

FROM AVANT-GARDE

TO DIGITAL:

THE LEGACY OF BRAZILIAN
CONCRETE POETRY

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

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I was stunned. Everything [Pignatari] was saying seemed to predict the mechanics of the internet ... delivery, content, interface, distribution, multi-media, just to name a few. Suddenly it made sense: like de Kooning's famous statement: "History doesn't influence me. I influence it," it's taken the web to make us see just how prescient concrete poetics was in predicting its own lively reception half a century later. I immediately understood that what had been missing from concrete poetry was an appropriate environment in which it could flourish. For many years, concrete poetry has been in limbo: it's been a displaced genre in search of a new medium. And now it's found one.²

The limbo Goldsmith refers to was quite real: in the 1980s and 90s, the going view, especially in Anglo-America, where concrete poetry had never really caught on, was that the 1950s experiment in material poetics was ideologically suspect-too "pretty," too empty of "meaningful" content, too much like advertising copy. In the university, this estimate still prevails. To this day, one would be hard put to find an English or Comparative Literature department that offers courses in concrete poetry. Doesn't the subject belong more properly, if at all,

in the art department, my colleagues ask, specifically in courses on graphic design?

Even books *about* concrete poetry have raised this issue. Consider Caroline Bayard's sophisticated theoretical study *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-Modernism* (1989). Bayard begins with a survey of the mid-century poetics of Oyvind Fahlström, Eugen Gomringer, and Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, only to conclude that the "fusion of expression and content" being advocated by the Concretists was an instance of what Umberto Eco had termed the "iconic fallacy"—the fallacy that "a sign has the same properties as its object and is simultaneously similar to, analogous to, and motivated by its object"³ (Bayard, 1989: 24). At its most naïve "naturalizing" level, the iconic fallacy manifests itself, Bayard argues, in poems like Gomringer's *Silencio* [figure 1], where the empty rectangle at the center of the composition is presented as the equivalent to the "silence" conveyed by the verbal sign. But even where the motivation is much subtler, as in Augusto de Campos's *sem um numero* ("Without a Number"), which makes no reference to an external object but uses graphic space structurally so as to dramatize the central o ("zero") status of the peasant [figure 2], concrete poetry, Bayard contends, is bedeviled by a lingering Cratylism—the doctrine, put forward by Plato's Cratylus in the dialogue by that name, that the sound and visual properties of a given word have mimetic value, and that, by extension, concrete poetry equates "graphic-typographical form with semantic function" (*Idem*: 23). This is, Bayard believes, a dangerous doctrine. "Typographical and calligraphic aesthetics were most striking in the 1960s, but also the least durable. They corresponded to the Cratylan phase of the experience, and while they inserted into texts typefaces hitherto unknown to literature, the experiment was short-lived" (*Idem*: 163). For—and here ideology comes in—"changing the sign system does not in any way imply that one is modifying the political system" (*Idem*: 171). And Bayard refers us to

Herbert Marcuse's argument that far from representing a breakthrough, the innovative typographic devices of the Concretists "dissolve the very structure of perception in order to make room . . . for what?" (*Idem*: 171).

This "for what?" functions as a battle cry. Visual poetry, or, for that matter, sound poetry, as in the case of Henri Chopin (*Idem*: 27-28), are thus judged to be questionable practices. Indeed, Bayard argues, it was only when the "form=content" assumption of Concretism was abandoned, as it was in the 1970s and 80s by poets like bpNichol, bill bissett and Steve McCaffery, who turned their attention to the anagrammatic and paragrammatic play *inherent in language* rather than on such Concretist elements as font, color, and spacing, that a more adequate poetics was born.

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It is a compelling argument: in my own *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media*, written in the late '80s, I was persuaded, as was Caroline Bayard, that post-concrete poetics was providing a needed "corrective" to the purported mimeticism and aestheticized composition of the earlier work.⁴ But now that, in Goldsmith's words, "an appropriate environment in which [concrete poetry] could flourish," has become available, the texts in question have recovered their place in the larger poetic field. To understand how this process of recovery works and how Concrete poetry itself perceived its role as the renewal of the avant-garde practices of the early twentieth-century, it may be useful to take up the concept of the *arrière-garde*, now gaining currency.⁵ We need, in other words, to ground Concretism in its history, to understand, for example, its relation to the two World Wars as well as to the varying cultures that produced it. And further: from the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can begin to discriminate *between* the various manifestations of what once seemed to be a unified movement. Not all concretisms, after all, are equal.

Bringing Up the Rear

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As William Marx makes clear in the Introduction to *Les arrière-gardes au xxe siècle*, the concept of the avant-garde is inconceivable without its opposite. In military terms, the rearguard of the army is the part that protects and consolidates the troop movement in question; often the army's best generals are used for this purpose. When, in other words, an avant-garde movement is no longer a novelty, it is the role of the *arrière-garde* to complete its mission, to insure its success. The term *arrière-garde*, then, is synonymous neither with reaction nor with nostalgia for a lost and more desirable artistic era; it is, on the contrary, the "hidden face of modernity" (Marx, 2004: 6). As Antoine Compagnon puts it in his study of Barthes in the Marx collection, the role of the *arrière-garde* is to save that which is threatened. In Barthes's own words, "être d'avant-garde, c'est savoir ce qui est mort; être d'arrière garde, c'est l'aimer encore"⁶ (Compagnon, in Marx: 93-101).

