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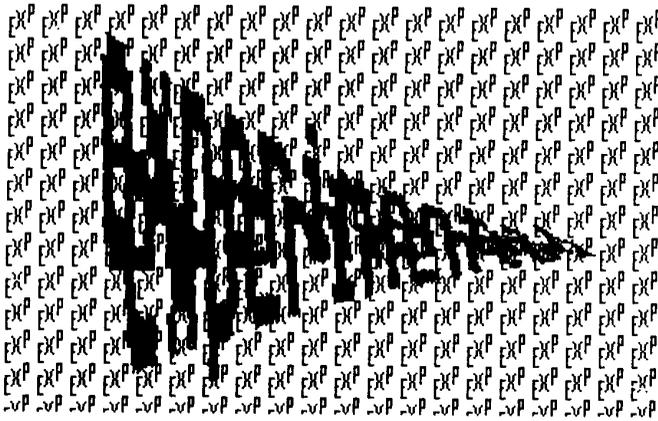
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EXPERIMENTAL POETRY⁹⁰

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In the second half of the twentieth century, the conviction that the exhaustion and the end of artistic forms is approaching still attracts followers. They search for reasons for the end of art in the evidence for the breakdown of traditional, inherited systems of social and human culture, which no longer corresponds to what is experienced in our present time.

In our opinion, the concern about such signs of breakdown is a symptom of the concern regarding the source of human creative activity. To subsequently conclude that it represents the end of art is to condemn creativity to disappearance. It corresponds to mutilating man's "partes vitais," or vital parts.

However, this same man believes that we are now merely reaching a new age for expansion and deepening, that in the technological and scientific fields as in the worldwide economic spheres, everything is at the beginning. The economic progress verified in some areas of the world makes us speak about several well-known miracles of development. They may let us foresee the more or less close possibility of widening the influence areas of this economic progress and even the expected universalization of its benefits. Human problems increasingly depend on economic progress, whatever the native ideologies of this or that

90 E. M. de Melo e Castro, "Excurso A - proposição 2.01" (From *O fim visual do século XX*, 1993, [Originally published in *Proposição 2.01*, 1965], pp. 31-37). Translation by Isabel Basto.

area may be. Economic progress increasingly depends on technological development. In turn, the latter is based on an open-minded mentality of research and experimentation. We experiment in order to recognize acquired knowledge and to make it objective through practical results. Yet, scientists say and we indeed feel that everything is just beginning. The collapse of an epoch may drag along with it methods, vices, and prejudices experienced by people living at that time. However, it does not erase human qualities or biological and intellectual functions. The end of creative activity would hence correspond to the end of man. The problem could be posed much like the prospect of solving the problem of hunger was scientifically posed for the first time in history at the beginning of the space adventure. Is it possible that whoever believes artistic activity has reached the end—eagerly defending obsolete forms of expression—has full conscience that doing so condemns mankind to extinction?

The absurdity of this position forces us to pose other questions: How could mankind have lost all creative virtuosity precisely at the beginning of a new phase of development?

When designing the future, how can mankind be construed as devoid of aesthetic activity, when one of the clearly visible features of that same forthcoming future is a wide and tense contact with the plastic and spatial values of the world and even of the universe?

The problems of mankind's creative activity and aesthetic manifestations must be faced headlong, the same way scientific and economic issues are questioned and reformulated, and new responses and solutions are proposed on a daily basis.

If for other fields of knowledge and philosophy we are able to discern dominant currents, it is hardly inconceivable that the same is possible for creative activity. This is why the experimental attitude regarding poetry is not a particular aesthetic trend but rather a mental attitude of search and research. It is a vital synchronism of the artist, not with time, but with the means, methods, and issues that society and science display as characteristically theirs. Yet, this experimental attitude faces the inevitable invasion of the future.

The emerging homo-economicus is not “castrado esteticamente,” or aesthetically castrated. If this were the case, the radical homo, or man, would have to be discarded. Instead, he is a high-level psychologically complex being, whose aesthetic activity can only manifest in a highly evolved manner, corresponding

to the levels of such complexity. And, if that is true regarding the structures and mechanisms of the creative process and regarding the specific nature of the artist, then avant-garde and experimental art propose artistic objects that as such belong more properly to the sociological level than to the psychological one.

Hence, the work of art enters a collective perspective of information dissemination. No more communication among individuals, neither the expression of feelings or of being. No more metaphysics and psychology mixed with aesthetics.

Expression and communication through the artwork are possible in specific cases, but they may never constitute the sole basis for an accurately structured and developed activity.

Avant-garde art inverts relations between ethics and aesthetics. The most ethical aesthetics will not be the one that serves any given moral. For the avant-garde artist, on the contrary, free experimental practice is the fundamental ethical rule of conduct if he/she wants to attain a fully functional and clear view of aesthetics, as a step towards the creation of valid and well accomplished artworks, i.e. an artwork that has clearly been made objective.

Once the artwork has clearly been placed in the field of aesthetic technology and in the field of collective information, the artist is required to develop his/her working skills through the perceptual experience he/she acquires and, also, to deepen his/her knowledge of the qualities and properties of the matter he/she works with.

