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Sección especial: poesía concreta

Introduction:

POEM/ART

Brazilian Concrete Poetry

K. David Jackson

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POEM/ART Brazilian Concrete Poetry, the title of an international conference at Yale University (November, 2006) commemorates 50 years of the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art in the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo in December, 1956. Representing a moment of intense creativity and experimentation in poetry and the arts in Brazil, following the first international art exhibit at the Bienal of São Paulo in 1951, the 1956 exhibit imprinted powerful images on the public imagination and projected the combined forces of Brazilian Concrete poetry and plastic arts as the vanguard of an international aesthetic movement.

Augusto de Campos contributed the original design for the conference poster, reproducing the Chinese ideogram for “sun” found in Décio Pignatari’s celebrated poem LIFE, with the words “poem” and “art” spelled in vertical columns to the left and right,

and in alternating red and black colors. The Yale conference was the third dedicated to Brazilian Concrete Poets Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos, and Décio Pignatari, after the 1995 Symphosopia (*Experimental, Visual, Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since the 1960s*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) and the 1999 joint Oxford/Yale conferences in honor of Haroldo de Campos's 70th year (*Haroldo de Campos: A Dialogue with the Brazilian Concrete Poet*. Oxford, 2005).

POEM/ART featured a major exhibit in Sterling Memorial Library, with materials from the Beinecke Rare Books & Manuscript Library, under the title "Verbivocovisual," curated by art historian Irene Small. The special exhibit included rare folios, pop-up books, manifestos, fold-outs, and games, described in the accompanying brochure.

Verbivocovisual: Brazilian Concrete Poetry

Irene Small

Yale University

Verbivocovisual traces the development of Brazilian concrete poetry from its emergence and theorization in the mid 1950s through its polemicization, rupture, and continued experimentation in the 1960s and 70s. Drawn from Book II Episode 3 of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the portmanteau word "verbivocovisual" was used by the Brazilian poets to evoke the synesthetic character of their work. As in Augusto de Campos's *tensão* (*tension*), of 1956, in which the poles of sound ("com som"/"with sound") and silence ("sem som"/"without sound") are anchored by the graphic tension of the poem's structure on the page, the dynamism of Brazilian concrete poetry lies in its attention to the materiality of language. In the current exhibition, this materiality is explored in works and documentation that range from folios and pamphlets to pop-up books, manifestos, fold-outs, and games. **Verbivocovisual** presents Brazilian concrete poetry as a distinct literary movement and a wider field of formal experimentation – in short, a pluridimensional art.

Concrete poetry emerged independently in Brazil, Switzerland, and Sweden in 1953, when Augusto de Campos completed *poetamenos* in São Paulo, a collection of poems for multiple voices based on Anton Webern's idea of "Klangfarbenmelodie", the Swiss-Bolivian poet Eugen Gomringer published his spatial *Konstellationen* poems in Ulm, and the Brazilian-born Swedish poet Öyvind Fahlström wrote his *Manifesto for*

Concrete Poetry in Stockholm. One year earlier, Augusto de Campos, together with his brother Haroldo and Décio Pignatari, had formed the Noigandres group in São Paulo and published their first magazine. With *Noigandres*, the young poets established a formal precedent in the poetry of Ezra Pound, specifically, the ideogrammatic method of the *Cantos*. The poets soon expanded this conceptual universe to include Ernest Fenollosa, Sergei Eisenstein, e.e. cummings, Guillaume Apollinaire, João Cabral de Melo Neto, James Joyce, Oswald de Andrade, and most importantly, Stéphane Mallarmé, whose 1897 *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* established the typographic character of words and the white space of the page as active, structural elements of composition.

By 1955, the Campos brothers and Pignatari had established the central principles of concrete poetry in a series of works and theoretical texts published in Brazilian newspapers, and in *Noigandres 2*, where *poetamenos* was published for the first time. The concrete poem, according to Augusto de Campos, was “the tension of word-things in space-time.” It did not unfold linearly, according to the discursive, syntactic conventions of verse, but presented itself instantly, as a “relational field of functions”. The concrete poem was analogous to the rapidity of modern communication, its structure as economical as a billboard, a poster, or an advertising slogan. The concrete poets saw a direct link between their work and the modernization of Brazil’s post-war industrial boom, which brought with it the country’s first institutions of modern art, the **São Paulo Bienal**, Latin America’s first school of industrial and communication design, and the euphoric “JK” years and their promise of “fifty years of progress in five.”

The poets' interest in the efficiency and rationality of communication led them to make contact with visual artists such as Waldemar Cordeiro and his **Ruptura** group as early as 1952. Cordeiro, who became spokesperson for the Concrete artists of São Paulo, had been influenced by Italian and Argentine concrete art as well as the Swiss Concretist Max Bill, who had exhibited in São Paulo in 1950. Cordeiro called for a "productive" art free of expression and subjectivity. Following Theo van Doesburg's 1930 distinction between abstract and concrete art, he insisted that the work of art has its own, objective reality, a description close in keeping with the concrete poets' formulation of their own work. Conversations between the groups led to the planning of a national exhibition which would place works of art and poetry side by side – both "products" of the new, modern world.

With the **1956 National Exhibition of Concrete Art**, concrete poetry entered, in the words of Pignatari, its "polemic phase." The exhibition was inaugurated at the Museum of Modern Art of São Paulo in December of 1956, and traveled to Rio de Janeiro in February 1957, where it was installed in the Ministry of Education and Culture. The concrete poets now counted among their adherents poets such as Ronaldo Azeredo, José Lino Grünwald, Théon Spanudis, and the Rio-based art critic Ferreira Gullar, whose 1954 publication *A Luta Corporal* enacted the atomization and deconstruction of language. A conference in Rio de Janeiro on the occasion of the exhibition's opening erupted in controversy, resulting in national coverage of the movement in popular magazines such as *O Cruzeiro*. In an article published shortly thereafter, titled "Concrete Poetry and the Brazilian Poetic Moment", the respected critic Mário Faustino recognized the Concretists as the most innovative poets in Brazilian literature yet.

As theoretical positions became more polemic, however, internal fissures began to appear among the artists and poets from São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. In 1957, with the publication of Haroldo de Campos's "From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition" and Ferreira Gullar, Oliveira Bastos and Reynaldo Jardim's "Concrete Poetry: Intuitive Experience", the two groups split, the Carioca (Rio) group calling the Paulista (São Paulo) poets and artists excessively rational and mechanistic, the Paulistas complaining of the Cariocas's subjectivism and lack of rigor. These differences in sensibility were magnified in the coming two years. In 1958, the Paulista group consolidated their position in the *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry*, a manifesto inspired by architect Lúcio Costa's pilot plan for the country's new, ultra modern capital, Brasília, then under construction. The Pilot Plan's description of the poem as a "mechanism" or "feed-back loop" was in stark contrast to the methods of the Rio group, who favored intuitive rather than *a priori* composition. In 1959, the Rio group formulated their own position in the *Neoconcrete Manifesto*, which described the work of art not as a "machine" or "object" but a "quasi-corpus".

In 1962, the São Paulo poets published the last issue of *Noigandres* and regrouped under the name *Invenção*. Although they maintained the designation "Concrete" and adhered to the essential conceptual principles they had outlined in the years proceeding, the poets displayed an increased engagement with popular, political, and social issues and a more flexible approach to composition. Augusto de Campos's *cubograma* of 1960-62 paid homage to the Cuban Revolution, while his *Poemobiles* and *Caixa Preta* [CASE 8], collaborations with the São Paulo-based Spanish artist Julio Plaza, exhibit an interest in graphic art, chance, and play. Pignatari, too, became interested in

non-verbal communication and the nature of signs, publishing with Luiz Angelo Pinto the *Manifesto of the Poem-Code or Semiotic* in 1964. From 1965 through 1976, Pignatari taught information theory at the Superior School of Industrial Design in Rio. Haroldo de Campos, meanwhile, devoted increasing attention to his work as critic, theorist and translator. Campos's interest in the Tropicália movement in the late 1960s brought him close to the musician Caetano Veloso and the artist Hélio Oiticica, who had emerged from the Neoconcrete movement years before. Campos's translations, or "transcreations", as he termed his method of creative misreading, meanwhile, range from pillars of the concrete poets's original formation—Pound's *Cantos*, Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*—to Mayakovsky, Dante, parts of the *Iliad*, and even the book of Genesis. Despite their later variation in method, the concrete poets remained committed to the project of formal experimentation. On that note, we might end with the post-script the poets themselves appended to their Pilot Plan in 1961: "*Without revolutionary form there is no revolutionary art -- Mayakovsky.*"

The “image of voice” in Augusto de Campos’ *Poetamenos*⁽¹⁾

[Antonio Sergio Bessa](#)

The Bronx Museum

Queste parole di colore oscuro

Dante

O olhouvido ouve

[the eyear hears]

Décio Pignatari

With a poetic program that strongly emphasized the “visuality of language,” it would seem as if the Noigandres poets had embraced design in detriment of sound. Their effort to render language iconic, one might have thought, would have pushed concrete poetry to the brink of aphasia. Indeed, the poems from the so-called heroic phase of concretism display a heightened sense of design that seems to overwhelm other aspects of the text. Some of those poems appear on the page like highly modernistic architecture, while others strike the reader rather like graphic riddles that need to be decoded in order to be read; an operation for the eye only, the ear playing very little in the reading process. But it would be a mistake to affirm that sound was altogether out of the Noigandres picture. I suggest that in the work of these poets sound was submitted to as rigorous a program

as the written text. This rigor however, as I hope to make clear in this essay, did not imply the loss of humor or the negation of pleasure.

In several texts written in the early 1950s by the Noigandres poets, collectively or individually, one finds repeated references to sound, particularly the emerging new music of composers like Boulez, Fano and Stockhausen. These references are telegraphed throughout the cryptic text of “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” the concretist period’s culminating manifesto, but other texts explored some of the same themes to greater extent and they lay out Noigandres’ understanding of the role sound ought to play in poetry. Among these early writings, Décio Pignatari’s seem mostly concerned with form and design. But even in the midst of an argument about structure or organizing principles, we find references such as this:

Mário de Andrade, in “Prefácio interessantíssimo” [Most Interesting Preface], after commenting on the common melodic verse, approaches what he calls the harmonic verse, formed by words without any immediate connection among themselves: “These words, by the very fact of not forming a coherent sequence, superpose over themselves and form, to our senses, not melodies, but harmonies. ... Harmony, combination of simultaneous sounds.”(2)

Departing from Andrade’s proposition of a “harmonic verse,” Pignatari traces a formidable micro-compendium of last century’s great synthesizers, including Lewis Carroll, Mallarmé, Pound, Joyce and the filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein. His idea of poetic “organization” is a composite that might include portmanteau words (Carroll and Joyce)

arranged according to ideogramatic principles (Pound, Fenollosa) spliced together like in a film (Eisenstein). Eisenstein via Pignatari: “(sonorous!) representations objectively expressed gathering together to create a unified image, other than the perception of its isolated elements.” (*Ibid*, 87)

Haroldo de Campos seems to agree with Pignatari’s equation of visual organization and musical harmony. Compare Pignatari’s argument with the following quote from “Olho por olho a olho nu” [“Eye for an eye in daylight”], a text by de Campos from 1956:

THE CONCRET POEM aspires to be: composition of basic elements of language, optical-acoustically organized in the graphic space by factors of proximity and similitude, like a kind of ideogram for a given emotion, aiming the direct presentation—in the present—of the object. (48)

One senses in these writings a certain hesitancy to address sound (or music, or melody) head on. Note how “acoustics” is appended to the “optical,” and the use of “composition” is also kept ambiguously undefined as it might equally refer to a musical or writing composition. But three decades later, in an interview from 1983 with Rodrigo Naves, de Campos declared forthright that his rapport with the literary tradition was *musical*, rather than *museological*:

Note that both adjectives derive from the same word, *muse* (from the Greek *Mousa*), and that the Muses are the daughters of memory (Mnemosine). I prefer the derivation that ended up in music because I like to read tradition as a trans-temporal music sheet, making, at each

moment, synchronic-diachronic “harmonies,” translating culture’s past onto a creative present.(3)

But even here, de Campos’s conception of music, with its Saussurean overtones (how exactly are these “synchronic-diachronic harmonies” translated in terms of music?), seems subjugated to the command of language. We are reminded that in the *Course in General Linguistics*, Saussure explains the linguistic sign thus:

The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses. The sound-image is sensory, and if I happen to call it “material,” it is only in that sense, and by way of opposing it to the other term of the association, the concept, which is generally more abstract. (66)

The two excerpts by de Campos share a number of basic interests with Saussure, especially in regards to the compound sound-image. It is also worth mentioning that Saussure’s vision of language is not unlike Mallarmé’s “divisions prismatiques de l’idée,” a theme often echoed throughout numerous Noigandres texts—language as an operation that makes ideas visible (and/or heard). It is also worth stressing Saussure’s reference to “psychological imprint,” and de Campos’s “ideogram for a given emotion.” We shall return to this theme in a moment.

Elaborating on Pound's concepts of *melopoeia* and *logopeia* in yet another interview from around the same period (285), de Campos reveals that his collection of poems *Signantia quase coelum* was "conceived in the form of music, as a tripartite composition," and explains the poem's minimalist structure as a visual equivalent of the use of silent gaps in music. And at the end of the interview he quotes from Severo Sarduy, who wrote that in the texts that compose *Galáxias* one finds:

(...) La exaltación y el despliegue de una región de la dicción, de un espacio del habla vasto y barroco como el mapa de su país: soplo y articulación, aliento y pronunciación: nacimiento del discurso. (287-8)

With extraordinary precision Sarduy sums up the entire concretist approach to sound: the vast legacy of the Baroque filtered through a "blow of air and articulation, breath and pronunciation."

Augusto de Campos, among the Noigandres poets, seems to be the one most overtly interested in sound experimentation. He is the author of two important books on music, *O Balanço da bossa—e outras bossas* [The Balance of Bossa Nova—And Other Bossas], and *Música de invenção* [Invention Music], and since the 1950s, his poetry has persistently pursued a kind of writing fused with music. His micro-sequence of sparsely diagrammed poems *Poetamenos* [Minuspoet], 1953, helped launch concretism in Brazil and was admittedly inspired by Anton Webern's concept of *Klangfarbenmelodie*. Augusto de Campos's musical ideas, as one might expect, was from the start highly unorthodox, a mix of Viennese dodecaphonic theory and

Brazilian *bossa nova* swing. He prefaced *Poetamenos* with a short text that is still striking in its visionary audacity:

... or aspiring in the hope of a

KLANGFARBENMELODIE

with words

like in Webern:

a continuous melody dislocating from one instrument to another, constantly changing it's color:

instruments: phrase/word/syllable/letter(s), whose timbres are defined by a graphic-phonetic, or "ideogramic," theme

[...]

reverberation: oral reading—real voices functioning as timbre (approximately) for the poem like the instruments in Webern's Klangfarbenmelodie. (*Teoria*, 15)

It is worth dwelling for a moment on Webern's concept because of its deep impact on concrete poetry, a poetics often accused of being too cerebral, devoid of emotion and, on many occasions, of impoverishing language. To the Canadian pianist Glenn Gould,

however, Webern's music was deeply steeped in emotion, and Klangfarbenmelodie was the method that heightened its expression:

The string quartet pieces of Opus 5 are one of (Webern's) first essays in atonal writing. Though nothing could display a less extrovert emotionalism, there is a strikingly sensual quality manifest not only in the treatment of the strings themselves, but also in the manner by which Webern frequently isolates an individual tone or short interval-group, and, by alternating dynamic levels and instrumental timbres, succeeds in immobilizing a particular pitch level around which the oblique shapes of his half-counterpoints seek to fulfill their evolutionary destinies. It seems to me that the expressionistic qualities of this music such as the above mentioned isolated tone procedure - (Klangfarbenmelodie) carries to its zenith the very essence of the romantic ideal of emotional intensity in art. (Gould)

Another important aspect of Webern's compositional style that attracted de Campos, and is not addressed in the preamble to *Poetamenos*, was the Viennese composer's use of "mirror forms," through which he was able to structure a musical composition around as few as three notes.⁽⁴⁾ In *Música de invenção*, de Campos writes:

In Webern we find an unprecedented use of formal concision and of the dialectic between sound and silence (the latter made

audible for the first time, and used not merely as pause but as structural element, at the same level as sounds). (96)

Webern's reputation as the difficult, demanding conductor whose compositions are equally difficult to perform, is a source of great excitement to de Campos, who sees in this difficulty the very sign of genius. When a Uruguayan composer visiting São Paulo in the late 1970s tells de Campos that, "To this day, no one has ever listened to Webern! There are no recordings that can reproduce his compositions with fidelity," he seems undaunted and ponders how Webern's work might be even greater than he has assumed it to be. (*Musica* 95) This incident stresses some of the issues at stake around the Webern affair. In the São Paulo of the 1950s, knowledge of dodecaphonic theory was still fragmentary, mostly through rare imported recordings, with their liner notes, rather than live concerts and lectures. Surely there was the figure of Hans-Joachim Koellreutter championing new musical theories, but the dissemination of information is still minimal. The interest in Webern, therefore, seems to rely more on his conceptual rigor, his pursuit of an ideal structure, rather than on how his compositions actually sounded. On the occasion of a concert of works by Stravinsky, Webern and Xenakis in the Festival of Avant-garde Music that took place in São Paulo in 1965, de Campos writes that the *Six Pieces for Orchestra*, an early work by Webern, already demonstrate an "extremely concise language, the precise dialectic between sound and non-sound, 'an entire romance in one sigh,' *non multa sed multum*, microcosmusic." (*Balanço*, 213) Like Pound, Webern aimed to "make new" an entire musical tradition, from Bach all the way through the Romantics, and the two men would certainly find much to agree upon as far as the issue of melopoeia is concerned. In the "Ricercare for six voices," for

instance, whereas Bach originally indicated only lines for no instrument in particular, Webern disperses the notes among the instruments transforming the sound of the melody and accentuating its melancholic quality. The rhetoric qualities of baroque music, its doctrine of affects (*affektenlehre*), is hence recovered by Webern through his method of *klangfarbenmelodie*.

Freeing music from "themes" and/or "motives" is generally perceived as Webern's major contribution; his ability to convey "sound clarity" through the pure structuring of musical elements. According to Pierre Boulez, in Webern "the architecture of the work derives directly from the ordering of the series." Composition becomes a system of proportions, of relationships between intervals. This concept can be illustrated by the "Sator Arepo" palindrome found in the ruins of Pompeii and that became a source of great interest to Webern.⁽⁵⁾

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

To Webern, this diagram represented the ideal porous structure as it can be read horizontally or vertically from top left to bottom right; and horizontally or vertically from bottom right to top left. In addition, it uses a minimum of elements (eight letters, five words) to create a greater number of combinations ("Non multa sed

multum”). The “monadic architect of the mirror-form” is how Herbert Eimert, founder of the WDR Studio in Cologne, called Webern; and de Campos is equally fascinated with the possibilities of the “spiegelbild.”

But how exactly, one might ask, were these concepts by Webern translated onto textual terms? The five elegiac poems that compose *Poetamenos* were written as homage to the poet’s wife-to-be Lygia, in the tradition of spousal verse, or epithalamium. Throughout the sequence, words are cut in syllables or letters with their fragments often interspersed among other words. Different colors indicate different timbres while the spacing between words and lines dictate the rhythm. Words, syllables and phonemes mirror each other creating the effect of an echo chamber. Amidst this cacophony other literary works resonate adding new shades to the poet’s erotic reverie.(6)

Poetamenos opens with a lyrical proem, introducing the series’ central themes through two felicitous portmanteaux: (7) the first, “rochaedo,” suggests the figure of a poet, (“aedo,” from the Greek *aoidós*), inert like/with the rocks (“rochedo” [cliffs]); the second, “rupestro,” suggests that poetic imagination (“estro” from the Greek *oístros*) is a force of nature (“rupestre” denotes vegetation that grows on rocks). The “voice” of the poet seems to be directed to his beloved, (“somos um” [“we are one”]) and at the same time unisonous with hers (“uni / sono” [“uni / sonous,” or “one I am,” or “I dream I am one”]).

The second poem suggests an erotic interlude in a garden, with references to an idyllic setting (first a fig orchard “figueiral /figueiredo”(8) and later a hanging garden, “jardim

suspenso”) gradually unfolding into a highly sexualized verbal environment. Nature is first evoked through literature, and immediately becomes animated (sexualized).

Whether words break (“suspenso” becomes “sus pênis”) or unite (“ah braços” [ah, arms] can also be read as “abraços” [embraces]) they seem to refuse definition. For instance, in one line the pairing of “penis” with “flagrante” [flagrant] can be misread as “fragrant penis;” and once again “suspenso” is broken but this time as “sus/penso” [under/I think]. Amid this verbal turmoil, the stone-like poet (“petr’eu” [stone I] is brought out of his torpor (“exempl’eu”) through the woman’s thighs (“fêmoras”).⁽⁹⁾

The poem features clusters of words highlighted in four different colors (blue, red, green, yellow), and the overall effect is that of superimposed ideograms. The cluster in red, which starts in the third line and goes until the last includes pairings like “pubis / jardim” [pubis / garden], and “paraiso pudendo” [pudendum paradise].

The name of the poet’s inamorata, Lygia, is dispersed throughout the third poem with the letters rearranged in different combinations (“digital,” “dedat illa(grypho),” “felyna,” “figlia”) forming new words until the woman is finally morphed into a “lynx.” The poem opens with an apparent grievance: “Lygia finge” [Lygia feigns]. But the next line (“er ser”) moves meaning to another direction as “finge” can now be read as “fingers.” The third and fourth lines confirm this possibility: (“digital”) and (“dedat illa[grypho]”).⁽¹⁰⁾ One possible reading then is that “Lygia’s fingers types” (the poem?), or maybe she “feigns to.” The poem’s final lines play with family bonds—“mãe” [mother], “figlia” [daughter, in Italian], and “sorella” [sister, also in Italian]—a theme that will appear again in the fifth, and antepenultimate, poem. These differences are finally balanced, visually conveyed by the poem’s symmetrical layout, in which,

like in a Rorschach blot, and with minor distortions, the right side mirrors the left. Hence we have pairings like: “amantes/parentes” [lovers/relatives], “cimaue/baixoela” [on top me/she below], “estesse/aquelele” [this it/he that].(11) The sexual tension accumulated throughout the series reaches its climax in this poem, indicated with another word-valise: “semen(t)emventre,” which unfolds in at least two possibilities, “semen inside the womb” and “seed inside womb.”

The series closes with a melancholic tone of departure, or absence, conveyed by a concerted series of signs, fragments and citations: The lovers are apart (“separamante”) uncommunicated (“sem uma linha” [without a line]); without his muse, the poet becomes “a nobody” (“expoeta”) near his end (“expira”); the beloved becomes enigmatic (“sphinx e/gypt y g”); and, looming over the entire poem, hints of family strife (through references in the first lines to a sonnet by Camões [12] and towards the end to Lygia’s family name [13]).

Poetamenos is a series remarkable, paradoxically enough, for both its consision and opulence; its restrained formalism concealing a torrent of emotions and sexual longing. In it de Campos’s technique comes the closest to uniting in one packet Pound’s concepts of melopoeia and phanopoeia. Each poem is composed as a “lyrical ideogram,” to use Jacques Donguy’s expression, with express indications for rhythm and tone.(14) Throughout the series Lygia is the principle that animates, enlivens and organizes the world around the poet. Before her arrival the poet is inert, rock-like. Her presence is both a force of nature (“lynx,” “felyna”), and the possibility of writing (“digital,” “dedat illa(grypho”). She is thus Echo, or rather Syringa.(15)

Augusto de Campos is obviously a refined reader, capable of incorporating onto his writing the most avant-garde tendencies available around. In addition to writing poetry he has also dedicated much of his time to inform the Brazilian public through an extraordinary translation program that includes authors as diverse as Dante, Donne, Dickinson, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Pound, and Valéry. He is also the author of three volumes of translations of Provençal poets. It is interesting to note, however, that despite the great variety of interests evident in his translation work and writings on music, his own poetry is in essence influenced by specific threads in Brazilian popular culture. In an essay from *Balanço da bossa*, for instance, he points out that *Poetamenos* was written under the influence of both Webern and Lupicínio Rodrigues, a samba composer whose torch songs were popular in Brazil in the 1950's.⁽¹⁶⁾ In the same essay, he praises Rodrigues's "restrained expressionism" and notes that Webern "gave classical music the physical dimension of popular music."^(Balanço 315-316)

De Campos's fascination with Rodrigues motivates him to track the singer/composer in his hometown, in the Brazilian south, to attend one of his performances and interview him. He admires Rodrigues's soft singing, which was the opposite of the big voice, opera style interpretation that was current back in the 1950s. In addition, he is also amazed by Rodrigues's lyrics, which make use of everyday, common-place language, and cliché phrases to the greatest effect. "Lupicínio, he writes, "attacks [the lyrics] with naked hands, with all the clichés of our language, using that which has been discarded to attain greatness, isolating redundancy from its context to achieve the new." De Campos marvels at the fact that in popular music, lyric and melody are impossible to

dissociate. And in the case of Rodrigues, his very interpretation of the song must be taken as part of the entire gestalt: “The degree of involvement is complete—one would even say “verbivocovisual”—and cannot be sectioned without losses.”(222-223)

Ultimately, the bridge proposed by de Campos between twelve-tone theory and samba is what prevents *Poetamenos* from being a mere illustration of a thesis. The series is rigorously structured, with three euphoric moments (“paraiso pudendo,” Lygia fingers” and “eis os amantes) and two disphoric (“nossos dias,” and “dias dias dias”), and as in Webern’s music, echoes of other works and styles reverberate throughout—Provencal, Baroque, Parnasianism. But from within this rigorous structure, the poet’s voice comes forth to tell us the story of his love for Lygia, full of longing and youthful yearning.

Notes

(1). In a footnote on page 11 of John Hollander’s *The Figure of Echo*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), we find the following reference to image of voice: “This phrase, (...) comes from the fairly literal Latin use of *imago*, or sometimes *imago vocis*, for echo. It precedes, rather than tropes, our primarily visual use of the word image.” I thank Fernando Pérez-Vilallón for bringing to my attention Hollander’s mention of this notion of acoustic image, a subject of central interest in the poetics of concretism.

(2). Décio Pignatari, “Poesia concreta: organização” [Concrete Poetry: Organization] in Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari and Haroldo de Campos, *Teoria da poesia*

concreta—*Textos críticos e manifestos, 1950-1960*. 2nd Edition, (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1975), p 86. Coincidentally Mário de Andrade, in *Pequena história da música* [Short History of Music], lists the “composer” Ezra Pound in the same breath as Webern: “Also in trios, quartets and quintets a most interesting generation has bloomed, employing the most unusual and curious group of soloists (Kurt Weill, Falla, Ezra Pound and Anton Webern.” Augusto de Campos concludes that Andrade might have heard of the performance of *Le Testament* at the Salle Pleyel in 1926. (cf. Augusto de Campos, *Música de invenção*, [São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1998], p 27.)

(3). “Minha relação com a tradição é musical,” in Haroldo de Campos, *Metalinguagem & outras metas*. 4th edition. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1992. pages 257-8

(4). In his *Concerto for Nine Instruments* of 1934, for example, all the pitch material is derived only from the three-note series B-Bb-D and its three mirror forms (retrograde, inversion, retrograde inversion).

(5). This diagram, which Webern used as the basis for his *Concerto*, op. 24, and that was ultimately inscribed on his gravestone, can be translated as "Arepo, the sower, holds the wheels at work," and there is much speculation as to what it really represents.

(6). Prominently among these references are: an anonymous Provençal song from Galícia, and lines from Luís de Camões (“Esperança de um só dia,” [Hope of a sole day]), and from the Parnassian poet Luis Guimarães Junior (“Oh, se me lembro, e quanto,” [Oh, do I recall it, and how]).

(7). In a French anthology of de Campos's work, (Augusto de Campos, *Anthologie—Despoesia*. Paris: Al Dante, 2002. p 16-29), Jacques Donguy performs a formidable “unpacking” of the word mutation going on in *Poetamenos*.

(8). The beginning of de Campos's poem is a rearrangement of the first lines of *Canção do figueiral* [Song of the Fig Orchard], a Provençal song from Galícia that celebrates the rescue of six young women captured by Moors. The original song starts thus: “No figueiral figueiredo, e no figueiral entrei” [In the fig orchard, in the fig orchard I entered]. Cf. Marques da Cruz *História da Literatura*. São Paulo: Editora Cia. Melhoramentos, 1924.

(9) Both expressions are complicated creations with very little trace of Portuguese. Donguy writes that “exempl’eu” is “un néologisme latinisé, au sens de ‘ouvrir vers l’extérieur,’” while “fêmoras” est une autre creation à partir du latin ‘femina,’ ‘femme’ et ‘femora,’ ‘femur.’” It’s worth noting that the Latin root *ampl-* is also present in *amplexus* [embrace]. This convoluted line would suggest thus an inversion of the biblical account of the creation of Eve.

(10). In the line “dedat illa(grypho)” de Campos deconstructs the Portuguese verb “datilografar” (typewriting) in order to insert his beloved’s name within his poetic practice. It could be said that the “ghost” (or presence) of Lygia haunts his writing (“grypho” can be read both as “glyph” and “griffin”).

(11). The portmanteau “estesse” (composed by two demonstrative pronouns with subtle difference: *este* [this] and *esse* [this]) can concomitantly be (mis)read as “ecstasy.”

(12). Camões’s sonnet “Sete Anos De Pastor...” refers to the biblical story of Jacob, who labored seven years in order to marry Rachel.

Sete anos de pastor Jacó servia
Labão, pai de Raquel, serrana bela;
mas não servia ao pai, servia a ela,
e a ela só por prêmio pretendia.

Os dias, na esperança de um só dia,
passava, contentando-se com vê-la;
porém o pai, usando de cautela,
em lugar de Raquel lhe dava Lia.

Vendo o triste pastor que com enganos
lhe fora assim negada a sua pastora,
como se a não tivera merecida;

começa de servir outros sete anos,
dizendo: — Mais servira, se não fora
para tão longo amor tão curta a vida.

(13). Here the beloved's family name "Azeredo" echoes "figueiredo" in the second poem. The word "azeredo" indicates an orchard of *azeiros* (*Prunus lusitanica*), a tree of the Rosaceae family. Most Portuguese family names are inspired by nature, and according to the legend around *Canção do figueiral*, after freeing the maidens from the Moors, the youth took on the name Figueiredo.

(14). A propos of "Lygia fingers" Donguy writes; "idéogramme lyrique de la féminité et de la félinité, avec la syllable 'ly' qui assume le caractère d'une cellule thématique." *Anthologie-Despoesia*, p 8.

(15). Elaborating on the "signification of the relation of Pan or the natural world with a voice," Hollander quotes the following passage from Francis Bacon's *De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum*: "For the world enjoys itself, and in itself all things that are. ... The world itself can have no loves or any want (being content with itself) unless it be of *discourse*. Such is the nymph Echo, a thing not substantial but only a voice; or if it be more of the exact and delicate kind, *Syringa*,—when the words and voices are regulated and modulated by numbers, whether poetical or oratorical. But it is well devised that of all words and voices Echo alone should be chosen for the world's wife, for that is the true philosophy which echoes most faithfully the voices of the world itself, and is written as it were at the world's own dictation, being nothing else than the image and reflection thereof, to which it adds nothing of its own, but only iterates and gives it back." And Hollander adds: "This marriage is one of nature to the true poetry of natural philosophy, the marriage for which he himself claims, in the *Novum organum*, to be writing the spousal verse or epithalamium." *Figure of Echo*, p 10.

(16). The influence of Rodrigues's songbook among other composers and poets still remains to be fully appraised. In *Balanço da bossa* Augusto de Campos dedicates three essays to this great composer, including a complete discography.

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Exploring the concrete labyrinth

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In 1952, three poets formed a group in São Paulo that was destined to become extremely influential: Augusto de Campos, his brother Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari. Paralleling a similar but independent development in Europe, the Noigandres group, as they came to be known, sought to exploit the physical properties of language.⁽¹⁾ Determined to revolutionize modern poetry, they began to experiment with the placement of words on the page, their sound, their physical appearance, and their interrelation to one another. Before long—the chronology is complicated--both groups began to refer to their creations as “Concrete” poetry.(Bohn 233) Like their European counterparts, the Brazilians treated words as visual and phonetic counters to be manipulated without regard to their meaning. “O poema concreto é um objeto em e por si mesmo,” they proclaimed, “não um intérprete de objetos exteriores e/ou sensações mais ou meno subjetivas” (“The concrete poem is an object in and of itself, not an interpreter of external objects and/or sensations that are more or less subjective”).⁽²⁾ Whereas traditional poetry operates on the conceptual level, Concrete poetry is based on perception. It differs from conventional verse in its ability to translate abstract ideas into visual images. This ability is what makes it concrete. In the absence of conventional grammar, Concrete poetry employs a spatial syntax. Words are free to combine with each other visually as well as verbally, vertically as well as horizontally.

Augusto de Campos

During the first half of 1953, Augusto de Campos wrote a series of poems that embodied this brand new aesthetic. Entitled *Poetamenos* (*Poetminus*), the volume was inspired by Anton Webern's "Klangfarbenmelodie" ("Color Tone Poems") and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. (3) The poems were intended not only to be read in the traditional manner but also to be recited by multiple voices.(4) In order to indicate which parts were reserved for which speakers, de Campos color-coded the words (and certain syllables) accordingly. Some of the works were designed for two voices, others for as many as five voices. Despite the obvious interest of such a procedure, production costs forced the poet to abandon his initial program. His current web site suggests he would have published all his poetry in color if he could have. For better or worse, black and white proved to be an excellent vehicle for the Noigandres poets because it allowed them to focus on structural concerns. "A poesia concreta começa," the trio announced in 1958, "por tomar conhecimento do espaço gráfico como agente estrutural O poema concreto comunica a sua própria estrutura" ("Concrete poetry begins by becoming aware of graphic space as structural agent The concrete poem communicates its own structure").(Solt, 70) Published two years earlier, the following text is the first part of a longer poem composed of four circular figures.

o v o
n o v e l o
novo no velho
o filho em folhos
na jaula dos joelhos
infante em fonte
feto feito
dentro do
centro (5)

[egg / ball of yarn / new not old / the son in ruffles / in the cage of
the knees / infant in source / fetus made / inside the / center].

Although the work's visual appearance is attractive, even seductive, it is highly atypical—at least for the three poets mentioned above. According to a key text entitled “plano-pilôto para poesia concreta” (“Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry”), it illustrates the first stage in the evolution of Concrete poetry, which is based on physical resemblance. In addition to evoking the egg verbally, the composition also depicts the egg visually. Interestingly, de Campos condemned Apollinaire for succumbing to the same pictographic temptation in an article published the very same year. (6) As practiced by the Noigandres group, Concrete poetry was, and continues to be, fiercely anti-mimetic. In keeping with the project outlined in the Pilot Plan, the vast majority of the compositions are dynamic and non-representational. (7)

The present text celebrates the incredible potential of the human egg, which miraculously develops into a fetus and eventually into a baby. The egg's circular shape is reflected not only by the visual design but by two additional objects as well: the ball of yarn and the uterus in which the fetus is growing. According to de Campos, the womb is not only the source but also the center of humanity, since ultimately everything revolves about it. Discussing a similar work, which will be examined later, he provides the following gloss for **novelo**: "implying the complication of the human being." (Solt 254) This appears to refer to biological complication rather than to the complications inherent in human existence. Thus the relationship between the first two words would seem to be metaphoric. Like a ball of yarn, which reveals innumerable twists and turns as it unrolls, the egg divides and re-divides innumerable times to produce the complicated animal we call homo sapiens. The poet envisions the young child dressed in ruffles and playing between his or her parents' knees.

As de Campos declares, eggs are associated with things that are new not with things that have grown old. They are associated with birth rather than with death. In fact, this construction holds the key to much of the poem—not at the semantic but at the phonemic level. The text incorporates two acoustical structures that reflect, illustrate, and embody two important themes. Each structure complements the other but also competes with it. The first theme is that of birth and rebirth, which is evoked by the metamorphosis that continually takes place in the poem. The syllables in the first two lines are rearranged, for example, to form the third line. **Filho** is transformed into **folho**, **jaula** into **joelho**, **infante** into **em fonte**, and so forth. Viewed from a different angle, a second theme emerges which, for lack of a better term, might be

called “security.” According to the printed text, the first expression is not transformed into the second but is simply juxtaposed with it. Five pairs of words are placed in opposition to each other to form a protective shell (or membrane). The egg is in the center, shielded by the acoustic walls that surround it.

Augusto de Campos published a poem entitled “**uma vez**” the following year that is more representative of his early work. Like most of his poetry, it is concentrated, abstract, and dynamic.

uma vez

uma fala

uma foz

uma vez **uma bala**

uma fala **uma voz**

uma foz **uma vala**

uma bala **uma vez**

uma voz

uma vala

uma vez

[one time / one speech / one river mouth / one time / one bullet /
 one speech / one voice / one river mouth / one ditch / one bullet /
 one time / one voice / one ditch / one time].

Like the preceding text, “**uma vez**” illustrates James Joyce’s concept of the verbivocovisual, which was enthusiastically adopted by the Noigandres group. The poem is composed of words, it appeals to the eye, and it is designed to be read aloud. Indeed, Claus Clüver reports that a recording exists of the text featuring two male

voices and two female voices. (8) At first glance, the composition resembles a capital Z that has been tilted on its side. The two transverse strokes and the two diagonal strokes are exactly the same length. Each contains four pairs of words that echo each other in a complicated ballet. Eventually, however, one perceives that the design is composed of two acute angles facing in opposite directions, which changes its whole Gestalt. The main problem that occurs is how to determine the correct reading order—assuming that such a thing exists. Depending on whether one follows literary conventions or artistic conventions, there would seem to be two possible paths. One can read from left to right and from top to bottom, as I have done in my initial translation, or one can decipher the figure on the right followed by the figure on the left. The second model produces the following poem: “one time / one speech / one river mouth / one bullet / one voice / one ditch / one time / one time / one speech / one river mouth / one bullet / one voice / one ditch.”

Both of these reading strategies generate interesting rhyme schemes. The literary model begins ABCA, adds three symmetrical couplets BBCCBB, and reverses the first four lines ACBA. The artistic model begins ABCB, reverses the first three lines CBA and repeats the whole process. Visually, the two figures mirror each other, but acoustically they are identical. Since the B rhyme (**fala** / **bala** / **vala**) concludes every other line, it provides a pleasant sonic constant. The question remains: which of these two strategies is correct? Interestingly, the recording described by Clüver follows both models. The first reading proceeds along the diagonals, while the second scans the poem horizontally. Beginning with “**uma bala**” on the left, the recital concludes with yet another reading. The four voices advance along the two diagonals simultaneously to

create an example of Concrete polyphony. Instead of attempting to privilege a single reading, the conductor fashions an acoustic tapestry composed of multiple readings. Since de Campos' own recordings observe a similar strategy, this seems to be the wisest approach. Instead of one poem the composition contains many poems. Or to put it another way, the composition consists of all possible readings.

No matter which path the reader ultimately chooses, some sort of drama appears to be taking place. Or rather, since “**uma vez**” can also be translated as “once upon a time,” the poem appears to recount an event that happened in the past. Since there are no verbs to link the six nouns together, the relations between them must be intuited. Although the plot remains the same no matter how one proceeds, some versions of the story are more satisfying than others. The artistic reading model is probably the most rewarding because it is concise, linear, and to the point. From what the reader can gather, someone was giving a speech by the mouth of a river when he was shot and killed. He barely had time to cry out before he fell dead. And he was buried in a ditch. The numerical logic is inexorable: one man was killed by one bullet and buried in one ditch. It could scarcely be otherwise. Who this individual was, what he was speaking about, and why he was killed are never made clear. Was it a political assassination? A crime of passion? A case of mistaken identity? An unfortunate accident? For better or worse, we will never know.

The final poem by Augusto de Campos, which recalls the first composition we examined, was published two years later. As Haroldo de Campos remarks, it is “another

generative poem, this time with cosmic and existential hints. A kind of ‘portable cosmogony’ in cross-word form.”(Williams unpaginated)

```

      o
    n o v e l o
      o v o
o v o          s o l
e              o
l              l e t r a
o              e
              e s t r e l a          t
              s r                      e
    s o l e t r a          r
    o e r                r
    l t e                e
              r l          t e m o r
              a a          o
              t          t          t
              e          m o r t e
    t e r r e m o t o          r
              o          r          m e t r o
              r          t          o
              t e r m o          m m
              e          m o t o r
              t          m o t o r
              r          t o r t o
              o          m o r t o
              r o
  
```

[ball of yarn / egg / egg / ball of yarn / egg / egg // sun / letter / star

/

spells out / sun / letter / star / spells out // fear / death / earthquake /

meter / term / fear / death / earthquake / meter / term // motive /

motive / unjust / death / motive / motive / unjust / death]

One thing is clear at first glance: the composition represents a stunning achievement. Not only is its interlocking design a marvel of geometric precision, but the figures that compose it are endowed with a crystalline purity. Adding to the poem’s visual appeal, the version that appears in Solt’s anthology is printed in white letters on a solid blue

background. While in theory, the reader could begin anywhere, the fact that the poem descends from the upper left to the lower right suggests that this is the preferred sequence. As in conventional poetry, one reads from left to right and from top to bottom. Like “**uma vez**,” each figure contains two identical groups of words. The vertical words echo the horizontal words and vice versa. The most productive strategy, which I have followed in my translation, seems to be to read the horizontal lines first and then the vertical lines. The whole composition is structured like a symphony with four distinct movements. In the same manner as the first two lines of “**ovo novo**,” the initial figure celebrates the mystery of life. Like the ball of yarn, whose shape and complexity it shares, the egg possesses enormous potential. Just as the yarn is eventually transformed into a sweater, the egg gradually evolves into a complex animal.

The second figure celebrates the mystery of the universe, which, like Nature in Baudelaire’s “Correspondances,” occasionally emits confused (and confusing) words. Whereas the words in Baudelaire’s poem are whispered to a passersby, those in the present composition possess a visual form. Composed of heavenly bodies like the sun and the stars, they form a celestial text that has to be spelled out letter by letter. And yet, simple as it sounds, the process is fraught with anxiety. Some of the words lack letters, some are illegible, and others are missing altogether. Inevitably, despite a few tantalizing glimpses, the heavenly message eludes the viewer. By contrast, the third figure evokes life on earth, which leaves a great deal to be desired. According to de Campos, human existence is dominated by fear and death--in that order. Much of daily life is threatening, and no matter how hard one struggles it inevitably ends with his or

her demise. Rather than an idyllic haven, the planet is a dangerous place to live, where earthquakes can swallow one up without warning. The fact that “**termo**” can be combined with “**metro**” to form the Portuguese word for “thermometer” reminds us that humanity is subject to numerous diseases as well. Confronted with life’s absurdities, the fourth figure is anything but comforting. Since motor is both a noun and an adjective, it may refer to the “engine” that drives the absurd universe or, as I suspect, to the Supreme Being’s “motive” for constructing that universe. Whatever the explanation, death is depicted as wrong, unjust, and unfair (all meanings of torto). What kind of Creator would invent a machine that self-destructs?

Looking back over the composition, one notes that it covers the entire gamut of human existence, from the moment of conception to the moment of death. In addition to the work’s existential preoccupations, it possesses a cosmic dimension that prompts Solt to call it “an object of shining spiritual quality.”(Solt 62) The arrangement of the words on the page mirrors that of the stars in the heavens and vice versa. In actuality the poem is concerned with two constellations, one poetic and the other celestial, one visible and the other merely imagined. Like the poem, the universe is composed of intelligible signs that demand to be deciphered. In several respects, the composition recalls Mallarmé’s “Un Coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hazard” (“A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance”), which is spread across the page like “UNE CONSTELLATION froide d’oubli” (A CONSTELLATION cold with oblivion”) and which also must be deciphered word by word. As Augusto de Campos declares elsewhere, Mallarmé’s revolutionary poem “[opened] the door on a new poetic reality.”(Campos, A. 259)

Haroldo de Campos

Haroldo de Campos was a prolific translator and literary critic as well as an accomplished poet. “Guided by theory and research,” K. David Jackson notes, “Haroldo’s poly-faceted production across genres includes poetry, theory, translation, criticism, the essay, conferences, interviews, and university courses.”(Jackson 18)

Throughout his work, K. Alfons Knauth adds, “there is a constant concern with the materiality of language, with verbal world making and the processing of a Concrete, multilingual literature.”(Knauth in Jackson 157) This preoccupation may be seen in his Concrete poetry in particular, where the linguistic sign’s semantic function is eclipsed by material concerns. In poem after poem, signification is sacrificed to visual and acoustic requirements. In Concrete poetry in general, Solt explains, “form = content and content = form.” (Solt 13) What you see—and what you hear—is basically what you get. This is especially true of Haroldo de Campos’ most advanced poetry, in which, to quote the Pilot Plan, “o isomorfismo tende a resolver-se em puro movimento estrutural . . . ; nesta fase, predomina a forma geométrica e a matemática da composição” (“isomorphism tends to resolve itself into pure structural movement . . . ; geometrical form and the mathematics of composition prevail”). (9)

Although the previous poem is largely non-representational, it contains occasional references to recognizable objects and actions. By contrast, the next poem is completely abstract. Composed of conjunctions, prepositions, and comparative adjectives, it refers to such concepts as size, quantity and intensity.

mais mais

menos mais e menos

mais ou menos sem mais

nem menos nem mais

nem menos menos

[more more / less more and less / more or less without more / neither
less nor more / nor less less]

Since “**mais**” can also be translated as “**plus**” and “**menos**” as “**minus**,” several critics have suggested that the poem represents a mathematical equation. Viewed in this perspective, the reader would presumably need to solve the equation in order to arrive at the poem’s final meaning. While the presence of five conjunctions and a troublesome preposition complicates this task, the composition appears to be divided into two symmetrical halves separated by the word “**ou**.” Since “**mais**” and “**menos**” oscillate back and forth between two meanings, the first half might also be translated as “more + more / - more and - / more.” If we treat this as an equation, the four terms add up to zero ($2a - 2a = 0$). Unfortunately, it does not seem possible to extract a meaningful solution from the second half, which is much more ambiguous. Although one can make similar substitutions, none of the results are significant. Perhaps the solution we are seeking is actually much simpler. While “**mais**” occurs four times in the first half and “**menos**” twice, for example, the proportions are reversed in the second half. Perhaps the positive and the negative charges simply cancel each other out, as they presumably do in the universe in general.

Or perhaps the explanation has nothing to do with mathematics after all. Upon reflection, one perceives that the poem illustrates the Zen Buddhist philosophy that “less is more.” Or rather, since it begins with “**mais**” and concludes with “**menos**,” it expresses the conviction that “more is less.” The first two words serve as a prelude and the last two words as a coda. The transformation from the first concept to the second occurs in the space of three short lines. **Mais** and **menos** alternate with each other until it has been completed. Taking place right before our eyes, the conversion demonstrates the truth of the very principle it espouses. As we have seen, Concrete poetry shares the same minimalist philosophy. By the judicious rendering of a few choice words, it manages to transform less into more. The fascination it exerts on the reader, the viewer, and the listener stems from the contrast between its limited means and its disproportionate effect.

Compared to the previous two poems, which employ highly restricted vocabularies, the following composition is positively verbose. Whereas the first work is composed of four words and the other work (for all practical purposes) of two, “**fala prata**” utilizes eight different terms. With two noteworthy exceptions, each word is repeated at least twice.

fala
prata

cala
ouro

cara
prata

coroa
ouro

fala
cala

para

prata
cala

ouro
fala

clara

[speech / silver / silence / gold / heads / silver / tails / gold / speech

/

silence / halt / silver / silence / gold / speech / clarity]

This time Haroldo de Campos sets out to deconstruct a well-known proverb: “Speech is silver, silence is golden.” Formulated for the first time around 600 A.D., in the Judaic Biblical commentaries called the *Midrash*, the expression serves as the poem’s point of departure. The first pair of words: “**fala / prata**” remind us that a gifted speaker is known as “a silver-tongued orator.” He not only possesses a valuable talent, but he also renders valuable advice. However, the second pair of words: “**cala / ouro**” portray the subject in a different light. Speech may well be precious, as traditional wisdom maintains, but silence is even more precious. Since the two can scarcely co-exist at the same time, the second statement effectively contradicts the first statement. To somebody who is engaged in silent meditation, speech is obviously unwelcome. By the same token, however, to somebody who is waiting for a reply to a question, silence is equally unwelcome. If silence is priceless, speech must be worthless, and if speech is

priceless, silence must be worthless. How can we reconcile the two statements? The remainder of the poem explores this rhetorical paradox and attempts to find a satisfactory solution.

The next two pairs of words, like the first two, are obviously juxtaposed with each other. This time gold and silver are associated with the opposite sides of a coin. Since coins were once made of precious metals, this makes a certain amount of sense. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two turns out to be metaphorical instead of metonymic. The next pair of words: “**fala**” / “**cala**” makes it clear that the metaphor describes the problem introduced at the beginning of the poem. Deciding whether silence is more valuable than speech or vice versa is like flipping a coin. Sometimes heads comes up and sometimes tails. At this point, two separate reading strategies present themselves, one primarily visual and the other literary. Readers can continue to the end of the diagonal, or they can continue to read from top to bottom and from left to right. On the one hand, the fact that the poem consists of pairs of words suggests that “**clara**” should be followed by “**para**.” On the other hand, the literary path makes more sense from a structural point of view. “**Para**” would interrupt the poem’s binary rhythm and prepare the reader for the double conclusion: “**prata**” / “**cala**” and “**ouro**” / “**fala**.” Stressing the conclusion’s clarity, “**Clara**” would serve as an epigram.

Décio Pignatari

The third member of the Noigandres group, Décio Pignatari, taught industrial design and communication theory for many years. In addition, he composed the most famous Concrete poem in Brazil, “beba coca cola,” which compares the American soft drink to

a series of nauseating substances. Since several critics have analyzed this poem previously, it has been omitted from the present study. Together with Luiz Ângelo Pinto, Pignatari also invented “semiotic poetry” at one point, which employs visual signs instead of words. However, it is his experiments with Concrete poetry that interest us here. Dating from 1956, the following poem is arranged to form a spiral rotating about a vertical axis consisting of a series of “m”s.

```

      u m
        m o v i
          m e n t o
            c o m p o n d o
              a l é m
                d a
n u v e m
      u m
        c a m p o
          d e
            c o m b a t e

              m i r a
            g e m
              i r a
                d e
          u m
            h o r i z o n t e
p u r o
  n u m
    m o
      m e n t o
v i v o (84)
  
```

[a / move / ment / composing / a / field / of / battle / beyond
 the/cloud/

mira / ge / fury / of / a / pure / horizon / at a / vivid / mo / ment]

That the composition is concerned with motion is apparent from the very beginning. As Iumna Simon and Vinicius Dantas note, it presents “uma descrição cinética de seu próprio conteúdo” (“a kinetic representation of its own content”).(Simon and Danta)

Extending the length of the poem, from “movimento” to “momento,” the vertical axis anchors the revolving words and prevents them from flying off the page. In contrast to its physical appearance, the composition’s vocabulary is largely unremarkable.

Similarly, despite a few phonic echoes, there is no systematic attempt at rhyming.

Although the poem’s language is perfectly ordinary, the finished text is unusual. At first glance, it seems to be curiously abstract. While there are a number of references to natural phenomena, for example, these appear to be juxtaposed at random. Since verbs are practically non-existent, readers are forced to intuit the relationships between various components, several of which appear to be metaphors. In addition, as we will see in a moment, the composition possesses an extraordinary degree of ambiguity.

Together with certain thematic considerations, these stylistic traits suggest that it was inspired by Mallarmé in particular.

The composition begins with a cryptic statement centered around a present participle-- the only verb in the whole work. Some kind of movement is supposedly composing a battlefield. However, since motion is not endowed with agency, how it can possibly compose anything? And what in any case does it mean to compose a field of battle? Complicating the scenario still further, além can also mean “above,” and nuvem can describe a “moving throug.” The mysterious action could conceivably be taking place above the cloud rather than behind it, and the cloud itself could actually be a group of people. Similarly, “miragem” may not refer to a mirage at all but simply to an “illusion.” Without further details, there is simply no way to tell. Despite these momentary setbacks, the second half contains an allusion that finally permits us to decipher the poem. Although many of the references are obscure, the presence of an

“horizonte” and a “momento vivo” suggests we are witnessing a vivid sunset. Unexpectedly, the poem turns out to be a landscape. The question that arises at this point is: who is the artist? An anonymous painter or Pignatari himself? Once again, for better or for worse, it is impossible to say. The poem may be a description of a landscape painting or of an actual landscape. In the last analysis, it does not make a great deal of difference. In either case, since the composition is a virtual creation, the scene it depicts is an illusion. The movement evoked at the beginning is that of the artist’s hand, either real or metaphorical, painting the battle scene in question. Mirroring the furious soldiers on the battlefield, the setting sun bathes the scene in a blood-red glow.

José Lino Grünewald

José Lino Grünewald is a lawyer, journalist, and well-known film critic who joined the Noigandres group in 1958. In several respects, the following composition resembles Augusto de Campos’ “caracol” and Décio Pignatari’s “um movimento.” Like them, it is a self-reflexive poem that is both dynamic and isomorphic.

êsse solo	
	calo
êsse sol	
	cal
êsse só	
	cá
êsse s	
	c(esse (10)

[that soil / callus / that sun / lime / that solitary / here / that s / c(eases)]

Like the two works mentioned above, “êsse solo” enacts what it depicts and depicts what it enacts. In general, auto-illustrative poetry that possesses a visual dimension utilizes one of two procedures. Either it portrays the subject in question, like Guillaume

Apollinaire's calligrams, or it illustrates the principle that the subject represents, like some of the Italian Futurists' poetry. As mentioned earlier, the Brazilians rejected the first practice but embraced the second enthusiastically. Indeed, the concept of visual isomorphic form is identical to that of the Futurists' analogia disegnata. As we have seen, there are basically two ways a principle may be invoked. It may be associated with a particular object, like "caracol," or with an abstract category like "um movimento." Although both poems are concerned with movement, the first one manages to evoke the animal as well, simply by naming it. Like the second work, Grünewald's composition illustrates an abstract concept: disappearance. The initial expression in each column undergoes a progressive reduction from one line to the next. The operation proceeds carefully and inexorably, deleting one letter at a time. By the end of the poem, "solo" and "calo" have been reduced to their initial letters. As the poet notes in the last line, they will cease to exist if the operation continues. At both the visual and the acoustic levels, the poem performs its own disappearing act.

While the composition is perfectly coherent visually and phonetically, the verbal message does not appear to make much sense. Although every other line begins with the word "êsse," which alludes to a specific antecedent, we have no idea what that antecedent might be. For better or worse, the poem exists in a referential vacuum. Several linguistic peculiarities exist as well that seem to have no justification. In the fifth line, a demonstrative adjective modifies a descriptive adjective, for instance, which is grammatically impossible. And for some unknown reason, the very last word employs the subjunctive tense rather than the indicative. In addition, some terms have more than one meaning. Solo can also be translated as "by one's self," for

example, caloas “blister,” and cal as “whitewash.” Finally, the relations between the various words that make up the composition are far from evident. Only with great effort does one succeed in constructing a provisional scenario. Without belaboring the point, the poem appears to be a Concrete version of the pastoral elegy. Mixing metonymy and metaphor, it laments the condition of the Brazilian peasantry and offers an ironic consolation. The first four lines evoke the brutal hardships of peasant life. Although the poor farmer toils endlessly in the fields, he receives little more than calluses for his pains. Burnt to a crisp by the blazing sun, which burns like quicklime, he is the very image of futility. The last four lines evoke the peasant’s solitary existence on earth, ignored by Church and State alike. His only relief comes--and this is scarcely much comfort—when he ceases to exist.

The second poem paints a picture of life in general which, no matter what part of the world one inhabits, is characterized by four constants. Depending on one’s point of view, the portrait is either amusing or depressing.

a v i d a
 c o m i d a
 a v i d a
 b e b i d a
 a v i d a
 d o r m i d a
 a v i d a
 i d a

[life / food / life / drink / life / sleep / life / gone]

That the three necessities of life happen to rhyme with the past participle of “to go” is fortuitous, to say the least. Portuguese and Spanish may be the only languages in the world where this is possible. Beginning with a phonetic relationship that is merely coincidental, Grünewald constructs a poetic scenario in which each word plays a

significant role. The first three words designate actions that are essential for human existence. In order to survive, human beings need to eat, drink, and sleep. The fourth word reminds us that, sooner or later, life comes to an end. For better or worse, the preceding facts describe the human condition. Since the composition contains no active verbs, it resembles a shopping list more than a traditional poem. Alternating with each of the four words in turn, the refrain: “**a vida**” stresses life’s fundamental importance. The fact that each line ends with the same three letters interjects a humorous note. However, since -ida means “gone,” it evokes life’s transience at the same time. That comida, bebida, and dormida are basically past participles emphasizes the finality of the actions in question. They imply that life has already been consumed, that it is too late to make amends. As mentioned, at least two interpretations are possible. The poem could be viewed as an invitation to enjoy life to the fullest, for example. Something like: “Eat, drink, and make merry, for tomorrow you may die.” Or alternatively it could represent a diatribe aimed at people who do nothing but eat, drink, and sleep. Considered in this light, the poem could conceivably represent a wake-up call rather than a general denunciation.

Unlike the previous composition, which appeals primarily to the ear, the next work appeals primarily to the eye. Although one could theoretically read it aloud, it is designed to be seen rather than heard. Indeed, if it were deprived of its visual dimension, it would be virtually impossible to decipher. Proceeding phoneme by phoneme and morpheme by morpheme, the listener would become hopelessly disoriented. By contrast, the viewer is able to grasp the poem’s structure at a single glance.

a a a a
 a a a
 a a a
 a a a a

p a a r a p o a
 s í a a l e r a
 t r a l a a
 m a a v r a s

p a l a r a s p o m a
 s í a b a l e r a s
 t r a s a b a s
 e m a a l a a s

p a l a v r a s p o e m a
 s í l a b a s l e t r a s
 l e t r a s s í l a b a s
 p o e m a p a l a v r a s |

[wordspoeM / syllablesletters / letterssyllables / poemwords]

This ingenious little poem celebrates the birth of language, both spoken and written, which it reenacts symbolically. The first stanza represents the earliest phase, when our ancestors' vocabulary consisted of a few repetitive sounds. At this stage, language resembled stuttering more than speech. Thus the stanza is composed of a single vowel repeated over and over in an apparently random fashion. While primitive man is technically still inarticulate, these sounds represent an embryonic language. The vowel in question (a) will eventually assume multiple functions in Portuguese, serving as an article, a preposition, and a pronoun. During the second phase, illustrated by the next stanza, it is joined by two more vowels and seven consonants. The creation of monosyllables at this stage represents a major step in the evolution of language. If we

add or subtract accents (a later development), a few simple words begin to emerge.

These include the terms for “shovel” (pá), “frog” (rã), “dust” (pó), and “self” (si).

The third phase, during which more letters are added, witnesses the creation of various polysyllables. At this point, the conglomeration begins to look more like an actual text. Although the poem has not yet assumed its final shape, most of the syllables have been transformed into words. “Pala” means “eyeshade” (among other things), “raspo” is the first person singular of raspar, and so forth. At this stage, the stanza reads: “eyeshade / i scrape / to me / self / skirt / he reads / ras / behind / skirts / rhea / row / ace.” While the words are not arranged in any meaningful fashion, they represent an important step in the drive toward intelligibility. The ultimate breakthrough occurs in the fourth stanza, which marks the completion of this drive and the emergence of the finished poem. The final section groups words together in ways that, despite the absence of verbs, still manage to make sense. In addition to language, it celebrates the phonemes, the syllables, and the words of which it is composed. In this respect, to be sure, the composition resembles Concrete poetry in general, which transforms linguistic signs into visual building blocks. Like the previous poems, it erects a visual edifice that rests on a verbal foundation.

Notes

(1). For a study of Concrete poetry in general, see Willard Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001), pp. 232-55.

(2). Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, “plano-pilôto para poesia concreta,” *Noigandres*, No. 4 (1958). Repr. in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), pp. 70-71. The translation is my own.

(3). See Claus Clüver, “*Klangfarbenmelodie* in Polychromatic Poems: A. von Webern and A. de Campos,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (September 1981), pp. 386-98.

(4). Three of the poems in this series are reproduced on the poet’s web site at www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/poemas.htm.

(5). Augusto de Campos, *Poesia 1949-1979* (São Paulo: Duas Cidades, 1979), unpaginated. The other poems examined in this article are also taken from this volume.

(6). Augusto de Campos, “Points-Periphery-Concrete Poetry,” *Jornal do Brasil*, November (11). 1956. Tr. by Jon M. Tolman and repr. in *The Avant-Garde Tradition in Literature*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1982), p. 263.

(7). One of four types of Concrete poetry identified by the “plano-piloto.” See Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry*, p. 237.

(8). Clüver, “Klangfarbenmeolodie in Polychromatic Poems,” pp. 395-96. He describes the recording in detail.

(9). See Note 6.

(10). José Lino Grünewald, *Escreviver* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1987),
p. 66. The other poems examined in this article are also taken from this volume.

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The Noigandres Poets and Concrete Art

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In 2006 we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of two interconnected events. The first was the trans-Atlantic baptism of a new kind of poetry produced in Brazil by the “Noigandres” group of poets and in Europe, as the Brazilians had recently found out, by Eugen Gomringer and others, and which Gomringer in 1956 agreed to label “poesia concreta / konkrete poesie / concrete poetry,” a label that Augusto de Campos had first proposed for their own production a year before. The second event was the opening of the “I Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta” in the Museu de Arte Moderna of São Paulo, where it was shown from the Fourth to the Eighteenth of December 1956 without attracting unusual attention. When it was transferred to Rio de Janeiro in February 1957, it caused excitement and derision and unleashed a critical debate in the newspapers that was to last for months. (We were also, incidentally, celebrating 75 years of the life of Augusto de Campos.)

The first event established the international presence of the Brazilians in a movement that was found rather than founded as its members gradually discovered each other, and that culminated (and ended) in the publication of several international anthologies in the late sixties and in a number of exhibitions, including a month-long “expose: concrete poetry” at Indiana University in 1970.⁽¹⁾ The second event had no international

repercussions but turned out to be of considerable significance for the Brazilian cultural scene of the day. It established the label “Concrete Art,” and with it “Concrete Poetry,” in the public mind. It was apparently the first exhibition in Brazil where paintings, sculptures, and poster poems were exhibited side by side. It thus gave visitors an opportunity to explore the features that prompted visual artists as well as poets to use the same label for their work – a challenge that has gone largely unheeded, even though many of these works were reunited in memorial exhibitions in 1977,(2) in 1996, (3) in 2002, (4) and in 2006. It was the first – and for a number of years the only – time when artists belonging to two groups, one from São Paulo, the other from Rio, all of them engaged in developing a constructivist, abstract-geometric art which they now decided to call “Concrete” (as opposed to “Abstract”[5]), exhibited their work together, ten artists from each camp.(6) The three Noigandres poets from São Paulo, Décio Pignatari and Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, were joined by three “Cariocas”, Wladimir Dias Pino, Ferreira Gullar, and Ronaldo Azeredo. Not long after, the artists and poets from Rio decided to break with the Paulistas for ideological reasons and declared themselves to be “Neoconcretos”, except for Ronaldo Azeredo who had already joined the Noigandres group (and was followed a little later by another Carioca, José Lino Grünewald). The exhibition was, finally, also the place to reaffirm the claims by all involved to represent the avant-garde in poetry and the visual arts, a claim already announced by the titles which the groups of artists had chosen for themselves at their foundation in 1952: “Ruptura” and “Frente”.

While the Frente artists from Rio were not given to producing manifestos, the Ruptura group distributed at its inaugural exhibition in 1952 a text that appears to have received

as much attention as the works exhibited. Evidently formulated by Waldemar Cordeiro, the group's polemical theorist, it proclaimed "there is no more continuity!" and rejected not only figurative art but also "the hedonistic non-figurative art spawned by gratuitous taste" in favor of "all the experiments directed at the renovation of the essential values of visual art (space-time, movement, material)."⁽⁷⁾ The exhibition was not documented; a reconstruction was attempted in 2002 (cf. Note 4). Examples of early works by Ruptura members who also participated in the 1956 exhibit are Waldemar Cordeiro's *Movimento* (1951; fig 1),

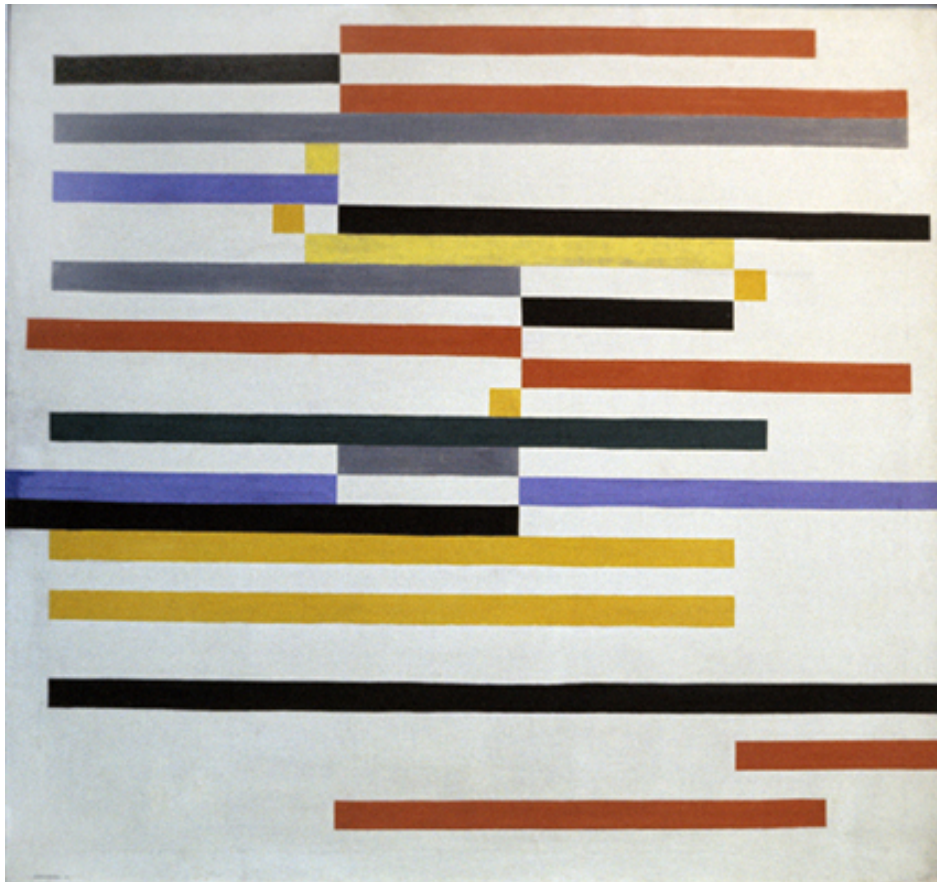


Fig. 1: Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973), *Movimento* (Movement), 1951.

Tempera on canvas, 90.2 x 95 cm. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Universidade de São Paulo (USP).⁽⁸⁾

Luiz Sacilotto's *Concreção* (1952; fig. 2).

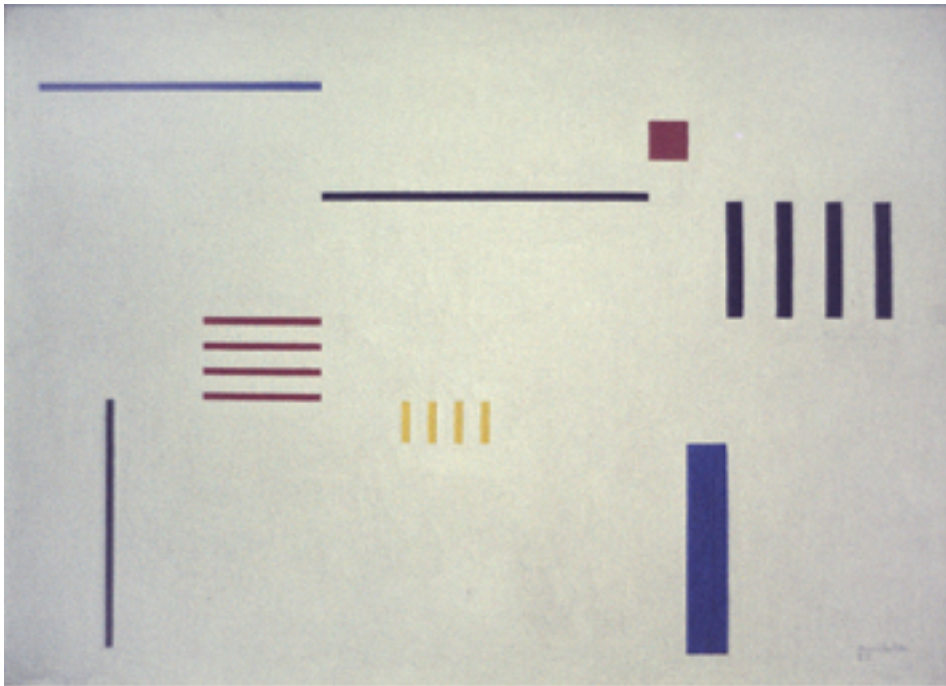


Fig. 2: Luiz Sacilotto (1924-2003), *Concreção* (Concretion), 1952.
Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm. São Paulo: Coll. Ricard Akagawa.

and *Desenvolvimento de um quadrado* and *Movimento contra movimento* by Geraldo de Barros (both of 1952; fig. 3).

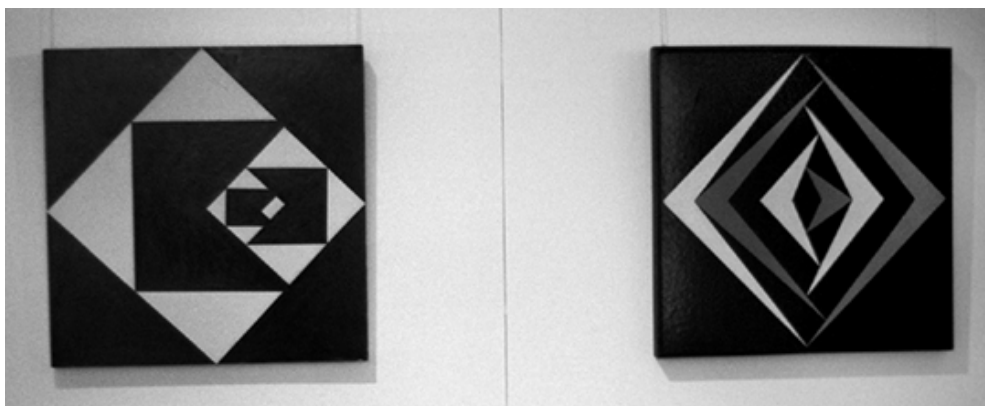


Fig.3: Geraldo de Barros (1923-1998)

Left: *Desenvolvimento de um quadrado [Função diagonal]* (Development of a Square [Diagonal Function]), 1952. Industrial lacquer on cardboard, 60 x 60 x 0.3 cm. Coll. Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.⁽⁹⁾

Right: *Movimento contra movimento* (Movement against Movement), 1952. Enamel on kelmite, 60 x 60 cm. Switzerland: Coll. Fabiana de Barros.

The reference to time or movement in the titles that is characteristic of Ruptura work, as well as the use of industrial media such as enamel or lacquer and of industrial board (kelmite or eucatex) for the support, are also found in *Objeto rítmico No. 2* (1953; fig. 4) by Maurício Nogueira Lima, who joined Ruptura in 1953.



Fig. 4: Maurício Nogueira Lima (1930-1999), *Objeto rítmico No. 2* (Rhythmic Object No. 2), 1953.
“Pintura” on eucatex, 40 x 40 cm. São Paulo: Coll. Luiz Sacilotto.

The apparent movement evoked by the design is particularly intriguing in *Círculos com movimento alternado* (1953; fig. 5) by Hermelindo Fiaminghi, who joined in 1955. The design consists of an off-white vertical field traversed by coupled horizontal bands in red and grey arranged in an alternating sequence which reverses over the horizontal axis; its most effective feature is the suggestion of a series of half-circles whose placement prevents the upper halves from meeting the lower halves in a circle – which induces the viewer to mentally moving them constantly closer or pushing them apart in order to achieve the perfect circular form. The temporal dimension is clearly perceived as a mental function induced by the spatial design.(10)



Fig. 5: Hermelindo Fiaminghi (1920-2004), *Círculos com movimento alternado* (Circles with Alternating Movement), 1956. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 35 cm. (11)

For the National Exhibition of 1956/57, an issue of the magazine *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* (No. 20, Dec. 1956) served as the catalogue and carried programmatic statements as well as reproductions of artwork and poems. The cover (fig. 6) was based on a painting by Fiaminghi that in 1977 was owned by the poet Ronaldo Azeredo (fig. 7).(12)



Fig. 6: Cover, *ad: arquitetura e decoração* (São Paulo), No. 20, December 1956.



Fig. 7: Fiaminghi, *Triângulos com movimento em diagonal* (Triangles with Diagonal Movement), 1956. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 60 cm. São Paulo: Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Cordeiro opened his statement in the catalogue by asserting: “Sensibility and the object encounter, at the hands of the avant-garde, a new correlation.” He continued: “Art represents the qualitative moments of sensibility raised to thought, a “thought in

images”. [. . .] The universality of art is the universality of the object. [. . .] Art is different from pure thought because it is material, and from ordinary things because it is thought. [. . .] Art is not expression but product. [. . .] Spatial two-dimensional painting reached its peak with Malevich and Mondrian. Now there appears a new dimension: time. Time as movement. Representation transcends the plane, but it is not perspective, it is movement. (“O objeto”)

Besides later work by the Ruptura artists already sampled, now less tentative and more sophisticated, the “National Exhibition” included work by a founding member, Lothar Charoux (fig. 8), by Judith Lauand, who had joined the group later (fig. 9), and by Alexandre Wollner, a close associate but never a Ruptura member (fig. 10).

