
by

David Fernando Cortés Saavedra

a Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in History and Theory of Art

Approved Dissertation Committee

Prof. Dr. Birgit Mersmann

Prof. Dr. Immacolata Amodeo

Prof. Dr. Susanne Klengel, FU Berlin

Date of Defense: January 9, 2015.
Statutory Declaration
(on Authorship of a Dissertation)

I, David Fernando Cortés Saavedra hereby declare that I have written this PhD thesis independently, unless where clearly stated otherwise. I have used only the sources, the data and the support that I have clearly mentioned. This PhD thesis has not been submitted for conferral of degree elsewhere.

I confirm that no rights of third parties will be infringed by the publication of this thesis.

Bremen, March 17, 2016

Signature ___________________________________________________________
Abstract

The present investigation traces the theoretical and productive interrelations between the Latin-American writers-artists Xul Solar (1887 – 1963), Vicente Huidobro (1893 - 1948) and Joaquín Torres-García (1874 -1949). This work demonstrates the existence of a Creative-Creationist aesthetic shared by the three authors based on a) the recuperation of the rational elements found in Pre-Colombian art, b) a common theory of inter-artistic translatability, c) the fusion of the processes of creation and construction and d) a transformation of the concept of writing derived from interartistic exploration in the fields of painting and poetry.

By exploring elements that have been left unattended in previous works concerned with the Latin-American Avant-Garde, this investigation proposes an alternative to the mapping of the continent as divided in open and closed regions, offering a less antagonistic panorama of the cultural and artistic interchanges that took place in the region during the first half of the twentieth century. The programs of social and spiritual transformation, as well as the structured and anti-colonialist recuperation of Mesoamerican and South-American cosmology found in the work of these authors, provide a renewed and more comprehensive image of the formal, programmatic and spiritual direction taken by Latin-American Avant-Garde.

Furthermore, by a close comparative reading of key works which had not been interpreted with the adequate tools of analysis until now, such as San Signos and Grafías from Xul Solar, the Poèmes Peints of Vicente Huidobro and the rustic illustrated books of Torres-García and his constructive ink drawings, it will be demonstrated that the Creative-Constructive aesthetic is a revaluation of articulated and visual languages, embracing new systems of writing which anticipate conceptualism and post-structural theory.
# Contents

List of Tables.................................................................................................................. 5  
List of Figures.................................................................................................................... 6  
Acknowledgments.............................................................................................................. 7  
Introduction....................................................................................................................... 9

1. Creating a Tissue. Latin-American Criticism about the Work of Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar ........................................................................... 16 
1.1 The Triangular Artist Network: Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar .................................................................................................................. 18  
1.2 Archaic Transcendentalism: Torres-García and Xul Solar ........................................... 20  
1.3 Footprints of an Intellectual Friendship: Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro ....... 22  
1.4 Critical Reception of the Cubist, Calligrammatic and Visual Poetry of Vicente Huidobro .............................................................................................................. 27

2. Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South .................. 37  
2.1 Xul Solar and Buenos Aires’ Peripheral Modernity ..................................................... 37  
2.2 Torres-García and Montevideo’s Cultural Eclecticism ............................................... 43  
2.3 Vicente Huidobro and Santiago’s Passage Towards the Institutional Avant-Garde ................................................................................................................. 50

3. Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde ............................. 60  
3.1 Modernities and Modernisms....................................................................................... 60  
3.2 The Topics of the Latin-American Avant-Garde .................................................... 65  
3.3 Two Variants of the Latin-American Avant-Garde .................................................. 69  
3.4 A Hypothesis: Torres-García, Huidobro and Solar between Modernism and Transmodernidad ..................................................................................................... 73

4. The Visual-Textual Universe of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro .................................. 81  
4.1 Xul Solar’s Painting between Esoteric Mysticism and Mesoamerican Mythology ...................................................................................................................... 81  
4.2 Image-Text Relation in the Solarian Universe ........................................................ 85  
4.3 Translatability of Textual and Visual Images .......................................................... 95  
4.4 Vicente Huidobro’s 1913 Experiments with Visual Poetry ....................................... 100  
4.5 Salle XIV .................................................................................................................. 107

5. Altazor and the Book of San Signos ............................................................................. 122  
5.1 Celestial Landscape and Divine Language .................................................................. 122  
5.2 Language Transformation ....................................................................................... 138  
5.3 The Ultimate Liberation ......................................................................................... 148
6. Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro: Humanization of Art through the Principle of Creative Constructionism

6.1. Unifying Creation and Construction

6.2 Humanization of Art

7. The Universal Writing

7.1 The First Series of Grafias

7.2 The 1960s Grafias Plastiutiles: Six Systems of Picture Writing

7.3 Tiabuanaco, Inca and Nazca Influence in the Constructive Work of Joaquín Torres-García

7.4 Textual-Visual Reorientation and Transformation of the Latin Alphabet in the Work of Joaquín Torres-García

7.5 Elements of Hieroglyphic Writing in the Work of Joaquín Torres-García and Xul Solar

7.6 The Illustrated Rustic Books of Torres-García

8. Portraits and Architectures

8.1 The Symbolic Portraits and Psicogramas of Xul Solar and Torres-García

8.2 Medieval and Modern Urban Architecture in Xul Solar’s Watercolors

8.3 The Cathedral Constructive Paintings of Torres-García

Conclusion. The Creative-Constructionist Solution to the Antagonist Panorama of Latin-American Avant-Garde

Figures

Bibliography
List of Tables

Table 1 ..................................................................................................................... 94
Table 2 ..................................................................................................................... 168
Table 3 ..................................................................................................................... 170
Table 4 ..................................................................................................................... 176
Table 5 ..................................................................................................................... 179
Table 6 ..................................................................................................................... 181
Table 7 ..................................................................................................................... 182
Table 8 ..................................................................................................................... 183
Table 9 ..................................................................................................................... 187
Table 10 .................................................................................................................... 203
Table 11 ................................................................................................................... 204
Table 12 ................................................................................................................... 209
Table 13 ................................................................................................................... 216
Table 14 ................................................................................................................... 247
List of Figures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Nana Watzin</em></td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Tlaloc</em></td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Banderas, amor te alcanza</em></td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Poco podré alzarme sino la rompo</em></td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Apoyo moral doi</em></td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>A los Astros</em></td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Podré</em></td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Drago</em></td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Ciudá y Abismos</em></td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Palacios in Brita</em></td>
<td>266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>País duro en noche clara</em></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Ocean I.</em></td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Tour Eiffel</em></td>
<td>268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Piano</em></td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Marine</em></td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Minuit</em></td>
<td>271</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Couchant</em></td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Kaleidoscope</em></td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Vicente Huidobro, <em>Moulin</em></td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Grafía Antica</em></td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Todo Ta Hecho</em></td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>El Sei rey wan. Telud (...)</em></td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>No sabe no parle (...)</em></td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Xamine Todo</em></td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Xamine Todo retene lo bon!</em></td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>San Pablo Say</em></td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Gran Rey Santo Jesús Kristo</em></td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Pagoda</em></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Ciudad</em></td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Vuelvilla</em></td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Mestizos de avión y gente</em></td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Proyecto</em></td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Iglesia de María</em></td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Xul Solar, <em>Marina</em></td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Untitled</em></td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Constructivo dedicado a Manolita</em></td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Hombre Constructivo</em></td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Drawing found on page 1 of Père Soleil</em></td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Drawings found on pages 43 and 44 of Père Soleil</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Drawings found on pages 9, 10 and 11 of Père Soleil</em></td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Torres-García, <em>Monumento Cósmico Constructivo</em></td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep appreciation and gratitude towards my advisor Prof. Dr. Birgit Mersmann; you have been an essential support throughout these last four years. Your continuous advice motivated me enormously and provided me with new perspectives on the topic of my investigation. I would also like to thank my committee members Prof. Dr. Immacolata Amodeo and Prof. Dr. Susanne Klengel for their support, as well as to the professors and colleagues at the Interdisciplinary Colloquium at Jacobs University. During my stay in Berlin, Professor Klengel from the FU kindly assisted me by helping me develop a more up-to-date outlook of the Latin-American Literary Avant-Garde; thank you for your clear advise. I would also like to extend my gratitude towards the members and coordinators of Entre Espacios and the Literature Colloquia at the Freie Universität Berlin where I was welcomed as an external participant. Many thanks and my deepest appreciation to all the researchers, patrons and staff at the Library of the Ibero-Amerikanisches Institut Berlin whose hard work deeply inspired me. My most sincere admiration and appreciation to Carlos, Maya, Javiera and Claudia, and to all whose work and social engagement was an example for me to follow.

This thesis could have not been completed without the help of Macarena Cebrían from the Fundación Vicente Huidobro who provided me with valuable material regarding many aspects of the life and work of the poet. Many thanks to all the staff of the Fundación Vicente Huidobro in Santiago de Chile for granting me access to their valuable collections. Special thanks to Professor Patricia Artundo for her bibliographical indications and advice regarding the work of Xul Solar. In Montevideo I would like to thank the staff of the archive Torres-García who kindly opened their doors to me, and to Gustavo Piegas, administrator of the Museo Figari who introduced me to the cultural life of the city.

I express my deepest gratitude towards Cecilia Bendinger; your kindness and encouragement were crucial for the comprehension of Xul Solar’s symbolism. I would
especially like to express my gratitude to Nestor Manoel Habkost who shared with me his findings in the field of *Neocriollo* picture-writing, providing a crucial element for the development of my own hypothesis.

I am most grateful to Ada Eremija and Megan Rouse for helping to edit this dissertation and to Boris Niclas- Tölle and Jayson Grimes for sharing their own research experience with me. Many thanks to my friend Jaime Baez, whose knowledge and advice greatly enriched this text.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the financial aid of Jacobs University and of the DAAD that provided the necessary financial support for this research.

I owe my deepest gratitude and love to my parents Carmen Rita Saavedra Morales and Tarcisio de Jesus Cortés Galeano, you supported me and always encouraged me during the writing process of my dissertation. Thank you Bea for your love and patience; the best pages of this text were inspired by you.
Introduction

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the literary and artistic study of Latin-American Avant-Garde has been enriched by the theoretical and methodological progress made in other concomitant emergent fields of study. Theoretic models of diverse provenance have helped us to visualize the relations between literature and the performance arts, to better understand visual textual medialization\(^1\) and to measure the scope of the epistemic transformation produced by the appearance of cinema at the opening of the twentieth century in the consciousness of artists and recipients as well. Books, congresses, special issues of literary magazines and art performances produced during the last two decades have explored new images of the Latin-American Avant-Garde while also dialoging with contemporary artistic expressions. In the year 2002, Fundación Neruda began a project in which 21 Chilean painters illustrated the twenty one poems contained in the book Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada from Pablo Neruda reviving Horace’s *Ut pictura poesis* principle while also bringing up to date Avant-Garde writing by extracting it from the limits imposed by the book. Works such as Vanguardia Española e Intermedialidad : Artes Escénicas, Cine y Radio (Albert 2005) opened the possibilities of a history of comparative media while the September 2002 issue of Quimera: Revista de Literatura from Barcelona gathered valuable research about visual poetry in Latin-American from an inter-arts and transmedia perspective.

The theoretical frame from which this work commences is found in the crossroads between these recent discussions on transmediality and the debt that such an approach has with the fields of art history and literary history by leaving unsolved many urgent problems concerning the regional mapping of Latin-American Avant-Garde. The programmatic complexity of Avant-Garde phenomena and the theoretical and productive lines of contact that

---

\(^1\) The study of textual and audio-visual narrative strategies in novel, television, cinema and video games in Spain and Latin-American was the main theme of the XIV congress of the Asociación Alemana de Hispanistas, held in the city of Regensburg form the 6 to the 9th of march 2003.
united poets and painters, providing important elements for the construction of a future theory of the Latin-American Avant-Garde, have not yet been sufficiently studied. Although the notions of trans and metamediality, instability and loss of hierarchical differentiation are now in vogue, we have not yet proposed an alternative to the dichotomy of “closed” and “open” regions (Traba, 1973), also expressed in the form of the concurrence between two clashing avant-gardes, one nativist and the other formalist. We might now understand how computational hypertext relates to the decentralized textuality of the Avant-Garde writers (Paz-Soldán 2001) but no efforts have been made in order to give visibility to the interartistic theories which transformed the notion of text itself at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Before 1920, writers and poets in Latin-America were accustomed to include the new technologies in their works in a descriptive manner. From the second decade of the twentieth century on, these artists took a step towards the incorporation of the enlargement of acoustic and visual experience brought by cinema and radio by simulating the effects produced by these new media in their own texts. (Paz-Soldán 2001) The enlargement of the visual experience partially due to the absorption of technological procedures had perceptible consequences since the early twenties in Latin-American poetry. Between 1920 and 1922, artistic, literary and cultural production was characterized by a loosening of the limits of genres and by the need to incorporate the visual experience into the sphere of the text. The publication of Veinte Poemas Para Ser Leídos en el Tranvía from Oliverio Girondo, the exhibition of Vicente Huidobro’s Poèmes Peints in Paris, the celebration of the Semana de Arte Moderna in Sao Paulo and the iconotextual production of Xul Solar, all of which date from 1922 (although Xul Solar’s inclusion of text into paintings begins three years earlier), are reveling in the need to integrate various artistic manifestations into one product, but also the necessity of liberating poetry from language, and painting from the dichotomy abstraction-representation.

When Joaquin Torres-Garcia arrived in 1934 to Montevideo with the intention of creating a School of the South and to introduce his orthogonal constructive system to the region, he had already systematized a symbolic regime which soon became an actual system of writing based on the merging of alphabetic signs and pictograms. In the same decade Xul Solar began to paint his Grafias, with the intention of producing a picture-writing or iconoscripture achieving extraordinary results. Altazor published in 1931 and the 1922 Poèmes Peints of Vicente Huidobro widened the poetic domain taking it beyond linguistic expression. Huidobro
wounded language by attacking signification and focusing on the signifiers instead of the signifieds. With the work of Huidobro, Solar and Torres-García, the communicative value of articulated language was put into question while new painterly problems arose. The level of uniformity achieved by Xul Solar and Torres-García in regards to the use of a symbolic system, the creation of a picture writing and their merging of pre-Colombian, classical, religious and modern elements has no parallels in modern western art. Works like the 1902 Ein Brief from Hugo von Hofmannsthal had already criticized the possibility of communicating through articulated language which is present in Huidobro’s Altazor, while the paintings of Kandinsky pointed to the symbolic use of plastic elements in the canvas some years before Latin-American painters started to work on similar problems. However, the creative-constructionist solution proposed by the authors studied in this dissertation is unique in both its programmatic coherence and in virtue of the archived results.

According to Philip Horst (Horst 2010) one of the main achievements of the historic Avant-Garde was to serve as a hinge between fixed mediality in Modernism and the loosening of the relation between œuvre and artifact in conceptualism. The work of the artists-writers Xul Solar, Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro commenced the process towards concrete poetry and conceptualism while foreseeing the post-structural redefinition of the concept of writing as something that goes far beyond the limits of language. By mapping the theoretical and practical relations between these three authors this research will demonstrate how far these authors got into a process of revaluation, not only of the artistic field, but of communication itself. The Creative-Constructionist projects of Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar imply a widening of the formal and ideological aspects of modernism while adding a hybrid component to the Avant-Garde of the Rio del Plata which limits the functionality of the concepts of closed and open regions provided by Marta Traba (Traba 1973). The researcher also intends to demonstrate that the interartistic work of these three authors questions the traditional notion of text by incorporating visual elements as semantic frames of interpretation but also by giving precise linguistic value to the images.

In this sense we should considered Lara-Rallo’s approach for whom “intertextuality is turning into an interdisciplinary concept which implies that the arts should be appraised primarily as sign systems open to cooperative and fertile transpositions” (Lara-Rallo 2012, 98). Lara-Rallo’s perspective is based in an explicit ascription to semiotics as a method to overcome
media boundaries, a “prevalence of a semiotic turn in the aesthetic and critical appraisal of the arts and their intersections.” (Lara-Rallo 2012, 97) Such perspective rehabilitates the possibilities of extrapolating elements of textual analysis to be used in interarts analysis. In what seems to be a paradoxical return to an all-encompassing narrative, the tendency towards the domination of all spaces of signification (of which semiotics has been many times accused) is the reason for which a semiotic approach seems to be able to overcome the difficulties imposed by a comparative interartistic analysis. Therefore I will be emphasizing what is common to two different artistic utterances conceived in two different media (their suitability to be analyzed as sign systems) and not in what makes them different from one each other (their media specificity). Moreover close reading and the use of a semiotic approach will show to be adequate approaches in order to study the grammatological aspects found in the art of Torres-García and Xul Solar, who were concerned with the creation of universal systems of communication demanding a holistic approach.

Regarding its structural aspects, this dissertation is divided into eight chapters. The first three chapters set the preliminary bases of the text providing: a literature review of the comparative studies on the three studied authors; a differentiated portrait of the region emphasizing the particularities of the processes of modernization lived in each urban center; and the epistemological framework of the investigation. Regarding this last point it will be important to emphasize that such frame is not a stable structure. Theories about Modernity, Modernisms and Avant-Garde are a methodological web which expands and contracts by the pressure exerted by the object of study itself. Since this dissertation proposes a revaluation of the contents gathered under the signifier “Latin-American Avant-Garde” and of its dichotomist differentiation, the departing notions will be tested and transformed all along the text.

Chapter four presents an examination of the praxis and theory of image-word fertilization developed by Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro. This section is conceptually based in the idea of mutual translatability of textual images and visual images developed independently by both authors during the 1920s (chapter 4.3). Enveloping this middle section, the first two and the last two sub-chapters are close readings of the artistic work done by both authors materializing their belief in the interconnection of visual and textual message and the mutual translatability of messages expressed in different artistic mediums.
In chapter five the reader will find a comparative close reading of *Altazor* and *San Signos*: two homologous journals of astral and spiritual exploration in which the dissatisfaction for the limitations of articulated language is manifested. This chapter introduces a fundamental element for the praxis of iconoscripture later explored in chapter seven: word recombination. Along with merging of the visual and linguistic signs (chapter four), breaking and re-accommodation of morphemes is one of the main pre-requisites for the formation of picture-writings and universalist symbolic systems as the ones developed by our two painters. Parallel to this practical principle of constitution of iconoscriptural systems used by Xul Solar and Torres-García, a more general theory of Creative-Constructionism animates their work. In the interest of consolidating the theoretical corpus produced around the concepts of creation and construction, chapter six synthetizes the multiple converging aspects of Vicente Huidobro’s and Torres-García’s aesthetic theories. Whereas Xul Solar did not produce a large theoretical corpus, Vicente Huidobro and Torres-García left behind an immense encyclopedia of ideas which are intimately correlated with each other. In many aspects the system of thought created by these authors is an expansion of the idea of mutual translatability of the arts proposed by Xul Solar and Huidobro (chapter 4.3) and should not be thought of as something independent from that principle.

Chapter seven, the longest section of this dissertation, gathers the most recent findings regarding Xul Solar’s creation of artificial languages following the transit from his first series of *Grafías* painted in the decade of 1930 to his most linguistically consistent work *Grafías Plastíñtiles* done two decades later in which the painter developed six systems of picture writing. Next, by combining historiographical data and iconological analysis of the constructive canvases of Torres-García we will analyze the presence of pre-Colombian motifs in his work from the perspective of the creation of a general system of writing. Furthermore, I aim to demonstrate that the principles of word recombination and interartistic merging of different systems of communication is present in the illustrated rustic books of Torres-García. These books are some of the most consistent and carefully designed products of the Latin-American Avant-Garde by reason of the balance achieved between the use of words and images. They are iconotexts merging various semiotic horizons which translate the principles of *Universalismo Constructivo* into a Universal writing.
Chapter eight presents completely new findings in the comparative analysis of Torres-García’s and Xul Solar’s work. The concept of architecture was fundamental for the creation of a constructive Universalist aesthetic in Torres-García and it is also found in the earliest watercolors of Solar. Whereas in chapter 7 the concept of architecture was exclusively linked to the production of a new system of writing, in this section a more precise historical analysis of the influences received by both painters is proposed. Andean Hybrid Baroque and Gothic architecture have been absorbed and transformed by both painters adding an unmistakable Modern Latin-American component resulting in spiritual architectural paintings where symbols are used as structural elements.

The conclusions found at the end of this work aim both to frame the findings presented by the researcher inside the large field of Avant-Garde theory as to indicate possible routes of future research that will help to configure a polyphonic image of Latin-American artistic and literary phenomena. It is important to stress the fact that while the comparative analysis undertaken in this dissertation puts together the work and theories of three authors who had not been regarded before as a group, we have mainly focused on those aspects of their work which have not been thoroughly studied until now and might appear as atypical of Latin-American literary and artistic production. The degree into which the goals of the Creative-Constructionist project were fulfilled is as important as its theoretical fundaments and is pivotal for the demonstration of the hypothesis proposed in this dissertation. Whereas the discrepancy between praxis and theory has been the rule and not the exception in the field of the Avant-Garde production (Schwartz 1991) the Creative-Constructionist aesthetic accepts the challenges of being judged by its achievements and not only by its theoretical proposals. Xul Solar’s iconoscriptures and the mixed alphabetic and pictogrammatic system used by Torres-García can no longer be regarded as hypothetical systems of communication but as transformative complex writings which demand close linguistic analysis. Although the examination proposed in this dissertation is limited by difficulties of accessing the totality of the pictorial production of both painters and the visual poetry of Vicente Huidobro, the interpretative work which has been undergone in this dissertation, is sufficient to demonstrate the practical and artistic achievements of the artists. Visual and textual material which never before had been closely analyzed as the illustrated rustic books of Torres-García, several watercolors of Xul Solar and an many of the Salle XIV visual poems of Vicente Huidobro will be here studied for the first time.
Lastly, the way into which this dissertation is inscribed inside the field of comparative and interartistic research determines the reach and nature of the findings here presented. The advantages of middle range comparative analysis over national and encyclopedic investigations are multiple. As it will be further discussed in chapter 1 encyclopedic analyses fail to develop truly international argumentations because the nets of artistic, political and social interchange and mobility between Latin-American artists, writers and intellectuals have scarcely been mapped. Limiting their scope by the nation-state borders, national investigations are biased in the same manner. Regional investigations revealing transnational interchanges assure a higher degree of historiographical accuracy while disclosing phenomena which might have not been perceived before. The visualization of the Creative-Constructionist aesthetic in Latin-American Avant-Garde is our contribution to this field which is still in its explorative phase but has proven to be a fertile terrain of research for the Human Sciences as the latest work of Marta Traba (Traba and Inter-American Development Bank 1994) and Mario Gradowczyk (Gradowczyk 2006) attested it. The innovative aspect of this work is thus not the introduction of new actors, or the proposal of another image of the Avant-Garde competing with the existing ones, but the presentation of communicating channels between works and theories which were no visible before.

Under the limits established by this investigation the researcher will explore the reach of a set of homogenous theories and artistic praxis which transformed the concepts of poetry and painting and presented a novel project of human transformation debiting from a revaluation of pre-Colombian thought and trans-historical Universalism. Instead providing a definite response to the problem posed by the antagonistic differentiation between open and closed regions this investigation will provide a more accurate representation of an essential component of south American-Avant-garde demonstrating the necessity of reestablishing the theoretical discourse in the field. In this sense the methodological reorientation of Avant-Garde analysis proves to be essential for the success of future investigations and for the re-characterization of a region which offered innovative and precise artistic responses to burning problems of modern arts and literatures.
Chapter 1. Creating a Tissue. Latin-American Criticism about the Work of Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar

The aim of this section is to guide the reader inside the corpus of abundant literature available concerning the work of Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar by focusing on the most relevant proposals of comparative analysis of their work.

As the following literature review will demonstrate, while the connections between the art of Xul Solar and Torres-García have been mentioned by a few authors, there are no works bridging their art and theories to those of the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro, whose theoretic posture and poetic praxis were intimately related to the work of both painters.

The following literature review shows the results achieved in the comparative study of the three authors as well as the large gaps which need to be filled. In order to make a more ordered exposition, this chapter will be divided into four short sections. The first one concerning the incipient existing comparative notes linking the three authors, the second and third exploring the couples Torres-García – Xul Solar, and Torres-García – Vicente Huidobro, and finally a fourth section devoted to the visual poetry of Vicente Huidobro. Since Vicente Huidobro has been recognized worldwide as a major exponent of Latin-American modern poetry, but less as an artist in a more general sense, it is fundamental to demonstrate the existence of a defined line of research connecting him with the praxis and theory of painting. Huidobro was not only a poet who built a general aesthetic theory for all the arts, but he was also a producer of interartistic products comparable to the iconotextual production of Xul Solar and Torres-García. This last point is of paramount importance in our research. The categories of painter or poet do not suffice to describe the work of these artists; this brings them together and even facilitates the comparative exploration of their work.
The total absence of comparative studies linking the work of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro is symptomatic of a deficiency in the field of intermedia and interartistic studies in the region. This dissertation will present the first results in that direction with the aim of contributing to the mapping of artistic and poetic cross-fertilizations in Latin-America.
1.1. The Triangular Artist Network: Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar

Although there are no monographic studies dealing with the relations between the three authors assembled in this dissertation, precedents of a comparative approach on the field can be found in a few articles tracing the similitudes between the work of Xul Solar and that of Joaquín Torres-García, as well as some brief references on the parallelism between the theoretical developments of Vicente Huidobro’s Creacionismo and Torres-García’s Universalismo Constructivo.

A hint of a possible bridging between the three creators is found in the short introduction to the section “Constructivismo” in Jorge Schwartz’s Las Vanguardias Latinoamericanas: Textos Programáticos y Críticos. (Schwartz 1991) In this anthology of programmatic and critical texts of the Latin-American Avant-Garde, two important manifestos of Torres-García are re-edited: “Naturaleza y Arte” (1918) and “Querer Construir” (1930). Here Schwartz signals the precise coincidences between the article “Naturaleza y arte” published in the Catalan review Un Enemic del poble in October 1918 by Joaquín Torres-García and the famous manifest “Non Serviam” read in 1914 in the main auditorium of the Ateneo de Santiago by Vicente Huidobro. Schwartz writes: “just as Creacionismo is hinged on the personality of Huidobro, constructivism converges on the subjectivity of his creator and main promoter (…) the denial of mimetic art as a mere reproduction of nature will be the motto of both artists” (Schwartz 1991, 425, 426. Trans. Cortés 2015). In the same text and only a few lines later the Brazilian-Argentinian critic points out briefly the similarities between Xul Solar’s codified painting and spiritualism and Torres-García’s art, placing the three authors in the same textual space but without providing further analysis on the role played by Xul Solar in the understanding of García’s or Huidobro’s work.

Torres-García valora al objeto artístico en sí mismo, eliminando al máximo el carácter referencial de la obra. Presupuesto teórico muy semejante al creacionismo huidobriano del manifiesto Non Serviam².

² Here Schwartz introduces a foot note: “La proximidad Huidobro - Torres-García queda confirmada por “Salutación a Joaquín-Torres García.” The text “Salutación a Joaquín Torres-García” to which Schwartz
Creating a tissue

La referencia a Platón también muestra la vertiente idealista y metafísica de Torres-García, distinguiéndolo de la mayor parte de los demás poetas artistas abstraccionistas, en los cuales prevalece la actitud formal, agnóstica y cerebral. Su idealismo abstracto lo acerca a Xul Solar, cuyas bellísimas pinturas están cifradas por códigos donde se mezclan el esoterismo y la modernidad de la pincelada abstracta. (Schwartz 2000, 425)

As it was suggested by Schwartz, idealism, creation, abstraction and codification are indeed some of the themes around which the aesthetics of the three poet-artists gravitates. Although one cannot imply from these lines that Jorge Schwartz was aiming to relate the poetics of Vicente Huidobro to the coupling of modernity and esotericism done by Xul Solar, Schwartz’s inclusion of the name of the Argentinian in the section of his book devoted to Constructivismo is characteristic of a change in the appreciation of the work of Xul Solar and Torres-García clearly visible since the 1990’s, signaling the birth of comparative studies between the two. It was the multifaceted figure of the Argentinian Mario Gradowczyk, a technical scientist and engineer, passionate by South American art, who first favored comparative research concerning the study of Xul Solar and Torres-García since 1988. His intervention explored the possibilities of a Xul Solar outside the limits of the Martín Fierro circle by connecting him with the art of the Uruguayan master, while at the same time denaturalizing the traditional association between Torres-García and the Vibracionista painter Rafael Barradas, which has been explored many times in virtue of the friendship shared both masters.

refers was written by Vicente Huidobro in September 1944 in the context of the homage planned by the friends of the painter to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his arrival to Montevideo. It was Esther de Cáceres who wrote to the Chilean asking for his contribution.


Creating a tissue

1.2. Archaic Transcendentalism: Torres-García and Xul Solar

It was in the catalogue of a retrospective of Xul Solar’s work held in the Kramer and the Rubbers galleries in Buenos Aires in 1988 (Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988) where Mario Gradowczyk suggested the possibilities of “reading” Xul Solar’s and Torres-Garcia’s works as homologous “systems of visual communication” for the first time, opening the possibilities of a comparative study based on the semiotic affinities between the two artists.

Lo que a primera vista resultaría una curiosidad, una búsqueda ingenua de un sistema de comunicación visual, deviene una bella y original propuesta que admite putos de contacto con los trabajos constructivistas de Torres García. Xul ha recuperado la belleza formal, el color, y el ritmo de la década del 20. Febrilmente crea varios sistemas alternativos de escritura”(Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988, 16)

What was only insinuated in 1988 is developed a decade later in the article “Torres Garcia, Xul Solar y Barnett Newman” published in the Brazilian magazine Estudios-Iberoamericanos in 1997. (Gradowczyk 1997) Besides commenting on the position of Torres-García in the Whitney Studio in New York and the influence that the Uruguayan exerted on the work of Barnett Newman and Adolph Gottlieb, Gradowczyk associates the work of the two Latin Americans under the premises that they do not depict objective reality, nor psychological reality, but rather the metaphysical structures which are behind such phenomena. For Gradowczyk, the “archaic transcendentalism” of Torres- García goes hand in hand with Xul Solar’s study of the I Ching and the Cabala, for both painters deploy general interest for all the ancient cultures as representative of a singular trans-historical spirit. However, there is a shift on the center of attention between 1988 and 1997 in Gradowczyk’s approach. In his first text, the author was concerned with the linguistic and textual aspects of the painting of both artists, while in the second he is more interested in the study of the plastic representation of the spiritual notions on the canvas. The first Gradowczyk is much more relevant to our study than the later one. It is in 1998 that the critic proposed six types of “alternative writing” found in the work of Xul Solar while exploring the similitudes between the artist’s use of words in the painting and the exploration done by Dada artists. In his 1997 article, this theme is left aside, possibly due to the
Creating a tissue

extreme difficulty of interpreting such writing systems. In his second text Gradowczyk refers to the syntagmatic level of Solar’s work from a much more general perspective.

According to Mario Gradowczyk, Torres-García’s *Constructivos Lineares* divide the plane in central and lateral columns that accommodate the painter’s system of symbols according to polar, intellectual and physical planes. This lead to the claim that lineal constructivist paintings match the ascendant scheme of the Cabala’s Tree of Life. As Gradowczyk precisely notes, Torres-García’s 1935 book *Estructura* is based on the belief of an elemental trinity. The essence of every act is the synthesis of a cause, an expression and a result. In this line of thought, the tree of life turns into the image which unites Newman’s zip-like vertical division of the canvas, Torres-García constructive paintings and Xul Solar’s *Pan Tree*. The latest is the recreation of the Jewish tree of life done by the Argentinian artist according to the duodecimal system which ruled many aspects of his art. Such approach is unfortunately not developed further by Gradowczyk in any other text. In fact, in *Torres-García: Utopía Transgresión*. (Gradowczyk 2007) there is only a short mention of Xul Solar’s use of dark and earthly colors as an expression of uneasiness which corresponds to the use of such tonalities in the work of Torres-García representing the modern exhaustion of society. Such neutralization of the spiritual elements and the intention of referring only in formal terms to the similitudes between the works of both authors are also found in a 2004 article by Bastos Kern (Bastos Kern Maria Lúcia 2004). According to the author of “O Mito da cidade moderna ea arte: Torres-García e Xul Solar,” the modern city suggests to both painters geometric and textual elements later systematized in their work. Their mysticism and the search for symbolic ascending shapes would be associated with the desire of reconstitution of a world that had collapsed after the First World War. Under this perspective as well as in the most recent book of Gradowczyk, the esoteric and spiritual aspects of the work of both painters are subsumed to the modern experience of war and to a more general confrontation with urban space. What has been left aside is the actual experience of a mystical, out of the body experience guiding the work of Xul Solar, and the Christian and

---

*The translation of the papers left by Xul Solar written in *Neocriollo* language was published in 2013 by Daniel E Nelson while the linguistic analysis of the systems of picture writing created by Xul Solar was only completed in 2008 by Nestor Manoel Habkost in a still unpublished dissertation.*
Creating a tissue

Pythagorean symbolism of Torres García, which goes well beyond their historical modern contextualization. The understanding of Xul Solar’s theosophical belief and of both painters acceptance of pre-Colombian religious and aesthetic principles cannot be regarded as a curiosity. They define their work in formal, symbolic and linguistic levels which need to be closely studied. Departing from this principle, the analysis of the linguistic elements found in the work of both artists, as well as their propositions for the transformation of languages and the alphabet, will be explored under the light of their spiritual beliefs and the symbolic correspondences between natural elements, colors, numbers, geometric shapes etc., derived from such systems of thought.

1.3. Footprints of an Intellectual Friendship: Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro

Anecdotic evidence of the friendship between Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro can be found in Bolodia Teitelboim’s *Huidobro la Marcha Infinita*, (Teitelboim 1997) the most complete biography of the Chilean poet. Referring to Huidobro’s 1945 trip from New York to Montevideo Teitelboim writes:

Durante la continuación del viaje de regreso a través del Atlántico, el poeta quiso celebrar en Río de Janeiro el cumpleaños de Raquel, para la cual había escrito un poema. Días más tarde, en Montevideo, donde fue esperado en el puerto por el pintor Torres García y numerosos poetas, Huidobro leyó en la radio Espectador los versos escritos para ella. (Teitelboim 1997, 260)

A second biographic nexus between poet and painter is made by Juan Manuel Bonet in his essay “Vicente Huidobro: what his Library tells us”:

Torres García retrató, en 1931, a Huidobro, que poseía varias obras suyas en su biblioteca, entre las que cabe destacar el ejemplar dedicado de *La Ciudad sin Nombre* (1941). Antes de regresar al Nuevo Mundo, el chileno y el uruguayo, a los que Jorge Oteiza rendiría visita, sucesivamente, en sus respectivas ciudades natales, habían sido los pilares del París Latinoamericano de vanguardia. En Soberna Juventud (1967), el segundo tomo de sus memorias, el estridentista mexicano Manuel Maples Arce describe su encuentro con Huidobro, en la casa parisienne de Torres-García. (Huidobro and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2001, 100)
Creating a tissue

We might complement this information adding that Torres-García also sent his books *Estructura* and *La ciudad sin Nombre* to Vicente Huidobro very shortly after their publication plus issue 21 from 1948 of the radical review *Remevedor* (unofficially directed by Torres-García). This issue was dedicated to the poet whose portrait adorned the cover page of the magazine in which Guido Castillo had written a celebratory article about Huidobro’s *Creacionismo*. Two intertextual relations are found in issues from August 2, 1936 and February 3, 1937 of the magazine *Círculo y Cuadrado* (organ of the Montevideo based *Asociación de Arte Constructivo* directed by Torres-García and continuation of the Parisian magazine *Cercle et Carré*) where short texts of Vicente Huidobro are found. The epistolary evidence found in the archives of the *Fundación Vicente Huidobro* and in those of the *Fundación Torres-García* consulted by the author of this dissertation prove that the friendship between the two dates at least from 1931, the year in which the first written exchanges started. As Torres-García was struggling to create the first group of concrete and abstract art in Paris at the end of 1928, and before *Círcle et Carré* was founded by him along with Michel Seuphor (in close collaboration with Hans Arp, Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Vantongerloo and Russolo), a list of names was written by Torres-García on a piece of paper under the enigmatic tile “A C.” This list, to which Pedro da Cruz (Cruz 1994, 81) has given some attention, is divided in two columns. Under the letter “C” one finds the name of Huidobro among other important modernist writers such as Raymond Queneau and Antonin Artaud and some cubist and constructivist painters such as Jean Hélion, F. Kupka, Constantin Brancusi or Van Doesburg. Bearing in mind that the group *Abstraction- Création* was founded two years later by Hélion, Hérbin and Doesburg, the letter “C” might stand for the French word “Création” (or a variation of it). Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe that “C” could not stand for “concrete” since J. Hélion and Doesbourg debated constantly with Torres-García about the use and significance of this term.

---

6 In a letter sent on March 28 1936, (Torres-García 1936) Torres-García asked Vicente Huidobro whether the latter had already read Torres-García latest oeuvre *Estructura* (1935).

7 The short quote “de todas las fuerzas humanas, la que nos interesa más es la fuerza creadora” from Vicente Huidobro is found in the August 1936 issue of *Círculo y Cuadrado*. (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1936, 3) Again in the February issue of 1937 a longer text of the poet is reproduced in the same magazine: “Nunca el hombre ha estado más cerca de la naturaleza, que ahora que no trata de imitarla en sus apariencias, sino de hacer como ella, imitándola en lo profundo de sus leyes constructivas, en la realización de un todo dentro del mecanismo de la producción de formas nuevas.” (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1937, 6)
Creating a tissue

Besides their epistolary dialogue and the attention given by Torres-García to Huidobro’s texts, and Huidobro’s own interest in García’s painting, there is evidence of the direct intervention and re-elaboration of the poetic work of Vicente Huidobro done by Torres-García. As Cedomil Goic has explained in: “Poèmes Paris 1925, Vicente Huidobro and Joaquín Torres García: Visual Image and Poetic writing/ Poèmes Paris 1925.” (Correa-Díaz, Weintraub, and Goic 2008) Joaquín Torres-García elaborated a creative rewriting of the first five poems of Vicente Huidobro’s 1925 book Tout à Coup. On that rare handwritten rustic book, only available in the Library of the Getty Research Institute, the founder of Universalismo Constructivo transforms the graphic disposition of the original poems of Huidobro, introduces breaks, enjambments, upper-case letters, symbols and drawings in order to stress or alter the meaning of the original text (see chapter 10.1).

Besides Jorge Schwartz’s linkage between the theoretical principles explored by Vicente Huidobro in his manifesto “Non Serviam” and Torres-García’s Universalismo Constructivo (Schwartz 1991) and Cedomil Golic’s short analysis of Poèmes Paris 1925, there are no other academic works dealing with the relations between Huidobro’s Creacionismo and Torres-García Universalismo Constructivo or any other aspects of their work. The copresence of both authors in the same textual spaces is incidental and is found in the interstices of the Latin-American history of the arts and literature. Marta Traba (Traba and Inter-American Development Bank 1994) quickly pointed to the relation between Vicente Huidobro’s internationalism and the surrealist-like painting of Roberto Matta as well as to the ideological link between the painting of José Sabogal and the emancipatory and nativist textuality of Mariátegui, but failed to see any points of contact between Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro.

Jose Miguel Oviedo in his Historia de la Literatura Hispanoamericana (Oviedo 2001) rightly placed both men in analogical positions inside the sphere of influence of Latin-American culture in Europe but only timidly suggested any concrete relation between them. Referring to the transformation that took place in Huidobro’s poetry from a post-modernist style to his Avant-gardist poetry, Oviedo notes: “Entre otras tendencias con las que manifiesta su afinidad,

---

8 Not only did Huidobro have paintings of Torres-García in his Santiago house (Teitelboim 1997, 182) but, as da Cruz notes “in the gardener of midnight castle, written by Arp and the poet Vicente Huidobro in 1931, Torres García is mentioned as one of the most interesting modern artist along with Braque, Breton, Duchamp, Ernst, Klee, Léger, Lipchitz, Matisse, Miró, Mondrian, Picabia and Picasso. (Cruz 1994, 81).
Creating a tissue

está el constructivismo del pintor Torres García.” (Oviedo 2001, 316) Interestingly, even if Oviedo does not define the relations between both artists, he does refer 4 times (from a total of 6 entries about Torres-García in his Historia de la literatura…) to the Uruguayan in the context of his study of the poetry of Vicente Huidobro, paralleling their positions in the artistic and literary fields.

El primer aporte hispanoamericano a la vanguardia internacional se anuncia en 1914: el chileno Vicente Huidobro (16.2.1) presenta en Santiago de Chile su inflamado manifestó “Non Serviam,” al que seguirán luego su libro El espejo de agua (1916) que oficialmente inaugura el creacionismo antes de que el poeta llegue a Madrid y Paris. Allí continuará publicando más libros creacionistas y lanzando varios manifiestos que lo convertirían en la figura clave de nuestra vanguardia poética. En Rusia hacia 1915, Malevich exhibe sus nuevos cuadros y publica su ensayo sobre el suprematismo, que era un esfuerzo por pintar los ritmos del infinito o “el color del espacio.” Esta tendencia dará origen al notable constructivismo Ruso (cuya exhibición inaugural data de 1921), con Lissitzky, Rodchenko, Popova y Malevich, y éste al singular constructivismo del teórico y pintor uruguayo Joaquín Torres García (1874-1949) (...) Emulándolos, Torres García también difundiría sus ideas sobre el “Universalismo Constructivo” -síntesis del cubismo, constructivismo y el “arte concreto” – a través del taller que llevó su nombre (1934). (Oviedo 2001, 292, 293)

Oviedo is wrong in his assimilation of Universalismo Constructivo as a variation of Russian Constructivism. From 1928, Torres-Garcia was mainly acquainted with the Neoplasticism group and with an international, not exclusively Russian constructive Avant-Garde. Although only in Paris will the Uruguayan systematically build on the constructive aspects of his work, the notion of construction was already found in his wooden toys built since 1918 and in his 1917 inks. The untitled drawing (figure 35) reproduced in the third issue of the magazine Un Enemic del Poble, in which several decomposed flat scenes are inserted into an orthogonal grid, are an early example of a constructive modification of Cubism. Moreover, Torres-García was not simply influenced by the international pictorial trends converging in Paris. He himself influenced the painting of Doesburg. The latter “used two different forms of composition; color fields subordinated to a linear structure used by the neoplastics in general, and color fields that bordered each other without lines” (Cruz 1994, 45) but after meeting the Uruguayan in 1928 this changed. Doesburg “disposed color fields of regular forms without border lines between each other. Later he traced on these color fields a linear structure that was independent of those color fields” (Cruz 1994, 45) which is precisely what Torres-García was doing earlier that year.

But although Oviedo’s reductive understanding of Universalismo Constructivo (probably coming from Torres-Garcia’s own declarations published in Cercle et Carré about his desire to find a synthesis between Surrealism, constructivism and Cubism) misses
Creating a tissue

everything that is unique and local about García’s work, the Peruvian historian rightly places the figures of Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro in the same cubist-constructivist context. The historian’s fine eye sees the connections between Huidobro’s own aesthetic and the international constructive movement arguing the primacy of Huidobro and Torres-García as the first Hispanic-American contribution to the international Avant-Garde. Some lines later in an epistemological twist which allows the historian to see in Huidobro what he had missed in the painter, Oviedo underlines the foundational role of both figures and the reach of their investigations in the European context:

Aparte de que el creacionismo de Huidobro es una idea que repercute en la poesía francesa, como se deja notar den Pierre Reverdy, los ciclos vanguardistas por los que pasan Vallejo (16.3.2) y Neruda (16.3.2), los otros dos grandes poetas de la época, no son meras variantes a influjos recibidos: son creaciones propias y originales que se añaden al gran repertorio de la vanguardia y la expanden. No solo ocurre así en el campo literario: también las contribuciones de nuestra pintura (baste señalar los nombres de Torres García, Lam y Matta) y de nuestra reflexión cultural e intelectual son capitales. (Oviedo 2001, 294)

Besides the above discussed investigations of Goic, Gradowczyk, Schwartz and Oviedo, there are of course more general works of reference about the arts and literature of Latin-America where the names of our artist are presented. These works do not necessarily define the routes of exchange or the coincidences in their artistic trajectory. In 1994, Marta Traba (Traba and Inter-American Development Bank 1994) indicated that one of the factors preventing the development of a history of modern art in Latin-America was the difficulty of establishing uniform guidelines for artistic value judgments which could not be derived from one-author studies or national studies, but had to be grounded in regional studies. In my view, whereas the broad scope used in encyclopedic works as Jacqueline Barnitz’s Twentieth-Century Art of Latin America (Barnitz 2001) or Fernando Arellano’s El Arte Hispanoamericano (Arellano 1988) respond to the question raised by Marta Traba, and have helped to strengthen such regional outlook, they also lack a clear historiographical and comparative perspective. This type of encyclopedic endeavors often indicates relations of contiguity which are not further developed. In some cases they depart from a broad scope which is not truly international since the relations between artists of different Latin-American countries is given by geography and ethnicity while the specific, practical and theoretical coincidences and oppositions between the artists remain concealed. One of the most recent examples of attempting such uncritical integration is Edwards Shaw’s Pintura Contemporánea Latinoamericana. (Shaw 2011) The work does not add any new findings in the field of art history or the visual studies. This is so because instead of
Creating a tissue

describing the transformations experienced by the artistic field in the region, it reduces each
country to a list of names and each name to a personal adventure taking place in a hostile
environment. If a transnational and comparative approach is necessary in order to define the
dynamics which connect different actors beyond the limits of the national states and the artistic
schools, such studies face the challenge of defining clear comparative guidelines or maps of the
rhizoamatic spread of the artistic phenomena, if existing. On a small scale Mario Gradowczyk’s
work did attempt this complex work. The limits of his comparative research were mainly
historical and not truly methodological. Thanks to the work developed in the last decade there
are now enough elements to thoroughly study the iconotextual relations between the work of
Torres-García and Xul Solar. With the inclusion of the figure of Vicente Huidobro, the present
investigation wishes to respond to the call made by Marta Traba as an element for a future and
more comprehensive mapping of the artistic and cultural dynamics of the region.

1.4. Critical Reception of the Cubist, Calligrammatic and Visual Poetry
of Vicente Huidobro

In 1964, the same year that the first edition of the Complete Works of Vicente Huidobro
was published, Fernand Verhesen (Bajarfla 1964) stated in the preface of J.J Bajarfla Bajarfla’s
La Polémica Reverdy – Huidobro. Origen del Ultraísmo, that when Vicente Huidobro died in
1948, he was virtually a forgotten poet.

Sólo, según nuestro conocimiento el Journal de Poètes, de Bruselas señaló su desaparición
publicando nuestra traducción de un largo poema (Monument à la mer); y fue necesario esperar a
que Undurruaga publicara su Antología (1957), y que apareciera la traducción Francesa de Altazor-
Altaigle (1957) para que Huidobro fuera bruscamente descubierto por la crítica. (Bajarfla 1964, 8)

Sixty five years have passed since the death of Vicente Huidobro and the panorama of
his critical reception has completely shifted in the half century between the publication of
Undurruaga’s anthology in 1957 until now. After the 1931 Madrid publication of his most
commented work Altazor, around 30 editions and dozens of reprints have been made of the
same poem in places like Santiago\textsuperscript{9}, Madrid\textsuperscript{10}, Mexico city, Paris\textsuperscript{11}, Brussels\textsuperscript{12}, Bratislava\textsuperscript{13} or Minnesota\textsuperscript{14}. By the year 2003 there were more than 900 entries on the critical bibliography of the poet (Goic 2003) including hundreds of articles and book chapters, dozens of books, interviews, homages, recordings, and diverse documents which keep augmenting, while covering topics that go from the unraveling of his personal dilemmas to the study of his poetic Creacionismo, and passing by his insertion in the Spanish and French Avant-Garde and the interpretation of his poetic, narrative and dramatic works.