The proposed dialectic is a useful corrective, I think, to the usual conceptions of the avant-garde, either as one-time rupture with the bourgeois art market, a rupture that could never be repeated - the Peter Bürger thesis - or as a series of ruptures, each one breaking decisively with the one before, as in textbook accounts of avant-gardes from Futurism to Dada to Surrealism to Fluxus, to Minimalism, Conceptualism, and so on. This second or progress narrative, ironically, continues to haunt the academy even when the avant-garde is by no means at issue: I am referring to the unstated premise of critical theory that the perspective of enlightened globalists, post-colonialists, or multiculturalists on a given art work or movement is inherently more "advanced" than what came before. But, as Haroldo de Campos points out in a blistering attack on Third World studies, it is condescending - indeed, as he says, *overall*, to assume, as does, for example, Fredric Jameson in his "theory of a cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature," that

subaltern fiction, "having as a necessary goal the achievement of a 'national allegory,' will not offer the satisfaction of a Proust or Joyce." At the current stage of development, Jameson posits, a given novel — his example is Guimarães Rosa's *Grande Sertão: Veredas* — may be understood as "a *high literary* variant of the Western." To which Haroldo responds:

The first thing that occurs to me, before a somewhat deprecating label like this one, is that the author of *The Political Unconscious* ignores the Brazilian Portuguese language and has built a fake, oversimplified image of the complex Faustian, metaphysical struggle between God and Devil embedded in the deep structure of Rosa's masterpiece. . . . the Anglophone master's discourse of the overaltern "salvationist" critics works as a rhetorical by-product of unconscious imperialism by effacing the subaltern "minor" languages and by underrating their creative verbal power". (Campos, in Jackson, 2005: 11-13)

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

This commentary provides us with a useful entry into the discourse of the Concretism of the 1950s. In 1953, the Brazilian-born Swedish poet Oyvind Fahlström published a "Manifesto for Concrete Poetry" under the title *Hipy papy bithithdthuthda bthuthdy*, a version of "Happy Birthday" he took from A. A. Milne's *Winne-the-Pooh*.⁷ The second epigraph for this manifesto — the first announces that Fahlström has shifted from "normal" writing to the creating of *worlets* (words, letters) — is in French and declares, "*Remplacer la psychologie de l'homme par L'OBSSESSION LYRIQUE DE LA MATIERE*". The citation is from Marinetti's *Technical Manifesto of Literature* (1912) — the famous manifesto, first printed as a leaflet in French and Italian, supposedly spoken by the propeller of the airplane in which Marinetti finds himself. The *Technical Manifesto* calls for the destruction of syntax, of adjectives, adverbs, and all verbs forms except the infinitive, and of punctuation, in favor of "tight

networks of analogies" between disparate images", as in "trench" = "orchestra" or "machine gun = femme fatale". Such strings of unrelated nouns — what Marinetti called *parole in libertà* — would replace the tedious lyric "I", which is to say all psychology: "The man who is damaged beyond redemption by the library and the museum, who is in thrall to a fearful logic and wisdom, offers absolutely nothing that is any longer of any interest". For psychology, Marinetti insisted, we must substitute *matter*, specifically such categories as noise, weight, and smell. And Marinetti exemplifies this "new" poetry by reciting from his onomatopoeic battle poem *Zang tumb tuuum* with its cataloguing of such items as "lead + lava + 300 stinks + 50 sweet smells paving mattress debris horseshot carrion flickflack piling up camels donkeys **tumb tuuum**"⁸ (Marinetti, 2006: 107-19).

Like Marinetti, Fahlström has little time for the conventional pieties of his day: his manifesto begins with a satiric thrust at the Sigtuna lake-front art colony (rather like our Yadoo or McDowell summer colonies), whose cultural hero was the neo-Romantic poet Bo Setterlind, the author of a long poem called *Mooncradle*. Like Marinetti, Fahlström senses that words "have lost their luster from constant rubbing on the washboard" (*in* Hultberg, 1999: 110) and believes that "changing the word order is not enough; one must knead the entire clause structure. Because thought processes are dependent on language, every attack on prevailing linguistic forms ultimately enriches worn-out modes of thought" (*Idem*: 117). And just as Marinetti dismisses ego psychology, Fahlström dismisses the fixation on "content," as the chief "unifying element" of the poetic text:

The situation is this: ever since the War, [there has been] a long, abject, doomsday mood, a feeling that all experimental extremes have been exhausted. For those of us unwilling to drift into the world of alcoholic or heavenly sustenance, all that remains is to use what means we have at our disposal to
Analyse

analyse

analyse our wretched predicament.

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

But, as the reference above to the postwar doomsday mood makes clear, there are, of course, also enormous differences between the avant-guerre Futurist Marinetti, and the post-World War II Fahlströhm - differences that similarly define the relationship of Pound and Joyce to the *Noigandres* group. The Utopian avant-garde, of which Marinetti was very much of a representative, believed in definitive rupture with the stultifying past. "A roaring motorcar" Marinetti declared famously in the First Manifesto (1909), "is more beautiful than the Winged Victory of Samothrace" (Marinetti, 2006: 13). And one of his best-known manifestos is *Contra Venezia Passatista* (1910), which insists, partly tongue-in-cheek, that the famed Venetian canals should be drained and filled with cement so that factories might rise up to replace the "dead" museum culture of this passéist city, whose abject citizens are little better than *cicerones*, guiding the wealthy foreign tourists from one museum or church to another.

Or again, there is the manifesto called *Down with Tango and Parsifal*, with its diatribe against Wagner and those who dance like "hallucinated dentists." For the Italian Futurists, as for their Russian counterpart and the Cabaret Voltaire, the past is not only dead but deadly. Avant-garde means to make it new. Accordingly, there is no homage to the poets and artists of the preceding century. The 1912 manifesto *Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (signed by David Burliuk, Khlebnikov, Kruschonykh, and Mayakovsky) declared that "The past is too tight. The Academy and Pushkin are less intelligible than hieroglyphs," and exhorted fellow poets to "Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity" (Burliuk et al., 1988: 51-52).

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The new technology, it seems, has changed everything. "If all artists were to see the crossroads of these heavenly paths", says Malevich, referring in 1915 to the "brilliance of electric lights" and "growling of propellers" of the modern city, "if they were to comprehend these monstrous runways and intersections of our bodies with the clouds in the heavens, then they would not paint chrysanthemums" (Malevich, 1976: 126). Who was it that did paint chrysanthemums? Monet for one, Renoir for another: artists of the great Impressionist movement who were now considered passéist. Indeed, Duchamp went further and rejected retinal art *tout court* - dismissing Courbet, not to mention the Impressionists, as devoid of any real ideas.

