

Iconicity in artistic creation: visual poetry

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Abstract

Although in oral societies iconicity works decisively and determined in the performance of reality and in the formation of communication through physicality and movement, in the societies of writing reality is attributed through the commitment of sound and its consolidation into an arbitrary image. The latter through the alphabet becomes a still sign that alienates the thing it represents from its true physical image. The image can then be searched in the reader or in the illustrator, but, also, in the way that the writing itself builds the space it occupies with its texts, either in arbitrary and conventional ways, or by drawing images of movement from everyday life. Literature and here in particular poetry in its visual form comes to a significant extent lift the element of arbitrariness of the language sign. At the same time, however, leaves room for interaction between the sonic words and the typographical space which becomes partly apparent through visual poetry. The search for how iconicity works in the societies of writing and leaves room for interaction of audio words and typographic space through visual poetry is the subject of the study.

Keywords: iconicity, visual artistic creation, visual poetry, speech, writing, image.

1. Introduction

The term 'iconicity' is productively derived from the word 'iconic' which in turn means what is potentially real, the one that contains all the necessary conditions for its realization and is used to meet the most essential need to rendering the content of the concept, in order to distinguish it from other well-established and evaluatively charged current meanings. In this sense iconicity is reality given through images, i.e., representations that have been recreated or reproduced. In the same way, they are phenomena or sets of phenomena that have been detached from the place and time where they first appeared. The phenomena that motivate our senses, natural phenomena, are really in the sense that they exist outside of us. At the same time, however, the cognitive representations created by these phenomena within the human brain may correspond to objects that either exist or do not exist.

Even if iconicity suggests a cultural perception of the interactive relationship between material objects and information, even then it is about reality and its representation. A representation that can be virtual, symbolic, or even semi-symbolic. At the same time, according to The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics (2021), iconicity denotes the principle by which semantic relationships are reflected in standard templates with which they are recognized. The term is attributed as such to Peirce and his theory of points (Peirce, 1983).

2. Logo - technical reality and image

By studying the language in its full and natural form, we see that the language of poetry and literature are intercession by the immediacy, the reality of the prose and the poem and are far from the algebrisis [the term is borrowed by M. Jousse (2016), algebra and necrosis: a disease of expression] that meaning can impart. Communication here is carried out through images formed by the listener or reader that make it possible to transfer the thought of their creator. Image as identified – if it can be identified – by Ezra Pound as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time” that gives the feeling of an unexpected liberation, the sense of unexpected freedom from the limits of time and from the limits of space. He even considers that presenting an image over a lifetime is preferable to producing a lot of work (Pound, 1971: 80-81).

In a parallel manner, the iconic function of many letters in literary texts presents another aspect of this very writing, beyond the arbitrary identification of its points. This concerns the natural need for communication and representation of reality through images. The use, for example, of the letter O as an alphabetical image of a variety of circular things or a circular process, or even the circular presentation of the verse of a poem on the paper could be attributed to this human need. Similarly, the use of exclamation marks, question marks, words in capital letters that indicate the intensity of emotion, even the silences marks, are aspects of iconicity.

The iconic use of alphabet letters can be sought even in 20th century advertisements; but users of writing from antiquity had used letters as iconic representations of objects in poetry and prose. From Shakespeare to the present day this alphabetical way of iconicity can be found in the literature of many cultures. But also, the relationship of speech and image, the dominance of text as a form and the importance of writing in artistic creation can also be studied through the works of artists.

Let us end those poetic images created through sound. When Edgar Allan Poe writes the “Philosophy of Composition” for “The Raven”, he describes the way he constructed the poem; with the intention of having a direct response to the broad audience and critical taste and at the same time stimulating the audience he chooses the length of the poem, an impression that makes *Beauty* the only legitimate area of the poem, the tone of the highest appearance of *Beauty* which is grief and finally the *refrain*. Searching the nature of a melancholy refrain, he decides to be short and therefore a word. He goes on, searching for the character of this word that would have a sound ending and receptive to prolonged emphasis in order to be effective. “That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt: and these considerations inevitably led me to the long o as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with r as the most producible consonant. The sound of the refrain being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word, embodying this sound and, at the same time, in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search, it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word *Nevermore*. In fact, it was the very first which presented

itself" (Poe, 1999: 4-5; Poe, 2000: 33-41). The sound within this poetic creation gives flesh and blood to the idea of the poet and, in combination with the image of the raven, creates an image that hides or reveals the mystery of the world.

