

Visual Arts and the Political World in P. K. Page's *Brazilian Journal*

by Wendy Roy

P. K. Page is best-known for her award-winning poetry, but her artistic production also includes a revised version of the journal she kept during a two-and-a-half-year residence in Brazil, illustrated with some of her paintings and drawings. Published in 1987, *Brazilian Journal* is fascinating to read not just because of its combination of poetically written journal entries, retrospective commentary, and evocative images, but also because over the years Page encircled her 1957-59 Brazilian experiences with many other textual and visual artifacts. These include essays and interviews, a dozen poems, several short stories, numerous paintings and drawings, and her 2006 "Memoir in Verse" *Hand Luggage*.¹ Commonalities in these widely varying artistic and literary productions include Page's agonized deliberations about her difficulty writing poetry during the late 1950s; her increasingly enthusiastic interest in visual arts; and her reflections on social, economic, and colonial power in her temporary country of residence. These three concerns converge in *Brazilian Journal*, as Page considers the reasons for her "poetic silence, this translation into paint" during her years in Brazil (*Brazilian Journal* 195) and at the same time criticizes her own aestheticization of the social world.

Page had used pre-Brazil poems such as "After Rain" to decry the impersonal, imagistic nature of her own poetry. However, her Brazilian visual art from the late 1950s, some of which is published in *Brazilian Journal*, was often stylized rather than realistic, suggesting that it, too, tended toward aesthetic distancing. At the same time, the captions under the paintings included in the first edition of the book, which link her artwork to specific places and experiences, help to extend her earlier self-criticisms of that kind of impersonal approach. This critique is also evident in textual commentary in *Brazilian Journal* about her encounters with extremes of poverty and wealth. Taken together, the visual and literary components of *Brazilian Journal* suggest that far from maintaining silence during her years in Brazil, Page continued to reflect on and express what she perceived as the incompatibility between the deliberate expression of socio-political concerns and an impersonal artistic mode.

Because the 1987 first edition of *Brazilian Journal* was published three decades after her residence and travel in Brazil, Page's book cannot be taken as a straightforward, unmediated account of her experiences and feelings. Page notes the reconstructed nature of *Brazilian Journal* when she writes in the "Foreword" that it is based on "letters to my family and extracts from my journal" that have been "clarified" and "fleshed out" (n.p.). Recent transcriptions and analyses of the original 1957-59 journals—for the reissue of *Brazilian Journal* in 2011 and for a forthcoming online edition of the journal manuscripts—reveal the substantial editing that took place before publication. The editors of the new edition, Suzanne Bailey and Christopher Doody, argue that the revisions in part demonstrate Page's desire to avoid publishing "negative comments about Brazilian culture" and "overly intimate comments about other people" (17); however, Page made many other significant modifications.² One reason may be that during the years between the original drafting of the journals and their editing for publication, substantial changes had taken place in understandings about the social construction of race and the legacies of colonialism; in addition, shortly after *Brazilian Journal* was published, theoretical discussions about the objectifying nature of the traveller's gaze proliferated (see, for example, Pratt 1992). Page's editing reflects these changing understandings and discussions. In her "Foreword," she nevertheless describes the book as a "period piece," indicating that much of it represents her political, social, and artistic views during her time in Brazil, tempered only partially by later reconsiderations.

The relationship between the decline in Page's poetic output between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, and her criticism of her own imagistic, impersonal modernist style, has been the subject of much productive commentary by critics such as Rosemary Sullivan, Laura Killian, Brian Trehearne, and Dean Irvine.³ Page's questioning of the efficacy of that impersonal style in getting across human emotions and social concerns had begun in the late 1940s, and blossomed after she left Canada in 1953 with her husband, diplomat Arthur Irwin. This self-examination is perhaps most evident in the poem "After Rain," written while Page and Irwin were posted to Australia and first published in *Poetry* magazine in 1956 (Djwa 152). Expanding on ideas expressed in earlier works such as "Photos of a Salt Mine"—a poem about the deceptive beauty of exploitive scenes as viewed from a distance—"After Rain" is an emotionally charged inquiry into the poet's personal experience of beauty in scenes that others might consider distressing or even morally repugnant. After outlining the beauty of a destructive rain through images of lacey clothing, geometry, and spider webs, the poetic speaker states bluntly, "I suffer shame in all these images"

(*Kaleidoscope* 90-91). The poem thus acknowledges what Trehearne calls Page's "too great tendency to see beautiful phenomena and to translate them as if without choice into poetry, excluding possibilities of sympathy and community" (41), as it critiques her poetic transformation of a destroyed garden into multiple, beautiful, and seemingly unconnected images that ignore the emotional response of the distraught gardener.