The *arrière-garde*, in contrast, treats the propositions of the earlier *avant-garde* with respect bordering on veneration. One can't imagine Marinetti or Malevich using the words of their nineteenth-century precursors as epigraphs, but Fahlström certainly does so. And the Brazilian *Noigandres* group specifically derives its names from a passage in Pound's *Cantos*. Thus Concretism, cutting-edge (literally!) as this *arrière-garde* was vis-à-vis the normative verse or painting of its own day, transformed the Utopian optimism and energy of the pre-World War I years into a more reflective, self-conscious, and complex project of recovery.

When, for example, Fahlström makes his case for the equivalence of form and content, his argument is less Marinettian than Khlebnikovian, amalgamating concepts developed by the French *lettristes*, who were his contemporaries. The basic principle, developed by Khlebnikov in his studies of etymologies, is that, as Fahlström put it, "l i k e - s o u n d i n g w o r d s b e l o n g t o g e t h e r" (Fahlström, in Hultberg, 1999: 115). "Myths", for example, "have been explained in this way: when Deukalion and Pyrrha wanted to create new human beings after the Flood, they threw stones and men and women grew from them: the word for stone was 'laas,' for people 'laos' ... Figs are related to figment, pigs to pigmentation" (*Ibidem*).

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

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

Here is the way the syllable *so* [with] is a field that encompasses *son* [sleep], *solntse* [sun], *sila* [strength], *solod* [malt], *slovo* [Word], *sladkii* [sweet], *soi* [calm: Macedonian dialect], *sad* [garden], *selo* [settlement], *sol'* [salt], *slyt'* [to be reputed], *syn* [son]. (Khlebnikov, 1987: 272-3)

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

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

And the analysis continues in this vein.

Khlebnikov's poetic etymologies recall Plato's *Cratylus*, where, despite Socrates's arguments against the representability of the sign, he is the one to come up with ingenious meanings for letters and syllables. The noun for truth, ἀληθεια (*aletheia*) is shown to be an "agglomeration of θεια αλη (*thea alé*, divine wandering), implying the divine motion of existence." Or again, Πευδος (*pseudos*) is "the opposite of motion; here is another ill name given by the legislator to stagnation and forced inaction, which he compares to sleep (ευδειν, *eudein*), but the original meaning of the word is disguised by the addition of Ψ (*ps*)."¹ If, as Rosmarie Waldrop put it neatly, "concrete poetry is first of all a revolt against the transparency of the word," making "the sound and shape of words its explicit field of investigation" (Waldrop, 2005: 57), the Plato of the *Cratylus*, and Khlebnikov after him, are certainly involved with concrete poetry. For the link between stagnation and sleep or between truth and a divine wandering are precisely the links that intrigue poets.

This, then, is the force behind Fahlström's *worlets* and his fascination with complex forms. In his own case, the early concrete experiments were only a first step in the elaborate language games we find in his collages, radio plays, installations, musical compositions, and documentaries. In all these instances, materiality and medium were central: Fahlström had dissociated himself early from the Surrealists who were his contemporaries, remarking that his aesthetic differed from theirs in that "the concrete reality of my *worlets* is in no way opposed to the concrete reality of real life. Neither dream sublimates nor myths of the future, they stand as an organic part of the reality I inhabit" (Fahlström, in Hultberg, 1999: 119).

In its inattention to sound and syntax, Fahlström implies, surrealism should be understood as a deviation from the true avant-garde path. The new poetics thus positions itself elsewhere - as the *arrière-garde* of Italian and Russian Futurism, of

the "destruction of syntax" (Marinetti) and the "word set free" (Khlebnikov). The question remains why such Concretism as Fahlström's, with its marvelous recovery of *zaum*, sound poetry, innovative typography, and appropriated text, came into being when and where it did. And what did the two World Wars have to do with it?

The Gomringer Variant

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

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

There was a Renaissance around 1910 in which the nature of all the arts changed. By 1916 this springtime was blighted by the World War, the tragic effects of which cannot be overestimated. Nor can any understanding be achieved of twentieth-century art if the work under consideration is not kept against the background of the war which extinguished European culture. . . . Accuracy in such matters being impossible, we can say nevertheless that the brilliant experimental period in twentieth-century art was stopped short in 1916. Charles Ives had written his best music by then; Picasso had become Picasso; Pound, Pound; Joyce, Joyce. *Except for individual talents, already in development before 1916, moving on to full maturity, the century was over in its sixteenth year.* Because of this collapse (which may yet prove to be a long interruption), the architectonic masters of our time have suffered critical neglect or abuse, and if admired are admired for anything but the structural innovations of their work. (Davenport, 1981: 314.)⁹

Extreme though Davenport's assessment may sound - surely many avant-garde works were produced *after* 1916 - his basic premise is, I think, correct. Pound, for example, had not yet

begun the *Cantos*, but the ideogrammic technique that made them so famous - their fragmentation, collage, multi-lingualism, and use of citation - were already in place in "Cathay" Duchamp had already produced his first readymades, and Malevich had exhibited his black and white squares at the *O.10* show in Petersburg.

The interwar years witnessed the refinement of these early innovations - El Lissitsky's of Malevich's abstractions, Duchamp's incorporation of his readymades into the *Large Glass*, Gertrude Stein's permutations in *How To Write* of her early prose technique - but the rupture that caused such widespread shock and consternation in art circles had already occurred. And in the 1930s and 40s, as socialist-realist writing came to the fore, avant-garde innovation was considered suspect. When revival came after World War II, it occurred, not in Paris, where the postwar ethos was one of existentialist introspection as to how France had made such a terribly wrong turn in the pre-Hitler years, and certainly not in the war capitals - Berlin, Rome, Moscow - but on the periphery: in Sweden (Fahlströhm), Switzerland (Eugen Gomringer), Austria (Ernst Jandl), Scotland (Ian Hamilton Finlay), and especially in São Paulo, Brazil.

