

Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry (1958)¹

Augusto de Campos, Decio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos: Brazil

From *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 1968, ed. Mary Ellen Solt, republished at <https://ubu.com/papers/noigandres01.html>

Concrete Poetry: product of a critical evolution of forms. Assuming that the historical cycle of verse (as formal-rhythmical unit) is closed, concrete poetry begins by being aware of graphic space as structural agent. Qualified space: space-time structure instead of mere linear-temporistical development. Hence the importance of ideogram concept, either in its general sense of spatial or visual syntax, or in its special sense (Fenollosa/Pound) of method of composition based on direct-analogical, not logical-discursive juxtaposition of elements. “Il faut que notre intelligence s’habitue à comprendre synthético-idéographiquement au lieu de analytico – discursivement” (Apollinaire). Eisenstein: ideogram and montage.

Forerunners: Mallarmé (**Un coup de dés**, 1897): the first qualitative jump: “subdivisions prismatiques de l’idée”; space (“blancs”) and typographical devices as substantive elements of composition. Pound (**The Cantos**); ideogramic method. Joyce (**Ulysses** and **Finnegan’s Wake**): word-ideogram; organic interpenetration of time and space. Cummings: atomization of words, physiognomical typography; expressionistic emphasis on space. Apollinaire (**Calligrammes**): the vision, rather than the praxis. Futurism, Dadaism: contributions to the life of the problem. In Brazil: Oswald de Andrade (1890-1954): “in pills, minutes of poetry.” João Cabral de Melo Neto (born 1920—**The Engineer** and **The Psychology of Composition** plus **Anti-Ode**): direct speech, economy and functional architecture of verse.

Concrete Poetry: tension of things-words in space-time. Dynamic structure: multiplicity of concomitant movements. So in music—by, definition, a time art—space intervenes (Webern and his followers: Boulez and Stockhausen; concrete and electronic music); in visual arts—spatial, by definition—time intervenes (Mondrian and his **Boogie-Woogie** series; Max Bill; Albers and perceptive ambivalence; concrete art in general).

Ideogram: appeal to nonverbal communication. Concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure-content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/ or more or less subjective feelings. Its material word (sound, visual form, semantical charge). Its problem: a problem of functions-relations of this material. Factors of proximity and similitude, gestalt psychology. Rhythm: relational force. Concrete poem, by using the phonetical system (digits) and analogical syntax, creates a specific linguistical area—“**verbivocovisual**”—

¹ Concrete poetry is the name given to a midcentury visual poetry movement centered in Brazil, one that claims a long lineage across global poetic traditions and that has had repercussions in the work and theorization of experimental poetry beyond Brazil. I’ve included this manifesto-like text as a critical introduction to the rest of the work here, in part because it is historically foundational, and also because it might help raise questions of what poetry does through, in, with, as language, and how the genre of the lyric fits into the larger work of the genre? category? of the poem.

For more background on Brazilian Concrete Poetry, see: <https://ubu.com/papers/perrone.html>

For a discussion of contemporary concrete/visual poetry in comparison with European Renaissance poetry, see: <https://ubu.com/papers/greene.html>

which shares the advantages of nonverbal communication, without giving up word's virtualities. With the concrete poem occurs the phenomenon of metacommunication: coincidence and simultaneity of verbal and nonverbal communication; only—it must be noted—it deals with a communication of forms, of a structure-content, not with the usual message communication. Concrete Poetry aims at the least common multiple of language. Hence its tendency to nounising and verbification. “The concrete wherewithal of speech” (Sapir). Hence its affinities with the so-called **isolating languages** (Chinese): “The less outward grammar the Chinese language possesses, the more inner grammar inherent in it” (Humboldt via Cassirer). Chinese offers an example of pure relational syntax, based exclusively on word order (see Fenollosa, Sapir and Cassirer).

