

## Experimental Poetry and Technology in Argentina: History, Critique, Politics

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E-Poetry Festival – Buffalo – May 2011

In 1924 two Argentinean young painters who had lived many years in Europe involved in the avant-garde scene, and who would become both very well known artists not only in their own country but internationally, decided to return home together in order to awake the local artistic ambience. Their names were Emilio Pettoruti and Xul Solar (adopted name of Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari). Both of them were committed with artistic experimentation, Pettoruti concerning cubo-futurism mainly; Xul concerning the progressive incorporation of words and numbers in his paintings, and the invention of artifacts as the “pan-lingua”, the “pan-chess”, the “pan-tree”, the “modified piano” and different calligraphies included in his paintings. Due to his calligraphies and to the invention of imaginary languages, Xul Solar would be recognized as one of the initiators of Argentinean experimental poetry, though during many years he was considered basically a painter. So, as I was saying, two young Argentinean artists returned home by ship in 1924. To me the interest of the story I am telling you concerns not only the figure of Xul Solar but rather the name of the ship which carried him home. She was called **Vigo**.

I am saying this in the hope the name Vigo means something to you, but just in case it doesn't I should mention that Edgardo Antonio Vigo was an Argentinean artist, born in La Plata in 1928, who died in the same city in 1997. As I will argue in what follows, Vigo – who is well known for his commitment with experimental poetry and mail art since the sixties– should be in many ways the point of departure of Argentinean e-poetry history and critique, even if he didn't use computers.

Let's resume my story about the two young painters returning home by ship in 1924.

My hypothesis –attached to Jorge Luis Borges' idea, developed in “Kakfa and his precursors” – is that we can read Edgardo Antonio Vigo experimental poetry as precursor of Xul experimentations. That is to say: we can read Xul's works as experimental, –at least as experimental poetry– in part because of Vigo, not the other (chronological) way round. In fact, it was Vigo (the ship) who carried Xul back to Argentina!

Vigo –the artist– is well known as a key note of Latin American experimental poetry, but let’s re-order Argentinean experimental poetry history at this new light. In that sense, Vigo would be a condenser and irradiator not only forward but backward at the same time.

One is tempted to hold that it is possible to read the history of techno-poetics without sticking to chronology, identifying instead “thick” moments, condensers and irradiators of processes that, even if they begin at a precise moment, they also irradiate – forward and backward in time– ways of inhabiting the space of art and its bonds to the technological ambience. In Argentina, what I would call the “**Vigo’s experience**” could be such a moment, for instance, because even if it had its center in the last years of the sixties, and from that moment on till his death, it enables to re-order the history, turning him as “precursor” of his predecessors like Oliverio Girondo, Guillermo de Torre<sup>1</sup> or Xul Solar. Not that they didn’t influenced Vigo, but because after Vigo we can re-read them in a new light.



Xul Solar, Marina - 1939

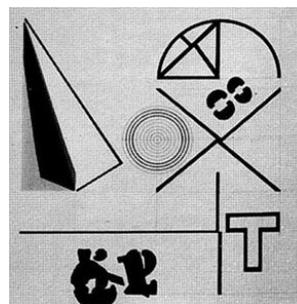
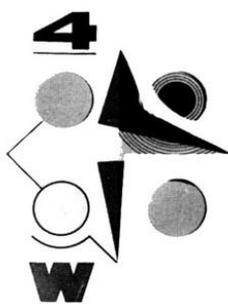
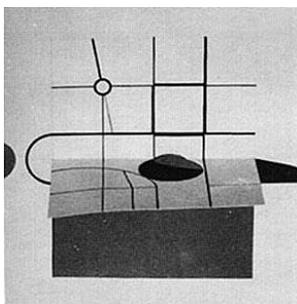
I have the impression that, in the same manner that Brazilian e-poets and scholars return their gaze, once and again, to concrete poetry –from Noigandres group to post concrete process poem–, in Argentina our point of departure is always Edgardo Antonio Vigo, because in a way he represents every other paths which intersect “E-Poetry”: taking in account that the “E” (from E-Poetry) not only could mean “electronic” but also “experimental”. Even if Vigo never made a computer poem or any other kind of electronic

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<sup>1</sup> Though mentioned in this summary history of Argentinean experimental poetry, Spanish Ultraist poet Guillermo de Torre is relevant to this discussion. He married Norah Borges (Jorge Luis Borges' sister, a painter herself) and they came to live in Argentina in the late 20s.

poetry, he did reflect on informational technologies. When writing in 1969 about his notion of “Poetry to and/or Realize” he held:

Hence the notion of “programmer” replaces that of “artist”. The latter is obsolete due to the action and the relation it sustains with society. If we talk about serialized art, technologically feasible, in easy reproductive ways and techno-annexations it is obvious we would keep using the former.<sup>2</sup>



Vigo, Poemas matemáticos barrocos

So, as I am arguing Vigo helps us to assess Argentinean techno-experimental poetry history. Of course he not only “created” his predecessors but his successors as well. Among them, Fabio Doctorovich’s remediation of *Plebiscito gratuito* by Vigo in *9MENEM9* or in his more recent *Sound, Gestural and Hypertextual Poetry to Make and/or Realize* which could be described –in his own terms– as performing sound poetry which is created, executed and improvised by the public.

