

# LATINOAMERICAN EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

CLEMENTE PADIN

Visual Writing  
/ubu editions  
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# Latinoamerican EXPERIMENTAL POETRY

by

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Visual poetry, a synthesis of centuries of poetic experimentation (recall the poems of Simias of Rhodes and Theocritus of Syracuse, around 300 AD), reaches an unusual point of development at the beginning of the 1950s. At that point we see its "expressionist" bent, which derives directly from French lettrism and, prior, from the "words in liberty" of the futurist Marinetti; as well, there is the "concretist" bent, derived from the visual concretism of the School of Ulm (Max Bill) and, earlier, from the abstract-geometric movement De Stijl, above all, Mondrian.

Much freer and less preoccupied with structure, the first tendency in many cases downplays the very semanticity of language, arriving at a sole privileging of the plasticity of the minimal units, that is to say, letters. The second tendency is much more rigorous, above all in its first stage; it causes space and verbality to coincide in a unique structure of semantic interrelation. Only with the appearance of the semiotic poem could words be substituted by forms, but mediated by lexical

keys. Then the Process/Poem movement (1968) totally liquidated this dependency. In this formal aspect, visual poetry, stemming from lettrism, had already freed itself of signification, although in general the forms it utilized were letters next to other visual elements.

In Latin America these currents are consolidated around 1968 with the first exhibitions of "New Poetry" (thus was named visual poetry at that time) organized by Edgardo Antonio Vigo in Argentina and by Clemente Padín in Uruguay, and above all by the experimental-poetic work that had been published much earlier by the network of alternative magazines of the time: *Diagonal Cero* and *Hexágono 71* published by Vigo in Argentina; *Signos* by Samuel Feijóo in Cuba; *La Pata de Palo* published by Dámaso Ogaz in Venezuela; *Ediciones Mimbres* in Chile by the graphic artist Guillermo Deisler; *Ponto, Totem, and Processo* published by Joaquim Branco and Wladimir Dias-Pino in Brazil; and *Los Huevos del Plata* and *OVUM 10* published by Clemente Padín in Uruguay. Today, at the beginning of the 1990s, the theme has been reborn, above all furthered by the Mexican poets of the Núcleo Post-Arte group, coordinated by César Espinosa, who have already sponsored two International Biennials of Visual and Experimental Poetry (1985/86 and 1987/88), and by the movement that is being pushed forward by the poet Philadelpho Menezes in Sao Paulo, Brazil, who has organized the first International Show of Visual Poetry in 1988, together with a significant symposium which brought together the most important creators and critics in this medium from all over the world.

Perhaps the major characterization of visual poetry we owe to the Uruguayan critic and poet Nicteroi Argañaraz, who, in his book *Uruguayan Visual Poetry* (Montevideo: 1986), says, "... visual poetry is poetry to be seen. . . This type of poetry incorporates a series of elements (visual) external to those canons of traditional poetry and proper to other expressive forms. It is not limited only to the verbal, and, in this sense, it represents an extension of the possibilities of traditional poetry. . . Visual poetry experiments in diverse levels with the relations among words and images and bases its results on a unique context. For this reason, its grammar (in the structural sense) is not exclusively

verbal nor exclusively visual, but is inter-semiotic." It is precisely this "inter-semioticity" which relates visual poetry to proposals of the conceptualist movement that created a multiple space in which languages give up being privileged one over the others (the "intermedia" of Fluxus art or the "multimedia" defined by the North American critic and poet Dick Higgins). This de-hierarchization of the languages reflects the clearly democratic and participatory sense of the new poetic tendencies. Art (in this case "literary" or "experimental-poetic") stops being a passive mirror in which are reflected the social relations privileging the old primacies of one language over others or the concepts of "good/bad" or their derivative "beautiful/ugly," which reproduce the relations of the social sphere by allowing someone or some institution to exercise the cultural "dictate" in one more manifestation of ideological repression.