While Page's self-criticism of her "image-accumulative" modernist poetics (Trehearne 67) may very well have played a part in slowing her poetic output while she was in Brazil, she did not stop writing altogether. Within *Brazilian Journal*, Page discusses writing "two small nature poems in Portuguese" (149). During 1957-58 she also drafted "Brazilian House," "Could I Write a Poem Now?," "Knitters," "Natural History Museum," "On Educating the Natives," "Some Paintings by Portinari," "This Whole Green World," and "Truce," some of which were published in *Cry Ararat* (1967), *The Glass Air* (1985), and *The Hidden Room: Collected Poems* (1997), and all of which appear in *Kaleidoscope: Selected Poems*, published just after her death in 2010. Later poems such as "Brazilian Fazenda," "Macumba: Brazil," and "Conversation" are based on Page's experiences in Brazil, and *Brazilian Journal* begins with an epigraph from the final stanza of her 1969 poem "Travellers' Palm."⁴

Brazilian Journal as a whole is also highly poetic in form and style. Consider, for example, this passage about the transformative nature of the night heat: "It is as if we dissolved and re-formed that day . . . ; dissolved and re-formed over and over again, never quite returning to the original shape, until, nearly liquid, we became part of the sticky jelly of midnight" (136). This sentence, with its repeated image of human bodies as liquefied shape-shifters, was heavily edited and elaborated on for publication, but her original diary also employs the strikingly poetic term "sticky jelly" to refer to the evening air (28 March 1958). Similarly, Page's description of a night trip up a mountain in a cable car presents a poetic breakdown of the reality of unseen space, as in both published and unpublished versions she describes the "illusion" that the mountain "dematerialized" as she moved through it, and then refers to the lack of solidity as "a kind of nudging at the membrane of the imagination" (154: 24 May 1958). Page also frequently writes about Brazil in erotic terms; her journal becomes a love poem, especially evident in the comment, "How do I write my love song? It is as if I were wired and someone (Someone?) had a finger on the buzzer all the time. *Can one fall in love with a country?*" (72: 17 August 1957).⁵ Page's revised and published journal thus can be interpreted as an extension of her poetic output rather than as a turn away from poetry.

While writing was still so important to Page that she notes toward the end of *Brazilian Journal*, “Part of me doesn’t exist when I don’t make notes” (236), she also muses repeatedly on her anguish about her inability to write the kind of poems that had won her the Governor General’s Award in 1954. One comment—“What to do about writing? Is it all dead?” (34)—is particularly poignant, especially since the entry in her unpublished diary ends with the question, “Am I dead?” (8 April 1957). When she learns of her inclusion in a journal article on Canadian poetry and of critic Stephen Spender’s description of her as “Canada’s best poet,” she regrets that these accolades are too late to motivate her to write poetry (195: 2 Jan. 1959). The next day’s entry refers to a “complex note” to herself that she has come across, “an attempt to understand my poetic silence, this translation into paint” (195). While she deliberately omits the contents of the note from both published and unpublished journals, emphasizing the difficulty she was having expressing her distress, a poem written during the same period provides some insight into her anxieties. “Could I Write a Poem Now?” comments on the speaker’s feelings of “guilt” about not using her poetic “talent,” and begins the concluding stanza with the question, “But how do you write a Chagall?” (*Kaleidoscope* 99).⁶ In these lines, Page moves toward a justification of her trouble writing poetry by suggesting that it was impossible for her to put into words Brazilian experiences that she found instead to be intensely visual and even painterly.

Both this poem and the earlier journal entry link Page’s “poetic silence” to her eventual channeling of her creative energy into drawing and painting. So, too, do her 1969 essay “Questions and Images” and her 2006 poetic memoir *Hand Luggage*. In the essay, published nearly twenty years before *Brazilian Journal*, Page begins her second paragraph with the sentence, “Brazil pelted me with images.” She then comments on how unsettling and life-changing it was not to speak the language of the country in which she was living. What does one do, she asks, “when there *is* no word . . .?” (187; ellipsis in original). The result of a surfeit of images combined with not enough words was “Blank page after blank page. The thing I had feared most of all had happened at last. This time I never *would* write again” (188). She writes much later in *Hand Luggage* that although she was at times ecstatic in Brazil,

my pen wouldn’t write. It didn’t have words. . . .
 I stared at blank paper, blank paper stared back.
 Then, as if in a dream, the nib started to draw.
 It drew what I saw.

(59)⁷

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The more she drew and painted, Page wrote in her unpublished journal, “the less I want to write and the more I race through it with little feeling for the means of expression” (7 Feb. 1959). Page thus commented in essays and poems, as well as in *Brazilian Journal*, on how the page had become something on which she expressed herself visually rather than verbally; these comments suggest that instead of becoming silent, she was simply speaking her artistic and social concerns in new ways.

