

PO.EX

***ESSAYS FROM PORTUGAL
ON CYBERLITERATURE &
INTERMEDIA***

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SHORT ESSAY⁷⁴

ANA HATHERLY

A Technology of Fascination

Ill-informed anyone who would announce himself his own contemporary, deserting, usurping with equal impudence, which the past ceased and when a future is slow to come, or when both are mingled perplexedly to cover up the gap. (Mallarmé 79)

We should bear in mind that alphabetic writing is quite recent and that communication through images had already been established long ago. Subsequently, when studying the origin of poetry as writing text, we should always associate it with its pictorial features. Through the history of images produced by people all over the world, we generally find writing and image side by side and often one poses as another.

Sylvester Houédard defines the area between poetry and painting, where visual poems are inscribed, as the point where they overlap, adding that this has always happened, since all writing originates from painting—writing is a painting of words—and since it’s possible to think visually in words. Therefore, if writing and painting are means of mental communication, the mind is the point where poetry and painting first meet.

Yet, such elemental verification only became obvious since the widespread understanding of Information Theory, of Wittgenstein’s research, Max Bense’s lectures, and by artists’ contributions, often influenced by Zen Buddhism and by Asian culture in general.

But in fact, it is from the moment that it becomes possible to establish an identity between ikon and logos, as put by Sylvester Houédard, that avant-garde poetry and the intimately linked visual poems are set in a timeline, beginning in the furthest Antiquity. Therefore, if it has been established by some historians that visual poems emerge at the beginning of the twentieth century with the Futurists—with their words in freedom and their typographical revolution—followed by the experiments of the Dadaists, Surrealists, and Letterists, all the way

74 Ana Hatherly, “Breve ensaio crítico,” from *A Reinvenção da leitura*, 1975, pp. 3-26, translation by Isabel Basto.

up to concrete poems, such timelines must include prior centuries of experiments with image-texts, comprised of hieroglyphs, ideograms, cryptograms, diagrams, rebuses, mandalas, amulets, jewels, toys, gravestones, and even some monuments, besides all other poetic texts or objects identifiable as such.

The mystic character of writing—for Plato it was the Geometry of the spirit—is assumed with great strictness in the East, particularly in China and Japan, where the poet-painter-calligrapher is a paradigmatic cultural unit. In India, Tibet, and in other Far Eastern countries, writing is, or rather was, a mystical and esoteric exercise. Moving onto the Middle East and Northern Africa, we will still find through the ages a vast complex of figurative texts and object-poems with similar cultural implications.

There are more ancient examples as well: the magical papyruses from the fifth century BCE are famed in Europe as well as the “Egg” by Simias of Rhodes from 300 BCE, for which a reading technique is known. It’s a bucolic poem graphically composed in the shape of an egg, the form being used as a metaphor for the poetic process. Its reading demands meticulous rules: one may read it by starting on the first line at the top, then stepping to the last line at the bottom, continuing to the second line at the top, then going down to the second line at the bottom and so on, until reaching the center.

Despite this example, Greek calligraphers seem to have used the most frequent form, the altar, which appears in anthologies from the fourth century BCE until the eighteenth century.

In the Latin *carmina figurata*, the name of Porfyrius Optatianus⁷⁵ stands out, as do the names of the poets Alcuin and Boniface in the Carolingian epoch. The special virtuosity of these compositions resides in their acrostic disposition, for they were meant to be read horizontally and also vertically.

During the Middle Ages and until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, time periods that were particularly interesting for Portuguese and Brazilian Experimental Poetry, image-texts continued to emerge. These texts’ page composition or layout of words, letters, and other signs participate in creating a plurality of meanings, and consequently a plurality of readings. Referring to Portuguese Baroque poetry, Hernâni Cidade highlights its “archetype of a moral crisis,”⁷⁶

75 T.N.: also Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius.

76 O.P.: “arquétipo de moral em crise.”

emphasizing the production of compositions in which “the length of the text is preset according to the print area it must assume,”⁷⁷ for example, the existence of “silent poetries, labyrinths, cubic poems.”⁷⁸ He also quotes Verney when he refers to “figurative” or “painted poems,” representing “an egg, an altar, and a small ax.”