Sharing some of the aesthetic principles transmitted by the cubist painters (Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris, and Georges Braque) and actively participating since 1917 within the group of poets associated to them (Apollinaire, Reverdy, Max Jacob, Cocteau, Paul Dermée, etc.) in the development of a homonymous poetic aesthetic, the association between the poetics of Vicente Huidobro and pictorial Cubism is the earliest reference to the contact of the Chilean poet with the visual arts. In 1920 and 1921, Carrillo (“El Cubismo y su Estética” in De Costa 1975) and de Torre (Torre 1921) referred to the opposition to the principle of mimesis as the point of convergence between pictorial Cubism and creationist poetry but denying the importance of Vicente Huidobro in the constitution of the European movement of Avant-Garde; a marginalization of the poet which de Torre continued to forward in his Literaturas Europeas de Vanguardia first edited in 1925. (Torre 1965)

In 1963, David Bary published the article “Vicente Huidobro: El estilo Nord-Sud” in Revista Iberoamericana in which the author proposed a reorientation of the discussion towards the stylistic analysis of the work of the poets who published in the pages of the famous Nord-Sud magazine. These poets promoted a style of poetry “free form narrative and descriptive elements” (Bary 1962, 87) but which could not be considered a textual transposition of “Cubism” although it intended to use the page as a unity of composition analogic to that of the canvas on a painting. In his analysis of Huidobro’s books, Horizon Carré, El Espejo de Agua

\textsuperscript{9} Altazor. Santiago: Editorial Cruz del Sur, 1949.
\textsuperscript{10} Altazor o el viaje en paracaidas. Poema en siete cantos (1919). Madrid, Compañía Ibero Americana de Publicaciones, 1931.
\textsuperscript{14} Altazor or a Voyage in a Parachute (1919). Trans. Eliot Weinberger, Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1988
Creating a tissue

and *Poemas árticos*, Bary used terms such as simultaneity, calligrammatic poetry, or impressionist and symbolist imagery but voluntarily discarded the notion of literary Cubism aware of the methodological and medial imprecisions that such coupling had generated during the 1920s.

With the chapter “Huidobro y el Cubismo” from his 1974 *La Poesía de Vicente Huidobro y la Vanguardia*, (Caracciolo Trejo 1974) Caracciolo T. opened the possibilities to a more serious approach to the cubist reading of the poetry of Vicente Huidobro. Whereas according to Bary the cubist dissolution of the subject could not be found in Huidobro’s poetry, for Caracciolo the economy of means, the synthesis of the image, and the solidity of figuration combined with a liberation from the perceived phenomena, joins the paths of Cubism and *Creacionismo*. But Caracciolo failed to trace the course of navigation of these twin expressions and obliterated the structural analysis done by Bary. This pushed him towards the improvable conclusion that there is an empty space, both in Huidobro’s poetry (the failure of its own poetic enterprise by wanting to get too close to painting) and in the large definition of Cubism itself which, if not used to define a precise painterly and poetic corpus, could be used to name the most heterogeneous products of imagination, from the *novela de caballerias* to the *roman noire*.

Our analysis (chapter 4) reverses this situation. The success of poetic Cubism cannot be measured by its ability to mimic painting procedures, but by its capacity of radically transforming our notion of what modern poetry is. Secondly, the dissolution of language (the empty space perceived by Caracciolo) found in Huidobro’s most important book: *Altazor* is not a relinquishment to expression. For too long the ecology of the poem has been bypassed. Under the light of contemporaneous enterprises of the improvement and universalization of languages, as Xul Solar’s *Neocríollo* and *Panlingua*, and Torres-García’s *Universalismo Constructivo*, the revolt of Huidobro against the Spanish language aims for the creation of a total or higher linguistic system, not to renounce poetic expression. The context of *Altazor* comprises the totality of Huidobro’s work, which goes beyond traditional forms of poetry. This includes his 1922 visual poetry bringing together the work of painter and poet, as well as narrative texts such as *La Próxima* in which the notion of national frontiers is hardly criticized. Along with his internationalism Vicente Huidobro proposed a theory of total translatability of poetry (chapter 4.3.) which enlarged the scope of modern Hispanic lyric.
Creating a tissue

In 1978, two articles relating the work of Huidobro with the visual arts were published. One in the *Bulletin Hispanique* of the University of Bordeaux entitled “La Estética Cubista en Horizonte Carré” by Frank Rutter (Rutter 1978) which synthetized the ideas that revolved around the first book of French expression of the poet, reading the topics of depersonalization, fragmentation, intellectualization of the aesthetic experience and chromatic opacity of the pieces of reality projected by the poems, as clearly cubist aspects of the book. The second article entitled “Trayectoria del Caligrama en Huidobro,” was published by Rene de Costa in the profusely illustrated Madrid magazine *Poesía* (De Costa 1978) signaling the beginning of new investigations on the calligrammatic distribution of the disintegrated verse in the poems “Triángulo Armónico,” “Fresco Nipón,” “Nipon” and “La Capilla Aldeana” from the section “Japonerías de Estío” of the 1913 book *Canciones en la Noche*. Moreover, in the same article de Costa mentioned Huidobro’s 1922 *Salle XIV* exhibit of painted poetry, making (to my knowledge) the first reference to this interarts experiment of the Chilean poet. The direction to which de Costa aimed in his 1978 article found later echoes in the international reception of the first books of the Chilean as it can be seen in the 1986 article “Textbilder und Klangtexte. Vicente Huidobro als Initiator der visuellen-phonetischen Poesie in Lateinamerika” by Harold Wentzlaff-Eggebert (Wentzlaff-Eggebert 1986) and in the short article by Joseph Chrzanowski, “El arte Tipográfico y la Trayectoria Poética de Vicente Huidobro.” (Chrzanowski 1988)

*El Creacionismo de Vicente Huidobro en sus Relaciones con la Estética Cubista*, by Estrella Busto Ogden (Busto Ogden 1983) and *Vicente Huidobro y el Cubismo* by Susana Benko (Benko 1993) were for many years the most complete investigations on that subject. In the first, Ogden devotes many pages to engrave a panegyric of Huidobro advocating his significance as an element of renovation in France and Spain while tracing back the roots of poetic *Creacionismo* and Cubism to symbolist French poetry and to the painting of Cezanne, obscuring the importance of figures such as Apollinaire or Pierre Reverdy. Ogden wisely recognizes that by 1921 the cubist movement had lost its homogeneity and that at least 7 years before this its most important plastic discoveries where already achieved. This would imply that the poetry of the Chilean is the belated continuation of an already ossified aesthetic; However, rather than assuming this last position Ogden argues that the poetry of Huidobro has evolved next to synthetic Cubism and that his *Creacionismo*, (as it is also the case with painterly

---

15 Between the two Gloria Videla de Rivero published the article “El simultaneísmo Cubista-Creacionista entre Cosmopolitismo, Autorreferencialidad y Trascendencia”. (Videla de Rivero 1989)
Creating a tissue

Cubism) will influence the most representative voices of the next generation of poets as its poetic principles are absorbed and continued by others. Although Ogden does not always base her work on close reading of the poems, her association of synthetic Cubism and the poetry of Huidobro is convincing as is her reading of the poem “Hallali,” which she defines as an example of synthetic Cubism. The poem “is a unitary and synthetic vision which directly moves the spectator and the reader” (Busto Ogden 1983. 148. Trans. Cortés 2015) transforming the experience of war into a formal force, as it is done in the 1937 painting Guernica from Pablo Picasso.

Benko’s 1993 Vicente Huidobro y el Cubismo is a judicious example of a close reading of the work of Huidobro which willingly puts into brackets the theoretic poetic postulates developed by the poet and proposes a visual reading of the poems themselves. Benko succeeds in revealing the stylistic and linguistic components, which create a structural link between Huidobro’s poetry and the cubist aesthetic. After devoting the first chapter of her work to the poetry of Apollinaire and Pierre Reverdy, Benko unifies the notions of poetic Creacionismo and Cubism in the 1918-1925 poetry of Huidobro, making use of the notions of intellectual adjustment of the image, unification-fragmentation, complexity of the syntax against simplicity of content, preeminence of nominal expression, materiality of language and planar perspective among others. Benko demonstrates the presence of poetic resources homologous to plastic cubist elements in the poetry of the Chilean analyzing the materiality and geometrization (instead of the diffusion) of the element light in the textual world created by Huidobro as well as the dislocation of logical proportion in the landscape. One of the strongest results of her method is the analysis of framing and composition in the poems of Ecuatorial and Horizon Carré, revealing the fusion between time, geography and the economy of means used in the creation a horizontal space. This kind of topological analysis is an important branch of our work. Much of the thematic coincidences between the painterly and textual work of Xul Solar and the poetry and visual poetry of Vicente Huidobro, comes from a detailed analysis of the spiritual, symbolic and historical implications of vertical and horizontal displacement.

By 1993, three clearly distinctive paths for bridging the work of Huidobro and the visual phenomena had been explored: a) biographical and stylistic nexus with painterly Cubism achieving its most convincing manifestation with the investigations of Ogden and Benko who
somehow closed the matter\textsuperscript{16} b) the calligrammatic and visual aspects of the poems gathered under the section “Japonerías de Estío” of the book \textit{Canciones en la Noche}, a theme explored by de Costa, Wentzlaff-Eggebert, and Chrzanowski and which has had recent echoes in the 2008 article “Triangulo Armónico y la Experiencia Visual de un Orientalismo Parodiado” (Correa-Díaz, Weintraub, and Goic 2008) and c) the presence of cinematic elements on the poetry and narrative of Huidobro, to which we will now shortly draw our attention.

In the article, “El efecto Cine en Manifestes y Ecuatorial de V. Huidobro” published in 1987 in the North-American magazine \textit{Discurso Literario. Revista de Temas Hispánicos}, (Alfani 1987) Maria Rosaria Alfani systematized what before her were isolated references to cinematic image in the work of Huidobro made by critics such as Saúl Yurkievich, Cedomil Goic and Guillermo de Sucre. Alfani drew her attention to the use of montage in the 1918 book of poems \textit{Ecuatorial}, which through the use of well selected adjectivation added movement to the visual imagery in opposition to the static Cubism of \textit{Horizon carré}. According to the author, richness of the visual experience and prolongation and amplification of the vision work to create images which not only describe objective movement but which are born “\textit{en movimiento}” since they emerge from previous ones. A precise example chosen by Alfani to demonstrate her thesis are the following salient verses of \textit{Ecuatorial}, in which the secondary image of the guitar is born from the primary image of the train engine leaving behind the tracks which are similar to a couple of parallel strings:

\begin{quote}
\begin{small}
\textbf{Ecuatorial}
\end{small}
\end{quote}

\textit{(...)}

\begin{quote}
\begin{small}
Entre la hierba
Silba la locomotora en celo
Que atravesó el invierno
\end{small}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\begin{small}
Las dos cuerdas de su rastro
Tras ella quedan cantando
Como una guitarra indócil (Huidobro 1976, 284)
\end{small}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} After the publication of her book in 1993 there have not been new efforts to map the structural coincidences between the poetic praxis of Huidobro and the pictorial resources used in Cubism. Only in 2008, Belén Castro Morales in “Los horizontes Abiertos del Cubismo: Vicente Huidobro y Pablo Picasso” (Correa-Díaz, Weintraub, and Goic 2008) explored new perspectives on the situation of the poet among the circle of cubist artists in Paris, but did not try a stylistic analysis or reading of his work.
Creating a tissue

In the section, “The avant-garde and cinematic imaginary: Huidobro’s Novela Film” of his *Latin American Literature and Mass Media* (Paz-Soldán 2001) Edmundo Paz-Soldán approached the novel *Cagliostro* (written by Huidobro in 1920 but published in the English language in 1931 and finally in Spanish in 1934) as the peak moment of the obsessive technological imagination of the poet. Huidobro modernized the form of the narrative genre by shaping it for an audience accustomed to the cinematic experience. Revolving around the notions of narrative, artifice and spectacle, Paz-Soldán claims that *Cagliostro* is a metafiction that plays not only with the conventions of representation in novel but also with the technical conventions of film. In the last section of his text the author sketched the influence of the expressionist aesthetic of German films of the 1920s over Huidobro’s novel, based on the way the Chilean followed some of the markers of the visual language of the silent film of the time: psychological characterization given by the rules of Lombrosian physiognomy, presence of fantastic acts, reversibility of time, mirroring or *doppelgänger*, and simultaneity of presence. This kind of analysis is continued in the article “Non Serviam o la imagen nueva: Cagliostro, de Vicente Huidobro” by Francisca Noguerol (Noguerol 2008) who besides paralleling some of the scenes of the 1931 novel with cinematic procedures (as the ones already studied in *extenso* by Paz-Soldán) visits the theme of vision (or sight) as a constant motif haunting the work and the fantasy of Huidobro from his 1916 *Adan* to the spectacular creation of a visionary entity in *Altazor*.

The project, which has perhaps more richly contributed to open the visual perspectives of study of the work of the Chilean poet in the last twenty years, was the 2001 edition and reconstruction of ten of the thirteen painted poems exhibited by Huidobro On May 16, 1922, at the Eduard VII Theater in Paris. The result was a beautifully illustrated and commented book edited by Madrid’s Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, entitled *Salle XIV Vicente Huidobro y las Artes Plásticas* with contributions in Spanish and English from Carlos Perez, Rosa Sarabia and Juan Manuel Bonet and one essay from René de Costa, unfortunately not translated into English. In this essay, de Costa defines the painted poems of Huidobro as follows: “Sin ser ni caligramas ni pictogramas, son más bien una amalgama perfecta de texto e imagen visual. Sin ser poemas sobre la pintura, ni pintura sobre la poesía, su aspecto visual se corresponde exactamente con lo que dice el texto.” (Huidobro 2001, 21) Besides providing valuable information about the process of reconstruction of those rare pictorial – textual pieces the volume proposes their
Creating a tissue

insertion into the field of visual poetry and a valuable commented bibliography of the books found on Huidobro’s personal library carefully compiled by Manuel Bonet.

After the publication of Salle XIV Huidobro y las artes plásticas, Cedomil Goic wrote the article “La Poesía Visual y las Vanguardias Históricas. 1. Vicente Huidobro” (Goic 2002) proposing an immanent reading of Huidobro’s work following the transformation of the use of the visual element on the work of the poet but less worried of his insertion into a cubist, futurist or cinematic aesthetic than the previous works were. Although Goic tries a systematization of the different types of visual poetry explored by Huidobro during his career, the categories proposed are so numerous that they end up being as numerous as the individual works.

Salle XIV was not only the product of Huidobro’s personal efforts to merge painting and poetry; his ideas about visual poetry were shared with his painter friends and it is very probable that he sought the help of Sonia and Robert Delaunay in order to sketch and put color to the visual poems. In 1917, Vicente Huidobro and Robert Delaunay worked together in the project Tour Eiffel, a small plaquette presenting a poetic text from Huidobro (already published the same year in the magazine Nord-Sud) and drawings from Delaunay reminiscent of the 1913 La Prose du Transibérien et de la Petite Jehanne de France from Sonia Delaunay and Blaise Cendrars. This collaborative interartistic work has been studied by Rosa Sarabia in “la poética visual de Tour Eiffel” (Sarabia 2003) where the author describes it as follows:

Tiene una presentación física que lo acerca a un objeto artístico: una dimensión mayor la libro estándar (35 cm x 26 cm); una cubierta al “pochoir” realizada por Robert Delaunay: más una reproducción en blanco y negro de un óleo del mismo artista: “La Tour 1910”; páginas de diversos colores (amarillo verdeo, gris azulado, malva, naranja, verde agua, beige) y un cordón artesanal que las anuda. (Sarabia 2003, 22)

After the publication of Tour Eiffel and due to his good relations with Delaunay (and Juan Gris) Vicente Huidobro decided to continue this sort of collaboration in “Football,” a ballet with music from Stravinsky, a script by himself and décor by Robert Delaunay, which was never concluded because of the poet’s 1918 student trip to Chile. As Volodia Teitelboim explained it Huidobro did not submit the complete text of the script to his colleagues and left Paris when the décor done by Delaunay was already finished. “No cumplió su compromiso de entregar el libreto. El hecho defraudó a un grupo exigente e irritó en particular a los demás partícipes del proyecto” (Teitelboim 1997, 75). However Huidobro’s intentions to work hand in hand with a musician materialized in 1922 with Offrandes a musical piece composed by the inventor of
Creating a tissue

organized sound, Edgar Varèse, with texts by J. Tablada and Vicente Huidobro which debuted in 1922 in New York. Rene de Costa’s article for the magazine Poesía (DeCosta 1978) includes a Long Play record of Offrandes. In July 1922, just after the Salle XIV exhibition took place, Vicente Huidobro did his last cooperative enterprise, this time with Sonia Delaunay creating a poem-dress, or poem to be dressed. This was nothing more than a blouse in which a poem of Huidobro was embroidered:

Petite chanson pour abriter le Cœur
Le jour de froid met l’oiseau de merveille
Sur chaque côté quelques mots de chaleur
Vers et cœur toujours en battement pareils
(Huidobro and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 2001, 17).

The interest for an enlargement of the poetic space and the dislocation of the medial limitations of poetry in Vicente Huidobro was materialized in in his visual poetry as well as in the collaboration in which he engaged with French and Spanish painters during his long stay in Europe. International Avant-Garde was characterized by such types of interartistic fertilization and collaboration. All alone in France the dada and surrealist revolution had made the notion of literary genre completely obsolete. Books as Les Champs Magnetiques (1920) or Nadja (1928) from André Breton cannot be defined as novels, manifestos or essay, nor do they comply with the nineteenth century notion of poème en prose. Text and image merged in the works of Braque, Picasso, Cendrars, Delaunay and many others; while unicity, irreproducibility and historical distance, the traditional elements of the work of art, (Benjamin 1968) were diametrically reversed in Duchamp’s ready-made. The work of Torres-García, Huidobro and Xul Solar were embedded both in the Latin-American and European Avant-Garde contexts, while they were also inserted into a discussion about modernity and tradition which defined the shape of Latin-America’s entrance in the XX century.

In the following section we will explore the transformations experienced in modern Latin-American cities focusing in the cultural live of Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile during the first half of the twentieth century. The way these urban centers developed and changed, profoundly shaped the work of Xul Solar, Joaquín Torres-García and (in a lesser extent) Vicente Huidobro. My goal is to differentiate the processes of modernization in each of these urban centers which cannot be cluster under the general definition of “Rio del Plata modernity.” The technological but mostly the cultural aspects which define the passage of these
cities from the nineteenth to the twentieth century were very particular in each case and in some aspects contradictory. These differential aspects should not be forgotten if one wishes to understand why the art of Torres-García was perceived as more revolutionary in the Uruguayan context than the earlier cubist-futurist paintings of Emilio Pettoruti in Argentina; or why the poetry of Vicente Huidobro, which was among the most avant-gardist products of Latin-American literature, was coldly received in Santiago de Chile at the return of the poet to his homeland precisely when the city had absorbed Avant-Garde painting as its official aesthetic.
Chapter 2. Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

2.1. Xul Solar and Buenos Aires’ Peripheral Modernity

In her already classic work, *Una Modernidad Periférica: Buenos Aires 1920-1930*, Beatriz Sarlo dialogued with some of the most interesting voices of the European and North-American modernity such as Raymond Williams, Marshall Berman and Walter Benjamin, mapping the coincidences and particularities of a process experienced by the city of Buenos Aires, from 1850 to 1930, in relation to partial modernization processes present in Europe and the United States. From a historiographical viewpoint Sarlo’s *Una Modernidad Periférica* clearly defines the large and the narrow margins of a process of modernization nucleated from the decade 1920-1930 (the peak of the Avant-Garde manifestations) but which finds its first indicators around 1850 ending around 1930. As Sarlo puts it at the very beginning of her book, the narrow margins of this process coincide with Xul Solar’s stay in the European continent:

Xul había aprendido en Europa, a donde viajó en 1903 y de donde regresa en 1924, el lenguaje y las experiencias de la vanguardia. Buenos Aires era un espacio donde esas formas de mirar podían seguir desplegándose. Muchas cosas habían sucedido en esos veinte años que ocupan el viaje Europeo de Xul y averiguar cuáles fueron algunas de las respuestas frente al cambio es el propósito de este libro. Lo que Xul mezcla en sus cuadros también se mezcla en la cultura de los intelectuales: modernidad europea y diferencia rioplatense, aceleración y angustia, tradicionalismo y espíritu renovador; criollismo y vanguardia. Buenos Aires: el gran escenario latinoamericano de una cultura de mezcla. (Sarlo 1988, 15)

The insertion of Xul Solar in the cultural Panorama of the Rio del Plata has been done repeatedly by the intermediacy of the *Martín Fierro* Avant-Garde of Buenos Aires. This is clearly the case in Sarlo’s work and is a tendency already present in the first monographic works devoted to the artist. Osvaldo Svanascini’s *Xul Solar* (Svanascini 1962), Aldo Pellegrini’s *Argentina en el*
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

Arte, Xul Solar (Pellegrini 1966) or Mario Gradowczyk’s Alejandro Xul Solar: 1887 – 1963 (Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988) approached the figure of the artist in this context. The importance of the role of Xul Solar in the Florida-Boedo sphere from 1924 can also be measured by his presence in the literary imagination of the period. Leopoldo Marechal fictionalized the figure of Xul in Adán Buenosayres (written around 1931 although published in 1948). Macedonio Fernández mentioned Xul Solar in Papeles de Recienvenido and Continuación de la nada (1944) and Jorge Luis Borges did the same in El idioma infinito, La inscripción de los carros, Las Kenningar and Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius.

Diana B Wechsler, in her Papeles en conflicto (Wechsler 2004) also occupies herself with the 1920-1930 period in Buenos Aires revisiting the most important magazines of those decades (Martín Fierro: Periódico Quincenal de Arte y Crítica Libre, Campada de Palo, Caridad, Proa, Plus Ultra among others) reconstructing the debates around the opposition between social art defended by Artistas del pueblo and the magazines Claridad and Campana de Palo in one side; and a Eurocentric Avant-Garde nucleated around Proa and Martín Fierro. It is significant that Wechsler devoted a short section of her book to the figure of Xul Solar, portraying him as one of the most important elements in Buenos Aires cultural life, mainly as an art critic and a promoter of the ideas of renovation. Álvaro Abós (Abós 2004) has pointed out that Xul Solar introduced the figure of the famous art collector Hewart Walden (Georges Levin) in Argentina and had good relationship with Macedonio Fernández, Evar Mendéz and the cubist painter Emilio Pettoruti. The latter was responsible for informing the local scene about the work of the European futurist painters in his notes for the Magazine Crítica. According to Patricia Artundo (Xul Solar 2005), Norah Borges, Pettoruti and Xul Solar where the most important links between the Rio del Plata region and the European Avant-garde. Given the abundance of literature on the subject, I will not reconstruct the cultural panorama of the period in Buenos Aires nor try to prove the presence of established Avant-Garde demonstrations in Argentina, something which has already been done, but only underline certain points of inflexion in order to demonstrate how mature those forms were at the arrival of Xul Solar to Buenos Aires after his long European transit.

In 1915, Ricardo Güiralde published the book of poems El Cencerro de cristal, historically installed in the post-modernist period but stylistically a precursor of the Avant-Garde’s use of metaphor (Videla de Rivero 1994) The edition of the book was financed by
Güiraldes himself and although, or precisely because it was a daring work, it was completely ill received by the public\textsuperscript{17}. According to Dieter Reichard the publication of *El Cencerro de Cristal* marked the opening of the Avant-gardist period in Argentina.

Taking the 1915 date given by Reichard as the closure of Modernista literature and the opening of the Avant-Garde period in Argentina, it could be argued that Xul Solar arrived to Buenos Aires almost 10 years after the second wave of modern cultural renovation had started (literary modernism being the first one). But even if we follow Horacio Salas in his preliminary study for the facsimile edition of the magazine *Martín Fierro* (Salas 1995) and push the dates some years later taking 1921 (the comeback of Jorge Luis Borges to Buenos Aires pasting his leaflet *Prisma* in the streets of Buenos Aires) as the breaking point which left symbolism and modernism behind, it would be clear that at least a small and later influential group of writers was able to dialogue with the plastic proposal brought by Xul Solar to Buenos Aires. Magazine *Proa*, with which Jorge Luis Borges would continue his short ultraist adventure and *Veinte Poemas Para Ser Leídos en el Tranvía*, the “anti-romantic” (Sarlo 1988) book of poems of Oliverio Girondo, were also invading the book shops of Buenos Aires by 1922. The support given to Xul Solar came from the very center of that formative Avant-Garde. Evar Mendéz, friend of the Argentinian president Marcelo T de Alvear (in power between 1922-1928), first director of the *Martín Fierro: Periódico Quincenal de Arte y Crítica Libre*, was the person who introduced the painter to the members of the group and functioned as his protector.

Horacio Salas pointed to the importance of this publication in the reception of modern national painting. The Greek-Argentinean sculptor Pablo Curatella Manes, who was rejected by the general public, as well as the (at the time) unpopular Argentinean painter of misty landscapes, Guillermo Butler, found in notes written by the architect Alberto Prebisch in

\textsuperscript{17} “Ricardo Guiraldes había pagado de su bolsillo la impresión de *El cencerro de cristal*, un libro de poesía y lleno de audaces metáforas pero, ante el plúmbeo silencio con que fue recibido, entierra los 500 libros en un pozo de su estancia, para que se pudran”. (Abós 2004, 117)
Martín Fierro not only reviewed Amigos del Arte exhibitions, but also discussed its activities in other areas, like exhibitions of art books and antique books (…) The martinfierristas felt comfortable at Amigos del Arte. Which took them in. But rather than taking sides between the two factions that were gaining strength in the literary and art fields in the mid-1920 (briefly, the Florida and Boedo groups), Amigos was always open to Artistas del Pueblo as well. Undeniably, two of its members – Agutín Riganelli and Adolfo Belloq – had a special relationship with Amigos. Riganelli was commissioned to make a portrait of Ricardo Güiraldes after his death in 1927 (…). (Artundo and Pacheco 2008, 275)

18 With reference to the rivalry between the artists and intellectuals associated to both streets Jorge Luis Borges declared: “Fui informado por uno de los conjurados de que yo estaba asignado a las huestes de Florida y que era demasiado tarde para cambiar de bando. Todo era un asunto artificialmente elaborado. Esa ficción es ahora tomada en serio por las universidades crédulas. Pero todo era parte publicidad y parte travesura de muchachos.” (Salas1995)
Thus, when Xul Solar went back to Buenos Aires, the city counted with an important circuit of promotion and distribution of art ranging from social painting to formal avant-gardism. However, this did not mean that Xul Solar’s art was successful in the market from his arrival to Buenos Aires. Solar did not manage to successfully promote his art during the 1920s and 1930s; although he offered his watercolors at relatively very low prices. Conversely in the two years that passed between the first exhibition of Emilio Pettoruti in Buenos Aires at Witcomb Gallery in October 13, 1924 and the exhibition at Amigos del Arte in 1926, the work of the Pettoruti had evolved from being rejected as scandalous and incomprehensible to become solid merchandise in the art market. This is also true for the art of Lino E. Spilimbergo and Horacio Butler. The quasi surrealist painting of the first and the colorful neorealism of the second were well received by the Argentinean cosmopolitan society.

And although that there is no much testimony from artists, we do know that in his 1926 exhibition, Emilio Pettoruti sold almost all watercolors exhibited at values that ranged from $100 to $200. In 1927, Alfredo Guttero who had recently arrived to Argentina, sold to the Comisión Nacional de Bellas Artes his Mujeres indolentes (Indolent Women) for sum of 2,000$, and the artists who submitted collectively to the Primer Salón de Pintura Moderna Argentina (Horacio Butler, Aquiles Baldi, Héctor Basalda, Antonio Bernt and Lino Spilimbergo) sold one piece each. Not everyone was so lucky; painters like Xul Solar—with pieces that went from $50 to $150—did not sell a single piece, whereas others like Eduardo Fabre—from a family of marchands d’art—sold thirty works (...). (Artundo and Pacheco 2008, 276)

Why, despite the support shown by the Martín Fierro community, did the 90 watercolors that Xul Solar bring with him from Europe (Painted mainly in the cities of Munich and Paris) and those done in Buenos Aires after 1924, not succeed in the art market of the city? According to Xul Solar’s biographer, the artist had chosen to present his work gradually in small and marginal galleries. After presenting his art in 1924 in the Primer Salón Libre at Witcomb Gallery, his work was exhibited only two years later in an exhibition of modern painting (the same one in which Pettoruti sold almost every canvas on the first day) organized by Amigos del Arte. Besides this event, Xul Solar did not make use of the organized system of exhibition proposed by Amigos del Arte and did not try to strengthen his relations with the institution. According to Patricia Artundo, (Xul Solar 2005) during the 1920s Xul had found a different system of public exposure in the magazines of Buenos Aires in which his public figure was built not as painter but as an astrologer, philologist, inventor and artist. Until 1925, Xul published texts in Atlantida, Revista de Arquitectura, El Diario Argentino de la Plata or Campana de Palo (here thanks to the intervention of the literary critic Atalaya -Alfredo Chiabra Acosta-) and later, during the 1930s, in Crítica, where he wrote about antique empires and criticized the
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

materialistic North-American society. Only in 1929 would Xul Solar individually exhibit his art while only starting to be visible on the pages of *Revista Mensual Ilustrada Para el Hombre y el Hogar, Mundo Argentino or El Hogar* in the 1940s, but again not as a painter but as an eccentric astrologer and inventor of languages and games.

Nevertheless, the management given to his public figure and the multiple occupations that drove him away from the purely painterly field are not sufficient to explain his lack of success in the art market. Following the reasoning of Abos (Abós 2004) and Gradowsckyz, (Gradowsckyz, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988) I believe that formal elements found on Xul Solar’s water colors which could not be assimilated by the avant-gardist aesthetic proper nor by the social art which opposed the latter, explain his lack of commercial success. The discrepancy in relation to the plastic syntax of both groups placed Xul Solar’s art in a gray area for which there were no clear criteria with which to “measure” the quality of his work. This was early noted by Atalaya in his review of the 1924 Primer Salón Libre in which he praises the work of the creator of Neocriollo as the most interesting work of the exhibition in terms of his differentiation with the rest of the works.

As Abos recalls it, Filippo Tomaso Marinetti was present at the 1926 show organized by *Amigos del Arte*. The art exhibits were supposed to accompany the conferences of the Italian who was preaching his futurism in the southern hemisphere at the time. Marinetti was bewildered by the work of Xul Solar which “did not fit into his system.” According to Gradowsckyz, the imagination of Xul Solar was satisfied neither by a purely symbol-expressionist system, nor by the futurist-cubist one. (Gradowsckyz, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988, 9) Xu’s thematic mix of eroticism and mysticism rendered through flat delicate glazes in which the animal and divine orders prevail over the human realm might be chromatically inspired in German expressionism but offer more points of contact with dadaism and suprematism, as has been demonstrated by Gradowsckyz (Gradowsckyz, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988, 9). This minor art, (which as well as Torres-García’s was produced abroad but did not bring the safeness of a pure reputed European code) differs greatly from the colorful Cubism of his friend Emilio Pettoruti and from the...
sculptural-faceted painting of Lino E. Spilimbergo which can be appreciated from a surrealist register and thus can be aligned to the great names of modernist painting. This is telling us something about the position of Xul Solar in what Traba (Traba 1973) has characterized as an open region, and obliges one to read more carefully the words of Beatriz Sarlo for whom Xul Solar was representative of a culture of mix, and thus an element of bridging between the Martín Fierro Avant-Garde and other universalists forms of the Latin-American modernity. This option will be explored at length after studying various approaches to the concepts of modernity and Avant-Garde in the following chapter.

The influence exerted by the association Amigos del Arte in Buenos Aires went beyond the limits marked by the Rio del Plata river. Pedro Figari, the recognized Uruguayan lawyer and painter who by 1917 had lead the transformation of the Escuela de Artes y Oficios in Montevideo by giving light to its rooms and guiding the production towards industrial design, had to appeal to Amigos del Arte to sell the colorful paintings of Gauchos he was producing in Paris in the 1920s. “It was clear that Figari was only able to support himself and his family in France thanks to the sales effected in Amigos del Arte. At least thirty-six works were sold due to the intervention of the institution” (Artundo and Pacheco 2008, 276). Why would the Uruguayan master operate with an Argentinian association in order to sell his art? What was happening in Montevideo at the time?

2.2. Torres-García and Montevideo’s Cultural Eclecticism

While the watercolors that Xul Solar exhibited in the decade of the twenties in Buenos Aires were hybrids of his own mystical visions and correlates to the actual processes of partial modernization of Buenos Aires, (their paradoxical situation resides precisely on its poor commercial success paralleled to their consistency with the spiritual temperament of Buenos Aires) the canvases that Torres-García exhibited in the decade of the 30 and the 40s in Montevideo were immediately incompatible with a society attached to the image of its own
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

stability. This society felt threatened by the radical proposal of the master who aimed to the
development of a modern aesthetic based on concepts which were far from self-explanatory
and which are today still difficult to grasp, such as the abstract rule, construction, the rule of
unity, the classic, the universal, etc. which burst into the Uruguayan capital through the
activities of the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (ACC) and the pages of their internationalist
magazine Círculo y Cuadrado. As Hugo Verani concluded, whereas in other Latin-American
countries nineteenth century realism was being questioned, a renewal of national regionalism
in Uruguay took place from around 1924, which was embodied in the neo naturalism of writers
such as Silva Valdés or Leandro Ipuche (Verani 1996, 14) supporting aesthetic conventions
antagonistic to the constructivist art promoted by Torres-García. If we are to follow the remarks
made by the young writer and journalist closest to Torres-García at his arrival to Uruguay, Juan
Carlos Onetti, the 1930s were marked by the absence of a truly Uruguayan novel. This indicated
a crisis of the narrative genre, but in a more general sense, it pointed to a crisis of the image
that the Uruguayan society had of itself. Foreign literature was clearly more successful than
national works and the indigenous history of the country was perceived as nothing more than
an illusion. Onetti who knew the influence of Pre-Columbian thought in Torres-García’s
aesthetic system advised him to leave Montevideo.

Yo ya estaba queriendo a Torres-García, ya estaba temeroso de su posible fracaso
montevideano. Con dulzura, quise expulsarlo de su patria y de su ambición: Váyase a Perú, a
México, a Guatemala. En esos países existieron culturas que pueden emparejarse con su concepción
del arte. En el Uruguay nunca hubo una civilización indígena. Aquí, si a una señora se le rompe la
infaltable maceta de malvones la tira en un basural. Y unos años después alguien prevenido descubre
un fatigado borde de barro, publica un artículo, un ensayo, un libro hablando de la cultura artística
de los indios charrúas. (Onetti 1975, 2)

According to Pablo Rocca and Gênese de Andrade (Rocca and Andrade 2006) during the
decades of 1920 and 1930 Uruguayan publications were more open than those in any other
Latin-American country to the products of the international Avant-Garde. However the country
did not produce artistic and literary works as dynamic as those of Brazil or Argentina. When in
1926 Filippo Tommaso Marinetti arrived to Uruguay, the seemly prosperous and democratic
country did not count on figures such as José Pereira or Graça Aranha in Brazil; or Emilio

19 Referring to the feeble foundations of the perceived prosperity lived in Montevideo in the first half of the
twenty-first century, Angel Rama describes the kinship between the writers of the 1955 generation as follows:
“Los ata esa crisis que ha resquebrajado el suelo seguro del hombre uruguayo, revelando las fisuras del
momento plácido que creía habitar.” (Conteris and Rama 1968, 8)
Pettoruti, Alberto Prebisch, Alfredo Vautier and Norah Borges in Argentina who could discuss futurist art on the same ground with Marinetti. What we find in Uruguay, at least until 1934 when Torres-García goes back to Montevideo, is a discrete cultural eclecticism, a description used by Alberto Zum Felde to refer to the situation of the periodical magazines printed in Montevideo, but which can be extensively applied to the situation of the Uruguayan capital. If Beatriz Sarlo can make a distinction between rupture magazines and modernization magazines in Buenos Aires, it would be impossible to find any meaningful examples of the first in Montevideo, a city where eclecticism dominated cultural life:

Las revistas que congregan a la juventud no eran polémicas: *Los nuevos, La cruz del Sur, La pluma* y *Cartel*, divulgan figuras importantes de los vanguardistas europeos sin animar mayormente la placida vida cultural. (Verani 1996, 21)

The particular transformations experienced in Buenos Aires at the beginning of the century (very high European immigration, drastic mechanization of public transportation, expansion of the electric system, multiplication of periodical publications, internationalism, presence of defined Avant-Garde groups, etc.) did not occur in the same rhythm, or might have not occurred at all in other Latin-American cities. But even inside the Rio del Plata region, in that narrow band between the parallels 34 S. and 33 S. in which Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile are found, the differences concerning the process of modernization are sufficiently great as to question the use of the term *Modernidad periférica* as a precise descriptor of the reality in which, Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro found in Montevideo and Santiago when they came back from their European stay at the beginning of the 1930s.

The social and political situation of Uruguay in the first half of the twentieth century was marked by the tension between the ideal of a model democratic society and its breakdown during the 1930s. From around 1903, Uruguayan society was characterized by hedonism and secularization while its democratic system was still seen as a model for the rest of the continent. Strong economic assistentialism is what was hidden behind this democratic model. Uruguayans developed a certain “aversion against social constriction and duties,” (Terán et al. 2004, 329. Trans. Cortés 2015) seeing the state as a provider of services and the political life as something foreign to the civil body and the exclusive ground of specialists. When in 1933 the fragility of Uruguay’s democracy was exposed by Gabriel Terra’s dissolution of the congress, the country entered on a period marked by the breakdown of liberalism. British economic assistance had stopped and the economic crisis made itself felt in a society tuned by opulence and comfort.
(Rama 1972, 21) Somehow, a dream was collapsing, and it did so at the same time that the founder of *Universalismo Constructivo* was proposing a complete transformation of spiritual and painterly values in the country. The austerity and discipline of Torres’ predicament spread through his ACC in the 1930s and the religious, metaphysic and cosmic elements of his doctrine were antagonist to the hedonist and secular society shaped during the first years of the XX century. Although the effects of a social an economic decomposition were to be felt strongly during the 1950s, Torres-García arrived to Montevideo at the same time that the first symptoms of the crisis were beginning to be visible to the most attentive Uruguayan observers. Carlos Quijano wrote in 1933 (a year before Torres-Garcia’s arrival) in an article for the Uruguayan newspaper *El Nacional*:

> Nuestra organización económica está en crisis; no podemos seguir viviendo de la ganadería; no podemos continuar apoyándonos en el latifundio; no podemos dejar que los campos se despueblen en beneficio de las ciudades, asientos de burócratas y de intermediarios. Todo el edificio de nuestra economía rural se viene al suelo, si es que no se ha venido ya. (...) Además de una crisis económica tenemos una crisis financiera. Esta agravará a aquella de la cual es, en parte, efecto. La agravará porque en este país, el presupuesto alimenta directa e indirectamente a la mayoría de población. (Quijano 1989, 2, 3)

My hypothesis is that the arrival of Joaquín Torres-García to Montevideo overlaps with the development of a critical consciousness among local intellectuals in the Uruguayan capital. His efforts were ill received since the birth of such consciousness was a consequence of social, economic and political crisis. Society was refractive to the transformative forces that it had released; critical artists, writers and intellectuals whose work was shaped by that crisis could not offer ready-made solutions that would bring back the golden age. Torres-García occupies a position in the art history of Latin America similar to that of Vicente Huidobro for the literature of the continent. He is the founder of a controversial aesthetic and an element of linkage between the developments of the Paris centered Avant-Garde and the periphery. However, Torres-Garcia’s *Universalismo Constructivo* disillusioned all those who expected him to incarnate the latest developments of post impressionism. Was Joaquín Torres-García’s difficult transit in Montevideo the artistic admission of Uruguay into modernity? According to Angel Rama:

> El Universalismo constructivo religaba la hora de las artes plásticas uruguayas con el momento que atravesaba el arte europeo, introduciéndolas en un desarrollo común, universal, que ya no las abandonó. (Rama 1972, 42)

If Torres-García united Uruguayan arts into a larger “common development,” this was only done as a problematic outbreak in the local scene. Authors such as Cruz (Cruz 1994), Mario
Gradowczyk (Gradowczyk 2007) and Juan Fló (Fló 1991) agree in pointing out that Torres-García held contradictory views towards his work in Montevideo, starting with a phase of enthusiasm which later lead to the disappointment of not being able to revolutionize the local scene and to do “on the walls” what he had done on canvas in Europe. Although his ACC an TTG are now seen as important marks of the evolution of Uruguayan art and as the most important precedent to the concrete art of the 50s, the copious exhibits held by the ACC (more than 12 from 1934 to 1938) were not translated into sales nor into the formation of a discussion around the concepts of structure, abstraction, construction or proportion. The vocabulary used by Torres-García, in order to refer to his own and other examples of geometric and constructive art, were foreign to the art history teachers and critics of the time.

Estas doce exposiciones nos han permitido sacar consecuencias ciertas y hasta si se quiere desalentadoras, con respecto al éxito de nuestra obra en ese medio. En esa última, que ha sido en su totalidad de obras constructivas, no se ha realizado una sola venta, lo que demuestra elocuentemente el poco apoyo que nos ha dispensado el público en general. (J. Luis 1943, 24)

In a 2006 interview done by María Laura Bulanti, the Uruguayan artist Guillermo Fernández, who assisted to many of the conferences done by Torres-García, drew a panorama of the cultural situation in Montevideo at the time:

Había un Salón Nacional cada tanto en el que los pintores que había pintaban algo… ¡pero hablar de proporción, tono y ritmo; hablar de estructura, de construcción y de admirar la gran tradición! De eso nada. La primera vez que oí hablar en concreto del pasado, no como cosa vieja, sino como cosa presente fue en el taller (…) Eso fue en una conferencia de Torres, cuando dijo: “Miren que Velázquez es más abstracto que Picasso, y es más plano y más funcional.” ¡Pa! Cuando yo oí eso no entendí nada, pero me dije, “aquí hay algo nuevo…” porque el Velázquez del que yo había oído hablar a los profesores de historia del arte de aquellos tiempos, era una “cosa histórica,” es decir del pasado. (Bulanti 2008, 98)

Although Torres-García’s 1938 announcement of the end of the constructive movement in Uruguay (Torres-García 1938) was the preface of a second and more belligerent époque, the general impression that one has from the period is that of a select group of artists who supported the master’s difficult enterprise in a social space which was not ready for the challenges raised by the Universalismo Constructivo, but which nevertheless was transformed by its presence.

La muerte de Joaquín Torres-García, en 1949, anticipó la futura clausura de una experiencia artística que había sido capital para la modernización de la pintura uruguaya a la vez que anacrónica en esa misma modernidad: el taller (…) (su obra) representaba la incorporación plena a la modernidad a través de una solución hispánica europeizada que resultó de transito más fácil; implicaba la adopción de un sistema de valores de nítido cuño universalista, atentamente teorizados, los que se nacionalizaron en el taller en gran parte por la acción de los discípulos jóvenes vueltos al plain air, fijando un equilibrado pacto de tendencias; acarreaba una severa dignificación del artista y su arte que impulsó un comportamiento crítico respecto a los poderes culturales – rechazo de los
While the cubist works of Emilio Pettoruti had already found a position on the other shore of the river (Buenos Aires) the reception of García’s rustic and unconventional painting was very cold in Montevideo. Journalist would ask themselves if those scribbles were actually the paintings of the master and art students would find it incomprehensible that a recognized painter who had passed most of his life in Europe did not know the rules of perspective. Torres-García arrived too late to Uruguay to function successfully as a solitary spiritual or artistic guide, as José Enrique Rodó or Manuel Blanes had been for the national philosophy and painting three decades before. Besides, far from representing the national values, García’s constructive painting was seen as an attack to the Uruguayan values, and his universalist approach as something foreign to the people of Montevideo. The following declaration of Guido Castillo summarizes the attacks received by the master simultaneously on two fronts. He was neither seen as representative of the conservative nation, nor of the revolutionary leftist fractions:

Como era de esperar el carácter excepcional del Taller, provocó el escándalo de la turbamulta de los vulgares de las derechas y las izquierdas, que se mancomunaron para atacar a Torres-García por todos los medios. Se lo consideraba un loco peligroso, cuyas extrañas y estrafalarias doctrinas corrompían a la juventud, y el taller se convirtió en una isla rodeada de enemigos y habitada por jóvenes salvajes, dirigido por un cacique y brujo que con sus hechizos los obligaba a realizar prácticas diabólicas. (Bulanti 2008, 26)

Although too old to be part of the intellectual generation that Angel Rama has clustered under the designation of generación crítica, which gathers intellectual and political figures as heterogeneous as Juan Carlos Onetti, Carlos Quijano or Mario Benedetti, Torres-García was a voice of renovation in Montevideo. Despite his age, he was part of a critical consciousness which opposed the official “organs of control of the artistic imagination”: La Comisión Nacional de Arte, El Círculo de Bellas Artes, the whole circle of rich art amateurs, and even the Escuela Taller de Artes Plásticas where he worked as a teacher for one year before his resignation in December 1935 (Peluffo Linari 1999). The fact that Torres-García based his predicament on the conciliation of a constructive and a universalist element was not innocuous since the latter element had been characterized as a sign of modernization feared as foreign by many.

El Universalismo, que signó la aparición de la generación crítica, fue en su momento objeto de censuras. Las formularon los sectores nacionalistas quienes detectaron correctamente el elemento modernizador que ese Universalismo comportaba y lo designaron con una palabra que quiso ser peyorativa: foráneo. (Rama 1972, 36)
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

In one sense the analysis that Beatriz Sarlo has done of the city of Buenos Aires can be precisely applied to the Montevideo of the 1930’s: Peripheral modernity is grounded in two opposite poles: foundational secureness and a constructive insecurity. What makes García’s work predominantly modern is precisely the fact that it reenacts such opposition. It supersedes fundamental colonial secureness and replaces it with a challenging modern constructive project. The ideas spread by the ACC and TTG seemed anarchist by some social groups and too “abstract” by others. The use of these terms is also in the middle of such controversy. Focusing on the main figures of the Cercle et Carré movement, Gradowczyk (2006) pointed to the problematic use of the term abstraction in the North and South-America, differentiating between spiritual and symbolist abstraction from cubist-like abstract art. The first is referred to as lyric abstraction or informal abstraction while the second is called geometric abstraction or cold abstraction. Torres-García understood abstraction as the essential riddance of unnecessary detail, the opposite of what his critics believed it was: lack of clarity.

