Experimental poetry in four authors: Tablada, de Campos, Padin and Brossa

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EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

IN FOUR AUTHORS:

TABLADA, DE CAMPOS,

PADIN AND BROSSA

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this work is to investigate and elaborate on the experimental poetry work of four authors: José Juan Tablada (Mexico), Haroldo de Campos (Brazil), Clemente Padín (Uruguay), and Joan Brossa (Spain-Catalonia), identifying commonalities and differences between them. Tablada and de Campos share the influence of the Chinese ideogram and Mallarmé’s innovative poetic propositions. Another similarity between them is their work in translating or transcreating (a term coined by the Noigandres group) literary texts. With respect to Padín and Brossa, their commonalities reside in their need to openly express social and political views against totalitarian regimes in their countries. Another similarity is their investigation of the relationship between the word and the world, and their efforts to produce a poetic expression closer to reality.

Chapter 1 investigates José Juan Tablada’s work. Considered the first avant-garde poet in Spanish America, he was influenced by European avant-garde movements and the concept of the ideogram in Chinese and Japanese poetry. He created short poems that he called haikais, a clear reference to the Japanese haiku. In his visual poems, a visual image fuses with the text in a way that both elements interrelate with one another, which allows for a poetic amalgamation.

With regard to the notion of orientalism, Tabladas does not have the confrontational characteristics proposed by Edward Said. If there is a dichotomy between the avant-garde and modernity versus ideograms and antiquity, Tablada would have been the first Spanish American poet who navigated and negotiated between these two influences.

Chapter 2 analyzes Haroldo de Campos’s concrete poetry and his translation or transcreation activity. Also influenced by Mallarmé, the Chinese ideogram, Pound and
Fenollosa, H. de Campos, along with his brother Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari founded the Brazilian concretist group *Noigandres* in the early 1950s. A concrete poem is a verbivocovisual composition that encompasses sound, visual and semantic elements. Its spatio-temporal structures contain a reduced verbal material that has been submitted to a rigid control process. It does not communicate subjective experiences, or transmit a prefigured message. Instead, the concrete poem aspires to exploit the visual, aural and semantic qualities of the verbal material and explore the possibilities inherent in phonic and visual correspondences.

Another topic developed in Chapter 2 is the comparison of H. de Campos’s and Tablada’s approaches to translation. Both poets worked on translating Japanese *haiku* into their native languages, but their approaches were different. Tablada adjusted the format of the traditional *haiku* into the Spanish syllabic organization, and incorporated Mexican cultural elements. By contrast, H. de Campos strived to keep as much of the Japanese format as possible in his *transcreations*. Instead of “braziliarizing” the Japanese language, he “nipponized” the Portuguese language.

Chapter 3 analyzes Clemente Padín’s visual poetry and mail art. Padín’s work will be connected to Joan Brossa’s visual and object poetry in Chapter 4. Both artists share the purpose of exposing social injustice and repression in works that clearly aim at having a socio-political impact on the reader/viewer. Padín’s performances and Brossa’s object poems transcend the white of the page as the only substratum on which to fix the message.

Chapter 4 investigates Joan Brossa’s visual poems and object poems. Brossa’s work not only was influenced by avant-garde movements, Marxism and Zen philosophy, but
also by the traumatic experience of the Spanish Civil War and Francisco Franco's dictatorship. Brossa's work was ground breaking, radical, and subversive.

His visual poetry aimed at avoiding the morphological and syntactic rules, because they did not reflect the fundamental nature of the concept they alluded to. Brossa indicates that words do not denote, they simply are.

His object poems become a part of language without losing their characteristics as objects. They have a great impact on the reader/spectator who, through a personal reading, becomes their co-creator.
DEDICATION

To Hector, Gabriel and Veronica, with love.
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This dissertation analyzes the following poets’ experimental poetry: José Juan Tablada from Mexico (1871–1945), Haroldo de Campos from Brazil (1929–2003), Joan Brossa from Spain (1919–1998), and Clemente Padín from Uruguay (1939–). Experimental poetry uses innovative means of expression in order to move away from what is considered dated, stereotypical, or limiting poetry. It aims at satisfying alternative aesthetic needs by pursuing non-linear representations of both form and content, as well as at transmitting messages of social content. Experimental poetry can be discursive, as, for example, in Joan Brossa’s poesia quotidiana (everyday poetry), which will be explained in Chapter 4. To define experimental poetry is not an easy task because it is an interdisciplinary and comprehensive genre that uses verbal language combined with other languages such as sound and visual media in a deliberately artistic manner. Some of the most popular expressions of experimental poetry are visual poetry, phonetic poetry, concrete poetry, object poetry, semiotic poem, Poem/Process, action poetry and performance, and mail art.

From futurism to concretism, to cite only two aesthetic movements, many poets have gone beyond the conventions of line, page, and book in their artistic/literary discoveries. In my study, an added emphasis will be placed on visual poetry, concrete poetry, object poems, and performances. This dissertation will focus on the visual poetry and haikais of José Juan Tablada, concrete poetry and transcreation of Haroldo de Campos, visual poetry, mail art and performance of Clemente Padín, and visual poetry and object poetry of Joan Brossa. Although as expressed above, the main purpose in this dissertation is to analyze the experimental poetic works of Tablada, de Campos, Padín, and Brossa, I
would like to use this introduction as a platform to present issues related not only to the topic of experimental poetry, but also to the situation of the limitation or non-inclusion of Brazilian literature in Spanish or Spanish American literature programs, trusting that in the future, I will be able to further expand on them.

My initial interest in experimental poetry that guided me to select the aforementioned authors, began with a graduate class about modernismo, during which my classmates and I were introduced to José Juan Tabladas literary work. Mostly, we worked on his modernista poetry. Nonetheless, we were also introduced to Tablada’s haikai and visual poetry. I found the idea of associating text with image enthralling; therefore, the logical path for me to follow was to choose the topic of experimental poetry for my dissertation.

The fact that this kind of poetry can be located at the periphery of literary studies for the reason that it uses a variety of vehicles of expression that are not only based on those in traditional discursive poetry was intriguing to me. As I was collecting information, I came across many interesting authors, ultimately deciding on the ones selected for this study, since each of them had a unique approach to experimental poetry. My intention was to see to what extent these four authors from different countries, using different languages and different approaches to experimental poetry exhibited commonalities in their work.

A first commonality is their need to find a kind of poetry that would allow them to experiment and revolutionize their poetic expressions in order to produce a body of work in line with their novel artistic discoveries. In such discoveries, as a product of their research, they all acknowledged Mallarmé’s revolutionary poetic influence, which, along with the avant-garde movements, deeply impacted their experimentation and the scope of
their work. Another commonality is the influence of the Chinese ideogram, which was particularly important to Tablada and de Campos. Zen philosophy was another important influence for the poets. This philosophical movement, in particular, helped Tablada create the contents of his haikais, and allowed de Campos to “transcreate” Japanese haiku into Portuguese. In the case of Brossa, Zen philosophy contributed to the creation of his minimalist poetry, which he called poesia quotidiana (everyday poetry) or antipoesia (antipoetry). This antipoetry was also influenced by Marxist principles introduced to the Catalan poet by João Cabral de Melo.

**The Historic Avant-Gardes and Experimental Poetry**

Along with the aesthetic revolution that the avant-garde brought to the artistic world, it also brought about political practices that aimed at subverting the bourgeois, capitalist standards in relation to modernity. The utopian social and political philosophy of the historic avant-garde was greatly influenced by Marxism – so much so that that the avant-garde and the left often became synonymous with each other. The tendency to look towards Marxism as a model was due to the fact that at the turn of the century, the problems that Marx addressed became increasingly aggravated by of the gap between the bourgeoisie and the lower class (Granade n. pag.). If we compare the socio-political conditions in the case of the four authors, we find a clear similarity with de Campos, Padín and Brossa. The three poets endured the experience of living under repressive military regimes. Padín and Brossa, both openly Marxists, wanted their poetic work to be vehicles through which they could express their views regarding social issues such as freedom, dictatorship, and repression. Brazil also suffered under the control of a
dictatorship from 1964 to 1985, forcing artists, writers and musicians to work in an increasingly repressive environment. Under these circumstances, Haroldo de Campos’s creative works served as a conceptual counterpoint to the repressive political climate in Brazil; he advocated principles of the avant-garde and innovation championed by the concretists and other proponents of Brazil’s social program of modernization (“Iso-Morphism.” The conflict of form and content in search of mutual identity” Yale University Library n. pag.). Tablada’s situation is different. In regards to the Mexican Revolution, he did not see the need for a socio-political change. Instead, he aligned himself with Porfirio Diaz’ conservative regime, and opposed the social changes the populist Revolution wanted to bring to the Mexican people.

Experimental poetry is a peripheral literary genre that co-exists with discursive literature. Nevertheless, it is quite intriguing to observe that in general, experimental poetry only occupies a marginal space within what is considered canonical literature. The obvious question is: Why? In the process of researching and writing this dissertation, I realized that experimental poetry is assessed through the lenses of traditionally discursive language. Academia has a canon of literary works, which students must be familiar with by the end of their academic careers. The body of relevant literary works, which students must know, grows over time; therefore, as the list grows, experimental poetry does not seem to be able to compete in earning a place in this canon. The possibility of familiarizing oneself with hybrid media within the field of literature opens the opportunity to extend one’s research to new areas, thus it becomes a valuable experience.
Poems as Open Works

The authors selected for this work express their personal aesthetic approach to art through their work with experimental poetry. This reminds me of the notion of the open work, as proposed by Umberto Eco in his book *The Open Work*. In it, he cites Henri Pousseur:

The poetics of the “open” work tends to encourage acts of conscious freedom on the part of the performer and place him at the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations, among which he chooses to set up his own form without being influenced by an external necessity which definitively prescribes the organization of the work in hand (4).

In *The Open Work*, Eco presents the idea of *opere in movimento* (works in motion), referring to the works of Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Henri Pousseur, and Alexander Calder’s mobiles. What these works have in common is the artists’ decision to leave the arrangement of some of the constituents of their work either to the public or to chance, giving them not one single and definitive order, but numerous possible orders, which Eco refers to as “ambiguity.” One can see the analogy with Mallarmé’s *Livre* in which the reader would have arranged the pages of the book in a variety of different sequences (*The Open Work* x). If Eco’s definition of “ambiguity” is the element that characterizes a modern work of art, the poetic work of the authors presented in this dissertation is a clear manifestation of their modernity.

Chapter 1 will examine José Juan Tablada’s visual poetry work and his use of the ideogram, along with the influence of avant-garde movements as media to create a new poetry in Spanish America. This chapter will also explore his orientalist perspective,
taking Edward Said’s theory on orientalism as a point of departure. Chapter 2 will look at Haroldo de Campos’s concrete poetry and transcreation. The rationale for this chapter sequence is that both Tablada and de Campos have the common influence of avant-garde movements and of the ideogram as a starting point in their exploration and development of their experimental poetry. Another common feature in these two poets is their interest in translation, or what de Campos called transcreation. Despite the fact that their respective approaches to this practice are different, they both felt the need to explore the possibility of bringing together a language based on the alphabet and the Chinese ideogram.

Chapter 3 will investigate Clemente Padín’s visual poetry and mail art. I also mention his performances, in which through his use of the body as signifier, he goes beyond the limits of the page. Padín’s work will be connected to Joan Brossa’s visual and object poetry in Chapter 4. Both artists share the manifest purpose of exposing social issues, such as injustice and repression, through works that clearly aim at having a socio-political impact on the reader/viewer. In addition, through their performances and object poems, they have transcended the white of the page as the substratum on which to fix the message.

Even though Tablada’s first artistic influence was the modernista movement, and later moving on to the avant-garde movements, which also greatly influenced the other authors, this thesis, will not directly focus on modernismo. However, the influence of the modernista movement and the historic avant-garde movements, such as surrealism and futurism, are clearly perceived in Tablada’s work. The avant-garde, the constellation of interrelated aesthetic movements appeared in the first two decades of the 20th century,
such as dadaism, surrealism, cubism, and futurism, and profoundly influenced music, poetry, prose, and the visual arts. These movements looked for innovation in artistic production by rejecting the established aesthetic canon, as well as by promoting radical social reforms, and outraging society’s morals, thereby challenging the status quo.

Jorge Schwartz explains in his book *Las vanguardias latinoamericanas*, that in the case of Latin America the transformation of cultural landscapes broke off from the fin-de-siècle traditions. Although the avant-garde movements in Latin America are considered to have begun in the 1920s, Schwartz selects 1914 as the beginning of the Latin American avant-gardes, the year when Vicente Huidobro read the manifesto *Non serviam* (I will not serve), which explained the theoretical foundation of creacionismo. However, there is a general consensus to declare 1922 as the *annus mirabilis*, as expressed by Schwartz, of the international and Latin-American avant-garde. It is the year of the publication of *Ulysses, The Waste Land, Trilce, Desolación*, and the “Semana de Arte Moderno en São Paulo” (Modern Art Week in São Paulo) (37). Therefore, even though the poets in this work come from different countries, wrote in different languages, and lived in different time periods, the widespread influence of avant-garde movements in the arts reached them and made them embrace it. It became their common ground.

Since this dissertation attempts to include not only an array of geographical areas, but also a variety of languages, – Spanish, Portuguese, and Catalan, – it is essential to establish some common grounds in regard to the avant-garde. As explained above, even though the term avant-garde encompasses a variety of aesthetic proposals in a specific

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1 Creacionismo was a literary movement initiated by Vicente Huidobro in which the poet is “un pequeño Dios” (a small God) who creates his/her own poetic world, independent from the external world. In his poem “Arte poética” he writes: “Inventa mundos nuevos y cuida tu palabra; El adjetivo cuando no da vida, mata” (“Create new worlds, and be vigilant with your word; when the adjective does not give life, it kills”) [my translation].
time frame, they all aim at breaking with the past in order to create something aesthetically and politically new. However, in the case of the avant-garde in Brazil, surrealism was not a major influence, as it was in Spanish American literature.

*Modernismo in Brazil, and the Study of Brazilian Literature in the Latin American Context*

Charles A. Perrone writes that in Brazil, the avant-garde was called *modernismo* (not to be confused with the Hispanic *modernismo*). The Brazilian *modernismo* was the equivalent of European modernism and avant-garde in the fine arts and literature. It was a broad-based movement of renovation, transformation, and self-realization in the vibrant decade of the 1920s and thereafter. *Modernismo* can be seen as a reaction to the exhaustion of artistic principles such as parnassianism and belletrism, as well as an endeavor in making new forms and as an intent to modify the cultural order, particularly in literature. Like in Europe, well known –*isms*, such as futurism, or cubism, configured modernism. Brazil’s coming-of-age with *modernismo* was not a unified program; rather it consisted of several different projects with shared interests in aesthetic freedom, as well as in the notion of being “modern.” What primarily distinguishes the Brazilian case are the following: its nationalistic dimension, the search for a New World mode of expression, and a definition of a national psyche (*Seven Faces. Brazilian Poetry since Modernism* 1). The official starting point of *modernismo* in Brazil was the Modern Art Week in São Paulo in February 1922. This three-day series of public events and performances constituted a historic mark unique to Brazil, as no other nation has so enshrined the time and space of its artistic maturation. Brazilian modernists held utopian
beliefs in progress, the possibilities of reform, and the wonders of technology (Perrone 2).

The dual impetus of modernismo, writes Perrone, were liberty in the artistic form, and the search for Brazilian identity. Oswald de Andrade was the most polemic, iconoclast and manifesto writer of modernismo. His works are characterized by the exploration of the boundaries between prose and poetry. Although his Poesia Pau-Brasil (Brazil-wood poetry, 1925) was inspired by European primitivism, it sought a “native originality” whose cultivation could lead to a modern poetry of export, in the same way that Brazil-wood was their first exported good in the sixteenth century. From Poesia Pau-Brasil, Oswald de Andrade’s project evolved into a second and more celebrated declaration of principles, his “O manifesto antropófago” (“The Cannibalist Manifesto” 1928).

In that manifesto he argues that a critical perspective on Brazilian cultural history beginning with the contact of the Portuguese and Amerindian populations can be gained through an encounter with the primitive forces of the unconscious. The metaphors of deglutition, devourment and anthropophagy are linked to the pivotal symbol of cannibalism in an effort to comprehend a native, totemic sense of eating one’s enemies in order to absorb their forces by means of magical disposition. This, in literature, would be understood as a critical assimilation of foreign information and experiences intended for a re-elaboration in local terms. Poesia Pau-Brasil and “O manifesto antropófago” encompassed a vanguard relativization of Brazi’s peripheral status (11), which would also be taken up by the members of the Noigandres group in their attempt to position their innovative art at the center of the national and international artistic milieu.

Jorge Schwartz deplores that it has been quite customary for Spanish American critics to leave Brazil outside of their analytic work scope, even though they use the term “Latin
America” to refer solely to Hispanic countries. For example, the term “Latin American avant-garde” in Saúl Yurkievich’s book, *Fundadores de la nueva poesía latinoamericana*, refers only to Spanish American countries (Schwartz 34). It is quite customary to create geographic and cultural loci in order to define literatures. There is a pedagogic rationale in organizing the study of literature by authors, literary periods, and geographic regions. However, because of this, it is difficult to establish connections among time frames, regions, and authors, resulting in a partial or reduced view of the world of literature. As expressed in the first chapter with respect to the concept of Orientalism proposed by Said, creating the “other” helps define the “self”. Nevertheless, in doing so, it becomes harder to get to know the “other,” and eventually what will be mainly highlighted will be the differences and not the commonalities that exist among individuals. This issue needs to be researched, particularly because by researching experimental poetry, which in itself is a peripheral literary genre, there is the possibility of blurring borders, thus allowing for a more encompassing literature.

In his book *Las vanguardias latinoamericanas*, Schwartz observes that the research of each of the avant-garde movements, the detailed study of the cultural contexts, and the historical consequences of each of these movements is long overdue (35). This is because the influences of the avant-garde movements had different impacts in Spanish America, Brazil, and Spain. There is a basic inequity vis-à-vis Brazilian literature. As it is written in Portuguese, it does not receive the attention it deserves in Latin American literature programs.

Non-traditional literary language has not yet been widely acknowledged in language and literature programs for the reason that traditional literary research has limited tools at
its disposal when it comes to the study and evaluation of experimental poetry. The fact
that experimental poetry, as a hybrid medium, inhabits the literary world, as opposed to
the world of fine arts, does not help in this issue.

We are familiar with the notion that it is ultimately the reader/viewer/listener who
brings the work of art to life. In the case of experimental poetry, how does the
reader/viewer apprehend it? In his book, *The Role of the Reader*, Eco explains that the
author presents a finished product with the intention that this particular composition
should be appreciated and received in the same form as he devised it. The addressee, that
is, the reader/viewer in the case of experimental poetry, will have a reaction to the stimuli
of the work of art, and will generate his/her own responses based on specific elements
such as his/her own conditioning, culture, taste, personal inclinations and prejudices. All
of these elements, which work together to form his/her individual perspective, modify
his/her comprehension of the original work. Thus, as Eco states:

The form of the work of art gains its aesthetics validity precisely in proportion to the
number of different perspectives from which it can be viewed and understood…

Hence, every reception of a work of art is both an *interpretation* and a
*performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh
perspective for itself (49) [emphasis in original].

When the reader/viewer is invited to read/view a piece of experimental poetry, his/her
perception will not be limited to the work’s linguistic component (that is, if there is any).
Unlike a traditionally written poem, in which there is a temporal succession of words,
verses, or stanzas, the reader/viewer will initially experience a visual reaction to the
entire work. Such a reaction will simultaneously encompass the reader/viewer’s
intellectual and emotional perception. Because an emotional reaction has been elicited, the process of reading or viewing the components of the work will acquire such a relevance for the viewer/reader, that will make the experience memorable.

Experimental poetry can be thought of as an example of an open work, as it invites the reader/viewer to co-participate with the author in the creative process. However, as Eco notes, every work of art, even if it has been produced to follow a specific outline, is actually open to unlimited possible readings, which will cause the work to obtain a new energy (63). It is obvious, then, that the reader/viewer plays a fundamental role in the life of an experimental poetic work, or of any kind of art work, for that matter. Without the reader/viewer/listener, the work of art does not exist.

**Visual Poetry**

Visual poetry has had a long history. Some of the first references to it are the ancient Greeks’ techopaegnia or shaped poems, in which the linguistic element is linked to the graphic one. “The Egg,” considered the first visual poem, was composed by Simias de Rhodes in 300 B.C. Willard Bohn succinctly defines visual poetry as “poetry meant to be seen. Combining painting and poetry, it is neither a compromise nor an evasion, but a synthesis of the principles underlying each medium. In its way, it is one of the most radical inventions (or reinventions) of our time” (*The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry, 1914 – 1928* 2). Visual poetry is also understood as an aesthetic exercise in which the poem does not limit itself to the graphic qualities of the alphabet. For example, a visual image fuses with the text in such a way that both elements interrelate with each other, like pieces that allow for a poetic amalgamation. For instance, a fragment of an advertisement sign
means not only what it says verbally; additionally, it contains multiple semantic references due to the mixture of image and word. In the poem “Autoritratto” by Corrado Govoni, words and image merge in order to create a poem in which the reader must decode two different systems: the visual and the verbal. The visual system will be the first to impact the reader and catch his/her attention as the face is perceived in its totality at first glimpse. The next step is to read and decipher the words within the visual image; by doing so, the reader is actively participating in the process of understanding and creating the poem for him-/herself. Later on we shall see the same process in Tablada’s, Padin’s, and Brossa’s visual poems. “Autoritratto: Rarefazione di Govoni” (Self-Portrait: Rarefaction of Govoni) by Corrado Govoni is an example of a futurist visual poem in which the author creates a childlike caricature containing handwritten texts:
The rarefaction, Antonio Pietropaoli explains, happens not only in the simplification of Govoni’s facial features, but also in the way the poetic written text is presented. Unlike a traditional poetic text, in which there is a chronological sequence of verses, in the case of this poem, there exists a dense and closely woven unifying space of vision of the figurative-linguistic picture. Because it becomes accessible and travelable through different and multiple ways, such as reading it from left to right, or vice versa, it is, therefore, difficult to establish the chronological order of the “verses.” In addition, the fact that the text is in manuscript form, reminds us of the childlike characteristic of the composition of the poem, as it refuses the coldness of the printing press. The novelty of this poem resides in its “craftsmanship” since the writing and the drawing are hand-made (95). The non-threatening characteristics of the poem invite the reader/viewer to play with it. The author has not imposed any rules in the way that the text should be read, allowing the readers/viewers to become co-authors even more than with other types of texts, thereby creating a personal, and potentially more memorable experience.

**Concrete Poetry**

By contrast, a concrete poem is a poem in which the physical medium is preeminent. In general, the essence of a concrete poem is language, including its form, design, and functions, wherein the words reduce themselves to their smaller elements. Augusto de Campos, brother of Haroldo de Campos, and cofounder of the *Noigandres* group, writes:
“O POEMA CONCRETO aspira a ser: composição de elementos básicos da linguagem, organizados ótico-acusticamente no espaço gráfico por atores de proximidade e semelhança, como uma espécie de ideograma para uma dada emoção, visando à apresentação direta – presentificação – do objeto” (Teoria da poesia concreta – textos críticos e manifestos 1950-1960 75).2

Furthermore, concrete poetry attempts to establish its linguistic substance in a new relationship between space and/or time and, thus, leaves behind traditional poetic meters. In this sense, concrete poems aim at being perceived more so than read. As Augusto de Campos stated in his manifesto on concrete poetry, the concrete poem perceives the word in itself, like a living cell as a whole, a living organism. Concrete poetry does not attempt to avoid reality; it is against any self-weakening introspection. It wants to position itself in a space of absolute realism. The conclusion that A. de Campos arrives at is stated as follows: “POESIA CONCRETA: TENSÃO DE PALAVRAS-COISAS NO ESPAÇO TEMPO” (Teoria da poesia concreta 44-45).3 This tension, explains A. de Campos, refers to the experimental attempts launched by poets like Mallarmé with Un coup de dés (1897) or Ezra Pound with Cantos (1925), texts that tend to impose themselves over the conventional organization of the poem whose formal unit is the stanza (44). Another important aspect present in concrete poetry is parataxis, which, unlike hypotaxis, allows for a variety of readings and viewpoints, through the exploration of the graphic aspect in the poem. About parataxis Philadelpho Menezes states: “Concrete poetry’s novelty in terms of compositional procedure is its installation of a new syntax based on relations of

2 “A concrete poem’s aim is to be a composition of basic elements of language, organized optically and acoustically in the graphic space by proximity and similarity, like a kind of ideogram assigned to one given emotion, aiming at the direct presentation -presentification- of the object” [my translation].

3 “Concrete poetry: Tension of word-things in time space” [my translation].
similarity among words: \textit{parataxis}” (25) [emphasis in original]. In this respect, the paratactic relationship depends on the geometric order that organizes its distribution on the page in such a way that the conventional syntactic order is substituted by signs that depend on geometric patterns. The following poem “Eis os amantes” (“Here are the Lovers”) by Augusto de Campos, is an example of a concrete poem in which it is possible to observe the symmetry in the organization and placement of words inside the space of the poem. At the same time, the words, presented in two contrasting colors, go through a process of transformation by a series of combinations. Thus they create neologisms that can be more clearly perceived and understood by the reader.

The English translation below was done by Augusto de Campos, Marcus Guimarães and Mary Ellen Solt:

Fig. 2b: Augusto de Campos, “Here are the Lovers,” Claus Clüver “The Noigandres Poets and Concrete Poetry” n. pag.

According to Clüver, the poem is a semantic representation of the sexual union between two lovers that culminates in the long portmanteau word at the bottom center of the
poem. The verbal fusion of the lovers is made visually clear by the interlacing of the two colors.

Marjorie Perloff notes that as early as the 1960s, Haroldo de Campos, through his concrete poetry, perceived that the technological revolution of our present time would create a condition in which “reading” is increasingly becoming “seeing,” and where the dichotomy between “prose” and “poetry” (understood as verse) is less than between seeing and seeing through (Differentials 193). To complete the idea, in “A Basis of Concrete Poetry” Rosemary Waldrop wrote: “Familiar shapes in familiar surroundings are invisible. We do not usually see words, we read them, which is to say we look through them, at their significance, their contents. Concrete poetry is first of all a revolt against this transparency of the word – as is all poetry” (141). These features will be presented in discussing Haroldo de Campos’s concrete poetry in Chapter 2.

Mail Art

Mail art is known as examples of the artistic manifestations that are transported by postal services, which, to a certain extent, can alter the meaning originally proposed by the author, due to the handling of the mailed object by the postal system. The innovation with mail art is the novelty of the transmission channel, which, with its specific features, alters the message sent with its “noise.” This “noise” is produced by the postal service through activities such as stamping, processing, and delivering. It is not a new artistic movement in its strict meaning; therefore, it does not belong to any specific “-ism.” Its novelty resides on its communicational level. The direct interpersonal relationship among artists through the postal service is non-hierarchical vis-à-vis the false “communication”
or monologue of the media, such as radio, television, and cinema. In addition, mail art establishes itself against commercialism and consumerism; therefore, it is a disruptive and even revolutionary artistic praxis.

Fig. 4. Clemente Padín “Lo pasado ¿pisado?” (Let bygones be bygones?) (1999) n. pag.

The mail art postcard shown above refers to Padín’s preoccupation with authoritarian governments. In 1973, Juan Maria Bordaberry directed the coup that overthrew the previous democratic government in Uruguay and became the leader of the military regime until 1976. Padín was a victim of this regime and was added to the long list of desaparecidos, living firsthand with the abuse of the military government. The title “Lo pasado ¿pisado?” problematizes the actions of the military regime symbolized by the boot footprint. It is made clear that he will not forget the abuse of this regime and urges the
people who will receive his mail art to do the same. Memory should be the vehicle through which the horrors of an abusive military government will be remembered, as well as a reminder that this situation must not be repeated.

**Object Poetry**

Object poetry allows for the communication of ideas through objects. According to Valeriano Bozal, the poem transforms itself into an object, demands a corporeality that is vital and that gives it meaning. Bozal writes:

> Sin dejar de ser lenguaje el poema se escapa a otro mundo, el de los objetos… Al igual que sucede con los poemas, ahora en sentido inverso, en los objetos, las imágenes desbordan el marco de lo que debe ser contemplado y se incorporan al de lo que debe ser leído o pensado, es decir, al marco del lenguaje, sin por ello perder la condición de objetos y de imágenes por contemplar (230, 233).

Carlos Yusti undertakes the issue of object poetry from the perspective of the reader/spectator because he is an active creator whose way of reading or looking does not limit itself to find the symbolic or metaphoric element of the read object. Instead, through a personal reading, such an object looses its real and common contours in order to transform itself into something else, into an aesthetic proposal. When poetry is composed of real objects different from language to express its poetics, it acquires an unusual, expressive platform (“Los poemas-objeto de Franklin Fernández: dos visiones críticas” no pag.).