From 1704, let us recall the “Anagrama Esférico” by Pedro Paulo Pinto, dedicated to Charles III of Austria, accompanied by “Exposição Intelectual e Metafórica” and two acrostic poems, presently kept in the records of the Portuguese archive of Torre do Tombo in Lisbon. From the second half of the eighteenth century, let us recall the two hundred volumes printed in avant-garde typography by Réstif de la Bretonne.

Moving to the nineteenth century, we will continue to find the reformulation of the relationship between text and image through experiments such as Bombaugh’s “concrete illustrations” ending with *Un Coup de Dés Jamais n’Abolira le Hasard* by Mallarmé. The first edition of this work dates from 1897 and decisively influenced Gomringer and the Noigandres Group, who established it as their precursor. In “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” the Noigandres Group assumes as their first “qualitative jump” the “prismatic subdivisions of the Idea” Mallarmé had suggested by using blank space and typographic resources as substantive elements in the composition.

We also know Mallarmé had another project, revealed by Jacques Scherer in 1959 and quoted by Haroldo de Campos, for which the “Coup de Dés” was merely an early sketch, and was concerned with a new conception of book as an object, thus anticipating the “object-books” by Russian Futurists. That book, designated by Mallarmé as “Bloc,”

totally avoids the usual notion of book and incorporates permutation and movement as structural agents: - The book, total expansion of the letter, should directly exploit its mobility [...] The pages of this book would be interchangeable and could be shifted and read according to certain combinatory rules predetermined by the author-operator, who incidentally is not considered more than a reader placed in a

77 O.P.: “a extensão do texto é determinada pela mancha tipográfica que deve tomar.”

78 O.P.: “poesias mudas, labirintos, poemas cúbicos.”

privileged position regarding the objectivity of this book, making him anonymous.⁷⁹

And Haroldo de Campos adds that:

It's no longer a circular work, always proposing a "da capo" (as in the Coup de Dés and later in Joyce's "Finnegans Wake") but a multi-book where from a relatively small number of basic possibilities thousands of combinations could be achieved.⁸⁰

An important issue worth mentioning is that J. Scherer, quoted by Campos, interprets the thematic indications of such work as a commitment to establish modern myths.

But the most decisive aspect of this diachronical view is that it allows us to consider a long chain of objects and texts produced by different cultures in different ages as ancestors of the visual text, to employ the terminology adopted by Max Bense. Considering such a great amplitude may imply eventual changes in perspective, but the most striking aspect to highlight is that this new way of interpreting poetic art objects or products is one of the most specific contributions of twentieth century avant-garde art.

From this new perspective, it becomes even clearer to what extent to be able to read is to be able to create, to what extent this dominant aspect of verbal or nonverbal communication was kept intact even when other values were lost.

The verification of the permanence of certain ways of expression, which may now be considered the historical evolution of the visual-text or image-text, works as a foundational and cohesive element for this sort of ancestral need that we find again in Gomringer's statements regarding the concrete poem.

79 O.P.: "refoge completamente à ideia usual de livro e incorpora a permutação e o movimento como agentes estruturais: - O livro expansão total da letra, deve tirar dela directamente, uma mobilidade [...] As folhas desse livro seriam cambiáveis, podendo mudar de lugar e ser lidas de acordo com certas ordens de combinação determinadas pelo autor-operador, que de resto não se considera mais do que um leitor situado numa posição privilegiada, face à objectividade do livro que se anonimiza."

80 O.P.: "já não se trata mais de obra circular, sempre a propor um 'da capo' (como no caso do 'Coup de Dés' e depois no do 'Finnegans Wake' de Joyce) mas dum 'multilivro', onde, a partir dum número relativamente pequeno de possibilidades de base, se chegaria a milhares de combinações."

Among several other goals, concrete poetry set as one of its main goals the abolition of subjectivism in art. Gomringer defines the concrete poem as functional object, above all. But the subjectivism, that all avant-garde poetry refuses and that seems a constant in the artistic process, ends up infiltrating beyond the lyric manifestations, creating a sort of new mythic thinking that definitely brought together the functional object and the magical object.

The unitary character of the magic object, its functionality, resides mainly in the desire for its recipient's interpretation. In other words, the magic-object-text demands from its user a suitable interpretative reading, the absence of which would jeopardize its efficiency. Such efficiency, as outlined by Lévi-Strauss, depends upon a common belief that included the object's maker, its user, and the community in which it appears. Therefore, the magic-object-text demands a certain degree of universalization of use, a generalization of value, and yet a virtually secretive quality, given specialized interpretation defined by its power of action. Such demand brings together functionality and the modern technique for text interpretation: meta-reading and creative reading.