Page’s poetry had always been intensely visual, and that focus on visual images is just as clearly evident in her prose.⁸ In *Brazilian Journal*, she often writes about a scene as though it is a painting being viewed. As an example, she describes entering the apartment of the Swiss ambassador as entering “a Matisse Painting,” with the ambassador’s wife wearing “a blue-and-white striped blouse” and sitting in “a yellow-and-white striped chair” (35; 14 April 1957). She first discusses visual art in a journal entry shortly after her arrival when she thinks of how much the ambassador’s residence would be improved by some brilliantly coloured canvases by Canadian artists (7-8; 3 Feb. 1957). She mentions her own experience as a visual artist for the first time when she writes that in mid-June 1957, Arthur saw doodlings she created while she was firing one of the servants, suggested that she take up drawing, and arrived home the next day carrying a roll of drawing paper (59).⁹ From this point on, Page’s *Brazilian Journal* is filled more and more with discussions of visual arts: taking art lessons from two different teachers; showing her work to Brazilian art critics (125); going on sketching trips with a Brazilian friend; learning to work with felt pen, crayons, gouache, and egg-tempura; and discussing the merits of works and techniques by modernist painters Paul Klee, Raoul Dufy, Henri Matisse, and Wassily Kandinsky (123, 211), as well as by Brazilian painter Candido Portinari (141), who became the subject of one of her poems. Page’s *Brazilian Journal* also contains detailed analyses of modernist architecture; her critiques of the dehumanizing aspects of buildings designed by Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer are especially intriguing (89, 170-71).

In *Brazilian Journal*, Page both repeatedly discusses painting and worries about whether she can be any good as a painter. She compares writing to painting, and both to architecture, when she notes that she cannot “put [my] picture up like a building, according to plan, . . . any more than I could have written a poem that way. Just as one word draws out another, so one shape draws out another” (211; 27 Feb. 1959). By the end of the book, at least every second journal entry discusses drawing or painting, or travelling somewhere to sketch. She writes, “I paint like a fool, without direction, knowledge, or control” (124), and “I would like to paint every day—six

hours at least! I've never known such a madness" (205). However, she also expresses some doubts about the wisdom of her interest in the visual arts, noting that the work is "nearly killing" her (176) and that she "can't stand" the "literalness" of her painting (213), and reporting her art teacher's criticism of her work as "nothing but empty spaces" (215-16). This uncertainty about painting is also recorded in the 1991 poem "Conversation." Set in Brazil, it describes two artists intoxicated by "the light, / the colour, the sharp smell of turps, / and the little jewel of a canvas we had made." The first-person speaker notes that under the weight of paint mixed with assurance by her fellow artist, her "hand collapsed" and her "arm fell" (*Kaleidoscope* 180); unlike her confident fellow painter, she has become immobilized by self-doubt.¹⁰

Page's doubts about painting can be interpreted as an extension of her doubts about her artistic vision in general. She had made a deliberate decision to sign and later exhibit her works of visual art under her married name, P. K. Irwin, suggesting a desire to develop a second and separate artistic identity. However, the two identities were brought together in the first edition of *Brazilian Journal*: the book was published under the name P. K. Page but was illustrated by twenty reproductions of visual artistic works signed by her alter ego, P. K. Irwin, including eight colour plates and a colour reproduction on the cover.¹¹ While researchers such as Denise Heaps, Albert Braz, and Suzanne Bailey have made astute analyses of the textual aspects of *Brazilian Journal*, and Page's visual art has been studied by critics such as Anne McDougall, Barbara Godard, and Cynthia Messenger, intersections between the textual and visual have seldom been examined.¹² However, such examination is essential because as Gillian Rose notes in *Visual Methodologies*, illustrations work in tandem with "other kinds of representations," including textual ones (10). The paintings and drawings reproduced in *Brazilian Journal* perform their interpretive work through their juxtaposition with Page's textual deliberations about social relations in Brazil and about the nature and function of art.

When Page-Irwin's sketches are reproduced in *Brazilian Journal*, what in other circumstances would be considered primarily artistic expressions are transformed into documentary images. While there is no clear-cut distinction between the documentary and the artistic, illustrations in travel literature usually fulfill a documentary impulse to show the people, places, and events the writer describes, rather than representing an artistic impulse. Pre-twentieth-century travel narratives often included travellers' sketches, but most twentieth-century books incorporate documentary photographs instead. Photographs could have been included in *Brazilian Journal*, such

as one of Page painting on a Brazilian beach that appears on the back cover of volume one of *The Hidden Room* or the portrait of her in the Canadian embassy in Brazil that serves as the frontispiece for the 2011 edition of *Brazilian Journal*. The only illustrative materials in the first edition of *Brazilian Journal*, however, are the pen sketches and paintings by Page-Irwin. They take on a documentary function, illustrating not Page herself but instead her experiences of place in Brazil: her house, the city in which she lived, and the communities and natural world that she and Arthur Irwin encountered on their trips throughout the country. They include evocative representations of the staircase in the beautiful ambassador's mansion in which the Irwins resided (fig. 1), the cityscapes of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (fig. 7), and Brazilian seascapes and mountainscapes (fig. 3).