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4 The poem, does not stop being language. It runs off to another world, the world of the objects. Just like what happens with the poems, but in an opposite direction, in the objects the images break through the frame of what must be gazed at, and become a part of what must be read or thought, that is, they become a part of the language without losing their attributes as objects or images to look at [my translation].
The following image is an example of an object poem:

![Object Poem Image]

Fig. 3. Franklin Fernández. “Corazón de poeta” (Poet’s Heart).

It uses real objects: a stethoscope, dice with letters, and a small box in the shape of a heart that contains the dice and what seems to be the heart-shaped lid of that box. The top part of the stethoscope touches the box that contains the dice with letters of the alphabet that will become words and sentences. The box with the dice connected to the stethoscope represents the intellectual aspect of the poetic creation while the bottom part of the stethoscope that listens to the heart represents the emotional aspect of the creative work. It becomes clear to the reader/viewer of this object poem that intellect and
emotions are intertwined in the creative process. It is essential that both artist and reader/viewer have a common cultural knowledge of the objects in order to give them meaning, like in the case of the object poem above, or other object poems, such as the ones created by Joan Brossa.

**Performance or Action Art**

Finally, I will briefly discuss performance, or what Clemente Padín also calls “arte de la acción” (Padín *Performanceologia* n.pag). My research has only touched on this particular artistic expression. However, Padín's investigations on inobjectal art are important in so far as they led him to become a performer. Like the object poem, a performance cannot be contained by the paper, the book or the picture frame. It is a scenic expression, formally similar to drama or opera, but different at the same time, as drama is “representation” and performance is “presentation.” The expressive tool (signifier) is the human body. There are three inseparable elements in a performance: the performer, the action (or inaction), and the audience. Even though the performance is an artistic genre that is accepted by the arts system, it is a peripheral art with a clear political sense (Padín *Performanceologia* n. pag.). Performances can happen in a variety of venues, either indoors or outdoors. As of today, Padín is actively involved in mail art and performance. In 2011, he organized an international mobilization to liberate Colombian poet Angye Gaona from political incarceration in her own country. Initially, she was accused of drug trafficking and later of political rebellion. The picture below shows Padín’s performance in the streets of Montevideo, which helped to create awareness of Gaona’s incarceration:
In order to bring attention to Gaona’s ordeal, Padín covers his head and wears a printed t-shirt with Gaona’s face. By hitting one rock against another, he is representing the mistreatment that people suffer in jail. Through this performance, Padín not only is showing solidarity with the Colombian poet, but he is also identifying with her, as he was also incarcerated during Bordaberry’s dictatorship in Uruguay. This performance has similar elements to the performance presented at the end of Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 1

JOSE JUAN TABLADA AND HIS APPROACH TO THE ORIENT

*The first great distinction between Chinese taste and our own is that Chinese like poetry they have to think about, and even puzzle over.*

Ezra Pound *Early Writings* 208.

José Juan Tablada (Mexico City 1871 - New York 1945) was acclaimed by Octavio Paz as the first avant-garde poet in Latin America. He started his literary career at the age of nineteen publishing in the newspaper *El Universal*, where he wrote Sunday chronicles with the title “Rostros y máscaras” that contained vignettes of Mexican life as well as poems in which he showed his command of the verse. His interest in Japan was evidenced by his translation in 1891 of paragraphs of a text by Edmond de Goncourt that represented monsters in Japanese art, which he rendered as “Arte japonés.” Shortly afterwards, *El Universal* published his translation of “Gentleman” by Jean Richepin (http://www.tablada.unam.mx/poesia/ensayos/trayect.html).

Given that the pinnacle of Orientalism in the nineteenth century had a tight relationship with the political and economic expansion of metropolitan zones, it is no surprise, argues Atsuko Tanabe in her book *El japonismo de José Juan Tablada*, that Tablada, a poet, journalist and diplomat, learned about China and Japan through French literature (7). However, when Tablada traveled to Japan in 1900, he acquired a firsthand awareness of the relationship between China, Japan, and Spanish American literature. Along with his work as a poet, he was a very productive journalist and wrote over 10,000 articles in newspapers such as *El Universal* and *El Mundo Ilustrado*, and in magazines in Mexico and abroad. He stimulated literary experimentation among young Mexican writers through his lectureships at higher education institutions such as the ‘Escuela
Nacional Preparatoria,’ the ‘Academia de Bellas Artes’ and the ‘Museo Nacional.’

Tablada was also active in the politics of his time. As a result of his collaboration with Victoriano Huerta to overthrow Francisco Madero, he went into exile in 1914 to New York where he would remain until 1918. During his absence, the Zapatistas destroyed his art collection. When he returned to Mexico, he served in the diplomatic service until 1920, before once more returning to the United States.

Tablada’s vision of the Orient contrasts markedly with Edward Said’s theory on orientalism. According to Said, orientalism shows one’s own position with respect to the other as a strategy of defining oneself in terms of what one is not. More specifically, Said’s orientalism points to false assumptions underlying the attitudes of the West with respect to the Middle East. For Tablada, by contrast, orientalism was used as a means that would enable him to pursue and synthesize the European avant-garde with Asian antiquity as a way of exploring and understanding his modern times. I shall argue that his position as a Mexican, whose roots are already a mixture of European and indigenous cultures, enabled him to obtain this synthesis. Consequently, Tablada’s orientalism showed that it is possible to navigate among diverse systems of thought without opposing one with the other.

By the mid-nineteenth century, explains Tanabe, Latin America witnessed a neo-colonial order from which there emerged new economic and social forces. These forces were made more tangible through increased foreign investments, technology, immigration, economic improvement, and political stability. At the same time there was an increase in the formation of a new kind of oligarchy closely linked to foreign forces that helped to establish the middle and upper classes in society (Tanabe 23). In Mexico,
from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, the régime of Porfirio Díaz, also known as the ‘Porfiriato,’ revealed a singular influence of French culture on Mexican society. Especially the Mexican bourgeoisie emulated French styles and art. This stylistic preference influenced industry, politics, city planning, architecture, art, science, and fashion (Tanabe 23).

At the end of the nineteenth century, Mexico was the first Latin-American country to establish social, cultural, and commercial relations with Japan (Chang Shik 91). In his article “El espacio asiático en las crónicas de José Juan Tablada,” Chang Shik elaborates that in the search for the country’s stability and as a strategy of the “República Restaurada,” Porfirio Díaz’ government attended to negotiations with American, Asian, and European countries. Mexico was the first Western country to sign a treaty with an Asian country, thus recognizing Japan’s sovereignty by negotiating a treaty based on absolute equality. Japan officially opened its doors to Mexico after signing the “Friendship and Commerce Treaty” in 1889, because Porfirio Díaz considered Japanese manpower beneficial to the modernization program of the country. However, the Asian artistic and cultural imagery was no novelty for Mexicans, as it was already evident in the works of modernista poets and writers such as Amado Nervo, Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, and Tablada himself, who were influenced by the French artistic movements of that time.

In Mexico, modernismo was born under such historic circumstances. It was a movement, as Hector Valdés summarized, marked by a “… pasión desbordada, imágenes novedosas, exotismo, justeza en la forma, aventura del lenguaje, vicios suntuosos y

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5 To give an example, in 1910, the Japanese Commercial Exposition in the ‘Palacio de Cristal’ in Mexico City was highly successful in stimulating an active Trans-Pacific commerce. Diplomatic and commercial relationships helped to reduce the physical distance that separated both countries (Chang Shik 91-92).
rebeldía a ultranza” (quoted in Tanabe 23). But the *modernista* vision of the Orient, particularly of China and Japan, was superficial, filtered by selective French influences.

Spanish-American *modernismo* started during the last decades of the nineteenth century. It was, as noted by José Olivio Jiménez in his book *Antología crítica de la poesía modernista hispanoamericana*, historically conditioned by a series of social, political and economic factors such as the expansion of capitalism in the burgeoning developing countries in America, and the triumph of the principles of liberalism and competitive individualism, which lie at the base of bourgeois society (Jiménez 46). The Mexican government’s lack of support for the arts fueled by its need for technological, industrial and commercial development proved to be detrimental for artists. The artist was forced to witness not only the cultural unseemliness of a society interested in achieving progress, technical developments and material goods through positivistic practice; but also to see a spiritually and aesthetically impoverished civilization. These worldly values marginalized the artist, who, oftentimes, in order to safeguard his survival had to work as a journalist (Jiménez 23). As a result, many artists removed themselves from what was considered the norm in society, and in their art escaped to a luxurious and pleasurable world, the cosmopolitism of Paris, the refinement of eighteenth century France, the classical and Norse mythologies, and exotic places like China and Japan (Jiménez 24). Thus, *modernismo* can be characterized as an idealization of the past and of the Greek and oriental cultures, spirituality and religiosity, consciousness of death, admiration of the aristocratic and disdain for the vulgar, use of daring literary figures, repudiation of dogma and social conventionalism.

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6 “… overflowing passion, original images, exoticism, formal precision, adventure of language, lavish vices and extreme rebellion” [my translation].
One of the beginnings of Modernismo was the publication in 1882 of José Martí’s *Ismaelillo* (11). The most outstanding representative of *modernismo* was the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Dario. However, other authors such as José Martí, José Asunción Silva, Manuel Gutierrez Nájera, Amado Nervo, José Juan Tablada and Ramón López Velarde, to mention just a few, were also highly influential in the movement. With Romanticism in decline, some artists felt the need to create a new aesthetic, *modernismo*, that would renovate and rescue the literary language. To this end, they turned to cultural sources alien to the Spanish tradition such as *parnassianism*, *symbolism* and *decadentism*.

*Parnassianism* was the most important influence in *modernismo*. The most prominent French Parnassians were Théophile Gautier, Leconte de Lisle, and Théodore de Banville. According to Jiménez, more than being interested in a non-biased and nonchalant attitude that French artists had adopted as a reaction to the excesses of romanticism, Latin American artists adopted *parnassianism* because it offered the opportunity to create a rigorous formal perfection. Other features of *parnassianism* embraced by the Latin American artists were an extreme plasticity or visuality, a linear clarity of forms, a prominence in the utilization of bright and “royal” colors, and a description of splendid materials such as gold, marble, silk, and precious stones (Jiménez 29). Poetry is valued for its beauty; therefore it must be perfect from an aesthetic standpoint. However, *modernista* Latin-American artists not only used the formal tools of *parnassianism* but also embraced the use of *symbolism* because they rejected positivist ideas and a mechanistic elucidation of the world. To them, symbolism allowed for the exploration of the mysterious that surrounds humanity because they believed that all sensory
phenomena have a metaphysical meaning. In fact, for them everything became symbolical (Jiménez 30).

Decadentism was linked to French symbolism and was widely practiced in Latin America. It extolled luxury, refinement, and elegance along with a preference for the strange, morbid or extravagant. Death, pleasure, violence, and sordidness were also themes associated with decadentism (Jiménez 31).

José Juan Tablada became acquainted with oriental objects and exotic stories in his childhood (Tanabe 29). While living in Mazatlán, a friend of his mother, Concepción Jáuregui de Arlegu, a widow of a general commander of the “naos” (ships) of China used to tell exotic stories that excited the boy’s imagination. These naos traveled across a commercial route that went from China to the Philippines and as a final point to the port of Acapulco. In addition, Tablada’s uncle Pancho used to collect oriental objects d’art in his house and taught him to carefully observe nature. The Spanish diplomat Pedro de Carrere introduced the teenager Tablada to the art and industries of the Far East along with the laws that controlled them (Tanabe 29). As a young poet, Tablada’s work showed a clear and passionate inclination for Japan and the exotic, influenced by modernismo and parnassianism. The poet endeavored to create rhymes that were aesthetically rich, and employed over-elaborate language and cultured vocabulary in which topics related to exotic lands, Greek mythology and classic culture were frequently used. He showed a preference for sonnets and strict accuracy of the poetic measure.

Tablada knew very little English at the time he started to write, and his sources were mainly French. One example of the influence of parnassianism in his work as a
A modernista poet is the sonnet “La venus china” which appeared in his collection Poemas de Juventud (1892-1900):

A mi amigo Okada Asataro

En su rostro ovalado palidece el marfil,
La granada en sus labios dejó púrpura y miel,
Son sus cejas el rasgo de un oblícuo pincel
Y sus ojos dos gotas de opio negro y sutil.

Cual las hojas de nácar de un extraño clavel
Florecieron las uñas de su mano infantil,
Que agitando en la sombra su abanico febril
Hace arder en sus sedas un dorado rondel…

Arropada en su mano de brocado turquí,
En la taza de jade bebe sorbos de té,
Mientras arde a sus plantas aromoso benjuí.

¡Más irguiese la Venus y el encanto se fue,
Pues enjuto, en la cárcel de cruel borceguí,
Era pie de faunesa de la Venus el pie!...  (Tanabe 149)

This sonnet echoes Parnassian traits that were embraced by modernismo, i.e., elements of what was considered exotic, in this case cultural references to China and elaborate language that describes a young Chinese woman in her luxurious attire and atmosphere.
She is described as a beautiful, pale woman sitting on her chair surrounded by sumptuous objects, mesmerizing the onlooker at first glance. However, when she gets up, the spell is broken because her feet, deformed according to the Chinese custom of foot binding, remind the poetic voice of a Faun, a Roman mythological creature whose upper body is human, but the bottom has the shape of a goat’s hind legs. The poem shows the influence of modernismo in Tablada, due to the use of exotic elements like ivory or jade along with elements that refer to Greek mythology such as Venus and a “she-faun.” It is interesting to observe that on the one hand Venus represents the Greek ideal of beauty, and the poetic voice equates the classic beauty with the beauty of the Chinese woman described in the poem. But on the other hand this beauty disappears, because in the last line of the sonnet, the Chinese beauty emerges as a she-faun with goat’s feet. The last stanza in the poem no longer describes attributes of beauty, but shows the disappointment and repulsion the poetic voice experienced when he saw the young woman’s feet. We must remember that modernismo aimed to pursue beauty understood from the perspective of Western aesthetics, and the deformed feet could not be part of that ideal of beauty. It is possible that this repulsion is not exclusively aimed at the aesthetic issue of deformed feet, but might be an image of a critique by a Western man of the consequences of this crippling Chinese custom for the lives of women.

Tablada’s profound knowledge of Chinese and Japanese literature greatly influenced his visual poetry, as will be shown in the remainder of this chapter. In the book Las vanguardias literarias latinoamericanas y la ciencia, Rodolfo Mata wrote that even though Tablada never signed a manifesto or affiliated himself with any “ism” i.e. the avant-garde, he has largely been recognized as an avant-garde writer holding a prominent
position in Mexican literature. Tablada was among the first to import the concept of Baudelerian *decadentism* and to publicly defend it. He was also an early promoter of ideographic poetry and introduced the haiku to the Spanish language. During the boom of the vanguards in the 1920’s, Hispanic *modernismo* ceased to be an influence on the Mexican writer. He was mostly working on formal experimentation and thematic renewal, endeavors that correlated to the pursuits of the avant-garde movements. With a unique style and an established literary personality, he did not need to demonstrate his breaking with the past. Tablada had already been a *dandy*, frequented “artificial paradises,” defied the bourgeoisie, and participated in battles in order to allow modernism to enter Mexican literature. In a time when avant-garde artists were discussing the need for openness and a cosmopolitan spirit, Tablada had already been Parisian and Japanese - in spirit- having traveled to Japan (1890) and to Paris (1911–1912). He had been to Havana, and New York (1914–1918). From 1919 to 1920, he lived in Colombia and Venezuela as a member of the Mexican diplomatic service, and finally settled in New York (1920–1936).

Always a step ahead of his time, even though the Latin-American avant-garde movements initially emphasized cosmopolitanism and later addressed its national issues, by that time Tablada was already partially immersed in this second phase that would be reflected in works such as *La resurrección de los ídolos* (1924) and his book of poems *La feria (Poemas mexicanos)* (1928). He was also a cultural promoter of Mexico, and worked as a journalist in New York. His mission was two-fold: he informed U.S Americans about Mexico and the Mexican culture in New York, and sent news about the city of New York to Mexico. At the age of 50, Tablada was an avant-garde artist without
the need for an avant-garde attitude. His “synthetic poems” were imitated by younger poets (Mata 111-113).

In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said proposes a definition of orientalism as: “a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction between ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’” (2). In this study, according to an interview published in *Power, Politics, and Culture*, Said combined his interest in literature and culture with studies and analyses of power (*Power, Politics, and Culture* 910). *Orientalism* criticizes the academic field devoted to oriental studies by proposing three main points: First, orientalism has political purposes. The orientalist attitude and ideology provided a justification for Europeans and diverse colonial governments to conquer Oriental lands. Second, orientalism has helped Europe to define itself. According to Said this has less to do with the Orient than with the occidental world. The construction of identity in each society and time, argues Said, involves the establishment of opposites, that is, the characterization of others. This happens because the development and continuation of each culture requires the existence of an alter ego. Orientalism created the image of Europe’s own cultural and intellectual superiority by which it saw itself as an innovative, dynamic and civilizing force, capable not only of cultural expansion, but also acting as judge and jury of every aspect of oriental behavior. And third, Said argues that orientalism has produced a false image of non-western people and this fact has been facilitating a tendency to negate, suppress and distort their systems of thought.7

7 Said writes: “Orientalism is a field of learned study. In the Christian West, orientalism is considered to have commenced its formal existence with the decision of the Church Council of Vienna in 1312 to establish a series of chairs in Arabic, Greek, Hebrew and Syriac at Paris, Oxford, Bologna, Avignon and Salamanca” (50).
By the nineteenth century, orientalism reached a high level of development. Among the most thorough of all orientalists was Jules Mohl, who was the secretary of the ‘Société Asiatique’ in Paris, a city considered the capital of orientalism, and the capital of the nineteenth century (51). Europe believed in its higher status vis-à-vis the Orient, and this Weltanschauung was accompanied by its systematic colonization of the “New World.” Consequently, if Mexico is seen by the Western European culture from the orientalist perspective as defined by Said, is it plausible to assume that Tablada’s view of Europe and the Orient was orientalist as well? In general, and because he was exposed to the Orient and Europe not only through objects, stories, and books, but also as a result of his sojourns in Japan and France, how orientalist was Tablada’s renewing vision of poetry?

A close look on his visual poetry clearly shows that Tablada was influenced by a variety of avant-garde movements. At the same time he incorporated into his own work the ideogram, a frequent device of Chinese poetry. Unlike other authors, he did not express his ideas on a theoretical level, but as early as 1920, he gave an indication of the possibilities of negotiating among different systems of thought that must not necessarily be in opposition with each other.

In 1900, Tablada spent several months in Japan. His experience was not as rewarding as he had hoped, because after a few months he was deeply nostalgic, hence returned to Mexico. However, this trip, according to Tanabe, represented a milestone in his orientalism, because now, instead of the lyric compositions inspired by modernismo and parnassianism, his work shifted towards the poetic forms found in the Japanese utas and haikus (52). Utas are poetic compositions of unrhymed units with 31 syllables that break
into five sections of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables respectively (Rosenow 72). *Haikus*, on the other hand, derived from a form of linked verse called *renga*, which stemmed from the *uta*. The *renga* was a collaborative work written by several poets. Its opening was comprised of 5-7-5 syllables named *hokku*. Eventually this opening section was separated from the longer poem and became the artistic form know as *haiku*. Haikus are compositions that attempt to capture one single instant in time, evoking mood and emotion (Rosenow 76).

The haiku is a poetic form that was developed in Japan during the 16th and 17th centuries. Basho is considered the most important Japanese poet and haiku composer. His themes incorporate elements from nature such as mountains, seasons, animals, fruits and insects, to mention a few. They are based on Zen Buddhism according to which one of the main characteristics is that the world is made anew in each and every moment (Rosenow 76). Consider for instance the following haiku by Basho:

Spring departs.

Birds cry

Fishes’ eyes are filled with tears

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/east_asian_history/106613

As can be noticed the poem allows the reader to visualize a moment and a place in the space-time continuum, which according to Zen Buddhism, represents the relativity of our perception of the universe.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, French writers became interested in *haikus*. Tablada, after staying in Paris, was able to consolidate his knowledge about Japan and leave behind the *utas* in order to embrace the *haiku* (Tanabe 102). Tablada’s compositions do not strictly follow the 17 syllables found in a traditional Japanese *haiku*. 
And instead of using the word *haiku*, he called his compositions *haikais*, that is, *haikus* with humorous elements and ingenuousness (Tanabe 103). In 1919 Tablada published *Un día…*, a collection of 37 synthetic poems that follow the patterns of Japanese haiku. These poems would lead the way to this kind of poetry in Spanish literature. In 1923, Tablada wrote another book of *haikais*, *El jarro de flores, disociaciones líricas*. He noted in the preface:

Los “Poemas sintéticos,” así como estas “Disociaciones líricas,” no son sino poemas al modo de los “kokku” o “haikai” japoneses, que me complace de haber introducido a la lírica castellana, aunque no fuese sino como una reacción contra la zarrapastrosa retórica, que solo ante el ojo de vidrio de Clemencia Isaura puede hacer pasar como poetas a los bembudos generales de Haití. El “Haikai,” de floral desnudez, no necesita búcara. Por esencia es justo vehículo del pensamiento moderno; tema lírico puro, adámico como la sorpresa y sabio como la ironía (5).

The above quote makes clear that Tablada’s use of the haikai not only pointed to his interest in and knowledge of Japanese poetry, but also signaled that he was leaving behind the modernista influence in his literary work in order to embrace avant-garde aesthetics. Let us look at the following *haikai* with the illustration by Tablada himself:

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8 Tablada called his *haikais* “poemas sintéticos,” that is, short poems in which he was able to amalgamate the beauty and contemplation of an instant in time.  
9 “I am happy to have introduced in the Spanish poetic community “Synthetic Poems” and these “Lyrical Dissociations” in the style of Japanese “hokku” or “haikai,” albeit as a reaction against the scruffy rhetoric of those thick-lipped Haitian generals, that only the glass eye of Clemencia Isaura can make them pass for poets. The haikai, of blossoming bareness does not need a flowerpot. It is essentially the perfect vehicle of modern thought; purely lyrical theme, primordial like a surprise, and wise like irony” [my translation].
EL PAVO REAL

Pavo real, largo fulgor,
Por el gallinero demócrata
Pasas como procesión…

Fig. 5. José Juan Tablada, “El pavo real” from Un día…, n. pag. (1919)

In this haikai, the poetic voice addresses the peacock, which in Spanish is composed by two words: pavo (turkey) and real (royal). The iridescent feathers that the peacock puts on display while marching solemnly in front of the henhouse can be compared to a robe of state worn by royalty during a coronation ceremony. The henhouse represents a plebeian world in which many animals fulfill their specific functions. Hens produce eggs while roosters fertilize the eggs and act as nature’s morning wake up call. By contrast, the peacock’s function is to show off its stunning feathers in front of the henhouse and to be admired by its laboring inhabitants. This image is reminiscent of rulers parading in front

THE PEACOCK
Peacock, boundless brilliance
by the democratic henhouse
you parade, like in a procession… [my translation]
of their subjects in order to display their status and power. By addressing the peacock, the poetic voice acknowledges its status as a sentient being, capable of understanding the meaning of words.

In *El signo y el garabato*, Octavio Paz states that Tablada’s *haikais* opened the door to avant-garde poetry in Latin America because, “Tablada pronto descubrió en la poesía japonesa ciertos elementos – economía verbal, humor, lenguaje coloquial, amor por la imagen exacta e insólita – que lo impulsaron a abandonar el modernismo y a buscar una nueva manera” (122). Paz states that *Un día*… is the first book of haikus written in Spanish (123). *Haikais* are a manifestation of Tablada’s keen knowledge of Chinese and Japanese poetry and ideograms, which had a clear influence in his later works such as *Li-Po y otros poemas* published in 1920. At the same time, the *haikais* represent a rupture with the aesthetic guidelines that influenced the first part of his work. In this regard Allen W. Phillips wrote: “…el poeta artífice se olvida de los paraísos artificiales; se aleja de la bohemia artística y del modernismo exterior, versallesco y exotista, para dar los primeros pasos hacia la eclosión del vanguardismo” (445). These “first steps” towards the avant-garde were already noticeable in Tablada’s book *Al sol y bajo la luna* (1918).

Leopoldo Lugones wrote a favorable prologue of this book in which he observed that the poet’s language and subject are removed from the *modernista* exoticism and are being

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11 “Tablada… soon discovered in Japanese poetry certain elements – verbal economy, humor, colloquial language, love for the exact and unusual image – that propelled him to abandon modernismo and seek a new way” [my translation].

12 “... the artisan poet forgets the artificial paradises, moves away from the artistic bohemia and the superfluous, affected and eroticist modernismo in order to take the first steps towards the emergence of the avant-garde” [my translation].
replaced by words that refer to technology and materialism, elements found in avant-garde poetry like the Futurism of Marinetti. The last four verses of the poem “Quinta Avenida” show this transition:

¡Mujeres fire-proof a la pasión inertes,
hijas de la mecánica Venus made in America;
de vuestra fortaleza la de las cajas fuertes,
es el secreto… idéntica combinación numérica! (Tablada Al sol y bajo la luna 113).

The title of this poem, “Quinta Avenida” is a synecdoche for New York City, which Tablada describes as fast, strong, mechanized, and materialistic like the women that inhabit the city. They are impervious to love and passion, strong like the steel used in bank safes, writes the poetic voice, and because all the women on Fifth Avenue are the same, they have the “identica combinación numérica.”

In reference to the haikais, Delia V. Galván writes that during his stay between 1900 and 1902, Tablada became fascinated with the haiku as a form of miniature verses capable of eliciting sharp and powerful images. For Tablada, poetic ideas were better expressed through concrete images instead of observations and descriptions (111).

What Tablada accomplished, according to Paz (cited by Tanabe) was to: “…abrir una ventana hacia una perspectiva desconocida. Esa forma dio libertad a la imagen y la rescató del poema con argumento, en el que se ahogaba. Cada uno de estos pequeños

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13 “Women fire-proof impervious to passion / daughters of the mechanical Venus made in America / the secret of our strength derives from the safes / … identical numeric combination!” [my translation].
poemas era una estrella errante y casi siempre un pequeño mundo” (111). For Tanabe,
Paz’s last sentence is the one that best portrays the essence of the haikai because in it, the
universe is concentrated in a symbolic way. Moreover, the haikai is a type of poetic form
far removed from traditional Spanish rhetoric where the use of figurative speech is at the
core of poetic composition. Again, Tanabe cites Paz: “…lejos de la tradición y de lo
convencional, una nueva poesía” (111). Tablada broke new ground in the Latin
American poetry of his time. While discovering the poetic art and technique of
Baudelaire, Verlaine, Apollinaire, and André Breton, among others, Tablada developed
his own revolutionary aesthetic, which culminated in a new poetics. Japanese poets like
Basho and Shiyo also influenced his work, as we will see in Tablada’s dedication in Un
día…:

A las sombras amadas
de la poetisa
SHIYO
y del poeta
BASHO
J.J.T.  

14 “…to open a window towards an unknown perspective. That form gave freedom to the image and
rescued it from the poem with a plot, in which was drowning. Each one of these small poems was a
shooting star and almost always a small world” [my translation].
15 “…far from the traditional and conventional, a new poetry” [my translation]
16 “To the beloved shades of poetess Shiyo and poet Basho J.J.T.” [my translation].
If in 1919 Tablada surprised the poetic milieu in Latin America with the publication of his book of haikais titled *Un día*..., by 1920 he had published another book: *Li-Po y otros poemas*, a collection of ideographic poems. About them he wrote:

Son un franco lenguaje; algunos no son simplemente gráficos, sino arquitectónicos…

Y todo es sintético, discontinuo y, por lo tanto, dinámico; lo explicativo y lo retórico están eliminados para siempre; es una sucesión de estados sustantivos; creo que es poesía pura… La ideografía tiene, a mi modo de ver, la fuerza de una expresión “simultáneamente lírica y gráfica,” a reserva de conservar el secular carácter ideofónico. Además, la antigua poesía, [Tabla refer to the Chinese and Japanese poetry] deja los temas literarios en calidad de “poesía pura,” como lo quería Mallarmé. Mi preocupación actual es la síntesis, … en primer lugar porque sólo sintetizando creo poder expresar la vida moderna en su dinamismo y en su amplitud.  

(Phillips 448-49)\(^{17}\)

Indeed, Tablada sought and attained his own poetic revolution. His ability to achieve poetic succinctness and symbolism, all based on the arts and the poetry of Japan, motivated him to search for and create a new form of poetry that allowed him to fuse word with image.

