

# ***PO.EX***

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

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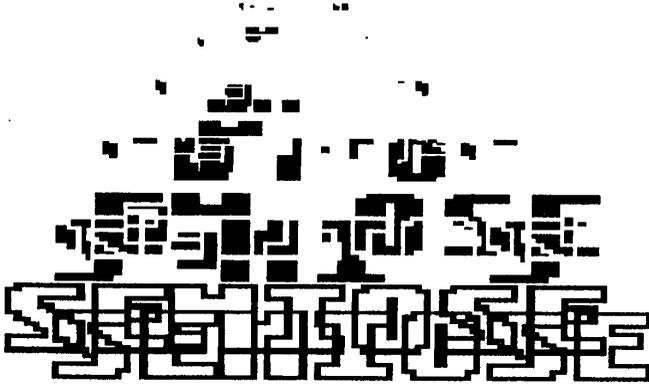
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# AN INTERSEMIOTIC NETWORK<sup>107</sup>

E. M. DE MELO E CASTRO



## Between Oral and Visual

One may imagine for the poetic word a diachronic path from oral speech to the written form and from there to visual poetry. One might, in a classification-historic haste, identify and argue that visual poetry appears consistently four times in the history of Western art: during the Alexandrine period, during the Carolingian Renaissance, in the Baroque period, and in the twentieth century.

It may be noted that each of these outbursts of visual poetry relate to the end of a historic period and the beginning of a new era. Geoffrey Cook provides an idea for thinking about visual poetry as a sign of transformation:

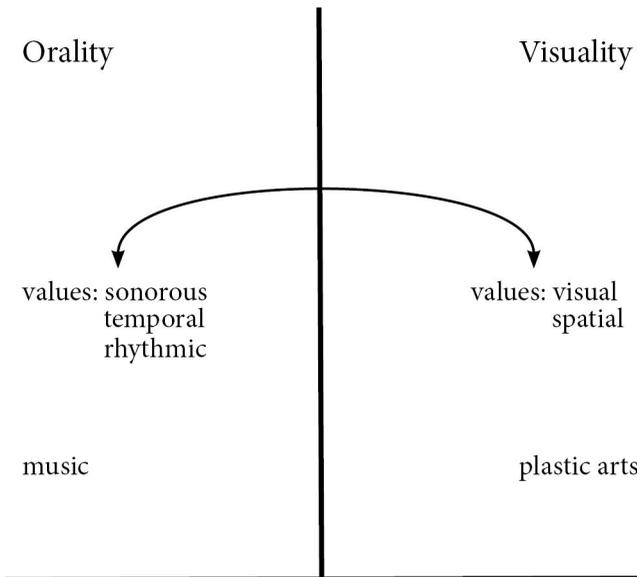
Visual poetry is a cry by the poet that the content of the past is cancerous and a new skin must be sewn to contain the dreams of the future—a visual statement that nothing more meaningful can be said till we can restructure the basic vision that is an historical culture. (141)

107 E. M. de Melo e Castro, “Uma rede intersemiótica” (From *O fim visual do século XX*, 1993, Originally published in *Poética dos meios e arte high-tech*, 1988, pp. 215-243. Translation by Isabel Basto.

Yet, such historical insight seems too easy in a world undergoing change—besides the attraction such insight undisputedly holds as enhancer of visual poetry’s role, a role mainly related to the condensing potential of visual communication. Potential simultaneously connects two sorts of structures: the archetypal formations that will be the working base for human mental activity (according to Jung) and the movements of synthesis. After the rationalist-analytical moments from the first and second Industrial Revolutions, the movements of synthesis will allow the qualitative leap in the future development of the dialectic spiral projecting onto the twenty-first century.

However, this type of thought cannot give us more than an abstract framing for something that is very concrete: visual poetry practice, in its interdisciplinary and intertextual relationship with other forms of articulation of word and image production. This is how one is driven to consider, synchronically, a wide range of verbal and non-verbal productions that intertwine between oral and visual production, as if in an intricate network of translations and correlations. Oral and visual productions are then conceived as irradiant qualities of the signs by which we perceive their existence, through the senses of hearing and sight.

Two structures can be identified to represent those signs in more or less articulate combinatorial series: the oral communication area and visual com-



munication area, which can be graphically exhibited as two quadrants, right and left.