As a matter of fact, the relation between mythic thinking and scientific thinking is a logical one, according to Lévi-Strauss, one with similar demands for positivity and rigor. On the other hand, the creation of "new myths" seems to relentlessly follow new artistic currents—"speed" for Futurists, "the subconscious" for Surrealists, "the structure" for Concretists—for as Roland Barthes noted, "What is the characteristic of myth? To transform meaning into form" (131). The abolition of a myth or its surpassing generally results in the creation of a new one. We therefore witness how the by-products produced by the process of substitution shape the magical quality of the creative act: fascination. The myth would then be a (magical) process through which the real is made abstract by voluntarily and specifically transcending its use, ending in the universality of its meaning.

Construing magic as fascination technology, as a technique of intended effects that concerns and even defines the creative act both in its strict functionality and as a marginalizing factor, leads to an accurate and creative form of reading for universality.

Referring to concrete poetry, Max Bense wrote that “fascination is a form of concentration, namely of the material level and the apprehension of its meaning”⁸¹, whereas for Roland Barthes “meaning is the myth.”

For instance, theorists of concrete poetry have always proclaimed their wish for universality and the possibility for the concrete poem to achieve it, once “meta-communication, coincidence and simultaneity of verbal and nonverbal communication occurs ... language’s common multiplicity is apparent.”⁸² It is therefore a demand for a creative use implying an anagrammatic reading, in other words, one needs to know how to read the text underneath the text.

Those same theorists underlined the intentional functionality of their objects when they declared they wanted to establish a relation of absolute identity between text and society. Furthermore, they wished to establish a form of art in a essentially rationalist, technological, and technocratic age, one which would reflect those forms of action that correspond to an ideology, a lifestyle, and a view of the world.

2. Image Reading Plurality

With the definition of visual texts, the general theory of text becomes a general theory of image.⁸³ (Max Bense)

Because the concrete poem was intended to be immediately readable and demanding of the reader’s participation in an intellectual game and thinking exercise, theorists highlighted both its reductive character and its affiliation, and even its dependence on the strongest currents in modern art. But by refusing the emotional aspects related to lyric-discursive expression, concrete poetry was above all intended to be objective and scientific.

With Mallarmé’s “Coup de Dés,” Fenollosa’s theories, and Pound’s theories regarding the Chinese ideogram assumed as predecessors, Information Theory, mass communication techniques, mathematical-scientific theories, etc.,

81 O.P.: “o fascínio é uma forma de concentração, nomeadamente do nível material e a apreensão do seu significado.”

82 O.P.: “ocorre o fenómeno da meta-comunicação, coincidência e simultaneidade da comunicação verbal e não verbal...visando a comum multiplicidade da linguagem.”

83 Portuguese translation of the original German: “Com a definição dos textos visuais, a teoria geral do texto passa para uma teoria geral da imagem.”

as well as Gomringer in Europe and the Noigandres Group in Brazil, appeared simultaneously and marked two different poles. Although they agreed on the main issues, these two poles ultimately lead to the different paths followed by other concrete poetry practitioners and theorists.

The Brazilian group was particularly influential on E. M. de Melo e Castro's work in Portugal, denoting the infiltration of the ideogram lyricism and the loyalty to Mallarmé's principles, with its particular emphasis on the aspects of text spatialization and its relation to music (turning the poem into a score). In Europe, mostly through Bauhaus, the influence from the plastic arts is stronger. We must bear in mind that Gomringer was Max Bill's secretary and that the influence from the post-cubist avant-garde art in the several fields of artistic creation was a decisive one. Thus, when the Brazilian group, perhaps with less graphic calling, evolved from scientific-lyricism to social criticism and satire (along with the language, a tendency somewhat inherited from the Portuguese vein of scorn and slander), and finally assimilated some Pop Art features, for European Concretists, mostly German and Anglo-Saxon, the importance of the formally visual aspect ended up imposing and even blanketing the literary aspect. Important ramifications emerged for the exploration of phonic zones of language, thus reconnecting with the avant-garde tradition (even though these terms may seem incompatible), in which language, sound, and image are combined, clearly challenging frontiers among arts.