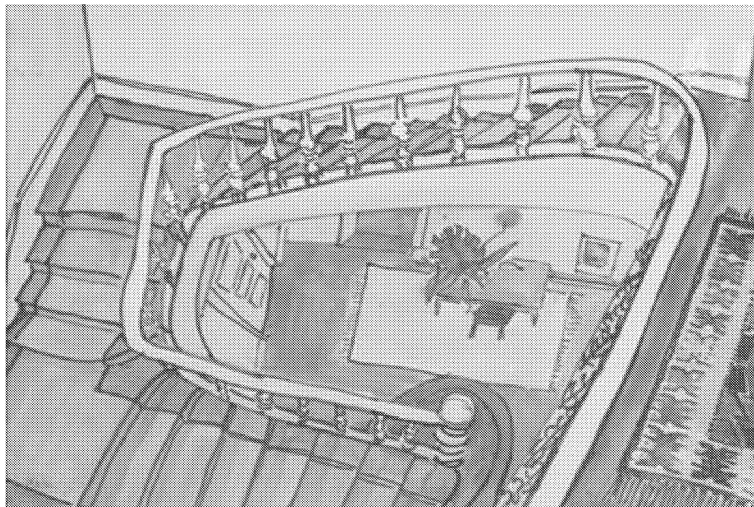


Fig. 1. P.K. Irwin's *The Stairwell*. 1957-58. Felt pen and gouache. 31.3 x 44.7 cm. Trent University Art Collection, Peterborough, ON. © The Estate of P.K. Page. All images courtesy of and with permission from Zailig Pollock and The Digital Page: PKI-188. Captioned in 1987 edition: "The stairs, built from some nameless wood golden as amber..."

Rose points out that even documentary photographs cannot be objective, since they "interpret the world" and "display it in very particular ways" (6). Page's paintings and drawings in *Brazilian Journal* are still more clearly subjective interpretations of the world around her. While many appear to represent specific interior or exterior places, those places become indeterminate because of her stylized approach. Page wrote that she found "abstractions" much "more exciting than realism" (*Brazilian Journal* 76), and even the drawings and paintings that represent specific buildings and

included in the first edition of *Brazilian Journal* (fig. 4). Similarly, a stylized pen drawing of people participating in *macumba* (now often considered a derogatory term for religious practices brought from Africa), was omitted from the 1987 edition, even though Page had included a detailed description of *macumba* (192-93; fig. 5) and subsequently published the poem “Macumba: Brazil.”¹⁵ Page’s visual art as reproduced in *Brazilian Journal* thus does something similar to what her poetry has done earlier: it veers toward the impersonal and abstract through its focus on line and colour, rather than on human expression and interaction.

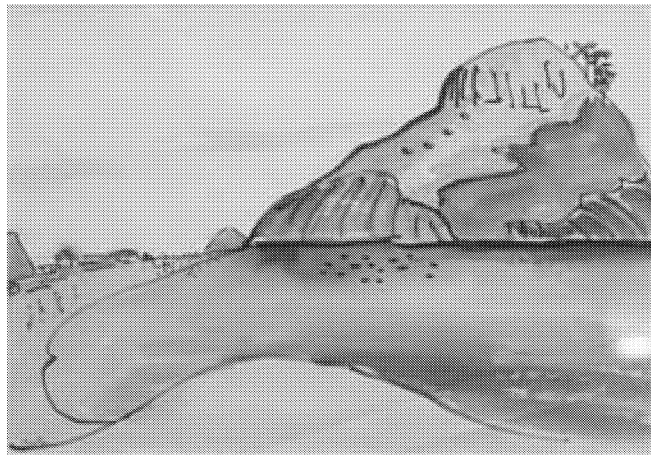


Fig. 3. P.K. Irwin’s *The South Coast*. 1958. Felt pen and gouache. 28.3 x 41.7 cm. Private collection. © The Estate of P.K. Page. The Digital Page: PK1-304. Captioned: “Spent Easter on an island near Angra dos Reis....”

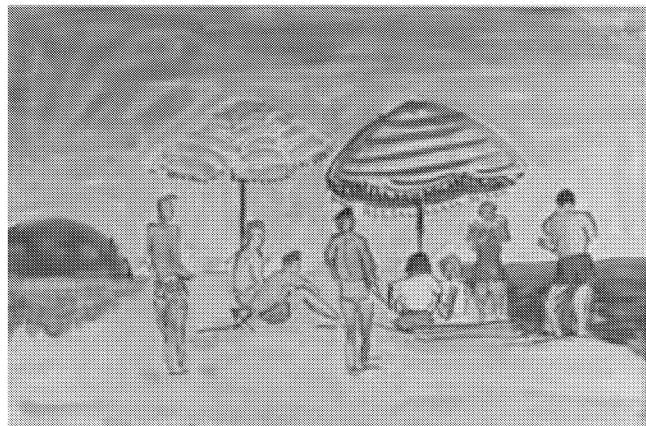


Fig. 4. P.K. Irwin’s *The Striped Umbrellas (Beach Scene)*. c. 1957-8. Felt pen and gouache. 40.6 x 52.1cm. Private collection. © The Estate of P.K. Page. The Digital Page: PK1-189.