The left quadrant—orality—contains sound, time, and rhythmic values, tending towards music, whereas the right quadrant—visuality—contains the visual and spatial values, tending towards plastic arts (as per the fine arts classification system from the 1900 and still in order). Visual poetry will correspond then to an investment of signs that form poems (letters, words, images) from the right quadrant, holding space and visual value, to the detriment of sound and time values, predominant in non-visual poetry.

This formulation, albeit its pedagogic value, is downgrading if we consider that visual poetry does not waive time and sound values. As well, conventional written poetry, being played in the orality quadrant, does not waive visual and spatial values either, often resorting to them in its imagistic role.

This is truly the subject of the present text: to establish a system of meaningful connections among each of the poetic modes that are mainly played in one quadrant or the other: firstly, through suitable theoretical formulation and secondly, through sound and visual examples from text-poems.

Before proceeding, I would like to state very clearly that this does not concern the idea of poems' illustration through drawings, paintings, or photographs. Not even, inversely, does it concern the stimulation of verbal production through the contemplation of pictorial images, revivalism that is presently quite common in our midst.

What is being proposed here is the construction of structural correspondences between two semiotic systems—the oral and the visual—so that verbo-visual formulations may be performed, as was proposed by the Noigandres Group from São Paulo regarding James Joyce. Such correspondences will be played in each of the quadrants stated through the respective features from the oral and the visual, conveying a simultaneous grid of stimulus and synesthetic perceptions to the reader-user of the poem.

Charles S. Peirce's notion of interpretant may be useful to us, as theoretical equipment towards the understanding of that same network of correspondences:

A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. (135)

As a result it is easy to apprehend that the role of reading is performed at the level of the interpretant *sign—poem*.

Therefore, we intend to characterize the interpretant signs at stake in the visual and oral quadrants. In the visual quadrant, the interpretant sign is specifically synchronic, compact, synthetic, spatial, and tangible. In the oral quadrant, the interpretant sign is specifically diachronic, extensive, analytical, temporal, and abstract.

Now the antithetical pairs may be established with their specific features. Through these we recognize valid or interdisciplinary relations, constituting a challenge to the artist's creativity and to the reader's reading skills.

The poet obviously works with what Peirce calls "representamen," which is constituted by the materials being used: sounds, in the case of orality (even if written); graphic signs and letters, in the case of visuality. The production of texts, in each of those areas, cannot waver the characteristic specificity of signs (representamen) employed.

Consequently, it is not at the level of the sign (representamen), visual or oral, that correspondences may be found but rather in the written articulations that seek corresponding interpretative signs in the reader.

Before presenting some of the examples of the creative possibility to establish such correspondences, I would like to shortly clarify some notions to support a correct reading of the proposed examples. Thus, I will consider there are interdisciplinary relations whenever principles of terminology transfer may be established by means of identical formulations in two different fields of knowledge. Setting antithetical pairs between specific concepts from two different fields also allows this sort of transfer. Intertextual relations feature text recovery and change, through plagiotropic and parodic moments. The intra-textual relations concern the structural elements of a given text. Last but not the least, inter-semiotic relations may be construed as those being established between two different codes as possible correspondence between interpreting signs but depending on the structural organization of the representamen. These somewhat abridged notions are presented because they are at the core of the reading of poetry, from the extreme pole of orality to the extreme pole of visuality, going through several degrees of inter-correspondence.

**Text Number 1: poem “Rondel do Alentejo” by Almada Negreiros**

We emphasize that this text bears musicality as the dominant stylistic feature. Sound and rhythm values are diachronically chained. Noteworthy are the abundant visual images weaving the text, and images of rhythmic and synesthetic visuality.

In minaret<sup>108</sup>  
mate

hits  
light  
snow green  
minuet  
of moonlight.

midnight  
of the secret  
of the boulder  
of a night  
of moonlight.

Dear eyes  
of heiress  
garnished  
with supplies  
of moonlight.

Fire breaking  
tambourines  
dark skin  
dancing tits  
and pretty,

---

108 This poem plays with specific sounds of the Portuguese language, rendering it almost untranslatable, as the author acknowledges.

dancing vests  
and jackets,  
the ribbons  
bringing relief  
to moonlight.

Flies the shawl  
swallow  
in the ball,  
and the life  
sickly  
and the hermitage  
in the moonlight.

Bow tie  
scarlet  
of courtesan  
gaiety  
of Mary  
la-da-dee  
in revelry  
of moonlight.