As Peluffo Linare sharply summarized on his exhaustive Historia de la Pintura Uruguaya, among the various artistic institutions which functioned on the 1930s in Montevideo debating between European and local values, three major groups could be observed:

1) la vertiente formalista inspirada en las enseñanzas del francés André Lhote y representada en Montevideo por la ETAP (Escuela Taller de Artes Plásticas) 2) la vertiente del “Realismo Social” de amplio espectro figurativo y 3) la vertiente “Constructivista” representada por el núcleo que rodeó desde 1934 al maestro Torres García. (Peluffo Linari 1999, 52)

The ETAP, which disappears in 1937 to give place to the Salón Nacional de Bellas Artes, was the mechanism of insertion of Torres-García into the art world of Montevideo offering an alternative to the old Circulo de Bellas Artes. Departing from the analysis of Peluffo it can be concluded that the ETAP, although being a private institution, could not admit ideological or aesthetic radicalisms for it was founded upon the spirit of conciliation forged on the first government of José Batlle y Ordóñez. It was an eclectic organism close to the political left, which could not accept the formation of an inner radical group conducted by Torres-García, who was not expecting to open one more art school but to completely transform the bases of Uruguayan art. The fact that the master renounced to any kind of compromise, leaving the ETAP, not aligning with the social realist painters and even rejecting the invitation to participate with his Asociación de Arte Constructivo in the common goal of the creation of a Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, were the cause of the displacement of his figure and a loss of
institutional support from around 1939. Due to the international notoriety he had partially achieved since his arrival on 1934, the master was welcomed by the most influential artistic and pedagogic institutions of Montevideo (Ateneo de Montevideo, Universidad de la República, Museo Municipal, local radio stations, Asociación Cristiana de Jóvenes, Sociedad Teosófica, etc.) but his constructive enterprise was not accepted as such. The golden medal with which he was awarded in 1943 in the VIII Salón Nacional de Arte for his Paisaje Menton, (a landscape with nothing in common with the constructive painting he was forwarding at the moment) is clear proof of this. The award had been given in recognition to the master’s efforts to advance the national arts while being a clear critic to his constructive doctrine.

2.3. Vicente Huidobro and Santiago’s Passage Towards the Institutional Avant-Garde

Following Bernardo Subercaseaux’s (Subercaseaux S. 2010) and Patricio Lizama’s (Yañez 1992) analysis of the evolution of the art system in Santiago it is possible to schematically reconstruct the transformations experienced by the literary and artistic fields of Chile’s capital during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Such changes were nucleated on the inflexion point that distinguishes a nationalist costumbrista aesthetic strongly installed during the 1910s and the institutionalization of the Avant-Garde, especially in the field of the plastic arts, at the beginning of the 1930s having direct repercussions on the way Huidobro’s poetry was locally evaluated before and after his European transit.

According to Subercaseaux, the turn of the century in Chile corresponds to a post-foundational époque or “time of integration” in which a transformation of the identity of the state was enhanced by the presence of new social elements as the “saltpeter plutocracy” or the rising criolla elite, but also by dissident actors such as workers unions and the federation of students constituted in 1906. As a general trend, Chilean nationalism was backed by positivism, Darwinism and the pseudo-scientific idea of a Chilean phenotype constituted by the breeding of two pure races: the Goths and the native Araucanos. Indeed, the economic expansion of
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

Chile, due to its Niter exports after winning the *Guerra del Pacífico* promoted European (especially German and English) immigration at very high rates; a total of 1000 immigrants per year from 1882 according to (Gallego 2006, 162). Moreover, the Santiago de Chile which left the XIX century with a poor sewage system and public transportation based on animal force, saw the quick emergence of a new social class whose capital transformed the architecture of the city, opened the doors to imported cultural forms (as the Opera) and even modernized national publications such as the *Mercurio* newspaper and the *Zig Zag* magazine which started to include color prints on its pages (Tzitsikas 1973). As Subercaseaux argues, unequal economic growth led to a sentiment of crisis of values in the social sphere and to a renewal of cultural nationalism resistant to late XIX century artistic forms, especially those coming from France, as symbolism.

Por otra parte, desde el punto de vista de la elite y del imaginario nacional, Chile es un país que debido a triunfos militares aumentó el territorio, y que necesita por ende —cuando todavía hay problemas de límites pendientes— consolidar un sentido de cohesión y de poderío nacional. Corresponde, sin embargo, a un período en que la modernización acelerada y sus desbordes inciden en la sensación de crisis, crisis que se convierte en las tres primeras décadas en un tópico persistente. El cambio de siglo en 1900, el Centenario en 1910, promueven la revisión y el balance, la proyección y el diseño, el calce y descalce entre el país real o íntimo y la utopía republicana. En periódicos, en el parlamento, en tertulias, ensayos, discursos y charlas, por doquier, se habla de crisis y decadencia. Intelectuales y políticos vinculados a las elites de provincias o a las emergentes capas medias perciben signos de crisis en el afrancesamiento exagerado de las costumbres, en el deterioro del modo de ser aristocrático y en el afán desmedido por la apariencia y el dinero. (Subercaseaux 2010, 60)

By reading the 1917 poetic anthology *Selva Lírica* as a thermometer of the poetic sensibility of the city of Santiago until then, Subercaseaux sees *regionalismo* as the official literary current of the time. Julio Molina Núñez and Juan Agustín Araya, editors of the anthology, as well as other important Chilean literary critics like Jean Ometh, give the highest literary value to those works depicting the Chilean soul and its regional types. Conversely, the latest book of Vicente Huidobro published at that time, *Adan* (1916), was dismissed as pretentious, naïve and mediocre by the editors of *Selva Lírica*; a judgment which extends to the “pseudo poetry” of Pablo de Rokha. By examining the anthology itself and how its contents are organized, it is visible that the newest poets are gathered under the vague notion of “unclassifiable” poetry; while no mention of terms such as Avant-Garde, Cubism, futurism or even impressionism is found.

Va dividida esta Selva lírica en dos grandes partes: Primera: Los neolíricos, y Segunda: Los poetas de tendencias antiguas. La Primera Parte va subdividida en tres: I) Los precursores y representantes de las diversas tendencias modernistas; II) Los poetas que les siguen en mérito, y III)
Among that forest of *criollistas, clásicos, nacionalistas* and *tropicales* there is no space for an *Avant-Garde*, since the editors operate a dissection of the work of Rokha and Huidobro, selecting the *Modernista* verses and omitting anything that presented formal or thematic inconsistencies with their *criollista* and post-romantic canon. The young poet was strongly discouraged by the editors of the anthology to continue the kind of “pretentious poetry” displayed in *Adan*; a poem which at least after the 1950s was to be revaluated as the central pillar of Huidobro’s early poetic edifice, but which in 1917 is conflictive with the expectations of the average national literary taste. However, and this is where one should question Subercaseaux thesis, the criticism of *Adan* made by the editors of *Selva Lírica* is exceptional and does not correspond to a general appreciation of Huidobro’s work. Huidobro was described by Molina Núñez and Araya as one of the most vigorous poets of the young generation and his explosive verses were celebrated as the notes of apocalyptic songs:

(…) los aplaude la vigorosa generación actual de ahora, y los gruñen sordamente, como perros sarnosos, los veteranos vencidos de peluca y pluma de ave de nuestra literatura (…) Son musicales como la música de los oleajes y de los truenos. Cortantes, como las espadas de doble filo. Penetrantes, como el aire de la noche siberiana. A veces tropiezan pero vuelven a remontar el vuelo. Otras, se cansan de andar en las alturas y corren como arañas por los muros bajos. Pero siempre son altivos: en las caídas se ven mejores sus inflexiones supremas. (Molina Núñez and Araya 1995, 294)

Despite criticizing Huidobro’s 1916 *Adan*, *Selva Lírica* embraces the young poet who doesn’t find a place among the poets of *El Centenario* nor among the younger generation of *El Grupo de los Diez* for whom he was nothing but a “scandalous rich boy” (Teitelboim 1997, 6. Trans. Cortés 2015.). Núñez and Araña respected the young poet for having already written six books of poetry, (one of which was evaluated as the most audacious swipe at the rusted codes of Spanish metric) and founded two literary magazines at age 24; to which of course should be added the fact that he was a member of one of the best families of Santiago and thus a representative of the same official political views defended by the anthologist.

---

20Since the publication of Antonio de Undurraga’s essay “Teoría del Creacionismo” (Huidobro 1957) the poem “Adan” has been considered repeatedly as the beginning of the poet’s *creacionista* poetry. This opinion has been shared by critics as Hugo Montes, Cedomil Goic and Cecil G. Wood whose work has strongly influence contemporary Latin-American literary criticism.
In this sense, *Selva Lírica* was an index of the situation of the national letters and culture in the 1910s in yet one more aspect: its dependence to the official discourse. At the end of the book there is still one more section devoted to the composition of the *Ateneo de Santiago*, listing all of its members along with a small laudatory text which depicts the institution as the soul and body of a prestigious artistic cenacle devoted to the promotion of high artistic and literary culture. After this, the reader can find two lists giving a detailed account of all the official literary and artistic contests called by the *Consejo Superior de Letras y Bellas Artes* (directed by the ministry of education and administrating all the resources allocated to the promotion and production of art) and another account listing other literary contests, especially those promoted by the celebrations of the centenary of Chile’s independence in 1910. These details, which might seem irrelevant, are of high importance to visualize the key actors in the system of promotion and production of cultural goods in Santiago and to show how an independent publication was comfortable aligning with the official expectations. The limits between private and institutionalized culture in Santiago de Chile at the beginning of the twentieth century were much feebler than in Montevideo or Buenos Aires. The alliance of *Selva Lírica* with the official taste is the first indicator of what later on will be, not the clash of Avant-Garde and tradition, but the absorption of the “aesthetic of the new” by cultural establishment.

The celebration of the centenary in 1910, as it was the case in Buenos Aires and Montevideo was the crystallization of the official discourse and state iconography. In his study of centenary photography, Gonzalo Leiva Quijada has proposed taxonomy of the motifs represented by the *fotografía del centenario* which reveals the ideological coordinates of a whole nation. Art and letters were called to forge and imagine a modern nation in accordance with the academic canon in the arts, and the regionalist discourse in the field of letters. Paraphrasing Leiva Quijada, the six themes chosen by the photographers participating in the *fotografía del centenario* contest were: 1) natural catastrophes; 2) "tradiciones típicas" or the presence of the peasants and the ethnic minorities and their products as seen by the ruling classes; 3) Institutions: the church, the army and the organs of education; 4) Architectural modernity and infrastructure (as the new means of transportation and the sewage system); and finally 5) the saltpeter industry as it was presented by the *Sociedad Propaganda del Salitre*. In this system of images all negativity is put on the externality (the natural catastrophe) while the depiction of the institutions, the architecture and the industry corresponds to a stable and
homogenous state in its phase of “integration,” to use the chronology proposed by Subercaseaux.

New elements competing with the holders of the official culture started being visible in the cultural panorama of Santiago. The Consejo Nacional de Bellas Artes, the Ateneo de Santiago and the semi-official critic of Emeth for the newspaper La Nación were challenged by the Avant-Garde. New voices such as the Generación del Trece and the Grupo de los Diez, started to shift the balance of the artistic panorama while the criteria of consumption of artistic goods was transformed by the presence of El Grupo Montparnasse. In 1923, the arrival of this group of young educated artists (who did not studied in the art academies of Vienna and Florence but in the ateliers of the modernist and avant-gardist Parisian artists, was like a tidal wave that shocked the local artistic environment. In the period of 16 years that goes from August 1916 when Huidobro left to Paris, and the austral summer of 1932 when he went back to Santiago pressed by economic difficulties, the Chilean capital had changed, not so much in terms of its material aspect but more concerning its spiritual life. Not only the international notoriety that Huidobro had gained by actively participating in the literary and artistic revolution lived in Europe during the late 1910s and 1920s, but those transformations in the system of production and reception of cultural goods in Santiago, could explain the feverous welcome that a representative group of poets and artists would give to poet at his return to the country.

How did such a cultural transformation occur? While cheap translations of the modern literary classics were arriving to Santiago and a group of criollistas were starting to gather around the figure of Mario Latorre, (with whom Huidobro would hold a quarrel, which starting in 1918, would last for decades) the second series of the magazine Lapiz y pluma was being

---

21 Although the architects Alberto Siegel and Josué Smith Solar built modernist structures and high store buildings in Santiago in the 1930s, the architecture of the city remained mainly neoclassic. (Bindis Fuller and Maino Aguirre 2006, 206)

22 Besides his close relation to the writer Jean Emar (one of the strongest agents of renovation in Santiago in the 1920s) Huidobro was surrounded by the Avant-Garde poets of the Grupo Mandragora: Braulio Arenas, Teófilo Cid and Enrique Gómez-Correa; and was warmly received by the painter and surrealist writer Jorge Cáceres, whose work was praised by André Breton (Oviedo 2001). To these names one should add the less well known poets Eduardo Molina Ventura and Helio Rodriguez who, much like Volodio Teitelbom (Huidobro’s biographer), were local voices acquainted with the poetry of Huidobro before his arrival to Chile. Some of them, such as the philosophic and religious writer Eduardo Anguita, expressed a true devotion towards Huidobro at his arrival to Santiago.
released in Santiago in 1912 as a common home for the “modern generation of Chilean artists” (Tzitsikas 1973, 11. Trans. Cortés 2015). Without defining a clear aesthetic or ideological direction, they encouraged the production of new forms of poetry. Four years earlier the first crack into the official system of art production took place inside the Escuela de Bellas Artes when the Spanish painter Álvarez Stomoyar was hired as professor of live drawing introducing costumbrista themes and a chromatic pallet that were going to be characteristic of the artists of the Generación del Trece, one of the first groups to oppose the regulations of the Consejo de Bellas Artes and to disregard the lessons of Neo-classism taught in the Escuela de Bellas Artes.

Fernando Alvarez de Sotomayor (1875-1960) inculcated the attraction to vernacular realism in our country and formed the “Generación del Trece” from his directorship of the Escuela de Bellas Artes, the School of Fine Arts (1910-1915). Respect for color and volume and technical solvency in the treatment of the human figure are present in all of his disciplines as well as an interest in the “costumbrista” topic so characteristic of this outstanding group of painters. (Santander and Cid 2007, 11)

The reaction against academic art in Santiago produced by the paintings of Fernando Alvarez Sotomayor and the social art produced by the Generación del Trece was continued by the Chilean painter J. F. Gonzales, a major figure of the Grupo de los Diez. Gonzales opposed to painting contests, which were the main mechanism used by young painters to attain public exposure but which only encouraged the reproduction of the official artistic norm. In exchange, Gonzales put high emphasis on the search of particular expression means in each student, defying an otherwise self-sufficient system of rigid plastic values which were meant to be assimilated and repeated by the students. In 1915, a pioneer group of young painters, writers, architects and musicians who had been gathering around the figure of the architect and writer Pedro Prado founded El Grupo de los Diez, which on June 19, 1916 inaugurated an art exhibit which had “extraordinary success” (Oelker 1993, 6). Although the Grupo de los Diez oscillated between humor and romantic mysticism (their meetings were preceded by a careful mystic ritual aiming to avoid all prosaic elements and conventional reality) they were all active artistic producers. Their partially fulfilled aim was to print 12 publications per year, 5 issues of their magazine, two literary works, two books on painting and one on music, sculpture and architecture. As was the case with the Generación del Trece, the art nurtured by the Grupo de los Diez materialized its criticism to the academy in the shape of a negation of neoclassical painting. Years later, after such controversies were forgotten, Gonzales’ painting was praised by its systematic decomposition of the object and the value given to the brush stroke.
Comienza con una descomposición sistemática del tema, desapareciendo el mundo estable construido según pautas externas (...) El tema deja de tener mandato irrestricto sobre el artista para privilegiar ahora la pincelada disgregada, como entidad absoluta, más allá del sometimiento a la línea, ese recinto, ese límite del color en que había convertido la pintura neoclásica y la pintura oficial de finales del siglo XIX. (Maino Prado, Elizalde Prado, and Ibáñez Santa María 1976, 33)

Unfortunately, the Grupo de los Diez dissolved shortly after publication of the Pequeña Antología de Escritores Contemporaneos Chilenos in 1917, the first effort to gather the new voices of the Chilean poetry, which was very ill, received. It is significant to see that the publication was buried precisely by the pro criollista and antimodernist literary critic, Omer Emeth. The journalist of La Nación did not have good relations with the members of the group and had already attacked their hermetic and symbolist tendencies, which, as we have seen in the case of Selva Lírica, were not appreciated at that time. Two more voices, although with more objective bases, joined the negative reception of the anthology to which Armando Donoso, in charge of the prologue of the book, replied that instead of “whipping” the young editors, the critics should show some support for the independent publications which would improve with time.

This was the situation until around 1918; Neoclassic art and regionalist literature were the plastic and narrative rule to which the vernacular painters of the Generación del Trece, the “symbolist” poets of El Grupo de los Diez, and poets like Rokha and Huidobro, although without showing any support to each other, opposed. Whereas in 1924 Xul Solar was embraced in Buenos Aires by the best positioned elements of the Avant-Garde in the region, and in 1934 Torres-García had to struggle for the positioning of his Constructive art in a conservative and protectionist environment, Vicente Huidobro missed the moment of inflection which had absorbed the Avant-Gardist discourse and plastic praxis in the 1920s, and only went back to Santiago in 1932 when the most belligerent elements of his aesthetic were a thing of the past.

Between 1920 and 1923, a group of Chilean painters arrived to Paris. They were Enriqueta Petit, Luis Vargas Rosas (who might be the first Latin-American artist to explore

23These were Ernesto Guzman and Ricardo Valdez as Tzitsikas recalls. (Tzitsikas 1973, 18)
24I am using the notion of symbolism in the double sense given to it by the editors of Selva Lírica and by Omer Emeth. A concrete historical category framing the works of French poets as Arthur Rimbaud or Stephan Mallarme but also a purely ideological category related to French decadentism which under the light of the most conservative views threatened to dissolve the imagined unity of the nation.
non-figurative abstraction), the brothers Julio and Manuel Ortiz de Zárate and José Perotti; or as they were known later on in Santiago: the Grupo Montparnasse. With their first exhibition, which took place at the Rivas y Calvo Gallery in October 1923, a transposition of the modernist and avant-gardist code present in Paris had arrived to the Chilean capital where social art had already displaced the neoclassical code. In 1919, the critic and journalist Álvaro Yáñez Bianchi (better known as Jean Emar and son of the director of the newspaper La Nación) arrived to the French capital were he and the group of Chilean painters got in contact with the work of Cezanne and with the cubist painters who continued his incursion into the aesthetics of the circle, the square and the triangle. By that time, Vicente Huidobro had already written his Horizon Carré and was a friend of the theorist and youngest of the cubist painters, Juan Gris. He also frequented Picasso and Lipchitz, besides the group of writers directed by the soon to disappear Guillaume Apollinaire. According to Patricio Lizama (Yáñez 1992), Jean Emar was the most important element of diffusion of the modernist ideas in the city thanks to his Notas de arte for the Newspaper La Nación. As Lizama claims, Jean Emar opened the journal to the voices of Le Corbusier, Léon Werth, and Vicente Huidobro, while writing about Erik Satie, Apollinaire, Neruda or Gerardo Diego; and reproducing works from painters such as Juan Gris, Cezanne and Picasso. The role of Huidobro as an influential expatriate, who continued to write for the local press, was important. During his 1925 stay in Santiago he joined the Salón de Junio (organized by the Grupo Montparnasse) with his Poèmes Peints presented three years before in Paris. He was associated with the Spanish cubist painters whose work was also exhibited in this event. Nevertheless, Huidobro was to return to Paris soon after his political defeat in Santiago, and was more interested in forwarding his own aesthetic in Europe than transforming the artist and literary life of the Chilean capital. It was Jean Emar, Edwards Bello and later

---

25This transposition can be observed in a 1923 interview done by Jean Emar with the painter Vargas Rosas who had absorbed the principle of post-Cezannian figuration: “Se pinta para crear un organismo nuevo que en él encierra su belleza y su razón de ser, sin necesidad de recurrir a la comparación con el mundo real para hallarle su sentido. Quisiera llegar a tal precisión que bastaran en mi papel seis o siete puntos, nada más, pero eso sí, que colocados en el sitio único en que matemáticamente deben estar. Entonces diré que soy capaz de “construir” un croquis.” (Yañez 1992, 49). This was a position shared by Torres-García but to which cannot be reduced his constructive Universalist enterprise.

26Alongside him, Edwards Bello defended the painters of El Grupo Montparnasse in the pages of La Nación.

27In a 1925 interview with Jean Emar, Huidobro made it clear that he had bypassed the plastic transformation lived in Santiago since his departure. To the question about his first impression of Chile he answers: “Primera impresion de Chile? Ningún adelanto. Creer en adelantos es vivir de ilusiones”. (Yañez 1992, 138).
Cultural Debates on Latin-American Avant-Garde in Parallel 33 South

Cruchaga Santamaria who exerted the systematic pressure needed to give a continuous presence to the Avant-Garde discourse in the press assuring a critical response to its artistic production until 1930 when it became the official aesthetic of the city. The 26 artists, who in 1929 traveled to Europe to be trained in, lithography, stained glass landscape design, ceramics, wood carving, muralism, interior decoration, stage and graphic design, were mostly “producing an art devoid of any narrative and immune to any conservative contamination” (Bindis Fuller and Maino Aguirre 2006, 246. Trans. Cortés 2015). Not only did they become influential figures in the artistic panorama of the city as the Grupo Montparnasse did, but they were all hired as teachers at the Escuela de Bellas Artes. The aesthetics of Lothe and Juan Gris were in the classrooms of the university to which the Escuela de Bellas Artes was annexed; simultaneously the intellectuals and painters linked to conservative magazines, such as Bellas Artes, struggled in vain to restitute the old aesthetic criteria and to “avoid artistic disorientation” (Yáñez 1992, 18. Trans. Cortés 2015).

The return of Huidobro to Santiago in 1931 had shocked the intellectual life of the city only for a short while. He was far from having the social influence of other poets such as Gabriela Mistral and Pablo Neruda. The three magazines he founded upon his return to Chile where short lived and the edition of his books, El Ciudadano del Olvido and Ver y Palpar, found a place in his own personal library since almost nobody bought them. Huidobro’s situation in Chile after 1931 was paradoxical: authors such as Gerardo Diego, Juan Larrea or Jorge Luis Borges were initially influenced by his poetry and no other Latin-American writer of his generation had had such an important international role in the evolution of new poetic forms during the 1910s and 1920s; but once back to his homeland, he had no editors and no public, a situation which did not change before the tenth anniversary of his death. Other figures such as Jean Emar, the Grupo Montparnasse and the painters of the 1929 generation were much more directly influential in the transformation of the average artistic and literary taste of the Santiago de Chile. When Huidobro came back in 1931 the poems and books that had been regarded as explosive, decadent and non-conformist fifteen years ago, seemed to be the echo of fresher local voices. Contrary to the case of Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro did not have to struggle for the transformation of the local artistic environment. His work and theories had set the bases for the Ultraista poetry in Spain which later came back to South America in the packaging of a European-born Avant-Garde. Only few poets and artists were ready to admit
this while Huidobro himself was blind to the transformations experienced by the city during his absence. For some time, Santiago de Chile overlooked the influence exerted by Huidobro as an agent of transformation while Huidobro never truly accepted the influence that the city had exerted in his poetry. The following generation of *Santiagueños* authors who, either admitted or not, was shaped by Huidobro’s cosmopolitism and inventiveness open their spirit towards their country and the entire continent. Latin-American writers, artists and intellectuals were starting to wonder why it was easy to find the most recently published French novels in Buenos Aires, but no one knew what the youngest generation of writers was publishing in La Habana, Ciudad de Mexico or Caracas. With the intention of strengthening the relations between the literatures of the region the 1962 Congress of Latin-American Intellectuals took place in the city of Concepción. This was the beginning of a new era, the Latin-American Boom was about to generate a net of editors, writers and publishers which dramatically changed the panorama of western literature unimaginable twenty or even ten years earlier. Were the authors of the previous generation unconcerned by this lack of communication inside the region, or did their work and projects set the bases for what was to become a reality years later? I believe that a third option needs to be explored. Perhaps their aims even exceeded that reality and it was not their shortsighted view but their utopian projections which made it difficult to materialize their ambitions. In the following chapter we will explore the multiple faces of modernity which has been both a reality and a project; a canvas whose limits seem to expand and contract and on which multiple projects have been sketched, erased and fulfilled.
Chapter 3. Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

3.1. Modernities and Modernisms

Now it would be stupid to deny that modernization can proceed along a number of different roads. (Indeed, the whole point of modernization theory is to chart these roads.) There is no reason to believe that every modern city must look and think like New York or Los Angeles or Tokyo.

Marshall Berman.
(Berman 1982, 124)

Cette histoire, trop partiale, est obsolète. Elle se concentre sur l'Europe de l'Ouest et l'Amérique du Nord, et privilégie les lieux où ont émergés les mouvements d’avant-garde: Paris, bien sûr, mais aussi Berlin, puis New York, qui a pris le relais après la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Mais elle exclut les scènes non occidentales et les autres pays européens. La période de post colonisation et de mondialisation dans laquelle nous vivons aujourd’hui nous a fait prendre conscience de cette injustice et nous oblige à reconsidérer les idées établies. La réalité est bien plus complexe. Et plus riche également.

(Grenier 2013, 24)

If one were to judge the current visibility of Latin-American art in the world based on the presence of Joaquín Torres-García’s work in one of the most important international exhibitions of modern art of 2013 and that of Xul Solar in the 2013 Venice Biennale, it would be hard to not agree with Jim Supangkat (Supangkat 2011) and declare that at least since the 1990 there has been a positive change in the systems of production, distribution and consumption of modernist art in the western world. Such change was signaled by an opening of traditional art centers towards the cultures of the periphery. The date of 1930, chosen by

---

28 The names of Torres-García, Frida Kahlo, Carmelo Arden Quin, Di Cavalcanti, and many other Latin-American artists are part of the 400 known and not so well known artists configuring the international exhibition Modernités Plurielles hold on the French Museum of Modern Art since October 23th, 2013.

29 Although there are effective attempts to build such plural spaces, I believe that the opposition between a close Eurocentric view and a contemporary pluralistic approach rooted on the multifaceted ethnic and cultural map of the world, (Supangkat vision) is illusory. Žižek’s judgment of our present impossibility to
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

Supangkat in “Multiculturalism / Multimodernism” (Supangkat 2011) to frame the upbringing of Indonesia’s particular form of modernism, approximately overlaps with the plurality of artistic, literary and cultural expressions of the Latin-American Avant-Garde which were mainly active during the 1920s and 1930s. This includes, of course Brazilian Modernismo, the form taken by the Avant-Garde in that country and which should not be confused with the homonymous expression Modernismo used in Hispanic America to refer to late nineteenth century post romantic poetry. As it is the case with Indonesian art, and the one produced in many other post-colonial societies, Latin-American arts and literature are inscribed in a discussion about modernization, which implies the need to differentiate the local cultural phenomenon of such peripheries from those of the traditional centers of production in Europe. In its extreme form, this might imply a reconfiguration of the concept of modernity itself. In Latin-America, voices as those of Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano or Edgardo Lander propose the most radical shift of the modern paradigm, a “constructive-libertarian praxis” in the words of Enrique Dussel (Dussel 1999, 17. Transl. Cortés 2015). Dussel sees in Hegel, Kant and Montesquieu the beginning of the distortion of history and the creation of a discourse that manages the centrality of Europe by imagining a myth of continuity between the ancient Greek civilization and the modern northern Europe. With the conquest of the Americas, the comparative advantage of the Chinese Empire over Great Brittany and France started shifting when the later actors, a “productively underdeveloped region” (Dussel 2004, 210. Trans. Cortés 2015) started buying Chinese merchandise with Peruvian and Mexican gold and silver. For Dussel, notwithstanding the historical preeminence of the Chinese empire, Europe would live the myth of history as the process of the evolution of its own centrality towards its inevitable modernization. In no more than 50 years, Europe had passed from accepting the productive and technological superiority of the Chinese over Europe, to creating a completely opposite image of the Chinese empire:

Ya a comienzos del siglo XIX (el tiempo que transcurre entre La Riqueza de las Naciones de 1776 de Adam Smith, en el que China era todavía el país más rico de la Tierra, y las Lecciones sobre la Filosofía de la Historia Universal, dictadas en Berlin por Hegel en el decenio de 1820) todo el Oriente era visto solo como la expresión del eterno y miserable despotismo oriental. (Dussel 2004, 217)

trust holistic narratives and to create new ones as a symptom of what is an already marketed plurality free of political engagement or social compromise, raises important questions to the issue of plurality and the negation of class struggle on the grounds of multiculturalism.
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

In his project of *transmodernidad*, Dussel proposes the recuperation of the knowledge cultivated by those cultures excluded from the European vision of modernity while dispatching the concept of post-modernity to which he denies any capability of subverting the Eurocentric view of history. In this perspective, concepts such as *multimodernism* or *transmodernidad* present themselves as necessary due to the singularity of the processes of modernization experienced by these societies. From the Eurocentric political project of Faustino Sarmiento to its mestizo opposite, the *Raza Cósmica* of José Vasconcelos, Dussel’s proposal is part of a long list of attempts to find the identity of the Latin-American individual and the state while being a clear response to the neo liberal project of late modernity. The large project of *transmodernidad* drafted by Dussel is not concerned with defining a historical process. It is offered as the proposal of a future pluralistic world-system re-codifying 250 years of European domination. It is an alternative historical reality and not a *development* of modernity itself which, following the reasoning of Gianni Vattimo, would still be an epistemological paradigm of modernity. (Dussel 1999)

Whereas Dussel’s revaluation of the position of Europe in world history calls for a large and important historiographical work, the theoretical bases of the multiple modernities approach favored by Supangkat seem to be more easily undermined. Volker H. Schmidt argues that the classic theory of modernity can easily accommodate the kind of differences evoked by the multimodernists for whom: “the whole world is (equally) modern nowadays. Every contemporary society would be modern, although in different ways” (Schmidt 2011, 166. Trans. Cortés 2015). Schmidt recalls the horrors of the cast system in India and its analogies with the clearly stratified societies of Latin America (in which social transit would be impossible) as a proof of the presence of pre-modern structures in both Societies.30 Although Schmidt’s examination of the theories of multiple modernities is fair from a theoretical point of view, his uncritical celebration of the social structure of the first world (as well as the assumption that symmetrical social relations are the paradigm of European societies) is not based on an empirical comparative study of both social realities, but on a deterministic prejudice. Schmidt argues that:

Práticas e hierarquias como essas são hostis a modernidade, porque são baseadas em, ou sob a premissa de, em desigualdades categóricas (...) Antes da ruptura modernidade, uma ordem

30 Beatriz Sarlo’s description of the process of modernization in Buenos Aires (Sarlo 1988) clearly contradicts this thesis. The shaping of the modern urban space in South America is fundamentally anchored in social mobility.
Insofar as it is a descriptive and regional category, Beatriz Sarlo’s peripheral modernity (Sarlo 1988) is an excellent descriptor of the transformations experienced by the city of Buenos Aires between 1920 and 1940 making use of the openness already found on the concept of modernity itself. Sarlo argues that the reference to new commodities as automobiles, modern furniture or clothing present in Argentinian magazines such as Caras y Caretas, Mundo Argentino and El Hogar were associated with symbolic messages of comfort, interior design and office space. However, these modern messages were only partially actualized by a society divided between nostalgia (for the reconciled space of tradition) and the constructive insecurity of the new urban order. The progressive voices of the new riches, businessmen and technocrats found a cultural echo in the debates about “the new” fostered by the Avant-Garde actors. However, the rigorous analysis of Sarlo does not aim to be a general theory of the modernity in Latin America, nor a project of an-other modernity encompassing the possibilities of the Caribbean or Andean reality. As it has been confirmed (chapter 1.3) Sarlo’s thesis is functional in regards to the city of Buenos Aires but needs to be rectified if one wishes to extrapolate it to the particular case of Santiago or Montevideo.

In the light of the present discussion, we should ask whether the projects of multiple modernities or trans-modernities are doomed to fail on the bases of the openness of the concept of modernity itself. In The Latin-American Origins of “Alternative Modernism,” David Craven argues that traditional medium-related definitions of modernism such as that of Clement Greenberg show a monolithic and Eurocentric modernism which does not correspond with the real differential nature of the phenomenon:

To speak with insight and sensitivity of modernist art from the late 1800s till the post 1945 period is to speak of a plurality of related but also notably divergent and even fractious tendencies, some of which were grounded in a broad-ranging multiculturalism and were part of an uneven, non-linear development that contravenes the linear concept of historical progress intrinsic to western modernization. (Craven 1996, 30)

Craven’s position is conciliatory as far as it promotes a differential view of the modernist phenomena and not a remaking of the cultural map in which it is inscribed. Despite his lack of radicalism, Cravens’ proposal goes beyond an opening of the modernist canon (as the one
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde proposed by Grenier\textsuperscript{31}, while it opposes the fatalist assumption made by Schmidt about the categorical inequalities which are hostile to any process of modernization in the third world. Craven does this by calling Latin-American literary and aesthetic \textit{Modernismo} to the battlefield, advocating its primacy in relation to European Modernism.

In order to dispel some of the incomprehension that currently enshrouds the overly hasty negative verdicts against modernism in its entirety, I shall try to accomplish at least two different things in this article: first, I shall reconstruct empirically the largely overlooked non-European etymology of the concept of modernism, along with the anti-colonial strain of it that has been christened ‘alternative modernism’. Such an analysis will entail a discussion of the poetry of Ruben Dario and the paintings of Diego Rivera in relation to artworks by Antoni Gaudí, Pablo Picasso and Paul Klee. (Craven 1996, 30)

In this sense, the argument according to which the differential aspects of Modernism are already included in the classical definitions of modernity only holds true if one is ready to admit the imprint left by those other Modernisms on the project of modernity itself. There is an important element of renovation in Ruben Dario’s expansion of the Spanish rhyme, themes and poetic vocabulary. In order to emphasize this emancipatory element, Craven associates the poetry of the Nicaraguan with the muralist Mexican movement. Craven is of course forcing the historic limits between \textit{Modernismo} and Avant-Garde by stressing the formal achievements of the first and the continuity of the ideas of social emancipation and anti-imperialism found in the \textit{Modernista} poetry of José Marti and Ruben Dario, but also in the works of Diego Rivera or Pablo Picasso. José Miguel Oviedo has defined Hispanic American\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Modernismo} as a movement of renovation of the arts and literature visible between 1880 and 1910 reacting against the codified models of romantic tradition, emphasizing concepts as cosmopolitanism, decadentism and symbolism. It was a new formalism which detached the artistic form from

\textsuperscript{31}The inclusion of artistic works coming from all the corners of the world in order to complement the collection of the Museum of Modern Arts in Paris does not intent a reconstitution of the Modernist Canon itself but the accommodation of the excess produced by peripheral modern art. Grenier implies that such reorganization can only be conducted from within the cultural axe that the Parisian museum of modern art represents: « Le centre Pompidou est le premier à apporter une réponse concrète d’envergure parce que sa collection, très international par son histoire, nous a permis de l’envisager » (L’express 2013. 8, 9). Instead of undermining the epistemological bases of the concept of modernity, what we find here is the double movement of affirmation and complementation of the modernist canon.

\textsuperscript{32}The notion of Modernismo Hispanoamericano is used here in order to avoid the confusion with Brazilian Modernismo, which refers to the artistic manifestations surrounding the Semana de Arte Moderna in 1922. “Mientras el modernismo anglosajón –y el modernismo brasileño- pueden asemejarse (con algunas variables) a lo que nosotros llamamos ‘vanguardia’, que comienza en los años inmediatamente previos a la Primera Guerra Mundial, el modernismo hispanoamericano es una estética características finisecular”. (Oviedo 1997. 222)
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

morality and which freed Hispanic poetry from rigorous Spanish versification. Although a regional development of the poetic forms, Hispanic American Modernismo cannot be equated to Modernism as a large concept used to group pictorial and literary products produced between the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century.

Although it needs to be rectified with references to other images of Modernism, the canonic version of Modernism described by Clement Greenberg is a necessary reference to approach the art of Torres-García and Xul Solar, and even that of Vicente Huidobro. In its turn, the notion of Latin American Avant-Garde presented in the following section will be modified by the interartistic cross-fertilizations done by our three authors. By reversing the map of the world (one should not forget Torres-Garcia’s moto: “nuestro norte es el sur”) and by enlarging and problematizing the concept of writing, these artists renewed the Avant-Garde discourse and made a huge conceptual lap which has not been understood as such.

3.2. The Topics of the Latin-American Avant-Garde

Una de las primeras preguntas que podrían formularse es si, de hecho, existió una vanguardia en América Latina. Aunque esta cuestión pueda esconder actualmente un fondo retórico, no es arriesgado responder afirmativamente. A partir de la década de 1920, la transformación de los panoramas culturales rompe de manera extrema con la tradición finisecular; la vastísima bibliografía disponible y la amplia y rica documentación, ambas aún en su fase de exploración, permiten no sólo confirmar la existencia de las vanguardias sino también delinear una arqueología de los respectivos movimientos. Jorge Schwartz. (Schwartz 1991, 35)

Three sets of tensions define the most visible current topics of discussion inside the multiple theoretic debates animated by the Latin-American Avant-Garde. These are: a) the relations between ideology and aesthetics (or politics and arts), b) the dynamic opposition between renovation and tradition, or the new and the old; and c) the distinction between the local and the foreigner- the inevitable supplement of every Latin-American product. These topics arise in the middle of debates opposing nativism to cosmopolitism, social realism to
abstraction or social art to the art of the elite, and were present in the inner debates of each group whether they were Martinfierristas in Buenos Aires, El Grupo Minorista in la Habana, the Estridentistas in Mexico or the intellectuals gathered around the Amauta magazine in Peru.

In reference to the study of concomitances between aesthetic and ideological postures, the Argentinian-Brazilian critic Jorge Schwartz in *Las Vanguardias Latinoamericanas. Textos Programáticos y Críticos* thrives to distinguish the interactions between the intellectual and ideological variants of the Avant-Garde actors. Besides tearing down the muro de Tordesillas which had kept the study of the Brazilian Avant-Garde separated form that of the rest of the sub-continent, Jorge Schwartz has defined the goal of his research as to “achieve the articulation between the aesthetic and ideological aspects of the texts” (Schwartz 1991, 35. Trans. Cortés 2015) defining the cultural debates of the period. In my view such debates are synchronic, in so far as the encounter between political and aesthetic Avant-Garde might take place in one publication or one group (as is the case with the magazine Amauta in Peru and La Campana de Palo in Buenos Aires). But the debate is also diachronic since, as Schwartz argues, there is a change from the explosion of works dealing with formal experimentation at the beginning of the twenties to a strong politization in the Avant-Garde discourse beginning around 1927. This is clearly seen in the revisionist work done by Oswald de Andrade and Pablo Neruda who, after writing *Recidencia en la Tierra* and *Serafim Ponte Grade*, respectively, turned into narrative and poetic militancy. The same holds true for the position of Vicente Huidobro who went from the formal exploration of cubist poetry of French expression during the late 1920ts (Benko 1993) to fanatic communism in just a few years.33

A different perspective on the same subject was held by the Peruvian historian José Miguel Oviedo for whom the double intellectual and political dimension of the Latin-American Avant-Garde should be considered from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives.

33 In 1931, the Chilean poet will not hesitate to declare: “whoever is not a communist is an idiot” (Teitelboim 1997, 186. Trans. Cortés 2015)
After developing a study of the main voices of the poetic Avant-Garde: Huidobro, Vallejo and Neruda (the fundamental triptych of modern Latin-American Poetry according to Saúl Yurkievich) (Yurkievich 2002), Oviedo follows the historical dimension of the process which begins with the formal adventures of Vicente Huidobro and his 1914 manifesto “Non Serviam” and deviates towards more political grounds with the rise of various indigenismos in the 1920s. Referring to the first burst of social uneasiness in the Andean countries, Oviedo adds: “muchos consideran que con la matanza obrera en las calles de Guayaquil en 1922 comienza una nueva etapa tanto en la vida política como estética del país.” (Oviedo 2001, 427)

In the chapter “Tensiones Ideológicas” of her recently published Modernidades, Vanguardias, Nacionalismos, Ivonne Pini (Pini and Ramírez Nieto 2012) revises the broad and internationalist program of the Uruguayan magazine La Pluma and the leftist political project of the Revista de Avance in Cuba, stressing the double presence of colliding political and purely artistic elements in both. The author frames the Avant-Garde period in Latin-America, by the social and political tensions which shaped the production of cultural and scientific discourses as follows:

En consecuencia, en términos ideológicos, el periodo estudiado se localiza en el momento de inflexión entre la prolongación inercial de los planteamientos positivistas, con sus múltiples facetas, y la emergencia turbulenta de líneas de pensamiento de izquierda que promovieron compromisos de las nuevas generaciones intelectuales con el desarrollo social y político de las clases menos favorecidas. (Pini and Ramírez Nieto 2012, 76)

As I have proposed at the beginning of this chapter, beyond the differentiations done with respect to the border lines dividing each nation-state or the assumed independence proclaimed by every Avant-Garde group, the current mapping of the literary and artistic products of the period responds to epistemological categorizations which have to do with the way pairs of tension such as old and young, ideological and aesthetic, and local and foreigner relate. In my view, by observing the varieties of negotiation between those values, Gloria Videla de Rivero has informed the categorization proposed in her Direcciones del Vanguardismo Hispanoamericano (Videla de Rivero 1994) distinguishing between 5 types of Avant-Garde: regionalista, internacionalista, universalista, estética and político social. Similarly the
“ideological tensions” reviewed by Jorge Schwartz (Schwartz 1991), which help the critic to understand the continental dimension of the ideological debates beyond the limits of the nation-state, is based on the analysis of the strong or weak presence of the aforementioned elements. Referring to the tensions between art and ideology in Latin America in the decade of 1920, Jorge Schwartz proposes a revival of the old opposition between engaged art and art pour l’art in the region.

Although Videla, Schwartz and Oviedo take into account the concomitance of these dialectic couples in all Avant-Garde manifestations, they also stress the regional and chronologic specificities that allow them to separate; for example, an internationalist from a political Avant-Garde. Conversely, Pini and Ramírez Nieto see Latin-American Avant-Garde as a mixed phenomenon and insist on the simultaneous presence of clashing elements such as iconoclasm and nationalism, renovation and tradition, openness towards Europe and militant nativism during the 1920-1940 period. According to Pini and Ramírez Nieto, at the opening of the twentieth century ethnic multiplicity coexisted with the presence of foundational myths of national identity instructed through law, education and the official iconography of the nineteenth century wars of independence. In this context, the authors found the amalgam between social and political expressions and anti-traditionalist aesthetic postures in the Estridentista Mexican case as well as the conciliation between Marxism, indigenism and Surrealism in the figure of the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui for whom the concept of Avant-Garde was a synthesis between the modern, the popular and the Andean. The same posture is taken when studying the group of artists and writers revolving around the Brazilian magazine Klaxon:

A lo largo de sus nueve números se fueron plasmando los ideales estéticos que los movían, y pese a que no siempre fue clara cuál era la escogencia entre la diversidad de ismos europeos, había una idea rectora: aceptar a modernidad y los movimientos vanguardistas, sin olvidar la significación que tenía la presencia de las raíces brasileñas que, a través del aporte indígena y negro, abrían espacio a una estética primitivista. (Pini and Ramírez Nieto 2012, 122)

34 These are: Estetica vanguardista y revolución, Nacionalismo vs cosmopolitismo, Antropofagía vs Verde amarillismo, Boedo vs Florida; Madrid, meridiano intelectual de Hispanoamérica.
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

Referring to the relations between Cavalcanti, Monteiro and Anita Malfati, the quoted authors commented: "ya allí se perfilaba la doble corriente que los modernistas le imprimían a su movimiento: impulsar la libertad formal y las ideas nacionalistas (…) La preocupación por lo brasileño no es contradictoria con la postura vanguardista" (Pini and Ramírez Nieto 2012, 121-122). The efforts towards the absorption of the European developments and the social forces striving to differentiate themselves from the external influx seem to be part of the same movement. They are the centrifugal and centripetal forces that keep the creative process in motion.

This view, which somehow equates two heterogeneous processes, is nevertheless a necessary reorientation of the study of the Latin American Avant-Garde. As we will see in the following section a more traditional view which opposes a Eurocentric to a Nativist Avant-Garde is not totally functional. The dichotomy between an open and a closed Avant-Garde forces a certain perspective in which the social, political and even nativist elements present in the work of authors traditionally associated to the so-called open version of the Avant-Garde, are disregarded. Such differentiation which is useful as an introduction to Avant-Garde phenomena in Latin-America loses its functionality once particular cases are more deeply studied.

3.3. Two Variants of the Latin-American Avant-Garde

In her Dos Décadas Vulnerables en las Artes Plásticas Latinoamericanas 1950-1970 (Traba 1973) while in search of a definition of Latin-American art, Marta Traba drew a differentiation between open and closed regions. According to the author, countries of high European immigration open to international cultural transit such as Uruguay, Argentina and Chile belonged to an open area: “pautada por su progresismo, su afán civilizatorio, su capacidad de absorber y recibir al extranjero, su amplitud de miras y su tendencia a la glorificación de las capitales.” (Traba 1973, 76) This is the geographic space defined by the Argentinian art critic as the open region. In the other hand countries like Peru, Bolivia and the Caribbean coast were
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

exemplary of a closed region in which the weight of the endogenous culture and its tradition was felt strongly and the African and indigenous component was easily observed. In a subsequent work (Traba and Inter-American Development Bank 1994) Traba extended the use of such categories embracing pre 1950 painterly and plastic Latin-American works and thus underlining the coupling between regional and thematic positioning of the painterly products of the Avant-Garde.

In a more recent development of a symmetrically opposed reasoning, Eduard Glissant (Glissant 1996) differentiates between a geographic and a demographic America that somehow hovers on top of the first and does not correspond precisely to it. For him the continent can be divided (not rigorously but accepting overflowing) into three regions: Meso-America or Atavic-America; Euro-America; and Neo-America. The first two identities defined by Glissant are geographically analogic to what Marta Traba called “closed regions” and “open regions.” What makes these two approaches substantially different is the fact that the “Euro-America” of Glissant, although geographically corresponding with the open regions of Traba, is not seen as a culturally open region. On the contrary, in the light of the anti-colonialist and multicultural approach of Glissant “Euro-America” is a zone thrown inside itself, afraid of cultural contamination and substantially closed. Free from the stiffness of the atavist cultures, the author proposes the diversity of *creolization*: that which is constantly forming itself. In his inspiring conference “*Introduction a Une Poétique du Divers*” the Martinican thinker drew the map of those three Americas as follows:

L’Amérique des peuples témoins, de ce qui ont toujours été là et que l’on définit comme la Méso-Amérique, la Meso-America : L’Amérique de ceux qui sont arrivés en provenance d’Europe et qui n’ont préservé sur le nouveau continent les us et les coutumes ainsi que les traditions de leurs pays d’origine, que l’on pourrait appeler l’Euro-America et qui comprend bien entendu le Québec, le Canada, les États-Unis et un partie (culturelle) du Chili et de l’Argentine ; L’Amérique qu’on pourrait appeler la Neo-America et qui est celle de la créolisation. Elle est constituée de la Caraïbe, de nord-est du Brésil, des Guyanes et de Curaçao, du sud des États-Unis, de la côte Caraïbe du Venezuela et de la Colombie, et d’une grande partie de l’Amérique centrale et du Mexique. (Glissant 1996, 13)

In his essay “Las dos Vanguardias Latinoamericanas” Angel Rama - with whom Jorge Schwartz agrees in declaring the first works of Vicente Huidobro as the beginning of the Latin-American Avant-Garde, and the year of 1922 the pinnacle of the international diffusion of the phenomenon - argued that as aesthetic and ideological orientations struggled with each other, two overlapping debates came about at the opening of the century in Latin-America. On one side, the opposition against tradition is materialized in the criticism against the realist
convention in narrative; while on the other hand, a debate inside the Avant-Garde itself is produced. This last tension is what the Uruguayan critic has called “the two Latin-American Avant-Gardes” in the homonymous essay of his book La Riesgosa Navegación del Escritor Exiliado (1994). Rama sees two opposed modes of aesthetic creativity: One which is thrown inside itself and advocates a strong regionalism, and another which wishes to “keep a pure Avant-Gardist formulation which implies a clear break with the past and appeals to an inexistent reality waiting in the future.” (Rama 1994, 222. Trans. Cortés 2015) Such projection into the future intensifies its involvement with the structure of European Avant-gardism while forcefully advocating for a Universalist aesthetic.