What does the title *Li-Po y otros poemas* refer to? According to Adriana García de Aldridge, the first part refers to Li-Po, a Chinese wandering poet who was probably born about 701 CE, and is believed to have died in 762 (119). He is recognized as the greatest

\(^{17}\) [Ideographic poems] offer a directness, a truthfulness of expression; some are not simply graphic, but architectural… And everything is synthetic, intermittent, and therefore dynamic; explanation and rhetoric have forever been eliminated; it is a succession of substantive states; I believe it is pure poetry… In my view, the ideography has the power of an expression “simultaneously lyrical and graphic” conditioned to preserve its ideophonic secular character. Moreover, the old poetry keeps the literary themes as “pure poetry,” like Mallarmé wanted it. My present preoccupation is synthesis,… because only by synthesizing I believe I can express modern life in its dynamism and breadth [my translation].
of the Tang dynasty poets, and according to legend, he drowned from leaning one night too far over the edge of a boat while drunk, in an effort to embrace the reflection of the moon. As a Taoist, his recurring symbol was the moonlight. Tablada uses the life and symbols of Li-Po as inspiration for the images of some of his calligrams. As an example of a calligram, Tablada recalls Li-Po’s legend in one of the poems of this book (Fig. 6):

![Calligram](image)

**Fig. 6 José Juan Tablada. Untitled, *Li-Po y otros poemas*, 21 (Caracas, 1920)**

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18 A calligram is a poem arranged in a design that creates an image or a visual representation of the topic of the text.

19 ([Inside the crescent]: Believing that the reflection of the moon was a cup of white jade and golden wine/ in an attempt to catch and drink it / one night / going down the river Li-Po drowned).

([Inside the full moon]: For the past one thousand one hundred years / the incense rises to the sky like a scented cloud /And for the past one thousand one hundred years / China reverberates a double funeral / weeping that sorrow in the immortal crystal gong of the full moon)"" [my translation].
It is generally believed that Tablada’s calligrams were directly influenced by Apollinaire’s, the French avant-garde artist. However, as Rodolfo Mata writes in the foreword to \textit{Li-Po y otros poemas}, the Mexican poet rejected this influence and stated that when he experimented with his calligrams he was not aware of Apollinaire’s texts. He insisted that the most important influence on his book was Chinese poetry. However, Rodolfo Mata indicates, that Tablada’s insistence on the publishing dates of his first ideogrammatic poems suggest that he wanted to hide his debt to Apollinaire, whom he greatly admired. In any case, it is clear that if Tablada was not an imitator of Apollinaire’s work, he was nevertheless indebted to other French authors, and particularly to Jules and Edmond Goncourt who introduced Japanese art to the West (23).

Tablada’s aesthetic search did not stop with his haikais. What did the ideogram offer to Tablada that the haikai did not? As Tanabe stated, as early as in 1900 during his trip to Japan, Tablada had learned about symbolization and concision, key concepts that are embedded in Japanese fine arts and poetry, that later on he would apply in his haikais. However, these haikais did not express his aspiration for a poetic purification. His interest in the Japanese writing system took him to attempt to combine Spanish poetry with Japanese hieroglyphics (Tanabe 212). In a letter addressed to Gonzáles de Mendoza in 1919 Tablada wrote: “¡Ah si yo pudiera vivir lo que ustedes vivirán, haría lo que los viejos pintores del Japón: escribiría la palabra ruiseñor, y el ruiseñor echaría a volar!” (123).\textsuperscript{20} Tablada’s letter to his friend reveals what the essence of the ideogram is for him: while it impresses the eye of the reader/viewer, it must, at the same time, entail a concept because it is generated from the imitation of objects in nature. But precisely due to this, it

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\textsuperscript{20} “Ah, if I could live what you will live, I would do what Japanese old painters did: I would write the word nightingale, and it would begin to fly!” [my translation].
is impossible to exactly translate a poem written in Japanese into an Indo-European language because the Japanese language not only conveys semantic and sound elements, but it also presents other signifiers that provide a visual impression. As Tablada said, “el lenguaje suele ser un vestido casi transparente que no puede ser completamente quitado” (124)\(^{21}\), that is, language will always be the intermediary between reality and the individual’s perception of reality.

Tablada’s *Li-Po y otros poemas* expressed artistic dynamism and multiplicity through a combination of visual and verbal elements. Tablada’s elaborations on the ideogram are parallel to Ernesto Fenollosa’s proposal in his essay “The Chinese Character as a Medium for Poetry.” Fenollosa (1853-1908) was an American Orientalist who lived much of his life in Japan and who wrote the seminal essay “The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry,” published by Ezra Pound in 1919. This essay provoked controversy in sinologic and literary circles. Fenollosa highlights the visual aspect of the Chinese character: “Poetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase, pregnant, charged and luminous from within. In the Chinese character, each work accumulated this sort of energy in itself” (Fenollosa 115-16). And also from Fenollosa: “In reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching things work out their own fate” (*Instigations of Ezra Pound* 363). Fenollosa’s and Tablada’s poetologies not only coincided in regard to the synthesizing capability of poetic thought but also with respect to the idea that the ideogram has “la fuerza de una expresion lírica y gráfica,”\(^{22}\) as Tablada wrote in a letter to Ramón López Velarde, which appeared in *El Universal Ilustrado* on November 13,

\(^{21}\) “language is usually an almost transparent dress that cannot be entirely taken off” [my translation].

\(^{22}\) “…the power of a lyrical and graphic expression” [my translation].
With his book *Li-Po y otros poemas*, Tablada, introduced a new poetics to Latin America poetry. His artistic work has not been made widely available in Mexico due to his long absences from his country and because his most important books were not widely published (Phillips 447). His artistic formation started within the modernista movement and his presence and influence in the Hispanic American literature has been gradually growing thanks to the validation of his work done by his friend Abate de Mendoza in 1943, and Octavio Paz in 1957.

Tablada was extremely interested in the features and functions of the ideogram. In his article “The Visual Trajectory of Tablada,” Willard Bohn argues that Tablada was the first ideogrammatic poet of the early 20th century in Latin America who not only was knowledgeable of Japanese but also of Chinese. Bohn adds that Tablada wished to achieve the following objectives: to liberate poetry from its romantic pathos, to insist on its playful dimension, and to praise the incessant movement and novelties associated with modernity. Tablada stripped away any remnants of narrative and rhetoric that had been imposed on the poem for centuries. His purpose was to create a style that was more appropriate for his own times. (201).

Aware of the impossibility to reconcile the gap between a phonetic writing and a

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23 It is unlikely that Tablada’s concept of the ideogram was influenced by Fenollosa’s work published in 1919 because that same year Tablada published *Un día*..., and by then he was already familiar with Chinese and Japanese poetry and literature. Furthermore, *Li po y otros poemas* was published in 1920, less than a year after Fenollosa’s publication. What becomes clear with this comparison of publication dates is that both writers presented the possibility and the effectiveness of ideogrammatic writing. Pound’s book of poems, *Cantos*, was influenced by Fenollosa’s analyses of ideographic readings, even though, according to Brian M. Reed and other scholars, in *Cantos* the ideograms were used in ways that Fenollosa would have never imagined because they served “to break down syntax and interrupt the linearity of traditional reading” (Bohn 34.) Pound admired the non-abstract, non-discursive, and graphic qualities of Chinese language.
language whose linguistic base is the ideogram, Tanabe explains that Tablada stopped his experimentations with the simultaneity of graphic and lyric effects in his poems written inside ideograms as shown on Figure 7, and thereafter, he chose other forms of poetry (127), like the next visual poem to be discussed, “Impresiones de la Habana.” But before we analyze the aforementioned poem, let’s observe the originality of the ideogrammatic poem. Here, words are inside the silhouette of the ideogram.

Fig. 7. José Juan Tablada, “Ideograma”, *Li-Po y otros poemas*, 13 (Caracas: 1920)

How can the reader approach this poem? Is it going to be read all the way from left to right, as follows?
guiado por una mano pálida es gusano de seda el pincel
que formaba en el papel negra crisálida
de misteriosos jeroglífico con alas de oro volador
sutil y misteriosa llama
en la lámpara del ideograma  

Or can it be also read by separating the two parts within the character, thus creating two poems that merge at the bottom of the ideogram?

Poem 1                                                                 Poem 2

guiado por una mano pálida                               es gusano de seda el pincel
que formaba en el papel                                      negra crisálida
de misterioso jeroglífico                                     con alas de oro volador
sutil y misteriosa llama en la lámpara del ideograma

Both reading versions are possible, and the fact that the poem can be approached from different reading perspectives compels the reader/ viewer to explore it, to engage with it, thus making the reading process not only relevant and memorable but also individual and transitory. The poem compares the skilful stroke of the brush dipped in black ink with a black silkworm that makes its chrysalis. The reference to the silk worm gives the reader the information that just like silk, the ideogram originated in China. Because the vast majority of Westerners are not familiar with the ideogrammatic system, and

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24 “guided by a pale hand the brush is a silk worm that in the paper formed the black chrysalis of mysterious hieroglyphics with wings of flying gold, subtle and mysterious flame in the ideogram’s lamp” [my translation].
25 Poem 1: “guided by a pale hand / that formed on the paper of the mysterious hieroglyph / subtle and mysterious flame in the lamp of the ideogram” [my translation].
Poem 2: “the brush is a silkworm / black chrysalis / with wings of flying gold / subtle and mysterious flame in the lamp of the ideogram” [my translation].
consequently, cannot decipher its meaning. Tablada describes the ideogram as being mysterious and subtle. In order to create a contrasting effect, the poem refers to a pale hand that holds and guides a brush full of black ink. Here the reader can perceive the contrast between the paleness of the hand and the black ink used to write or draw the ideogram. The brush is compared to a silk worm, which in the process of metamorphosis becomes a pupa or chrysalis, and finally a silkworm moth. This image correlates to the fact that the brush, under experienced hands, is writing an ideogram. But the writing of the ideogram is a process that happens through time, in the same way as what happens in the metamorphosis of a silkworm. When the chrysalis becomes a moth, it naturally flies towards the light, thus becomes a “misterioso jeroglífico con alas de oro volador sutil y misteriosa llama en la lámpara del ideograma.” When the ideogram is finally complete it can deliver its meaning, that is, it ‘enlightens’ whomever is reading it. The poem makes a comparison between the complete metamorphosis of a silkworm and the final product of the work of art, that is, the ideogram.

The poems written within the boundaries of an ideogram eventually became constrained and limited because they had to fit within the specific outline of the ideogram, thus greatly restricting the extent of the artistic expression. As a result, the synthesis that Tablada was so eager to achieve would not occur in this context. Tanabe explains that Tablada was looking for the simultaneity of graphic and lyric effect. Nonetheless, because there is no correspondence between signifier and signified, the poet realized the insurmountable difficulty of fighting against the chasm that exists between a phonetic writing, and a language whose linguistic base is the ideogram (125). On the
other hand, it must be noted that these poems represent a step forward in Tablada’s poetic experimentations.

Letters, punctuation marks, and words serve a double purpose in his calligramatic poem “Impresión de la Habana.” They enable the poet to create lines and use them as elements of the drawings and at the same time they create a written text. The first thing the reader/viewer sees is a variety of drawings like a lighthouse, a palm tree, and birds composed of letters. By associating the title with the drawings the reader/viewer is coaxed into decoding the poem. The next step for the reader/viewer is to read the words that will finally describe Havana.

Fig. 8. José Juan Tablada, “Impresión de la Habana” Li-Po y otros poemas, p. 29 (Caracas: 1920).
This poem was first published in January 1919 in the Cuban periodical *Social*. As Bohn explains, it was composed during Tablada’s brief visit to Havana on his way to assume a diplomatic post as secretary of the Mexican legation in Ecuador. Similar to Guillaume Apollinaire’s poem “Paysage” from *Calligrams* (1918) the poem “Impresión de la Habana” is basically a landscape (Bohn 162). According to Klaus Meyer-Minnemann, it suggests the form of a postcard “resume en la convención de una tarjeta postal el título del poema” (443). At first glance, the calligramatic organization of the poem allows the reader/viewer to identify a lighthouse, a palm tree, birds, and waves. The next step consists of reading the words of each of the elements listed above, plus the words both at the bottom left side of the lighthouse organized in a square, and to the right that appear similar to a rectangle. The viewer/reader is given the opportunity to dissect the poem, which, as its title suggests, is the poetic voice's impression of Havana. Being an impression, the statements in the poem are subjective. If we read the top part of the poem, we see how the words are organized to suggest the light beams of a lighthouse:

“TIERRA… TIERRA… CLAMA SOBRE EL MAR TU FULGOR… EN FRENTE DE AMERICA COMO CRISTOBAL COLON.”

Lighthouses signal to approaching ships that land is near. From history we know that Rodrigo the Triana on board of Columbus’s ship Santa María, yelled “tierra, tierra,” when for the first time on their voyage, they saw land (the Bahamas). By contrast, in this poem the clamor TIERRA…TIERRA… is uttered from the sea when Columbus’s expedition approaches land, while at the same time the lighthouse shouts TIERRA… from the land through its beams of light. The tower that holds the light beam

26 “[the poem], through the convention of a postcard, summarizes its title” (443) [my translation].
27 “LAND… LAND… YOUR GLEAM CLAMORS OVER THE SEA IN FRONT OF AMERICA, LIKE CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS” [my translation].
is composed of the following words: “Surges sObre la islA de amOr ERES caDáver En piE del fuErte Conquistador.” According to Bohn, Tablada decided to eliminate the initial personification of TIERRA and transformed it into la tierra, the dirt or earth on which the lighthouse stands. As a result of this transformation, la tierra is not just Columbus’s equal, but instead is transformed into the defeated enemy lying at his feet (165). I want to add that in this section, Tablada is not only referring to the dirt or earth, but also to the conquered indigenous people of Havana, whose lighthouse is the first thing people can see when they approach the city from the sea. Because the lighthouse was built after the Conquistadores had arrived on the island, it represents their power over the indigenous people. In the square to the left of the lighthouse we read: “Sobre tus piedras Llora la vieja luna Y cantan Las nuevas sirenas.” One can see the contrast in mood between the weeping moon and the singing new sirens, which suggests that the moon has been witness over the centuries of the lives of the indigenous people before the arrival of the Europeans, and now weeps because it sees how violently the Conquistadores have disrupted and destroyed their way of life. By contrast, the new sirens, who are the beautiful women in Havana, are happy to be living in that city. The topic of women continues in the rectangle to the right of the lighthouse:

Habana, son tus mil LUCES fulgores
de cocuyos que se tornan miradas
femeninas flores sombrías de las
frutas carnales. Aromas de Alcoba y de jardín

28 “You emerge frOm the island of lOve YOU ARE the stAnding corpsE of the strOng Conquistador” [my translation].
29 “Over your stones the old moon weeps and the new sirens sing” [my translation].
en el medio de mi triste vida hallé una flor. 

The sexual reference in this section of the poem suggests that Havana is desirable not so much because of the city itself, but because of its beautiful and mysterious women. The words at the far right follow the theme of women and sensual pleasures, where the words form a palm tree: “LAS PLUMAS DE LOS ABANICOS Y LAS SEDAS DE LAS HAMACAS SE MUEVEN COMO LAS MUJERES Y COMO LAS PALMERAS.”

To the left of the palm tree the words and the fonts suggest birds flying with opened wings over the sea: “GAVIOTAS EN LO AZUL.” At the feet of the lighthouse one reads in gothic font: “Se incrustan en tus farallones los huesos de los españoles.” Since in Spanish a lighthouse is called “faro,” one can perceive that the poetic voice wanted to use an indirect alliteration of the word, and hence the use of “farallones.” Tablada carefully chose his words taking into account their etymologies. According to the *Diccionario Crítico Etimológico de la Lengua Castellana* by Juan Corominas, the term is derived from the Catalan *faralló*, which probably derives from the Italian *faraglione*, a metathesis of the Greek word *φαιλαρις* that means “to be white with foam.” However, continues Corominas, according to the *Dizionario di Marina*, the term *farallón* derives from *faro* that derives from the Latin *pharos*, meaning a lamppost; and from the Greek *φαρος* because these *farallones* were islands or outcrops in which such lampposts were placed with the purpose of helping ships avoid running aground at night (489). It is likely that

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30 “Havana, your thousand LIGHTS are gleaming / fireflies that turn into feminine / glances dark flowers of / carnal fruits. Fragrances of Bedroom and garden / In the middle of my sad life’s path I found a flower” [my translation].
31 “THE FANS’ FEATHERS AND THE HAMMOCKS’ SILK SWAY LIKE THE WOMEN AND PALM TREES” [my translation].
32 “SEAGULLS IN THE BLUE” [my translation].
33 “The bones of the Spaniards are embedded in your rocky outcrop” [my translation].
before the construction of the lighthouse, several Spanish ships may have run aground
while approaching Havana, killing the sailors, thus the reference to the bones of the
Spaniards caught in the outcrops.

At the bottom of the page, the poetic voice addresses Havana and associates
metaphorically the hue of blue of the Adriatic Sea with the Caribbean Sea: “El Adriático
azul de tu calido mar lleno de luz.”34 By associating the blue of the Caribbean with the
famous beauty of the Adriatic Sea, the poetic voice is extolling the beauty of the former.

“Impresión de la Habana,” as expressed above, is like a poetic postcard whose purpose is
to depict tourist places in a country. Therefore, the poetic voice, in this case a foreigner
who is approaching Cuba, is showing in the poem/postcard elements such as the
lighthouse, the palm tree, the sea, and the reference to sensual women that stereotypically
characterize Cuba. The calligrammatic layout of words on the blank of the page bolsters
the semantic substance of the poem. Since the signs are set in the form of a palm tree, a
lighthouse, birds, etc., the message delivered to the reader/viewer becomes powerful.

With “Nocturno alterno” (see fig. 9), Tablada used a third kind of visuality based on
typographic form, which is different from his ideogrammatic and calligramatic poems
seen earlier in this chapter. This poem has two parts that contain three typographic fonts:
one for its title and the other two for the poem itself. In the first part, the typographic
differences point to two different poems that intersect with each other. However, the
reader has the possibility of reading the verses in either a continual or intercalated fashion
adding a semantic multiplicity to the poem. In the second part of “Nocturno alterno” the
fonts are organized in tiers guiding the reader to the climax, that is, the image of the
moon that shines simultaneously in New York and Bogotá.

34 “The blue Adriatic of your warm sea filled with light” [my translation].
Fig. 9. José Juan Tablada, “Nocturno Alterno” *Li-Po y otros poemas*, p. 31 (Caracas: 1920).

35

*Alternate Nocturne*

Golden night of New York
Gold walls of Moorish lime

Rector’s Champagne and fox-trot
Silent houses and strong grates

And turning the gaze around
Over the silent mud tiles

The soul petrified
Moon’s white cats

Like Loth’s wife
The even verses in the first part of the poem have nine syllables (eneasílabos) each of consonant rhyme. The rhyme scheme is a/b/a/b. The lines describing Bogotá have no verbs. This conveys the idea of a sleepy and silent city, a city where time passes slowly. In the article “Los ideogramas de José Juan Tablada,” Eduardo Mitre portrays Bogotá as a world closed, oppressed and repressed by a strict puritan morality (679). To describe this world, Mitre writes, Tablada chooses not to use verbs, but finds that nouns and adjectives suffice to create the oppressive mood of that city under the moon. One can add that the social rigidity is formally expressed by the verses that follow the old strict counts of syllables and rhyming patterns. By contrast, the odd verses that pertain to New York City convey noise, speed and ultimately loneliness (“el alma petrificada”/ “the petrified soul”), despite the fact that the city offers infinite ways of exercising hedonistic and unbridled pleasure. Formally, the verses in this section have a varied number of syllables (9-7-8-8-7) with consonant rhymes a/b/a/a/b that represent the ebullience and uproar of New York City, and also the poem’s liberation from rigid standards of past literary dictums, thus embracing modernity. While the inhabitants of New York City and Bogotá can only view the moon from their respective cities, the moon can simultaneously see

Nevertheless,
    it is the
    same one
    in New York
    and in Bogotá

THE MOON…! [my translation].
what is happening in New York and Bogotá: the unraveling of human drama.

Through the use of different typefaces in “Nocturno alternó” Tablada created a visual rhythm that complemented the lyrical one, thus enhancing the reading experience. The use of different fonts helps the reader/viewer to better perceive the contrast between New York and Bogotá. The serif font Garamond is used in the odd verses that pertain to New York City. Garamond is considered to be among the most legible of fonts, and therefore is widely used in print applications such as newspapers or magazines. Because newspapers are massively printed in order to reach a substantial number of people in the shortest amount of time, this font symbolizes New York City’s large population, and society’s reliance on mechanization. By contrast, the even verses in bold sans serif font Libel Suit describe Bogotá. Since this typeface resembles a person’s handwriting, one can infer that in Colombia’s capital, manual labor is still predominant, and its population is a fraction of New York City’s. These new ideographic statements are another of Tablada’s contributions to the literature of the Americas because they helped establish an acoustic and graphic rhythm in Spanish poetry; reflecting his familiarity not only with the ancient Oriental writing system and literature, but also with the avant-garde movements.

In conclusion, this chapter has focused on Tablada’s evolution in his poetic expression that led him to be recognized as the first experimental poet in Spanish literature. However, it is also relevant to mention that Tabladas’s Orientalism does not have the confrontational characteristics proposed by Said. On the contrary, the Mexican poet’s quest for a new poetry took him through a long journey of discoveries where he was influenced by a variety of artistic European avant-garde movements, while at the same time he worked on the notion of the ideogram offered by Chinese poetry. If the
dichotomy (exemplified by Apollinaire/Li-Po) between the avant-garde and modernity versus ideogram and antiquity existed, Tablada was the first poet in Hispanic America who knew how to navigate and negotiate between these two diverse currents as a way of understanding his modern times.
CHAPTER 2

THROUGH THE IDEOGRAM AND INTO THE CONCRETE: HAROLDO DE CAMPOS’S RESPONSE TO JOSE JUAN TABLADA

"In order for a text to expect in any way to render an account of a reality of the concrete world (or the spiritual one), it must first attain reality in its own world, the textual one.

Francis Ponge The Power of Language 8.

A commonality between José Juan Tablada’s visual poems and Haroldo de Campos’s (São Paulo 1929-2003) concrete poetry is the use of the ideogram. The ideogram served these two authors in their quest for a new poetry because it comes from an entirely different linguistic system that allows poetry to have a maximum of economy and control where a direct communication of verbal forms is possible, and more in tune with the times in which they lived. Nonetheless, this use was not the only characteristic that the two poets shared.

Unlike Tablada, Haroldo de Campos, who was born in 1929, did not experience the historic avant-garde first hand, but became familiar with modernist writers like Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Fenollosa, Pound, Cummings and Joyce, among others. He was also influenced by modernist Brazilian writers and subscribed to the aesthetics called “anthropophagic” proposed by Oswald de Andrade.36 Yet like Tablada, de Campos grounded his aesthetic research on Mallarmé’s vision of poetry. If on the one hand Tablada mentions Mallarmé’s influence in terms of poesia pura, de Campos emphasizes Mallarmé’s concept of the blank page because for concrete poets, the stanzas are substituted by space.

36 The philosophe for the Brazilian modernism was the “antropofagia” or cannibalism conceptualized by Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954), which consists of a metaphoric proposal of devouring foreign influences and rework them from a Brazilian perspective. Traces of this “cannibalism” can be seen in the various genres of Brazilian literature, and concrete poetry is one of them (84).
Along with the similarities mentioned above, there are two more that I want to investigate. These are the poets’ interest in translation or in what H. de Campos would call *transcreation*. The purpose of this chapter is to present H. de Campos’s background, his approach to concrete poetry, specifically the *Noigandres* group concrete poetry of which he was a cofounder, along with his notion and work on *transcreation* of literary texts. I will note influences on de Campos’s concrete poetry such as Mallarmé, Fenollosa, Pound, the avant-garde, Max Bense and the theory of relativity. In the case of his *transcreation*, we will see how the haiku, and the writings by Fenollosa and Pound influenced his work. Later, we will compare and contrast H. de Campos’s and José Juan Tablada’s approaches to translation/*transcreation* of haikus into Portuguese and Spanish respectively.

Unlike in the case of José Juan Tablada, Haroldo de Campos’s concrete poetry specifically refers to Brazilian concrete poetry. H. De Campos states that the Brazilian concrete movement emerged in the early 1950s. The founding group was called *Noigandres*, which included Haroldo de Campos, his brother Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari. H. de Campos emphasizes that unlike foreign concrete poets such as the

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37In his article “The Brazilian Jaguar,” published in *Boundary 2*, de Campos established a succinct genealogy of the Brazilian literature among which I want to showcase the following points: first, according to H. de Campos, Brazilian poetry never had a true infancy and for that reason, it was born as an adult and operating on one universal code (he compares it with some mythical heroes): the Baroque. The first Brazilian poets used an elaborate and sophisticated baroque style they wrote in Portuguese and Spanish including in some of their poems Indian and African words. Second, and unlike in Spanish-American romanticism, Brazilian romanticism produced only one extraordinary poet: Joaquin de Sousa Andrade or Sousândrade (1833-1902), who became famous for writing an epic and a dramatic travel poem. Third, among the symbolists, the most prominent are the Afro-Brazilian Cruz de Sousa, and Pedro Kilkerry, a mulatto of Irish descent who was proficient in several languages. He greatly admired Stéphane Mallarmé and translated Corbière into Portuguese. Fourth, modernism or the Brazilian avant-garde began in 1922, the year that also saw the publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, César Vallejo’s *Trilce* and T. S. Elliot’s *Waste Land*. The Brazilian avant-garde was influenced by Italian futurism and French cubism. And unlike the Spanish-American countries that received a marked influence of French surrealism; this movement did not have a significant influence in Brazilian modernism (83-84).
Swiss-Bolivian Eugen Gomringer, or the Swedish Öyvind Falhstrom, the Brazilian concrete poets were greatly influenced by the principle “to make it new” proposed by Ezra Pound. In her book Os melhores poemas de Haroldo de Campos, Inês Oseki-Dépré explains that The Noigandres group/movement was launched publicly in 1956 during the “Exposiçao Nacional de Arte Concreta” which gathered artists from different sectors in the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo (7). In their writings, members of this group manifested themselves as an “antidote” of the lyrical-sentimental and confessional-psychological poetry that was typical of the “geraçao de 45” (7). “Semana de 22” was one of the most important events in Brazilian Art History since it manifested the utmost dissatisfaction with mainstream culture subservient to foreign imported models, and stated the need to reaffirm the search for a truly Brazilian art, which led to the emergence of Brazilian Modernismo.

The Brazilian concretists wanted to adopt the most radical elements of the legacy of modern poetry: their inspirations were Mallarmé’s Un coup de dés and Ezra Pound’s ideogrammatic method created for poetry. In this sense, Haroldo de Campos’s objective is revealing:

O poeta, como afirma Jakobson, é aquele que configura a materialidade da linguagem. Nesse sentido, toda poesia digna deste nome é concreta: de Homero a Dante, de Goethe a Pessoa. Mais especificamente, a “poesia concreta” representa o caso limite da poesia, no qual existe uma total sistematização de todos os níveis – semântico, retórico, sonoro – da palavra (Oseki-Depré 7).34

34 “The poet, as Jakobson affirms, configures the materiality of language. In this sense, any poetry deserving this name is concrete: from Homer to Dante, from Goethe to Pessoa. And “concrete poetry” specifically, represents the liminal frontier case of poetry, in which exists a complete systematization of all levels – the semantic, syntactic, rhetoric, sonorous – of the word” (7) [my translation].
The consequences of such a new point of view, adds Oseki-Dépré, are diverse both on the creative and critical levels. Without taking away the contributions from “antropofagia,” the manifest “Plano-piloto para poesia concreta” signed by Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari is the most riveting attempt in Brazilian literature to incorporate the radically innovating poetry of authors such as Mallarmé, Joyce, E.E. Cummings, Maiakóvski and many others into the Brazilian literary culture. Moreover, by abolishing the semiotic frontiers, in the sense that Jakobson describes the poetic function (the one in which the form becomes the message, naturally present in poetry), concrete poetry allowed for a greater intermedial approach with elements both musical and visual. All those media could be enriched with poetic significance. Haroldo de Campos wrote that he aimed at:

Pensar a literatura ou o texto num espaço impensável. Levar adiante uma experiência de linguagem como trabalho produtor inscrito na região do significante, isto é, numa região onde o significado não existe senão como deslizamento entre superfícies significantes, como faiscamento incessante do signans, ou seja, do corpo verbal, concreto, da linguagem (8).35

Through concrete poetry, de Campos’s approach to the text and literature can be described as revolutionary because for him the work of art must happen predominantly in the realm of the signifier, that is, in the sign’s physical form in order to be as close as possible to reality. Moreover, concrete poetry presents a new sense of structure free from

35 “One must think of literature or of a text in an unthinkable space. To carry forward a linguistic experience as creative work inscribed in the region of the signifier, that is, in a region where the signified exists only as a gliding among signified surfaces, as an incessant sparkling of signs, that is, of the verbal and concrete body of language” [my translation].
the successive and linear chaining of verses, in order to produce a poem in which all its elements are connected through a system of relationships.

In his article “Reflections on Verbivocovisual Ideograms,” Claus Clüver explains that the “heroic phase” or the high point of Brazilian concrete poetry took place in 1958 with the publication of Noigandres 4, the portfolio edition of eleven ideograms by Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Ronaldo Azevedo printed as posted poems, supplemented with Pignatari’s kinetic “poema-livro” LIFE, and the manifesto “plano-piloto para poesia concreta” (137). Clüver defines Brazilian concrete poems as:

spatio-temporal structures in which highly reduced verbal material has been submitted to a rigidly controlled process. They are almost impersonal compositions where there is no lyrical “I,” nor a narrative voice. They don’t communicate a subjective experience or convey a message. Instead, they exploit the visual, aural, and semantic qualities of their verbal material and explore the possibilities inherent in the accidents of phonic and visual correspondences (137).