The periphery, as we have seen in Fahlströhm's case, defined itself by its resistance to the dominant aesthetic of its day, turning instead to the avant-gardes of the early twentieth century. But the rear flank of the army can't protect the troops without understanding the moves the front-runners have made - a situation that makes *arrière-garde* activity much more than mere repetition. Eugen Gomringer, generally considered the father of concrete poetry,¹⁰ is a case in point. Gomringer differed from Fahlströhm, as from the Campos brothers, in coming out of an artistic rather than a literary milieu.¹¹ As early as 1944, he had seen the international exhibition of concrete art organized by Max Bill in Basel, and in 1944-45, he made the acquaintance of Bill and Richard Loehse at the *Galerie des Eaux*

Vives in Zurich.¹² Soon, he was collaborating with two graphic artists, Dieter Rot and Marcel Wyss, to create a new journal called *Spirale*. Bauhaus, Hans Arp, Mondrian and *Der Stilj* — these were Gomringer's chief visual sources.

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

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

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

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

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

avenidas
avenidas y flores

flores
flores y mujeres

avenidas
avenidas y mujeres

24>25

avenidas y flores y mujeres y
un admirador

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

Structurally, *Avenidas* thus is not yet a "concrete" poem: the stanza breaks, for example, could be elided and the spacing between couplets could be changed without appreciably altering the lyric's meaning. Within the year, however, Gomringer had written *silencio* [see figure 1], *ping pong*, *wind*, and the "o" poem [figures 6-8], poems whose typography is clearly constitutive of their meaning.¹³ The motivation of these "constellations," as Gomringer called them, was closely related to the situation of Switzerland in the immediate postwar era. In the 30s and 40s, there had been much talk of German Switzerland becoming a separate nation by adopting a written German variant of its own. Although the plan was abandoned, the war further isolated Switzerland, turning it into a neutral island surrounded by warring power blocks. After the war, a unified but still trilingual Switzerland once again opened its borders to the

larger European world, but that world (including Germany itself) was now newly divided by the Iron Curtain. Concrete poetry, Gomringer insisted, could break down the resultant linguistic and national borders by transcending the local dialects associated with *Heimatstil*, the endemic Swiss nativism. In using basic vocabulary as in the short poem beginning *sonne man / mond frau* ("sun man / moon woman"), poetry could avoid the local.¹⁴

But such globalism was not without its problems. From his first manifesto, "From Line to Constellation" (1954), Gomringer emphasized the need for reduction, concentration, and simplification as "the very essence of poetry". "Headlines, slogans, groups of sounds and letters," he wrote, "give rise to forms which could be models for a new poetry just waiting to be taken up for meaningful use" (Solt, 1968: 67). The "new poem" should be "simple" and could be perceived "visually as a whole as well as in its parts. It becomes an object . . . its concern is with brevity and conciseness." Such a poem is called a "constellation," in that "it encloses a group of words as if it were drawing stars together to form a cluster" (*Idem*: 67).

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

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But what happens when the identity of poem and industrial sign is complete? How, then, is art different from commerce, poetry from good design? In 1967, Gomringer took on the position of chief design consultant for Rosenthal, the famous china and glass manufacturer, and increasingly his work became that of consolidation rather than innovation. Perhaps the difficulty was that his concept of poeticity set itself against the traditional model of Goethean — or Rilkean — lyric without absorbing the Italian *parole in libertà* and Russian *zaum* works that had performed such a similar role. He had, in other words, no useful paradigm to revive and adjust, believing that his “simple” and “direct” constellations were something entirely new. Thus when, in his last major poem, with its Rilkean title *das stundenbuch* (“the book of hours”) of 1965, Gomringer turned from visual “constellation” to the normal page, producing fifty-eight pages, primarily of five couplets each, containing permutations of twenty-four short conceptual nouns (e.g. *Geist, Wort, Frage, Antwort; mind, word, question, answer*), each modified by *Mein* and *Dein* (“mine” and “yours”) in what is a latter-day book of hours, a meditation on the relationship of life to death, the role of graphic space becomes much less significant, although verbal repetition in poetry always has a visual as well as an aural and semantic function. Iconicity, anagram, paronomasia — these now give way to the accessibility of the sign: Gomringer’s is a poem readable with a minimum of German. True, the elegantly produced 1980 edition provides, not only the text but also four complete translations, into English (Jerome Rothenberg), French (Pierre Garnier), Spanish (Jaime Romagosa), and Norwegian (Jan Østergren) respectively (Gomringer, 1980 [1965]). But the very fact that *stundenbuch* translates so nicely shows that the materiality of the signifier no longer plays the central role in the poem’s production. The lines *deine frage / mein wort* inevitably become *your question / my word*: the translator need only follow the score.

Pós-Tudo, Pós-Utópico

The Brazilian Concretists, to whom I now turn, had a close relationship to Gomringer at the inception of the movement, but their work soon took a different direction. The very name *Noigandres*, chosen by the Campos brothers and Decio Pignatari as the name of their movement, launched in 1952, is revealing. *Noigandres*, Augusto has explained, was taken from Ezra Pound's Canto XX, in which the poet seeks out the venerable Provençal specialist Emil Lévy, a professor at Freiburg, and asks him what the word *noigandres* (used by the great troubadour poet Arnaut Daniel) means, only to be told by Lévy that for six months he has been trying without success to find the answer: "'Noigandres, NOIgandres! / You know for seex mons of my life / Effery night when I go to bett, I say to myself: / Noigandres, eh *noigandres*, Now what the DEFFIL can that mean!'" (Pound, 1993: 89-90). But despite this colorful disclaimer with its phonetic spellings, "Old Lévy" had, in fact, gone on to crack the difficult nut in question: the word, he suggested, could be divided in two — *enoi* (*ennui*) and *gandres* from *gandir* (to ward off, to remove) — and in its original troubadour context, the word referred to an odor (probably of a flower) that could drive *ennui* away. Other Provençalists have suggested that *noigandres* might also refer to *noix de muscade* (nutmeg), which is an aphrodisiac — a reading that is plausible given that Arnaut's poem is a love poem. And since the nutmeg plant is prickly on the outside, silky on the inside, *noigandres* may also be a sexual metaphor.¹⁵