The conflict form-subject looking for identification, we call isomorphism. Parallel to form-subject isomorphism, there is a space-time isomorphism, which creates movement. In a first moment of concrete poetry pragmatics, isomorphism tends to physiognomy, that is a movement imitating natural appearance (**motion**); organic form and phenomenology of composition prevail. In a more advanced stage, isomorphism tends to resolve itself into pure structural movement (**movement** properly said); at this phase, geometric form and mathematics of composition (sensible rationalism) prevail.

Renouncing the struggle for "absolute," Concrete Poetry remains in the magnetic field of perennial relativeness. Chronomicro-metering of hazard. Control. Cybernetics. The poem as a mechanism regulating itself: feed-back. Faster communication (problems of functionality and structure implied) endows the poem with a positive value and guides its own making.

Concrete Poetry: total responsibility before language. Thorough realism. Against a poetry of expression, subjective and hedonistic. To create precise problems and to solve them in terms of sensible language. A general art of the word. The poem-product: useful object.

Note: Original printed without capitals. The "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry" presents a synthesis of the theoretical writings of the Noigandres group from 1950–58. The critical writings and manifestos of Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari and Haroldo de Campos have been collected in a volume: *Teoria da Poesia Concreta, Textos Críticos e Manifestos 1950–1960*, Sao Paulo, Edições Invenção, 1965.

Translated by the authors.

1958

(From **Noigandres 4** (the Concretes' poetry journal))

Examples of concrete poetry in Portuguese and English:

https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/concrete_poetry/

It may be interesting to page through and see what stands out among the examples included in the link above, which span several decades of the movement. Augusto de Campos's "Lygia Fingers" on the website, as well as several others, include audio of the author reading the visual poem. I'm also including below Haroldo de Campos's "nascemorre", as well as an English translation (or perhaps transcreation, to use a term Haroldo coined. I couldn't find the translator's name, unfortunately.) "Nasce" means he/she/one/you is (are) born; "morre" means he/she/one/you die(s). "Re-" and "des-" are prefixes that mean the same as their English counterparts; "se" can mean "if" and is also the pronoun used in impersonal expressions (se nasce: one is born) as well as reflexive verbs (one births oneself, so to speak).