Referring to a poem/anti-advertisement by Pignatari “coca cola,” Clüver notes that the textual operation proceeds strictly via the analysisi of the letters and sounds contained in the advertised slogan and by making use of the semantic ambiguities offered by a Portuguese reading of a US-American trade name (137):

```
beba  coca  cola
babe   cola
beba  coca
babe  cola  caco
caco
cola
beb  cola  caco
36  cl o a c a
```

---

36 drink  drool  cocaine  glue  glue
A possible interpretation of the poem is that a product (Coca-Cola), which is consumed worldwide, becomes the object of critique. Originally, Coca-Cola was marketed as a tonic which contained extracts of cocaine, along with Kola nut, a caffeine-rich nut that is chewed in many West African cultures to restore energy and ease hunger pangs. Just like cocaine, Coca-Cola generates addiction and a person becomes “glued” to it. The word “babe” (drool) can imply that a person likes the product so much that he/she drools in anticipation to drinking it. With respect to the reference to “caco” (shard), it should be noted that at the time when Pignatari wrote the poem, Coca-Cola was bottled in glass bottles, which could potentially break into shards of glass that could not be glued together. Finally, the word “cloaca” (cesspool) can be understood as the place where all the guzzled Coca-Cola will end up; and metaphorically can mean the place where people with addictions find themselves.

Clüver states that concrete poems are heavily pregnant with meaning, not because of their discursive statement, conventional syntax, and linear temporality, but because of their ideogrammatic quality in which they have created a visual and aural syntax, product of a calculated and careful placement of their verbal elements on the page. What holds these poems together is their overall gestalt and the specific structure of the “verbivocovisual” relationships established for each text (138). Just like in the case of the ideogram, the visual shape of the concrete poem is crucial for its overall message. Like a graphic figure it must be perceived instantaneously and simultaneously. Reading the text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>drink</th>
<th>cocaine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>drool</td>
<td>glue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shard</td>
<td>shard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c e s p o o l (137) [my translation].
as a verbal system is a temporal activity, however, unlike more conventional texts, the concrete poem is compelled by its structure to proceed in various directions such as horizontally, vertically, diagonally, forward and backward, up, and down. The white space surrounding the words or graphic marks becomes an active and integral element of the text, assuming semantic functions just like the graphic marks. The following poem “branco” by H. de Campos shows how the whiteness of the page speaks eloquently as the graphic shapes while the eye traverses from the word/black (opposite to white) “branco” above to the word/black “branco” below. This white space makes us aware of the arbitrary relationship between the verbal sign and the extra-linguistic reality it signifies:

```
branco  branco  branco  branco
vermelho
estanco  vermelho
espelho    vermelho
estanco  branco (138)
```

According to the “plan piloto” of the “Noigandres” manifesto of concrete poetry, these poems communicate primarily their own structure. It is in this structure where the content can be found. At the same time, concrete poems do not hinder the referential qualities of the verbal materials they are composed of. By being presented as concrete objects,

```
37    white  white  white  white
red    red    red    red
I stop [I staunch]  I stop [I staunch]  white  [my translation].
```

64
paradoxically they accentuate the distance between signifier and signified and yet, as ideograms, they offer structural parallels to the objective realities to which they refer.\textsuperscript{38}

From the beginning of the movement, the Brazilian concretists conceived and developed a translation activity from many languages into Portuguese, which they described as “transcriação.” They also developed an intense critical activity in order to create points of reference that would help us appreciate this kind of poetry. They called attention to creative poets such as Sousândrade and Kilkerry who had been neglected by literary historians. For these reasons, explains H. de Campos in his article “The Brazilian Jaguar,” Brazilian concretism had a crucial influence on the artistic scene. It served as a point of departure for new aesthetic developments throughout the next decades (84-85).

Among H. de Campos’s works of translation/transcreation are Bere’shith, a cena da origem in which he translated the initial passage of the Genesis, and The book of Job both from Hebrew to Portuguese; and Hagoromo de Zeami, o Charme sutil, a Nô play from the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{39} The first words that H. de Campos wrote in Hagoromo de Zeami, o Charme sutil are relevant, because they illustrate his progression towards concrete poetry: “As peças do teatro clássico Nô já foram comparadas a haicais amplificados… Segundo argumenta Donald Keene, só os momentos de máxima intensidade são enfocados, como que a sugerir o restante do drama” (13).\textsuperscript{40} Nô plays are understated, refined, symbolic, and function through suggestion. While there are moments of great intensity in the plays,

\textsuperscript{38} In 1986, H. de Campos published Transblanco, a book he co-authored with Octavio Paz based on the poem “Blanco” by the Mexican poet.

\textsuperscript{39} Hagoromo, a Nô theatre play that sings to nature during the spring season was written by Motokiyo Zeami (1363-1443).

\textsuperscript{40} “The pieces of Nô theatre have already been compared to amplified haikus… according to Donald Keene, only the moments of highest intensity are focused, the rest of the drama is only suggested” [my translation].
silence and emptiness are also distinctive elements. The stage is simple so that nothing
distracts from the drama of the main character. Typically, one of the characters in a Nô
play is a Buddhist priest. As Keene has noted, these features are reminiscent of the haikus
because they aim at capturing an instant of experience where the seemingly ordinary
reveals its inner nature, the here and now, stressed by Buddhism. In Nô theatre the way
of acting, the singing and the rhythm are as important as the plot itself (Keene 13). As a
matter of fact, the Brazilian concrete poems will take the leap of substituting the stanza
traditionally formed by words with the empty space which is vital in a haiku, and which
Mallarmé called “the white of the page” (Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hazard, no pag.) or graphic field. H. de Campos endeavors to use as much of the target language
grammar as possible, and in doing this, when translating into Portuguese, he aims at
creating a new language. Thus he is “trans-creating” and generating neologisms, since he
is not only looking at words in a new way, but also using and modifying them. His
translation is a work of creation, which takes seriously the etymological root of the word
“poetry,” which according to the Greek “Poiesis,” means to “create, to make.” A
poet/transcreator, therefore, is a creator, a maker.

One of the fundamental characteristics of contemporary art, wrote de Campos in A
arte no horizonte do provavel, is that it can be analyzed from an ontological perspective
in which, according to classic aesthetics the work of art is sub specie aeternitatis.

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41 De Campos also wrote that Kunio Komparu, an active practitioner of the art, representing the 22nd
generation in a direct line of Nô performers, resorts to the example of the haiku to highlight the
intersemiotic audiovisual and textual aspects of the Nô theatre. According to De Campos, one could
compare the plot of a Nô play to a haiku poem calligraphed on one special card in which one reads the
words and also appreciates the arrangement and form of the characters along with the ink brushstrokes and
the spaces left blank (13).
42 In his article “Evolução de formas: poesia concreta,” included in the book Teoria da poesia concreta,
Haroldo de Campos states that concrete poetry is the result of a systematic study of forms supported by an
active historic tradition, and its origin is Mallarmé’s Un coup de dés (53).
Contemporary art is produced within the margins of an eminently technical civilization that is in constant and rapid transformation. From this perspective, the essence of art is based on its relativity and temporality. Like many other avant-garde artists, H. de Campos sees a parallel between contemporary aesthetics and modern physics. The connection of concrete poetry to space and time is inspired by the theory of relativity and quantum physics, according to which space becomes a flexible category that can be influenced and changed by time. H. de Campos mentions that the rigid determinism of classic physics with its strong hold on certainty is substituted by the notion of probability, the Heisenberg principle of indetermination.\textsuperscript{43} Probability is integrated as a desired element into the composition of a contemporary work of art (H. de Campos A arte no horizonte do provavel 16-17). In this respect, concrete poetry aims at a synthesis between the arts and sciences by breaking physically with the linear structure of discourse. This includes having the imagination to organize itself by juxtaposition and coordination (parataxis) rather than by subordination (hypotaxis), and by permitting a multiplicity of readings and points of view through the exploration of graphic resources. In an interview with Roland Green, Augusto de Campos expressed that concrete poetry interpolates space into the temporality of language, therefore it relativizes that temporality. This phenomenon brings him to speak of a space-time, although in an unorthodox way, with an obvious allusion to the conceptual universe of modern physics (Harvard Library Bulletin 22).

The theory of relativity that was mentioned by A. de Campos refers back to Stéphane Mallarmé’s interest in the control of chance. In the poem “UN COUP DE DES JAMAIS

\textsuperscript{43} In his seminal work Physical Principles of Quantum Physics published in 1930, Werner Heisenberg explained that what is mathematically established is only an objective fact in a small part, because in its majority it is an inclusive view of possibilities.
N’ABOLIRA LE HAZARD/ (Excepté peut-être pour une constellation),” written in 1897, Mallarmé stated that chance was impossible to abolish (17). H. de Campos cites Jacques Scherer’s research, according to which Mallarmé’s “UN COUP ..” was a first outline of all the French poet’s later writings. “Un coup…” became a metapoem where the element of chance would be included in the composition. For Mallarmé, the book or “block” would drown out the traditional concept of the book, and incorporate permutation and movement as structural agents. In his article “Le livre, instrument spirituel” published in 1895 in La revue blanche, Mallarmé states that: “le livre, expansion totale de la lettre, en doit tirer, directement, une mobilité et spacieux [sic], par correspondence, instituer un jeu, on ne sait, qui confirme la fiction” (18). He thus points to a new physical and conceptual perception of the book. The pages of that book would be interchangeable, and could be read according to certain laws of combination determined by the author-operator (19). The author-operator can be seen as a reader in a privileged position. From this perspective, the result would be a multi-book where from a small number of options, it is possible to reach thousands of combinations. The large number of combinations questions the notion of a closed or finished work; it imposes the temporary over the perfect and paradigmatic immutability of eternal objects (A arte no horizonte do provável 20).

What is unique to concrete poetry, in particular to the Brazilian concrete poetry developed by H. de Campos and other members of the “Noigandres” group, is that “o espaço está irremisivelmente ligado ao tempo” as stated by H. de Campos in Teoria da

44 “The book, total expansion of the letter, must obtain a direct mobility; and spacious, by correspondence, establish a game that nobody knows, which confirms the fiction” [my translation].
45 Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela would be a clear example of Mallarmé’s concept.
46 “…space is perpetually linked to time” [my translation].
This statement reveals Mallarmé’s profound influence on Brazilian concrete poetry. In the preface to “UN COUP DE DES…,” Mallarmé explains about the importance of the blank space and the paper. According to him,

Les “blancs,” en effet, assument l’importance, frappent d’abord; la versification en exigea, comme silence alentour, ordinairement, au point qu’un morceau, lyrique ou de peu de pied, occupe, au milieu, le tiers environ du feuillet: je ne transgresse cette mesure, seulement la disperse. Le papier intervient chaque fois qu’une image, d’elle-même, cesse ou entre, acceptant la succession d’autres et, comme il ne s’agit pas, ainsi que toujours, de traits sonores réguliers ou vers – plutôt, de subdivisions prismatiques de l’Idée, l’instant de paraître et que dure leur concours, dans quelque mise en scène spirituelle exacte, c’est à des places variables, près ou loin du fil conducteur latent, en raison de la vraisemblance, que s’impose le texte. L’avantage, si j’ai droit à le dire, littéraire, de cette distance copiée que mentalement sépare des groupes de mots ou les mots entre eux, semble d’accélérer tantôt et de ralentir le mouvement, le scandant, l’intimant même selon une vision simultanée de la Page: celle-ci prise pour unité comme l’est autre part le Vers ou ligne parfaite (no pag.).

47 “The ‘blanks’ indeed take on importance, they surprise at first glance; the versification demands them, as a surrounding silence, to the extent that a fragment, lyrical or of a few beats, occupies, in its midst, about a third of the space of the sheet of paper: I do not transgress this measure, only disperse it. The paper intervenes each time as an image of itself that ends or begins accepting a succession of others, and, since there are only regular sonorous lines or verses – instead of prismatic subdivisions of the Idea, the instant they appear, and as long as they last, in some precise spiritual performance, that is in variable positions, close to or away from the implicit guiding thread, according to the verisimilitude the text imposes on itself. The advantage of the literary value, if I am allowed to say so, of this copied distance which mentally separates groups of words or words among themselves, seems to accelerate or slow down the movement, it paces it, estranges it, given one’s simultaneous sight of the page: the latter taken as unity, as elsewhere the Verse is or perfect line” (Trans. Chris Edwards www.writing.upenn.edu/library/Mallarme.html).
Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard can be considered the most radical break in the history of modern poetry because for the first time a poem not only contains broken lines across the double page or the folio, but in addition, a multiplicity of typefaces along with the multiplication of word interpolations that dislocates reading. Thus it created what Mallarmé called “constellations.” But unlike the dark firmament in which the stars appear scattered as bright contrasting spots, in Mallarmé’s poem the firmament is the blank/white page in which black letters and signs of punctuation are scattered by “le hazard.” However, once chance has influenced the roll of the dice, the words are finally affixed on the page, and the structure of the poem allows the readers to carry out a plurality of readings, making them part of the creative/probabilistic process.

In his article “Pontos-periferia-poesia concreta,” that appeared in Teoria... Augusto de Campos noted the following four characteristics of concrete poetry; all of them based on ideas presented by Mallarmé. The first one refers to the use of an assortment of different typographical characters, because the different sizes establish differences between the main, secondary and adjacent themes, dictating their importance in the oral emission. The second characteristic deals with the relevance of the position of typographical lines, since the positions on top, in the middle and on the bottom of the page indicate changes of intonation. The third one alludes to the use of blank spaces, that acquire importance since the paper gains relevance every time an image appears or disappears, allowing the ingress of other images. Finally, the fourth characteristic of concrete poetry concerns how the paper sheet is used in a special way as it becomes two open pages where the words on the one hand are perceived to form a totality, and on the other hand are divided into two groups. To the right and to the left of the center of the page folded in are components of
the same ideogram, as if the center fold were a supporting point for the balance between the two groups of words (18).

Poets other than Mallarmé were a pivotal influence on Brazilian concrete poetry. In “Concrete Poetry, a Brief Structural-Historical Guideline,” Décio Pignatari added that concrete poetry was also indebted to Ezra Pound. Concrete poetry, notes Pignatari, goes beyond the ideogrammatical process practiced by Pound because it incorporates the space within the ideogram as an indispensable element of the poetic structure and for the creation of meaning. Thus, a new time-space and rhythmic space is created, and the traditional lineal rhythm is destroyed (Teoria... 62).

H. de Campos’s poem “Ver navios” (“To see ships”) exemplifies this poetic process; it consists of a succession of words:

```
vem navio
vai navio
vir navio
ver navio
ver não ver
vir não vir
vir não ver
ver não vir
ver navios
```

Fig. 10. Haroldo de Campos Noigandres (n. pag.) (Sao Paulo, 1958).

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48 Pound based his ideas on Ernest Fenollosa’s studies on Chinese writing, and gave a very elemental and at the same time clear definition of an ideogram. Pound asks: “how does the Chinese language define what is “red”? His answer is that the ideogram that represents the element of “red” is based on things that everybody knows, such as a flamingo, or a cherry, a rose, or rust.

49 come ship
go ship
ship comes
The placement of the words follows a non-lineal and non-traditional form; that is, the space has acquired an important role. It can be disassembled in the following geometric figures:

![Geometric representation of poem “Ver navios.”](image)

Fig. 11. Geometric representation of poem “Ver navios.”

The parallelograms are placed in a mirror image, with the bottom one being wider than the top one, and the rectangle located on the lower part. They represent the spatial units or planes in space in which the words are contained. The three parallelograms can be seen as allusions to the three dimensions: length, width and depth. In the book *Poesia de vanguarda no Brasil*, Antônio Sérgio Mendonça and Alvaro Sa explain that this poem is built from the geometric building of words which become object-words, that is, the visual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>to see the ship</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>to see not to see</td>
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<tr>
<td>to come not to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to come not to see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to see not to come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to see ships [my translation].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
material of the poetic composition (155). In this case the poem’s aesthetic force is produced by a non-verbal condition, that is, the distribution of words in space, even though its interpretation is given through verbal parameters. The issue of verbal parameters is at the core of the definition of experimental poetry, because this genre is analyzed through verbal parameters as well. Fig. 11 shows that the top parallelogram and the bottom one are in clear contradiction, not only in terms of their spatial configuration, but also in terms of verbal configuration. The top parallelogram is affirmative in nature, whereas the bottom one is negative, not only because it has the opposite direction, but also because it includes the negative word “não,” which creates a tension between the two entities. The bottom rectangle represents the resolution to this tension because it is manifested with the pluralization of the word “navios” and is presented in an affirmative manner.

The above example can be related to Fenollosa’s and Pound’s validation of the Chinese ideogram as an instrument for poetry, which H. de Campos paraphrases in his article “Aspectos de la poesía concreta,” also included in Teoria da poesia concreta. De Campos contends that in the composition process, two combined elements do not produce a third one, but their combination suggests a fundamental relationship between them (96). De Campos explains that in the case of Pound’s Cantos the ideogram is the structural principle that regulates the interaction between the units of ideas that reiterate, criticize and illuminate each other. Furthermore, the isolation of thematic nuclei in chains of essences and medullas imposes the awareness of the graphic space as the organizing factor in the body of the poem (96). In the case of a concrete poem, the use of the ideogram is primordial. However, this affirmation must not be taken as an inclination to
substitute one linguistic order for another, but it is the point of departure to consider the
ideographic instrument as a mental organizational process in exact concordance with the
urge to obtain a more direct and economic communication of verbal forms that
characterize the anti-discursive and objective spirit. For that reason, the Brazilian
concretists named the poem they created a verbivocovisual unit, because it encompasses
sound, visual and semantic elements.

Similarly to H. de Campos’s concrete poem “Ver navios,” “UN COUP DE DES…”
also involves a vessel. With the exception of the capitalized first word “SOIT” (be it) the
poem is written with one same font and size. On the left side of the folio the words are
arranged from left to right occupying the space of two imaginary parallelograms. On the
right side of the folio, one can also perceive two imaginary parallelograms: the three first
stanzas are arranged from left to right within the space of a top imaginary parallelogram
while the rest of the stanzas can be seen occupying a larger, wider parallelogram:

SOIT
que
l’Abîme
blanchi
étale
furieux
sous une inclinaison
plane désespérément
d’aile
la sienne
par
avance retombée d’un mal à dresser le vol
et couvrant les jaillissements
coupant au ras les bonds
très à l’intérieur résume
l’ombre enfouie dans la profondeur par cette voile alternative
jusqu’adapter
à l’envergure
sa béante profondeur entant que la coque
d’un bâtiment
penché de l’un ou l’autre bord

(Stéphane Mallarmé, UN COUP DE DES JAMAIS N’ABOLIRA LE HAZARD/ (Excepté peut-être pour une Constellation), n. pag.

The geometric representation of “UN COUP DE DES…” is as follows, fig. 12:

Mallarmé's constellatory placement of the words in the ‘folio’ “abolishes” the traditional verse structure and forces the reader/viewer to look not only to the words, but also to the space that contains them in order to comprehend the poem. And just as in a constellation the stars are arbitrarily perceived and assembled to form a figure or outline, the placement of the words in the poem is arbitrary. As seen in Fig. 12, the space organized in parallelograms contains the words, similarly to H. de Campos’s geometrically organized concrete poems as shown in fig. 11.

How experimental can concrete poetry be? In this regard, Wladimir Krysinski’s article “The Endless Ends of Languages of Poetry: Between Experiments and Cognitive Quests” is illuminating. Krysinski examines some significant moments and achievements of experimental and/or avant-garde history in order to relativize and enhance the critical and historical validity of terms such as “avant-garde,” “transgression,” “rupture,”
“innovation,” and “the new.” Krysinski attempts to create a cognitive map of the various problems and phenomena linked to the emergence of the concrete, visual and spatial poetry of the 1960’s (123). He cites the following comment by Kostelanetz: “There is no end to contemporary art, but only an endless stream of new beginnings” (124). Let us consider this statement in relation to the following poem by Augusto de Campos:

![Image of Augusto de Campos's poem]

Fig. 13. Augusto de Campos, “Pós-tudo,” 124, 1984 Experimental–Visual–Concrete...

For Krysinski, this poem is an allegory of the discursive situation of modern and postmodern art, as it “achieves an intellectual and poetic synthesis of the present, an epochal configuration of artistic discourses, and by the same token, ‘poetic utterances and meta-utterances,’ that is to say, the totality of poetic discourses produced as an enormous

51

I WANTED
TO CHANGE EVERYTHING
I CHANGED EVERYTHING
NOWAFTEREVERYTHING [NOWAFTERALL]
EXEVERYTHING
I CHANGE / I AM SILENT [my translation].
series of intentionally lyrical, paralyrical, metapoetic, concrete, visual, or sound statements” (124). Kostelanetz’s comment and A. de Campos’s poem share the idea that poetry remains innovative despite the fact that we live in a “post-all” era. (124).

“Pós-tudo” can be approached in a number of ways, generating a rich reading and viewing experience. For instance, the poem can be vertically divided into three sections: left, center and right. On the left, one reads “mudar,” “mudei,” “agora,” and “mudo.” The poetic voice starts with the infinitive of the verb “mudar” (to change) on the second line, or stanza. On the next line it proceeds to conjugate it in the first person preterit “mudei” (I changed). On the fourth line the word “agora” (now) helps the transition to the following line, which would be the sixth one, since there is a gap between the fourth and sixth one. On this line one reads the word “mudo,” which has a double meaning in Portuguese: the first person present tense of “mudar” (I change), and also the adjective “mudo” (mute/silent). The section to the right comprises five lines that are vertically constituted by the word “quis” (I wanted) on the first, “tudo” (all) on the second, “tudo” on the third, “tudo” on the forth and “tudo” on the fifth one. The central section is composed of the following prefixes: “pós” (post) on the fourth line and “ex” (out/past) on the fifth one. On the fourth line, the words “agora” and “tudo” are connected by “pós” creating the neologism “agorapóstudo,” and on the fifth line we read the neologism “extudo.” The word “agorapóstudo” is conformed by three words, therefore it is the most semantically charged word in the poem, and serves as a hinge between the words from the first three lines and the last two. Using the format of a concrete poem, A. de Campos vividly summarizes the artistic process, the change and evolution of the “Noigandres” group from its inception in the fifties up to the eighties, when the poem was created,
through the paradox “agorapóstudo” (nowafterall). According to a traditional reading from left to right and top to bottom, the poetic voice tells the story about its yearning (“quis”) to renovate the ornate poetry proposed by the Geração de 45 into a minimalist poetry, known as concrete poetry. On the third line, the poetic voice declares that it was successful at producing the shift to concrete poetry in Brazilian literature: “mudei tudo” (I changed everything). But then, as years pass and art evolves, “agorapóstudo” (nowafterall) the poetic voice is aware of the fact that poetry, “continues notwithstanding the fact that we live in the “post-all” era” (Krysinski 124).

Read vertically, without including the prefixes “pos” and “ex,” the poem develops into two different renditions that converge on the last line:

1. 

   QUIS
   MUDAR
   MUDEI
   AGORA
   MUDO 52

2. 

   QUIS
   TUDO
   TUDO
   TUDO
   TUDO

In this case, the exclusion of the prefixes “pos” and “ex,” suggests the existence of a pessimistic subject who can only remain silent, since there is nothing else for him to say.

The term “avant-garde” is still very much alive in the 1950s and 1960s in Latin America and Europe. Although it does not have the connotation of a grandiloquent and

52 1. 

   TO CHANGE
   I CHANGED
   NOW
   I CHANGE/ I AM MUTE / SILENT

2. 

   I WANTED
   EVERYTHING
   EVERYTHING
   EVERYTHING
   EVERYTHING

   [My translation].
futuristic movement full of the assertiveness and ostentatious aggressiveness of the early decades of the 20th century, it still relies on the cognitive and combinatory function of poetry and of literature more generally, where languages undergo functional changes in view of a text’s cognitive, semantic and semiotic events that emerge as meaningful forms and messages (Krysinski 125). In this respect, Elisabeth Walther-Bense’s article “The Relations of Haroldo de Campos to German Concretist Poets, in Particular to Max Bense” is illuminating. It describes how in July of 1959, Haroldo de Campos and Max Bense initiated a lifelong friendship which would lead to a stimulating exchange of aesthetic views and works, and at the same time helped the “Noigandres” group to become known internationally. The first “Noigandres” exhibition was in 1959 in Stuttgart; and from that point on, “the correspondence between Haroldo de Campos, who was the spokesman of the group, and Stuttgart led to a very broad and intensive exchange of ideas” (355). In 1961, H de Campos invited Bense to Brazil, which sparked a productive collaboration between the German artist and the members of the “Noigandres” group (356). The collaborations went on for several years. For instance, Haroldo de Campos extensively presented on Bense’s aesthetics to the Brazilian literary scene, while Max Bense and his wife prepared anthologies of the works of the Noigandres group to be presented in Europe. In 1996, Elisabeth Walther-Bense wrote:

In the Sixties, concrete poetry was known to small circles only, but now it penetrates globally into the consciousness of a broader public. I wish to emphasize… that the relations of Haroldo de Campos and his group to the United States, Japan and Europe, and particularly to Max Bense and other German Concrete poets played, without a doubt, an important role in this respect. But I also want to repeat that Concrete art and
poetry always were and still are international “events,” never limited to pure national circles. These new forms of literature developed all over the world almost at the same time, departing from the same forerunners such as Mallarmé, Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Schwitters, Hausmann, and many others …, resulting in similar texts (361).

The Brazilian Concretist poets called for a practice of concreteness understood as a constellatory poetic discourse, and referred to Stéphane Mallarmé’s “Un coup de dés” as the catalyst to initiate a new poetry that challenged the traditional cycle of verse viewed as the unity of rhythm and form. This constellatory poetic discourse, says Krysinski, stems from a cognitive rereading and a new understanding of artistic phenomena, such as Mallarmé’s spatiality, James Joyce’s organic interpretation of time and space, Ezra Pound’s ideogrammatic method, Cumming’s atomization of words, and Anton Webern’s, Pierre Boulez’s and Karlheinz Stockhausen’s dodecaphonic and concrete music (Krysinski 126).

As noted above, Ezra Pound’s ideogrammatic method greatly influenced the Brazilian Concretist poets. Given that for both H. de Campos and José Juan Tablada the use the ideogram was a point of departure for their poems, what differences and similarities can be found between these authors? The first difference between the poets is the geographical space and time period in which both authors lived, because they had a great influence on their initial motivations in regards to their approach to the ideogram. On the one hand, José Juan Tablada, born in 1871, was greatly influenced by the Hispanic-American modernista movement at the beginning of his literary career. Driven by his interest in the Orient, Tablada spent two years in Japan. While cultivating his knowledge of the “oriental,” Tablada came into contact with different aspects of European and U.S.
American avant-gardes such as cubism, surrealism and futurism during the first decades of the 20th century. His restless search for a new poetry was stimulated by his interest in painting; and at the same time he experienced the avant-garde movements first hand.

Haroldo de Campos comes from quite a different context. He received the influence of Brazilian modernist writers, as De Andrade, but unlike Tablada, he did not experience it first hand. Following De Andrade’s “antropofagia,” he became familiar with authors such as Apollinaire, Mallarmé, Fenollosa, Pound, Cummings and Joyce, for whom the ideogram represented the possibility of creating a new literature, which would help him develop his concrete poetry.

Another difference between Tablada and H. de Campos is that, even though Tablada had a clear knowledge of the concept of the ideogram, he did not produce any theoretical and critical texts about the subject. He did not belong to a literary group that shared aesthetic ideals, even though he had some followers. H. de Campos, however, was part of the Noigandres group where the theoretical and critical activities helped disseminate this kind of poetry.

Among the similarities between the poets, both Tablada and de Campos earnestly worked on the translation (or transcreation, the term used by de Campos) of Japanese poetry. Both authors chose the haiku as their point of departure in the development of their new aesthetics. Like Tablada, H. de Campos dreamt of visiting Japan, and in 1991 this dream finally became a reality. His trip was the inspiration of his book of poems Yūgen (Charme sutil). In addition, he continued “trans-creating” a series of poems, although not necessarily haiku. His most ambitious task was the “trans-creation” of a long poem (chōka) by Kakinomoto Hitomaro, which is a requiem for the heir prince
Kusakabe (Hinamishi) (ca. 689). The poem consists of 65 verses of a text whose setting is anchored in the time of the creation of the world, which corresponds to the Toldoth/biblical Genesis of the Kojiki (a Shintoist Bible) (H. de Campos “En la ruta de las especies de la vanguardia occidental” 12).

Yet Tablada’s and H. de Campos’s approaches to translate the haiku are different. Tablada realizes the great difficulty of closely translating a haiku from Japanese into Spanish. This propels him to his innovation in poetry of adjusting the format of the traditional Japanese haiku to the organization of syllables in the Spanish language. He also incorporates cultural elements from Mexico, as we will see, for instance, in Fig. 15. On the other hand, H. de Campos strives to use as much of the Japanese format in his translation/trancreation of the haiku as possible, thus creating neologisms based on, for instance, the combination of two verbs. By trying to scrutinize the Japanese grammar as much as possible, he actually created a new language, a new way of looking at words. His work of translation is in fact a work of creation.