My works are clearly inscribed in this European line, culminating in *Mapas da Imaginação e da Memória* (*Maps of Imagination and Memory*) and *O Escritor* (*The Writer*), but Portuguese Concretism and Concretism-like work was already extensively addressed in my essay entitled "Elementos para uma Investigação da Poesia Experimental nos anos 60/70."

When intending for the concrete poem to be immediately readable, once again with no intervention from deciphering reading, its theorists condemn it to immediate exhaustion, unexpectedly placing it at a level of sacrificial immolation: on the one hand, by the total valuing of the instant—Zen—and on the other hand, by the metaphorical assumption of the consumerist society in which men and objects, indifferently consumed, disappear in a desperate manufacture of the obsolete that from the start renounces all of its proposed values.

That reading—not impertinent—of concrete poetry mechanisms in its initial phase, although not the only thing I accomplished, was important to me.

It drove me to practice the experiment that was deliberately exhausted in its own performance. In 1959, I pointed out this aspect of implicit condemnation in its narrowing process when I published in the supplement *Artes e Letras* of the Lisbon newspaper *Diário de Notícias*, the first critical article on concrete poetry and also the first concrete poem by a Portuguese poet published in Portugal. I then stated that concrete poetry condemned itself by means of excessive nounification, to immobility and muteness.

Concrete poetry, as originally defined by Gomringer and the Noigandres Group, was considered to be truly incomprehensible, opposing the reiterated desire of immediate communication, maybe not because of its undeniable originality but because of the extreme attitudes the first practitioners were forced to adopt—phenomena already noted as inevitably subsequent to the marginal situation assumed by avant-garde authors. Through the efforts developed mainly by the Brazilian group and afterwards by the Portuguese—both of whom fought against a tradition of sentimental lyricism, confessionism, laziness, lack of culture, backwardness, established views, and everything else that defined the state of decrepitude and stupification of the society—it wanted to establish concrete poetry emerges as a real threat to bourgeois cultural values.

And so it was. Questioning those values, challenging their meaning, their use and all they implied, affected the society sustaining those values. It raised issues and posed big questions, that in Portugal would have to remain unanswered for a long time. Persecuted by mockery and discredit—traditional weapons—the best practitioners of concrete and Experimental Poetry hardened their struggle. In literary criticism and translation theory, for example, the Brazilian group reached heights that had never been reached before, decisively contributing towards a reformulation of criticism and subsequently towards reading reformulation.

In Portugal, acceptance was very difficult, and it is not yet complete. Official criticism still denies avant-garde poetry, even though it may be considered an old worldwide tendency, instead advocating almost exclusively the lyricist-discursive poetry. However, and after more than a decade of publications and cultural dissemination by the few Portuguese avant-garde authors, a tendency is emerging towards acceptance of the image-text in some sectors. Anthologies start emerging, but except for those cases in which the critic is also an avant-garde poet, criticism did not develop at the same rate.

Meanwhile, the revolution brought about by concrete poetry theory both in Europe, the Americas, and all over the world actually took shape, and its advent was decisive for all those who had in depth knowledge of it.

Gomringer, quoted by Schmitthenner, defined the objects of concrete poetry, as follows:

Concrete Poetry is based on a rationalist—synthetic future experience of the world. If concrete poetry is still perceived as foreign—as aetically thin and simplifying—that’s probably due to a lack of intuition of an evolutionary trend in our society, in the way of thinking and acting which contains in its core a new totalitarian vision⁸⁴.

Another definition was given in 1964 in the avant-garde English magazine LINK, in a text entitled “Como Ler Poesia Concreta”:

If it is the first time you see it, do not try to read it as poetry. Do not even try to read it at all. Just look at it. Examine the spaces between letters, the typographical variations, and the spaces around words. Think of it as an image. Then see what ideas come up from that image associated with the letters and words in it.⁸⁵

These initial positions could never be abandoned, even though they were made easier through use. They clearly illustrate the need for an initiation, for a rigorous interpretative reading, both specific and characterizing: in sum, creative and productive.

The poet-theorists started by assuming total responsibility before the traditional language of literature, the national language. In *Teoria da Poesia Concreta*, the Noigandres Group declares:

Concrete poetry is fully accountable for language, accepting the assumption of the historical language as an indispensable communication core. It refuses to absorb words as mere indifferent vehicles, with

84 O.P.: “A poesia concreta assenta na mundivivência futura de natureza sintético-racionalista. Se a poesia concreta ainda é sentida como estranha (asceticamente magra e simplificadora) isso acontece provavelmente por uma falta de intuição numa tendência evolutiva da nossa sociedade, da sua forma de pensar e agir, que contém no seu âmago uma nova visão totalitária.”