Rama sees a certain mix of fantasy and purism in those cultural manifestations closest to the European influence; that is, in the Rio del Plata region centered on the city of Buenos Aires. In this sense it would be expected that the most iconic products of that milieu such as the Oliverio Girondo of Veinte Poemas Para Ser Leídos en el Tranvía or the water colors of Xul Solar keep their distance from social or ideological debates to be inserted in the field of the unreal; the pure formal experimentation and the futuristic imagination. As Francine Masiello argued in her essay “Lenguaje e ideología. Las escuelas de vanguardia” (Masiello 2004) the city depicted in the poems of Oliverio Girondo has no past and no context. In his poems the object does not belong to the eye of the beholder (Sarlo 1988), it merely passes in front of his eyes. The city is not a social space; it is not real, but closer to a representation, to a drawing on a postcard or to the scenery in a theater. This description of the city of Girondo done by Masiello can be used to relate his world vision to that of Xul Solar. In the 1920s, the Argentinian painter produced a series of watercolors devoted exclusively to theater décors. In them, the painter does everything in order to accentuate the unreality of the depicted nature and to enhance the illusion of an image inside an image. In the water color Escena 4 (1920) Xul Solar represents a theater set in which the trees are depicted as if drawn on top of a cardboard, making a subtle reference to the modernist topic of the relation between the represented figure and the two dimensional surface in which it is presented.

However, such interpretation is only valid in virtue of an ideologically based framing of their work. When analyzing the totality of the artistic production of Xul Solar we will see that it is impossible to talk about formalism detached form social preoccupations. The Neocriollo project of Xul Solar is indeed a Universalist enterprise, the making of a new man,
but it is not a purist project of conversion towards a European ideal. On the contrary, the Neocriollo is the future creole man, a cultural anthropophagus, an Aztec and a modern whose colors are those of Nana Watzin; not because he is importing them but because he is recovering them. On the other hand this mixed, or properly creole subject, is not afraid of seemingly disjunctive mixtures adding elements coming from the other side of the Atlantic. Neocriollo language is mainly based on European languages; that is, the languages of the invader. But, as Klengel recalls it in reference to Fernández Retamar, (Klengel 200, 47 - 65) the complexity of the creole identity lays precisely in the re-signification and subversion of the cultural codes of the other. These codes are transformed and re-invented; the strength of the conqueror is used to legitimate the creole identity. This seems to be the uncomfortable supplement that many analysts have tried to avoid when dealing with Rio del Plata artistic production, to which it should be added the not less important issue of crossfertilization between different arts, which only very recently has begun to be explored in the context of the Latin-American Avant-Garde.
3.4. A Hypothesis: Torres-García, Huidobro and Solar, between Modernism and Transmodernidad

La expansión mundial del arte norteamericano encabezada por Greenberg –cuyos textos se habían convertido en el segundo paradigma del modernismo- se encontraba en fase con la política desarrollada por su departamento de estado durante la guerra fría, y por consiguiente defendía el pragmatismo y contundencia formal de la escuela de New York. Por consiguiente no resultaba útil reconocer las fuentes míticas y simbólicas reclamadas por Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman y Adolph Gottlieb, quienes se habían propuesto desarrollar un arte imbuido de valores universales buscando respuestas en las artes primitivas. Los pictogramas de Torres-García representaban otra alternativa posible. Gottlieb y Newman los estudiaron con interés, renuentes, sin embargo, a reconocer abiertamente la influencia del Uruguayo, casi un desconocido fuera de un pequeño círculo ciudadano de un país lejano carente de importancia geopolítica y cuyos coleccionistas no participaban del mercado norteamericano. (Gradowczyce 2007, 20)

Torres-García was a modernist, possibly one of the top figures of Modernism. The fight for the development of plasticism, or the pure art of structuring the pictorial materials in accordance to the inner rules of painting which is found all along Torres-García’s career, clearly reflects the ideas forwarded by Greenberg in his famous essay “Modernist Painting” (Greenberg 1993). In a 1907 text for the Barcelona magazine “Empori” entitled “La nostra ordinació i el nostre camí” (Our Agenda and Our Path35) Torres-García recommends the artist to place every object in its ideal space regardless of its place in reality. The following year, in an article for the same magazine entitled “El literati I l’artista” (“The man of letters and the artist”) he declared that the artist does not need to see the world through a literary image of it (implying a distance from cult iconography) but should see the plastic elements themselves: “Culture and knowledge are useful. However the artist should not see things as the writer. The latter does not see the plastic thing, the shape, and the color. Artistic understanding must be absolutely plastic, and everything should be subordinated to it, since it is the point of departure of the painter and the sculptor” (Torres-García 1980, 32.Trans. Cortés 2015) Torres-García proposes here a medium oriented definition of plasticism, which on its specificity and idealism precisely coincides with Greenberg’s definition of the modernist phenomenon.

35 Unless indicated otherwise all translations from Catalan into English are done by the author.
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

It quickly emerged that the unique and proper idea of competence of each art coincided with all that was unique in the nature of its medium. The task of self-criticism became to eliminate from the specific effects of each art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thus would each art be rendered “pure,” and in its “purity” find the guarantee of its standard of quality as well as of its independence. “Purity” meant self-definition, and the enterprise of self-criticism in the arts became one of self-definition with a vengeance. (Greenberg 1993, 2)

The natural conclusion of modernist art was to arrive at the exacerbation of the most salient and particular characteristic of the properly visual in opposition to volume or movement which were the domain of sculpture or the arts of the stage. Painting renders (or not) a tridimensional and stenographic illusion into a (necessarily) flat surface. The solution given to this constitutive tension was conceived by Torres-García in 1915 in purely modernist terms. A comparison of Torres-García’s predicament with Greenberg’s description of the orientation taken by modernist painting reveals their deep coincidence.

Figures should remain flat, simplification must be a work of differentiation between what is essential and what is not; it is a work of reason and not of brush. Make use of the rules of art, of your sense of proportion and you will make the miracle of something as classic as a Venus or an Apollo, which, I can assure you, comes only from nature as your own rhythmic figure. (Torres García 1915. Trans. Cortés 2015)

For flatness alone was unique and exclusive to pictorial art. The enclosing shape of the picture was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theater; color was a norm and a means shared not only with the theater, but also with sculpture. Because flatness was the only condition painting shared with no other art, Modernist painting oriented itself to flatness as it did to nothing else. (Greenberg 1961, 155)

Then comes the cancellation of the dramatic imbalance of the figure, the “violation of traditional principles of composition” for which the orthodox impressionists (Monet, Pissarro and Sisley) were responsible by creating almost undifferentiated surfaces, patterns, with no center in which all elements had almost the same value. This polyphony preceded Jackson Pollock’s “all over painting,” Mark Tobey and, yes, Joaquín Torres-García. Already in 1948 Greenberg himself had noticed the parallels between the art of the Uruguayan and the “polyphonic” or “all over” painting of American Abstract Expressionism: “Another at least partial exponent of “all over” painting is that subtle Uruguayan artist, Joaquín Torres-García.” (Greenberg 1961, 156) Torres-García’s art precisely complies with the two more salient features of modernist art: flatness\(^{36}\) and polyphony, which are present in almost – if not all – of his constructive works from 1929 on.

\(^{36}\) Of course Greenberg does not imply that all modernist painting is flat. Surrealism with its formal retour à l’ordre is proof of that.
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

Not only the art of Torres-García, but also the watercolors of Xul Solar and all the *Poèmes Peintes* of Vicente Huidobro’s *Salle XIV* respond to the characterization of modernist painting done by Greenberg. Xul Solar’s flat geometric figuration either expressively cancels the illusion of a three-dimensional space by a humoristic gesture in which a flat element is placed inside a scene with (illusory) depth (*Escena* 1920), or zooms in, presenting one or very few glowing flat figures physiologically dislocated. These figures directly interact with squares, triangles or circles, which superpose into each as is the case in the 1923 watercolor *Nana Watzin* (figure 1) It is very interesting to see that, although Torres-Garcia’s and Xul Solar’s art can perfectly be inscribed into the orthodox frame of Modernism their work is still difficult to align with other manifestations of European and Latin-American art. Even more important is the fact that the reception of their art in Buenos Aires and Montevideo was obstructed precisely because it did not fit into the codes of the kind of painting, which had or was gaining local reputation be it romantic, impressionism or cubist.

By approaching the *Poèmes Peintes* of Vicente Huidobro from the purely painterly viewpoint (an exercise which we will be doing often from now on) some general aspects of the arrangement of the elements on the page can be immediately recognized as constant in all the poems of the book. First, a basic geometric construction which arranges the elements following diagonals, straight lines and semicircles; second, the delimitation of a shallow space solely filled with flat elements; and third the differential but decentralized arrangement of discrete units (letters, objects, ribbons, color areas) which gives a clear decorative aspect to the pictures but which also completely explodes the centralized and monolithic space of calligrammatic poetry. The flat semi-geometric figuration of Xul Solar, so adventurously close to children’s art, and the polyphonic space invaded by an almost “naked” structure in Huidobro’s *Salle XIV Poèmes Peints* comply unrestrictedly with the description done by Greenberg of modernist art.

As it is difficult to question the orthodox modernist aspects found in the work of these three authors it is impossible to deny that we might also be facing three projects of transmodernism, in the sense given to the concept by Dussel. Torres-García’s *Escuela del Sur*, the name given by the master to the artistic and social revolution that the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (AAC) and Taller Torres-García (TTG) were supposed to activate, was a well-formed project of a modernity other. The Uruguayan master wished to turn Montevideo’s art system into a community of artisans and creators of an effective symbolic vocabulary and
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

objects associated to everyday activities. He partially succeed in creating a school of arts and crafts, dislocated from industrial production and with little impact over the materialist and consumerist society it wished to supersede, but which left a vast production of painting, sculpture, ceramics, wood and iron reliefs, decorative objects, textiles and murals whose history has begun to be traced. (Ramírez and Buzio de Torres 1992) Looking for the eternal rules of art that they wished to find in pre-Colombian crafts, José Collel and Gonzalo Fonseca, members of the TTG “succeeded in recreating lost techniques of pre-Colombian and Greek art, executed in red clay with engobe colors and burnished surfaces.” (Ramírez and Buzio de Torres 1992, 124) Nevertheless, Torres-García and the other members of the TTG did not conceive this as a pasadia enterprise but as the only way to put Uruguay in the modern path by transcending the Eurocentric foundations of modernity, by dislocating the violence of the instrumental reason, to put it in the words of Dussel.

Although the theorization about a project of a different modernity is less abundant in the case of Xul Solar (he did not gather hundreds of conferences in a volume as Universalismo Constructivo, as Torres-García did) it is clear that the projects of the Neocríollo and the Panamerica share a transmodern nature. As it has been already indicated by Patricia Artundo, the Neocríollo started as a transformation of the Spanish language taking elements from the Portuguese around 1915 evolving during the 1930s until it became opaque to the readers of both languages. Daniel E Nelson listed all the languages in which Xul Solar had based his Neocríollo: “hay que notar la introducción de múltiples raíces basadas en el inglés, el francés, el alemán, el italiano, el latín, el griego antiguo, el hebreo, el tupí-guaraní, el náhuatl, el sánscrito y el chino, y finalmente del lenguaje infantil y de la nomenclatura científica moderna.” (Xul Solar 2012) Xul Solar effectively aimed for the propagation of the Neocríollo, not only with his close friends such as Borges, Marechal and his own wife Micaela Cadenas, but also on its public use while addressing friends and acquaintances of the working class.

Xul solar también trató de extender el uso del creol a las clases obreras. Por ejemplo, Borges recuerda caminando por el barrio orillero de Chacarita cuando el inventor del nuevo idioma lo invitó a tomar una ginebra en el almacén La Tapera: “Allí abundaban los cuchilleros, los carreros, en fin, toda clase de personajes orilleros. Yo sentía cierto temor por ese ambiente, pero Xul estaba acostumbrado a frecuentarlo, y recuerdo que habló con ellos en creol. A mí me resultaba extraño todo eso; sin embargo Xul se manejaba con toda comodidad y lo respetaban.” (Xul Solar 2012, 40)

The Neocríollo was not only a language; it was the adjective used to talk about a new individual; a supra-national spiritualized man in need of a new language to communicate in Panamerica, the imagined continental and creole union. Far from being an Ursprache, the invented language
Two Epistemological Frameworks: Modernism and Avant-Garde

of Xul Solar navigated the opposite way; it would cluster a multiplicity of languages without preventing the parallel use of local languages as he made it clear in a conference in the Archivo general de la Nación of Buenos Aires on August 28, 1962. The process of imagining a different modernity can also be found in the articles written by Xul Solar in the 1950s for various magazines in Buenos Aires. Besides these elements the Panchess, the modified piano (see chapter 4.3.) and the Panlingua, were all adventurous (although sometimes naive and) proposals of a new technological and epistemological modern frame of social interaction.

Can one find a transmodern project in the work of Vicente Huidobro? His answer is a utopia. In 1930, the Chilean poet sensed that the conditions for a new war in Europe were eminent. A war for which new powerful weapons would be developed, indistinctively annihilating civilian populations and armies. With the certainty of this premonition on his heart, the poet contacted the Portuguese embassy in Paris gathering the necessary information for the constitution of a colony of artists in Angola where pacifist and all of those who wished to be saved from the imminent catastrophe would create an utideal society. He himself organized the circulation of small leaflets in the Metro of Paris: “¿Quiere usted salvar su pellejo? ¿No quiere perecer en la próxima guerra que se prepara? Venda sus muebles y tome el primer vapor para Angola?” (Teitelboim 1997, 159)

While neither the constitution of the colony nor the trip to Angola ever took place, Vicente Huidobro left a literary testimony of his vision in one of his most coherent narrative pieces, La Próxima, a short novel published in 1933 and written in the Italian Alps in 1930 where he almost convinced his friend Roberto Suárez to depart with him to Africa. While in other short novels such as Cagliostro and Papá o el Diario de Alicia Mir Huidobro did not succeed in the construction of a narrative universe, La Próxima shows a stronger narrative unity and a more organic insertion of the recurrent ideological motifs transmitted by the dialogues between the characters. Marxism, communism, biblical messianism and utopia converge in the project of
sustainable agricultural communitarian society dominated by cultural progress. It is true that Although Huidobro forces the communist solution, his project is fundamentally technocratic, based in cultural and technological progress, close to the society proposed by Xul Solar in his flying city Vuelvillaa.

According to Angel Rama especially after 1929 under the pressure of the process of transculturation, the regionalist solutions proposed by Latin-American writers were revised under the light of Modernism. Carpentier tunes his ear with the music of Stravinsky before rediscovering the música negra, and Miguel Ángel Asturias overwhelmed by automatic writing uses it to justify the cosmology and poetry of the black communities of Guatemala (Rama 2008, 35). In my view, the cases of Carpentier and Asturias are symmetrically opposed to those of Xul Solar and Torres-García. Instead of modifying their views about the cultural products of their own continent under the light of the European experience, their Modernism á la européen was reshaped under the light of a grass roots Universalism, which in terms of Rama could be named after the notion of cultural plasticity, or the créol, using the term favored by Glissant.

According to a 1959 text by Xul Solar recently published in Alejandro Xul Solar, Entrevistas, Artículos y Textos Inéditos (Artundo 2005) Vuelvillaa was the project of a flying city sustained by helium balloons and pushed by air currents. It would be a flying romantic cruiser, a theater of giant puppets in which transformed mutant humans would act and dance. Below the flying Vuelvilla a Sub-Villa would travel over train tracks providing all the resources for the sustainability of the flying cruiser.
The creation of a traditional drawing method in Mexico by Adolfo Best Maugard in 1926, the anthropologic investigations which effectively took place and which lead Joaquín Torres-García to the publication of _Metafísica de la Prehistoria Indoamericana_ in 1939, or the recreation of the Aztec myths of creation by Xul Solar in his early 1920 paintings, are all instances of the spirit of recuperation of that which was politically and socially muted but which fed the emancipatory and spiritual fantasies of the Latin-American intellectuals. The visits to the Ethnographic Museum of Buenos Aires done by Pedro Figari and his students in 1916, or even the Permanent exhibition of _Art Negre_ held by Vicente Huidobro in 1921 are representations of that third cultural option providing an alternative to the Hispanic colonial past and its modern substitute: Euro-American imperialism.

The work of Vicente Huidobro is overtly emancipatory against all instances of domination: his own family, the literary tradition, French and Spanish modern poetry and the language itself. He approached the pre-Colombian solution as he had once approached Christianity, mysticism, or magic; as a counterattack against society. Nevertheless, he also embodied that special mix of the rational constructor, Universalist mystic and manipulator of symbols that Torres-García and Xul Solar were. Like the two painters, he was eclectic and absorbed only what he considered the best of the tradition. Contrary to the case of Xul Solar and Torres-García, Huidobro’s personality was stronger than his own beliefs and his relation with tradition was always that of the counter-influence. He wished to be before his predecessors, he had already invented what he discovered. Even if the image of the rose flourishing in the poem had been given to him by an indigenous-American as he claimed it to be, Huidobro was always in the present, at the Avant-Garde with one foot in the present and the other in the future denying all influence and all past. This independence, which he wished to maintain in regards to the poetic work of others, is the same one that separates him from any other poet or artist, no matter how closely connected to him they might be. Vicente Huidobro created an image of himself according to which he was invulnerable to the influence of other poets and artists while admitting an almost metaphysical linkage between the poetic and artistic creators of all times among which he was included. This might be the reason why his relation with Joaquín Torres-García never eroded. Torres-García felt himself a part of this long tradition of creators and

---

38 See Carlos Montoya. *Colección de Esculturas Africanas Vicente Huidobro*. (Montoya 2006)
constructors without ever trying to place himself in the privileged position of the genius. *Universalismo Constructivo* was an anonymous art of all times, *Creacionismo* was the general poetic theory of one man: this is the temperamental difference of two sister aesthetic theories based on principles of construction and creation. Along with Xul Solar’s project of creating a general aesthetic doctrine, these theories start in the poetic realm but aim to surpass it in order to set the bases of a post-rational civilization of spiritual progress and unity. We will analyze these theories and the artistic products, which materialize them, exploring the symbolic, textual and visual levels of wonderful works as the book of *San Signos* and the *Grafías* paintings from Xul Solar; *Altazor* and the *Poèmes Peints* from Vicente Huidobro and the constructive canvases and illustrated books of Torres-García. Some of these works, such as *Altazor*, have been thoroughly studied by contemporary criticism, while others, such as the illustrated books of Torres-García, have been overlooked by most researchers for too long. In all cases, until today a comparative and interarts analysis has been missing. Through the latter a new image of Latin-American Avant-Garde will emerge, an up-to-date appreciation of surprisingly heterogeneous phenomena which aimed to break the limits of the media.
4.1 Xul Solar’s Painting Between Esoteric Mysticism and Mesoamerican Mythology

The years between 1919 and 1923 in which Xul Solar traveled between the cities of London, Turin and Munich, encompass the finding of a particular pictorial style in the multifaceted artistic trajectory of the painter along with his first steps towards interartistic experimentation. During this time the theosophical and pre-Columbian framing of his spiritual research incorporates texts and symbols into the watercolors creating an unmistakable style which has points of contact with dada and cubist painting developed in the first decade of the twentieth century, while being chromatically close to the German expressionist palette. Teresa Tedín (Tedín 2005), Abós (Abós 2004) and Glusberg (Glusberg 1998) agree that there is a simplification of line and plane, richness of color and overtone and that the incorporation of linguistic signs and symbols are the main developments of the Argentinean during this period. As Mario Gradowczyk has remarked, the human figure represented in the 1919-1923 watercolors has points of contact with the “expressionist writing” (Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988, 9) of Erich Heckel and Max Pechstein but opposes their nervous expressionist brush stroke with defined contours and the representation of placid subjects which Glusberg (Glusberg 1998, 34) has accurately named as “post cubist humanoids.” Moreover, argues Gradowczyk, the incorporation of ribbons, semicircles, arrows and flags in these paintings is reminiscent of the work of El Lissitzky and that of Malevich from 1914-1915, placing our

39 Symbol: used here in the large sense of “conventional sign” whether referring to pictograms, ideograms, heraldic icons, etc. as provisionally proposed by Eco. (Eco 1976)
artist in the crossroad of pictorial expressions as separate as German expressionism and Russian constructivism.

As early as 1912 Xul Solar acquired *Der Blaue Reiter Almanach* and immediately became interested in an art which (unable to accurately pinpoint) he considered fauve, futurist and cubist and also interestingly distant from the representation of nature. Far from wanting to adhere to this group of painters, Xul Solar saw a link between his own style and that of the early expressionists, considering his own work to be more meticulous in the use of color and composition than theirs.\(^{40}\) While traveling through Italy the creator of the *Panlingua* showed great interest in esoteric Renaissance art in Rome and got seriously interested in Hinduism and Sinology in Florence (Abós 2004, 61). From 1919 in London he became familiar with the esoteric work of Helena Blavatsky, Daniel Douglas, Rudolf Steiner and Aleister Crowley. Kandinsky’s book *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* written in 1912 had been influenced by the same theosophical ideas which were later explored by Xul Solar, but there is no evidence that it was through the Russian that the Argentinean decided to explore the esoteric world of the above mentioned authors who were extremely popular in England at the time.

Besides the influence of European mysticism over the young Xul Solar during his 12 year overseas, the Argentinean had concurrently studied the mythology and iconography of the ancient cultures of Mexico and incorporated it into his work. At least five watercolors painted between 1922 and 1923 depict the world of priests, sacrificial rituals and zoomorphic deities of the Aztecs. In 1997 Adriana B. Armando and Guillermo A. Fantoni discussed the specific rendering of Aztec mythology in two paintings elaborated by Xul Solar in Munich just before returning to Argentina: *Tlaloc* (1923) (figure 2) and *Nana Watzin* (1923) (figure 1) as well as a less specific presence of Mexican iconography in the paintings *Por su Cruz Jura* (1923) *Homme des serpents* (1923) and *Jefe de dragones*. (1923), also painted in the Bavarian capital. As the Argentinean researchers suggest, Xul Solar could have gathered knowledge about the cults and religions of ancient Mexico in the works of Humbolt, Ernest Théodore Hamy (first director of the *Musée d’Etnographie du Trocadéro* in Paris) and the German anthropologist Eduard Seler,

\(^{40}\)In a 1912 letter to his father Xul Solar writes: “Pero estoy satisfecho de mí mismo porque veo como yo solo, sin inspiración exterior de ninguna clase he trabajado en la tendencia que será la dominante del arte más elevado del porvenir, por una parte, y por la otra porque veo como podre sobresalir entre estos artistas nuevos fácilmente porque tengo más sentido de la composición y del color que la mayoría de ellos.” (Abós 2004, 36)
circulating at the time on the continent. To these references should be added the illustrated translations into English of the Mayan prophesies of the *Chilam Balam of Chumayel* done in 1913 by the Museum of the University of Philadelphia and the partial translations of the *Popol Vuh* (which along with the *Chilam Balam* is one of the most complete sources of Maya cosmology to the date) which also started circulating at the beginning of the twentieth century in Europe and the Americas and which Xul Solar might have consulted before 1923. The success of exhibitions of Pre-Columbian objects like the one held in the Burlington Fine Art Club of London in 1920 and the influential *Les Arts Anciens de l'Amérique*, of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs held in Paris in 1928 (which Torres-García visited during a period when Mesoamerican and Andean art was an influence in his work) prove the great interest that the ancient cultures of the Americas had in the European public in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Stylistic affinities between the above mentioned 1923 watercolors of Xul Solar and Aztec classic painting are clearly traceable in narrative, chromatic and compositional levels. The geometric patterns and figures found in Aztec wall decoration (characteristic of the early classical Aztec period) as well as profile representation of the human figure found in their late classical friezes (Kubler 1971, 37) are both present in the five above mentioned paintings of Xul Solar. But it is the Borbonicus Codex which offers the most precise similitudes with the 1923 watercolors. Due to the quality of the pigment used by the Aztec artists, this colonial document is the most legible and well conserved example of their craft which also provides a precise narrative and historical account of the life of the empire. For his watercolors Xul Solar made use of the same colors found in the codex: different tones of blue, yellow, green, red, black and white plus magenta which is not present in the sixteenth century example. Profile representation of the stylized zoomorphic and human figure, the use of black line to define the outlines, the presence of symbolic geometrized smaller elements floating around the main characters and the representation of movement and interaction between the characters achieved through the dramatization of gestures is the main characteristics that link the Mexican Codex and the paintings exhibited by Xul Solar in the spring of 1923 in the *Musée Galliéna de Paris* (Armando and Fantoni 1997, 25). The main formal differences between the two are the high degree of detail and ornamentation used by the Mexican artist in the presentation of figure and costume which contrasts with the representational simplification used by Xul Solar as well as
a more severe use of geometry done by the latter which accounts for the typical modernist characteristics of his work.

According to Armando and Fantoni the paintings Tlaloc (figure 2) and Nana Watzin (figure 1) narrate Aztec myths of creation. Tlaloc is the ancient Mexican deity of life and creation which also incarnates communication between water and fire. Xul Solar’s homonymous painting represents the deity walking on the ocean’s surface among snake-like creatures and directing his regards towards the sun while being connected to a rainbow which begins as a stripe of blue light coming out of his mouth. Elements such as the blue feather headdress, the face painted red, a golden medallion over the chest, round eyes, and the ability to walk on water correspond to the representation of the water gods Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue in the Borbonicus Codex were used by Xul Solar in his painting to depict his modern interpretation of the Mesoamerican myth. Following the interpretation done by Armando and Fantoni Xul Solar’s painting represents the end of the third age of the world in Aztec cosmology. The red sky and the arrow-lightings of Xul Solar’s painting represent the moment in which the sun of water unchains an igneous cataclysm and a rain of fire and lighting covers the earth.

In his sixteenth century illustrated codex Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España, Friar Bernardino de Sahagún transcribed for the first time into Spanish the Aztec myth of Nana Watzin, in which the world is renewed by the sacrifice of the deity in the sacred flames. The myth was represented by Xul Solar in his 1923 painting whose composition is similar to that of the representation of the Aztec festivity of the new fire depicted in the Borbonicus Codex.

As argued by Daniel E Nelson (Nelson 2012, 51) Xul Solar represents in his painting the moment in which Nana Watzin gathers his strengths and throws himself into the sacred fire in the altar of Tlazoltéotl where he burns covered in smoke and flames. The text accompanying the watercolor: “Sacra flama por sol. Nana Watzin s ‘exalta. Renovación por Fogo Santo”
points to the sacred quality of the fire and the exaltation experienced by Nana Watzin before throwing himself into the fire, an action which would cause the renewal of the world. As pointed out by Nelson, the presence of the word “pasión” below the fire has explicit sexual connotations since Nana Watzin was the god of sexual disease, also purified by the fames, schematically rendered as red arrows in Xul Solar’s painting.

Besides the narrative coincidence between the watercolors Tlaloc and Nana Watzin; and the diegesis of the Borbonicus Codex and the Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España, the speech scrolls used by Xul Solar to frame the words found in his 1923 watercolors recall those in the Mesoamerican Codex and wall painting. The murals found on the altar of Teopanaxco (modern Cuernavaca) represent priests with flowered speech scrolls achieving a pictorial and linguistic dialogue which profoundly affected Xul Solar’s the work. As Kubler argued, in these murals “the linear conventions mingle direct observation with abstract ideographic signs.” (Kubler 1971, 39) As chapter seven of this dissertation will demonstrate, the insertion of linguistic signs in the paintings of Torres-García is also related to his contact with South-American pre-Columbian arts which encouraged the painter to explore the possibilities of a universalist system in which the opposition between text and image disappears.

4.2. Image-Text Relation in the Solarian Universe

Let us now draw our attention to the content of those speech scrolls present in Xul Solar’s watercolors painted just before his arrival in Argentina. From a total of around 70 watercolors done in Europe there is a large corpus of more than 25 paintings in which Xul Solar added text to his pictorial work preceding the most ambitious projects of the Grafías and Grafías Plastiútiles in which it is difficult to decide whether one is in front of a text or an image. The added text in the 1919-1923 watercolors is present both in the form of isolated words designating the name of the characters present in the paintings (Jefa 1923, Tlaloc 1923) as well as whole sentences which usually correspond to the speech produced by the depicted characters themselves as it is the case in the works Banderas amor te alcanza from 1919 (figure 3) or Poco
podré alzarme sino la rompo (figure 4) painted one year later. In order to more accurately designate these works of art “made up of visual and verbal signs” we could use the definition of iconotext as used by R. Wagner which will also be adequate to refer to similar interarts projects produced by Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro.

By iconotext I mean the use of (by way of reference or allusion, in an explicit or implicit way) an image in a text or vice versa. I have borrowed the term from Michael Nerlich, who introduced it to designate a work of art made up of visual and verbal signs, such as Evelyne Sinamy’s novel with photographs, La Femme se découvre in which text and image form a whole (or union) that cannot be dissolved (…) When painting appropriates language, a similar shift takes place. The words must bear the burden of duration, even as they interact within the illusion of transitory time. (Wagner 1996, 15, 16)

By the time Xul Solar was working on the mentioned group of paintings the artist was making simultaneous use of Spanish, Portuguese and an early version of his invented mixed artificial language Neocriollo both in his artistic work as in the personal missives\(^{41}\) sent to his father living in Argentina. A revision of the texts found in the watercolors painted in this period shows us the first steps the artist took towards the development of this artificial language and towards the understanding of the spirit that animated his hybrid art. The main orthographic transformations and linguistic estrangement found in these works are the transposition of the letter “k” for the letter “c” in El Alfa das Kosas, (1922) and the letter “i” for the letter “y” in Apoyo Moral doi (figure 5) to which we can add the use of apocope, phrasal ellipsis and new word compounds present in works as Gestación 1919, Upa Mais Mi Forza 1922, as well as the use of Portuguese and Latin whenever the Spanish equivalent is longer. By this time Xul Solar had not yet included voices from Tupí-guaraní, Chinese or Sanskrit which have been identified by Daniel E. Nelson as present in Xul Solar’s book San Signos written between 1924 and 1937.\(^{42}\)

Although linked by a clear thematic unity, there has been no attempt to classify and study the content of these 1919-1924 hybrid works which are framed by what could be called a semantic isotopy of ascension. In Baderas Amor te alcanza two human figures are placed in an indeterminate space looking upwards in a position which clearly indicates their movement

\(^{41}\)Alvaro Abós (Abós 2004) has localized the use of modified Spanish expressions in the 1917-1922 epistolary between Xul Solar and his father in which the transposition of “kiza” for “quisás” ; “kerencia” for “reencuentro” and “y” for “i” is present.

\(^{42}\) As an exception a small addition to the use of modified Portuguese, Spanish and Latin is found in the watercolor Nana Watzin which includes the names of the gods Xolotl and Nana-Watzin coming from Náhuatl language.
on the vertical axis towards a sun headed deity. Distributed along the painting we find the following text:

```
YA
VENID
TO
TE
CO
AMOR
TE
ALCA
NZA
RA AL
FIN
```

Besides its telegraphic style and the breaking of the Spanish word “alcanza” as “alca-nza” there are no other textual anomaly in this example. On the other hand the text reinforces the idea of ascension with the use of the verb “alcanzar” (to reach) and the phrase “ya venid, te toco” (yet come, I touch you). The same holds true for other watercolors dated 1920 such as Poco podrá alzarme si no la rompo (figure 4), A los Astros (figure 6) or Apoyo moral doi (figure 5) In the first example a chained male figure tries to reach up to the sky and catch a flying bird. The text “Poco podrá alzarme sino la rompo” (but little will I elevate if I don’t break it) refers to the chain attached to his feet which prevents the man from leaving the ground symbolizing the physical aspect of life in opposition to spiritual ascent. A tension which has been identified as so called “aesthetic of anguish” (Glusberg 1998, 33) heightened by the elevated spiritual goals set by the artist. As is the case in most of Xul Solar’s watercolors the presence of ladders (and staircases) represent a path towards ascension which in the above mentioned watercolor is obstructed by the chain and by the fact that the ladders themselves cannot take the man any further. In A los Astros a female figure rides a winged horse reaching for the sky while the short text “Â LOS ASTROS” (TOWARDS THE STARS) clarifies the goal of the cosmic voyage. From a formal viewpoint A los Astros is an anomaly in the work of the artist. There are no transparencies, colors are solid, contours don’t overlap and geometric abstraction has receded emphasizing the figurative but also more finished and decorative aspects of the painting, which nevertheless is still flat—the preferred form of representation also used by Torres-García in his Constructivos and by Vicente Huidobro in his cooperative visual experiences with Robert Delaunay and the group of 1922 visual poems Poèmes Peintes. The text itself, which in most
of Xul Solar’s work is irregular and even messy, in this case is easily legible clearly imitating printed type. Conversely the watercolor Apoyo moral doi (figure 5) is what we could call an orthodox Solarian painting. It presents an unfinished texture with its extensive use of transparencies and thin layers of color, and low differentiation between background and foreground while the figures are schematic and geometric rather than expressively elongated or deformed.

It is in this kind of more simple or “childish” work that one finds higher interartistic complexity. In A los Astros (figure 6) the sentences are spread all over the painting framed by speech scrolls which might be associated with the thoughts or words of each one of the tree characters represented in the picture: the man, the snake and the bird, which are also reminiscent of the speech scrolls found in the Aztec Borbonic Codex. In the above mentioned painting text is distributed over the painting’s surface as follows:

APOYOMORALDOI

NOME CANSARÉ

MEOCULTO

FUYO i

PORAGORA

The first sentence “APOYOMORALDOI” (I give moral support)—found close to the head of the human figure at the top left corner of the watercolor—eliminates the space between the words and is written in Spanish with a slight orthographic modification replacing the last “y” with an “i.” The second sentence “FUYO I MECOULTO PORAGORA” (I flee and hide for now) corresponds to the speech of the snake and mixes Spanish and Portuguese: “FUYO” is probably a voluntary misspelling of the Portuguese “Fujo” while the letter “i” has replaced the Spanish conjunction “y.” “MEOCULTO” removes the spaces between the Spanish pronoun “me” and the verb “ocultar” conjugated in the first person of the singular, while PORAGORA

43Regarding the critique of the differentiation between background and foreground it is important to note that not only does the constructive work of Joaquín Torres-García erases such a differentiation (this is especially visible in works from the 1930s like Formas trabadas anímicas or Constructivo con formas entrelazadas from 1933) but he also theorized about the necessity to unify the two planes since they evoked a further oppositions between form and content which he wished to avoid. “El error en que se cae frecuentemente, desdoblando la obra en fondo y forma, separando lo que describe, de la manera de describirlo, estableciendo una dualidad que no debe existir.” (Torres García 1944, 325)

44Unless mentioned otherwise all translations of texts written in Neocriollo found in Solar’s watercolors are done by the author.
links the Portuguese phrase “por agora.” The last sentence in Spanish “NOME CANSARÊ” at the extreme right side of the picture might represent the message expressed by the bird (I will not get tired) and is written in the Spanish language while the space between the words has been removed. The cooperation between text and image in this example is close to the one taking place on cartoon stripes where the depicted action is clarified by the text. Nevertheless it will be difficult to establish a clear sequence of reading as well as a narrative sequence. In *Apoyo moral doi* (figure 5) the total message is equally coherent regardless of which sentence we read first; those at the right side, at the left side or in the middle. The snake, a symbol of wisdom and connection between earth and heavenly order in the work of Xul Solar, is leaving the scene, and might be hiding from the bird or from the strong sunlight, possibly because “PORAGORA” (currently) it does not have enough moral strength to attain the higher celestial order. The bird which seems to be attacking the snake might as well be flying upwards towards the sun. It seems to be stronger than the snake, but it is still doing a great effort to get closer to the astral body, insisting on its purpose by saying “NOME CANSARÊ” (I will not get tired). On the other hand, the human figure at the left is giving moral support to the bird and the snake and seems to be already at the same level as the sun, looking down to both animals.

An interesting twist of the motif of ascension is found in the 1919 water color *Podré* (figure 7) in which a political element is added and the meaning of the “obstructed rising” is reversed, winning positive connotations. In this picture a snake-like creature creeping above the ruins of civilization is marked by the symbols of gold and money and is labeled with the word PLUTO. In this context Pluto represents the god of the underworld and the treasures found inside the earth. This snake, marked with the symbols of material wealth, is being taken by the head by a human figure who is armed with an axe and is about to use it against the reptile. The man is tagged with the words SOCIALIMSO (socialism) and FORZA (strength) while a blue bird flies on top of the snake carrying a banner in which the word PODRÉ (I will be able to) is written. The whole takes place under a white sun marked with the word FUTURO (future). Boldly stated, the message here is that socialism will kill the animal of plutarchy chopping its head off in the present time before it dominates the future. This way the iconography which Xul Solar usually uses to depict a spiritual process is transposed to deliver a political message, and the interrupted ascension ceases to have negative connotation, since the snake (negatively valued this time) must be prevented from attaining the sun. It is important to take note of the early date in which the watercolor was painted (1919) since it proves the presence of social
The Visual-Textual Universe of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro

preoccupations and a clear political posture taken by the artist in a moment when formal renovation was the paramount preoccupation of the Martín Fierro Avant-Garde, which the artist was associated with. This example provides an exception to Jorge Schwartz’s thesis according to which only after 1927 would political messages be the canonic content of Latin-American literary and artistic production. In fact, the Neocriollo project implies pan-Americanism at a very practical, not only spiritual level. Besides being the language of communication of the Americas the Neocriollo is a subject, the citizen of an internationalized world, a creole ready to overcome national divisions. Politization of the spiritual project is present again in the 1927 watercolor Drago (figure 8). In this painting Latin-American nations represented by their flags are riding on top of a dragon which is being led by a woman with a mix of Eastern and pre-Columbian features holding a staff. The symbol of the scale has been placed by the artist precisely in front of the woman’s face, probably as a reference to equality and international justice—an idea which is also expressed in the 1919 painting Podré (figure 7). Moreover the head of the dragon is adorned with the symbols of Christianity (the cross), Islam (the crescent) and Judaism (David’s star) stressing the conciliatory direction of the spiritual enterprise. Cohabitation of the three religions is of course a political program on itself. Xul Solar is one of the few artists of his generation, who besides basing his art in heterogeneous religious and spiritual praxis was aware of the more general political, social and military tensions lived in the modern world. By the 1940s, the interest in the international political situation is expressed by the artist in a series of desolate monochromatic architectural landscapes such as Valle hondo (1944) or Ciudad y Abismos (1946) (figure 9) which confront the disastrous consequences of war portraying the stillness and sadness of a dead world. Such themes were absent from the work of other innovative Latin-American artists like Emilio Pettoruti, Pablo Curatella Manes or Luis Vargas Rosas who did as much as Xul Solar for the formal development or the painting of the region but who did not share the social and political sensibility of the creator of Neocriollo.

Ascension is not only a personal spiritual movement in the work of Xul Solar. As we have seen, it is linked to political and social preoccupations. A further development of this theme is found in the watercolor Tlaloc (figure 2) where the homonymous Aztec deity directs his regards towards the sun producing a “rainbow of speech” and in Nana Watzin (figure 1) which represents the preface of the process of ascension of the deity. According to Daniel E. Nelson the watercolor Nana Watzin and the book San Signos hold an intertextual relation. The latter is the account of the spiritual visions experienced by Xul Solar between 1924 and 1937.
which were rendered in 64 short texts written in Neocriollo. Nelson suggests that painting and text share the themes of holy renovation by fire, spiritual metamorphosis, expiation of sin, and presence of birds which help the traveler during his passage to the upper regions.

_San Signos_ is a posthumous edited work which had been inaccessible to the general public for more than 60 years, finally being edited and translated in 2012 when it was published following a long process of reconstruction based on the manuscripts and typescripts left by Xul Solar. In the 2005 essay _Los San Signos de Xul Solar: el libro de las mutaciones_ (in Artundo and Xul Solar 2005) Daniel E. Nelson proposed that the spiritual rising movement described by Xul Solar in his book corresponds to a recurrent or repetitive structure stratified in the eight moments. These are: meditation, development, ascension through several spiritual levels, epiphany, illumination, ecstasy, descent, and return to the physical body. The fourth section of Vision 33 of the _San Signos_, dated February 5th or 6th 1926 summarizes this movement of ascension and fall as follows:

flotisubu mo perdio en los manoscasstríos, yo manumo de tanto, asta un espacio maimás ralo. me fensentu mo nun blogbo maimás gran, i audu: “teós es pandios panglobo.” i debe ser toeqai akí. (…) i too fen’mó dentro de infinito hial’ globo, fosgrís. no puedo ya téngeme, i kaigu akí. (Xul Solar 2012. Vision 33. )

Subo flotando como perdido entre las constelaciones humanas, yo un ser humano entre tantos, hasta un espacio más y más ralo. me (sic) parece que me siento como si estuviera en un globo más y más grande, y oigo: “dios es el dios de todo y el globo de todo.” y (sic) debe ser divinamente exaltado aquí. (…) y todo parece como dentro de un infinito globo cristalino, gris fosforescente. ya (sic) no puedo tenerme, y caigo aquí. (Xul Solar 2012. Vision 33. Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)

There is a general preoccupation in the 1919-1923 watercolors to witness the struggle of the subject in order to abandon the physical limitations and rise towards illumination. Although watercolors like _Banderas amor te alcanza_ (figure 3), _Upa mais mi forza, Poco podrá alzarme sino la rompo_ (figure 4), _A los Astros_ (figure 6), or _Apoyo moral doi_ (figure 5), were painted before Xul Solar had formulated the precise method of meditation which would allow him to experience the sort of mystical visions rendered in _San Signos_ after 1924, these works are announcing the first steps of a cycle of elevation, illumination and descent, later put into words in the _San Signos_. The iconography of birds, suns, crosses, arrows, saints, snakes, stars and ribbons later to be found in his visions and in other watercolors painted in Argentina in the 1930s and 1940s, were given life in the 1919-1923 paintings which organically relate to subsequent textual and pictorial projects. This relation can be exemplified by comparing the 1919 watercolor _Podré_ (figure 7) to which we have already drawn our attention, with Vision 3
of the *San Signos* dated May 21st 1924. Xul Solar writes:

I

Un inmenso jal sol de oro, casi tokue la terra, derrame su lux hen gran chorros en pepitas likias de oro likio sobre un suelo clar liso raurue, hi yo bri sueltio rauvuelu pacá pallá, riéjan en ese suelo con mi sang’en gor’gotas suscituas una vegeta plantío de hial’palo verde. (Xul Solar 2012, 3)

I

Un inmenso sol de jalde de oro, casi tocando la tierra, derrama su luz en grandes chorros en pepitas líquidas de oro líquido sobre suelo claro y liso que se acerca rápidamente, y yo espiritualmente libre vuelo rápidamente para acá y para allá, regando ese suelo con gotas gordas de mi sangre que suscitan un campo plantado de palo verde cristalino. (Xul Solar 2012, 3. Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)

Several elements of this description are present in the scene depicted in the 1919 water color *Podré*. A low sun which is almost touching the ground sheds its light not in the shape of rays but as “pepitas likias” or yellow pebbles, and a blue bird (which in the *San Signos* vision represents the artist himself) is flying above leaving behind what could be a trace of blood drops, just as it is described in the text.

In a larger sense and also taking into account those works painted during the 1930s and 1940s, text and image come together in the Solarian universe to create a spiritual geography of the upper worlds which can be reconstructed and mapped if one knows how to match the scattered pieces of the textual and visual puzzle. Towers, paths, multi-shaped mountains made of all materials, pelerines looking for their way, fire layers, goddesses with several eyes in the shape of astral bodies, and all kinds of hybrid creatures between mineral, animal and plant are placed in different strata of a universe hierarchically divided by the vertical axe. All of the scenarios and characters described by Xul Solar in each of his 64 visions are found in his water colors but often not in a one to one relation. What is expressed in one vision might correspond to the content of several paintings, or vice versa. The landscape described in Vision 1 dated March 15th 1928 at 20:30 is associated with the contemplation of the first hexagram of the *I Ching* where the artist describes his voyage in a valley by which other pilgrims are passing by. The same scene is rendered pictorially in the watercolors *Palacios in Bría* (1932) (figure 10), *País duro en noche clara* (1933) (figure 11), and *Bosque yogui* (1931).

I. Esperu diu. Alfín entrú a valh’entre altas rocas o baus, no ne sabe. En meio hay gran cruz negra, sobre seis gradas. (…) 

2Entón apareze plen’ kiz ‘luna flu je alune una natur’nochegris, i ai también gran seud’astros masbén rostros mírin’me muitos con un oxo solo (…) circunmiru, i tudo es ‘tlgrís, mo zinki.
3. De otro lado veo muchas otras montañas artificiales en filas paralelas de este a oeste, formas especiales que se forman sin, no según, la geología: unos de forma de poliedro, otros de cristal, otros tétudos y hechos o de basalto o de basura, o de humo; no hay dos iguales entre las filas de los montes hay valles como en el que entré, con gente al fondo que veo de lejos, abajo envueltas en niebla de color ocre fosforescente: en casi cada cima hay uno o pocos hombres, en sus auras detrás (sic) de mi monte los demás en su fila son menores o muy chicos, y no tienen hombres encima (...) (Xul Solar 2012, 1).

I. Espero por mucho tiempo. Al final entro a un valle entre piedras altas o edificios, no sé de eso. En el medio hay una gran cruz negra, sobre seis peldaños. (...)

2. Entonces aparece algo que es quizás una luna llena fluida que ilumina una noche natural de color gris, y hay también grandes seres semejantes a astros, que son más bien rostros, mirándome, muchos con un solo ojo. (...) miro alrededor y todo es gris metálico.

The first part of the vision seems to describe very accurately the situation pictorially rendered by Xul Solar in Palacios in Bria (figure 10) where the artist has depicted the black cross and the stone pillars in a valley transited by hermits. Those giant one eyed beings similar to astral bodies (Xul Solar 2012, 1, 2) are common in many Xul Solar’s paintings. The 1931 painting Bosque yogui seems to particularly relate to this vision since other elements like the stone altars, the black cross, the hermit (in this case a yogi in state of meditation) and the creatures placed on top of the altars are present in the same graphic space. Part 3 of Vision 1 has also been accurately translated into a picture in the watercolors Paisaje celestial (1933) and País duro en noche clara (1933) (figure 11). In the latter artificial polygonal and column-like mountains with heads (or at least with painted eyes which transmit a physiological impression into the stone) are abundant. In the same painting we find hermits with bright auras walking far away in the valley and sitting on top of pillars (“en casi cada cima hay uno o pocos hombres en sus auras” as written in vision 1) all of which takes place on a night illuminated by the silver light of the moon.