In her article “Different Songs Sung Together” Ce Rosenow poses an important question: how should we evaluate a poetic form once it has been taken from its original culture and language and been transplanted? To a certain extent the guidelines used in Japanese haiku also apply to haiku written in other languages. And so, the amount of images that a haiku contains along with the concept of the haiku moment does not vary between languages. In any language, a haiku is the poetic conveyance of a haiku moment from the poet to the reader. Nevertheless, in order to translate this kind of poetry, other

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53 Rosenow cites the book Haiku Moment: An Anthology of Contemporary North American Haiku in which its author, Bruce Ross defines a “haiku moment” as follows: “In haiku each of these particular instances of time is intended to present an insight into reality, often evoking moments of transcendence, awe, or simply joy found in the unexpected. Underlying this emphasis on the given moment of time is the Buddhist idea
aspects of the *haiku* must be adapted. For example, the images used vary depending on
the region or time in which the poet is writing. Also, it needs to be considered that
Japanese *haiku* are written in a single vertical line and that the Japanese *onji*, a sound
symbol that refers to one of the phonetic characters used in writing Japanese phonetic
script, has a very short sound, much simpler than most syllables in Spanish, Portuguese,
English or German.

Although Tablada understood the classical form of the Japanese *haiku*, he was more
interested in adapting it to a modern form of Spanish language poetry. He was no longer
translating specific Japanese poems into Spanish, but was translating the form of *haiku*, a
traditionally Japanese poetic form, into a workable form of Mexican poetry. While other
Western poets, such as the Imagists, wrote *haiku*-like verses that focused on Japanese
scenes and subjects, Tablada used them to write about Latin America.

In regards to the topic of translation, Tablada’s poem “The Birdhouse” from the book
*Un día...* illustrates his concern. The original poem in Spanish is called “La pajarera” and
was illustrated by Tablada:

![Image of birds in a birdhouse]

**Distinctos cantos a la vez;**

that the world is made anew in each moment. A kind of divine spontaneity thus inheres in each moment…
*A haiku* does not simply portray mere nature. It reveals the universal importance of each particular in
nature as it burgeons forth and relates to other particulars in a given moment” (76).
La pajarera musical

Es una torre de Babel

Fig 14. José Juan Tablada, “La pajarera” from Un Día..., (n. pag.) 1919

Ce Rosenow suggests that the reference to the Tower of Babel illustrates the difficulties that Tablada encountered when trying to transplant a poetic form from one language into a different language and culture, that is explained by the sounds in the aviary. In translating *uta* and *haiku* Tablada was aware of the difficulties of adapting a traditional Japanese form to a completely different language and culture. Trying to write in a successful *haiku* in Spanish was a difficult task because there was no tradition of *haiku* in the Spanish language. Tablada worked with poetry in Spanish and Japanese, and the difficulties he encountered in this process prompted him to think of the birdhouse, in which, like in Babel’s tower, many different languages are spoken. The poem suggests that different voices can be musical, like when Japanese poetry can be translated into Spanish and still be poetry. Conversely, different voices carry the potential for misunderstanding if a word cannot be accurately translated, or if the cultural associations of a particular word make no sense to the readers from a different culture, thus creating a “tower of Babel” in which two languages can build a “cage” that obstructs communication (81).

Translators and theorists have long addressed challenges related to the viability of translating a text directly into another language. Walter Benjamin considers the act of

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54 “The Birdhouse”
Different songs sung simultaneously; The musical birdhouse Is Babel’s tower [my translation].
translation in relation to language itself. In his essay “The Task of the Translator,” he asserts that all languages share a relationship to an original, pre-Babelian language that no longer exists and that “languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationship, interrelated in what they want to express” (72). Therefore, “a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are parts of a vessel” (78). Benjamin’s contention reaffirms the validity and importance of Tablada’s translation and Haroldo de Campos’s transcreation, not only from the standpoint of meaning, but also from the standpoint of form. By combining Mexican elements and meanings with a variation on the Japanese haiku, Tablada has created a new form of poetry that stems from the combination of two poetic traditions (83).

An example of Tablada’s adaptation of a haiku into the Mexican tradition can be seen in the poem “American Black Vultures.” The original poem in Spanish is called “Los zopilotes;” it also includes an illustration by Tablada:

Llovió toda la noche
Y no acaban de peinar sus plumas
Al sol, los zopilotes.\textsuperscript{55}

Fig. 15. José Juan Tablada, “Los Zopilotes” from \textit{Un Día…}, (n. pag) 1919.

Zopilotes are large birds from the vulture family whose habitat ranges from pastures to beaches, rooftops and garbage dumps. They can be found in the U.S., Mexico and Central America. The word “zopilote” stems from the náhuatl “tzopilotl” where “tzotl” means garbage and “pilotl” means to hang, making reference that when in flight, these birds hold the carrion with their talons. The first line of the poem indicates a narrative situation in which it has rained all night, and consequently, the birds cannot fly with wet feathers. The illustration shows sunny skies as background to these vultures. When the sun finally comes out, it will take a long time for the zopilotes to dry their feathers, which means that they have become vulnerable to predators and humans, and also cannot search for food. This is a challenging situation for the birds, but “combing” the feathers with their beaks under the warmth of the sun helps them to solve this problem. This poem suggests the trials and tribulations that we humans must endure, along with the necessity to find solutions to our predicaments in order to get on with our lives. The familiarity of the Mexican people with the black vulture or zopilote functions as a link between Tablada and the readers of this three-line poem that is quite atypical of Mexican poetry.

Tablada experimented with the combination of \textit{haiku} and illustrations called \textit{haiga}.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{55} “American Black Vultures”
It rained all night
And they cannot stop combing their feathers
Under the sun, the vultures [my translation].

\textsuperscript{56} With respect to the definition of haiga, Stephen Addis wrote: “In a fine haiga, the poem does not just explain the painting, nor does the painting merely illustrate the poem. Instead, they add layers of meaning to each other” (9).
We can take as an example the illustration of the poem “The Birdhouse” (Fig. 14). The different songs can represent different languages or different voices expressing different interests. Differences can be musical, but when people do not listen to each other, the songs are “sung together,” building a tower of Babel. The illustration has dark bars that remind the viewer of a jail, the confining space of the birdhouse. There is no reference to the idea of prison in the poem; however, when a poem (haiku) and illustration (haiga) work together, the reader is able to make the connections and complete the association between illustration and poem (Rosenow 85). On the other hand, H. de Campos’s translation of creative texts, that he called transcreation in which not only the meaning is provided, but also its form, was not limited to the Japanese language, as it was for Tablada. De Campos’s scope extended to many other languages. He wrote:

Thus for us the translation of creative texts will always be recreation [sic]…it is not only the signified that is translated, but also the sign itself, its physicality, its materiality…The signified, the semantic parameter, will merely and only constitute the boundary of the recreative task. And this (kind of translation) [sic] can be seen as the opposite of the so-called literal translation” (quoted in Thelma Médici Nóbrega, John Milton 259).

As stated above, and also different from Tablada, de Campos wrote both poetic and critical texts. In 1995 he wrote the article “En la ruta de las especies de la vanguardia occidental. Relaciones de un poeta brasileño con la cultura japonesa.” He starts by mentioning how historians and comparatists talk about the influence of Chinese and Japanese literatures on the art and literature in the West, pointing out the importance that the haiku, Nô theatre and Chinese poetry had over Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound (3).
Since 1952, with the publication of the first issue of the book-journal *Noigandres*,
Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatari and Haroldo de Campos embarked on a movement
of systematic renovation of Brazilian poetry from a theoretical and practical standpoint,
which culminated with the launching of Concrete Poetry in 1956. H. de Campos writes:
“Uno de los puntos fundamentales de nuestro programa era el método ideogramático de
composición, desarrollado por Pound, a partir del ensayo de Fenollosa por él editado,
acerca de los caracteres de la escritura china (los Kanji japoneses) como instrumento para
la poesía” (5). He elaborates that for about two years he received lessons in Japanese
language and made his first translations of haiku, that were published in the literary
supplement of *O Estado de São Paulo* in 1954 (Aug. 30) and in 1964 (July 25) (5). In his
*transcreations* of Japanese poetry, H. de Campos followed Fenollosa’s and Pound’s
suggestions to a certain degree. He also followed the cautionary advise of the North
American translator W. McNaughton: “Una palabra en chino se escribe con un ideógrafo
que, a veces puede ser analizada, para vivificar o intensificar el sentido aceptado” (7).
Based on this advice, H. de Campos did not limit himself to obsequious translations, nor
did he acquiesce to being a belletrist of obsolete aesthetics, that were superseded by the
modernist revolution in 1922 (7). Instead, he transcreated, that is, he did not simply
translate one word from one language to another. For him the elements of the poem’s
structure, such as the rhythm or sound combinations, were much more important than the

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57 “One of the fundamental aspects of our program was “the ideogrammatic method of composition,”
developed by Pound, came from Fenollosa’s essay and edited by Pound, about the characters of Chinese
writing (Japanese Kanji) as poetic instruments to write poetry” [my translation].
58 “A word in Chinese is written with an ideogram, which sometimes can be analyzed in order to invigorate
or intensify the accepted meaning” [my translation].
semantics of the words. In this sense, translating the meanings of the words is not enough; it is necessary to restore its original structure into another language.

As an example, let us focus on the following haiku by Bashô:

*furu ike ya / kawazu tobikomu / mizu no oto.*

This haiku has been widely translated into many Western languages. In his translation, de Campos’s intention was to give a new interpretation to the poem that would not exclude more conventional interpretations, but be able to capture certain effects of the original language through the resources of Portuguese modern poetics. He followed R. Panwitz’s alienating precept extolled by Benjamin: instead of ‘braziliarizing’ the Japanese language, he ‘nipponized’ the Portuguese language. An so, this is how the poem looks:

**O VELHO TANQUE**

RA SAL'T

TOMBA

RUMOR DE AGUA (“En la ruta de las especies…” 7)

H. de Campos organized the space of the text in four fragments on the white page, the same technique he used in his concrete poetry. Unlike conventional translation practice, he attempted to replicate the configuration of the composite Japanese verb *tobikomu* where *tobu* is “to jump” and *komeru* is “to enter” or “to submerge into.” He created an equivalent composite verb in Portuguese: *salt’tomba* (TOMBa/TOBikOMu) and divided it with an apostrophe to better visualize the ‘jump.’

In the following years, H. de Campos continued his experiments in translation. He

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59 THE OLD POND
FROG JUMPS’N
FALLS
WATER’S SPLASH [my translation].
stated that his ‘re-creative’ work acted in response to a radical project that he called ‘hiperpoundiano’ (11-12). In his article “Transcriação/ Transcreation. The Brazilian concrete poets and translation,” K. David Jackson Tonkin writes that for H. de Campos any creative literature could be translated. In addition, the work of the transcreator can be associated to the anthropophagic theory as described by Oswald de Andrade. The concrete poets ‘devoured’ texts and languages, while instilling the idea of a world cultural heritage open to all in translation. The receptor language remained Brazilian Portuguese, which proved to be a perfect language not only for poetic translation, but also to create new trends and movements to lead the literary vanguard in the western tradition of literature. H de Campos’s theory of translation provided a foundation for the Brazilian reception of world literature in translation, and also enabled a critical debate on aesthetics, translation theory, and the nature of language (Jackson 153, 155).

In conclusion, H. de Campos not only had a response to Tablada’s views about the haiku and the art of translation, but he went a step further. Despite the fact that de Campos and Tablada lived in different time and geographical spaces, the ideogram, in combination with the aesthetic proposal of avant-garde artists, was for both the key device that would push them to generate a breakthrough in the literature of their time. Tablada was the first Spanish-American poet who introduced and experimented with the haiku, leaving behind the traditional literary dictum of his times, and opening the door to new forms of artistic experimentation. He cultivated a work of art that would generate an immediate effect on the reader/viewer through the combination of visual and verbal elements. However, de Campos went a step further in his artistic experimentations. Based on Mallarmé’s proposal on poetry, he highlighted the verbivocovisual effect of concrete
poetry in which, besides the verbal and visual elements, he incorporated a third one; that is, the white space or the blank page that became as relevant as the words/signs that populate it.

Another aspect that both Tablada and de Campos shared was their interest in translation from Japanese into their native languages. Tablada soon realized the difficulty of translating from Japanese into Spanish without loosing something from the original language. But in Tablada’s case, this apparently insurmountable obstacle launched him to produce his haikais from the standpoint of Spanish language and Mexican culture with great success. De Campos took a different approach to this issue. He methodically engaged in studying the Japanese language, and when he felt confident enough, he begun translating/transcreating haiku and other literary genre into Portuguese. Unlike Tablada’s approach to translation, de Campos’s purpose was to bring the Portuguese grammar closer the Japanese. By doing so, he experimented and created neologisms in his native language.

As mentioned above, even though de Campos’s literary work went a step further when compared to Tablada’s, this statement is not detracting from Tablada’s work and reputation. On the contrary, both artists in their own right deeply influenced the literary milieu of their times by proposing innovative ways of approaching art.
This chapter will explore the experimental poetic work of the Uruguayan artist Clemente Padín (Lascano, Rocha, 1939), specifically his visual poetry and his mail art. Visual poetry is the aesthetic exercise, through which the poem encompasses other aspects in addition to the graphic elements. For example, a visual image joins the text so that both elements interrelate and allow for poetic play. Mail art is the artistic activity transmitted through the postal services and expressed via post-cards, postal stamps, envelopes, and other media, in order to create non-hierarchical communication networks among artists or participants.

My rationale for writing about Padín is twofold: first, because he has undertaken a multiplicity of artistic expressions that made him a poet, artist, graphic designer, mail artist, performer, curator, video maker, multimedia artist and networker; and second because of his profound commitment to human rights and denunciations of abuses and injustices perpetrated by military dictatorships. Joan Brossa, the Catalan artist that will be presented in chapter 4 shares this commitment. Like Padín, Brossa participated in different artistic media, and denounced and suffered the abuse of power during Franco’s regime. Hence, in the same way that Tablada’s and de Campos’s poetic works are interrelated in chapters one and two, chapters three and four offer a connection between Padín and Brossa.

Clemente Padín obtained Bachelor degrees in both Hispanic Studies and Education from the Universidad de la República del Uruguay. He directed the magazines Los
*Huevos del Plata* (1965-1969), *Ovum 10* and *Ovum* (1969-1975), *Participación* (1984-1986) and *Correo del Sur* (2000-2003). While *Los Huevos del Plata* dealt with avant-garde movements as a reaction against the Uruguayan literary canon of its time, the magazines *Ovum 10* and *Ovum* progressively left behind their connection to the historic avant-gardes in order to showcase the work of artists dedicated to the experimentation with poetic forms that went beyond rational poetics and traditional association of poetry with words. The artists aimed at dissolving the traditional linguistic system as a way to renovate the literary aesthetics of their times (Dansilio no pag.) *Participación*, on the other hand, published mail art works (Restrepo no pag.), and *Correo del Sur* included mail art stamps.

Padín authored more than 20 creative and critical works, published in France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Venezuela, the United States and Uruguay. From one of his first, *La poesía debe ser hecha para todos* (1970), he published a large number of articles and notes. Since 1992 he has participated in Internet events and has edited two CDs with work from Net Art (Museo universitario del Chopo no pag.). He has contributed to more than 220 art exhibitions and 1,500 exhibitions of mail art from 1969 to 2008, and in 2005, he was the recipient of the Pedro Figari prize for his artistic career in Uruguay.

In his online article titled “Algunas historias personales en relación al arte correo, a la poesía experimental y a la performance,” Padín informs that he was jailed in 1977 due to his social activism and opposition to the military dictatorship. The work of art that

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60 Padín has played an important role in the development of new artistic forms such as graphic design, visual poetry, mail art, performance, installations, videos and computational networks, among others. His work has been exhibited, inter alia, in countries such as Germany, Italy, the United States, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Japan, Korea and Ecuador. His work has been translated into several languages such as English, Portuguese, Catalan, French, Italian, Hungarian, Dutch, German, and Russian. He has also been involved in multiple events on the Internet since 1992 (Clemente Padín blogspot, no pag.).
brought about his incarceration and sentence of four years in jail was an edition of apocryphal rubber stamps and postal stamps that denounced the suppression of human rights that lead to death, torture and the disappearance of hundreds of fellow citizens opposed to the military regime. The official forces pronounced Padín’s work a “derision and vituperation to the moral strength of the Armed Forces.” The sentence was also because of his attempt to organize a Counter-Biennial in front of the space occupied by the Latin American section, put together by the National Museum of Visual Arts of Uruguay at the 10th Biennial in Paris, France, in 1977. Due to an intense and consistent mobilization of supportive artists from around the world, Padín’s sentence was reduced to two years and three months, even though he later had to endure a surveillance that kept him outside the artistic milieu until 1984, when he recovered his freedom and his passport (Padín no pag.). This experience shaped his view of art. Padín is a socially committed artist who protests against any oppressive and totalitarian socio-political system. Padín states the following in Dore Ashton’s article “Artists and Politics, Politics and Art”:

Of the 360 million people who inhabit Latin America (that was in 1985) 110 million live in what is called “critical poverty.” They live without work, without a decent place to live, without medical care. They cannot read or write, but vegetate in that region where, as a famous critic once said, “to work is the same as being killed.” They are condemned to an unworthy life and so to talk about art, referring to Beauty, Eternity and other such values, is dark humor, if not an insult (78).

His denunciations and protests do not only inform the contents of his experimental poems, but furthermore, his inclusion of representations different from traditional
discursive artistic language carries a condemnation and protest against institutionalized art. In the article “Estudio de la obra poética de Clemente Padín,” Paula Enöder-Boxer explains how *Ovum 10* played a major role in spreading the “Nueva Poesía” proposed by Padín. Additionally, it was the main vehicle of circulation of Latin American experimental poetry such as the “Poema/Proceso,” “Poesía para y/o realizar,” “Poesía Inobjetal,” “Conceptualismo,” and in general the avant-garde art of the 1970s. In an interview by Fernando Davis and Fernanda Nogueira published in the magazine “ERRATA#,” Padín elaborates on the origins of *Los Huevos del Plata*. He explained that, together with a group of other young artists, he was looking for a space in which to publish their poems, only to realize that the poets from the *Generación del 45* had occupied the entire publishing space. Consequently, the only option for the young artists was to create a magazine for their works' circulation, and this is how *Los Huevos del Plata* originated in 1965. Padín explains that its platform consisted of the dissemination of those poetic expressions that the *Generación del 45* had marginalized, particularly from Latin America.

The last editions of *Los Huevos del Plata* included more radical work such as concrete poetry, visual poetry and other poetic tendencies such as the Brazilian *poem/process* that aimed at more actively engaging spectators. This kind of “new” poetry was simultaneously being presented and acknowledged in many Latin American countries. *Los Huevos del Plata* brought together musicians, poets and writers that had been looking

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61 The name was chosen as a reaction to the published magazines of the *Generación del 45* because they had only one word in their name such as *Escritura, Marcha, Asir*, and *Número*. Padín and his group decided to use several words in the title of their magazine, thus they transformed the transcendental and serious tone of the publications of the *Generación del 45* into the humorous name *Los Huevos del Plata*.

62 The term “New Poetry” was the name given to Latin American experimental poetry in the 1960s in order to differentiate it from traditional poetry.
for a space, and they collaborated in its 14 issues until 1969, when the publication veered towards visual and experimental poetics that encompassed the concept of the poem/process and “poesía para y/o realizar” (poetry to make real). Poem/process derives from concrete poetry, but breaks away from it because it does not use only words, but also other signs with the understanding that the poem is executed as a process, and not merely with words. Wlademir Dias-Pino was one of the founders of this artistic genre. In the case of “poesía para y/o realizar,” Padín makes clear that its function is to have the reader/spectator take an active role in the process of reading the poem, hence becoming its “co-creator” allowing them to change from being the consumer to becoming the creator (López Fernández no pag.).

In the late 1960s, the majority of the editing collaborators showed no interest in this kind of experimental poetry, and the magazine circulation came to a standstill. This situation, notes Fernanda Nogueira, was contradictory, because Los Huevos del Plata precisely attempted to give space to new productions while challenging traditional literary forms (194). She then asks Padín about the social and political situation of Uruguay at that moment. His explanation is crucial, he elaborates on the “Nueva Poesía” which was a reaction and direct result of the social and political climate in Uruguay in the late 60s and early 70s. Padín described Uruguay’s serious economical and social crisis as unique, and stated that the country was in shambles. Between 1968 and 1972, the democratically elected government of Jorge Pacheco Areco increasingly revealed its true intentions to overthrow the constitutional rights using the framework of the “Plan Cóndor” organized by the CIA and US transnationals. Some sectors of society raised up in arms. An example would be the Tupamaros, a National Liberation Movement of urban
guerrillas of the extreme left that adopted the armed fight as its method of action. This period, known as the “Pachecato,” prepared the ground for the future civil-military dictatorship that appeared in 1973 (Davis and Nogueira 195). In this context, explains Padín, an important aspect of his and other artists’ critique was to place themselves outside the national repressive apparatus. They considered language an instrument of social control and began to question the truth of many political assertions. For that reason, they sought to deeply alter the means of communication.

Many artists of Padín’s generation adopted a type of writing that did not allow any space to the immediate giving of meaning: it was a kind of “asemantic” visual poetry. Padín and other artists researched and experimented with all possible expressive avenues located on the margins of the regular elements of language. Out of this there grew a visual poetic that was known as “Nueva Poesía” (Davis and Nogueira 196). Fernando Davis asked Padín how the “Nueva Poesía” was the preamble to his following conceptualization of “arte inobjetal” (inobjectal art), how it came to be and what it implied. Padín explains that in 1971 he made a postcard where he stated the whole process - the drawing of a woman’s crotch with the title: “Métale el dedo o lo que quiera …” (Stick in it your finger or anything you want).
Fig. 16. Clemente Padín. “Inobjetal 1” no pag., published in _OVUM 10_, nr. 10, Montevideo, Uruguay, April 1971.

At the bottom he wrote: “Y sienta el vacío y la frustración que le espera detrás de la hoja. No de otra manera opera el arte: le brinda un sustituto de la realidad para que Ud. pueda escapar de ella. Arte es lo que Ud. hará en relación directa con lo que lo rodea, y no en relación a un sistema representativo de esa realidad.” 63

“Inobjetal 1” was the point of departure for Padín’s inobjectal art that signaled a step towards an art of action. In order to announce this, Padín sent a massive number of postcards to friends and artists, similar to the one described above, in order to disseminate his inobjectal art. Later on, he wrote three more notifications where he further explained

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63 “And feel the void and frustration that awaits you behind the page. This is how art operates: it gives you a substitute of reality so that you can escape it. Art is what you will do in close relationship with what surrounds you and not in connection with a representative system of that reality” [my translation].
his proposal. In the last one, written in August of 1971 he states the three moments of action - before, during, and after the act:

![Diagram](image)

Fig. 17. Clemente Padín. “Inobjetal 4.”

With three minimalist self-referential outlines, “Inobjetal 4” foregoes the traditional system that represents reality, that is, ‘art’, in order to show that what is really important is the action, and not the representation of it. The words “ANTES” (BEFORE) and “DESPUES” (AFTER) help the reader/viewer understand that time plays an important role; the “ACTO” (ACT) can only happen in a moment in time, before and after that moment, nothing really matters. One can observe the five arrows that converge towards the word “ACTO,” and once they have reached it, that convergence into the “DESPUES” becomes a collision, a destruction of the previous time in which the “ACTO” occurred.

In *La poesía experimental latinoamericana: (1959-2000)*, Padín further elucidates:

Entre uno y otro [momento] media un abismo. Una diferencia no en cantidad sino en calidad: el testimonio de un salto, no de un paso. Transportar el arte a esa
zona intermediaria entre los dos momentos, la acción que modifica cualitativamente el “status” es la intención del arte INOBJETAL. La obra de arte, (después), es también un producto diferente del elemento inicial (antes) pero no modifica el “status” sino que lo desarrolla, pues se trata de la “zona de seguridad” del sistema.

El arte debe salirse del arte, debe restarse de los sistemas de representación de la realidad para volverse sobre la realidad misma, no transportando sus vicios (la obra en sí y por sí misma, la creación, el consumismo, la reflexión conceptual sobre sí misma, la representación simbólica de un movimiento del espíritu) sino transfiriendo su capacidad de acción, sus normas de conducta activa frente al medio, su imaginación inagotable, sus propósitos jamás desmentidos de mejorar la vida de los hombres (196-7).64

The following is an example of Padin’s inobjectal proposal called “Gastou, Gastou”:

64 “Between one and the other [moment referring to art and language], exists an abyss. A difference of quality, not of quantity; the evidence of a leap, not a step. To carry art to that intermediate zone between both elements, the action that qualitatively modifies the “status” is the intention of the INOBJECTAL art. The work of art (after) is also a different product from the initial element (before), it does not modify the “status” but develops it, because it is a “security zone” of the system. Art must extricate itself from art, it must remove itself from reality’s systems of representation in order to return to reality itself, without carrying its shortcomings (the work of art in itself and for itself, the creation, the consumerism, the conceptual reflection about itself, the symbolic representation of a spiritual movement), but transferring its capacity for action, its rules of active conduct in front of the media, its boundless imagination, its undeniable purpose of bettering the life of humankind” [my translation].
Fig. 18. Clemente Padín. “Gastou, Gastou” no pag., published in *OVUM 10*, 1971.

Like “Inobjetal 4” “Gastou, Gastou” also illustrates three moments in time, but in this case Padín writes on the bottom left “La obra no es el nudo sino el acto que desencadena” (The work [of art] is not the knot, but the act that it triggers). Unlike in “Inobjetal 4,” he gives a definition of the work of art from the standpoint of inobjectal art, while at the same time he suggests to the viewers how to interpret it. Because of the knot, it is possible to take the action of disentangling the string, as is shown in the central drawing, where a knot is untangled by some entity on the bottom right. Once the knot is untangled in a moment in time, the action is completed and the only thing left is a string with no purpose. With “Gastou, Gastou,” Padín’s intention was to have the spectator act on the artwork by “untying” the knot. This gesture symbolized the brevity and transience of the artwork because at the instant it was performed, its informational content was depleted. Padín’s aim was to demonstrate that the work of art was the act and not the knot, and that there existed a qualitative difference between the before and after of its performance. In
other words, Padín made a piece of inobjectal art, without any artistic object, where only pure action existed.

With “Gastou, Gastou,” Padín manifested those innovative ideas that questioned the traditional relationships that were produced between the work of art and the artist, the consumer and the receptor (Einöder-Boxer 31). In *La poesia experimental*, Padín stated the following:

- La obra depende del acto del creador/consumidor.
- La obra existe en tanto es creada/consumida.
- El proyecto es hacer posible el número infinito de versiones dependiendo de la creatividad del consumidor.
- La obra es el acto\(^{65}\) (201).

The active participation of the spectator becomes an indispensable factor in Latin American avant-garde poetry, especially from the Neo-Concretism of Ferreira Gullar, and particularly the Semiotic Poem and the Poem/Process.

Padín had an interest in French Structuralism, which was indebted to Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory of language. According to de Saussure, the linguistic sign is arbitrary and consists of two elements: the signifier, which is the material representation of the sign, and the signified, understood as the concept associated with the signifier. In accordance with this theory, Padín attempted to formalize a language of action. His

\(^{65}\) The work of art depends on the act of the creator/consumer.
- The work of art exists as long as it is created/consumed.
- The purpose is to make possible an infinite number of versions depending on the creativity of the consumer.
- The work of art is the act [my translation].
concern was to transfer the core of art to the area of action going beyond a mere representation of reality. In this way, the public could choose to participate, based on its own decisions. The crux of Padín’s inobjectal art was that the public would operate directly on reality without any mechanism of representation, that is, without using artistic languages, commonly called “systems of representation.”

In the early 1970s, Padín was an active member of the Communist Party. With his critical and artistic production, his purpose was to extricate people from a passive role by offering instruments for action, in order to oppose the system. In addition to Padín’s liaison with the party, he was also an editor of a political underground pamphlet (ERRATA #2 200), which along with magazines such *Ovum* and *Los Huevos del Plata*, as Einöder-Boxer explains, they created new spaces for a culture that challenged the status quo of mass society. The intent of these diverse activities and publications was nothing less than to transform the world, and art was seen as the vehicle for such transformation.

In the first issue of *Ovum 10* in 1969, Padín stated provocatively that he wanted to “throw everything to the trash” (no pag.). That “everything” refers to traditional approaches to language and art with a renewing and radical attitude towards syntax, word use, writing styles, neologisms, etc. Hence, Padín wanted to break with old systems that “jailed” and “eroded” language, particularly the tradition of poetic language. According to Padín, language is primarily matter, first as a phonic object, and second, as

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66 Representation is the production of the meaning of concepts in our minds through language. [A] “system of representation” … consists not of individual concepts, but of different ways of organizing, clustering, arranging and classifying concepts, and of establishing complex relations between them (Hall 17).