**Edgardo Antonio Vigo**

**Poema a Realizar**

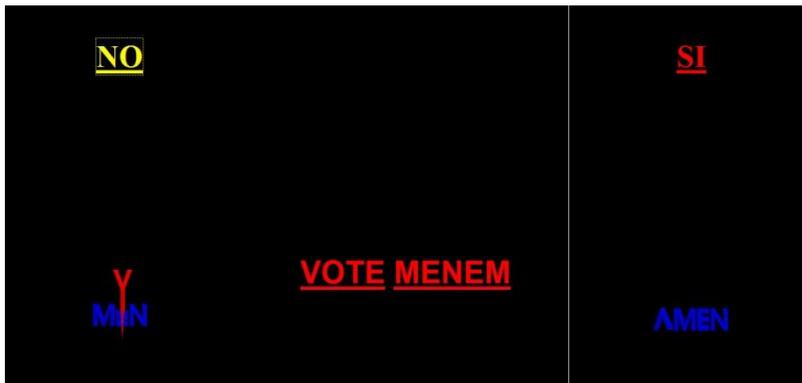
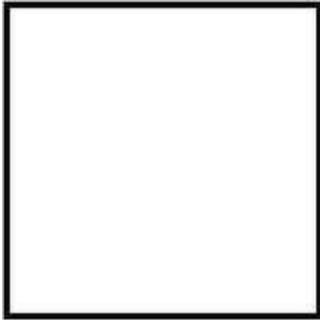
**Basado en un PLEBSICITO GRATUITO**

**Instrucciones: Plantéese el interrogante que usted quiera. Posteriormente escriba con un elemento gráfico libre (tanto en su técnica como color) el “SÍ” o “NO” dentro o**

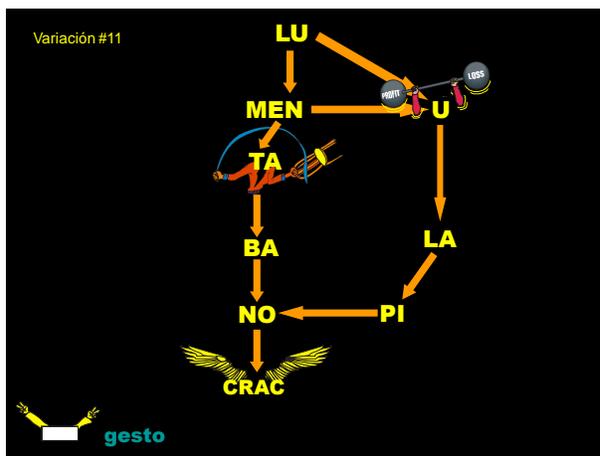
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<sup>2</sup> Edgardo Antonio Vigo, “De la poesía/proceso a la poesía para y/o a realizar” (ensayo 1969). La Plata, Diagonal Cero Editora, 1970, pág. 0’8. [my translation]. Original: “Así el término ‘programador’ supe al de ‘artista’. Éste ya está perimido por la acción y relación que mantiene con la sociedad. Si hablamos de un arte seriado, *tecnológicamente* realizable, con formas de fácil reproducción y anexiones técnicas es obvio seguir utilizando este término”.

fuera de los cuadrados impresos) como contestación al mismo. ELIJA UD. SU  
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Fabio Doctorovich, 9Menem9, hypertextual poem



Fabio Doctorovich, *Sound, Gestural and Hypertextual Poetry to Make and/orRealize*

In a summarized history of techno-experimental poetry in Argentina I should mention the group Parallengua, la ohtra poesía (the name includes a misspelling as we would say: the hother poetry) between 1989 and 1998, created by Roberto Cignoni, Carlos Estevez and Fabio Doctorovich, which gathered in their presentations poets as Jorge Santiago Perednik, the editor of revista XUL (you can see it digitalized by Ernesto Livon Grosman in a project sponsored by Boston College), Javier Robledo, who would become later the editor of a quite well known videopoetry festival called VideoBardo Festival, among many others. The Parallengua venues in the 90s combined performance, visual, phonetic, electro-acoustic, multimedia, video and digital poetry. Following Jorge Santiago Perednik's statement, one would say that a particular interesting thing of this group related to the building of the experimental poetry scene in Argentina is that they were mainly poets and not visual artists as it was more usual before them and perhaps also continues being after them, at least if we consider the role played by Vortice Argentina and the Barraca Vorticista, a gathering of visual poets and visual artists created by Fernando García Delgado and Juan Carlos Romero, who organize since the mid 90s till now different activities, among them the Visual, Sonic and Experimental Encounters, and who also were crucial in the recuperation of the figure of Edgardo Antonio Vigo.