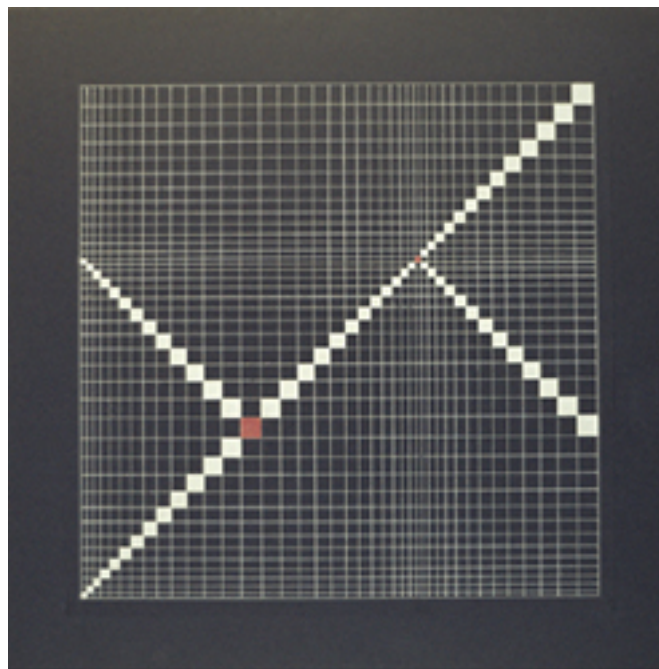


Fig. 8: Lothar Charoux (1912-1987), *Desenho* (Design), 1956. Ink on paper, 49.3 x 49.2 cm. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea, USP.

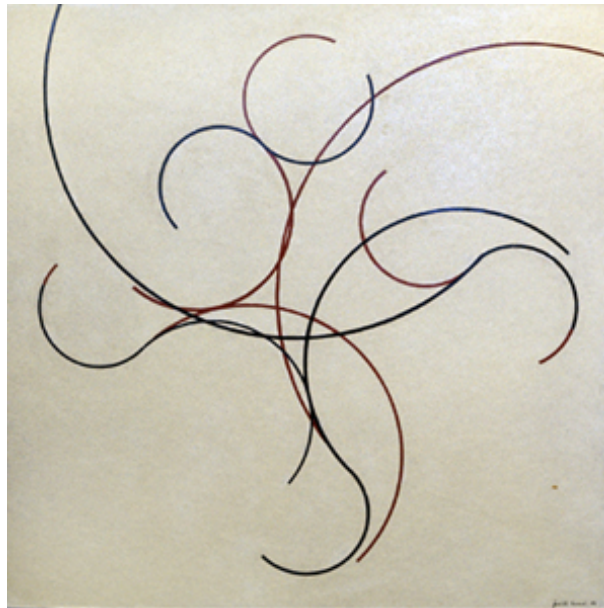


Fig. 9: Judith Lauand (b. 1922), *Variação em curvas* (Variation in Curves), 1956. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 60 cm.

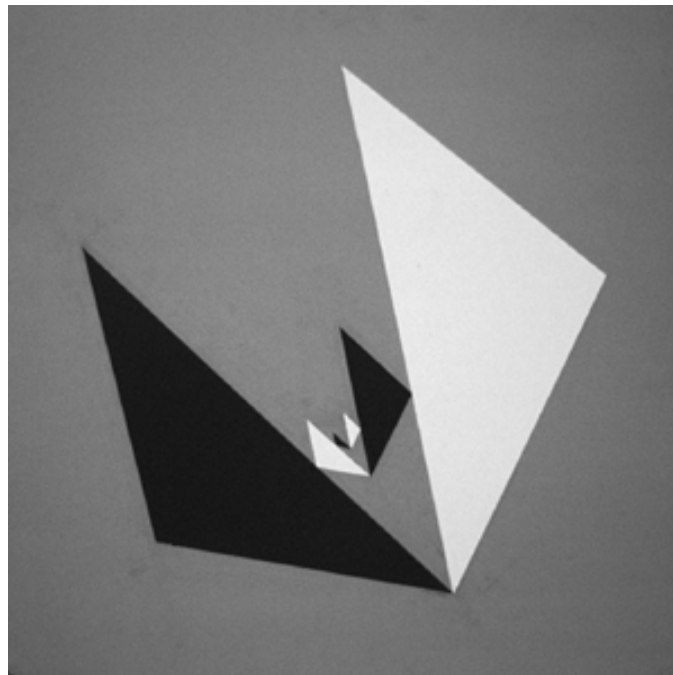


Fig. 10: Alexandre Wollner (b. 1928), *Composição em triângulos* (Composition in Triangles), 1953. Enamel on duratex, 61 x 61 cm. [Remade in 1977, after original in coll. Max Bill.]

All three are based on the square, the preferred shape for much of the work by the Ruptura artists at the time (cf. figs. 3, 4, 7, 12, 14, 26); all three confirm the tendency of

these Concrete artists' designs to use "variation" and "development" of lines and shapes by systematically altering their size and thus achieve implications of a temporal dimension and the illusion of moving into the depth of the field.

Alfredo Volpi, thirty years older than most of the others and now counted among the very great in Brazilian art, was for a number of years drawn onto the Concrete path. In his *Xadres branco e vermelho* (fig. 11) he introduced into a static, flat, decorative red- and white checkerboard pattern a dynamic ambiguity by splitting diagonally descending squares diagonally into halves of opposing colors, which inverts the pattern below the diagonal and altogether confuses one's optical orientation – which is only one of the consequences of this simple intervention, more difficult to verbalize than to grasp visually.

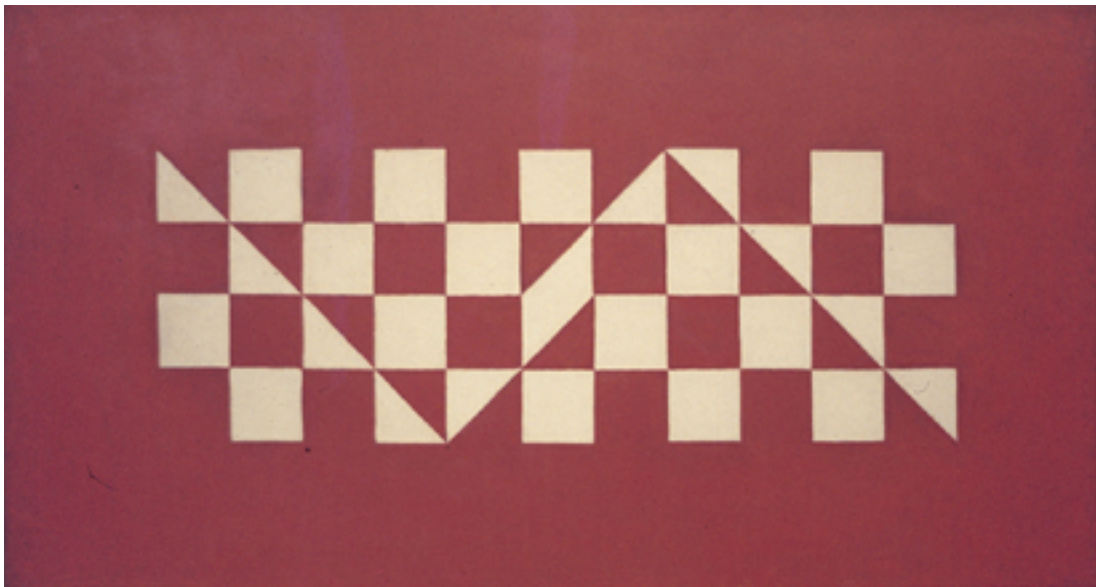


Fig. 11: Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), *Xadres branco e vermelho* (White and Red Checkerboard), 1956. Tempera[?] on canvas, 53 x 100 cm. São Paulo: Coll. João Marino.

A black-and white reproduction of Volpi's painting was reproduced in the *ad* catalogue, and so was Mauricio Nogueira Lima's *Triângulo espiral* (fig. 12), a black square in

which a set of interlocking triangles follows a systematic pattern of development that imposes a rotation either inward to the left, with regular diminutions, or outward to the right, with the triangles increasing, so that the spiral movement may suggest either an implosion or an explosion.

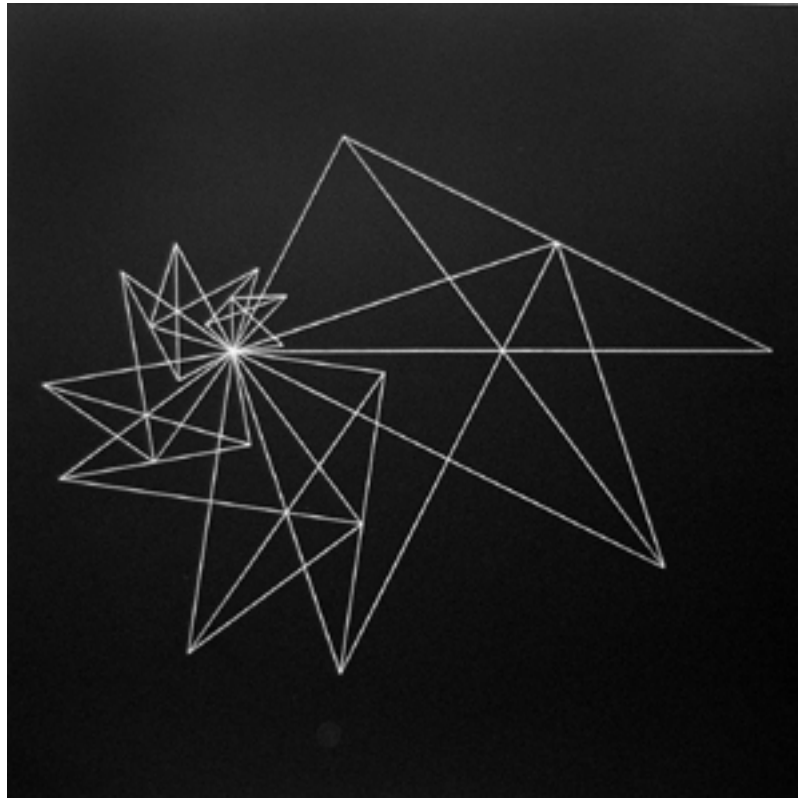


Fig. 12: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, *Triângulo espiral* (Spiral Triangle), 1956.
Paint on eucatex, 60 x 60cm.

A striking example of the use of industrial material with a suggestion of manufacturing processes was Sacilotto's *Concreção 5624* (fig. 13);⁽¹³⁾ its uneven surface resulting from pasting on identical small aluminum squares in a rigorous pattern introduced into the monochrome work a play of light and shadows that changed with the position of the observer.

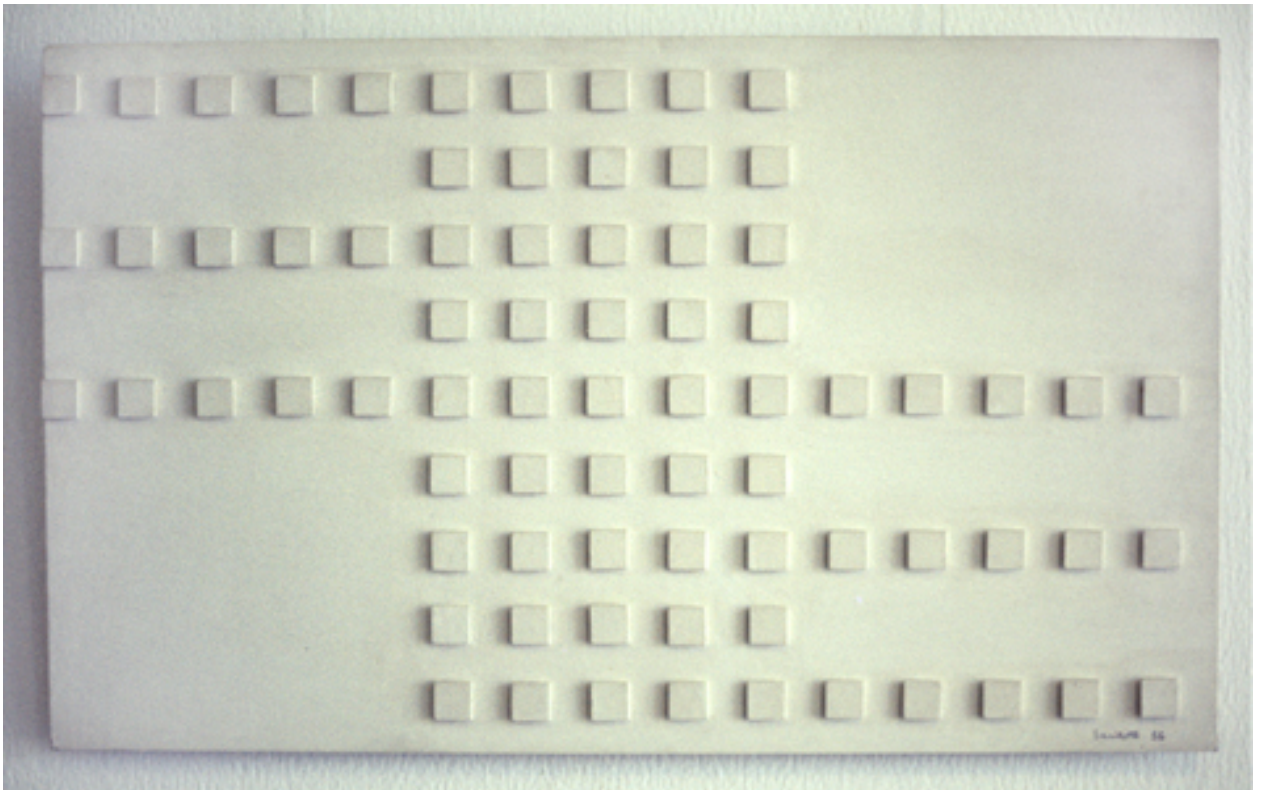


Fig. 13: Luiz Sacilotto, *Concreção 5624*, 1956. Oil on aluminum, 36.5 x 60 x 0.4 cm. Coll. Renata Feffer.

In keeping with the slogan “the work of art does not contain an idea, it is itself an idea,”⁽¹⁴⁾ Cordeiro entitled many of his paintings of that time “Visible Idea”; figure 14 shows one version of a series developing this particular idea, or theme.⁽¹⁵⁾

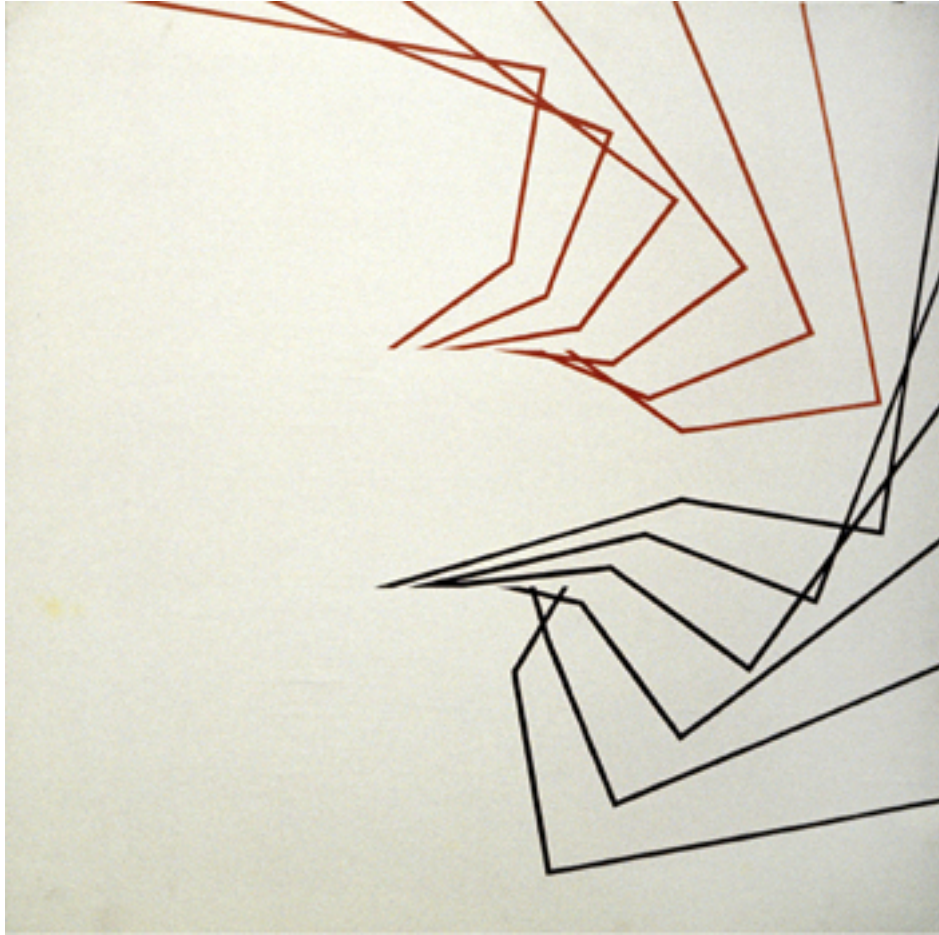


Fig. 14: Paint and plaster on plywood

The impersonality of their work of the 1950s made it at times difficult to recognize authorship, but – as these examples will have demonstrated – differences existed and would eventually become more pronounced; however, for a number of years the members of the Ruptura group adhered quite faithfully to their program. The materials of their paintings (straight or curved lines, geometric shapes, a few carefully balanced colors used for structural effect) were reduced to a minimum; all signs of individual production, such as brushstrokes, were eliminated. The only self-expression they permitted their work to show was the expression of their particular way of visual thinking and of the ways in which they conceived and executed “visual ideas.” Every

work followed a clear plan which could be formulated as verbal instructions to be executed by someone else; and a realization of the rules governing each “visible idea” was a necessary part of the viewer’s experience and understanding. In the case of Cordeiro’s painting shown in figure 14 we see two sets of angled straight lines, one in red, the other in black, placed so asymmetrically that they hardly invade the left half of the white square, but with the implied movement producing a sense of visual balance. The black lines function as it were in counterpoint to the mechanically regular progression of the identical angular lines in red, except for the reverse angle in the final line that braces the movement; yet the effect on the perception and visual imagination is not mechanical at all. Spatial relationships become ambivalent, and a major characteristic of this minimalist work is its rhythmic dynamism.

The work of these artists, much of which was undertaken as a kind of “pesquisa” (research), an exploration of the possibilities of the medium, created indeed a sense of movement, differently induced in each case and mentally executed by the viewer. “The painters, designers and sculptors from São Paulo not only believe in their theories but also follow them, at their own risk”, wrote the influential critic Mário Pedrosa in response to the exhibition of 1956/57, contrasting them with the artists from Rio, whom he considered “almost romantics” by comparison. (16) Indeed, the poet and critic Ferreira Gullar, who was to become their major spokesman, confirmed: The Grupo Frente did not have at least two of the characteristics that are common to avant-garde movements: the defense of a single stylistic orientation and a theoretical underpinning. [. . .] Nevertheless, it played a role in the renovation of Brazilian art [. . .] (“O Grupo Frente” 143)

A number of the artists from Rio who participated in the 1956 exhibition, including a very young Hélio Oiticica, were indeed to assume prominent positions in the artistic avant-garde, mostly in their “Neoconcrete” phase. But the break that led to Neoconcretism was caused by disagreements with the theoretical attitudes of both the visual artists of São Paulo and the Noigandres poets. In fact, it was Haroldo’s 1957 essay “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição” (From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition) that led to a counterstatement by the Cariocas Oliveira Bastos, Ferreira Gullar and Reynaldo Jardim, “Poesia concreta: uma experiência intuitiva” (Concrete Poetry: an Intuitive Experiment/Experience). In March 1959 Gullar completed the break by composing a lengthy manifesto in which he (with his fellow signatories) rejected the primacy of theory and the “mechanistic” and “rationalistic” turn allegedly taken by the Concrete artists and poets of the rival city. (17)

No matter what the merits of this criticism, both their work and their theoretical statements confirm the affinities between the Noigandres poets and the Ruptura artists. Cordeiro met Décio, Haroldo and Augusto in November 1952, when they had just published the first issue of *Noigandres* with their recent poems and the Ruptura artists were about to open their exhibition. I do not know much about the intensity of the contacts in the years before the National Exhibition, but some of the Ruptura members have been called “interlocutores constantes” with the poets. In 1953 Décio and Cordeiro traveled together to Chile to participate in the Continental Culture Congress, a trip financed by the Brazilian Communist Party. But then Décio left to spend two years in Europe. In his absence, Haroldo and Augusto

published *Noigandres* 2 (1955), all of one-hundred copies, made expensive because of Augusto's six multi-colored *Poetamenos* poems which he had composed as early as 1952/53 and which are rightly considered the first Brazilian Concrete poems.

All of these poems are inscribed in invisible squares. All contain at least two colors, with the sixth, "dias dias dias," displaying all of the primary and secondary colors as well as lower-case and capital letters. Inspired by the composer Anton von Webern's theory and practice of *Klangfarbenmelodie*,⁽¹⁸⁾ published.⁽¹⁹⁾ The most frequently discussed poem is "lygia," reproduced and analyzed (again) in Marjorie Perloff's essay; I have shown elsewhere, following Augusto's own lead, that the poem is in fact (among other things) a transposition of the opening measures of Webern's Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Tenor saxophone and Piano, op. 22 (Clüver, "Klangfarbenmelodie").

In the newspaper articles Augusto and Haroldo began to publish in 1955 there was apparently no reference to Brazilian Concrete art. When the "plano-piloto da poesia concreta" (Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry), the condensed summary of the theoretical statements composed by the two and Décio over the past four years and published in 1958 in *Noigandres* 4, defines Concrete poetry as "tension of word-things in space-time" and lists parallels in music and the visual arts, it refers to "mondrian and the *boogie-woogie* series; max bill; albers and the ambivalence of perception; concrete art in general." It is difficult and also rather pointless to speculate on the effect the personal contacts may have had on the thoughts and the work of poets or painters during the years leading up to the National Exhibition.

But the affinities are obvious. In hindsight, considering them from the “orthodox” (or “heroic”) phase that their work had reached with the poems published in *Noigandres* 4, Augusto’s *Poetamenos* poems still show a number of characteristics that were later eliminated (which, for some readers, may make them more interesting and appealing). There is still a lyrical “I” present – in fact, in terms of referential content they are a kind of *Erlebnislyrik*. The fifth poem, “eis os amantes,” using a more reduced verbal material and approaching the isomorphism so strongly emphasized in the “Pilot Plan”, indicates most clearly the path future developments will follow.

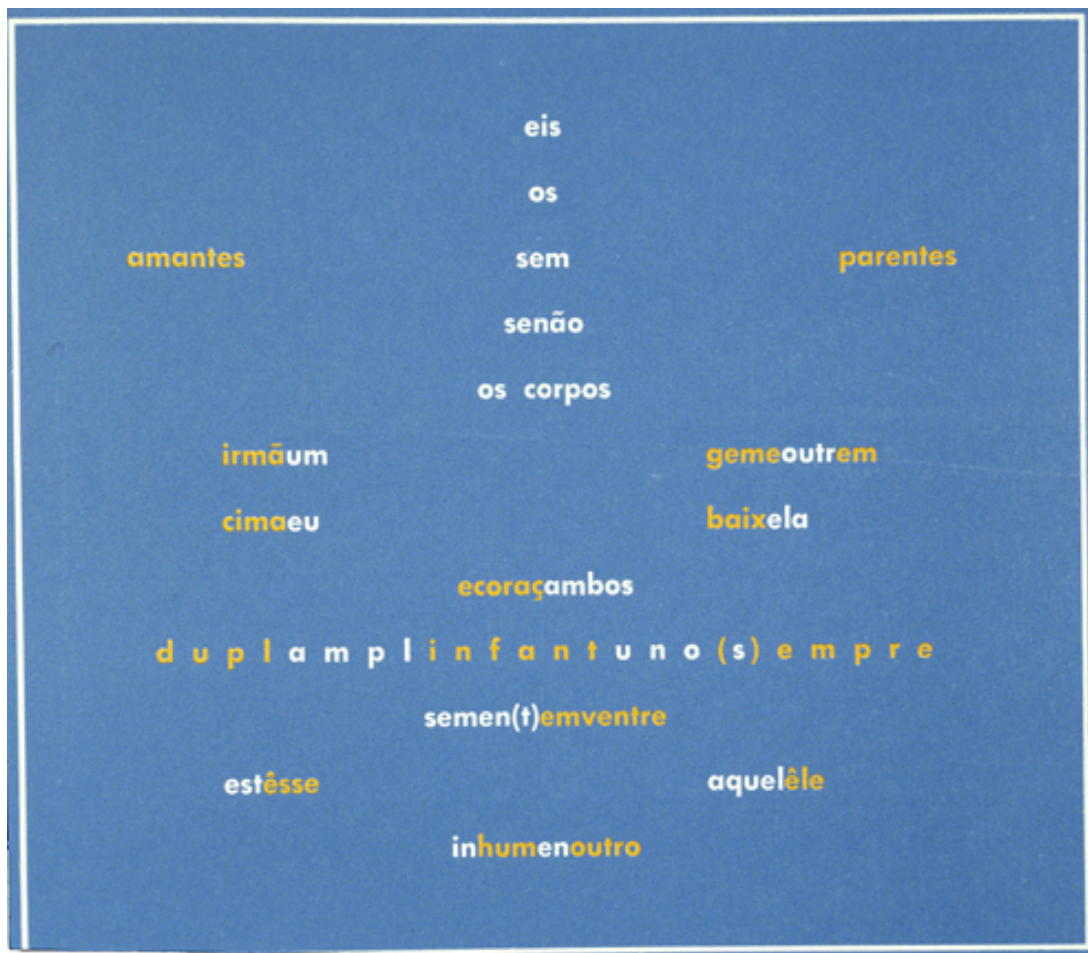


Fig. 15a: Augusto de Campos (b. 1931), “eis os amantes” (1953/55), from Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry*, recto of inside cover page.



Fig. 15b: Augusto de Campos, “here are the lovers,” trans. A. de Campos, Marcus Guimarães

and Mary Ellen Solt , from Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry*, verso of inside cover page. Originally published in the complementary colors blue and orange,(20) it was placed in white and orange within a blue square for its publication in Mary Ellen Solt’s *Concrete poetry anthology* (fig. 15a), with the English translation appearing in blue and white in an orange square (fig. 15b).(21) The semantic representation of the sexual union of two lovers, culminating in the long portmanteau word in the center and the final verbal fusion of one in the other continuing the “infant” motif, is visually shown by the placement, approximation, intertwining and crossing of the two colors. *Noigandres* 3 was published on the occasion of the 1956 exhibit, with poems by Décio Pignatari,

Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, and Ronaldo Azeredo. Pignatari's "um movimento" was also included in the *ad* catalogue as a typewritten text. I reproduce it below with an attempt at a translation that makes compromises in order to somehow preserve its most salient features. It is (still) a syntactically coherent statement complete with a verb (a participle, "compondo") and separated by an empty line into two stanzas. But the most striking feature is the column of m's in the center (making it into a kind of *Mittelachsendichtung*), which emphasizes its spatial properties and invites the exploration of other vertical relations and internal visual structures. The entire shape suggests an iconic relation to its semantic content, a (metaphoric?) landscape or cloudscape, which moves from "a movement" to "a moment", with "horizonte" representing the most prominent horizontal feature. There is still an implied observer and therefore the expressed presence of a consciousness.

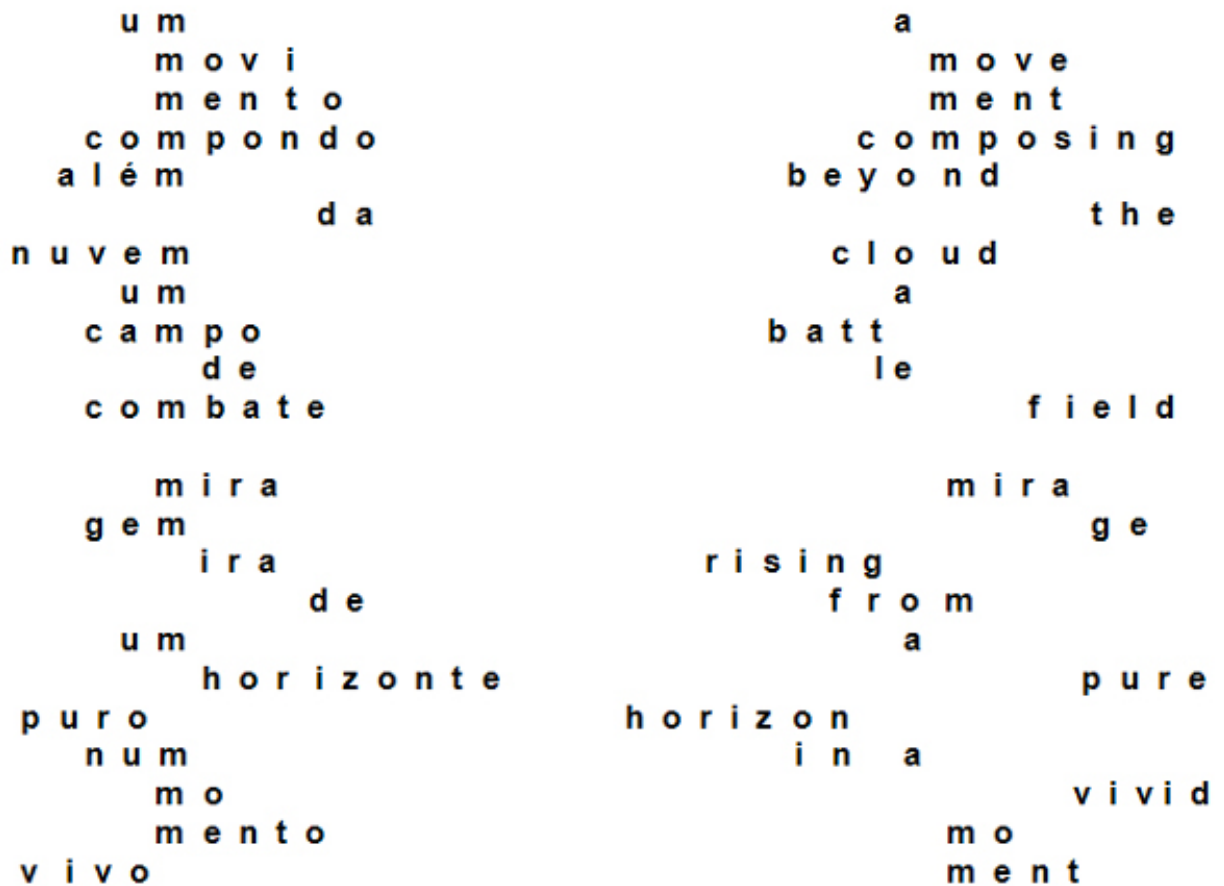


Fig. 16: Décio Pignatari (b. 1927), “um movimento,” from *Noigandres 3*, 1956; English version: Claus Clüver.

Composed in the same year but not included in *Noigandres 3*, Augusto’s “terremoto” (earthquake) (22) (fig. 17) has a purely spatial syntax, although conceptually, in its lexical references, it develops a temporal theme of cosmic proportions. Its “stanzas” descend diagonally from top to bottom, although each of these interlocking open squares is internally developed both horizontally and vertically (Augusto has referred to it as a Concrete crossword-puzzle). There is a sense of expansion and contraction; the last stanza is a dense ball dominated by o’s and t’s (which in the Futura typeface look like crosses). This ball refers us both visually and conceptually back to the o’s of the egg (“ovo”) and the ball of yarn (“novelo”) of the opening and thus suggests a

circularity that is found in a number of poems of the later phase, formally expressing the space-time dimension emphasized in the “Pilot Plan,” which is there likened to the same phenomenon represented “in concrete art in general.”

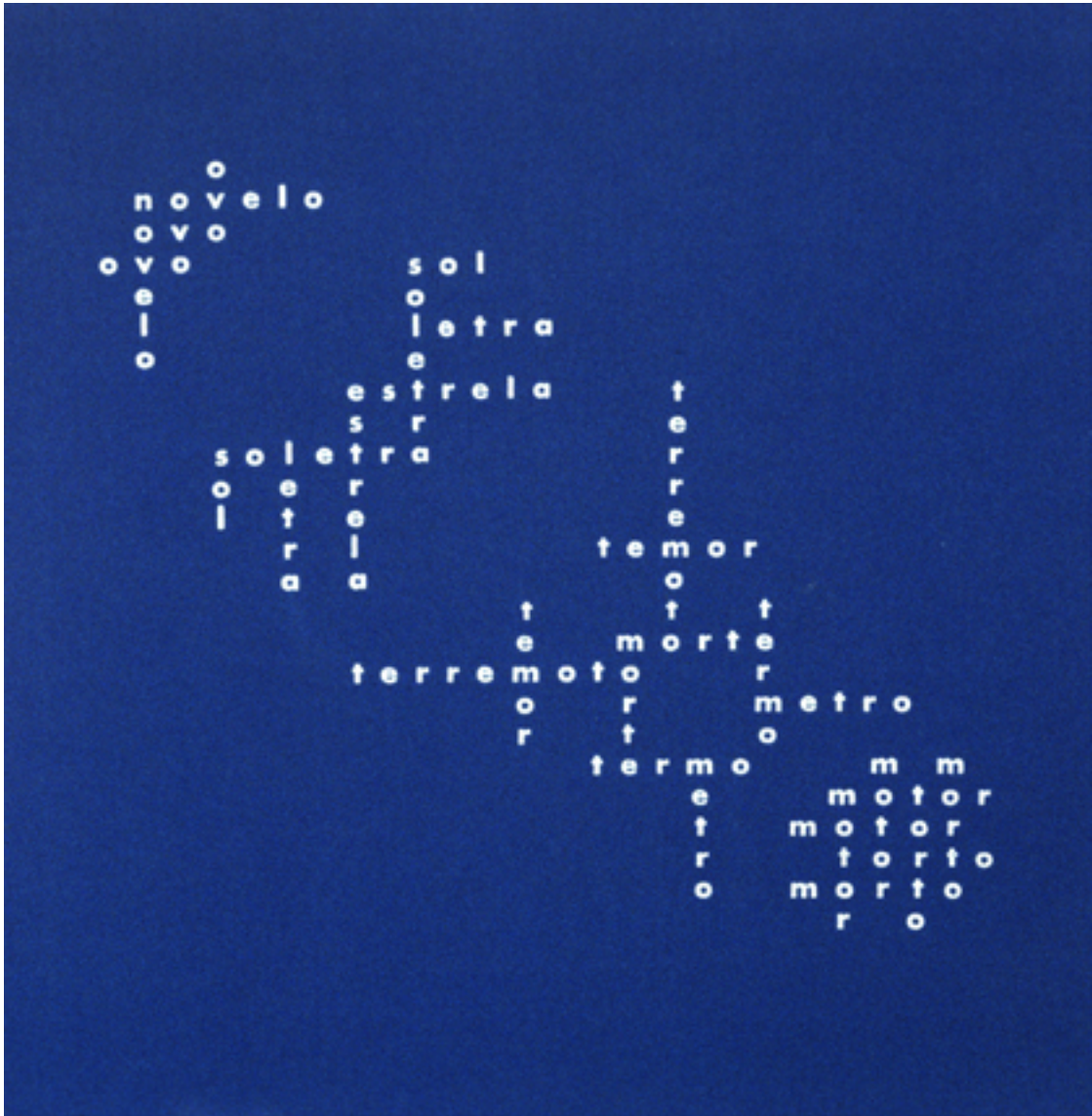


Fig. 17: Augusto de Campos, “terremoto” (1956), version published in Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry*, np.

The poem was originally published in black on a white page; the version shown here, which shows the letters in white inscribed in a dark blue square, visually evokes a stellar constellation, in keeping with part of the dominant imagery. This iconic emphasis may subdue other implications and associations evoked by the text; but Augusto has

agreed that a white-on-black reproduction may be appropriate (just as two of Haroldo's contributions to *Noigandres 3* offered a white text against a black ground).

In "arte concreta: objeto e objetivo," the programmatic opening statement of the catalogue, Décio Pignatari emphasized that:

Verse having been abolished, Concrete poetry confronts many problems of space and time (movement) that both the visual arts and architecture have in common, not to speak of the most advanced (electronic) music. Moreover, the ideogram, for example, can perfectly well function on a wall, internal or external. (*ad*, no. 20, np.)

Obviously, the experience of showing their work side by side with paintings and sculptures determined the poets' decision to publish *Noigandres 4* (1958) as a portfolio edition with twelve poster poems, ready to be displayed. It had a cover by Fiaminghi (fig. 18). With these poems, the production of the four had reached the most characteristic form of the Concrete "ideogram," as they called



Fig. 18: Cover of *Noigandres 4*, 1958; design: Hermelindo Fiaminghi.

their texts as disciples of Ezra Pound. To a considerable degree, its characteristics can be described by the same terms that I used to indicate basic aspects of the paintings of the Ruptura members – which is obviously the reason why they decided to exhibit their work together, under the “Concrete” label. Reducing their verbal material to a

minimum, the poets were engaged in exploring its inherent possibilities by structurally exhibiting the interplay of its visual, aural, and semantic properties. Because of the importance they continued to attach to semantics, they never worked with less than a word, although the word could be subjected to processes of fragmentation and permutation. The structure achieved by arranging the verbal elements in the space of the page according to a text-specific strategy can be considered as analogous to Cordeiro's "visible idea." No structural procedure is ever repeated; while construction is rule-bound, it is always tied to the semantics of the material in order to achieve what the poets would call an "isomorphism," an iconic relationship between the verbal sign and its signified (see Clüver, "Iconicidade"). Arranged according to a spatial syntax, these seemingly simple texts would frequently allow for multidirectional readings and return the reader to the beginning. With the abolition of traditional linear progression the poems would establish spatio-temporal relations that linked them to the Ruptura paintings also in this respect. Eliminating any notion of a "persona" or self-expressive lyrical "I", the Concrete ideogram was designed to be an "objeto útil", a useful textual object to be contemplated and explored, "open" (23) enough to allow readers to "use" it according to their own ingenuity, but with the expectation that they would respect the rules of the game inherent in the structure. In an interview about the National Exhibition of 1956, Augusto has quite recently explained the polemical use of such phrases as "useful object":

It is obvious that certain characteristics of the new poetry were carried by us to the limit, in the case of terms and themes such as that of the "mathematics of composition" and of "poem: useful object." But I think

that this radical attitude was necessary in view of the self-complacency and sentimentalism dominant in our midst. I saw in the “sensible rationalism” on which we insisted the fundamental objective of poetry itself: to achieve a production where not a word, not a letter could be changed, where no part of the text could be moved without having the poem collapse – which is, after all, the goal of every poet. (24)

I have used Haroldo de Campos’s poem “nascemorre” (fig. 19) on an earlier occasion (25) to show how a change of the minutest detail can destroy a major structural effect: the first triangle formed by a regular (if you like mathematical) development of the minimal verbal material (“se nasce morre”, if he/she/it is born he/she/it dies) re-constructs itself by seemingly turning over an invisible horizontal

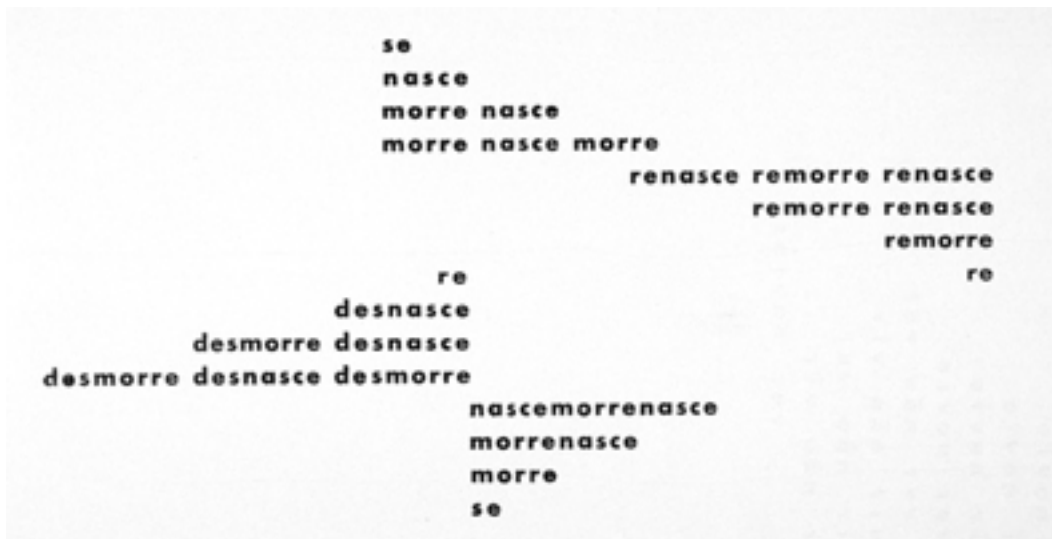


Fig. 19: Haroldo de Campos (1929–2003), “nascemorre,” *Noigandres* 4, 1958.

and a structurally designated vertical axis formed by carefully aligned “re”s; a shift of the second triangle by one slot to the left (as it has happened in the fine anthology

organized by Mary Ellen Solt) not only removes that axis but violates the structural feature of vertically aligning all e's of the text except for those of the initial and final "se." Altogether the poem exhausts all the possibilities inherent in its semantic properties as well as of the visual arrangement of its triangles. The final syllable (an echo of "nasce") returns us to the beginning in an endless progression of dying and becoming.

In visual terms, the poem's structure is quite similar to Sacilotto's *Concreção 6048* of 1960, which also exhausts all the possibilities of combining the black and white triangles and of placing the pairs that are inherent in the design. Such similarities could be found in structural comparisons of several poems with works by Ruptura artists. But the triangles and the placement of the pairs in Sacilotto's painting



Fig. 20: Luiz Sacilotto, *Concreção 6048*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 60 x 120 cm. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado.

obviously have a different motivation and function than those in Haroldo's poem, where each triangle manifestly performs the act of "becoming" signaled by the verbal semantics and the "death" of the first triangle leads to its "rebirth" in the second and the

inversion of the second also inverts the meaning of the verbs: “desnasce” equals “morre.” On the other hand, as I hope to have shown, the similarities between the work of both groups in their orthodox Concrete phase reach significantly deeper. The two latest members to join the Noigandres group tended to work with the least amount of verbal material. In “ruasol” (fig. 21) by Ronaldo Azeredo, the word “sol” (sun) seems to move through the visual field formed by repetitions of “rua” (street), only to return as a trace (an s) in the last line, where the s simultaneously turns “rua” into a plural – only “ruas” is left when “sol” is gone. But our

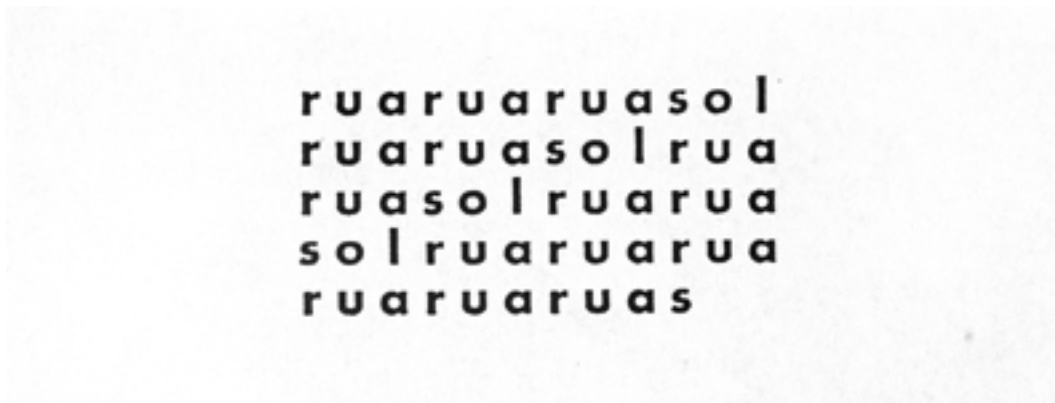


Fig. 21: Ronaldo Azeredo (1937–2006), “ruasol,” *Noigandres* 4, 1958.

reading of this text will not stop with recognizing its representational and iconic qualities; of greater interest is the exploration of the verbal material and its signifying properties on which the poem’s isomorphism is based – and of the kind of isomorphism embodied in this text. (26)

The most rewarding way to read the poems under consideration here is to approach them as metapoems – which in this case includes the observation that “ruasol” is intranslatable, because only Portuguese uses three letters to form each of the two nouns signifying “street” and “sun.” An effort to understand how the text functions is very similar to the effort of understanding a Concrete painting or sculpture.

A poem that seems to “say” even less is José Lino Grünewald’s “vai e vem” of 1959 (fig. 22). Here are some notes by the filmmaker Stefan Ferreira Clüver, who in 1980 based an 18-minute film on this poem:

Two simple, formal transformations of a commonplace generate some very complex possibilities for meaning making. First, by violating the syntactic closure of the phrase “vai e vem” with a repetition of the “e” at its end, a regular verbal pattern is created that can go on indefinitely: ABA becomes ABAB. Second, by giving this syntactic alteration a graphic statement that connects beginning and end, the way in which the now endlessly repeating phrase signifies is radically altered: it becomes an ideogram. This ideogram, however, is quite different from those in current writing systems that have become as conventional as letter-based ones. The poem generates its own rules for making meaning because, as an ideogram, it can only be understood as a graphic violation of the linear, cumulative signifying conventions of language.

The poem’s arrangement on the page creates a tension between a syntactic dynamism and graphic stasis. The verbs “vai” and “vem,” normally words of action, become the visual resting points of the graphic, while the conjunction “e” is the visual motor. “Vai” and “vem” become thing words, “e” becomes the movement word. (27)



Fig. 22: José Lino Grünewald (1931–2000), “vai e vem” (1959), *Anthologia*

Noigandres 5, p. 181.

In 1962 the five “Noigandres” poets (now also including Grünewald) collected their published poems and quite a few unpublished ones in *antologia noigandres 5: do verso à poesia concreta*, with a cover (fig. 23) based on a painting by Volpi owned by Pignatari (fig. 24). The anthology concluded the “heroic” phase of orthodox Concrete poetry produced by the Noigandres poets, at about the same

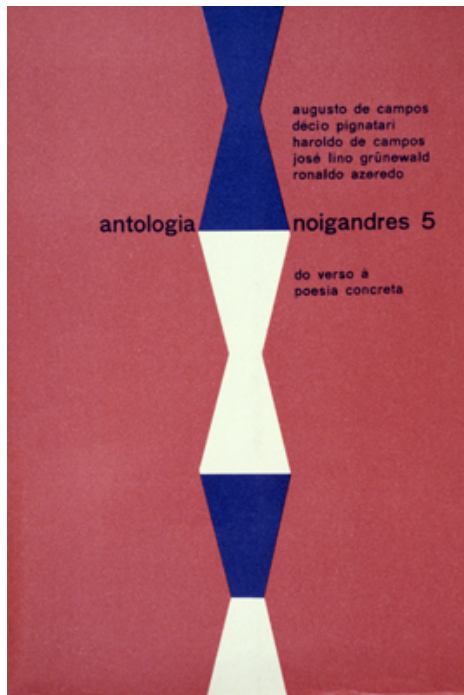


Fig. 23: Cover, *antologia noigandres 5*, 1962.



Fig. 24: Alfredo Volpi, 1960, Coll. D. Pignatari.

time that the Ruptura artists began to strike out in individually more distinct and separate ways, as did the poets. The contacts among artists and poets continued. When I began my research in Brazil in 1974, one of the first things I was told by Augusto was to seek out the painters, and I consequently visited and interviewed Fiaminghi, Sacilotto, and Volpi and later Judith Lauand and Geraldo de Barros. But I also encountered the painters in the poets' living-rooms. Here is a sampling of slide pictures I took in the homes of Décio Pignatari and Ronaldo Azeredo, besides those already shown. Among others, Décio owned these works by Mauricio Nogueira Lima and Fiaminghi:



Fig. 25: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, 1953., Coll. D. Pignatari.



Fig. 26: Hermelindo Fiaminghi, 1956., Coll. D. Pignatari.

In Ronaldo Azeredo's home I found these two small paintings by Volpi and one by Sacilotto,

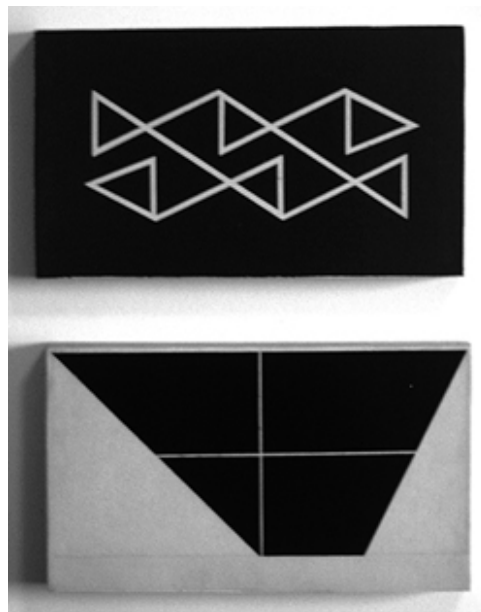


Fig. 27: Alfredo Volpi, two paintings, Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo...

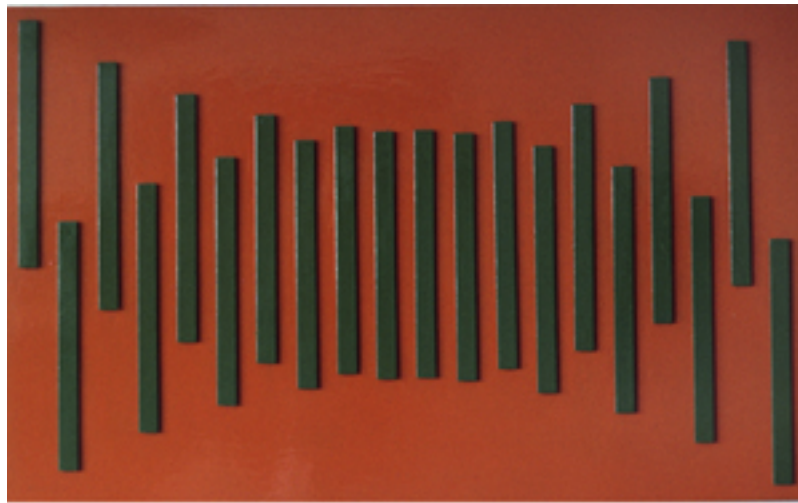


Fig. 28: Luiz Sacilotto, 1958, Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

as well as this work by Nogueira Lima (besides the Fiaminghi painting shown in fig. 7):



Fig. 29: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, 1960. Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Augusto owned a painting by Sacilotto that I did not photograph; Haroldo's living-room wall was full of paintings, but there my son filmed while I was taping my interviews, and so I have no slides.

I have limited my remarks to the decade surrounding the National Exhibition and to the relations of the Noigandres poets to Concrete art produced in São Paulo. The Noigandres model induced the production of Concrete poetry in other parts of Brazil. As has already been suggested, the relations between the Noigandres poets and the two poets from Rio who were to be involved in "Neoconcretismo" became complicated in the late fifties, and so did the relations between the two groups of visual artists. In fact, the groups disbanded as such, with the most prominent Frente members exhibiting for a while under the banner of "Neoconcretismo." Indeed, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica followed divergent paths that distinguished their later work significantly from that of the Paulistas.

On the other hand, the sculptors from Rio participating in the National Exhibition, Franz Weissmann, a Frente member, and Amilcar de Castro, long associated with the group, continued throughout their career to develop a line of work that retained close affinities to the Concrete aesthetic; some of their later work is found in public places also in São Paulo. This is not the place to investigate the claims that the ideas expounded by the theorists of Neoconcretism offered Weissmann an "alternative to the scientific orientation ['cientificismo'] that dominated the movement from São Paulo" (Salzstein 91). Let us look at three sculptures dated 1958. To the "Coluna concretista" created earlier in the decade (and which won him the National Sculpture Prize at the

São Paulo Biennial of 1957; Salzstein 119) Weissmann opposed in 1958 a “Coluna neoconcreta” (fig. 30). (28) The work is systematically constructed out of flat metal squares framing circular cut-outs – not unlike the use of circle and square in the design of some of the paintings we have seen. Like the earlier column conceived around an empty space, but emphasizing the diagonal rather than the vertical and horizontal and thus resting on the points of its



Fig. 30: Franz Weissmann (1911–2005), *Coluna* (Column), 1958. Painted iron, 280 x 110 x 75 cm.

São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea, USP. Photo: Claus Clüver, 1977.

squares rather than on their sides, the new column was lighter and less austere. The basic idea on which the column is built is also found in another sculpture displayed in the 1977 exhibit, *Três pontos* (fig. 31). The artist told me in an interview in 1981 that he had hoped to see it placed, in a larger scale, in the center of Brasília, to symbolize the interplay and intricate balance among the three branches of government.



Fig. 31: Franz Weissmann, *Três pontos* (Three Points), 1958. Painted iron, 120 x 160 x 160 cm. Photo: Claus Clüver, 1977.

The sculpture that stood at the entrance of the exhibit in Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Modern Art, Weissmann’s *Círculo inscrito num quadrado* (fig. 32), shows one of the simplest forms of the idea of creating interlocking squares out of flat sheets of metal and “inscribing” in them circles by cutting them out; here, the squares rest on their sides.



Fig. 32: Installation shot, “Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (1950–1962)”, Rio de Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 1977, with Franz Weissmann, *Círculo inscrito num quadrado* (Circle Inscribed in a Square), 1958. Painted iron, 100 x 100 x 100 cm. Photo by Claus Clüver.

Amilcar de Castro’s work is characterized by a seemingly intuitive approach and the great simplicity by which he creates spatial configurations by cutting and bending “flat” circular (fig. 33) or square (fig. 34) steel plates. I first saw a display of some of his sculptures in 1976 in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais. I could not locate images of these in the lavish book on the artist by Ronaldo Brito, but it contains reproductions of work done in the 1960s and even in the 1950s that is very similar to the sculptures shown here.



Fig. 33: Amilcar de Castro (1920–2002), steel sculpture displayed in front of the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, in 1976. Photo by Claus Clüver.



Fig. 34: Amilcar de Castro, steel sculptures displayed in the courtyard of the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, in 1976. Photo by Claus Clüver.

The work of both sculptors clearly shares the Concrete aesthetic exemplified by the paintings, sculptures, and poems shown in the National Exhibition of 1956/57. It was not even then a unified aesthetic, and the rupture between Cariocas and Paulistas that was to occur soon after and to turn into a split between Concrete and Neoconcrete art (and poetry) brought into greater relief what an attentive observer like Mário Pedrosa noted right away. But much of the public reaction involved an attempt to come to terms with the radical break with tradition perceived in all of the work, and most specifically in the poetry, because constructivist visual art produced in Brazil had already been in the limelight at least since the First São Paulo Biennial of 1951.

This essay has focused on the interrelations between the work of the Ruptura artists and of the Noigandres poets, and on the interactions among its members. As a consequence of the juxtaposition and of the exploration of analogies and similarities, access to these works may have become easier; even nowadays, “reading” these texts – paintings, sculptures, and poems – is still a considerable challenge for many.

And the way we read them has changed in the course of fifty years. We are looking back at them with a knowledge of what has been produced since –both by the artists and poets themselves and by the culture that shaped them and that they have shaped in turn. The critical discourse has changed: not only have post-modern notions about the nature and function of art affected the way we approach these visual and verbal texts, but we have witnessed a lively debate about the construction of avant-gardes and neo-avant-gardes based on a well-mapped landscape of the earlier part of the century that may be at odds with the information that was available to the young Brazilians at mid-century.

What is also beginning to change, to some extent under the impact of the new media and of the intermedial genres of textmaking they are generating, is the habit of looking at such events as the National Exhibition of 1956/57 through the limiting lenses of the traditional disciplines. The developing field of Studies of Intermediality will provide a more appropriate perspective and better tools to look at such intermedial phenomenon as Concrete poetry. Even now, the semicentennial celebrations have by and large looked at it as a literary event. The insistence of the Noigandres poets on listing in the “Pilot Plan” not only Mallarmé, Pound, Joyce, Cummings, and Apollinaire as well as the Brazilian poets Oswald de Andrade and João Cabral de Melo Neto as “precursors”, but pointing to aspects of the work of Eisenstein and Webern as well as of Mondrian, Max Bill, Josef Albers and “Concrete art in general” as providing signposts for the new poetry (and art) to be “invented” has had little impact on the critical discussion. Nor have the references to the other arts in the poems themselves received much attention. (29) For the poets, their participation in the exhibition was a defining moment. They saw their work as constituting part of the new avant-garde that was to shape their country’s cultural production – and possibly turn it from the post-colonial “anthropophagic” consumer of foreign models into a supplier itself of “models for export.”(30)

To some degree, the poets have succeeded; they occupy an often privileged position in relevant international anthologies and exhibition catalogues, (31) although many of their manifestos and theoretical statements collected in their *Teoria* have for the most part remained untranslated. The Ruptura artists have remained almost entirely unknown abroad, for reasons that have little to do with their work and everything with the

international art scene. But their impact within the country, along with that of the Neoconcretos, can be assessed by the number of memorial exhibitions I listed earlier, besides a growing number of studies devoted to Brazil's "Constructivist Project" in general (32) or monographs on individual artists.(33) The publications accompanying and documenting the exhibitions (34) included material about Concrete (and Neoconcrete) poetry; in the monographs the connection between Concrete art and poetry is not a topic. Art critics and historians have disregarded the intermedial and intersemiotic dimensions of the Brazilian avant-garde of the fifties just as much as their literary counterparts. This essay provides no more than a modest orientation.

Appendix

Visual Artists

* Participated in the "National Exhibition of Concrete Art," 1956/57

(according to the list in ad, No. 20, December 1956)

Grupo "Ruptura," São Paulo (since 1952):

- * Geraldo de Barros (1923-1998)
- * Lothar Charoux (1912-1987)
- * Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973)
- * Kazmer (Casimiro) Féjer (b.1922)
- * Hermelindo Fiaminghi (1920-2004, joined in 1955)
- Leopoldo Haar (1910-1954)
- * Judith Lauand (b.1922, joined later)

Grupo "Frente," Rio de Janeiro (since 1952):

- Eric Baruch (joined in 1955)
- * Aluísio Carvão
- * Lygia Clark (1920-1988)
- * João José da Silva Costa
- Vincent Ibberson
- * Rubem Mauro Ludolf
- * César Oiticica (b. 1939?)

* Maurício Nogueira Lima (1930-1999; joined in 1953)

* Luís Sacilotto (1924-2003)

Anatol Wladyslaw (1913–2004)

(gave up Concrete art in 1955)

Associated with the group:

Carlos do Val [in 1955)

Antonio Maluf (b. 1926)

* Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988)

* Alexandre Wollner (b. 1928)

* Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980)

Abraham Palatnik (joined in 1955)

Lygia Pape (1929-2004)

Ivan Serpa

Elisa Martins da Silveira

* Décio Vieira

* Franz Weissmann (1911-2005)

Associated with the group:

* Amilcar de Castro (1920-2002)

Willys de Castro (1926-1988)

Poets

* Participated in n the “National Exhibition of Concrete Art,” 1956/57

Grupo “Noigandres”, São Paulo (since 1952)

* Augusto de Campos (b. 1931)

* Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003)

* Décio Pignatari (b. 1927)

From Rio de Janeiro

* Ronaldo Azeredo (1937-2006)

(joined “Noigandres” in 1956)

* Ferreira Gullar (b. 1930)

* Wladimir Dias Pino (b. 1927)

Associated with the “Noigandres” group:

Edgard Braga (1897-1985)

Not exhibiting:

José Paulo Paes (1926-1998)

José Lino Grünewald (1931-2000)

Pedro Xisto (1901-1987)

(joined “Noigandres” in 1958)

Notes

(1). The major anthologies are listed in the Bibliography of Clüver, “Concrete Poetry: Critical Perspectives.” The month-long international exhibition at Indiana University in February 1970 was based on the collection of Mary Ellen Solt, with many contributions by others. Presentations were made by Vagn Steen, Emmett Williams, Iannis Xenakis, Claus Clüver, and David Thompson.

(2). “Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (1950–1962),” Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado 1977.

(3). In the “Casa das Rosas,” Avenida Paulista, São Paulo.

(4). Memorial exhibition “Arte Concreta Paulista” at Centro Universitário Maria Antônia da USP, one section of which was an attempt to reconstruct the “exposição do grupo ruptura no museu de arte moderna de São Paulo 1952”. Catalogues: *Arte Concreta Paulista*. 5 vols. São Paulo: Cosac & Naify. (1) *Arte Concreta Paulista: Documentos*, org. João Bandeira; (2) *Grupo Ruptura: Revisitando a Exposição Inaugural*, curator Rejane Cintrão, texts Rejane Cintrão and Ana Paula Nascimento; (3) *Grupo Noigandres*, curators Lenora de Barros and João Bandeira; (4) *Waldemar Cordeiro: A*

Ruptura como Metáfora, ed. Helouise Costa, texts: Helouise Costa and Vivian

Boehring; (5) *Antonio Maluf*, ed. Regina Teixeira de Barros, texts: Regina Teixeira de Barros and Taisa Helena P. Linhares.

(5). See Augusto de Campos, Interview, 2006. The exhibition “concreta ’56: a raiz da forma” was held in the Museu de Arte Moderna of São Paulo from September 26 till December 10, 2006. The impressive catalogue had 311 pages.

(6). See the “Appendix” for a list of participants.

(7). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The announcement of the exhibition has been reproduced repeatedly, most recently in Pérez-Barreiro, ed., *The Geometry of Hope*, 45. The reception of the program is documented in Bandeira, org., *Arte Concreta Paulista*, 46–51.

(8). The images reproduced here are based on slides I took from the originals, the majority at the 1977 exhibition “Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (1950–1962)” in Rio de Janeiro, others in the homes of the Noigandres poets, or from documents in my collection.

(9). Very perceptively analyzed by Gabriel Pérez-Barreira in *The Geometry of Hope*, pp. 128–130 (fig. 16); the design has been reproduced on the front of the catalogue’s hard-cover edition as a shape embossed on the uniformly blue cover (replacing the black-white contrast of the original with a figure-ground relationship).

(10). I have analyzed this painting more fully in Clüver, “Brazilian Concrete,” 208–09.

(11). This is the title listed in the exhibition catalogue *projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950–1962)*, 14 (where the date is given as 1953, apparently erroneously). In Cabral and Rezende, eds, *Hermelindo Fiaminghi*, the painting is listed as *Círculos Concêntricos e Alternados*, dated 1958. But the painting was included in the 1956/57 exhibit; a black and grey version of the design was featured in *ad*, the exhibition catalogue, entitled “movimento alternado” (n.p.).

(12). I have not been in a position to follow up on possible changes in ownership since my 1977 visit in the home of Ronaldo Azeredo.

(13). Sacilotto called all of his works at that time “Concretions”, which he dated by year and numbered.

(14). The slogan on the back of the invitation to the 1952 exhibit of Grupo Ruptura (reproduced in Amaral, org., *Arte Construtiva no Brasil* 287).

(15). Another version from 1956, smaller and using different materials (acrylic on masonite), is reproduced in Pérez-Barreira, ed., *The Geometry of Hope* fig. 24, accompanied by an extended analysis by Erin Aldana, pp. 148, 150.

(16). Mario Pedrosa, “Paulistas e Cariocas,” 136.

(17). Gullar, “Manifesto Neoconcreto,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), 22 March 1959.

(18). Schoenberg’s idea that by changing instrumental or tone color one could produce an effect analogous to the melody achieved by changing pitches was developed more rigorously by Webern in his minimalist compositions.

(19). Augusto had circulated them among friends as typewritten copies produced by using colored carbon paper, at the suggestion of Geraldo de Barros (Augusto de Campos, Interview).

(20). The original can be accessed at
<http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/poemas.htm>

(21). First published in 1968 as a topical double issue of *Artes Hispanicas / Hispanic Arts* (1.3-4).

(22). “terremoto” appeared in *Antologia Noigandres 5* as an unpublished poem. For a very detailed analysis of this poem see Clüver, “Augusto de Campos’ ‘terremoto’.”

(23). H. de Campos had introduced the concept of the “open work of art” with regard to structure and use of materials and the activity of the reader in 1955 (“A Obra de Arte Aberta”), long before Umberto Eco.

(24). “É claro que certas características da nova poesia foram levadas por nós até o limite, caso de lemas e temas polêmicos como o da “matemática da composição” e do “poema, objeto útil”. Acho, porém, que essa radicalidade foi necessária diante da autocomplacência e do sentimentalismo dominantes em nosso meio. Eu via no “racionalismo sensível” que sustentávamos o ideário da poesia mesma: chegar a produções às quais não se pudesse substituir uma palavra, uma letra, deslocar uma parcela do texto sem que o poema desmoronasse — algo que é afinal a meta de todos os poetas.” Augusto de Campos, Interview, 16 Sept. 2006.

(25). See Clüver, “Concrete Poetry: Critical Perspectives,” 271–72. – Like so many of these ideograms, “nascemorre” is built entirely on a linguistic peculiarity (in Portuguese, “nascer” and “morrer” are active verbs, and personal pronouns are not needed) and on a spelling accident: the two verb forms have the same number of letters. Moreover, the final sound of “nasce” happens to equal “se,” and the “re” at the end of “morre” takes on a function of its own.

(26). For an examination of the way the Noigandres poets theorized different stages of isomorphism in their work see Clüver, “Iconicidade.”

(27).Stefan Ferreira Clüver,

(28).These titles may be part of the polemical opposition of Neoconcretism to Concretism. In the catalogue of the 1977 “Projeto brasileiro constructive” exhibit the

work is listed as in the caption. However, Salzstein (90–91) captions the work pictured as *Coluna neoconcreta* (196 x 76 x 52 cm), MAC, USP; Ribeiro, opposes pp. 28 and 29 a photo of *Coluna Concretista* (1952–53) with two photos of *Coluna Neoconcretista* (1958–78, 140 x 50 x 50 cm, no location). In the MAC's 1973 *Catálogo Geral das Obras* the sculpture shown on plate 147 is listed as *Tôrre* (Tower; 1957, 169 X 62.7 X 37.2 CM). Catalogues of 1988 (Amaral, *Perfil*) and 1990 (*O Museu*) list no holdings of a Weissmann work. (but I saw the *Coluna* there in 1996).

(29). For instance, Haroldo's poem "mais e menos" was a response to Mondrian's *Plus and Minus*; his poem "branco", which I discussed long ago as an intersemiotic transposition of a Mondrian painting such as *Composition in Black, White and Red* (1936; see Clüver, "On Intersemiotic Transposition"), turns out to have been conceived as an homage to Malevich.

(30). Cf. Clüver, "The 'Ruptura' Proclaimed by Brazil's Self-Styled 'Vanguardas' of the Fifties."

(31). One of the most important is the expansive catalogue *Poésure et Peintrie: «d'un art, l'autre»*, org. by Bernard Blistène and Véronique Legrand, accompanying the exhibit of intermedial poetry held in 1993 in Marseille.

(32). See esp. Amaral, *Arte Construtiva no Brasil* (1998), with an extensive bibliography.

(33). See Ana Maria Belluzo, *Waldemar Cordeiro: Uma aventura da razão* (1986); Isabella Cabral and M. A. Amaral Rezende, *Hermelindo Fiaminghi* (1998); Ronaldo Brito, *Amilcar de Castro* (2001); Enoch Sacramento, *Sacilotto* (2001); Sônia Salzstein, *Franz Weissmann* (2001); Helouise Costa, curator. *Waldemar Cordeiro: A Ruptura como Metáfora* (2002); Fernando Pedro da Silva and Marília Andrés Ribeiro, *Franz Weissmann: Depoimento* (2002); André Stolarski, *Alexandre Wollner e a formação do design moderno no Brasil* (2005). I have listed only monographs about Ruptura artists, besides those about the two sculptors discussed.

(34). See Amaral, ed.. *Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte* (1977); *Arte Concreta Paulista* (2002) – one of the 5 volumes is dedicated to *Grupo Noigandres*, curated by Lenora de Barros and João Bandeira.

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List of Works Shown

Fig. 1: Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-1973), *Movimento* (Movement), 1951. Tempera on canvas, 90.2 x 95 cm. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea, Universidade de São Paulo (USP).

Fig. 2: Luiz Sacilotto (1924-2003), *Concreção* (Concretion), 1952. Oil on canvas, 50 x 70 cm. São Paulo: Coll. Ricard Akagawa.

Fig. 3: Geraldo de Barros (1923-1998)

Left: *Desenvolvimento de um quadrado [Função diagonal]* (Development of a Square [Diagonal Function]), 1952. Industrial lacquer on cardboard, 60 x 60 x 0.3 cm. Coll. Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.

Right: *Movimento contra movimento* (Movement against Movement), 1952. Enamel on kelmite, 60 x 60 cm. Switzerland: Coll. Fabiana de Barros.

Fig. 4: Maurício Nogueira Lima (1930-1999), *Objeto rítmico No. 2* (Rhythmic Object No. 2), 1953. "Pintura" on eucatex, 40 x 40 cm, São Paulo: Coll. Luiz Sacilotto.

Fig. 5: Hermelindo Fiaminghi (1920-2004), *Círculos com movimento alternado* (Circles with Alternating Movement), 1953. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 35 cm.

Fig. 6: Cover, *ad: arquitetura e decoração*, No. 20, December 1956.

Fig. 7: Fiaminghi, *Triângulos com movimento em diagonal* (Triangles with Diagonal Movement), 1956. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 60 cm. São Paulo: Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Fig. 8: Lothar Charoux (1912-1987), *Desenho* (Design), 1956. Ink on paper, 49.3 x 49.2 cm. São Paulo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea, USP.

Fig. 9: Judith Lauand (b. 1922), *Variação em curvas* (Variation in Curves), 1956. Enamel on eucatex, 60 x 60 cm.

Fig. 10: Alexandre Wollner (b. 1928), *Composição em triângulos* (Composition in Triangles), 1953. Enamel on duratex, 61 x 61 cm. [Remade in 1977, after original in coll. Max Bill.]

Fig. 11: Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), *Xadrez branco e vermelho* (White and Red Checkerboard), 1956. Tempera[?] on canvas, 53 x 100 cm. São Paulo: Coll. João Marino.

Fig. 12: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, *Triângulo espiral* (Spiral Triangle), 1956. Paint on eucatex, 60 x 60cm

Fig. 13: Luiz Sacilotto, *Concreção 5624*, 1956. Oil on aluminum, 36.5 x 60 x 0.4 cm. Coll. Renata Feffer.

Fig. 14: Waldemar Cordeiro, *Idéia visível* (Visible Idea), 1957. Tinta e massa s-compensado, 100 x 100 cm. São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado.

Fig. 15a: Augusto de Campos (b. 1931), “eis os amantes” (1953/55) , from Solt, ed.,
Concrete Poetry, recto of inside cover page.

Fig. 15b: Augusto de Campos, “here are the lovers,” trans. A. de Campos, Marcus
Guimarães and Mary Ellen Solt , from Solt, ed., Concrete Poetry, verso of
inside cover page.

Fig. 16: Décio Pignatari (b. 1927), “um movimento,” from Noigandres 3, 1956;
English version: Claus Clüver.

Fig. 17: Augusto de Campos, “terremoto” (1956), version published in Solt,
ed., *Concrete Poetry*, np.

Fig. 18: Cover of *Noigandres 4*, 1958; design: Hermelindo Fiaminghi.

Fig. 19: Haroldo de Campos (1929–2003), “nascemorre,” Noigandres 4, 1958.

Fig. 20: Luiz Sacilotto, *Concreção 6048*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 60 x 120 cm. São Paulo:
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Fig. 21: Ronaldo Azeredo (1937-2006), “ruasol,” Noigandres 4, 1958.

Fig. 22: José Lino Grünwald (1931–2000), “vai e vem” (1959), *Anthologia*
Noigandres 5, p. 181.

Fig. 23: Cover, antologia noigandres 5, 1962.

Fig. 24: Alfredo Volpi, 1960, Coll. D. Pignatari.

Fig. 25: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, 1953. Coll. Décio Pignatari.

Fig. 26: Hermelindo Fiaminghi, 1956. Coll. Décio Pignatari.

Fig. 27: Alfredo Volpi, two paintings. Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Fig. 28: Luiz Sacilotto, 1958. Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Fig. 29: Mauricio Nogueira Lima, 1960. Coll. Ronaldo Azeredo.

Fig. 30: Weissmann, *Coluna*, 1958. Painted iron, 280 x 110 x 75 cm. São Paulo:
Museu de Arte Contemporânea, USP. Photo: Claus Clüver, 1977.

Fig. 31: Franz Weissmann, *Três pontos* (Three Points), 1958. Painted iron, 120 x 160 x
160 cm. Photo: Claus Clüver, 1977.

Fig. 32: Installation shot, “Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (1950–1962)”, Rio de
Janeiro, Museu de Arte Moderna, 1977, with Franz Weissmann, *Círculo*

inscrito num quadrado(Circle Inscribed in a Square), 1958. Painted iron, 100 x 100 x 100 cm. Photo: Claus Clüver.

Fig. 33: Amilcar de Castro (1920–2002), steel sculpture displayed in front of the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, in 1976. Photo: Claus Clüver.

Fig. 34: Amilcar de Castro, steel sculptures displayed in the courtyard of the Palácio das Artes in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, in 1976. Photo: Claus Clüver.