Turning feet  
turning steps  
sunflowers  
and the hoods,  
and the arms  
of these two  
turning bonds  
in the moonlight.

The vest  
of this virgin  
maddens

as the S  
of the rocket  
in the vertigo  
from moonlight.

In minaret  
mate  
hits  
light  
snow green  
minuet  
of moonlight.  
(1913)

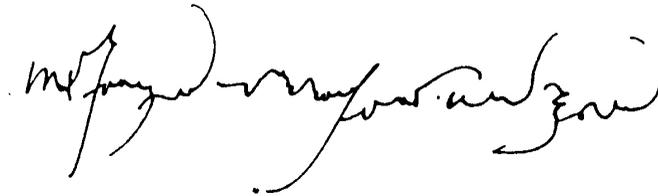
**Text Number 2: Calligraphies by Roland Barthes or the signifier without signified (“o significante sem significado”).**

Nevertheless, one may question whether a signifier without signified indeed exists. In fact, all signs refer to an object, even if a purely aesthetic one, non-translatable into other code, for instance ideological.

On the other hand, a purely aesthetic sign could not exist, since there must be an ideological interpreter for any sign, whatever it might be.



Spelling nothing...

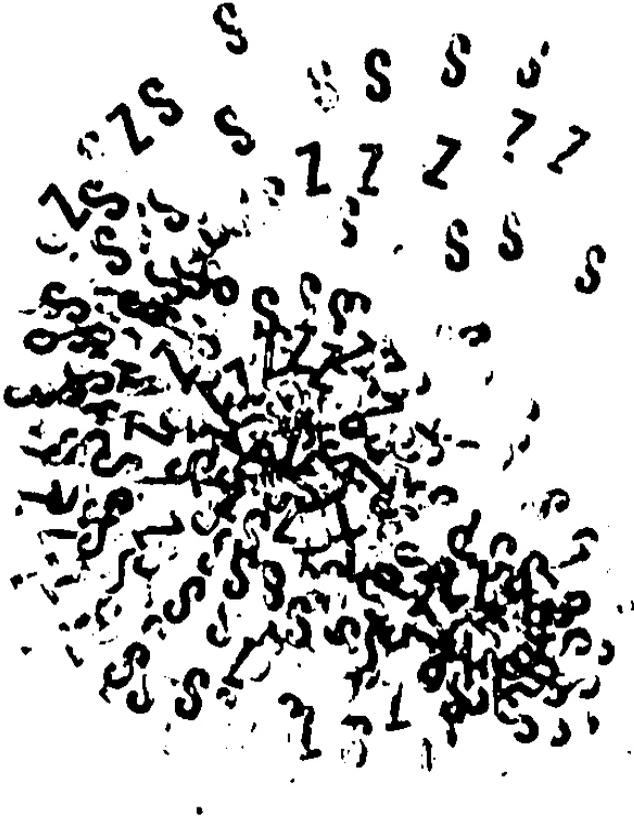


...or signifier without signified

**Text Number 3—Calligraphy by E. M. de Melo e Castro**



**Text Number 4—Visual poem by E. M. de Melo e Castro. The arrangement of visual signs suggest sibilant sounds.**



**Text Number 5—Example of intertextual parody relation between a verse by Camões and a visual poem soulofmine (“almaminha”)**

almaminha  
almaminha  
almaminha

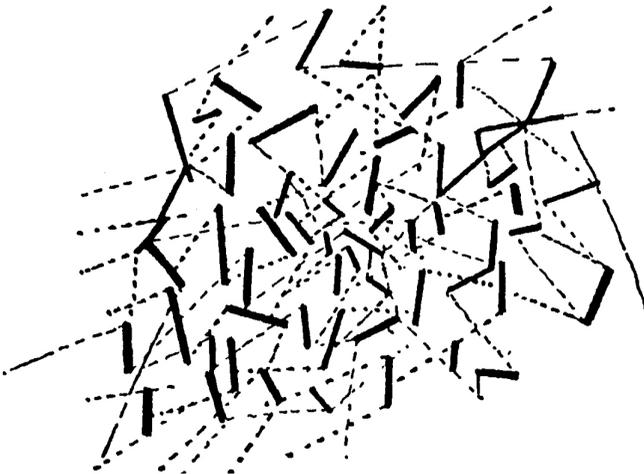
**Text Number 6—Example of intertextual relation structuring the visual poem’s disposition (building), with the terms concrete (“cemento”) and iron (“ferro”).**

```

      o
      o
      i
f     n           c i m e n t o
e     e           f           r
r     m           r           e
f     i           r           e
c k n e n t o i a e m i c i m e n t o e
r     i           o           r
r     m           o           r
e     e           r           o
f     n           r           o
f     t           a           o
f o r r o r r e f e r r o f e r r o o o
      t
      e
      m           f           r           t
      i           c i m e n t o f           m
      r           r           f           i
      r           r           f           c
o t a e m i c i m e n o r r e f           c