For our purposes here, it matters less what the word *noigandres* actually means than that the Brazilian Concretists took a word of complex etymology from Pound's Cantos so as to name their movement and journal. This was an unusual move: in the Brazil of the early 1950s, Pound was barely known. Incarcerated in St. Elizabeth's hospital for his wartime activities, he was at best, a controversial figure — one whose award of

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the 1948 Bollingen Prize, on the part of a panel of distinguished fellow poets, had aroused the ire of most critics and journalists. Then, too, he had long been an exile, living in obscurity in Rapallo, Italy, so that the interwar literary world of Europe had largely forgotten him.

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

In the fifties . . . there was a very important demand for change, for the recovery of the avant-garde movements. We had had two great wars that marginalized, put side for many many years, the things that interested us. You see, the music of Webern, Schoenberg and Alan Berg, for example, was not played because it was condemned both in Germany and in Russia, the two dictatorships. You could say that all experimental poetry, all experimental art, was in a certain sense marginalized. Only in the fifties began the rediscovery of Mallarmé, the rediscovery of Pound. Pound suffered at that time from the charge of fascism. His work was very much condemned. We participated in an international movement . . . that tried to rescue Pound, who was excluded from American anthologies. (Jackson, 2005: 171)

The war, Augusto observes, put all artistic experiment on hold, "it was a traumatic situation . . . [in] all the arts. Duchamp was rediscovered in the sixties by the Pop movement and by Cage, and then he balanced the influence of Picasso. . . . There was a great movement in music, in Europe as in the U.S. — the revival of Charles Ives, Henry Cowell and Cage. So, I think it was a necessity to recover the great avant-garde movements". And now Augusto adds a comment that is significant for our understanding of concrete poetics today. It is the need for recovery of the avant-garde, he argues, that has prompted him to turn a critical eye on post-modernism: "There is inside the discussion of post-modernism a tactic of wanting to put aside swiftly the recovery of experimental art and to say all this is finished!" (*Idem*: 171).¹⁶

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

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What about surrealism? For the Brazilian arrière-garde, as for Oyvind Fahlström, surrealism was distraction rather than breakthrough. In Latin America, Augusto declares, surrealism, with its “normal grammatical phrases” and the “very conventional structure” that belies its reputed psychic automatism (*Idem*: 170), had “a traumatic influence as a kind of avant-garde of consummation!” (*Idem*: 175). Haroldo adds, “A kind of conservative avant-garde. . . . All the emphasis on the unconscious and on figurality. I think French poetry did not free itself from surrealism until now. They did not understand *Un coup de dés* no poet after Mallarmé was as radical as Mallarmé. Not even Apollinaire. Apollinaire is decorative where Mallarmé is structural” (*Idem*: 175). And Augusto cites

Pignatari as quipping that, "Brazil never had surrealism because the whole country is surrealist" (*Idem*: 176).

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

30>31

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

FIG. 9

Augusto de Campos. *Lygia*, from *Poetamenos*, 1953.

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lygia		finge	
	rs	ser	
		digital	
		dedat illa (grypho)	
lynx lynx			assim
	nde	fe ly na	con ly
	figlia	mo felix	sim na nx
	seja:	quando	so lange so
ly			
gia	la	sera	sorella
			so only lonely ft-
I			

This love poem juxtaposes the "red" title word with green, yellow, blue, and purple word groups to create a dense set of repetitions with variations and contrasts. The need for translation is minor here, since Augusto himself has invented a multilingual poetics that oddly anticipates what is sometimes known in poetry circles today as "The New Mongrelisme". *Lygia* contains English, Italian, German, and Latin words and phrases, bristling with puns and double entendres. Thus *finge* ("feints" or "tricks") in line 1 becomes *finge/rs* (line 2). Do Lygia's fingers play tricks? The third and fourth lines confirm this possibility with the anagram *digital* and *dedat illa[grypho]*. As Sergio Bessa has explained, in lines 3-4, Augusto deconstructs the Portuguese verb *datilografar* ("typewriting") in order to insert his beloved's name into the scene of writing: *grypho*, moreover, can be read both as "glyph" and "griffin."¹⁸ By the time we reach line 5, Lygia has morphed into a lynx, a feline creature (*felyna*), but also a daughter figure (*figlia*), who makes, in a shift from Italian to Latin, *me felix* ("me happy"). Note too that *Lygia* contains as paragram the suffix -ly (repeated five times, twice color coded so as to stand out from the word in which it is embedded) — a suffix that functions as teaser here, given that the adjective it modifies (happily? deceptively? treacherously? generously?) is wholly indeterminate. The German phrase *so lange so* in line 8, puns on *Solange Sohl*, whose name Augusto, as he tells it, had come across in a newspaper poem and had celebrated as the ideal beloved in the Provençal manner *ses vezer* ("without seeing her") in his 1950 poem *O Sol por Natural*.¹⁹ In line 10, the second syllable of Lygia morphs into Italian to give us *gia la sera sorella* — "already evening, sister", where *sorella* may be addressee or an epithet for *sera*, the longed-for evening. The poem then concludes with the English words *so only lonely tt* — and then the solitary red letter *l*, recapitulating the address to Lygia, but this time reduced to the whisper or tap of *tt* and a single liquid sound.