Augusto de Campos, Digital Poetry, and the Anthropophagic Imperative

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When Pero Afonso de Sardinha arrived on the shores of Brazil from Portugal in the mid-sixteenth century to be Bishop of Bahia, natives in the Aimorés tribe ritualistically ate him. This historical event has been a source of identification for Brazilian artists since the modern era, and has been used as a foundation for the cultivation of encompassing expressive poetic forms. Use of this transgressive context has by now expanded, and has new significance and application in today's media environment. Anthropophagy (or cannibalism) was the name assigned to this unusual, iconoclastic, and somewhat obscure creative philosophy, a concept announced by, and exemplified in, Oswald de Andrade's "Anthropophagy Manifesto" (1928), which proclaims "I am only interested in that which is not my own" (65).⁽¹⁾ External texts and idioms become grist for the anthropophagist's mill, a trait reflected in Oswald's short poems "Biblioteca Nacional" (partially composed of juxtaposed document titles, e.g., "Brazilian Code of Civil Law/How to Win the Lottery/Public Speaking for Everyone/The Pole in Flames) and "Advertisement" (which adopts the language of advertising copy, e.g., "All women—deal with Mr. Fagundes/sole distributor/in the United States of Brazil") (Bishop 11, 13). While numerous poets and artists were profoundly motivated by anthropophagy, this presentation divulges the underlying principles and impact of the concept as it relates to poetic works by Augusto de

Campos, who has tapped into aspects of Oswald's idea as a resource and rationale throughout his career.⁽²⁾ Connections between anthropophagy and digital poetry, an emerging genre known for its synthesis of fragments (which Augusto has also practiced for many years), will also be introduced.

Augusto explains in a 2005 interview, "Oswald made a distinction between anthropophagy and pure cannibalism—by hunger or by greed—from ritual anthropophagy. Ritual anthropophagy is a branch of anthropophagy in which the cannibal eats his enemy not for greed or for anger but to inherit the qualities of his enemy. The metaphorical, and also in certain aspects philosophical, idea of cultural anthropophagy Oswald promoted was the idea of cannibalizing the high culture from Europe, with the results that one could acquire, or could have from this devouration, and could then construct something really new out of this development" (Interview 2005). An excellent example of how Oswald's practice incorporated these premises is found in a diagram included in a page of *O perfeito cozinheiro das almas deste mundo* [*The perfect cook of the whole souls of the world*] [Fig. 1]:

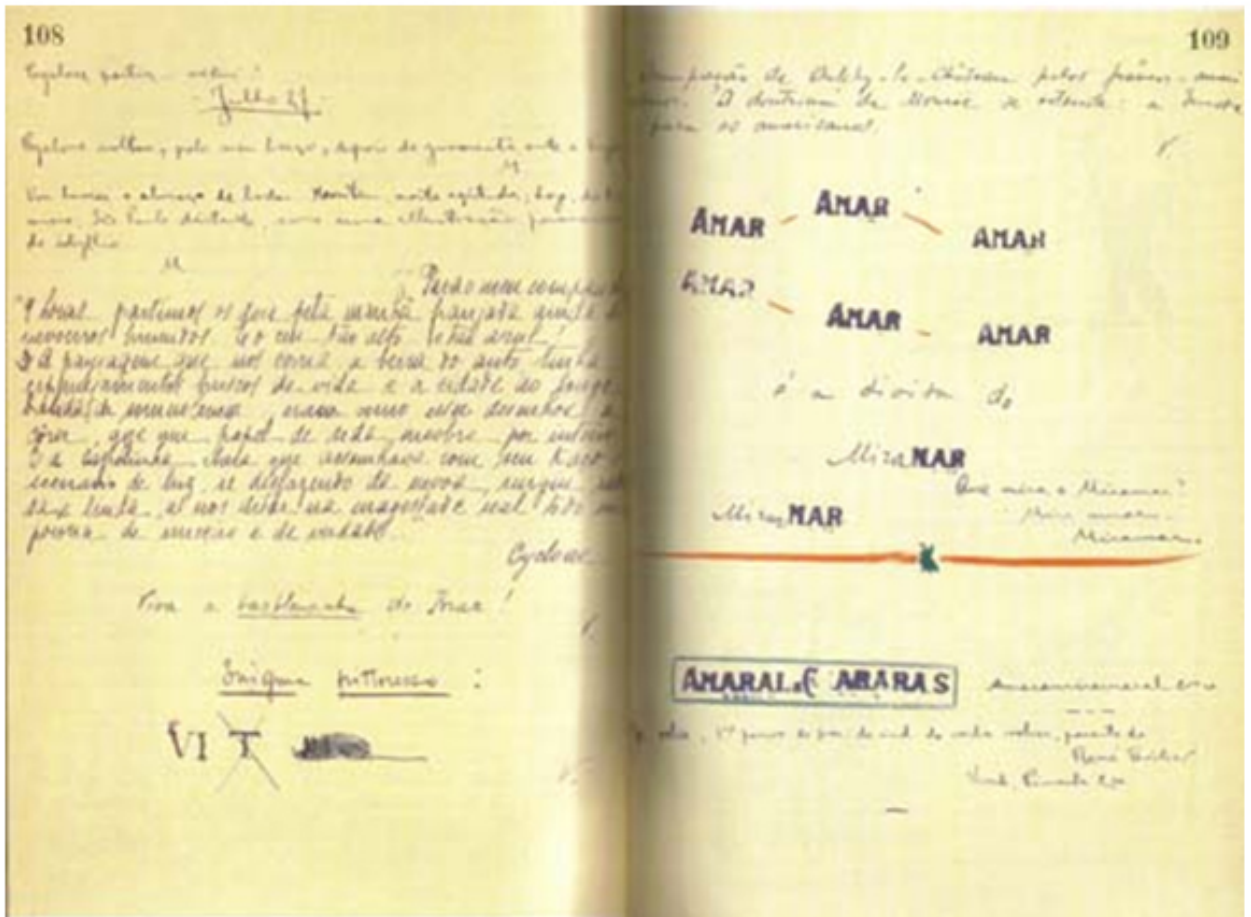


Fig. 1. Oswald de Andrade, from *O perfeito cozinheiro das almas deste mundo*. 108-109.

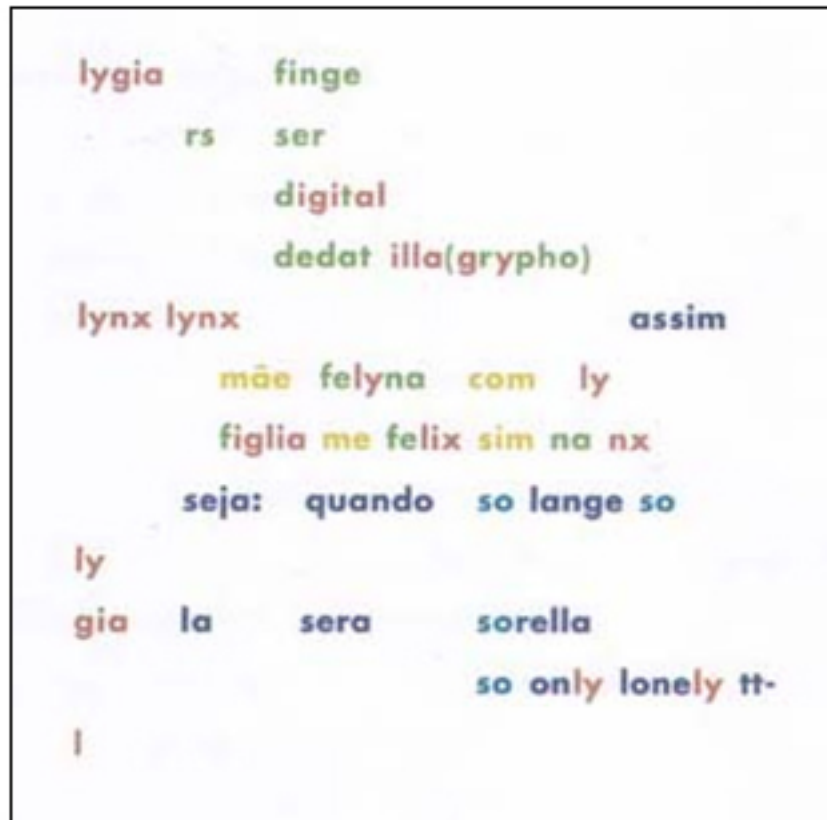
This book contains writing as well as significant visual attributes, including drawings and, as in Fig. 1, Oswald’s use of rubber stamps. *O perfeito cozinheiro das almas deste mundo*, a collaboration similar in style to the surrealist practice of the “exquisite corpse,” was started by Oswald but filled with contributions by anyone who visited or participated in salons held at Oswald’s São Paulo apartment during 1918. Anthropophagy was also influenced by Futurism, and proposed that creative potential is reached through a skepticism of organizational systems which include, as Caetano Veloso remarks in *Tropical Truth*, “nationality, history, language” (155). An anthropophagic text devours other texts and icons to create a form of expression that is

“at once loose and dense and extraordinarily concentrated” (155). Discovery and re-discovery of meaning is reached through the cannibalization of texts, which may then establish alternative perspectives on cultural or personal subjects taken up by authors in textual composition, re-composition, and composting (as seen in the examples of Oswald’s poems above). Artists are free to reshape external influence, writes Rodrigo Nunes, “to its own ends, without allowing itself to become imprisoned by anything that might restrain its vitality” (n. pag.). Critic Bernard Schütze has observed anthropophagy involves “an open process of dynamic transformations in which identity is never fixed but always open to transmutations,” which “produces a reservoir of heterogeneity” (n. pag.).

Although he was a crucial poet and thinker, Oswald was not always taken seriously by the Brazilian literati.⁽³⁾ All of the Brazilian concrete poets were, however, aware of his theory of anthropophagy, became influenced by it, and to varying degrees promoted certain of its elements in order to “reclaim the origins of Brazilian modernism... and to reassert its international prospects” (Green). In the production of text, cultural and aesthetic matter is absorbed (like structures or techniques from other visual disciplines), and then formalistically pronounced in various ways by the concrete poets, including the many translations done by members of the group—famously described as *transcreations* by Haroldo de Campos. From a certain perspective, the habitual, steady flow of translations could be considered the most anthropophagic output of the concrete poets, even if the persevering dedication to invention of expression implemented via means of graphical apparatus is also convincing evidence of ritualistic practice. Replying to a recent inquiry about this matter, Augusto writes: “Our approach

was not, physically, or say, dionisiacally ritualistic.... We viewed Anthropophagy as an anthropologic metaphor, nurtured in Freud, Nietzsche, Lévy-Bruhl and Bachoffen (from whom he took the theory of ancient Matriarchy, that would have preceded Patriarchal society, associated with authoritarian monarchies and private propriety).... The brainstorming in which we three, Decio, Haroldo, were engaged, in a Poundian way (“paideuma”, “the age demanded”), trying “to gather from the air a live tradition”, reading in several languages as only barbarians do to arrive at the selective choice MALLARMÉ-JOYCE-POUND=CUMMINGS was surely linked to the Oswaldian cultural ANTHROPOPHAGY” (Email 2006).

While this presentation exclusively focuses on Augusto’s work, the discussion could be widened and address works by Décio Pignatari (e.g., “Adieu, Mallarmé,” 1954) and other concrete poets, as well as historical figures previously mentioned (Bopp, Carvalho) and younger artists who practice with intent today. I’ll show examples of works from three different stages of Augusto’s non-electronic work, which indicate anthropophagy as an operative principle. The colored poems of “Poetamenos” series (1953), such as “lygia” [Fig. 2] are multicursal: crafted language leads the reader through various paths.



**Fig. 2. Augusto de Campos, from *Poetamenos*.
Vivavaia 71.**

Visual information, like color, and typographically scripted presentation—tools inherited from visual and graphical artists—are a source of sustenance in these poems. Various emerging strands can be experienced in any order, and a viewer’s experience with the poem is defined by the way he or she reads it. Use of different colored texts, and implied sonic (echoic) attributes, give the impression that multiple texts are stitched into one shaped pronouncement with visual texture. In “Poetamenos” the impression is literal fact, as the author repurposes quotes borrowed from poems by Luís de Camões and others.⁽⁴⁾ Further, in the prefatory note to “Poetamenos,” Augusto explains that he intended the series to be a representation of Webern’s concept of "klangfarbenmelodie" (tone-color-melody). Different states of emotion/intonation, used to pronounce the

lyrical threads, are expressed in each of the colors. A correspondence between heretofore discrepant senses of “color” in music and graphics are established in these multi-sensory poems.

Although his stated technological desire for “Poetamenos” was not met (“but luminous display of film letters, wish we could have it”), Augusto surely achieves the effect of radiant presentation on the page (Vivavaia 65). The poem’s sonic attributes are significantly anthropophagic. Each of the three brief sections are discursively built on aural associations, beginning with the word “lygia,” followed by echoic variations built with verbal fragments chosen by the poet. The poem is activated by this creative recycling reflected in the characters on the page and how we hear it. In subsequent works, like the “Novelo ovo” series (1954-1960), a shaped poem is composed with short words that at once sustain a dialog and present a compelling diagram, using words to form a letter (and a shape) rather than letters forming a word [Fig. 3].



Fig. 3. Augusto de Campos, from *Novelo ovo*. Vivavaia 97.

While graphically less complex than “Poetamenos,” the work presents similar challenges for the reader, who will see first the overall shape and proceed to follow a path from there. The poem is at least partially anthropophagic because this macro- “v” propels the poem on multiple levels; it is unquestionably used by the poet to build form and content, reflecting “v” as versus (v.), verb (v.), and verse, coming to a point, from which the poem vectors out.

In Augusto’s mid-1960s “Popcrete” phase, incorporation of unrelated external influence and materials increases: images from fashion magazines and newspapers are blatantly dismembered to make unusual, calculated, and sometimes non-linguistic works.



Fig. 4. Augusto de Campos, from *Popcretos*. *Vivavaia* 125.

In this example [Fig. 4], instead of interpreting what the language presented might mean, someone who encounters the work must “read” the assembled symbols, and crack a type of visual code in order to build comprehension. The anthropophagy is transformative: external icons—and the culture they are a part of—are re-shaped into something with an agenda unrelated to their initial purpose. A new context asserts the possibility, if not reality, of alternative planes of sight and multiplicity of perspective. Among the many curious aspects of this particular work are the four symbols at the top of the chart: three arrow keys inside circles, pointing to different directions, and an empty circle. This facet intimates if not forecasts interactivity: you can stop here or proceed in a different direction.

A more recent book, *Não Poemas* (2003), includes several “Profilogramas,” single-page poems that serve to transmit—through the visual language and textscape presented—rapid profiles, philosophical reflections on people who have made an impression on Augusto.(5)

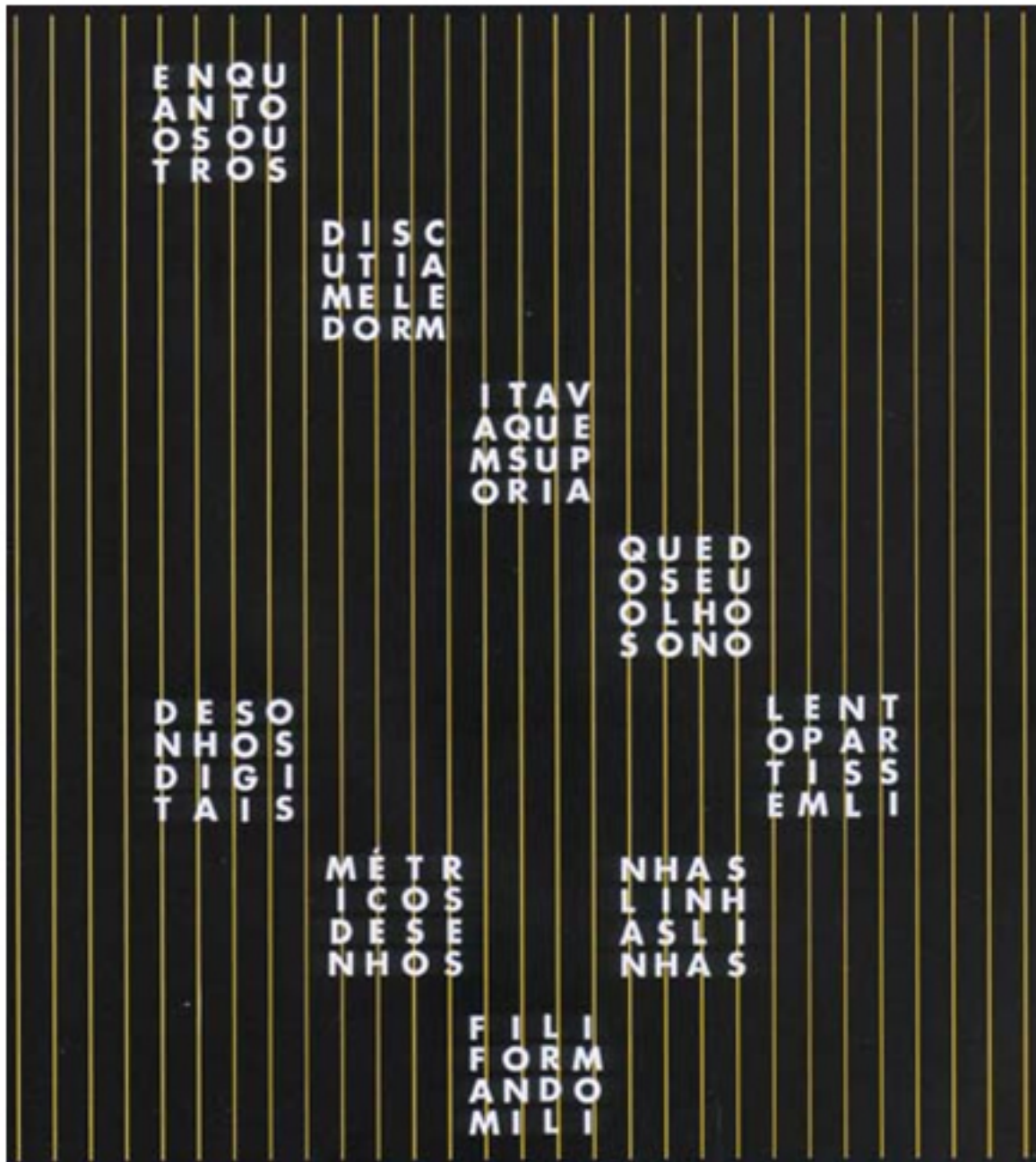


Fig. 5. Augusto de Campos, “charoux”. *Não poemas 77*.

In “charoux” (1996) [Fig. 5], straight lines, box shapes, and hooks, which are icons and techniques found in images of Paulista painter Lothar Charoux, are overtly evident and used to provide shape and texture to Augusto’s poem. With non-trivial effort, words can be deciphered, although the tactics of reading most certainly differ from those used

when poems are of standard delineation. The reader must (again) decide where to begin (possible starting points here would be either “De sonhos digitais...” [from digital dreams] or “Enquanto outros...” [while others]), and determine where words begin and end. The anthropophagic elements, while resolvable (after all we should recall this is a modernist proposition), present distinct dimensions and challenges: the graphical insistence and appropriation in these works complicate the poetry considerably.

Another section of *Não Poemas*, “Intraduções,” consists of *transcreations* in which non-verbal techniques (in type or design), absent from the originals, aim to produce iconic interpretations and interdisciplinary dialogues.⁽⁶⁾ Augusto reworks texts by Khlebnikov, Stevens, Akhmatova, Basho, Rilke, and others, applying “calligraphic techniques in more refined graphic structures” (Email 2006). The following poem [Fig. 6], revisits and repurposes Basho:



**Fig. 6. Augusto de Campos,
rã de bashô (1998) *Não poemas* 97.**

Clearly the overtly decipherable words in “rã de bashô” —uma, rã, pula, goa (the last of which is a neologism)—could only be an intimation or fragment of anything Bascho wrote.⁽⁷⁾ Augusto, through use of coloration in the letter “a,” depicts a multidimensional text, where even more of a language puzzle is presented than in previous examples. Characters can be read horizontally and vertically; alternative linguistic recognition emerges through enjambement or collision. New words are proposed by the poet using a designer’s touch on the work.

The book’s title poem “Não” begins as a block of text [Fig. 7], gradually consuming and compacting itself over ten pages to become a “no” poem—one that sends a message through an active relationship between word and page. The initial text is cannibalized, as is the “p” in “poesia” [Fig. 9] to illustrate process and result.



Figs. 7, 8, 9. Augusto de Campos, from *Não. Não poemas* 21, 31, 39.

The technique recalls Lenora de Barros’s early video poem “Entes...Entes...” (“Beings...Beings...,” 1985), in which mirrored word forms are sequentially molded into different twenty line patterns, becoming gradually compressed into blocks.⁽⁸⁾ In Barros’s and Augusto’s work, the viewer/reader is left to wonder what becomes of the poem—and why—as the line length compacts into fragments. The poets squeeze the

verbal information to the edge of semantic recognition; yet, in both examples, the visual activity of the poem serves to enact the verbal content.

Digital Poetry

Before proceeding to look at Augusto's computer-based works, I want to pause to introduce briefly some perspectives on poetry enabled by digital media, which has been called e-poetry, computer poetry, cyberpoetry, and digital poetry.⁽⁹⁾ Essentially these labels are used to describe a new genre of literary, visual, and sonic art launched by poets who began to experiment with computers in the late 1950s. Poets initially used computer programs by synthesizing a database and a series of instructions, in order to establish a work's content and shape. By the mid-1960s, graphical and kinetic components emerged, rendering shaped language as poems on screens and as printouts. Since then, videographic and other types of kinetic poems have been produced using digital tools and techniques. Beginning in the 1980s, hypertext (mechanically interconnected non-linear texts) developed in sync with the increasing availability of personal computers. A few other experimental forms, like audio poetry and holographic poems, emerged as media technology advanced.

References to concrete poetry are far from uncommon in dialogues regarding the influence of literature on new media productions: concrete poetry has been cited as an influence on computer poems since the first two books on the subject appeared in the 1970s, Richard W. Bailey's anthology *Computer Poems* (1973) and Carole Spearin McCauley's monograph *Computers & Creativity* (1974). Bailey writes that in graphical

computer poems, “concrete poetry is reflected with a computer mirror” (n. pag.). McCauley acknowledged in *Computers and Creativity* that computerized graphical poetry “resembles, or perhaps grew from... ‘concrete poetry’” (115). More recent books on the subject, such as Loss Pequeño Glazier’s *Digital Poetics* (2002) and Brian Kim Stefans’s *Fashionable Noise* (2003), also discuss the relevance of concrete poetry to the development of digital poems.

The invention of the computer is certainly one of the definitive moments of the past fifty years. One of the foremost ways digital poetry is anthropophagic is because it mints a literary concept via the absorption of forms of expression and production that were not previously related to digital technology. Poets courageously embraced formidable machines, built for the progression of science and business; their explorations are sometimes fruitful. Assimilation of texts and language unrelated to computer operations, which results in the reinvention of both language (through programming) and computers (through making poems with them), has endowed digital poetry with a type of autonomy, and numerous projects contain artistic qualities worthy of circulation and study. The anthropophagy of early computer poems generated by algorithmic equation reify modernism’s inscription of tentative, nonlinear arrangements of text (use of randomized elements, as in Dada, is sometimes employed). Instead of computing equations and processing data, the computer is entrusted with creative expression, giving the machines and programs a role in the negotiation between author and language. Since 1959 text-generating programs that process and permute databases of words into poems have been built by poets. Mechanically consuming a text to project a new text is unquestionably anthropophagic on an aesthetic register. The

anthropophagic analogy, in which perpetual digestion is a necessary function, also corresponds to one of the profound observations on hypertext and hypermedia, upon which contemporary identities for digital poetry now rest. As Michael Joyce has observed, electronic text almost always authoritatively “replaces itself” (rather than affix itself)—a defining characteristic of digital poetry (Joyce 236). This possibility invites the author to reconsider what an author is and does—a far-reaching concept that permits poets to use previously composed texts within new contexts.

Augusto de Campos’s electronic works

Another theme in Oswald’s project of anthropophagy was to imagine changing taboo into totem. Augusto, who began presenting poems on computers in the early 1980s, has always rejected the idea that technology is forbidden; in fact it is desired (and not to destructive ends). His engagement with computers as a poet was contrary to typical avant-garde methods at the time. As Marjorie Perloff observes in the early 1990s, “the most common response to what has been called the digital revolution has been simple rejection” (3); she explains that the consensus amongst most poets was that “technology...remains, quite simply, the enemy, the locus of commodification and reification against which a ‘genuine’ poetic discourse must react” (19). By now, a more realistic perspective generally acknowledges computer hardware and software are tools capable of presenting vibrant poetic works; Augusto has used them since the moment he was given access. As he stated in an interview with Roland Greene, “The virtual movement of the printed word, the typogram, is giving way to the real movement of the

computerized word, the videogram, and to the typography of the electronic era. From static to cinematic poetry, which, combined with computerized sound resources, can raise the verbivocovisual structures preconceived by CP [concrete poets] to their most complete materialization” (Greene n. pag.).



Fig. 10. from *Novelo ovo. Vivavaia 108.*

Several works on the *Não Poemas* CD-ROM (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2003), using variant approaches, reflect anthropophagic tendencies.⁽¹⁰⁾ The first piece, an animogram called “Caracol,” repurposes a 1960 poem that appeared in the

volume *Novelo ovo* [Fig. 10]. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Caracol”]

Whereas the original piece appeared in block formation, the animated version inscribes the image of a shell, and then uses the shape of the image in the composition and re-composition of the text, presented as fragments as the author recites the original script; the shell is embodied in the revolving shapes presented in the poem. Augusto’s original text, already anthropophagic, is dynamically processed by the computer that enables an expressive presentation in which additional cannibalistic aspects (in appearance and form) are present; verbal units are digitally shaped and treated with graphics and sound. “Cidade” (1963), another early work [demonstration of oversized, folded page from *Vivavaia*], was also digitally reversioned as an “animogram.” “Cidade” synthesizes and compresses multiple languages into a single word without spaces as a way to try to capture the verbal and visual intensity of a cosmopolitan place. In the mediated version of the work (“Cidade,” 1997; “Cidadecitycite,” 2003), a soundtrack literalizes the din, and the scripting of the animation puts the poetry—as a representation of the chaotic city—into motion. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Cidade” (1997); see <http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/clippoemas.htm>]

Mechanical possibilities amplify the poem’s original intent when Augusto feeds his poems into the computer.

Augusto’s “interpoem” “conversograms” directly fuses the voices of other artists with his own. This short piece, an “imaginary conversation” between Cesário Verde, Fernando Pessoa, and Vladimir Mayakovsky, ends playfully, with the faces of the three authors superimposed in an elegant portrait. [demonstration of CD “conversograms”]

These poems display a type of feedback, digesting the other in order to invent; it is

composition as a regurgative, recyclical process in which European subjects or other outside influences are transformed “into metaphorical objects of consumption,” worthy of being assimilated in the construction of an ongoing cultural project in the present (Rocha n. pag.).

These intertwining works, digested, are not only poetic but critical—Augusto is selective and purposeful, biting what he can, chewing on it to make something new. He samples characters and cultures that have influenced him, combines sound bytes and animations to assert the relevance of work, and adds his own material into the body of the poem. Within it, as in “Caoscape”—which predominantly features John Cage’s voice, picture, and words—Augusto not only intervenes with his own voice but has the power to control all aspects of the content included. In this piece a multistage, interactive narrative is presented, a reconstruction of, and synthesis with Cage that makes a statement about chaos. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Caoscape”]

Describing the composition of this piece Augusto recalls he

took a musical cell of Boulez and united it with a Cagian fragment. So you cannot recognize what is Cage and what is Boulez. There are in a single musical cell. Sounds that appear when you interact with the image of that circle, the image of chaos, because Cage recalls the anecdote, the story of Kwang-Tse, so the seven signs that compound the face arrive at the end. When the face is completed, chaos appears and then Cage (Interview 2005).

Each of the “morphograms” on the CD use a similar technique, typically uniting in shorter bursts of expression two voices with a representative animation of the speaker’s facial profile. “Stein Pound” begins with a photograph of Gertrude Stein that becomes, before the user’s eyes, Ezra Pound, while the intermingling voices of the authors are heard. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Stein Pound”] “Joao Webern,” probably my favorite, fuses line drawing animations of the faces composers João Gilberto and Anton Webern while sounds composed by these artists are playing. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Joao Webern”] The sounds, while discrepant, are harmonious; we are introduced to audio and visual elements, notes and drawings, brought together as simultaneities. Different forms of nutrition feed the poem. The samples are played forward, backwards, and then forward again; a flow is apparent in the experience of the presentation, as is a sense the author is exploring the possibilities of feedback.

The “Clip poems” from 2003 continue to explore the possibilities in merging kinetic text and processed spoken language. In the “Rever” section, there are new versions of “Cidade” (retitled “Cidadecitycité”) and “Inistante”. Animated text and sound are the primary features. One work in particular, however, establishes a new appearance—perhaps more literal—of anthropophagic effect. “Sem-Saída” is laid out so that it presents itself then devours itself. At first, the overall visual structure of the poem is shown briefly as montage on the screen. Then the user drags the mouse to unveil the first line of text. In order to proceed through the piece, the viewer must visually dismantle (by erasure with the mouse) the text that has just appeared on the screen. [demonstration of CD-ROM version of “Sem-Saída;” see

<http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/clippoemas.htm>] This is an aesthetic inherent to many electronic works, text being replaced by other texts; text is constantly

being shown and removed, or put on the plate and devoured so the next course can be served. At the end, in a modernist gesture, the overall visual structure is shown again and a polyvocal soundtrack including the author reciting the lines is heard; there the user can use the mouse to illuminate any of the poem's lines and bring the reading of that line to the fore.

In the last line to appear in “Sem-saída,” “nunca saí do lugar” [I never moved from this place)], Augusto could be speaking of his engagement with anthropophagy. It is not surprising that it is easy to see these works as concrete poetry extended, as they require “new forms of linguistic codification that imply a stricter involvement between the verbal and the non-verbal” (Greene n. pag.). Augusto's digital works represent a transparent transition from his theorizing to practicing of this kind of new poetry, spatial poetry, a temporal-spatial idea or conception, which he leaves as a possibility by way of invention. A formidable degree of anthropophagy, used to “in-spire and ex-pire information from the outside to develop and produce new information,” is revealed in these efforts (Email 2006).

Certainly there are other poetic interpretations of anthropophagy, and other sorts of artistic engagement with the concept. Nevertheless, Augusto and other concrete poets approach anthropophagy in distinct and profound ways: (1) through translation/*transcreation*, “original” writings are processed and re-linguaged; (2) through direct incorporation of external elements (including multiple languages, images, and symbols) in the generation of original expression; and (3), in the mechanical presentation of the work (and inventing new technological/navigational structures).

While some of these traits are undoubtedly present in his analog poems, it is in recent digital multimedia works that Augusto is best able to represent anthropophagic mechanics, which, as Charles Bernstein writes, give us “a way to deal with that which is external...by eating that which is outside, ingesting it so that it becomes a part of you, it ceases to be external. By digesting, you absorb” (n. pag).

An evolving, transitory art, instigated from a moment of possibility, has thus been sprung with intent, aesthetic polemic, and, plausibly, political depth. In the world of just globalization artists absorb, through consumption, to become another. To transform, one must be transformed. To ignore the world, to have its makings at your fingertips and its attention through the network, and not incorporate its conditions into a progressive scheme may not be mandatory. Doing so, however, opens up new possibilities for the synthesis of discrepant cultures and expressive histories.

Notes

(1). Other associated essays from the same period are collected in the volume *The Anthropophagic Utopia*. Comment on the translation of the title of "Manifesto Antropófago": in a recent email, André Vallias observes that the title “should be translated, in my opinion, as ‘Anthropophagus Manifesto’. "Antropófago" is an adjective” (Email 2006).

(2). Works by at least two other major figures of twentieth century art in Brazil, Raul Bopp and Flavio de Carvalho, would be at the top of the list of artists whose works seriously embrace anthropophagy. I would like to thank both Lucio Agra and Marcus

Salgado for bringing relevant works by historical and contemporary artists to my attention, and for our ongoing dialogs, which have substantively contributed to my discussion of the topic.

(3). References to his work were not common until the publication of the manifestos of the Concrete poets in the 1960s.

(4). The allusion to Camões is in the fifth poem of the series, “dias...”.

(5). The Perfilogramas series, as well as “Intraduções” (see below in essay), were both initiated in an earlier collection, *Despoesia* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1994).

(6). While confirming that this type of work is *transcreation*, de Campos writes “I prefer to call this kind of translation ‘tradução-arte’, deriving the term from “futebol-arte” (art-soccer), used to distinguish characteristic ballet-like Brazilian football... (Email Oct 2006).

(7). The Portuguese translation of Bashō’s complete haiku is: “velho lago/mergulha a rã/fragor d’água” (or, Into the ancient pond/A frog jumps/Water’s sound!).

(8). For more discussion of this work and other early videopoems, see my essay “A Vanguard Projected in Motion: Early Kinetic Poetry in Portuguese (*Sirena* 2005: 2, 152-165).

(9). Digital poetry, as defined by the authors of a 2004 anthology titled *P0esIs: Aesthetics of Digital Poetry*, “applies to artistic projects that deal with the medial changes in language and language-based communication in computers and digital networks. Digital poetry thus refers to creative, experimental, playful and also critical language art involving programming, multimedia, animation, interactivity, and net communication” (13). The form is further identified as being derived from “installations of interactive media art,” “computer- and net-based art,” and “explicitly from literary traditions” (15-17). “Medial self-referencing” in digital poetry, wrote the authors of *p0esIs*, “refers to poetic interest in the ‘concrete’ (as defined, for instance, by concrete poetry) ‘material’ of the language itself” (25).

(10). Incidentally, the CD-ROM was engineered by a pioneering Brazilian digital poet from a subsequent generation, André Vallias. Vallias, a graphical designer based in Rio de Janeiro (<http://www.andrevallias.com/>), is one of many important artists who were profoundly influenced by concrete poetry. He edits the Web journal *Aleer* (<http://www.refazenda.com/aleer/>)

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Traveling in Haroldo de Campos's *Galáxias*:

A Guide and Notes for the Reader

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Homage to the presence of Haroldo de Campos at Yale
and other North-American universities, 1968-1999

Long Distance Calls by Cellular Prose

Haroldo de Campos remained full of projects and of the creative energy, always so positive and exuberant as was his characteristic, up until his last moments. When in hospital, in August 2003, he proposed to his brother Augusto a joint translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, with the striking suggestion that they could do it by telephone. That would have been another successful encounter of technology with philology for Haroldo, the synthesis of a syncretic and a temporal vision of literature in its most creative moments, across time, with the vanguardist techniques of our own age. That galactic-technical vision was always Haroldo's specialty, from the "panorama" of *Finnegans Wake* to the "transhelenization" of the *Iliad*, the final monument of his long literary career. This is the same Haroldo of the "Scribblevaganza," the title he gave to a conference that he and I organized at the University of Texas in Austin in 1981, an event in which the act of writing was meant to accelerate to galactic speeds. He dedicated the same energy to the Yale

Symphosopia in 1995, where an international group of with ties to his work, poets, writers, and critics from Italy to Japan, collaborated to produce a book of commentaries on the concrete aesthetic based on their active participation (*Experimental--Visual--Concrete: Avant-Garde Poetry Since 1960*, Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1996). In 1999 Haroldo again read polemical texts and poetry, even in poor health, at the consecutive symposia organized at Oxford and Yale in honor of his 70 years (*Haroldo de Campos: A Dialogue with the Brazilian Concrete Poet*, Oxford, 2005). Haroldo's classicism, rooted philologically in the great epic poems, in Homer, Virgil, Dante and Goethe, always found its modern expression in the theme of the voyage, where a contemporary Ulysses strolls among the cities of the world, in the guise of a Westerner whose phantasmagorical prototype can be found in Cesário Verde's poem "Sentimento de um Ocidental." As *Finismundo* attests, one of Haroldo's last poems, Ulysses continues his voyage until he arrives at the Brazilian coast, thus the theme of the voyage becomes one unified theme over time, from its classical origin in Homer to the spaceships, from Greek islands to contemporary cities. It is as if baroque opera were sung with concrete poetry to announce the final arrival of Ulysses at the land and literature of Brazil.

The voyage is also philological, another characteristic of Haroldo, who always worked in close contact with many different languages and literatures -- Japanese, German, English-American, French, Italian, Spanish, Spanish American, Greek, Hebrew -- applying his techniques of transcreation to the greatest philological challenges: *pois um livro é viagem* (frag. 8). Deeply rooted in Brazil, his imagination allowed no borders between languages or literary genres. His work on the *Galáxias* from 1963 to 1976

(São Paulo, Ex Libris, 1984; 2nd ed. São Paulo, 34 letras, 2004) was located, as he said, at the extreme limits of prose and poetry (“à l’extrême des limites de la poésie et de la prose”, *Galaxies*, La Souterraine, 1998). In the *Galaxies* it is the poet who travels through a gigantic phantasmagorical world, in a Dantesque and Faustian stroll, going from city to city, as in Dante's circles. In the style of James Joyce, Haroldo returns us to a geographical-linguistic-mythical sea of classical proportions, weaving new literary metamorphoses into his "verbivocovisual," or phono-morpho-syntactical net. His prime materials are the basic fables of human imagination, conceived as voyages or as metamorphoses. In the 50 fragments of *Galaxies*, the narrator is a Haroldo-Ulysses confronting his own dangerous journey, his world discourse, narrating a mythical autobiography by a contemporary navigator, via Ulysses and Camões. The *Galaxies* are a new voyage by the Ulysses-narrator, without geographical borders, where the philology of language fables meets the technology of a Brazilian traveler *molto perpetuo*, in paradisiacal and infernal wanderings on the Earth, through cities of God and the devil. Following the technical terms that Haroldo proposed to his brother, the *Galaxies* are fifty long-distance calls by cellular prose.

From the *Odyssey* to Brazilian Seas: "Routes, Routes, Routes, Routes"

One of the essential references for a reading of *Galaxies* in the context of the historical vanguards is Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922). The Joycean novel narrates the live of Dublin's citizens, with multiple allusions to the city in all its vitality and disorder for a symbolic period of 24 hours. It is structured in episodes, narrated by interior monologues, soliloquies coming from the subconscious often in a stream of

consciousness. There is a diurnal/nocturnal rhythm that oscillates between esthetic emotion (*stasis*) and a putrid realism (*kinesis*), each episode carrying the marks of a certain hour of the day, scene, organ of the body, art, symbol and, above all, corresponding to an episode of the *Odyssey*. Joyce's scheme, today universally known thanks to Stuart Gilbert's *James Joyce's Ulysses* (New York, Vintage, 1955), was meant to help the reader perceive the novel's larger organizational units, revealing in its composition a discipline that the critic compares to Greek drama, or to the symmetry of any living organism. In his chart, Gilbert distinguishes 18 episodes, divided into three sections (3-12-3), corresponding to the morning, or Dedalus and Bloom's leaving home, to their wanderings around the city, and to their return home, now in the early morning hours. In this scheme each episode is numbered and assigned a title, taken from the corresponding episode of the *Odyssey*, according to the scene or place, the hour, an organ of the body, an art, a color, symbol and technique: "1. Telemachus/The Tower/8 a.m./Theology/White, Gold/Hair/Narrative (young)."

Possessing a structure reminiscent of *Ulysses*, the *Galáxias* accompany the narrator's voyage, in a subconscious open monologue, through multiple cities in an allegory of human destiny, in his mythical search for esthetic emotion and structure (*stasis*), in a material world governed by worthlessness and nothingness (*kinesis*). Traveling through microcosms toward the macrocosm, following the Joycean expression "all space in a not-shall," each fragment of *Galáxias* returns the reader to a larger mythical structure, originating not only in the *Odyssey* but in the allegorical nature of speech itself, of an occult world of symbols. By reinventing stories in the fashion of the thousand and one nights, both enchanting and fatal, the monologue in *Galáxias* both affirms and negates,

alternately, reproducing an organic rhythm. The hero seems condemned to wander eternally among the world's cities, waiting for a utopian-esthetic liberation or for an epiphany or illumination: "...une insinuation épique se résolvant en une épiphanie." *Galaxies*, 1998). In these wanderings through a purgatory of the real, the narrator finds a referential unity, parallel to the basic skeleton of the novel *Ulysses*, unlocked by Gilbert. To aid the reading of *Galáxias*, I propose a schematic design parallel to the one that Gilbert designed for *Ulysses*, so that the reader of Haroldo's greatest work of prose and poetry can better accompany and understand its themes and profound rhythm. The initial scheme outlays a sequence of cities and of literary references that makes up the basic material of the voyage of the narrator-poet through a world of plural signifiers. These notes are the result of seminars on the *Galáxias* in Brazil in 1991 at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Florianópolis) and Universidade Federal de Rio Grande do Norte (Natal), under the Fulbright program, in addition to interviews with the author in São Paulo and in the U.S.

Guide to the 50 fragments of *Galáxias*

TITLE	AREA/SPACE	LITERARY- AESTHETIC REFERENCES
1. e começo aqui	fable	Divine Comedy
2. reza calla y trabaja	Granada	Lorca, António
Machado on Lorca		

3. multitudinous seas Macbeth.	sea	Pound, Borges,
4. no jornalário	newspaper	Dante, Paradiso
5. mire usted	Córdoba	Arabist
6. augenblick	Stuttgart	art gallery
7. sazamegoto Buson (1716-84)	Prague	Haiku. Bashô,
8. isto não é um livro	Geneva	story by Cortázar
9. açafirão	Rome	post card
10. ach lass sie quatschen	Germany	Sinagogue
11. amorini	Italy	Pompei
12. um avo de estória of Cologne	Spain	San Sebastián Roman mosaic
13. esta é uma álealenda	Paris	Artaud
14. ma non dove Carducci. Sousândrade.	Ravvisano, Italy	text by
15. circuladô de fulô	Brazil	
16. um depois um the Cologne station	Germany	group of drunks at
17. uma volta inteira	Karlsbücke, Prague	Baudelaire
18. cheiro velho holiday. Cassiano Ricardo.	Rome	August
19. como quem escreve	Lithuania	bad faith

20. não tiravam o chapéu	Madrid	bullfight, newsmen
21. e brancusi	Stuttgart	Brancusi's egg
22. hier liegt	Cologne	Exposition. Lorca.
23. neckarstrasse	Tübingen	Schiller, Goethe,
Sophocles, Hölderlin, Bloch		
24. a liberdade	Manhattan	Sapho, Mondrian,
Lorca, Vozniessienski,		
Sousândrade		
25. aquele como se chamava	N. York/Mexico,D.F.	Mexican roads
26. apsara	Boston	Kenholz painting
27. sob o chapéu	San Francisco	William Carlos
Williams, Ferlinghetti.		
28. ou uma borboleta	New York	Tchuang-se
29. poeta sem lira	Los Angeles	Ode by Píndaro,
Hölderlin, Novalis, Henry Miller,		
Arthur Miller,		
Marilyn Monroe, Bashô.		
30. pulverulenda	Argentina	tangos of Buenos
Aires, Orson Welles		
31. o que mais vejo aqui	fable	
32. na coroa de arestas	Andalucia	Triptic
33. mármore ístrio Venice, Rapolla,	Pound	
34. calças cor de abóbora	Washington, D.C.	black power
35. principiava a encadear-se	Washington, D.C.	Galdós, Goya

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|
| 36. eu sei que este papel | New York | Barbarella. |
| 37. cheiro de urina | Salvador, Bahia | |
| 38. o ó a palavra ó | Mariana, Minas Gerais | N. S. de Ó |
| 39. circulado de violeta | France | Monet in Paris. |
| 40. como quem está num navio | Cluny | Woman in a café, |
| Raphael | | |
| 41. tudo isto tem que ver | writing | Joyce |
| 42. a criatura de outro | fable | Sanscrit |
| 43. vista dall'interno | Italy | |
| 44. cadavrescrito | fable | Rabelais |
| 45. mais uma vez | sea | Joyce, polypho |
| 46. esta mulher-livro | paper | Galatea |
| 47. passatempos e matatempos | fable | Macunaíma and Propp |
| 48. nudez | New York | Circe in New |
| York. Rilke. | | |
| 49. a dream that hath no bottom | Blumenau, Desterro, | Dr. Fritz |
| Müller, Darwin, Agassiz, Pound, Oswald, | | |
| | Santa Catarina | Volpi, Faustus, |
| Don Juan | | |
| 50. fecho encerro | fable | Pasárgada. Sobolos |
| rios. Dante. Snow White. | | |

A Neo-Baroque Drama: Reversible mirrors

The 50 fragments of *Galáxias* can be read in the form of a neo-baroque drama, controlled by the technique of mirroring and of reversible forms: *esta é uma álealenda ler e reler retroler comogirar regirar retrogirar* (frag. 13). The principles that Walter Benjamin distinguished in German drama apply to art and to the concepts in *Galáxias* (*Ursprung des deutschen trauerspiels*, Berlin, E. Rowohlt, 1928). More than contrasts, or meeting of opposites, there is a play of images and or words that return or repeat constantly, in which each affirmative/positive contains its own negative pole. Such is the respiratory rhythm that runs throughout the work in all its plural levels of meaning. As in neo-baroque drama, the libretto is the writing itself, while the fragments suggest excerpts from an endless legendary narrative or chant. As if on stage, a narrator, heard but not seen, walks through the world's cities looking for his art and his muse. The scene is allegorical and Faustian, representing a narrator navigating through an occult sea of language, always searching for a key that will open forms and end his exile, that will allow him to reach a supreme consciousness of the celestial city for which he searches, in terms that parallel Camões's mannerism in the celebrated poem of exile "Babel e Sião," through artistic means: *a mente quase-íris se emparadisa neste multilivro e della doppia danza* (frag. 50).

The main esthetic building blocks of the "galactic" neo-baroque drama can be represented schematically, following the same categories that Gilbert applied to Ulysses: rhythm, technique, scene, and symbol:

RHYTHM	TECHNIQUE	SCENE	SYMBOL
<p>1. <i>e começo aqui</i> Alternating rhythm</p>	<p>fable, <i>Divine Comedy</i> simultaneism</p>		
<p>2. <i>reza calla y trabaja</i> Alternating textual rhythm memory/experience; silence/speech; white/writing; paradise/anti-paradise; birth/death Spanish landscapes.</p>	<p>Melopea from Homeric Greek Lainn Shakespeare</p>	<p>1959, Granada</p>	
<p>3. <i>multitudinous seas</i> Rhythm: systole, diastole</p>	<p>dimension memory-reading textual history as movement, covert memory into experience</p>	<p>Red Sea in blood, Homeric sea. sounding, polysonorous sea</p>	<p>The sea</p>

4. *no jornalário*

descent into inferno,
the voyage

satanic

daily life,

vision of paradise at the end

Newspaper

5. *mire usted*

short notes

1959, Córdoba

6. *augenblick*

group of old women
art works

Stuttgart

art gallery

almost

mythic nudity
of paintings

7. *sazamegoto*

whispering,
seduction

Haiku,

Japanese

literature

Prague

woman with poet

in a train carriage

stork

"The rains of Spring!

Dear lady driving with me here

Your whispering!"

8. *isto não é um livro*

News in a paper,

ambiguity
between space
and time

Geneva
João Pessoa
S. Francisco churches

prostitute
underdeveloped
and ingenuous

9. *açafrão*

counterpoint

eroticism
of language,
of referents

Rome;
Vilagorio
museum;
sale of stolen
watches

post card for which
there cannot be
reproduced

10. *ach lass sie quatschen*

lace

arabesque

Stuttgart

synagogue,
manuscript with names
of the dead

names of the
dead,
tragic beauty

11. *amorini*

tragic-erotic
daily trivia

Priapic

Pompei
licentious
costumes

evil eye;
cadavers in the
museum in the
position in which
they died

12. *um avo de estória*

basic speech

mosaic

Spain

Roman mosaic
of Cologne

green eyes of a

woman-panther:
jaguarfulgueros

13. *esta é uma álealenda*

perfect equilibrium

painting

Paris

French woman with
cafetan,

miscegenation

miniturized
in a box

biological
recolonization

14. *ma non dove*

reflexive structures

notes

Ravvisano

that form
a macrostruture

headlines of TIME,

"nympholveros..."

Sousândrade, old
poet and the stones

15. *circuladô de fulô*

Brazil

16. *um depois um*

moment of inferno

labyrinth

Cologne station

group of drunks

17. *uma volta inteira*

reflection

artificial paradises

Karlsbrüke, Prague

Congonhas

Czech film,

"once there was a"

cat"

18. <i>cheiro velho</i>			
youth confronting	infernal images	Rome	Cassiano Ricardo
satisfied old person			
19. <i>como quem escreve</i>			
real/imaginary confraternization		Lithuania	woman with children
with the enemy;			dead in the war
bad faith			and young lover
20. <i>não tiravam o chapéu</i>			
stylization	description trouvé	Madrid	bull fights
21. <i>e brancusi</i>			
others	Parody of	Stuttgart	Brancusi's "Egg"
Generals in Paris/ "Family",	old ladies of	Mulatta going into	
1964 coup	"Tradition & Property"	museum/ very beautiful statues	hillside, corral of the poor
22. <i>hier liegt</i>			
train trip	Cologne		a young woman,
contrast Madrid	exposition on	Tea house	Civil
and Toledo	barbarities committed against the jews		Guards

24. *a liberdade*

always virgin

infernial circle

Manhattan,

Sapho verse,

25. *aquele como se chamava*

pop culture

N. York/

Mexico,D.F.

Mexican

roads

26. *apsara*

the false

hyperrealism

Boston

waitresses,

Hindu nymph,

woman

on the backseat

of a car

from that time

27. *sob o chapéu*

procession

contrast

San Francisco

Ferlinghetti/

William Carlos

Williams

28. *ou uma borboleta*

haiku

newspaper

New York/
S. Paulo

Strip tease.

29. *poeta sem lira*

Granada train,

obscure poem

from antiquity

blind score

Los Angeles

trivial things

30. *pulverulenda*

Orléon performer

religion and order

Buenos Aires

tango

31. *o que mais vejo aqui*

fable

32. *na coroa de arestas*

Triptik

from repor
in a newspaper

Andalucia

Death of Guevara,
Monroe, Kennedy

33. *mármore ístrio*

Pound's poetry

paradise

Venice, Rapolla

Pound's hotel

34. *calças cor de abóbora*

Bloomington, Ind/
Dupont Circle

black power in
D.C./sad bureaucrats

35. *princiava a encadear-se*

metalanguage in the text

Spatial signs

Washington, D.C.

girl on Lincoln's
lap; Suleiman's
Persian
calligraphy;
professor giving
lecture on Galdós

36. *eu sei que este papel*

happening

placenta of nothing

New York

Instalation,
Plastic balls,
Barbarella in a
happening.

37. *cheiro de urina*

semantics

Om

Salvador, Bahia

"Colorless green
ideas"—Chomsky's
impossible
sentence.

38. *o ó a palavra ó*

continuity in writing

Baroque haikai

Mariana, MG

Sabará museum

a painting

book of designs;
gold that took on
the form of a
shell

39. *circulado de violeta*

subway announcements

in Paris;

tunnel / funicular

graffiti from hell/
book from heaven

France,

oriental

museum

Paradiso

Monet ugly nymphs

immense paintings

40. *como quem está num navio*

detours and disagreements

the page

Paris,

stork/albin

41. *tudo isto tem que ver*

beams of light

between visible

and invisible

grotesque description

of the writer

writing

toilet paper

in Latin:

cacara carta;

nymphs

"après-midi"

42. *a criatura de outro*

Sanscrit poem, fable,
Buddist psalm.

writing

Lesbian

43. *vista dall'interno*

flight

distortion

Italy

travestite,
wig

44. *cadavrescrito*

rescue language
Portuguese fable

writing

magic moment

45. *mais uma vez*

to learn French

sea

Polypho.

46. *esta mulher-livro*

reading

Polyphemo-desire

Lingam;

paper, Japanese
painting

Yonis
(Female sex
in Sanscrit)

Woman in kimono
Galatea
Word nymph.
Kimono-butterfly
with red wings

47. *passatempos e matatempos*

talisman	pseudo-fable		girl who wants
			“the who of the,
			story, passes all the
			tests

48. *nudez*

Tautodessey	transmorphism	New York.	Ulysses's voyage.
.	into pigs		Circe,
			masseuse in NY;
			Venus on the beach.

49. *a dream that hath no bottom*

atheism	teach Latin	Blumenau,	Fritz Müller
anti-racism	to youth;	Desterro,	
	fish by Müller:	Santa Catarina	
	“Náuphus”		

50. *fecho encerro*

reversible,	Textual salvation.	Pasárgada.	Paradise of writing.
self-portrait of	Dante's Paraíso.	Mirror:	
writing		“Quasi Glória”	neg./pos. of
			liberation

The *Galáxias* have received growing international critical attention, intensifying since the French translation by Inês Oseki-Dépré in 1998. At the Oxford/Yale symposia in 1999, the novel received critical attention from the grand names of criticism, Marjorie Perloff, Luiz Costa Lima, Wladimir Krysinski and others. Krysinski places *Galáxias* in the company of the great texts of the twentieth century that refer to all literature, as well as to themselves, beginning with the *Cantos* of Pound, the *Waste Land* of Eliot and Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. And Perloff compares the technique of *Galáxias* to works by Gertrude Stein (*How to Write*, 1931) and to the diaries of John Cage. To travel through its pages is always intriguing; it is to travel through the insistently new, in the meaning

that this quality gained from the vanguards of world literature. *Galáxias* represents the Brazilian contribution to that tradition, Haroldo de Campos's invitation to a referential and self-reflexive literary voyage. The charts presented in this essay should serve the purpose of helping the reader to navigate through the sea of text, through the multiple philological and technical references, and so to answer the phone, picking up the 50 long distance calls from Haroldo, who now continues his earthy and textual journey in galactic space.

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Writing as Re-Writing: Concrete Poetry as Arrière-Garde

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In the spring of 2001, the poet and intermedia artist Kenneth Goldsmith participated in a panel on Brazilian Concrete Poetry with, among others, one of the movement's founders, Decio Pignatari.⁽¹⁾ Goldsmith recalls:

I was stunned. Everything [Pignatari] was saying seemed to predict the mechanics of the internet . . . delivery, content, interface, distribution, multi-media, just to name a few. Suddenly it made sense: like de Kooning's famous statement: "History doesn't influence me. I influence it," it's taken the web to make us see just how prescient concrete poetics was in predicting its own lively reception half a century later. I immediately understood that what had been missing from concrete poetry was an appropriate environment in which it could flourish. For many years, concrete poetry has been in limbo: it's been a displaced genre in search of a new medium. And now it's found one.(Goldsmith, 1)

The limbo Goldsmith refers to was quite real: in the 1980s and 90s, the going view, especially in Anglo-America, where concrete poetry had never really caught on, was

that the 1950s experiment in material poetics was ideologically suspect—too “pretty,” too empty of “meaningful” content, too much like advertising copy. In the university, this estimate still prevails. To this day, one would be hard put to find an English or Comparative Literature department that offers courses in concrete poetry. Doesn’t the subject belong more properly, if at all, in the art department, my colleagues ask, specifically in courses on graphic design?

Even books *about* concrete poetry have raised this issue. Consider Caroline Bayard’s sophisticated theoretical study *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (1989). Bayard begins with a survey of the mid-century poetics of Oyvind Fahlström, Eugen Gomringer, and Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, only to conclude that the “fusion of expression and content” being advocated by the Concretists was an instance of what Umberto Eco had termed the “iconic fallacy”—the fallacy that “a sign has the same properties as its object and is simultaneously similar to, analogous to, and motivated by its object.”⁽²⁾ At its most naïve “naturalizing” level, the iconic fallacy manifests itself, Bayard argues, in poems like Gomringer’s *Silencio* [figure 1], where the empty rectangle at the center of the composition is presented as the equivalent to the “silence” conveyed by the verbal sign. But even where the motivation is much subtler, as in Augusto de Campos’s *sem um numero* (“Without a Number”), which makes no reference to an external object but uses graphic space structurally so as to dramatize the central **o** (“zero”) status of the peasant [figure 2], concrete poetry, Bayard contends, is bedeviled by a lingering Cratylism—the doctrine, put forward by Plato’s Cratylus in the dialogue by that name, that the sound and visual properties of a given word have mimetic value, and that, by

extension, concrete poetry equates “graphic-typographical form with semantic function” (Bayard 23). This is, Bayard believes, a dangerous doctrine. “Typographical and calligraphic aesthetics were most striking in the 1960s, but also the least durable. They corresponded to the Cratylan phase of the experience, and while they inserted into texts typefaces hitherto unknown to literature, the experiment was short-lived” (163). For -- and here ideology comes in--“changing the sign system does not in any way imply that one is modifying the political system” (171). And Bayard refers us to Herbert Marcuse’s argument that far from representing a breakthrough, the innovative typographic devices of the Concretists “dissolve the very structure of perception in order to make room . . . for what?” (171).

This “for what?” functions as a battle cry. Visual poetry, or, for that matter, sound poetry, as in the case of Henri Chopin (Bayard 27-28), are thus judged to be questionable practices. Indeed, Bayard argues, it was only when the “form=content” assumption of Concretism was abandoned, as it was in the 1970s and 80s by poets like bpNichol, bill bissett and Steve McCaffery, who turned their attention to the anagrammatic and paragrammatic play *inherent in language* rather than on such Concretist elements as font, color, and spacing, that a more adequate poetics was born. It is a compelling argument: in my own *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, written in the late ‘80s, I was persuaded, as was Caroline Bayard, that post-concrete poetics was providing a needed “corrective” to the purported mimeticism and aestheticized composition of the earlier work.(114-118) But now that, in Goldsmith’s words, “an appropriate environment in which [concrete poetry] could flourish,” has become available, the texts in question have recovered their place in the larger poetic

field. To understand how this process of recovery works and how Concrete poetry itself perceived its role as the renewal of the avant-garde practices of the early twentieth-century, it may be useful to take up the concept of the *arrière-garde*, now gaining currency.⁽³⁾ We need, in other words, to ground Concretism in its history, to understand, for example, its relation to the two World Wars as well as to the varying cultures that produced it. And further: from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can begin to discriminate *between* the various manifestations of what once seemed to be a unified movement. Not all concretisms, after all, are equal.

silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio
 silencio silencio silencio

Figure 1

sem um numero
 um numero
 numero
 zero
 um
 o
 nu
 mero
 numero
 um numero
 um sem numero

Figure 2

Bringing Up the Rear

As William Marx makes clear in the Introduction to *Les arrière-gardes au xx^e siècle*, the concept of the avant-garde is inconceivable without its opposite. In military terms, the rearguard of the army is the part that protects and consolidates the troop movement in question; often the army's best generals are used for this purpose. When, in other words, an avant-garde movement is no longer a novelty, it is the role of the *arrière-garde* to complete its mission, to insure its success. The term *arrière-garde*, then, is

synonymous neither with reaction nor with nostalgia for a lost and more desirable artistic era; it is, on the contrary, the “hidden face of modernity” (Marx 6). As Antoine Compagnon puts it in his study of Barthes in the Marx collection, the role of the *arrière garde* is to save that which is threatened. In Barthes’s own words, “être d’avant-garde, c’est savoir ce qui est mort; être d’arrière garde, c’est l’aimer encore.”⁽⁴⁾

The proposed dialectic is a useful corrective, I think, to the usual conceptions of the avant-garde, either as one-time rupture with the bourgeois art market, a rupture that could never be repeated—the Peter Bürger thesis--or as a series of ruptures, each one breaking decisively with the one before, as in textbook accounts of avant-gardes from Futurism to Dada to Surrealism to Fluxus, to Minimalism, Conceptualism, and so on. This second or progress narrative, ironically, continues to haunt the academy even when the avant-garde is by no means at issue: I am referring to the unstated premise of critical theory that the perspective of enlightened globalists, post-colonialists, or multiculturalists on a given art work or movement is inherently more “advanced” than what came before. But, as Haroldo de Campos points out in a blistering attack on Third World studies, it is condescending—indeed, as he says, *overaltern*, to assume, as does, for example, Fredric Jameson in his “theory of a cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature,” that subaltern fiction, “having as a necessary goal the achievement of a ‘national allegory,’ will not offer the satisfaction of a Proust or Joyce.” At the current stage of development, Jameson posits, a given novel—his example is Guimarães Rosa’s *Grande Sertão: Veredas*-- may be understood as “a *high literary* variant of the Western.” To which Haroldo responds:

The first thing that occurs to me, before a somewhat deprecating label like this one, is that the author of *The Political Unconscious* ignores the Brazilian Portuguese language and has built a fake, oversimplified image of the complex Faustian, metaphysical struggle between God and Devil embedded in the deep structure of Rosa's masterpiece. . . . the Anglophone master's discourse of the overaltern "salvationist" critics works as a rhetorical by-product of unconscious imperialism by effacing the *subaltern* "minor" languages and by underrating their creative verbal power."(11-13)

The "new realism," Haroldo insists, has not shed the language of Joyce and Borges as readily as it might seem.

This commentary provides us with a useful entry into the discourse of the Concretism of the 1950s. In 1953, the Brazilian-born Swedish poet Oyvind Fahlström published a "Manifesto for Concrete Poetry" under the title *Hipy papy bithithdthuthda bthuthdy*, a version of "Happy Birthday" he took from A. A. Milne's *Winne-the-Pooh*.(8) The second epigraph for this manifesto—the first announces that Fahlström has shifted from "normal" writing to the creating of *worlets* (words, letters)—is in French and declares, "*Remplacer la psychologie de l'homme par L'OBSSESSION LYRIQUE DE LA MATIERE.*" The citation is from Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Literature* (1912)—the famous manifesto, first printed as a leaflet in French and Italian, supposedly spoken by the propeller of the airplane in which Marinetti finds himself. The *Technical Manifesto* calls for the destruction of syntax, of adjectives, adverbs, and

all verbs forms except the infinitive, and of punctuation, in favor of “tight networks of analogies” between disparate images,” as in “trench”=”orchestra” or “machine gun =femme fatale.” Such strings of unrelated nouns—what Marinetti called *parole in libertà*—would replace the tedious lyric “I,” which is to say all psychology: “The man who is damaged beyond redemption by the library and the museum, who is in thrall to a fearful logic and wisdom, offers absolutely nothing that is any longer of any interest.” For psychology, Marinetti insisted, we must substitute *matter*, specifically such categories as noise, weight, and smell. And Marinetti exemplifies this “new” poetry by reciting from his onomatopoeic battle poem *Zang tumb tuuum* with its cataloguing of such items as “lead + lava + 300 stinks + 50 sweet smells paving mattress debris horseshot carrion flickflack piling up camels donkeys **tumb tuuum.**”(9)

Like Marinetti, Fahlström has little time for the conventional pieties of his day: his manifesto begins with a satiric thrust at the Sigtuna lake-front art colony (rather like our Yadoo or McDowell summer colonies), whose cultural hero was the neo-Romantic poet Bo Setterlind, the author of a long poem called *Mooncradle*. Like Marinetti, Fahlström senses that words “have lost their luster from constant rubbing on the washboard” (110) and believes that “changing the word order is not enough; one must knead the entire clause structure. Because thought processes are dependent on language, every attack on prevailing linguistic forms ultimately enriches worn-out modes of thought” (117). And just as Marinetti dismisses ego psychology, Fahlström dismisses the fixation on “**content,**” as the chief “unifying element” of the poetic text:

The situation is this: e v e r s I n c e t h e War, [there has been] a l o n g, a b j e t, d o o m s d a y m o o d, a feeling that all experimental extremes have been exhausted. For those of us unwilling to drift into the world of alcoholic or heavenly sustenance, all that remains is to use what means we have at our disposal to

Analyse

analyse

analyse our wretched predicament.

Today with laboured symbolic cryptograms, silly romantic effusions or desperate grimaces outside the church gate being propounded, as the only healthy options, the concrete alternative must also be presented. (110-11)

But, as the reference above to the postwar doomsday mood makes clear, there are, of course, also enormous differences between the avant-guerre Futurist Marinetti, and the post-World War II Fahlströhm—differences that similarly define the relationship of Pound and Joyce to the *Noigandres* group. The Utopian avant-garde, of which Marinetti was very much of a representative, believed in definitive rupture with the stultifying past. “A roaring motorcar,” Marinetti declared famously in the First Manifesto (1909), “is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace” (Marinetti 13). And one of his best-known manifestos is *Contra Venezia Passatista* (1910), which insists, partly tongue-in-cheek, that the famed Venetian canals should be drained and filled with cement so that factories might rise up to replace the “dead’ museum culture of this passéist city, whose abject citizens are little better than *cicerones*, guiding the wealthy foreign tourists from one museum or church to another.

Or again, there is the manifesto called *Down with Tango and Parsifal*, with its diatribe against Wagner and those who dance like “hallucinated dentists.” For the Italian Futurists, as for their Russian counterpart and the Cabaret Voltaire, the past is not only dead but deadly. Avant-garde means to make it new. Accordingly, there is no homage to the poets and artists of the preceding century. The 1912 manifesto *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (signed by David Burliuk, Khlebnikov, Kruschonykh, and Mayakovsky) declared that “The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphs,” and exhorted fellow poets to “Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity.”(Burliuk 51-51)

The new technology, it seems, has changed everything. “If all artists were to see the crossroads of these heavenly paths,” says Malevich, referring in 1915 to the “brilliance of electric lights” and “growling of propellers” of the modern city, “if they were to comprehend these monstrous runways and intersections of our bodies with the clouds in the heavens, then they would not paint chrysanthemums.”(116-135) Who was it that did paint chrysanthemums? Monet for one, Renoir for another: artists of the great Impressionist movement who were now considered passéist. Indeed, Duchamp went further and rejected retinal art *tout court*—dismissing Courbet, not to mention the Impressionists, as devoid of any real ideas.

The arrière-garde, in contrast, treats the propositions of the earlier avant-garde with respect bordering on veneration. One can’t imagine Marinetti or Malevich using the words of their nineteenth-century precursors as epigraphs, but Fahlström certainly does so. And the Brazilian *Noigandres* group specifically derives its names from a passage in

Pound's *Cantos*. Thus Concretism, cutting-edge (literally!) as this arrière-garde was vis-à-vis the normative verse or painting of its own day, transformed the Utopian optimism and energy of the pre-World War I years into a more reflective, self-conscious, and complex project of recovery.

When, for example, Fahlströhm makes his case for the equivalence of form and content, his argument is less Marinettian than Khlebnikovian, amalgamating concepts developed by the French *lettristes*, who were his contemporaries. The basic principle, developed by Khlebnikov in his studies of etymologies, is that, as Fahlströhm put it, “l I k e – s o u n d i n g w o r d s b e l o n g t o g e t h e r” (115). “Myths,” for example, “have been explained in this way: when Deukalion and Pyrrha wanted to create new human beings after the Flood, they threw stones and men and women grew from them: the word for stone was ‘laas,’ for people ‘laos’”. . . Figs are related to figment, pigs to pigmentation (115).”

Here is the Cratylan or iconic “fallacy” so regularly called into question by critics of Concretism. From an arrière-garde perspective, however, there is an important precedent for Fahlström’s formulation, which also covers rhythm (“metrical rhythms, rhythmic word order, rhythmic empty spaces”), homonyms, syllepsis, which “unites words, sentences, and paragraphs” (114-15), anagram, paragram, and the “arbitrary attribution of new meanings to letters, words, sentences, or paragraphs.” “We might,” for example, “decide that all ‘i’s in a given worlet signify ‘sickness’. The more there are, the more serious the illness” (116).

Khlebnikov, whom Roman Jakobson considered the great poet of the twentieth century, expended much labor on tracing the relationships of meanings produced by such words and syllables. In a short essay (1913) on cognates of the word *solntse* (sun), Khlebnikov observes:

Here is the way the syllable *so* [with] is a field that encompasses *son* [sleep], *solntse* [sun], *sila* [strength]], *solod* [malt], *slovo* [Word], *sladkii* [sweet], *soi* [caln: Macedonian dialect], *sad* [garden], *selo* [settlement], *sol'* [salt], *slyt'* [to be reputed], *syn* [son].(272-273)

And to make the relationships more vivid, Khlebnikov sketches them as the rays of a sun bearing the key word “SO.” Logically, the relationship between these verbal units is largely arbitrary—what does salt have to do with sun?— but poetically, Khlebnikov shows, they can be made to inhabit the same universe:

Although the refined tastes of our time distinguish what is *solenyi* [salty] from what is *sladkii* [sweet], back in the days when salt was as valuable as precious stones, both salt and salted things were considered sweet; *solod* [malt] and *sol'* [salt] are as close linguistically as *golod* [hunger] and *gol* [the destitute] (Khlebnikov 272).

And the analysis continues in this vein.

Khlebnikov's poetic etymologies recall Plato's *Cratylus*, where, despite Socrates' arguments against the representability of the sign, he is the one to come up with ingenious meanings for letters and syllables. The noun for truth, **alhqeia** (*aletheia*) is shown to be an "agglomeration of **qeia alh** (thea alé, divine wandering), implying the divine motion of existence." Or again, **Yeudos** (*pseudos*) is "the opposite of motion; here is another ill name given by the legislator to stagnation and forced inaction, which he compares to sleep (**eudein**, *eudein*), but the original meaning of the word is disguised by the addition of **y** (*ps*)." If, as Rosmarie Waldrop put it neatly, "concrete poetry is first of all a revolt against the transparency of the word," making "the sound and shape of words its explicit field of investigation,"(57) the Plato of the *Cratylus*, and Khlebnikov after him, are certainly involved with concrete poetry. For the link between stagnation and sleep or between truth and a divine wandering are precisely the links that intrigue poets.

This, then, is the force behind Fahlström's *worlets* and his fascination with complex forms. In his own case, the early concrete experiments were only a first step in the elaborate language games we find in his collages, radio plays, installations, musical compositions, and documentaries. In all these instances, materiality and medium were central: Fahlström had dissociated himself early from the Surrealists who were his contemporaries, remarking that his aesthetic differed from theirs in that "the concrete reality of my *worlets* is in no way opposed to the concrete reality of real life. Neither dream sublimates nor myths of the future, they stand as an organic part of the reality I inhabit" (119).

In its inattention to sound and syntax, Fahlstrom implies, surrealism should be understood as a deviation from the true avant-garde path. The new poetics thus positions itself elsewhere—as the *arrière garde* of Italian and Russian Futurism, of the “destruction of syntax” (Marinetti) and the “word set free” (Khlebnikov). The question remains why such Concretism as Fahlström’s, with its marvelous recovery of *zaum*, sound poetry, innovative typography, and appropriated text, came into being when and where it did. And what did the two World Wars have to do with it?

The Gomringer Variant

In *The Geography of the Imagination* (1981), Guy Davenport made a comment that sheds much light on the relation of concrete poetry to the avant-gardes of the early century:

Our age is unlike any other in that its greatest works of art were constructed in one spirit and received in another.

There was a Renaissance around 1910 in which the nature of all the arts changed. By 1916 this springtime was blighted by the World War, the tragic effects of which cannot be overestimated. Nor can any understanding be achieved of twentieth-century art if the work under consideration is not kept against the background of the war which extinguished European culture. . . . Accuracy in such matters being impossible, we can say nevertheless that the brilliant experimental period in twentieth-century art was stopped short in 1916. Charles Ives had written his best music by then; Picasso had become Picasso;

Pound, Pound; Joyce, Joyce. *Except for individual talents, already in development before 1916, moving on to full maturity, the century was over in its sixteenth year.* Because of this collapse (which may yet prove to be a long interruption), the architectonic masters of our time have suffered critical neglect or abuse, and if admired are admired for anything but the structural innovations of their work.(314, my emphasis)

Extreme though Davenport's assessment may sound—surely many avant-garde works were produced *after* 1916—his basic premise is, I think, correct. Pound, for example, had not yet begun the *Cantos*, but the ideogrammic technique that made them so famous—their fragmentation, collage, multi-lingualism, and use of citation—were already in place in “Cathay.” Duchamp had already produced his first readymades, and Malevich had exhibited his black and white squares at the *O.10* show in Petersburg. The interwar years witnessed the refinement of these early innovations —El Lissitsky's of Malevich's abstractions, Duchamp's incorporation of his readymades into the *Large Glass*, Gertrude Stein's permutations in *How To Write* of her early prose technique—but the rupture that caused such widespread shock and consternation in art circles had already occurred. And in the 1930s and 40s, as socialist-realist writing came to the fore, avant-garde innovation was considered suspect. When revival came after World War II, it occurred, not in Paris, where the postwar ethos was one of existentialist introspection as to how France had made such a terribly wrong turn in the pre-Hitler years, and certainly not in the war capitals—Berlin, Rome, Moscow-- but on the periphery: in Sweden (Fahlström), Switzerland (Eugen Gomringer), Austria (Ernst Jandl), Scotland (Ian Hamilton Finlay), and especially in São Paulo, Brazil.

The periphery, as we have seen in Fahlströhm's case, defined itself by its resistance to the dominant aesthetic of its day, turning instead to the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. But the rear flank of the army can't protect the troops without understanding the moves the front-runners have made—a situation that makes *arrière-garde* activity much more than mere repetition. Eugen Gomringer, generally considered the father of concrete poetry,⁽⁷⁾ is a case in point. Gomringer differed from Fahlströhm, as from the Campos brothers, in coming out of an artistic rather than a literary milieu. As early as 1944, he had seen the international exhibition of concrete art organized by Max Bill in Basel, and in 1944-45, he made the acquaintance of Bill and Richard Loehse at the Galerie des Eaux Vives in Zurich.⁽⁸⁾ Soon, he was collaborating with two graphic artists, Dieter Rot and Marcel Wyss, to create a new journal called *Spirale*. Bauhaus, Hans Arp, Mondrian and *Der Stijl*—these were Gomringer's chief visual sources.

At the same time, he had a taste for poetry, having begun, as a student, to write sonnets and related lyric forms in the tradition of Rilke and George, many of them on classical subjects like the dramatic monologue "Antinous" (1949), or the Petrarchan sonnet "Paestum which begins:

Am Strand und in der Dünen Einsamkeit
Läßt sich von kleinen Händen nichts bewegen,
Da scheinen Sonne, Mond und fallen Regen
Und Winde wehn im alten Maß der Zeit. (Schnauber 7)

On the shore in the loneliness of the dunes
Nothing can be moved by small hands,
Here shines the sun, the moon, and rain falls
And winds blow, as they did in ancient times. (my translation)

The poem moves through neatly rhyming quatrains and sestet, tracking the poet's contemplation of the stones of Paestum and their testimony to the human potential for greatness.