```

**Text Number 7—Intertextual relation between two types of codes, written and visual, in the same poem.**



**Text Number 8—Interdisciplinary relation between numerology and conventional lyricism: Sonnet sums 14X (“Soneto soma 14X”), by E. M. de Melo e Castro.**

1 4 3 4 2

2 3 3 0 6

4 1 6 1 2

3 2 2 1 6

5 0 0 1 8

2 1 2 5 4

1 4 0 1 8

3 2 4 1 4

3 1 2 3 5

5 4 1 2 2

3 0 4 2 5

4 3 3 1 3

5 1 2 1 5

8 9 3 5 3

## Infopoetry

Since the beginning of the 1960's, the long-standing idea of producing texts with poetic quality through special machines became possible. Computer development allowed text-processing through certain morphological and syntactical functions. The road towards an informatic poetry or infopoetry was open. It was necessary to develop new categories of critical understanding in order to deal with the emerging issues.

The widely-employed notion of artificial text seems to be neither theoretically useful nor adequate for the critical assessment of the texts produced with computer assistance. Actually, “artificial” merely refers to an artifice that does not exist in nature. Isn't all writing, every production of text by the hands of humans, or by typography, an artifice to record and register oral communication?

And human voice—isn't it also an artifice to enable communication among beings said to be human, through an arbitrary code of sounds they are able to produce and form into language?

Are there really natural languages and artificial languages?

Aren't all languages human-made, along the successive stages of a person's development, with the purpose of improving the efficiency of our relationships or with the purpose of adapting to new living circumstances that depend on them? In any case, the notion of artificial text appears today as a false notion, to the extent that there are no texts we can call natural. All texts are produced by humans with instruments and suitable materials: mechanical or electronic recording, long-distance transmission, and various writing techniques and different media used for visual recording of speech, such as Paleolithic inscriptions on stone, papyrus, bamboo, bird-feathers, paper, brushes, press, pen, pencil, ballpoint, typewriter, and, finally, the computer. All these instruments we may call hard, but another set of instruments is soft, or immaterial, constituted by words and grammatical rules to organize speech. In the new era, computers, as machines that write text, can use words and apply grammatical rules. So, we use that equipment to assist us in the production of texts, performing functions that are not merely to record, reproduce, or disseminate previously existing texts.

In 1964, in a note from his book *Electronicolítica*, Herberto Helder explains how the process of textual production he designed was similar to the pioneer

experiments by the Italian poet, Balestrini, who used a computer for poetic production. This is Helder's note:

In 1961, Nanni Balestrini performed a very curious experiment in Milan. He chose a few fragments from ancient and modern texts and supplied them to an electronic calculator which organized them. It organized them according to certain combinatorial rules previously established, and 3,002 combinations were generated.

The author of these poems [Herberto Helder] kept the implicit general combinatorial principle from that experience. Thus, he distributed a limited number of expressions and words among each poem without following any specific rules. Whenever he felt like, he rejected the initial core vocabulary and introduced new words, which combined with the existing words or simply with each other.

Due to the use of a restricted number of words, the compositions resembled some primitive magical texts, some popular poetry, and some medieval lyricism. The obsessive application of the same words generated an incantatory language, a sort of magic ritual formula in which there are traces of popular refrains, as well as traces of medieval lyrics, such as the songs ("cantigas") from the song-books ("cancioneiros").

The combinatorial principle is truly the linguistic foundation for all poetic creation.<sup>109</sup>

This text is clear and requires no comment or glosses, but I would like to underline another principle, besides the combinatorial, that is also important in Herberto Helder's text: the randomness principle. It is present in the poet's will, when he introduces new words and does not use any rule for vocabulary in each poem.

Also, similarly clear is the evolution of the computer's use in producing creative experiments from the 1960's until our day by using a combinatorial algorithm, or a random algorithm, or even producing instructions to feed the computer, which led to the execution of grammatical or visual programs, according to previously established conceptual (mathematical) models.