*And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!*

3. Iconicity and poetry

According to Plutarch (1995), Simonides the painting calls it poetry that is silent and the poetry painting that speaks. This two-way and *non-natural* relationship precisely suggests this naturalness of poetry and more generally of expression through poetic forms. Images involved in poetry and painting come to give -even non-oral- the communicative aesthetic relationship between things and the subject. And if here, the subject and object of the subject, which is the poem and the painting, form structures and relationships of communication, let's see how iconicity meets poetry.

In an introduction entitled "Ασημία και Ταυτοσημία στην Ποίηση", Andreas Belezinis argues that signifier and signified tend to identify – physically and non-positionally – in poetic creation. "The acoustic image (and its optical image) is concluded in the sense that its sound contains and thus the poetry to which it aims, by its very nature, tends towards the immediacy and physicality of the local speaking forms and, therefore, its familiar habitat can only be the area not of the arbitrariness of the conventionality of the *sign*, but of the complete organicity and internal justification" (Belezinis, 1986: 91-125).

Robert Olsen (1997), in his study of the poems in Walt Whitman's collection "Leaves of Grass", spoke of the poet's textual embodiment. Thus, he perceives the poem as an image of the poet's body and examines the complete ratio between text/content and body/soul. Iconicity, here, concerns the distinction and the extent to the invoked but also undermined relationship between body and soul. Thus, the iconicity of poetry shows through literary tricks (such as standardization of lines, thematic repetitions, forms of accentuation), bodily functions, such as the rhythm of breath, the comfort of recitation, the excessive appetite for guilty joy.

But Jakobson (1998), also, considered that a key feature of poetry is the utterance of phonological elements; even if so, this utterance of phonological elements is based on the poet's ability to invent a trick of speech such as to indicate in the reader's mind images derived from the quality of sounds. So, we could argue that, in this poetic practice, acoustic images invoke visual images.

At the same time, the verse itself is a key visual element of the poem. Already in Hellenistic times, in Bucolic poetry the creators use in their poems a typographical arrangement of the lyrics aimed at the representation or even stimulation of meaning (Gow, 1952). The verses of the poems form shapes such as an altar or an axe or an egg or even the wings of the god of Love, which are about the title of the poem.

But, also, in the Renaissance, the length of the verse acts suggestively for example the space, time, size, intensity, hyperbole, loneliness, absence, silence or even metaphorically gives the image of a wave, arrow, flying, small or large object, etc. (Nänny, 2002). A typical

example of phonetic-visual poetry are the poems of the Dadaist. Arguing that, when language becomes rigid and petrified by academicism, its true spirit appeals to children and "mad" poets, they write abstract-vocal poems around 1900. In the presentation of a vocal poem, breathing and the resulting sound play a creative role, rendered typographically in letters of different size, shape and form. The vocal poem thus becomes phonetic-visual. Shortly afterwards Christian Morgenstern makes *Fisches Nachtgesang*, a poem of metric symbols in the shape of a fish (Pίχτερ, 1983: 189-192; Bigsby, 1989: 38-50; Kasda, n.d., 45-49).

In recent Greek reality, we stand in the 'An Oral Self-portrait' by Odysseus Elytis, who, speaking of the final goal of the poem and its form, argues that the form, expressive and lyrical ways of the poem are dictated by the nature of the poem itself. Even referring to solar metaphysics gives the poem a nuclear configuration: "If one imagines consciousness in the position of the sun, on the one hand and on the other, all the factors that contribute to the poetic expression –images, likenesses, metaphors, thoughts– in place of the planets, one will see that the movement presented by this whole takes on the same character that the movement of a solar system takes on" (Elytis, 2000: 31-33).