85 O.P.: “Se é pela primeira vez que a vê, não tente lê-la como poesia, melhor, nem sequer tente lê-la de todo: olhe simplesmente para ela. Examine os espaços entre as letras, as variações tipográficas, os espaços à volta das palavras. Considere-a como uma imagem. Depois veja que ideias surgem dessa imagem associadas com as letras e as palavras que há nela.”

no life, no personality, no history—taboo toms with which conventions insist on burying the idea.⁸⁶

Through intensive “nounification,” including the compositional space, through its optical, phonic and linguistic structures, through the coincidence of those operating structures, the concrete poem is “verbivocovisual” (a term coined by Joyce) in its interaction. Refusing the old syllogistic-discursive formal foundation,⁸⁷ the concrete poem becomes a relational field of functions:⁸⁸ “TENSION OF THING-WORDS IN SPACE-TIME.”

The concrete poet sees the word “in itself—a magnetic field of possibilities,” he/she is against “a perspectivist syntactic organization where words sit like ‘corpses in a banquet,’” opposing it a sense of structure (Campos, A). According to Gomringer, for the concrete poem, the structure is also the visual form. When he conceives and defines the poem as a constellation, adopting the notion of prismatic division of the idea by Mallarmé, more than the execution of an image, he is actually proposing a new plurality in image reading. Its degree of intelligibility, its informative content also reflecting its immediate accessibility, is ultimately what defines its communication degree and the demand for an adequate reading.

In its initial phase in the 1950’s, the concrete poem is still exclusively made with words, even though they are object-words. Nonetheless, or because of that, it is still literary. Only in subsequent stages does concrete poetry detach itself from that subjection. In order to reach and assimilate vaster and more ambiguous areas of communication through the same elements, it works with the graphic image and the phonic value of language. Concrete poetry as both visual and aural opens it up to a wide range of cultural traditions.

Therefore, concrete poetry in its original forms was enclosed in an anticipated cycle—of its rapid and necessary depletion. Through that same annihilation process, it originated new and different research areas from the same step—and that is what is truly fundamental—widening the scope of reading beyond traditional literary boundaries.

86 O.P.: “A Poesia Concreta assume uma responsabilidade total perante a linguagem, aceitando o pressuposto do idioma histórico como núcleo indispensável de comunicação, recusa-se a absorver as palavras como meros veículos indiferentes, sem vida, sem personalidade, sem história—túmulos tabus com que a convenção insiste em sepultar a ideia.”

87 O.P.: “o velho alicerce formal silogístico-discursivo.”

88 O.P.: “um campo relacional de funções.”

According to Pierre Garnier, the original linguistic concrete poem was joined by 1) the visual poem, object and core of energy; 2) objective poetry, implicating performing tridimensional objects and the collaboration of musicians; 3) mechanist or permutational poetry; 4) various types of phonic poetry from direct composition in magnetic tape, related to electronic music; 5) phonetic, based on phonemes, demanding the participation of human vocal organs, through tape recorder or not; 6) kinetic poetry, tactile, etc., until reaching the extreme border of performance-poetry, which connected to the happening. There are outstanding examples in Portugal such as the “Concerto e Audição Pictórica” (Pictoric Audition and Concert) in 1965, at the bookstore “Divulgação” and the “Conferência-Objecto” (Conference-Object) in 1967 at the bookstore “Quadrante” in Lisbon. The specific terminology is remarkable—“Concert” in one case and “Object” in the other (in the latter, the very space of the Bookstore-Gallery was “nounified”). The terminology highlights its theoretical orthodoxy, with the participation on both of poets from the so-called Experimental Poetry group with the collaboration of avant-garde musicians such as Jorge Peixinho.

3. Readability/Non-Readability

The linguistic sign . . . loses its independence and self-sufficiency, its individual concretion, as soon as it functions as a sign for a “thing,” for something objectively intended and objectively formed (Ernst Cassirer 154).

The concrete poetry movement is fundamental for the evolution of reading to the extent that it contributes toward preventing the text from being a mere literary-lyrical expression to become at last a pure combination of signals, thus establishing a new trajectory from word to sign.