So, it may be said that today there are countless possibilities for poetic production that benefit from the computer's speed of execution in the combina-

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109 See Appendix 3 for original Portuguese.

torial or random production of texts and also from their accurate application of mathematical conceptual models.

The first experiments should today be considered pre-historical and paradigmatic. Such experiments include Balestrini's or Margaret Masterman's computerized production of "haikus," Marc Adrian's production of concrete poems, and many others performed during the 1960's and 1970's in many universities.

These experiments were paradigmatic because they demonstrated the possibility of an informatic poetry and, also, the difficulties involved in carrying out such projects. They were pre-historical to the extent that the dissemination of microcomputers and PC's allowed informatic poetry to expand into a research field addressing the diverse creative possibilities of the computer. That research is the real meaning of poetics, and there is no need to demonstrate that again.

As illustrations of infopoetry in Portuguese, besides Silvestre Pestana's work, we should mention the works of Pedro Barbosa in the 1970's gathered in the two volumes of *A Literatura Cibernética (Cybernetic Literature)* and in the 1988 volume *Máquinas Pensantes: Aforismos Gerados por Computador (Thinking Machines: Computer Generated Aphorisms)*, in which the combinatory and random methods are demonstrated. In 1984, the same author produced several aphorisms from a conceptual textual model that I proposed in 1971 in *Álea e Vazio (Randomness and Void)*, 33 with clear literary quality, according to conventional standards. Barbosa published an article concerning that experiment in *Jornal de Notícias* (June 5th, 1984). I later published a paper in the magazine *Colóquio Letras* (#89, January 1986), on the production of the same aphorisms and implications to the change in the notion of author and in the role of criticism.

1. The following model is proposed:
2. A and B are a pair of opposites;
3. A and B are nouns or pronouns;
4. C is random;

$\text{If A is B } \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{In the presence of} \\ \text{In the absence of} \end{array} \right\} \text{ A (or B or C, etc.)}$
---

5. choose your words and develop the model according to a combinatory rule;
6. carefully study the resulting propositions;
7. do not suspend your research: everything can be said in a poem.

Barbosa specifies:

In order to provide aphoristic semantic results, the vocabulary repertoire built in the program consists of fifty words that are predominantly abstract. The aphorisms hereby represented are a limited selection among the several hundred that were executed, or rather, among the several thousand possible. The BASIC generating algorithm establishes a dialectic between programming and casuality while operating within a textual model. This follows Umberto Eco's statements, although they pertain to an aesthetic context and not a computing one: "To program fields of events in which casual procedures may occur: we will then have a unique dialectics between chance and program, between mathematics and randomness, between planned design and free acceptance of what may occur, since that, in the end, will happen according to second normative lines, pre-arranged, not denying spontaneity, but imposing it barriers and possible directions" [Cf. *A Definição da Arte (The Definition of Art)*, Edições 70, Lisbon, 1981, p.219]. In the field of artistic creation all this approximates a Neo-Pythagorean ideal reintroducing a mathematical harmony: programming rigid textual configurations that still contain the fertility of randomness and disorder. Such artistic creation is in symmetry with the re-evaluation in the scientific world, regarding statistical and random procedures. This is a borderline area joining the "concluded form mystiques" and the "dissolved form anarchists."

Series of 33 aphorisms:

- 1) Will man be God in the presence of fire
- 2) Will God be everything in the presence of nothing
- 3) May God be nothing in the absence of everything?
- 4) Will light be light in the absence of light
- 5) Will night be night in the presence of night
- 6) May light be light in the presence of fire?
- 7) Will God be silence in the presence of evil
- 8) Will night be great in the presence of you
- 9) May evil be good in the absence of evil?
- 10) Will infinite be small in the presence of infinite
- 11) Will great be great in the absence of great

- 12) May God be great in the presence of Man?
- 13) Will nothing be nothing in the presence of nothing
- 14) Will ugly be beautiful in the absence of beautiful
- 15) May light be light in the absence of night?
- 16) Will everything be a weapon in the presence of the weapon
- 17) Will good be silence in the presence of the weapon
- 18) Will the weapon be weapon in the absence of the weapon
- 19) Will the wind be great in the presence of the night
- 20) Will everything be night in the absence of you
- 21) May silence be music in the presence of silence?
- 22) Will nothing be evil in the absence of Man?
- 23) Will evil be everything in the absence of good
- 24) Will Man be Man in the absence of Man?
- 25) Will wind be nothing in the absence of wind
- 26) Will the night be silent in the absence of fire
- 27) Will white be black in the presence of God?
- 28) Will everything be wind in the absence of Man
- 29) Will the night be silent in the absence of you.
- 30) Will fire be fire in presence of wind?
- 31) Will God be night in the presence of nothing
- 32) Will nothing be nothing in the absence of everything
- 33) May everything be everything in the presence of everything?