To recapitulate: in this and related poems in *Poetamenos*,

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what Umberto Eco called the “iconic fallacy” continues to be operative, but here it is made reflexive and subversive — as if to say that representation must itself be called into question. And indeed, issues of iconicity or even spatial design — striking as that design surely is — are subordinated to the poem’s overall verbivocovisual composition, all of whose *materials* have a signifying function. Pound’s familiar distinction between *melopoeia*, *phanopoeia*, and *logopoeia* is applicable here, but note that *phanopoeia* is transferred from the realm of representation (e.g., the word or word group as effective “image” of X or Y) to that of the materiality of the poem: its sound (emphasized by color) and its visual appearance on the page. *Logopoeia*, the dance of the intellect among words, occurs throughout, and it is *melopoeia* that dominates: I have already talked of the *lygia—finge—digital—illa gryphe—lynx lynx—figlia* thread; consider also the echo of *so lange so* in *sorella* and then in *so only lonely*, the spacing further drawing out these word-notes. “Lygia” thus emerges as a troubadour lyric made new: the time frame of the *aubade* or *planh* gives way to the spatial-aural construct of this amorous *Klangfarbenmelodie*. The love song, moreover, nicely ironizes its conventional subject matter: Lygia, both lynx and digital, has her own tricks and, in any case, the figure of Solange Sohl looms in the background.

The next step — and we find it in the work both of Augusto and Haroldo — was the large-scale translation, more properly, in Haroldo’s words, *transcreation* (see Jackson, 2005: 9) that included works from the *Iliad* (Haroldo) and Arnaut Daniel (Augusto), from Goethe and Hölderlin to August Stramm and Kurt Schwitters (Haroldo and Augusto), to Rimbaud [Augusto, figure 10], Hopkins, and e. e. cummings (Augusto), from essays on Hegel, Christian Morgenstern, and Bertolt Brecht (Haroldo) to the “rhythmic criticism,” as Augusto calls it, the “ventilated prose” or *prosa porosa* used in Augusto’s riffs on Lewis Carroll, Gertrude Stein, Duchamp, and John Cage in *O Anticritico* (1986). Together, Haroldo and

Augusto have given us an artist's book called *Panaroma do Finnegans Wake*, which contains translations of selected fragments from the *Wake*, together with critical and scholarly commentary, and art work.²⁰

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

Writing today in the Americas as well as in Europe will mean, more and more, as far as I can see it, rewriting, remasticating. Writers of a monological, "logocentric" mentality — if they still exist and persist in that mentality — must realize that it will become more and more impossible to write the "prose of the world" without considering at least some reference point, the differences of these "ex-centrics," in the same time Barbarians (for belonging to a peripheral so-called underdeveloped world") and Alexandrians (for making "guerilla" incursions into the very heart of the Library of Babel. (Jackson: 10)

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The texts that come out of this program are very much artworks in their own right. The *Panaroma*, for example, takes as one of its epigraph's the phrase "to beg for a bite in our bark Noisdanger" from the *Wake*, and thus finds a hidden link between Joyce and the Pound of *noigandres*. The translated fragments, many of them quite short, emphasize the linguistic and poetic side of Joyce's work, at the expense of its narrative, mythic analogues. And the illustrations sprinkled throughout the text are themselves like abstractions from concrete poems, letters, and ideograms arranged in new ways [figure 11]. As a result, *Panaroma* is less a translation of Joyce than it is a found text, a transposition taking on its own life. Indeed, from here, it is a short step to Haroldo's own *Galáxias*.

Another example of such transcreation may be found in Augusto's version of Gertrude Stein's *Porta-Retratos* (Campos: 1989). The portrait on the cover (and reprinted as the frontispiece), *uma rosa para Gertrude* [figures 12-13] was made in 1988. In his Preface, Augusto admits that he came to Stein

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

Meanwhile — and this is another form of transcreation — Haroldo was engaging in theoretical projects that similarly consolidated the position of the arrière-garde. In *Ideograma*, a book that has gone through three editions since its first appearance in 1977, Haroldo gives us a translation of Ernest Fenollosa's famous "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry", which had such a decisive influence on Ezra Pound. Haroldo's purpose, however, is not merely to reproduce or enlarge on Fenollosa's argument but, on the contrary, to submit it to theoretical scrutiny. Indeed, his own long chapter, "Poetic Function and the Ideogram", is perhaps a more cogent critique than any we have to date in English, of the notion that Pound himself accepted at face value: namely, that in the Chinese language, words are much closer to things than in English, that the "pictorial appeal" of the ideogram makes Chinese a more "poetic" language than the Western ones, characterized as they are by a high degree of abstraction.

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

Whereas for the referential use of language it makes no difference whether the word *astre* ("star") can be found within the adjective *desastreux* ("disastrous") or the noun *desastre* ("disaster") . . . for the poet this kind of "discovery" is of prime relevance. In poetry, warns Jakobson, any *phonological coincidence is felt to mean semantic kinship*. . . in an overall fecundating process of pseudo-etymology or poetic etymology . . . What the Chinese example enhanced for Fenollosa was the homological and homologizing virtue of the *poetic function*. (Campos, 1994: 47-8)²¹

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Haroldo will later complicate his theory of meaning by incorporating Charles Peirce and Derrida, but for our purposes here, the Jakobson reference is central for an understanding, not only of Fenollosa but of concrete poetry itself. The Cratylan argument, we can now see, is not a "fallacy" in the sense Caroline Bayard took it to be one, for the whole point is that poetry is that discourse in which *astre* and *desastre* do belong together even if, in ordinary discourse, there is no meaningful relationship between the two. Both Augusto and Haroldo, like Oyvind Fahlstrom and such other Concretists as Ian Hamilton Finlay and Ernst Jandl, understood this distinction. The iconic aspect of Concrete Poetry, emphasized in the early stages by Gomringer and Max Bense was always subordinate to the necessity for relational structure, whereby, to enlarge on Jakobson's thesis, any phonological or visual coincidence is felt to mean semantic kinship. In this sense the material is the

meaning. Fenollosa, as Haroldo recognizes, was on to something important, but by naturalizing the ideogram (just as Pound naturalized the Image), he assumed that word and thing can be one.