4. Visual poetry or concrete poetry?

One of Olga Fischer's and Max Nänny's articles on iconicity (2002) mentions a well-known incident involving Pablo Neruda and Mario Ruoppolo the postman. Being exiled to a small island in Italy, Neruda recites to the illiterate postman the poem *Ode to the sea*:

Here surrounding the island,

There's sea.

But what sea?

It's always overflowing.

Says yes,

Then no,

Then no again,

And no,

Says yes

In blue

In sea spray

Raging,

Says no

And no again.

It can't be still.

It stammers

My name is sea.

It slaps the rocks

And when they aren't convinced,

Strokes them

And soaks them

And smothers them with kisses.

With seven green tongues

Of seven green dogs

*Or seven green tigers
Or seven green seas,
Beating its chest,
Stammering its name, ...*

Followed by the dialogue:

Pablo Neruda: [after reading a poem] *What do you think?*

Mario Ruoppolo: *It's weird.*

Pablo Neruda: *What do you mean, weird? You're a severe critic.*

Mario Ruoppolo: *No, not your poem. Weird... Weird... how I felt while you were saying it.*

Pablo Neruda: *How was that?*

Mario Ruoppolo: *I don't know. The words went back and forth.*

Pablo Neruda: *Like the sea then?*

Mario Ruoppolo: *Exactly. Like the sea.*

Pablo Neruda: *There, that's the rhythm.*

Mario Ruoppolo: *I felt seasick, in fact.*

Pablo Neruda: *Because...*

Mario Ruoppolo: *I can't explain it. I felt like...like a boat tossing around on those words.*

Pablo Neruda: *Like a boat tossing around on my words? Do you know what you've done, Mario?*

Mario Ruoppolo: *No, what?*

Pablo Neruda: *You've invented a metaphor. Yes, you have!*

Mario Ruoppolo: *Really? But It doesn't count because I didn't mean to.*

Pablo Neruda: *Meaning to is not important. Images arise spontaneously.*

(Il Postino, 1995, directed by Michael Radford, with Philippe Noiret and Massimo Troisi).

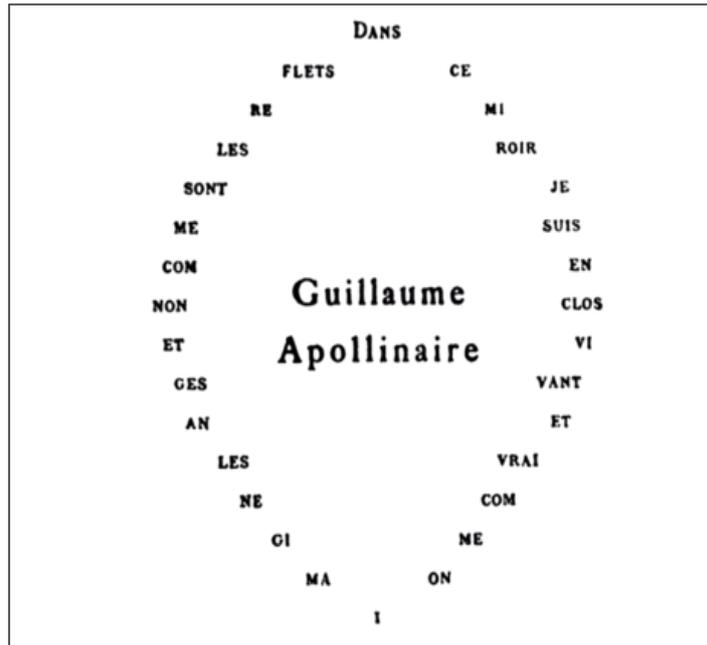
They're sitting by the sea, and Mario, listening to it, feels nauseous from the ripple of words. Neruda tells him he's made a metaphor. But through their words and rhythm that resembles the rhythm of the sea, the endless one of the waves and ignoring the verbal or editorial structures of the poem, Mario felt the poem in a natural and emotional way without the help of logic or grammar and syntax.