The following table lists persistent iconographic coincidences between the 64 texts of the San Signos and the watercolors done by Xul Solar until the 1940s before he started developing his symbolic portraits and Grafias.
| Table 1.  
List of the 8 most persistent elements found both in Xul Solar’s 1919-1940 watercolors and in the book of San Signos.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of the element</th>
<th>Example of its textual location in San Signos</th>
<th>Examples of pictorial location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snake-like plants</td>
<td>“plantas simples fluidas y humeantes que serpentean hacia arriba.” Vision 2</td>
<td>Watercolors: “Casi plantas,” “vision en fin del camino.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid snake-like creatures</td>
<td>“Por fin veo nítidamente al dios de antes. Tiene una cabeza de serpiente y un gran ojo arriba.” Vision 37</td>
<td>Watercolors; “Palacio almi,” “Noche,” “Paisaje celestial banderas”, “País duro en noche clara” (figure11).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animated astral bodies</td>
<td>“grandes seres semejantes a astros, que son más bien rostros mirándome, muchos con un solo ojo.” Vision 1</td>
<td>Watercolors: “Bosque y yogui,” “Un yogui,” “Paisaje,” “Palacios in Bria” (figure 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels and higher beings</td>
<td>“voe delante de mi un país que es un ángel, con sus pies o piernas como rojas columnas de fuego.” Vision 63</td>
<td>Watercolors: “visión en fin del camino,” “pliente,” “dos anjos”, País duro en noche clara” (figure 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insect-like letters or swarms of letters</td>
<td>“entiendo que es mi propia cabeza desde el mundo que encierra y guarda el enjambre de letras, y mi yo superior como un punto.” Vision 52</td>
<td>Watercolors: “Zodíaco,” ”Muros y escaleras,” and most of the 1930s Grafías series</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3. Translatability of Textual and Visual Images

Thanks to Xul Solar’s anthology of articles and interviews published in Argentinian newspapers and periodicals of the 1940s and 1950s done by Patricia Artundo in 2005 (Xul Solar 2005) the researcher can corroborate that the Argentinean artist gave little importance to the specificity of the medium used to materialize his creative energy. Writing, painting, calligraphy, games and mechanical inventions were all equally suitable for creation and transmission of his aesthetic and spiritual beliefs. In 1924, back in Argentina, Xul Solar succeeded in combining chromatic and musical expression in one synesthetic object, the modified piano. His improved version of the piano had a shorter keyboard distributed in three rows of rounded colored keys. Taking the key of La as a basis of the system and the color violet as its representation, each note was associated with a color making the study of the instrument much more simple and intuitive. Parallel to this project Xul Solar created a modified chess game or Panchess whose rules, board and tokens were transformed in accordance to the relative movement of the planets, music theory and the duodecimal numeric system. The rules of the game shifted as it was being played on the basis of creative improvement; and every match was a map in progress of possible dialogues, astrological charts, paintings, or musical pieces. The game was described in a 1953 interview to the Argentinian magazine *El Hogar* as follows.

Cada escaque representa diez minutos de tiempo, una nota musical o dos grados y medio de arco; el tablero tiene trece casillas, por lado, siendo la primera superposición de la última, tal como en un acorde de octava. Cada jugador interviene con treinta piezas, y hay una: el azar, que es para ambos, pudiendo decidir ella una partida, no por su suerte, sino por las combinaciones o cálculos lógicos de un adversario. (…) la notación forma palabras, circunstancia que transforma el juego en un dialogo o contrapunto musical o lineal que se puede trasladar con signos taquigráficos específicos, al papel o a la tela, permitiendo desarrollar cuadros o films. (El Hogar. No 2288, 1953)

In this context of exploration with different objects, materials and media, we can understand how the artist valued his paintings and texts as materialization or translation of spiritual experiences without privileging one medium over the others. In a text dated May 1924 found in the first of several hand written notebooks devoted to the transcription of *San Signos*, Xul describes his project as follows: “To rewrite the Yi King (sic) describing each hexagram by means of pure vision. To make 63 symbolic drawings of short prose or poetical descriptions but with the most
careful attention to a uniform method presentation.” (Xul Solar 2012, 22) I would like to draw attention to the phrase “symbolic drawings of short prose.” Is the artist referring to “drawings” made out of text? Firstly we should indicate that in the case of the San Signos this should not be mistaken for a variation of typographic painting as a means to use text to create the contour or volume of a figure. In the context of the media ecology created by the relation between watercolors and texts, one should bear in mind the definition of image as an image proper in the sense discussed and criticized by W. J. T. Mitchell. On one hand images are not restricted to pictorial artifacts—they “involve multisensory apprehension and interpretation” (Mitchell 1986, 14) and on the other they act as a resemblance of the divine. “The true, literal image is the mental or spiritual one; the improper, derivative figurative image is the material shape perceived by our senses, especially the eye” (Mitchell 1986, 32). From this perspective the San Signos texts are not less of an image than the watercolors themselves, since both of them are reflections of spiritual experience.

On the other hand, by filling his pictorial images of heavenly regions, hermits and divinities with metaphysical value Xul Solar is also empowering them and overcoming the dependence of speech acts in relation to linguistic systems of communication. The direct spiritual power of the image and the attempt to overcome the opposition between alphabetic writing and other types of written communication was also paramount for the work of Torres-García. The understanding of the notion of symbols according to the father of Universalismo Constructivo is given by intuition and mediates between word and image. This means that the image is not the false reflection of the ideal world, but the only means to translate it. In his work Xul Solar dismisses the claim about the falsehood of the picture-artifact and about the silent emptiness of the image in general by affirming the translatability of his mystical experiences. This does not mean that his proposal erases the differences between artistic mediums. On the contrary, there is cooperation of two independent media. From the perspective of a rehabilitation of the spiritual image the interaction Xul Solar creates between visual mediums is successful because instead of unsatisfactory hiding human imperfection

45 Elsewhere in watercolors as Iglesia Maria (figure 33) or Proyecto Estructura para una Ciudad dating from around 1954 Xul Solar uses blocks of letters in order to represent at once linguistic messages and architectonic structural elements of building façades. Solar’s use of letters in both their concrete and semantic aspects has points of contact with Isidore Isou’s 1945 “Manifieste Lettriste” in which the author proposed the unmaking of words into letters. But while Isou recuperated the ontological value of the letter in detriment of its semantic aspect, Xul Solar never dislocates signs from their communicative value, not even when they become alive flying as swarms of insects. (See analysis of Vision 52 in chapter 5.2.)
behind the image, or using it as falsification of reality, it works as a mechanism of disclosure. Works like *Poco podre alzarme sino la rompo* where the text-image relation emphasizes the difficulty of the ascension, *Puerta del Este* (1935) where a humanoid creature seems to actively refuse the aid given by a divine hand, or *Las dos*, where the subject seems to be obsessed by the nudity of the female body, put the human – divine contradiction explicitly on the table. In the work of Xul Solar the struggle, if not resolved, is at least not mystified. Images are no longer “threatening blasphemies”; they are allowed to talk side by side to the texts. The semantic consequence of such a proposal of inter-media translatability was phrased by W. J. T. Mitchell as follows:

13) The moral here is that, from the semantic point of view, from the standpoint of referring, expressing intentions and producing effects in a viewer/listener, there is no essential difference between texts and images and thus no gap between the media to be overcome by any special ekphrastic strategies. Language can stand in for depiction and depiction can stand in for language because communicative, expressive acts, narration, argument, description, exposition and other so-called "speech acts" are not medium-specific, are not “proper” to some medium or other. I can make a promise or threaten with a visual sign as eloquently as with an utterance. While it's true that Western painting isn't generally used to perform these sorts of speech acts, there is no warrant for concluding that they could never do so, or that pictures more generally cannot be used to say just about anything. [26] It would be very difficult to account for the existence of pictographic writing systems if pictures could not be employed as the medium for complex verbal expressions. (Mitchell 1994)

This is why Xul Solar’s paintings strike us as somehow childish or naïve: in most cases they are depurated of a long list of predicates frequently associated through history with pictorial representation (perspective, finished facture, foreground-background opposition, historical setting, accurate representation of human figure and landscape, volume, coherence of the object inside a virtual physical space, lack of precise communicative meaning, and so on). Although this might be the case with many other Avant-Garde pictorial works, Xul Solar’s revaluation of the image went beyond a need for formal experimentation and pictorial transculturation of the visual modes with which he was confronted in Europe. As we will see, the reality of his mystic experiences and his social concerns defined the formal aspects of his art, while the exploration of the limits of pictorial representation and his manipulation of the linguistic sign followed the reasoning of his own mystical experiences. Via his watercolors and *San Signos* Xul Solar reclaims the openness of the realm of the image and makes a proposal of total translatability which is coherent with his postulate of a total aesthetic doctrine gathering all artistic schools as a rainbow gathers all the colors into an organized totality.
The proposal of a *Panbeldoike* and the theory of mutual interaction of the arts and the media (derived from the visual and textual rendering of Xul Solar visions, his *Panchess* and modified piano) is very close to Vicente Huidobro’s theories of translatable *creacionista* poetry to different languages and to his general theory of inter-artistic translatability expressed in his 1925 manifesto “El Creacionismo”:

Si para los poetas creacionistas lo que importa es presentar un hecho nuevo, la poesía creacionista se hace traducible y universal, pues los hechos nuevos permanecen idénticos en todas las lenguas. ...Es difícil y hasta imposible traducir una poesía en la que domina la importancia de otros elementos. No podéis traducir la música de las palabras, los ritmos de los versos que varían de una lengua a otra; pero cuando la importancia del poema reside ante todo en el objeto creado, aquél no pierde en la traducción nada de su valor esencial. De este modo, si digo en francés:

> La nuit vient des yeux d’autrui  
> o si digo en español:  
> La noche viene de los ojos ajenos  
> o en inglés:  
> Night comes from others eyes  

el efecto es siempre el mismo y los detalles lingüísticos secundarios. La poesía creacionista adquiere proporciones internacionales, pasa a ser la Poesía, y se hace accesible a todos los pueblos y razas, como la pintura, la música o la escultura. (Huidobro 1976, 737)

Between 1917 and 1925 Vicente Huidobro left behind the use of Spanish as a language of communication to appropriate the linguistic system of Guillaume Apollinaire, Pierre Reverdy, André Breton and other French non-conformist writers publishing in the pages of *Nord Sud*. The magazine directed by Reverdy was financially assisted by Huidobro himself, in an attempt to conquer the linguistic space of the new center of artistic rejuvenation that Paris had become at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to Waldo Rojas (Huidobro and Rojas 1998) the French poetry of Vicente Huidobro is steeped in the belief that languages are nomenclatures for a world of objects and ideas waiting to be named. For the *Creacionista* poet, which Rojas and Sarlo equate to the French period of Huidobro, language doesn’t work as a differential system but as primordial baptism to a reality whose contours are defined in advance. Unaware of the developments of linguistics done by Saussure in his 1915 lessons (and this is where our position differs from the analysis of Rojas), the poet proposed the total translatability of the created poem between articulated languages like Spanish, French or English, but also

---

46 *Horizon Carré*, *Tour Eiffel*, *Hallali*, *Automne Régulier*, *Tout à Coup*, the *Poèmes Peints* presented in the 1922 *Salle XIV* exhibition and a few other poems scattered in the magazines *Nord Sud* and *La Bataille Littéraire* between 1917 and 1920.
aimed at the possibility of translating the poetic message into music, design or the visual arts. This was proven by the poetic visual experience of Salle XIV (1922) and the cooperative work with Robert Delaunay Tour Eiffel (1917); by his association with the composer Edgar Varèse in the music piece Offrandes in 1922; and by the “poem to be dressed” Petite chanson pour abriter le Cœur, which was nothing more than an embroidered by Sonia Delaunay in one of her blouses reveling the verses: Petite chanson pour abriter le Cœur / le jour de froid met l’oiseau de merveille / sur chaque côté quelques mots de chaleur / vers et Cœur toujours battement pareils.

Upon his arrival to the French capital Vicente Huidobro had not only experienced a linguistic displacement of his poetry, but also wished to conquer new artistic spaces and to participate in the activities of the cubist and dada Avant-Garde. His personal relations with the young cubist painters were close and the poet made sure to leave many textual clues in his books revealing such affinities. As it is well known, his book Horizon Carré was illustrated by the Spanish cubist painter Juan Gris who made two portraits of the poet, one of which was included in Huidobro’s book Temblor de Cielo. Huidobro dedicated his Spanish book Ecuatorial and the many times reedited poem “Paysage” to Pablo Picasso, who also did a portrait of Huidobro published in the anthology Saisons Choisisies and in the catalogue of the 1922 Salle XIV exhibit. Later in 1932 Huidobro wrote an homage to the painter, and in 1941, in the now many times quoted interview by Carlos Vattier, Huidobro presented himself as part of the cubist group from which Juan Gris and the sculptor Jacques Lipchitz were his closest friends. The second part of the 1917 book Horizon Carré and the book Poemas árticos were dedicated to the Spanish cubist Juan Gris, while Poemas árticos itself and the poem “Cowboy” were also dedicated to Jacques Lipchitz. At the same time that Vicente Huidobro decided to start writing his poems in French in order to enlarge his European public and be included in the Parisian Avant-Garde, he was strengthening his relations with the young group of cubist

47 “Paysage”, a visual poem in which the verses are arranged in such a way that each strophe is in itself a little Calligramme sketching an element of a landscape composed by a moon, a tree, a mountain, a river and a grass field, was first published in Horizon Carré in 1917. This poem was later to be re-edited in the Dada Almanach whose only issue was published in Germany in 1920 gathering contributions by the most important figures of the Dada movement at the time (Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, Francis Picabia, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, Hugo Ball, Philippe Soupault etc.). “Paysage” was edited for the third time in 1922 in the catalogue of the Salle IV exhibition and later on was modified by Sara Malvar who respecting the arrangement of the text done by Huidobro added color to the figurative depiction of the landscape done with text by the poet. It is important to highlight the formal consistency of “Paysage” through all its re-editions, something that rarely happened with pomes published by the Chilean more than once.
painters. The creation of this net of relations was strategic not only as a way to promote his poetry among a larger group of artists, but as a means to be part of the development of such aesthetic. Huidobro was interested in the art of painting as such and he wished to incorporate it into his work. His theory of interartistic translatability demanded a close connection with the art of painting not only from a theoretical stand but also as a living praxis. His early experiments with visual poetry during the 1910s and his 1922 Poèmes peintes are the evidence that beyond looking for a higher visibility in the Parisian cultural scene, Vicente Huidobro was being true to the development of this Creacionista theory which aimed to the dissolution of the limits between languages and between different artistic materializations.

4.4 Vicente Huidobro’s 1913 Experiments with Visual Poetry

Visual poetry: that place of poetic intervention in which words create images or interact with them without being properly installed in the visual arts field, (Argañaraz 1986, 12) intuitively seem to be an adequate point of departure to refer to the 1913 poems of the section Japonerías de Estio of Huidobro’s Canciones en la Noche. Willard Bohn in his The Aesthetics of Visual Poetry 1914-1928 (Bohn 1986) uses the expression visual poetry in reference to the Italian futurist’s parole in libertà and what he insists on seeing as a French phenomenon along with the calligrams of Guillaume Apollinaire. According to Bohn visual poetry is a “highly mimetic genre” (Bohn 1986, 5) which embraces psycotype, words at liberty, figurative poetry, ideograms, and calligrams all of which are characterized by the value given to the spatial positioning of the words in order to create a figure, which can be the representation of an object, a geometric shape, or a an abstract shape; and which might include graphic elements like drawings, photographs or other reproductions of works in a collage-like manner.

Unlike conventional poetry, visual poetry utilizes a dual sign. It comprises two sets of signifiers and signifieds - one verbal, the other visual. The linguistic sign which constitutes a complete system in itself, functions as the first term of the poetic sign, which expands to
encompass a second signified at the visual level. In this manner the written words serve as the support for the visual message. (Bohn 1986, 5)

Victoria Pineda (Saborit and Pineda 2002) rightly pointed to the fact that visual poetry gathers together what Lessing had divided in his *Laokoon*: space and time, imitation and expression, silence and eloquence, the eye and the ear, the natural sign and the arbitrary sign. Visual poetry is the alteration of the normativity of the universe of signs which goes beyond the mixing of two different mediums. In 1912 the visual poem “Japonería” by Vicente Huidobro was published in the sixth issue of the literary magazine *Musa Joven* from Santiago de Chile, the same magazine where the young poet (who had founded it and directed it) had sketched his first ideas about creation and the end of literature as imitation. As Rosa Sarabia has indicated, the poem was later published as part of the book *Canciones en la Noche* where newer visual poems of Huidobro were also published.

Este, como otros poemas publicados en la revista a lo largo de sus seis números, formó parte de Canciones en la Noche (1913) dentro de la sección ‘Japonesías de estío’ y bajo el título definitivo de ‘Triángulo armónico’. Dicho poemario parece haber querido abarcar y resumir un siglo de estilos que van del romanticismo al mundonovismo’ (Sarabia 2008, 15).

**Triángulo armónico**

*Thesa*

La bella

Gentil princesa

Es una blanca estrella

Es una estrella japonesa.

Thesa es la más divina flor de Kioto

Y cuando pasa triunfante en su palanquin

Parece un tierno lirio, parece un pálido loto

Arrancado una tarde de estío del imperial jardín.

Todos la adoran como a una diosa, todos hasta el Mikado

Pero ella cruza por entre todos indiferente

De nadie se sabe que haya su amor logrado

Y siempre está risueña, está sonriente.

Es una Ofélia japonesa

Que a las flores amante

Loca y traviesa

Triunfante

Besa.

“The Triángulo armónico” included in *Canciones en la Noche* along with the visual poems “Fresco Nipón,” “Nipona” and “La Capilla Aldeana,” is shaped as a rhomboid or as two triangles connected at the base the lower one being the reflection of the upper one. According to Sarabia,
the poem is a parody of the modernist discourse done by a poet who was probably in contact with the antimimetic theories exposed by Apollinaire in “Du sujet dans la peinture moderne” (1912) and who following in the footsteps of the French poet had re-baptized his “ideográmás líricos” (the expression used to described his “Japonería” in 1912) to “Caligramas” using the Spanish translation of the French expression “Calligramme” used by Apollinaire in his book.

Although the interpretation of the poem as a parody of a series of out of date styles is sufficiently argued by Sarabia, it should be noted that the visual experimentation of the poem responds to certain ideas expressed two years later by Huidobro in his 1914 book Pasando y Pasando and which the young poet was to take very seriously at the time. Following Huidobro’s declarations expressed in that controversial book which was taken out of bookstores by his father shortly after its publication, art cannot be expressed in one form, but solicits an array of methods having in common the sole virtue of allowing the recipient (reader) the pleasure of recreating the artistic message. Be it an experience of oriental parody or a serious attempt to create a new kind of poetry, the constant change in the length of the verses done by Huidobro in this poem, as well as in “Fresco Nipón” and “Nipona” in order to achieve geometric figuration is a valuable attempt to translate the textual modernist experience into the visual register.

With “Fresco Nipón” Huidobro has abandoned syllabic measuring versification. (De Costa 1978, 35) The upper and lower parts of the poem are dominated by two contrasting images which relate to the opposition created by the two triangles meeting at their tips. The first contains the melting snowy volcano and the flowers which “splash” opium dreams. This evanescent or melting landscape is the one that the poet has literally “copied” on the page. The position of the triangle pointing downwards refers to the movement of downfall and reproduces the slope of the mountain. The Buddha symbolically placed in the middle of the poem serves as a source of stability before the opposite movement of expansion begins. This later movement is personified in the voice and the strings of the instrument resuming the final stereotype image of the flower-princess who, as the poem does, flourishes or emerges from her dress before running into the valley. “Fresco Nipon” is also a variation of the game with triangular shapes introduced by Huidobro in “Triangulo Armónico.” The latter showcases two triangles joined by their base while the former joins them by their axes. In both texts the transition from one triangle to the other is related to a textual clue. The lower triangle of “Triangulo Armónico” is
the reflection of the first on a mirror of water. In the eighth verse of the poem (almost its center) Huidobro introduces the lotus flower which immediately evokes the presence of a lake or a body of water without directly mentioning it. That body of water on top of which the flower floats is the axis of the poem and also the horizontal surface into which the second stanza is reflected. In a similar manner the Buddha conjured by the poet in the eighth verse of “Fresco Nipon” is the formal and symbolic center of the poem and joins the two symmetric figures. By the same token, the typographic arrangement of the poem “Nipona” creates a geometric figure displaying axial horizontal symmetry departing from the triangular shape.

**Fresco Nipón**

Cuando al morir el sol dora la nieve del Fusiyama  
Los paisajes nipones en mi cerebro copio  
Siento el olor que el crisantemo derrama  
Los vagos, dulces sueños de opio.  
Veo el campo inerme  
La pagoda muda  
Done duerme  
Budha  
Siento  
La voz viva  
El dulce lamento  
De las cuerdas de la diva.  
Como una pálida flor morisca  
Envuelta en un raro manto de tisú  
Una princesa cruza en su rápido giuriska  
Y oigo el canto de una uta melódioso de Azayasú

Although the visual arrangement of these poems could be read as an obsolete revival of the medieval Carmina Figurata, one should not see in “Fresco Nipón” and “Nipona” a simple repetition of a basic motif. In his article “Sobre Vicente Huidobro y la Poesía Visual” (Llanos Melussa 2008) Llanos Melussa justifies the omission of the poem “Nipona” under the claim that it does not add anything to the genre and that it is nothing but a variation of the poems. “Triangulo armónico” and “Fresco Nipón.” Let us revise this interpretation. The figure in question is a vertical double arrow which is typographically achieved by the changing length of the verses of the poem but also by the free use of spacing leaving a clearly visible empty space at the very middle of the poem between the words “brutal” and “deseo.” As it was the
case with the other two visual poems, that empty space placed in the physical middle of the poem is also its semantic nucleus

_Nipona._

Ven
Flor rara
De aquel edén
Que llaman Yoshiwara
Ven, muñequita japonesa
Que vagaremos juntos nuestro anhelo
Cabe el maravilloso estanque de
   turquesa
   Deja que bese
   Tu rostro oblicuo
   Que se estremece
   Por un inicuo
   Brutal deseo
   ¡Oh! Déjame así
   Mientras te veo
   Como un bisquit.
Son tus ojos dos gotas ovaladas
   y enervantes
En tu rostro amarillo y algo marfileo
Y tienes los encantos lancinantes
De un ficticio y raro ensueño
Mira albas y olorosas
Sobre el plaqué
Las rosas
Té

The poem, which is a portrait of a woman, revolves around the idea of the brutal desire felt by the author of the picture who cannot but hide the actual theme of the poem under the textual surface of an idealized and symbolized register. Huidobro risks an oblique approach to a message which he wishes both to reveal and hide. We will also find a game of symmetric repetition between the contents of the first and second halves of the poem. Reading the poem from its extremities to its center it is easy to see that in both cases (in the arrow facing upwards and the one facing down) a flower is placed at the vertex of the triangles. The second verse of the poem, “Flor rara,” corresponds to the one before the last, “Las rosas.” Immediately after the mention of the flowers, moving towards the center of the poem, a dream atmosphere appears
The Visual-Textual Universe of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro

in both arrows, first in the verses “de aquel edén / que llaman Yshiwara,” and then in the arrow facing down in the verses “De un ficticio y raro ensueño.” In the middle section of the poem, the idealized description of the Japanese woman develops in the center where there is an empty space left by desire. This way the geometric horizontal symmetry of the poem is mirrored in the communicative level in the formula:

\[
\text{Flower + dream + description} \Leftrightarrow \text{description + dream + flower}
\]

La capilla Aldeana

Ave
canta
suave
que tu canto encanta
sobre el campo inerte
sones
vierte
y ora-
ciones
llora.
Desde
la cruz santa
el triunfo del sol canta
y bajo el palio azul del cielo
deshoja tus cantares sobre el suelo.
Une tus notas a las de la campana
Que ya se despereza ebria de mañana
Evangelizando la gran quietud aldeana.
Es un amanecer que en una bondad brilla
La capilla está ante la paz de la montaña
Cómo una limosnera está ante una capilla.
...Se esparce en el paisaje el aire de una extraña
Santidad, algo bíblico, algo de piel de oveja
Algo como un rocío lleno de bendiciones
Cual si el campo rezara una idílica queja
Llena de sus caricias y de sus emociones.
La capilla es como una vieja acurrucada
Y al pie de la montaña parece un cuento de hada.
junto a ella como una bandada de mendigos
Se agrupan y se acercan unos cuantos castaños
Con la malevolencia de los viejos huráños.
Y en el cuadrito lleno de ambiente y de frescura
En el paisaje alegre con castidad de lino
Pinta un brochazo negro la sotana del cura.
Cuando ya la tarde alarga su sombra sobre el camino...

It is thus impossible to agree with Llanos Melussa and interpret the visual arrangement of the poem as only a matter of typographic reorganization detached from the poetic and
semantic qualities of the work. Although Huidobro’s poetic theories and poetry is highly visual and demands an analysis of its extra linguistic elements, most of the commenters of his work have not yet confronted the problem of a poetry that proposes a new type of text. Since the messages of these poems are transmitted through the interaction of phrasal unities within a hierarchic and semanticized plane, the process of reading goes beyond the actualization of linguistic contents. In the three poems analyzed so far the empty spaces, the duplicity of the geometric figures and the forms themselves (be them an acute angle, the horizontal base of a triangle or the sense of direction produced by an arrow) produce specific meanings and frame the reading process. This is even more evident in the poem “La Capilla Aldeana,” a work re-elaborated several times by Huidobro and whose final version achieves a “pontilliste effect visualizing text and context in one visual texture.” (De Costa 1978)

Indeed the fact that the shape of the poem is sufficiently ambiguous so that it can be simultaneously read as a chapel but also as a hunched old lady and that both interpretations are equally sustained by the text in the verses “La Capilla es como una vieja acurrucada / y al pie de la montaña parece un cuento de hada” bear witness to a poetic treatment of the visual image with which the poet has achieved a degree of polysemy close to the one expressed by the textual message itself. The same holds true for the ambiguity of the shape inspired by the first verses of the poem which form the chapel’s cross but which also might be read as the shape of a bird spreading its wings, a possibility reinforced by the content of the verses themselves: “Ave / canta / suave / que tu canto encanta / sobre el campo inerte.” Through this work of semantic unfolding the Chilean embraced his belief in the translatability of the artistic message (later theorized in his 1925 Manifesto El Creacionismo) and poetically materialized the contents of his 1914 Teoría del sugerimiento: the need to keep a high degree of ambiguity in poetry by evoking images which are to be reconstructed in the spirit of the reader.

Four years later after the publication of Canciones en la Noche and, the same year that Huidobro published his first book in French, Horizon Carré, the Chilean reedited his poem “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13) already published in the magazine Nord Sud, in a collaborative edition with Robert Delaunay from which the painter provided two reproductions of the Eiffel tower. After the failed project to collaborate with Stravinsky and Delaunay in the creation of the ballet Football that same year, Huidobro was engaged in two more inter-artistic cooperative projects, Offrandes with music by Edgar Varèse and the poem-dress “Petite chanson pour arbitre le
Coeur” created by Sonia Delaunay in 1922. The 16 of May of the same year Vicente Huidobro surprised the Parisian public with the presentation of 13 Poèmes Peints in an exhibition at the Théâtre Edouard VII in Paris which apparently had to be closed down only 3 days after the opening because of protests by the public. (Perez and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 2001, 55) This material, which Huidobro wished to publish immediately in the form of a book entitled Salle XIV but edited for the first time in 2001, is the most important interarts project of the Chilean in which his theory of total translatability goes beyond the level of language to function in the visual space. This group of poems which have been shortly and partially analyzed by De Costa, Goic and Sarabia, is the object of study of our next section in which I propose a close, although not definitive, reading of the visual poems aiming to do justice to their interplay of visual and textual elements.

4.5. Salle XIV

As we arrive to the 1922 Poèmes peintes we will find a new level of complexity concerning the relation text-visual image. In order to analyze Huidobro’s Poèmes peintes I propose a differentiation between two main functions: i.) one in which the limit of a media is tested or bent by appropriating certain characteristics which are typical of a different medium. Usually this will take the form of typographic picturing, whenever this intervention implies a rearrangement of the verse and the breaking of the strophic distribution to create geometric, abstract or clearly figurative shapes. ii.) Hybrid manifestations (or “mixed arts”) in which two clearly distinguishable media strata interact in one semantic expressive or artistic unit, as it is the case in Xul Solar’s 1919-1923 watercolors.

Following the distinction proposed here we could classify the group of 13 poems of Huidobro’s Salle XIV into two groups. The first is composed of the poems “Ocean I,” (Figure 12) “Ocean II,” “Tour Eiffel,” (1922) (figure 13) “Piano,” (figure 14) “Marine,” (figure 15) and the collaborative work between Huidobro and Delaunay: Tour Eiffel (1917). All of these are visual poems in which hybridity is the most salient feature. Textual and visual strata are easily discernible and the poetic message is produced in the space of interaction between those two
levels. The second group is composed of the visual poems “Minuit,” (figure 16) “Couchant,” (figure 17) “Kaleidoscope,” (figure 18) “Moulin” (figure 19) and “Paysage” differing from the first group by their extensive use of typographical picturing. As it was the case with Xul Solar’s 1919-1924 watercolors, the text-image relationship in Huidobro’s poems is defined by an anchorage function (Barthes 1982) which might be simple or develop itself on various levels. According to Sara

Sarabia “Huidobro was to follow in his contemporary’s footsteps: Minuit, Couchant, Paysage and Moulin are extreme lyrical alchemy in the style of Apollinaire, they were calligrammatic exercises” (Sarabia and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 200, 292). As we can see I follow Sarabia’s organization by proposing these four poems as examples of visual poetry guided by the use of typographical picturing. In this sense my contribution is merely the simplification of the conceptual panorama by proposing only two concepts suitable to classify most of the different types of visual intervention proposed by Huidobro in his poems. This way we avoid the use of many specific—but often interchangeable—categories such as typography (Chrzanowski), visualization (de Costa), calligram (Busto Ogden, Paz –Soldan, Castillo, Goic and others) ideogram, figurative poem, abstract poem, non-figurative isometric poem (Goic), Carmina Figurata, lyrical ideogram (Sarabia), lyric polyphony (Cifuentes-Aldante) and so on. Lastly the poem “6 Heures–Octobre” will be difficult to classify as a visual poem at all since the only quality that distinguishes it from a regular poem is its large format: 62 x 50 cm. A better name for this kind of work would be “poster-poem.” Besides its uncommon large format and font size used to make the poem suitable to be hung and exhibited on the walls of the Edouard VII Theater, it does not display any kind of typographic irregularity.

Poems “Ocean I” (figure 12) and “Ocean II” are identical except for their background color. The first one uses a gradation of greens in order to differentiate between the background formed by the sky and the ocean, and the handwritten text; while the second makes use of a variation of orange tonalities for the same purposes. Here the background works as a setting and as a pictorial representation of the main signifier: the ocean, around which other signifiers rotate. These are the water, the port, the waves, the foam, a ship, and a “wet sun” which are all explicitly mentioned in the text. The cubist simultaneity to which David Bary (1962) drew his attention in the analysis of Horizon Carré, El Espejo de Agua and Poemas Árticos, is perfectly
rendered by Huidobro in “Ocean I” (figure 12) and “Ocean II.” The poems respond as well to the abolition of distance referred to by Gloria de Videlo in the poem “Express:”

Los recursos literarios que permiten la expresión de este poeta expandido y ubicuo, de visión aérea que permite abolir las distancias y aunar tiempos distintos, son los propios del simultaneísmo: superposiciones y condensaciones espaciales y temporales, la «visión» (imagen que atribuye cualidades o funciones irreales a un ser, tales como la dimensión cósmica, la capacidad de vuelo),17 las relaciones causa efecto que se apartan de lo experiencial, la imagen creacionista, que aproxima en la comparación realidades distantes entre sí (Videla de Rivero 1994, 39)

In the two versions of “Ocean,” *la mer* and *le bar* are related by contiguity without having any syntactic connection. The verses “*quand il y a le dancing ou la tempête / les violons de la mer obéissent à ma baquette*” directly unite dance and storm with the French conjunction “*ou*” besides introducing “the violins of the sea” as a ready-made unit which needs no further explanation. The poem ends with the unification of the violin (or the more abstract “music of the violin”) and the ship in the verse “*et un bateau qui s’éloigne comme un air de violon.*” This procedure results in the fusion of maritime space with the dancing floor of a ballroom where the music is the tempest and the instruments are the ships. Once the background picture absorbs that double signifier we cease to see it exclusively as a schematic representation of the ocean to simultaneously consider the upper section of the picture as a stage and the larger section as the floor of the ballroom. A similarly suggestive re-evaluation of the austere image used as a background is found in the poem “Marine.” (figure 15) If the text is removed we are left with a black rectangle framed by two decorative zigzag ribbons, but once the image is contextualized the black rectangle turns into a “*mer sans amis oubliée de naufrages*” or a “sad ocean without friends forgotten by the wreck ships” while the ribbons become schematic waves playing the piano. Although it is unclear whether Huidobro himself did the graphic work necessary for the consolidation of his *Poèmes peints* or if Robert Delaunay was partially responsible for giving life to the ideas transmitted to him by Vicente Huidobro—the thesis favored by Carlos Pérez (Perez and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2001)—all the sketches on which the final version of the visual poems are based were done and designed by Huidobro who always indicated the colors to be used in the final version of the poems. This point should not be missed if one wishes to understand what kind of graphic modality Huidobro was aiming at.

In the case of “Marine” (figure 15) the zigzag lines have a clear representational value; they are geometrically schematized representations of the ocean waves and not only geometric patterns. This style of flat abstracted or simplified figuration is related to the work of Juan Gris,
The Visual-Textual Universe of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro

Picasso and Delaunay while having major points of contact with Tarsila do Amaral’s art. Although there is no direct influence, the graphic result achieved by Huidobro in his _Poèmes Peints_ is very similar to do Amaral’s work in terms of chromatic vocabulary, outline and composition. Do Amaral and Huidobro make use of monochromatic planes whose outline is clearly delimited producing the impression of cut color paper carefully pasted on the canvas. They do not dislocate the figure or make use of simultaneous perspective as the cubist painters do. Huidobro’s work is more geometric and simplified than Tarsila do Amaral’s; but this might be related to practical constrains since Huidobro never received formal education in the visual arts. If Robert Delaunay was actually responsible for creating the final version of these visual poems, he did so hiding his individuality behind the work. The painter was translating Huidobro’s ideas and created something closer to Latin-American modernist painting than to his previous orfist works.

“Tour Eiffel” (1922) (figure 13) is one of the poems deploying the highest number of interpretative possibilities and visual ambiguity of the group. The original version of this _Poème peint_ present in the _Salle XIV_ exhibition has been lost. It was later reconstructed in 2001 with the aid of black and white photographs taken around 1922 and a sketch done by Huidobro himself in which the colors of the composition were indicated. This visual poem makes use of very restricted typographic picturing seen in the diagonal arrangement of the first two verses which form the top angle of the triangle and in the last ones slanted in the same fashion at the base. The picture represents a very schematic flat version of the Eiffel Tower by means of a simple white full triangle over a clear blue “sky,” plus a black semicircle at the very bottom creating the arcade of the structure. This reading which is reinforced by the title of the poem itself and by the words “Tour Eiffel” written in very big characters at the bottom of the picture is immediately contradicted by the first verses of the poem “Œil d’oiseau / dans le ciel mou.” In light of the opening verses one is compelled to immediately see the picture as something different. The white triangle, which at first sight represented the Eiffel Tower, becomes the beak of a bird, while the black semicircle or arcade turns into the eye of the animal and the diagonal text “tour Eiffel” convert into its nostrils. It is important to bear in mind that besides the vortex of the triangular shape, there is no “natural” or analogue affinity between the shape of the tower and that of the head of a bird. The image created by Huidobro in his sketch (but probably rendered in its final form by Delaunay as suggested by Carlos Pérez) is explicitly ambiguous and obliterates both the concave contour of the tower as well as its grid structure,
which if present would make it difficult to see the image of a bird and a tower at once. This can be easily proved by observing the depictions of the Eiffel Tower used in the homonymous 1917 cooperative book made by Huidobro and Delaunay in which two depictions of the tower made by the French artist are printed: one in a colorful orfist style incorporating the discs of light commonly used by Delaunay in his paintings at that time, and a second picture reproducing a 1910 canvas from the same artist in which the Eiffel Tower is depicted in an analytic cubist style. None of these depictions could be mistaken by a representation—not even a transfigured representation, of a bird. According to Rosa Sarabia (Sarabia 2003, 125-128) the fragmented verses of the 1917 poem *Tour Eiffel* go hand in hand with the fragmentation of the object done in the paintings of Delaunay, while the portions of reality partially rendered both by the text and by the visual image are used as dispersed indexes or synecdoches of the tangential indicated reality.

The procedure taking place in “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13) is a different one. In this case instead of reinforcing the meaning of the picture the text is stretching the semantic space and adding interpretative possibilities. This way Huidobro creates a polysemic visual effect in a purely two-dimensional flat space exploring possibilities foreseen by the cubist aesthetic while being very close to geometric abstraction. This defamiliarization of the image is taken further when Huidobro erases the boundaries between the sky and the ocean in the fourth verse of the poem: “*que ce soit le ciel ou l’eau*” and unites the two created images of the bird and the tower into one producing a bird-tower which flies through time with a half-moon in the background. That “*lune de voyageurs qui se dégonfle au loin*” is represented by the black semicircle which previously was interpreted as both the arch of the tower and the black eye of the bird. The text works with a series of semicircles functioning as a repetitive expansive motif culminating with the image of a dead black world. This procedure of repetition and variation of a motif which loses centrality but gains in texture and topological distribution is a typical Huidobrian procedure clearly present in the visual poem “Moulin” (figure 19) as well as in *Altazor*. With the series of circles: arcade, eye, moon, death black world, Huidobro does not repeat the visual information found in the painting but increases its semantic value. The reader might have noticed that I have added the adjective “black” to the noun “world” – absent in the text, in order to emphasize the fact that the image is fostering new readings of the text so that the totality of the image produced by this iconotext cannot be restricted to the one created by the text and then planted upon the picture. In fact the sense of the poem and the value of the images multiply
outside the limit of the visual and linguistic media. The paradigmatic values expand and the
reader has the impression that they overpass the materiality of the poem. Huidobro writes “elle
connait l’abîme où tombent les années / elle voit tout / la nuit qui se dénue / une lune de
voyageurs qui se dégonfle au loin,” but in the visual level he asserts that the abysm were the
years fall is the eye of a bird with a moon on his head. The poet writes “elle sera toute seule
daus la journée profonde / Après la fin du monde” but the image represents a black world
receding downwards behind the tower which represents the sky and the future. This semantic
surplus transmitted by the image seems to contradict the idea of ascension in a “deep day”
expressed in the second to last verse, in an interplay of hope and solitude which is not
completely resolved.

The serigraphy “Piano” (figure 14); also exhibited in the art gallery of the Théâtre
Edouard VII in the frame of the Salle XIV evening is our last hybrid visual poem. The examples
of visual poetry that will be studied afterwards make heavy use of typographical writing and
low use of hybridization, reversing the logic of the works to which we have devoted our
attention until now.

In “Piano,” the background picture used in the serigraphy is a flat representation of a
schematic black Grand piano whose resonance box is simultaneously an open base which
instead of holding a music score is framing a poem written in French with white characters. The
text of the poem itself presents strophic disposition, inner rhymes inside the verses, use of
rhetorical figures of speech and other poetic devices. We might read the poem “as a poem,”
listen to the sounds appreciating the choice of words, the strength of the images, the
estrangement of language and so on but we are still confronted with the problem posed by the
image of the piano and the possibilities of interpretation which the tension between image and
text, creates. The most salient characteristic of this poem is how it succeeds in creating a
dialogue between the textual and visual strata materialized in a creative contamination on both
levels. Without recourse to typographic picturing and without losing its value as a sign, the text
acquires a high pictorial value due to the pressure exerted by the picture, while the latter (as it
was the case in “Tour Eiffel” 1922) adds a level signification to the text. In the reading that I
propose, the lines of text that make up Huidobro’s poem duplicate the white keys of the piano
while the space created by the black page echoes the black keys of the instrument. The black
keys are spaced from one another and structure the way the keyboard is divided into octaves,
in the same way that the spaces and the syntagmatic relations structure the grammatical dimension of the verse. We can think about the letters of the poem as the notes printed over the score’s pentagram: they are the sounds or notes played by the instrument, while the keys of the piano—a discrete system divided by half tones\(^{48}\)—reinforce the idea that langue is a differential system based on opposing couples. (Saussure, 1975, 166-167) Huidobro is thinking of letters in terms of keys which are simultaneously the sounds of the notes being played by the piano. In this visual poem the notion of language goes well beyond the articulation of words, there is nothing substantially particular in them; they can unfold into notes and piano keys.

### Piano.

La chanson dans le jardin maritime
et ce jet d’eau que perce
les nuages d’été

Mon piano naturel
le rire au fond du soir

la chanson

Des étoiles s’éteignent à chaque son
El les oiseaux du piano
s’envolent à l’arbre
du milieu.

Le plantes du couchant
pussent à l’autre bord
MONDE ROUGE

Qui a crucifié les crépuscules
J’ai rempli le vent
Des mes doigts et mes plumes
toute s’en va
Les paroles échappent pour chaque cheveu
Et j’aperçois (sic) mes yeux
Tout au fond de sa voix

The poem “Piano” (figure 14) is framed by a virtual two page music score. In the first one, the text recreates an emergent physical movement from the deep bottom of the ocean to the sky which motivates a process of reclassification of the image itself. In a first reading, “La chanson dans le jardin maritime” is referring to the poem written on white characters against the black background of the piano taking the characteristics of a deep and obscure marine garden. The transformation occurs at the beginning of the second verse where the image of the underwater

\(^{48}\)It is significant that Xul Solar’s modified piano challenged this very notion. His improved instrument allowed the execution of a quarter of tone differences between each note by the addition of two extra rows of keys on top of the main one.
garden recedes to give place to that of the laughter at the bottom of the night: “*Mon piano naturel / le rire au fond du soir.*” This is how the white keys of the piano and the text of the poem begin their poetic transit as a representation of the song only to be permuted by a nocturnal laughter, simultaneously creating a link between “*la chanson*” and “*le rire,*” as well as between “*le jardin*” and “*le soir.*” However, the identification between these two couples of textual images is only possible by the linkage of the visual image of the piano where the two couples meet. The first and fifth verses of the poem are structurally complementary and have identical value, but such identification can only be perceived once the verses are put in the context of the image which is now part of the text. Writing is larger than language if we are to put it in Derridean terms. The picture works as a sign by becoming the place where meaning is produced or where the two messages “*La chanson dans le jardin maritime*” and “*le rire au fond du soir*” meet in the shape of the keyboard over the black background.

The same procedure is repeated from the sixth verse on where the text again takes the value of a song, although a song made of stars, and the keys of the piano become the birds which fly upwards to a tree in the middle of the page. The birds are represented in two different moments: first standing on the ground as the keys of the piano, and subsequently when they have already taken off and are flying towards the tree in the shape of letters; but each moment entails the next. The whole chain of signifiers attached to the letters is thus enlarged as follows:

\[
\text{Text } \vDash \text{ Song } \vDash \text{ Laughter } \vDash \text{ Stars } \vDash \text{ Birds.}
\]

The second page of the score or the “other shore” as the poet itself calls it, registers a complementary movement opposite the one described in the first part of the poem. Now we contemplate the dawn of the world. The poet loses his fingers, his feathers, his words, and even his own eyes are found down under. Whereas the first movement of ascension profited from a layer structure in which one meaning adds to the other, in the other shore decomposition has no order; it is pure *senseless* destruction. Creative production of meaning is cancelled finishing at the deep bottom of the voice, the favored agent of human communication. From all descents, the ultimate drop is the one that leads to silence. This double fall (a physical and semantic one) is the main theme of *Altazor,* a poem which as it will be demonstrated serves as a reading grid.
for understanding Xul Solar’s language transformation in San Signos and the relations between text and painting in his art.

The visual poems “Paysage,” “Minuit” (figure 16) and “Couchant” (figure 17) are redundant drawings of toy landscapes in which form and content constantly point to each other sharing the same playful register of Oliverio Girondo’s Veinte poemas para ser leídos en el tranvía, Martín Adán’s La casa de cartón or Xul Solar’s tiny theater scene watercolors from 1920. Whereas “Piano” (figure 14) and “Tour Eiffel” (1922) (figure 13) introduce the topic of death and the consciousness of finitude and loneliness, “Paysage,” “Minuit” and “Couchant” are the celebration of the artificial. “ATTENTION A NE PAS JOER SUR L’HERBE FRAICHEMENT PEINTE” can be read at the bottom of “Paysage.”49 By making the shapes precisely coincide with the content of each verse and then pointing to the artificiality of the procedure, Huidobro is emphasizing his own awareness of the failure of bringing such a world alive. Maximizing the referential function of the poem in which the shape talks about content and the content follows the shape; Huidobro is forgetting the principle of the “estética del sugerimiento.” The poem becomes a dangerously antipoetic or prosaic game leaving nothing to the imaginative or constructive effort of the viewer. However, read as an ironic game, Huidobro would be dismantling the illusion of representation by making all too obvious the falsehood of the procedure.

In tune with the playfulness present in “Paysage,” the poem “Couchant” (figure 17) begins with a couplet which mimics the rhyme and motifs of a children’s song: “SOLEIL PETIT OISEAU PERFUMÉ / QUI DIT AU REVOIR A L’HEURE DU THÉ.” The poem tells us the story of a sailor who risks getting burned by the setting sun. In opposition to the dawning described in “Piano” (figure 14) and the black moon of “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13) there is no further development of the content of the signifier “sun” besides being a little perfumed bird with which the bored sailor will play. The precise identification between the shape sketched by the text and its content, which is overwhelming in the case of “Paysage,” is here restricted to the first two couplets, the first one creating a semicircle representing the sun and the second tracing the line of the horizon or the line where rain ends. A similar use of typographic picturing

---

49 I will be referring here to the 1922 version of “Paysage” found in the catalogue of the Salle XIV exhibition. The poem was first published in Horizon Carré in 1917 and later in 1920 in the Dada Almanach. There is a 1925 version of the poem in which color and drawing were added. Since this last version is a transformation of the poem done by Sara Malvar and not a collaborative work with the poet I will only refer to the 1922 version in my analysis.
of simple elements like the semicircle representing the astral bodies or the straight horizontal line used as the line of the horizon is found in “Minuit” where two diagonal intersecting lines of text represent a schematic star and an oblique line of text stands for a decorative serpentine. In this poem the relation between the purely painted element (the black background) and the rest of the composition takes place as an intertextual relation between such background and the title of the poem itself. In the words of Rosa Sanabria:

In the poem Minuit white letters over the black background - the night- form a minimal astral landscape: a star, a meteorite, a moon. The difference of this painted poem to the others in the set is that neither the title of the poem nor the word “Minuit” appear written in the lines, therefore the chromatic element transforms into a symbol and it is visible just by looking at it.” (Sarabia and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2001, 294)

The reading of the black background as the midnight sky is emphasized by the presence of other elements in the same sphere such as the moon, the meteor, the star, and the astronomer. However this linear reading is disrupted by the last verse “ICI C’EST LA VALLÉ DE LARMES ET L’ASTRONOME.” The image of the valley of tears is compatible with that of the falling serpentine and the moon-balloon which deflates. Even within its playful experimentation Huidobro’s game is somber since the darkness of the sky is also that of the valley of death. The cycle of life and death and the inevitability of the end are also present in the visual poems “Moulin,” (figure 19) “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13) and “Piano” (figure 14). Following the reading of the Spanish poet Juan Larrea Cedomil Goic (Goic 2002), pointed to the funerary resonances of the poem “Minuit” (figure 16) which creates a delicate balance between a festive atmosphere and deep sadness. As in Xul Solar’s iconotextual paintings the lower section of the painting bears negative connotations while the upper section is a clear symbol of the sky. The same phenomenon is present in the poems “Moulin,” (figure 19) “Piano” (figure 14) and “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13): the end of the world, rain, night and winter are found in the lower section of the page while vision, clarity and redemption are associated to the ascending figure of the triangle and the uppermost section of the page.