Thus, the spectator or "reader" of visual poetry is in a situation of genuine relationship with the work through his knowledge and through the elements that this contributes, making real his option to decide whether or not it has living value for him, without preestablished judgements or impositions of any kind. This attitude of poetic experimentalism has generated new languages, valuable and genuine in themselves, which are related to the rest of the creative processes that conceptualism ushered in: performance, video, installations, mail art, street actions, etc. (expressions in which it is not unusual to find visual poems). At the same time, on encouraging the spectator to discover the information for himself, participation was offered, which did away with the paternalism of the "unique genius" creator, expression of the domination of some by others.

For the Process/Poem artists, the visual poem is "an (anti-) literary product that avails itself of the graphic (typographic) and/or purely visual resources of calligrammatic, ideogrammatic, geometric, or abstract tendencies. . . . [the visual poem is] one of the most fruitful forms of artistic experimentation whose graphic-visual possibilities do not exclude other literary possibilities (verbal, sound, etc.) in the specific field of the avant-garde." (Moacyr Cirne). The visual poem is a critical, productive consequence of the development of the literary (or



anti-literary) avant-garde in the heart of the social practice of art and of language in general; that is, it is not an entity floating in space, nor an entelechy, but a product founded in the real and in the social-historic. The same dynamism of the diverse currents already indicated--as much those emerging from the historical avant-gardes of the beginnings of the century as those closer to Conceptualism--has generated a great variety of forms that take advantage of the most obscure channels. For this last tendency, that is, for those artists preoccupied with making precise the concept of a total (or almost total) disconnection of the work in relation to the object, directed more towards privileging the "situation" (we recall the "Theory of the non-object" of Ferreira Gullar) over the "material," of a Duchampian origin--the desacralization of art via the ready-made--visual poetry is an ideal means for the pursuit of its postulates, above all of its signifiers, that is, the graphic, sonorous, or situational element that (whether free or not from the social-semantic convention) is erected in response to the artistic fact. This of course implies "facts" or "events" developed in time, and of course therefore they are fallible, neither definitive nor eternal, modified by reality's dynamic changes.

The artistic avant-garde is necessarily experimental with respect to language. That is, such works would not be avant-garde if they did not establish radical writing or discourse projects impelled by the search for and production of new information. The theme of the avant-garde is based on laying out problems, not their solution. This has nothing to do with manipulating the signs of the repertory itself of each language in what would amount to a redundancy of already known solutions--the pointless exercise of imitative virtuosity. Rather, it has to do with generating information that problematizes other languages, putting them in question, obliging them to remake their structures in the light of the process that information brings forth. These reaccommodations of the distinct repertories--not only artistic but social--in turn will generate new projects and questioning that will modify that information, leading to new advances in knowledge.

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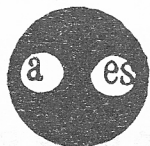
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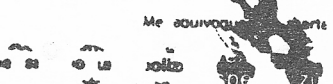
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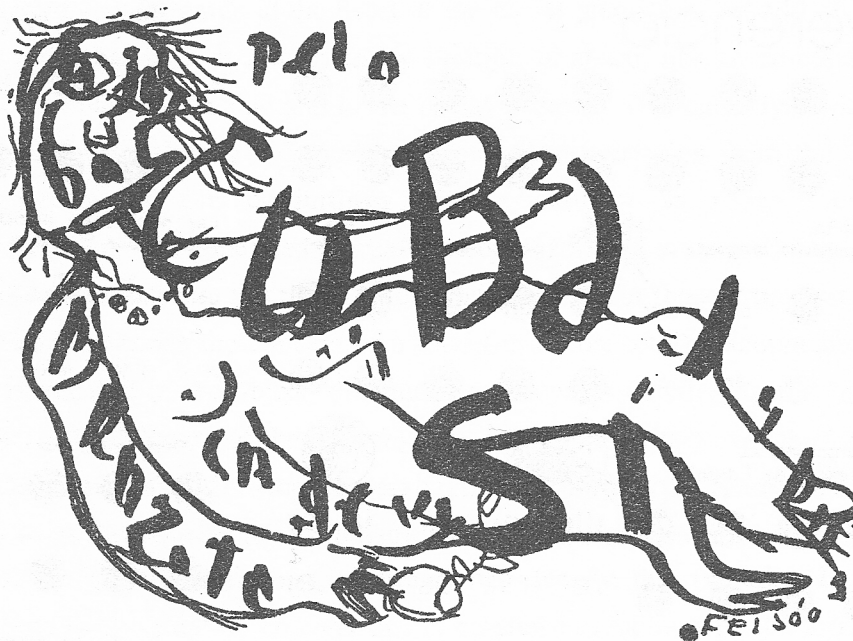
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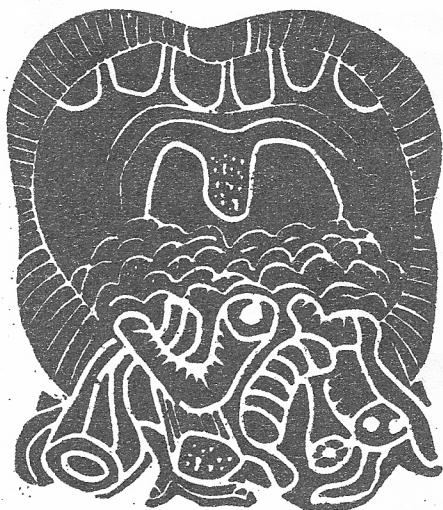