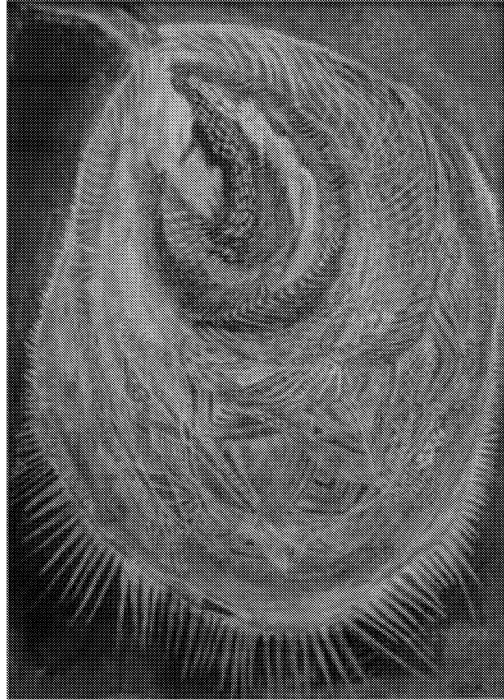


Fig. 6. P.K. Irwin's *Stone Fruit*. 1959. Oil pastel. 40.5 x 31.8 cm. Private collection. © The Estate of P.K. Page. The Digital Page: PKI-418.

As another way of maintaining a documentary effect, the drawings and paintings reproduced in the first edition of *Brazilian Journal* are stripped of their titles and instead are accompanied by long captions taken directly from passages in the book. Indeed, nowhere in the 1987 edition are titles or dates of creation or media of execution listed.¹⁷ Thus while the works of art express increasingly abstract aesthetics, the captions serve an opposing function, providing readers with a concrete entry into Page's time in Brazil. While many captions document place, others include explicit and implicit criticisms of what she saw and experienced. *The Stairwell*, for example, is renamed using a line from the book that indicates Page's initial, almost disbelieving, response to the luxury that surrounded her (fig. 1; *Brazilian Journal* 7, illus. 84-85), while *Snapshot (Cityscape, São Paulo)* becomes a criticism of the dehumanizing urban landscape of that city (fig. 7; 42, illus. 53). Other captions help to trace Page's artistic journey, including the captions for *Leaves Large as Hand*, "Almost totally preoccupied



Fig. 8. P.K. Irwin's *Flowers and Phone*. c. 1957-8. Felt pen and gouache. 32.5 x 47.0 cm. Private collection. © The Estate of P.K. Page. The Digital Page: PKI-134. Captioned: "I like these gouaches. The colours are vivid..."

In *Brazilian Journal*, however, the visual and textual together interpret Brazil in contradictory as well as complementary ways. Essential for an understanding of that complex interaction is an examination of what Rose calls "the range of economic, social and political relations, institutions and practices that surround an image and through which it is seen and used" (17). Surrounding Page's images in *Brazilian Journal*, and helping us to interpret them, are journal entries that connect the economic, social, and political world in Brazil to Page's artistic vision.

While Brazil "pelted" Page with images ("Questions" 187), in *Brazilian Journal* she acknowledges that some were of poverty and privation, and she recognizes and interrogates her tendency to find beauty in these images. One key passage, written after seven months in Brazil, provides an especially trenchant examination of her visual response to societal realities:

shattered the black night air” (“Questions” 187). The references to the sounds of celebration and unrest in Rio de Janeiro, which Page could hear from her bedroom window, echo the irreconcilable differences Page encountered in Brazil: wealth and beauty on one hand, poverty and social injustice on the other. She repeatedly notes the country’s racial segregation, a lingering result of the Portuguese (and later Brazilian) investment in slavery until 1888, that dictated even the appearance of the servants she could hire for public positions in her house (*Hand Luggage* 61). She comments that Brazil has one of the world’s largest gaps in income levels: “the rich are so rich and the poor so poor” (*Brazilian Journal* 122).¹⁹ Thus Page emphasizes rather than downplaying Brazil’s “disturbing social realities.”