Barbosa continues:

One may ask: how to justify insinuating a random procedure in the sphere of thought and reason?

Consider the symmetrical validity of these two opposing aphoristic statements:

“Will the night be great in the presence of you.”

“Will the night be great in the absence of you.”

Certainly “the night is great” in the first and second case will receive different meanings depending on the imaginary picture one deems to adjust: probably a euphoric interpretation in the first production and

a dysphoric interpretation in the second. Also, consider the 54 variations in the following series:

“Will God be everything in the presence of everything?”

“Will God be everything in the presence of nothing?”

“Will God be nothing in the presence of everything?”

“Will God be God in the presence of everything?”

“Will God be nothing in the presence of God?”

Etc, etc, etc.....

From the logical-semantic standpoint, how does one understand that all these labyrinthine productions are equally acceptable for us, since there is truth in refusing, opposing, or contradicting all of them? Does this demonstrate the arbitrary game in our thought or the flexibility of our interpretive procedures before a given text, which forces us to adjust semantic mechanisms before A as before anti-A, so they become equally plausible?

Are there mere semantic interpretation phenomena from a metaphorical adjustment effort similar to the one involved in projective tests? But if such an effort can be made before the statement A as before the statement non-A, where lies the reassuring logic of language, that last raft that was rescuing us from an epistemological shipwreck in our relationship with the world, with reality, with the truth? (331–333)<sup>110</sup>

The questions posed by Pedro Barbosa regarding the results in the development of my poetic model may be faced as a reinforcement of the critical role of the reader, that is, driving the addressee to a selection process on received messages and forcing him or her to assume active and participating standpoints in the process of reading. If both the statement A as well as the non-A statement may be and are concrete and real, the reader will be in charge of taking a stand regarding their veracity. The poem is an open text, formally and semantically. The critical role is, therefore, a part in the process of creating texts that must be executed by the reader. The author is merely the proponent of models to generate texts.

Technology is being developed to produce art objects—visual, auditory, or literary—that the author would not, by himself, be capable of executing. It

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110 Originally published in *Jornal de Noticias* and later republished in *A Ciberliteratura*. See Appendix 4 for original Portuguese.

originates a shift on the concept of authorship, questioning the metaphysics of creativity based on the mediating role of the individual artist. Once released from the operations of materialization of the work (that the computers and robots perform quickly and more accurately), artists may concentrate in the conceptual and critical aspects of creation, for which they are more gifted than those machines.

## Videopoetry

In 1969, I produced for the Portuguese television a videopoem with the duration of 2'43" under the title *Roda Lume (Fire Wheel)*. After being broadcast in a literary information program by Eduíno de Jesus, it was destroyed by the broadcasting company.

That small videopoem is a pioneer of the work I have been developing since 1985 in Universidade Aberta in Lisbon.

### **Videopoetry: a proposal for multiple research.**

On the one hand, videopoetry explores the grammatical and expressive possibilities of video media while simultaneously researching new techniques for creativity that manifest through writing and reading. It also explores the iconized verb acting in space and time, with the possibility for new narratives in which the notion of visual-time acquires a particular meaning. Such a notion refers to the time an image requires to transform into another one, giving us unstable and mutating information about itself.

As a consequence, the “blank” page by Mallarmé acquires substantive dynamism (self-performed) and a psychological meaning translated into the dynamics of each user’s subjective perception, which manifests through the fascination provoked by video images.

We may mention—as grammatical elements specific to video—the vibrant instability of colors, requiring no referent beyond themselves. This regards images that unlike cinematographic images, are total and autotelic. These are the materials, the “words” for creation, to which we accurately call videopoetry: the virtual materializing of textual images’ fascination.