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se
nasce
morre nasce
morre nasce morre
renasce remorre renasce
remorre renasce
remorre
re
desnasce
desmorre desnasce
desmorre desnasce desmorre
nascemorrenasce
morrenasce
morre
se
```

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if
to be born
to die to be born
to die to be born to die
to be reborn to die again to be reborn
to die again to be reborn
to die again
again
not to be born
not to be dead not to be born not to be dead
not to be dead not to be born not to be dead
to be born to die to be born
to die to be born
to die
if
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Pondo os olhos primeiramente na sua cidade conhece, que os mercadores são o primeiro móvel da ruína, em que arde pelas mercadorias inúteis, e enganosas²

Gregório de Matos (1636–1696)

Triste Bahia! Oh quão dessemelhante
Estás e estou do nosso antigo estado!
Pobre te vejo a ti, tu a mi empenhado,
Rica te vi eu já, tu a mi abundante.

A ti trocou-te a máquina mercante,
Que em tua larga barra tem entrado,
A mim foi-me trocando, e tem trocado
Tanto negócio, e tanto negociante.

Deste em dar tanto açúcar excelente
Pelas drogas inúteis, que abelhuda
Simples aceitas do sangaz Brichote.

Oh se quisera Deus, que de repente
Um dia amanheceras tão sisuda
Que fora de algodão o teu capote!

To the City of Bahia Laying His Eyes First upon His City He Sees That Its Merchants Are the Primary Cause of Its Ruin, Because It Longs after Useless and Deceitful Goods

(trans. Mark A. Lokensgard)

Poor, sad Bahia! oh how different
You are and I am from our former state!
Wretched I see you, you to me in debt,
Rich I once saw you, you to me abundant.

The merchant marine has you changed,
As in your ample harbor it entered
I have been changed by, and have exchanged
So much commerce, so many merchants.

You have begun to trade so much excellent sugar
For useless remedies, and impudently
You accept them from the wily foreigner.

Oh if God would wish the coming of the day
That dawning, would you find you so astute
That of cotton were made your cloak!

² I'm including this sonnet, not so much to consider it on its own, but rather as one of many lyric sources incorporated in the song that follows by Caetano Veloso, and to put this relatively conventional musical rendering of a/the lyric in dialogue with Caetano's later musical collaboration with a digital/visual poem by Augusto de Campos.

Triste Bahia

Caetano Veloso, 1972³

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQqXrhooTNU>

Triste Bahia, oh, quão dessemelhante
Triste Bahia, oh, quão dessemelhante
Estás e estou do nosso antigo estado
Pobre te vejo a ti, tu a mim empenhado
Rico te vi eu já, tu a mim abundante
Triste Bahia, oh, quão dessemelhante
A ti trocou-te a máquina mercante
Que em tua larga barra tem entrado
A mim vem me trocando e tem trocado
Tanto negócio e tanto negociante

Triste, oh, quão dessemelhante, triste
Pastinha já foi à África
Pastinha já foi à África
Pra mostrar capoeira do Brasil
Eu já vivo tão cansado
De viver aqui na Terra

Minha mãe, eu vou pra lua
Eu mais a minha mulher
Vamos fazer um ranchinho
Tudo feito de sapê, minha mãe eu vou pra lua
E seja o que Deus quiser

Triste, oh, quão dessemelhante
Ê, ô, galo canta
O galo cantou, camará
Ê, cocorocô, ê cocorocô, camará
Ê, vamo-nos embora, ê vamo-nos embora camará
Ê, pelo mundo afora, ê pelo mundo afora camará
Ê, triste Bahia, ê, triste Bahia, camará
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte

³ From the album *Transa (Happening)*, recorded in exile in London. Interestingly, most of the songs on the album are sung in a mixture of English and Portuguese. It seems a full reading of the lyric(s) would be very much tied in with listening to the song. (For those who aren't familiar with it, the album is a landmark in MPB (música popular brasileira, or popular Brazilian music), and a beautiful one at that!)

Pé dentro, pé fora, quem tiver pé pequeno vai embora
Pé dentro, pé fora, quem tiver pé pequeno vai embora

Oh, virgem mãe puríssima
Oh, virgem mãe puríssima
Oh, virgem mãe puríssima
Oh, virgem mãe puríssima
Oh, virgem mãe puríssima
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Trago no peito a estrela do norte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Trago no peito a estrela do norte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte
Trago no peito a estrela do norte
Bandeira branca enfiada em pau forte

Triste Bahia

(my translation, mostly)⁴

How sad Bahia, oh how dissimilar⁵
How sad Bahia, oh how dissimilar
You are and I am from our old state
I see your poverty, you see me pawned
I've seen you rich, you've seen me abundant
How sad Bahia, oh how dissimilar
The merchant ships that have crossed
Your long reefs have shortchanged you
And so many merchants and so much business
Have changed and are changing me

How sad, oh how dissimilar, how sad
Pastinha already left for Africa⁶
Pastinha already left for Africa
To show capoeira from Brazil
I already live so tired
Of living here on the earth

My mother, I'm going to the moon
I and my wife
We're going to build a little hut
All made out of thatch, my mother I'm going to the moon
And may it be what God wants

How sad, oh how dissimilar
Hey, the rooster sings
The rooster sung, comrade

⁴ Not a beautiful translation of the song, but it should get the idea across. Stanza divisions are provided by Google and may not be what was originally intended. I've used Charles Perrone's translation of the first two stanzas of Gregório de Matos's sonnet, published in an article on the use of lyric poetry in Brazilian popular music, as they seem less stilted and more literal than Lokensgard's above (<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20119407>). I'll annotate the musical citations throughout this song, with gratitude to this article by Rafael Julião: <https://revistas.ufrj.br/index.php/tm/article/view/17831/10820>

⁵ The first two stanzas of Gregório de Matos, "To the City of Bahia..."

⁶ From Julião: "Vicente Ferreira Pastinha (1889-1981) was an important Bahian *mestre* who lived in Salvador and was fundamental for the divulgation of Angola Capoeira." Capoeira is a martial art, in which music plays a central role, first practiced in enslaved communities in Brazil. This video (starting around 1:15) shows Mestre Pastinha playing capoeira on the beach in Bahia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OMUHKFwx05I>

This line, as well as what follows, cite Mestre Pastinha's 1969 album of capoeira songs (songs attributed to the public domain), in particular, "Eu já vivo enojado." Here is a partial transcription of the lyrics and a recording; you can hear the citation not only in terms of lyrics but also Caetano's use of traditional instrumentation: <https://www.letras.mus.br/mestre-pastinha/1250673/>

Hey, cock-a-doodle-do, hey cock-a-doodle-do, comrade
Hey, let's go, hey let's go, comrade
Hey, how sad Bahia, hey, how sad Bahia, comrade
White flag hung on a strong pole⁷
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag
White flag hung on a strong pole

Afoxé leí, leí, leô⁸
Afoxé leí, leí, leô
Afoxé leí, leí, leô
Afoxé leí, leí, leô
Afoxé leí, leí, leô
Afoxé leí, leí, leô

White flag, white flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails⁹
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea
The Waterfall steamboat no longer sails in the sea