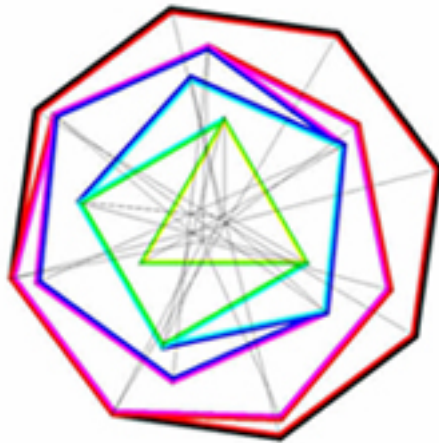


Figure 3



Figure 4

The turn to concrete poetry, based on the abstract art (called “concrete” because of its emphasis on the materials themselves) exhibited in the Zurich and Basel galleries [see figures 3-4], thus came without a working out of the problems of iconicity and representation that we find in Fahlströhm and the *Noigandres* poets. Gomringer merely turned from the conventional lyric to concrete art-inspired “constellation.” Here is the 1952 “avenidas,” [figure 5], written in Spanish in homage to Gomringer’s birthplace, Bolivia:

avenidas
avenidas y flores

flores
flores y mujeres

avenidas
avenidas y mujeres

avenidas y flores y mujeres y
un admirador

This minimalist poem, divided into four couplets, repeats the three nouns for *avenues*, *flowers*, and *women* with six repetitions of the conjunction “and” (“y”), in the following pattern--a, a + b; b, b + c; a, a + c; a + b + c +; the final line introduces a fourth noun modified by an indefinite article—*un admirador*—thus bringing the poet, discreetly referred to in the third person, into the picture.

Structurally, *Avenidas* thus is not yet a “concrete” poem: the stanza breaks, for example, could be elided and the spacing between couplets could be changed without appreciably altering the lyric’s meaning. Within the year, however, Gomringer had written *silencio* [see figure 1], *ping pong*, *wind*, and the “o” poem [figures 6-8], poems whose typography is clearly constitutive of their meaning.⁽⁹⁾ The motivation of these “constellations,” as Gomringer called them, was closely related to the situation of Switzerland in the immediate postwar era. In the 30s and 40s, there had been much talk of German Switzerland becoming a separate nation by adopting a written German variant of its own. Although the plan was abandoned, the war further isolated Switzerland, turning it into a neutral island surrounded by warring power

blocks. After the war, a unified but still trilingual Switzerland once again opened its borders to the larger European world, but that world (including Germany itself) was now newly divided by the Iron Curtain. Concrete poetry, Gomringer insisted, could break down the resultant linguistic and national borders by transcending the local dialects associated with *Heimatstil*, the endemic Swiss nativism. In using basic vocabulary as in the short poem beginning *sonne man / mond frau* (“sun man / moon woman”), poetry could avoid the local.⁽¹⁰⁾

ping pong
 ping pong ping
 pong ping pong
 ping pong

Figure 6

 w w
 d i
 n n n
 i d i d
 w w

Figure 7

 o
 bo
 blow
 blow blow
 blow blow blow
 blow blow
 blow
 bo
 o
 so
 show
 show show
 show show show o
 show show show
 show show
 show
 so
 o
 lo
 flow
 flow flow
 flow flow flow
 flow flow
 flow
 lo
 o

Figure 8

But such globalism was not without its problems. From his first manifesto, “From Line to Constellation”(1954), Gomringer emphasized the need for reduction, concentration, and simplification as “the very essence of poetry.” “Headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters,” he wrote, “give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use” (see Solt 67). The “new poem” should be “simple” and could be perceived “visually as a whole as well as in its parts. It becomes an object . . . its concern is with brevity and conciseness.” Such a poem is called a “constellation,” in that “it encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster” (67).

Reduction, compression, simplicity, objecthood: note that these are not equivalent to Fahlströhm’s call for verbivocovisual language and para-grammicity. In his second major statement on the subject in 1956, Gomringer declared that “Concrete poetry is founded upon the contemporary scientific-technical view of the world and will come into its own in the synthetic-rationalistic world of tomorrow” (Solt 68). This functional definition of a “universal poetry” brings concretism dangerously close to industrial design and conformity to the political-ideological status quo. And indeed, by 1958, in “The Poem as Functional Object,” Gomringer is talking about “reduced language” as necessary to “the achievement of greater flexibility and freedom of communication.” “*The resulting poems,*” he wrote, “*should be, if possible, as easily understood as signs in airports and traffic signs*” (Solt 69—70, my emphasis).

But what happens when the identity of poem and industrial sign is complete? How, then, is art different from commerce, poetry from good design? In 1967, Gomringer

took on the position of chief design consultant for Rosenthal, the famous china and glass manufacturer, and increasingly his work became that of consolidation rather than innovation. Perhaps the difficulty was that his concept of poeticity set itself against the traditional model of Goethean—or Rilkean—lyric without absorbing the Italian *parole in libertà* and Russian *zaum* works that had performed such a similar role. He had, in other words, no useful paradigm to revive and adjust, believing that his “simple” and “direct” constellations were something entirely new. Thus when, in his last major poem, with its Rilkean title *das stundenbuch* (“the book of hours”) of 1965, Gomringer turned from visual “constellation” to the normal page, producing fifty-eight pages, primarily of five couplets each, containing permutations of twenty-four short conceptual nouns (e.g. *Geist, Wort, Frage, Antwort; mind, word, question, answer*), each modified by *Mein* and *Dein* (“mine” and “yours”) in what is a latter-day book of hours, a meditation on the relationship of life to death, the role of graphic space becomes much less significant, although verbal repetition in poetry always has a visual as well as an aural and semantic function. Iconicity, anagram, paranomasia— these now give way to the accessibility of the sign: Gomringer’s is a poem readable with a minimum of German. True, the elegantly produced 1980 edition provides, not only the text but also four complete translations, into English (Jerome Rothenberg), French (Pierre Garnier), Spanish (Jaime Romagosa), and Norwegian (Jan Östergren) respectively. But the very fact that *stundenbuch* translates so nicely shows that the materiality of the signifier no longer plays the central role in the poem’s production. The lines *deine frage / mein wort* inevitably become *your question / my word*: the translator need only follow the score.

Pós-Tudo, Pós-Utopico

The Brazilian Concretists, to whom I now turn, had a close relationship to Gomringer at the inception of the movement, but their work soon took a different direction. The very name *Noigandres*, chosen by the Campos brothers and Decio Pignatari as the name of their movement, launched in 1952, is revealing. *Noigandres*, Augusto has explained, was taken from Ezra Pound's Canto XX, in which the poet seeks out the venerable Provençal specialist Emil Lévy, a professor at Freiburg, and asks him what the word *noigandres* (used by the great troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel) means, only to be told by Lévy that for six months he has been trying without success to find the answer: "Noigandres, NOIgandres! / You know for seex mons of my life / Effery night when I go to bett, I say to myself: / Noigandres, eh *noigandres*, Now what the DEFFIL can that mean!"(89-90) But despite this colorful disclaimer with its phonetic spellings, "Old Lévy" had, in fact, gone on to crack the difficult nut in question: the word, he suggested, could be divided in two-- *enoi* (*ennui*) and *gandres* from *gandir* (to ward off, to remove)—and in its original troubadour context, the word referred to an odor (probably of a flower) that could drive ennui away. Other Provençalists have suggested that *noigandres* might also refer to *noix de muscade* (nutmeg), which is an aphrodisiac-- a reading that is plausible given that Arnaut's poem is a love poem. And since the nutmeg plant is prickly on the outside, silky on the inside, *noigandres* may also be a sexual metaphor.(11)

For our purposes here, it matters less what the word *noigandres* actually means than that the Brazilian Concretists took a word of complex etymology from

Pound's *Cantos* so as to name their movement and journal. This was an unusual move: in the Brazil of the early 1950s, Pound was barely known. Incarcerated in St.

Elizabeth's hospital for his wartime activities, he was at best, a controversial figure—one whose award of the 1948 Bollingen Prize, on the part of a panel of distinguished fellow poets, had aroused the ire of most critics and journalists. Then, too, he had long been an exile, living in obscurity in Rapallo, Italy, so that the interwar literary world of Europe had largely forgotten him.

Why, then, *The Cantos* and Joyce's controversial *Finnegans Wake* rather than models closer to home? As Augusto explained it in a 1993 interview with me:

In the fifties . . . there was a very important demand for change, for the recovery of the avant-garde movements. We had had two great wars that marginalized, put side for many many years, the things that interested us. You see, the music of Webern, Schoenberg and Alan Berg, for example, was not played because it was condemned both in Germany and in Russia, the two dictatorships. You could say that all experimental poetry, all experimental art, was in a certain sense marginalized. Only in the fifties began the rediscovery of Mallarmé, the rediscovery of Pound. Pound suffered at that time from the charge of fascism. His work was very much condemned. We participated in an international movement . . . that tried to rescue Pound, who was excluded from American anthologies.(171)

The war, Augusto observes, put all artistic experiment on hold, “it was a traumatic situation . . . [in] all the arts. Duchamp was rediscovered in the sixties by the Pop movement and by Cage, and then he balanced the influence of Picasso. . . . There was a great movement in music, in Europe as in the U.S.—the revival of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Cage. So, I think it was a necessity to recover the great avant-garde movements.” And now Augusto adds a comment that is significant for our understanding of concrete poetics today. It is the need for recovery of the avant-garde, he argues, that has prompted him to turn a critical eye on post-modernism: “There is inside the discussion of post-modernism *a tactic of wanting to put aside swiftly the recovery of experimental art and to say all this is finished!*” (Jackson 171, my emphasis).

Here is the important distinction between avant-and arrière-garde. The original avant-garde was committed not to recovery but discovery, and it insisted that the aesthetic of its predecessors—say, of the poets and artists of the 1890s—was “finished.” But by mid-century, the situation was very different. Because the original avant-gardes had never really been absorbed into the artistic and literary mainstream, the “postmodern” demand for total rupture was always illusory. Haroldo, following Augusto’s lead, explains that the Concrete movement began as rebellion—“We wanted to free poetry from subjectivism and the expressionistic vehicle” of the then-dominant poetic mode (173). But it is also important to appreciate continuity. Thus Haroldo praises Paul Celan’s work, which has “the contemporaneity of concrete poetry. He was a poet who was . . . influenced by the syntax of Hölderlin, by some devices of Trakl, but on the other side, there are visual elements in his poetry, there is a reduction and fragmentation

of language typical of concrete poetry.” Indeed, the “German tradition” in concrete poetry is criticized for being “much less interested in the field of semantics than, for instance, Brazilian poetry.” “The Gomringer poetry,” Haroldo adds, “is very interesting, but very limited” (Jackson 173).

What about surrealism? For the Brazilian *arrière-garde*, as for Oyvind Fahlström, surrealism was distraction rather than breakthrough. In Latin America, Augusto declares, surrealism, with its “normal grammatical phrases” and the “very conventional structure” that belies its reputed psychic automatism (170), had “a traumatic influence as a kind of *avant-garde* of consummation!” (175). Haroldo adds, “A kind of conservative *avant-garde*. . . . All the emphasis on the unconscious and on figurality. I think French poetry did not free itself from surrealism until now. They did not understand *Un coup de dés*no poet after Mallarmé was as radical as Mallarmé. Not even Apollinaire. Apollinaire is decorative where Mallarmé is structural” (Jackson 175). And Augusto cites Pignatari as quipping that, “Brazil never had surrealism because the whole country is surrealist” (176).

The point here is that, whereas the Surrealists were concerned with “new” artistic content—dreamwork, fantasy, the unconscious, political revolution—the Concrete movement always emphasized the transformation of materiality itself. Hence the chosen pantheon included Futurist artworks and *Finnegans Wake*, Joaquim de Sousandrade’s pre-Modernist collage masterpiece *The Inferno of Wall Street* (1877), and the musical compositions of Webern, Boulez, Stockhausen, and Cage.

How, then, did this recovery project work in practice? The concrete poems in Augusto's first book *Poetamenos* (*Poetminus*), were, interestingly, not iconic at all but fused Mallarméan spacing, Joycean pun and paragram, and the Poundian ideogram, with Webern's notion (in *Klangfarbenmelodie*) that musical notes have their own colors. Here, from *Poetamenos* (1953), is the third color poem *Lygia* [figure 9] (12)



Figure 9

This love poem juxtaposes the “red” title word with green, yellow, blue, and purple word groups to create a dense set of repetitions with variations and contrasts. The need for translation is minor here, since Augusto himself has invented a multilingual poetics that oddly anticipates what is sometimes known in poetry circles today as “The New Mongrelisme.” *Lygia* contains English, Italian, German, and Latin words and phrases, bristling with puns and double entendres. Thus *finge* (“feints” or “tricks”) in line 1 becomes *finge/rs* (line 2). Do *Lygia*’s fingers play tricks? The third and fourth lines confirm this possibility with the anagram *digital* and *dedat illa[grypho]*. As Sergio Bessa has explained, in lines 3-4, Augusto deconstructs the Portuguese verb *datilografar* (“*typewriting*”) in order to insert his beloved’s name into the scene of

writing: *grypho*, moreover, can be read both as "glyph" and "griffin." By the time we reach line 5, *Lygia* has morphed into a *lynx*, a feline creature (*felyna*), but also a daughter figure (*figlia*), who makes, in a shift from Italian to Latin, *me felix* ("me happy"). Note too that *Lygia* contains as paragram the suffix -ly (repeated five times, twice color coded so as to stand out from the word in which it is embedded)—a suffix that functions as teaser here, given that the adjective it modifies (happily? deceptively? treacherously? generously?) is wholly indeterminate.

The German phrase *so lange so* in line 8, puns on *Solange Sohl*, whose name Augusto, as he tells it, had come across in a newspaper poem and had celebrated as the ideal beloved in the Provençal manner *ses vezer* ("without seeing her") in his 1950 poem *O Sol por Natural*.⁽¹³⁾ In line 10, the second syllable of *Lygia* morphs into Italian to give us *gia la sera sorella*—"already evening, sister," where *sorella* may be addressee or an epithet for *sera*, the longed-for evening. The poem then concludes with the English words *so only lonely tt-* and then the solitary red letter *l*, recapitulating the address to *Lygia*, but this time reduced to *the* whisper or tap of *tt* and a single liquid sound.

To recapitulate: concrete poetry, as represented by *Lygia* and its neighboring constellations in *Poetamenos*, is less a matter of iconicity or even spatial design, striking as that design is, than it is conceived as verbivocovisual composition, all of whose *materials* have a signifying function. Pound's familiar distinction between *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia*, and *logopoeia* is applicable here, but note that *phanopoeia* is transferred from the realm of representation (e.g., the word or word group as effective "image" of X or Y) to that of the materiality of the poem: its sound (emphasized by color) and its visual appearance on the page. *Logopoeia*, the dance of the intellect among words, occurs throughout, and it is *melopoeia* that dominates: I have

already talked of the *lygia—finge—digital—illa gryphe—lynx lynx—figlia* thread; consider also the echo of *so lange so* in *sorella* and then in *so only lonely*, the spacing further drawing out these word-notes. “Lygia” thus emerges as a troubadour lyric made new: the time frame of the *aubade* or *planh* gives way to the spatial-aural construct of this amorous *Klangfarbenmelodie*. The love song, moreover, nicely ronizes its conventional subject matter: Lygia, both lynx and digital, has her own tricks and, in any case, the figure of Solange Sohl looms in the background.

The next step—and we find it in the work both of Augusto and Haroldo-- was the large-scale translation, more properly, in Haroldo’s words, *transcreation* (see Jackson 9) that included works from the *Iliad* (Haroldo) and Arnaut Daniel (Augusto), from Goethe and Hölderlin to August Stramm and Kurt Schwitters (Haroldo and Augusto), to Rimbaud [Augusto, figure 10], Hopkins, and e. e. cummings (Augusto), from essays on Hegel, Christian Morgenstern, and Bertolt Brecht (Haroldo) to the “rhythmic criticism,” as Augusto calls it, the “ventilated prose” or *prosa porosa* used in Augusto’s riffs on Lewis Carroll, Gertrude Stein, Duchamp, and John Cage in *O Anticritico* (1986). Together, Haroldo and Augusto have given us an artist’s book called *Panorama do Finnegans Wake*, which contains translations of selected fragments from the *Wake*, together with critical and scholarly commentary, and art work.(14)

The poetics of such “translation” has been described by Haroldo as follows:

Writing today in the Americas as well as in Europe will mean, more and more, as far as I can see it, rewriting, remasticating. Writers of a

monological, “logocentric” mentality—if they still exist and persist in that mentality—must realize that it will become more and more impossible to write the “prose of the world” without considering at least some reference point, the differences of these “ex-centrics,” in the same time Barbarians (for belonging to a peripheral so-called underdeveloped world”) and Alexandrians (for making “guerilla” incursions into the very heart of the Library of Babel (Jackson 10).



Figure 10

The texts that come out of this program are very much artworks in their own right.

The *Panaroma*, for example, takes as one of its epigraph’s the phrase “to beg for a bite in our bark Noisdanger” from the *Wake*, and thus finds a hidden link between Joyce and the Pound of *noigandres*. The translated fragments, many of them quite short, emphasize the linguistic and poetic side of Joyce’s work, at the expense of its narrative,

mythic analogues. And the illustrations sprinkled throughout the text are themselves like abstractions from concrete poems, letters and ideograms arranged in new ways [figure 11]. As a result, *Panaroma* is less a translation of Joyce than it is a found text, a transposition taking on its own life. Indeed, from here, it is a short step to Haroldo's own *Galaxias*.



Figure 11

Another example of such transcreation may be found in Augusto's version of Gertrude Stein's *Porta-Retratos* (Santa Catarina: Editora Noa Noa, 1989). The portrait on the cover (and reprinted as the frontispiece), *uma rosa para Gertrude* [figures 12-13] was made in 1988. In his Preface, Augusto admits that he came to Stein rather late; that in his youth, he accepted Joyce's and Pound's hostile estimate of her work and has only

recently come to realize how astonishing her verbal compositions really are. What interests him especially, Augusto notes, is Stein’s emphasis, in “Composition as Explanation,” on the “continuous present.” His red “rose,” made of three concentric circles, beautifully enacts this concept. The sentence “A rose is a rose is a rose. . .” does not begin or end anywhere: begin reading the concentric circles wherever you like and the clause is read as continuing. Then, too, the sequence “roseisarose” contains a paragram on *eis*—Portuguese for “here is.” Here, indeed, is the rose itself. In English, Stein’s sentence remains linear, a one-directional sequence followed by a period. In his visual variant, Augusto has found a way to apply Stein’s two other two principles from “Composition as Explanation” as well: “beginning again and again,” and “using everything.” His cover ideogram thus provides the needed context for the translations inside: “A Portrait of One: Harry Phelan Gibb,” “If I Told Him,” “Georges Hugnet,” and “Identity:a Tale.”

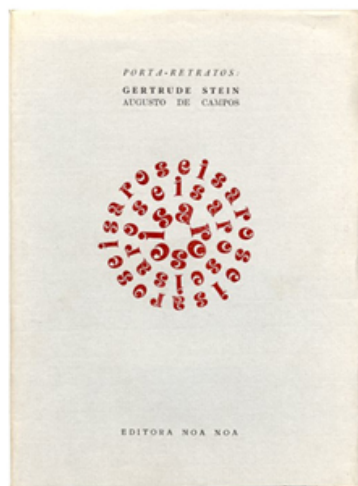


Figure 12



Figure 13

Meanwhile—and this is another form of transcreation—Haroldo was engaging in theoretical projects that similarly consolidated the position of the *arrière-garde*.

In *Ideograma*, a book that has gone through three editions since its first appearance in

1977, Haroldo gives us a translation of Ernest Fenollosa's famous "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry," which had such a decisive influence on Ezra Pound. Haroldo's purpose, however, is not merely to reproduce or enlarge on Fenollosa's argument but, on the contrary, to submit it to theoretical scrutiny. Indeed, his own long chapter, "Poetic Function and the Ideogram," is perhaps a more cogent critique than any we have to date in English, of the notion that Pound himself accepted at face value: namely, that in the Chinese language, words are much closer to things than in English, that the "pictorial appeal" of the ideogram makes Chinese a more "poetic" language than the Western ones, characterized as they are by a high degree of abstraction.

Haroldo counters that, first of all, "in ordinary use Chinese readers treat ideograms in the same way as users of alphabetical languages treat script, as conventionalized symbols, without any longer seeing in them the visual metaphor—the visible etymology—which so impressed Fenollosa." More important, "The Chinese Written Character" displays an improper understanding of what Roman Jakobson called the *poetic function*:

Whereas for the referential use of language it makes no difference whether the word *astre* ("star") can be found within the adjective *desastreux* ("disastrous") or the noun *desastre* ("disaster") for the poet this kind of "discovery" is of prime relevance. In poetry, warns Jakobson, any *phonological coincidence is felt to mean semantic kinship*. . . .in an overall fecundating process of pseudo-etymology or poetic etymology. . . . What the Chinese example enhanced for Fenollosa

was the homological and homologizing virtue of the *poetic function*. (15)

Haroldo will later complicate his theory of meaning by incorporating Charles Peirce and Derrida, but for our purposes here, the Jakobson reference is central for an understanding, not only of Fenollosa but of concrete poetry itself. The Cratylian argument, we can now see, is not a “fallacy” in the sense Caroline Bayard took it to be one, for the whole point is that poetry *is* that discourse in which *astre* and *desastre* do belong together even if, in ordinary discourse, there is no meaningful relationship between the two. Both Augusto and Haroldo, like Oyvind Fahlstrohm and such other Concretists as Ian Hamilton Finlay and Ernst Jandl, understood this distinction. The iconic aspect of Concrete Poetry, emphasized in the early stages by Gomringer and Max Bense was always subordinate to the necessity for relational structure, whereby, to enlarge on Jakobson’s thesis, any phonological or visual coincidence is felt to mean semantic kinship. In this sense the material is the meaning. Fenollosa, as Haroldo recognizes, was on to something important, but by naturalizing the ideogram (just as Pound naturalized the Image), he assumed that word and thing can be one. Haroldo’s “rear-guard” operation vis-à-vis the early twentieth-century avant-garde is thus pivotal. For years, Pound’s comments on the “ideogrammic method” were taken at face value and used as entries into *The Cantos*. More important, Haroldo’s understanding of how the materiality of the signifier really could work in the new poetics made it possible for him to write his great poetic prose text *Galaxias*. There are a number of detailed analyses of *Galaxias* in David Jackson’s collection (including Jackson’s and my own), and I do not have space to discuss this long poem

here. But I want to call the reader's attention to the beautiful preface to Inés Oseki-Dépré's French translation of *Galaxias*, by the poet, novelist, theorist, and founder of Oulipo, Jacques Roubaud.

The preface, called *Sables, syllabes* ("Sand, Syllables"), is itself a prose poem, beginning, like Blaise Cendrars's "Prose du Transsibérien" with the words, "En ce temps-là" and permutating a set of phrases in a series of strophes so as to convey the image of Haroldo the traveller, debarking, now and again, among "les ancient parapets d'europe" (the allusion is to Rimbaud's *Bateau ivre*) so as to rediscover *les lieux Poundiens les revisiter les investir de ses syllabes de ses reflexions les prendre au miroir de ses syllabes de ses ideogrammes de sa barbe de ses cheveux* "(the Poundian places to revisit them to invest them with his syllables his reflections to put them in the mirror of his syllables of his ideograms of his beard and his hair"). And Roubaud piles infinitive on infinitive to produce a highly stylized series of strophes commemorating the days when he himself and Haroldo shared their first loves (the troubadour cantos and the poetry of ancient Japan), beginning again and again:

*commencer et recommencer à nous inquiéter nous révolter nous
enthousiasmer nous décourager nous stimuler nous replonger dans
l'écume indéfiniment émietlée dans les grains de sable innombrablement
énumérés de la lumière quand tout cela je me souviens et me ressouviens
et retrouve ce moment inoubliable ce moment de poésie d'il y a vingt-
cinq ans où j'ai vu sur la page et commencé le commencement de lire les
premières syllabes les premières lignes immenses et longues et serrées
des GALAXIES.*

Begin and rebegin to worry ourselves, to disgust ourselves, to excite ourselves, to discourage ourselves, to stimulate ourselves, to plunge ourselves again into the foam indefinitely crumbling the grains of sand innumerably enumerated in the light when I remember all this and remember again and rediscover the unforgettable moment the moment of poetry of twenty-five years ago in which I saw on the page and began the beginning of reading the first syllables the first lines immense and long and twisted of GALAXIES.(16)

Le forgeron de syllables, Roubaud calls Haroldo, “the blacksmith of syllables..”

Roubaud’s own word and syllable play is rather different, rule-based and numerically organized as it is, but the basic thrust—against ego psychology, expressiveness, the communication of preformed “meanings”—is similar, as is the poets’ genealogy from Provençal lyric to Mallarméan language and Modernist music.

The elaborate verbal play of *Galaxias* is one direction the Concretist *arrière-guerre* has taken. The other—and I come back now to my beginning—is the digital. In 1997, when digital poetry was still in its infancy, Augusto began to produce, for the Casa das Rosas in São Paulo, electronic constellations in which meaning is produced both spatially and temporally, both kinetically and musically. The most elaborate of these is probably *SOS*, his 1983 *expoema* now set, so to speak, to digital music. In his *Anthologie despoesia*, Jacques Donguy has produced the 1983 text in both Portuguese and French [see figure 14] and provided a transcription of the Portuguese, which I give here in English:

I ego eu ya ich io je yo	I ego eu ya ich io je
yo	
sós pós nós	alone after we
que faremos apos?	what will we do afterwards?
sem soi sem mãe sem pai	without sun without mother
without father	
a noite que anoitece	in the night that becomes
night	
vagaremos sem voz	we will go roaming without
voice	
silencioso	silently
SOS	SOS

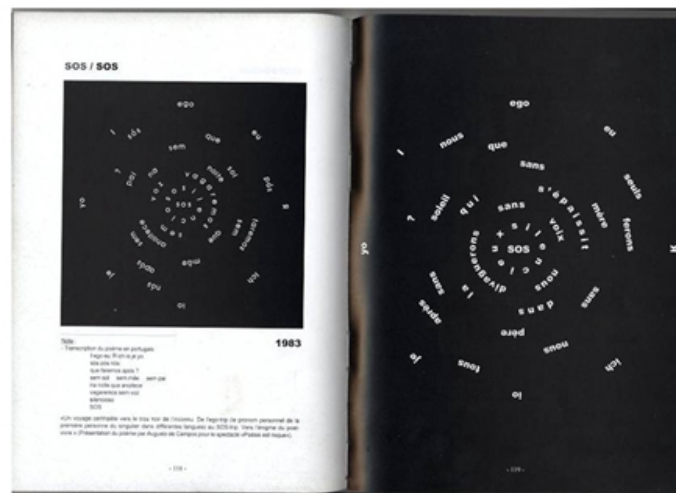


Figure 14

Augusto's note reads, "A centripetal voyage toward the dark hole of the unknown. From the ego-trip (the personal pronoun of the first person singular in different languages) to the SOS-trip. To the enigma of the after- life" (Donguy 118).

The stationery concrete poem is extremely effective as the eye moves from the outer circle of those first-person pronouns into the eye of the storm *SOS*. But it cannot compare to the electronic version [figure 15], in which the words first appear as stars in the black night, against the background of discordant noise, and then disappear again as the poet declaims the words, bringing in, in time for the third circle, a second reader, the two voices producing a kind of counterpoint in a series of verbal rounds of repetition and variation as the wheel of words starts turning, circle by circle. The sounds become more and more ominous until, in the final moment of *SOS*, the "bomb" explodes in the center, the yellow circle spreads out to the margins, *SOS* appearing in huge black letters on yellow ground. Quickly, the image bursts and dissolves into a black hole. What will we, who are alone, do afterward?

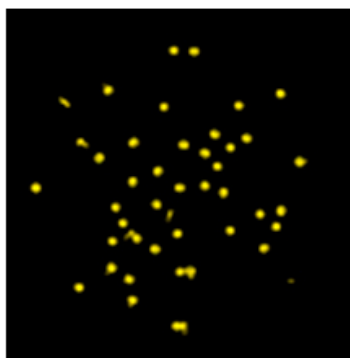


Figure 15

As an electronic poem, *SOS*, like such related works as *cidade-city-cité* and *instante* (both 1999), can obviously be faulted for committing the iconic fallacy. The spinning circles of words represent the planets spinning out of control as

doomsday nears. But the poem's iconicity would not add up to much were it not for that central pun on *SOS*—at once the classic distress symbol as relayed in Morse Code as well as, with an accent over the *o*, the Portuguese adjective, in plural form, for *only* or *alone*. *Sós*, moreover, rhymes with *pós* (after). The black hole that awaits us in Augusto's poem is a terrifying image, especially in its verbivocovisual dimension. But Augusto's *Expoemas* also anticipate a more recent trend in digital poetics—the conceptualism that characterizes such texts as Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*, a book-length writing produced by copying a single day's *New York Times* in linear progression from its first word to its last in what is an astonishing defamiliarization of our daily reading practices. One of Augusto's pieces is called REVER [figure 16], but, far from containing dream imagery, visual or verbal, it consists of no more than the word *REVER* itself alternately silhouetted in black against a double blue and green band and a larger red and green one.. The red and green bands move to fill the whole screen, first one then the other, but the word REVER shoots out like a noisy rocket, one letter at a time, repeatedly demanding our attention. As such, the piece continues indefinitely until the reader clicks it to stop. No undisturbed sleep, it seems, for the viewer, who is forced to watch the formation of the single word REVER. No escape from the eternal WORD, noisily intruding on our contemplation of "pure" color. *REVER*: will it *NEVER* go away, will it play out for-EVER? A Cratylist, moreover, could hardly help noticing the presence of EVE in the poet's green garden.

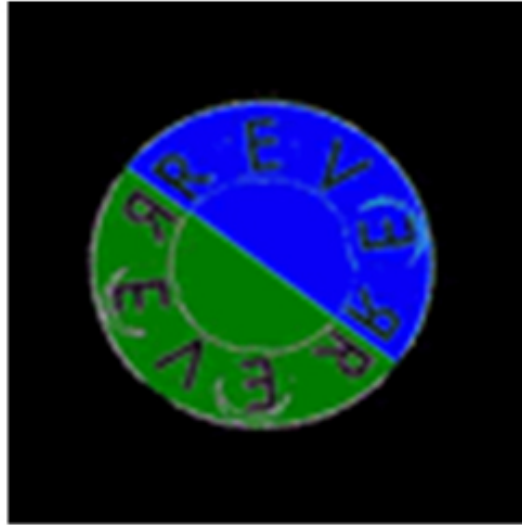


Figure 16

In dreams begin responsibilities. *REVER* positions itself against all those avant-garde dream poems from *Le Bateau ivre* to John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, abjuring the semantic density of these lyrics even as it slyly spins out its own. In the new digital environment, as Goldsmith has suggested, such *arrière-garde* "concretism" takes on a new life.

Notes

(1). The program (6 March 2001), held at the Society of the Americas on Park Avenue, also included K. David Jackson, A. S. Bessa, and Claus Clüver, all speaking on the *Noigandres* poets.

(2). Caroline Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 24. Eco's term appears in his *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 191.

(3). See especially William Marx (ed.), *Les arrière-gardes au xx^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004). Translations from this text are my own.

(4). Antoine Compagnon, “L’arrière-garde, de Péguy à Paulhan et Barthes,” in Marx, 93-101. The reference is to Roland Barthes, *Oeuvres complètes*, III, p. 1038 (“Reponses, 1971): “To be avant-garde is to know that which has died. To be arrière-garde, is to continue to love it.”

(5). Oyvind Fahlstrom, *Hipy papy. . .*, in Teddy Hultberg, *Oyvind Fahlström on the Air—Manipulating the World. Bilingual text* (Stockholm: Sveriges Radio Förlag,” 1999), 108-20. The manifesto, translated by Karen Loevgren, is also found in Mary Ellen Solt’s classic *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 74-78.

(6). F. T. Marinetti, “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature,” *Critical Writings*, New Edition, ed. Günter Berghaus, trans. Doug Thompson (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), pp. 107-19. The manifesto, originally printed as a four-page leaflet in French and Italian, is dated May 11, 1912, and August 11, 1912. For the full Italian text, see F. T. Marinetti, *Opere*, Vol. 2: *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, ed. Luciano de Maria (Milan: Mondadori, 1968), 40-54.

(7). See, for example, Solt, *Concrete Poetry*, 8.

- (8). See Cornelius Schnauber, “Einleitung,” *Deine Träume, Mein Gedicht: Eugen Gomringer und die Konkrete Poesie* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1989), 5-6.
- (9). In the *o* poem, the title’s circle becomes a negative presence, the two circle halves outlined by 4 triangles made of the container words: *show, flow, blow, grow*.
- (10). See Kurt Marti, “Zu Eugen Gomringers ‘Konstellationen’,” and Peter Demetz, “Eugen Gomringer und die Entwicklung der Konkreten Poesie,” in Schnauber, 88-94, 151-respectively.
- (11). In the preface to his French translation of Augusto de Campos, *Anthologie despoesia*, (Romainville: Al Dante, 2002), 7-8, Jacques Donguy has a long scholarly footnote explaining the etymology of *Noigandres*. See also Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 116. In an email to the author, 26 June 2002, Augusto de Campos provides further information about the term, describing his own consultation of the 4-volume *Provenzalisches Supplement-Wörterbuch* (1904), where he found additional etymological data on Arnaut Daniel’s use of the word. But Augusto is skeptical about the sexual theme put forward, Donguy tells, by Provençalists like Julien Blaine.
- (12). Augusto de Campos, *Lygia*, from *Poetamenos* (1953), reproduced in many of Augusto’s volumes—for example *Poesia 1949-1979* (São Paulo: Atelier Editorial, 2001)—is most easily accessible on line

at <http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/home.htm/> and in Donguy, *Anthologie déspoesia*, pp. 22-23. I have relied in large part on Donguy's excellent note on p. 22.

(13). See Donguy 22 and email to the author 26 June 2002, Augusto recalls how he first saw the name Solange Sohl in 1949 "signing a very beautiful poem in a newspaper," and then learned this name was a pseudonym of Patricia Galvao ("Pagu"), the former wife of Oswald de Andrade, political activist, and first translator of Joyce's *Ulysses* into Portuguese. In 1983, Augusto published a an edition of her work under the title .PAGU: VIDA-OBRA .

(14). In the order cited: Haroldo de Campos, *os nomes e os navios: Homero, Ilíada, II* (Rio de Janeiro: Sette Letras, 1999); Augusto de Campos, *Mais Provençais* (São Paulo, Capnhia das letras, 1987); Augusto de Campos, *Irmaos Germanos* (Santa Caterina: Editions Noa Noa, 1992); Augusto de Campos, *Rimbaud livre* (São Paulo: Editora perspectiva, 1992); Augusto, *Hopkins A Beleza Dificil* (Editora perspectiva, 1997); Augusto, *e.e. cummings 40 POEM(A)S* (Editora Brasiliense, 1987); Haroldo de campos, *O Arco-Iris Branco* (Rio di Janeiro, Imago, 1997); Augusto, *O anticritico* (São Paulo: Companhia des letters, 1986).

(15). Haroldo de Campos, *Ideograma*, 3d. ed. (São Paulo: USPED, 1994), 47-48. My translation is based on that of Maria Lucia Santaelle Braga, in "Poetic Function and Ideogram: The Sinological Argument," *Dispositio: Revista Hispánica de Semiotica Literaria*, 6, no. 17-18 (1981): 9-39. This translation refers to the first edition of *Ideograma*. In the third, Haroldo has added a section on Charles Peirce and Derrida,

which complicates the issue further. "Poetic Function and the Ideogram," in a revised translation, is published in S. A. Bessa and Odile Cisneros, *Novas: Selected Writings of Haroldo de Campos* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), forthcoming.

(16). Jacques Roubaud, "Sables, syllabes: Préface", in *Galaxies*, traduit, Inés Oseki-Dépré & l'auteur (Paris: La Main courante, 1998) unpaginated. For the original, see Haroldo de Campos, *Galáxias* (Sao Paulo: Editora ex Libris, 1984). English translation is mine.

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Ensayos/Essays

Ironía y parodia en “La pesquisa” de Paul Groussac

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Desde el origen del género, el relato policial rinde homenaje a una metodología cognoscitiva que, basándose en procedimientos lógicos, celebra la certeza de sus resultados. El conocimiento conclusivo de la identidad del criminal, de los motivos del crimen y de sus procedimientos deriva de las observaciones meticulosas y de la aplicación de un análisis cuyo rigor anula cualquier otra posibilidad de solución. El investigador, héroe de la narración, reúne pistas en apariencia casuales y luego de ordenarlas según una relación de causa a efecto detalla magistralmente los procedimientos del crimen sorprendiendo a sus oyentes y lectores. La solución del enigma restablece el equilibrio social alterado por el crimen de comienzos del relato y satisface la curiosidad del lector que, admirado, concede la superioridad del héroe. En el transcurso de la lectura, el lector participa en la elucidación del enigma elaborando hipótesis que, por lo general, resultan equivocadas. A pesar de la rara coincidencia entre los juicios del lector y los del investigador --de otra manera, la sorpresa del final se perdería-- ambos siguen procedimientos similares en la búsqueda de la solución. La lectura de relatos policiales pone en práctica una hermenéutica lúdica en que compiten las lecturas del héroe narrador y del lector.(1) Se trata de un juego de inteligencia cuya resolución depende de una elaboración intelectual basada en una metodología crítica.(2) Este proceso narrativo inaugurado por Edgar Allan Poe y

cultivado durante el siglo XIX por Emile Gaboriau, Conan Doyle y Wilkie Collins, precursores del género, se afirma en los principios del positivismo. La investigación pone en práctica la observación minuciosa de los indicios disponibles y concluye indefectiblemente en declaraciones que, aunque variadas afirman la fe en el progreso científico. Los célebres protagonistas, Dupin, Lecoq, Holmes y Cuff siguen esas pautas, dejan de lado las posibles pistas falsas y cerebralmente prueban la identidad del criminal.

Hacia fines del siglo XIX, el género tuvo buena acogida en la región ríoplatense donde fue iniciado por Raúl Waleis (seudónimo de Luis V. Varela) y practicado más tarde por Paul Groussac y Eduardo Holmberg . Desde ámbitos diferentes, los tres autores están involucrados en el esfuerzo modernizador de Argentina. Holmberg, médico y naturalista y Varela, abogado y jurisconsulto realizaron investigaciones en sus respectivas áreas de estudio antes de incursionar en la literatura. Fieles a las ideas de su tiempo, confían en los aportes de la ciencia y formulan planteos conducentes a una visión progresista del país. Las novelas seriadas, *La huella del crimen* y *Clemencia* de Waleis, publicadas en 1877 y las *nouvelles* « La bolsa de huesos » y « La casa endiablada » de Holmberg, publicadas en 1896, resuelven sus incógnitas policiales enfatizando su fe en la razón y en los avances de la ciencia.

Paul Groussac, como los anteriormente nombrados debe ser considerado por su trayectoria pública – escritor, inspector nacional de educación, director de la Biblioteca Nacional-- como una figura destacada del panorama cultural de la época.(3). Pero su concepción sobre la situación del ambiente cultural argentino y las necesidades que

genera difiere de la de sus colegas ya que expresa una ideología muy personal, no exenta de ambigüedades.

Su relato, «La pesquisa», publicado en 1887, a una distancia casi equidistante de los libros de Wales y Holmberg, sorprende puesto que en fecha temprana ironiza y parodia las normas del género.⁽⁴⁾ Hay que recordar que las características del policial no han sido aún formalmente sistematizadas ; habrá que esperar para ello hasta bien entrado el siglo XX para hallar publicaciones dedicadas a hacerlo. S.S. Van Dine será uno de los autores que se ocupan de la tarea y establece las « Twenty rules for writing detective stories » en 1928 en *The American Magazine*. Sin embargo, no sería especular demasiado pensar que Groussac, francés de origen, conociera a Poe por las traducciones de Baudelaire y a los folletines de Gaboriau por la prensa francesa. Además, en Buenos Aires también circulan otras versiones : « ...Olivera fue quien descubrió y puso de moda entre nosotros a Poe, cuyo relato « Berenice » tradujo y publicó en abril de 1879 en el folletín del diario *La Nación*, como primicia de una asidua labor de acercamiento que en 1884 lo llevaría a completar la traducción directa del inglés de trece (número seguramente no casual) cuentos representativos de Poe, entre ellos los tres que fundamentan su reputación como creador, o por lo menos genuino precursor, del género detectivesco : ‘Los crímenes de la calle Morgue’, ‘El misterio de Marie Roget’ y ‘La carta robada’ ». (Lafforgue y Rivera 117-118) Sea como fuera, tanto el género como su lector estaban ya bien establecidos y Groussac demuestra en su relato que se ha percatado agudamente de sus normas. Introduce en « La pesquisa » una perspectiva que, aunque ambigua, desmonta los elementos constitutivos del género para dar una visión novedosa de ellos. La trama combina todos los elementos necesarios al relato de enigma

tradicional: el asesinato, la víctima, el policía, el motivo del crimen, la investigación y la solución final se combinan según los modelos arquetípicos. Pero a diferencia de los modelos, ofrece numerosas pautas tendientes a establecer una distancia irónico-crítica en relación con ellos. Lo que más llama la atención son las que llamaríamos « fallas » en el relato y que permiten una reinterpretación del crimen, diferente de la solución formulada por el investigador.

Es necesario aquí recordar brevemente la trama de « La pesquisa ». Elena, joven huérfana, vive con su madre adoptiva en una casa aislada de Recoleta, suburbio de Buenos Aires. Una noche, luego de un intento de robo, la madre es asesinada y, en la misma casa, la policía encuentra también el cadáver del presunto asesino. Elena, que se halla en su cuarto mientras ocurre el suceso, cuenta los escasos datos que conoce. Nota además, la falta de una joya de su madre, un medallón en forma de candado. Durante la investigación se encuentra el testamento de la asesinada por el que lega la joya a su hija: «Y recomiendo a mi amada Elena que no se separe nunca del medallón en forma de candado de oro que llevo al cuello : allí está mi verdadera fortuna, si ella la sabe encontrar.» (31) El caso queda sin solución hasta que el comisario encargado de investigarlo lee en un periódico una nota que ofrece dinero por el candado de oro. La pista lo conduce a Elena que, al ser confrontada, relata lo sucedido: mientras ella estaba en su cuarto con Cipriano Vera, su novio, ocurrieron el robo y el asesinato de su madre y fue su novio quien en un acto justiciero mató al asesino. Cipriano escapó llevando inadvertidamente la joya consigo. Herido, ingresó a un hospital donde pasó una temporada alejado de la ciudad. Decide regresar porque al igual que el comisario, ha leído el aviso del periódico. Elena dice haber ocultado lo ocurrido para proteger la

reputación de ambos. El relato queda interrumpido dejando por sentado que no hay otra versión del crimen.

La narración del caso policial en « La pesquisa » está a cargo de Enrique M., excomisario de sección en Buenos Aires que recuerda los crímenes ocurridos en 188... La reconstrucción retrospectiva de los hechos por quien tuviera un conocimiento de primera mano, le confiere una posición privilegiada y le otorga supuestamente una credibilidad indisputable. Sin embargo, la función narrativa autodiegética le impone la necesidad de distanciarse del personaje que años atrás, viviera los sucesos. El yo narrativo encubre así dos funciones : la del excomisario narrador y la del comisario, héroe del relato. Ese distanciamiento, junto al deseo de presentarse según el convencionalizado heroísmo del investigador, lo convierten en un narrador poco fidedigno desvirtuando su testimonio.

Por otra parte, existe en el relato un segundo narrador, extradiegético, que introduce el relato y explica las circunstancias de la narración, enmarcándola según el modelo clásico del *Decameron*. El excomisario forma parte de un grupo de pasajeros cuyas historias sirven de entretención en medio de una travesía. La situación de ocio pone de manifiesto que la tarea del excomisario consiste en crear un relato de recreo según los recuerdos que tiene de un caso criminal real: «...después de la comida y, si la tarde era bella, de cuatro vueltas dadas sobre cubierta de popa a proa, deteniéndonos a ratos para encender un cigarro a la mecha del palo mayor.... solíamos sentarnos para escuchar cuentos e historias más o menos auténticas »(25) El narrador extradiegético anuncia igualmente que el excomisario quiere probar con su relato una tesis personal, puesta en

duda durante una discusión entre los oyentes: «...en la mayor parte de las pesquisas judiciales la casualidad es la que pone en la pista... ». El anuncio implica la necesidad de ilustrar una idea, adjudicándole al relato una segunda intención, de carácter didáctico. Por último, incluye una advertencia sobre la actitud del excomisario : « demostraba afición a sentar paradojas en equilibrio inestable, como pirámides sobre la punta... »(25).

Esta puesta en escena presagia el carácter irreverente del relato y demarca el horizonte de expectativas para el lector. La « mise en abîme » y las prevenciones señaladas por el narrador extradiegético influyen en el lector sembrando en él una desconfianza previa sobre lo que va a leer. El enmarque contraría desde el comienzo las situaciones narrativas de los modelos policiales ya que, en aquellos, no hay cabida a cuestionamientos sobre su veracidad. A propósito de esto, recordemos la función de Watson, testigo fidedigno de los casos que narra como prueba fehaciente de las facultades extraordinarias de Holmes. En la introducción a « La pesquisa » es sobre todo el aviso sobre la propensión del comisario a elaborar « paradojas en equilibrio inestable, como pirámides sobre la punta, » el que resulta incongruente en un género que tiende precisamente al rigor matemático y que, llega a veces a adoptar una organización geométrica. (Todorov 11)

El cierre del marco narrativo a finales del relato insiste en la intención paródica. Hay que recordar el episodio: cuando el excomisario está por terminar su narración, el comandante del barco lo manda a callar para no disturbar a otros viajeros. La interrupción que deja la relación inconclusa cumple así una primera desvalorización, a

cargo del representante de la más alta autoridad en el barco. Se agrega a esto que los oyentes se han quedado profundamente dormidos durante el transcurso del relato. Este procedimiento cómico resta aún mayor autoridad al discurso del excomisario denunciando sus fallas como narrador. Lejos de realizar la promesa de toda narrativa policial de despertar la curiosidad del auditorio y de acrecentar sus expectativas por medio del suspenso, produce el efecto contrario. Si el desenlace en el relato policial provoca una reacción de cuestionamiento y de revisión de las hipótesis postuladas en el transcurso de la lectura o de la recepción del mismo, en este caso, el auditorio manifiesta una total indiferencia ante el desarrollo de la trama y la solución del enigma. En "La pesquisa", el juego paródico resemantiza la función del narrador cuyo propósito de entretener y educar queda invalidado y se torna una burla de sí mismo. El prestigio de los narradores fundacionales del género se apoyaba en el serio rigor de su pensamiento y de su expresión. El recurso del narrador extradiegético le permite a Groussac establecer un distanciamiento crítico que incluye una interpretación divergente de las reconocidas en el género.

Las perspectivas diferentes de los narradores mencionados distingue dos niveles de discurso y dos niveles de recepción : el de los oyentes del relato y el de los lectores del cuento. Asimismo hay que notar que si la falta de un cierre definitivo es irrelevante para los oyentes dormidos, no lo es para los lectores del cuento quienes desean ver al final el restablecimiento del orden alterado por el crimen. Para ellos, la falta de un juicio conclusivo solicita su participación en el desarrollo del relato. Tal participación, normática casi en el juego competitivo entre narrador y lector, facilita el

cuestionamiento del proceder del comisario y la postulación de hipótesis que difieren de las suyas.(5)

Linda Hutcheon observa en la parodia una relectura revisionista del discurso parodiado, es decir, que diálogo y distanciamiento coexisten en el texto nuevo favoreciendo la formulación de una crítica del anterior. El texto de Groussac es el primer cuento policial hispanoamericano que incorpora lecturas diversas inaugurando el tono paródico que será más adelante, en la literatura policial del siglo XX, un recurso utilizado con frecuencia. El uso de la parodia en « La pesquisa » está intensificado por la utilización máxima de la superposición de varias modalidades de recepción dentro del texto. Aparte de las anteriormente mencionadas se debe incluir la del propio Groussac que, aunque no forma parte integral del texto, lo altera al cambiar el título en la segunda edición. El título inicial, « El candado de oro » (1884) enfatizaba el valor del tesoro, la finalidad de la pesquisa en tanto emblema del conocimiento buscado; la joya, una vez abierta, revela la clave para la resolución del enigma. Allí se lee E.L.E.N.A. siglas que corresponden a la fórmula que abre la caja fuerte. Pero si el candado le ofrece a Elena el modo de acceder al dinero legado por su madre, no le da al comisario la solución del enigma mayor, la identidad de los asesinos. El título elegido para la edición de 1887, « La pesquisa », enfatiza el proceso investigativo, anterior a la resolución del enigma. El cambio sugiere una nueva perspectiva, resultado de una relectura y de una reinterpretación del texto por parte del autor, cambio con el que pretende influir al lector, privilegiando el desarrollo del relato por sobre el desenlace. Todorov afirma en su análisis del relato de enigma que su estructura está constituida por dos historias: la del crimen, muchas veces anterior al comienzo del relato y, la de la pesquisa, destinada

a detallar el proceso investigativo.(11) Groussac, al cambiar el título podría ser considerado un precursor de Todorov con quien coincide al darle preeminencia a la segunda historia que explica la existencia del texto mismo. (12) El cambio de título desplazaría el interés del lector de la conclusión del enigma, hacia la historia de la narración invitando una lectura de los juegos y procedimientos puestos en práctica durante la pesquisa.

El detective

Borges ha destacado la importancia del detective en la solución del enigma propuesto por el crimen: «...el hecho de un misterio descubierto por obra de la inteligencia, por una operación intelectual. Este hecho está ejecutado por un hombre muy inteligente que se llama Dupin, que se llamará después Sherlock Holmes, que se llamará más tarde el padre Brown, que tendrá otros nombres, otros nombres famosos sin duda. » (193) La permanencia de las características del detective, cualquiera sea su nombre, es rasgo esencial del relato policial de enigma; por eso resulta de gran interés que *La pesquisa* no rinda el homenaje esperado a sus poderes investigativos; por el contrario, formula una propuesta inédita sobre la metodología apropiada para resolver el crimen. Esta concepción ideológica sirve de apoyo teórico al relato y le permite subvertir la función del detective. Se ha dicho anteriormente que este género expresa confianza en el éxito de la búsqueda y en el triunfo de la verdad. Indicios, pruebas, signos y testimonios forman parte de un saber fragmentario que descodificado y reorganizado por el investigador conduce a un saber totalizante : la identidad del criminal, y a sus derivados, el motivo y el modo del crimen. En "The Murders of the Rue Morgue", Poe se basa en

la tradición literaria del flâneur para otorgar a Dupin dones de observación e interpretación con los que sistemáticamente soluciona el desorden de las situaciones criminales para sintetizarlas luego en explicaciones coherentes. Sin embargo, al final del relato de Groussac, el triunfo del conocimiento es puesto en duda; son numerosos y divergentes los puntos de vista que entran en juego. El comisario, en consecuencia, no sólo no es premiado por sus dones de razonador sino que hasta podríamos afirmar su fracaso. Ese fracaso, como veremos, ocurre en dos niveles : en la pesquisa del caso y en el relato del mismo.

El excomisario narrador explica su metodología investigativa de esta manera: « ... en la mayor parte de las pesquisas judiciales la casualidad es la que pone en la pista, basta un buen olfato para seguirla hasta dar con la presa. » (25) El comentario que otorga relevancia a un factor imprevisto y accidental-- decisivo para el éxito de la empresa-- contraría de manera obvia los postulados anteriormente mencionados. Por otra parte, el reconocimiento del « buen olfato » como aptitud igualmente decisiva rinde culto a una característica física, casi animal y no intelectual. En relación a esto, una de las normas establecidas por Van Dine prohíbe muy específicamente la inclusión del azar en el proceso investigativo. De no ser así, explica, el autor sería un chistoso, « a practical joker ». (6) El personaje creado por Groussac devalúa las facultades de sus predecesores literarios, tanto los extranjeros como los creados por Wales y Holmberg, homenajeados todos por sus capacidades intelectuales e interpretativas. Si bien estos personajes también suelen hacer gala de ciertas intuiciones, es el poder de observación el que predomina en sus metodologías. (7)

El relato de Groussac insiste aún más en señalar sus diferencias. De este modo se expresa el comisario:

Yo creo firmemente que hay en nuestro ser mental una especie de segundo yo instintivo y vergonzante, que habitualmente cede el lugar al primero –al yo inteligente y responsable que procede por lógica y razón demostrativa--. Pero en ciertos instantes, raros en nosotros, gente vulgar, y frecuentes para el hombre de genio, el antiguo instinto desheredado, esa como *conscientia spuria*, que diría Shopenhauer, se lanza a la cabeza del batallón de las facultades y manda imperiosamente la maniobra. (36)

(8)

Desafía claramente el planteo del relato policial tradicional cuya metodología « procede por lógica y razón demostrativa » para dar resultados infalibles y desmitifica la superioridad del investigador en tanto ser "inteligente y responsable". Afirma que mientras en el hombre de genio domina un instinto superior, en el hombre vulgar, predomina la razón metódica. La adjetivación polariza aún más los términos, -- « vergonzante » y « exhibicionista »--y señala la falta de criterio del público deslumbrado por la superficialidad del «yo inteligente» de los grandes detectives e ignorante de las fuerzas instintivas que generan procesos mentales de envergadura . El excomisario se autodefine como ser « vulgar » en un gesto de seudomodestia que disimula su papel de narrador poco confiable. Más adelante, en efecto, en dos momentos claves del relato al exponer su método de trabajo se autorrepresenta con fuerzas que escapan a la lógica. Uno de esos episodios ocurre después de la lectura del aviso publicado por Elena en el diario, dice entonces tener « la vaga intuición de estar en la pista de una solución extraordinaria ;» (32) un poco más adelante, agrega :

« Repito que no hubiera podido analizar el móvil exacto de mi cambio de resolución; pero instintivamente iba a casa de Elena, persuadido, convencido de que allí se iba a decidir la cuestión aquella misma noche. » (36) El comisario hace ahora suyas una intuición y un instinto privilegiados, las mismas cualidades que había adjudicado al hombre de genio.

Las complejidades de carácter del personaje le conceden ambigüedad a sus supuestos poderes infalibles. Recordemos sumariamente los datos que aporta él mismo sobre la situación de Elena: tiene una relación amorosa clandestina, demuestra interés por la fortuna de la madrastra, lleva una vida claustral que le resulta molesta y su cariño por la señora por momentos parece dudoso. Los datos llevan a sospechar un crimen doméstico. Pero, en la conclusión del relato, el comisario acepta la explicación de esta heredera que debiera ser considerada como extremadamente poco confiable: « Escuché con emoción profunda el relato de Elena. No podía ya dudar de la verdad : su explicación era limpia como sus lágrimas, convincente y clara como la luz del sol. » (41) Ante tales admisiones, no puede adjudicarse la solución del enigma al

comportamiento del comisario ya que después de llevar a cabo la pesquisa, se somete crédulamente a las razones de quien debería ser uno de los principales sospechosos.

Llama la atención, sobre todo cuando ha sido probado anteriormente que Elena es capaz de mentir cuando le conviene. A comienzos de la investigación, oculta la relación que la une a Cipriano Vera y su presencia en el momento de los asesinatos. Es el excomisario mismo quien implanta dudas sobre los sucesos : « Con todo, debo decir que uno o dos puntos oscuros no dejaron de despertar en mí una vaga desconfianza, teniendo alerta mi instinto olfateador de sabueso policial. Pero aquello fue muy pasajero, y luego todas mis

sospechas se desvanecieron –o adormecieron. » (28) En la misma ocasión, el comisario se deja influir por el aspecto físico de Elena: « La explicación me pareció satisfactoria. Por otra parte, quién podía abrigar sospecha y pensar un instante en establecer correlación alguna entre el abominable crimen y esta fresca muchacha que sollozaba al recordar a su madre adoptiva, revelaba todos los detalles de su pasado y desarrollaba ante nosotros con imperturbable tranquilidad la trama gris de su monótona existencia?» (30-31) El « instinto olfateador » queda reducido en admiración de la « fresca muchacha » y el comisario en un procedimiento puramente subjetivo cree lo que escucha. La seudociencia fisiognómica --implantada en la literatura policial de la época- - que busca una correspondencia entre los signos exteriores y el carácter y comportamiento humanos, conduce aquí, si no a una interpretación totalmente equivocada, al menos a una resolución incompleta del enigma. La inoperancia de su comportamiento es notable ya que Elena y su novio, a quien ella encubre --es el justiciero del asesino de su madre-- eluden todo castigo. El relato no brinda datos sobre Cipriano, nombrado apenas por Elena. Sin embargo, el hecho de que la relación amorosa sea cuidadosamente ocultada a la madre de Elena hace sospechar al menos de alguna contravención al reglamento familiar. Que el comisario no se ocupe de investigar las declaraciones de la joven anula la autoridad legal que representa y el acto criminal -- aunque fuese justiciero-- queda impune.

Estas fallas del texto se convierten en pautas para el lector que puede elaborar diferentes versiones sobre el crimen. De tal modo, la lectura sospechosa a la que incita la literatura policial conduce a fijar la atención sobre el texto mismo que se supone engañoso, sembrado de pistas falsas que desvían la atención de los culpables del crimen.(Duflos,

124-125) Los conflictos que puede detectar el lector no resultan visibles para el comisario que en el nivel homodiegético despliega una ideología acorde al desarrollo de la historia. Pero la divergencia de puntos de vista entre el comisario, el lector y el narrador extradiegético asigna a « La pesquisa » un fuerte tono de ambigüedad que mitiga la tesis que el comisario quiere ilustrar.

Habría que añadir que en contraposición a este texto, la impunidad no tiene lugar en los textos de Waleis y de Holmberg en los que se manifiesta confianza en las instituciones legales del estado. (Ponce 24-25) Si bien en « La pesquisa » no existen pruebas ciertas de la participación de Elena en los asesinatos, está claramente indicado su papel de encubridora. Josefina Ludmer ha señalado que los delitos femeninos en la literatura logran escapar a la justicia estatal : « Las que matan en los cuentos actúan ‘signos femeninos’ (los de la histeria : pasión doméstica y simulación) y a la vez les aplican una torsión, porque se valen de los ‘signos femeninos’ de la justicia, como el de ‘mujer honesta’, para burlarla y para postularse como agentes de una justicia que está más allá del estado, y que por eso las condensa a todas. » (372) La juventud y la belleza de Elena junto a su situación de huérfana le permiten apoderarse de tales « signos », necesarios para expresar la idea de inocencia. La correlación entre belleza y bondad –encantadora, interesante, fresca, joven, huérfana son algunos de los epítetos empleados--establecida prejuiciosamente por el comisario favorece el triunfo de Elena por sobre la *conscientia spuria* del comisario. De igual manera, el aspecto del asesino muerto lo condena, antes de cualquier investigación, se trata de un "hombre mal trazado—de la sumaria resultó italiano". El universo imaginario construido por el excomisario está plagado de signos estereotipados que unívocos para él se vuelven incitadores de dudas y sospechas para el

lector. Resalta aún más elocuentemente el misterioso silencio sobre el asesino del "italiano".

Las múltiples modos de lectura y de recepción del relato que aparecen en el texto insisten en el procedimiento doble de diálogo y distanciamiento referido por Hutcheon. En función de él se efectúa la reflexión sobre el género policial y sobre el relato propio. Podríamos incluso ver en él a un precursor de Borges y de Bioy Casares quienes bajo el seudónimo de Bustos Domecq publicaron en 1942, la serie paródica mejor conocida del género, *Seis problemas para don Isidro Parodi*.

La ciudad

Como es sabido, el nacimiento y desarrollo de la literatura de carácter policial están íntimamente relacionados con el crecimiento de la ciudad moderna. Se trata de un género eminentemente urbano, en que los espacios públicos son escenarios de encuentros violentos entre individuos movidos siempre por alguna pasión egotista. Aún cuando en « La pesquisa » las descripciones espaciales son limitadas y la narración se concentra en un enigma de « ambiente cerrado », la ciudad aparece como trasfondo de los desplazamientos del comisario; la escenografía, conocida para los lectores, relaciona trama y espacio. La época del relato corresponde aproximadamente al período de la intendencia de Torcuato de Alvear quien a partir de 1880 emprendió obras de embellecimiento en la ciudad de Buenos Aires.⁽⁹⁾ La Recoleta, barrio que aún no había sido conquistado por la burguesía, como lo será ya para fines de siglo vive un período de transición. Allí permanecen todavía rasgos orilleros debido a la cercanía de mataderos y corrales. La zona, dividida en quintas servía para que « vagos y maleantes

se reunieran con el fin de concertar alguna fechoría a realizarse en lugar más o menos cercano, descontando la impunidad merced a los recursos para esconderse y escapar, que ofrecían la oscuridad del barrio, los huecos, túneles y zanjones existentes.»

(Barriada) En el relato se mencionan también la plaza Lorea y la calle Larga, única avenida que llevaba directamente desde el centro hasta la Recoleta. La distancia a recorrer desde la plaza, parada de los « coches » hasta la casa de Elena, marca la separación entre el centro de la ciudad, núcleo de la civilización y de sus instituciones -- la Central de Policía, entre ellas-- y el suburbio. El traslado del comisario del centro al suburbio podría leerse como un intento por parte del estado organizado de ejercer una influencia ordenadora sobre un espacio aún dominado por la "barbarie". Los límites entre los ambientes y las clases sociales diferentes, en esa época de transición, se vuelven tan dudosos como el éxito del comisario.

La modernización de fin de siglo y la apertura a los aportes culturales, fomentados por la Generación del 80 y por la ensayística de Groussac, prometían la construcción de un país pujante y sobre todo, de una ciudad capital modelo. Sin embargo, el pensamiento de Groussac debe ser matizado. En sus ensayos lamenta la falta de una metodología informada y de producciones literarias y filosóficas a la par de las europeas, de las francesas, sobre todo.⁽¹⁰⁾ Pero expresa paralelamente desconfianza ante la imitación de los europeos. Tanto José Mármol como Rubén Darío son acusados del mismo defecto de obediencia ciega al modelo.⁽¹¹⁾ Su intelecto, elitista como pocos, imagina una aristocracia del pensamiento capaz de guiar los destinos de la nación pero se trata más de un ideal que de un plan concreto.

La visión que surge de « La pesquisa » pone aún más en relieve las ambigüedades de sus ideas. Sale a relucir allí su vacilación ante el impacto de la ola inmigratoria que en la época comenzaba a transformar la ciudad con el arribo de miles de extranjeros. Los personajes del relato componen una galería ejemplificadora de los recién llegados: la víctima, viuda de un español; el primer asesino, italiano; la empleada doméstica, vasca; el ayudante del comisario, belga; Elena de « aspecto extranjero». El único que respondería quizás al tipo local sería Cipriano, el segundo asesino. La tipificación de cada personaje esterotipa su papel y muestra la estratificación social que le asigna un sitio y una labor precisas. Sin embargo, la interacción, inevitable, entre los representantes de las diversas nacionalidades provoca una relación difícil en que el robo, el crimen y la sospecha prevalecen. Frente a la tensión social creada por el choque entre idiomas y costumbres diversas, el comisario fracasa porque no consigue interpretarlos. La lectura única que pretende imponer no logra dar cabida a la diversidad que lo rodea. Podríamos incluso especular sobre el futuro de la nación, puesto en duda en este panorama caótico. Si la imagen del romance familiar puede ser leída como metáfora fundacional de la nación, la relación romántica entre Elena y Cipriano, basada en el crimen y su encubrimiento no promete un porvenir ilustre.

La prevención del narrador que inicia el relato cobra ahora todo su sentido: el « comisario demostraba extraordinaria afición a sentar paradojas en equilibrio inestable, como pirámides sobre la punta.... » « La pesquisa » da un giro innovador al género policial, pone en duda sus fundamentos y la pirámide, representación simbólica del progreso hacia el conocimiento trascendental queda invertida, sacudidos sus principios estructurales y teóricos. A comienzos de este ensayo se había indicado la

confianza de los textos policiales en el progreso social basado en la ciencia. En ese nivel, « La pesquisa » no sigue el patrón designado y postula sus dudas respecto de la fe científica del positivismo. Esta noción puede ser adjudicada directamente al autor que la ha corroborado en su obra ensayística. Allí desaprueba la adaptación del cientificismo a la moda a áreas de estudio que no corresponden a las ciencias: « En este sentido, se ocupaba de señalar que el término ‘ciencia’, cuyo uso correcto hallaba vinculado a la posibilidad de establecer leyes universales, no debía aplicarse a las disciplinas sociales, de conclusiones más ligadas al terreno de la conjetura... » (Bruno 36).

Lo dicho hasta ahora a lo largo de este trabajo demuestra hasta qué punto el uso de la parodia por Groussac amplía las posibilidades del género a diferentes niveles de lectura. Los comentarios irónicos sobre los procedimientos investigativos sirven como punto de partida para desmontar todo un sistema de pensamiento que abarca el comentario literario y el comentario social. En cada una de esas áreas se lleva a cabo un reto a las ideas de la época abriendo una discusión que en el texto no encuentra solución. Resta al lector continuar la pesquisa investigando las pistas nuevas que encuentra en cada lectura.

Notas

(1). Tomo la expresión hermenéutica lúdica de Colas Duflo quien califica así la interacción entre narrador y lector. Afirma que se impone así una manera de lectura específica. « On vise bien sûr à nous faire comprendre que le roman policier est un jeu,

ce qui signifie qu'on tient à nous prescrire un mode particulier de lecture, una façon différente de faire vivre le texte. « (117)

(2). Gilles Deleuze ha establecido una relación entre este juego de la novela policial y la búsqueda de la verdad en filosofía : « Dans l'ancienne conception du roman policier, on nous montrait un détective de génie, consacrant toute sa puissance psychologique à la recherche et à la découverte de la vérité. La vérité était conçue d'une manière toute philosophique, c'est-à-dire comme le produit de l'effort et des opérations de l'esprit. Voilà que l'enquête policière prenait son modèle sur la recherche philosophique, et inversement donnait à celle-ci un objet insolite, le crime à élucider. » Citado por Pierre Sauvanet, 40.

(3). Entre sus escritos hay que notar estudios sobre historia argentina, ensayos de crítica literaria, libros de viajes y textos de ficción. Además, siendo director de la Biblioteca Nacional, publica las revistas *La Biblioteca* y *Anales de la Biblioteca*.

(4). Groussac lo publica anónimamente por primera vez, en 1884 con el título "El candado de oro". El nuevo título "La pesquisa" figura en la publicación de 1887 en *La biblioteca*. La edición consultada para este trabajo es la que se incluye en la antología, *Cuentos policiales argentinos* de Jorge Laffogue.

(5). Una de las reglas estipuladas por Van Dine establece lo siguiente: "The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent — provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should

reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face—that all the clues really pointed to the culprit — and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying.”

(6). La quinta norma de Van Dine dice : « The culprit must be determined by logical deductions — not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker”.

(7). Así, por ejemplo, en *La casa endiablada* de Holmberg, le dice el oficial al comisario : « Usted me ha dicho, en más de una ocasión, que un buen pesquisante debe fundar sus averiguaciones no sólo en hechos, sino en simples conjeturas, hasta presentimientos. » (339)

(8). La referencia a Schopenhauer proviene de su texto “El egoísmo”: ¿Tiene su origen la conciencia en la Naturaleza? Puede dudarse de ello. A lo menos, hay también una conciencia bastarda, *conscientia spuria*, que a menudo se confunde con la verdadera.”(152).Schopenhauer, sin embargo, no utiliza la palabra *conscientia* como sinónimo de inteligencia sino como principio de moral.

(9). Entonces «se fundan entonces la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras y el Museo de Bellas Artes ; se levantan el Teatro Colón y el Plaza Hotel ; se realizan las reuniones del

Ateneo y la Syringa ; se multiplican las publicaciones periódicas ; se dan los primeros pasos del teatro rioplatense, vía gauchescos y saineteros ; se instaura el modernismo con dos libros capitales : *Prosas profanas* y *Los raros*, que Rubén Darío publica en 1896 ». (Lafforgue, 12)

(10). Ver por ejemplo los ensayos “Democracias americanas” y “El gaucho” en *Travesías intelectuales de Paul Groussac*.

(11). Ver “Boletín bibliográfico: *los raros*, por Rubén Darío, *Ibid.*, 241-246. La referencia a José Mármol se halla en « La biblioteca de Buenos Aires », *Ibid.*, 221-223

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Literaturas postautónomas

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Estoy buscando territorios del presente y pienso en un tipo de escrituras actuales de la realidad cotidiana que se sitúan en islas urbanas [en zonas sociales] de la ciudad de Buenos Aires: por ejemplo, el bajo Flores de los inmigrantes bolivianos [peruanos y coreanos] de *Bolivia construcciones* de Bruno Morales [seudónimo de Sergio Di Nucci, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2007], y también el de *La villa* de César Aira [Buenos Aires, Emecé, 2001], el *Montserrat* de Daniel Link [BsAs, Mansalva, 2006], el Boedo de Fabián Casas en *Ocio* [Buenos Aires : Santiago Arcos, 2006], el zoológico de María Sonia Cristoff en *Desubicados* [Sudamericana, 2006], y en su compilación *Idea crónica* [Beatriz Viterbo, 2006]. Pienso también en las puestas del proyecto Biodrama de Vivi Tellas, y en cierto arte. Así como muchas veces se identifica “la gente” en los medios [Rosita de Boedo, Martín de Palermo], en estos textos los sujetos se definen por su pertenencia a ciertos territorios.

Estoy pensando en la reflexión de Florencia Garramuño ["Hacia una estética heterónoma. Poesía y experiencia en Ana Cristina Cesar y Néstor Perlongher" a aparecer en el *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*].

Y también pienso en la reflexión de Tamara Kamenszain [*La boca del testimonio. Lo que dice la poesía*. BsAs. Norma, 2007] sobre cierta poesía argentina actual: el testimonio es “la prueba del presente”, no “un registro realista de lo que pasó”. Mi punto de partida es este.

Estas escrituras no admiten lecturas literarias; esto quiere decir que no se sabe o no importa si son o no son literatura. Y tampoco se sabe o no importa si son realidad o ficción. Se instalan localmente y en una realidad cotidiana para ‘fabricar presente’ y ése es precisamente su sentido.

I.

Imaginemos esto. Muchas escrituras del presente atraviesan la frontera de la literatura [los parámetros que definen qué es literatura] y quedan afuera y adentro, como en posición diaspórica: afuera pero atrapadas en su interior. Como si estuvieran ‘en éxodo’. Siguen apareciendo como literatura y tienen el formato libro (se venden en librerías y por internet y en ferias internacionales del libro) y conservan el nombre del autor (se los ve en televisión y en periódicos y revistas de actualidad y reciben premios en fiestas literarias), se incluyen en algún género literario como ‘novela’, y se reconocen y definen a sí mismas como ‘literatura’.

Aparecen como literatura pero no se las puede leer con criterios o categorías literarias como autor, obra, estilo, escritura, texto, y sentido. No se las puede leer como literatura porque aplican a ‘la literatura’ una drástica operación de vaciamiento: el sentido (o el autor, o la escritura) queda sin densidad, sin paradoja, sin indecidibilidad,

“sin metáfora”, y es ocupado totalmente por la ambivalencia: son y no son literatura al mismo tiempo, son ficción y realidad.

Representarían a la literatura en el fin del ciclo de la autonomía literaria, en la época de las empresas transnacionales del libro o de las oficinas del libro en las grandes cadenas de diarios, radios, TV y otros medios. Ese fin de ciclo implica nuevas condiciones de producción y circulación del libro que modifican los modos de leer.

Podríamos llamarlas escrituras o literaturas postautónomas.

II.

Las literaturas posautónomas [esas prácticas literarias territoriales de lo cotidiano] se fundarían en dos [repetidos, evidentes] postulados sobre el mundo de hoy. El primero es que todo lo cultural [y literario] es económico y todo lo económico es cultural [y literario]. Y el segundo postulado de esas escrituras sería que la realidad [si se la piensa desde los medios, que la constituirían constantemente] es ficción y que la ficción es la realidad.

III.

Porque estas escrituras diaspóricas no solo atraviesan la frontera de ‘la literatura’ sino también la de ‘la ficción’ [y quedan afuera-adentro en las dos fronteras]. Y esto ocurre porque reformulan la categoría de realidad: no se las puede leer como mero ‘realismo’, en relaciones referenciales o verosimilizantes. Toman la forma del testimonio, la autobiografía, el reportaje periodístico, la crónica, el diario íntimo, y hasta de la etnografía (muchas veces con algún “género literario” injertado en su

interior: policial o ciencia ficción por ejemplo). Salen de la literatura y entran a ‘la realidad’ y a lo cotidiano, a la realidad de lo cotidiano [y lo cotidiano es la TV y los medios, los blogs, el email, internet, etc]. Fabrican presente con la realidad cotidiana y esa es una de sus políticas. La realidad cotidiana no es la realidad histórica referencial y verosímil del pensamiento realista y de su historia política y social [la realidad separada de la ficción], sino una realidad producida y construida por los medios, las tecnologías y las ciencias. Es una realidad que no quiere ser representada porque ya es pura representación: un tejido de palabras e imágenes de diferentes velocidades, grados y densidades, interiores-exteriores a un sujeto, que incluye el acontecimiento pero también lo virtual, lo potencial, lo mágico y lo fantasmático.

“La realidad cotidiana” de las escrituras postautónomas exhibe, como en una exposición universal o en un muestrario global de una web, todos los realismos históricos, sociales, mágicos, los costumbrismos, los surrealismos y los naturalismos. Absorbe y fusiona toda la mimesis del pasado para constituir la ficción o las ficciones del presente. Una ficción que es ‘la realidad’. Los diferentes hiperrealismos, naturalismos y surrealismos, todos fundidos en esa realidad desdiferenciadora, se distancian abiertamente de la ficción clásica y moderna.

En la ‘realidad cotidiana’ no se oponen ‘sujeto’ y ‘realidad’ histórica. Y tampoco ‘literatura’ e ‘historia’, ficción y realidad.

IV.