Haroldo's "rear-guard" operation vis-à-vis the early twentieth-century avant-garde is thus pivotal. For years, Pound's comments on the "ideogrammic method" were taken at face value and used as entries into *The Cantos*. More important, Haroldo's understanding of how the materiality of the signifier really could work in the new poetics made it possible for him to write his great poetic prose text *Galáxias*. There are a number of detailed analyses of *Galáxias* in David Jackson's collection (including Jackson's and my own), and I do not have space to discuss this long poem here. But I want to call the reader's attention to the beautiful preface to Inês Oseki-Dépré's French translation of *Galáxias*, by the poet, novelist, theorist, and founder of Oulipo, Jacques Roubaud.

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

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

Begin and rebegin to worry ourselves, to disgust ourselves, to excite ourselves, to discourage ourselves, to stimulate ourselves, to plunge ourselves again into the foam indefinitely crumbling the grains of sand innumerably enumerated in the light when I remember all this and remember again and rediscover the unforgettable moment the moment of poetry of twenty-five years ago in which I saw on the page and began the beginning of reading the first syllables the first lines immense and long and twisted of GALAXIES. (Roubaud, 1998)²²

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Le forgeron de syllabes, Roubaud calls Haroldo, "the blacksmith of syllables". Roubaud's own word and syllable play is rather different, rule-based and numerically organized as it is, but the basic thrust — against ego psychology, expressiveness, the communication of preformed "meanings" — is similar, as is the poets' genealogy from Provençal lyric to Mallarméan language and Modernist music.

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

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

Augusto's note reads, "A centripetal voyage toward the dark hole of the unknown. From the ego-trip (the personal pronoun of the first person singular in different languages) to the SOS-trip. To the enigma of the after-life." (Donguy *in* Campos, 2002: 118).

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

As an electronic poem, *SOS*, like such related works as *cidade-city-cité* and *instante* (both 1999), obviously has an iconic dimension. The spinning circles of words represent the planets spinning out of control as doomsday nears. But the poem's iconicity would not add up to much were it not for that central pun on *SOS* — at once the classic distress symbol as relayed in Morse Code as well as, with an accent over the o, the Portuguese adjective, in plural form, for *only* or *alone*. *Sós*,

moreover, rhymes with *pós* (after). The black hole that awaits us in Augusto's poem is a terrifying image, especially in its ver-bivocovisual dimension.

But Augusto's *Expoemas* also anticipate a more recent trend in digital poetics - the conceptualism that characterizes such texts as Kenneth Goldsmith's *Day*, a book-length writing produced by copying a single day's *New York Times* in linear progression from its first word to its last in what is an astonishing defamiliarization of our daily reading practices (Goldsmith, 2003). One of Augusto's pieces is called REVER [figure 16]. The title means "to see again" or "to review", with a pun on the French *rêver*, to dream. But, far from containing dream imagery, visual or verbal, Augusto's digital poem consists of no more than the word REVER, a mirror image around the central V, itself alternately silhouetted in black against a double blue and green band and a larger red and green one. The red and green bands move to fill the whole screen, first one then the other, but the word REVER shoots out like a noisy rocket, one letter at a time, repeatedly demanding our attention. As such, the piece continues indefinitely until the reader clicks it to stop. No undisturbed sleep, it seems, for the viewer, who is forced to watch the formation of the single word REVER. No escape from the eternal WORD, noisily intruding on our contemplation of "pure" color. REVER: will it NEVER go away, will it play out for-EVER? A Cratylist, moreover, could hardly help noticing the presence of EVE in the poet's green garden.

In dreams begin responsibilities. REVER positions itself against all those avant-garde dream poems from *Le Bateau ivre* to John Berryman's *Dream Songs*, abjuring the semantic density of these lyrics even as it slyly spins out its own. Then, too, Augusto's recent digital poems cast an ironic eye on the poet's earlier stationery works: REVER does so by its very title, and SOS makes use of the *post/vos/sos/* rhyme to call into question the poet's earlier Concrete book *Pós-Tudo* ("Post-Everything").²³ In the new digital environment, as Goldsmith has suggested, such *arrière-garde* "concretism" takes on a new life. <<

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FIG. 1
Eugen Gomringer, *Silencio*, 1953

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

>>

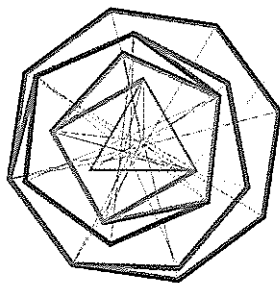
FIG. 2
Augusto de Campos, *sem um numero*, Noigandres 1962

40>41

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

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FIG. 3
Max Bill, *Fifteen Variations on a Single Theme*, v. 14, 1938



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FIG. 4
Richard Paul Lohse, *Untitled*, 1961

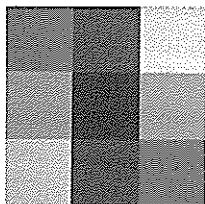
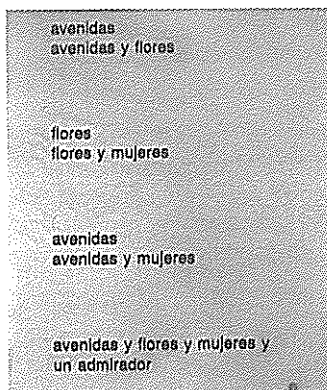




FIG. 5
Eugen Gomringer, *Avenidas*, 1952 silkscreen



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FIG. 6
[Sem titulo]

ping pong
ping pong ping
pong ping pong
ping pong



FIG. 7
Eugen Gomringer, *Wind*

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



FIG. 8
Eugen Gomringer, "o" poem, *Constellation*, 1953

o
to
blow
blow blow
blow blow blow
blow blow
blow
to
o

a
go
grow
grow grow
grow grow grow o show show
grow grow show show
grow
go
o
to
flow
flow flow
flow flow flow
flow
to
o

o
so
show
show show
show show
show show
show
so
o



FIG. 10
Augusto de Campos, *Rimbaud Livre* (1992)



42>43



FIG. 11
[Sem título]

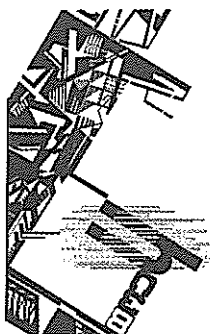
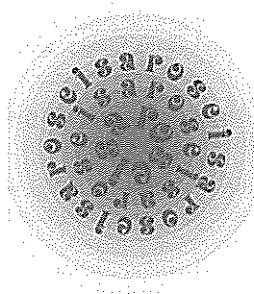


FIG. 12
Augusto de Campos, cover of *Porta-Retratos*, Gertrude Stein





FIG. 13
Augusto de Campos, *Uma rosa para gertrude*, 1988



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FIG. 14
Augusto de Campos, *SOS in Portuguese and French*, in Donguy book.