---

50 I use the term intertextuality in the large sense proposed by Todorov (Todorov 1978). Intertextual relations can happen between two works, as Jacques le Fataliste dialogues with Tristam Shandy or even between a single work and a literary genre as the relation between El Quijote and and the caballeresca literature. In my example “textual transcendence” takes place between only two texts, although one of them is pictorial and the other linguistic.

51 According to Larrea the poetry of Huidobro was an incomprehensible revelation, like passing from the obverse to the reverse of existence (López González de Orduña 2000). He and Gerardo Diego where deeply influenced by the poetry of Huidobro and were the first Spanish poets to recognize he ascendance of the Chilean poet over Spanish poetry Ulltraísmo.
As Perdigó has proven, within the poetic production of Huidobro “the general progression of the books from *Ecos del Alma* to *El Espejo del Agua* was towards innerness and seclusion” (Perdigó 1994, 91). While the theme of death was already present in the early poetry book *Ecos del alma* (1911) there was indeed a transformation of the poetry of Huidobro going from the “celestial” (Yurkievich 2002) and “metaphysical” (Wood 1978) themes towards social preoccupations, starting with the 1918 book “Ecuatorial,” a breaking point between the young and the mature Huidobro. The 1922 *Salle XIV* poems are found at that the breakpoint between the assertiveness and celebration of formal experimentation *per se*, characteristic of the first works of Huidobro, and the post-creacionista poetry of books like *Altazor* or the anthology *Últimos Poemas*. Whereas in visual poems like “Couchant” (figure 17) and “Paysage” the presence of the graphic element parallels the playfulness of the textual message, something totally different is achieved in a poem like “Moulin” where the anguish produced by the passing of time is actualized by the poet through the graphic manipulation of written text.

With “Moulin” (figure 19) Huidobro manages to transmit a deep metaphysical uneasiness spreading his message in written and pictorial textures. The poet relates the rarefaction of the textual arrangement —the concentric placement of the verses—with the vertigo produced by the circular passing of time through the seasons, in the figure of the windmill. This poem was first published in 1921 in a single leaflet containing two versions of the same work. On the front side of the page the usual strophic disposition of the text was respected; only the words MATIN, MIDI, SOIR and NUIT placed aslant in a different column in front of the poem break with the regular strophic structure. On the reverse of the page the same poem was printed as a calligram sketching the contours of a windmill with a level of detail higher than any of the other visual poems exhibited in the Édouard VII theater the night of May 16th, 1922. This leaflet was actually included in the catalogue of the *Salle XIV* exhibition as a poème peint which, in opposition to the works hanging on the walls, could be taken home and carefully inspected. According to Waldo Rojas in the introduction to Huidobro’s *Obras Poéticas en Francés*. (Huidobro 1998) we know that the same poem was reproduced in the first issue of *Creación*—the magazine directed by Huidobro—in April 1921, and again on March 5th, 1923 in the newspaper *Los Tiempos*. Around 1925 a modified version of the poem was created by Sara Malvar who, as it was the case with “Paysage,” added color and some decorative elements to the poem (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2001) without the intervention of the poet himself. As it was the case with the poem “Paysage” the version here
analyzed corresponds to the one done by the poet and in this case included in the *Salle XIV* catalogue as a separate leaflet.

In “Moulin” both visual and semantic axes interlock precisely. The center of the poem and that of the main structure of the windmill are marked by the signifier *patience*. This is the isotopy around which the seasons and other temporal markers rotate. Each one of the four seasons is distributed around the axe on each blade of the mill and connected to it by a word indicating a part of the day. The word “MATIN” links the axe with the season spring, while “MIDI,” “SOIR” and “NUIT” are connected to summer, autumn and winter following a culturally codified chain of signification emphasized by elements like flowers, fruits, the cross and the ice each related to one season and one part of the day. As long as this chain of meaning works as a cognitive guide enabling interpretation it should be considered as a frame, however stereotyped it might be (Wolf and Bernhart 2006.) Moreover, this frame is at its time being framed by a bigger graphic and semantic structure surrounding the whole composition: “*MOULIN DE LA MORT MOULIN DE LA VIE / MOUD LES INSTANTS COMME UNE HORLOGE / ILS SONT DES GRAINS AUSSI MOULIN DE LA MÉLANCOLIE / FARINE DU TEMPS QUI FERA NOS CHEVEUX BLANCS.*” Without renouncing the stereotyped chain of signifiers symbolizing each season and each part of the day, a second frame dominates the interpretation of the poem: this is the windmill of life and death, the windmill of time whose product is the almost palpable “flour of time.” This is the real windmill, or as the poet puts it “*VOILÀ ICI LE VRAI MOULIN / NE OUBLIEZ JAMAIS SA CHANSON.*” Acting at once as a physical and semantic frame, the value of substantives like “*mort,*” “*instant*” “*horloge,*” “*mélancolie*” and “*temps*” dominate the reading of the whole composition and guide our interpretation transmitting a sense of decay through the spinning of the blades which rotate in space and time towards death.

To conclude this reading of Huidobro’s *Poèmes Peintes* we are now taken to the textual-visual experience of “Kaleidoscope,” (figure 18) one of the most interesting poems of the *Salle XIV* series. This poem makes extensive use of typographic picturing in order to produce a geometric shape recalling the classical Greek *technopaegnion*, a reading favored by Sarabia who has also seen points of contact between the poem and pictorial geometric abstraction:

Kaléidoscope is an example of technopaegnion: the verses are a perfect rhomboidal frame for the coloured figure. By the same token, this perfection is broken in its interior where the cross-shaped verses purposely fail to form an acrostic (an old visual tool combining a phonic-graphic
unity) and produce a delicate cacophony by duplicating the “D” - a significant imbalance where the graphic boycotts the word “DISCIPLINE.” Of all the figures, Kaléidoscope is the most modern, closest to the geometric abstraction that Mondrian, Malevich and Picabia were already producing in the 1920’s. It is a flat figure that rejects the volume of the artistic space. (Sarabia and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia 200, 293)

Like “Moulin,” (figure 19) “Kaleidoscope” is characterized by a strong visual framing controlling the semantic level of the composition in a univocal fashion. One semantic unit is redundantly indicated, described, and sectioned, but in such a way that without the paratextual presence of the image and the title it would be almost impossible to derive any meaning at all from the poem. The poetic efficacy of “kaleidoscope” lies in the paradoxical insistence on an object which nevertheless is being hidden. The verses 1 to 8 have no common thematic ground. If they were decontextualized and taken out of their visual ecology it would be very plausible to assume that the poet has gathered scattered verses from different poems to make a new one, or that he has purposely juxtaposed unrelated lines in a senseless collage or “colcha de retazos” in order to produce a semantic relation only achieved through spatial contiguity. The eight numbered lines that make up the poem in the order proposed by the poet, plus the two cross-shaped lines which produce the “cacophony” of the false acrostic, clearly illustrate this effect of disconnection:

1 HASARD DE LA FETE ET DU PAPILLON
2 C’EST COMME JOUER AUX DES AVEC LES SAISONS
3 DRAPEAU DRAPEAU DE L’ŒIL A QUOI CA TIENT
4 SURPRISE D’UN ACR-EN-CIEL AU FOND DE MON CHEMIN
5 TUYAU SANS BOUGIE ET PLEIN D’AME
6 MON ŒIL A JAMAIS PROJETÉ DANS LAS FLAMME
7 CHERCHEURS D’AMOUR AU FOND DE LA BOUTEILLE
8 ET LE BRUIT DE LA MER POUR TOUJOURS DANS L’OREILLE

AU BOUT DU NEZ
COUCHANT DISCIPLINE

These ten verses have no thematic unity and hardly suggest any point of reference. Besides the presence of nouns like “SAISONS,” “ARC-EN-CIEL,” “PAPILLON” and “AMOUR” socially associated with spring, it is difficult to find a directing signifier in the poem. However once the title of the composition is added and the poem is reinserted into its visual context it is all too clear that each verse is a description of the visual effects produced by looking through an object chamber which projects in a “TUYAU SANS BOUGIE ET PLEIN D’AME” images on “flames,” at “the bottom of the bottle” creating butterfly or rainbow shapes. Moreover the visual framing of the poem begins with the double set of lines of text creating the rhomboid shape which is then echoed by the presence of the geometric figure itself in the center. Once this geometric
space is established, it is possible to argue that the orange color of the rhomboid points to the amber coloration of the glass bottles, while the rhomboid shape itself recalls the small pieces of glass found inside the kaleidoscope to produce its colorful reflections.

As Sarabia suggests, the flat shape of this painted poem rejects volumetric representation and is linked to geometric abstraction and Russian constructivism. Moreover all of the visual poems presented in the 1922 Salle XIV exhibition avoid the use of perspective and depart from schematic geometric figuration in order to represent figures as the piano, ocean waves, the Eiffel Tower or a kaleidoscope, creating general points of contact with the simplified representation of Xul Solar and his inclusion of geometric shapes and text in the post 1919 water colors. This flat esthetic was not exclusively employed by Xul Solar, Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro. Many Latin-American painters active during the first half of the twentieth century were following the coordinates of twodimensional figuration and simultaneously experimenting in the field of geometric abstraction. The modernist aspects of Tarsila do Amaral’s work are visible in her use of defined and bold outlines and in the creation of a continuous space while the rehabilitation of local colors and her particular expressionism set the iconic bases of Brazilian Antropofagia. The Chilean Luis Vargas Rosas and in a lesser extend the Argentinean Emilio Pettoruti also experimented with flat figuration and geometric abstraction of the figure: The first searching for dynamic and semi-biological shapes and the latter fusing Cubism and futurism in a colorful palette. Amelia Pelaez, a gifted student of the Academia de San Alejandro in Cuba drifted away from landscape painting in order to experiment with baroque and Pre-Colombian architectonic shapes in extremely well structured work resembling the kind of figuration and light diffusion found on stained glass. Her work achieves the same degree of control of the plastic elements of the constructivist aesthetic although departing from a recuperation of Latin-American colonial architecture. Without abandoning portraiture and figuration Pedro Nel Gomez in Colombia and Camilo Mori in Chile grasped human expression and inner life by resort of minimalistic elements. Mori’s concern for drawing, line, definition and limitation of the object remind us of analogous procedures found in the painting of Tarsila do Amaral, but his desire to create a perfectly structured an balanced art takes him closer to the Universalismo Constructivo of the Uruguayan Joaquin Torres-García. The work of these artists (who were active before Argentinean, Brazilian, Colombian and Venezuelan concrete art became popular in the fifties) help us to dismiss the myth -conceived in France by André Breton- of Latin-America as a surrealist continent par excellence.
The popularity of Frida Kahlo’s symbolic self-portraits, Wilfredo Lam’s lustful Caribbean scenes or Roberto Mata’s violent physiologic morphologies which became a trademark of the spiritual life of the region were actually only one option inside a more heterogeneous panorama. It is undeniable that the work of these masters conveys the sort of expressivity and emotion difficult to find in other examples of modernist art. Their work is among the finest produced by western modernist artists. Xul Solar and specially Torres-García are very well-known artists but not necessarily for the right reasons. The astonishing results achieved by them reorganizing the hierarchies of visual and written text are achievements of the Latin-American Avant-Garde which need to be brought to light and which have not been thoroughly studied. The fact that a poetic doctrine (that of Creacionismo) is so closely linked to their painterly praxis is telling us something about the general aspect of Latin-American Avant-Garde; as we will see, the efforts towards the creation of a rigorous unified interartistic aesthetic modify the notion of text while recuperating the rational aspects of the processes of artistic creation, a theme which has been left unexplored until now.
Chapter 5. *Altazor* and the Book of *San Signos*

5.1. Celestial Landscape and Divine Language

So far we have proved the presence of visual-textual exploration in the artistic production of the Argentinean painter Xul Solar and the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro nucleated in the 1919-1923 watercolors of the former and the 1922 *Poèmes Peintes* of the latter exhibited on the occasion of the *Salle XIV* exhibition. In both cases, the elaboration of these projects has been done overseas in a period of transition from strong avant-gardist formal experimentation towards a more personal, but at the same time universal and/or social aesthetic. With the 1919-1923 paintings, Xul Solar defines the nucleus of his visual vocabulary and begins to explore religious, metaphysical and social problems fixed during the 1930s on his astral landscapes debiting from the *San Signos* visions, as well as in the paintings of architectures of the 1940s. Concurrently the 1922 visual poems of Huidobro recuperate and improve the calligrammatic experiences of his 1913 book *Canciones en la Noche* by portraying a transition through the purely innovative effect of works as “Paysage” or “Couchant” (figure 17) to the semantic complexity of visual poems such as “Piano” (figure 14) or the existentialist resonances of “Moulin” (figure 19). Working in a language other than their mother tongue, (French in the case of Huidobro and Neocriollo in the case of Xul Solar) the symbolic value given to the movements of ascension and fall are paramount for both artists during this period. As will now be demonstrated, *Altazor*, the masterpiece of Huidobro, closely relates to Xul Solar’s book of *San Signos* in terms of imagery and fundamental themes. Nevertheless, the last chants of the long poem, which have haunted the Huidobrian critic for decades with their renouncement of functionally working as communicative language, take us beyond the limits of the *San Signos* and point to the most extreme criticism of the limits of the painterly vocabulary achieved by
Xul Solar during the 1930s and two decades later at the beginning of the 1960s in his projects *Grafias* and *Grafías Plastiútiles*.

As is well known, after his short visit to Chile in 1918, Vicente Huidobro announced to the poet Rafael Cansinos Assens in Spain that he had brought with him the sketch for an ambitious poetic work aiming to solve “important aesthetic problems” (Schopf 2003, 1492). This “voyage en parachute,” was the seed of the long poem published 12 years later in 1931 under the name *Altazor o el Viaje en Paracaídas. Poema en Siete Cantos*, the most commented and translated work of the Chilean poet. Whether this poem closes the Avant-garde cycle of the poetry of Huidobro, as Teitelboim proposes, or it served as the canalization of the energies that could not be fitted under his poetic Creacionismo (the option privileged by Schopf), there is a more or less homogenous consensus in the Altazorian criticism about the multiplicity of levels of the voyage described by the poet, which is not only personal but also historical and metaphysical; this last aspect being the one that is up for examination now.

According to Saul Yurkievich, Huidobro considered poetry as the most sublime activity and placed himself high above the rest of the humankind, convinced that the poet was an exceptional individual. (Yurkievich 2002, 63) Yurkievich also argues that the young Huidobro conceals reality by means of self-reclusion or celestial flight while in *Altazor*, the conflict between the contingency of the poet and his dreams, history and metaphysics explode. Huidobro would anxiously supersede the unproblematic elevation seen in his French-published books with the antithesis of the symbolic fall. This way the poet is finally closer to the social or human tissue only when falling from the ivory tower. This fall has been interpreted by Wood as “the symbolic descent and subsequent ascent (which) parallels the concept of rebirth through death” (Wood 1978, 185) and as an intervention on the very properties of physical space and time according by Federico Schopf.

La caída acontece en un espacio aparentemente homogéneo y continuo pero que está sometido a violentas amplificaciones y contradicciones, desde el espacio sideral, infinito, incommensurable, hasta el espacio interior del sujeto también insondable (…) La caída es múltiple y tiene lugar en el espacio interior y exterior, en la atmósfera y en el espacio sideral, cósmico, caótico, en la naturaleza y en la historia, en la profundidad abisal del yo, en el pasado y en el presente, en el porvenir, en la realidad y en la realidad virtual (Schopf 2003, 1499)

*Altazor*, the diary of the poetic voyage and fall of Huidobro, is the double of another diary of astral traveling, the book of *San Signos* of Xul Solar which was also written in a lapse of 12
years from 1924 to 1936 registering in four notebooks the mystical visions experienced by the artist after being accepted as probationer in the order A...A... and being compelled to write a magic diary describing his transit in superior levels following a precise method of presentation. It should be emphasized that beyond the factuality of such spiritual transit, in the case of Xul Solar we are neither dealing with the description of a metaphorical voyage nor with the results of a spiritualist session of surrealist characteristics. The process of automatic writing or subconscious exploration is not in question here. In the frame of anthropocentric beliefs (shared in Europe by Bauhaus masters as Paul Klee and Kandinsky) and as a participant of the order of the Golden Dawn (as William Butler Yeats was) the process used by Xul Solar to achieve his visions is hyper-conscious and required a complex training which should not be mistaken with the séances de tables tournantes where many of the “automatic” texts written by René Crevel and Robert Desnos were produced. If there is a coincidence between the method used by Xul Solar to achieve his visions and other contemporaneous literary experiences, it should be found in the work of Vicente Huidobro himself who privileged a method of clarity and high concentration in order to create the poetic verb.

Si me arrebataran el instante de la producción, el momento maravilloso de la mirada abierta desmesuradamente hasta llenar el universo y absorberlo como una bomba, el instante apasionante de ese juego consistente en reunir en el papel los varios elementos, de esta partida de ajedrez contra el infinito, el único momento que me hace olvidar la realidad cotidiana, yo me suicidaría. (…)

La superconciencia se logra cuando nuestras facultades intelectuales adquieran una intensidad vibratorio superior, una longitud de onda, una calidad de onda, infinitamente más poderosa que de ordinario. (…)Dicho control no es el de la fria razón de que habla Platón, sino el de una razón elevada hasta la misma altura, puesta en el mismo plano de la imaginación. (Manifiesto de Manifiestos. Huidobro 1976, 723-724)

By inspecting Xul Solar’s entries in his personal diary, his personal correspondence with Aleister Crowley52 and the commentary made by other members of the order of the Golden Dawn, Patricia Artundo has provided sufficient evidence about the role played by Xul Solar as

---

52In a 1929 letter sent by Aleister Crowley to Xul Solar, the English founder of Thelema described the Argentinean as the “best seer I have ever tested.” (Artundo 2012, 117) It should be emphasized that the role played by the controversial figure of Aleister Crowley in the esoteric education of Xul Solar is only a proof of the interest expressed by Solar concerning the acquisition of a type of knowledge which went beyond scientific and artistic limits. This interest sent him on a quest for contemporary sources of esoteric knowledge whose veracity or falsehood is not relevant for the results of this study. The alleged occultist, prophetic, or demonical qualities of Aleister Crowley are not discussed in this thesis. Thus it is his reputation and particular status inside a social field, and not his alleged cabalistic powers, which make his relevant to us. Correspondingly, whether the visions of Xul Solar are only hallucinations, or evidence of a type of knowledge not yet understood by the western logos, it is clear that Xul Solar saw himself as something more than a painter, and that his work was intended to convey extra artistic messages.
a probatorien and about the specificity of his praxis of clairvoyance in what is called “Travelling in the Spirit Vision.”

The appurtenance of Xul Solar to the order of the Golden Dawn is comparable to that of Vicente Huidobro in the French masonic lodge Travail et Vrais Amis Fidèles where he debuted as an apprentice in 1924 achieving the title of master in 1925 following the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. From October 1920, Huidobro was associated with Le Sprit Nouveau, the Avant-Garde magazine founded by Paul Dermée with collaboration of Ozenfant and Jeanneret (Le Corbusier). Dermée was a reputed gnostic and highly ranked freemason. Ozenfant, Gris and Lipchitz, who befriended Huidobro, were also initiated in French masonry while Jeanneret was a “Maçon sans tablier,” an associated member who does not belong to any specific lodge. (Castro Morales 2013, 11) As argued by Morales, the ideas of Oswald Wirth (the high Swiss freemason admired by the members of Le Sprit Nouveau) were very influential to Huidobro. Besides being initiated by Wirth in Travail et Vrais Amis Fidèles, Huidobro collected the issues of the magazine Le Symbolisme founded by Wirth in 1912, and shared with the Swiss a conception of poetry as a creative act and of man as a god and constructor. It is possible that by 1923, the year when his anti-colonialist text Finis Britanniae was published, Vicente Huidobro had already been seriously interested in joining a freemasonic lodge. Not only Victor Haldan, the seer and political hero of the novel, belonged to a secret aristocratic society, but the enterprise of political self-determination and the protection of culture were values promoted by the Grand Lodge de France at that time shared by Huidobro in his defense of Irish independence from the British Empire. A similar program, this time not of protection but of political and spiritual salvation of the values of modern civilization is found in La Próxima, the novel published in 1934 in which the poet anticipated the magnitude of destruction that a new military conflict would bring. The same year of publication of La Próxima, Huidobro published Cagliostro, a movie script set in XVIII century pre-revolutionary France, written in 1923 which was finally published as a novel in English language under the title Mirror of a Mage in 1931 and printed once more three years later in Spanish. According to Oswald Wirth in his La Franc-Maçonnerie rendue intelligible à ses adeptes, tome 1: L'apprenti, which must have been studied by Huidobro as an apprentice of Wirth himself,
Cagliostro was the most amazing man that has ever lived and at his arrival to France the Italian was accepted in the loge *Les Philalethes* (Wirth 1920, 28). It is thus very probable that Huidobro had decided to further investigate the figure of Cagliostro in order to prepare himself as an initiated freemason, while he was also sufficiently aware of the transformations that the narrative genre was experiencing with the advent of cinema, as to write his text in the form of a movie script instead of a conventional novel.

The participation of Xul Solar and Vicente Huidobro in hermetic spiritual associations as the order of the *Golden Dawn* and the lodge *Travail et Vrais Amis Fidèles*, provide an interesting key of reading of the work of both authors. As suggested by Daniel E. Nelson, translator of the *San Signos* from *Neocriollo* to Spanish, the book of *San Signos* could be read as mystic poetic prose. Instead of being a gathering of short fictional texts, the whole would be a revelation, a vision, or image of a metaphysical travel; a reading reinforced by Xul Solar’s own exercises in the technique of “Travelling in the Spirit Vision” as part of his spiritual training. Nelson placed the *San Signos* in the same category of *Primer Sueño* from Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, a book which was also linked to *Altazor* by Belén Castro Morales (Morales 1991, 76) who argues the matching of the symbol of the tower of Babel between *Primer Sueño* and *Altazor* as a rebellious embodiment of the process of ascension. Although the frame of Huidobro’s work is clearly poetic (its title tells us that it is *poem* in seven chants) whereas the text of Xul Solar aims to be the register of an actual out of the body experience, we know that in the creative universe of the Chilean the poet holds a special almost metaphysical position. Expressing similar ideas to the ones expressed by Oswald Wirth54, Huidobro presents the poet as a god and seer, as it is declared in the manifestos *La Poesía* (1921) and *Las Siete Palabras del Poeta* (1925). By the same token the idea of traveling, paramount in *San Signos*, where every text is the description of a celestial voyage and in *Altazor*, which is also the celestial flight and descent of a de-personalized self, is present in the work of Wirth and might have influenced the work of the Chilean in that direction.

Tercer Viaje

54 In the article, “El descenso en sí mismo” quoted by Castro Morales, Wirth writes: “El hombre-dios debe completar la creación (...) Su tarea es coordinar y construir.” (Castro Morales 2013, 14)
The topic of the spiritual travel might have been induced to Vicente Huidobro through freemasonry, but the characteristics of such travel are the particular creation of the author of Altazor. In this sense, when it comes to an analysis of the description of the travel accomplished by the textual doubles of Huidobro and Xul Solar, the precise similitudes are surprising. These go far beyond the points of contact that Christianity, and the two variations of Gnosticism: freemasonry and theosophy would inevitably have in common. The universe created or visited by both authors is so close that it is almost interchangeable. It is the space of transit between the earthly territory and the astral level filled with impossible and hybrids creatures where the rules of time, space and unity of the self are broken. Mountains, birds, stars, planets, angels, broken chains, and gazes which fasten the subject to the earthly dimension are ever-present in the universe created by both.

Altazor

(…)

La luna niño de luz se escapa de alta mar

Mira este cielo lleno
Más rico que los arroyos de las minas
Cielo lleno de estrellas que esperan el bautismo
Todas esas estrellas salpicaduras de un astro de piedra lanzado en las aguas eternas
No saben lo que quieren ni si hay redes ocultas (más allá
Ni qué mano lleva las riendas
Ni qué pecho sopla el viento sobre ellas
Ni saben si no hay mano y no hay pecho
Las montañas de pesca
Tienen la altura de mis deseos
Y yo arrojo fuera de la noche mis últimas angustias
Que los pájaros cantando dispersan por el mundo. (Canto I 66-79)

Romped las ligaduras de las venas
Los lazos de la respiración y las cadenas (…)
Cadenas de miradas nos atan a la tierra

(Wirth 1920, 61)
Romped romped tantas cadenas.

(…)

(Altazor III, 1-13)

The stellar landscape described by Huidobro in these verses is the general background of the *Sans Signos*. As our short analysis of the iconography presents in the work of Xul Solar (table 1) demonstrates, elements such as the personified astral body and the space filled with stars; planets and zoomorphic creatures, are recurrent presences in Xul Solar’s watercolors; in both his book of *San Signos* and in the long poem of Huidobro, *Altazor*. Moreover, the powerful and concrete regard, a central motif of the cinematographic novel *Cagliostro* with which Huidobro won an award “for the book of the year having the best possibilities for moving picture adaptation,” (Paz-Soldán 2001, 62) offered in 1927 by the *League for Better Motion Pictures*, is also found in Xul Solar’s watercolors in which the arrow indicates the intentionality of the gaze as in *Puerta del Este* (1932) or the watercolors *Pareja Jura* (1922) and *Las dos* (1923), the latter representing the sexual attachment of the subject articulated on his lustful glaring which prevents him from attaining a higher state. The equivalent of the gaze that bounds is found in the verse of chant 4 of *Altazor*: “cadenas de miradas nos atan a la tierra.” Those chains which the Chilean poet wished to break since his early book *Pasando y Pasando* and which are also condemned by *Altazor*, keep the lowest beings of the *San Signos* nailed to the ground as it was the case with the obstructed elevation depicted in the watercolor *Poco podré alzarme sino la rompo* (figure 4). But if in Huidobro’s novel *Cagliostro* the regard of the Count exerts control over servants and lovers, the field of influence of the visual level goes beyond that of vision and is inscribed in the cinematic properties of the text which borrows elements from the aesthetic of the cinema. As it was rightly argued by Paz-Soldán in his reading of the first lines of the novel:

Huidobro carefully guides the artificial transformation of reader into spectator, or at least into a hybrid, a reader who is also a spectator: “So, reader, you aren’t leaving a bookstore, you’re entering a movie theater...the orchestra finishes. The curtains rise, or better, are drawn, and there appears: Cagliostro, by Vicente Huidobro.” (…) *Cagliostro* continuously comments on the relationship between the movement on the screen and the reader’s fixed perspective: “A coach, of strange shape and colour, advances toward the reader, the heavy thud of horses’ hooves making the whole novel shake” (…) In this play of perspectives, through the uncovering of fiction as an aesthetic artifice, Huidobro attempts to bring modernity to the novel. (Paz-Soldán 2001, 61)

Vicente Huidobro uses the surface of the paper as a screen on which his “film” is projected. The paper surface is the limit dividing reality from fiction and also the door that connects the fictional world with the real one. For Xul Solar, the door that divides the earthly plane of perception from the spiritual one is also a thin membrane, a print: each one of the 64 *I Ching*
hexagrams which provide 64 doors of transit to spiritual regions. While in a state of deep meditation, Xul Solar imagined a spiritual door through which his transit outside the physical body and towards the heavenly region began. Altazor is also a visitor of the celestial order. Next to God and the virgin, where his voyage beings, Altazor amalgamates spiritual and physical altitude. Although Xul Solar inaugurates every journey with a process of ascension from the physical body towards heavenly illumination and Altazor begins his in a privileged position in the celestial sphere before beginning his descent, both travelers will always find each other on the heights, in that very second preceding the inevitable fall. This is how Altazor begins his fall, as related on the preface of the poem:

(…) Una tarde, cogí mi paracaídas y dije: «Entre una estrella y dos golondrinas.» He aquí la muerte que se acerca como la tierra al globo que cae.
Mi madre bordaba lágrimas desiertas en los primeros arcoíris.
Y ahora mi paracaídas cae de sueño en sueño por los espacios de la muerte.
El primer día encontré un pájaro desconocido que me dijo: «Si yo fuese dromedario no tendría sed. ¿Qué hora es?» Bebió las gotas de rocío de mis cabellos, me lanzó tres miradas y media y se alejó diciendo: «Adiós» con su pañuelo soberbio.
Hacia las dos aquel día, encontré un precioso aeroplano, lleno de escamas y caracoles.
Buscaba un rinncón del cielo donde guarecerse de la lluvia.
Allá lejos, todos los barcos anclados, en la tinta de la aurora. De pronto, comenzaron a desprenderse, uno a uno, arrastrando como pabellón jirones de aurora incontesterable.
Junto con marcharse los últimos, la aurora desapareció tras algunas olas desmesuradamente infladas.
Entonces of hablar al Creador, sin nombre, que es un simple hueco en el vacío, hermoso, como un ombligo. (Altazor, Preface 9-15)

In order to discover the heaven of Xul Solar, one needs to build it up with the pieces given by each one of his visions until a general image is finally achieved. All visions are complementary and each one describes with variable degrees of the precision of elements or characteristics of the creatures found on the lower, middle and higher regions which the painter will encounter during a voyage. Vision 64 is representative being that it takes us precisely to a location analogue to the one where Altazor is found at the beginning of the homonymous poem. In this vision the painter is found next to an enormous god in the middle of a cosmic phosphorescent and dynamic setting.

5.
Ahora estou mui xai, hi circunveu, ciel’veu: por lexo kesté algo, en cuan lo miru lestou al lado, i el sense es tan choi’i tru, ke luego de plurmiré no me cenrisentu mas en mí, sino fen’ke mi cuerpo abarkel circunzonte. Esto tan túrbeme ke lolvidú i resou yo.

6.
Entón veu gran azúl divo envuelvio en mas nocje, i yo, bola nablu noche menór, lo sanmiró; su ventre ante mí son tres disaquéh surponios moncionndulos ‘manpululios; nel so tercio, muiots felices en bartola, i nel unos tan bri-tan ra’fenetícos ken cuan os miru contagianme i zas fluséntu me perdi’ona chola del divo ke me plendeslumbre, i paul’olvidu too i simul paul’estou re nel mundo.
5. Ahora estoy muy alto, y veo alrededor, veo celestialmente: por lejos que esté algo, en cuanto lo miro estoy al lado de él, y la sensación es tan instantánea y verdadera que luego de haber mirado múltiples veces no me siento más centrado en mí, sino que me parece que mi cuerpo abarca el horizonte alrededor. Esto me turba tanto que lo olvido y soy yo otra vez.

6. Entonces veo un gran dios azul envuelto en más noche, y yo, una bola en la noche azul menor, lo miro sagradamente: su vientre ante mí son dos paisajes superpuestos ondulados como montañas pululados de seres humanos; en el tercio de abajo, muchos andan felices a la bartola, y en el tercio de arriba, unos tan espirituales, tan rápidos y frenéticos que en cuanto los miro me contagian y ¡zaz! De una manera fluida me siento perdido en la cabeza del dios que me deslumbra plenamente, y paulatinamente estoy en el mundo otra vez. (Xul Solar 2012. 64 5, 6. Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)

The fusion between man and landscape described in the last line of part 5 of vision 64: “no me siento más centrado en mí, sino que me parece que mi cuerpo abarca el horizonte alrededor” is very similar to the technique of depersonalization and expansion of the self used by Huidobro in the preface of his long poem. “Mi madre bordaba lágrimas desiertas en los primeros arcoiris” or “Allá lejos, todos los barcos anclados, en la tinta de la aurora. De pronto, comenzaron a desprenderse, uno a uno, arrastrando como pabellón jirones de aurora incontesteable,” in which the landscape dissolves and the natural elements as the water and the air unify one with the other.

Once the landscape and the ego have been liberated from their limits and just before the subject begins its descent, God is found. Far from being an anthropomorphic entity, God is a navel over the black space in Altazor, and the abstract juxtaposition of three landscapes on top of each other in San Signos. The fall is the leitmotiv of Altazor and San Signos. It will be persistently conjured in verses such as: “Cae eternamente / Cae al fondo del infinito / Cae al fondo de ti mismo/ (...)” (37) and then again as a funerary image in Chant V in the lines “Se abre la tumba y al fondo se ve el otoño y el invierno / Baja lento lento un cielo de amatista / Se abre la tumba y al fondo se ve una enorme herida / Que se agranda en lo profundo de la tierra.” In San Signos the fall will be the conclusion of every one of the sixty-four visions of Xul Solar, who either suddenly or steadily, full of energy or in despair, is dropped back to his physical body after each voyage: “Y caigo fulminado para aquí, a esto y a mi cuerpo;” (42.4) “(...) antes de que todo lo que hay se me vuelque encima y me aplaste, vuelvo a este quieto mundo;” (48. 8) “(...) me extrae por segunda vez al mundo, donde la fluidez acaba en un gran borrón y humo y estoy aquí.” (61. 16)
What were the words pronounced by God just after Altazor found him on the middle of the space? Do they bear any relation with the message given to Xul Solar by the gods found on his voyage?

Far from being an isolated idea, these last words are a mantra of the Huidobrian poetics: “Creé la lengua de la boca que los hombres desviaron de su rol, haciéndola aprender a hablar... a ella, ella, la bella nadadora, desviada para siempre de su rol acuático y puramente acariciador.” This purely aquatic and caressing language, the heavy, humid and palpable word seems to be the ideal pole to which the poetics of Vicente Huidobro are attracted but which can never be fully represented. This liquid language will sparkle from time to time in the poem in the shape of mixed, transformed and invented words while completely flooding chants VI and VII and washing off the communicative function of speech.

This aquatic language displays similar characteristic to the sacred language of the gods found in Xul Solar’s heaven. In vision 52 of San Signos, the guardian of a heavenly temple directs the seer in front of a King who is simultaneously upside down and in a straight position and whose head is made out of white light shaped like an egg. “En forma de huevo de luz blanca cuyo halo frecuentemente lanza alrededor haces de luz flexibles como tentáculos” (52.4). As authoritative as Huidobro’s God, this king presents to Xul the deep primordial language, the ultimate liquid signifier which will become the model of the true sign for both the Chilean poet and the Argentinean artist.

5.

Menunde too de signos ke le salgan de la boca i no audu, ke pletan el qol mui más ke gente: son pensicoágulos ke e paul condensan en biocristales i más en moiletas ke muitah se autoquntan i recombinan, se derraman por palacio i ciudá i ne camban el ceo por tantta clar’masa de pensilúz i biofrases desde cielo ke plur’perduran. De tanta sopaleri en ke nadu no calu sino encites a vivi’en cielo, ha decide,obre i cumple, h aimante neogente ja, too asáz flu, pero luego se aclarel dize, i me
Here the biological, aquatic and vocal qualities of language have been recuperated and given to Xul Solar by a higher and divine being. The signs coming out of the kings mouth are a coagula of thought condensed in living crystals which combine and divide, swimming and creating a soup of letters just as the language shown by God to Altazor is personified and swims like an amphibian animal in the ocean made out of the voice of God. Moreover, the importance given to the mouth and the tongue are paramount for both travelers. In Altazor, before creating language, God created the mouth and the lips to hold that tongue-language. Here the ambiguity of the Spanish word “lengua” which refers both to the physiological organ of speech (tongue) as to its social architecture (language) is recuperated by Huidobro in order to emphasize the etymological relation between both of them. The same insistence is expressed in part seven of Xul Solar’s 52th vision when he is taken and put inside the mouth of the king experiencing a delightful and carnal sensation of pleasure before being thrown back to his physical body with the sensation of being one long, complicated word. Besides being a fresh multi-sensorial metaphor, the metamorphosis of the traveler into a word just after dissolving inside the mouth

---

David M. Guss, in The Selected Poetry of Vicente Huidobro, opted for translating “lengua” as tongue instead of language. Here the translator has made a contextual decision by favoring the noun that best related to other thematic elements in the page. Nevertheless, by comparing this with other entries of the word “lengua” in the poem (“lengua maternal”, lengua de profeta”) one can be sure that ambiguity cannot be solved in the use of the noun “tongue.”
of the king as a sugary piece of candy is a very strong textual motif which will repeatedly appear in his painterly work throughout the 1940s and 1950s when animals, vegetal and human bodies become an incarnation of speech.

In Adan Huidobro introduced his readers to the language of God and to the possibilities of creation through the mere act of contemplation (Zonana 1992) with Altazor, the ultimate language, the sacred word which “gives sight to the blinded,” is given to the poet as a mythical or prehistoric device swinging in the middle of an empty space beyond the beginning of time.

yo hablo en nombre de un astro por nadie conocido
Hablo en una lengua mojada en mares no nacidos
Con una voz llena de eclipses y distancias
Solemne como un combate de estrellas o galeras lejanas
Una voz que se desfonda en la noche de las rocas
Una voz que da la vista a los ciegos atentos
Los ciegos escondidos al fondo de las casas (Altazor, I 606-615)

This language born in unknown oceans, was forged in the night of the rocks which Altazor has the privilege of resurrecting (“Hay que resucitar las lenguas,” Chant III, 123) with his stature of magician and anti-poet, as having the same weight of the Solarian divine word. The voice; talking in the name of the astral bodies; heavy enough to break the bottom of the night, and as concrete as crystal: “como esos cristales alados y fatídicos”; (Altazor Chant I, 588) bears the same physic qualities of the coagula of thought and the flying swarm of symbols into which the linguistic symbol has been transformed inside the painterly and textual universe of Xul Solar.

(See the pictorial representation of language related to the zodiac signs Gemini and Libra in the watercolor Zodíaco) In San Signos, the sign is not a virtual place of semantic production but a totem, which shall not liberate itself from its material and concrete representation to which it is naturally attached and in virtue of which it is inserted in the sphere of the being and not of the enunciation. This is immediately connected to the reevaluation of the image done by Xul Solar, who has liberated it from its stance of falsification to make it concrete language or a necessary translation of the spiritual.

In a vision dated November 6, 1925, after leaving behind a sea of dead bodies which rejoice in its own perversion, Xul Solar arrives to a golden land where phosphorescent forests grow over a soil of red clouds and hordes of beasts float along human organisms of all sizes. As he ascends towards heaven, a golden angel is in charge of taking care of his soul, as the rest of his spiritual being continues the ascension. When he finally arrives to the uppermost section
of that heaven, Xul Solar is introduced to a divine symbolic language which, as that of Altazor, does not belong to him, but to the astral realm. Part five of vision twenty-one depicts the precise moment when the angel TAR OEA, announces the gift of a book of symbols which is at once the result of the work of the artist and divine revelation.

5. Cuando ji tornu, él en pie ante mí, ‘tende sus falmas i luzbandas i ne mecerre me cubre, se nombre TAR OEA. Me doke: “las regiones ke viste son un mismo cielo. Somo divos de mismo clan. Cada uno es parte dos demás, i toos en cada uno. Símbolos valgan si xe magiusan. No son lengua estable. Harás un simbo’libro pos. Te lo darán en un cielo más xai keste Cuna más cor’pondas i rela’s tene un símbolo, más veroh somus los divos, (…) Creazes, pero, i serás divi. Autocreáazeste, per. Tu obra es arraige, junte, relem distidiscosas nun macrosér. Esto eh Ciel’pu’e’i. Vivarás basti pa la obra.” (Xul Solar 2012. 21. 5)

This book of relations and correspondences, which is the future and revealed materialization of Xul Solar’s œuvre, is of paramount importance to illustrate how the process of association and multiplication of meanings is one of the fundamental creative activities of the artist and the saint. According to TAR OEA, the more correspondences and relations are evoked by a symbol the truer and deep it is. Plurisemantic symbols are the closest to divinity. Alongside the rehabilitation of the process of symbolization, we find the act of creation (here understood as the creation of relations or correspondences and thus nothing more than a synonym of the process of symbolization itself) baptized as a heavenly action: “crea continuamente y serás divino. Créate a ti mismo continuamente. Tu obra es arraigar, juntar, relacionar, cosas diferentes y distantes en un Gran ser. Esto es posible en el cielo. Vivirás lo suficiente como para concluir la obra.” (Xul Solar 2012. 21. 5. Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)
As we know, these are nothing more than the central mottos of the poetry of the author of Non-Serviam: Creation and unification of distant realities. “Debemos crear. El hombre ya no imita. Inventa, agrega a los hechos del mundo, nacidos en el seno de la Naturaleza, hechos nuevos nacidos en su cabeza,” (Huidobro 1976, 750) wrote the poet in his 1921 manifesto Época de Creación while assuring that the first, second and third conditions of the poet where “to create” as it was written on the pages of that 1925 manifesto emphatically named Creacionismo where the poet re-invents himself. Rebirth is an important but hidden motto for the poet. It is implicit in the duplication of the self into the mythical figures of Adan, Cagliostro, Mio-Cid, and Altazor. In Creacionismo, imagination is defined as the unification of two distant realities; a concept which the poet has borrowed from Voltaire’s Philosophic Dictionary to which the poet adds: “el poeta es aquel que sorprende la relación oculta que existe entre las cosas más lejanas, los ocultos hilos que las unen. Hay que pulsar aquellos hilos como las cuerdas de un arpa, y producir una resonancia que ponga en movimiento las dos realidades lejanas. La imagen es el broche que las une.” (Huidobro 1976, 728) The same theme of a reunion of distant realities had been vaguely explored by Huidobro in his 1913 book, Pasando y Pasando and again 8 years later in a more concrete form in the pages of his 1921 manifesto, “La poesía” where poetry is understood as the eternal expression before and after the end of times, making the extremes of the spirit touch one with the other.

La Poesía está antes del principio del hombre y después del fin del hombre. Ella es el lenguaje del Paraíso y el lenguaje del Juicio Final, ella ordeña las ubres de la eternidad, ella es intangible como el tabú del cielo. (…)Y no sólo de la imaginación, sino del espíritu mismo, porque la poesía no es otra cosa que el último horizonte, que es, a su vez, la arista en donde los extremos se tocan, en donde no hay contradicción ni duda. Al llegar a ese lindero final el encadenamiento habitual de los fenómenos rompe su lógica, y al otro lado, en donde empiezan las tierras del poeta, la cadena se rehace en una lógica nueva. (“La Poesía.” Huidobro 1976, 717)

With the “arrival to the final limits of the normal enchainment of the phenomena” Huidobro is rehabilitating the inexhaustible character of the symbol. As is attested in Xul Solar’s Vision 21, creation through association of distant realities is also the highest enterprise to which the seer can be engaged, while multiplication of signification becomes nothing less than divine reproduction, or the process through which the universe gives birth to existence. Symbolization, through which the secondary or connoted meaning takes over the literal one, (Todorov 1978) is thus more relevant than direct signification.

For Cedomil Goic, the travel of Altazor was both the revelation of the Heideggerian being towards death as well as a ritualistic or shamanic travel of spiritual ascent, a description
to which the Huidobro of *La Creación Pura*, who assured us that the notion of the artist as an absolute creator was given to him by an old Aimará South-American native, would be more than happy to agree upon. This shamanic transit traces a virtual architecture arranging the poetic space in a very specific fashion:

Altazor está construido, digamoslo finalmente como un “ziqquart,” esto es, como una arquitectura escalonada, ancha en la base y disminuyendo sus dimensiones en cada uno de los escalones. La forma de pirámide o del templo escalonado y el número de sus gradas, comunican una significación sagrada a disposición. Su configuración tipográfica y de sentido constituyen una escala ceremonial para el ascenso al cielo. Cada canto representa un cielo distinto transitado por Altazor en su vuelo. El primero es el de Saturno, el segundo Venus, en estricta correspondencia que puede hallarse también en los cantos finales: el sexto de la Luna y el séptimo postrero del Sol. En los misterios de Mitra, encuentra el poema un motivo adecuado para la ilustración del ritual iniciático del hablante, para su doble rito de ascenso a los cielos y de descenso a los infiernos. (Goic 2003, 1603)

The stepped architecture of the pyramidal temple (large on the bottom and narrow towards the top) used by Goic to visually explain the structure of Huidobro’s poem, is a recurrent motif of Xul Solar’s 1940s watercolors as *Muros y escaleras* (1943), *Ciudad y Abismos* (1946) (figure 9) or *Valle Hondo* (1944) and is already found in earlier watercolors such as *Pirámide* (1921) and *Neo-bau* (1923). In the 1921 painting, a ceremonial stair placed on the front side of a pyramid leads towards a divine figure, while in *Neo-bau*, we find a colorful and somehow modern architectural project of an apartment building which nevertheless narrows towards the top imitating the pyramidal structure. The use of the staircase as a device of contact with the heavenly order is the central motif of many of Xul Solar’s watercolors done during the 1940s such as “Trece San Mástiles,” (1949) “Santos y Guardianes,” (1949) “Pais Rojo,” (1949) or “Celdas Difíciles,” (1948) which not only create a world made of stairs but also represent high narrow towers, poles, buildings and mountains recalling the phallocentric imagery present in the French poetry of the Chilean. The Judeo-Christian division of the astral space in different

---

56 This Reading of Altazor is continued by Belén Castro Morales, who in *Impulso Fáustico y torres de Babel en primer Sueño y Altazor* complements the reading done by Goic arguing that the poem is built around the symbol of the tower: “Ya Cedomil Goic sugería que la estructura de la obra, con sus siete cantos de distintas tonalidad expresiva, correspondía a la estructura escalonada de un zigurat. Pero es más: todo indica que la similitud rebasa el esquema constructivo y la identidad formal: el poema, en su esencia misma, se configura como ambición de su creador y en esa pretensión, simultáneamente, Altazor se derrumba en su castigo” (Castro 1991, 3)

57 Although painted in the same year that Kurt Schwitters started working on his Hanover *Merzbau*, to our knowledge there is no connection between Xul Solar’s and Schwitters’ work. The German noun *Bau* was extensively used by Xul Solar in order to refer to buildings. In the linguistic compound *Neo-bau*, we can already find the components of novelty, rebirth and concision so important in the Neocriollo enterprise.
strata of higher or lower importance according to the altitude and the use of stairs as instruments
to arrive to the higher regions is constantly present in San Signos.

2

(…) Subo verticalmente cada vez más y arriba aumentan los suelos, enteros y truncados,
cada uno con su propio aire y una hora diferente del día o de la noche (…)  
diferentes suelos con sendos soles y lunas de todas clases; y hay otros pisos abajo con gente
pintada, ornamentada, en chozas y pantanos; y aún otros pisos arriba con gente bermeja que serían
seres humanos (…) y cuanto más subo más hay de estos trozos de países llenando el espacio sin
relaciones entre sí, los de arriba son más complicados, mejor poblados de gente jaldada y con

5

(…) hay escaleras largas en el aire doquier, (sic) aparentemente para escalar el cielo; unas
sostenidas por enormes andamios ligeros – una llega tan alto que solo la mantienen en vuelo unas
aves acuáticas con sogas-; otras zigzaguean arriba aparentemente sin sostén; otras bajan de las nubes;
cerca del suelo fluido hay andamios ligeros y brillantes que quizás son máquinas que no entiendo
(Xul Solar 2012. 48.5. Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)

Likewise, in the poetry of Huidobro, stepped constructions and ladders facilitate spiritual and
physical climbing. They are the access route used by the “the seeds awaiting to flourish through
the paths of sap,” a highway by which nature reaches the “sky of the tree.”