Mainly concerning the written text, videopoetry makes obvious references to visual poetry from the 1960’s and cartoons. But what is being

searched and longed for is the investigation regarding the technical and aesthetic specific potential that video places upon a poet's reach. The coordinates of movement and time, as well as of chromatic dynamism, now assume the quality of a new grammar of visual transformation, corresponding inevitably to a different reading attitude.

The use of advanced technological media is, therefore, a challenge to any poet for whom poetry is the independent and unalienated quest for communication.

The poetic role of language, as defined by Roman Jakobson, is characterized by the importance awarded to the message itself, i.e. to the media upon which the message is built and that constitute its matter and structure. Hence the importance awarded to the phonic values in oral poetry; to the writing values in written poetry; to visual values in visual poetry; and to technological values when new media are in order, such as the video, and for artistic creation, not for simple repeating or controlling purposes.

That is how videopoetry becomes possible and even necessary towards the research of specific characteristics in such an audiovisual medium and also towards its independence from a use merely alternative to cinema, or from information massification through television broadcasting companies.

But what may those characteristics be, and those values, specific to video, that make it suitable for poetic creation? These questions will be answered through comparative experimentation regarding other widely acquainted audiovisual media, seeking to characterize the grammatical structures and techniques allowed by video.

Although one cannot state that the video is a new medium, the critical and theoretical conceptualization generally available are not the most appropriate to appreciate specific performances as videopoetry. With that medium, it can be verified as—in fact, what has always been verified when a new support appears—a new technique or a new form of expression that is invariably read and accessed in regards to the creative manifestations that apparently preceded it: photography accessed in regards to painting, cinema in regards to theater, television in regards to cinema, and video in regards to cinema and television.

According to McLuhan, video is a cold medium, and it may be considered that the cold and constructive aesthetics is the most adequate to creating videopoetry, but it may be experimentally concluded that video also allows for collage and time change, enabling two sorts of narrative articulation: slow times

corresponding to the proposal of a new form of reading, intimate or in small communication circles (narrowcast); and the accelerated times proposing a new impressionism and a synthetic reading, appropriate for broadcast or mass dissemination through television.

However, both descriptive articulations are supported by a combinatorial syntax in which the rhythmic and musical components become essential. Videopoetry is naturally inscribed in what could be designated as Kinesthetic Art, in which the fascination through sight finds its correspondence in other senses, mostly regarding somatic aspects.

Cinema lives from capturing natural images (except in the case of animation), and its rhetorical figure of speech is the synecdoche, giving us the part for the whole. Video also allows for non-natural images that are electronically generated or transformed in order to be themselves their own whole. Rhetoric is thus established through the articulation and sequence of those total images, generating a metonymic reality.

## SV

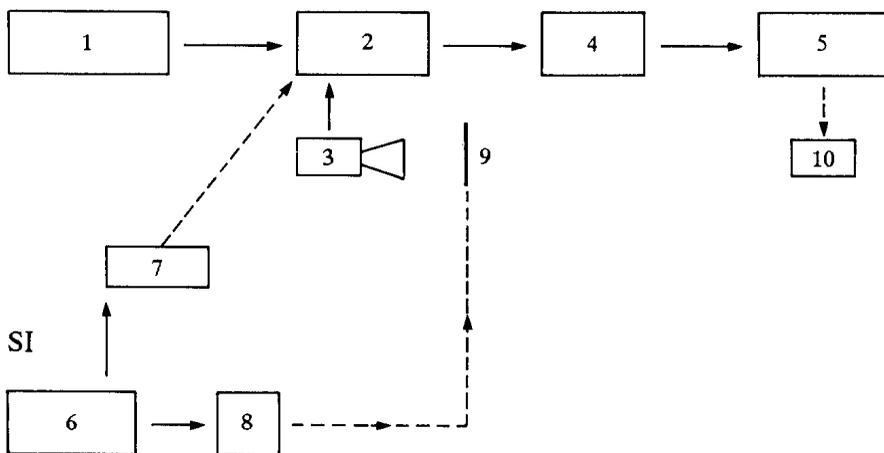


Figure 9—Scheme of equipment (hardware) to perform videopoetry

SV—Video system to generate images

1. Characters generator

2. Special effects
3. Video camera
4. Image processing and transformation
5. Editing or assembling

SI—Informatics System to generate images

6. Computer
7. Video recorder for computer generated images
8. Direct photograph of computer screen
9. Computer-generated imagery slides
10. End Product = Videotape

Images are the referent for video in the same way that words are the referent for poetry.