If the word becomes sign, if it becomes sign again, other signs may also be or become readable again, and finally even literary, legitimating the encounter between ikon and logos. Supported by Peirce’s sign theory, Max Bense was able to conclude, for example, that “the aesthetic information of material nature, autonomous, of Concrete Poetry texts is primarily of indicial nature.”⁸⁹

89 O.P.: “a informação estética de cunho material, autónoma, dos textos da poesia concreta é, primordialmente, de natureza indicial”

An important experience in non-readability was for me the study of archaic writings that I made during the 1960's, as I experimentally attempted to discover writing mechanisms. I mentioned that experience in the preface to *Mapas da Imaginação e da Memória* (*Maps of Imagination and Memory*), a collection of visual texts made during that research, extended along about ten years. At that time, when the study of modern linguistics and oriental philosophy dominated my work, I was able to reflect thoroughly on the problems of the text's communicability, its readability and non-readability. I was constantly working with texts literally non-readable to me—in archaic Chinese, for instance—but that I nonetheless did read. That experience emphasized the frailty of communication regarding text contents and the possible variety of readings of the forms. Then, I could develop the practice of the image-text that simultaneously transcends and includes the problem of the content at the level of meaning, enlarging it towards what might be considered a field of integral meaning which creates specific non-deliberation of its content, with graphic form being its only limitation.

With that attempt I tried, on the one hand, to extend the field of reading beyond literality; on the other, to widen the field of formal research and also to enlarge the creative field for writing itself, metaphorically and factually. By drawing attention towards writing as sign drawing or painting (making it non-readable to evict the habit of content reading), I was attempting to restore the original force of writing: semiotic, iconic, autonomously semantic. I was trying to do the following:

- To think on the problem of readability or non-readability of text as proper to the writer, who constantly faces the issue of writing that ciphers and decipherers.
- To ponder on the degree of readability (or intelligibility) of a text, or even on the influence of time over a text's readability, or the wearing-out of language that does not just match the wearing-out of the successive ideologies that use it but also recreate it.

Specifically, to ponder on readability is to attempt to evaluate to what extent results from the limitations imposed by a code in which the relationship between sender and receiver regulates its own readability. The possible degree of message communicability and deciphering is the real problem of reading.

E. H. Gombrich states for instance that in art, all communication consists of “making concessions” to the knowledge of the receiver (196). And in fact, even within a particular language like art, it would be necessary to be able to decide what is literally readable and what is literally non-readable. And most of all, readable to whom? When? How? Why?

We know that whatever the language—word, gesture, and object—all is not always readable, as all is not always sayable, as all is not always decipherable. And precisely in that zone of obscurity, determined by the limitations of expression and interpretation, lies the essential non-readability of the art object—what remains unsaid, in silence, unspoken—that precisely allows for countless and perhaps infinite creative readings.

Yet, the word unsayable (“indizível”) does not refer in the present case to a mystical notion as for instance unnamable (“inominável) but rather to a practical verification of the impossibility to say all, referred to by Wittgenstein in his famous Proposition 7.

The silence of writing—writing is a mute, symbolic speech—drives the author to reflect upon the implicit silence of words. But the same problem of silence poses other forms of artistic expression, and ultimately all forms of expression. Wittgenstein, in Proposition 4.1212 further declares that “what can be shown cannot be said” (79). And this assertion clearly exposes an eloquent illustration of all forms of visual communication.

The visual poem—visual-text, image-text—is literally and literarily silent. Through non-literal readability, it can reach its worldwide circulation: in the confusion and incommunicability of languages and concurrently of civilizations and cultures (Joyce stated the Tower of Babel is the Tower of Sleep). Communication through image (non-verbal communication) becomes a sort of “lingua franca”, a universal language.

And in their withdrawal from literary tradition, visual poems strip off the clothes of the society that originated them. Even by assimilation they criticize its ideologies and techniques; they ignite preconceived ideas on how writing, writer, and text should be.

A new technique, when widely adopted, defines its own viability and need. If it becomes universal in a given age, that is because it corresponds to a truth simultaneously contemporary and original. Likewise, since new techniques are imposed on a society due to their use, a mutation of sensibility takes place. This

mutation is perfectly illustrated by concrete poetry texts, demanding a real evolution in the way of reading, interpreting, and conceiving poetic expression.