La idea y la experiencia de una realidad cotidiana que absorbe todos los realismos del pasado cambia la noción de ficción de los clásicos latinoamericanos de los siglos XIX y XX. En ellos, la realidad era ‘la realidad histórica’, y la ficción se definía por una relación específica entre “la historia” y “la literatura”. Cada una tenía su esfera bien delimitada, que es lo que no ocurre hoy. La narración clásica canónica, o del boom [*Cien años de soledad*, por ejemplo] trazaba fronteras nítidas entre lo histórico como "real" y lo “literario” como fábula, símbolo, mito, alegoría o pura subjetividad, y producía una tensión entre los dos: *la ficción consistía en esa tensión*. La ‘ficción’ era la realidad histórica [política y social] pasada [o formateada] por un mito, una fábula, un árbol genealógico, un símbolo, una subjetividad o una densidad verbal. O, simplemente, trazaba una frontera entre pura subjetividad y pura realidad histórica (como *Cien años de soledad*, *Yo el Supremo*, *Historia de Mayta* de Mario Vargas Llosa [1984], *El mandato* de José Pablo Feinmann [2000], y las novelas históricas de Andrés Rivera, como *La revolución es un sueño eterno*).

Estas escrituras ‘sin metáfora’ [como las que analiza Tamara Kamenszain] serían ‘las ficciones’ [o la realidad] en la era de los medios y de la industria de la lengua (en la imaginación pública). Serían la realidad cotidiana del presente de algunos sujetos en una isla urbana (un territorio local). Formarían parte de la fábrica de presente que es la imaginación pública.

V.

En la realidadficción de alguna “gente” en alguna isla urbana latinoamericana, muchas escrituras de hoy dramatizan cierta situación de la literatura: el proceso del cierre de la

literatura autónoma, abierta por Kant y la modernidad. El fin de una era en que la literatura tuvo “una lógica interna” y un poder crucial. El poder de definirse y ser regida “por sus propias leyes”, con instituciones propias [crítica, enseñanza, academias] que debatían públicamente su función, su valor y su sentido. Debatían, también, la relación de la literatura [o el arte] con las otras esferas: la política, la economía, y también su relación con la realidad histórica. Autonomía, para la literatura, fue especificidad y autorreferencialidad, y el poder de nombrarse y referirse a sí misma. Y también un modo de leerse y de cambiarse a sí misma.

La situación de pérdida de autonomía de ‘la literatura’ [o de ‘lo literario’] es la del fin de las esferas o del pensamiento de las esferas [para practicar la inmanencia de Deleuze]. Como se ha dicho muchas veces: hoy se desdibujan los campos relativamente autónomos (o se desdibuja el pensamiento en esferas más o menos delimitadas) de lo político, lo económico, lo cultural. La realidad ficción de la imaginación pública las contiene y las fusiona.

VI.

En algunas escrituras del presente que han atravesado la frontera literaria [y que llamamos posautónomas] puede verse nítidamente el proceso de pérdida de autonomía de la literatura y las transformaciones que produce. Se terminan formalmente las clasificaciones literarias; es el fin de las guerras y divisiones y oposiciones tradicionales entre formas nacionales o cosmopolitas, formas del realismo o de la vanguardia, de la "literatura pura" o la "literatura social" o comprometida, de la literatura rural y la urbana, y también se termina la diferenciación literaria entre realidad [histórica] y

ficción. No se pueden leer estas escrituras con o en esos términos; son las dos cosas, oscilan entre las dos o las desdiferencian.

Y con esas clasificaciones ‘formales’ parecen terminarse los enfrentamientos entre escritores y corrientes; es el fin de las luchas por el poder en el interior de la literatura. El fin del ‘campo’ de Bourdieu, que supone la autonomía de la esfera [o el pensamiento de las esferas]. Porque se borran, formalmente y en ‘la realidad’, las identidades literarias, que también eran identidades políticas. Y entonces puede verse claramente que esas formas, clasificaciones, identidades, divisiones y guerras solo podían funcionar en una literatura concebida como esfera autónoma o como campo. Porque lo que dramatizaban era la lucha por el poder literario y por la definición del poder de la literatura.

Se borran las identidades literarias, formalmente y en la realidad, y esto es lo que diferencia nítidamente la literatura de los 60 y 70 de las escrituras de hoy. En los textos que estoy leyendo las ‘clasificaciones’ responderían a otra lógica y a otras políticas .

VII.

Al perder voluntariamente especificidad y atributos literarios, al perder ‘el valor literario’ [y al perder ‘la ficción’] la literatura posautónoma perdería el poder crítico, emancipador y hasta subversivo que le asignó la autonomía a la literatura como política propia, específica. La literatura pierde poder o ya no puede ejercer ese poder.

VIII.

Las escrituras posautónomas pueden exhibir o no sus marcas de pertenencia a la literatura y los tópicos de la autorreferencialidad que marcaron la era de la literatura autónoma : el marco, las relaciones especulares, el libro en el libro, el narrador como escritor y lector, las duplicaciones internas, recursividades, isomorfismos, paralelismos, paradojas, citas y referencias a autores y lecturas (aunque sea en tono burlesco, como en la literatura de Roberto Bolaño). Pueden ponerse o no simbólicamente adentro de la literatura y seguir ostentando los atributos que la definían antes, cuando eran totalmente 'literatura'. O pueden ponerse como "Basura" [Héctor Abad Faciolince. *Basura*. I Premio Casa de América de Narrativa Americana Innovadora. Madrid, Lengua de Trapo, 2000] o "Trash" [Daniel Link. *La ansiedad* (novela trash). Buenos Aires, El cuenco de plata, 2004]. Eso no cambia su estatuto de literaturas posautónomas. En las dos posiciones o en sus matices, estas escrituras plantean el problema del valor literario. A mí me gustan y no me importa si son buenas o malas en tanto literatura. Todo depende de cómo se lea la literatura hoy. O desde dónde se la lea.

O se lee este proceso de transformación de las esferas [o pérdida de la autonomía o de 'literaridad' y sus atributos] y se cambia la lectura, o se sigue sosteniendo una lectura interior a la literatura autónoma y a la 'literaridad', y entonces aparece 'el valor literario' en primer plano.

Dicho de otro modo: o se ve el cambio en el estatuto de la literatura, y entonces aparece otra episteme y otros modos de leer. O no se lo ve o se lo niega, y entonces seguiría habiendo literatura y no literatura, o mala y buena literatura.

IX.

Las literaturas postautónomas del presente saldrían de ‘la literatura’, atravesarían la frontera, y entrarían en un medio [en una materia] real-virtual, sin afueras, la imaginación pública: en todo lo que se produce y circula y nos penetra y es social y privado y público y 'real'. Es decir, entrarían en un tipo de materia y en un trabajo social [la realidad cotidiana] donde no hay ‘índice de realidad’ o ‘de ficción’ y que construye presente. Entrarían en la fábrica de presente que es la imaginación pública para contar algunas vidas cotidianas en alguna isla urbana latinoamericana. Las experiencias de la migración y del ‘subsuelo’ de ciertos sujetos que se definen afuera y adentro de ciertos territorios.

X.

Así, postulo un territorio, la imaginación pública o fábrica de presente, donde sitúo mi lectura o donde yo misma me sitúo. En ese lugar no hay realidad opuesta a ficción, no hay autor y tampoco hay demasiado sentido. Desde la imaginación pública leo la literatura actual como si fuera una noticia o un llamado de Amelia de Constitución o de Iván de Colegiales.

El pánico lesbiano en *Réquiem por una muñeca rota*

(Cuento para asustar al lobo)

Diana Palaversich

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Si hace unas décadas definir la narrativa lesbiana no se planteaba como un problema -- la narrativa lesbiana era aquella que hablaba de las mujeres atraídas sexualmente a otras mujeres-- a partir de los noventa tanto la definición del sujeto lesbiano como la de la narrativa lesbiana se han convertido en un complejo problema teórico. Las críticas y teóricas literarias se han dividido en dos campos opuestos: aquellas que despliegan posturas afines con el esencialismo que caracterizaba la postura de las lesbianas feministas de los setenta, y las teoristas “queer” de los noventa. (1)

La teoría lesbiana tradicional ofrece una definición más transparente del texto lesbiano como aquel determinado por la experiencia compartida por una comunidad de autoras, lectoras y personajes identificados explícitamente como lesbianos, o codificados como tales, y trata la narrativa misma como una herramienta en buena medida neutral dentro de la cual se puede narrar y representar un personaje lesbiano. Por otra parte, la teoría *queer*, que postmodernamente se resiste a fijar identidades, trata al sujeto lesbiano como una identidad fluida e inestable, y ni siquiera exige la presencia obligatoria del mismo para poder definir un texto como “lesbiano”. Lesbiana, en este caso, viene a ser toda estrategia textual que subvierte el movimiento teleológico y lineal de la narrativa

tradicional, y resulta en un texto fluido que se desborda como la identidad de los personajes. Este pensamiento se refleja en la postura de Judith Butler: “I would like to have it permanently unclear what precisely that sign [lesbian] signifies” (14)

Marilyn Farwell en su *Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narrative* advierte que la definición postmoderna del texto lesbiano es demasiado amplia y bastante problemática puesto que borra la diferencia política entre las autoras que se definen explícitamente como lesbianas, y otras que simplemente usan una estrategia narrativa definida como lesbiana en su sentido *queer* explicado arriba. Farwell señala que la definición amplia e imprecisa del término lesbiana presupone una posibilidad absurda: que también los textos escritos por hombres, lleguen a ser definidos como lesbianos, en cuyo caso, la parte esencial de la definición del sujeto lesbiano ‘la mujer’ quedaría borrada. Para evitar este tipo de despolitización y disolución completa de una identidad específica, Farwell aboga por una postura crítica que combine el acercamiento esencialista con el postmoderno:

Although I stress the need to define the lesbian subject as a textual strategy and to distinguish sameness from identity, I do not want to use those arguments as antidotes for essentialism. I embrace essentialism and identity politics as strategic necessities [...] My description of the lesbian subject as the locus of the lesbian narrative acknowledges the need for centrality of a textual approach in the definition of the lesbian narrative but also refuses to be caught in the trap that decrees lesbian as indefinable and therefore the lesbian narrative as indefinable [...] (24).

En mi análisis de la novela de la autora mexicana Eve Gil *Réquiem por una muñeca rota* (*cuentos para asustar al lobo*) (2000) que cuenta la amistad apasionada entre dos adolescentes, la bella Vanessa y su amiga menos atractiva Moramay (Mora), narradora del texto, seguiré la definición mínima del texto lesbiano que ofrece Farwell. Según este criterio, por muy estrecho que sea para ser definido como lesbiano el texto tiene que satisfacer por lo menos uno de los tres requisitos: ser escrito por una autora lesbiana; tener escenas eróticas entre mujeres; o contar con personajes lesbianos centrales o marginales a la narrativa. En *Réquiem por una muñeca rota* se dan los dos últimos: la novela contiene varias escenas indiscutiblemente lesbi-eróticas, y aparte de los personajes principales que defino como lesbianos, cuenta con otros codificados como tales: la tía de Mora, Lourdes, y algunas de sus compañeras del equipo de *softball*.

Mi propósito en este ensayo es examinar la novela de Gil bajo el signo lesbiano que lo enmarca, reconociendo desde un principio una situación peculiar: en el texto abundan las relaciones lesbianas, éstas se demuestran superiores a las heterosexuales, y sin embargo, la palabra temida, ‘lesbiana’, no se asoma en ningún momento sino que se reemplaza con un término neutral: ‘amistad’. Siguiendo las pautas de Patricia Smith expuestas en su estudio *Lesbian Panic. Homoeroticism in Modern British Women’s Fiction*, consideraré este silenciamiento como un ejemplo de “pánico lesbiano” que según la crítica británica se expresa en los momentos textuales cuando los personajes femeninos se muestran incapaces de asumir su identidad lesbiana, o reconocer su deseo sexual como tal; o bien cuando las mismas narradoras y autoras del texto rehuyen la palabra lesbiana, construyendo así “the ‘unspeakable’ or palimpsestic subtext that lies beneath the surface of apparently heterosexually oriented narratives” (3). En un nivel más bien metafórico, trataré el lesbianismo ‘sumergido’ de *Réquiem por una muñeca*

rota como una posición autorial subversiva; un lugar excéntrico desde el cual se socavan instituciones tanto literarias como sociales: se subvierte burlescamente un género arquetípico y por excelencia heterosexual --el romance familiar (*the family romance*)-- como también se deconstruyen la sacrosanta institución de la familia burguesa, los papeles tradicionales del padre y de la madre, y la relación entre las hijas y las madres.

El tono burlón que establece una relación intertextual irónica entre el lenguaje del cuento de hadas y el romance familiar inaugura la novela y pertenece a una Mora adulta que cuenta retrospectivamente, definiendo la época de los ochenta, cuando transcurre lo narrado, como un período pre-posmoderno:

Había una vez [...] un edificio como tajada de pastel de chocolate sumergido en un charco de betún, al que mi padre, el rey, muy apropiadamente nombraba Torre de Babel [...] eran tiempos anteriores a la ira de los dioses que hizo temblar la posmoderna Tenochtitlan y la llegada del anticristo Bill Gates a bordo de su Macintosh (9-10).

Mamá, empotrada en su más primoroso mandil de florecitas, internada en los vapores como Miss Marple entre la espesa niebla de Londres, manipulaba ingredientes y utensilios con la pericia de un galeno en el quirófano, con su crepé del salón Paquita y la impecable manicura envuelta en celofán. Al contemplarla, invariablemente deseaba haber tenido una madre más vieja y menos guapa; alguien que no le gustara tanto a papá y tuviera más tiempo para mí (13-4).

El texto gira en torno de la relación intensa y apasionada, entre Vanessa y Mora, alumnas en un colegio británico para niñas bien. Su relación, para el desagrado de Mora, se ve interrumpida por los breves noviazgos de Vanessa con Guillermo, y posteriormente con Manuel, un roquero con el cual pierde la virginidad. Vanessa, impulsada por su madre que comercia con el cuerpo de su bella hija adolescente, es también una modelo para los calendarios masculinos. Cuando el padre de Mora, un hombre rico y poderoso, por motivos no explicados hasta el final de la novela, decide vender el apartamento en que viven Mora y su madre y mandarlas de vuelta a Hermosillo, la ciudad natal de la madre, las chicas deciden morir juntas. Antes de tomar la sobredosis de tranquilizantes estas dos Julietas sin Romeos se desnudan y hacen el amor, jurándose amor eterno. Sin embargo, debido a un detalle cómico que mitiga la posible tragedia --el disco rayado que se atasca en un verso de la canción *Endless love*-- son descubiertas a tiempo por la madre de Vanessa.

En cuanto al carácter de la relación entre las dos chicas, lo defino como una relación lesbiana en ese sentido más amplio que otorga Lilian Faderman en su *Surpassing the Love of Man. Romantic Friendship and love between Women from the Renaissance to Present*. Esta autora emplea el término lesbiana “to signal content about female same-sex emotional and physical relationship” (ix), donde el contacto sexual, en mayor o menor grado, puede formar parte de esta relación, o puede estar completamente ausente (17-8). A esta formulación agregaría también la noción del “lesbian continuum” de Adrienne Rich que capta “a primary intensity between and among women”, como también su definición del erotismo lesbiano como “that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself” (1993, 240). En el caso de la novela

de Gil la validez de estas definiciones se evidencia en el hecho de que los afectos más fuertes en el texto se dan entre los personajes femeninos. Además, todo contacto entre Mora y Vanesa es altamente erotizado: se tocan, besuquean, duermen juntas, comen del mismo plato, se alimentan la una a la otra, Vanessa insiste en que Mora esté presente en todas las citas con su novio Guillermo. Estos encuentros amorosos triangulares desembocan en escenas cómicas, si bien poco probables, donde las manos de Mora y su rival masculino libran una batalla erótica, debajo de la mesa, sobre los muslos de la bella adolescente. En las escenas de este tipo, Gil parece subvertir el triángulo más común, compuesto por dos hombres y una mujer --descrito por Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick en su libro *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire*-- en el cual, como apunta esta crítica, la verdadera “comunicación” se da entre los hombres. En este tipo de relación, que puede tener tanto el carácter homosocial como homosexual, la presencia de la mujer es necesaria “estructuralmente” porque “legitima” la relación entre dos hombres asegurando el semblante heterosexual. Al colocar el novio en la posición de una carnada inocente, a través de cuya presencia “legitimizante” se comunica el prohibido deseo lesbiano, Gil invierte el triángulo amoroso descrito por Kosofsky que prioriza el deseo masculino.

La amistad entre Mora y Vanessa está marcada con un gesto que subvierte burlescamente el *bonding* masculino, en vez de cortarse el dedo o el brazo como los varones, las chicas sellan su pacto de amor y lealtad con un gesto abyecto, propiamente femenino: intercambian las toallas sanitarias usadas y de esta manera la ‘impura’ sangre menstrual llega a ocupar el lugar de la sangre heroica masculina. La autora otorga a la sangre femenina una función prácticamente idéntica a la que le atribuye Julia Kristeva

quien en *Powers of Horror* define lo abyecto de los flujos femeninos no como signo de carencia de pulcritud o salud, sino como un signo subversivo que desestabiliza la identidad y el orden social, como también viola reglas de la norma heterosexual (4).

Al final de la novela este intercambio de flujos femeninos culmina en un encuentro explícitamente sexual entre las jóvenes:

Siempre nos habíamos abrazado como deseando fundirnos, como si nos asaltara la necesidad de abrirnos el pecho para portarnos una en otra [...] Pude besarla como siempre quise, succionando la venita azul de su cuello que ella me entregaba con deleitosa sumisión, como intuyendo desde siempre mi deseo de poseerla. Nos amamos como un par de gatas a lenguazos y mordiscos, celebrando la travesura máxima con risas de duende, deseando que nuestros padres pudieran vernos a la una hurgando en el sexo de la otra, y así [...] alcanzamos la plenitud (143).

Es interesante observar que en esta escena la Mora se representa mediante el tropo de la vampiresa lesbiana, que succiona la vena (sangre) del objeto de su obsesión. Una figura explotada frecuentemente en la narrativa y el cine postmoderno, la vampiresa (lesbiana) es un monstruo sagrado, “a grotesque version of the woman’s body exceeding boundaries assigned to it by culture, discourse, and narrative” (Farwell, 12). Vanessa y Mora, dos vampiresas *teen*, a través de sus juegos eróticos celebran una sexualidad activa y subversiva que va a contrapelo de las prescripciones heteronormativas que insisten en que el objeto natural del deseo femenino es el hombre. La misma imagen de las adolescentes como vampiresas se confirma a través del lazo etimológico entre la palabra vampiro/vampiresa y la palabra derivada *vamp*, puesto que la bella Vanessa

desde el principio del texto se representa como una *vamp*, es decir, una *femme fatale* precoz que posee un encanto irresistible.

Mi definición de la relación entre las jóvenes de trece años como lesbiana puede parecer excesiva ya que es posible argüir que Mora y Vanessa no son mujeres adultas conscientes de su sexualidad sino que son, simplemente, unas niñas que comparten una amistad íntima y posesiva, típica en las chicas de su edad. No obstante, el texto de la novela no las presenta como ingenuas e inocentes: a la edad de trece años Vanessa ha tenido relaciones sexuales con hombres y es asimismo una *pin-up girl* que posa para los calendarios masculinos. Ella es completamente consciente de su atractivo sexual, y Mora, por su parte, no es menos consciente de que el objeto máximo de su deseo erótico es su bella amiga. Cabe advertir que respecto a la sexualidad precoz de Vanessa el texto despliega cierta ambigüedad, oscilando entre la representación de la bella chica como víctima de su madre ambiciosa y su padre incestuoso, y por otro lado, de una Lolita, niña *vamp*, que conscientemente manipula su sexualidad. Para apoyar este argumento sobre el lesbianismo de las adolescentes me remitiría otra vez a la formulación de Rich, que define como lesbiana la relación en la cual la atracción primaria se da entre dos personas del mismo sexo.

Definir la relación entre las jóvenes como lesbiana tiene sentido también en el contexto más amplio de la novela, puesto que Mora y Vanessa comparan su conexión apasionada con aquella entre la tía Lú y su amante Yolanda. Las relaciones lesbianas sin duda se favorecen e idealizan en *Réquiem por una muñeca rota*: la relación entre la tía y

Yolanda se propone como modelo de la amistad femenina y funciona como antídoto de la falsa amistad entre las mujeres heterosexuales, observada por Mora en el caso de su madre y sus ‘amigas’. Éstas se celan la una a la otra, son rivales en la competencia por conseguir un hombre. A esta relación perversa entre las mujeres como rivales que disputan la atención del macho, Mora opone la “amistad verdadera” de las mujeres que aman a otras mujeres:

Aquellas parejas me causaban gracia porque no eran “amigas” como aquellas señoras emperifolladas y descotadas de perfecta manicura que frecuentaban a mamá [...] no, estas amigas de mamá, cuyos maridos eran tan invisibles como el suyo, en el fondo la odiaban y envidiaban [...] no era una real amistad sino un pasatiempo, una competencia cruel. La amistad de la tía Lú y Yola era otra cosa. O la de Lupita Chamorro y Dunia, la bella porrista. O La Cachorra Fraga y Edelmira Cueto. Ellas eran amigas de verdad, que se profesaban un afecto demasiado evidente, se dedicaban canciones, se miraban a los ojos y se tomaban las manos (43).

Aquí como en otros momentos textuales la tensión homoerótica “fulmina” pero la palabra lesbiana no aparece por ninguna parte. Dicha palabra no asoma en la boca de los personajes adultos, incluyendo la misma tía, y ni siquiera escapa por los labios de la narradora quien oscila --a veces de manera dubitativa-- entre la voz de Mora aún adolescente y la voz de Mora adulta. (2) Aunque el texto evita el nombramiento explícito de la sexualidad de la tía, la codifica en todos los momentos mediante la imagen de la mítica “mannish lesbian” (Newton, 281), el arquetipo lesbiano que ha dominado el cine y la narrativa occidental desde la primera mitad del siglo XX, la época

en que los personajes lesbianos se escamoteaban detrás de códigos tales como la apariencia y el vestuario andrógino, el pelo corto, la inteligencia “masculina”, el comportamiento independiente y agresivo, el estatus de la mujer soltera y un interés exagerado en otras mujeres. Es interesante señalar que el personaje de Lurdes se construye mediante el uso abundante de dichos signos que apuntan a la identidad lesbiana de la tía, obvia pero nunca nombrada.

Las razones de la resistencia a nombrar este amor que no se atreve a decir su nombre son ambiguas y por lo tanto abiertas a varias interpretaciones. Esta resistencia, como estoy señalando, puede constituir un ejemplo de lo que Smith ha llamado “lesbian panic”: un instante textual que demuestra el miedo de la autora, la narradora o del personaje de asumir una identidad diferente --lesbiana-- confirmándose de esta manera el triunfo del discurso patriarcal. Por otra parte, el ocultamiento de la identidad lesbiana de varios personajes de esta novela puede ser una estrategia deliberada cuyo propósito es reflejar la invisibilidad lesbiana dentro de la sociedad mexicana regida por lo que Adrienne Rich ha definido como el sistema de “compulsory heterosexuality” incapaz de concebir una relación de índole sexual entre dos mujeres. Este sistema supone que la orientación sexual innata de toda mujer es hacia el hombre y que la conducta sexual femenina se puede definir solamente en relación a la sexualidad masculina. También cabe la posibilidad de que la resistencia a nombrar el lesbianismo sea una instancia del “clóset de cristal”, que refleja el conflicto real que experimentan muchos sujetos gay o lesbianos, tratándose de una situación en la cual todos reconocen tácitamente la homosexualidad o el lesbianismo de una persona pero nunca lo mencionan explícitamente. Por último, sería posible inferir que el texto se resiste de una manera

postmoderna a fijar las identidades, prefiriendo presentarlas como identidades sexuales inestables y fluidas. Sin embargo, cabe reconocer que esta última posibilidad corre el riesgo de convertirse en aliada --¿involuntaria?-- del discurso freudiano según el cual la homosexualidad y el lesbianismo representan un estado inmaduro en el desarrollo sexual del individuo. Visto a la manera freudiana, el lesbianismo es una condición que resulta de la inhabilidad del sujeto femenino de negociar adecuadamente riesgosos pero necesarios *shifts* entre los objetos de amor durante la infancia y la adolescencia. Según Freud los que maduran de una manera ‘normal’, ‘naturalmente’ son heterosexuales. Dentro de esta perspectiva, la relación entre Mora y Vanessa se podría concebir como un cuento de iniciación a la sexualidad adulta donde es obligatorio pasar por la homosexualidad y la amistad íntima con las personas del mismo sexo para así entrar al estado más maduro, léase, heterosexual. Sin embargo, es importante destacar que en la novela las adolescentes no regresan a este estado ‘natural’ por su propia voluntad sino porque sus padres y madres las obligan a hacerlo, separándolas: Mora se muda con su madre a Hermosillo mientras que Vanesa se va a vivir con su padre incestuoso.

No obstante, estas posibles razones de la evasión de nombrar el lesbianismo no modifican el hecho de que, desde el punto de vista literario, la abundancia de las relaciones lesbianas que nunca se mencionan como tales, constituye ejemplo del pánico lesbiano que enmarca el texto. Smith indica que los finales de las novelas británicas que analiza y que exhiben claros momentos del pánico lesbiano se caracterizan por la muerte de uno de los personajes, o la separación de la pareja y el regreso de las ‘ovejas perdidas’ al seno de la sociedad heterosexual. Lo mismo ocurre en *Réquiem por una muñeca rota*: una de las *softballistas*, Lupita, se suicida cuando su amante Dunia la deja por un hombre; una chica del colegio se trata de ahorcar cuando su amiga le retira el

habla; Mora y Vanessa están separadas por sus padres, o más bien sus madres que actúan como “gendarmes del patriarcado”, ya que son ellas las que inician la separación definitiva de las chicas para que la sociedad patriarcal y heterosexual pueda continuar funcionando según sus normas que el texto de antemano presenta como perversas. Este tipo de final narrativo confirma la idea de que el género del romance es una construcción ideológica dentro de cuyo marco rígido el personaje lesbiano, o bien gay, no tiene cabida, tratándose de personajes no representables dentro de la economía heterosexual y patriarcal del romance familiar.(3)

Si las relaciones lesbianas parecen ser condenadas al fracaso, las heterosexuales se presentan como hipócritas, o de plano abusivas y violentas. *Réquiem por una muñeca rota* desmantela la imagen de la decente familia burguesa exponiéndola como una farsa que bajo el simulacro de la felicidad familiar y el orden heterosexual esconde la hipocresía y la desdicha. Detrás de la imagen, “la foto perfecta” (123), de la familia de Mora --una madre bella y un padre apuesto y rico-- se esconde un secreto que se mantiene oculto prácticamente hasta el final de la novela. Lo que los lectores, junto con una Mora niña y adolescente, percibían como un hogar familiar regular, se revela como “la casa chica” del padre que en alguna otra parte de la ciudad tiene una familia legítima. Gil brinda a la institución de casa chica --ocurrencia bastante común en la vida real pero raras veces representada en la ficción latinoamericana-- la visibilidad que en la vida real la casa chica no tiene. La autora reproduce la simultánea visibilidad e invisibilidad de esta institución ‘ilegítima’, presentándola como si fuera otra instancia del ‘clóset de cristal’: todos excepto Mora saben que la suya es una familia ilegítima,

pero, como en el caso del lesbianismo de su tía, el verdadero carácter de la familia no se nombra nunca.

En este contexto la relación lesbiana de las adolescentes funciona como una herramienta subversiva del destape que facilita la salida a la superficies de los secretos y esqueletos en el armario de las dos familias representadas. En el caso de Vanessa, se revelan los manoseos incestuosos de su padre y el mercadeo con el cuerpo de su hija por parte de su madre. En el caso de Mora, se descubre el estatus ilegítimo de su familia, como también el hecho de que a la edad de cinco años la niña fue violada en un juego “infantil” por su vecino de quince años. Este incidente nefasto la madre lo esconde como otro esqueleto en el armario de los secretos de familia. El desmoronamiento del perfecto cuadro familiar se advierte mediante la gradual decadencia física de la madre-amante observada a través de los ojos de Mora que nota una lenta pero segura metamorfosis de “una mamá maniquí” a una madre “con papada, subida de peso que ahora sí se ve como más madre” (123). Y es precisamente cuando la muñeca perfecta que cuida la casa chica y sirve al señor empieza a parecerse cada vez más a una esposa y madre, es decir cuando la institución ilegal se convierte en el reflejo en el espejo de la rutina y la cotidianidad de la familia legítima, que el hombre decide vender el departamento en el cual vivían la niña y su madre para mandarlas de vuelta a Hermosillo. Siguiendo el pensamiento de Judith Roof en torno de la ‘perversión lesbiana’, entendida como una posibilidad donde “the perversions are the spot where the story falls apart [...] perversion acquires its meaning as perversion precisely from its threat to truncate the story” (citado en Smith, 8), se podría confirmar que las adolescentes “perversas” ocupan un espacio narrativo privilegiado desde el cual desmontan el romance familiar heterosexual: ellas “truncan la

historia”, desenmascarándola como una farsa. En este sentido bien se podría decir que “el discurso lesbiano”, forjado por la autora-narradora de *Réquiem por una muñeca rota*, “replots itself in dialogue with its adversary, the traditional narrative structure” (Smith, 8). Esta postura se evidencia en el hecho de que Gil no se detiene solamente en el desenmascaramiento de la familia burguesa mexicana sino que da un paso más allá, presentando el ejemplo de un cuento de hadas de la vida real que terminó como una farsa trágica --la reunión entre el príncipe Charles y la princesa Diana-- como otro ejemplo que demuestra el aspecto hipócrita y esencialmente trágico de toda relación heterosexual:

El príncipe Carlos era mas bien feo: huesudo de cara, rojizo como calamar... pero ¿qué mas daba siendo príncipe?, ilógico pensar que la bella Diana merecería algo mejor, porque lo mejor del mundo era pescar un príncipe. Si en aquel momento alguien me hubiera dicho que ese imbécil pensaba en otra mientras besaba románticamente a su novia, habría dejado de creer en el amor en un cuajo [...] Máxime cuando aquella otra resultó ser una vieja esperpéntica, un auténtico costal de huesos roídos, desgarbada, con una sonrisa sin labios como de muerte: primera vez que la bruja del cuento rivaliza en amores con la princesa [...] Nadie me dijo [...] que el amor es puro cuento [...] (121-2).

El ejemplo de las familias que se describen en *Réquiem por una muñeca rota* como aquel de la familia real británica confirman que el romance familiar, por definición heterosexual, según Gil, está en bancarrota hasta en un cuento de hadas. (4) La autora no sólo destaca que los romances familiares son farsas de proporciones operáticas sino

también las demuestra como perversas. La falsa moralidad que según la novela define el comportamiento de la familia burguesa protege y aprueba tácitamente la existencia de familias dobles --el caso de la familia ilegítima de Mora-- como también protege a los padres incestuosos --en el caso del padre de Vanessa. Aunque la madre de la última, otrora una bailarina famosa del flamenco, deja a su marido cuando una noche lo sorprende en la cama de su hija, no lo hace como una madre cómplice y protectora de su hija sino como una madre rival cuyo verdadero motivo son los celos: la hija se ha convertido en una enemiga por cuya culpa el marido ya no está interesado en la esposa.

Es en torno de la figura de la madre que se revela otro subtexto de la novela, el que cuenta la relación entre las madres y las hijas planteándola no como una relación signada por complicidad sino por rivalidad y conflicto. El dilema que implícitamente plantea Gil -- ¿colabora la madre con el patriarcado o se le opone?-- ha sido tema de mucha consideración teórica en los estudios de género a partir de los 1970. Marianne Hirsh en su libro *Mothers and Daughters* advierte que la mayoría de las feministas demuestran una afinidad no con las madres --con cuyo papel de víctima las hijas no quieren identificarse-- sino con otras hijas (*sisterhood*). Es decir, buscan alianzas en contra de las madres que perciben como personas que han aceptado sin protestas su posición sumisa hacia el padre y en este sentido son colaboradoras complacientes del sistema patriarcal que las oprime. La madre así deviene el símbolo de la víctima que cada mujer lleva adentro, y para liberarse es necesario simbólicamente matar a la madre propia. Adrienne Rich observa al respecto:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mother's bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the

unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery (1976, 236).

Este rechazo de lo materno --el deseo de su muerte real o simbólica para que la hija pueda vivir independientemente-- se hace eco en las palabras de Mora: “me ponía furibunda verla así tan endeble, sometida y apocada [...] (124); “estaba frenética y sostenía un tenedor en la mano, como si me dispusiera a matar a mi propia madre” (124). Y se hace aún más evidente en el silenciamiento de la voz materna puesto que toda la novela se cuenta desde la perspectiva de la hija, Mora, cuya voz desplaza por completo la voz de la madre. Respecto al silenciamiento y la negación de la subjetividad de la madre, se podría decir que el discurso de las hijas --siendo ellas las teóricas feministas o las jóvenes protagonistas de *Réquiem para una muñeca rota*-- revela una actitud que se diferencia poco del discurso patriarcal que también relega a la madre a la posición de un objeto cuyo discurso y subjetividad propios son no-representables. (5)

Conclusión

Resulta evidente que los sujetos lesbianos, tanto en las narrativas británicas descritas por Smith como en la novela de Gil, son la herramienta discursiva y política que desestabiliza el orden de la heterosexualidad obligatoria. Mora y Vanessa desmantelan el discurso patriarcal mexicano, cuestionan sus silencios y exponen sus esqueletos en el armario; en el proceso, desmienten las apariencias engañosas de las familias burguesas, señalando que la tan pretendida decencia burguesa está predicada en la hipocresía y el doblez moral.

No obstante, esta historia lesbiana carece de un desenlace feliz, que es el típico atributo del romance familiar heterosexual. Al sujeto lesbiano se le niega la realización de su propia felicidad, quedando absorbido y neutralizado por la narrativa tradicional. El romance que incluye la iniciación sexual de Mora termina con el triunfo del discurso patriarcal. Después del caos creado por un amor prohibido que sus respectivas madres perciben como enfermizo y reprochable, las adolescentes son separadas por un pacto entre los padres de Mora y la madre de Vanessa. Mora, tal como lo dispuso su padre, se marcha con su madre a la provincia y Vanessa se va a vivir con su padre incestuoso que, aprovechando la belleza y el atractivo sexual de su hija, espera convertirla en cantante, un papel que Vanessa acepta sumisamente. Esta separación definitiva de las ‘lesbianas perversas’ permite a la sociedad heterosexual recuperar su estabilidad. La rebelión juvenil que amenazaba con socavar la fachada impenetrable del discurso burgués y heterosexual, resulta así frustrada y ‘truncada’ y el alejamiento de las jóvenes asegura la restauración del orden social y sexual.

Notas

- (1). Para un excelente resumen de las diversas posturas hacia el sujeto y la identidad lesbiana ver Marilyn Farwell y Patricia Smith.
- (2). A continuación especulo sobre las posibles razones más complejas que llevaron al silenciamiento de la palabra lesbiana sin dejar de tener presente la posibilidad de que la autora no la menciona porque su intención fue narrar la novela entera desde la perspectiva de una Mora de trece años que desconoce el término. Es precisamente debido a ciertas inconsistencias estilísticas en la primera novela de Gil, que por

momentos resulta difícil desentrañar la verdadera intencionalidad del texto y establecer si la voz que focaliza lo ocurrido es Mora en la vida adulta o la Mora adolescente. Aún en el supuesto caso de que la novela fuera narrada por Mora desde la altura de sus trece años, es precisamente debido a las razones arriba expuestas y el hecho de que lo narrado toma lugar en los años ochenta en Condesa --una colonia capitalina de clase media-- que la tesis de una Mora ingenua que nunca haya oído la palabra lesbiana es completamente inverosímil.

(3). En este sentido es interesante observar el éxito de la película *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) que constituye el primer intento del *mainstream* hollywoodense de presentar y por consiguiente absorber un romance gay. Sin embargo, el desenlace inevitablemente triste y trágico del filme en el cual el pánico homosexual --que afecta tanto a los protagonistas como a los que los rodean-- juega un papel importante, demuestra que el género del romance, por excelencia heterosexual, no tolera historias de amor alternativas.

(4). El desmantelamiento feminista de los cuentos de hadas que hace Anne Sexton en su libro *Transformations* expone la violencia de un sistema narrativo que exige que los personajes femeninos sean silenciados y violados literal y simbólicamente para poder entrar a una historia --cuento de hadas-- que tradicionalmente idealiza el romance familiar y el matrimonio. Aplicando las observaciones de Sexton a la novela de Eve Gil se puede decir que para Vanessa y Mora pasar a la adolescencia e iniciarse en la sexualidad incipiente significa acogerse a un guión narrativo y social capaz de convertir la más hermosa doncella en una bruja fea y malvada, o simplemente en una mujer inútil cuyo atractivo sexual ha sucumbido a la presión de la edad. Este tipo de futuro que

espera a la mujer en su madurez se ilustra con el caso de las madres de Vanessa y Mora, anteriormente bellas y sexualmente atractivas pero en el momento de la narración descartadas y menospreciadas por sus hombres.

(5). La relación entre madres e hijas en esta novela es lo suficientemente compleja y ambigua como para merecer un estudio aparte y rebasa los parámetros de este artículo. El texto de Gil es uno entre muchos ejemplos de textos feministas, tanto teóricos como literarios, que demuestran que escribir siempre ha sido una actividad de las hijas (*daughterly activity*) caracterizada por lo que Maureen Reddy llama “daughter-centricity” (centralidad filial) (2). En este tipo de escritura la madre no existe como un sujeto en derecho propio sino sólo en su función social de madre (*motherhood*). Además, como nota Hirsh, la madre “in her maternal function, remains an object, always idealized or denigrated, always mystified through small child’s point of view” (167), una percepción que, a juzgar por la perspectiva que caracteriza la escritura de las hijas sobre el tema, persiste más allá de la infancia.

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**Sujeto Popular entre el Bien y el Mal:
Imágenes Dialécticas de “Jesús Malverde”**

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Toda exploración seria de dotes
y de fenómenos ocultos, surrealistas, fantasmagóricos
presupone un entretejido dialéctico
inaccesible a la mentalidad romántica.

– Walter Benjamin

Hoy en día, a lo largo del noroeste de México y hasta Los Ángeles, California, Jesús Malverde se presenta como una articulación alternativa de la santidad y la criminalidad. Cuando uno piensa en iconografías religiosas, en general no las relaciona con imágenes criminales. La palabra “mal” incluida en su apellido, dentro de la cual está inscrita una tonalidad altamente negativa y peyorativa, no encaja como referencia a un santo católico. Además se contrapone con su nombre de “Jesús” que evoca por antonomasia la generosidad y el bienestar común en la tradición cristiana. Este enlace incongruente y misterioso nos lleva a preguntarnos cómo pueden coexistir las imágenes de santo y criminal dentro de una misma figura, y cómo se articulan dos características contradictorias en el despliegue empírico de la historia. Al respecto, ¿cuáles son los

efectos textuales y sociopolíticos que permiten transformar la topografía tanto práctica como discursiva de la realidad?

Jesús Malverde es conocido como un bandido social de fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX en México. Ha habido varias leyendas que cuentan su vida y milagros, pero su historia se ha puesto en tela de juicio como puro mito debido a la ausencia de pruebas sustanciales que puedan evidenciar su existencia. Algunos datos son diferentes de otros, hay episodios que no aparecen en otros testimonios. Pese a las dudas, según la versión más popular y aceptada, este Robin Hood mexicano nació en Sinaloa aproximadamente en 1870. Tal época corresponde al régimen del porfiriato, el período de modernización y progreso definido por la historia oficial pero, por otro lado, el de la dictadura y la pobreza que llevaron a su población a la polarización entre ricos y pobres. Dicen que sus padres murieron de hambre y no podía alimentarse; otros dicen que fue obrero de la construcción o ferrocarrilero, y que se convirtió en algún momento en ladrón escondido en la sierra de Culiacán, la capital del estado, robando a quienes por entonces más tenían para repartir a personas necesitadas que a cambio le brindaban la protección del silencio. Pero fue traicionado por uno de sus compadres y ejecutado por el gobernador en 1909 poco antes de llegar la revolución. Su cabeza fue colgada en un árbol como una advertencia a sus seguidores, y se prohibió enterrar su cuerpo.

En no mucho tiempo, sin embargo, su figura renace con acciones milagrosas como la de encontrar una vaca perdida y devolverla a un lechero o sanar a un paciente de cáncer a cambio de que pusiera piedras para ayudar a cubrir su cuerpo. Tales anécdotas han pasado de boca en boca, multiplicándose y por fin convirtiendo a Malverde en el santo

laico que protege y ayuda al pueblo. Actualmente es uno de los santos más conocidos más allá de su región de origen, hasta el otro lado de la frontera. No obstante, la iglesia católica no reconoce el culto a Malverde por no tener datos fidedignos de su existencia, y porque de haber existido su vida no sería un ejemplo para nadie.

“Mal-verde”, reexpresión relacionada con las hojas de plátano, alude de hecho a las hierbas hechizadas que tienen que ver con el mundo narco. En realidad, es el sujeto considerado como la figura santificada de los narcotraficantes: los contrabandistas no quieren cruzar la frontera sin llevar la medalla de Malverde en su cuello. No es cosa extraña que se encuentren las capillas que lo veneran en los campos de plantación de marihuana u opio (Wald 61). Aparte del hecho de que Sinaloa es conocido como el lugar donde empezó el cultivo de la droga más temprano en México, la razón por la que se identifica a los narcos con la vida y el destino de Malverde, a pesar de su distancia temporal, radica en la afinidad de su condición social: ellos están en el lado oscuro de la ley.⁽¹⁾ Son los que corren riesgo de exponerse a la detención institucional y de caer en la posición de los criminales hasta convertirse en enemigos del Estado. En otras palabras la ilegalidad estigmatizada en su cuerpo, sea real o potencial, pone de relieve la distancia irreductible entre ellos y la autoridad oficial.

Lo que se debe tener en cuenta, sin embargo, es que Malverde no se limita a ser un santo exclusivamente para los narcotraficantes, sino que esa es sólo una fracción de su práctica. Este santo narco está abierto a todos los que necesiten su ayuda para pedir y aprovechar sus fuerzas milagrosas; de hecho es venerado como un protector y defensor de los pobres. Para ellos, Malverde es “El Bandido Generoso” o “El Ángel de los

Pobres”, de tal manera que es posible extender su imagen más allá de la figura criminal hasta la gente que no se puede identificar con nadie o no es capaz de representarse a sí misma. Malverde no tiene los datos ni específicos ni fidedignos para verificar su existencia, sino que su identidad se concretiza a través de la apropiación de su figura por parte de los narcos o los pobres. Dado que el mundo narco y los pobres tienen en común que ambos no tienen lugar dentro del sistema oficial, cada uno, en vez de excluir o reemplazar al otro, se encuentra entretelado con el otro produciendo una amalgama sin limitarse meramente a oscilar entre lo criminal y lo popular, y dicha flexibilidad entre los dos posibilita reconfigurar a este santo como una nueva producción sociocultural. En este sentido, no es suficiente con insistir en perseguir su identidad con datos numéricos o evidencias visibles para indagar el fenómeno cultural armado a su alrededor. Su opaco carácter, más bien, abre nuevos caminos para subjetivarlo. Aparte del conflicto de dos aspectos en Malverde, el personaje tampoco es recibido igual hoy que como lo era a fines del siglo XIX. Se transforma en la manera que el espíritu del pasado interrumpe en el momento presente en vez de quedarse pegado a la temporalidad que le corresponde. A la vez que el pasado se traiciona a sí mismo, distorsiona constantemente la relación estructurada en el presente, lo cual llega a cristalizarse en la metamorfosis de Malverde. Considerada la criminalidad como una heterogeneidad social al modo hermenéutico, el propósito de este trabajo, en primer lugar, es releer la magia de Malverde en relación con la condición inclusivamente exclusiva del ser humano bajo la normatividad moderna. Segundo, Malverde, el vehículo flotante que pone en práctica el yo y el otro en el campo de la batalla simbólica, se condensa como un imaginario corporizado que provoca miedo acompañado del terror y la violencia en el metabolismo del poder dominante, por un lado; los otros eligen a Malverde mismo y

lo apropian como lugar contrahegemónico que rompe el hechizo mítico de la historia privilegiada, por el otro.

El Jinete de la Divina Providencia – el retorno del fantasma

En torno a su figura contradictoria, el intento de canonizar a Malverde dentro de la iglesia católica señala el límite del rol de las instituciones mismas insinuando también la necesidad de otra aproximación acerca de su identidad. *El Jinete de la Divina Providencia*, escrito por Óscar Liera para el teatro y estrenado en 1984, es la obra que dramatiza la búsqueda de localidad de Malverde dentro o fuera de la categoría del santo. El drama toma la forma de una investigación realizada por los representantes de la iglesia que hacen preguntas a los informantes sobre recuerdos concernientes a Malverde y sus milagros; esos diálogos en el presente se desarrollan paralelamente a la obra interior en la que aparecen personajes del fin del siglo XIX y acciones en la forma del “teatro dentro del teatro”. Pese a los dos espacios divididos, la obra dispone del uso de la puesta en escena de largos pasillos que hacen de puente del destiempo entre el espacio “mágico” y el “contemporáneo”.

Los padres de la iglesia junto con el obispo les requieren a los informantes los datos concretos y las evidencias materiales respecto a Malverde para atestiguar sus milagros, pero los que responden a las preguntas no pueden satisfacer la expectativa de la iglesia. Por el contrario, sus testimonios están llenos de historias y memorias inciertas con las que no se puede garantizar de forma científica o racional la verdad sobre los milagros contados generación tras generación. Las narraciones populares son menospreciadas por su incapacidad de verificar, lo cual destaca la tensión teatral y lingüística entre la letra

oficial de los curas y la oralidad de la gente popular despreciada como atrasada y opuesta a la modernidad. Los testimonios sobre él en no pocas ocasiones dependen de lo que les contaban sus padres, abuelos y vecinos, cuyas historias no sólo contienen informaciones sobre Malverde, sino que también dejan huellas de sus propios anhelos, angustias y quejas, digamos que sus imaginaciones están inscritas en sus testimonios. Por lo tanto los milagros realizados por Malverde quedan inciertos y sospechosos. De ahí resulta que no es fácil beatificarlo y canonizarlo en la categoría de santo. La figura se diluye cada vez más, y la iglesia católica decide clausurar la investigación concluyendo que Culiacán no es más que un pueblo de locos en el sentido de que todos cuentan historias diferentes acerca de un mismo suceso. Sin embargo, la gente popular no acepta la decisión de una instancia oficial cuyas miradas y lenguajes resultan inútiles para reconocer las realidades que están pasando fuera de la iglesia. En la escena del debate en torno a la recuperación de un paciente que tenía cáncer, el médico aclara que su curación debe ser atribuida al encantamiento del pueblo por Malverde a pesar de no poder atestiguarlo.

MÉDICO: Pues bien: la iglesia, como institución, está en el mismo caso. Yo le pediría que no trataran de institucionalizar a Malverde; es un santón y un héroe del pueblo; no traten de arrebatárselo de las manos; la realidad es que está allí, la gente lo quiere, le tiene y lo más maravilloso es que (Muestra las radiografías.) hace milagros. (475)

Si la ilusión de un personaje interviene en la realidad, las memorias e imaginaciones son, también, reales y dejan de tener un solo significado, cambiándolo en constante

amplificación y multiplicación. De esta manera, el espíritu de Malverde no se captura, sino que se vuelve misterioso en su complejo procedimiento de significación. O sea, una realidad mágica y al mismo tiempo social. Benjamin argumenta que el lenguaje del surrealismo no deja de permanecer en forma misteriosa y resulta operativo como motivo potencial para transformar el presente en el espacio de la lucha profana por el poder o en el camino para alterar una sociedad o comunidad (1978: 178-9). Para él, la experiencia surrealista en el surrealismo europeo del siglo XX, más allá de los sueños o el fumar opio, refleja un nuevo encantamiento de objetos seculares que se han percibido espirituales y supersticiosos, pero que ofrecen una inspiración materialista desde el punto de vista antropológico. La “iluminación profana” y sus imaginarios configurados, superando a la iluminación religiosa del catolicismo ortodoxo, puede generar energías revolucionarias para deconstruir la realidad canonizada al nivel de la vida cotidiana como un elemento de tal vida.

En este sentido, los imaginarios esotéricos como lo oculto o lo fantasmagórico no son las ficciones que no toman forma sustancial. Al contrario, son el lenguaje e imaginario cuyas interacciones le dan diversas formas y voces a la realidad. A partir de la ficción se crea una realidad incierta en la cual la relación recíproca inestable de la verdad y la ilusión llega a ser una fuerza social fantasmal. Todas las sociedades viven de ficciones consideradas reales que se convierten en la realidad constantemente inconstante.

No obstante, el fantasma de Malverde y sus magias se quedan separados del mundo oficial y marginados con una mirada despreciativa, aún cuando pueden participar en la realidad. Frente al mundo legitimado, otra informante, Claudia, cuestiona tal situación en torno a la iglesia católica:

CLAUDIA: ¿Qué? ¿Les horroriza? Pero eso existe, está allí en cada ciudad, es muy fácil no mirar. Están ustedes como lo hacen muchos cuando se les presentan las cochinas feas, voltean los ojos al cielo y piensan en las vírgenes bien vestidas de la iglesia y llenas de joyas, pero así no se remedia nada. (453)

Ella intenta reivindicar las realidades invisibilizadas por la razón de ser feas y humildes. Pero Malverde no tiene espacio para reconciliarse con el orden oficial, pues se presenta en la morada de los pobres como el símbolo de la vida precaria. Por tanto, su imagen conlleva la capacidad de abarcar diversos elementos de la heterogeneidad social en la forma impura y oscura de la barbarie.

Mientras que las escenas exteriores teatralizan la discusión acerca de la verdad del santo popular, las interiores regresan al giro del siglo XX donde se origina su mito. La obra escenifica la condición socioeconómica de la época del régimen de Porfirio Díaz, el presidente del año 1877 a 1910. Durante ese período, los postulados políticos de la Pos-Reforma centrados en las ideas de la elite intelectual y cuasi gubernamental pretendieron transformar México en nombre de la institucionalización acompañada del fortalecimiento del Estado y de los aparatos gubernamentales. Esta planificación culminó con la reorganización de todo el sistema conforme a la ley, e intentó imponer el nuevo sistema hasta las regiones más remotas del territorio. Pese a que sus proyectos eran constitucionalistas, el régimen paradójicamente dependía de una forma de gobierno altamente autoritaria, y la figura de Porfirio Díaz representa al dictador más atroz en la

historia mexicana. La realidad es que la política científica, influida por el positivismo europeo, se desarrolló bajo la orientación liberal que recurre a la intervención activa del Estado.(2)

Así pues, en la obra se tratan el conflicto y la violencia causados en el desenvolvimiento legislativo mexicano: los campesinos que labraban su tierra como dueños desde hacía tiempo perdieron el derecho a cultivarla de acuerdo con la ley moderna y cayeron en la posición de peones pagados por su trabajo. El gobernador dispone del poder estatal acompañado de la violencia en nombre de la ley. Pero sus actos inevitablemente causan la “suspensión de la ley” misma bajo el pretexto de impedir la probable violación de la ley. Esta situación no se puede interpretar sólo como una excepción, sino que más bien demuestra el carácter intrínseco del poder soberano moderno al que se le autoriza el derecho a monopolizar la violencia dentro de su territorio. Según Agamben, la soberanía, en el fondo, está a la vez dentro y fuera del orden jurídico creando y garantizando el ambiente que la ley necesita para su propia validez (17). La violencia ejercida por la autoridad es el artefacto legitimado y naturalizado mediante el cual ella crea un espacio con más suspensión de la ley y con menos libertad de los individuos. La prioridad de la soberanía sobre la vida individual no ha cambiado mucho, así que la condición del ser humano sigue insegura y en peligro hasta hoy. En su testimonio, otra informante dice que “bueno, las cosas no han cambiado mucho; decía que los ricos acusaban a un pobre y que lo fusilaban por nada” (Liera 449).

Además la legislación requiere el proceso de homogeneización cuyo propósito principal es incluir a la gente dentro de su régimen, pero también por su criterio inclusivo concibe una ineluctable frontera que presupone la lógica de exclusión que produce necesariamente a los otros. Una vez que alguien es definido como nocivo, se ve marcado con una imagen de criminal latente que pone en peligro la seguridad de la sociedad de manera que un ciudadano en cualquier momento podría convertirse en el otro al que se le arrebate el derecho de la ciudadanía supuestamente entregado desde el nacimiento.

El *montaje* del sujeto popular

En la obra interior Liera crea el espacio preciso para la interpelación de las clases populares. El gobernador Cañedo abusa de la autoridad y aflige a su población, en cambio los campesinos no encuentran ningún asidero que los proteja y cuide dentro de los aparatos institucionales. Esta condición explica la razón por la que ellos identifican su destino con el de Malverde. El gobernador graba la imagen del “mal” en los peones que desafían su autoridad, y la representación negativa del pueblo le permite justificar el ejercicio de la violencia contra los peones.

Bajo dicha situación, desemboca el juego dramatizado del poder con doble mirada en el teatro del terror: la intención de homogeneizar al otro por parte del poder hegemónico no siempre resulta exitosa por su radical heterogeneidad que dificulta el pleno dominio o reconciliación. Debido a esta incapacidad, la violencia no logra capturar a los campesinos por completo y el gobernador no puede menos que preocuparse por sus reacciones imprevisibles.

Cañedo, aterrorizado, ya vestido elegantemente, se apoya en la tina.

Cañedo siempre oye discretamente y en la penumbra la conversación de Adela con Hilario; más bien parece que ellos dirigen la conversación hacia él como si quisieran ir llenándolo de miedos con sus historias.

HILARIO: Platican las ramas de los árboles. Adela; se oye de los que ya murieron; entre las hojas hay murmullos y cantos como si anduvieran bocas solas volando por el aire. (447)

Ante el imaginario fantasmagórico que él mismo había creado en el cuerpo del otro, el gobernador no sabe cómo confrontar el miedo. En cambio, los peones no rechazan la imagen del diablo figurada por Cañedo, y hacen intencional uso de esa imagen cambiando la dirección en sentido opuesto para incrementar el temor mental del gobernador. La imagen del mal estigmatizada ya no es plenamente negativa, sino de alguna manera útil, y hasta positiva para el otro en el juego del poder. La mirada proyectada al otro regresa al sujeto produciendo la contraimagen en la que es posible la resistencia del otro y la trasgresión del mito.

El argumento de Taussig acerca del chamanismo reside en que el otro puede ser el espacio vacío en donde lo representado se traslada hacia el del propio yo reconstruido con una alteridad tibia todavía. La diferencia ontológica hace que el poder privilegiado ejerza actos violentos que establecen formalmente la verdad canonizada. A la vez, la diferencia de la cual se ramifica lo heterogéneo y hasta lo malo podría ser una fuente de

fricciones sociales y un objeto de nuevo encantamiento con el cual desilusiona el mito institucionalizado (17).

Dicho de otro modo, de lo representado viene lo que derriba la representación, y al hacerlo, lo imaginado sirve como recurso mnemónico de puntos focales en la historia social, puntos cargados del tiempo de persecución y salvación. “La función mnemónica vuelve a colmar el presente de temas y de oposiciones míticos insertos dentro de un drama semiótico en el teatro de la redención y de la justicia divina” (249). Por eso, tanto la desmistificación como la remistificación se realizan en el mismo significante llamado Malverde por medio de la dialéctica de las imágenes que posibilita la transformación de la trayectoria de una vida en otra.(3)

De tal manera Malverde, capturado en la criminalidad como un punto de pivote, resulta funcional para darle terror al gobernador e implantar los deseos del pueblo que se convierte en fuerza potencial de la resistencia contra el gobernador Cañedo. Dentro de una figura se intersecan imágenes opuestas: la demonización de Malverde por el gobernador y la clase dominante se contraponen con la santificación del sujeto criminal. Y la interpretación opuesta lleva el mundo real al irreductible conflicto hermenéutico, y el montaje como artefacto dramático aborda el efecto del giro lingüístico. Malverde, nadie más que un ladrón para los ricos, se impone como imagen del héroe según la visión de los pobres. El choque imaginario es central e incommensurable a lo largo de la trayectoria dramática sin dejar ninguna posibilidad de reconciliación homogeneizadora. Más bien el montaje de las dos imágenes fragmentadas paralelas engendra un cambio drástico en el que se realiza la política popular en materia de venganza.

Adela es la criada del gobernador Cañedo, pero el gobernador en realidad le arrebató la tierra y además le quitó la vida de su hijo que había protestado contra él porque no le pagaba su trabajo. Después de enterarse de la historia oculta de la violencia, ella se puso a delirar y soñó con la venganza. Puesto que ella no pudo apelar a la institución, entonces pide a las sombras que se mueven en el viento, es decir, se apoya en el fantasma oscuro de Malverde que le puede provocar al gobernador angustia y miedo hasta que se muera por el temor al fantasma. Debido a la imagen ficcionalizada por la clase dominante, él paradójicamente se puede convertir en el símbolo de la resistencia. No es que los otros no sean capaces de expresarse, sino que han subsistido escondidos de forma distinta y con voces no oficiales. Adela aprovecha la oscuridad de la barbarie como el vehículo para vengarse del gobernador, a través de lo cual invoca la voz total de lo heterogéneo.

ADELA: Siempre hemos vivido entre fantasmas, siempre hemos visto sombras entre los árboles y entre los huecos del viento. Debajo de todas las piedras se esconden voces extrañas y en el croar de las ranas hay un lamento acechante. (478)

Gracias a la otredad incomprensible, los fantasmas tienen la posibilidad de llevar a cabo el trastorno del mundo visible. Y la figura de Malverde, como metonimia de los fantasmas, no se limita a representar al único héroe como redentor, sino que traza un lugar de participación donde cualquiera puede tanto actualizarse como agente de hacer milagros como alterar la relación social ya establecida. Adela misma ingresa al

mundo mágico y comienza a jugar el rol de Malverde dejando de pedirle protección y ayuda.

En ese proceso, este santo narco renace articulado con el sujeto marginado, manteniendo la imagen del criminal excluido de la ley y el sistema legítimo. Desde su posicionamiento involucra a los que viven desamparados por las instituciones. Y por medio de la venganza, la santidad como una función redentora llega a tener carácter político en el sentido de que las peticiones religiosas se interpenetran con los reclamos políticos actuales. Malverde absorbe los deseos del pueblo y su repolitización pone de manifiesto la posibilidad de perturbar el status quo. Debido al atributo de la ley como la norma incluyente, su criminalidad se conecta con la marginalidad de donde emerge una alternativa política de la clase popular en el régimen liberal. Y la política de Malverde redefine la santidad en la manera más popular y menos institucionalizada, pues esta obra está en busca de una reconstrucción de la santidad que no rechace lo religioso del mundo contemporáneo, sino que recalque la heterogeneidad social dentro de la santidad.

Junto a la participación de lo heterogéneo como agente social, la interpretación de Liera lleva a cabo la desheroicidad de la imagen de Malverde: en sus leyendas, “poner piedras” era un hechizo ritual para pedir deseos a Malverde, pero este drama lo trastoca como un acto determinante que representa la venganza colectiva del pueblo; al día siguiente de que se divulgara el rumor de que Malverde fue lastimado y sangraba por un balazo, todos los personajes, menos el gobernador, aparecen vendados en la muñeca con rastros de la sangre. Malverde es el catalizador que motiva y estimula al pueblo, en

cambio el que traza las demandas y rellena con los materiales este vacío vehículo es, de hecho, el pueblo mismo. Su leyenda es renarrada de tal manera que Malverde mismo se desvanece por detrás de la escena, al mismo tiempo que es sustituido por el sujeto popular como protagonista del secreto de los milagros.

El momento más dramático llega con la revelación sugestiva de su identidad. Mientras que expresa su deseo de vengarse del gobernador, Adela le dice a Polidor que salga de la sombra que oculta su verdadero rostro. Polidor se asusta pero inmediatamente pretende negarse, lo cual alude a la identidad de Malverde con máscara de Polidor.⁽⁴⁾ No obstante él no es el único Malverde; otros personajes también se identifican a sí mismos con el santo, y en la última escena el acto de la venganza de Adela llega a traslaparse con la imagen colectiva representada por la aparición grupal de hombres y mujeres. Todos ellos participan en este rito como los cómplices secretos, de ahí que se configure implícitamente la venganza colectiva y se muestre la máscara religiosa de Malverde en clave política.

Adela empieza a bañarlo. Hombres y mujeres del pueblo salen y, mirando fijamente al público, empiezan a golpear piedra contra piedra. Cuando todos han salido, Adela toma una piedra grande, se dirige a Cañedo por sus espaldas y, antes de asestarle el golpe mortal, se hace el oscuro. Aunque es posible que él haya muerto anteriormente de miedo en el corazón, contagiado por el miedo de los huesos. (485)

Para realizar sus deseos o reclamos, cada uno apropia a Malverde, que puede aterrorizar al poder dominante. La venganza es una reacción del resentimiento que no apela a la ley, por eso no se ha considerado ni legalmente apropiada, ni incluida en la esfera pública en el mundo moderno institucionalizado. En esta escena, sin embargo, el acto vengativo del pueblo se pone en práctica en la plaza, el sitio público y más abierto de una sociedad, y el lugar donde antaño se escenifican las represiones ejemplares de la justicia institucional. La venganza invierte su propia imagen negativa, no sólo adquiriendo un carácter colectivo sino abrazando el derecho público. De esta forma es justificada como la acción inevitable del pueblo que no tiene la ley a su lado, y es defendida dentro de todo el sentido político.

Aquí, se revela la interpretación populista de Liera (5): Malverde es una máscara cuya subjetividad se debe a las imaginaciones del pueblo. Por consiguiente, su identificación ya no se fija en una figura, sino que más bien se describe con “significantes flotantes” cuyo carácter vago imposibilita definirlo con un sentido determinado, pero por la misma razón puede concebir una variedad de las heterogeneidades sociales que no se incluyen en la norma de una sociedad (Laclau 164). En la vida cotidiana, los elementos heterogéneos subsisten dispersados en cada individuo sin generar ninguna fuerza significativa. Pero tal flexibilidad característica de la máscara lleva a cabo una producción discursiva que incorpora heterogeneidades sociales operando como un articulador antagónico dentro de su pluralidad. Por fin, ellos no son separables: el pueblo no puede reconstruir una colectividad en ausencia de Malverde, asimismo éste no hubiera tenido ninguna significación sin la materialización concreta del pueblo.

A partir del significante vacío, Malverde llega a ser la frontera política que efectúa la fabricación estructural del “pueblo” dentro de la oposición de nosotros/ellos, identidad/otredad. La venganza de Adela refleja el momento edificador en el que se integran las diversas demandas, y se convierten en reclamos colectivos y políticos las peticiones personales que no se pueden realizar en el sistema homogeneizador. Como ya se ha dicho, Liera se ha enfocado en configurar la transformación de la imagen de Malverde como el objeto que se venera con diversas peticiones individuales en el mundo real en un vehículo en el que puedan converger tales deseos fragmentados del pueblo y desembocar en movimientos políticos en una forma tanto articuladora como contrahegemónica. Según su interpretación, no importa verificar si los milagros son las obras de Malverde; la verdad es que “el pueblo, cuando quiere, hace milagros” (484). El pueblo rellena el espacio de los milagros volviéndose agente en nombre de, y en vez de Malverde, en la propuesta de la política populista.

Mientras que su origen como ladrón representa la condición humana determinada por la inclusiva exclusividad del sistema legal, su santidad involucra deseos y esperanzas de la gente como una religión no ortodoxa ni dogmática. A través de la dialéctica entre su criminalidad y su santidad, tal contradicción se ha operado en la manera de la fuerza potencial del pueblo que reemplaza a la iglesia oficial y pone en peligro las instituciones ya establecidas que ligan la religión al gobierno.

Maravilla-nación

Aunque está excluido del Estado, el mundo narco en no pocas ocasiones se ha confabulado con el Estado mismo; incluso ha llegado a su propia institucionalización

con la corrupción y el uso de la violencia armada como pseudo-Estado. Es innegable que la capilla conmemorativa de Malverde en Culiacán, de hecho, fue construida con el patrocinio de un capo de los narcos (Wald 62). Si tenemos en cuenta hechos como esos, y sin romantizar la criminalidad, no debemos pasar por alto una parte del mundo narco como la violencia e impunidad que ya está presente en la vida cotidiana. Frente a su compleja realidad, Liera, evitando la seducción de la simpatía por los narcos así como la del juicio moralista, corporiza a Malverde con la imagen política que resiste a una representatividad fijada, lo cual lo localiza en una lucha hegemónica entre el bien y el mal.

Como se ha visto, los milagros en el drama no son restringidos sólo como ficciones inventadas, ni considerados como hechos supernaturales ajenos a la realidad. Malverde desempeña el papel constitutivo de borrar la frontera de la dicotomía del mundo real y del mágico: el fantasma, en sí, actúa como un elemento real que conlleva efectos políticos en los cuales su imaginario y la práctica popular, imbuidos por la fuerte connotación del subdesarrollo o el atraso, más bien muestran experiencias culturales del punto de quiebre hermenéutico a favor o en contra del poder legitimado. En otras palabras, tras los elementos anacrónicos como magias y misterios se pone de manifiesto la economía política de la dominación y la resistencia del yo y el otro. En tanto que el poder dominante crea la otredad con la cual intenta dominar a su población, a su vez los oprimidos reconstruyen su identidad conforme a lo proyectado por los dominantes, pero invirtiendo la dirección del sujeto/objeto. Como resultado, su imagen surrealista llega a formar parte de la conciencia de “lo popular” que posibilita deshacer el mapa oficial y crear una comunidad de manera diferente.

Liera define las características del Culiacán donde se producen Malverde y su práctica con el término de “maravillas” (485). No lo hace para afirmar que son verdaderos e indudables los milagros hechos por él, sino porque esta ciudad y la región a que pertenece reúnen mal gobierno del poder institucional, por un lado, y por otro anhelos e imaginaciones de la gente que no tiene otro recurso que apelar a los milagros. Las maravillas, pues, se cristalizan como chispa en el momento del choque entre las dos partes incompatibles en estructurada forma de peticiones, demandas, y hasta resistencias. Esta dinámica pone de relieve las demarcadas características de una región en la que un antihéroe se convierte en el símbolo religioso.

Si se recuerda que existe una variedad de modalidades de imaginar la nación (Anderson 15-6), Malverde puede ser, como imagen dialéctica de criminal y santo, una herramienta materializada con la que se imagina, de manera no tan directa pero suficiente para articularla, una comunidad en la mente del sujeto popular. La nación moderna no ha dejado de producir al sujeto que se degrada de momento a la posición del otro con poco acceso a un espacio general de representación en el proceso de su construcción y regeneración. En ese sentido, la religiosidad popular y sus imaginarios anacrónicos irónicamente evidencian la crisis del proyecto moderno, a la vez que aportan otra espiritualidad arraigada en el estrato bajo de la sociedad. Si bien no tiene forma institucional o administrativa, el terreno de las maravillas se grafica reclamando su propio lugar en las conciencias colectivas y sensibilidades compartidas. Por ello, la religiosidad popular en Culiacán es entendida como un proceso de reterritorialización de la topología del poder, que posiblemente repercute en otras regiones y sujetos que tengan situaciones similares.

En *El jinete de la Divina Providencia*, la estrategia discursiva en torno a la polarización evidente en la política liberal de fines del siglo XIX y principios del XX transforma la leyenda de Malverde en una narrativa populista donde se posibilita la representación de un espacio para la heterogeneidad social. Para Liera, los milagros que hacía Malverde no son parte principal para entender el fenómeno cultural de su práctica en el mundo actual, sino que este santo anacrónico juega el rol catalizador de juntar peticiones personales y deseos dispersos, formando parte de la edificación de una nueva colectividad y su terreno por medio de la desilusión del mito ya legitimado.

Notas

(1) Los narcocorridos, forma renovada de las canciones folklóricas tradicionales, relatan como temas recurrentes la violencia, el narcotráfico y la frontera. Pese al retrato negativo en el discurso oficial canalizado a través de los medios, estas canciones han sido aceptadas ampliamente a partir de los setenta y hasta el día de hoy. Entre ellas se encuentran los temas sobre el bandido social en los que se cuenta su historia en relación con la ley. Uno de ellos canta a Malverde:

Voy a cantar un corrido de una historia verdadera,
de un bandido generoso que robaba dondequiera.

Jesús Malverde era un hombre que a los pobres ayudaba,
por eso lo defendían cuando **la ley** lo buscaba. (“Corrido a Jesús Malverde”, énfasis mío)

En este corrido, Malverde es perseguido por la ley a causa del robo y queda en la misma situación ilícita que la de los narcotraficantes. En consecuencia, la ley juega el rol de borrar la diferencia temporal entre los dos y de cohesionar a Malverde con los narcos rotulados como criminales. Se lo trata como un “bandido social” que cometía delitos para el bien de la comunidad, y por tanto es definido más como un héroe que como un simple criminal (Hobsbawm 13-29). Según Astorga, por lo menos desde la primera mitad de los años setenta, en México y particularmente en el norte y noroeste, el enlace del “bandido-héroe” de otras épocas ha sido reemplazado por el “traficante-héroe” (91). De hecho, los narcotraficantes, de vez en cuando, fían dinero permitiendo el acceso de diversos servicios y mercancías en las zonas rurales y aparecen así como benefactores populares. Además, mediante los corridos de Malverde, se apropian del carácter del héroe generoso con el cual pueden cambiar en cierto grado su imagen arquetípica o estereotipada (Wald 62-4).

(2) Charles A. Hale indaga en la compleja relación entre el liberalismo y la política científica en el fin del siglo XIX en México. Según él, el legado intelectual durante ese período es de suma importancia para el México contemporáneo en el sentido de la similitud del sistema económico y el papel del Estado. A partir de 1875, cuando la idea liberal y científica llegó a la política mexicana, se impuso la manera en que Spencer y Darwin concebían el progreso, como la adaptación de los hombres a los cambios en su entorno para una generación con una conciencia racial y un anhelo de desarrollo económico. En México, sin embargo, se promocionaba el papel positivo del Estado. Por ejemplo, cuando estalló la revuelta campesina, la respuesta de la élite liberal no fue más

que la apelación a la fuerza material de los aparatos estatales. Las diferencias políticas fueron olvidadas cuando los defensores de la política científica y los liberales doctrinarios por igual llamaron al goberino a actuar contra la amenaza de la “barbarie”, a reclutar a “los elementos conservadores de la sociedad” para que defendieran la propiedad, y en general a promover el “trabajo” (380-405).

(3) Las imágenes dialécticas vienen de la terminología de Walter Benjamin. Su mecanismo se puede explicar con el montaje en el que no se armonizan las imágenes a contrapelo de la lógica de la dialéctica hegeliana que al fin y al cabo resulta operativa para llevar a la homogeneización como síntesis. Más bien las dejan incomensuradas e irreconciliadas para abordar tensiones sociales entre las imágenes contradictorias e impedir el olvido con el paso del tiempo. En este sentido, las imágenes del pasado no se desvanecen ni se incorpora en el momento presente. Asimismo, el mito y la fantasía entremezclados con el panorama capitalista no son necesariamente reaccionarios ni atrasados, sino que contienen las semillas en el suelo arado del presente a la espera de germinar y alimentarse. De este modo la dialéctica hace hincapié en los elementos heterogéneos que conducen a la contradicción no armonizada y constantemente conflictiva en el conjunto (Susan Back-Morss 96: 284-7).

(4) Aún cuando su presencia en la escena se limita a unas pocas ocasiones, Polidor como un personaje misterioso juega el rol significativo que desempeña una doble misión en el despliegue de este drama. En primer lugar, no es difícil inferir que representa a un corporizado Malverde que nunca se visibiliza en la obra. Pero también, como un guía, ayuda al público a adivinar la verdad del asunto que pasa en las escenas

interiores, precisamente entre el gobernador, Cañedo y el pueblo, a través del cual se entera de la ficción e ideología del poder dominante. En deliberado cálculo narrativo, este doble papel de su personaje resulta útil para colocarlo en la posición vacilante entre el héroe carismático y el mediador que inspira al pueblo a movilizarse. Por tanto, los pasmosos portentos pueden ser las obras del pueblo, no solamente milagros religiosos del santo.

(5) El populismo no conlleva contenido ni patente ni establecido para engancharlo necesariamente dentro de una ideología de derecha o de izquierda. En vez de tener una ideología fija en su definición, se relaciona más con la forma en la cual se constituye el pueblo a través de la articulación dinámica de diferentes grupos o sujetos que quedan por movilizarse. Así pues, no es meramente una retórica que alucina a la gente llevándola al espacio público sin proyecto político específico, sino que tiene como catalizador una retórica cuyo funcionamiento conduce su potencial a desbordar y explotar hacia construcción de una fuerza colectiva unificadora que se confronta con el poder dominante (Laclau 16-9).

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**The Thrill of the Kill: Pushing the Boundaries of Experience in the
Prose of Eduardo Antonio Parra**

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La antigua relación entre víctima y victimario, que es lo único que humaniza al crimen, lo único que lo hace imaginable, ha desaparecido. (. . .) Para nosotros el crimen es todavía una relación — y en este sentido posee el mismo significado liberador que la Fiesta o la confesión—. De ahí su dramatismo, su poesía y — ¿por qué no decirlo? — su grandeza. Gracias al crimen, accedemos a una efímera trascendencia.

(Paz, *El laberinto* 55)

Nada como matar a un hombre. Oler la sangre ajena, sentirla en la piel; probarla con la punta de la lengua es la mayor conquista

(Parra 2002: 210)

Within the span of the last ten years, the contemporary Mexican writer Eduardo Antonio Parra has established himself as the author of a particularly visceral and brutally explicit prose.⁽¹⁾ His texts faithfully portray bleak urban environments, grim US-Mexican border towns, and desolate rural areas, where resentment and loneliness prevail above all other sentiments. Just as he reveals a predilection for nocturnal settings in his fiction, Parra seems to be drawn to the dark side of the human mind; his fascination with shadowy emotions such as erotic fury, aggression, blood thirst, and the pleasure found in pain— both one’s own and that inflicted upon others— is the key building block of his entire work. His protagonists’ quests for the ultimate ‘high’ and the lowest ‘low’ translate into what Albert Camus called ‘metaphysical rebellion’ (26), when referring to crimes executed as deliberate acts of protest against the human condition. In other words, these transgressive yearnings always appear against the background of an omnipresent violence, invariably envisioned in Parra’s poetics as part and parcel of the human condition.