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Alfabismo — Álvaro de Sá



1RA. AUDICION DE POESIA FONICA  
 CA-121 RADIO UNIVERSIDAD TECNICA  
 DEL ESTADO  
 ANTOFAGASTA. ENERO DE 1972

G. DEISLER

# DE LA SOLEDAD AL AMOR VUELAN GAVIOTAS

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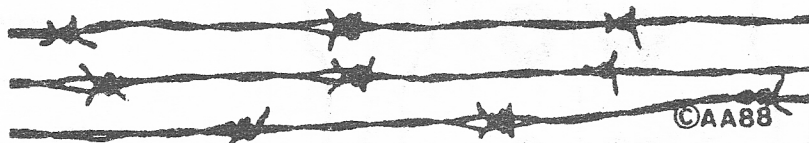
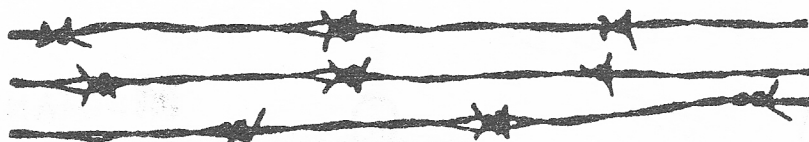
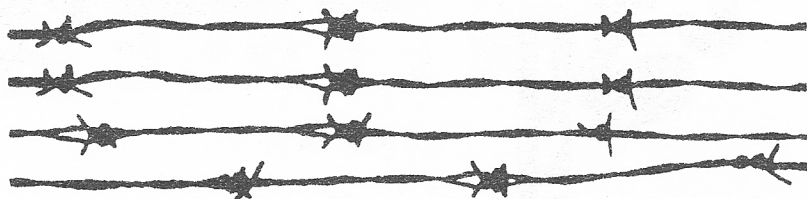
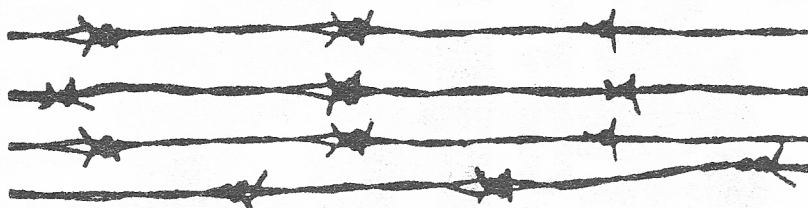
do, deletrear que siempre, siempre te amaré, ya es bastante que valga por ahora, al amor no se le niega que más tarde devalúe la magia, deshaga murmullos, revoque esperanzas