67 For these reasons, the ground-breaking magazines of the ’60s and ’70s had a historic significance in Latin America.
a visual-phonic object. From that moment on, it is free from the burden of meaning and it becomes the instrument for poetry. For Padín “ahora las palabras han dejado de ocultar el arte, retoman su primigenia condición de actos, de objetos… La poesía es acto, no pensamiento” (6). Additionally, in his book La poesía experimental, Padín expressed: “La palabra nombra al objeto, no por requerimiento de éste sino por necesidad del hombre. De esta manera se erige en una metáfora que reemplaza al mundo exterior y se establece como un intermediario, instrumental insustituible entre la realidad y el hombre y consecuentemente, entre ellos, constituyéndose en un lenguaje particular: la lengua de las naciones y pueblos.” Padín is conveying the notion that language is the metaphor of reality, and a much-needed instrument that functions as liaison between reality and man.

In “La Nueva Poesía II,” Revista OVUM 10:4 (1970), Padín states that the linguistic sign is no longer trustworthy since it has become the instrument through which those who own the means of production can oppress humankind:

El signo sustituye el objeto y la acción. La información no podría ser trasmitida si necesitáramos tener presentes los objetos y las circunstancias de la acción sobre las cuales versa. Esa condición, se ha convertido en instrumento de opresión: la representación ha dejado de servir al hombre para servir al motor de la sociedad en la que se mueve, en nuestro caso la concentración de las fuentes productivas en pocas manos… La realidad es reemplazada por su representación lingüística y la misma representación asegura, por hábito conceptual, su predominio sobre la verdad y la

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68 “…now words no longer hide art, they retake their primordial condition as acts and objects… Poetry is act not thought” [my translation].

69 “The word names the object, not because it is forced by the object, but rather because of man’s necessity. In this way, the word becomes a metaphor that replaces the exterior world and establishes itself as the intermediary, an irreplaceable instrument between reality and man, and consequently between themselves becoming a specific language: the language of nations and people” [my translation].
The sign’s function is to substitute objects and actions in order communicate them. However, argues Padín, the sign, which is indispensable in the communication of ideas has been distorted and no longer serves mankind. Instead, it now serves groups that control society and is ever more detached from truth and life.

Consequently, for Padín, words and poetry are objects, matter, actions; and not abstract thoughts communicated through the artistic work, but the relationship between the individuum and reality. Of course, Padín does not deny the expressive function of language, through which mankind has been able to communicate for centuries. In the dialectics between form and content of the objet d’art, the avant-garde has tipped the scale towards form. To illustrate this situation, we can see the case of painting, where the tendency has been towards abstraction, leaving behind symbolisms and representations of ideas in favor of an interest in the media, which in paint are colors, form, and line. In the same way, we see in Padín the transition from a traditional poetry based on the meaning and symbolic features of the words towards an emphasis on the form, underlining the role of the material, the signifier, that becomes the foundation of the new poetry, because the signifier is an object of phonic or visual nature (Einöder-Boxer 7).

In his first manifesto of “La nueva poesía,” Padín stated that one of the fundamental differences between visual poetry and mail art is the format, that is, if visual poetry inserts itself within the format of a printed page of a book, mail art uses an alternative

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70 “The sign substitutes object and action. The information could not be transmitted if we always needed to have the objects in front of us, and the circumstances of the actions over which it talks about. This condition has become an instrument of oppression: representation no longer serves humankind, now it serves the motor of the society in which it operates, in our case the concentration of the productive sources in few hands, and the restrain of the coherent development of those sources due to the transfer of its essence… Reality is replaced with its linguistic representation and this representation guarantees, by force of conceptual habit, its preponderance over truth and life” [my translation].
format. It is circulated through postcards, envelopes or computer images. The distancing from the printed page confirms that Padín is questioning art institutions and the role of art in society. This choice of format strongly reaffirms Padín as a committed artist.

In the article “La poesía experimental en América Latina” Niteroi Argañaz wrote with respect to inobjectal poetry:

Su lenguaje será, entonces, el de los hechos, el “lenguaje de la acción” cuyo signo es el acto que, como significante, opera sobre la realidad y, como significado, opera sobre la ideología, dependiendo su grado de información de la intensidad de la acción. Esta propuesta que conoció desarrollos en varios países, fue modificada por el autor [Padín] quien — según sus propias declaraciones — percibió la falacia de un arte que fuera únicamente acción pura e incorporó otros lenguajes a sus creaciones posteriores en esta línea, como lo prueban el proyecto “El artista está al servicio de la comunidad” (San Pablo, 1975) que puede considerarse una síntesis de su estética y la performance “Por el arte y por la paz” (Berlín, 1984) en la cual se aprecia la confluencia de diversos lenguajes en el tratamiento de un aspecto de la problemática latinoamericana actual (no pag.).\footnote{"His language will thus be a language of facts, a “language of action” whose sign is the act, which as a signifier, operates on reality, and as signified, operates on ideology, depending on the degree of information on the intensity of the action. This approach, which was developed in several countries was modified by the author who — according to his own words — perceived the fallacy of an art that was merely action, and incorporated other languages into his later artistic creations of the same orientation, proofs of it were the project “The Artist Serves the Community” (Sao Paulo 1975) that can be considered a synthesis of his aesthetic; and the performance “For Art and Peace” (Berlin, 1984), in which the convergence of different languages in the handling of an aspect of present Latin American issues is being appreciated” [my translation].}

In Padín’s inobjectal art, the sign is constituted by the act where the signifier operates on reality and the signified operates on ideology. However, Padín recognized that art could not rely only on action because it needs a medium to express it, such as a canvas or a
piece of paper, and from that moment on, he began to incorporate other languages to his artistic work. In fact, Padín wrote: “Cuando comprendí la naturaleza del signo del lenguaje de la acción detuve mis investigaciones a causa de una contradicción evidente e imposible de no ver: la información necesita de un objecto para ser transmitida, ya sea una hoja o un disco, o un ambiente o una acción” (Einöder-Boxer, 33). 72

This reconciliation with the vehicle of the work of art allows him to incorporate a wide variety of languages into his work. Padín made an important contribution to experimental art by distinguishing between language and reality showing that often human beings assign more significance to words and what they represent than to reality. Einöder-Boxer notes that our world is monopolized by symbols and words and that exchange of information only has a relative value. Padín’s proposal is enriching because he aims at an expression that gets as close as possible to reality so that it may reach everyone. The difficulties that he encountered, specifically with his non-object poetry, do not diminish his original proposal, but open the path to new investigations in the realm of art. Therefore, Padín’s approach to art not only problematized the human dilemma regarding reality and perception, but also expressed it in a graphic and innovative fashion.

In his article “Progress, Science and Poetry,” Fabio Doctorovich writes that, according to Clemente Padín, experimental poetry moves beyond the manipulation of established concepts, and thanks to the conceptualization of the unknown, makes possible the development of cultural knowledge, avoiding its stagnation (91). In this regard,

72 “When I understood the nature of the sign of language of action, I put my studies on hold due to an evident contradiction which could not be overseen: information needs an object in order to be transmitted, be it a page, or a disc, or a space or an action” [my translation].
Doctorovich argues that there is a prevalent tendency among authors and critics to incorporate scientific precepts in their literary investigations. We have already seen this inclination in the case of Haroldo de Campos’s concrete poetry with its emphasis on its geometric postulates.

Padín is a “post-avant-garde” artist as he inscribes himself into artistic movements such as Process/Poem and Poetry to Make and/to Realize. These movements revised the mechanisms of reading and intended to shift the center of creation and of emission towards the reader. This view was a step towards the disappearance of the author-artist placed on a superior plane of creation, a notion that according to Doctorovich has contributed to the construction of a barrier between reader and work (92).73

Visual poetry does not limit itself to the graphic qualities of the alphabet, but encompasses other aspects as well. For example, a visual image joins the text so that both elements interrelate and allow for poetic play. Just as with a visual poem, a fragment of an advertising sign does not mean only what it says literally, but has multiple meanings due to the mix of image and word. In the article “Poesía visual latinoamericana: cofluencia de lenguajes,” Padín cites the literary critic N.N. Argañaraz’s definition of visual poetry:

La poesía visual es poesía para ser vista… Este tipo de poesía incorpora una serie de elementos (visuales) externos a los cánones de la poesía tradicional y propios de otras formas expresivas. No se limita sólo a lo verbal y en este sentido, representa una extensión de las posibilidades de la poesía tradicional. La poesía visual experimenta

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73 In his essay “The Death of the Author”, Roland Barthes argues that readers should no longer be subjected to the traditional literary practice of including the biographical context and the intentions of the author in order to interpret a text. Instead, the meaning or message of a literary work depends on the impression of the reader, thus liberating the text from its author’s authority.
en diversos niveles las relaciones entre palabras e imágenes y funda sus resultados en un contexto único. Por esta razón, su gramática (en sentido estructural) no está exclusivamente verbal ni está exclusivamente visual, sino que es intersemiótica.  

The poem on the next page, “La poesía no es suficiente” presents Padín’s proposal of art at the service of society.

Fig. 19. Clemente Padín. “La poesía no es suficiente” (Poetry is not enough).

74 “Visual poetry is poetry to be seen…This kind of poetry incorporates a series of visual elements that are external to the canons of traditional poetry, which belong to other expressive forms. It does not limit itself only to the verbal, and in this regard represents an extension of the possibilities of traditional poetry. Visual poetry experiments at different levels with the relationship between words and images, and anchors its results in a unique context. For this reason, its grammar (in a structural sense) is not exclusively verbal or exclusively visual, but it is intersemiotic” [my translation].
The title tells that art (in this case poetry) does not suffice to feed the hungry, and it is therefore the responsibility of the artist to create or initiate awareness in the readers/viewers or consumers about the basic need for survival of those who have been left out in society. The image of a hungry child with an empty bowl indicates the urgency to eradicate hunger, particularly among children who cannot fend for themselves. The child’s right hand close to his mouth suggests that he has something to eat, but it is not sufficient to sustain his body. This is a clear example of Padín’s engaged art and his vision of what art should be.

The following visual poem is an example of what Padín also calls a “semantic poem”:

Fig. 20. Clemente Padín. “Oximoron” p. 45. *La poesía es la poesía.*

The words ESABILIDAD/ESTABILIDAD are identified. The poem can be divided into two parts: on the one hand, the sentence “es abilidad” (it is skill) appears. The correct spelling of the word in Spanish is “habilidad,” however, the “h” is silent; therefore its “visual” absence does not represent a major loss in semantic terms. It depicts the ability of people to survive any kind of crisis: financial, political, social, personal. On the other hand, to the right, the letter “T” is upside down, giving the impression that it is falling
down from the stack of letters on the left. If we incorporate this letter into the column to
the left, we will read “estabilidad” (stability), but the fact that Padín removes the letter
“T” from those columns can be interpreted not only as the sign of instability, for instance
of governments in Latin America and the world, but also addresses the issue of economic
stability or instability of the world markets. From a visual standpoint, the letters are
grouped in columns of two, which can be read vertically from top down. There is a visual
dramatization of the poem in two instances: first, through the placing of the letter “T”
apart from the columns to the left (therefore segregating it), and second, through it being
upside down, as if it were falling head down into an abyss. The falling of the “T” helps
the reader/viewer understand the gravity of the loss of “stability.” This “T” can also be
understood as the Christian cross, symbol of death. In his article “El operador visual en la
poesía experimental,” Padín talks about the “visual parallelism” between the components
of a poem (graphic, iconic) and its meaning. Using Padín’s article as a point of reference,
it can be argued that the falling “T”/cross, represents the idea that if a nation does not
have an overall stability, the death of people will be an expected and tragic consequence.
Another semantic poem by Padín illustrates this denunciation on the lack of stability even
further:

Fig. 21. Clemente Padín. “dolar/dolor” (dollar/pain) n. pag. Poems to Eye 2002.
The poem can be read vertically. It starts with the word “dolar” with the “a” clearly outlined. By using one word as a reference, and focusing on only one letter in the word, Padín engages in the graphic and semantic transformation of the original word “dolar” into “dolor.” The verticality of the poem suggests a notion of hierarchy established by money, thus denouncing capitalistic ways of production. In her article “The Credit Crisis: Is the International Role of the Dollar at Stake?” Raama Vasudevan writes that the privileged role of the dollar as international money has been critical to U.S. imperialist hegemony. By 1970, the military dictatorships in Chile, Indonesia, and Argentina among other countries, along with free market regimes orchestrated by the “Chicago Boys” were strengthened by repression and supported by readily available loans from U.S. banks overflowing with oil funds. The explosion of private financial flows globally helped the United States establish and preserve its pivotal place at the center of the international financial markets and impose a “dollar standard.” Padín lived through the debt crisis in 1982, with a new wave of neoliberal reforms and financial liberalization imposed through the IMF/World Bank rescue packages. In numerous countries, the IMF and World Bank imposed “structural adjustment” policies during the crisis phase that shattered all attempts at independent economic development while engulfing their financial systems in the sphere of dollar hegemony (no pag.).

With the visual poem “dolar/dolor,” Padín denounces the injustice and violence that the powerful countries, corporations and individuals are inflicting upon those less privileged. To complete the idea, Linda S. Goldberg’s article “Is the International Role of the Dollar Changing?” states that the dollar pervades the world with its presence in the

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75 The dominance of the dollar as international money started with the Bretton Woods negotiations at the end of the Second World War.
global economy, financial and exchange markets. It not only deals with monetary exchanges but also is present in the trade of commodities from medicines to, for example, weapons (1, 2). From the second to the fourth lines of the poem, the letter “a” from “dolar” undergoes a metamorphosis to becoming an “o.” On the fifth line, the “o” for “dolor” or “pain” is clearly outlined. Unlike the second, third and fourth lines, only the first and last ones (opposites) have clearly written letters in the words. This poem is open to diverse interpretation. For example, it can signify that the dollar, as a measure of wealth determines the destiny of a person. Since on the first line the word “dolar” is clearly represented, it symbolizes the reduced community that owns the majority of wealth in the world. The second line shows the letter “a” that is not as clear as the one on the first line, but it can still be read. This letter represents groups that may not own the means of production, but can still live quite comfortably. On the third and fourth lines the “a” is blurring and is transformed into the new vowel “o.” These two lines designate populations with lesser resources. The fifth one, where the “a” has clearly become an “o” and thus the word is now “dolor,” represents the dispossessed who cannot provide for themselves and their families the minimum that a human being needs in order to stay alive.

The process of transformation in the word may also allude to social classes in Latin America during the time the poem was written. The article “Las estructuras de clase en América Latina: composición y cambios durante la época neoliberal,” by Alejandro Portes and Kelly Hoffman, identifies four social classes: the dominant class that includes capitalists, executives, and elite workers; the intermediate class that includes non-manual workers such as technicians and white-collar workers; the subordinate class that
comprises the quasi-formal proletariat (blue-collar workers and artisans/workers in commerce; and finally, the informal proletariat, which includes service workers and agricultural laborers (25). We could say that these four groups are alluded to in Padín’s poem from lines one to four. Nevertheless, the dispossessed on the fifth line are not part of a society that participates in the distribution of wealth; they are outcasts, therefore not even a transformed “a” would represent them because they have nothing. They only have “dolor,” the pain of hunger or the pain of physical illness due to a lack of resources, or the emotional pain and stress due to their life condition.

Besides Padín’s political poetry, his poems critically address poetic traditions, as is the case in the following visual poem that in this particular case deals with the subject of iconicity:

Fig. 22. Clemente Padín. “Noigandres”, p. 33. La poesía es la poesía.
It can be inferred from the title “Noigandres” that Padín is acknowledging two important influences in the area of experimental poetry, that is, Ezra Pound’s poem that used the Provençal term “Noigandres” from his Canto XX, and the Brazilian Concretists who had used it to name their artistic movement and journal. In Padín’s poem, we see a gate with two horizontal planks and a transversal one. When put together, they resemble the letter “Z,” the second letter of the name “Ezra.” If we rotate the poem clockwise, the original “Z” becomes an “N,” the fourth letter in “Pound.” If we think of the symbol of a gate, it represents an opening, a passage or entrance. In this case, it may symbolize the entrance into a new kind of poetry, the verbo-visual poetry that was heralded by Ezra Pound.

I wish now to approach what has been Padín’s most radical artistic expression. In his article “El arte correo en Latinoamérica,” Padín described mail art as an example of those artistic manifestations that are transported by postal services, which, to an extent, can modify the sense intended by the creator. The innovation in mail art is the transmission channel, which marks the sent message with its own characteristic features, and alters it with its “noise.” Here the noise is characterized as the activity that is done by the postal offices in order to process the mail, its collection, classification and distribution. Mail art is not a new artistic wave in any formal way; therefore, it does not belong to any specific “ism.” Its novelty resides in its communicational approach, that is, the relationship from

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Augusto de Campos had explained the term Noigandres was taken from Ezra Pound’s Canto XX. In the poem, the poet asks a specialist in Provençal language about the meaning of noigandres (used by the great troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel) only to be told: “Noigandres, NOlgandres! / 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!” Despite this colorful disclaimer with its phonetic spellings, the critic had, in fact, found an explanation: 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 (Perloff 65).
person to person through the postal service. This communication manifests itself as revolutionary vis-à-vis the false communication or monologues of mass media such as radio, television, cinema, etc. If we add the anti-commercial and anti-consumerist features that it had from its beginning, mail art can be characterized as a disruptive artistic phenomenon since, according to Padín, the works cannot be returned to the sender or commercialized, though they can be donated to the institutions that sponsor them.

The beginnings of this artistic communication can be found in Futurism and Dadaism, with Marcel Duchamp being the most important predecessor. In fact, mail art does not only consist of the act of sending a piece of work through the postal service, but also it refers to the use of this service in order to establish non-hierarchical communication networks among mail art artists, a phenomenon that is also seen in net art, one of mail art’s most recent successors. In “El arte correo en Latinoamérica,” Padín says that the instigators of mail art were members of the neo-dadaist movement “Fluxus” from the early 1960s (George Maciunas, Dick Higgins, Ben Vautier, Ray Johnson, etc.). Critics have come to accept that mail art started as a movement of a group of artists organized by Ray Johnson in 1962 in the New York Correspondence School of Art. Since then, it has kept growing and expanding throughout the world. Nowadays there are thousands of followers (Blom no pag.).

In Latin America, the first mail art artists were Porter and Luis Camnitzer from Argentina, Pedro Lyra from Brazil and Clemente Padín, who in 1969 published an edition of creative postcards in *OVUM 10*, of which the following is an example:
The Brazilian Pedro Lyra, was another important contributor, who also published a manifesto about mail art in 1970. There was an intense exchange among Latin-American artists in alternative magazines. In the 1970’s, artists used mail art frequently as a tool to convey their social criticism. One of their reasons to use mail art was their frustration with the difficult access to the media and mass communication structures due to their monopolization. This situation, continues Padín, contributed to the creation of alternative

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77 Some mail art magazines that disseminated mail art in Latin America were: W. C., Diagonal cero, Hexágono, and Hohe, Hoja Hoy in Argentina; La pata de palo, and Margen in Brazil; Ediciones mimbre in Chile; Post arte, and Marco in Mexico; and Ovum 10 in Uruguay.
The creativity of mail art artists is evidenced by their practice of sending postal works using three different ways to communicate: The first method consists of sending postcards with reproductions of their literary and/or plastic work. This method does not take into account the modifications that occur during their transport. The second method involves sending postcards, and aims at including possible modifications produced during the delivery, including the “noise of the channel” that contributes to the shaping of the work and which is open to elements of chance. Finally, the third method entails sending postcards that have per se no meaning but become meaningful only through the “noise of the channel.”

The first method of sending mail art includes reproductions of works, classical or modern, announcements of exhibitions, signs, poems, drawings, etc. on postcards, in which the informational-aesthetic factor is assembled by the sender and not produced by the medium. The second method includes varied forms and tendencies according to the emphasis of the mail art artists. Among the many criteria, Padín describes the following: first, the artist can add elements pertaining to the postal service such as real stamps, or those apocryphally created by the artists, which are added to the official ones. Next, the artist can add rubber stamps that they have created, in irrelevant roles. Another criteria according to Padín is to create networks in which “A” sends to “B,” “B” to “C,” “C” sends to “N” and “N” hands back to “A.” Next, the artist sends postcards as pieces of a puzzle that the recipient must assemble. Lastly, the sender requests an artistic collaboration from the recipient in order to complete the postcard. The third method of sending mail art is less abundant but more relevant because it includes works of art that
are highly unpredictable and therefore generate information that is more aesthetic. For instance, the artist can send postcards in which the work of art is combined with official stamps placed either at the front or on the back of it. In addition, the artist can send postal items with two addresses, leaving the mail carrier to decide to which address to deliver them. Alternatively, the artist can send postal items with false addresses and back to sender notices, or addressed to dead artists or to oneself with the same or different address.

For Padín, in order for a work to be an example of mail art, it must be sent through the postal service, and all the works received, regardless of the subject, must be fully exhibited, without any selection. In the case of a mail art exhibition, for example, the jury must not impose any restrictions regarding the size, technique, artistic movement; and the addressees must write an acknowledgment of receipt sending a list of all the participants or catalogs with addresses. This artistic method was derived from conceptualism, an artistic movement that rebelled against commercial art. In their article “Conceptual Art: Transformation of Natural and of Cultural Environments,” William Vazan and Paul Meyer described conceptual art as concerned with artistic ideas or concepts, rather than with media or techniques (205). For Joseph Kosuth, conceptual art is such because it is based on an inquiry into the nature of art (no pag.). Therefore, as stated in “Web Guide’s Movements in Modern Art” (no pag.), conceptual artists sought to avoid the “artist’s touch” by creating works that have little or no physical presence that remains after the act. A performance piece exists physically while it is being performed, but once the performance is over, there is no remainder, such as a picture to hang on the wall.

Although there might be documentation of a piece performed, such as photographs, this
documentation is not the work of art itself.

Padín explains how in mail art the artists emphasize the idea or project over the artistic artifact; therefore, the attention is not placed on how reality is represented. Mail art wants to demystify the mechanisms of creation as metalanguage, while destroying the pathos, aura, and impression of mystery with which the “miracle of art” has been traditionally surrounded. It aims at returning to society a genuine instrument of connection and not merchandise. During dictatorships, mail art can be a tool to denounce injustice, and explain the situation to international audiences through the massive circulation of postal stamps. For instance, mail art artists abroad show their solidarity by using and circulating stamps created by mail art artists who must keep an artistic and political low profile while living through a dictatorship. These stamps denounce the violation of human rights such as the bloody repressions that are carried out through torture, incarcerations, and the disappearance of people. Examples of a regime’s repressive violence against mail art are the closure of “II Exposição de Arte Postal” organized by Paulo Bruscky and Daniel Santiago in Recife in 1976 by the Brazilian military, the deportation of Guillermo Deisler after Pinochet’s coup, and Padín’s own incarceration, among many others. The following is a set of apocryphal stamps by Padín representing the violence executed during the dictatorship of Juan María Bordaberry (1973-1976), who dissolved parliament, social organizations and left-wing parties, and suppressed civil liberties.
Each of the stamps shown above represents different stages of the violent process implemented by the military government. The first one on the top left illustrates the establishment of the military regime. The second one on the top right suggests the putting into action the violence by the military regime, as we can see the drawings of explosions due to bombings and shootings. The third one to the bottom left shows a swastika that in the western culture represents Hitler’s fascist regime. Because Bordaberry’s dictatorship was of the extreme right, the author represents it with a swastika. The fourth stamp to the bottom right refers to the large number of people who had been tortured and had disappeared; the word “AY” displays the pain suffered by those being tortured and murdered. This pain is endured in the darkness, that is, the dictatorship is keeping this activity secret. Due to the publication of these apocryphal stamps, Padín was incarcerated in August 1977. He insists that mail art emphasizes the importance of communication instead of a focus on commercial products deriving from the laws of the market. Mail art, he continues, is not produced to be consumed, but rather it is a product of
communication. For this reason, he started to create less visual poetry, while increasing his production of mail art, because for him it was the best vehicle to express his intellectual and political positions. For Padín the aesthetic value of mail art resides in the communicative efficacy of the ideas to be transmitted. This fact, however, does not prevent mail artists from sometimes producing images and works to please critics. In this respect, the following quotation from Padín, “The Options of Mail Art,” is helpful:

The ideological mechanisms of cultural control thrive in societies that favor a hegemonic system. No wonder that Mail Art, intended as a full expression of humanity, is distorted to the point that it can only be spoken of as a historical or autonomous discourse, like an entity floating in space. Mail Art is taken out of the world and is alienated from the social reality that gave rise to it. It is necessary that we recover Mail Art from these tendencies and return it to its communicative efficacy. It is impossible to reduce artists to the political or the social; yet artists can only reduce reality by pretending that their work is not involved in the political and social (206).

Padín laments the progressive weakening of mail art as a disruptive and defiant artistic expression, since, according to him, it no longer accomplishes its original intention of denouncing social or political issues. Nonetheless, the poet believes in the necessity of recovering mail art’s original function, which can only happen if artists are willing to voice social or political concerns.

This chapter has focused on Padín’s visual poetry and mail art and his establishing
and performing of his “arte inobjetal.” His commitment to inobjectal art took him a step further, and in 1987, he started to carry out performances, or what he calls “the art of action.” Since performances do not happen on a piece of paper, but in the real world, the main purpose of Padín’s work is to keep promoting in the viewers/participants a social conscience through the knowledge of events that indicate the violation of human rights, or the abuse of power (Zaliasnik Schlkryt no pag.). Through these performances, Padín shows yet again that for him art can be and must be political. The following performance is an example of this point of view, as for him art must be of service to humanity:

Fig. 25. “Punto final” (The End) at Teatro Solís’ foyer, Montevideo Uruguay, Sept 23rd 2005.

This performance in which the artist and the spectators remain silent, denounces the status of the “desaparecidos,” victims of the brutality of the military regimes in Uruguay, Chile and Argentina. The video shows Padín’s performance, in which, using his body as signifier, he represents the process of violence, from freedom to persecution to assassination. Next, in front of an image of Jesus, the artist creates the silhouette of a dead man on the floor using petals of white flowers that symbolize the innocence of those
unjustly killed. Then, Padín covers his head with a black bag and for a few minutes knocks two stones against each other symbolizing the torture endured by the “desaparecidos,” an experience that Padín himself had to suffer in 1977. Next, the artist calls a spectator to assist him in a series of tasks. Eventually all the spectators participate in the performance by attaching on Padín’s black sweater, a symbol of death, the pictures of the Uruguayan “desaparecidos.” At one moment, an older woman, who evidently suffered the experience of having a “desaparecido” in her family, embraces Padín while weeping. Then, red carnations are distributed among the spectators who approach the silhouette of the man on the floor and form a circle around it. Next, they toss the flowers on the silhouette like during a funeral where people toss flowers on top of the casket. Finally they clap while they sing a song about the tragic event. In this performance, the participants did not need to communicate verbally, since they were aware of the story Padín was communicating. He was retelling it, thus remembering, which is a primordial humanitarian task, since remembrance helps to avoid mistakes of the past in the future. The title of the performance, “Punto final” (End of story), is a homage of hope to those who suffered and died under tragic circumstances, and the promise that the fatal turn in history will not be repeated.

The performance “Punto final” is another example of the importance of the signifier for Padín, although the medium in this case is the human body through the materiality of gestures and not the word. Words and poetry are the material, the object; they are communicated through the work of art/poem that helps establish the relationship between the individual and reality. The importance of materiality in the work of art will also be investigated in the next chapter with the work of the Catalonian Joan Brossa.
In conclusion, this chapter aimed at observing Clemente Padín’s work and its evolution through a series of artistic mediums, with a focus on his visual poetry and mail art. The need to express himself artistically and politically is grounded in his personal experience as a “desaparecido.” This has urged him, and still urges him, to engage in protests against any forms of violence. For him, art is the most compelling vehicle to denounce injustice. His pursuit to create art that could be closest to reality drove him to conceptualize his “inobjectal art,” as opposed to art conventionally viewed as escapism from reality. Padín proposed an art of action, in which once the action has been completed, there is no more purpose for the work of art. When inobjectal art became too radical, Pain explored visual poetry as a means to communicate more directly the visual poetry devoted to the service of society.

Padín’s interest in mail art stems from the urge to articulate socio-political concerns while communicating with other artists, particularly during a time when authoritarian regimes control mass media. Postal services were and still are the vehicles for the circulation of mail art that allow for feedback and dialog among participants in a non-hierarchical manner. With the advent of the Internet, the medium is no longer limited to postal services or snail-mail, and has evolved in email art or net art. Since 1987, Padín has been performing, based on the principles of his “inobjectal art.” In this art form, he uses his body as signifier in order to provoke a social conscience in the viewers/participants. The knowledge and remembrance of events that deal with the violation of human rights and abuse of power, communicated through a committed art, helps to avoid history repeating itself.
CHAPTER 4

JOAN BROSSA: THE MATERIAL WORD. VISUAL POETRY AND OBJECT POEMS

La poesia visual no és dibuix, ni pintura, és un servei a la comunicació. 79
Joan Brossa (joanbrossa.org n. pag.)