Page also acknowledges and condemns her own position in that rigidly divided economic system. In Rio de Janeiro, she resided within earshot of a slum but in a fifty-seven-room ambassador’s mansion with a pink marble staircase, a swimming pool, and a dining room that could seat forty people. Her descriptions of the house criticize its excesses (*Brazilian Journal* 6-7, 59); in the retrospective poem “Brazilian House” she refers to the mansion as “this great house white / as a public urinal” (*Kaleidoscope* 98), while in *Hand Luggage* she disparagingly describes “Reception rooms cold / as fish on a slab” and marble floors “Like headcheese in aspic” (52). In *Brazilian Journal*, Page laments that she spent much of her time in Brazil managing the house, including its eleven servants (19). She also remarks on the demands of her social obligations, which necessitated purchases of clothing that made her feel “that the whole thing is make-believe and that I am dressed up in my mother’s clothes” (29) and of jewelry that she did not like but that “some ambassador’s-wife role I seem to be playing” required (173). While these passages can be interpreted as self-critique, Page eventually became accustomed to living in such an economically stratified way; when she left Brazil because her husband was posted to Mexico, she wrote, “It will be hard to turn my back on such luxury” (238). However, an unpublished diary entry of a few days later adds self-censure—“This kind of a life makes you a kind of a monster” (23 Aug. 1959)—indicating that Page recognized that a privileged position could blunt feelings of empathy.

Socio-economic problems caused by the unequal distribution of wealth became increasingly obvious to her as she was toured around the countryside in her official capacity as ambassador’s wife. In a review of *Brazilian Journal* shortly after its publication, Janet Giltrow argues that Page was “[r]arely permitted even a glance beyond the itinerary of these official tours, beyond the local perception of what requires seeing” (69), and that because her “diplomatic assignment” required “neutrality” she was unable to write

about anything other than “public surfaces” (75, 74). However, many passages in *Brazilian Journal* demonstrate that Page’s eyes took in pain and hardship as well as beauty, and that she wrote about what was going on beneath the placid surface of official sightseeing.

Such passages become more frequent toward the end of her residence in Brazil, and include even more self-assessment. Of the Irwins’ tour through São Luís, capital of the state Maranhão, for example, Page writes,

I was appalled by the poverty and realized that a vast change had taken place in my attitudes since I had gone to British Guiana when I was twenty-one. Then I had thought of the people as “natives” living in conditions natural to a primitive people. Here, seeing similar conditions, I am shocked by how poverty-stricken the north-east is, and how deplorable it is that these Brazilians are deprived of adequate housing and adequate diet.

The palace, by contrast, was an impressive, long, low, white building in a street of elegant buildings faced with *azulejos* which shone softly in the sun. (221-22; 16 April 1959)

Her focus in this passage is both on her own growing political awareness, and on economic inequity made explicit through a textual juxtaposition of impoverished residences with the palace. This analysis is elaborated on in a description of the later part of that trip. Page writes that when she stopped in at a wattle house, she was greeted by two “nearly naked men” with

the customary Brazilian welcome — *É sua casa* (It is your house). I have not lived here long enough to hear the phrase the way I hear “How do you do,” and am always moved by it, but in this context I find it unbearable. Their *house*. It is all they have.

Inside, an uneven earthen floor . . . , a hammock, . . . and on the windowsill, some *cuias* to use as bowls. . . . I am overwhelmed, horrified by the plenitude of our lives. (226-27)²⁰

Verbs in these two passages such as “appalled,” “overwhelmed,” and “horrified,” and descriptors such as “deplorable” and “unbearable,” powerfully convey Page’s intensely negative reaction to this extreme economic disparity. Her self-criticism is evident in the last line, in which she compares the excesses in her own life to the insufficiency in others’.

In both these passages, Page employs a language technique characteristic of decolonizing writing. She code-switches—a practice that underscores “alterity” or cultural difference (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 71)—by including not only a translation of the Portuguese words of greeting, but also untranslated Portuguese words for both the beautiful tiles of the rich (*azule-*

jos) and the gourd bowls of the poor (*cuias*). Throughout her journal, she has called the slums of Rio de Janeiro *favelas* without translating the term for her readers. Brazilian critic Miguel Nenevê argues that by leaving some terms untranslated, Page acknowledges “untranslatability” and “escapes the danger of misinterpreting a culture” (164). While Page may not have entirely succeeded in this goal, she does inscribe cultural difference through repeated inclusion of a language other than English, at the same time as she writes about economic difference.