FRANCISCO GARZON CÉSPEDES



**APARTHEID**

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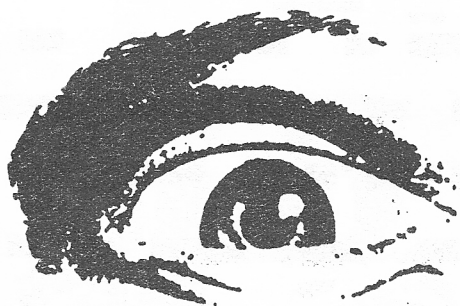
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AVELINO DE ARAÚJO

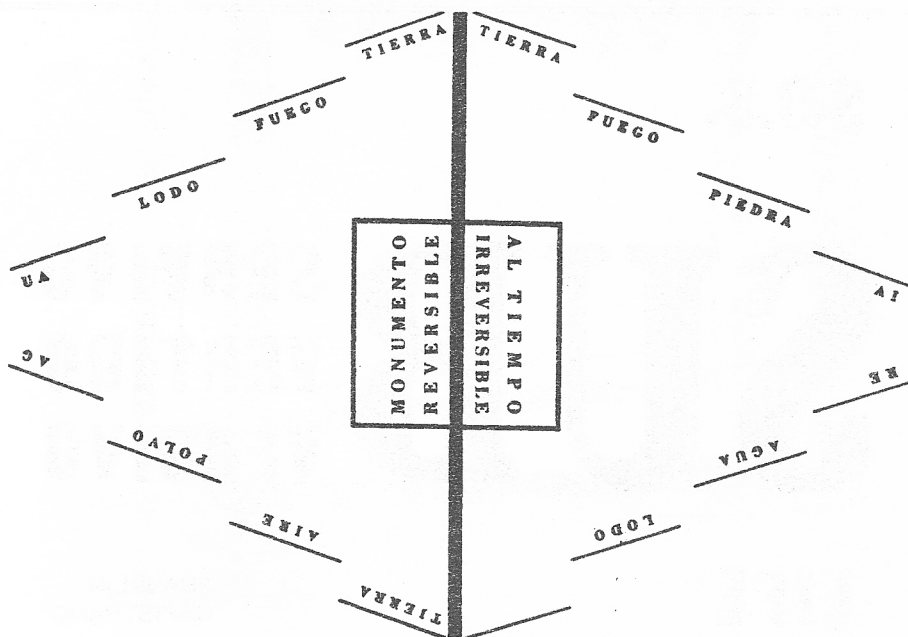




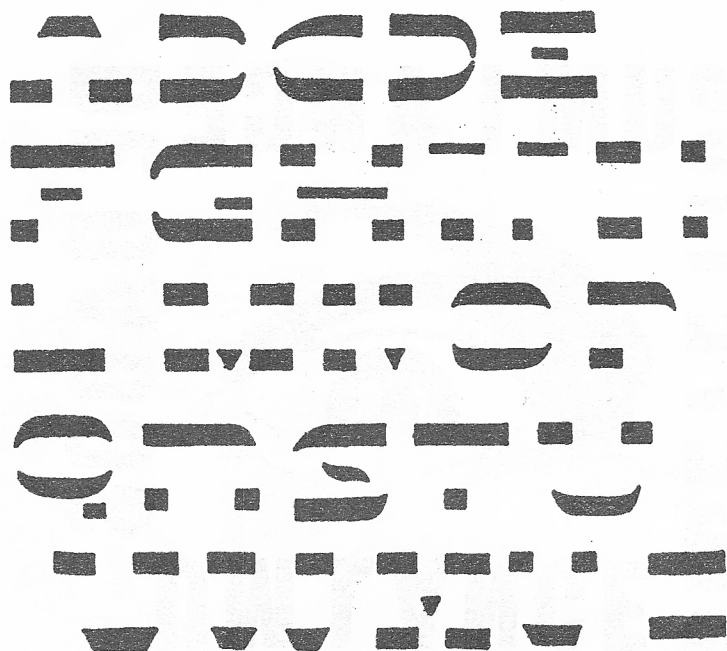