How sad Recôncavo¹⁰
Oh how dissimilar

⁷ From a traditional song, “Ponto do guerreiro branco”; according to Julião, a citation “evoking here the Afro-Brazilian religions that developed in Bahia and that deeply influenced the mythical-musical imaginary of samba and Brazilian music.” Popular Brazilian singer Maria Bethânia (who is also Caetano’s sister) recorded this song on an eponymous album in 1969. I can’t find this album anywhere online, but here is a video (albeit of poor quality) of her performing the song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs0CyZ2EtU>

⁸ Afoxé, Afro-Brazilian musical instrument, also the name of a musical rhythm characteristic of Carnival in Bahia and taken up by popular musicians in Brazil in the 1960s and 70s: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afox%C3%A9>

⁹ “O vapor de Cachoeira,” song named after a steamboat that connected the cities of Salvador and Santo Amaro in the nineteenth century. A traditional song with many variations on the lyrics; here is one 1956 version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eraxOCT-f4>

¹⁰ Region in the state of Bahia where colonization began and sugarcane and tobacco were grown for export.

Sad

Maria hit the jungle it's time
Maria hit the jungle it's time
Lift your skirt and let's go
Lift your skirt and let's go
Maria hit the jungle it's time
Maria hit the jungle it's time
Lift your skirt and let's go
Lift your skirt and let's go
Maria hit the jungle it's time
Maria hit the jungle it's time
Lift your skirt and let's go
Lift your skirt and let's go

Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves¹¹
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves
Foot in, foot out, whoever has a small foot leaves

Oh Virgin Mother most pure¹²
Oh Virgin Mother most pure
Oh Virgin Mother most pure
Oh Virgin Mother most pure
Oh Virgin Mother most pure
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
I carry the North Star in my heart
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
White flag hung on a strong pole
I carry the North Star in my heart

¹¹ Julião on these lines: “a combination of folkloric themes that connects as much to a tradition of children’s music as to *samba de roda* in Bahia [he adds these songs are also often incorporated capoeira] . . . It isn’t unusual, in any of these styles, to combine diverse songs from popular culture, sequenced in a way that makes it difficult to determine the limits between them. This means that Caetano’s collage practice, which seems avant-garde, was inspired by the tradition of popular culture.”

¹² From the Hymn to Our Lady of Purification. I don’t know that it’s traditionally sung, but here is a version by Maria Bethânia, clearly citing Caetano: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETn9N4-jyyo>

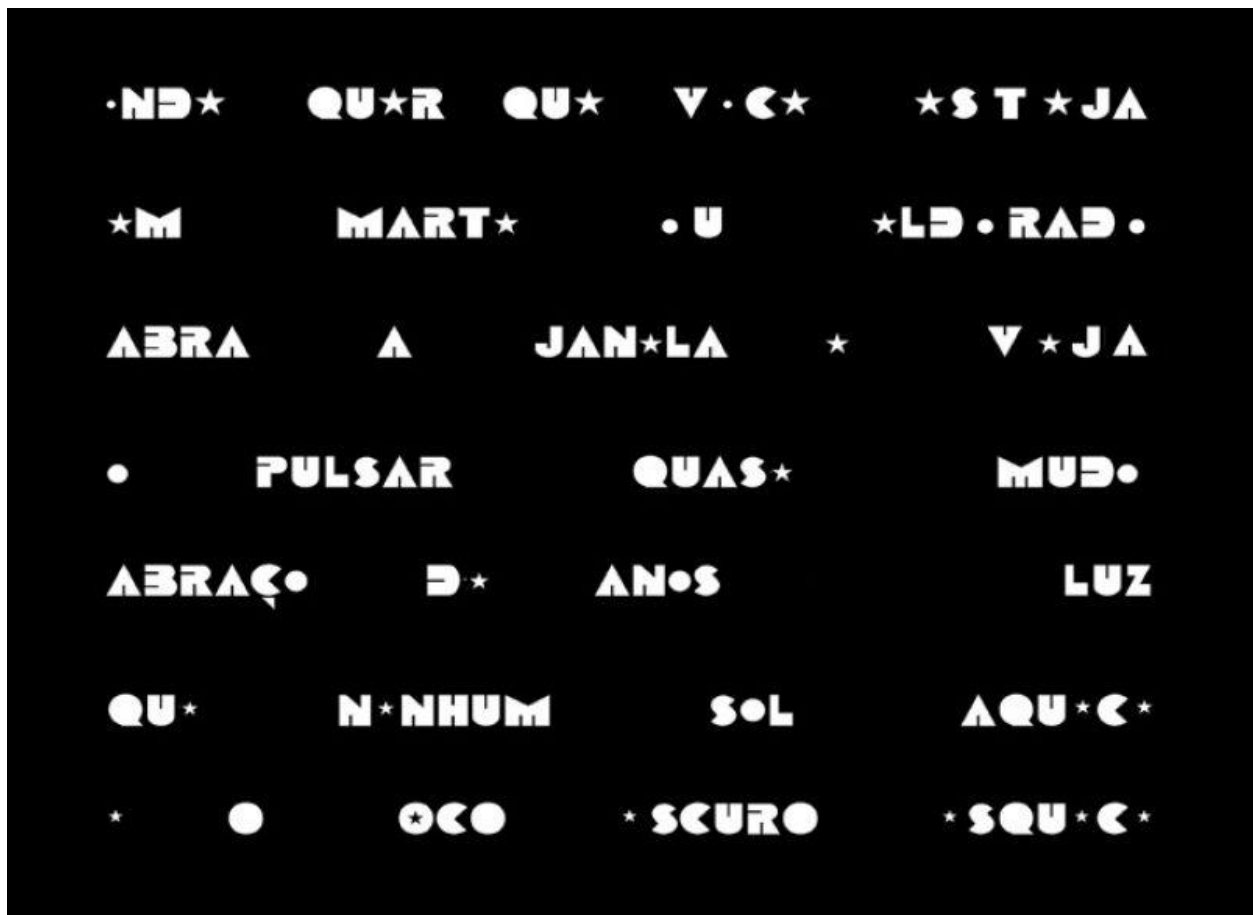
White flag hung on a strong pole
I carry the North Star in my heart
White flag hung on a strong pole

Augusto de Campos, “Pulsar” (1984)

Portuguese original in the link, sung by Caetano Veloso. This 2014 video is a remake of a video made by artist Paulo Barreto using a computer in 1984.¹³ Note the use of a highly stylized font in the Portuguese, in which the letters “e” and “o” are replaced with a star and a dot, respectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hlgkz-g-ukc>

Wherever you might be
On Mars or El Dorado
Open the window and see
The pulsar almost mute
Embrace of light years
That no sun warms
And the empty darkness forgets



¹³ Available here, where the old computer technology is evident: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgE0UuWTtas>

Nicanor Parra, “Manifiesto” (1969)¹⁴

Señoras y señores