Studies devoted to Parra’s work have sought to privilege his trademark symbolism of limits: be it the spatial frontier between two countries or the existential bounds of man’s actions.⁽²⁾ Likewise, this essay will foreground the very antipodes of experience by exploring the topic of death, the ultimate boundary par excellence. I will focus on Parra’s novel *Nostalgia de la sombra* (2002) and the short story “El placer de morir” from *Los límites de la noche* (2000), in which dark instincts play themselves out with a particular force and where murder, the ultimate taboo, becomes the common denominator. These texts are also bound by an implicit misogyny and an outright gendered violence, where a woman, the erotic other, is the object of man’s destructive

pleasures. In both cases, it is also woman's corporeality where the drama of transgression is played out, thus conferring a particularly literal relevance to the expression 'over her dead body.' Through the grid of George Bataille's philosophy of the extreme and his celebration of self-ruin as a divine or sovereign inspiration, I will examine Parra's male protagonists as they embark upon an unbridled pursuit of ecstatic experiences in search of the *raison d'être* of their own existence. I will argue that, ironically, this very moment of final self-realization is a double-edged sword of an almost mystical illumination and self-inflicted, irreversible condemnation.

Under the Rubric of Death, or Where Parra and Bataille Converge

Parra's gritty world of tormented individuals is violent, but not gratuitously so. Rather, it appears that its destructive tendencies are an inherent human condition making coexistence with others so much more challenging. In an interview with Eduardo Castañeda, Parra articulated his interest in humanity's evil side and his belief in its strong influence over the choices we make. He stated that all are capable of most violent reactions and it is often coincidental whether kindness or cruelty predominates in a given situation:

cuando estás en convivencia siempre hay una chispa de ira. La violencia está en todos lados, entonces, lo que yo he tratado de hacer es cuestionarme por qué. Creo que en mis textos hay una cierta perplejidad, una fascinación y una intención de desentreñar esos orígenes. No sé, no quisiera irme al lado metafísico, este de que el mal está en todas partes, pero yo creo que de alguna manera sí. El ser humano es totalmente

contrastante; todos traemos lo maldito adentro y lo bendito también. La cosa es cuál te domina más.

Likewise, the inhabitants of Parra's narrative world eventually find themselves at a crossroad, where one step forward leads them to the abyss of the previously unexplored and socially forbidden territories of lawless release. Tempted by this intoxicating transgression, they wrench themselves away from quotidian existence and, regardless of the consequences, give themselves up to their self-consuming instincts. This newly discovered explosiveness of life allows them to climb the peaks of evil as they transgress with their lives the laws of reason. Apparently, only by foregoing societal restraints can they confront their true being: a contradictory and dangerously destructive self, trapped between the life instinct and the impulse for death. From a theoretical point of view, such a pervasiveness of sexually charged violence first brings to mind the Marquis de Sade and his trademark pursuit of erotic pleasure at the expense of others. Parra's novel, however, is closer to the thought of Georges Bataille, whose philosophy oscillates between societal constraints and one's natural desire to exceed communal bounds. Bataille wrote extensively on the fundamental contradiction present within an individual, who while capable of protecting and loving, often harms with the same ease. For Bataille, man's existence is fundamentally law-abiding and family-oriented, deeply rooted in respecting all social limitations. Yet, it is also profoundly an experience of limits, of violated social boundaries revealed through unexpected and brief instances of utter violence, where the same lawful citizens become rapists, criminals and torturers (1986: 168). Because, in Bataille's view, we experience the essence of being when recognizing those limits, what better way to approach one's self than through contact with death, the absolute limit of human experience? Both Bataille and Parra seem to be

drawn to this extreme because, despite their apparent need to embrace society as a cloak of relative security, they have delved at the same time into the limitlessness of forbidden violence; Bataille, in his study of most abhorrent crimes across centuries, and Parra in his exploration of the criminal drive hidden in the common individual.⁽³⁾ Unlike Sade, for whom society is irrelevant and he himself constitutes the only valid point of reference, Bataille is acutely aware of the power of human laws.⁽⁴⁾ Bataille knows that an individual cannot live outside society, but he also considers civilization to be deleterious to one's well-being. This is so because everyday routine and quotidian obligations chip away at the individual's power to experience life. As a result, individuals live in servitude, caged in their own fears, terrified of laws and a crippling temporality, and condemned to the compromises and hypocrisies weighing down on them. They become the individual "already shut up in his house, who binds himself to his bosses, his tables, his workbenches and his tools" (1994: 76). In the meantime, the individual's true essence (containing the extreme values of life) remains dormant, buried beneath a superficial representation responding to the demands of everyday existence (1985:130-4). In the end, the only possible escape from this existential yoke is rebelling against the overwhelming obligations imposed by society. Such an unconditional rupture, the will for one's actions to respond to oneself and nobody else, or as Bataille puts it, "existing in the world with no other end than to exist" (1994: 169-70), constitute the true—and perhaps only— sovereign act.

For Bataille, this sense of sovereignty flickers through its ecstatic moments of painful erotic encounters; its true revelation, however, occurs solely in the flash of supreme violence. Faced with an imminent end, some individuals refuse to attach themselves to the banality of life, embracing instead this moment of ultimate vertigo. In other words, true subjectivity is ecstatic, desperate, furtive and violent; it comes as a revelation to an individual who renounces attachment to the world, all the while knowing that these last moments inevitably must spiral downward. It offers the best and the worst, making every instance superbly meaningful: ‘He alone is happy who, having experienced vertigo to the point of trembling in his bones, to the point of being incapable of measuring the extent of his fall, suddenly finds the un hoped-for strength to turn his agony into a joy’ (1985: 236). It is my contention that such an ecstasy of the instant, one’s sudden insatiability for the forbidden, regardless of social consequences, is the undercurrent of Parra’s work. His protagonists take their lives in their own hands exclusively by unleashing their passions and destroying social barriers. Ironically, it is the acceptance of death —experienced by them or inflicted upon others— that allows them to grasp the irreplaceable possibility to become once and for all their own autonomous selves.

Nostalgia de la sombra: The Birth of a Killer

Who better to illustrate this aforementioned exuberance of forces than a spontaneous murderer? A common citizen who becomes capable of executing the most horrific crimes under extreme circumstances, thus achieving a previously unimagined sense of control and freedom? Parra’s characters often flirt with danger but none of them

undergoes such a complex metamorphosis as Ramiro Mendoza Elizondo, the protagonist of *Nostalgia de la sombra*. His transformation from a harmless family man to a ruthless killer does not impugn his circumstances but rather points to the latent death instinct hidden in many individuals. Ramiro's life can be divided into three fundamental stages, where first, he discovers his aggressive potential, in order to embark on a career of killing and lastly, to return to his native Monterrey to assassinate his first female victim. Between his initial and final encounter with crime, Ramiro seems to complete a full circle of self-discovery and this essay will focus on the breaking points in the protagonist's criminal *bildungsroman*.

Ramiro is a compliant, law-abiding citizen. Caught up in a dead-end, paper-pushing job at a local newspaper in Monterrey, he edits mediocre articles, hoping to write a brilliant script for a *film noir*, which would change his luck and bring him out of his precarious existence. Facing more failures than successes, he worries about his wife's missed period, knowing that he cannot provide for yet another child. One afternoon he decides to celebrate his paycheck with a customary couple of beers, thus delaying his trip back home. Walking back in the middle of the night he is stopped and attacked by a group of hooligans, who first beat him up and then try to steal his money. This very instant is a turning point which determines the protagonist's entire life: he must choose between losing the little he has or conquering his fears and finally standing up for himself. And stand up he does, confronting his own demons and fighting his real-life opponents with an unfathomed force. As he punches their faces and breaks their bones, Ramiro suddenly experiences an epiphany: he realizes that, up to this point, his life has been

hampered by endless prohibitions and that releasing his own physical aggression turns out to be hypnotizing and superbly exhilarating.

As a consequence, the obedient and emasculated editor who “nunca había hecho nada aparte de dar media vuelta y retirarse” (2002: 48), unleashes his anger and pent-up frustration, responding to nothing but his survival instinct: “De cuando en cuando lograba atrapar un miembro, una cabeza y la molía con puños y rodillas, con la frente, mordía la carne hasta arrancarla y después escupía la sangre” (2002: 53). When everyone collapses under his raging fists, he finishes off one of the attackers with the obvious pleasure and dexterity of a professional:

Adelantó su rostro hacia el del muchacho para no perder detalle de su única pupila en tanto hundía despacio la navaja entre dos costillas, ahí donde había sentido el golpeteo. Una mujer chilló y se escucharon pasos y murmullos cercanos. Bernardo no hizo caso, concentrando en esos ojos cuyo brillo interpretó como de agradecimiento. (2002: 54)

This unexpected massacre becomes a rite of passage for the killer who, as Parra would concur with Bataille, is secretly living in everyone: “There is a potential killer in every man, the frequency of senseless massacres throughout history makes that much plain” (1986: 72). From this moment on, Parra’s protagonist is a different man, no longer attached to worldly concerns or worried about his future. In a strange, twisted way, he becomes free, liberated from his fears and obligations (“El miedo se había esfumado para siempre” [55]). In the past, in his respectable life, Ramiro only fantasized about

transgression, translating his destructive desires onto a film script whose hero was a merciless but a justified killer: “La venganza fría y absoluta (...) representaba el éxtasis. El hecho de tener una sola misión en la vida, y cumplirla desdeñando lo demás, significaba que venir al mundo no había sido un desperdicio” (2002: 32). Now, he enthusiastically embraces the lifestyle of an outlaw, at the same time revealing that he has secretly craved this status all along: “El demonio. Cada uno de nosotros lo carga escondido en las entrañas. Queremos que salga porque cuando se agita retorciéndose nos sentimos hinchados, a punto de reventar” (2002: 27). By crossing the boundaries of what is permissible and by putting his own life in danger, Ramiro has finally found the way to feel truly alive and empowered.

On a parallel note, Bataille observes that only by the use of reason do we control the future, grasping instead the significance of pure instantaneity through the realm of our passions (1994: 88). Similarly, Ramiro abandons what reason has always dictated to him as morally right, deciding to live in and for the moment only, in the vertigo of a continuous risk. As Miguel G. Rodríguez Lozano rightly notes, “Aquí se trata en todo caso de exterminar y gozar, disfrutar con ello. Por esto, la idea del mal vinculado con la violencia vibra como discurso zigzagueante”(70). No longer subjugated to work or the law, Ramiro discovers within himself a new man who does not have to respond to anyone for his actions. He begins an existence on his own terms, far away from his previous family; first, as a homeless man, then, as a prison inmate, and finally, as an assassin for hire who does what he likes best, namely, to play with death for the mere thrill of the moment. He knows that sooner or later he will have to pay for this transgression with his own life, yet he does not fear death, for he has lived what Bataille

would describe as an experience ‘freed from all constraints, including and especially the constraint of duration’ (1994: 115).

While Ramiro’s transformation into a killer is presented retrospectively in alternate chapters throughout the novel,⁽⁵⁾ the first section of the book marks the beginning of an end: the protagonist’s return to his native city with the assignment of eliminating his first female victim. The reader suspects that this murder will coincide with the protagonist’s change of heart or perhaps even his downfall, because Ramiro has completed a full circle by returning to his hometown, and because his current mark goes beyond the usual elimination of other men. What gives the story another twist is his unexpected infatuation with the person he had agreed to murder. While following his female victim Maricruz Escobedo around town, Ramiro becomes fascinated with his charismatic prey. Her mature beauty, her inner resolve, the impenetrable veneer and fearlessness with which she strikes business deals with influential men, all make Ramiro esteem and desire her. Such a turn of events makes us suspect that Ramiro might give up his mission and decide to save the targeted woman in the name of love. Nonetheless, far from an idyllic solution, the novel embraces instead a sublime combination of love and death, thus augmenting Ramiro’s final transgression. Just as for Bataille, “[t]he anguish of death and death itself are at the antipodes of pleasure” (1986: 102), Ramiro comes to experience the ultimate vertigo by loving and annihilating what he grew to love. Bataille believes that there is an indelible connection between eroticism and death because the momentarily upsurge of life, attributed primarily to the instant of imminent death, can also be experienced in supreme erotic

encounters. Likewise, Parra's protagonist comes to the point where death and eroticism converge, where the sensuality of crime opens for him yet another mystical climax.

This hit promises to be very special; it is where the protagonist truly submerges himself in his mission, where he grows to desire the same individual he has every intention of eliminating. Solitary and detached from society by choice, Ramiro realizes that he has found an equal in this woman who, like him, has grown to control her circumstances by playing tough and by sacrificing most of her personal life. Doing what infatuated people tend to do, Ramiro watches Maricruz's every step, repeatedly looks at her photograph, and inwardly talks to her, trying to comprehend her unforeseen appeal. In his mind, he will finally communicate with his victim through an act of the ultimate wounding, while sinking his knife in her chest. Penetrating her with the weapon and imagining her hapless body softening in his arms, he achieves a feeling of being swept off his feet, of falling headlong as if in the greatest erotic episode. Unlike previous lovemaking with his wife or dispassionate sexual acts with prostitutes, this encounter promises what Bataille described as an intoxication of existence, where for a moment, he can lose himself in another being: 'If love exists at all it is, like death, a swift movement of loss within us, quickly slipping into tragedy and stopping only with death' (1986: 239). Clearly, the violence underwriting Parra's novel is highly eroticized, because woman's desirability is configured as that of an oblivious target to man's attack. However beautiful she may be as an object of desire, this desire always takes on the trappings of pure fetishism. Ramiro indulges in a sexualized cat-and-mouse-game, where only he knows about his victim's imminent end. Exercising the role of omnipresent narrator in his own, real-life criminal script gives him an additional thrill, continuously echoing Bataille's belief in the intrinsic connection between love and death: 'Possession of the

beloved object does not imply death, but the idea of death is linked with the urge to possess' (1986: 20). The day of the planned execution Ramiro fantasizes about their encounter, as if it were a rendezvous between two lovers:

Pensó en Maricruz Escobedo recién despierta, desnuda en la orilla de la cama, acariciándose la piel de los pechos. (...) ¿Eres tú? Sí, soy yo, Maricruz (...) Ramiro, te hablo para recordarte,... hoy debemos encontrarnos antes de que anochezca. ¿No lo has olvidado? No, Maricruz, desde hace más de una semana no pienso en otra cosa. Qué bueno. A mí me pasa lo mismo. Ardo en deseo de conocerte (...) Quiero saber lo que es capaz de hacerle un hombre como tú a una mujer como yo. (2002: 279)

True, there is something morbidly sensual in his planned act of femicide, since Ramiro will consummate the ultimate possession of this woman's body. Parra's novel strongly suggests that seeing her life slipping away will be the most intimate act the protagonist can perform on her, the supreme sacrifice and the high point of Ramiro's life. He awaits her outside her office, oblivious to his surroundings and anxious to act. When she finally comes out, he attacks her for the first time, letting his prey get away for a while as he fights off and overpowers her driver. Then, for a brief moment, the killer and his female victim seem to be the only actors on the stage. All other passers-by hurriedly abandon the scene of the crime, proving themselves worthless in defending the woman. While Ramiro repeatedly sinks his knife in Maricruz's body, the narrative again takes on palpably erotic hues, converting this murder into the privileged moment of a sexually

charged encounter: “Los labios se humedecen, se entreabren y se adelantan igual que si desearan unirse a los de él en un último beso. Maricruz Escobedo gime, se estremece, entorna los párpados y su rostro poco a poco adquiere una expresión de ternura y alivio mientras el torrente de la yugular abierta baña las manos de Ramiro ” (2002: 296). This scene, delivered to us through the eyes of the killer, suggests strong intimacy between the murderer and the victim, the mutual experience of sublime suspension from worldly concerns that they (and the reader, albeit in astonishment and horror) savor for a few interminable instants before the event is made public.

But Bataille’s poetics of justice projects a dramatic end as the only possible denouement for an unrepentant transgressor: “The modern rebel exists in crime: he kills, but in his turn he accepts that his crime consecrates him to death: he ‘accepts dying and paying for a life with a life’. In human terms there is a curse on all sovereignty, as on all revolt. Anyone who does not submit must pay, for he is guilty” (1994: 171). Similarly, as Ramiro returns to his car amidst the sounds of sirens and a general tumult, he realizes that annihilating Maricruz has led to his own downfall. The initially unnoticed gun wound, inflicted on him by Maricruz’s driver during their brief fight, turns out to be lethal. After all, “at the summit the unlimited negation of otherness is the negation of self” (Bataille 1986: 173), and Ramiro had exterminated what he had grown to respect the most. Having reached the zenith of his rebellion against the world, he now lets go of it all, confronting his most intimate desire for (self) annihilation. As he sits in the car, oblivious to the world around him, Ramiro bleeds to death, thereby paying for his wild detour from the mundane existence of a middle-class family man. Having reached the limits of evil, he quickly fades away, no longer fearing his own imminent end. Behind

him, the female character who never served any other purpose than to be the target of man's eroticized violence, fades into the background again.

“El placer de morir”: In the Realm of the Senses

Unlike Parra's novel, where carnal pleasure is suppressed, and the erotic emerges only half way through the text and exclusively at the spiritual level, the short story “El placer de morir” is all about the orgy of the senses. From the onset, the text stands out as deliberately disturbing and controversial, as it tracks the vicissitudes of Roberto's erotic development and his rapid descent into a decadent world of perverse carnal pleasures.

The story brings Sade and Bataille together, as Roberto's lifestyle faithfully mirrors Bataille's observations about the father of sadism, whose life “was the pursuit of pleasure, and the degree of pleasure was in direct ratio to the destruction of life” (1986: 180). Unabashedly perverse, Parra's protagonist is intent on satisfying his utmost desires starting at the early age of twelve. Nightly escapades to the maid's quarters, where he finds alcohol, cigarettes, and a nascent sexuality, give him a taste for the forbidden, a penchant that only grows with every passing year. His vocation is simple but uncommon: ‘tener lo indispensable y dedicarse a fabricar deseos y satisfacerlos’ (2000: 22). He does not crave the usual riches, power or fame but, instead, dedicates himself to the pursuit of what he holds in the highest esteem: “el placer: exprimir el máximo goce que la vida pueda ofrecer a un hombre” (2000: 22).

His parents' death in a car accident enables him to descend into the X-rated world, where he can dispose of his inheritance with impunity. Though still under-aged, Roberto secretly acquaints himself with local brothels in order to satisfy his curiosity

about the intricacies of sex. This self-proclaimed “buscador de placer” and “huérfano libertino” (2000: 25, 27) explores manifold means of sexual gratification, invariably intent on learning how to maximize his pleasure beyond what he has experienced so far. Fully corrupt and debauched, the protagonist engages voyeurism rather than rapport in the reader, since his only motivation is nothing other than pure, selfish pleasure. His aloofness notwithstanding, Roberto, just as Ramiro in *Nostalgia de la sombra*, represents Bataille’s sovereign rebel, an explorer of all that can be explored in his quest for the extreme. Ignoring the risk of eventual poverty once his parents’ money runs out, he refuses to subjugate his life to work, which in his mind, would make him bear the same weight overwhelming all the socialized others.

Roberto’s early predilection for transgressive practices takes him one step further when he meets his first long-term girlfriend, a wealthy virgin who submits to his growing sexual demands in order to keep him attached. Their unequal experience with sex causes Roberto to become the girl’s tutor, manipulating both her body and mind to keep himself entertained. Gradually, his games escalate to a pre-calculated sadism in which, in the sense of Bataille, “Cruelty and eroticism are conscious intentions in a mind which has resolved to trespass into a forbidden field of behavior” (1986: 79-80). Having already experimented with the pleasures and varieties of sexual intercourse with local prostitutes, he craves something superior to the mere usual. Consequently, the story demonstrates that the allure of their bond does not build itself upon his love or her willingness to fulfill his desires, but on the humiliation and the devaluation that Roberto can inflict upon the compliant and utterly devoted debutant:

Vencida por el amor, no se atrevió a poner reparos a los deseos de Roberto, que experimentaba con ella todas las fantasías que brotaban de su mentalidad de sádico en ciernes. La sodomizó, la flageló. La obligó a representarle las más descabelladas comedias, la llevó a todos los límites imaginables para una muchacha como ella. (2000: 30)

Echoing Sadean philosophy, Roberto finds the most extreme pleasure in inflicting pain through the misogynistic practice of subjugating the woman's body ("el goce sin límites de provocar dolor en el sexo opuesto" [30]). Unlike Roberto's peers who, in his eyes, live enmeshed in a bourgeois malaise with the primary purpose of getting ahead in life, the protagonist closes himself to the outside world, listening exclusively to his own instinct. Unapologetically, he chooses libertine behavior in his tenacious pursuit of personal gratification through sex and drugs.

When we meet Roberto in the story, he is a mature man who has finally squandered his entire inheritance. Ensnared in a seedy hotel, he is engaged in a night of sex and drugs with an unidentified woman. As his companion dozes off from partying, Roberto sips leftover wine in the dark and reminisces about his whole life, thereby providing us with flashbacks of his sordid adolescence. Once his partner wakes up, they return to their drug-enhanced orgy, maximizing their pleasure by rubbing cocaine on their gums and on each other's genitalia. A repeated focus on sexual organs in states of arousal and incoition situates the story deep in the realm of the senses, exploring the purely physical disconnected from any pretense of sentimentalism. However, while the orgy seems to satisfy his partner, who moans in response to Roberto's automatic caresses, the

protagonist is overcome by an acute sense of insufficiency. In fact, he has wanted more his entire life, and only now the idea of what he envisages as “la máxima creación, la obra maestra” (2000: 32) slowly materializes in his mind.

Bataille has stated that ‘at the basis of human life there exists a *principle of insufficiency* (1985: 172). Haunted by the reality of death, we seek to provide ourselves with a security that would somehow cheat the inevitable end. For Bataille, this desired refuge can occur in erotic communication between two individuals, where, albeit only momentarily, I and otherness merge into one. The motivation for such a longing is that, in the process, it will offer a glimpse into an ephemeral, cosmic continuum. Likewise, Roberto seeks tirelessly to surpass his own limited condition in order to return to the comfort of undifferentiation and universal communion. Yet he is doomed to be unsatisfied, for desire is by definition insatiable: “El placer se agota porque es uno mismo: por eso es necesario acumularlo, atesorarlo como riqueza debajo del colchón de la memoria. Si no, es semejante al dolor, propio o ajeno: hay un momento en que se desvanece”(2000: 31).

When the protagonist exhausts the pleasures of life, he begins to suspect that the supreme transgression—the supreme orgasm—may indeed come from living the pleasure of death, the ultimate boundary bracketing human experience: “[Roberto] ha comprendido que la tentación de la muerte es irresistible como la del sexo” (2000: 36). He comes to believe that eroticism entails a death wish, an impulse toward the pure, unbroken continuity that lies beyond the discontinuity of selfhood. Thus the story reinforces the connection between coitus and killing, corroborating the terrifying

sublimity of their points in touch since both, according to Joel Black, ‘are pre-eminently private acts, intensely intimate personal experiences that are completely sealed off from intersubjective discourse because they impart a wordless kind of knowledge mediated by the body’ (121). Unlike Ramiro—the killer for hire who has found his own sense of sovereignty by administering death—Roberto moves towards a similar solution in order to enhance the erotic bliss to its maximum. He, too, immerses himself headlong in the forbidden, but only to intensify the impetus of supreme pleasure: “Morir...de sólo pensarlo se excita como nunca antes. Pero de la muerte no le interesa el misterio, la eternal duda sobre lo que habrá del otro lado (...) No. El interés está en el acto de morir, en el placer que con seguridad inundará ese instante de transición” (2000: 33). Though, at first, Roberto contemplates orchestrating his own death at the hands of his oblivious lover, he quickly decides to commit the killing himself. After all, only by staying alive can he remember the moment repeatedly at will. Here, again, Bataille’s framework proves insightful for the analysis of the protagonist’s train of thought: if intercourse truly unites two bodies, and if the attraction lying in death is superior to sexual bliss, then one’s death in the process of coition might give the partner a glimpse into the unknown territory of death. Thus, murder during intercourse could potentially lead the protagonist to what Bataille considers the summit of human experience, an ecstasy available exclusively for the most daring: ‘It is through this release of the passions that we enter into the instant’ (1994: 88). Once again, but this time in an entirely pornographic setting, Parra’s protagonist decides to find fulfillment in debasing and ultimately destroying his female partner, in reaching his erotic climax over her dead body. (6)

As Roberto approaches his climax while the entranced woman begs for more brutal caresses, he reaches for a knife buried in the sheets and frantically stabs her without withdrawing his organ. Unconcerned about the consequences of his action— the woman’s death, his own long-term incarceration or other inevitable repercussions— Roberto finally feels accomplished in his search for the ultimate, knowing that he could never top what he has just experienced: “Y Roberto ya no piensa ni imagina nada cuando las contracciones internas de la muerte son dos fauces que atrapan su miembro hasta exprimirlo por completo, antes de desplomarse sobre un cuerpo húmedo y pegajoso, temblando en la satisfacción de haber experimentado la última frontera del placer” (37). His controversial quest for the supreme orgasm finally dissolves in the erotic experience of murder, in what he has envisaged as the intimate communion between slayer and slain. Envisioning himself as an artist—a man who by definition makes and unmakes things—and not the cold-blooded killer that he is, Roberto, as Black would say, domesticates ‘the most aberrant, sociopathic behavior—of converting a moral transgression into an amoral, aesthetic digression’ (111).

Conclusion

Clearly, Parra’s flawed protagonists are guilty of an abhorrent misogyny and neither the narrative nor the characters make any attempt to defend or to exonerate themselves to the readers. They are anti-heroes, whose choices cannot elicit sympathy in the reader. Yet, their criminal acts aside, they somehow strike a familiar chord, owing to the singular intensity and angst with which they approach themselves and their particular reality. By extension, Parra’s prose exhibits much more than the mere nuances of the

dark side of the human mind. It goes back to the fundamental ontological quest for the meaning and value we ascribe to our lives and to the evilness that lives entrapped within many, threatening with constant eruption, as foreseen by Freud in his pessimistic vision of civilization. Moreover, it exudes the primal anguish underwriting the human condition, a despair that elevates his protagonists beyond their criminal acts and towards a rebellious manifestation against the common condition imposed by nature and by society.

There is no doubt that the most fundamentally tragic feature of life is its finiteness; to live is to march steadily towards death. While most individuals retreat within their daily routine to eschew the anguish of the inexorable end, Parra's protagonists choose to confront this truth through unconventional and pathological means, probing the very core of who they are and what they have become in the process of their tumultuous search. Rejecting any moral standard that could prevent them from crossing over into the abyss, they push beyond the systems that reassure and insulate others, deciding instead to face the consequence of their rebellion against the existential yoke. But in this brief moment of insurgence, they live fully their evilness, confronting life in an open way and accepting responsibility for their role in the journey. In the end, Parra's most unsettling provocation lies, I think, not in his insistence on exploring the darkest human side but in demonstrating that there is something intriguingly alluring in transgressing and accepting one's own evil. In the end, even if the results of their actions are disastrous, his protagonists make the choice to live their rebellion against all prescribed moral values rather than to accept the burden of living that was placed upon them.

Notes

- (1). I would like to thank John Eipper for reading and critiquing this article.

- (2). See Diana Palaversich's 'Espacios y contra-espacios en la narrativa de Eduardo Antonio Parra,' Miguel G. Rodríguez Lozano's 'Sin límites ficcionales: *Nostalgia de la sombra* de Eduardo Antonio Parra,' and Pablo Brescia's 'Los límites del narrar: primeras propuestas cuentísticas de David Toscana y Eduardo Antonio Parra'.

- (3). See Bataille's *Eroticism* and Parra's short stories, especially 'El Cristo de San Buenaventura' from the collection *Tierra de nadie* ([México: Ediciones Era, 1999] 109-141), which amply explores the theme of infinite cruelty.

- (4). See Richardson, 1-25.

- (5). The novel conserves a dualistic form, where the past—presented in every other chapter—is intertwined with the narrative present throughout the entire text.

- (6). It would be instructive, though beyond the scope of my present focus, to read the stories through the dead bodies of Parra's silent female victims. Elizabeth Bronfen's text entitled *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetics* (1992) aptly captured the significance of the image of a dying or a dead female beauty in Western civilization, arguing that such moribund females objectify an anxiety of displaced identity and disturb for a moment the established order, only to reinforce it in the end.

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Strategy of a Provincial Nun: Sor María de Jesús de Agreda's Response

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In August of 1649, Sor María de Jesús de Agreda, abbess of the Convent of the Conception in Agreda, wrote to King Felipe IV, with whom she had been corresponding on a regular basis since 1643, expressing her concern that certain clergymen intended to tamper with her biography of the Virgin Mary (1) “Quieren mudar el estilo y modo que lleva la historia de la Reina del cielo. . . la pueden pervertir” (Seco Serrano, 108: 200). (2) Aware of the King's interest in her work, and accustomed now to his praise, for he had a copy of the manuscript and was reading it, Sor María did not hesitate to add that she had burnt all of her writing out of fear that the Inquisition, already suspicious, would interrogate her sooner or later: “Y oprimida de este cuidado he quemado algunos papeles, y he dicho los demás no están bien escritos, y he salido con esto del peligro de darlos” (Seco Serrano, 108: 200).

When the Holy Office did eventually appear at the convent several months later, summoning Sor María from her sick bed, the majority of the questions she was obliged to answer focused on alleged journeys through bilocation, which she had made to New Mexico thirty years earlier with the intention of converting the Indians who lived there. (3) Sor María answered the questions intelligently and thoroughly, which is not surprising considering this was the second time she had been examined by the Inquisition.(4)

Fifteen years earlier, on April 15, 1635, the Holy Office had appointed a commission of advisors to investigate the story of Sor María's famous and extraordinary bilocations. The investigators, however, could not agree on the evidence and testimony they heard. The case was suspended and the documents were filed away for possible future use. Sor María, therefore, must have considered the possibility that in the years following the investigation of 1635, the Inquisition could reopen the case. It is likely that she also began to contemplate what to do in the meantime to defend herself.

The story often recounted in reference to Sor María's life begins in 1629, when two events coincided: the visit of a group of Jumano Indians to the Mission of San Antonio de Isleta, in New Mexico, and the arrival there of a group of Spanish missionaries conveying rumors about a Spanish nun who had levitated in her cell in Agreda, and had bilocated to New Mexico to preach the gospel and encourage the native people to seek baptism at the few Spanish missions scattered throughout the area. The custodian of San Antonio, Father Alonso de Benavides, was immediately intrigued by the details of Sor María's actions in the New World. Encouraged by a letter from the Archbishop of Mexico wanting to investigate, Benavides decided that the Indians' request for baptism was inspired by this mystical nun (Hickerson, 74). He even convinced himself that her miraculous visits had been orchestrated by God in favor of the Franciscans, after some of the recently-arrived Indians attempted to identify Sor María by pointing to a portrait of another famous nun hanging in the mission. (5) The result of this exchange between the Jumano and the missionaries was recorded by Benavides in his history of New Mexico, which he published in Spain in 1630, under the title *Memorial*; in it he refers specifically to the conversion of the Jumano Indians by a Spanish nun. While back in

Spain, in 1630, he not only promoted his book, but, hoping to receive the title of Bishop of New Mexico, used his text to solicit the support of powerful people, including the King (Hodge, Hammond, Rey, 11): “I beg that your Majesty may be pleased to submit it [the *Memorial*] to one or two royal councilors of the Indies, so that your Majesty may be more easily informed, and that, being such a Catholic, you will favor and help those conversions.” (6)

In 1631, Benavides met with Sor María in the convent in Agreda. Under obedience, and clearly intimidated, she was somewhat captive to Benavides's enthusiasm and illusions and would write almost 20 years later, in her “Relación”: (7) “La pena me tuvo tan fuera de mí, que temblaba, y no sé lo que me firmaba, ni lo atendí” (176r). The encounter seemed a prelude to the examinations by the Inquisition that would follow, the first in 1635, the second in 1650. In the presence of Benavides, and corroborating his beliefs, Sor María seems to have written a letter, an exordium to a longer communiqué by Benavides, addressed to the friars, and praising their missionary work in the New World, for Benavides left the convent with a letter bearing her signature. Later in her life, however, she dismissed the authenticity of her exordium, as well as Benavides's accompanying letters to the friars, in which he describes many miraculous feats he claimed she executed. In response to his report, Sor María wrote in her letter of defence: “Lo que hallo disonante en este cuaderno es, decirme, que lo escribieron por mi orden, siendo verdad, que en la acción me avine passivamente y no activa, y que sentí mortalmente se hiciesse la información.” (176r). (8)

The problems for Sor María really began here, after this encounter, when Benavides copied the letter he claimed Sor María wrote, and sent it, along with his *Memorial* and two of his own letters, as a communiqué to the friars in New Mexico. Both of his letters are panegyrics; the first outlines Sor María's miraculous feats in New Mexico, and the second explains what went on during his meeting with her in Agreda: “Y tengo el propio hábito con que ella allá anduvo, y del velo sale tanto olor que consuela el alma” (Palou 310). (9) The tone of Benavides's letters, as well as the one supposedly written by Sor María, clearly reflects his missionary ambitions, specifically his desire for promotion:

Padres de mi alma, no sé como signifique a VV. PP. los impulsos y fuerza grande de mi espíritu cuando me dijo esta bendita Madre que había asistido conmigo al Bautismo de los Pizos y me conoció ser el mismo que allí vio. Asimismo asistió al P. Fr. Cristobal Quiros a unos Bautismos, dando las señas verdaderas de su persona y rostro, hasta decir que, aunque era viejo, no se le echaban de ver las canas; que era carilargo y colorado de rostro. . . .(Palou, 311)

The most spurious part of this dispatch, however, is the second letter in the voice of Sor María, which was printed as a “traslado” (“transcript” [Palou 312]). Although this “copy” purports to be conceived and written by Sor María, the language and tone sound suspiciously designed by a Franciscan friar eager to promote himself. The structure of the letter is very similar to the first letter of the communiqué by Benavides, quoted

above, and therefore reiterates and strengthens the friar's message. For example, in his letter he writes: "Y así, no se agradecía ni sabía lo que VV. PP. con tan apostólico celo han trabajado en esta viña del Señor. . ." (Palou, 309). "Her" letter reads: "Descubriendo estas Provincias se pondrá grande obra en la viña del Señor. . . Alégrense VV.PP. Padres mios, pues el Señor les ha dado la oportunidad, ocasión y suerte de los Apóstoles" (Palou, 314). Even more puzzling in this communiqué is the equivocal, at times deceptive language Benavides employed when attempting to bolster what he referred to as the authenticity of Sor María's letter. Referring to the transcript, yet in obvious self-serving language, he writes:

Se las [las palabras de Sor María] mostré para que me dijese si en algo me había equivocado o si era lo mismo que entre los dos había pasado. . . pondré aquí el traslado de lo que ella por su propia mano y letra respondió, que queda en mi poder para llevarlo a VV. PP. . . . Mucho quisiera, PP. y hermanos mios, poder escribir en esta para mayor consuelo suyo, las muchas cosas que tengo escritas así de mi letra, como de esta Sta. Madre. . . pero son más para guardarlas en el corazón que para escritas, y me parece que con las razones sobredichas, que son todas de su letra y firma, que quedan en mi poder, se consolaron VV. PP. . . . (Palou, 312-16)

Benavides's role as mediator and even arbitrator in Sor María's process of textual self-fashioning conforms to the conventional Counter-Reformation dynamic between nun

and male religious authority; she is unavoidably in a subordinate position, attempting to negotiate between obedience and self preservation. However, as was typical of nuns who wrote autobiographical narratives, she resisted male hierarchical authority both through rhetorical strategies and, more atypically for the period, by quite literally and directly condemning Benavides's discursive exploitation of her experiences. In a letter to the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, Father Pedro Manero, written twenty years after Benavides's visit and immediately following the Inquisition's visit, Sor María would say that she didn't fully understand that Father Benavides was taking notes and recording all she said during their meeting in 1631. He had taken everything so literally, she complained. His report was all mixed up. How could an educated man interpret her experiences that way? And she certainly did not pay attention to the letter he asked her to sign, the same letter that reached the friars in New Mexico as a *traslado*. Therefore, as a consequence of Benavides's imprudent inclusion of her story in his *Memorials* and somehow coaxing a letter out of their meeting in the convent, Sor María suffered the interrogation of 1635. (10) Yet rather than focus on the fear she must have felt at the Inquisition's first visit, I would suggest that the experience instilled an enduring determination in Sor María to counteract her public image rendered by prelates and missionaries, which had begun to take shape when rumors of her bilocations were first transported by missionaries across the ocean to New Mexico. Later, she both clarified and proclaimed the misrepresentation by documenting it in her *Relación* to Father Manero:

El haberse adulterado la verdad, añadido o trocado las cosas,
no es de marabillar; porque los padres grabes, que hicieron la

información y declaración, no habían sido mis confesores
quando sucedió el caso. . . . informolos quien no sabía sino
algunas palabras, que habían oído sueltas, con que no fue
posible apurar la verdad, sino adulterarla. (181r)

Kendrick suggests that in the years leading up to the 1650 interrogation, it was fear that caused Sor María to burn her work, including what she had started of a new draft of “*Mística ciudad de Dios*”(74). Undoubtedly, as is clear in her letters to the King, she worried about the reception her book would receive if published or widely circulated. Yet, it is possible to interpret her actions in another way by observing that she was strategic, not simply a “provincial woman,” as she had been called by Father Juan de Palma. (11) After all, she burnt the first version of *Mística ciudad de Dios* and later part of a revised version, knowing that the King had a copy. Counting on him for protection, she wrote: "Harto alivio es de ellas que mi secreto por entero no está sino en V. M., donde le considero más seguro que en mi pecho" (Seco Serrano, 108: 200). And four months later she would write: “Beso sus pies con humildes agradecimientos por lo que ampara esta obra" (Seco Serrano, 108: 205).

Although Sor María employs pious, humble language in her letters to the King, beseeching him to devote himself more to prayer, or praising the Virgin Mary, she also displays a shrewd sense of court politics, and military strategy:

Suplico a V.M. con todo el encarecimiento posible, que ponga V.M.
general en el ejército de Cataluña, fiel, experimentado y cuidadoso, y

que las plazas de Lérida y Fraga se provean luego al punto, que sé de cierto les falta provisión; los enemigos tienen espías, con que lo sabrán y se adelantarán y nos veremos afligidos. (Seco Serrano, 108: 175)

Writing allotted her a certain amount of freedom by allowing her to participate in the world even if she was cloistered in the convent. She found that writing was a useful tactic for self defense, if executed precisely, at the right time, and directed toward the appropriate people. Although in 1627 she claimed to have received orders from the Virgin herself to write her life story, it wasn't until ten years later, in 1637, just two years after the first inconclusive interrogation by the Inquisition, that she actually began to write her "*Historia de la Reina del cielo.*"

Mística ciudad de Dios, first published in Madrid in 1670, is divided into three parts containing eight books based on the Conception, the Incarnation, the Transfixion, and the Coronation. In first person, and with great detail, Sor María tells the story of the Virgin's life as it was revealed to her, beginning with the Virgin's preordained role as "mystical city of God," (12) and continuing with her birth, youth, marriage to Joseph, role in the early Church, and finally her Coronation as Queen of Heaven. The writing is personal, and intimate, especially when Sor María departs from the narrative and addresses the reader, explaining her own humility and insignificance, or interpreting what the Virgin Mary, who visited her many times, has told her. The Virgin, therefore, is both historical character and contemporary muse. Sor María uses the term "visión abstractive" ("abstract vision") to define the Virgin's intellectual faculty

and infinite understanding of divine mysteries. She is a queen, teacher, scholar, warrior, wife and mother:

Que como Reina conocía toda su monarquía y lo que
extendía; como Señora sabía a dónde llegaba su dominio;
como Madre conocía todos sus hijos y familiares de su casa.
. . como Gobernadora conocía a todos los que estaban por su
cuenta; y como Maestra llena de toda sabiduría estaba muy
capaz de toda la ciencia con que la santa Iglesia en todos
tiempos y edades había de ser gobernada y enseñada. (VIII,
12, 1405)

Although the text was written, ostensibly, for her nuns, it demonstrates what Vollendorf has described as an “awareness of living both apart from and as part of the world beyond the convent wall” (99). Sor María conceives of and imparts to her readers this possibility of female participation in social and civic affairs.

At the end of almost all 205 chapters, the narration changes and under the title: “Doctrina que me dio la Reina del cielo María Santísima,” Sor María records how the Virgin preached to her, gave her advice on how to reject all temptations, and strive for a state of divine perfection, by imitating the Virgin, who serves as the supreme paradigm for women as well as men. The contents of these homilies directed at Sor María, yet in the voice of the Virgin herself, sometimes imitate Sor María's own narration describing the Virgin's life. For example, the Virgin Mary tells Sor María: “La plenitud de esta luz

se te ha dado a ti” (V, 28, 1095), in the very same way God addresses the Virgin in the narration and proclaims that she has been chosen to enlighten mankind: “Te hago señora de todos estos bienes y te doy la posesión y dominio de todos ellos. . .” (III, 9, 385). God encourages the Virgin to mirror his virtues just as the Virgin tells Sor María: “Sígueme por su imitación y camina por mis huellas” (III, 2, 392). Therefore, Sor María depicted in this manner two female protagonists of parallel stature, who have been endowed with profound knowledge to communicate to others. Through their interaction and conversation Sor María also manages to address controversies that surrounded both of them in the seventeenth century. In the introduction to the third part of *Mística ciudad*, for example, the Virgin praises Sor María’s work, informing her that she was chosen to fulfill the arduous task of writing the History, therefore both legitimizing her literary endeavor and discouraging her critics: “Ya llegas a escribir la última y tercera parte de mi Historia, y es tiempo de que te levantes a mi perfecta imitación y te vistas de nueva fortaleza y extiendas la mano a cosas fuertes”: (VII, Intro., 1113). Sor María, for her part, defends questionable doctrine regarding the Virgin and her role in the Church, particularly the issue of the Immaculate Conception which was so controversial during the nun’s lifetime: (13)

Pero advierto a todos que la Reina del cielo estimó tanto de adorno y hermosura que la dio su Hijo y Esposo en su purísima concepción, que esta correspondencia será su indignación contra aquellos que con terquedad y porfía pretendieren desnudarla de él y afearla, en tiempo que su Hijo santísimo se ha dignado de

manifestarla al mundo tan adornada y hermosa, para Gloria suya
y esperanza de los mortales. (I, 17, 115)

The Virgin is represented as eternally virginal, without the stain of sin: “Que naciera el niño dejando virgen a la Madre” (IV, 11, 557). She is conceived immaculately and does not die a mortal death, rather, due to the divine love she feels, leaves the earth and rises to heaven to be received by God the Father. Through intricate detail, elaboration on scripture and devotional writings, and extraordinary creativity, Sor María reveals, and conceals, as any skilled writer would, her own opinions and concerns. She adheres to traditional hagiographic themes while simultaneously reformulating them in what Ibsen calls subtle subversion of “hierarchies of discursive authority” (18).

Sor María practices a number of strategies in asserting these opinions, tampering with hagiography and manipulating language to defend her own story, which had become quite public after Benavides's *Memorials*. In several instances in *Mística ciudad*, intending to rebuke those contemporaries who never believed in what she was writing, Sor María describes how the devil appeared condemning the work, and calls on the Virgin Mary to help protect it: “No me la roben las aves de rapiña, el dragón y sus demonios, cuya indignación he conocido en todas las palabras que de ti, Señora mía, dejo escritas” (VIII, 23, 1486). Anticipating condemnation of her work from ecclesiastical authority, Sor María substitutes their potential criticism with a message from the devil, pitting anyone who questions the work against God and the Virgin, and therefore discouraging censure. The Virgin also alludes to the possible persecution of Sor María and advises the nun: “Humíllate a los que te persiguen, ámalos y ruega por

ellos con verdadero corazón” (II, 18, 299). The message for the reader, from the Virgin herself, is that piety and kindness are far holier than interrogation; she also confirms Sor María’s humility and fortitude, laying the groundwork for Sor María’s later candid statement about the self in her letter to Father Manero, which was extraordinary for a religious woman writing under obedience in Counterreformation Spain: “De mi persona, siempre he tenido grande escrúpulo, porque yo sé quien soy” (“Relación,” 180r).

By constantly emphasizing the Virgin's authority, Sor María absolves herself of the presumptuous act of writing a long and detailed biography that so assertively proclaims the Virgin's authority and active participation alongside Christ in the Scripture. Yet, while Sor María claims to be a humble, ignorant servant of God, one can't help but see the inversion of this message in images of the Virgin as a religious woman who fiercely controls her own representation in a book, and who is thoroughly exempt from the limitations Sor María herself suffered.

The image of the Virgin’s omnipotence and equality with Christ is present throughout the text. She is so physically strong that she engages in battles with Lucifer and his devils. One chapter heading, clearly alluding to the Book of Revelations, reads: “Persevera Lucifer con sus siete legiones en tentar a María santísima; queda vencido y quebrantada la cabeza de este dragón” (III, 28, 494). The Virgin is also competent to govern the angels, the disciples, even the actions of Christ and her own husband Joseph, who refers to her as his teacher, as she instructs him: “Solía la Princessa del cielo leerle en algunos ratos oportunos las divinas Escrituras. . . . Y como sapientísima Maestra se

las explicaba, y el santo esposo, que también era capaz de esta sabiduría, le preguntaba muchas cosas, admirándose y consolándose con las respuestas divinas que su esposa le daba" (IV, 6, 531). Quite regularly she devotes herself not only to spiritual matters, but to daily, mundane concerns. She actively participates in civic life, modeling, for women in particular, an alternative, or at least a supplement, to a cloistered or domestically confined life, like the one prescribed by so many male writers of the Renaissance book of conduct:

Y aunque todos los varones y muchas mujeres iban a los apóstoles, pero otras muchas después de oírlos acudían a la Magdalena y sus compañeras y ellas las catequizaban, enseñaban y convertían a otras que llegaban. . . porque esta gracia también se comunicó a las mujeres santas, que curaban todas la enfermedades con solo poner las manos sobre las cabezas, daban vista a ciegos, lengua a los mudos, pies a los tullidos y vida a muchos muertos. (VII, 6, 1165)

Of the many overt allusions to Sor María's life in *Mística ciudad de Dios*, the most remarkable are the Virgin's elevations to heaven, which correspond to bilocation. In the middle of Book 6, Chapter 29, Sor María departs from the narration momentarily to address the reader and to explain the importance of these journeys: "Me hallara dudosa en escribir el oculto sacramento de esta subida a los cielos de nuestra Reina si no fuera tan grande falta negarle a esta Historia maravilla y prerrogativa que tanto la engrandece" (1097). In a sermon that follows, the Virgin herself, confirming the importance of these elevations, informs Sor María (as well as the reader) that the ability

to understand the elevations is reserved for those predestined to enter heaven. In other words, those who cannot get themselves to accept the idea of a woman ascending to another realm will not be saved.

Sor María's capacity to describe extraordinary events extends to her letter writing. While she addressed King Felipe IV on practical matters involving the country and his own personal life, as well as issues such as the Immaculate Conception, she could, when she felt it was necessary, rely more on a creative strategy to promote her interests. In an epistle, written during a period in which she disapproved of the conduct of the Court and certain advisors to the King, she describes a revelation involving Felipe's son, Prince Baltasar Carlos, who had died some weeks earlier. The letter explains how the Prince, accompanied by his guardian angel, had appeared to her "En forma humana pero con las penas del purgatorio" (Seco Serrano, 259). Sor María chose to reveal her vision by rendering the Prince's message in direct quotation, dramatizing his torment:

De mi pobre padre tengo gran compasión (cual puedo tenerla ahora)
conociendo que vive rodeando de tantas falacias, mentiras, dolores,
traiciones, y malas correspondencias, de los que le habían de ayudar.
Quisiera darle luz de esto y que participan de la que yo tengo, y de la
verdad que veo y a el le ocultan, porque conociera los peligros en que
vive (Seco Serrano, 109: 259)

Sor María continues the letter, now in her own voice, explaining what she experienced after receiving this revelation: "Fui puesta en un otro estado altísimo de nueva luz,

inteligencia, y conocimiento” (Seco Serrano, 109: 259). In many of the King's letters, he looked to her for help, always asking for her prayers in various situations: “Ayudadme vos, Sor María (como creo que lo hacéis) con vuestras oraciones” (Seco Serrano, 109: 228). This time, however, she seems to take matters into her own hands; rather than simply praying quietly in her cell, she has managed to grant herself a powerful role in the King's Court. Like the Virgin in *Mística ciudad de Dios*, she becomes advisor to a king, an intermediary for events that take place on earth and in other realms.

Similarly, Sor María acts as a mediator between the reader and the divine word when she addresses the themes of elevations in *Mística ciudad*, and explains the difficulty in understanding their nature. Nonetheless, she tells us, one must try: “Necesario es dar motivos a la piedad para pedir el crédito de lo que es oscuro” (VI, 29, 1097).

Sympathizing with the readers' skepticism, she mentions the difficulty she experienced in understanding the Virgin's elevations. But why is it such a mystery when she herself, in some form or other, levitated and journeyed to New Mexico?

Expressing ambiguity about the nature of her levitation, as well as the Virgin's ascensions, is part of the strategy Sor María employed when forced to explain her visits to New Mexico. She expressed genuine uncertainty in the letter she wrote in 1650 to the Minister General, Father Pedro Manero, after the Inquisition's final visit. In it she attempts to explain her journeys, the rumors, and the anguish Benavides induced when he visited her in Agreda almost twenty years earlier and left with a letter signed by her explaining, in detail, how she experienced the New World in such corporeal form.

In the letter, Sor María denies many of the statements Benavides made concerning her journeys, and she openly acknowledges his exaggerations and inventions: “Y en la

información del Padre Benavides, veo confunden unas cosas con otras” (“Relación,” 177v). She denies ever having had any physical contact with the angels, as Benavides claimed in his *Memorial*, and expresses even more irritation at his assertion that she flew to New Mexico with St. Michael and St. Francis. “No sé yo con qué fin pudo decir persona docta, que los ángeles tienen contacto, porque son sustancias espirituales” (“Relación,” 180r).

Yet Sor María does not totally deny her physical presence in the New World, rather, with some trepidation, she ponders the possibility. Like the Virgin, in *Mística ciudad*, who experiences abstract visions (“A los tres años y medio, estando ya en esta edad muy crecida nuestra hermosísima princesa María purísima, tuvo otra visión abstractiva de la divinidad” [II, 21, 310]), Sor María, too, endures similar revelation. For example, she states that her contact with the Indians in New Mexico occurred in a vision, infused into her mind or soul, intellectual in nature: “Paréceme que un día después de haber recibido a Nuestro Señor me mostró su Magestad todo el mundo, y a mi parecer con especies abstractivas y conocí la variedad de cosas criadas, cuán admirable es el Señor en la diversidad de la tierra” (“Relación,” 170v). At other times she could not define the contact, nor could she remember circumstances clearly and blames it on trances into which she had fallen during a state of ecstasy. Her genuine fear of the Inquisition is evident when she writes: “Y que si es fantasía, todo lo temo” (“Relación,” 176r). She then contradicts these admissions by depicting herself physically present among the Indians: “En una ocasión me parece, di a aquellos Indios unos rosarios, yo los tenía conmigo, y se los repartí” (“Relación,” 179r). Finally, she gives the explanation she says she was most inclined to believe: “El modo a que yo más me arrimo y que más

cierto me parece, fue: aparecer un ángel allá en mi figura, y predicarlos, y catequizarlos, y mostrarme a mí acá el Señor, lo que pasaba, para el efecto de la oración” (“Relación,” 179r). We will never know Sor María’s true perception of what happened regarding her experiences with the Indians, but it is apparent that she used ambiguity to her advantage; by suggesting numerous possibilities and simultaneously avoiding detail, she was not only able to escape incrimination, but succeeded as well in prolonging and protecting her writing.

Sor María's descriptions of the nature of the Virgin's journeys to heaven in *Mística ciudad de Dios* are similarly inconsistent. The majority of the scenes involving the Virgin’s mystical flight from earth occur in chapters previous to her ultimate ascent, the Coronation: first, when she is a child and rises to heaven to begin the process of gaining divine knowledge; next, in the days before the Incarnation, in preparation for her marriage to the Holy Father; and finally after Christ is crucified, when she accompanies him to heaven. Sometimes the Virgin seems to control her own flights: “Aunque María santísima era de naturaleza corporea y terrena, pero en ella fue más estimable, como más peregrino y costoso, el subir a la altura de todas las criaturas terrenas y espirituales y hacerse con sus méritos condigna Reina y Señora de todo lo criado” (III, II, 356). At other times, she is raised by other powers: “Fue llevada corporalmente por mano de sus santos ángeles al cielo empíreo. . .” (III, 7, 375). In a scene in Book Three, Chapter Seven, an angel replaces the Virgin so that she can leave earth to receive more knowledge from God. Sor María later applies this explanation to her own situation in her “Relación,” albeit in an inverted and therefore more acceptable form, when she claims that she remained in the convent, perceiving the New World through abstract

images infused divinely while an angel acquired her physical appearance in New Mexico and preached to the Indians: “Y que según lo que los Indios dijeron de haberme visto, o fui yo o algún ángel en mi figura” (“Relación,” 180r).

In contemplating bilocation, Sor María confronted a conflict between the spiritual and the physical nature of humanity that either prevented her from clarifying what she really meant regarding these journeys, or perhaps assisted her in evading persecution. In the letter to Manero, she sounds confused indeed: “Real y verdaderamente concluyo, no puedo yo asegurarlo” (“Relación,” 174r). It seems as though she wanted to include physical qualities in the descriptions of her journeys but was discouraged by the underlying tenet of her faith that alleged that the body was corrupt, as she herself stated: “Porque como el demonio no es dueño del interior, endereza su batería a los sentidos exteriormente” (“Relación,” 174v). Nonetheless, in the letter to Manero, as well as in certain scenes in *Mística ciudad de Dios*, she experiments with the idea that the body was significant and could work harmoniously with the soul in what Bynum has described as a “concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity” (223). Sor María depended on her physicality just as the Virgin did, in order to gain knowledge, in order to see the kingdoms of the New World, to feel what the weather was like, and to know that the Indians' foods were different. The Virgin, in *Mística ciudad de Dios*, also seems to have depended on an exchange between physical and spiritual qualities, for Sor María, when describing how the Virgin physically labored to provide her family with food and clothing when Joseph was sick, tells us, of the Virgin's actions, that they were executed both interiorly and exteriorly:

“Muchas cosas de las que allí dije eran para esta ocasión, cuando con especial modo las obró nuestra Reina, y las acciones exteriores y materiales” (VI, 13, 745).

The Virgin's elevations are often linked to acquiring more knowledge. Finding freedom to gain this knowledge far above the earth suggests that on earth there exists limitations, and these apply to some more than others, as the Virgin tells Sor María during one of their colloquies: “Esta queja del Señor y mía es por la inhumana perversidad que tienen los hombres en tratarse los unos a los otros sin caridad y humildad. . . conociendo los hombres cómo todos son hijos de un Padre que está en los cielos, hechuras de su mano, formados de una misma naturaleza” (IV, 5, 524). Although Sor María had the support of certain clergymen and the King, there were members of the Church who tried to dissuade her from writing by claiming that she was neglecting her religious duties, or was influenced by the Devil. She must have felt a number of other restrictions, most notably those that prohibited her from leaving the convent and moving about in the world. In her letter to Manero she tells of the great desire she had felt for a long time to convert the Indians: “Todo esto disponía más mi ánimo y afecto, para trabajar y pedir” (“Relación,” 166r). But she wasn't permitted to leave the convent, or Spain as the missionary fathers did, crossing the ocean in a boat, encountering new lands and cultures, founding missions or cities in the case of the New World chroniclers. She could only dream about it:

Que yo veía los reinos distintamente; y sabía sus nombres, que se me ofrecían. . . . Que veía las ciudades, y conocía la diferencia de las de acá, y que el tiempo y la calidad era diferente, más cálido. . . . Aunque alguna

vez, me parece, que veía al mundo, en unas partes ser de noche, y en otras de día, en una serenidad, en otras nubes, y el mar, y su hermosura. . . También conocía las guerras que tenían, y que no peleaban con armas como las de acá, sino con instrumentos para tirar piedras” (“Relación,” 175r, 176v) ([14](#))

In the sixth book, in *Mística ciudad*, during the ascension of Christ, when the Virgin is praying in the Cenacle and simultaneously accompanying her son to heaven, Sor María offers a unique explanation for the elevation: “Obró el poder divino por milagroso y admirable modo que María santísima estuviera en dos partes” (VI, 29, 1097). She does not say that the Virgin rose “in body and soul,” or that the Virgin experienced an intellectual, abstract vision, as she describes in other scenes in the book. Nor do the body and soul separate in Neoplatonic fashion. The Virgin is simply “in two places at once.” Yet her skills in the Cenacle are limited, while the Virgin who rises with Christ, to sit at the throne with God as judge and advisor, enjoys “el más perfecto uso de las potencias y sentidos, y al mismo tiempo en el cenáculo con menos ejercicio de ella” (III, II, 1097). In other words the woman in the Cenacle, praying with the people, in an earthly, religious context mirroring convent life, is restricted, and so is her ability to exercise knowledge and actively participate. Far above the earth, however, in an exotic realm, exists her opportunity to participate in all the glory, which includes advising a king on how to govern his kingdom. God says to the Virgin: “Aciende más adelante” (VI, 9, 1101). Then he offers her the choice of staying with her son or descending back to earth. She chooses to labor “en la vida mortal entre los hijos de Adán” (III, 29, 1102), rather like a missionary amongst heathens.

Sor María further contemplates the essential role played by the Virgin's physicality in her actions and acquisition of knowledge by focusing on the Virgin's anatomy; after all, she conceived and gave birth to Christ. Sor María not only relies on metaphors of the Virgin's womb as a sacred bridal chamber, an archive, and a crystal shrine, but alludes to more concrete, practical images, such as the state and function of the uterus during pregnancy, and the Virgin's joy, like most mothers,' at feeling the baby move inside her. Christ begins to grow in the Virgin's womb, moving around: "Creciendo naturalmente en el lugar del útero con el alimento, sustancia y sangre de la Madre Santísima" (III, II, 398). For three pages, Sor María describes the infant inside the womb: "Sin aquella túnica que llaman *secundina* en la que nacen comunmente enredados los otros niños y están envueltos en ella en los vientres de sus madres" (IV, 10, 556). We are informed of details of the amniotic sac, the covering or cuticle of the child. How to dispose of that physical matter, wonders Sor María? Christ slipped out of it before he was born for it could be dealt with much more appropriately if left in the womb: "Se pudo obrar mejor quedándose en él, sin salir fuera" (IV, 10, 557)

Perhaps by including these details Sor María simply meant to add authenticity to her story, to present Christ's humanity and enhance the belief that he came from a woman of flesh and blood, who remained intact after birth. Displaying her own scientific knowledge of anatomy and biology, Sor María examines the function of the female body in light of its unique ability to give birth; if it can perform this miracle, surely it can accomplish other feats, such as participating in matters of state, founding missions, and converting savages in distant lands.

One might assume that Sor María, with all her imaginative description and elaboration of apocrypha and other stories related to the cult of the Virgin, intended to provoke the reader into considering an alternative history of the Virgin Mary, and by extension that of women in general, since the Virgin functioned as principal archetype for female behavior in early modern Spain. Father Andres Mendo, a censor for the Inquisition, approved of her work in his report of 1666, but concluded: “La segunda cosa, que también alguno podría estrañar, [the first being the fact that the book was written by a woman] es, el referirse en esta Historia puntos inéditos de que no avía conocimiento, acciones de la Virgen no sabidas” (71). (15)

After examining Sor María’s case a second time, the Inquisition concluded that she was a religious and very pious woman, and that *Mística ciudad de Dios* was authentic, that is to say that it resulted from divine inspiration. This paradox of praise, though standard for the time, effectively diminished Sor María’s achievements. She, too, employed the familiar self-effacing rhetorical strategy from the spiritual autobiography, in order to protect herself and ensure a safe future for her writing, whereas the clergymen who called her “provincial,” probably meant it. Though she could reduce herself to “la más párvula e inútil de tu iglesia. . . el instrumento vil y flaco” (I, 1,17), when describing the task of writing the Virgin’s biography, she could also display a calculating, conscientious side to defend her right to write, as when, in the last chapter of *Mística ciudad*, she describes how she ascended to heaven to admire, along side the Trinity, a beautiful, mysterious book: “Un libro hermosísimo de gran estimación y riqueza, más que se puede pensar y ponderar” (VIII, 23, 1493). As the Trinity and the Virgin praise it profusely, Sor María reveals its importance to the reader: “Luego me llamó la gran

Señora del cielo y me dijo: ‘¿Quiéres saber qué libro es este que has visto? Pues atiende y mírale.’ Abrióle la Divina Madre y púsome delante para que yo lo pudiese leer.

Hícelo y hallé que era su misma Historia y vida santísima que yo había escrito” (VIII, 23, 1493). Moreover, reflecting on the threat of censure and visits by the Inquisition, Sor María described the great care she took in guarding her papers: “Y porque se quedasen estos papeles ocultos solo hice apuntamientos en papeles sueltos, que sola yo los puedo entender, y para ponerlos en forma. . . .” (Seco Serrano,; 255).

A month after Sor María's last examination by the Inquisition, King Felipe wrote to congratulate her for the approbation she ultimately received, as if the whole ordeal were nothing more than a rite of passage: “Todos estos nublados han de ser para que salga más clara luz de vuestra virtud” (Seco Serrano, 109: 209). In truth, Sor María, in a poor state of health, had appeared kneeling, for hours at a time, for eleven days, in front of a tribunal known for its severity (Royo, 327). Afterwards, however, she would write to the King to tell him that although she had told the Tribunal that she had burnt the original manuscript of her “History of the Virgin Mary,” they didn't mention the King's copy, and perhaps they didn't need to know about it: “De la historia de la Reina del cielo no han dicho nada; no lo deben de saber. Hasta que se aquiete esta tormenta mejor está oculta” (Seco Serrano, 242: 208). Nevertheless, she recovered her health and continued diligently rewriting her voluminous biography of the Virgin Mary.

In the first chapter, third book, of *Mística ciudad de Dios*, Sor María describes how the Virgin, after receiving a monumental amount of knowledge: “Se humilló hasta el profundo de la nada” (III, 28, 352). Yet, in the next chapter, the Virgin begins to rise

again, to ascend toward heaven to seek even more knowledge, to continue teaching and enlightening human beings with all her strength and insight. This, then, is the paradox of the provincial nun, whose claim to nothing--nothingness--is precisely what facilitated her access to greatness, even to crafting a portrait of God's mother in her own image.

Notes

(1). Sor María referred to her manuscript as “la historia de la Reina del cielo.” First Published in 1670, five years after her death, it was given the title *Mística ciudad de Dios*. Soon after its publication it became both popular and controversial. The 1992 Fareso edition of *Mística ciudad de Dios* lists some 162 editions and translations of *Mística ciudad de Dios* between 1670 and 1969. For a study of the various publications and translations, see, also, Antonio Perez-Rioja, 77-122. For studies of various controversies surrounding the publication of *Mística ciudad*, see Solaguren’s introduction in the Fareso edition (1992), and Draugelis’s, “Moral Crucifixion of *The Mystical City of God*.”

(2). María de Agreda and Felipe IV maintained a regular correspondence beginning with her letter dated July 16, 1643, which she sent to the King several days after he visited her at the Convent of the Conception, in Agreda. Her last letter to the King is dated March 27, 1665, two months before her death. See Seco Serrano, *Cartas*.

(3) Bilocation is the ability to be in two places at once. Sor María claims to have bilocated only during three years: 1620-23. In her “Relación” addressed to Father

Manero, she states: “Y no sentí si me escureciesse, ni faltasse en los tres años, que tuve de exterioridades, las cuales me principiaron en la Religión el año del noviciado” (*Relación*, 166r). For a translation in English of this letter, see Clark Colahan’s *The Visions of Sor María de Agreda*, 101-127.

(4). For an analysis of the Inquisition’s examination of Sor María, particularly regarding her role in the baptism of indigenous groups of New Mexico, see Pérez Villanueva.

(5). Luisa Carrión (1565-1636), like Sor María, a Conceptionist nun, was known in Spain for levitating and miracle-working. Father Benavides mentions her in his *Memorial of 1634*. In relation to the Jumano’s eagerness to be baptized, and their willingness to point to the portrait of Luisa and later corroborate the story of Sor María’s bilocations, Hickerson mentions the religious movement a hundred years earlier in Mexico devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe and points out its possible influence on the Jumano: “Indeed, with trading contacts extending into Nueva Vizcaya and Coahuila, they may have played a part in introducing the cult into the regions north of Mexico” (81).

(6). Cited in Hodge, Hammond and Rey (156).

(7). This letter remains unpublished in Spanish. Clark Colahan published an English translation in his book: *The Visions of Sor María de Agreda*. The Biblioteca Nacional, in Madrid, has four copies. I cite from Manuscript 153, the same one translated by Colahan.

(8). Sor María's role in composing this letter remains ambiguous. Although the letter, and indeed the whole communiqué, was intended for the friars in New Mexico, it appears that Benavides kept the original and sent the friars a transcription. See "Traslado de las razones que la bendita madre de Jesús escribe a los dichos padres del nuevo méjico" (in Palou, 313-315). Pérez Villanueva, who has examined the Inquisition's case against Sor María, underscores the circumstances under which Sor María wrote and signed part of the communiqué, during the meeting with Benavides, and he notes that "her" letter was replete with rhetorical language that was typical of missionaries who were promoting their cause: "Sor María accede a poner de su mano y letra lo que acababa de relatar. La confesión de Sor María está redactada en forma de carta a los franciscanos que se afanan en la tarea evangelizadora" (32).

(9). I quote from Palou's publication of Benavides's communiqué to the friars of New Mexico, first printed in Mexico under the title: "Tanto que se sacó de una carta" For information about the various editions, see Hodge, et al., 8-9.

(10). In addition to her role in baptizing the Indians of New Mexico, and her bilocations to the New World, the Inquisition also concerned itself with her life story of the Virgin Mary.

(11). When Father Juan de Palma used the term "casi rústica" to describe Sor María, she was already 45 years old. She had been abbess of her convent for twenty years, had

composed a number of manuscripts, litanies, and spiritual treatises, and corresponded regularly with King Felipe IV and other member of his Court.

(12). “The mystical city of God,” as a metaphor for the Virgin, comes from *Revelations* (21). Sor María elaborates on this metaphor of the Virgin, the holy city (the New Jerusalem, the new Eve), by citing and interpreting Revelations (21). See Chapters 17-19 in Book One of *Mística ciudad de Dios*.

(13). Sor María, in her letters to King Felipe IV, pursued the issue of the Immaculate Conception, which was so controversial during her lifetime: “Alégrome en extremo que Vuestra Majestad la obligue con diligenciarle la gloria de la definición de su Purísima Concepción, que no se quedará este celo sin gran premio” (Seco Serrano, 18: 16). In a letter to Sor María, on May 15, 1645, the King tells her of his letter to the Pope, written three months earlier, and includes a copy for her to read: “Y para que veáis en la forma que escribí a Su Santidad sobre el punto de su Purísima Concepción, os envío esa copia de la carta que la escribí, que me la volveréis en viéndola” (Seco Serrano, 108: 17). Sor María’s intense promotion of the Immaculate Conception in *Mística ciudad* caught the attention of both the Inquisition and later the Sorbonne. She was accused of adhering to Scotist belief, and in 1682 her book appeared on the Index of Prohibited Books (Draugelis, 47).

(14). Perelmuter, Myers, and Luciano, among others, have demonstrated Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s use of classical and Renaissance rhetorical structures to define and defend her inclination to study. Similarly, in her “Relación,” Sor María utilizes hagiographic

and epistolary rhetoric as well as language that was associated with the New World *relación*, which Echevarría reminds us was systematic in its listing of detail, as the 1571 decree signed by Philip II affirms: “Por lo cual os encargamos, que con diligencia os hagáis luego informar de cualesquiera persona, así legas como religiosas. . . de los descubrimientos, conquistas, guerras o facciones de paz o de Guerra. . . . Y asimismo de la religión, gobierno, ritos, y costumbres que los indios han tenido y tienen; y de la descripción de la tierra, naturaleza y calidades de las cosas de ella” (quoted in Echevarría, 64).

(15). Cited in Esposito.

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Resisting Hollywood-style Globalization in the Argentine Chaco

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In his now widely-disseminated article, Néstor García Canclini posed the following question: Will there be Latin American cinema in the year 2000? Written in the 1990s, García Canclini's article was concerned with two simultaneous processes: on one hand, the penetration of American films in Latin America as a result of more efficient technologies such as the VCR and the internet; on the other, the subsequent impact of the consumption of American films on Latin American national cultures, given the lack of regulations in Latin America to subsidize or protect national audiovisual productions. García Canclini read these concurrent developments as emblematic of the process of globalization that links different parts of the world through the use of fast means of communication. Anthropologist Arjun Appudurai was also concerned with the effects of globalization, particularly the effects of both electronic media and diasporas on local imaginations. Indeed, the unprecedented mobility of images and people constitutes a defining characteristic of twenty-first-century globalization. Like his fellow anthropologist García Canclini, Appudurai also pointed out that the impact of transferences among different countries irrevocably alters cultures. Nonetheless, Appudurai's views differed from García Canclini's in that the former highlighted the resistance of local or regional imaginations to the homogenizing push brought about by globalization. Indeed, for Appudurai, imagination defined as "a form of negotiation

between sites of agency (individuals) and globally-defined fields of possibility” (31) was a fundamental element in shaping the forces of resistance “between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization” (32). Taking these remarks by these two anthropologists as a point of departure, I explore how Mempo Giardinelli’s *Imposible equilibrio*, a novel published in 1995, engages in a dialogue, which weighs the issues set forth by both Appudarai and García Canclini. I argue that Giardinelli’s novel reacts to a globalizing world through the use of the imagination, but with a curious twist: he deploys foreign images and formulas to underscore the effects of globalization. His cooptation of transnational audiovisual models reveals the opposing consequences of globalization: on one hand, imagination occupies a central place as it is expanded by metropolitan mass media images, while on the other, it emphasizes the distinctiveness of local cultures using imagination as a tool that challenges the push for a homogeneous world. In resisting dominant global trends, regional groups re-appropriate themes, strategies and formulas deployed for world consumption and transform them to reach wider audiences or to establish national agendas. I will address García Canclini’s concern with how American films impact Latin American literature by analyzing Giardinelli’s novel as a cultural product that bears the influence of American popular culture. I will also deploy Appudarai’s concepts to examine the ways in which Giardinelli uses imagination in a post-national era.

Imposible equilibrio: the national and transnational

Imposible equilibrio tells the story of a group of middle-class men and women from Chaco, Argentina, who strongly oppose the import of two African hippopotami

and their off-springs. These animals are considered the solution to a common local problem: *camalotes*—pieces of earth and vegetation that float in the rivers of the region and are said to be responsible for devastating floods. Contrary to the official promises made by authorities who anticipate the hippos helping to improve the future of the people of Chaco by eating the *camalotes*, the opposing group views the arrival of these animals as a smoke screen that distracts the citizens' energy and attention from more pressing problems. Moreover, it sees the import of hippopotami as an example of the country's dependency on foreign saviors to solve its structural problems. As a result, these disaffected citizens kidnap the hippopotami the very day of their arrival, disrupting the welcome ceremony attended by national and state authorities with violence and improvisation. This kidnapping gives way to a chase that continues throughout the novel at a frantic speed. (1)

Before examining the influences of American popular culture in the novel, I will briefly focus on the main characters and some of the elements that appear in *Imposible equilibrio* that represent the national, or the truly Argentinian—the space threatened by the consumption of transnational popular culture. To portray the national, Giardinelli chooses a community, which gathers in a coffee shop to share views on diverse topics ranging from events of national relevance to small-town gossip. The characters that make up this community embody the different ideological views of the Argentine middle-class. They hold university degrees, are entrepreneurs or work in various trades. Ideologically, they embrace political views from the extreme left to the far right. Among those who are leftists, we find Victorio Lagomarsino and Pura Solanas, both of whom were political militants in the armed groups of the 1970s, and survived the

repression of the most recent Argentine dictatorship (1976-1983). In accordance with their past militancy, they both openly challenge the conformist traits of 1990s Argentine society, which they consider as evidence of the official emphasis on consumption and immediate pleasure. Another local character that shares Pura's and Victorio's views is Cardozo, a professional journalist and the first person narrator of this story. Although Cardozo has also been critical of the policies enforced by the administrations of the early 1990s, he fails to engage in action to resist them. While he silently cheers for the kidnapers and their wild actions, he strives to remain a neutral chronicler of the events and conversations that unfold in the wake of the kidnapping. Along with these three protagonists, we find other minor characters whose function is to give voice to other middle-class opinions. These minor characters are all part of the local closely-knit community which serves as a microcosm of the larger national community.

Many foreigners are also part of the local community; some are descendants of immigrants. The inclusion of these characters points to remind readers of the multiple origins of Argentinians and puts into perspective the recent emphasis on interconnectedness brought about by globalization. However, as noted by Appudurai, the current increased mobility across borders has led to a rise in diasporic subjects, mainly in metropolitan centers, but also noticeable in previously isolated areas such as Chaco, where the novel takes place. Indeed, the recently arrived immigrants found in *Imposible equilibrio* are subjects who, for a myriad of reasons, have left their homelands and now live in Chaco. They represent otherness, not just in racial, ethnic or economic terms, but also because they stand for a certain cosmopolitanism, a transnational flavor that diversifies and contrasts with the national. Since they speak with foreign accents, blend languages and use different Spanish dialects what is evident

is the fact that they still preserve traces of their national identities and are thus named after their places of origin: Mexico, Brazil and America. The choice of these three nationalities may be related to the visual foreign products consumed and enjoyed by Argentinians: Brazilian and Mexican soap operas and American TV programs and films. Moreover, these three countries were, in the 1990s (when there existed a parity between the Argentine peso and the American dollar), widely promoted as popular tourist destinations for middle- and upper-class Argentines. Thus, as noted by Appudurai, these three nationalities have been present in and contributed to the shaping of Argentine imaginations in more ways than one.