The organic and integral bonding of speech with the image, the combination of poetry and painting and the writing of the lyrics on the page figuratively, constitute figurative poetry or visual poetry (concrete poetry, poesy visive). Reality becomes poetry in shape or movement for the reader through the visuality of the language of the poem. As Pierre Garnier argues, *"this kind of poetry no longer narrates, describes, directly expresses the poet's ego: it is not created by language, but uses it as a medium"* (Garnier, 1989: 292, 289).

How lyrics are layouted so that different shapes are formed on the page, as well as the typographical configuration of the page in two columns or other virtual ways such as acrostics, but, also, the combination of poem and painting form images as forms of emotions that regurgitate us to our senses, biology, and nature (Skartsis, 1984: 79, 262, 267). The verbal and figurative code is combined in such a way in the visual poem as to subvert every conventional aspect of the poem.

Although concrete poetry seems to have met many imitators in the 1950s-1980s or so, we stand by Guillaume Apollinaire's earlier efforts in the late 19th century. First with handmade writing and then with mechanically assisted writing, Apollinaire used curves, diagonals, and rhombus to declare birds, springs, and rain respectively. Questioning the

traditional use of language, he was influenced by Dada's entry into Paris and the renewal of the language it proposed. The Dadaists “let the words sound and the meaning come out of the sound” (Pierre Bissé, Marcel Dusan, etc.) forming an auditory speech and, at the same time, developing the language. In 1918, he published his collection entitled “Calligrammes”, consisting almost all schematic poems. At first, he called them lyrical ideograms (Apollinaire, 1982: 79). Characteristic is the poem of the *Mirror*:



A few years ago, in ‘Bestiary: or the Parade of Orpheus’, whose poems are accompanied by woodcuts by Raoul Dufy, Apollinaire reveals how concerned he is about the relationship between poetry and illustration but, also, this page itself.

At the same time, he spread out his poetry in space by forming poems-visual compositions that were addressed to the reader in more ways than simple written poetry. He advocates that the eye should read the poem with a single *glance*, as one sees at a single glance the plastic elements of the poster (Apollinaire, 1952: 130).

It is of course worth relying on the movement of Futurism, based on the complete renewal of human ‘sensitivity’, caused by great scientific discoveries. The creator of the movement, Tommaso Marinetti (1909), as a poet will introduce sound not only to words but, also, in the place of words: “We affirm that the world’s magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed”. Cymbals, clicks, and typewriters gathered to cause auditory impressions. The same practice is followed by the Dadaists, trying to transmit through the sound the complexity of the simultaneous experience. Words, liberated from grammatical constraints, hit the receiver with all their might. At the same time, words are, also, released in the field of their writing, forming geometric shapes. The latter are violent attempts to renew both typography and the way the book is perceived in the twentieth century.

Looking back at the tradition of concrete poetry, we will meet names such as Ezra Pound (1971: 40, 43)⁵, Theo Van Doesburg, Guillaume Apollinaire, Stéphane Mallarmé, Lewis Carol,

⁵ Ezra Pound will meet Japanese poetry from T.E. Hulme and the group of impressionists in Paris and later the results of this work will be shown in the *Lustra* poetry collection, which combines Greek-Latin prosodic scansion

George Herbert, Dylan Thomas, V. Mayakovsky but, also, those of the first creators of the writing itself. The virtual use of the letters of the alphabet in this poetry can be found in his poems Rabelais, του Mallarmé (Chadwick, 1989: 55-69)⁶, Cummings (Cummings, 1994, 1999)⁷, etc., or still in the drawings and shapes made with words of Seferis στο “Τετράδιο Γυμνασμάτων και στο Ημερολόγιο Καταστροφώματος Β’”.

Let's look at some examples:

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vas
vast
ness.Be) look
now
(come
soul;

and haiku. In his essays, entitled *A retrospect*, criticizing, and instructing poets, he distinguishes poetry into three genres. One of which is the lamp factory i.e., the projection of images in the eye and imagination. In the lamp factory, he says, we find the longest course for the full accuracy of the speech. This art is based almost exclusively on accuracy.