The depuration that avant-garde movements, including concrete poetry, have tried to achieve in the field of literature and arts is the reflection of change underway in the society that bears them. To deny and reject the means of expression of the present society is to refuse its significance. The avant-garde literature emerging in the bourgeois society is anti-bourgeois. It stands “against literature” to the extent that it reflects and depicts the decadence of the dominant class who appropriated it, making it inoperative through routine use, institutionalized by official culture.

The extreme character of combat positions (borrowing terminology from martial techniques, stressing struggle and battle) turns attitudes and works from avant-garde followers into exceptions, always to be considered esoteric; that is, unreadable, not immediately assimilable not only for psychological reasons, but also because in fact the code they are based upon is no longer the common code in the society against which they stand.

Avant-garde groups are therefore identifiable with all those performing a task that questions the safety of the Dominant Power in a society, be it political, religious, or artistic. As militants of any emerging ideology, they begin as small groups with subversive action, bringing upon themselves the challenging responsibility of disorder.

But such disorder, to the extent that it implies establishing a new order, carries the seed of its own eventual dismissal. That is how avant-garde movements, as revolutions in general, necessarily succeed each other.

Immersed in traditional logics, words become an ambiguous reality, along with their context. The ambiguity of writing, its contradictions within the plurality of meanings, the natural non-readability of writing, now make reading a form of reinvention that becomes a civic obligation.

And if the art of narrative that once was poetry’s leads to the exploration of space and visual effects, then the disintegration of language defines a struggle for renewal, witnessed by texts, and that reading recreates through interpretation.

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Appendix

Exemplo 1 - Camões e Herberto Helder

CAMÕES

Transforma-se o amador na cousa amada
por virtude do muito imaginar;
não tenho, logo, mais que desejar,
pois em mim tenho a parte desejada.

Se nela está minh'alma transformada,
que mais deseja o corpo de alcançar?
Em si somente pode descansar,
pois consigo tal alma está liada.

Mas esta linda e pura semideia
que, como um acidente em seu sujeito,
assi com a alma minha se conforma,

Está no pensamento como ideia:
o vivo e puro amor de que sou feito,
como a matéria simples, busca a forma.

Luís de Camões, “Transforma-se o amador na cousa amada”, 1595, LCII, p. 265

HELDER

“Transforma-se o amador na coisa amada” com seu
feroz sorriso, os dentes,
as mãos que relampejam no escuro. Traz ruído
e silêncio. Traz o barulho das ondas frias
e das ardentes pedras que tem dentro de si.
E cobre esse ruído rudimentar com o assombrado

silêncio da sua ultima vida.
O amador transforma-se de instante para instante.
e sente-se o espírito imortal do amor
criando a carne em extremas atmosferas, acima
de todas as coisas mortas.

Transforma-se o amador. Corre pelas formas dentro.
E a coisa amada é uma baía estanque.
É o espaço de um castiçal,
a coluna vertebral e o espírito
das mulheres sentadas.
Transforma-se em noite extintora.

Porque o amador é tudo, e a coisa amada
é uma cortina
onde o vento do amador bate no alto da janela

aberta. O amador entra
por todas as janelas abertas. Ele bate, bate, bate.

O amador é um martelo que esmaga.
Que transforma a coisa amada.

Ela entra pelos ouvidos, e depois a mulher
que escuta
fica com aquele grito para sempre na cabeça
a arder com o primeiro dia do verão. Ela ouve
e vai-se transformando, enquanto dorme, naquele grito
do amador.

Depois acorda, e vai, e dá-se ao amador,

dá-lhe o grito dele.
E o amador e a coisa amada são um único grito

anterior de amor.

E gritam e batem. Ele bate-lhe com o seu espírito
de amador. E ela é batida, e bate-lhe

com o seu espírito de amada.
Então o mundo transforma-se neste ruído áspero
do amor. Enquanto em cima
o silêncio do amador e da amada ainda alimentam
o imprevisto silêncio do mundo

e do amor.

Herberto Helder, “Transforma-se o amador na cousa amada’ com seu”, 1961, *Poesia Toda*,
p. 17

Exemplo 2 - Camões e Ana Hatherly

CAMÕES

Mote

Descalça vai pera a fonte
Lianor pela verdura;
vai formosa e não segura.

volta

Leva na cabeça o pote
o testo nas mãos de prata,
cinta de fina escarlata,

saínho de chamalote;
 traz a vasquinha de cote,
 mais branca que a neve pura;
 vai fermosa e não segura.