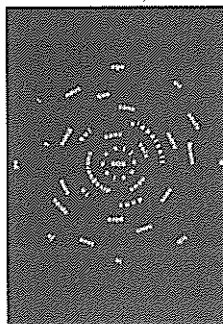
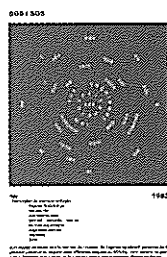


FIG. 15
De Campos, SOS

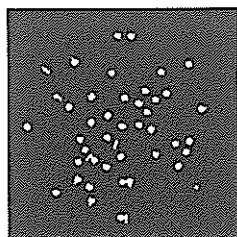
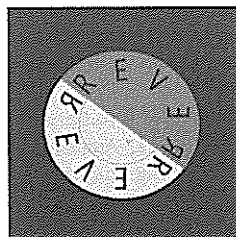


FIG. 16
Augusto de Campos, REVER



NOTES

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

[2] Kenneth Goldsmith, "From (Command) Line to (Iconic) Constellation", Ubuweb Papers http://www.ubu.com/papers/goldsmith_command.html, 1.

[3] Eco's term appears in his *Theory of Semiotics* (1979: 191).

[4] See Perloff, Marjorie (1991: 114-18).

[5] See especially Marx, William (2004).

[6] Compagnon, Antoine, "L'arrière-garde, de Péguy à Paulhan et Barthes," in Marx, 93-101. The reference is to Roland Barthes (1971: 1038): "To be avant-garde is to know that which has died. To be arrière-garde, is to continue to love it".

[7] Fahlström, Oyvind, *Hippy papy*. . . in Hultberg, 1999: 108-20. The manifesto, translated by Karen Loevgren, is also found in Mary Ellen Solt's classic *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1968, 74-78.

[8] The manifesto, originally printed as a four-page leaflet in French and Italian, is dated May 11, 1912, and August 11, 1912. For the full Italian text, see F. T. Marinetti, 1968.

[9] My emphasis.

[10] See, for example, Solt, Mary Ellen (1968), *Concrete Poetry*, 8.

[11] In his essay "Brazilian and German Avant-Garde Poetry" (2007), Haroldo de Campos notes that "Gomringer practiced an extremely concise poetry with a rigorous and orthogonal construction, thematically limited to notes from nature or an urban landscape, or instead abstract motifs of dynamic structures. . . . Brazilian concrete poetry . . . was more complex. It employed, instead of a two-dimensional (orthogonal) construction, a multidimensional, less concentrated one" (252). This book is subsequently cited in the text as *Novas*.

[12] See Schnauber, 1989: 5-6.

[13] In the *o* poem, the title's circle becomes a negative presence, the two circle halves outlined by 4 triangles made of the container words: *show, flow, blow, grow*.

[14] See Marti, in Schnauber, 1989: 88-94, 151 - respectively.

[15] In the preface to his French translation of Augusto de Campos, *Anthologie despoesia* (2002: 7-8), Jacques Donguy has a long scholarly footnote explaining the etymology of *Noigandres*. See also Kenner (1971: 116). In an email to the author, 26 June 2002, Augusto de Campos provides further information about the term, describing his own consultation of the 4-volume *Provenzalisches Supplement-Wörterbuch* (1904), where he found additional etymological data on Arnaut Daniel's use of the word. But Augusto is skeptical about the sexual theme put forward, Donguy tells, by Provençalists like Julien Blaine.

[16] My emphasis.

[17] Campos, Augusto de, "Lygia", from *Poetamenos* (1953), reproduced in many of Augusto's volumes - for example *Poesia 1949-1979* (São Paulo: Atelier Editorial, 2001) - is most easily accessible on line at <http://www2.uol.com.br/augustodecampos/home.htm/> and in Donguy, *Antihologie despoesia*, pp. 22-23. I have relied in large part on Donguy's excellent note on p. 22.

[18] Sergio Bessa, "The Image of Voice in Augusto de Campos's *Poetamenos*," unpub. paper.

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

[20] In the order cited: Campos, Haroldo de (1999), *os nomes e os navios: Homero, Ilíada, II*; Campos, Augusto de (1987), *Mais Provençais*; -- (1992), *Irmãos Germanos*; -- (1992), *Rimbaud livre*; -- (1997), *Hopkins: A Beleza Difícil*; -- (1987), *40 POEM(A)S - e. e. cummings*; Campos, Haroldo de (1997), *O Arco-Íris Branco*; Campos, Augusto de (1986), *O anticrítico*.

[21] Haroldo de Campos, *Ideograma*, 3d. ed. (São Paulo: USPED, 1994), 47-48. My translation is based on that of Braga, Maria Lúcia Santaella (1981: 9-39, rpt. *Novas* 287-311, see pp. 294-95). This translation is of the first edition of *Ideograma*. In the third, Haroldo has added a section on Charles Peirce and Derrida, which complicates the issue further.

[22] For the original, see Haroldo de Campos, *Galáxias* (São Paulo: Editora ex Libris, 1984). English translation here is mine. For further translations of *Galáxias* by Sergio Bessa and others, see *Novas* 121-30.

[23] I owe this insight to a conversation with the scholar of Portuguese poetry Odile Cisneros, April 12, 2007.

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