Because Page does not translate all of the Portuguese words she includes, her code-switching makes demands of readers: they must put energy into understanding cultural and social diversity. Page calls for this energetic response not only from readers of *Brazilian Journal* but also from herself. She begins the book, as she did her unpublished journal, by writing that living in a house full of servants who do not speak English “is exactly like having a house full of monkeys” (17; 26 Feb. 1957). Since she could have edited out this comment, her decision to include it suggests that she wants readers to have the opportunity to censure her former attitudes and to take note of her transformations. Within a few weeks, she is writing about being immersed in lessons in the Portuguese language (27), and she criticizes an embassy employee who comments that Brazilians “were so ignorant they couldn’t even speak English” (101). Page eventually learned to speak Portuguese, at least well enough that she could socialize and give speeches in the language, and as noted above, *Brazilian Journal* is peppered with untranslated words as though she expects her readers, too, to learn some Portuguese.²¹ She also expects them to gain at least some understanding of Brazilian society and culture. As an example, one poem from this time, “On Educating the Natives,” explores the wrong-headedness of imposing colonialist cultural practices on people who already have their own forms of artistic beauty. The short poem describes people who “weave baskets of so intricate a beauty” but are now being taught “in a square room by a square woman / to cross-stitch on checked gingham” (*Kaleidoscope* 103). Page’s critique is evident not only in the poem’s blunt conclusion but also in its move from spaciousness to controlled geometric place.

The power of Page’s critique in *Brazilian Journal* and its associated literary and artistic works comes not just from the voice she employs to identify colonial power structures and economic disparities, but also from the way that she highlights and questions her own vision and that of others. Page said that in Brazil she lived “almost entirely” through her “eye” (*Brazilian Journal* 177) and that “it was as if my eyes were sharpened to a greater sensitivity” (“That’s me” 54). Five years after the original publica-

tion of *Brazilian Journal*, Mary Louise Pratt identified in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* the figure of the “seeing man,” the visitor to a place whose eyes “passively look out and possess” (7). Page certainly presents herself as a “seeing woman” during her time in Brazil, but she constructs herself neither as passive nor possessive. Instead, both text and image of *Brazilian Journal* demonstrate an active engagement and a desire for understanding, as Page interrogates what she sees and experiences and explores her own personal concerns about aestheticized responses to human social problems.

Just as Page’s critique of the aestheticization of the social world began before she arrived in Brazil, so too did her investigations of the potentially destructive force of a colonialist way of seeing. In “Cook’s Mountains,” like “After Rain” written in Australia just before she travelled to Brazil, Page describes mountains that Australian Aboriginal people had personified and represented as a family, but that English naval captain James Cook had renamed in 1770 the Glass House Mountains.²² Page’s poetic comments about her first sight of the mountains highlight the possessive and politically transformative power of the imperial gaze. She writes that “It was his gaze / that glazed each one” and notes that once she heard Cook’s name for the mountains, “instantly they altered to become / the sum of shape and name” (*Kaleidoscope* 96). “Cook’s Mountains” acknowledges and critiques dehumanizing ways of seeing that Page identified in herself and with which she continued to grapple as she made the physical, emotional, and intellectual journey outlined in *Brazilian Journal*. During her time in Brazil, Page admittedly did not write much poetry; *Brazilian Journal* demonstrates, however, that she continued to interrogate her concerns about presenting social and political concerns through impersonal artistic techniques. Page’s experiences in Brazil, and her resulting textual and visual productions, thus can be reconfigured as providing continuity, rather than disconnection, between her earlier and later artistic and ethical self-investigations.

Notes

This essay had its beginnings in a paper written for an annual convention of the Association for Canadian and Quebec Literatures, where co-presenter Albert Braz was instrumental in encouraging me to revise it for publication. I would also like to thank the editors of this special edition, especially Michèle Rackham Hall and Emily Ballantyne, and the anonymous reviewers of this essay, for their helpful comments and suggestions. I am very grateful to the estate of P. K. Page for permission to reproduce her paintings and brief excerpts from her diaries. Many thanks also to Zailig Pollock and Christopher

Doody for providing access to scans and transcripts of Page's Brazilian diaries held at Library and Archives Canada.