The chromatic variability allowed by video keeps us away from the chemical color of cinema and photography, thus giving us the unstable and flickering color that has nothing to do with the realistic color in painting or the real color from nature.

Regarding assembling techniques, video is simple thanks to the opportunity to preview before the final recording. The suitable ratio between exposure time for each image and time for its correct perception and meaningful articulation with the previous and the next image is, therefore, planned. That relation between real times and subjective times of perception may be named “visual time,” which is a concept pertaining to video and particularly pertaining to videopoetry.

Speech fragmentation, its speed or slowness, is subsequent to that visual time duly iconized since it is adjusted to image sequence. The notions of discursive assembly, realism, and impressionism that are implemented in cinema must make way to concepts that are no longer aesthetic but psycho-iconic, adapted to a notion of transformation made possible by video.

Regarding television, it should be noted that such a medium as the video is posterior to television broadcasting, and it equipped the broadcasting companies with a versatile resource they seldom use. Programmatic linearity in television is being questioned by the expansion of the video. The age of the unique and totalitarian televisions is long over and done, and the video through television, by cable or by satellite, has become vital towards the global enrichment of informa-

tion. Being a metaphorical language, video consists in a meta-language but is also a multiple eye, creating images we can enjoy. It is a media of cutting-edge technology particularly suitable for poetic creation.

### **And Now, Afterwards . . .**

A central idea is that the use of cutting-edge technologies in artistic creation is a pragmatic consequence of the aesthetics that developed throughout the twentieth century and whose moments of radicalism and rupture were named avant-garde. Ruptures which today constitute a continuum, that is, a strategic tradition in re-reading the past, assumed through the shape of radical cuts and re-evaluations.

At the same time, those strategies cannot be detached from social, political, and economic changes, wherein the scientific and technological investigation is manufactured. All those facts or spheres intertwine increasingly quickly. Now it is quite difficult to determine who acts and who is acted upon or what action is performed and what is the meaning of that action.

The signs of a new reflection upon these issues begin to surface, either in the field of economics or in the ideological field, with the urgency towards the awareness that creativity cannot be absent from those reflections. The role of poetics is, exactly, to provide the impulses (even if underground ones) in order to think again of the now and the afterwards. Now and afterwards are contained in the necessary criticism regarding economic and ideological systems, which despite the crisis syndrome still establish the rules of the game we are all playing. Such criticism may be found for instance in Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*, and may be seen in some ideologists, capitalist or socialist, such as the latest works by Friedrich A. Hayek or Mikhail Gorbachev's *Perestroika*, respectively.

Yet, I am sure that to artists, as to art and communication theorists, belongs the larger role of clearly defining the new deontology with regards to relationships and communication among human beings in the age, already begun, of high technology for everyone.

This is so because otherwise a new barbarianism would dominate those media, destroying all "critical" and "cultural" referential systems in the name of the right to subjectivism, thus instating anything less than a primary anarchism.

Such a state of affairs is financially rewarding and easily fits into a wild economic liberalism environment under the mask of art market or culture indus-

try, when it is known that the non-criticism leads to vulgarity, the absence of culture just harvests foolishness, and both lead to violence. In the case of cutting-edge technologies, total destruction is the horizon for such barbarianism.

But, if technology has been the trigger for the economic and ideological change we are being subjected to, this is so precisely because it changes the perception of the phenomena as well as the phenomena. And, therefore, one can no longer state that in the age of electricity, art has become impersonal or cold, precisely because the perception of the individuals producing it is undergoing change, and such art, performed through other media—now electronic, cybernetic, and dematerialized—will forcibly be just a different one.

Individuals and societies are also being different ones, but not necessarily less human. The notion of connotation—applicable to untranslatable meanings from poetry and art—will play an increasingly structural role in the definition of that humanity.

The reflection about means and media, that is, on their poetics, is now one of the doors onto afterwards—through the proposals and challenges contained by those media, such as the Greek sphinx.

Now, the signifiers are light and energy, because it is with light that the works of art are made in the technological age. It should then be questioned if the categories from semiotics are not becoming misfits, since light is the final meaning in the universe. Einstein would surely agree. Besides a new geometry, for instance fractal, there is also a new social geometry emerging: not the rigid class stratifications but the “fractal” fragmentation of society in scalar modules, relatively defined according to their creativity or their own ability to produce energy and to communicate it in suitable codes: “art.”

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