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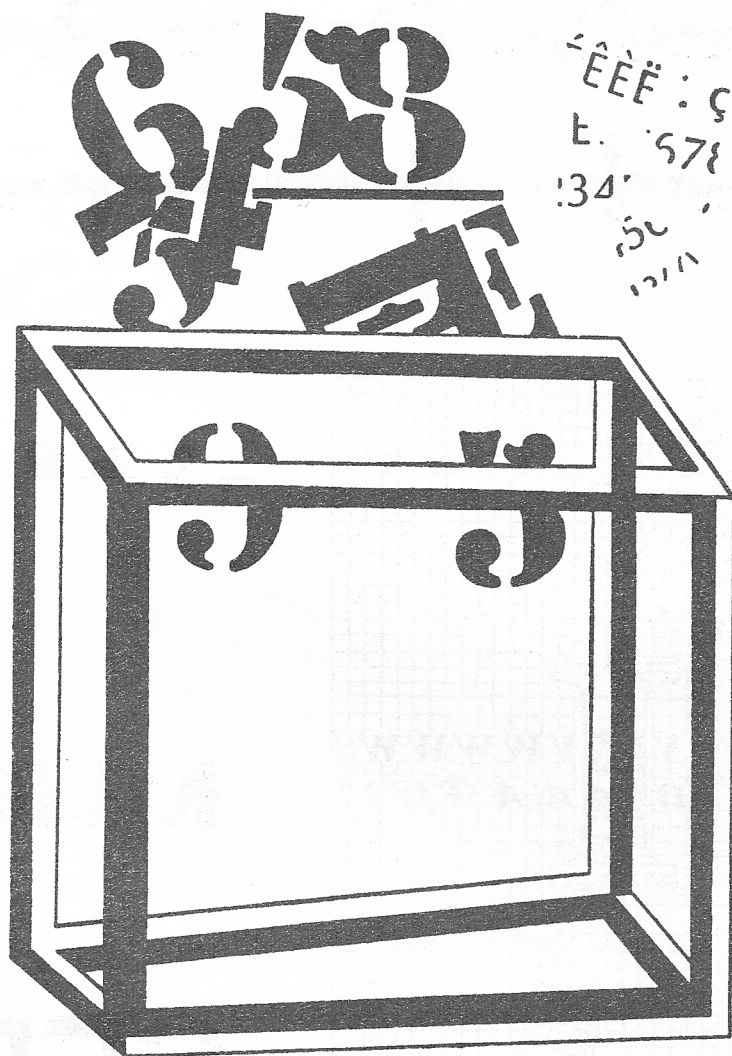
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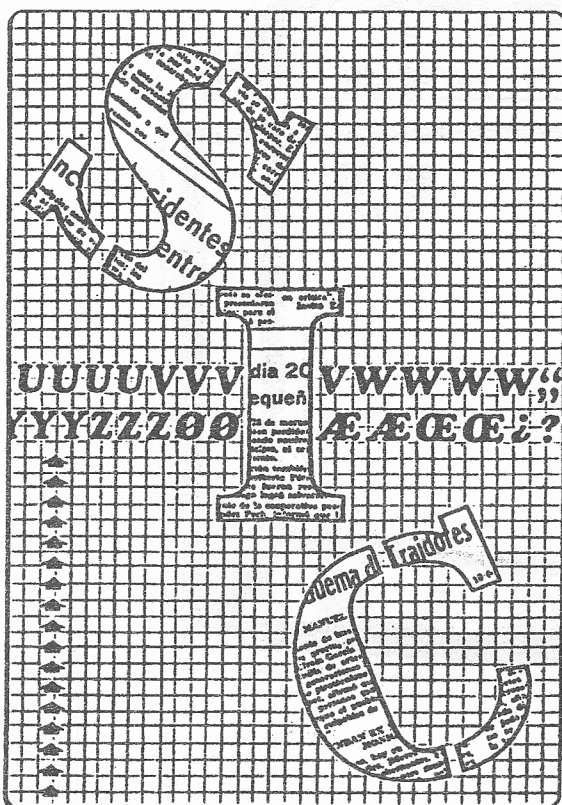


poema matemático 1968

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F. SILVA





Visual Writing: Documents in Concrete and Visual Poetry

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