Of particular importance among these diasporic characters is the American, Frank Woodyard, whose arrival “cuatro años y una semana” earlier nearly coincided with the installation of an official policy in favor of globalization. The neo-liberal program implemented in the early 1990s by President Carlos Menem held that the country needed to give up nationalism and embrace open-market policies to participate in global decision-making.⁽²⁾ At first, Frank may be taken to represent the tenets of a free-market economy due to his foreignness and his American citizenship. Indeed, Frank’s background –war veteran, Catholic priest and professor at a local university – attests to his links to what Louis Althusser has called Ideological State Apparatus (ISAs): the State, the Church, the educational system, all institutions that influence the mindset of a given society.⁽³⁾ Being a part of these ISAs that spread ideologies, Frank may have contributed to the dissemination of the logic of capitalism through war, his missionary work and his teachings. However, because he is an expatriate and he renounced his Catholic priesthood after he fell in love with Pura, Frank is also separated from

mainstream capitalist ideology and the dominant religion. Therefore, he is well-received and considered a part of the local community. As a member of this community, Frank probes his affiliation to the group by resisting globalization and by being one of the characters who, along with Pura and Victorio, resist transnational solutions and kidnap the hippos.

Within this context of foreigners living in Argentina and foreign ideologies such as neo-liberalism penetrating the national space, it is also possible to observe other foreign elements impacting the lives of Argentinians. I am referring to the influence of audiovisual products on the national imagination, particularly noticeable in the multiple references to movie theatres and their centrality in local social life. Movie theatres and movies are repeatedly mentioned in the novel. As a topic of conversation, different views on movies and movie theatres provide the opportunity to all those gathered at the coffee -shop to express themselves and share their memories of films and anecdotes that took place in movie theaters. David Desser, a film scholar, names this phenomenon as cinephilia, “the ability and necessity of acknowledging the intertextual chain of references, borrowings, and re-workings” (528) surrounding cinema and includes it as a defining feature of global noir. In Giardinelli’s novel, films have shaped the imaginary of the local characters: several movies have made an impression on their lives and have molded their mindsets in noticeable ways, particularly in how to resist what *Imposible equilibrio*’s rebels consider oppressive forces.

For the characters who reflect on movie theaters, there are significant differences between the cinemas of the past and those of the present. The former ones, the Viejo

Cine Argentino and Café Cinema Lumière, are depicted as communal places where people shared the enjoyment of filmic adventures and events of the world without social distinctions.⁽⁴⁾ Contrary to this, the remaining movie theater in town no longer serves as a point of reunion for different ages: the *Biógrafo 70* is the only movie theater still open in Chaco (46), a change that is directly related to the discourse of efficiency and profit-making ushered during the 1990s when many long-standing cinemas changed management or were sold and renovated into more and smaller rooms. ⁽⁵⁾ Indeed, the *Biógrafo*'s decadence resulted from the transference to a new owner who was intent on making a profit (a reference to the privatizations of the 1990s) and thus adapted showings to the demand for a more individualistic type of pleasure.

Despite these recent changes to the consumption of foreign audiovisual products, the conversations of the characters in *Imposible equilibrio* about films, reveals that both popular movies and high art have had a lasting effect on their imaginations. Although many characters declare themselves or are portrayed as lovers of "pure art," ⁽⁶⁾ many others acknowledge the influence of more popular and commercial movies and actors, such as Tony Curtis and Liz Taylor. Curiously, what is particularly significant is the fact that whether talking of high art or popular culture, the characters do not mention any Argentine films as having any bearing on their personal, political or artistic sensibilities.⁽⁷⁾ By contrast, American popular culture not only influences the novel's characters, but its plot and action as well. ⁽⁸⁾ I will elaborate more on this shortly, but for now I will focus on the novel's use of cinematic techniques.

Imposible equilibrio primarily uses audiovisual strategies as a way to narrate a series of improvised adventures in a marginal region. The kidnapping and flight of the dissident characters is narrated by Cardozo, the writer's alter ego and also a witness and listener to his fellows group members' reactions to the kidnapping. Another point of view narrates the flight of Pura, Frank, Victorio and young Clelia with the hippos across Chaco. This deployment of two "recording cameras" makes it possible for the reader to simultaneously follow the kidnappers as well as the coffee shop conversations of those who either express their support of or disagreement with the rebels. Thus, while the point of view of the people at the coffee shop is more of an auditory recording, the "camera" that goes along for the flight provides a more visual account. Both cameras or points of view alternate each other in portraying the developments at the coffee shop and during the kidnappers frantic journey. This strategy, judiciously noted by Andrew Brown, "forces the reader to switch between plot lines" (204). Toward the end of the novel, a third camera is added to trace Cardozo's actions to help the kidnappers. One noteworthy fact of this division of viewpoints is that the recording that follows the kidnappers acts a hidden camera that exposes the reality of the Chaco countryside, a region that has been forgotten or marginalized by several administrations, both at the state and national levels. Indeed, situated in northeastern Argentina, Chaco is a province of a wider area that includes parts of Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina. In the late nineteenth century, it was an appealing destination for immigrants who arrived in Argentina looking for a better life. Researchers of the Universidad Nacional del Noroeste who have studied the importance of immigration to Chaco provide the following data: between 1895 and 1947, the population of this province increased from 42,274 to 430,555 (48.8 %), which in relative terms was more than double that of the

other provinces (Besil et al 3). The three main economic activities responsible for attracting so many people to this province were cultivation of cotton, extraction of natural dyes from regional tree species, and an incipient industrialization. However, in their recent study of the Chaco economy, Antonio Besil, Elena Alfonso and Lucila Bonilla noted that this favorable outlook of the first half of the twentieth century was drastically reversed in the 1990s when cotton production decreased from 74,12% in 1989-90 to 60 % in 1998-99 (3-4). Another economic study provides darker data: the infant mortality rate in the northeast region of Argentina, of which Chaco accounts for 20 %, was 21, 1 % for the same period, slightly above the average for the rest of the country and significantly higher than that of Buenos Aires. Finally, in the late 1990s the percentage of families in Chaco that did not have their basic needs satisfied met to 33.2 %, in other words, one in every three families was living in poverty. Thus, Chaco stands as a decadent, impoverished environment, deeply affected by both the closing of local industries and the obsolescence of traditional agricultural products, such as cotton and *tanino*, which havenow been replaced by new products (synthetic fibers and dyes) that have appeared in the market in the 1990s. Hence, the camera system that Giardinelli uses captures the impact of neo-liberal policies in the region. Nonetheless, the very use of a visual recording to depict the conditions in Chaco also alludes to cinematic genres, and specifically American popular culture that also inform the plot of *Imposible equilibrio*.

Three American film genres influence Giardinelli's novel: action movies, Westerns and Roadies. The formula of action movies helps structure the kidnappers' improvised flight in the novel with its emphasis on speed and adrenaline rush. There are several instances

when the rebel characters create spectacular violence. The first one is when Victorio bombs the steps on which authorities are situated to witness the arrival of the hippopotami. The second one takes place when the Scania truck that Victorio drives crashes into police cars that were barricading the road. These violent clashes resonate strongly with American action movies. It is evident in Victorio's actions that Giardinelli borrows from action films of the 1980s the figure of "the individualistic, ostensibly anti-authoritarian or anti-government hero" (Gallagher 12). I will come back to the idea of the hero later, but what I want to stress now is that in carrying out the kidnapping of the hippo, Victorio stages a revolt that aims not only at discrediting the government, but also at expressing his frustration about the ways that neo-liberalism and globalization were implemented in Argentina without proper consensus.

Among American action movies, the novel is particularly influenced by the American war movies of the late 1970s and 1980s, such as *Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986) and *Casualties of War* (1989) that were successful blockbusters in Argentina as well. Of these American movies, it is crucial to highlight the imprint of *Apocalypse Now* on the plot structure of *Imposible equilibrio*. Both fictional works heavily rely on journeys that lead to hellish environments. In Francis Ford Coppola's film, the protagonist's journey leads him to find American Colonel Kurtz, who has changed sides and resides in the middle of the Vietnam jungle. In Giardinelli's novel, the rebel characters flee to the torrid and humid areas of Chaco. In both works, either the jungle or the tropical forest acts as a milieu that suffocates and distorts reality. The descent into hell-like surroundings is also related to the topic of the end of the world or the apocalypse. For Conrad E. Ostwalt Jr., who has analyzed the use

of the apocalypse in Coppola's movie, this topic is used "to provide meaning to a chaotic existence" (61). The same is evident in the conversations that the characters of *Imposible equilibrio* have as they are immersed in and secluded by the heat. Their sense of reality –or the way they have perceived and envisioned their nation – is slowly giving way to a different reality, one shaped by a weakened version of the state.

Precisely, part of the rebels' frustrations is directed towards the failure of the government to develop the Chaco region and provide a dignified standard of living for its inhabitants.

Giardinelli further reinforces his debt to American popular movies by using Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo* as model for the characters of both Victorio and Frank. Frank, a Vietnam War veteran, seems to be a character that has just stepped out of an American war movie. Giardinelli borrows from American Vietnam-war movies the character of the disillusioned warrior who, after fighting to spread liberal democracy and capitalism and witnessing the human cost of war, repents of his actions. In becoming a dissident and minority voice, Frank is a "de-territorialized" character in American society because of his awareness of the implications of capitalistic expansion. In a similar way, Victorio is also shaped as a war veteran –this time of the internal fighting that took place in Argentina in the late 1960s and early 1970s–. Like Frank, Victorio is deeply troubled by the loyalty he feels to his past ideals –social justice, a better redistribution of national wealth, and national autonomy – which in the Argentina of the 1990s seemed to have been completely forgotten. Frank's and Victorio's disillusionment contrasts with the climate of unbridled optimism among those who favor neo-liberalism and the globalization trend, since neo-liberal tenets work against Victorio's ideals of

making Argentine society more socially inclusive. Thus, Victorio is also a de-territorialized character, whose ideals have lost the aura that they had twenty years earlier when he was an active militant fighting for social change.

Because two distinct projects are presented in *Imposible equilibrio*, the novel also insinuates the imprint of another genre of commercially successful American movie: the Western. Among the several elements of the Western that *Imposible equilibrio* adopts, most notable is the location of the plotline in Chaco, a frontier between habitable and under-populated lands similar to the ones shown in Westerns. The novel's allusion to the frontier also marks the two sides that always clash in Westerns: on one side, the urban and cosmopolitan civilization; on the other, the barbarism of the rural areas where the "national" takes shelter. In the novel, the urban and cosmopolitan area is presented as a contaminated realm where globalization flourishes, while the rural is seen as an isolated, backward zone. Thus, in fleeing to the frontier, the characters seek to strip themselves of the straight jacket of global neo-liberalism. As one of the characters puts it, "[V]ivimos en una trituradora. Este país es una máquina de picar carne" (56).

Unemployment, underemployment and meager salaries are all phenomena brought about by opening the country to free trade – a move that has rendered national workers powerless by depriving them both of employment and dignity. Therefore, contact with a different, "unaltered" environment is fundamental for the rebel characters in order to reclaim a sense of self. In this regard, it is crucial to consider Del Jacobs' observation about the function of the landscape in neo-Westerns: "The Western landscape still holds the promise of liberation and/or redemption, rebirth and reinvention" (67). The main characters' need for emancipation leads them to consider the frontier as an untamed,

limitless space where they can exercise their freedom, away from the influence of foreign images. Moreover, this space allows them to be independent from the officially-sponsored ideology that attempts to homogenize society through its embracement of globalization.

The conflict between law and order, which in this case pits a group of social misfits against state and national authorities is another element of Westerns noticeable in the novel. The protagonists' violation of the law also separates them from their local peers, and this separation corresponds to the individual-versus-community dichotomy that informs many Westerns, such as *High Noon* (1952) is a case in point where the tensions are enacted. Indeed, in kidnapping the hippopotami Frank, Pura and Victorio alienate their community of friends, a situation that resembles some Westerns, in which characters often collide with the system, or lack the support of their communities. In this regard, Frank, Pura and Victorio are the outlaws who disavow the dominant ideology, and can therefore no longer occupy the space of the civilized.

The deployment of these Western elements as a subtext that serves to chronicle the resistance of a group of leftist characters against the financial, cultural and social flows made possible by globalization is not a coincidence. Quite the contrary, the use of a genre that relies heavily on force as a means to assert oneself transports readers to the past. As Western scholar Robert Murray Davis explains, "Western myth is essentially anti-modernist, for it is confined to a narrow period and is based on a linear theory of history" (134). Precisely what the fleeing characters discover in their flight is the fact that they have too much awareness of the present to embrace more traditional ways of

life. As they travel in rural Chaco, the images that they see belong to a time-past, to failed dreams, to promises that never materialized. However, none of the characters, regardless of age or sex, can identify with those who live in the devastated areas of the province. Thus, by relying on a genre that defies progress and change, Giardinelli seems to be pointing out the futility of the outlaws' self-imposed mission. In other words, the return to the past is an impossible mission, and those who long for a bygone era have no place in modern society.

The third and final popular American genre closely linked to Westerns that also acts a subtext for the novel are Roadies. Roadies are films that take place on the road and exemplify both an escape from orderly life and an instance for self-discovery. Among these films we find *City Slickers* (1991), *Thelma and Louise* (1991), and more recently, *Transamerica* (2005). Indeed, in *Imposible equilibrio*, characters flee city life using modern means of transportation. The fact that they change cars and pilot a helicopter to run away from authorities also underscores the influence of this popular genre. The physical frenzy of Roadies often mirrors the protagonists' unresolved inner tensions. According to film scholar Mark Williams, the road movie phenomenon illustrates "the innate restlessness of the American people" (6). In *Imposible equilibrio*, the "outlaw" characters hit the road to experience a freedom that is denied to them in their daily life. They use technological advances to escape a society dominated by modern products.

However, it is during their journey through the abandoned lands of rural Chaco that the characters realize that there is no viable alternative to neo-liberalism and globalization.

Unlike most American movies where the frontier is ever-expanding, the characters of Giardinelli's novel find themselves cornered and suffocated by the landscape. Without a way out, they are forced to turn in circles, reinforcing the idea that it is not feasible to successfully oppose global standards. Additionally, following the message of American popular films, their imagination is shaped by the endless possibilities of a powerful nation, the promises of technology and the power of the individual to tame the land. Conversely, the Argentine reality they experience points to limited advancement, systemic poverty and an agrarian society based on subsistence farming. It is by confronting another reality –poorer, more isolated, more rural– that they realize that because of their knowledge of “the other reality” –more technological, more urban, more cosmopolitan– they cannot return to the past. They also understand that their beliefs no longer mobilize large segments of the population; hence, there is no longer place for a successful anti-capitalist revolution that would end the plight of the lower classes or place for a society that could free itself from the events of the world. In this regard, the rebel characters become aware of their paradoxical location in a Third World attempting to act as American popular cinematic characters.

These rebel characters first recognize the pervasive influence of American popular culture on their imaginations when they break the law, and realize that their roles seem to have been scripted, or that they are acting as characters from certain movies. For instance, when Victorio complains about the quagmire in which they find themselves – an improvised and tumultuous flight–, Frank reassures him with “Vos tranquilo, Vic, Rambo pasó peores” (139). In another instance, Victorio and his young partner, Clelia successfully overcome a police barricade and Clelia celebrates saying, “Igual que en las

películas” (164). What is evident from these remarks is not merely the fact that they allude to movies, but that the characters have the opportunity to try, at least briefly, different identities, a characteristic, as pointed out by Appudurai of the process of contact and exchange. To use his words, “[E]lectronic media at the same time are resources for experiments with self-making in all sorts of societies, for all sorts of people. They allow scripts for possible lives to be imbricated with the glamour of film stars and fantastic plots” (3). The rebel characters of *Imposible equilibrio*, use these scripts to attempt to escape what they consider an oppressive situation. However, later and as events become more complex, Victorio and Clelia admit that “ellos mismos son, ya, una especie de Bonnie and Clyde espantosos” (173). The glamorized settings and performances of Hollywood films stand in stark contrast to the reality that these characters encounter as they run away. Entrapped in one of the poorest areas of the country, Victorio and Clelia become aware of their shortcomings, and thereby, feel like caricatures of celluloid characters. (9) As their rebel actions begin to fall short, the distance between what takes place in films and real life becomes more apparent, stressing the “failure” of their imitation of American actors and films, or the artificial features of their acts. This consciousness that their thoughts and actions resemble American popular movies exhibits the extent to which in an interconnected world, identities are shaped by local elements as well as global influences.

So what can we make of a novel that decries the effects of globalization in Argentina while deploying American cinematic forms and genres? How are we to interpret the cultural transference between these two very different cultures that are located respectively in the powerful North and the poor South? I believe that the answer

to these questions is voiced by Cardozo who holds that, “Hoy nuestra resistencia es cultural” (57). By calling attention to the unidirectional flow of foreign audiovisual products from North to South, Giardinelli appears, at times, to reject the passive role assigned to spectators, especially those south of the Rio Grande, who consume American popular products. At other times, the novel appears to pay homage to the sustained appeal of American popular culture, cinematic in particular, which has provided generations of spectators with the possibility of scripting their lives with a fantasy and glamour that would otherwise be unattainable in their daily lives. The novel’s open ending, in which fantastic elements are introduced, further points to the impossibility of resisting the global. On one hand, Victorio and Clelia’s lives are spared a literary death, a fact read by Brown as a sign of Giardinelli’s optimism (215). On the other, their fantastic survival can be considered a symbolic death since they no longer inhabit the real world. Thus, the project led by Pura, Victorio and Frank instead of leading to a pure and frank victory –as symbolized by the protagonists’ names– disappear in the air. This disappearance occurs after Victorio and Clelia meet another couple: Ramiro and Araceli, characters in Giardinelli’s novel *Luna caliente* (Sultry Moon 1986) that leads them to a safe place. This encounter can be interpreted as a return to the realm of the literary, and thus, the nation. As scholars who focus on the spread of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson, or those who have studied the formation of national cultures in Latin America—here I am referring to Angel Rama – have stressed, national literatures were crucial elements in the nation-building process. Printed materials constituted the main means of shaping a national identity in nineteenth-century Latin America and held a prominent place in the national imaginations until the 1960s. During these decades, lettered culture ruled unchallenged

as the optimal medium not only to build a national citizenship and to create bonds among regions and groups that had held opposing ideas for the development of the nation, but also as a way to organize previously dislocated imaginations into a national one. Thus, an interpretation along these lines suggests that *Imposible equilibrio* invites readers to revisit Argentine national literature as a solution to resist globalization's homogenizing push from the very site of a national culture. Similar to the visual arts, literature creates and preserves "living" myths and heroes that belong to the national community, an advantage over foreign visual products that also provide spectators with myths and heroes, but belong to a different cultural heritage. Finally, the very title of the novel *Imposible equilibrio* poses the question of whether or not it is possible to find an equilibrium between the post-national visual and the national literary in times of globalization.

Notes

(1) In her review of the novel, Marisa Avigliano has also noted the vertiginous rhythm of the novel. For his part, Giardinelli has referred to *Imposible equilibrio* as "una novelita que me sirvió para, precisamente, cambiar de tema y cambiar todo. Nada que ver con nada anterior. Una de aventuras, una road-novel o road-book. Puro cachondeo, persecuciones y tiros en plan absurdo" (Roffé).

(2) Ironically, in Giardinelli's novel the vessel that carries the foreign hippopotami to Argentina (and which therefore represents foreign penetration) is, named *Evita capitana* after Eva Duarte de Perón (1909-1955), a leader who rejected foreign

ownership of key national assets and stressed national sovereignty. *Evita capitana*, then, is a symbol of the nationalistic resistance that has inspired and unified left-wing Argentine political groups for decades. The Peronist Party was similarly co-opted and its ideological tenets reversed during the 1989-1999 period to introduce neo-liberalism in the country. It should be remembered that during this decade, President Carlos Menem sold many of the country's assets when he privatized nationally-owned companies and transferred them to foreign investors. Thus, by using *Evita capitana*, a previously nationalistic symbol, Giardinelli avoids a simplistic assessment of the introduction of globalization in the country. He seems to suggest that the transnational forces that impact national culture both come from abroad and are also strongly encouraged by local groups who benefit from them.

(3) Similarly, Appudurai mentions that before the twentieth -century, war and religious conversions were the main forms of sustained cultural interaction between different cultures (27).

(4) For instance, one of the characters narrates the anecdote of a Spanish immigrant woman who thought that her whole family had perished in the Spanish Civil War, only to realize forty years later that her brother was alive and was one of the characters in the film *Morir en Madrid* (186). Shocked by the event, the lady suffered a heart attack and the audience shouted to have the movie stopped so that she could receive medical attention, a gesture that illustrates the close connections and past sense of solidarity.

(5) For more on this, see Ana Wortman's "Viejas y nuevas significaciones del cine" in *Pensar las clases medias. Consumos culturales y estilos de vida urbanos en la Argentina de los noventa* (111-128).

(6) Some characters remember, for example, Federico Fellini's *Amarcord* (1973), *Juventud*.

(7) Something similar happened to Argentine writer Manuel Puig (1928-1990) who used numerous foreign films in his novels *La traición de Rita Hayworth* (1965) and *El beso de la mujer araña* (1976).

(8) Argentine writer José Pablo Feimann (1943) who belongs to the same generation as Giardinelli also admits his indebtedness to Hollywood films: "El cine de Hollywood es el que mejor conozco porque es el que más me gusta" (19).

(9) Fernando Reati has observed that the entrapment of characters within the national space in *Impossible equilibrio* bears a resemblance to Osvaldo Soriano's *Una sombra ya pronto serás* (1990). For more detail on Soriano's novel, see Reati's *Postales del provernir. La literatura de anticipación en la Argentina neoliberal* (1985-1999).

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**Turbio fondeadero: Política e ideología en la poética neobarrosa de
Osvaldo Lamborghini y Néstor Perlongher**

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La forma de poema es una desgracia
pasajera.
(Lamborghini, "Die Verneinug", 1977)

En la poética de Osvaldo Lamborghini y Néstor Perlongher no son los barcos, como dice el tango, los que van a recalar en el fangoso y turbio Río de la Plata, sino cuerpos que, arrastrados, tapados y penetrados por las corrientes arcillosas, no pueden escapar a las transformaciones que les inflige una marea oscura, desconocida. Esta metáfora podría referirse al destino de las miles de víctimas del terrorismo de estado practicado por la última dictadura militar argentina (1976-1983); podría explicar el uso del lenguaje en la poesía de ambos escritores, o aludir a un modo de entender el sujeto que, de acuerdo a lo señalado por Tamara Kamenszain respecto de la última etapa en la poesía de Oliverio Girondo, "...deviene eso, multiplicación..." (175) (1) De hecho, podría ser las tres metáforas juntas; con lo que se estaría en presencia de una manifestación de lo político y lo ideológico en el lenguaje poético, y de uno de los rasgos principales del *neobarroso*, el neobarroco rioplatense. Este trabajo analiza esta característica en la poesía de Osvaldo Lamborghini y Néstor Perlongher y traza la diferencia entre el neobarroco y el *neobarroso*, circunscribiéndose a dos aspectos: la exaltación de los espacios y la exuberancia de los cuerpos (2).

Durante la década del ochenta, el neobarroco fue uno de los lenguajes poéticos que expresó la voluntad de reflexionar sobre los efectos de la última dictadura militar en Argentina (3). Esta poética coexistió con otra tendencia --que ya se había iniciado como resultado de la dictadura--, identificada con el alejamiento de lo referencial, el rechazo y abandono del tono coloquial, la estructura narrativa y la intención comunicativa en el discurso poético.

Después de la transición democrática la poesía tendió a desdibujar los límites entre lo interno y lo externo, a romper con la sintaxis y a profundizar los ritmos y las sonoridades. Jorge Fondebrider describe a esta poesía como "Incertidumbre, desconfianza, abordaje oblicuo del discurso, enmascaramiento, fractura, desplazamiento de los grandes temas a la propia subjetividad, búsqueda de un centro ubicado fuera del entorno social inmediato" (13). El neobarroco surgido en la post dictadura, sin embargo, no propuso ni la descentralización externa ni la búsqueda de un eje interno. Por el contrario, mediante la descentralización constante, producto del rechazo de la búsqueda de un centro, promovió el cuestionamiento de la identidad. En este sentido, el neobarroco post dictatorial de Néstor Perlongher comparte rasgos con el neobarroco de Osvaldo Lamborghini, previo al golpe militar, y ambos presentan la característica central del *neobarroso*: la presencia de lo político y lo ideológico en el texto. Perlongher, quien recogió influencias de Deleuze y Guattari, José Lezama Lima y Severo Sarduy, trazó una genealogía neobarroca argentina que se remonta hasta principios de los setenta, con los textos poéticos y en prosa de Osvaldo Lamborghini, y llega hasta él mismo.(4) Al definir las características del neobarroco rioplatense, propuso el término *neobarroso*, al cual definió como "...El neobarroco [...] que se

vuelve festivamente neobarroso en su descenso a las márgenes del Plata [...] no funciona como una estructura unificada, como una escuela o disciplina artística, sino que su juego actual parece dirigido a montar la parodia, la carnavalización, la derisión..." (*Prosa plebeya* 115). En efecto, la exaltación de los espacios y la exuberancia de los cuerpos, resultado de la confluencia de sintaxis barroca, parodia y carnavalización, invita a la lectura política e ideológica del texto poético. En el caso de Lamborghini, lo político y lo ideológico son resultado de la tarea de reconstrucción crítica que el lector debe hacer del "cuerpo social" presente en el texto. Transfiguradas en él, aparecen las contradicciones provocadas por la posibilidad del surgimiento de una izquierda peronista en la década del setenta, y la crítica al sistema cultural propuesto por la izquierda socialista en el caso de Perlongher, la exaltación de los espacios y la exuberancia de los cuerpos abre paso a una lectura política que conduce, más que a la reconstrucción crítica del "cuerpo social", al cuestionamiento de las categorías de construcción del individuo.

Durante las décadas de los setenta y ochenta el barroco se insertó en el debate intelectual sobre la modernidad/postmodernidad en medio de otra polémica que vio en la experiencia latinoamericana la disonancia de la modernidad (5). Según Irlemar Chiampi, la reaparición del barroco, atestigua "...la crisis/fin de la modernidad y la condición misma de un continente que no pudo incorporar el proyecto del Iluminismo" (17). El texto neobarroco se presenta entonces como la expresión de ese "desorden compuesto" en el que el sentido es devorado por la experiencia de las palabras. El resultado es un sujeto poético conciente del descentramiento que se produce tanto al nivel de la forma como del contenido, y provoca una profunda sensación de "falta de

armonía” (6). Se trata del “...reflejo necesariamente pulverizado de un saber que ya no está apaciblemente cerrado sobre sí mismo. Arte del destronamiento y la discusión...” (Sarduy 103) (7), y de la reflexión sobre la imposibilidad de fijar un sentido único. Los significados pierden su referencia habitual y los cuerpos y los espacios aparecen entonces en un “rizoma” unidos a la experiencia de lo innombrable.

La descentralización es una de las principales características del barroco y del neobarroco. Producto de la tensión entre el deseo de fijar el sentido y la imposibilidad de hacerlo, surge una sintaxis trastocada en la que el sujeto poético "es" en tanto que "no es". Este se materializa en las elipsis que discurren en la corriente de significantes del poema, transformado en un continuo fluir de palabras abandonadas por la denotación y sometidas a lo impredecible de la connotación. Pero mientras que en el barroco (8) antítesis, elipsis, metáfora, parábola e hipérbole son las herramientas retóricas que dan lugar al movimiento y al descentramiento, en el texto neobarroco los mecanismos que operan en el texto son otros: a- la sustitución de un significante por otro alejado en términos semánticos; b- la proliferación de una cadena de significantes alrededor de un significante excluido y c- la condensación, unión de dos términos de una cadena de significantes para producir un tercero, la “insignificación”, mediante juegos fonéticos y neologismos. Estos tres mecanismos generan una ruptura del nivel denotativo de las palabras exaltando el carácter connotativo del lenguaje (9).

El *neobarroco*, por su parte, además de generar el movimiento y descentralización del sujeto a través de la cadena de significantes (barroco), y de proponer la conciencia de la materialidad del lenguaje (neobarroco), agrega la parodia y la carnavalización. (10)

Ambas intensifican la experiencia de la materialidad producida por la cadena de significantes, provocando la exaltación de los espacios y la exuberancia de los cuerpos. En la poética lamborghiniana esto constituye el camino para “inferir” lo político, en vez de decirlo. En primer término, se parodia todo un sistema cultural dador de prestigio, el mismo en el que se erigió la representación realista de izquierda de las décadas del veinte y treinta (11). En segundo término, a la generación de las décadas del sesenta y setenta, que vislumbró en la militancia política --y desde dentro del sistema cultural dador de prestigio que continuaba oponiendo cultura vs. peronismo--, la posibilidad de surgimiento de una izquierda peronista. La poética de Lamborghini, tanto en su prosa como en su poesía, rompe con ambas estructuras al mostrar, mediante la cohesión de cuerpo y espacio, que el lenguaje y la representación parten del hecho político. Este último se halla ausente, pero es aludido mediante el uso paródico y la carnavalización de los significantes (a través de la rima, la aliteración, el exceso del hipérbaton, y la sustitución, proliferación y condensación de los significantes).

Una vez lograda la obturación semántica de lo establecido, del sentido generalmente aceptado, sólo permanece en el texto el significante, que puede unirse a otros referentes y producir nuevos significados. En consecuencia, el lenguaje poético exhibe el carácter inestable de la relación entre significante y referente. Por eso, la lectura de la poesía de Lamborghini se torna necesariamente política, porque requiere un continuo reajuste ideológico, político y cultural de los modos de leer; es decir, precisa de un trabajo de inferencia del contenido político. Se observa esto en los primeros versos de “Los Tadeys” (1974): “...Ya no/Esto no/no pensar sino hormigero vasto/(algo que se extiende por el cuerpo)/grosero/las palabras hasta caen fuera de la matriz extraída la

leyenda.../Hormiguelo y bullido/que no bulle ni se evapora/y agregado de la postrer
desgracia/Menos aún descansa” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 48).

Sin su significado habitual, las palabras son una progresión espacial sin sentido, una desintegración, metafórica, del cuerpo en tanto unidad de significado. De ahí que éste aparezca como un todo denigrado, sometido a la violencia externa. En primer lugar, la gramaticalidad que garantiza el mensaje se quiebra en una progresión de significantes que inexorablemente conduce a la exaltación y cohesión de espacio y cuerpo. Al desestabilizar el “fordismo” del discurso --su lógica--, el relato avanza hasta llegar a exponer los cuerpos y los espacios: “...Cosa de hombres,/la máquina de escribir se traga a los hombres/(rasga el manuscrito)/con evidente perfección/poco menos que fordesca.../Es el encanto,/Todo se entiende tan bien/Tan injusto suena aquello/(ese decir: naides entiende)...” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 49). En segundo lugar, el sin sentido de ese avance desnuda al lenguaje y exhibe su materialidad, todo aquello que precede a la conformación del discurso: “...Crece/hasta crecer/hasta creerse en el haber nacido/y en payada cualquiera se raja./Rezuma en su encordado:/Ajá: o el hombre se hace mundo/o zas: el mundo hombre se vuelve'/Tanto la una como la otra, esas dos procosas/imposibles son./Entonces telón./Veintisiete letras” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 49). Se llega, de este modo, a una desintegración de la individualidad, por ejemplo: “Yo, que tiene que vivir,/progresar en el relato,/decididamente no puede: el poder.../se invierte en todo lugar, conquista/(a la larga) la superficie de cualquier inversión./Así que: ningún qué...” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 50). En efecto, aquí la falta de correspondencia entre sujeto y predicado (yo, que tiene), indica, además de la ‘multiplicidad de sujetos’, la desintegración de lo individual a causa de los condicionamientos externos del cuerpo.

La agramaticalidad indica así la convivencia de múltiples sujetos en un mismo cuerpo; por ejemplo, en el mismo poema: “...(Te) Estoy de vuelta./escarnecido y humillado./con silbos aun a cuestras del dorso./Pero, no importa./En amor, quién sabe./Nunca se sabe de qué lado./No en amor, nunca se certifica la posesión/y ni siquiera se es:/no, quien reconoce abraza.../Té: una, dos y hasta tres tazas/bebidas en el revés de la pestaña./...” (Poemas 1969-1985, 64). Aquí, el juego con el pronombre (te) y con el sustantivo (té) señala la “cosificación” de la persona y la personificación del objeto y de la acción; ambos son producto de un proceso de inversión cuyo resultado es la exaltación del cuerpo, no ya como unidad sino como espacio en el que ocurren sucesos, en el que se solapa lo público con lo privado (12).

En el constante pasaje de la palabra hacia la materialidad --mediante la denigración e inversión del orden--, se intensifica la percepción de la continua transformación del cuerpo y su integración en el espacio, que en el caso de Lamborghini se trata de un espacio no estrictamente urbano sino más cercano a lo telúrico: “Hoy, Especiado de Contra Tona./Hermético, ridículo poema en cuerda Tikidiki:/hoy había un consejo de Regencia/donde la titiritada diosa aparecía/(llaga invernal o la dostoiievskiana eternidad/en el hueco oscuro de una letrina...” (Poemas 1969-1985, 50). La inversión del orden, característica central de la carnavalización, acentúa la experiencia de la materialidad generada por la sucesión de significantes.(13) Según el mismo Perlongher “...hablaría de 'neobarroso' para la cosa rioplatense porque constantemente está trabajando con una ilusión de profundidad, una profundidad que chapotea en el borde de un río...” (Fondebrider 22). Por otro lado, para Nicolás Rosa, “...La extensión producirá

una suma infinita de significantes [...] La extensión de un significante como 'goma' daría la gomosidad, lo graso, la grasitud, lo cebáceo, lo craso y lo untuoso..." (69).

El neobarroso remarcaría así las diferencias entre lo que emerge de la cadena de significantes y aquello que está ausente; por ejemplo --haciéndose eco lamborhiniano de "Die Verneinug" (1977)--, en el poema de Perlongher "Un brillo de fraude y neón" (14), donde: "...Y el azogue circulizado festeja la silueta de una sombra, / no deslumbra por luz sino por ebria oquedad en el plegado / del cimbroneo por montajes de piel /..." (*Poemas completos* 300). En el poema de Lamborghini, la insignificancia revela un sistema de equivalencias transitorias que impone, justamente a causa de su transitoriedad, una lectura política. En "Die Verneinug", aquello identificado con lo bello de la gramática, con la prosa prolija, es equiparado a lo oscuro, a lo que se identifica con los fluidos y los deshechos corporales: "El retrete, en suma. La plegaria, el duque de Ohm./El deslucido y rasgado papel de los gramáticos..." (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 77). La sintaxis representa un orden opuesto al movimiento de los fluidos, "... [los gramáticos]No construyen sistemas: se empernan./Es visible sin embargo que estas orejas ofenden al parque/y perpetuo lo incluyen del otro lado./El tiempo, el condenado a gruta ornamental./Y la cara contra allí golpea, se hiere./falta de imaginación incluso para la protesta./Pero obtenida, todo en orden./Obtenida, con membrete/con un membrete/la patente de cárcel..." (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 77). El movimiento de descenso que conduce a una progresiva denigración establece equivalencias que provocan la exhuberancia, tales como imaginación=orden; membrete=cárcel; vida=muerte, o masculino=femenino.

En efecto, estas equivalencias exponen la inversión del orden y el carácter provisional de todas las categorías y etiquetas sociales. Por ejemplo, en “Prosa cortada” (1977), “Si hay algo que odio es la música./Las rimas, los juegos de palabras./Nací en una generación./La muerte y la vida estaban/En un cuaderno a rayas:/La muerte y la vida./Lo masculino y lo femenino...” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 78). Aparece aquí, con mayor nitidez, el sustrato poético presente en “El fiord”, en el que la falta de concordancia entre significante y referente propicia la irrupción de lo público en el espacio textual (15). Ese espacio en el que, transitoriamente, se suceden las equivalencias, puede identificarse en “La madre Hogarth” (1977) del siguiente modo: “El duque de Ohm, fiordizado/vale decir uncido cara a cara/hambrientamente a una muerte/de brillo, de fraude y de neón,...” (*Poemas 1969-1985*, 89). Retomando el poema de Perlongher “Un brillo de fraude y neón”, aquello que surge de las palabras se encuentra “plegado”, pero mientras que en la poética de Lamborghini lo que aparece es el momento posterior al pliegue, la exhuberancia consumada en la cohesión entre cuerpo y espacio --palabra y acto--, en la poética de Perlongher, el pliegue es constante, la exhuberancia, la “fiordización”, es continua.

En la poesía de Perlongher los lugares comunes del progresismo democrático son ridiculizados por el humor irrespetuoso, la sonoridad lingüística y la insolencia (16). Lo político surge del texto, pero su intensidad y dirección son distintas a las de Lamborghini. Al igual que en éste, una cierta violencia resulta del movimiento de los significantes, de la sonoridad lingüística, de la parodia y la carnavalización, que agrade pero al mismo tiempo adora aquello que está presente --el significante nuevo que emerge del texto--, y aquello que está ausente --lo que se alude parodiando su ausencia.

La sonoridad de los textos presenta un cuerpo que ya no se identifica con las versiones normalizadas de la "identidad" (17).

Pero a diferencia de Lamborghini, en Perlongher el cuerpo no ingresa a un sistema de equivalencias, sino que es continuamente vencido por la descentralización de la cadena de significantes. Por eso, en su poesía los fluidos que emanan del cuerpo son los que le dan forma y contenido. Este aparece a medida que fluyen sonoramente las palabras. Su exuberancia es resultado de la exageración grotesca de un ellaél o de un ellella, parodia de la ausencia o presencia de lo masculino o lo femenino. Se puede observar esto en "El polvo" (*Austria-Hungría*, 1980), donde la exuberancia del cuerpo es resultado de la cadena de significantes: "...esos destrozos recurrentes de un espejo en la cabeza de otro espejo / o esos diálogos: / "Ya no seré la última marica de tu vida", dice él / que dice ella, o dice ella, o él / que hubiera dicho ella, o si él le hubiera dicho: / "Seré tu último chongo" /..." (*Poemas completos* 31). La ausencia de lo masculino/femenino como algo definido se parodia a través del lenguaje, de la rima y aliteración del los significantes: "...espeso como masacre de tulipanes, lácteo / como la leche de él sobre la boca de ella, o de los senos / de ella sobre los vellos de su ano, o de un dedo en la garganta / su concha multicolor hecha pedazos en donde vuelcan los carreros / residuos / de una penetración: la de los penes truncos, puntos, juncos, / la de los penes juntos / en su hondura - oh perdido acabar / albur derrame el de ella, el de él, el de ellaél o ellella /..." (*Poemas completos* 31)

En la poesía de Lamborghini, la cohesión entre cuerpo y espacio es provocada por la parodia y la carnavalización de lo telúrico. La voz del campo, de lo rural, de aquello

identificado como la antítesis de la ciudad y de lo civilizado, es parodiada para conducir al cuerpo a un encuentro con el lugar de los prejuicios. Por el contrario, en la poesía de Perlongher, en la que el cuerpo es un continuo fluir, no hay coincidencias; por ende, no hay inversión de un sistema de equivalencias sino un escenario, el urbano, que con su vulgaridad predispone a la inversión constante de las etiquetas de la identidad. En "Nostro mundo" (Parque Lezama, 1990), lo urbano es el recorrido que hace el cuerpo al discurrir: "...un plano de tierra plana. / Cómo urdir un territorio / cuyas fronteras fueran tan lábiles que dejasen penetrar / el flujo de los suburbios y la huelga de las panaderías matinales /..." (*Poemas completos* 212). En "Pavón", también de Parque Lezama, el cuerpo es el que hace aparecer a los espacios urbanos a través de su continuo deambular: "Si hubiese cruzado la Pavón cuando él meneándose arisco en una falsa amenaza de fuga o de seguir andando sin parar no hubiese rizado el espacio que corroía la distancia entre la botamanga y la pupila de ojos en compota futuramente hueros si no sino su llaverito con gomas de la confitería del molino o fresas..." (*Poemas completos* 229).

La cadena de significantes ya no muestra una fotografía de lo espacial sino que lo presenta un mapa viviente del cuerpo en tanto éste es múltiples recorridos. Este fluye a través de las palabras y los espacios surgen de esos diversos recorridos. Los barrios son los circuitos por los que el sujeto poético (el cuerpo) sucumbe a continuos procesos de identificación. Para Perlongher, la calle es el lugar de circulación, el lugar en el que "se" deviene deseo, en el que el individuo se convierte en sujeto "deseante", es decir, se transforma. Tal operación se da por lo que se omite, por lo ausente, lo excluido y silenciado, lo que no se es, o lo que se niega ser. En "Chorro de las iluminaciones en

combate bicolor", (*El chorreo de las iluminaciones*, 1992), se observa del siguiente modo en el encuentro entre dos hombres: "El relajo de los reflectores sobre los poros goteantes / o lamparones que satina el linimento engominado, / las emulsiones de la ilusión recolectaban lo amarillo / del fondo de los ojos inyectadas de una barata / sanguinolencia, o somnolencia, dependiendo de las horas / del gong, del movimiento de los cinturones en la / falsa arena que es Portland pisoteado con polvo /..." (*Poemas completos* 308).

El sujeto es el que se da cuenta de que no es, y el poeta no es más que un "cartógrafo" que ofrece una crónica de los "circuitos deseantes". Pero la captación, como acto, no se produce para fijar el sentido ni para promover una identidad sino para dinamitar toda posible fijación de ésta. Tamara Kamenszain observa del siguiente modo la exaltación de los espacios y los cuerpos en la genealogía neobarroca que ella misma propone:

...Muchacho de Avellaneda, no le alcanzaría el modo girondiano de hacer de las *chicas de Flores* un objeto metafórico. Con empuje dominguero - no muy usual para nuestra poesía de días laborables- Perlongher extrajo del domingo porteño una especie de trópico. Los <saquitos de banlon>, las <ligas>, las <carteras con francés>, los <breteles ácidos>, las <bombachas de nylon>, no cuelgan del cuerpo metafórico de las chicas de Flores, sino que se descuelgan sobre la página para construir, dentro de ella, el emporio de los materiales. Si Lamborghini no podía empezar, Perlongher ya no puede detenerse. Junto con el amontonamiento de materiales irrumpen sus infinitas combinatorias para el verso (118).

La cadena de significantes, entonces, a través de la parodia y la carnavalización, desata un movimiento irrefrenable hacia el interior del mismo poema, y a la vez hacia el afuera, al mundo referencial en el que el discurso poético irrumpe a través de lo vulgar y lo grotesco.

En la propuesta neobarroc/sa de Lamborghini y Perlongher, forma y contenido se hallan unidos en la noción de pliegue o fiord.⁽¹⁸⁾ El pliegue es lo que otorga profundidad a la superficie barroca provocando multiplicidad; simultaneidad; punto de subjetivación sin centro; flujos múltiples; desterritorialización y aniquilamiento del yo; éxtasis a través de la fiesta de la lengua; inflación de significantes; saturación del lenguaje comunicativo y socavamiento de las nociones. Un potlach sensual en el que el cuerpo aparece lleno de inscripciones heterogéneas y conduce a la sexualización de la escritura y la ruptura del contexto exterior (del mundo referencial), un "tajo". ⁽¹⁹⁾ La cadena de significantes que es el poema, desata una "indetenible subversión referencial", y "...se produce una alteración, una disputa: como si una feria gitana irrumpiese en el gris alboroto de la Bolsa" (*Prosa plebeya* 96).

La poesía de Osvaldo Lamborghini y Néstor Perlongher ratifica las características del neobarroco. Sin embargo, su poética va más allá y le agrega a esta apuesta estética la invitación a la lectura política e ideológica. En el caso de Lamborghini se trata de percibir la inversión de un orden cultural que se leyó a sí mismo y a la política --sobre todo al peronismo--, por medio de la dicotomía civilización y barbarie, en la que encajan otras como lo culto vs. lo popular, lo democrático vs. lo populista o lo

intelectual vs. lo irracional. El resultado de tal lectura es la visualización de la cohesión de cuerpo y espacio que presenta el solapamiento del plano discursivo con el de la acción. En el caso de la poesía de Néstor Perlongher, se trata de la participación en una lectura que cuestiona de manera micropolítica las categorías de construcción de la identidad individual. Por eso, en su poesía la inversión es constante y la desidentificación es un resultado de los recorridos que hace el cuerpo por los espacios urbanos, cuyos elementos vulgares y grotescos amenazan las etiquetas ya adosadas a ese cuerpo. Puede decirse entonces que la poética neobarrosa de Osvaldo Lamborghini y Néstor Perlongher es una invitación a la lectura política en la que es precisa la simultánea reconstrucción y destrucción de sistemas de equivalencias semánticas. Ambos procesos conforman no sólo una estética *neobarrosa* sino también una forma *neobarrosa* de leer.

Notas

(1). La transformación de los significantes muestra el devenir del yo en eco, en multiplicación. El pronombre personal "yo", por ejemplo, se transforma en un verbo, "yollar", que indica que la subjetividad es movimiento y sufrimiento (soy yo sin vos/sin voz/aquí yollando).

(2). La limitación a estos rasgos se debe fundamentalmente a dos razones: en primer lugar, y tomando en cuenta lo formulado por Edgardo Dobry, "...el neobarroco abarcó a poetas de tan amplia variedad estilística y temática que en muchas ocasiones se tiene la impresión de que esa denominación se refiere antes a un corte generacional o a la

temporalidad en la publicación de los libros..." (51); en segundo lugar, el neobarroco, con su exaltación del los cuerpos y los espacios, fue retomado por gran parte de la poesía argentina de los noventa, que, a pesar de su impronta objetivista, vio en estos dos rasgos una estrategia para su discurso. En el objetivismo "El poema [...] transcribe un orden visual, sin melancolía, sin repugnancia moral ni estética. El poema vuelve a la historia, a la Historia; la subjetividad del poeta se diluye en el paisaje o en la masa [...] una poesía objetivista concebida como una corriente que, nacida con el Romanticismo, recorre la poesía de los últimos siglos [...] No existe valor o sistema de valores con que contrastar la realidad, no existe sistema mítico frente a la mera evolución narrativa [...] en esta poesía no hay nada que venga de fuera, no hay sustento para una lectura moral..." (Dobry 48 - 49). Por su rechazo a los neologismos y al lenguaje coloquial, y por la recuperación del significado directo de las palabras (denotación) y su carácter nacional y de pertenencia a una comunidad, gran parte de la poesía de los noventa se opone al neobarroco. Sin embargo, la exaltación de los espacios urbanos y del cuerpo son dos rasgos que recuperan del neobarroco.

(3). En la década del ochenta surgen diversos grupos poéticos como resultado de la publicación de revistas de poesía, tales como *Ultimo reino*, *Xul*, *La danza del ratón* y *Diario de poesía*, entre otras. Se generan nuevos contactos entre estos distintos grupos y, de acuerdo a Fondebrider "...De algún modo, las poéticas en ciernes entran en contacto con sus precedentes [...] se intenta reconstruir un tejido desgarrado por los años de la dictadura..." (20). Esto da lugar a la formación de un "ambiente" que genera espacios para expresar esa voluntad de reflexión. En este contexto surge el neobarroco en Argentina, como una propuesta en la que "...el neobarroco, más que un género sea

una poética que corresponde al misterio de una época [...] una época que está en la búsqueda de nuevas formas y en su valorización..." (Arturo Carrera, Fondbrider 25)

(4). *Rizoma* (1966), de Deleuze y Guattari; *El pliegue* (1988) de Deleuze; *Paradiso* (1966), de José Lezama Lima, y diversos trabajos de Severo Sarduy, son las influencias que reconoce Néstor Perlongher. En cuanto a los escritores argentinos, se refiere a "El fiord" (1969), de Osvaldo Lamborghini, *Nanina* (1968), de Germán García, y *El frasquito* (1973), de Luis Gusmán; y llega hasta Arturo Carrera hacia fines de los ochenta.

(5). Chiampi distingue tres momentos del barroco en Latinoamérica. Un primer momento se iniciaría con el preciosismo verbal y la presencia del mundo exterior en la poesía de Rubén Darío. Para Chiampi este barroco sería una versión coherente con el 'proyecto modernista', que pretendía alinear la literatura americana con el simbolismo y producir una recreación temática identificada con lo español. La segunda reapropiación la harían los poetas de la vanguardia, como Borges y Huidobro con su Ultraísmo, con el que se pretendía un 'transformismo prismático' de las percepciones. Para estos escritores, la metáfora barroca era un modelo contra cierta referencialidad directa del modernismo. La tercera etapa sería la inaugurada por José Lezama Lima (a partir de los cincuenta), quien propuso una 'patente' del barroco en Hispanoamérica. Esta patente es la oscuridad que proviene de la dificultad de asignar un sentido único, resultado de la experiencia de ruptura en el origen y en la realidad de lo Hispanoamericano. Para Chiampi, en la propuesta de Lezama Lima hay una reivindicación de la identidad cultural. En la especificidad de la estética barroca se encuentra la expresión americana,

"...Lezama insiste en la idea de lo americano como un devenir (un ser y uno no ser), en permanente mutación..." (26). Podría decirse entonces que es a partir de esta tercera etapa en la que se puede comenzar a hablar de neobarroco como un barroco que además incluye la expresión de lo americano e imprime un sello particular, su patente, a la estética barroca. Chiampi destaca que el texto neobarroco desplaza dos categorías centrales del modernismo: las categorías de sujeto y de temporalidad. Este desplazamiento es resultado de la agrupación de fragmentos, el constante movimiento, la estructura circular, la 'descomposición en orden y composición en desorden, y la ausencia de avances y retrocesos en el texto.

(6). Así, sujeto y temporalidad se desvanecen en el texto neobarroco. El sujeto del texto neobarroco habita espacios eufóricos e intensos, pero temporarios por su fragmentariedad. Para Sarduy, "...el neobarroco, refleja estructuralmente la inarmonía, la ruptura de la homogeneidad [...] reflejo estructural de un deseo que no puede alcanzar su objeto, el deseo para el cual el logos no ha organizado más que una pantalla que esconde la carencia..." (Sarduy 1973, Chiampi 47).

(7). Por ejemplo, en "El pabellón del vacío" (*Fragmentos de su imán*, 1977), de Lezama Lima, el descentramiento es el vacío de todo significado. Sin embargo, en el vacío, en lo que está del otro lado de las palabras, también hay movimiento; y por eso la voz del sujeto poético reaparece una y otra vez en la superficie del poema: "*Voy con el tornillo (se mueve) / preguntando en la pared (está preguntando en el vacío de las palabras) / un sonido sin color (un significante sin significado) / un color tapado con un manto (un significado siempre oculto, siempre del otro lado de la pared, en el vacío)*"

/ con las uñas voy abriendo (con el cuerpo abre un significante nuevo) / el tokonoma en la pared / Necesito un pequeño vacío, (voluntad de reflexión sobre la imposibilidad de fijar el sentido) / allí me voy reduciendo/para reaparecer de nuevo, (nuevo significante, que sale del cuerpo) / palparme y poner la frente en su lugar. / Un pequeño vacío en la pared" (Ortega 27).

(8). En el barroco, “antítesis” y “metáfora” se combinan para producir un texto que adquiere la forma de una cadena de significantes en continuo movimiento de avance y retroceso del que surgen nuevos significantes a medida que otros son elididos. Para Severo Sarduy, el texto barroco surge de una estética elaborada y minuciosa que se opone a lo puro y equilibrado de la forma clásica precedente. La antítesis es la figura retórica central del barroco, es decir, la contraposición de palabras antónimas (Todorov - Ducrot 318). La retórica barroca adquiere la forma de una cadena de significantes, muchas veces contrapuestos, que indican movimiento de avance y retroceso circular, del cual surge un nuevo significado. La metáfora es la figura que conduce este movimiento, "...la mudada retórica por excelencia, el paso de un significante, inalterable, desde su cadena 'original' hasta otra, mediata, y de cuya inserción surge el nuevo sentido..." (Sarduy 53). La metáfora es "...el empleo de una palabra en un sentido parecido, y sin embargo diferente del sentido habitual..." (Todorov - Ducrot 319). Otras figuras retóricas caracterizan a la sintaxis barroca, tales como la elipsis (supresión de uno de los elementos necesarios para una construcción sintáctica completa), la parábola (una historia corta y simple relacionada con una fábula) y la hipérbole (aumentación cuantitativa de un objeto o el estado de un objeto). Estas figuras hacen que la retórica barroca sea una retórica en movimiento y descentrada. Asociada al concepto

de *rizoma*, Sarduy advierte que en la representación del los espacios "...la ciudad barroca [...] se presenta como una trama abierta, no inferible a un significante privilegiado que la imante y le otorgue sentido..." (61). El texto poético, en tanto texto rizomático, no propone la asignación de un sentido único sino una continua cartografía.

(9). En "Oro" (*Oro*, 1975), de Arturo Carrera, se observa cómo a través de la cadena de significantes se produce una exaltación de los espacios y de los cuerpos a los que se refiere de modo alusivo; "...*le reponden pájaros rojos ojos ocelos / celo en tus ojos rojos un instante de / tus ojos bajan a mezclar la luz con el / mescal / las plumillas de plomo soplan / oro siempre soplan viento y son oro / en tus trazos no vuelven al libro / no hay soporte / los objetos zumban / giran en torno mío estrepitosamente / no hay soporte en tu cuerpo / no hay superficie en tu cuerpo /...*" (Ortega 485).

(10). Se entiende el término parodia tal como lo plantean Todorov y Ducrot: "...En el discurso literario, no basta con diferenciar las palabras 'poéticas' (es decir, utilizadas sobre todo por la literatura) de las demás; se identifican ciertas palabras o expresiones con corrientes literarias, épocas, inclusive autores y obras particulares. Cuando se emplea una palabra así marcada por los contextos precedentes en una función análoga, se habla de **estilización**; si la función está invertida, se trata de **parodia**..." (297)

(11). Por ejemplo, en "El niño proletario" (1973), puede hacerse esta lectura sobre los escritores de Boedo.

(12). Tal coincidencia, en efecto, se puede observar en el estudio que John Krasniauskas hace de “El fiord”, en el que analiza la relación alegórica entre Eva Perón y el cuerpo y la nación.

(13). Para Perlongher "...La carnavalización barroca [...] como en el *Theatrum Philosophicum* de Foucault, todo aquello que es supuestamente profundo sube a la superficie: el efecto de profundidad no es sino un repliegue en el drapeado..." (*Prosa plebeya* 96)

(14). Dedicado a Osvaldo Lamborghini, en "Un brillo de fraude y neón" (*El chorreo de las iluminaciones*, 1992), Néstor Perlongher observa del siguiente modo la estética neobarroca "Agita la moreneta la morera castaña de los pelos / El cabello, el capullo: urde el casullo de látex /..." (*Poemas completos* 300). Cabello, capullo y casullo resuenan en un proceso de sustitución, proliferación y condensación. El cabello, que es parte del cuerpo, con forma de capullo (la redondez del cuerpo, sus partes curvas), en el casullo (concavidad de lo que recubre al cuerpo, el látex, el preservativo). Más adelante el poeta dice "...Untuosa brida desmelenada el vello, público: / orquídea negra que esplandece emancipada de las lianas /..." (*Poemas completos* 300). Untuoso es el fluido que se condensa y adquiere la fuerza mecánica de una brida, forma del pene erecto que emerge del vello púbico.

(15). Este aspecto ha sido expuesto en detalle en el estudio de Susana Rosano sobre las referencias al peronismo y al “otro” en la representación literaria, y el de Josefina Delgado relativo a la forma de representar la nación en “El fiord”.

(16). En la serie que Perlongher dedica al mito argentino de Eva Perón, se observan todos estos rasgos como una 'voluntad manifiesta de blasfemia', de agravio, pero también de adoración.

(17). El cuerpo sucumbe una y otra vez a los procesos de "desidentificación" que le van imponiendo los significantes que surgen de la sonoridad, resultado de la parodia, la ironía, lo vulgar y grotesco de la carnavalización del discurso.

(18). Para Perlongher "...Estado de sensibilidad, estado de espíritu colectivo que marca el clima, 'caracteriza' una época o un foco, el barroco consistiría básicamente en cierta operación de plegado de la materia y la forma [...] Poética de la desterritorialización [...] Al desujetar, desubjetiva [...] No es una poesía del yo, sino de la aniquilación del yo..."
(*Prosa plebeya* 93 - 94)

(19). Georges Bataille desarrolla en *La parte maldita* (1974) una teoría del Potlach. Es, como el comercio, un medio de circulación de las riquezas, pero excluye el regateo. Es el don de riquezas que un jefe tribal ofrece a su rival con el objeto de humillarlo, retarlo y de dejarlo en una obligación. Quien recibe estas riquezas tiene que corresponder un tiempo más tarde con un nuevo potlach, más generoso que el primero. En esta situación "dar", se convierte en "adquirir" para el otro y pone de manifiesto un poder. Quien consume la riqueza modifica al que da en el acto de la consumación. Esta transformación es lo que constituye el poder del don de las riquezas. Esta relación

permite revelar aquello que habitualmente se escapa, a la vez que enseña que se trata de una ambigüedad fundamental.

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Notas/Notes

Escribir con luz desde la luz : *Desde esta cámara oscura*, de Gerardo Piña-Rosales

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Una tarde fría de este pasado febrero leí de un tirón la novela de Gerardo Piña-Rosales. Al terminarla, un rato largo me dejé sentir la pena y el placer que el texto me había regalado, y ese contacto íntimo e intenso con uno mismo que siempre producen los libros que valen la pena leer.

Nos dice el relator del prólogo que el texto que leemos es copia fiel de los pliegos que Bejarano, escritor y fotógrafo de nota, le ha enviado antes de emprender un largo viaje. Él se ha limitado a vertebrar el relato y a editarlo mínimamente. La historia de los pliegos, que valida la ficción atribuyéndole valor documental, es recurso narrativo bien conocido. También se oyen ecos de narrativa clásica en las palabras que concluyen el prefacio: "Me parece, querido lector, que hubiese sido un imperdonable error por mi parte mantener inéditas estas páginas. Creo que su valor histórico, psicológico y literario avalan con creces mi decisión. Que te aprovechen."

El momento de la escritura de esos pliegos es una suerte de *stasis*, la reflexión aquietada y última del que está por partir, y recorre, con ojos ya alejados, lo que sabe que no volverá a ver. A modo de inventario de la casa que abandonará pronto, los objetos arrastran recuerdos, palabras y silencios. ¿Cómo no pensar, cada lector que sepa de extranjería, en el minucioso amor con que tocó por última vez sus posesiones más

preciadas antes de partir? ¿Y qué medievalista puede no pensar en el Cid, mirando las perchas vacías y las puertas ya sin candados antes de salir para el exilio de su casa de Vivar?

Dentro de ese espacio quieto de introspección meditativa, deja Bejarano correr el río de su vida. Este contraste de quietud y movimiento podría ilustrar la paradoja de la existencia de la que hablaba Kierkegaard, esa necesidad de entender la vida de adelante para atrás al mismo tiempo que la vivimos de atrás hacia adelante. Pero no es así, porque Bejarano, de alguna manera, ha adquirido la postura de quien ya no está, y eso parece ser responsable de un cierto modo liberado de contar.

Desde la muerte mirar la vida, que ya ha quedado atrás. No se trata de pensar en la muerte para vivir mejor lo que tenemos; no hay aquí ningún intento de convencer ni de enseñar nada a nadie. Se cumple en la novela el *dictum* de que el arte sólo puede cultivar la conciencia renunciando a la persuasión. Aquí no se juzga. Aquí simplemente se apunta con el dedo. Aquí se miran las cosas con el amor que sólo la conciencia de la muerte puede darnos, admitiendo que, ilusorias y mortales, son, al fin y al cabo, nuestra única, fragilísima posesión.

Desde "los helados esqueletos que trabaja el gusano," como diría Baudelaire, el fotógrafo registra los hechos. Paralela a la tendencia contemporánea de nuestra cultura, que privilegia la superficie y la velocidad, es la resistencia a contemplar con paciencia las cuestiones trascendentales. Por eso, es muy posible que la muerte sea tema que hoy resulte molesto. Por eso también creo que esta novela, en apariencia tan tradicional,

resulta moderna por no moderna. Porque, para alivio de esta lectora al menos, brillan aquí por su ausencia las formas del poder y la identidad, y porque sus personajes no son ciudadanos del mundo global sino de la España trágica de la guerra civil. Contra corriente, el mundo de la novela, sordo y ajeno a la globalización de las grandes corporaciones, invita a contemplar la condición humana, gobernada por un dios (en minúscula), que nos ha inventado el vivir y el morir.

Al crítico que quiere entrevistarle, Bejarano le previene que la guerra civil ya no le interesa a nadie. De hecho, como aquella guerra "incivil," la muerte es tema antiguo, por universal. Cuenta Herodoto (iv, 126-127) que los escitas, que eran nómades, se retiraron varias veces ante Darío, y que por fin respondieron a uno de sus ultimátums diciéndole que no habitaban ciudades ni cultivaban tierras y por tanto, Darío no tendría nada que pudiera devastar. Pero si Darío se atrevía a tocar las tumbas de sus muertos, ahí sí los encontraría dispuestos a la batalla.

La muerte tiñe el brillo de las cosas del mundo con nostalgia. Adorno (p. 132) nos dice que sin nostalgia no hay obra de arte válida, y añade, claro, que las obras de arte serían impotentes si sólo fueran nostalgia. Como sabemos todos, el deseo de la nostalgia es precisamente lo que no es, lo que ya no está. Muerte y pérdida son también los temas de la elegía, género que responde de modo artístico a lo que casi no puede soportarse, parejo con las flores que llevamos a la tumba y con la música que escogemos para los ritos funerarios, porque la belleza y el arte son catalistas que transforman el dolor crudo en tristeza serena. La primera página del libro está ocupada por una foto compuesta: en el cuadrante superior, dos mapas cuadrados y paralelos: la España blanca (a la

izquierda) y la España negra (a la derecha). Ahí, claro, el asunto ostensible del libro. Y sin embargo, intriga el hecho de que abajo, aparezca la foto del artista, metido en su redondo universo. Ese globo, a pesar de alinearse con la España de la izquierda, pasa la frontera imaginaria y ocupa también una porción del cuadrante inferior derecho.

Fotógrafo con premios internacionales y sobreviviente de la guerra civil, Bejarano es español de otra España y de otra época. Su vida no podría ser más lejana de la mía. Y sin embargo, años de lectura me han hecho saber que leer es como sentarse a la ventana.

Tarde o temprano, uno se verá a sí mismo pasar por la calle, dice Benjamin. Tarde o temprano uno se encontrará en el texto que lee, podríamos añadir nosotros. Sabemos que todo arte está anclado en lo particular y siempre se remonta a lo universal y lo eterno. Si es cierto que, como dice el tío de Bejarano, la fotografía es la verificación plástica de un hecho, en tanto artes, fotografía y literatura son también la expresión de lo que no existe más que en la más cerrada intimidad de cada uno.

Imposible dilucidar a fondo esta alquimia del arte. Apenas podemos ensayar algunas pocas precisiones. ¿Cómo se logra que una voz inconfundiblemente española, una voz republicana, termine pudiendo ser la mía, o la de cada uno de ustedes? Imposible no pensar en la lengua, que para Sartre era una prolongación de los sentidos, una suerte de extensión del cuerpo. De hecho, lo que me empujó a seguir leyendo y a terminar la novela tan rápido, fue el placer de la riquísima lengua de este texto, que se siente paladeada por el que escribe y que uno paladea a cada línea.

Todos conocemos los estragos que el exilio hace en nuestra vida y en nuestra lengua.

Buena parte de quien somos son nuestros

recuerdos. Pero los recuerdos del extranjero exigen otros cielos. Buena parte de quien es el extranjero habita catedrales sumergidas que de vez en cuando apuntan en la superficie del agua, como la aleta de un tiburón. Cuando el extranjero busca una palabra, se le aparece en la otra lengua. A veces se encariña con ese simulacro y lo hace suyo. En otro lugar, aquí, es materia violentada, que siempre acepta una forma más. Es otro el que escribe en inglés, otra también la que escribe en castellano. El extranjero, en fin, no hace memoria ni hace pie.

Por eso me impresionó tanto el léxico envidiable de la novela de Piña-Rosales. Me admira profundamente que haya logrado defender su lengua a cal y canto después de tantos años de exilio. La suya es una lengua que permite un acercamiento íntimo y al mismo tiempo preciso a las cosas de este mundo. Se trata de la precisión que tiene el buen fotógrafo hasta cuando borronea deliberadamente los perfiles. Aquí y allá, me sorprenden palabras que no reconozco bien, otras que simplemente no conozco pero cuyo sentido puedo adivinar. Y sobre todo, encuentro placer en este aire de familia que percibo al correr de las páginas, quizás porque despiertan palabras enterradas hace mucho, o porque me hacen oír ecos interiores de escritores queridos como Cervantes o Quevedo.

Gerardo Piña-Rosales, además de intelectual y escritor, es también excelente fotógrafo. Pero si no lo supiéramos, la fotografía podría leerse en la novela como la metáfora más adecuada del lenguaje. Podríamos pensar que el trabajo de una lente eficaz en manos de un buen fotógrafo, es comparable a la lengua del escritor, las dos mediadoras, más

perfectas cuanto más precisas sean sus precisiones, sus esfumados y sus borroneos.

Trabajo arduo y feliz.

El tío Salvador, que inicia a Bejarano en la fotografía, le dice que "la fotografía es escribir con luz." En las *Upanishads* se lee que para el ignorante, la experiencia se parece a escribir en la piedra; para quien ha empezado a conocer el espíritu, la experiencia es como escribir en el agua; sólo el liberado escribe en el aire. Traigo este recuerdo porque en la novela de Piña-Rosales, la cadena de eslabones que constituyen la vida del artista, es precisamente la que le ha servido para liberarse. Se respira un aire de libertad en la narración, una libertad que parece provenir del ángulo de visión. El ángel de grandes alas de cadenas ya ha remontado vuelo.

A más de un mes de leer el libro, antes de abrirlo de nuevo para escribir estas notas, me alcanzó, como en una fotografía, la memoria del río humano que marcha hacia Francia, imagen que el texto graba con firmeza precisamente por rechazar todo tinte sentimental y que quiero citar. Dice Bejarano:

Abandonamos España por los Pirineos. Nuestras tropas, en retirada, volaban los últimos puentes. Había cuerpos destrozados colgando de cables eléctricos. Perros famélicos husmeaban las basuras y los cadáveres en descomposición. La furgoneta de mi tío se quedó sin gasolina, y tuvimos que continuar a pie. El frío era intenso. Comenzó a llover. La aviación alemana -los Messerschmitt, los Henkels, los Junkers- nos perseguía lanzando bombas y ráfagas de metralla. Los niños, aterrados, se asían a las faldas de sus madres. Formábamos parte de un río humano, un río de mantas, boinas y borricos

cargados con las posesiones más preciadas ‘un colchón, una sartén, una cacerola’, un río de hombres, mujeres y niños sostenidos por la esperanza de que algún país sin bombas y con pan nos acogiera. (p. 49)

¿Quién puede leer esta marcha hacia Francia sin que lo conmueva el dolor de aquellos españoles trágicos? ¿Y quién puede no leer allí también su propio exilio? Es que estos españoles que buscan acogida en un país sin bombas y con pan son los españoles perseguidos por Franco, los argentinos desaparecidos por los militares, los judíos, gitanos y polacos víctimas del soldadete con bigote chaplinesco, como dice Bejarano, los chilenos asesinados en el estadio por otro bigote infame. Y tantos, tantos más. Esos españoles son legión, perseguida por el hambre y los horizontes cerrados de la injusticia. Como cuando uno tira una piedrita en el agua, los círculos se expanden, y éstos, que ya abarcan a los exiliados acogen también, claro, a los marginados de la sociedad. La lista podría continuarse.

Con todo, pasado el flash de los noticieros, sabemos muy bien que estas cosas no le importan a nadie, como dice Bejarano, y si el expatriado quiere evitar más injurias de las que ya sufrió, debe mantener sus cicatrices en discretísimo silencio. Sólo quedan exceptuados de ese silencio los artistas, los más altos extranjeros, hayan o no experimentado el exilio geográfico. Gracias a ellos, el resto de nosotros encuentra voz, ojos y manos. Porque esa alquimia elusiva del arte se basa siempre en alguna mirada dislocada, que nos extraña las cosas para que podamos verlas, en todo su esplendor y en toda su miseria. Anclada en la geografía particular, la de los mapas cuadrados de la España blanca y de la negra, la novela de Gerardo-Piña Rosales se ensancha hasta

respirar el planeta y nos recuerda también que para los artistas, esos más perfectos
extranjeros, la extranjería ha dejado de ser castigo para convertirse en don, en llave de
los goces más altos que puede permitir nuestra humana condición.

Desde esta cámara oscura, Gerardo Piña-Rosales

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Transgressing Limits: Belli's *El taller de las mariposas*

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Gioconda Belli (1948) is internationally known for her feminist poetry and fiction for adults. Her one story for children, *El Taller de las Mariposas* (The Butterfly Workshop), originally published in a German edition in 1994, came out in Central America two years later in 1996. The oversized book, 12 x 14 inches, includes colorful surreal illustrations by German artist and writer Wolf Erlbruch that underline the literal level of the text, an Aesop-like fable that purports to explain the origin of the butterfly. Few of Belli's critics, however, are even aware that she has published a children's book. Of the sixty-some critical articles on Belli's corpus listed since 1994 in the *Modern Language Association Bibliography*, not one discusses this narrative for children,⁽¹⁾ clearly symptomatic of the undervaluation of children's literature in general and the invisibility of Central American children's literature specifically. Belli's tale for children, however, is just as complex and aesthetically pleasing as her writing for adults. Furthermore, it reveals the same preoccupations that underpin her other prose and poetry: questions of gender and patriarchy, social justice and utopia, the role of the artist and the meaning of art.

In Belli's version of the creation myth,⁽²⁾ all living things, animals and plants are invented by the "Diseñadores de Todas las Cosas" [Designers of All Things] who are divided into various workshops. Strict rules governing the cosmos guide the Designers

and prohibit them from mixing the animals of the Animal Realm with the flowers, fruits and plants of the Vegetable Realm. Odaer, a young designer in the Insect Workshop (and Belli's only male protagonist in her entire narrative corpus), feels the rule is too restrictive and becomes obsessed with how to make an insect beautiful, that is, how to achieve artistic perfection without contradicting the system or breaking the rules of creation. The key to his success lies in the possibilities of the imagination:

Gioconda Belli plantea que la esperanza debe venir de la imaginación. Mientras no se pierda la fe en la capacidad de imaginar mundos diferentes, va a poder existir el mundo de la utopía (López Astudillo 107).

[Gioconda Belli proposes that hope should come from the imagination. While faith is not lost in the capacity to imagine different worlds, utopia will be able to exist].

Odaer, who parodies the image of the brooding, solitary, revolutionary artist, insists on searching for an idealized, utopian beauty. Specifically, he wants to mix the beauty of a flower with that of a bird, a combination that would be strictly prohibited under the current system. After many attempts and failures to achieve this dream, Odaer finally sees the shadow of a hummingbird reflected on the surface of a pond, reflecting the reds and blues of the sunset. In an epiphany, he realizes he has found his design for the butterfly.

This story on its literal level is transparent enough for children anywhere to grasp—European or Latin American, German, Spanish, or English-speaking. Belli’s fable, complete with a moral interwoven in the text (“El secreto estaba en no cansarse nunca de soñar” (40) [The secret was never to tire of dreaming]), clearly emphasizes Belli’s belief in the primacy of the imagination, the value of pursuing a goal, the virtue of persistence, and the conviction that dreams can become realities even under adverse circumstances.

While Belli emphasizes and encourages the role of imagination in the act of creation, she makes it quite clear to her children/readers that there are also limits that must be respected. The laws of creation in Belli’s cosmology are not arbitrary, but symbolize the limitations that we all face, whether natural or imposed, by our very human condition. The challenge for the child/artist, then, is to create within certain boundaries. Belli, like Sor Juana, believes that the ultimate value lies in the attempt even when the final product may be virtually unattainable:

. . .el poder de lo utópico se encuentra precisamente en la expresión de su deseo y en su activa búsqueda aun cuando se esté conciente de la imposibilidad de su materialización.(3)

. . .the power of utopia is found precisely in the expression of its desire and the active search for it even when one is conscious of the impossibility of its materialization.

Less visible or audible, especially to her children readers, are Belli's multiple subtexts that merge to form a polyphonic discourse. These partially erased narratives hidden in the form of a palimpsest, address some of Belli's ongoing concerns — political, theological, sociological, and artistic. The narrator's insistent probing of the childlike question: why? — (why can't I do that?) — reveals the frustration produced by the imposition of limits and voices the basic question at the heart of all change, invention, paradigmatic shift, or new vision. It is not surprising, then, that beneath Belli's literal text we can identify other texts: a story of revolutionary struggle, a reinscription of the Biblical myth of creation, a deconstruction of gender and racial stereotypes, and ultimately a theory of art.