Ésta es nuestra última palabra.
-Nuestra primera y última palabra-
Los poetas bajaron del Olimpo.

Para nuestros mayores
La poesía fue un objeto de lujo
Pero para nosotros
Es un artículo de primera necesidad:
No podemos vivir sin poesía.

A diferencia de nuestros mayores
-Y esto lo digo con todo respeto-
Nosotros sostenemos
Que el poeta no es un alquimista
El poeta es un hombre como todos
Un albañil que construye su muro:
Un constructor de puertas y ventanas.

Nosotros conversamos
En el lenguaje de todos los días
No creemos en signos cabalísticos.

Además una cosa:
El poeta está ahí
Para que el árbol no crezca torcido.

Este es nuestro mensaje.
Nosotros denunciarnos al poeta demiurgo
Al poeta Barata
Al poeta Ratón de Biblioteca.
Todos estos señores
-Y esto lo digo con mucho respeto-
Deben ser procesados y juzgados
Por construir castillos en el aire
Por malgastar el espacio y el tiempo
Redactando sonetos a la luna
Por agrupar palabras al azar
A la última moda de París.
Para nosotros no:
El pensamiento no nace en la boca

¹⁴ Nicanor Parra, Chilean poet (or antipoet?), 1914–2018. A fun biographical profile by Argentine *cronista* Leila Guerriero, including praise for Parra from Harold Bloom: <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2012/03/26/our-twilight-lands/>

Nace en el corazón del corazón.

Nosotros repudiamos
La poesía de gafas oscuras
La poesía de capa y espada
La poesía de sombrero alón.
Propiciamos en cambio
La poesía a ojo desnudo
La poesía a pecho descubierto
La poesía a cabeza desnuda.

No creemos en ninfas ni tritones.
La poesía tiene que ser esto:
Una muchacha rodeada de espigas
O no ser absolutamente nada.

Ahora bien, en el plano político
Ellos, nuestros abuelos inmediatos,
¡Nuestros buenos abuelos inmediatos!
Se retractaron y se dispersaron
Al pasar por el prisma de cristal.
Unos pocos se hicieron comunistas.
Yo no sé si lo fueron realmente.
Supongamos que fueron comunistas,
Lo que sé es una cosa:
Que no fueron poetas populares,
Fueron unos reverendos poetas burgueses.

Hay que decir las cosas como son:
Sólo uno que otro
Supo llegar al corazón del pueblo.
Cada vez que pudieron
Se declararon de palabra y de hecho
Contra la poesía dirigida
Contra la poesía del presente
Contra la poesía proletaria.

Aceptemos que fueron comunistas
Pero la poesía fue un desastre
Surrealismo de segunda mano
Decadentismo de tercera mano,
Tablas viejas devueltas por el mar.
Poesía adjetiva
Poesía nasal y gutural
Poesía arbitraria
Poesía copiada de los libros

Poesía basada
En la revolución de la palabra
En circunstancias de que debe fundarse
En la revolución de las ideas.
Poesía de círculo vicioso
Para media docena de elegidos:
"Libertad absoluta de expresión".
Hoy nos hacemos cruces preguntando
Para qué escribirían esas cosas
¿Para asustar al pequeño burgués?
¡Tiempo perdido miserablemente!
El pequeño burgués no reacciona
Sino cuando se trata del estómago.

¡Qué lo van a asustar con poesías!

La situación es ésta:
Mientras ellos estaban
Por una poesía del crepúsculo
Por una poesía de la noche
Nosotros propugnamos
La poesía del amanecer.
Este es nuestro mensaje,
Los resplandores de la poesía
Deben llegar a todos por igual
La poesía alcanza para todos.

Nada más, compañeros
Nosotros condenamos
-Y esto sí que lo digo con respeto-
La poesía de pequeño dios
La poesía de vaca sagrada
La poesía de toro furioso.

Contra la poesía de las nubes
Nosotros oponemos
La poesía de la tierra firme
-Cabeza fría, corazón caliente-
Somos tierrafirmistas decididos-
Contra la poesía de café
La poesía de la naturaleza
Contra la poesía de salón
La poesía de la plaza pública
La poesía de protesta social.

Los poetas bajaron del Olimpo.

Nicanor Parra, "Manifesto"

(my translation)