This chapter will explore two of the several artistic expressions of Joan Brossa (Barcelona 1919-1998), that is, his visual and object poetry. The inspiration to write about Brossa arises from the fact that like Padín, Tablada, and de Campos, his visual poetry also involves an investigation of how words play on paper. The second reason is his unique contribution to the worlds of art and literature through his object and visual poems, the former being more distinctive by its nature. Brossa is known to have blurred the boundaries between poetry and other artistic expressions. Within the poetic worlds of Catalonia and Europe during the second half of the twentieth century, he is considered a unique artist, a poet with a singular and vast body of work. All of his poems have been produced in Catalan. In the tradition of the historic avant-garde, he enlarged his poetic scope towards diverse spheres such as theatre, the fine arts and film. Brossa said:

“Siempre digo que no soy “vanguardista.” Soy de mi tiempo. Lo que pasa es que entre tanto “retroguardista” ser de tu tiempo es ser “vanguardista” (Brossa Añafíl 2 118). 80 In this quote, he is not only alluding to the artists and the artistic scene trapped in the constraints imposed by censorship during Franco’s dictatorship, but also to those artists whose main motivation is to sell their art, thus submitting to the preferences of buyers, art

79 “Visual poetry is not a drawing or a painting. It is community service” [my translation].
80 “I always assert that I am not a “vanguardist.” I belong to my time. What happens is that among so many “retroguardists,” being modern is being a “vanguardist”” [my translation].

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institutions and art critics. In his 1985 speech at the “Jocs Florals” in Barcelona he stated:

Una manera de vèncer la tradició és continuar-la, no de repetir-la; aquest criteri és el que ajunta les posicions avantguardistes. Perquè una reiterada interpretació racional dels fet encotilla la coneixença de la realitat. L’activitat creadora necessita renovació i, les dimensions d’una extensió, ens les poden fornir unes eines que el temps ens posa a les mans i que esdevenen tot un repte (Joan Brossa *La piedra abierta* 43).

He never differentiated between the variety of artistic expressions that he was engaged with, and turned away from art that he deemed trendy (Bordons ed. *A partir del silenci* 9). As “poiesis” entails creation and action, the profession of poet was natural for Brossa. He employed the tools accessible in his time, writes Glòria Bordons, in order to always express and create. “Verse” is “furrow” in Latin; it also means to “turn” and “change.” This accounts Brossa’s art (“El universo heterodoxo de Joan Brossa: las seis manos del destino” 1-2). He was an outsider, living on the edge of literary and artistic groups, and always opposed that which supported governmental power, capital, church, militarism, and any other form of authority.

For similar reasons that inspired them to use the medium of poetry to serve society, both Brossa and Padín embraced Marxism, believing that their artistic work should be a contribution in the dissemination of principles that promoted social justice and freedom. They share some common biographical experiences such as the presence of a dictatorship in their nations, which lasted around 12 years in Uruguay and 40 years in Spain. Both

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81 “One way to conquer tradition is to live with it rather than to repeat it; this criterion unifies avant-garde positions. As a repetitively logical interpretation limits understanding of reality, creativity calls for overhaul, and it is time that provides tools that can grant us an extension, thereby changing everything into a challenge” [my translation].
poets were aware of the need to extend poetry beyond the book, the white page and the picture frame. Therefore, the use of tridimensional media such as Padín’s body in the case of his performances, and object poems and installations in the case of Brossa, allows them to bring concepts closer to the reality we inhabit.

Through his extensive poetic work, explains Manuel Guerrero, Brossa muses on topics such as the mystery of life, the struggle against injustice, the mutual self-respect of humans, and the significance of fate (La piedra abierta 21). Still, his most significant theme was to reflect on poetry and language. He became increasingly aware of the transformation from a literary culture, of a society based on books, to a visual culture fascinated with audiovisual shows and virtual simulacra (21). Although Brossa wrote 300 theatre plays and over 80 literary texts, Alberto Lladó explains in “Joan Brossa, la poesía más allá del papel” that recognition for his artistic work came late (n. pag.). He became known in the 1980s through his visual poetry and his art work. In 1986, Brossa became a public man in great demand. Local authorities and architects commissioned works to the Catalan poet (n. pag.). During his mature years, he wrote books like Furgó de cua (Caboose, 1991) Suite tràmpol o el compte enrere (Trance Suite or the Countdown, 1992) or Passat festes (After the Holidays, 1995). Theses books were written by a tired Brossa, who had distanced himself from his earlier revolutionary optimism, disillusioned with the course that his country had taken, conscious of his physical decay, and rather pessimistic about the human species (Guerrero 20-21).

Brossa defined himself as a poet and not as a visual artist, and unlike many other artists, he did not have an academic formation. His work is subversive, radical and shocking. However, the international success of his visual poems and his object poems
has turned Brossa into one of the most admired artists in the last decades. During the last years of his life, he received a widespread public recognition as the author not only of visual poems and object poems, but also as the author of an innovative and rigorous poetic work, in addition to theater plays that he called “scenic poetry” (Manuel Guerrero La piedra abierta 13).

Brossa was born into an artisan family (menestral). His father was an engraver with deep Catalan convictions as evidenced by his personal library. But his library was not limited to works by Catalan artists; there were also books that represented Brossa’s father’s adherence to Republican ideals. It is pertinent to mention that during Primo de Rivera’s dictatorship, Catalans ended all efforts to come to an understanding with the Spanish crown. In his book, Añafil 2, Brossa explains that his father died before the Civil War, but he was certain that his relationship with him would have been a good one. On the other hand, his mother, a zarzuela singer, and her family, represented all the things Brossa and his father fought against. As the years passed, Brossa became estranged from his mother and her family. He said: “los buenos amigos han sido mi verdadera familia. Además, no creo en los vínculos de sangre; en el mundo de las relaciones todo son grados de amistad” (81).82 Forced by his mother and her family, Brossa studied commerce in order to become a bank’s employee like one of his uncles, whose zeal to protect German assets was rewarded with the Third Reich Iron Cross. Later on, that Iron Cross would be used by Brossa to create an imprecatory object poem that will be analyzed in this chapter.

Brossa started to feel the need to write during his participation in the Spanish Civil War. Enlisted by the República at 17 years of age, his first piece of work was the

82 “My good friends have been my real family. Besides, I do not believe in blood ties. In the world of personal relationships there are different degrees of friendship” [my translation].
description of a skirmish, which, under his captain’s orders, was published in his regiment’s bulletin. Brossa was hurt in the Lérida front and evacuated to Barcelona where he was appointed to auxiliary services. After the Republica’s defeat, he was drafted and sent to Salamanca in order to comply with his conscription as a member of the Franco army. Here, the environment was pervasive with drunkenness and prostitution. Lacking political consciousness, young Brossa wandered purposelessly. However, soon he would come across the works of Carl Gustav Jung and Sigmund Freud, and the book Chung-Kuei, domador de demonios (Chung-Kuai, Demon Tamer), a book that he would treasure all his life. Influenced by the study of the subconscious mind, he started to write hypnagogic images, that is, short poems composed of visual and auditory images drawn from his subconscious mind (Bordons 9). In his article “Joan Brossa y los juegos intermediales,” Xavier Rabassó explains that like Buñuel and Dalí, Brossa’s experimentations with “hypnagogy” helped him with his improvisation and automatic writing that would lead him to the cross-disciplinary study of consciousness towards sensory experiences, predominantly visual (101). The following is an example of a “hypnagogic” poem composed in 1940 (Pont 305):

Dels lleus enraonaments a les bengales
Polifonia d’extàtic en el vaivé de les maromes
Els turments sorgeixen impetuosos

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83 Chung-Kuei (Shouki in Japanese) was a Chinese deity who protected Tang-era Emperor Xuanzong from malevolent demons. According to the legend, Shouki appeared to the sick emperor in a dream and subdued the demons that were causing his sickness. In gratitude, the emperor awarded Shouki the title of “Doctor of Zhongnanshan.” Zhongnanshan is the legendary birthplace of Chinese Taoism. It is here that Lao-Tse gave classes and wrote the Tao Te Ching (Japanese Architecture and Art Net User System n. pag.)

84 William Buhlman explains that a state of consciousness similar to a twilight between sleep and full awareness is often referred to as the hypnagogic state. This is a brief but conscious dreamlike state that occurs as we drift off to sleep. Creative artists and inventors have used the hypnagogic state to further their work (Adventures Beyond the Body: How to Experience Out-of-Body Travel 160).
Dins la seva inclinació zigzaguejant
Ballarines pels reguerots.\textsuperscript{85}

As in a dream, the elements in these poems are incongruent. The conversation, a motionless activity in the first line, is suddenly transformed into the noise and burst of the dynamic light of flares. In the second line, the words “Polifonia” and “vaivé” also suggest noise and movement that can be associated with circus performances. The rest of the poem also implies movement. The third line, in the middle of the poem, suggests that in the process of the dream, which now becomes a nightmare, something ominous is happening: the dreamer cannot control his feelings of intense distress. Usually, the dreamer wakes up in order to end a nightmare, but in this case, the hypnagogic training allows the poetic voice to bypass such a nightmare by initiating a harmless dream, notwithstanding the strange environment in which he sees ballerinas twirling around inside dirt furrows, as seen in the fourth and fifth lines.

The period from 1943 to 1949 is characterized by Brossa’s interest in neo-surrealism. This was a decisive time in his development as an artist. He met Joan Miró, who helped him get in touch with the international avant-garde. Of him he said:

Joan Miró es seguramente el personaje más importante que he tenido la suerte de conocer. Tratar con él era una fiesta. Interiormente Miró vivía en beauté, como quería Gauguin. Su pintura me producía el efecto de un estimulante. Cataluña es la

\textsuperscript{85} From light conversations to flares ecstatic polyphony in the swinging ropes tempestuous torments emerge in their zigzagging tilt ballerinas by the furrows [my translation].
Also, during this period, he received from Josep Vicenç Foix, considered the most important Catalan poet of the avant-garde, the advice to write traditional forms of poetry like sonnets, while keeping his aesthetic views. One of his first sonnets, “Camí fressat. Postguerra” (Beaten Road. Postwar) describes the trauma and horrors of the Spanish Civil War:

Veires de dol, sovint. L’ós de Madrid
Gruny rera l’arbre. Quin cruel sistema
De repartir els estels aquesta nit!
Tots els carrers de barriada extrema

S’amguen entre el boscagte sorgit
De poble endins, arran mateix del tema
Que a les timbales fondes he sentit
O m’he promès sentir si el mon es crema

En tal dissort fent signes d’hospital.
Combat la llum fins al daer fanal.
Bandera i música de debades. Rasco les

86 “Joan Miró is surely the most important figure that I had the good fortune to meet. Being with him was like a celebration. From the inside, he lived en beauté, as Gauguin wished. His paintings had for me the effect of a stimulant. Catalonia is the land of my roots. And this is important, as it was important for Joan as well” [my translation].
Caixes mandoses; pesa haver perdut.
Només la lluna adopta una actitud
De Bagdad sobre els replans de les bascules (Antologia de poemes de revolta 9).87

The sonnet addresses the grief the poetic voice is experiencing vis-à-vis the tragic events of the Spanish Civil War in which the Republican forces were defeated by Franco’s army, thus assassinating countless Catalanians. The symbol for Madrid is a bear leaning against an arbutus tree. However, since Madrid is Franco’s headquarters, the poetic voice now sees instead a menacing bear growling. The bombardments happen at night, and the lights emitted by the bombs’ gunpowder resemble vicious stars. Because of the destruction and the racket of bombs, the streets of the neighborhood bear a resemblance to a thicket. The poetic voice seems to be hiding in a safe place, far from the commotion and violence of the bombardments; however, he cannot remove himself from the horrific noises of violence that make him believe that the world is on fire. The bombs have destroyed even the last lamppost in the neighborhood. The poetic voice seems to suggest

87 Mourning glasses. Madrid’s Bear
Growls at the tree. What a cruel system
Of distributing stars tonight!
All the streets of the furthest neighborhood

Hide through the thicket that emerges
From the depths of town, to the limit of the theme
That in the deepest drums I have heard
Or I swore to have heard if the world is burning

In such drama with hospital signs.
The light fights up to the very last lamppost.
Useless flag and music. I scratch the

Lazy boxes; it is heartbreaking to have lost.
Only the moon assumes a resemblance
Of Bagdad over the weighing machine landings [my translation].
that his hiding place is among produce boxes crowded together in a market warehouse. As the battle progresses, he realizes that the fight for the cause he and his comrades believed in is lost. Finally, looking at the sky, he sees the moon shining, detached from the bloody events, reflected on the metallic weighing machine landing.

Pere Gimferrer acknowledges that it seems paradoxical that an avant-garde poet, heir to surrealism, has centered his work, on the one side, on the working of classical verses such as sonnets, sextines and Sapphic odes, and on the other on the recovery of the speech and lifestyles of artisans, whose activity was opposed to the moral of surrealism and Marxism. In Catalonia the Republican defeat in the Spanish Civil War brought the official eradication of the Catalan language from public places in order to obliterate the Catalan way of life, its legitimacy and freedom. To isolate fragments of conversations was something that was already done by Guillaume Apollinaire, and along with his calligrams, this poet became another important influence on Brossa, who adopted a language that was both concise and colloquial. At the same time, as expressed above, Brossa’s scope was to revitalize classic verses. These influences commingled in Brossa, whose words expanded towards a third spatial dimension; his scenic poetry that would eventually lead towards his visual and object poetry. Other important influences were Salvat-Papassait and Junoy, both Catalan vanguard writers, and Mallarmé.

As a mature artist, Brossa acknowledged the influence of Rimbaud and Mallarmé in his work. Gimferrer praises Brossa’s work by saying that he assimilated and incorporated

88 The world of artisan work (menestrales) is a differentiated cultural cosmos based on the accessibility to productive independence, that is, shop ownership. A large number of artisans in Barcelona instead of becoming the wage-earning workforce in factories, they established their own autonomous businesses (Juan José Romero De agremiados a menestrales. Los artesanos barceloneses de 1814 a 1869 n. pag.). Since a menestral owns his/her means of production, and avoids becoming waged workforce, he/she cannot align with Marxism.
to the very end the legacy and challenge of avant-garde art (Gimferrer 12). According to Pilar Parcerisas, in her article “Juan Brossa. Poesía a ras de tierra,” Brossa’s visual poetry begins at the same time as his literary poetry: in 1941. It is a time of creative and intellectual regression imposed by the Franco system. The only avant-garde strongholds available to Spanish society were those from before the Civil War (33).

In 1946, thanks to his friendship with Joan Ponç and Arnau Puig among others, Brossa started his publishing experience with *Algol* (the name Arab astrologists give to the devil). In it, Brossa included “La presència forta,” the article-manifesto that not only denounced the rigid atmosphere in Spain, but also encouraged insurgency. Only one issue of *Algol* was published, but it was the springboard that would launch a second publication, *Dau al Set*, in 1948. The collaborators at *Dau al Set* were Catalan artists and intellectuals such as Ponç, Puig, Antoni Tàpies, J. J. Tharrats, Modest Cuixart and Juan Eduardo Cirlot. The publication followed Breton’s vision on surrealism (Joan-Elies Adell). The magazine was published until 1951 when the group disbanded (Guerrero 17).

The period from 1950 to 1960 was characterized by Brossa’s political commitment and the continuation of his work with colloquial language. In 1950, he met the poet João Cabral de Melo, Brazilian consul to Barcelona. Cabral de Melo played an important role in Brossa’s affiliation with Marxism, and his interest in recovering and isolating everyday speech that he treated as “object trouvé.” The visual poem “Oda a Marx,” indicates Brossa’s political affiliation by dedicating the poem to the founder of Marxism:
This poem utilizes the image of sea waves crashing against each other, hence suggesting the revolutionary effect that Marxism has on individuals, and also on modern societies. The combination of the sea with the letter “X” helps the reader/viewer put these two elements together and come up with the word “Marx.” By combining an image (the sea waves) with the letter “X,” Brossa has created an intersemiotic relationship between an image and a letter of the alphabet that resulted in the word “Marx.” Both image and letter share the representational character of the visual poem, by becoming a hybrid signifier.

In the book, *Joan Brossa: les sabates són més que un pedestal*, Isidre Vallès I Rovira writes that besides the influence of surrealism, another artistic movement that would attract Brossa’s attention was Dadaism with its heavy criticism and corrosive denouncement of any kind of social conventionalism, its opposition to any established
power along with its constant attack on authoritarian rule. However, Brossa rejected the Dadaist use of the absurd as a creative instrument since he believed that the absurd can never be the point of departure to any work of art. Other influences were conceptual art, abstract art, and pop art, which, due to their connections with mass media and to the world of objects of daily use, found an echo in Brossian poetics. With respect to conceptual art, Brossa came to know the work of Marcel Duchamp only after he incorporated concepts and attitudes considered Duchampian in his poetry (112). Duchamp’s artistic revolution had an enormous repercussion in art. In “Paragraphs of Conceptual Art,” Sol LeWitt wrote: “In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (n. pag.). The three mental components in Brossa’s creative process and methodology are the idea, imagination, and consciousness. The idea is the fundamental starting point after having gone through the filter of consciousness and having used the resources of imagination, which is made concrete though the written language or the image. According to Duchamp, the idea is enough and does not need to be materialized. In this respect, Brossa thinks that a poem is an idea that can be expressed with or without words, but it must be materialized with the help of some mediums of expression, as in the case of the object poem, “Bombeta,” in which the eruption of the idea is integrated to the rapid emission of the light rays:
Therefore, according to Brossa, the idea without its poetic materialization would remain in a state of non-object impossible to evaluate.

Thanks to the avant-garde movements, especially Dadaism and Surrealism, and to a lesser degree conceptual art as conceived by Marcel Duchamp, chance acquired a progressive importance as trigger and model for Brossa’s creative activity. In this respect he wrote: “L’atzar és més important del que la gent tendeix a pensar. Jo funcion per una mena de raó inspirada que ha fet que les coses sorgissin a mesura que les anava necessitant. Jo ho diuen els hindús: si realment necessites una cosa, la trobarás” (Vallés y Rovira 113). Consequently, chance is the decisive and determinative instance of the “object trouvé,” but its basic foundation does not reside in its random circumstance that motivates the find, but in the prior intention of looking for, or to be constantly on the look

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89 “Chance is more important that people tend to think. I function with a kind of inspired reasoning that makes things emerge as needed. The Indians say: if you really need something, you will find it” [my translation].
out because when the opportunity arises, the artist can relate it with something that has been gestating inside his/her creative being. “Nowadays, everything is full of possibilities for the poet, but it is he who ultimately must make these possibilities compelling,” said Brossa (Rovira 113). Thus, the free impulse emanating from the interior of the human being configures and assembles the creative activity with a circumstantial finding of events, people, objects, or external situations that instigate the creative flow (Rovira 114).

Continuing with the theme of creativity, Brossa’s artistic methodology was also deeply influenced by Japanese Zen. Along with Surrealism, Zen proved to be a useful platform for his creative undertaking. Zen allowed Brossa to discover the implicit wealth of the cosmic sphere helping him to broaden his creative horizon, while at the same time bringing together crucial aspects of Brossa’s personality and work. According to Zen’s contemplative and active aesthetics, the universe influences the social sphere in which the harmony principle takes into great consideration the integration of the individual and society into the cosmic totality. Zen stimulates the identity of the poet and his poetry with his surroundings, and also strengthens the disposition and addition of the effects obtained with the application of the surrealist method. Zen also contributed to liberate the human interior, to reconcile structure and spontaneity, sociability and individuality (Vallès I Rovira 116). Zen aesthetics and philosophy not only contributed a methodological dimension of openness, but they also enabled Brossa to discover the value of social and/or everyday poetry.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Zen is a philosophy that does not believe in the importance of words in scriptures and religious texts, since words are always open to interpretation, and can lead to disputes. Zen emphasizes the need of developing an understanding of one’s own self and the universe, since the self and the rest of the universe are not separate entities (V. Kumar “The Influence of Zen Buddhism on the Culture of Japan” n. pag.). The understanding of this cosmic interconnection, along with Marxism, helped Brossa to develop his everyday poetry.
In 1950, Brossa started developing his social and/or everyday poetry, aiming at achieving full identification of the language with the existential aspects of the human being. Brossa had introduced what he termed the fourth dimension to poetry either through movement, or visual artistic aspects, or through forces that are generated from the individual, or as a result of cosmic discovery. The poet wanted to identify poetry with social reality. Brossa’s methodology applied to his everyday poetry brings to the front the evolution carried out in surrealist forms, and ideas derived from Zen. It included a progressive social principle that wanted, as Cabral de Melo would say, to bring art, in this case poetry, back to topics pertaining to humanity. In order to do so, Brossa had to get rid of his subjective state of mind, and reach an essentiality and objectivity that would allow him to incorporate a vital rhythm, a human rhythm to poetry (Vallés y Rovira 118-119). The following is a poem that illustrates Brossa’s *poesia quotidiana* (everyday poetry), also called *antipoesia* (antipoetry), included in his book *Em va fer Joan Brossa*, published in 1951 with an introduction by Cabral de Melo:

Un home esternuda.
Passa un cotxe.
Un botiguer tira la porta de ferro avall.
Passa una dona amb una garrafa plena d’aigua.
M’en vaig a dormir.
Això es tot. (Brossa *La piedra abierta* 118)

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91 A man sneezes.
A car passes by.
A shopkeeper lowers the metallic shutters.
A woman passes by with a carafe full of water.
I am going to bed.
That is all [my translation].
This poem of six lines is an example of Brossa’s *poesía quotidiana*. From the first to the fourth lines, the poetic voice witnesses and elists everyday activities performed by different people. Their randomness and the apparent lack of connection among them alludes to the element of chance inherent in Brossa’s work. Since there is no description that implies opinion or emotion from the part of the poetic voice, the poem reminds us of a Zen-based *haiku*, which refers to events that happen at a specific moment in time. In the fifth line, and without explaining why, the poetic voice states that he will go to bed. The sixth line says “Aixó es tot,” that is the conclusion of the account. There is no need for any explanation on why the actions in the poem are performed, or what are the feelings and thoughts involved in the activities depicted. The poetic voice is simply stating events and actions that happen in his surroundings. The reader may decide that there is no need to ponder over the poem. However, the actions described, provide information not only about a particular moment and place in time, but also about the poetic voice that is observing the actions. The poetic voice provides clues that help the reader infer that the actions are happening late at night, probably in his neighborhood, given the mention of one last car cruising the street, a shopkeeper lowering his store blinds, and that the poetic voice, witness to the events listed in the poem, is ready to go to sleep. The bearing of the poem relies on its universality, and since the actions mentioned in the poem can happen in any place, they expand their reach to the entire human community.

Even though Brossa continued writing sonnets, explains Albert Lladó, the period from 1950 to 1960 is characterized by his everyday poetry, an increased political commitment, and a defense of his Catalan homeland that was being coerced by the Franco regime. Still a relatively little-known artist, the poet no longer writes and talks
about the subconscious mind, since now he has become obsessed with the terrible and immediate reality that surrounds him (n. pag.). The following is one of Brossa’s first visual poems composed in 1950:

![Poema visual 1950](image)

Fig. 28. “Pardal” Poema visual 1950.92

A list with the name of 9 birds written vertically appears on a red background. The second to last, the “pardal” (sparrow) has been scratched off the list. There is no explanation why the poetic voice compiled a list of bird names, and why the word

92 magpie
quail
owl
blackbird
greenfinch
linnet
hoopoe
sparrow
vulture [my translation].
“pardal” was erased. The poetic voice offers no clue; therefore the interpretation must proceed completely from the reader, who must use a cultural referent in order to find meaning to the poem. One possible interpretation might be that among the birds listed, the one that has had a long relationship with humans is the sparrow. According to Rob Dunn, once the house sparrows began to live among humans, they spread to Europe with the spread of agriculture (n. pag.). Therefore, for Brossa, unlike the other birds who thrive in the wild, free and autonomous avoiding a connection with humans, the sparrow has followed humans, is trapped among them, lives around human dwellings and also in cages, thus it is under erasure because it has lost its ability to live independently from humans. It is possible to understand this visual poem as a metaphor of the situation Cataluña had to endure during Franco’s regime. The article “El intento de lingüicidio de la dictadura franquista” by the Generalitat de Catalunya explains that when Franco’s troops entered Catalan territory on April 5th of 1938, they enacted a law created by Franco’s government that cancelled the statute of autonomy of Catalonia, banning the Catalan language, which until then was the official language there along with Castilian, and removing it from Catalonia’s Parliament, schools and universities. The public use of Catalan language was forbidden, and limited only to family life. It was confined to a status of diglossia, in which Castilian was predominant over Catalan and the use od Catalan limited. Many consequences of the prohibitions and linguistic prosecutions of the Spanish dictatorship still remain (n. pag.). A language is a fundamental element of the identity and cultural cohesion of a people, and when it is taken away, people feel violated since they have lost the freedom to express themselves in their mother tongue. They have been largely silenced. Just as sparrows become accustomed to living around humans,
Catalonia, by virtue of being part of Spain’s territory, was coerced into becoming “domesticated” by Franco’s imposition of the Castilian language. One could say that Franquismo wanted to force Catalans into exile inside their own lawful territory, which drove Brossa to staunchly speak and write in Catalan.

In visual poetry, the graphic and textual elements must be together in order to convey meaning. For Brossa, the visual element is essential in his creative work because for him words are not sufficient, since they can only represent reality, but are not reality. Thus, the visual component in his visual poems permit them to get closer to reality. We have seen the concern about the possibility of the reality of the word, manifested in different forms by the other authors analyzed in this study.

Approximately from 1960 to 1975, Brossa looks for concision, and the white of the page becomes a vital element as he develops his visual poetry that will make him famous. Throughout this study, we have observed Mallarmé’s influence on the work of Tablaba, de Campos, Padín and now, Brossa. In this last case, just like with Mallarmé, the white of the page was as important as the words written on it. It was the breaking of the silence, represented by the white of the page that gave more power to the message. Alicia Ruiz García explains that this circumstance added a new dimension to Brossa’s poems: an investigation towards the essence of things. The poet is concerned with the representative power of the word and begins to reflect about this phenomenon. His enthusiasm at capturing ideas through a synthetic way of writing poetry, will take him to explore visual poetry in depth. Brossa will develop his visual poetry, and will also throw himself into an experimentation in numerous artistic areas (61-62). If the 1940s saw his initiation towards a poetic path inspired by the historic avant-garde and surrealism, and the 1950s
represented an awakening of his political consciousness and an investigation of his personal voice; the 1960s thrust him towards an experimentation with new poetic languages. In his speech at the 1985 “Jocs Florals” in Barcelona, he said that the function of a contemporary poet is to save mankind’s identity, which has became stale in a society of consumerism. The contemporary poet must extend his field, leave books behind, and launch himself forward with the tools that society gives him. In addition, he must include an ethical content that society cannot provide. For Brossa this is where the experiences of visual poetry start becoming the experimental poetry of our times. The poet must search for a new ground between visual and semantic language (Brossa La piedra abierta 31).

This is the period in which he collaborates with fine arts artists. Simultaneously, he also works actively on the object poems. In “La trama constitutive de Joan Brossa,” Arnau Puig refers to the fact that the extraordinary world of Brossa became established from a structured social language, that is, Catalan. He endeavored to possess a deep knowledge of the language, and all through his creative production he accepted and applied all the rules and canons that constituted it, always opting for lexical rigor. His poetic work is written using all kinds of metrics, either traditional or modern. He submits to the strict sense of the words that appear in the normative dictionary. The only thing he does differently is using these words according to his personal way of understanding the function of language in society and among its speakers. The same applies with respect to the use of objects, with which he crafts his artistic poetics. None of them suffer transmutation or alteration. They are used according to how life offers them. They are shown through daily practice, or they are found as remnants of society. Brossa’s only intervention is syntactic, dispositive and organizing. And just like a child, he does not
dissociate the word from the image or vice versa. For him there are no differences between expressive language and reality, and yet he is aware that language is more determining than reality.

According to Brossa, the word makes the object happen. The object is that which the subject believes it is, and he/she knows it because he/she knows it, because he/she owns the word of the object. In other words: one can manipulate words, and thus one can manipulate things. This allowed Brossa to go to the next stage in his poetic discoveries where he could manipulate objects in the same way as he would with words. As a surrealist, Brossa’s initial writing was oneiric, and later on automatic. In this kind of writing or discourse, the cultural structures are minimized; everything flows without any pauses. Even though what is exteriorized appears to make no sense or seems disconnected, we know this is not accurate, since all expressions, verbal or plastic may not be codified, but are not unmotivated. Brossa never felt forced to justify his creativity. Hence, the lack of understanding towards his work, he believed, could be attributed to others, the bourgeoisie, priests or politicians. Brossa also quarreled sometimes with the concrete world, becoming ironic, sarcastic, and attacking those who would criticize him. First he did it with words, but progressively he did it with images. The creative process is the same. It consists of manipulating reality through words or images. All of Brossa’s visual poetry and his object poems follow the same principle: the poet establishes reality. Brossa’s poetics is a game, a telling, a showing, a presentation and also an adaptation to and about everything that surrounds us. This kind of poetics cannot become detached from its author because he does not work abstractly, at the service of a few established rules. His work is rather the result of an attitude, of the spiritual and social stance of an
individual who feels compelled to do so. The result of his action is a work of art, and not a political, or a sociological pamphlet, or a sociological statement (Puig 23-25).