Altazor

(…)
Darse prisa darse prisa
Están prontas las semillas
Esperando una orden para florecer
Paciencia ya luego crecerán
Y se irán por los senderos de la savia
Por su escalera personal
Un momento de descanso
Antes del viaje al cielo del árbol
El árbol tiene miedo de alejarse demasiado
Tiene miedo y vuelve los ojos angustiados
La noche lo hace temblar
La noche y su licantropía
La noche que afila sus garras en el viento
Y aguza los oídos de la selva
Tiene miedo digo el árbol tiene miedo
De alejarse de la tierra.
(Altazor IV 251-266)

The stepped structure of Altazor is that of the spiritual universe visited by Xul Solar. The divine
language of their gods, described more like an organ and a being than a function and a system,
as well as the value given to the symbolic transformation of sense, links both works in a deep
manner. Climbing through staircases until reaching the divine regions and then free-falling,
Altazor takes advantage of the falling in order to transform language and come about with a
new type of poem which destroys the grammatical stability of language. In order to go forward
with his project of uniting letter and picture in a new language, Xul Solar will need to deviate from the purely meditative level of the *San Signos* and approach the problem from a purely artistic perspective. It is that capacity of taking advantage of the lost which differentiates the poetry of Huidobro from the work of many of his contemporaries; he seems to be unable to give up, always translating falling into rising even if this means to derail the logic of world and language.

### 5.2. Language Transformation

Directly debiting from their peculiar treatment of the linguistic phenomena; hybridization and metamorphosis of the object are the key processes of production of neo unities in *San Signos* and *Altazor*. In these texts, both authors excel as masters of hybridization in so far as the fusion of vegetal, animal, mineral, human and divine levels is expressed on a textual craft on crisis hunted by the possibility of incommunicability which parallels the subject’s risk of a free fall from the stellar order.

According to Saul Yurkievich, (Yurkievich 2002) the chain of linguistic transformation found in *Altazor* begins with the derangement of the noun and the metastasis of the object in chant IV continuing with an attack on the grammaticality of the verb in chant V and a reduction of the expression in chant VI, first as a restriction to nominal expression and secondly as the purely musical valuation of language. “En el canto VI el lenguaje se constríñe, se vuelve telegráfico, se sustantiva y los verbos desaparecen casi por completo; los vocablos entran en franca armonización fónica, rítmica, acentuada para ahondar el foso entre la expresión normal y la poética.” (Yurkievich 2002, 93, 94) Finally in the last chant, we experience the breaking of the last link of the chain that held Altazor attached to social language; words melt and attack communicativeness in a return to their embryonic state, that caressing role from which lengua was detached by learning how to speak.

Huidobro wisely prepared us for his revolt against the syntax of the Spanish language in chant IV, by using his *Creacionista* images in the first three chants and developing a magic
landscape of impossible events and metamorphosis which, as it has been said, will later explode the grammatical structure itself.

Altazor

Las montañas de pesca
Tienen la altura de mis deseos
Y yo arrojo fuera de la noche mis últimas angustias
Que los pájaros cantando dispersan por el mundo.

Reparad el motor del alba
En tanto me siento al borde de mis ojos
Para asistir a la entrada de las imágenes

Soy yo Altazor
Altazor
Encerrado en la jaula de su destino
En vano me aferro a los barrotes de la evasión posible
Una flor cierra el camino
Y se levantan como la estatua de las llamas
La evasión imposible
Más débil marcho con mis ansias
Que un ejército sin luz en medio de emboscadas
(Altazor I 75-90)

This beautiful description of a universe where fingers are the size of mountains, where one can sit on the edge of an eye and a flower rises as a statue of fire closing the way in front of the walker, denies the impossibility of the impossible and corresponds point by point to the definition given by Huidobro of the founding elements of a “created poem”: “Os diré qué entiendo por poema creado. Es un poema en el que cada parte constitutiva, y todo el conjunto, muestra un hecho nuevo, independiente del mundo externo, desligado de cualquiera otra realidad que no sea la propia, pues toma su puesto en el mundo como un fenómeno singular, aparte y distinto de los demás fenómenos.” (El Creacionismo. Huidobro 1976, 732) Following the same definition, the following passage of the San Signos is as much as a “poema creado” as a mystic vision:

Estou luego en país de oro. Su róxizo suelo vive: se alza i baxe, se desplace o tiemble, per.
Ji crezan folhesvás o d’rivan sobre róxizo nubisuelo ho sobre spolo sí’s raizes con gemas tuberculos de ke se nutran. Palmas con ramas mo sedimangas, gran hial’troncos con fronda de fosborra, sierpilianas, folhas banderas, lila i púrpura, boskes flótino chul’upa y chul’juso, lagos surpendidos nel aire. Tropas de gran bestias felices pasan en aire, i omes de too tamaño dokiér. Mara’vida nunca iguíal. (Xul Solar 2012. 21.3)
The presence of the fantastic, which is the general background of both works, becomes more precise in *Altazor* from Chant III on, were we find a clear process of mutation and synthesis which attacks the stability of the object.

Rainbows turn into birds, crows become planets, leaves are feathers and the gaze mutates into a river. But not only do the objects mutate, they also dislocate and mix creating hybrid bodies such as the crow with feathers of herb and the emptiness with “legs of river.” Mutation; this classical melody sung by Ovidius in Rome, by the prophet Chilam Balam de Chumayel in the Yucatan, and by the authors of the *I Ching* (the book of transformations), in China, has its name in the language invented by Xul Solar: *Pueinecómbinas* or possible combinations. The main technique of physical transformation and estrangement of the universe used by Xul Solar on
the transcription of his visions is hybridization. Among many other mixed beings, Xul Solar introduces us to *Chi Mancuerpo y ra’ membros arañi* (35,3) or small human bodies with quick arachnid members; *Movigramas* (35,5) or mobile writing; *Cuatripieses, entre saurio y ganso* (48,1) or four legged animals between alligator and goose; *boembudos* (35,5) or biological funnels; and *pensicoágulos*, or a coagulum of thinking. Through a process of creative synthesis and compression, the author of the *San Signos* goes even further by creating oxymoronic hybrids which defy the rules of geometry and reason, reminding us of the famous polysemantactic paintings of M.C. Escher. *Bol’ plié’dros*: (35, 6) circular polygons; *Lalemudi*: (4. 41) muted talks; *Fueimar de flamiolas*: (35, 1) seas of fire and waves of flame; and *Biopalacios* and *Briarmazón*: (36, 7) Biological palaces and structures of soul are all contradictory units, in many cases impossible to be pictorially translated and always difficult to mentally visualize.

But our reader has already noticed that these combined entities are named with signifiers which are linguistic hybrids themselves and she/he is possibly eager to know by now, whether or not the modification of the Spanish language done by Vicente Huidobro in *Altazor* in the chants IV, V, VI and VII is similar to the modification done by Xul Solar of the Spanish language in his book of *San Signos* written in Neocriollo. The answer is categorically affirmative concerning chants IV and V, but is only partially valid concerning the other two whose intermittent suspension of recognizable meaning and the concentration on the purely musical qualities of the phoneme are not to be found in *San Signos*. Beyond the fact that the *Neocriollo* of Xul Solar is *a posteriori* artificial language making use of semantic roots from other 14 different languages besides Spanish, and that the language of *Altazor* makes only a timid use of this kind of inter-linguistic borrowing; four linguistic transformative procedures can be isolated as common to chants IV, V and VI of *Altazor* and to the thirty-six texts of the *San Signos*. These are: extensive use of ellipsis; word creation and recombination (in the form of synthesis of two or more words into one new unit completely disregarding the linguistic indivisibility of the morpheme as a minimal unit, as was the case for the 1919-1924 texts found on the paintings of Xul Solar); and transformation of the verbal unit, to which gender transformation of the noun – more present in *Altazor* than in *San Signos*, – *could* be added. This approximate list covers the most salient coincidences between both texts but is not an exhaustive description of the entire dispositive used separately by both authors in their texts.
Let us read once more the famous verses of chant IV of *Altazor* beginning with the song of the swallow and the “horizon of the mountain and the mountain of the horizon,” if such a prosaic translation of the language used by the poet is possible.

*Altazor*

(…)

Viene gondoleando la golondrina
La horitana de la montazonte
La violondrina y el goloncelo
Descolgada esta manana de la lunala
Se acerca a todo galope
Ya viene viene la golondrina
Ya viene viene la golonfina
Ya viene la golontrina
Ya viene la goloncima
Viene la golonchiña
Viene la golonclima
Ya viene la golonrima
Ya viene la golonrisa
La golonniña
La golongira
La golonlira
La golonbrisa
La golonchilla
Ya viene la golondía
Ya viene la golontrina
Que tiene un nido en cada uno de los dos calores
Como yo lo tengo en los cuatro horizontes
Viene la golonrisa
Y las olas se levantan en la punta de los pies

Viene la golonniña
Y siente un vahído la cabeza de la montaña
Viene la golongira
Y el viento se hace parábola de sílfides en orgía
Se llenan de notas los hilos telefónicos
Se duerme el ocaso con la cabeza escondida
Y el árbol con el pulso afiebrado

Pero el cielo prefiere el rodoñol
Su niño querido el rorreñol
Su flor de alegría el romiñol
Su piel de lágrima el rofañol
Su garganta nocturna el rosolñol
El rolañol
El rosiñol
(Altazor IV, 160-203)

Synthesis of two nouns into one unit and presence of continuous chains of transformations are extensively present in chant IV of *Altazor*. As the referents horizon, mountain, moon, wing, cello, laughter, day and breeze combine with each other; the signifiers used to designate such
elements undergo the same transformation. New words are born which contradict Spanish syntax. In this sense the combined words horitaña, montazonte, violondrina or goloncelo used by Huidobro in his poem, relate to Neocriollo nouns as bol’ pli’edros, Lalemudi, Fueimar or Briarmazón. In both instances, apocope is used to retain an (etymologically arbitrary) word stem, eliminating its ending and replacing it either with another noun or with the last syllable of the noun with which the author has chosen to create the synthesis. This is an extremely synthetic procedure which allows a plus or less precise translation of the created word into a nominal expression of equivalent value.

The consistency of the use of such linguistic hybrids; the unity achieved by San Signos following this transformative procedures, and the intention of the author to make a public or social use of the creative linguistic system he created, allows us to refer to Neocriollo as an artificial language. Without a dictionary or printed grammar, it possesses an implicit regular syntax and grammar, which is proved by the linguistic analysis and the translation of the 64 texts of the San Signos done by Daniel E. Nelson. Conversely, the intermittent rearrangement of some nouns and verbs done by Vicente Huidobro in Altazor, and the final loss of sense in which this linguistic transformation results, cannot be organized in a syntactic system of communication created for means of social interchange and thus falls outside the limits of apriori and aposteriori artificial languages.

As it was observed by the translator of San Signos, Neocriollo was created around 1915. Later on, linguistic roots coming from English, French, German, Italian, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Tupí-guarai, Náhuatl, Sanskrit, Chinese and modern scientific language and children’s language were added. Although the most common linguistic borrowing happens between Spanish, Portuguese, German and English, and the other languages evoked by Nelson are seldom used by Xul Solar on his San Signos; anyone confronted by the text will have a clear inter-linguistic experience. The more rich and agreeable the more one is able to recognize such borrowings and understand the meaning of the text without the help of translation. In the third part of vision 52 for example we will find expressions such as “pontiupa” (with the head up, or with the axe on the top)\(^{58}\) or “poih siguéntramo” (afterwards we follow and enter) which make use of the English words “up” and the Portuguese “depois” (reduced to “poih”) combined

---

\(^{58}\) I am following the Spanish translation done by Daniel E. Nelson in order to arrive to these English definitions.
with elements in Spanish to produce new units. Other hybrids as “vuel’arraste” (to pull while flying), niebl’ zonte (a cloudy horizon), “penveibles” (barely visible) found in vision 52 or “zontilímites” (61, 3) (the limits of the horizon), “vuel’gente” (61,12) (flying people) and “kemie’lente” (61,2) (so hot that it burns) in which the author has freely and poetically modularized the syntax of the Spanish language, are very similar in value and motivation to the “horitaña” and “montazonte” of chant IV of Altazor, or to the “horicielo” and “fueguisa” used in chant V and created by the Chilean in the base of apocope and synthesis. Nevertheless its absence of definable syntax and communicative social function draw the language of Altazor apart from Neocriollo.

Artificial languages, such as Esperanto, Volapuk, or Neocriollo are conceived as auxiliary tools of international communication with social repercussion. Compared to the former, the effective social repercussion of Neocriollo was very low, if not to say totally absent. Intended to be an auxiliary language between the Americas as well as a project of Pan-American association, Neocriollo is a failed project because it did not find users outside a small circle of initiates. Esperanto, in the other hand, is a widely spoken artificial language with an estimate of two million users worldwide. Although Xul Solar never openly accepted the influence of Esperanto over his Neocriollo, the structural similarities between the both are considerable. Both Neocriollo and Esperanto are agglutinative languages, but whereas Esperanto points to simplicity, Neocriollo does not seem to mind a certain level of complexity and arbitrariness. Besides favoring Spanish and Portuguese over other languages, Xul Solar did not have a clear system of distribution as the one created by Zamenhof who would privilege common terminology between neo-Latin, Germanic and Slavic languages when creating new morphemes. The way Esperanto combines prefixes and suffixes is also regulated by a logic according to which adjectives precede nouns and root morphemes are derived exclusively from natural languages. In change, Neocriollo does not define a stable set of roots but uses apocope in variable ways in order to shorten words and to create new units whose meanings have no equivalence in other natural languages. This means that if Neocriollo cannot match Esperanto in the optimization of grammar (e.g. the use the dative in Esperanto simplifies sentences which would require an article in Neocriollo) the language invented by Xul Solar not only allows but also incentives a novel classification of reality. If, as Umberto Eco believes (Eco 1993, 227), the function of Esperanto is not to organize a universal set of knowledge but to create an optimized linguistic system able to express as many contents as any other natural language
does; then the Neocriollo of Xul Solar clearly goes beyond the goal set by Esperanto. The language of Neocriollo (one should not forget there is also a Neocriollo man) is meant to name the ineffable. Whereas Esperanto aims to express as accurately as possible the set of contents found in other languages, Neocriollo expresses what others have not yet said. Whereas natural languages accept neologism only sporadically and as an alteration to the system, Neocriollo is based on neologisms. It is made of direct borrowings, constant intervention and reconfiguration of its vocabulary and structure. Neocriollo was a work in progress invented to describe spiritual and aesthetical experiences which lay somehow beyond language itself. This aspect brings Neocriollo closer to Altazor than to an auxiliary artificial language as Esperanto. Within the frame of creacionista poetry, language transformation in Altazor creates new objects and labels others which have not yet found a linguistic form. Both Neocriollo and Altazor are Adonic languages; while both Neocriollo and Esperanto aim to be social systems of communication. While Neocriollo recreates a tension between personal mysticism and social emancipatory energies, the strength of Altazor derives from a tension between an intra-poetic creation and divine manifestation which completely ignores pragmatics and sociolinguistic aspects of communication. It is thus surprising that having two completely different aims Neocriollo and Altazor share more structural similarities than Neocriollo and Esperanto which share a similar communicative and social goal of humanist linkage.

It is true that Altazor does not create an artificial language, but it is more difficult to assert that it does not activate interlingusitic processes in order to create a poetic experience which interrogates human language and its limits. Although the 1931 version, the first complete edition of the poem Altazor, was published in Madrid in the Spanish language, older versions of the poem where written in French under the title “Extrait du voyage en parachute.” The first name used by Huidobro to refer to the poem before it had been finished was: Altazur, a clear combination of the Spanish word “Alto” (high) and the French “Azur,” an archaism for the color blue. Moreover, Canto IV seems to be written in French and then adapted to Spanish years later. (García Pinto 1979) Besides these French anticipations, it is significant to find trails of the use of the French language in the series of combinations “rodoñol,” “rorreñol,” “romiñol” “rofañol,” “rosolñol,” “rolañol” and “rosiñol” in which the French word rossignol and not the Spanish equivalent ruiseñor is used as a departing unit. In this section of Canto IV, the nightingale is used to create a melodic recombination with each of the seven tones of the musical chromatic scale in which the poet takes advantage of the general musical associations
evoked by birds and the particular homophonic relation between the signifier *rossignol* and the first and last notes of the chromatic scale “do” and “si.”

The way Altazor puts forward the acoustic properties of the word before a process signification takes place is also present in Neocriollo texts, which are inevitably unfamiliar to anyone since there are no natural users of the language. *Neocriollo* words remain unfamiliar to our ears and preserve a high degree of indeterminacy, however precise they might be. The contrast between phonetic unfamiliarity and the high semantic precision of the *Neocriollo* accounts to its poetic value. The chromatic vocabulary of *Neocriollo* is wider than the current Spanish equivalent; besides usual colors as *añil* (dark blue) *róquiza* (redish) *púrpura* (violet) *blan* (white), we will find, *fosfluxo* (florescent and fluid) *blunegro* (blue and black), *blugrís* (blue and gray), *clorcosas* (things purely made out of color) among others. The same holds true for the qualities of the objects and the actions, which can more precisely be indicated in the artificial language than in the translation. If the translation is legitimate, it will inevitably be longer than the original text, since more Spanish words are required to express the ideas contained in fewer *Neocriollo* characters. Such asymmetry between the compression of the form and the distention of the content is clearly visible comparing any passage of the *San Signos* with the translation made by Daniel E. Nelson.

In the following passage we find a 10 to 7 relation between the length of the translation and that of the original which is kept all through the 64 texts of the *San Signos*.

---

Se levante, me toma de la mano zurda ♀ y me arrastra volando, luego cambiando de manera me lleva sin la mano con sólo su atracción, por sobre la pampa parda, por mucho tiempo. Al fin llegamos a un horizonte nebuloso y grisáceo y allí entramos: es una ciudad floja sin base ni dureza, con gente y cosas y otras cosas, peneibles movizas, a cualquier nivel e eje, mo poco pesi, too fen ’ke fórmido na niebla. Siguientramo ha otra niebla clar’azul, también con ciudá i más orden, menú flu: casas más altas en grupos, gent’en filas i geom’grupos. I poih sigiéntramo ha otra niebla lumi giiva do tudo xe define i pese: palacios firmes lisos, gent’ en mítines i tráfico, mui hinkietas, de testas bien, con cuerpos rúgozos mui cortos i soanchos, mo cucruchos granates pontiupa, šas perinah še penven. (Xul Solar 2012. 52.3)

Se levante, me toma de la mano zurda ♀ y me arrastra volando, luego cambiando de manera me lleva sin la mano con sólo su atracción, por sobre la pampa parda, por mucho tiempo. Al fin llegamos a un horizonte nebuloso y grisáceo y allí entramos: es una ciudad floja sin base ni dureza, con gente y casas y otras cosas, las cuales son movedizas y apenas visibles, a cualquier nivel y eje, como poco pesadas, todo al parecer formado en niebla. Siguientramo a otra niebla azul claro, también con una ciudad y con más orden, menos fluidez: casas más altas en grupos, gentes en filas y e grupos geométricos. Y después siguiendo aún más entramos a otra niebla luminosa de color melado donde todo se define y pesa: palacios firmes y lisos, gente en mítines y tráfico, muy inquietas, de cabezas bien modeladas, con cuerpos arrugados muy cortos y anchos abajo como
Until now we have only referred to noun modification and combination. We can take our analysis further by inspecting the relations between the presentation of the action in *Altazor* and *San Signos*. Regarding the transformation of the verbal units in *San Signos*, this is usually the result of the combination of a verbal unit with an adverb or an adjective. Xul Solar does not combine two Spanish verbs; the widening of the verbal space is a secondary procedure following the previous finding of an expression either in Spanish - or any other language, which is an ellipsis or apocope in itself, that can subsequently be attached to other linguistic units. This is the case of *Neocriollo*, where verbs such as *movicoindicidan*: the action of making two movements occur simultaneously, are found in vision 61.12; *prunsbubu*: to rise in a straight vertical axe, found in vision 13; or *suelsalgan*: to go out or leave in a dispersed fashion.

Conversely, the intervention done by Huidobro in the verbal space of chant V of *Altazor* orbits around the animation of the noun or the formation of inexistent verbs on the bases of substantives.

The solution found by the poet in these verses is elegant and minimalistic. Instead of modifying the written form of the noun in order to translate it into a verb, the poet has chosen to place the noun in an unauthorized syntactic position where it is automatically read as a verb. Although they have not suffered any actual modification, words as “cabellera,” “cama” and “ruta” lose their familiarity and are born anew to our ears as if they were heard for the first time. The actions created by Xul Solar as *Flutel’p’e*: to say by means of fluid telepathy, *movicoindicidan*, *prunsbubu* or *suelsalgan* are opposed to the simplicity achieved by Huidobro. Their morphologic complexity is immediately present; they are opaque and hide two or three significations, something which is unknown to the verbal universe of *Altazor*. Xul Solar chose to assemble the verb, Huidobro found the verbal nature of the noun. Yet, beyond these immediately recognizable differences in the treatment of the action, what *San Signos* and *Altazor* share is the expansion of the verbal repertoire, or the ability of expressing an action inexistent before...
the creative work of the poet is set in place. This feature (nonexistent in other verbal games such as the *Jitanjaforas* of Cuban poet Mariano Brull) is what more intimately relates the work of linguistic transformation found in *Altazor* and the *San Signos*. The creator of the *Panchess* and the father of poetic *Creacionismo*, not only imagined a stellar space inhabited by hybrid creatures, but also invented the actions adjusted to the new world they were birthed into.

5.3. The Ultimate Liberation

Chants IV and V of *Altazor* are the exasperation of meaning: polysemy by means of word recombination. What follows in Chant VI of the poem is the disintegration of meaning, an emphatic attack on the communicative function of language without disintegrating the morpheme. Instead, Huidobro has decided to reshape the structure of the phrase producing powerful but a-syntactic verses where words no longer grammatically relate to each other. Although only intermittently, in many verses of Chant VI words are not controlled by their immediate phrasal context, but their individual meanings expand and are disfigured, projecting sense in an uncontrolled manner.

*Altazor*

(…)
Alhaja apoteosis y molusco
Anudado
    noche
    nudo
El corazón
Esa entonces dirección
    nudo temblando
Flexible corazón la apoteosis
Un dos tres
    cuatro
Lágrima
    mi lámpara
    y molusco
El pecho al melodioso
Anudado la joya
Con que temblando angustia
Normal tedio
Sería pasión
Muerte el violoncelo
Una bujía el ojo
Otro otra
Cristal si cristal era
Cristaleza
Magnetismo
sabéis la seda
Viento flor
lento nube lento
Seda cristal lento seda
El magnetismo
seda aliento cristal seda
Así viajando en postura de ondulación
Cristal nube
Molusco sí por violoncelo y joya
Muerte de joya y violoncelo
Así sed por hambre o hambre y sed
Y nube y joya
Lento
(Altazor VI. 1-37)

We have not yet arrived at the annihilation of signification found in chant VII, but we already see that the liberation of the word from the structure of the sentence is at odds with the functioning of Xul Solar’s Neocriollo, which is an improved and highly specific code with little noise in which the eccentricity of the hybrid forms responds to the unconventionality of the perceived reality itself. The excess of meaning in Xul Solar’s San Signos comes with the invention of new nominal and verbal units which eliminate ambiguity, never with the derangement of syntax in order to isolate the meaning of the morpheme.

If the end of Altazor has been many times taken for a failed enterprise, it is partially because its transgressive qualities have not been analyzed with the use of suitable methods and in the light of Huidobro’s previous transmedia enterprises. The seventh Chant of Altazor continues the kind of media alteration found in earlier examples of typographic picturing although it does not swerve towards the visual but partially towards the acoustic, vocal or purely sensorial experience. In the context of the totality of Huidobro’s artistic work, which comprises an extensive corpus of theoretical and poetic deliberations on the unification of the artistic experience, including colorful visual poetry, cinematographic novel, musical and visual collaboration with other artists, it would be difficult to deny that the following lines mimic the song of a bird and by doing so denounce the limits of articulated language.
These lines which have gained so much critical attention in the Latin-American field, are at least problematic within the frame of literary criticism. Indeed, how can one interpret something which has no meaning? Perdigó summarized the transit from the first experiences of visual poetry in the 1913 poetry of Huidobro to Chant VII of Altazor as follows: “in Huidobro’s first calligrams, _creacionismo_ consisted of the production of full signs; now in _Adan_ he only produces their signifiers, which are referential. Progressively his experiments lead into the non-referential signifiers of Altazor.” (Perdigó 1994, 85) References to the purely phonic value of the word (Yurkievich), the destruction of language (Schopf) or its ineffability (Goic) agree in presenting the last Chant of Altazor as the experience of falling into meaninglessness. David Bary, in his _Altazor o la Divina Parodia_, (Bary 1962) saw the verbal ritual of chants IV and V of Altazor as _anticreacionista_ poetry; a destructive attack against the word and the world of created poetry itself. In the line of Pedro Aullón de Haro, Bary believed that the chant VI, which conserves the rhythm of the traditional _octosílabo_ verse, as well as the seventh chant, where the arbitrary placement of the letters still brings echoes of recognizable words, represented the failure of Huidobro’s attempt to find the primordial language of the world. But the destruction of language cannot be a failed enterprise when it is the coherent evolution of a poetry wishing to be as universal as music, painting or sculpture (Huidobro 1976, 737) and which tries to be translatable to any other articulated language. If there is a failure in Altazor it is not found in the dissolution of language but perhaps in its own attachment to the Spanish language which could be questioned from within Huidobro’s own poetic system.

More significant than what is lost, is what has been gained. A sentiment of dissatisfaction with the working materials links the last Huidobro of Altazor with some of the artist-poets that will come after him trying to invent new languages with new grammar whose reception does not fall in the ambit of literature nor in the visual arts. This is the case of the artists that nucleated around the 1956 _International Movement of Concrete Poetry_ who systematized solutions already prefigured by Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar in the 1920s and
The interpretation of the end of Altazor as a failed poetic enterprise, which is far from being unanimously shared by the most recent criticism, is not to be negated but can be turned inside out in order to obtain a more refined interpretation of the poem. The poem will then flourish out of its most negative aspects which are as well its most definite base: the revolt against communicative speech, social interaction, against the laws of physics themselves. According to Bary, the silence of the (human) voice of the poet is related to the traumatic acceptance of the death of God. However, such traumatic experience is then twisted and the poet sees clear what is the only option open to him: he replaces god. In the poetic experience of Altazor, this means that the metaphysical problem is undistinguishable from the linguistic problem. As Bary argues, content and form are reduced to one thing: the search for the infinite and the quest for a language by means of which that infinite can be expressed. The search for a language suitable to directly express the transcendent is what we will find in chants VI and VII of Altazor which recuperate the pre-communicative qualities given by God to speech in the preface of Altazor and which were presumably lost in the course of history with the purely practical usage of language.

As we have already discussed, the book promised by the angel TAR OEA to Xul Solar in vision 21.5 is written in a language compatible with the one searched by Altazor. An Ursprache of profound divine symbols which is unknown to man and which contradicts the

---

59 Concrete poetry was simultaneously proposed in 1956 by the Swiss-Bolivian poet Eugen Gomringer and by the group of Noigandres poets from São Paulo: Déécio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos and Augusto de Campos. In the preface of his 1968 Book of Hours and Constellations Gomringer provides the theoretical basis of his poetry as follows: “Languages today are in a process of formal simplification. A reduced number of minimal forms are developing. The content of a sentence is often carried by a single word, while longer statements may be broken down to groups of letters. Instead of many languages we are learning to work with a handful that is more or less universal.” Xul Solar’s Neocríollo texts (written two decades before Concrete Poetry was created), materialized the linguistic simplification proposed by Gomringer. Moreover the creation of six systems of picture writing (chapter 7) and the Panlingua project of Xul Solar go well beyond the proposal of the Book of Hours and Constellations. While the development of a “reduced number of minimal forms” clearly matches the theoretical formulations of many artists and poets associated with the historical avant-gardes, from Kurt Schwitters to Guillaume Apollinaire, the visual poetry of Vicente Huidobro is still the most important precedent of concrete poetry. His Poèmes Peints were (not “will be”) “memorable and (as image) easy-to-remember” characteristics discussed by Gomringer with regard to the “new poem.”

60 Bruce Dean Willis (Wills 2010) criticizes the notion of failure replacing it with a romantic reading of the poet as a visionary ahead of his time, whose procedures were later recuperated by the Noigandres poets, the concrete poetry and hypertext. In 2003, Federico Schopf had also reframed the problem of the failure as that of a simulacra of a metaphysical experience comparable to the use of vast decors in cinema sets, as the one used in the film Intolerance (1916) by David W. Griffith presenting a grandiose, but fungible image of reality as a background for the motion picture.
functioning of our alphabetic writing always evoking more and more symbolic meanings. Although such a book is referred to in *San Signos*, it is not one with it. I propose that the divine language promised to Xul Solar in 1925, was later incorporated by the Argentinean artist in his series of *Grafias* painted in the 1930s and later on, in his series of *Grafias Plastíútiles* done in the 1950s. Strikingly abnormal as purely visual devises, and being a clear attack to the limits of the media, these series of works are to the development of Xul Solar’s art, what the last two chants of *Altazor* are for the poetry of Vicente Huidobro: an attempt to surpass the limits of the used media and to achieve a created language.
Chapter 6. Joaquín Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro: Humanization of Art through the Principle of Creative Constructionism

6.1. Unifying Creation and Construction

Installed in Santiago de Chile, although often traveling to France and Spain, Vicente Huidobro engaged in an epistolary relation with Torres-García during the 1930s. The latter returned to Uruguay in 1934 after being absent from his home country for more than four decades. If not an intimate one, the relation between the two was highlighted by long-lasting admiration and cordiality, something atypical in the social interchanges of both men with other artists and poets, which were usually more passionate and variable. In an undated letter (probably written in 193861), the Chilean expresses his sympathy for the artistic ideas of the Uruguayan and goes as far as to claim that, without working together, both had said “more or less the same things” and are found on the same side of the battle.

(…) Muy bien. Lo curioso que yo aquí estoy librando las mismas batallas y que sin ponernos de acuerdo hemos dicho más o menos las mismas cosas. Ello prueba que los hombres de nuestra época, los que la comprendemos, tenemos una unidad de pensamiento evidente.

Le enviaré otros artículos míos. Ahí va ese que yo escribí a mediados de Agosto y publicado en PROA en el número del primero de Setiembre.

Debería Ud. Tratar de venir por aquí. Aquí ya está en marcha el movimiento renovador y su obra es conocida, yo he hablado mucho de Uds. Y he mostrado sus cuadros – los que yo poseo y reproducciones de otros. Le esperamos. (…) (Huidobro 1938)

61 The letter makes reference to a freshly published Manifesto by Torres-García sent to Vicente Huidobro. Since there are no references to any previous texts of this type in other letters, the document cannot be other than the 1938 Manifiesto No 2. Constructivo 100% which is actually the first public manifesto written by the painter. The tone of the missive implies that Torres-García sent the text to the poet very soon after its publication.
The ideas that both authors shared and their “unity of thought” is the subject of this chapter. Regarding the paintings by Torres-García in Vicente Huidobro’s possession, there is little if not any information available to the researcher concerning precise works. Epistolary evidence informs us that the Chilean must have received a couple of paintings dated before 1931 from the Uruguayan who in that year did two portraits of the writer based on photographs of him. The first of those works, entitled *Pictograma Huidobro*, is a pencil drawing of small dimensions, probably a draft of a slightly bigger work done with egg tempera on paper entitled *Retrato de Vicente Huidobro*. Both of them are constructive works making use of the orthogonal grid in which the portrait of the writer is placed in the top most right niche of the compositions surrounded by many of the symbols usually present in the work of Torres-García from circa 1929. While in both cases the portrait of the poet conserves more or less the same expression and level of detail, there are two minor additions found in the tempera but absent on the smaller drawing. These is a ruler for measurement and an ink pot which come to replace the depictions of the key and the star found in the pencil drawing. The ink pot is a romanticized reference to the material used by the poet to create his work, while the ruler activates symbolic connotations which at first sight seem to be alien to the poet. Why would Vicente Huidobro, the father of poetic creacionismo, be associated to the measuring instrument, which in the universe of Torres-García is a reference to architecture and construction? The answer should be looked upon in an investigation of the constructive elements found in the poetic doctrine endorsed by the Chilean and in the creative elements found in Torres-García’s *Universalismo Constructivo*, which are abundant but have been almost completely disregarded by both poetic and artistic criticism until now.

As Pedro Aullón de Haro has observed (Haro, de 2000, 203) the modern idea of antimimetic poetry is derived from German romanticism and persisted as a topic of symbolic poetry before being recuperated and transformed by the artists and poets of the early XX century. Around 1913 Vicente Huidobro and Joaquín Torres-García began to systematize a principle of anti-mimetic artistic production. The poet published his manifesto-conference “Non Serviam”.

---

62 The topic of the productive metaphor in romantic poetry as opposed to a theory of reflection was extensively studied by M. H. Abrams in his classic *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Haro’s concept of the avant-garde is derived from this kind of western poetic romantic tradition.

63 It is here that we find the famous huidobrian maxim: “Non serviam. No he de ser tu esclavo, madre Natura; seré tu amo” (Huidobro 1976a)
in 1914 while the painter published his *Notes sobre art*\(^{64}\) one year earlier in 1913. Around those years similar ideas were defended by many other artists. Guillaume Apollinaire in his *Méditations Esthétiques. Les Peintres Cubistes*,\(^{65}\) Pierre Reverdy in several articles as his famous 1917 “Sur le Cubism,”\(^{66}\) and Ortega y Gasset in *La Deshumanización del Arte*,\(^{67}\) were all convinced that modern art could not be guided by the reproduction of objective reality. A similar program was shared by almost all post-cézannean artists involved with geometric experimentation from Juan Gris\(^{68}\), Picasso and Fernand Léger to the Italian futurists\(^{69}\) and Dutch Neoplasticists such as Piet Mondrian\(^{70}\). Before the above mentioned authors, it was Charles Baudelaire with his *Peindre de la vie moderne* (1869) who first updated the topic in light of the

---

\(^{64}\) In the context of a Barcelona art scene dominated by a conservative nationalist revival, the voice of Torres-García in 1913 is directing attention to totally new painterly problems unforeseen by Nucentist aesthetic. “L´art no és la reproducció de les belles coses d´quest món; és més bé un comentari d´aquíxes coses, fet per un artista” (*Notes Sobre Art* in Torres-García 1980, 44). “Art is not the reproduction of the beautiful objects of the world. It is a commentary of these things made by an artist” (Trans. Cortés 2015).

\(^{65}\) Becoming the first historian of Cubism, Apollinaire emphatically declares the artist as the master of nature in 1913. “On s´accoutume vite à l´esclavage du mystère. Et, la servitude par créer de doux loisirs. On laisse ouvriers maitriser l´univers et les jardiniers ont moins de respect pour la nature que n´en ont les artistes. Il est temps d´ êtres les maîtres” (Apollinaire 1980, 54)

\(^{66}\) “Nous sommes á une époque de création artistique où l´on ne raconte plus des histoires plus o moins agréablement mais où l´on crée des œuvres qui, en se détachant de la vie, y rentrent parce que qu´elles ont une existence propre en dehors de l´évocation ou de la reproduction de choses de la vie.” (*Sur le Cubisme*. in. Reverdy 1975, 20).

\(^{67}\) Departing from an elitist understanding of art, the Spanish critic proposes a creative artistic theory in negative sentences; a proscription of “the common taste of the masses who will only tolerate fantasy and deviation from representation as long as these elements do not interfere with the understanding of the narrative elements of the work.” (Ortega y Gasset 1985, 50)

\(^{68}\) In the 1923 article “Sobre mi pintura” later gathered in the volume *Posibilidades de la Pintura*, Gris argues that a painting does not represent a scene, but a suggested reality which originates from abstraction. “Las relaciones pictóricas entre las formas coloreadas me sugieren ciertas relaciones particulares entre elementos de una realidad imaginativa. La matemática pictórica me conduce a la física representativa.” (Gris 1957, 97)

\(^{69}\) By 1927 when Cesar Vallejo publishes his “Contra el secreto profesional” preceded by Huidobro’s “Futurismo y Maquinismo,” (1925) the futurist revolution was seen as nothing more than an old inconvenient corpse that needed to be hidden. Nevertheless today it is still important to remember the second point of the *Manifesto dei Pittori Futuristi* (dated February 11.1910) where one can read: “2. Disprezzare profondamente ogni forma d’imitazioni” (Boccioni et al. 1910) which was a no accepted influenced to Huidobro.

\(^{70}\) In *Neoplasticism in Painting*, (1917-1918) Piet Mondrian discusses the topic in terms of an evolution from naturalism and superficial detail towards equilibrium and abstraction. “Art too, as the product of a new duality in man, is now expressed as the product of cultivated outwardsness and of a deeper, more conscious inwardsness. As pure creation of the human mind, art is expressed as pure aesthetic creation, manifested in abstract form.”. (Quoted in Jaffge 1971, 2)
modern urban experience, making an uncompromising praise of beauty as artificiality. But while the subject of creation is not new, its treatment was revised in a distinct way by the Chilean poet and the Uruguayan painter who associated the concepts of creation and construction through a third element: the humanization of the arts. By systematically and explicitly uniting creation and construction as a double function found in nature but which needed to be actualized by the artist, Vicente Huidobro and Torres-García complemented the critique of an anecdotic and narrative language of art, brought forward by Ortega y Gasset and the reversal of the process of artistic production that goes from mimesis to abstraction.

In the article “Época de Creación,” published in 1921 in the second issue of the shortly lived magazine Creation, as well as in the declaration of principles of the first issue of the same magazine, Vicente Huidobro associated the principles of poetic creation to those of construction. First, as an invitation to all constructors to be part of his editorial project and later by incorporating what he understood as the constructive laws of nature into the poetic domain. “La poesía no debe imitar los aspectos de las cosas sino seguir las leyes constructivas que forman su esencia y que le dan la independencia propia de todo lo que es” (Huidobro 1976b, 750). Correspondingly, Joaquín Torres-García equated the concept of creation to that of construction in his 1938 hand-made book La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto: “obra construida: creación. Obra imitativa: ficción.” (Torres-García 1974, 12) By the same token in Universalismo Constructivo, (edited in 1944 but the result of a life’s work) the concept of creation was associated with geometry and proportion, two concepts which in other volumes such as Raison et Nature and Estructura were related to reason and constructive work.

“La estructura geométrica pues, será la inspiradora en este caso y sinceramente creo, que todo camino que no sea éste, es falso, Así pues, como un problema de matemáticas, podemos plantear el asunto en esta forma.

Geometría
Proporción

Y quien siga este camino nunca dejará de ser artista plástico”
(Perazzo 1983, 47)

In his beautifully illustrated Raison et Nature (1932), the father of Universalismo Constructivo summarizes the idea of creation as the appointment of the forms of nature inside the frame given by the human spirit: "Inscrire la Nature dans le cadre des formes de la pensée – établir un ordre- créer et non imiter – voilà ce que draverait être l’art.” (Torres - García 1974a, 15) Such
circumspection of the natural world to human reason is not episodic, but part of the general program furthered in parallel by Joaquín-Torres García and Vicente Huidobro whose opinions on that matter are quoted in issues 2 (1936) and 3 (1937) of the Círculo y Cuadrado magazine, the organ of the Asociación de Arte Constructivo run by Joaquín Torres-García.\textsuperscript{71} Further developing the ideas found in his 1914 conference Non Serviam and in his short 1921 text “Época de Creación,” Vicente Huidobro unites once more the notions of creation and construction in his manifesto “La Creación Pura” (1921) as a method of avoiding representation while absorbing nature’s productive methods.

La idea de que la verdad del arte y la verdad de la vida están separadas de la verdad científica e intelectual, viene sin duda desde bastante lejos, pero nadie la había precisado y demostrado tan claramente como Schleiermacher cuando decía, a comienzos del siglo pasado, que la poesía no busca la verdad, o, más bien, ella busca una verdad que nada tiene en común con la verdad objetiva. (…) 

El Hombre sacude su yugo, se rebela contra la naturaleza como antaño se rebelara Lucifer contra Dios, a pesar de que esta rebelión sólo es aparente, pues el hombre nunca estuvo más cerca de la naturaleza que ahora que ya no busca imitarla en sus apariencias, sino que hacer lo mismo que ella, imitándola en el plano de sus leyes constructivas, en la realización de un todo, en el mecanismo de la producción de nuevas formas. (Huidobro 1976a, 718)

In “La creación Pura,” the Chilean poet develops two important ideas. First, what is true in art does not correspond to the truth of the objective world and second, rebellion against nature means avoiding duplicating its products and instead imitating its constructive laws. The same notion is expressed by Torres-García in his 1913 Catalan book Notes Sobre art: “L’obra del més gran artista és tan falsa respecte a la natura, com la de l’últim; in en canvi, respecte a l’esperit, en la mida que ens dongui una imatge més universal o una vana apariencia, tendrá una veritat més menys relative.” (Notes sobre art in Torres-García 1980, 45) "The work of the greatest master is as false to nature as the work of the worst artist. In change, regarding the spirit, and as far as it gives us a Universal image or a vain appearance, it will reflect a truth, or not.” (Trans. Cortés 2015) Again in the 1918 manifesto Naturaleza y Arte the painter precedes the poet in his creation of an analogy between God and the poet. “Es igual el propósito, que es

\textsuperscript{71} The texts of Vicente Huidobro quoted in issues 2 and 3 of Círculo y Cuadrado are the following: “De todas las fuerzas humanas, la que nos interesa más es la fuerza creadora.” (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1936*, 3) and “Nunca el hombre ha estado más cerca de la naturaleza, que ahora que no trata de imitarla en sus apariencias, sino de hacer como ella, imitándola en lo profundo de sus leyes constructivas, en la realización de un todo dentro del mecanismo de la producción de formas nuevas.” (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1937, 6) The first text is an excerpt of an article written by Huidobro for the fourth issue of 1926 of the Peruvian magazine Amauta. The second is a passage from Huidobro’s manifesto La Creación Pura (1921). The transcription of the second text of the Chilean published in the Uruguayan magazine presents minor syntactic imprecisions although the idea remains exactly the same.
peor: copiar de la naturaleza, no crear de la Naturaleza (…) Cuando el artista trabaja, trabaja de verdad. No solo no imita nunca lo que tiene delante suyo, sino que, al fecundar, es entonces fecundado al mismo tiempo. Sin embargo, la obra de ese momento siempre será una cosa eterna: el creador o es un Dios o es un monstro” (quoted in Schwartz 1991, 428). The main motto of “Non Serviam:”72 respect for nature’s productive forces and the simultaneous proclamation of independence from it, presents an interesting variation on Torres-García’s Ce que je sais et ce que Je fais par moi-même under the platonic formula of following one’s inner nature without letting any external influence have command over natural-born knowledge.


The dialogue between the personal powers of the artist and his indebtedness to the productive forces of nature will unavoidably produce a clash, an explosion whose result is the created or constructed work of art and which also will derail the comfortable relation between the artist and the world, since the latter can no longer be the measure of the products of the former. Along with the constructed work, a structure of production is born, giving stability to an œuvre which can no longer rely on its faithfulness to perceived reality, but whose existence needs to be justified not only by an inner necessity but by a general system of laws. According to Torres-García, such a system was transmitted from antiquity by anonymous constructors and systematized in important historic breakthroughs by thinkers such as Plato or Pythagoras (an option also favored by Xul Solar) or it was part of the common repository of ideas explored by the great solitary poets, into which Huidobro wished to be included. Theosophists, magicians and freemasons were the privileged holders of similar truths. Torres-García, who was in contact with members of such secret societies, never wished to be part of one. The case of Xul Solar is a different one since he was spiritually preparing himself for an afterlife and thus searched for the occult wisdom, which could open such a path in associations such as the Golden Dawn. Vicente Huidobro, on the other hand, was interested in the aristocratic elements involved in the

72“Non serviam. No he de ser tu esclavo, madre Natura; seré tu amo. Te servirás de mí: está bien. No quiero y no puedo evitarlo; pero yo también me serviré de ti. Yo tendré mis árboles que no serán como los tuyos, tendré mis montañas, tendré mis ríos y mis mares, tendré mi cielo y mis estrellas. Y ya no podrás decirme: ’Ese árbol está mal, no me gusta ese cielo…. los míos son mejores’. Yo te responderé que mis cielos y mis árboles son los míos y no los tuyos y que no tienen por qué parecerse. (…)’ (Huidobro 1976, 715)
secret activities of the freemasons. Torres-García admired the geometric, mathematical and spiritual knowledge of those stone builders who had raised the most long-lasting structures ever made by man (after classical times), but wished only to join and direct the modern community of South American constructors, having little interest in being part of a secret society.

6.2 Humanization of Art.

On March 28, 1936, Torres-García, who had established himself in Uruguay two years earlier struggling for the consolidation of the Asociación de Arte Constructivo in Montevideo, sent a letter to Vicente Huidobro, who was about to leave Santiago de Chile and travel to Spain as war correspondent for an Uruguayan local newspaper. Besides congratulating him for his cooperative work with Hans Arp in Tres Inmensas Novelas and possibly unaware that the Chilean was planning a passionate incursion in the Spanish Civil War, the Uruguayan painter inquired about the poet’s opinion on his latest book Estructura. In this 1935 œuvre, which the painter offered as a gift to the poet, Torres-García proposed a theory of aesthetic and intellectual development from an embryonic state of imitation towards a higher state of abstraction and creation developed in three gradual steps. In this work, Torres-García uses the terms abstraction and construction as synonyms of the most advanced art, while classifying the psychological life of the individual into three phases corresponding to three homologous historical ages. In the infancy of man his art is imitative, in his adolescence it will be fetishist and in his adulthood it is constructive. A very similar evolutionary system is proposed by Huidobro in 1921 in his

---

Analogue evolutionary schemes influenced by mysticism and free interpretations of XIX century positivism were frequently used by early XX century Latin-American thinkers. Some of the more prominent examples are found in Motivos de Proteo (1909), the psychological and pedagogic enterprise of the Uruguayan philosopher J.E. Rodó; in La Raza Cósmica (1925) where José Vasconcelos divides human evolution into Materialistic, Political and Aesthetic ages; as well as in the valuable but forgotten work of Adolfo Best Maugard, Método de dibujo. Tradición, resurgimiento y evolución del arte Mexicano (1923) where the Mexican subdivides the historical and psychological infancy of the human being into four aesthetic and intellectual phases beginning with a stage associated to volumetric reproduction of the object and evolving towards the abstraction of basic two-dimensional geometric shapes.
manifesto, La Creación Pura. In the words of the Chilean, the historic and psychological phases of the evolution of art can be presented as follows:

Estas fases pueden reducirse a tres y, para designarlas con mayor claridad, he aquí el esquema que imaginé:

Arte inferior al medio (Arte reproductivo).
Arte en armonía con el medio (Arte de adaptación).
Arte superior al medio (Arte Creativo).