Ladies and gentlemen
This is our final word
—Our first and final word—
The poets have come down from Olympus.

For our elders
Poetry was a luxury good
But for us
It is a basic necessity:
We cannot live without poetry.

Unlike our elders
—And I say this with all respect—
We hold
That the poet is not an alchemist
The poet is a man like any other
A bricklayer who builds his wall:
A builder of doors and windows.

We converse
In the language of every day.
We don't believe in cabalistic signs.

And another thing:
The poet is there
So the tree doesn't grow crooked.

This is our message.
We denounce the demiurge poet
The Cockroach poet
The Bookworm poet
All of these gentlemen
—And I say this with great respect—
Should be tried and judged
For building castles in the air
For wasting space and time
Writing sonnets to the moon
For gathering words at random
In the latest Parisian style
Not for us:
Thought is not born in the mouth
It is born in the heart of the heart.

We renounce
The poetry of dark glasses
The poetry of cloak and dagger
The poetry of the wide-brimmed hat.
Instead we favor
Poetry to the naked eye
Poetry to the bare breast
Poetry to the naked head.

We don't believe in nymphs or tritons.
Poetry must to be this:
A girl surrounded by ears of wheat
Or otherwise be absolutely nothing.

Well then, on the political plane
They, our immediate grandparents,
Our good immediate grandparents!
Recanted and dispersed
Upon passing through the glass prism.
A few became communists.
I don't know if they really were.
What I know is something:
They weren't popular poets,
They were revered bourgeois poets.

Things must be said like they are:
Only one or two
Found out how to reach the heart of the people.
Every time they could
They declared themselves by word and deed
Against directed poetry
Against the poetry of the present
Against proletarian poetry.

We accept that they were communists
But the poetry was a disaster
Second-hand surrealism
Third-hand decadence
Old tablets returned by the sea
Adjectival poetry
Nasal and guttural poetry
Arbitrary poetry
Poetry copied from books
Poetry based
In the revolution of the word
In circumstances where one should be founded

In the revolution of ideas
Poetry of a vicious circle
For a half dozen of the elect
“Absolute liberty of expression.”
Today we make crosses asking
Why would they write those things
To startle the petit bourgeois?
Miserably lost time!
The petit bourgeois does not react
Except when it deals with his stomach.

That they'd startle him with poetry!

The situation is this:
While they were
For a poetry of twilight
For a poetry of the night
We promoted
The poetry of the dawn.
This is our message,
The splendors of poetry
Should reach everyone equally.
There's enough poetry for everyone.

Nothing more, comrades
We condemn
—And I do say this with respect—
The poetry of the little god
The poetry of the sacred cow
The poetry of the raging bull.

Against the poetry of the clouds
We oppose
The poetry of solid ground
—Cold head, hot heart
We are resolute solidgrounders
Against the poetry of the cafe
The poetry of nature
Against the poetry of the salon
The poetry of the public plaza
The poetry of social protest.

The poets have come down from Olympus.

Raúl Zurita, “La vida nueva”, 1982¹⁵

Spanish text and video of original sky-writing of poem available at link below. Photographs of this “poetry-action” were interspersed through a bilingual edition of the book-length poem *Anteparadise*, trans. Jack Schmitt (University of California Press, 1986). The more recent translations below of “La vida nueva” and a selection from *Anteparadise* are by Anna Deeny Morales (from Raúl Zurita, *Sky Below: Selected Works*, Curbstone Books, Northwestern UP, 2016). The poem that follows, “Las playas de Chile I,” is the first in a series that makes up most of the first section, “Utopias,” of the book *Anteparadise*.

