

PARALENGUA AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF POST-TYPOGRAPHIC POETRY

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When Paralengua was founded in 1989, perhaps one of the most interesting poetic enterprises in Argentina was that represented by *Xul* magazine. The poetry portrayed by *Xul* could be primarily considered as visual and concrete poetry, though an important component of language manipulation, close to what is here regarded as L-A-N-G-U-A-G-E poetry, was also present.

Though one of *Xul*'s active collaborators was involved in the foundation of *Paralengua*, its creation was conceived as an alternative to other poetics more than as a continuation of *Xul*'s poetry: *Paralengua* came to be the "ohther" poetry -*oh* symbolizing novelty, surprise, experimentation-; one that utilizes technologies other than Gutenberg's. In order to understand the importance of this change, we must keep in mind that all literary genres have utilized printing during centuries as its main technological tool. The impact of the introduction of new technologies such as photography, video or computer manipulations in the field of literature has been increasing during the past few decades and will probably be tremendous on the next century. Even old technologies forgotten by poets (such as theater or singing) are being nowadays rediscovered all over the world. In Argentina, we could name *Emeterio Cerro* as a theatrical poet, and *Carlos Estévez* as a sound poet.

The influence of new technologies on poetry is going to be as decisive as Gutenberg's invention, though in an inverse way: at the time printing started, oral and other non-typographic poetry were gradually abandoned as a consequence of the arising power of the printing press. In his book about the emergence of post-typographic culture, Eugene Provenzo says:ⁱ "The changes that are beginning to emerge in our culture as a result of the large scale introduction of computers parallel many of the changes that took place in Europe as a consequence of the information revolution that followed the invention of printing." I would add that not only computers but also other electronic media such as radio or TV are contributing to the creation of new languages which attempt to adjust to the new technologies. In that sense, the early recordings of poetry readings are primitive ancestors of what sound poetry should be: not an oral translation of paper poetry but a new language designed exclusively for the oral media. The consequence of this is that the limits of literature are being gradually shifted to the point that the following question should be asked: *is literature only written word?*

Having discussed the relationship between poetry and technology, what is, then, *Paralengua*? The term was originated as a Spanish neologism, a combination of the words *para* (which means *for* as a word and *parallel* as a prefix -as in paramedics-) and *lengua* (meaning *tongue* as *language* but also as the physical organ). *Paralengua* is then the parallel tongue, the language-but-not-written-language, the alternative outsider. Since 1989, *Paralengua* has performed several shows in Buenos Aires, all of them constituted by a variety of performing poetry: sound, visual, theatrical, dance, multimedia. Though a heterogeneous blend of all kinds of post-typographic poetry, certain characteristics are common to all of them, and, paradoxically, most of them are inversely parallel to the changes that occurred at the beginning of Gutenberg's era. While, according to McLuhan, the printed page revealed for the first time the separation between poetry and music,ⁱⁱ a striking feature in *Paralengua* is the fading of the esthetic frontiers that separate poetry from other arts or media, in that sense contributing to a redefinition of not only literature but other arts as well. Also according to McLuhan, the portability of the printed book contributed immensely to individualism. The fact that *Paralengua* is performed on a stage under the

presence of public changes the notion of "reading" (a lonely act with a slow asynchronous response by the reader) for that of "collective experience" (a group action in which the answer of the public is received in an immediate and synchronized manner). The presence of an audience at the moment the poem is performed not only improves the poet-reader communication but it also makes feasible the participation of the public in the making of the poem. Numerous experiences of that type have been produced by *Paralengua*: in some cases a poem or its fragments are distributed among the audience to be read, or participants are invited to "confess" a poem to a priest-poet concealed behind a black curtain on the stage. An interesting event is a "poetic interview" in which the public may ask the poets any kind of question, which is answered in the form of improvised poems.

On the other hand, the loss of immortality menaces to the new generation of poets: while the printed book has been the way of achieving eternal memory² and a permanent record of the writer's work, the poetry performance is -unless video recorded and edited- instantaneous and perishable. Nevertheless, Sartre said that "poetry, the same as other literary genres, needs in order to have existence not only of the author, but also of the reader." Considering the microscopic amount of existing readers (and therefore, the minuscule quantity of surviving poets), and the fact that new ways of making poetry could increase exponentially the number of potential "readers," the loss of immortality seems to be a minor point.

Though not an isolated phenomenon, *Paralengua* has settled the foundations of post-typographic poetry in Argentina. It is likely that within the next decades the importance of poetry performed on media other than Gutenberg's will increase exponentially, as the younger generations -those born and grown under the enormous influence of TV and computers- start to play their roles in literature.

Paralengua as a poetic group is composed by (each author's publications are between parentheses): Ricardo Castro, Roberto Cignoni (*Margen Puro*, 1982, La Lámpara Errante; *Resplandores*, 1985, La Lámpara Errante; *28 Poemas*, 1987, Xul Ediciones) Fabio Doctorovich (*Pol!v%?0 /pólumm/*, 1988, La Lámpara Errante; *Bribage Cartooniano*, 1994, Luna Bisonte Prods/Nuevo Milenio, 137 Leland Ave, Columbus, OH 43214) and Carlos Estévez (*Oral* -book and tape-, 1985, Ediciones Botella al Mar; *Tempo* -tape-, 1987, Ediciones Botella al Mar; *Transfonaciones* -tape-, 1993, Editorial El Caldero, Vicente López 43, Ramos Mejía, Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina). A myriad of other poets has participated in *Paralengua*'s events. A documentary video has been produced with material recorded in 1989 and is available, as well as Xul magazines (c/o J. S. Perednik, Junín 558, piso 9°, 1026 Buenos Aires, Argentina, \$ 8). An anthology of Xul is being prepared in English and will be soon edited by Roof Books. Also, essays on other Latin-American poetry (such as those from Uruguay and Brazil) may be found in the book "Corrosive Signs" from Maisonneuve Press (1990). A next *Paralengua* show is being planned to be realized soon in Buenos Aires and will be an all video-poetry performance.

ⁱ Provenzo Jr., E. F. *Beyond The Gutenberg Galaxy*. New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1986.

ⁱⁱ McLuhan, Marshall. *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.