The political subtext of this story is in many ways autobiographical (as is much of Belli's work) and deals with the author's own psychological and personal struggles to come to grips with her participation in the Sandinista revolution in the 1970s. As a member of an upper-class family in Nicaragua, Belli could easily have chosen to exercise her privileged position within the status quo. Instead, her political commitment to ousting the Somoza dictatorship forced her into exile for several years and ultimately ruined her marriage. Her highly acclaimed and much studied first novel, *La mujer habitada* (1988), recounts this period of her life from both fictionalized and magically real perspectives, rewriting her participation in the urban guerrilla movement and documenting her growing dissatisfaction with the continual deferral of gender issues within the Sandinista/Marxist framework. Her second novel *Sofía de los presagios* (1990) takes these concerns even further by contemplating the situation of women in post-revolutionary Nicaragua, and her third novel: *Waslala: memorial del*

futuro (1996), written simultaneously with her children's story *El taller de las mariposas*, takes the reader into the future and the possibility and loss of utopia. Belli's social and political preoccupations are no less evident in her story for children, written over a decade after the Sandinista victory in 1979 and in the wake of the political defeat of the Sandinista government to the Chamorro opposition in the elections of 1990.

Odaer and his non-conformist group are nothing less than Romantic rebels. They work in secret against the existing order and disagree with the limitations and restrictions that have been imposed upon them. They have a dream and never give up, despite setbacks. Furthermore, Odaer sees his dream, not in personal terms, but as a goal for the general good: "Me siento responsable por hacerla más bella para los demás" (14); that is, he feels responsible for making life more beautiful for others. Ultimately, the group is successful, not because they have rebelled outright, but because they have approached their circumstances from a new perspective, synthesizing and merging apparent differences to produce a new and unique creation.

Odaer's effort to keep his dream alive, therefore, can be read as a simplified parallel to the decade's long Sandinista struggle. The existential implications of his persistence mirror the philosophy of commitment shared by Nicaragua's idealistic revolutionaries: "Si renunciamos a nuestros sueños, qué sentido tendrá nuestra existencia?"(17) [If we renounce our dreams, what meaning will our existence have?] In other words, the story of Odaer's quest for beauty is also a story about political commitment to social change against overwhelming odds. The conclusion of Belli's story could just as well conclude the Sandinista story whose motto was "victory or death": "El secreto estaba . . . en no darse por vencido"(40) [The secret was. . . never to give in to defeat].

One has to be careful not to take the Sandinista analogy too far, however. While Belli clearly celebrates the Sandinista vision and goals, she seems to have reevaluated their methods “and the permanence of *machista* rhetoric within Sandinismo” (Rhoden 89), particularly once they seized governmental control. In fact, Belli ultimately separated herself from the Frente Sandinista citing its authoritarian hierarchy and calling for a democratization of its structure to allow for the full participation of all of its leaders (López Astudillo). The story of Odaer and his friends marks this move away from the revolutionary politics of the FSLN. Fernández Carballo, in his graduate thesis on Belli’s novel *Waslala*, calls *El taller de las mariposas* an allegory of utopia: “plantea la utopía que ha de contribuir a la belleza y la armonía del ser humano, pero sin que ella subvierta el orden existente, más aún, que tenga la aprobación de dicho orden” (25) [she posits a utopia that would contribute to the beauty and the harmony of human life, but that would not subvert the existing order; even more, a utopia that would have the approval of that order]. Politically, therefore, Belli seems more conservative in this book. At the very least, Odaer’s struggle marks a change in her approach from direct conflict and confrontation to a more imaginative and consensual approach to change and creativity. On a theological level, Belli has created a feminist alternative to the Biblical version of creation. In her cosmology, although Odaer, like Adam, is male, the highest power, the maximum force and authority in the universe, the controller of all knowledge, is female—**She** who controls all knowledge. Belli’s book of poems *De la Costilla de Eva* (1983) also rethinks the traditional patriarchal discourse of creation in much the same way. According to Kathleen March “To see Eve as Creator does not imply a rejection or humorous dismissal of the male sex. . .but rather...a return to and a focussing (sic) upon, a matricentric world view such as that of antiquity” (246).

This gender shift in our traditional patriarchal conceptions about God is merely the first and most obvious transgression against orthodoxy in this tale. The illustrations that accompany the text insinuate a host of additional subversions and transgressions far more radical and heretical. First, the Ancient Woman in Charge of Knowledge is also a person of color. Her skin is dark and her exaggerated facial features form a caricature of a native American/Amerindian. More disturbing, however, are her red dress, the serpent-like cane she carries, and her phallic index finger, which she is always pointing. This sexually ambiguous image is consistent, however, with the archetype of the Great Mother: “Mother Earth, origin of all, had both male and female attributes, her symbols such as the moon, the bull, and the serpent” (March 255).



Traditional connotations associated with race (black/indigenous), the red dress (symbol of sexual transgression), and the serpent (Biblical symbol of evil) are sub(in)verted in

their association with the Ancient Woman. Like God, her Christian counterpart, la Anciana has a monopoly on wisdom (the tree of knowledge) and a set of restrictions, like the prohibition to Adam, which must be obeyed. In Belli's cosmos, however, Odaer finds a way to get what he wants without direct defiance or disobedience, thus avoiding the punishment of Adam. Like the true subaltern he is, Odaer figures out how to manipulate the system.

While the symbolic sexual overtones in the illustrations clearly work to subvert patriarchal discourse, they also serve to reinforce La Anciana's authoritative stature as an ontologically complete and independent being, in charge of her own sexuality, indicating, directing, and delegating with that outstretched finger. Like many of the women in Belli's other novels, she is "sexually self-assured" (Rhoden 81). Yet, certainly she is an unconventional authority. Unlike the visionary image that Christianity projects of omniscience, Belli's keeper of knowledge stares out from behind a pair of thick glasses, more reminiscent of an intellectual, than a Christian God who sees every sparrow fall. Furthermore, contrary to the Christian tradition of Genesis, where God omnipotent creates the world by Himself, Belli's Ancient Woman delegates creation to the various workshops. This idea of creation as a product of teamwork fits the ideals of the early FSLN. Furthermore, the image of creation as the product of hard work and physical compromise is consistent with Belli's poetry where she portrays God with hammer and drill in hand:

Todo lo creó suavemente

A martillazos de soplidos

Y taladrazos de amor (“Y Dios me hizo mujer”)

[He created everything softly/Hammering with puffs of air/And drilling
with love] (translation mine).

The Ancient Woman’s managerial style also contradicts the patriarchal autocracy of the Church (and what turned out to be a similar structure within the Sandinista Party). Her decisions are not top down, but consensual; when Odaer asks for a new workshop dedicated specifically to the design of butterflies, he must convince the other Designers of All Things, not just the Ancient Woman.

Finally, a more subtle transgression: the work week is reduced to five days, rather than the biblical six with rest on the seventh day. Work is continuous and ongoing. There is no rest for dreamers. In Belli’s system, even when Odaer sits by the pond, he is overwhelmed by thought and desire: “No podré descansar hasta que no pueda diseñar algo que sea tan bello como un pájaro y una flor”(13)—that is, he literally cannot rest until he designs something as beautiful as a bird and a flower. Only the dog he meets seems perfectly content to accept the status quo, “Soy feliz con sólo tener un lugar donde echarme”(13) [I’m happy just having a place to lie down]. By setting up an opposition between Odaer, our hero, and the dog, Belli makes a clear statement; only dogs give up and lie down. The dog represents everything that Belli opposes in artistic creation: “La gente que escribe no puede hacerse eco de la desesperanza, ni tampoco venderse, en el sentido de convertirse únicamente en entretenedores” (López Astudillo

107) [People who write cannot become an eco of despair, nor can they sell out, in the sense of becoming mere entertainers].

Belli's Anciana is truly an ambiguous and paradoxical figure. The narrator calls her the boss — *la jefa* de los Diseñadores de Todas las Cosas. Her job, it would seem, is to maintain harmony in the universe. Consequently, Odaer and his friends' insistence on thinking of all the things they could invent if the rules were different concerns her: "se preocupó y decidió que era necesario hacer algo que impidiera que las ideas de Odaer se hicieran populares, ya que ponían en peligro la armonía de la creación"(7) [she worried and decided it was necessary to do something to prevent Odaer's ideas from becoming popular, since they could endanger the harmony of creation]. From a political standpoint, this kind of justification of the status quo sounds like a tyrannical Somoza-type railing against the ideas of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. From a theological standpoint, it smacks of the rigid control of the Catholic Church. Yet, the boss is not depicted as a tyrant or an autocrat as the text progresses, and visually, she is the subversion of a conventional leader. Her gender, her color, her exaggerated Mayan nose and high cheekbones (salient racial features of the New World Indians), her obesity and poor vision, form a composite picture that resists and subverts the Eurocentric concept of beauty. She is portrayed more as the wise old grandmother figure than a goddess. It is significant, therefore, that in one picture Odaer is sitting on her lap.



Political and religious parallels aside for a moment, the more important issue under discussion in this story would seem to be the concept of beauty: what it is and what it does or should do. In this sense the Ancient Woman in charge of knowledge seems to have rightly come by her position. While she demotes Odaer and his group to the dusty Insect Workshop to keep them out of trouble, she argues against Odaer's conventional complaint that insects are not beautiful. "Y quién dice que no pueden serlo. . .Háganlos bellos. De ustedes depende. Tienen toda la libertad para diseñarlos como mejor les parezca"(7) [And who says they can't be? Make them beautiful. It depends on you. You have complete freedom to design them however you think best]. Although Odaer considers that the rule against mixing plants and animals is too restrictive, he paradoxically restricts his own conception of beauty by conventional ideas, conventions that the Anciana both contradicts verbally and subverts through her visual presence. Her

advice to the young designer is not only aesthetic, however; it can also be read on a theological and political level as well:

En tu búsqueda del diseño perfecto, puedes crear monstruos. Tu afán de hacer la vida más agradable y bella, puede resultar, si no eres cuidadoso, en dolor y miedo para otras creaturas de la naturaleza. (10)

In your search for the perfect design, you can create monsters. Your urge to make life better and more beautiful, if you're not careful, can result in pain and fear for other creatures in nature.

Belli's critique here of the Sandinista government is hardly subtle. She makes an incontrovertible distinction between a dream and an obsession. An admirable goal, she seems to say, whether political, theological, or artistic, still must carefully monitor its means: "La búsqueda de la belleza y de la perfección está llena de tropiezos. Muchos se han perdido en el camino"(11) [The search for beauty and perfection is full of obstacles. Many have gotten lost along the way]. Such a search, she implies, is tantamount to the search for knowledge in Christian theology where so many with lofty goals, from Satan to Adam, have fallen. Equally, the Anciana's remark may be read as a comment on revolutions gone wrong, from France's guillotine to the Mexican Revolution's *paredón*, to the infighting of the Sandinistas once they had ousted Somoza in Nicaragua. In addition to the political and theological nuances of Belli's story, therefore, the underlying dialogue about the nature of beauty and art and the role of the artist in

society is at issue. Belli joins this discussion-in-progress that begins with the pre-Columbian Amerindian cultures of the Isthmus and reaches its zenith in Nicaragua in 1888 with the publication of Rubén Darío's *Azul*. Every Nicaraguan poet, indeed every Central American poet after Darío, has had to come to terms in one way or another with the effects of the indigenous past on the present and the impact of *modernismo* on aesthetics. These concerns are not unique to this story but represent Belli's ongoing preoccupation with the role of artistic production within society.

Para ella, el reto más grande de la creación es encontrar en este momento de la historia (cualquiera que sea). . .cómo se puede insertar el escritor o escritora con su trabajo creativo y mantener viva la esperanza, incluso convertirse en un creador o creadora de posibilidades (López Astudillo 106).

[For her, the biggest challenge in creation is to find in this historical moment (whatever it might be). . .how the writer can intervene with his or her creative work to maintain hope alive, and even to convert himself or herself into a creator of possibilities].

Odaer, when he talks to those around him, merely sets the stage for Belli to talk back to the past, engaging in a diachronic dialogue about the meaning of beauty and the purpose of art. At one point a rock asks Odaer "Pero, cuál es el sentido de una flor?. . .Se marchita muy pronto y muere" (21) [But what is the meaning of a flower? It soon wilts

and dies]. It is significant that in Belli's story the rocks and the dogs talk just as they do in the Mayan creation myth recounted in the *Popol Vuh*. The fact that the rock asks about the meaning of a flower can be seen either as ironic, from a Western perspective, or as completely consistent with an Amerindian perspective that holds that all things, whether animate or inanimate, have a spirit or soul, and as such are all connected. In this way, Belli's magically real world of Western children's literature (where animals, plants, and rocks routinely talk and have feelings) converges with the cosmological vision of the Mayan communities where man and the natural world are interrelated and interdependent. This notion of interconnectedness is not limited to Belli's story for children, however; literary analyses of the new ecocritical school (4) have begun to study the role of nature in Belli's other work.

Odaer's response to the rock's question is ambivalent: it both agrees and disagrees with Darío's defense of art for art's sake: "Se hace fruto...Pero además es bella. Lo bello no se puede explicar, se siente" (21) [It bears fruit... But in addition, it is beautiful. Beauty cannot be explained; one feels it]. Certainly, Darío would agree with Odaer and Belli's articulation of art as felt experience, but he might be less willing to concede that art or beauty bears fruit and that this function gives art meaning. Belli, in a recent interview, insists, however, on this functional aspect of art, particularly on its critical role; she is fully conscious of her political commitment: "siguiendo un poco la tradición latinoamericana de participación política de los escritores" (Dobles 6) [following a bit in the Latin American tradition of political participation of its writers] and cites Darío in her explanation about the role of the artist:

De cierta manera el poeta es profeta, como dicen, y entonces esa calidad, esa dimensión de la poesía que le atribuye la gente espontáneamente por la historia que tenemos, por Rubén Darío, por lo que sea, de alguna manera también es una responsabilidad de participación para mí, de ser una voz crítica, de no dejar de hacer análisis crítico, de hacer conciencia crítica de la sociedad.
(Dobles 6)

[In a certain way the poet is a prophet, as they say, and so that quality, that dimension of poetry that people attribute to spontaneity because of the history we have, because of Rubén Darío, because of whatever, in a way also indicates a responsibility to participate for me, to be a critical voice, never to stop making critical analysis, to make conscious criticism of society.]

Moreover, art as felt experience implies an aesthetic problem concerning the kinds of feelings art projects or provokes in its audience. Belli parodies the problem in a short dialogue between a lightning bolt, a serpent, and Odaer:

La belleza es como cuando yo aparezco en el cielo e ilumino todo lo que toco-dijo el rayo.
-Pero tú das miedo-dijo la serpiente.
-Mira quién habla-respondió el rayo. (21)

“Beauty is like when I appear in the sky and illuminate everything I touch,” said the lightning bolt.

“But you’re scary,” said the serpent.

“Look who’s talking,” responded the lightning bolt.

Certainly Darío would be more inclined to agree with the lightning bolt, that beauty illuminates everything it touches, for beauty, Darío thought, need only exist. But Odaer’s response to this humorous exchange is deadly serious: “Yo quiero algo que dé felicidad” (21) [I want something that produces happiness]. Odaer’s conception of art, and we can logically assume Belli speaks through him, ultimately agrees with the precepts of beauty and idealism that underpin Darío and the Latin American Modernist movement: “Creo en ese poder de la palabra, extraordinario, de la palabra que nos une a todos; ser parte de esa red” (Dobles 6) [I believe in that power of the word, extraordinary, of the word that unites us all; to be part of that network].

Perhaps, with Odaer’s insistence on creating beauty that imparts happiness, we have the clearest distinction in the debate over the differences between children’s literature and adult literature. Certainly, if the production of happiness is the sole criteria for art, much of the adult canon would fail to qualify. But the happily-ever-after convention in children’s literature is a firm component of reader expectation, and one that Belli adheres to in this story. Art is fragile, as the wind and the volcanoes point out to Odaer; beauty can be damaged and destroyed, but Odaer counters that it always returns; it never gives up. Thus, art for Belli falls within the Mayan tradition of the natural cycles

of rebirth and regeneration as well as Darío's ideal of art as the ideal and the essence of human dreams and imagination.

Even though “a nadie parece importarle que no exista eso que tu quieres diseñar” (14) [no one seems to care that what you want to create doesn't exist], Odaer firmly believes that the world will be a better place because of his creation. Although he has chafed at the limitations imposed on his artistic potential, he has played within the rules; he has not changed them. Still, he has managed to find his own poetic voice. As Belli talks back to her artistic past, chafing at the limitations imposed by her aesthetic heritage and searching, like Odaer, for her own poetic voice, she inevitably returns to the literature that precedes her. After the decades long political struggle in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America, after all the *testimonios* and revolutionary poetry produced in Central America as the result of the low intensity wars of the 1970s and 80s, Belli ultimately returns to Darío in this story for children of all ages and concedes that beauty is its own reward.

Notes

(1). Actually, one article refers to the work as part of her narrative corpus but calls it a book of short stories, which it is not (López Astudillo 106). The entry on Belli in *Gale's Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Preble-Niemi) dedicates two sentences to the book and completely misrepresents the plot, claiming that the story “tells of a laboratory worker who whimsically crosses a flower and an insect to create the butterfly.” The entire point of the story is that the protagonist, who is not a laboratory worker but a

designer in Belli's recreation of the cosmos, is not allowed to cross elements of the vegetable realm (a flower) with elements of the animal realm; and the animal in question is not an insect but a hummingbird. The point is: neither of these critics even bothered to read the story, assuming, no doubt, that a child's book is neither relevant to nor worthy of comment in an overview of Belli's narrative corpus.

(2). Rewriting the myth of creation is a recurrent theme in Belli's work.

(3). Moyano (22) is talking here about Belli's futuristic novel *Waslala* (written at the same time as Belli's children's book), which presents the loss of utopia and the future of Latin America as "grandes extensiones de tierra donde prevalecen las guerras y el narcotráfico, el caos en suma, y cuyo fin será el convertirse en el basurero de la tecnología y el progreso del Norte" [large extensions of land where wars and drug trafficking prevail, in sum chaos, and whose destiny is to become the trash heap for the technology and progress of the North].

(4). See Fayer, for example, who quotes Paula Gunn Allen in "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective," to explain that "indigenous peoples understand life as a 'sacred hoop,' which is 'the concept of a singular unity that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life-- that is, dynamic and aware, partaking as it does in the life of the All Spirit and contributing as it does to the continuing of life of that same Great Mystery.' An important consequence of these beliefs is that 'tribal people allow all animals, vegetables, and minerals (the entire biota, in short) the same or even greater privilege

than humans' (243). This attitude towards nature is characteristic not only of North American Indian cultures but also of the indigenous peoples of Central America.”

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**Guillermo Gómez-Peña's "Tekno Poética" Web Verse,
Lost and Found in a Webspora**

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For an author who likes to cross borders Guillermo Gómez-Peña (1955) has certainly reached audiences in both the U.S. and Mexican artistic, literary, theoretical, and political arenas. Now, with the advent of more technological mediums such as the Internet, the borderless artist makes use of the global fetish that, in theory, reaches a global community. As a prelude to his performances, workshops, conferences and lectures, Gómez-Peña's collaborative webiste engages his readers in video-poetic selections, and hypertext poetic medley with topics that are sure to catch their interest with poems such as "Apocalypse," "Sexo," "Militias," and the video-poems "Apocalypse" and "Califas." His "ethno-techno art," as he calls it, does more than disrupt traditional theoretical dialogue using the same jargon and disengaging it from its original context, it satirizes the disciplines that try to give explanations. His online video-art and poetry performances are composed of fragmented thoughts, and a myriad of politically, symbolically and theoretically-charged words that give resonance to a vital verse. The poet is lost and found in the Diaspora of the world as experienced on the Web, in Webspora. We hear the itinerant poet, the artist who's borderless and whose very conscious transgressions make the poet in Diaspora unyielding and not accommodating to any discourse, not from here or there.

“Webspora” a Home Away from Home

Early in his artistic trajectory Gómez-Peña makes it very clear that he has never associated his border performance art with any site-specific space. The Chilango artist emphasizes how his borderless identity does not speak of a specific Diaspora, but rather is an all encompassing experience. He states: “For me, the border is no longer located at any fixed geopolitical site. I carry the border with me, and I find new borders wherever I go” (*New World Border* 5). His Diaspora then consists of not belonging and belonging to all, all at once. In fact, Gómez-Peña has always claimed his displacement as a “home,” embracing the power of the borderless artist who’s art speaks to all and embraces all nationalities, nations, and above all, all those lost in Diaspora all while “raising tough questions regarding access, identity politics and language” (Gómez-Peña “The Virtual Barrio”).

As a “reverse anthropologist” he claims he uses the data he gathers to echo the *zeitgeist* (or social consciousness) of society and represent it to that same public, all with the intent of having his audience contemplate and recognize their own thoughts. He enters the virtual world with high aspirations. In his first draft of a manifesto entitled, “Remapping Cyberspace” Gómez-Peña notes that his

desire is to remap the hegemonic cartography of cyberspace; to ‘politicize’ the debate; to develop a multicentric theoretical understanding of the (cultural, political and aesthetic) possibilities of new technologies; to exchange a different sort of information (mythopoetical, activist, performative, imagistic); and to hopefully do all

this with humor, inventiveness and intelligence. (Gómez-Peña “The Virtual Barrio”)

In an earlier interview Gómez-Peña emphasized that the iconography of his characters does draw from Chicano imagery but is meant to express the translatable experience of the uprooted foreigner living in Diaspora (Huizar 207). So, keeping this in mind we can see how the “cybersaints” aim to represent “this process of hybridization of borderization, not just in America, but in the world” (“The Virtual Barrio”). For Gómez-Peña, “artist-made CD-roms and web pages can perform an extremely vital educational function: they can function as community ‘memory banks’ (‘encyclopedias chicanas’), sites for encounter, dialogue, complicity, and exchange; and virtual bases of operation and action” (Gómez-Peña “The Virtual Barrio”). The web—a global community—then, becomes a metaphoric home where anonymity is the identity of choice. He has always claimed that border artists like himself would like to “brownify” virtual space; to ‘spanglishize the net,’ and to ‘infect’ the lingua franca” with their participation in the artistic realm of cyberspace. Their goal is to find innovative “grassroots applications to new technologies,” he asserts (*Dangerous Border Crossers* 259). His attempt to infect cyberspace with the ethnographic images, language, themes and artistic renderings of social critique has been a project of his and his troupe since the mid-nineties. In his earlier venture with the variables of the Internet as a medium, he solicits audience participation in his *Temple of Confessions* (1995) to specifically address the fears and prejudices of his spectators by using much of the dialogue and topics as subject for his performance scripts. His earlier work with the *Temple of Confessions* (1995), which requests audience participation of confessions of fear or desire, provided the artist with the audience obsessions and reflected these in

his performance script. He uses the global-based medium to extrapolate responses from the “phantasmagoric beings,” as he calls them, and uses these reactions as material for his work. The audience participations, thus, become the substance of his text. His performance art, then is both a reflection of his audience and a projection of mythical characters that allegorically represent the immigrant experience. He claims, “we use them [the answers] to design our multicultural Frankensteins—our ethnocyborgs.” It is Guillermo Gómez Peña’s goal to have these ethnocyborgs help the viewer see how American society is “riddled with fear of otherness, differences, change.” Ultimately, people should deal with the demons of prejudice and stereotypes and recognize that the concept of “otherness;” thus, for that matter the experience of diaspora is in fact relative to the perspective taken. In that context the global-based medium served as a mediator between the artist and his public. Now, that the Pocha Nostra website provides such a borderless channel where he can reach a global community, the idea of “borderless” is even more pervasive with the imminent cultural notions of globalization including the growing dominance of western (or even American) forms of political, economic, and cultural life (“westernization” or “Americanization”), and the proliferation of new information technologies (such as the “Internet Revolution”).

This virtual and global world is assumed to be a hybrid as it is increasingly dominated by globalization, yet it leads us to question—much like the artist does in his own work—the increasingly segregated technological community that is for the most part perceived as the imperialist gaze of the United States. In this space we can interrogate the poetic representation of the images, sounds and language posted in poetic dioramas on the Internet to be explored and performed at various times and in invariable types of

audiences, and spaces. We also see that in Guillermo Gómez-Peña's cyber world the multiplicity and possibility of border identities, and kitsch representations of Latino culture are interrogated only in a way that allows the viewer to deconstruct the performed and commodified visual and written text. In fact, we can see how the web provides this artist with variable ways to recycle texts and fragments of action, whose meaning may or may not play out—in the reader's, the viewer's or participant's interpretation—in the same fashion.

“Tekno-poéticas”

Much like a *performance*, the reading of these “Tekno poéticas” is left open, raw and mixed; the web environment provides an illusory unwavering site-specific location of his performance that changes its dialogic repertoire as it enters the varied private spaces of its public and performer. The performance can no longer attempt to be adapted to speak and reach specific concerns and or communities, his audience is now in a “global” context where the reader is just about anyone. Although, one could also assume that the viewer that navigates to this particular website is well acquainted with the artist's work and is simply looking for more.

The website houses simulated three-dimensional temples where the user/viewer can enter the chamber and confront these “cybersaints.” He uses humor and irony in his performance of a varied cartography of identity stereotypes and geopolitical issues to provoke the audience's perceptions of cultural hybridity. He uses elements of poems, performance monologues, spoken word pieces in a combination to weave distinctive textual montages. These may aim to address a given audience, but in reality are left

open to interpretation by the global community. The artist has often said that his characters are icons, more about pop-culture processes and the reflections of the *zeitgeist* of the times than about mere ethnic reflections.

In the Pocha Nostra website besides several marketing information regarding his presentations, workshops and lectures and publications, the Museo section houses the “Tekno poética” and the Video Gallery which include several hypertext and video-poems. The “Tekno Poética” is subdivided in three poems: “Militias,” “Sexo” and “Theory.” These represent the three most politically charged expressions of a culture: the armed forces that protects and in some cases governs a country; sex as necessary for survival of the human race, but also serves as a vital indicator of the social state of our civilization, the *zeitgeist*; and finally, theory gives explanations and answers to the human condition while at the same time it is inevitably linked to the artistic production. The “Tekno poética” is a hypertext verse of animated words accompanied by computerized music that adds to the eerie performance of the piece. All three reflect on society’s experience and suggest the uneasiness of the time we are living in. In “Sexo,” for instance, the topic is a universal one, yet by using the Spanglish voice Gómez Peña makes it about the bicultural and biracial experience. That is, it is the ethnic voice that speaks of sex, it is this ethnic body that is presumed to be involved. The words flash before the reader, slide from left and right and disappear instantaneously:

All we have sex

S E X

Cybersex

Sexo anónimo: without emotional or biological repercussions

Sexo aeróbico: sin facciones, sin identidad

Sin Recuerdo

sin en español es pecado

Sin

Sex

What we have is a double reference to the anonymity of the body in cyberspace: the body that is not recognized, that does not exist (as in cybersex) and the body whose sexual actions compose the being, as in:

Sex

o bien

sex intranscendete,

Sex doloroso,

sex extremo,

sexo impersonal,

y sin propósito alguno

en la calle,

bajo niebla

en la misma morgue

as a high spiritual goal

so death is temporarily unattainable

One of the features of this poetic voice is how the body's actions—in regards to sex—make the being what s/he is, and in a sense what society is as a whole. Gómez-Peña houses this unidentifiable ethnic body in a space that both robs him of his specificity

and replaces it with the perspective of the Other. In this particular case, cyberspace houses the marginalized body's experience or outlook and decentralizes the hegemonic anglo body's experience. It is an example of how the web functions as a home of the diaspora voice that speaks for all, that uses the marginalized voice to speak of universal truths. "Militias" speaks of the invasion of self-governed armed forces that rob the identity of its constituents "free falling toward c h a o u s." In this poem we also see how the center is de-centered: the poetic "I" ("our cities") is invaded by the "anglo militias." This identity is shown to be at the brink of destruction as these

militias
keep moving north
our identity
freefalling
toward
c h a o u s

Again, the once displaced ethnic voice is privileged. Assumptions can be made of the political position taken by the artist and his critique of the invading militias. "Theory," on the other hand, takes a more universal angle and appeals to the reader's search for "truth" or answers. Gómez –Peña simply proposes that it is with this concept and practice that we find meaning to the world, because everything else including "friendship, health and love" are temporary. That which is eternal then is hypothetical discourse and are mere assumptions that give answers to our questions and support our critiques. And, only "the ephemeral utopias of art, travel and laughter" allow thinking beings to exist. In this abstract discussion he adds:

These small privileges that make life bearable

Temporarily as we know tomorrow
The earth might open up again
We might get deported
We might get aids
Yes, my dear contemporaries
Uncertainty rules
Our fragile kingdom
And our art
Is an impression
An expression of this uncertainty

Guillermo Gómez-Peña has often said that his performance art is a reflection and analysis of society and his function as a “reverse anthropologist” is to reveal how the marginalized experience and the view of reality place the hegemonic culture in that same perspective. While these poems are not necessarily interactive, they are examples of the artist’s attempt at “brownifying” the web with the Spanglish language, the gaze of the Other, and the critique of the dominant culture’s fears. The topics chosen do not represent a specific sector of society nor do they speak of ethnic issues; these can in fact be translatable to any culture. In a sense, we can say that he has brought the margins to the center in these examples by speaking of issues that are transferable and yet speak of a particular experience, that of the ethnic in the U.S.

Video Gallery

In his “Video Gallery” we find a more hi-tech poetry that incorporates images, video, music, and verse, all mixed in a *mélange* of animation, recitation and sound elements. In these particular pieces the reader / spectator / audience participant is an integral component of his dialogical work. These are examples of how web-based video-poetry and hypertext verse, placed in a global medium, both absorbs the reader and requests audience participation making ultimately the effect of displacement and dislocation an exercise that questions not only the physical act of moving and immigration but also the political, theoretical and even philosophical notions of identity and displacement. These texts serve as examples of concrete social, demographic, and linguistic processes that speak in a mythical language about a “proletariat kind of internationalism,” as Gómez-Peña would put it (Huizar 210); processes that are typical all over the world and in a sense international. He refuses to regard these processes as part of globalization because of the colonial connotations and ethnocentric notion that this concept entails. In this section there are two video-poems that reflect the experience of the Other, “Apocalypse,” and “Califas.” “Apocalypse” uses the city of Los Angeles as subject of this inevitable destruction. It is an “L.A.that nunca vino y nunca llegará.” The poem starts with the image of the mex-tech speaking into a microphone—the artist wearing an Aztec head piece—and a satellite view of the geographical area of the city, and then goes on to represent this urban area with the rapid surge of freeway lights that shimmer and daze the viewer. The viewer is thus looking at the space from above, and we know it is the Other looking down as we see the image of the two mariachi figures above the clouds looking down. The spectator takes the same perspective. This city is symbolic of many voices that have contributed to this devastation: the criminals, lawyers,

policemen, *políticos*, Hollywood screenwriters. According to Gómez-Peña, they all have participated in a convoluted plot to “join cults to make life bearable” they see no difference between “primal desire and self-expression.” We can sense a subliminal effect in the video with the flashing verses, the oral recitation and eerie music. The poet/artist speaks bluntly of an alter reality that exists in this city, or as he says, “fascism with yogurt, to put it bluntly.” We hear a critique of the media that treats monumental (war) and entertainment (sports) events with the same level of importance; we see, says Gómez-Peña, “all American boys with big weapons and small aspirations” on the same television broadcast with sports entertainment. Finally, we can sense how the disembodied body (on the web) is related to the disfranchised body that no longer has a home, not an L.A. nor a U.S. He chants,

U.S. means not a country
and L.A. not even a city
my house not even a house

L.A. *nunca vino*
y nunca llegará

this *pinchi* city doesn't even exist

Los Angeles home to so many immigrants, to so many and varied experiences of Diaspora, in this web experience is the site of displacement for both the immigrant and the citizen, for the concept of urban settlement is debunked by Gómez-Peña when he makes it clear that everyone is afraid of “losing themselves in another culture, another airport, another lover, another trip. . . *que sé yo.*” The displaced persona in this piece is the inhabitant that claims to have a home, to live in an L.A. and a U.S. that is actually

non-existent. He speaks of the fear to experience other cultures and get lost in these, of getting lost in the transient space of an airport, or in the arms of a lover or the experience of a trip. “Califas” posits the notion of news and the relations between the individual and its relation to world affairs: “Good evening California, good morning Europe.” The city is seen as representative of a nation juxtaposed to the individual represented by a continent. The center of the world is situated in “Califas” or California and from here he relates the various events affecting the individual. In this world perspective “*historia* and *hysteria*” are parallel and simultaneous where outrageous events may might as well seem real: “eight-year old suburban wonder kid kills his parents, neighbors and his toys, claims he ate too much ice cream and receives 2000 letters of support. A vivid example of global solidarity.” On the other hand, the real political issues remain unquestioned and uneventful, “120 Mexicans on death row” does not scandalize the viewer. In this confusion the “border is open tonight” and hysteria replaces history in which FOX Channel 12 makes it happen. In this video-poem Gómez-Peña explores several key factors that affect all individuals, such as the dark sides of globalization, the fear of invasion by immigrant cultures, of “mexicide,” for example, a dangerous contaminant similar to those of pesticide and genocide, all of which aim to kill a species. The images posted in this virtual space, this video-poem, confronts the fears and desires of the hegemonic anglo culture and critically suggests a revision of this.

As Thomas Foster succinctly points out, Gómez Peña’s technological representations of racialized subjects help analysts think and question how race is represented in a more technological medium. It leads me to question if race can be erased with the possible anonymity and gender-less identification that technology, such as cyber-space, can

provide. His “cybersaints” do exactly the opposite, they do not let the viewer forget that s/he is entering a very ethnic space where the protagonists speak Spanglish, raise issues of representation of the “other,” question the white hegemonic order, and resist any process of acculturation that would devoid them (the “cybersaints”) of differentiation. The fact that these *personas* are unusual grant them a privileged space where the reader/spectator can either identify with them or be appalled by the “hybridity” or unusualness of the character. The fact of the matter is that most viewers that dive into Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s website know what to expect, and in fact, seek and embrace the “borderless” representations of race, as its author cites. It might even be safe to say that these spectators are not the average web-surfer, but rather form part of the very specialized, privileged and well-read critics (literary, cultural, theatrical and performance) that find in these representations an embodied account of the same theories they profess. So, then, does the web, specifically his site, provide a home for the Diaspora experience? I would venture to say that it does. The notions of the racialized body, the ethnic individual’s experience, and ultimately the gaze of the Other is privileged; the images conjure an ethnic gaze scrutinizing the anglo-culture’s fears. Although Gómez-Peña’s site performs a very clear marketing function for his performances, books and CDs, it does provide a strong contribution to the critical representation of how the ethnic body may use the discursive space of the world wide web.

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Reseñas/Reviews

Correa-Díaz, Luis. *Cervantes y América / Cervantes en las Américas. Mapa de campo y ensayo de bibliografía razonada. Kassel/Barcelona: Edition Reichenberger, 2006.*

Al lector del XXI, inmerso en el internet y la cultura mediática, se le plantea una pregunta. ¿Cómo ha de leer a Cervantes cuya obra lleva más de un siglo siendo parte de América, de sus diversas tradiciones culturales y de sus escritores? El libro de Luis Correa-Díaz ofrece una respuesta sólida, al rastrear la trayectoria del *Quijote* por el hemisferio occidental y plantar en lo americano la más fecunda semilla que hoy tiene el cervantismo.

Apenas salido el *Quijote* de la imprenta, se embarcó hacia México la mayor parte de la *princeps* y, en 1607, la farsa quijotesca celebrada en Perú en honor del virrey, generó comentario escrito. A través de los siglos y remontando el tabú de separación entre lo español y lo hispanoamericano, plumas como la de Bello, Lizardi, Montalvo y sobre todo la de Rubén Darío, mantuvieron viva la presencia de Cervantes en las Américas, e hicieron del Alcaláino un residente permanente de varios países americanos. La obra de Cervantes se convirtió así en una archimetáfora y en una fórmula de identificación no sólo para grandes escritores, sino que la asumieron países y hasta movimientos internacionales. Kathy Acker se lo apropió para reclamarlo como calibrador de la cultura estadounidense. Eduardo Galeano contribuyó con "En un lugar de la cárcel" al subgénero cervantino de estudios carcelarios/de terror político que dio a luz Latinoamérica en las décadas de los 1970s-80s. Guillermo Cabrera Infante y Carlos Fuentes proyectaron La Mancha hacia América, en un afán de renovación. De costas europeas a costas americanas, un puñado de expertos logró mantener vivo el tema de "Cervantes y América" y su correlativo de "América en la obra de Cervantes". El

cuatricentenario del *Quijote* acarreó un sinnúmero de congresos, conferencias internacionales y comentarios célebres. Ha tomado más de un siglo de esfuerzos de pioneros latinoamericanos (Febres Cordero, J. T. Medina) y españoles (Rodríguez Marín, Díaz-Plaja), para que dé fruto valioso. En el 2005, la Real Academia Española de la Lengua reconoció al "factor América" como tema legítimo del cervantismo. El enorme territorio de intertextualidad reclamado por esta vertiente del cervantismo cubre actualmente desde la Patagonia hasta California y desde España hasta la costa americana del Pacífico. Es imprescindible un "mapa" para poderlo transitar, y finalmente lo tenemos, indica el prologuista (Fernando Moreno de la Universidad de Poitiers) de *Cervantes y América/Cervantes en las Américas*.

La primera parte del título alude a la presencia de las Indias en las obras de Cervantes, área de estudio que dejó de ser novedad a fines del XX, merced al reconocimiento internacional brindado a los aportes de Diana de Armas Wilson y Roberto González Echevarría.

La segunda parte traza la proyección de la extensa obra cervantina —narrativa, poesía, teatro e incluso ensayo— en las obras de varios autores contemporáneos (latinoamericanos, chicanos, "americanos", "hispanos"), pero también hacia la cinematografía: desde el cantinflesco filme *Un Quijote sin mancha* hasta el reciente *Lost in La Mancha*, pasando por la serie televisiva dirigida por Orson Welles. El bimembrismo temático de este razonado libro cubre estructuralmente sus otras partes, que sirven de complemento al lector interesado en la vigencia actual de Cervantes, cuyos escritos cada vez se ven menos separables de América y lo americano.

La tercera parte, "La Cervantiada americana", se enfoca en los textos recreativos (Borges, bajo el lente de Julio Ortega) y en autores cervantinos como Rosario Ferré de *El coloquio de las perras* y el chicano Daniel Venegas con su *Don Chipote*; pero no pasa por alto pertinentes referencias de la huella cervantina en el cine, el teatro, las crónicas de viaje y los testimonios.

La parte siguiente revisa la "crítica literaria" americana —latinoamericana y estadounidense— y ocasionalmente la española (Díaz-Plaja, "Don Quijote en el país de Martín Fierro"), y les sigue la pista a los críticos dedicados a calibrar el impacto de lo cervantino en las letras latinoamericanas. "El carácter quijotesco", quinta parte, da las principales referencias de artículos, libros, ensayos y ponencias "que aplican el paradigma quijotesco para interpretar la realidad y, en especial, el carácter americano", las cuales van desde Arciniegas ("Don Quijote: un demócrata de izquierda") a Fernández Retamar.

Parte sexta y penúltima, "El quijotismo en el Descubrimiento y Conquista/Evangelización de América" se ocupa de las obras que han estudiado al *Quijote* como conquistador intelectual y emocional de la cultura hispanoamericana, sin olvidar mencionar las obras que han tocado el asunto del viso quijotesco de los conquistadores.

Finalmente, "Personajes históricos americanos en su dimensión quijotesca" constituye un interesantísimo y pertinente muestrario de textos sobre Simón Bolívar y sus émulos, donde no faltan el Che Guevara, Chávez y Marcos, siendo cada entrada útilmente

acompañada del correspondiente sitio o página internet. [Véase la Tabla de contenidos en: <http://www.siglo-de-oro.eu/html/sumb44.html>]

Resulta aparente que, en el precario reino de los libros, el *Quijote* se ha convertido en el fenómeno mundial de transculturización. El internet es prueba de este proceso-en-desarrollo y Correa-Díaz cumple con darnos los portales electrónicos de muchas de sus entradas bibliográficas y de referencias clave, el Centro Virtual Cervantes y la revista digital *Espéculo* de la universidad complutense de Madrid, p.e. Su libro es un instrumento de amplio rango que sirve tanto al investigador avezado como al estudiante iniciado.

Con su eficaz *Mapa de campo y ensayo de bibliografía razonada*, Correa-Díaz une su voz a la de cervantistas como George Mariscal, Anne Cruz y James Fernández para que, con el clamor conjunto, la investigación sobre el tema Cervantes/América se mantenga activa a dos vías y asuma el carácter transoceánico que siempre alentó el creador del *Quijote*.

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Martín Kohan, *Museo de la revolución*. Buenos Aires: Mondadori, 2006. 187 páginas

Desde hace varios años, en Argentina, toda una literatura memorialista escrita por los sobrevivientes de la violencia armada y de la represión estatal de los años setenta no ha dejado de volver en clave de testimonios catárticos a lo que años de neoliberalismo y democracia de mercado convirtieron en un enigma: la pasión política de los años setenta, la ética revolucionaria no divorciada de la violencia armada. Confiando en la potencia narrativa del recuerdo y en el poder catártico de la memoria para reconstruir el pasado, numerosas autobiografías y testimonios volvieron, en primera persona, a una experiencia a la que el sujeto no solo podría acceder sino también comunicar plenamente por medio de palabras dóciles que entregan una verdad sin resistencia. En *Tiempo pasado. Cultura de la memoria y giro subjetivo*, Beatriz Sarlo (2005) ha criticado extensamente este giro subjetivo que, a pesar del descrédito teórico del 'yo', confía en el testimonio como herramienta fiable de conocimiento –como si el sufrimiento fuera garantía de verdad suficiente.

¿Pero cómo vuelven las generaciones más jóvenes a los años setenta? Favorecidos literariamente por no haber estado allí, sin el ímpetu memorialista ni los achaques realistas de las generaciones anteriores que publicaron durante los 90 sus historias de vida, aquéllos que en los años 70 eran demasiados jóvenes para ser militantes son los que hoy tienen que abrir nuevas vías para escribir, pensar o desear lo que nunca fueron ni tuvieron: un pasado de militantes revolucionarios. La pregunta para ellos no es cómo fue, sino cómo habrá sido –una pregunta que más que evocar recuerdos suscita hipótesis

y dispara ficciones. Heredar, para ellos, no es una fatalidad sino una tarea que no puede confiarse al recuerdo de los hechos ni apelar al sufrimiento como garantía narrativa. Así, sin sentimentalismo ni nostalgia por el pasado juvenil perdido, algunos de estos escritores reescriben la violencia en clave de absurdo (Daniel Guebel, *La vida por Perón*) o trabajan las consignas revolucionarias como un material cristalizado y por lo tanto parodiable (Carlos Gamerro, *La aventura de los bustos de Eva*). Otros en cambio, como en la película *Los rubios*, se desentienden de la herencia en nombre de la vida privada y de una ‘nueva’ memoria que impugna y rechaza de plano el proyecto revolucionario –una memoria que se confunde con el olvido.

Tal vez por no recurrir exclusivamente a la memoria como procedimiento narrativo, el espesor temporal que Martín Kohan (*Los cautivos*, *Dos veces Junio*, *Segundos afuera*) logra darle a su sexta novela, *Museo de la Revolución*, es inédito dentro del mapa de la literatura argentina contemporánea sobre los años setenta. Nacido en 1967, Kohan se toma en serio la responsabilidad de una herencia y escribe una novela sobre un militante revolucionario –Rubén Tesare, nombre de guerra “Dorrego”– quien, en las pausas de la acción, se dedica a aquello que estaría en abierta contradicción con la experiencia política pura: además de hacer la revolución, Tesare escribe y teoriza sobre ella. Las puntillosas notas de lectura de Tesare sobre la revolución y el tiempo (o sobre el tiempo de la revolución, o sobre cómo una revolución comienza por revolucionar el tiempo), están en poder de Norma Rossi, una exiliada argentina que, veinte años después de la desaparición de Tesare, está por entregarle el manuscrito al narrador de la novela, un agente literario de viaje por México interesado en publicarlo. La entrega del manuscrito se demora, y este aplazamiento es la novela: ni sí ni no, Norma monta históricas escenas

de lectura en voz alta para el narrador que, acosado por las notas obsesivas de Tesare sobre Marx, Engels, Lenin o Trotsky, espera una respuesta para volverse a Buenos Aires. Pero además de esas notas de lectura, parece que también hay un diario donde Tesare llevaba el registro de sus experiencias. ¿Pero hay un diario? ¿Dejó Tesare un registro de sus experiencias de militante, de su misión hasta ese pequeño pueblo de provincia donde fue visto por última vez antes de desaparecer? No lo sabemos, porque es Norma, entre lectura y lectura, la que maneja los hilos de la historia de vida de Tesare: la misión clandestina que lo llevó hasta un pequeño pueblo de provincia, el fastidio de Tesare con sus compañeros de agrupación por haberlo obligado a abandonar a su pareja, su aventura ocasional con una pasajera como revancha secreta contra la verticalidad de sus mandos.

Museo de la revolución se mueve entre el pasado y el presente, entre esa noche de 1975 en un pequeño pueblo de provincia y el viaje a México en 1995 (mala época, en Latinoamérica, para la conciencia revolucionaria), entre la teoría y la acción, entre la vida privada y la disciplina partidaria del militante. Quebrando la linealidad del relato y multiplicando franjas temporales, Kohan despliega el repertorio de géneros y discusiones sobre los modos de representar los años setenta. ¿En qué capa discursiva yace la clave del enigma de Tesare? ¿Por qué discurso vamos a dejarnos atrapar, por la historia de su vida o por la pasión de su reflexión teórica? ¿Qué lengua literaria utilizar para excavar en ese pasado que, como los fantasmas, vive de volver? Y si de un acoso se trata –los muertos de una generación que vuelven por justicia– ¿qué consignas vamos a heredar y transmitir? La respuesta de *Museo de la revolución* es exasperar el conflicto, tensar las contradicciones. Si la historia de Tesare se repite para el narrador no es

porque veinte años después la escritura se conciba también como una acción, o porque el pensamiento utópico se aloje hoy en los recovecos de la memoria y la vida privada. Se trata de dos lógicas intraducibles. Antes que juzgar o parodiar, *Museo de la revolución* trata de entender la validez histórica de una serie de dicotomías cuyo sentido se nos ha vuelto inaccesible –la oposición entre teoría y acción, o entre lo político y lo privado. De hecho, y esto es lo inquietante, Tesare no habría muerto si hubiera obedecido la orden de someter su vida sentimental a las directivas de su partido; si hubiera comprendido cabalmente que en la guerra “las cuestiones sentimentales también son cuestiones políticas” –un ascetismo inadmisibles para nuestra sensibilidad actual. Ni la escritura ni lo privado son entonces un consuelo o una continuación de la revolución por otros medios. “La revolución no deja margen para jugar con las traslaciones de sentido. Bajo el imperio radical de la realidad, los únicos sentidos posibles son los literales” –escribe Tesare en *Museo de la Revolución* (186), desalentando la tentación de cualquier lectura alegórica que ponga en el mismo plano de igualdad al novelista de hoy con el revolucionario de ayer (ambos trabajan con el tiempo, ambos elaboran la relación entre palabras y acciones, etc). Cuando en *Museo de la Revolución* se dice, se escribe o se lee “revolución” se está queriendo decir: revolución –no, mal que nos pese, novela o vanguardia. La escritura comienza porque termina la revolución, o porque la revolución desapareció del horizonte del presente, si bien no las violentas desigualdades que llevaron a una generación de jóvenes a optar, razonablemente, por la transformación y el cambio revolucionario. Lo que vuelve no es un recuerdo, sino un cuaderno, una escritura que llama menos a la memoria que a otra escritura. Heredar es releer y reescribir, es no interrumpir una cadena de lecturas, es recibir y relanzar los restos de un deseo incumplido, no de un proyecto fracasado.

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Hugo Achugar. *Planetas sin boca*. Montevideo: Trilce, 2004, 262 páginas.

Planetas sin boca es una colección de textos recientes (1995 - 2003) del crítico y escritor uruguayo Hugo Achugar, donde se recoge y en algunos casos se reformulan algunos ensayos aparecidos con anterioridad en publicaciones dispersas en diversas partes de América. Está dividido en tres secciones: “Espacios inciertos”, “Representaciones de la nación” y “Sobre arte y representaciones”. En la primera aparece planteado el problema del espacio de la enunciación del discurso crítico, y el lugar del intelectual en las redes de distribución de los capitales --tecnológico, financiero e intelectual-- analizando las relaciones de poder implícitas en esas redes. En las dos últimas secciones se transitan algunas articulaciones locales de la memoria y de la noción de nación, a partir de ejemplos concretos tomados de la cultura latinoamericana contemporánea.

El libro gira en torno al problema de las relaciones del discurso crítico y de los fenómenos culturales locales respecto a la globalización cultural. En particular, los ensayos muestran una preocupación constante respecto a la cuestión de la hegemonía de los discursos críticos que se orientan desde los centros culturales, y en particular desde los centros de poder de la academia norteamericana, hacia la problemática de las culturas “subalternas” o “periféricas”. Si bien la temática de la(s) cultura(s) latinoamericana(s) aparece en prácticamente todos los ensayos, creo que sería erróneo restringirlos a un libro de crítica sobre la cultura o la literatura de América Latina. Más bien se orientan hacia el problema de las representaciones de lo otro o del otro (no

exclusivamente latinoamericano) desde ambos márgenes de las dicotomías que han atravesado el pensamiento crítico en las últimas décadas, y que aparecen replanteanteadas en esta serie de reflexiones: centro/periferia, global/local, mundo/aldea (77).

En primer lugar, Hugo Achugar hace un relevo de los cuestionamientos críticos que se han hecho acerca de esta serie de oposiciones. Denuncia que la negación o el cuestionamiento que un sector de la crítica establece sobre ellas esconde un gesto regresivo de colonialismo cultural, según el cual la globalización traería, por fin, un debate intelectual en pie de igualdad, sin tomar en cuenta las diferencias sociales:

Según esta línea de pensamiento, no habría ya centro ni periferia. Habríamos realizado el sueño del pibe periférico y seríamos todos centrales y todos periféricos. Una suerte de democracia universal habría ganado la galaxia cultural. El reino de los cielos sería de los sumergidos pero también lo sería el infierno. En ambos convivirían metropolitanos y aldeanos, centrales y marginales todos conectados en las autopistas informáticas y en las gigantescas redes/telarañas de la internet.

Con ello, denuncia en el discurso crítico emanado desde los ámbitos hegemónicos el efecto de borrar la diferencia mediante la ilusión de un debate igualitario en el ámbito académico, como si no hubiera lugar a luchas políticas y tentativas de dominación implícitas en ese discurso.

El problema pasa por cómo se conceptualizan y se les da voz a las historias locales. En este sentido, es ilustrativo lo que señala para el caso de Walter Mignolo, y la problemática del uso del inglés como lengua universal de debate académico:

A pesar de validar las “historias locales” como productoras de conocimiento que desplazan las epistemologías globales, Mignolo sostiene (al referirse a un intento de contextualización del discurso de Retamar en función de lo sostenido por el argentino del Barco) que “el momento de enorme energía y producción intelectual de América Latina” (supuestamente los setenta) “tiende a desdibujarse en la escena teórica internacional debido a la fuerza hegemónica del inglés, como idioma, y de la discusión en torno al posmodernismo y del poscolonialismo, fundamentalmente llevada adelante en inglés” . El planteo de Mignolo parece sugerir que la reivindicación y restitución de las “historias locales” como productoras de conocimiento que desafían “(. . .) las historias y las epistemologías globales. . .” sólo es posible en inglés. Lo cual habilitaría preguntar si esa afirmación no tiene que ver con “las historias locales” desde donde Mignolo reflexiona y escribe –el campus universitario norteamericano y el surgimiento de un “mercado” teórico latino-norte-americano– así como a la creciente “anglo-sajonización” de la reflexión sobre América Latina. (73)

Achugar sostiene que las relaciones entre los discursos académicos que emergen desde centros de poder económico-financiero (llamado en el libro el *Commonwealth* teórico), y aquellos que surgen desde la periferia no son horizontales. Por eso el crítico promueve

no abolir festivamente la dicotomía centro/periferia, para, en lugar de ello, centrarse en la dinámica conflictiva de sus relaciones. En cuanto al valor conceptual de esta oposición, Achugar defiende la necesidad de mantenerla como resultado de un cálculo de ganancia y pérdida realizado desde la posición del intelectual periférico:

En cierto nivel, parecería que [. . .] la espacialidad desde donde se pensaba o desde donde nos pensábamos ha caducado. Sin embargo, si bien sería posible aceptar esta suerte de reformulación espacial, tecnológica y financiera donde centro y periferia perdería su sentido original, lo que se pierde parece no ser trivial. Se pierde nada menos y nada más que la consideración de las desigualdades en nuestros países y en nuestras sociedades. (75)

Es contra esa pérdida justamente que el discurso crítico de Hugo Achugar busca posicionarse, haciendo explícito el espacio desde el cual se enuncia, y analizando también el lugar que le cabe al intelectual en las sociedades latinoamericanas contemporáneas. Se trataría de un discurso que toma como asunción básica la situación de desigualdad social presente en el espacio en el cual se ubica el sujeto de la enunciación. Con ello, una mirada sobre la periferia que no tome en cuenta esas desigualdades será leída con sospecha.

Se denuncia que la mirada desde los centros de poder financiero, político y académico opera una homogeneización de la periferia al otorgarles en su narrativa un “perfil universal” que se confronta a la heterogeneidad del “mundo real” (74). Concretamente, el habla periférica sería percibida desde los centros como un balbuceo, al que alude el

ensayo titulado “Sobre el balbuceo teórico latinoamericano”, donde justamente se plantea que la mirada sobre el otro oblitera la diferencia, y es básicamente un constructo proyectado.

En efecto, es ingenuo pensar que los flujos de conocimiento se dan al margen de fenómenos de acumulación, y lo es también desconocer el hecho de que los espacios en los que esa acumulación se genera establecen una relación jerárquica respecto a sus periferias. Los centros de poder político, cultural y financiero tienen interés en proyectar un tipo de mirada sobre la alteridad.

Apuntando a analizar las relaciones entre los discursos hegemónicos y los discursos elaborados en ámbitos periféricos, Achugar señala que estas relaciones no se dan sin actos de resistencia concretos, que cuestionan la unidireccionalidad de la imposición cultural y discursiva. Basado en la noción de “receptor activo” de Antonio Cornejo Polar, Achugar concluye que los procesos de resignificación y reapropiación que los artefactos culturales globales sufren en su contacto con las culturas locales (atravesadas, a su vez, por desigualdades de clase, género, etnia, etc.) una transformación tal, que ya no se puede hablar de un mismo valor cultural, sino que se introduce en ellos una cualidad diferencial:

La tensión puede ser o es más rica; sobre todo si se piensa que la eventual diversidad o fragmentación de las sociedades o comunidades nacionales produciría una decodificación múltiple del mensaje único. Esto confirmaría algo ya sabido, la heterogeneidad propia e histórica de

nuestros países no permite imaginar una homogeneización inexorable. Por lo menos confirmaría que los procesos de penetración de culturas hegemónicas en América Latina no han supuesto ni es probable que supongan una uniformización aculturada. (67)

Por esta misma diversidad de receptores y formas de recepción, es que pierde consistencia la operación homogeneizante del *Commonwealth* teórico respecto a las culturas a las cuales se refiere, problemática que no concierne a América Latina exclusivamente. Un ejemplo de esto puede constituirlo el análisis de las clasificaciones étnicas que se opera en la academia norteamericana, que al ser aplicadas a otras realidades, implica el contrabando de una historia y de una memoria particulares hacia otras regiones del planeta. Esa historia y esa memoria pueden tener validez, en efecto, en el contexto local norteamericano, pero su funcionamiento y conceptualización no son universalizables:

¿Por qué no pensar que la historia de los intentos de “*melting pot*” no es la misma en los Estados Unidos y en las distintas partes de América? ¿Por qué no pensar que la lucha por los derechos civiles alteró el proyecto del “*melting pot*” en los Estados Unidos y que en América Latina el proyecto del “crisol de razas” ha tenido una historia distinta y que además varía según las regiones? Y para terminar, me pregunto si el fracaso o la erosión del proyecto del “*melting pot*” en los Estados Unidos obliga a una idéntica lectura de la historia del proyecto del “crisol de razas” en América Latina? (51)

En este pasaje, el “*melting pot*” y el “crisol de razas” funcionan como marcos conceptuales o como proyectos diversos entre sí en un grado tal, que no pueden asimilarse sin una revisión conceptual profunda.

Planetas sin boca, pues, explora las tensiones entre las formas de conceptualización globales y sus respuestas, procesamientos o reposicionamientos locales, así como las condicionantes para una elaboración contra-hegemónica del discurso crítico. Las soluciones posibles no son simples ni unívocas, sino que dependen de la capacidad para recorrer la heterogeneidad y dar cuenta de ella. El espacio de lo heterogéneo y de las localizaciones múltiples se abre como abanico ante la mirada crítica. El posicionamiento del intelectual respecto a ese espacio determinará su lugar en las relaciones de poder, y en las redes de distribución de los saberes.

[Marcos Wasem](#)

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Entrevistas/Interviews

Política y literatura: conversando con Jorge Santiago Perednik

[Susana](#) Haydu

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Jorge Santiago Perednik es poeta, traductor y ensayista. Es reconocido por su trayectoria literaria que incluye la dirección del Programa de Altos Estudios en Poesía de la Universidad de Buenos Aires. También es director de la Revista de Poesía XUL desde 1980. Ha publicado *Los mil micos* (1979), *El cuerpo del horror* (1981), *El shock de los lender* (1985), *Un pedazo del año* (1986), *El fin del no* (1991), *Variaciones padin* (1996), *La desconocida - Circo macedonista sobre "Adriana Buenos Aires"* (1998), *El gran derrapador* (2002), *El todo, la parte* (México, 2005) y *La querella de los gustos* (2006).

Susana Haydu: *¿Te resulta interesante que se hable de una “generación” de los poetas de tu época y se te incluya en ella?*

Jorge Santiago Perednik: El concepto de generación sirve para ordenar la realidad. Parecería que en todos los ámbitos el ser humano necesita eso, poner frenos a un orden del que forma parte y por resultarle ajeno e incomprensible llama caos, resistir la falta de jerarquías y clasificaciones que propone el mundo, evitar el tránsito por esa suerte de “cambalache” en constate cambio, el universo que habita. El intelecto rehuye el

desnudo de lo real, porque rehuye todo lo que no puede someter: prefiere relacionarse con mapas, que en definitiva son criaturas suyas, y no con territorios. Necesita que un orden de su elaboración reemplace a la realidad, se interponga e intermedie, sea un refugio, un distanciamiento, una fuga posible del estado de inquietud y zozobra permanentes que la inhumanidad de lo real le generan. La clasificación tranquiliza, ofrece la ilusión de que se entiende algo porque se lo coloca en un casillero, pero ubicar las cosas o agruparlas en clases no asegura su comprensión, y muchas veces distrae de ella. Los esquemas organizativos son una instancia segunda, un artificio, una abstracción; además, en tanto para la mayoría de las personas no son frutos de su elaboración intelectual sino esquemas heredados, son un atajo de la comodidad. Así funcionan respecto de la diversidad de la literatura las generaciones y en ese punto tienen poco de interesante. Conforman un orden que opera de un modo masivo –cuando la poesía resiste lo masivo–, contemporizador –cuando la poesía evita someterse a un tiempo, especialmente al suyo–, y que valora las coincidencias y deprecia las diferencias –cuando el arte o lo poético es la búsqueda de las diferencias. Pueden ser una manera de no conocer, pero también una manera de acceder a la poesía y entrar a ella, aun por la puerta de las generaciones, es en sí mismo un paso importante: una vez adentro, si vale la redundancia, se está adentro y no se sabe qué puede pasar; tal vez comience una aventura. La crítica, por ejemplo, puede trabajar desde las generaciones en contra de la política de las generaciones, empeñarse en buscar diferencias dentro de las similitudes, o incluso entender las coincidencias como un momento negativo, en el que la fuerza de una moda impone un estilo colectivo y aliena a los poetas para que imposten una voz que se conforme a él. Incluso lo generacional puede ser una vía de acceso para conocer las excepciones. Me parece que lo más interesante puede ir por este

camino, no importa cual sea el instrumental crítico que se adopte. En resumen: no se puede conocer sin las generalizaciones, pero sólo se puede conocer cuando se va más allá de ellas. En los años 70 y 80, otro ejemplo, se solía usar un concepto parecido, y se hablaba en vez de “generación” de “producción” poética de los 70, producción de los 80, etc. La crítica estaba tomada por una jerga economicista, adoptada sobre todo de los desarrollos teóricos del marxismo. Ahora esta visión, que se proponía criticar la sociedad, curiosamente terminaba reinsertando la literatura dentro de la producción social capitalista y la actividad de los artistas dentro del trabajo alienado. Por eso en los países autodenominados socialistas no pasó nada diferente. Poetas y poéticas más o menos mediocres sostenidos por el partido porque respondían a sus designios y otros que no, los más interesantes, muchas veces perseguidos o silenciados. A mí me interesa la idea de un arte o una poesía no integrados ni homologados sino en resistencia con su sociedad, entendiendo que la resistencia no es una pared sino más bien una red, un intento de oposición agujereado. Así que aquí hay otro concepto, el de “producción” poética, también poco interesante para leer poesía. No obstante en un punto da en la tecla, aun sin proponérselo, porque muchos poetas y poemas parecen tomar como modelo la “producción”, o ser resultado de ella, esto es, las reglas del proceso económico capitalista les cuadran. Un fenómeno contemporáneo interesante, a partir del cual se podría armar un principio de clasificación: de un lado la producción de poemas de cualquier década; del otro los poemas de esa década que escapan a la producción. Un comentario es que dentro del primer “grupo” están algunos de los poetas reconocidos, esto es propuestos para el consumo por el mercado; otro comentario es que no debe resultar extraño que el mercado se interese, más que por el arte o la poesía, por la producción y el consumo: depende de ellos, existe para ellos.

SH: *Volviendo al tema de la “generación”, ¿cuál sería tu crítica al concepto?*

JSP: Da lugar a muchos equívocos, es más, parecería que su función establecida, o pobre, es ésta, provocar el equí-voco: una generación como un conjunto de voces equi-paradas, con-fundidas. Poetas que se paran o son parados en equivalencia con sus vecinos y están, además de fundidos en un estilo común, bastante confundidos respecto de lo que están haciendo o se está haciendo con ellos. La generación o creación de un ordenamiento generacional es una tarea de uniformización de las voces. Una de las acepciones de generación es la de un conjunto de personas que comparte un momento histórico, en este caso de poetas, pero otra de sus acepciones, en una suerte de metáfora biológica, alude al surgimiento de un cuerpo nuevo. Y la generación es eso, un cuerpo nuevo, distinto de los poemas y poetas y posterior a ellos, una realidad segunda, inventada. Algo generado por la crítica, a veces incluso por los mismos poetas, de ningún modo un hecho de poesía. No obstante, la generación tiene también su interés y utilidad. Para empezar hace referencia a una época, que es algo exterior y a la vez interior, lo que permite a la lectura perforar el bloque de la generalización, tener la posibilidad de un ingreso y una fuga. Esta podría ser la función rica de las generaciones. Hay datos contextuales, de la circunstancia histórica, geográfica, cultural, además de los poéticos, con los que se puede ensayar agrupamientos y a la vez ir más allá de ellos, esto es, iniciar travesías distintas, acumular planos de lectura múltiples. Por ejemplo la segunda parte de la década de los 70, cuando empecé a escribir, tuvo un dato totalitario, que abarcó a toda la población: el terror. El régimen militar de terror bajo el que vivieron los nuevos poetas fue para sus poemas, como para todo lo que se hizo en la

época, una influencia permanente, totalitaria, que abarcó pero excedió lo poético. Afectó la vida cotidiana, las relaciones personales, lo que se podía o no se podía decir, lo que había que ocultar, en definitiva, todo lo que se hacía. Los poetas sometidos a las condiciones exteriores de terror, afectados por ellas, necesariamente tuvieron que dar respuestas poéticas a esas condiciones, elaborarlas de algún modo o incluso tratar de evitarlas en sus versos, lo que deviene en ciertas estrategias rastreables por la lectura. Se puede intentar pensar, entonces, cómo afectó el terror a la poesía de su época, qué respuestas generó. Por supuesto que cualquier poema puede y suele ser leído desgajado de su circunstancia, pero apenas se advierte que fue escrito bajo el terror cotidiano, cobra un sentido distinto.

SH: *¿Entonces tu punto de vista es que la dictadura militar influyó en los poemas de la época?*

JSP: Por lo que viví y vi, nadie sometido a un gobierno o una época de terror puede escapar a su influencia. Más aún, si alguien afirmara lo contrario, si dijera por ejemplo, como más de uno dijo, que la poesía no tiene nada que ver con su época, o que a la poesía el terror nunca la alcanza, pensaría que quiere ocultar algo, cualesquiera sean sus motivos. Diría que habla como si estuviera sujeto a algún terror. Aquí en Argentina durante la dictadura militar había mucha gente que trataba de no salir de sus casas o trabajos, salvo para lo imprescindible, porque tenía miedo de “desaparecer”, aunque no perteneciera a ninguna de los bandos o las bandas que se enfrentaban militarmente. Había operativos sorpresivos en las calles o en los transportes públicos donde detenían gente al azar, o por las dudas. Detenían-desaparecían a quienes figuraban en las libretas

telefónicas de otros detenidos. Había un clima de persecución y de imprevisibilidad de la represión. Los intelectuales y los artistas eran sospechosos para el régimen por su sola actividad, y víctimas potenciales. Es muy difícil sostener que una persona intelectualmente inquieta, conciente de lo que estaba pasando y sensibilizada por ello, podía evitar que ese estado de terror la afecte, que se traslade de algún modo a su actividad de poeta, a los poemas que escribía. Después habría que leer los poemas desde esta perspectiva y verificar las relaciones que los poemas entablan con su época, los modos en que el terror es filtrado o expresado o evitado en los versos.

SH: *¿Y según tus lecturas esa influencia se verifica?*

JSP: Me gustaría poder decir que todas las poéticas que se destacaron entonces, sin exclusiones, tuvieron una actitud de oposición a su época social, pero no fue así. La poesía no es algo idílico, tiene sus costados pragmáticos, negocia con su entorno, cede, concede, intercambia. El terror exige y el peor aterrorizado es el que se rinde sin advertirlo. El poeta en definitiva es un ser humano, con sus grandezas y limitaciones. Por otro lado hay dos hechos que dan qué pensar respecto de lo poderosa que fue la influencia de esa época. El primero es que no hay todavía, tres o cuatro décadas después, una crítica que se aboque a considerar cuáles fueron durante el terror las relaciones entre la poesía y su época. ¿Cómo puede ser que un tema tan obvio o primario siga todavía intratado? Mi idea es que el terror afectó también a la crítica, le impuso silencio sobre ciertas cuestiones, y que los efectos del terror todavía continúan. El segundo es que no hubo en ese entonces, hasta donde uno conoce, una nueva poesía de cierto volumen escrita en el exilio. La poesía que interesa parece ser la que vivió el

terror como circunstancia de escritura. ¿Por qué en este caso las cosas fueron así, sabiendo que otros sucesos históricos dieron lugar a poesías de exilio riquísimas? ¿Hay en el caso argentino alguna relación distinta entre terror, lugar y escritura poética?

SH: *Hablame de “El Shock de los Lender” en relación a su época.*

JSP: Es un largo poema que propone, con toda intención, usar la época como tema/. Parte de un hecho real que en su momento conmovió a la sociedad, la dejó por uno o dos días en estado de “shock” –como dice el título, que recurre a un par de palabras extranjeras, tomadas del apellido de los protagonistas del hecho. El poema comienza con una propuesta poética, o al menos de lenguaje: “La palabra más bella del idioma es extranjera, bárbara”. “Bárbara” es desde su inscripción en el latín una onomatopeya que reproduce, más que el vocablo extranjero, cierta relación que se tiene con él. Muestra cómo alguien que no lo entiende ni lo quiere entender, oye un bar-bar-bar: dice de la propia extranjería del oyente en relación con una palabra de la que no se puede apropiarse, en primer lugar porque no la quiere escuchar. Para los romanos todos los extranjeros son bárbaros, pronuncian un mismo bar-bar-bar aunque hablen distintas lenguas. En poesía, según pienso, la extranjería también opera pero de manera inversa: en vez de por enrasamiento, por explosión de la diferencia. La belleza toma cuerpo cada vez que el contacto con la extranjería de las palabras interrumpe un mecanismo, alguno de los mecanismos que componen el gran mecanismo por el cual la sociedad se reproduce a sí misma. La poesía sería el momento de esterilidad de un mundo que permite la generación de mundos nuevos. Porque no hay reproducción de la sociedad sin lenguaje. Y la poesía, la que proponen ciertas poéticas al menos, sería una obstrucción, una

interrupción, a las acciones del lenguaje dominante. El poema sigue en una deriva hasta que se advierte que la palabra más bella del idioma que anunciaba el primer verso es “sabotaje”. Que se podría definir como un barbarismo, una palabra capturada de otro idioma. La belleza sería eso, un sabotaje, una acción cuyo propósito es interrumpir un mecanismo, detener un proceso, impedir que cierta producción continúe. La belleza sería una salida del camino ya trazado, una interrupción del ritmo normal de las cosas, una anomalía. Y la poesía como acción de sabotear un mundo es un sabotaje positivo, porque su acción no es meramente destructiva sino que obstruye mediante una operación positiva, constructiva, que resulta del aporte de un poema. Por supuesto, no hay una palabra que pueda ser erigida como la más bella de la lengua, pero aquí de lo que se trata es de instalar este concepto de extranjería, y a la vez la idea de que la belleza es en sí misma paradójica, al menos en el terreno de la lengua.

SH: *Además el poema tiene un referente exterior que es histórico, un acontecimiento de la época.*

JSP: Sí. Un caso, presentado como policial, de unos hijos que mataron a sus padres. Después de un primer momento van surgiendo otros detalles: que la madre procuraba intercambios sexuales con uno de sus hijos, que el padre incurría avanzada su madurez en prácticas homosexuales. Estas son las anécdotas de la historia. En un nivel menos personal, hay otras circunstancias, sociales, que intervienen de manera “pesada”, como el tráfico de armas, el tráfico de drogas, las multinacionales complicadas en prácticas corruptas con las fuerzas armadas y funcionarios gubernamentales, los negociados, que involucraban al padre, ingeniero y alto ejecutivo de una de estas empresas. Poco antes la

vivienda familiar había sufrido un extraño y devastador incendio intencional y antes había muerto de forma dudosa otro alto ejecutivo compañero de trabajo del padre. La superficie del caso en cambio se cubría de ese delirio morboso fomentado por el amarillismo periodístico, a su vez seguramente alimentado desde el gobierno para distraer de lo importante. A lo que se sumaban detalles que no por delirantes dejaban de ser verdaderos: uno se enteraba que el Che Guevara había sido novio de la madre, o seguía las peripecias de la huida del protagonista, que durante días lograba eludir a las fuerzas armadas del país que lo perseguían huyendo a caballo. Había un shock superficial, mediático, culturalmente distractivo, y detrás otro que sacudía dos de los pilares, o de los tabúes, sobre los que se asienta la sociedad, la prohibición del incesto y la prohibición del parricidio, que este acontecimiento infringía. Eran estas violaciones y no los chismes periodísticos lo que provocaba semejante conmoción social, incluso semejante renegación social. Se pueden agregar tráfico de armas, tráfico de drogas, corrupción, asesinatos desde el poder, que de quedar expuestos, podrían hacer tambalear la credibilidad que el gobierno necesitaba para su funcionamiento. La poesía habla de las mismas cosas que puede hablar el periodismo o la telenovela, por nombrar algo, pero mientras estos reproducen y fortifican con sus discursos a la sociedad, la poesía con el suyo obstaculiza la reproducción, le pone escollos.

SH: *¿Qué imagen se tiene de la Argentina en el exterior y por qué?*

JSP: No sé si contestar la pregunta, porque vivo en Argentina, no viajo mucho, y conozco poco y mal qué se piensa del país en el exterior. Puedo tener a lo sumo una imagen de la imagen que se tiene de la Argentina fuera de ella, producto de mis pocas

lecturas e intercambios personales, pero lo peor es que va a ser la imagen de un promedio, es decir, de algo que ni siquiera es una imagen. Uno de los atractivos para mí es que nos vean como la más europea de las naciones sudamericanas, lo que se podría traducir diciendo que los europeos y los americanos coinciden en vernos, a nosotros, que somos americanos, como bastante poco americanos. Supongo que esta coincidencia tiene después una valoración distinta: no debe significar lo mismo ser poco americano para un americano que para un europeo. De cualquier modo por este efecto de dislocación somos algo extranjeros en todas partes, algo extranjeros para todos, e incluso esta dudosa verdad funciona como un fantasma para el resto de los habitantes de Latinoamérica: basta con leer lo que escriben de nosotros ensayistas de los países vecinos. La posición de extranjería no es la más deseable para las personas, pero culturalmente es privilegiada, de hecho las culturas más ricas tienen ese componente: un afuera desde el adentro, un adentro desde el afuera. El arte, por ejemplo, suele ser una actividad en relación de extranjería. Y la cultura argentina durante décadas se fue armando en esa posición, y tal vez en ello reside su encanto, ser agradablemente incómoda. Pienso por ejemplo en Borges, pero también en Cortázar, en Xul Solar, en Macedonio Fernández, en Juan L. Ortiz, en el Oliverio Girondo de *En la masmédula*. La tragedia argentina se desata cada vez que, siendo extranjeros para nosotros mismos, al mismo tiempo decidimos ser xenófobos: cuando odiamos la extranjería propia. Hay una historia de la recurrencia de este rasgo que espera ser escrita, una suma de ataques periódicos contra una parte de lo que somos que conforma una tarea de autoaniquilación, un programa de realización de la historia argentina como suicidio progresivo. Esto, creo, contribuye a que la imagen que se tiene de Argentina en el exterior tenga esa cuota de perplejidad por el curso de la historia del país, por su

destino. Cómo es posible que una tierra tan dotada por la naturaleza, tan variada y rica, de población tan hábil y capaz, de escritores y artistas refinados e innovadores, de científicos destacados, viva en una recurrente tragedia. Si no conoce la pulsión autodestructiva que devora a la sociedad, todo esto resulta incomprensible.