Descobre a touca a garganta,
 cabelos d'ouro o trançado,
 fita de cor d'encarnado...
 Tão linda que o mundo espanta!
 Chove nela graça tanta
 que dá graça à fermosura;
 vai fermosa, e não segura.

Luís de Camões, “Descalça vai pera a fonte”

HATHERLY

“VARIACÃO VII”

descalça ia leonor. ia à fonte leda efria.
 ia leste ia. a fonte corria. leonorapenasia.
 pela aragem fria. pela manhãia. sorria&ia.
 loenoria. leonorana leonor. anaía bela &ia.
 despedia. sorria &ia. leonor. leonorama.
 pela manhã. florelia floribela. anafior anafiora.
 anafloreana. lenorama. ana&bela e ana&ana. lenorana.
 oh quem te ama. lenorama. floralia. floriela.
 floriana. oh lenorana. lenorortesta. lenorormestra.
 mestra&ana. lenorana. oh lenorana. oh lenorcravo. lenorortravo.
 comigo te trago. oh lenorana, que me insana.
 oh insulana. lenorilha. minha anafilha.
 arvorea. lenorana. oh lucibela. oh lucidor.
 analeonor. oloreana. oh lenorana. analiana.
 leo&ana. leão de ana. oh quem te ama. lenorama.
 amadisana. anatisana. eleonor. eleonorana.
 miridiana. rio de ana. lenorana. oh quem te ama.
 lenorama. lenorala. lenorola. anacorola.
 anacoreta. lenoreta. rosaliana. lianorana.
 lenorinda. lenorana. a la ventana. lenorana.
 oh analivia. livida&ana. viridiana. analianor.
 anabellana. a la fontana. lenorama. oh quem te ama.
 lenorama. lenor&ana. oh lenorama.

Ana Hatherly, *Leonorana*, 1965-70

“VARIACÃO VIII”

descalça leonor a verdura da sua formosura
 e sem usura a fonte segura da verdura mui escura

e pura e na verdura leonor dura enverga a formosura
na cintura leonor pura cordura queimadura dura
da formosura cura a verdura de sua dura figura
de doçura fonte de amargura dura e tanta formosura
tem que a fonte dura e então descura
a verdura e corre leonorpura envergando escura
a profundura dura em sua altura a formosura pura
e então dura a mente obscura da impura fonte segura
da hora dura mordidura funda urdidura
da tessitura dura e dura da verdura insegura
e então mura a demorada pura leonura sua formosura
dura comissura pura da tortura da verdura que situra
e então leonorua pisadura longadura e ansiedura
mentepura captadura a verdura insegura
leonorpura saltadura de seu leito pura

Ana Hatherly, *Leonorana*, 1965-70

Exemplo 3 - Jorge da Câmara e E. M. de Melo e Castro

JORGE DA CÂMARA

De tempo em tempo tudo vai andando,
o tempo sem pôr tempo vai correndo,
sem tempo não se vão os tempos vendo,
por tempo o tempo vai profetizando.

Do tempo, o tempo só pode ir faltando,
a tempo se pode ir o tempo erguendo,
com o tempo se vão os tempos estendendo,
que o tempo vários tempos vai mostrando.

Nunca o tempo perdido é mais cobrado,
que se o tempo nos tira o que é presente,
mal pode dar o tempo o que é gastado:

O tempo gasta bem todo o prudente,
que se o tempo que passa é bem passado,
todo o tempo passado tem presente.

British Museum Library, Add. 25 353, fl. 6

MELO E CASTRO

uma chama não chama a mesma chama
há uma outra chama que chama
em cada chama que chama pela chama
que a chama no chamar se incendeia

um nome não nome o mesmo nome
um outro nome nome que nomeia
em cada nome o meio pelo nome
que o nome no nome se incendeia

uma chama um nome a mesma chama
há um outro nome que se chama
em cada nome o chama pelo nome
que a chama no nome se incendeia

um nome uma chama o mesmo nome
há uma outra chama que nomeia
em cada chama o nome que se chama
o nome que na chama se incendeia

E. M. de Melo e Castro, in *Versus-in-Versus*, 1968