<https://hemisphericinstitute.org/en/hidvl-additional-performances/raul-zurita-la-vida-nueva.html>

NEW LIFE

MY GOD IS HUNGER	MY GOD IS CHICANO
MY GOD IS SNOW	MY GOD IS CANCER
MY GOD IS NO	MY GOD IS EMPTINESS
MY GOD IS REGRET	MY GOD IS WOUND
MY GOD IS CARRION	MY GOD IS GHETTO
MY GOD IS PARADISE	MY GOD IS PAIN
MY GOD IS PAMPA	MY GOD IS

MY LOVE OF GOD

—written in the sky—

New York—June 1982

¹⁵ Raúl Zurita (Chile, 1950 –), according to the Poetry Foundation, “one of Latin America’s most celebrated and controversial poets.” Much of his poetry—including *Purgatory* (1979), *Anteparadise* (1982), and *New Life* (final version published 2018)—again, according the Poetry Foundation, grows out of a response to “the violence and atrocities committed against the Chilean people and the corruption of the Spanish language” during the military dictatorship that lasted from 1973 to 1990.

LAS PLAYAS DE CHILE I

No eran esos los chilenos destinos
que lloraron alejándose toda la playa se
iba haciendo una pura llaga en sus ojos

No eran esas playas que encontraron sino más bien el carear
del cielo frente a sus ojos albo como si no fuera de ellos
en todo Chile espejeando las abiertas llagas que lavaban

- i. Empapado de lágrimas arrojó sus vestimentas al agua
- ii. Desnudo lo hubieran visto acurrucarse hecho un ovillo
sobre sí tembloroso con las manos cubriéndose el
pulular de sus heridas
- iii. Como un espíritu lo hubieran ustedes visto cómo se
abrazó a si mismo lívido gimiente mientras se le
iba esfumando el color del cielo en sus ojos

Porque no eran esas playas que encontraron sino el volcarse
de todas las llagas sobre ellos blancas dolidas sobre sí
cayéndoles como una bendición que les fijara en sus pupilas

- iv. Porque hasta lo que nunca fue renació alborando por
esas playas
- v. Ese era el resplandor de sus propias llagas abiertas en la
costa
- vi. Ese era el relumbrar de todas las playas que recién allí
le saludaron la lavada visión de sus ojos

Porque no eran esas las costas que encontraron sino sus propias
llagas extendiéndose hasta ser la playa donde todo Chile comenzó
a arrojar sus vestimentas al agua radiantes esplendorosos
lavando frente a otros los bastardos destinos que lloraron

THE BEACHES OF CHILE I

Those were not the Chileans' destinies
they wept withdrawing itself the whole
beach became an utter sore in their eyes

Those were not the beaches they found but the sky face
to face with their eyes white dawn as if not theirs
in the whole of Chile reflecting the open sores they washed

- i. Soaked in tears he threw his vestments to the water
- ii. Naked you'd have seen him huddled coiled upon
himself shaking with his hands covered over
the swarm at his wounds
- iii. Like a spirit you all would've seen how he held
his arms around himself livid howling as the
sky's hue vanished from his eyes

Because those were not beaches they found but the over-
spill of all sores on them colorless in pain upon itself
falling over them like a blessing that he'd set in their pupils

- iv. Because even what never was reborn dawning
through those beaches
- v. This was the resplendence of his own open sores on
the shore
- vi. This was the dazzle of all the beaches that having just
arrived there received the cleansed vision of his eyes

Because those were not the shores they came upon but their
own sores extending themselves until being the beach where
the whole of Chile began to throw its vestments to the water
radiant splendid washing in front of others the bastard
destinies they wept.