From 1975 to 1998, Brossa continued his artistic experimentations and worked with diverse media. Despite his incessant work in plastic art, Brossa kept the discipline of using written language associated with traditional metric, and in 1975 Brossa started to work with sextinas, a complex medieval composition of seven stanzas which consist of six stanzas of six verses each, and the last one of three. He used sextinas largely to communicate his admiration for certain people and to express political demands. As a result of an exhibition of visual poems and object poems in 1986 at the Fundación Miró, Brossa greatly increased the volume of his artistic work, and was finally able to have the means to bring to fruition object poems that he had sketched years earlier.

With his transitable visual poems his art expanded to the streets, becoming part of Barcelona’s landscape. The pictures next page shows the letter “A” located in the Jardins del Velòdrom d’Horta. It is part of a visual poem, also called corporeal poetry by Brossa, due to its large size:
This visual poem invites the “voyager” to reflect on the journey from birth to death. The letter “A,” which is 12 meters high, signifies the beginning of life. The viewer/traveler will start his/her journey by crossing its threshold. Further down, the traveler will encounter different punctuation marks that represent life’s experiences. Finally, the visual poem will end with the letter “A,” partially demolished, representing death.

With regard to the importance of visual poetry, Brossa notes: “La poesía te presenta retos. Como por ejemplo la poesía visual. Actualmente la imagen tiene una gran importancia… ¿por qué el poeta no utiliza la imagen así sigue el sentido de la poesía visual? Yo digo que la poesía visual no es dibujo ni pintura, sino un servicio a la
Brossa is aware that communication in society is increasingly done through visual vehicles. If an artist or a poet wants to have an impact on the general public, he/she must use the media which might best reach the public.

In her article “Estudi lèxic de la poesia escènica de Joan Brossa,” Sandra Cuadrado I Camps explains that Brossa’s purpose is to create a world that materializes through the word. Brossa has dedicated himself to the investigation of linguistic experiments in poetry. He has looked for the essence in his discourse, and for that reason, his poetics linguistically eliminate those elements that he considers unnecessary, in order to arrive at the real meaning of words (71). Both surrealism and Zen insist on the necessity of going beyond the limits of reason, of questioning the nature of objects. Cuadrado I Camps has semantically analyzed Brossa’s creative process. In visual poetry, Brossa starts with physical entities, that is, immediate referents, in order to convey a conceptual proposal, and sometimes he will also use some linguistic support. The poet needs linguistic tools in order to bring forth his literary proposals. Nevertheless, the linguistic sign’s duality bothers him because it keeps him away from the real meaning of words. What Brossa is seeking is not the word or the lexical unity, but the concept and its identification. He wants to write a word that is at the same time a referent and a free object. Language is always associated with morphological and syntactic rules that do not allow a sense of the fundamental nature of the concept they allude to. Due to this, Brossa believes that words do not denote, but instead are. For Brossa the dichotomy signifier/signified is a non-real relationship, because for him words in themselves cannot stop being abstract since they cannot explain the essence of the concept; they can only attempt to reproduce it.

93 “Poetry challenges you. Like for example visual poetry. Nowadays the image has a great importance… why does the poet not use the image so that he can follow the direction of visual poetry? I say that visual poetry is not drawing or painting, but a service to communication” [my translation].
Consequently, a reflection on the linguistic sign is located at the core of all his literary proposals (73-74). He wrote: “Yo no sé si un dia podré escriure el mot en tant que mot I objecte lliure” (*Rua de libros* 3). Many times his poems present lexicographic definitions in an effort to reach the essence of their designations because when Brossa has to articulate his discourse, he must also own the words. Due to this, dictionaries are an important element in the work of this author. In this regard, Pompeo Fabra, considered the ‘father’ of modern Catalan linguistics, and author of *Gramàtica de la lengua catalana* (1912), receives from Brossa a tribute for his dedication to the Catalan language, in his poem “Entreacte”:

![Entreacte](Image)

**Entreacte**

Els mots corren a canviar-se de vestir. Balsen els telons, i les bambolines vinen de nou damunt els bastidors.

Els subjectes, els verbs i els adverbs, ja vestits d’una altra manera, tornen a escena. Resta un grup d’adjectius mirant pel forat del teló.

*Homenatge a Pompeu Fabra.*

*Els ulls i les orelles del poeta* 1961.

Fig. 30. Joan Brossa. “Entreacte” (Intermission) n. pag. *Els ulls i les orelles del poeta* 1961.

94 “I do not know if one day I will be able to write the word as both word and free object” [my translation].

95 INTERMISSION

The words run to change their clothes. Lower the curtains, and drop scenes are coming again on top of the framework,

Nouns, verbs and adverbs already dressed differently return
This visual poem consists of two parts. The first part, the visual component, is a black mask that illustrates the superficiality and fallacy of language, since it covers reality and prevents things to be seen for what they are (Cuadrado I Camps 75). The letters of the alphabet on the left side of the mask suggest that because they are attached to it, language cannot reach the essence of things. Brossa said: “tot el porcés ha estat de reeixir a saber mirar, reeixir en l’empresa de penetrar les coses” (Arthur Terry “La idea del llenguatge a la poesia de Joan Brossa” n. pag.).

The second part of the poem has elements that make up a sentence such as “nouns,” “verbs,” “adverbs,” and “adjectives.” They are the actors performing a variety of roles, who must constantly change their “outfits.” This kind of theatre never stops performing. But the key word is “performing.” Here, Brossa highlights the performative aspect of a verbal utterance. Every time words are uttered, written, or read, they are actually performing in the theatre of discourse. Unlike real objects, they are playing a role, and becoming a substitute dimension for reality.

Masks, letters, (particularly the “A”) and decks of cards are Brossa's preferred themes, appearing not only in his visual poems or object poems, but also in his screenplays and scenic poems. With respect to the letter “A,” he said: “La “A” es el alfa, la puerta del alfabeto, la entrada a la literatura, el principio de la expresión literaria. Además tiene una
This following visual poem is one of many that Brossa has created with the letter “A”:

![A magnet visual poem](image)

**Fig. 31. Joan Brossa Visual Poem “Imant” (Magnet) 1975 La piedra abierta 367.**

According to Brossa the letter “A” is the door to the alphabet, and therefore the door to language. As the title suggests, the large “A” works as a magnet, thus attracting the two smaller “A’s” that originally were included in the word “Barcelona,” located at the bottom of this visual poem. The smaller “A’s” free themselves from the word “BARCELONA” and lodge themselves at the base or feet of the legs of the large “A.”

The loss of the two “A’s” in the word “BARCELONA” has a negative impact on the

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97 “The letter “A” is the alpha, the door to the alphabet, the beginning of literary expression. Besides, it has a very interesting form, showing deep roots: if you turn it upside down, you will see the head of an ox” [my translation].
signifier, has undermined it, and as a result the signified has been damaged as well. Conversely, now that the small “A’s” have been attracted and united with the large “A,” they become a strong unit of three. Following the pattern, the viewer/reader may conclude that if the word “BARCELONA” has lost its “A’s”, nothing prevents other words to lose their “A’s” as well, and undermine their original meaning. And therefore, the original group of three “A’s” becomes now a group of seven “A’s” because the rule expressed in the visual poem dictates that the new “A’s” can only lodge themselves at the base or feet of the “A’s.” This process can be repeated ad infinitum. This is a clear example of Brossa’s wish to give letters their freedom to assemble and disassemble, of operating in an independent way. When the viewers/readers sees this kind of work, it triggers questions that pertain to their personal freedom. For example, they choose not to belong to a group without being punished, like the “A’s” that no longer want to be part of the word “BARCELONA,” or have the freedom to choose with whom one wants to assemble, like the “A’s” that gather together. We have seen how freedom has always been paramount in Brossa's life; therefore it is only natural that he would endeavor to grant words their status as words and free objects.

In the next visual poem “Espanya 1975,” Brossa utilizes elements of the baraja española (Spanish deck) to represent a crucial year in the history of Spain, the year of the death of Francisco Franco.
With the combination of two suits, clubs and swords, Brossa has created the image of a swastika, or “cruz gamada” in Spanish, which represents not only the dictatorship under Franco’s rule, but also the alliance of Franco’s regime with the Third Reich. The title “Espanya 75” alludes to the year that Franco died. The death of the dictator opened the door to the possibility for Spain to become a country with a modern democracy, in which personal and political freedom would finally be acknowledged. According to the Spanish deck, swords symbolize the nobility, the clergy and the army, while clubs symbolize the general populace with no legal privileges (“Juegos de cartas: historia y orígenes – Naipes – Barajas” n. pag.). Using these symbols as cultural references, Brossa shows how the
Spanish nobility, the clergy, and the army control the masses. The reader/viewer can perceive the four clubs being cornered against each other at the center of the visual poem, while the tips of the swords aim at them. Not a single word is expressed to explain the situation that Spain has been living under since the Civil War. However, the title helps better understand that, in the middle of the horror of war and dictatorship, after Franco’s death, Spain can hope to embrace a democratic system.

As has been shown in this chapter, Brossa has made poetry first with the word (literary poetry), then with the representation of the word (visual poetry), and now he materializes the poem (object poem). Brossa described his object poems as: “una conseqüència de la poesia visual. Representa un canvi de support [I, novament, de codi]. Després d’haver fet servir el paper, la impremta, la serigrafia, se’n va a ocórrer canviar de material: uns objectes que tinguessin significació per ells mateixos” (Joan Brossa: les sabates son més que un pedestal 227).98

His object poems do not constitute a large part of his poetic production. However, it was the focus of the first retrospective of Brossa's visual and object poems, organized in 1986 by the Joan Miró Foundation. The exhibit was called Joan Brossa o les paraules són les coses (Joan Brossa or Words are Things). This retrospective launched a series of international exhibitions of the poet’s work. Despite this new attention, Brossa remained unruffled by this success, and carried on with his everyday life working in his studio, or attending the “Filmoteca” (Manuel Guerrero La piedra abierta 20).

Words and objects occupy two different cognitive spheres. However, in everyday life this distinction remains covert. In his article, “El nominalisme de l’objecte,” Robert

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98 “… a consequence of visual poetry. It [object poetry] represents a change in the linguistic support [and again, in the code]. After having used paper, the printing press, serigraphy, it occurred to me to change the material: objects that would have meaning by themselves” [my translation].
Lubar explains that without symbolization the world as such is shapeless, it needs the word in order to become defined. In our social performance, to name an object entails its extension into the real world. However, Lubar adds, we must remember Magritt’s warning: the road that passes through the territory of the word and the realm of the object is dangerous. Brossa’s acknowledgement of the provisional relationship between things and words, the physical world and our particular way of understanding it, between nature and social life is the central axis in his work, as poet and visual artist (n. pag.). The first time Brossa used an object as a medium different from paper was in 1943 when he produced his object poem “Escorça” a sort of ready-made in which he placed a lemon tree bark on a wooden base. He created object poems from everyday items, such as keys or hammers. His object poems follow through the steps of his poesia quotidiana or antipoesia in which the leading theme does not deal with personal feelings or situations of the individual, but rather with themes that pertain to the human race. The following object poem illustrates this fact:

![Image of an object poem](image)

Fig. 33. Joan Brossa. Object poem “Merda” 1986 n. pag. Fundació Joan Brossa.
This object poem is the result of a project that Brossa started in 1969 and completed in 1986. As expressed at the beginning of the present chapter, Brossa’s uncle received the Iron Cross of the Third Reich in recognition for his work defending Germany’s financial interests. Brossa establishes a synecdochal relationship between the iron cross and Nazi Germany, which allows the object poem to be self-explanatory. In addition, by reading the title of this object poem, the viewer/reader clearly sees the poet’s point of view. This is an important fact, because as Antonio Monegal explains in his article, “La cosa poètica,” Brossa’s use of the word in the title of his object poems plays an important role in their poetic construction. It not only allows the poet to manipulate the object, but also helps the object to distance itself from its original function (n. pag.). In this particular case, the original purpose of the Iron Cross Medal was to honor an individual, Brossa’s uncle, for his efforts and accomplishments in defending the Third Reich. But in Brossa’s hands it acquires the opposite meaning. This is an extreme case in which the symbolism of the original object not only is altered as we will see in the next object poem), but entails the reverse of the original idea.

The following object poem, “Fe eclesiàstica” was completed in 1994:

Fig. 34. Joan Brossa. “Fe eclesiàstica” n. pag. 1994 Fundació Joan Brossa.
A well-known anti-clericalist, Brossa created “Fe eclesiàstica” to express his negative opinion about the Church in a sarcastic way. By combining the title of the object poem with a bible, a totally exposed 100 dollar bill, and a partially exposed Spanish banknote as if they were bookmarks, the reader/viewer understands that Brossa is exposing the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church, which is run as any for-profit business that expects payment in exchange for its “spiritual” services. If we had the chance to see the above object poem in person, we could probably extract even more meaning by reading the pages to which the Bible is opened. It would be interesting to know if Brossa chose to open the Bible on those particular pages, or he allowed chance to intervene. As we know, the Bible can be open to an assortment of interpretations, offering the reader/viewer a multiplicity of interpretations.

Brossa’s object poems expose issues such as human dignity, injustice, and violence against those who cannot defend themselves, and the way of the world, without the need for extended intellectual explanations. Once the object poem has elicited a visceral reaction from the part of the reader/viewer, the intellect follows to scrutinize it. This all-encompassing experience allows the reader/viewer to actively participate in the creative process that has been ignited by the poet.

To conclude, Joan Brossa’s poetic work presented in this chapter shows a multifaceted poet who started his poetic vocation during the Spanish Civil War. A self-taught poet, influenced by surrealism and a co-founder of the neo-avant-garde literary review, Dau al Set, he produced a vast body of work in Catalan. He highlighted the double ethymological source of “poiesis” as both creation and action. For him being a poet was the most natural state. He never made any distinctions between the variety of
media he worked with. Brossa became acquainted with Marxism through Cabral de Melo, and from that moment on, his poetic work that he called *poesia quotidiana* grew to be political with a deep social commitment, an attitude that he would continue for the rest of his life. Another important influence for the artist was Zen philosophy, which helped him become aware of the cosmic sphere. The understanding that the universe influences the social sphere helped him identify himself and his poetry with his surroundings, leaving behind his subjective state of mind in order to reach an essentiality and objectivity that would allow him to incorporate a human rhythm to his poetry.

For Brossa, his reflection on the linguistic sign is located at the core of all his literary proposals. In his visual poetry, Brossa searched for the reality of the word, for a word that could at the same time be a word and a free object. He considered the word to be a physical entity. But at the same time he understood that it cannot stop being abstract due to the fact that it cannot explain the essence of a concept, but only attempt to reproduce it.

Brossa’s object poems follow through the themes of his *poesia quotidiana* or *antipoesia*. The poet is aware of the provisional relationship between things and words, the physical world and our particular way of understanding it. When objects of daily life are manipulated, for instance, by being given a title, they lose their original practical purpose and become vehicles through which the artist not only can express his ideas, but also help the object distance itself from its original function.

As expressed at the beginning of the chapter, there is a commonality between Joan Brossa and Clemente Padín. Both suffered though the violence and repression of a dictatorship in their respective countries. In addition, having both embraced Marxism, they believed that artistic work should make a contribution to the diffusion of ideas that
support social justice and freedom. With regard to their artistic work, both poets saw the need to extend poetry media beyond the limits of the white of the page, since in their experience, tridimensional media is the vehicle that allows them to get closer to the reality of the world.
CONCLUSION

The main goal in this dissertation has been to explore the experimental poetry of José Juan Tablada, Haroldo de Campos, Clemente Padín, and Joan Brossa, and to draw commonalities among the four authors. Another goal has been to explore and analyze a selection of the various manifestations of experimental poetry, including visual, concrete, mail art and object poetry.

Chapter 1 examined Tablada’s visual poetry and haikais, and the influence the avant-garde and Chinese poetry had on his experimental work. Although Tablada’s first poetic work showed the influence of modernismo, his sojourn in Japan had a great impact on his future work. His familiarity with the Japanese haiku facilitated his shift towards experimentation with, and creation of, haikais, evidenced in his book Un día.... Tablada’s next project, visual poetry, synthesized his experience with Chinese and Japanese ideographic poetry and his exposure to different aesthetic avant-garde movements, culminating in the book of poems Li-Po y otros poemas.

Another important aspect discussed in that chapter dealt with the relation of Tablada’s orientalism to the concept developed later by Edward Said. For Said, orientalism refers to false assumptions underlying Western attitudes about the Middle East, comparing oneself with others in order to define oneself negatively in terms of what one is not. Tabladas’s orientalism, however, lacks the confrontational characteristics proposed by Said. For the Mexican poet, orientalism meant the possibility of traveling to the Orient and acquiring first hand knowledge of the art and culture of China and Japan, an experience that he used to pursue and synthesize the European avant-garde with Asian antiquity. This chapter argued that Tablada’s position as a Mexican, with roots in a mixture of European
and indigenous cultures enabled him to be receptive to new cultures, a characteristic that his *haikais* and his visual poetry demonstrate.

This chapter has shown that, if a dichotomy (exemplified by Apollinaire/Li-Po) between the avant-garde of modernity and the ideogram of antiquity existed, Tablada was the first Spanish American poet who knew how to navigate and negotiate between these two diverse influences.

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to present H. de Campos’s concrete poetry and his approach to translating literary texts that he called *transcreation*, and to establish a dialog between the Brazilian poet and Tablada. My research shows that these two poets have commonalities as well as differences. For example, the Chinese ideogram influenced both de Campos’s concrete poetry and Tablada’s visual poetry. As well, both poets acknowledged the influence of Stéphane Mallarmé’s research on the aesthetics of poetry on their own creative works. Tablada described Mallarmé’s influence in terms of *poesía pura*, while de Campos emphasized Mallarmé’s concept of the blank page, because for concrete poets, the stanzas are replaced by space. Another similarity arose in de Campos’s and Tablada’s work with translation, or *transcreation*.

H. De Campos’s concrete poetry specifically built on Brazilian concrete poetry. Emerging in the early 1950s, the founding group called *Noigandres* included H. de Campos, his brother Augusto de Campos, and Décio Pignatari. Unlike foreign concrete poets such as the Swiss-Bolivian Eugen Gomringer or the Swedish Öyvind Falhstrom, Brazilian concrete poets were greatly influenced by Ezra Pound’s admonition “to make it new.” The other important influences included Mallarmé, Fenollosa, Max Bense and the theory of relativity. Brazilian concretists adopted the most radical elements of the legacy.
of modern poetry and took as their inspiration Mallarmé’s *Un coup de dés* and Pound’s ideogrammatic method for creating poetry.

The poet’s task, H. de Campos said in reference to Roman Jakobson, is to configure the materiality of language; therefore, any poetry worthy of being called poetry is concrete. Concrete poetry epitomizes the liminal frontier case of poetry where there exists a complete systematization of all levels (semantic, rhetoric, sound) of the word. Thus, as Claus Clüver explained, concrete poetry can be defined as spatio-temporal structures in which extremely reduced verbal material has undergone an extremely rigid control process. The compositions are almost impersonal, and lack a poetic or narrative voice. They do not communicate subjective experiences, or transmit a message. Instead, they exploit the visual, aural, and semantic qualities of the verbal material and explore the possibilities inherent in fortuitous phonic and visual correspondences (Clüver 137).

A concrete poem is profoundly charged with meaning due to its ideogrammatic quality, which produces a visual and aural syntax through the calculated and careful placement of its verbal elements on the page. A concrete poem is held together by its overall *gestalt* and the specific structure of the “verbivocovisual” relationships established in the text (138). Brazilian concrete poems will take the leap of substituting the stanza traditionally formed by words with the empty space that is vital in a *haiku* and that Mallarmé called “the white of the page.” A concrete poem generates a variety of readings not only from the perspective of the words/signs but also, and equally importantly, from the organization and placement of those words on the page. The reader/viewer thus has the freedom to perform multiple readings, therefore making his/her experience noteworthy.
From the founding of the Noigandres group, the Brazilian concretists conceived of and developed a method of translating a variety of languages into Portuguese, which they called transcriação. Both H. de Campos and Tablada worked arduously on the translation of Japanese poetry, using haikus as their point of departure in the development of their new aesthetics. Like Tablada, H. de Campos traveled to Japan, and this trip inspired his book of poems Yûgen (Charme sutil). However, these poets took different approaches to translating haikus. Tablada realized the great difficulty of closely translating a haiku from Japanese into Spanish, so he innovatively adapted the traditional Japanese haiku to the organization of the syllables in Spanish while incorporating cultural elements from Mexico. In addition, Tablada experimented with a combination of haiku and illustrations called haiga. In this format, not only does the poem describe the painting, and the painting illustrate the poem, but also both media add layers of meaning to each other (Stephen Addis, 9).

In contrast, H. de Campos strove to use as much of the Japanese format in his translation/trancreation of the haiku as possible and created neologisms based, for instance, on the combination of two verbs. By “dissecting” Japanese grammar, de Campos actually created a new poetics, a new way of looking at words. For him, translation was a work of creation because a poem’s structural elements, such as rhythm and sound combinations, were much more important than the semantics of the words. Translating the meanings of the words was not enough; it was necessary to restore the words’ original structure into another language. Thus, rather that “braziliarizing” the Japanese language de Campos sought to “nipponize” the Portuguese language.
Although de Campos and Tablada lived in different times and places, the ideogram, combined with the aesthetics of avant-garde art, was for both the key device that led them to generate a breakthrough in the literature of their time. Tablada was the first Spanish-American poet to experiment with the haiku in the Spanish language, paving the way for new forms of artistic experimentation. He endeavored to create artworks that immediately affected the reader/viewer through the combination of visual and verbal elements. De Campos went a step further in his artistic experimentations. Based on Mallarmé’s theory of poetry, he highlighted the verbivocovisual effect of concrete poetry in which, along with the verbal and visual elements, he incorporated a third one – the space or the white of the page – and made it as relevant as the words/signs that inhabit the page. Unlike Tablada, de Campos aimed to bring Portuguese grammar closer to Japanese grammar and experimented with, and created neologisms in his native language. These facts support the inference that de Campos’s literary work went further than Tablada’s. However, this claim should not reflect detrimentally on Tablada’s work and artistic reputation. To the contrary, in their own right, both artists deeply influenced the literary milieu of their times by creating innovative, new approaches to art.

Chapter 3 investigated Padín’s visual poetry and mail art, and briefly described his performances, that were a logical consequence of his poetic investigations. The rationale for writing about Padín was twofold. First, he embraced a multiplicity of artistic roles, that made him a poet, artist, graphic designer, mail artist, performer, curator, video maker, multimedia artist and networker. Second, he was profoundly committed to supporting human rights and denouncing abuses and injustices perpetrated by military dictatorships. Brossa, the Catalan artist who was the subject of Chapter 4 shared this
political commitment and broad artistic agenda. Like Padín, Brossa utilized different artistic media and denounced and suffered under Franco’s regime. Therefore, as Chapters 1 and 2 directly connect Tablada’s and de Campos’s poetic works, Chapters 3 and 4 illustrate a connection between Padín and Brossa.

Padín’s *Nueva poesía* was a reaction to the violent and repressive social and political climate in Uruguay in the 1960s and early 1970s. He and his colleagues believed that language was an instrument for social control and repression; therefore, many artists from Padín’s generation experimented with “asemantic” visual poetry like the *poema proceso* (poem process.) *Nueva poesía* was the prelude to Padín's *arte inobjetal*, an art of action in which the work of art had no more purpose once the action was completed. However, when the *arte inobjetal* became too radical, Padín explored visual poetry as a means for more direct communication. In his inobjectal art, the sign consists of the act by which the signifier operates on reality and the signified operates on ideology. Padín, however, recognized that art could not rely solely on action, as it needed a medium through which to express itself, such as a canvas, a piece of paper, or even a human body. This reconciliation with the vehicle of art allowed Padín to use a wide variety of languages in his work. Distinguishing between language and reality, he showed that human beings often assign too much significance to words and what they represent than to reality. In a world dominated by symbols and words, and where the exchange of information has only a relative value, Padín made an important, enriching contribution to experimental art because he aimed at creating an expression as close as possible to reality, so that it could reach everyone. His approach to art both problematized the human quandary of reality and perception, and expressed it in a graphic, innovative fashion.
Padín’s need to express himself artistically and politically was motivated by his personal experience as a desaparecido, which inspired him to protest against any form of violence. For him, art is the most compelling vehicle to denounce injustice.

In experimental poetry, mail art is another vehicle for expression. Circulated by postal services, it facilitates non-hierarchical feedback and dialog among participants. Padín believed in the need to eliminate the status of the author-artist, which elevated art to a superior plane and erected a barrier between the work of art and the reader/viewer. Padín’s interest in mail art also stemmed from his urge to discuss socio-political concerns with other artists, particularly when authoritarian regimes control mass media. Another reason for the utilization of mail art was the artist's difficulty in accessing the monopolized media and other mass communication structures.

Since 1987, Padín has done performances based on the principles of his inobjectal art. In this art form, he uses his body as a signifier to build a social conscience in the viewers/participants. For Padín, sharing and remembering events involving the violation of human rights and abuse of power through a socially committed art, is extremely important because remembrance makes it possible to avoid history repeating itself.

Chapter 4 was devoted to the poetic work of Joan Brossa. While the Catalan poet was a multi-faceted artist who worked in a variety of artistic mediums, this chapter focused on his visual poems and object poems. Brossa's work was subversive, radical, and shocking. He defined himself as a poet, a creator who blurred the boundaries between diverse artistic expressions. Joan Brossa and Clemente Padín shared the experience of suffering through the violence and repression of dictatorships. In addition, both having embraced Marxism, they believed that an artistic work should contribute to the diffusion of ideas.
that support social justice and freedom. Brossa used any opportunity and artistic expression to denounce the dictatorship and repression in Spain, particularly in Catalonia, which after the Spanish Civil War was coerced into a Castilian assimilation, and officially forbidden to use its native language. In their artistic work, both Brossa and Padín saw the need to extend the media of poetry beyond the limits of the white of the page. In their experience, the vehicle of tri-dimensional media drew art closer to the reality of the world.

Influenced by Marxism and a variety of avant-garde movements such as surrealism, Brossa went through a series of phases in his evolution as a poet. He began to write at age 17 as a reaction to his witnessing of the horrors of the Civil War. After the war, he wrote hypnagogic and surrealist poems, and practiced classical forms such as the sonnet while maintaining his vanguard aesthetic views.

In his extensive poetic work, Brossa pondered topics such as the mystery of life, the struggle against injustice, humans self-respect, and the significance of fate. Observations on poetry and language, though, dominated his investigations. He became increasingly aware of the transformation of literary culture from a book-based society into a culture fascinated with audiovisual shows and virtual simulacra.

The poetic work by Brossa discussed in this chapter reveals a multi-faceted poet who found his vocation during the Spanish Civil War. A self-taught poet, influenced by surrealism and the co-founder of the avant-garde literary review, Dau al Set, he produced a vast body of work in Catalan. Since poiesis means creation and action, being a poet was the most natural state for Brossa, who never made any distinctions between the variety of media with which he worked. Once introduced to Marxism through Cabral de Melo,
Brossa infused his poetic work, which he called *poesia quotidiana*, with deep political and social commitments, an attitude that persisted for the rest of his life. Another important influence, Zen philosophy, made Brossa aware of the cosmic sphere. Understanding that the universe influences the social sphere helped him to identify himself and his poetry with his surroundings, leaving behind his subjective state of mind to reach a universality and objectivity that enabled him to create a human rhythm to poetry.

A reflection on the linguistic sign lies at the core of all Brossa’s literary proposals. In his visual poetry, he searched for a word that could simultaneously be a word and a free object. He considered the word to be a physical entity, but understood that it is inherently abstract because it cannot explain the essence of a concept, only reproduce it.

His object poems follow the themes of his *poesia quotidiana* or *antipoesia*. The poet was aware of the provisional relationship between things and words, the physical world and mankind’s particular way of understanding it. When objects from daily life are manipulated, for example, by being given a title, they lose their original, practical purpose and become vehicles through which the poet can express his ideas, and separate object and function.

This dissertation has explored the experimental poetry of Tablada, de Campos, Padín and Brossa, and analyzed commonalities among them. It has also analyzed a number of poems via close reading of them. In future research, I plan to further investigate the influence of Zen philosophy on Brossa’s poetic work, and to connect it to the work of Tablada and de Campos. Another potentially fruitful topic is to compare and contrast the notions of orientalism in Tablada and H. de Campos, who were both greatly influenced
by Japanese literature and culture. In addition, I plan to investigate possible links between orientalism and the topic of Brazilian literary anthropophagy, or cannibalism.

I hope that this dissertation will contribute to the awareness and understanding of experimental poetry.
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