Concerning recent developments of techno-poetry in Argentina, I could talk about Belén Gache's Radikal Karaoke, Gustavo Romano's IP Poetry, Héctor Piccoli's fractal poetry, Fabio Doctorovich recent work on a periodic table of the alphabet characters, Carlos Gradin spam poetry, or the various projects launched by programmer/artists as

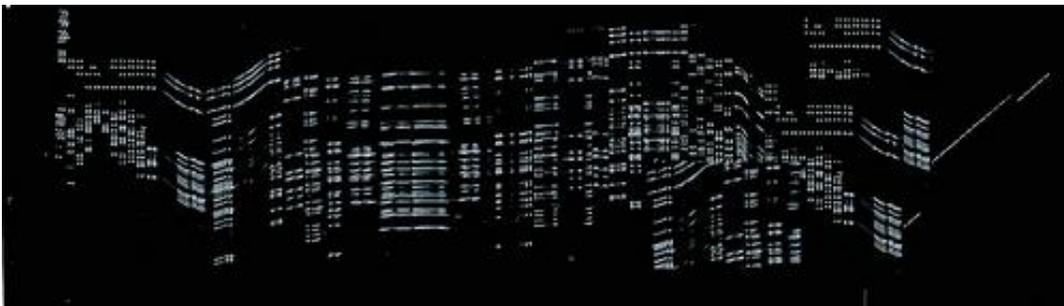


Considering the critique of inter/trasmedial poetics –in its confluence between several artistic languages–, contemporary art transformations in the technology axe present a great challenge because, linked as it is this axe to novelty, it becomes tempting to turn critique in an inventory of what it is less known or even in a gathering of prodigies in relay. Nevertheless, it happens to be a space which is worth to be thought about. Even more when we realize that Latin American techno-poetic critique is usually committed with debates such as:

- the dispute between determinacy and indeterminacy, that is to say, between programs (even if they include random procedures) and what we could call “de-programs” or “noises” that take part despite the program
- the (in)visibilization of experimental poetry in the context of (digital) culture and/or its institutionalization
- the place of “the free software issue”
- the issue of language diversity

If we talk about technology that means that we are also talking about politics. And that is why I read yesterday morning a sort of political Manifesto which later during the day I felt could dialog with some of other presentations we heard such as John Cayley’s, for instance.

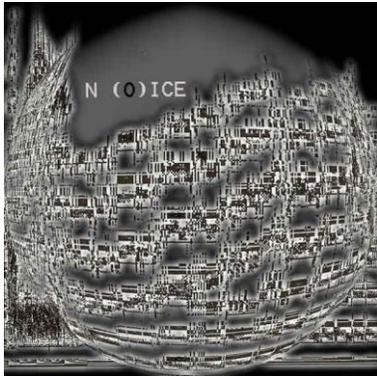
Let me finish presenting you the work of a poet half hidden under the name of El pájaro mixto.



Mauro Césari, Untitled

Mauro Césari lives in Córdoba, one of the main cities of Argentina. Experimental poet and psychologist, he produces different textualities, grafisms and images taking as a point of departure a “display of pro-cedures”: a proliferation of inflexions which pro-cede – at the same time that they move forward the poetic materiality, they make it cede–. He

considers writing “to be a registry of the power of bodies, generators of potential liberation against the production of serial subjectivity and despotism that fall upon and envelop them”.



Mauro Césari, silent poetry

His techno-experimental writing doesn't connect imperatively with epochal technologies. He explores instead different body-machine interfaces in a partial handcrafted manner which involves various anachronistic technologies: visual poems written by typewriter, photocopied texts folded in and photocopied again, text-images produced by a typewriter connected to a scanner, alteration by effacement of texts using filters as equations or stencils. Product of this kind of procedure is his book *El orégano de las especies*, distilled of more than 600 pages of patient effacement of *Origin of Species* by Darwin, where he manages to open the back side of the original text, the “non said” of the text.

Particularly interested in the iconography which inhabits Antique medical treatises of anatomy, where he managed to find a sacred biological iconography –sort of Christian optical unconscious–, it is tempting to think that his retro-technological experimentations end in revealing our contemporary techno-substratum as in the works which seem to be digitally produced, but which in fact aren't. I specially would drive your attention to the images I am showing here and ask you to remember some of the visuals Eugenio Tiselli showed us last evening. To me the coincidence is amazing even if the tools were so different. I would like to say that they are both ways of exploring our digital unconscious, that is to say our attachment to serial digital subjectivity.

**Because life is a techno-artifact which is worth deconstructing.**