⁶ Mallarmé, by inserting the iconographic element into poetry, he draws the poem *Un coup de dés* to be printed in twenty pages, in different sizes and elements, with his verses scattered calculated in pages, in a kind of typographical free fall that essentially governs with dice. He declares that his goal was to avoid the narration and dilute the reading of the poem so that the poetic unit would be the page, with its typographical spaces, rather than the verse. At the same time a large part of the poem that has the theme of the sky and the sea is rendered with words placed on the double page like *black stars in a white sky and with the lines of typographical elements that flow along the paper like the negative photo of the groove that leaves a ship* (<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/un-coup-didees-a-new-translation-of-mallarmes-a-roll-of-the-dice/> and <https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/MallarmeUnCoupdeDes.php>, 6/8/2021).

⁷ Cummings created a visual poetry based on his own idiosyncratic syntax and the parallel reversal of the traditional position of words on paper. Although he has written several sonnets and ballads in the traditional way, used virtual techniques such as scattering words on the page or the schematic distribution of words or even the use of spaces to indicate perhaps its own self-overturning, but also situations, phenomena, and things. In a typographical age, he manages to render words without the use of words or even by using the symbol of parentheses to render the new moon through the silence of the poem. Through images of presence and absence he presents a fantasy or non-existence and dreams of touching or better matching himself with nature. In his untitled poem number 276 for grasshopper, he decomposes the words of the text and scatters them unevenly throughout the page, until at the end the letters meet in the final word grasshopper – all to indicate the irregular and visually dizzying movement of the grasshopper until the moment it appears before us on a leaf of a plant.