The psychology behind artistic creation is more a knowledge of the structuring ability of the human spirit by means of its specific biological, mental, or emotional functions, than a simple study or representation of its social, moral, or sentimental behaviors.

The experimental work of art detaches itself from its author and is placed in a standpoint of collective dissemination of information—the information of its own existence as a beautiful object, corresponding to the aesthetic needs of the collectivity—which each and every individual in the collectivity will try to satisfy through his/her own perception of the artwork. As Stockhausen and others have argued, users and viewers of artworks can adapt and make use of them as they please.

The experimental attitude in poetry is based on the in-depth study of the im/possibility of communication among human beings through the various signaling systems specifically aiming at the doors of perception. The work of art,

therefore, demands objective existence structures through those signaling systems. The connection, therefore, occurs between the one who perceives it and the work as an object. The author, a psychological entity, necessarily remains outside this circuit. The experimental work of art consequently requires from its user an attitude change from passive to active. Hence, an energy exchange between work and user is established, the sort of energy depending on the structural principle stemming from the work and the user's door of perception it succeeds in impressing.

Thus, considering poetry a formal synthesis of several human activities, dynamisms, or tensions related to biological and intellectual functions, we can consider the following types of experimental poetry:

- Visual poetry: for example, Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*; graphic experiences from Futurism; Concretism (Brazilian and international). Visopoems (Lisbon).
- Auditive poetry: experiments with human voice worked or not through "magnétophone"; rhythmic poetry or melodic poetry with words, syllables, or pure sounds; direct composition on soundtrack; some experiments from Dadaism to Letterism.
- Tactile poetry: the poem is an object; all forms of collaboration with plastic artists; readymades; object poem and poem object; all construction processes that confer a material body to the poem.
- Respiratory poetry: for example, Pierre Garnier's experiments with human exhalation.
- Linguistic poetry: for example, E. E. Cummings, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and many others; attempts to create new words and languages; polyglot poetry.
- Conceptual and mathematical poetry: cybernetic; combinatorial and permutational methods; numeric structure of the work of art; for example, Raymond Queneau's experiments.
- Synesthetic poetry: development of synesthesia; hybrid products of the aforementioned types of poetry.
- Spatial poetry: for example, Mallarmé: *Un Coup de Dés*; generally, spatial feeling manifests itself as a common denominator of all contemporary forms of poetic experimentation.

The spatial feeling was particularly developed after the Second World War and is currently the most vivid, distinctive element of humankind. In fact, the fundamental distinction between the conventional poet and the experimental poet can be established according to spatial feeling. The latter occupies space with his/her poetry, and sometimes the poem is what defines the occupied space (as in the sculptures by Nicolas Schöffer).

The conventional poet merely perceives the surrounding space and his/her psychological space, providing only perceptible references or descriptions using some of the linguistic and auditive possibilities of the formative process of images, metaphors, and symbols. From the point of view of released energy, it seems clear that a distinction must be established between the potential energy of the artwork and the energy objectively released by poetic machines and poetic objects that may be built. The objectively released energy is precisely what the experimental poem seeks to achieve.

From the simple proposition of experimental poetry, the existence of some kind of bonding between artistic activity and scientific activity may immediately be inferred. Obviously, aesthetic experimentation is not similar to scientific experimentation, but the difference is more technological than one of mental attitude. Experimentation as poetic phenomenon does not imply working outside the sphere of the poetic. It is rather the obligation to work within—with an open attitude and without prejudice or restrictions—to go deeper into its own nature, in order to limit its methods. This would require redefining its laws and roots, from the earliest originating sources until their present development and adaptation to contemporary human and technological conditions.

What is at stake is not identifying art with science but instead recognizing a certain sort of parallel between the experimental artist and the research scientist. The parallel is not between experimental art and lab science, but rather among a wide range of activities involved therein, each with its own specific scope.

For a new technique or a new resource to be integrated and used in a creative way, it is first necessary to submit the whole poetic process to a reduction of accumulated accessory elements, scrupulously minimizing them to the most basic, so that this new technique or resource may find a way of being used by the human spirit with the purpose of creating poems. The experimental poet may only start his/her adventure after completing that task. All tendencies that for some time now have been noted in modern poetry—such as the quest for rigor in language, the ideal of returning to the

origins, the techniques of syntactic and linguistic reduction, the potential overload of images—are phases of that same study. In other words, they are stages of the evolution in the poetic process, towards today's experimental methods.

Consequently, primitive poetry and popular poetry will always be of more interest to the experimental poet than some refined tradition, even if that tradition is currently practiced. In the same way a poem will be of more interest than a poetry concept, a technique developed in a practical manner—even if it derives from other techniques until recently considered obsolete—will always be more important than an outburst of imprecise inspiration, even if it comes from a great contemporary poet.

A perilous incursion in the slippery field of metaphorical construction—undertaken with full conscience of the risks involved and with total freedom to create—will be of more interest than a poem that is linearly clear but programmatic and, therefore, created under conditions that restrict its poetic needs.