- 1 Parts of Page's book had been earlier published in the journals *Brick*, *Canadian Literature*, and *Descant*, and in the 1984 collection *Views from the North: An Anthology of Travel Writing*. The post-Brazil essays include "Questions and Images" (1969), while the stories include "Mme Bourgét Dreams of Brésil" (written in 1987) and "Fever" (1999), both published in *A Kind of Fiction* (2001). More than a dozen poems either composed in or referencing Brazil can be found in *Kaleidoscope: Selected Poems* (2010) edited by Zailig Pollock, the first of the proposed ten-volume *Collected Works of P. K. Page*. Some of the Brazilian art works have been donated to Trent University and can be examined on the university's website; reproductions of others will be part of the online presence of the *Collected Works* in a catalogue of Page's visual art currently being prepared by Michèle Rackham Hall.
- 2 Bailey and Doody's edition is volume two of the *Collected Works of P. K. Page*. Since my argument is about intersections between illustrations and text authorized by Page when the book was first published, I use the 1987 edition as my source text. See Bailey's essay for an expanded discussion of how Page attempts to "interest her readers in Brazil rather than to be critical of its culture" by omitting discussions of race relations that might "strike readers as inappropriate or condescending" (67, 68).
- 3 Sullivan (1978) discusses Page's recognition that the "image-making process" can detract from meaning (33). Killian (1996) defines an "'impersonal' modernist aesthetic" (86) and argues that poems such as "After Rain" recognize "the depersonalizing effects" of this aesthetic (97). Trehearne (1999) provides a detailed analysis of "After Rain" to demonstrate its "paradigm of binary pairs that cannot be reconciled" (45); he argues that the "silence of Page's middle period" (45) is in part a reaction to the "latent exclusionism of modernist style" (100). Irvine (2004) similarly explores Page's poetic "silence" as "the accumulated effect" of the "unsynthesized dialectical pairs" of her earlier poetry (25).
- 4 These four later poems, completed from 1966 to 1991, also appeared in collections including *Kaleidoscope*, as did English-language reworkings of her two Portuguese nature poems, retitled "Fly: On Webs" and "Anachronism" (Ballantyne 61).
- 5 See also *Brazilian Journal* 46, 64, and 68.
- 6 Russian-French painter Marc Chagall. The poem was first published in Cynthia Messenger's 1994 essay "But how do you write a Chagall?"
- 7 See also similar statements in "Questions and Images" (188).
- 8 Sullivan (33) and Trehearne (88) both discuss the visual tendency in Page's poetry.
- 9 This retrospective account does not appear in the unpublished diary entry. Rackham Hall points out that Page had already made a few sketches in the 1940s and early 1950s (374).
- 10 The poem recalls Page's experience with Arie Aroch, the Israeli ambassador to Brazil, with whom she collaborated on the scratched egg-tempura *Insects* (*Brazilian Journal* 217).
- 11 Indeed, almost all of Page's books after Brazil incorporate at least a few of her works of visual art. The 2011 edition of *Brazilian Journal* reproduces three times as many Brazilian drawings and paintings as the 1987 edition, although only six are in colour and several from the 1987 edition are omitted. Bailey and Doody argue that images reproduced in the original edition were those "which happened to be available at the time in suitable resolution" and that the images they include in their edition illustrate the text more effectively (19). Since the paintings would have had to be photographed so that plates could be made for printing, the original choice was likely less arbitrary than Bailey and Doody suggest. The wealth of visuals in the 2011 edition will significantly alter analyses of Page's artistic output in Brazil and its relation to her journal.

- 12 Messenger's 1994 and 2004 essays, Ballantyne's 2010 thesis, and Rackham Hall's 2011 dissertation focus primarily on the connections between Page's visual art and her Brazilian poetry.
- 13 Rackham Hall argues that Page moved from realism to abstraction so that she could focus on geometric and organic form (375). Godard discusses Page's technique of "building up brilliantly coloured layers, then sharply, intricately incising them with microscopic lines" (65), while Messenger analyzes her "biomorphic modernism" or "visual abstraction based on organic forms" ("Biomorphism" 76).
- 14 The painting is reproduced in the 2011 edition over two full pages to illustrate an earlier party at the same location (*BJ* 2011, 90-92).
- 15 Both *The Striped Umbrellas (Beach Scene)* and *Macumba* are reproduced in the 2011 edition (*BJ* 2011, 64, 231).
- 16 Heaps notes "the conspicuous absence" of reference to Page's body in *Brazilian Journal* (357); Page herself comments, "I rarely write of things that distress me" (*Brazilian Journal* 194).
- 17 The 2011 edition, in contrast, has no captions, although the reproductions are often placed close to passages they might illustrate and the titles of the paintings appear on a page before the index.
- 18 See Bailey's challenge to this criticism: "Is it unethical to represent a scene of poverty as beautiful, the very question Page confronts here?" (62). Miguel Nenevê also argues persuasively that Page avoids too detailed a critique because it might be "interpreted as a 'colonizing' view" (167). Paradoxically, one of Page's abstract paintings from her time in Brazil suggests that she did not resist the urge to aestheticize this scene; it is composed of stacked and patchworked rectangles of colour that may represent the water-filled gasoline tins (online at P. K. Page Irwin Collection, Trent University, 2009.045.1).
- 19 While Albert Braz finds much to commend in Page's book, he criticizes her "sweeping generalizations" about "the inordinately high degree of violence in the country" (49) and the way she introduces people in terms of "race in general and blackness in particular" (50).
- 20 The more perfunctory unpublished diary entry of 21 April 1959 indicates that some of the analysis of this scene was added at a later date.
- 21 As Braz has pointed out, Page's translations in *Brazilian Journal* are not always completely accurate (49).
- 22 Pollock in his introduction to *Kaleidoscope* (14) and Bailey and Doody in their introduction to the 2011 edition of *Brazilian Journal* (13) suggest that Page's unpublished Australian journals contain more "social commentary" than *Brazilian Journal*.

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