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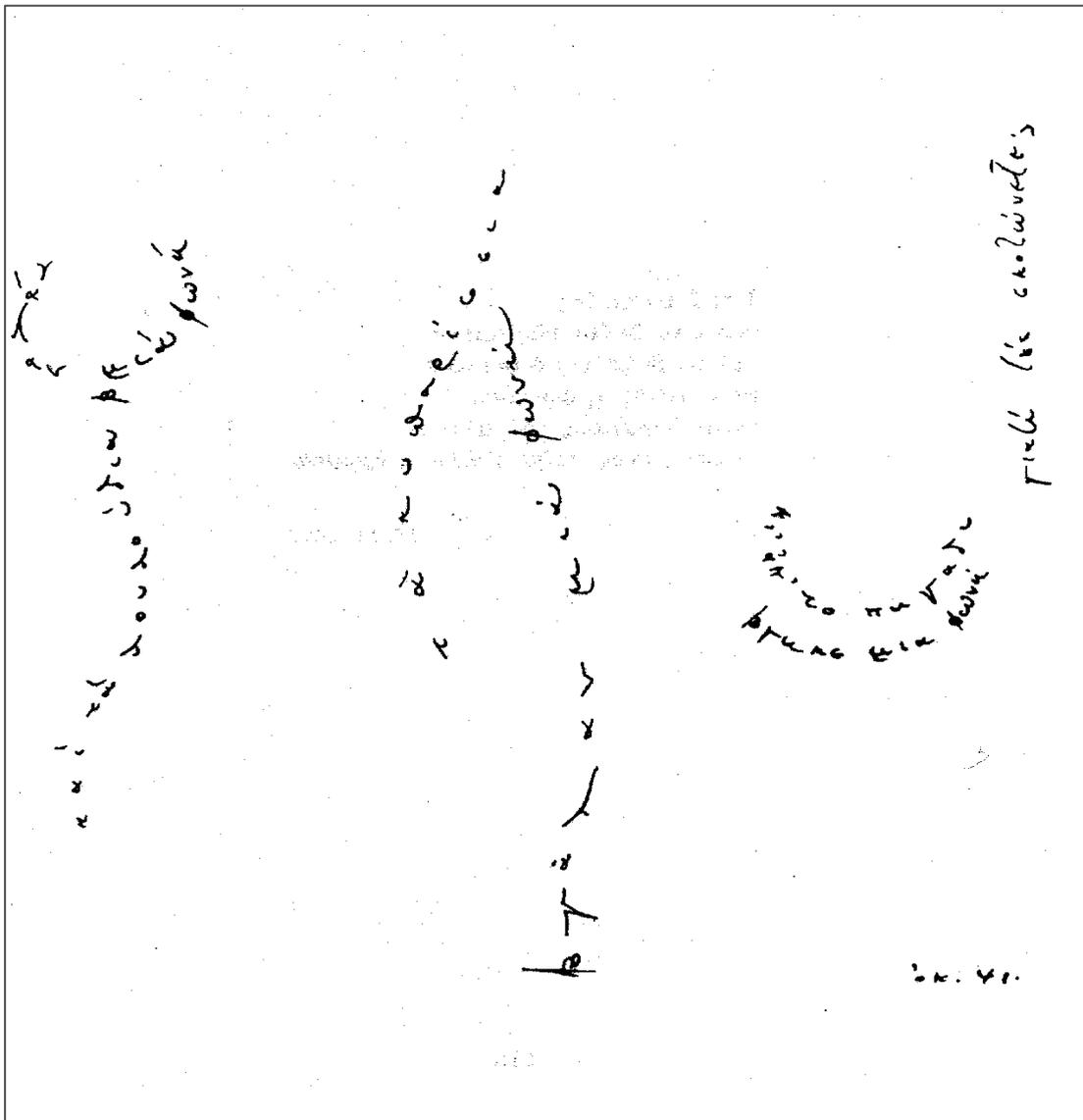
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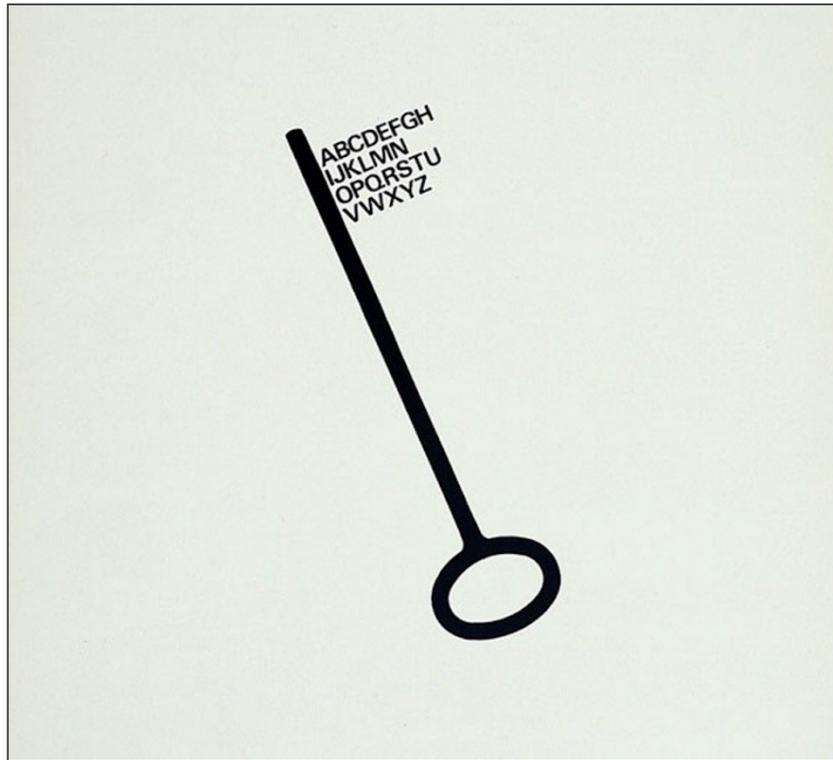


*and the flowers made a voice
cypresses made a voice
and a voice came out of the well:*

Why are you killing them?

October 1941, Giorgos Seferis (1976, p.114).

Sometimes visual poetry was identified with the poetry of the typewriter (typewriter poetry), using typewriter letters. At the same time, calligraphic letters or letters cut from newspapers were used for the synthesis of visual poems. It is worth mentioning here the Joan Brossa, Catalan poet and one of the leading supporters of visual poetry, who did not put boundaries between speech and art composed visual poems and verbal images, thus expressing the obsession of our times to make speech a visual signal, i.e., an image.



(<https://alfalfastudio.com/2016/08/09/joan-brossas-visual-poetry/>)

In modern Greek reality, among others, Telemachus Chytiris has written visual poetry (1978, 1983), Ersi Sotiropoulou (1980), Lambros Spyriounis (1986) and Michael Mitras (1997), who sometimes creates sound images through words and sometimes writes poems about the correct position of words and sometimes paints by writing ΣΑΝ ΤΟΠΙΟ ΤΟΥ VAN GOGH:

μαύρος	κίτρινα
ουρανός	δέντρα
κόκκινες	άσπρο
πέτρες	χώμα
πράσινα	μπλε
νερά	λουλούδια

black	yellow
sky	trees
red	white
stones	soil
green	blue
waters	flowers

In closing this brief reference to visual poetry, we stand in the Anthology of Specific Poetry which in its foreword, Ougen Gobinger notes about visual poetry: so, these are naked linguistic structures, and as in architecture, as in the visible form of this poetry, the rule applies that they are similar to their structure (Giannouloupoulos, n.d.: 23).

5. An example of poetry with images

The modern use of verse and image can be found in poetic creations of Japanese tradition and specifically in Haiku and Haiga. According to Konstantinos Stambouloupoulos (2002), Haiga is an old way of uniting Haikou with Sybokou –i.e. art with water and ink. Describing his experience, he writes: ... *“the cornering caused in the mind and imagination, to give a bearable haiku, brings a rare balm that stimulates but, also, relieves in such an ecstatic way ... and then comes on paper a short drawing – words reward with tangible sensations. Intoxication of words that unexpectedly transform each stroke – instantaneously”*:

Κατάλευκο χαρτί
τ' όμορφο του τίποτα
γίνεται μαύρο

Translation:

White paper
its beautiful nothing
turns black

Speaking of contemporary use, we mean not only the illustration of poems or the creation of poetic paintings and poem with paintings but, also, the presence in the same work of image and verse by the same creator. Words that become images and images become words. The visual matches of the themes of haiku are rendered artistically with Haiga. The lyrics inspire the poet's brush and paint the images that words make. But the words themselves make images, as shown by Basho's haiku below:

1
*The old pond
A frog leaps in.
Sound of the water.*

2
*Spring ocean
Swaying gently
All day long.*

(<https://www.masterpiece-of-japanese-culture.com/literatures-and-poems>, 1/8/2021)

In Japanese writing, haiku is, also, a painting, a purely linguistic element, and it, also, expresses what we call in the West "content" with images. But they are again, inseparable, organized in the whole language the specific sounds that have a certain "meaning", themselves and by their combination (Skartsis, 1990: 11).

Sometimes the text itself in Japanese literature becomes an image through ideographic writing or calligraphy or even its layout on paper and silk. Words and image with the help of brush and ink try to convey a message with emotional charge. Views of the world, natural and metaphysical, thoughts and dreams become messages expressed either by the national traditional technique of color surface and linear design (Yamato), or by the traditional Chinese

technique that uses touches with ink (sumi-e) (Papapavlou, 1988: 16-22). At the same time, however, his distinctive elements *are* his relationship with Zen and the use of a seasonal poetic word (Phais, 1994). The word with its emotional dimension in relation to the inner life of Zen create images to the recipient, which are easily recruited or formed, and the time of their creation is disproportionate to the impression and emotion they leave.

Finally, let us prefer to Andrei Tarkowski's view of this poetry: in this poetry I am particularly fascinated by the artist's refusal to even hint at the final meaning of the image, which lets it be gradually deciphered as a syllable. Haiku processes his images so that they mean nothing beyond themselves, while, at the same time, expressing so much that it is impossible to capture their final meaning (Tarkowski, 1987: 146).

6. The visual poetry of computers

The rules of writing, the ankylosis of typography and the limits of imagination in a place such as poetry may have to be overcome for poetry to express its images and messages in any way. At the same time, visual poetry is a genre that seems to fit the needs of the internet. Today the combination of standard writing in lyrics and edited image covers a large part of the expressive and communicative poetic needs of people on the internet. Its form seems to change in the sense that new possibilities are given to typographical writing through computers. The standard and still writing acquires movement and thus can fluctuate or fly or even become rain in the verse of Vizyinos: *μεταβληθεί εντός μου /ο ρυθμός του κόσμου* (*changed within me /the rhythm of the world*). But, also, the emoticons (emotional images) of computers are used as a visual component of poems.

7. The aphasic speech

We could also look for iconicity in a modern form of expression of literary work. Where absolute freedom in the language allows a whole new reading of the text and the reader becomes a creator. Modernist theorists of literature called it aphasia or aphasic speech. Thus, the term means the lack of phase between the word and its meaning or the long distance of *signifier and signified*. Bart describes this form of literary expression as innovative literature. Logic and reality are not involved in this kind of literature. The sole reality is the identity writing (Dizikirikis, 1990: 88-90).

The common language code is annihilated, and a self-language is displayed that ignores "reasonable writing". Aphasia, of course, was, also, considered a disorder. Roman Jakobson studied aphasia as a disorder in the combination of language units. In fact, he distinguished aphasia into a disturbance of similarity and a disturbance of relevance. Thus, in the first case the whole linguistic behavior of the patient is determined through relevance and the selective ability does not work (in whole or in part) while the ability to combine works in part. Here, we have wear and tear of the metalingual functions. On the contrary, in the second case, the relevance is disturbed, the rules of syntax are lost, and the patient returns to the first phases of the infant's linguistic development or even to a prelingual level. In this case, we have a destruction of the ability to maintain language units. Finally, according to Jakobson, the principle of similarity and thus metaphor governs poetry, while prose is promoted mainly by relevance and thus by the metonymy (Jakobson, 1998: 31-54). This, of course, raises the problem of the unsociality of literature and non-communication. That self-language doesn't seem to have a receiver. But if the receiver is the subject, the reader, who through the imagination, emotion, and reality he experiences, reads, and creates the text, then a communication takes place in non-conventional terms.

8. Conclusions

If we accept that language and forms of expression cooperate in social reality and in some way serve its social and, above all, dominant structures, then we must see the development of iconicity in relation to these structures. An iconicity that serves to impose a certain view of the world and relies on authority cannot be virtuality with the physical dimension of the term. It does not represent, even interactively, the real thing. Instead, it is constructed and through language interprets reality through arbitrary symbolic processes. Iconicity thus builds the reality that has built itself. The social conditions of the use of iconicity, as they become visible through its relationship with the educational process and the function of the image, symbol, and word in competitive terms, indicate this very function of language in a dominant context where communication is politically determined. In this way, everyday language functions not only as a stock of aesthetic poetic and philosophical forms but, also, as a reserve of taxonomic principles for the intake of reality.

Through a dialectic process, which allows every influential sensory, material activity of man to produce in a primary way a presence image of the real or cognitive object, he is trying to express, makes it clear that virtual art is inextricably linked to language. At the same time, the expression with images is much wider than the writing itself. The conception of reality through the world of language and its reflection on thought – through symbols – allows man to express himself and communicate by listening and seeing. However, when the vocal expression is coordinated with the graphic, the image loses its dimension of freedom, and the verbal process, also, loses the multitude of symbols placed within the linear script. This loss, of the iconicity of words, comes to make up poetry with a superior type of creation, the poetic image. Through poetic images, poetic language makes possible the sense of its very structure, the arrangement of words. The latter takes on another dimension through visual poetry and raises more strongly the question of the pedagogical value of iconicity and whether the latter leads or involves forms of social learning, coping with reality, linguistic and expressive ability, cognitive practice.

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