Cada una de las partes que compone este esquema, y que marca una época en la historia del arte, involucra un segundo esquema, también compuesto de tres partes y que resume la evolución de cada una de aquellas épocas:

Predominio de la inteligencia sobre la sensibilidad.
Armonía entre la sensibilidad y la inteligencia.
Predominio de la sensibilidad sobre la inteligencia. (Huidobro 1976a, 718)

Although it is only the first part of the scheme (classifying art into mimetic, adaptive, and creative tendencies) which precisely corresponds to the ideas expressed by the painter in his books Estructura and La tradición del Hombre Abstracto,74 there is a more profound notion allying poet and painter and differentiating them from other contemporary anti-mimetic postures. In section 35 of Estructura, Torres-García criticizes Mondrian’s Neoplasticism arguing that the art of the Dutch school has dehumanized art to the point of turning the artist into a machine. As much as Torres-García got close to Neoplasticism, (in respect to rigorous and symbolic use of vertical and horizontal lines, flat geometrization, reduced chromatic expression and a critique of the excessive weight placed in personal expression) the Uruguayan’s interest in recuperating an ancestral constructive tradition was opposed to the art of Mondrian and van Doesburg. According to Torres-García, man arrives at the final abstraction and truly created art by humanizing nature.

6. para que dibuja el hombre prehistórico? Unos quieren que sea con fin decorativo, otros religioso. De todo eso hay. Pero hay que creer más bien, y esta es mi opinión, de que además fue con el fin de vivir en algo suyo, en la plástica, en su mundo interno, y de crear. (Torres-García 1935, 6)

The creative aesthetic of Huidobro is based on the same principle upheld by Torres-García: to create is to humanize nature. This was overtly expressed in La creación Pura where the poet asks himself, “¿Acaso el arte de la mecánica no consiste también en humanizar a la Naturaleza

74 “Generalmente se cree que el arte pasa de a esquematización a la imitación. Es un error. El primer balbuceo del arte es imitativo.” (Torres-García 1974, 1)
y no desemboca en la creación?” (Huidobro 1976a, 721) The idea of humanizing nature is later developed as the basic principle of his poetic theory in the 1925 manifesto *El Creacionismo* in which the poet presents his 1917 “cubist” book *Horizon Carré* as the consummation of such procedure:

Opposing the thesis according to which the highest achievements of modern art derive from a numbing of human sensibility, as advanced by Ortega y Gasset in *La Deshumanización del Arte*, Vicente Huidobro and Torres-García proposed a humanized art derived from the Baudelairean doctrine of artificiality and the belief in artistic production as the construction of a rational mind. However, Huidobro opposed abstraction in favor of construction (the poet made use of a very free definition of the former term associating it to the evanescent or volatile) while Torres-García saw it as a propaedeutic of the latter; the necessary elimination of the superfluous elements and the recuperation of the ideal traces materialized in the construction. On the first page of the third issue of *Circulo y Cuadrado*, Torres-García explicitly states that for those who share the language of the modern South-American constructors, abstraction does not necessarily mean “nonfigurative” but synthetic.

---

75 “Tout ce qui est beau et noble est le résultat de la raison et du calcul. Le crime, dont l’animal humain a pris le goût dans le ventre de sa mère, est originellement naturel. La vertu, au contraire, est artificielle, surnaturelle, puisqu’il a fallu, dans tous les temps et chez toutes les nations, des dieux et des prophètes pour l’enseigner à l’humanité animalisée, et que l’homme, seul, eût été impuissant à la découvrir (...) Il importe fort peu que la ruse et l’artifice soient connus de tous, si le succès en est certain et l’effet toujours irrésistible. C’est dans ces considérations que l’artiste philosophe trouvera facilement la légitimation de toutes les pratiques employées dans tous les temps par les femmes pour consolider et diviniser, pour ainsi dire, leur fragile beauté. L’énorme en serait innombrable ; mais, pour nous restreindre à ce que notre temps appelle vulgairement maquillage, qui ne voit que l’usage de la poudre de riz, si niaisement anathématisé par les philosophes candides, a pour but et pour résultat de faire disparaître du teint toutes les taches que la nature y a outrageusement semées, et de créer une unité abstraite dans le grain et la couleur de la peau, laquelle unité, comme celle produite par le maillot, rapproche immédiatement l’être humain de la statue, c’est-à-dire d’un être divin et supérieur?” (Baudelaire. 1943, 24)
Although Vicente Huidobro did not share a deep understanding of the notion of abstraction with Torres-García, what both systems share on a conceptual level is a necessary suppression of the irrelevant elements in art and the need for a “deep human expression” which transforms the object into an artistic product through the act of human intervention. As Torres-García wrote in 1915 in chapter XXI of his Catalan book *Diallegs*: “La simplificació ha de ésser un treball d’esculliment entre o escencial y lo que no ho es, es a dir, treball de l’entiment i no del pinzell.” (Torres-García 1980, 80) “Simplification must be a work of differentiation between what is essential and what is not. It is a work of reason and not of brush” (Trans. Cortés 2015).

Likewise, the young Huidobro assures that the sole function of poetry is to draw the basic traces of an object, which will be actualized by the recipient. This idea is presented in *Pasando y Pasando* under the doctrine of the aesthetic of evocation (*estética del sugerimiento*).

Parada Soto (Parada Soto 2004, 27) has pointed out that the goal of precision and simplification constitutes part of the neo-platonic program of Torres-García who subsumed art to geometry and to a preconceived formal graphic cannon, while making ethics conduct painting. Torres-García’s interest in the work of Plato begins in 1896 when the young painter is confronted with the work of Puvis de Chavannes and with the theoretical elaborations of the Spanish theologian Torres y Bajes. Concurrently, by tracing the common points between the cubist and creationist aesthetic, Busto Ogden has identified a classical influence deriving not from Platonic but from Aristotelian poetry in the aesthetic of Vicente Huidobro and the modern poetry of his contemporaries.

In relation to classical philosophy, Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro covered the circumference of the same circle by traveling in opposite directions. While one has departed from absolute creative freedom and the other has willingly constrained himself to the “eternal rule,” they both negate contingent reality in their search for a totality which directly connects the symbol to the transcendent, whisking away the middle ground of the world of shapes or
reflections. Trying to achieve a pure plasticism, the Dutch colleagues of Torres-García never accepted the Uruguayan’s openness towards representation. In their critique they were missing the fundamental transformation suffered by the concept of pictorial art in the work of Torres-García for whom letter and picture unite as one in the symbol. The schematic figures of Torres-García are not intended to represent but to indicate. The problem of representation of the object became secondary and receded in light of a more important enterprise: the foundation of a constructive or architectural symbolic system of totality. In other words, the development of an *écriture* in the large sense given to it by Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1967, 149-157) as the effacement of the illusion of the immediate vocative; *écriture* as the difference and classification of the self and of the universe that can be found in the zigzag patterns that decorate pre-Columbian textiles and pottery; and above all, *écriture* as the questioning of the primacy of alphabetic writing over its pictographic and ideographic cousins. Torres-García wanted to resolve the opposition between the alphabetic and pictorial systems. In doing so he created a universal system of writing bringing together the graphic and semantic aspects of the sign as if they were two clashing vectors which refuse to travel side by side. This is a proposal that claims that conventionality is not the only rule that relates the signified and signifier.
Chapter 7. The Universal Writing

7.1. The First series of Grafias

With his 1923 watercolors, (chapter 4.1) Xul Solar keyed the spiritual desire for transiting through heavenly regions to a flat and colorful style of painting. The mythical and symbolic figures inhabiting those watercolors, and the texts written in Neocriollo accompanying them, were intimately linked and pointed to one semantic field: spiritual ascension. As we have seen, despite the close thematic relation found between text and image, there was a relative autonomy between both levels since it was always possible to mark the frontier dividing the two. During the 1930s, this situation changed. On one hand the insertion of text in modified Spanish and Neocriollo (making use of the Latin alphabet) was abandoned, and in the other Xul Solar started to experiment with a formal fusion between image and text. Between the years 1930 and 1962 the word Grafia was used as a generic appellation to group together a series of works of similar characteristics. However, the Grafia was much more than that. As we will see, the Grafia was a new type of art invented by the Argentinean; an art not fully comprehended by his contemporaries and which only now begins to find the critical reception that it deserves.

In the dissertation, Entre Peinture et Langue: L'invention d'un Langage dans L'oeuvre de Xul Solar, Nestor Habkost (HABKOST 2009) demonstrated that Xul Solar created a “litero-pictorial” language which the artist started developing in the decade of 1930 and perfected during the years of 1961 and 1962 just before his death. The group of watercolors painted during 1935 and 1939 by Xul Solar is characterized by the exploration of the expressive qualities of the line. The artist leaves aside the representation of the human figure and focuses on the dynamism of the traces and the symbolic qualities of the figures insinuated by the lines. Works
belonging to this series such as Grafía Antica (1939) (figure 20), or Marina (1939) (figure 34) depict large intertwined hocks or sticks forming simple geometric figures, fairly similar to the shorthand system of writing systematized by John Robert Gregg and revised many times since 1893. In this line of thought, these works have been interpreted as systems of writing based on stenographic forms, (Artundo and Xul Solar 2005) while the 1960 series of Grafías Plastiútiles has similarly been defined as an original plastic system of writing, sub-divisible in various graphic categories. (Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988) Although these two were highly interesting interpretations, opening the doors to future investigations of the Grafias from a semantic viewpoint, none of them was based on a rigorous linguistic analysis of the corpus of watercolors. This situation changed in 2009 when Habkost engaged in the first analysis of the Grafías and Grafías plastiútiles from a linguistic and semantic point of view. Following the results yielded by Habkost’s investigation, it would now be impossible to refer to the Grafías painted during the 1930s as texts. On the contrary, the Grafías Plastiútiles painted two decades later by Xul Solar, proved to be texts written using six different systems of picture writing. These works, written in what Habkost has denominated a “litero-pictorial” language, comply with the requirements of an iconoscripture (Ikonoskriptur) as coined by Mersmann in the context of the Chinese and Japanese graphic arts. They are the symbiotic merging of writing and picture: Symbioseformen zwischen Bildlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit (Mersmann 2013, 160) and interlock the visual, phonetic, and semantic components in a unique artistic whole.

Although the first series of Grafías painted between 1935 and 1939 by Xul Solar are not examples of iconoscripture, they are a highly important moment in the transition towards the creation of true picture writing since they contain symbolic and semantic elements belonging to both the first water colors painted ca. 1923 and to the last group of watercolors produced at the beginning of the 1960s. In his analysis of Grafía 1935, Habkost found the same division between upper and lower levels that we have investigated in the early works of Xul Solar where the sky and the earth opposed as magnetic poles. Besides this, Habkost demonstrated the presence of a link between the straight line (used by Xul Solar to write numbers) and culture; and a second association between the curved line (used to depict animals and plants) and nature. To the particular associations given to straight and curved lines proposed by Habkost, a second symbolic relation could be added between color and the hierarchy of spiritual positions of his universe. Size and position of the sign in the pictorial space, are markers of syntactic differentiation in the work of Xul solar easily recognizable in the Grafías
The Universal Writing

plástítiles, but the symbolic use of color is a more general and ever-present element from the first to the last paintings of the artist. Follower of Theosophy, Xul believed that every chromatic tone corresponds to the content of a word. Through the conferences given by Rudolf Steiner, Xul Solar got acquainted with the theory of colors of Goethe and later created a series of spiritual and chromatic correspondences of his own explained in a 1943 vision:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colors</th>
<th>Corresponding Worlds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Divinity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Spiritual world or ego</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Reason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Mental world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Realm of bright souls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Mirrors, connection, duplication</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Paraphrasing this Neocriollo excerpt into English we will find a clear system of correspondences between five colors and five levels of existence. The color purple means divinity; blue relates to the spiritual world or ego; green represents reason; yellow is an image of the mental world; orange is a representation the realm of the bright souls; and finally the color red represents mirrors, connection or duplication.

In Grafía Antica, (figure 20) Habkost has recognized the presence of the Latin letters “V” and “L” moving in a semitransparent space. Ethereal birds or spiritual presences placed in the background of the painting might be responsible for producing the sounds represented by those letters as part of a mysterious speech whose sense is only partially understandable by the viewer. Based on Marc-Alain Ouaknin’s Les mystères de l’alphabet, Habkost informs us that the letter « L » is related to dynamism while the letter “V” as well as the letter “W” represent a link or channel between two different levels of existence. By complementing the reading done by Habkost of the Grafía Antica with Xul Solar’s own symbolic analysis of color, present in the 1943 vision, it is possible to prove that the painter had already began to use precise color codification around 1935. The interpretation, according to which the ethereal bird-like figures are representations of spiritual beings, is reinforced by the chromatic codification of Xul Solar. The celestial blue used by the artist in this composition is meant to represent the spiritual world or world of the ego: “Cu, azul del mundo espiritual o ego.” Following this codification, the artist has painted the high spiritual beings (birds) in blue. The same chromatic logic, this time in reference to the color red, is used to emphasize the link between the two levels of existence expressed by the letter “V.”
The color red, used to create the shades of the birds, the letter “V,” and some of the hook-like figures, is related by the painter to the world of reflections or mirror repetitions. As a symbol of the passage to another world, the use of the color red reinforces the cabalistic meaning of the letter “V” as a channel as well as the interpretation given by Habkost of the birds as representations of high spiritual states connecting the celestial and physical worlds.

In light of these considerations, it is also possible to interpret one of the most beautiful works of the series; the 1939 watercolor *Marina* (figure 34). At the time, Xul Solar was experimenting with a fusion between figure and background. Recognizable elements, such as human headed worms, are interlocked in hooked-like geometric shapes (representing cursive writing), open angles and even basic humanoid figures. The figurative use of those linear elements in order to create a fish in the lower right corner of the painting, and a humanoid figure in the upper right corner, reveal the intention of unifying the cursive writing and a figurative regime within a complete symbolic landscape. Following the chromatic clues left by Xul Solar in his 1943 vision the use of green or aquamarine in the body of the worm-like figures, may refer to a mix between reason and spirit, being the color blue the representation of the spiritual region. In the lower part of the painting where the “V” and triangular shapes are found, Xul Solar has decided to make use of brick red tonalities, probably with the intention of enhancing the idea of a connection between two levels: reason and spirit, as in *Grafia Antica*, where the cabalistic meaning of the letter “V” as a channel was enhanced by the use of the color red which has the same meaning.

However, there is even more in this painting than the symbolic use of colors and Latin characters. This is a particularly significant work since it is the transitional link between the exploration of the dynamic and symbolic value of line and the creation of an actual iconoscripture derived from those early experiences. *Marina* is a formal prelude to the systematization of a new linguistic code; an anticipation of a procedure which the artist consistently set forward between the years of 1960 and 1962 but which was almost completed by 1939. In this sense, I will have to diverge from the Habkost interpretation. If it is true that most of the *Grafias* painted during the 1930s are not pictographic or logo-syllabic writings,
Marina (Figure 34) is the one example which contradicts such interpretation. The most salient characteristic of this watercolor is the presence of some cursive traces, which can be recognized as phono-syllabic signs by comparing them with the table Code de l’écriture cursive (HABKOST 2009, 96) created by Habkost in order to decode the cursive system of writing found in the 1962 Grafias plastiútiles of Xul Solar.

However, it will be imprecise to assert that the linear shapes that inhabit the watercolor Marina are exclusively used as phono-syllabic signs. In this watercolor, the linear traces can be simultaneously valued in at least four different manners: i) for their purely expressive, dynamic and artistic characteristics; ii) as vague references to the Latin alphabet (found in the representation of the letter “V”) and Arabic numbers; iii) such as the contours of figurative elements like animals and plants; and finally iv) as the phono-syllabic signs of a highly artistic iconoscripture. Whereas the first three characteristics are easily recognizable in most of the Grafias painted during the decade of 1930, the last one seems to be restricted to works as Prigrafia from 1938 and the work in question, Marina, from 1939. In order to demonstrate this last point we should carefully analyze the linear shapes of this watercolor in light of the discoveries made by Habkost presented in his table to decode the cursive writing. 2009, 188)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. « Code de l’écriture cursive » (Habkost 2009. 188- detail)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graphical representation of phono-syllabic signs" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated by Habkost, Xul Solar followed a principle of axial rotation of the symbol in order to represent the vocalic value of each syllable. In these works, the vocalic value of a shape is always determined by its inclination. As it can be observed in table 2 the value of each consonant in the cursive writing is given by the shape of the hook, while the vocalic values
depend on the inclination of the whole symbol, taking as a base the horizontal line representing the letter “A.” The 45 and 90 degree counterclockwise rotation of the basic horizontal form are valid values for the vowels “E” and “I,” while the 45 and 90 degree clockwise rotation are valid values for the vowels “O” and “U.” Any other type of rotation is not valid. By closely examining the 1939 Marina (figure 34) we will see that most of the linear shapes found in the watercolor match syllables in the cursive writing, but the angles in which they are drawn are many times invalid. Symbols displaying vertical mirror symmetry of the syllable “LI” and vertical mirror symmetry of the syllable “TA” (both of which are non-valid variations the basic horizontal form), might be understood as counter-evidence to the thesis of an early development of the iconoscripture. However, such inconsistencies prove only that the artist was unsure or perhaps was still experimenting with the norms that dominate the positioning of the symbols in his newly created writing system. While many traces cannot be read as cursive writing symbols, there are many other that do fit into the system.

The syllable “RA” represented with the symbol found in the upper right section of the painting follows precisely the writing logic used in the 1960-1962 Grafias Plastiútiles which were thoroughly analyzed in Habkost’ s work. The same can be said about the syllable “LU” found in the middle upper part of the watercolor which, combined with other traces, forms a shape similar to the Arabic number 4 which is repeated in other Grafías and which holds symbolic properties for being a multiple of the number 64 (4.4.4.4) which stands for the totality of the being according to the I Ching, studied by Xul Solar. Moreover, the symbolic value given to isolated syllables is explained by Xul Solar in a 1953 text presenting the properties of the Panlingua. It should be already clarified that the 1960-1962 Grafias plastiútiles are representations of texts written in Neocriollo and that until now no connection between the 1930s Grafias, the 1960s Grafías Plastiútiles or the Panlingua project has been established. In our view, although the Panlingua project was never materialized, it seems plausible that during the time he was working in the first series of Grafías, the artist was at once thinking about projecting Panlingua and Neocriollo ideas onto the canvas before deciding to exclusively work on the latter.
According to this 1953 text, the *Panlingua* syllable “RA” is linked to the zodiac sign Sagittarius and it means “to act.” The astrological interpretation of the syllable “LU,” (Bendinger 2004, 53) also found in this painting, points to water, movement and the zodiac sign Pisces which is related to the color blue and the creatures that inhabit the aquatic landscape of *Marina* (figure 34). Besides the presence of what we have interpreted as *Panlingua* morphemes, the *Neocriollo* word “RoKa” is found in the upper middle section of the painting written with the same traces that were used by the artist to represent the Arabic number “4.” The function satisfied by the word “rock” in this painting is unclear, but it might be a complement to water or even a synecdoche of earth as the solid counterpart of the oceans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.</th>
<th>syllabic signs of Xul Solar’s cursive writing as isolated by Habkost (Habkost 2009, 188)</th>
<th>Examples of valid and non-valid variations of cursive signs found in the Grafia <em>Marina</em> 1939</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllable “li”</td>
<td>Vocalically non-valid vertical mirror symmetry of the syllable “Li,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllable “TA”</td>
<td>Vocalically non-valid vertical mirror symmetry of the syllable “TA”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllable “LU”</td>
<td>Valid sign of the Syllable “Lu”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllable “RO”</td>
<td>Valid sign for the morphene “ROKA.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllable “KA”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The examples illustrated in table 3 show us how far Xul Solar was able to drive his initiative of formalizing a system of writing at the end of the 1930s. Such a system had to be at once artistically and communicatively valid to be in harmony with his Panbeldoiike; project of a universal doctrine of all the arts.

The 1935-1939 Grafias series reminds us of the immense panels that the Swiss artist Paul Klee was painting at the time. The expressive use of the line, which creates the contours of abstracted animals, humanoids and geographies, as well as the absence of closed volumes allowing the background color to progress towards the surface of the painting, links the work of both artists. The important differences between their work are not so much formal as they are communicative. Whereas the fluid lines of Klee’s Insula Dulcamara (1938) represent the contours of the Greek coastline, an ancient idol and sailing ships; the cursive traces of Xul Solar’s Marina (figure 34) are not only symbolic figurative shapes but were intended to be linguistic signs and in many cases they were actual syllabic representations of Neocriollo and Panlingua sounds, as we have intended to demonstrate. As Xul Solar expressed in a 1946 interview for the magazine El Hogar of Buenos Aires, his intention was to go beyond the limits of a mixed language created on the foundation of a recombination of other natural languages. The artist intended to create a universal a priori linguistic system, with invariable semantic roots with no grammar or pronunciation exceptions. The Panlingua project was his contribution to the formation of a universal culture based on astrological and spiritual knowledge: a total language.

By asserting the presence of “effective symbols” which transform the art of painting into writing, Xul Solar was creating distance between himself and the “modern abstract” painters, whom he argued were not interested in this type of visual-linguistic cross-fertilization. Whether other modern painters succeeded in creating systems of picture writing lies beyond the limits of this investigation. However, we can be sure that the art of Xul Solar was not the isolated achievement of a genius, but a historically anchored phenomenon. The goal of inventing a total language.
and perfect artificial language links him to the long tradition of philosophers, logisticians and entrepreneurs who for millennia had contemplated the possibilities of such a system. In *The Search for the Perfect Language*, (Eco 1993) Umberto Eco traces the European history of such endeavor. The Tora, the Bible, the perfect language of Dante, the magic language of Dee and the Egyptology of Kircher are some of the key elements in the early history of the symbols on their transit towards a scientific (or in any case secular) understanding of the perfectibility of languages. What can be considered as a philosophical turn in the project of the constitution of the perfect language begins in the late XVI century with Bacon and Comenius and evolves into organized enormous classificatory systems in the next century with the works of Dalgarno and Wilkins, reaching encyclopedic thought with Leibniz whose blind reasoning and labyrinthine association would be fundamental for the encyclopedia.

According to Eco, John Wilkin’s *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical language* (1668) differed from previous projects of the creation of an artificial languages in so far as it was concerned with the common notions of classification valid to the whole of the human species and not with the notions listed in the available repertoire of concepts of any particular language. Such was the intention of Xul Solar with the creation of his *Panlingua*. But while Xul Solar’s ideographic language aimed to surpass the conceptual limitations of natural languages, it was also embedded in the astrological and mystical discourse and had little to do with a scientific classification of reality. As a modern mystic, Xul Solar was aiming for the reconstitution of an Adonic language, not only in the Christian sense but via a large pansophical understanding of the universe. Far apart from Wilkins neo-Aristotelian and almost naturalist systematization, Xul Solar’s project is closer to the ideas expressed by Comenius in his *Via Lucis* (1668) wishing to connect all the elements of the universe following the Rosiacristian tradition. Just like Comenius’ project, Xul Solar’s never materialized. Besides a few articles published in Argentinean magazines during the 1940s and 1950s currently there is no available information concerning the syntax, grammar or logic regulating the *Panlingua*, nor any examples of text written in such a system.

Based on the interviews published in the Argentinean magazine *El Hogar* in 1953 concerning the *Panchess* and other projects of modification of games and instruments, it can be deduced that the *Panlingua* was conceived as much more than a linguist ideographic writing. It was a logical system related to mathematics, astrology and music, which could be expressed
The Universal Writing

numerically, ideographically or via images and sounds. Similar to Leibniz Gedankenschrift, Xul Solar’s *Panlingua* was more of a logical language or calculus leading the human spirit directly to the truth, than an ideographical writing understood as collection of analytically organized concepts. The progress made by Leibniz by imagining a language as a formal calculus in which the content of the symbols is irrelevant but the interactions among them are mathematically calculated is continued by Xul Solar. The ideal of two human consciousness dialoging using symbols whose contents might vary but whose syntax is almost universal and at the same time transformative, is presented by Xul Solar in his description of the *Panchess*. This game was the dictionary of the *Panlingua* and according to the artist through it he managed to solve many of the problems derived from the creation of such a language.

The *Panchess* is a master board of mathematical, astrological and musical combinations played in a language called *Panlingua* in which the 33 tokens are the symbols of mutable and interchangeable contents. What Xul Solar calls “the notation” is the basic writing system of the *Panlingua* which can be translated into words, tachygraphy signs, musical counterpoint, films or paintings; that is, into any expression of the human imagination. The cursive symbols representing the syllables “RA” and “LU” found on *Marina* (Figure 34) might be one of many possible expressions of this language. They are not the most sophisticated forms of expression of the *Panlingua* because they are part of a logosyllabic system that is still too much enrooted in the western alphabetic culture. Those syllables do not represent the degree of freedom to which a musical counterpoint would take us, but they might be the closest example of what a hypothetical work of art written in *Panlingua* is.
7.2. The 1960s Grafias Plastiútiles: Six Systems of Picture Writing

Grafias Plastiútiles is a corpus of more than 200 watercolors painted at the end of the 1950s and in the first two years of the decade of 1960 by Xul Solar using a combination of geometric shapes, stenographic characters, and heraldic, zoomorphic and vegetal forms. For many years the most comprehensive description of this series was given by Mario Gradowczyk in Alejandro Xul Solar: 1887 – 1963, a work in which the Argentinian timidly mentioned the artistic relations between Xul Solar and Joaquín Torres-García.

Grafías Plastiútiles is a corpus of more than 200 watercolors painted at the end of the 1950s and in the first two years of the decade of 1960 by Xul Solar using a combination of geometric shapes, stenographic characters, and heraldic, zoomorphic and vegetal forms. For many years the most comprehensive description of this series was given by Mario Gradowczyk in Alejandro Xul Solar: 1887 – 1963, a work in which the Argentinian timidly mentioned the artistic relations between Xul Solar and Joaquín Torres-García.

Finally a fines de los años 50 encara su último y quizá más ambicioso proyecto visualizar con una escritura plástica original, propuestas o lemas útiles para mejorar el comportamiento humano, escritos en Neocriollo, un nuevo intento de utilizar su arte para mejorar el mundo

Estos trabajos, denominados "grafías,” pintados sobre papeles o cartones, fueron realizados en su mayoría en su casa sobre el río Luján, y fechados en forma simultánea utilizando los sistemas decimal y duodecimal: por ejemplo 1175 equivale a 1961 en el sistema duodecimal

Lo que a primera vista resultaría una curiosidad, una búsqueda ingenua de un sistema de comunicación visual, deviene una bella y original propuesta que admite putos de contacto con los trabajos constructivistas de Torres García. Xul ha recuperado la belleza formal, el color, y el ritmo de la década del 20. Febrilmente crea varios sistemas alternativos de escritura, una suerte de variado caleidoscopio. Básicamente se identifican seis clases de grafías:

1. Geométricas: las letras o sílabas están construidas por figuras geométricas planas;
2. Bloques de letras: una modificación del abecedario romano agrupando las letras en bloques;
3. Cursivas: una escritura del tipo jeroglífico o estenográfico;
4. Vegetales; las consonantes o sílabas se representan por plantas;
5. Antropomórficas: es una integración de la escritura geométrica y cursiva con formas humanas o extraños animales; son las de mayor contenido esotérico;
6. Mixtas: combinaciones de los tipos anteriores.”
(Gradowczyk, Borges, and Aizenberg 1988, 16)

Whereas Mario Gradowczyk divided this series of Grafías into six groups, the last one being a combination of the other five, more than a decade later Cecilia Bendinger proposed not five but twelve different types of Grafías. These were classified according to the use of different “morphologic alphabets” dispersed all along the series as follows:

1. Geométrico
2. Geométrico con inclinación de vocales
3. Geométrico de bordura
4. Geométrico de bordura con inclinación de vocales
5. Geométrico y antropomorfo (caras)
6. Geométrico y antropomorfo (caras, manos y pies)
7. Geométricos de bordura y antropomorfo
8. Antropomorfo euritmista
There is a common presence of geometric, stenographic, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic symbols in both arrangements, but also a disparity in the classification proposed by both authors since the supposedly vocalic, eurythmic and *bordure* alphabets evoked by Bendinger are absent in the classification proposed by Gradowczyk. Cecilia Bendinger was the first author to give some hints regarding the general symbolic meaning of the eurythmic figures found in the series of *Grafías Plastiútiles*, but the author did not provide enough information explaining how this (or any other) visual regime would function as a type of writing. Bendinger’s study does demonstrate, however, that some pictorial elements found in Xul Solar’s work should be read as “universal emblems” ⁷⁶ (like the depictions of the cross, the open hand, the stars, the arrow, the zodiac signs, the eye, the tree, the seed etc.) according to the theosophical and occultist systems studied by the artist; while others are phonographic signs of Neocriollo. Four geometric shapes relating to four groups of consonants were isolated by Bendinger as the building blocks of the geometric alphabet. Square-based figures would be related to the consonants d, t, p, b, k and g; those based on the semicircle would be related to the consonants n, m, and l; circular shapes would relate to the consonants s, v, f and h; and finally the triangle and its multiple variations would represent the consonants j, r, rr, and x.

---

⁷⁶The Universal Emblem, as proposed by Umberto Eco (Eco 1976, 56), is a strongly codified *iconogram* used in multiple ways due to the overlapping of semantic systems. This would be the case of symbols as the start or the candelabra that possesses different meaning and value depending on their use in Christian, Cabalistic or Theosophic systems.
Table 4.

Basic table of conversion of the geometric alphabet of Xul Solar based on Bendinger’s findings (Bendinger 2004, 57)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geometric shape and associated element</th>
<th>Group of Neocriollo consonants represented by each basic geometric shape.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earth</td>
<td>D, T, P, B, K, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>N, M, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air</td>
<td>S, V, F, H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>J, R, RR, X,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five years after the publication of Bendinger’s *Xul Solar Grafías Plastiútiles*, (2004) Nestor Manoel Habkost completed his still unpublished PhD dissertation, *Entre Peinture et langue: L’invention d’un Langage dans L’oeuvre de Xul solar*. Using the division proposed by Gradowczyk to classify the *Grafías Plastiútiles* into 5 groups, each one relating to a type of picture writing, adding one of Bendinger’s categories, Habkost proposed his own classification of the *Grafías Plastiútiles* as follows:

1. L’écriture bloc de lettres
2. L’écriture cursive
3. Écriture Géométrique
4. L’écriture anthropomorphique/zoomorphique
5. L’écriture végétale
6. L’écriture de bordures
What distinguishes Habkost’s work from the precedent investigations is his rigorous demonstration of Xul Solar’s creation of 6 writing systems and the decoding of those systems. The first of these, the “block” writing, was created by Xul Solar under a principle of economy and transformation of the alphabet. Slightly modified Latin characters and protosiniatic characters are used by Xul Solar to represent Neocriollo syllables. The painting Todo for la gran patria created in 1961 are examples of this type of picture writing.

The second group, the cursive writing to which we have already brought our attention uses simple linear traces inspired in shapes belonging to ancient writing systems such as the Egyptian, Aramaic and Phoenician without relating to them in a semiotic or syntactic fashion. These cursive linear traces form syllables in quite a simple manner using the principle of vocalization directed by angular positioning of the symbol which can be appreciated in table 2 of chapter 7.1.

Formellement, ces signes (graphies) sont composés d’un long trait, généralement droit qui représente une voyelle et, à l’une de leurs extrémités, un trait court qui représente une consonne, un trait qui est ce qui permet ou opère la différenciation entre ces signes, par exemple, un petit trait droit, un cercle, un demi-cercle, etc.

Examples of the cursive system of writing can be found in works such as Xamine todo retene lo bon! (figure 25) or Todo Ta Hecho (1961) (figure 21) In this last example (decoded in extenso by Habkost) we can easily recognize the word “TODO” as the combination of two descending diagonal figures (a position which indicates the vowel “O”) where the syllables “T” and “D” are marked by the perpendicular appendixes of each line. This can be clearly visualized with the aid of table 2.

The third system of picture writing is especially important for us since it constitutes the bases of the following three systems and it is here that my own investigations in the field can be compared to the work done by Habkost. The geometric writing is a monosyllabic system based in four geometric shapes, each of which is associated to a group of consonants. (See table 4). The astrological basis of this division were well demonstrated by Cecilia Bendinger by investigating the associated values given to planets, zodiac signs, sounds and shapes in various esoteric traditions influential to Xul Solar. Continuing the work of Bendinger and Garcia Romero, the method used by Habkost to decode the geometric picture writing consisted of the

---

*A detailed analysis of the relations between Torres-García’s and Xul Solar’s symbolism and the Egyptian and Maya writing systems is found in chapter 7.5 of this dissertation.*
comparative analysis of several paintings in which the same Neocriollo text was written in two alphabets: the Latin and the geometric one. When I started this investigation before becoming acquainted with Habkost’s work, I intuitively followed the same method and registered very similar results as the ones obtained by Habkost. However, whereas the Brazilian researcher disposed of a large number of watercolors to be analyzed, I only used a small corpus of 7 watercolors\textsuperscript{78} painted in 1958 and 1959 by Xul Solar in which the artist made systematic use of a group of geometrically based symbols combined with a freer symbolic vocabulary of emblems, pictograms and other shapes. The result of the comparative analysis of these seven works is systematized in table 5. It should be noted that whereas Habkost always abstracts the shapes used by Xul Solar and produces one standardized phono-syllabic symbol by overlapping many variations of one trace, I have directly taken the symbols from the paintings of Xul Solar. This table is not a true dictionary of standardized symbols, but it conserves the plastic, chromatic and artistic qualities given by Xul Solar to each syllable, thus underlying the fact that the geometric writing is not only an abbreviated alphabet but in addition and above all, an artistic writing.

\textsuperscript{78} These are: “El Sei rey wan. Telud. / Konra to kredu diu / Lujan se / Bei Santa. Worker”, ” No sabe no parle / no parle si no sabe / Pués ke on tru hier / Segure to se mi otri mort / No Hotri / San Lao Tse Say, Nel Tao Te King”, “De Tao Te Kin – Lao Tse (Lininiie vieji) / Lu Tao nen lu ley I Ching. / Yi sabe fine / Nen PAXli y Bei Santa Raza Mundo,” “Oh! Na credo, kierdo de cieloarki / Man san 3 vibra; todo kon ji ’mundo”, “la muerte es porta de vida De san sielu, san mori”, “Na de, viva yi tu ego/ No be pax lux. Ley pan to, / Ki love kan salvan” and “Santa María- Madre Teo – Ora / Dulo nen prei. Amén.”
Table 5.
Table of conversion between recurrent geometrically based symbols present in Xul Solar Grafías and their corresponding Neocriollo phonemes based on an iconographic comparative analysis of 7 1958 - 1959 Grafías

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Corresponding Phoneme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>Sa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>N, L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image6" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image7" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image8" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image9" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image10" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image11" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>Le</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image12" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>Ne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image13" alt="Symbol" /></td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be</td>
<td>D, T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re</td>
<td>Ra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Er</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kre, kro</td>
<td>Ork,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolated dot: colon&lt;br&gt;Dot Inside a geometric shape: i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bei</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As it can be derived from the analysis of this table, it has not been possible to precisely isolate all vocalic phonemes (there is an ambiguity between the use of the vowels “a,” “o” “and “u”) and the graphic representation of the consonants is rudimentary, leaving many empty spaces (only the consonants s, n, l, w, b, t, k, r have found a geometric counterpart). The Habkost decoding table, on the other hand does not produce this kind of ambiguity, but it tends to modify the shapes given by Xul Solar in order to obtain homogeneous results as it is visible in his decoding of the geometric writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 6. Detail of Habkost’s decoding of the cursive writing. (Habkost 2009, 243)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CÓDIGO DA ESCRITURA GEOMÉTRICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B- Ba- Be- Bi- Bo- Bu-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P- Pa- Pe- Pi- Po- Pu-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jorge Luis Borges complained about the fact that the difficulty of learning new languages and games with the founder of the Panlingua resided not only in the complexity of the system of rules proposed by Xul Solar, or in the polysemantic value of the symbols and tokens used by the artist, but mainly in the fact this constructor and inventor changed the rules of the game in medias res.

Dije que Xul Vivía inventado constantemente. Había inventado un juego, una suerte de ajedrez, más complicado – como él diría más “plí,” porque en lugar de complicado decía “plí” - Un ajedrez más “plí” y quiso explicármelo muchas veces. Pero a medida que lo explicaba comprendía que su pensamiento ya había dejado atrás lo que explicaba, es decir que al explicar iba enriqueciéndolo y por eso creo que nunca llegué a entenderlo, porque él mismo se daba cuenta de que lo que él decía ya era anticuado y agregaba otra cosa. (Testimony of Jorge Luis Borges, in Nelson 2012, 27)

But even if Xul Solar was not completely systematic in the use of his geometric picture writing it is still possible to develop the iconographic analysis and translation of many of his Grafias.
based in a geometric writing. As an example, I have chosen the work “El Sei rey wan. Telud. / Konra to kredu diu / Lujan se / Bei Santa. Worker” (Figure 22.). This Grafix is especially suitable both for a translation of its geometric contents and for an iconographic analysis of the universal emblems which accompany it since, besides these two pictorial regimes (geometric writing and emblems) the watercolor does not include any other system of pictorial writing.

Table 7.
Transliteration of the 1959 Grafix “El Sei rey wan. Telud. / Konra to kredu diu / Lujan se / Bei Santa. Worker” (figure 22) to Neocriollo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>![Image]</th>
<th>El Sei Rey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>(?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>Wan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>Telud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>Konra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>To Kredo diu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>Na Lujan se</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Grafia “El Sei rey Wan. Telud. / Konra to kredu diu / Na lujan se / Bei Santa. Worker” (figure 22)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Six axed star" /></td>
<td>Six axed star: Solomon’s seal. Representation of the law and the Torah in the Jewish tradition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Palm tree" /></td>
<td>Palm tree: symbol of moral strength and parenthood (Lopez 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Arrow" /></td>
<td>Arrow: According to Bendinger the arrow represents the will and the intellect. If placed horizontally, as here, it indicates the direction in which the Grafía should be read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol of mercury" /></td>
<td>Symbol of the planet mercury. According to the Pan Klu table done by Xul Solar (reproduced in Bendinger 2004, 36) mercury is related to the infrared, the musical note F and the letter “n.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="The Key of Sol" /></td>
<td>The Key of Sol. According to Bendinger, along with other symbols such as the Ying Yang, the four elements, and the heart, the musical symbol represents life and dynamism, the middle spiritual level inside a system of spiritual and moral hierarchies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Grafia “El Sei rey wan. Telud (...)” provides a message without noise, which allows the interpretation of the iconoscriptural writing as well as of the painting’s emblematic message.
The Universal Writing

proposed on tables 7 and 8. While the message transmitted by the heraldic symbols isolated in Table 8 is polysemantic, the text written by the artist through the use a geometric writing (table 7) admits only one type of interpretation: the one done through a system of decoding which leads to the specific Neocriollo text associated to the watercolor bearing its name. By isolating each geometric symbol and associating it with a Neocriollo syllabic sound, we have discovered a set of discrete units regulated by syntactic differentiation admitting only one code as the “correct” one. Although heraldic symbols are also discrete units, their value oscillates and their meaning varies according to the code used to interpret them. Heraldic symbols are ideograms; they represent an idea, not a sound, as the geometric writing does.

In purely semantic terms, we could now ask whether the asymmetries between the Neocriollo system and the geometric alphabet exposed on table 5 are caused by the ambiguities of the system itself, or if they are gaps in the process of decoding which needs to be refined. While having a Neocriollo text as a goal of the translation, we also forced the interpretation to fit into that precise message. The basic shape of the semicircle, which is transformed into a precise eye-like ellipse representing the letter “L” in various Grafías, presents variations as the almost circular shape in the word “Telud” (Table 7) and the almost rectangular shape in the Neocriollo phrase “El Sei rey.” Moreover, many other elements besides the particular shape of the geometric sign, mediate in the reading of a Grafía. In many cases, in order to begin the decoding of a Grafía, one must divide the watercolor into several zones corresponding to each one of the sentences divided by a “/” symbol in the name of the Grafía. In our example, we found four pictorial regions representing four spiritual states beginning with the divine realm in the top of the Grafía descending to the human on its bottom most part. In its textual form, these four levels are present as follows:

2. Konra to krendu diu / Honra al credo duradero
3. Lujan se / En luján es
4. Bei Santa. Worker / Bella Santa Trabajadora

(Trans. Daniel E. Nelson)

Thus, whenever we find difficulties or clear ambiguities translating the geometric pictorial writing into Neocriollo, we refer to these levels and adjust the translation. This is how I resolved the ambiguity of the oval green figure containing a “V” like shape. In the word “Telud,” (see table 4) the geometric representation of “Telud” had to be found in the upper most part of the Grafía since its Neocriollo equivalent was found in the first sentence of the
text representing the first or uppermost region of the watercolor. Something similar takes place when referring to the phrase “El Sei rey.” The meaning of the word “rey” (king) is conveyed by the signifiers “rey,” “” and by an emblem: the six axed star.

While a comparative analysis of various *Grafias* demonstrates that the eye like symbol stands for the syllables “ra” “re” or “ar” the meaning of top triangle has been difficult to systematize. In the context of the *Grafia* “El Sei rey wan. Telud (…)” (figure 22) it must indicate the letter “y” or the phoneme “i” in the word “rey.” Although it was not isolated as such in Table 7, the *Neocriollo* text makes us chose that interpretation of an otherwise ambiguous geometrical symbol. This is why the creation of a definite table of conversion as the one proposed by Habkost is a useful tool in the decoding of the messages but cannot be understood as an infallible syllabic representation of every symbol. It is not only the *Neocriollo* text that accommodates the interpretation of the symbol in this direction but also the heraldic symbols themselves that reinforce the semantic space of divine royalty. The six-axed star: symbol of Solomon, king of Israel and son of David, and the palm tree, referring to his offspring are also signifiers of the sign “king.” Retroactively, the heraldic symbols, which in a different context might adopt a totally different meaning, become univocal and are adjusted or framed by the general message carried by this multilayered text.

In the work, *No sabe no parle / no parle si no sabe / Pués ke on tru hier / Segure to se mi otri mort / No Hotri / San Lao Tse* Say, *Nel Tao Te King* (figure 23) the artist mixes geometric and cursive writing adding some elements of heraldic and eurythmic human shapes. The geometric and cursive texts presented in this work are legible and contain all the information provided in the title of the work. The *Neocriollo* sentence “No sabe no parle / no parle si no sabe /” is written with the geometric system while “Pués ke on tru hier / Segure to se mi otri mort / No Hotri / San Lao Tse* Say, *Nel Tao Te King” is written using cursive writing.79

The merging of different languages was an ever-present characteristic in the work of Xul Solar. The fourth of his artificial picture-writings, baptized “anthropomorphic and zoomorphic” was built on the basis of the first two arrangements, the cursive and the geometric,
to which animal and human-like figures were added. The presence of animal and human shapes in these works justifies such classification but their inclusion does not add new linguistic elements to the paintings. A work like Xamine Todo (figure 24) which repeats the same message expressed by Xul Solar in other Grafias, is an example of this. Cursive and geometric writing are used to outline the shapes of various animal forms. In some cases the cursive symbols create the torso and head of the animals to which the legs and tail are added. However, when humans and animals are not drawn out of the symbols belonging to the cursive writing, they possess no linguistic value.

The fifth writing, the vegetal one, is also derived from the cursive system. Yet, unlike the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic writing, in this case we won’t find figurative shapes combined or infixed to the cursive traces. The vegetal writing is a graphically independent arrangement that follows the compositional principle of the cursive writing without recourse to such shapes. Habkost has determined that the longest line of each sign (or the stem of the plant) represents the vocalic sound, while the shortest (the branches) represent the consonant. Like all the other forms of picture writing created by Xul Solar, this is a monosyllabic linguistic system, not an alphabetic or idoegrammatic one. To our knowledge only very few works were created by Xul Solar exclusively using this type of writing: a second version of Xamine todo Retene lo bon and Pax, Worke, Love (1962).

Based on repeating geometric motifs producing beautiful bands morphologically related to pre-Columbian Mexican decorative grecas (Best Maugard 1923) the bordure writing is the last of the linguistic systems created by Xul Solar. There are only two available examples of watercolors in which the painter made exclusive use of this type of writing, the watercolor San Pablo Say (figure 26) and Mwi worker for teo reino… (1961), neither of which displays all the possible syllabic combinations between the five vocalic sounds and the twenty syllabic sounds found in Neocriollo. Habkost faced this problem by applying the same construction principles of the cursive and geometric writings to the bordure writing.

Un des principes appliqués par l’artiste a été destiné à l’établissement du système de vocalisation de cette écriture. On verra que Xul Solar a employé le schéma de vocalisation de l’écriture cursive afin de placer spatialement une certaine syllabe de façon à caractériser son sens vocalique. Par ce moyen, les syllabes composées par certaines voyelles qui n’ont pas été trouvées dans les tableaux seront projetées.

Un autre principe, qui a été aussi appliqué aux autres systèmes d’écritures, consiste à construire certaines consonnes en paires à partir d’un seul signe, dont une identifiée avec ce signe dans la position inverse. Cette procédure a été observée par des exemples avec les consonnes T et
By following the principle of coupling, deduced from the analysis of the two above-mentioned bordure Grafias, Habkost deduced the missing signs virtually present in Xul Solar’s bordure writing. Since Xul Solar has arranged most consonants as complementary pairs in his bordure writing, it will be enough to know one of the elements in the couple in order to infer the graphic representation of its complement. The artist often used the same bordure to represent two different basic consonants by inverting the position of the symbol in the horizontal axe. However, it seems that this phenomenon is not exclusive to the bordure writing and it can also be found in other picture writings by Xul Solar. In his vegetal writing, we can find examples in which every pair of consonants corresponds to two vegetal symbols: one in which the branches are facing upwards and another one in which the same type of branch is facing down.

How did Xul Solar decide to form these letter couples? As we have seen it, a trade mark of his art and life was the belief in the astrologic planning of the universe: a system of universal correspondences that could be read in the apparent astronomic movement of the celestial bodies. More particularly, the relations between letters, natural elements, colors, music tones, astrologic sings and geographic positions is found in what Cecilia Bendinger has called the “energetic alphabet of Xul Solar.” (Bendinger 2004, 52) Xul Solar divided the consonants in four groups associating each one to one basic element, one zodiac sign and one phonetic characteristic. This means that each of the letters is intrinsically linked to another four or five letters by their astrologic affinity. These associations are reflected in the graphic representations of the syllables especially in the geometric, vegetal, and bordure alphabets. As it is clearly seen in table 4 each of the four basic shapes: square, semicircle, circle and triangle from which the geometric writing is derived are linked to a natural element and to a group of consonants. Every natural element is, in its own time, connected to three zodiac signs in such a way that each group of consonants is related to one zodiac sign. The resulting associations between the astrologic functions, the natural elements and the consonants, could be arranged in a table expressing the placement of each pair of complementing signs inside and astrologic and elemental map as follows.
Table 9. Astrologic and phonic associations of the consonants present in the iconoscripture of Xul Solar. Symbols extracted from Habkost’s decoding of the vegetal, geometric and bordure writings (Habkost 2009 307-311.) The analysis has also been based in Bendinger’s investigation about the astrologic correspondences with vowels and consonants in the work of Xul Solar. (Bendinger 2004, 54, 54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zodiac Signs and consonants associated to the Earth element, explosive or obstructive sounds and the square.</th>
<th>Signs and consonants associated to the Water element, nasal sounds and the semicircle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taurus</td>
<td>Cancer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin character</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetal writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometric writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bordure writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgo</td>
<td>Scorpio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin character</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetal writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometric writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bordure writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Pisces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin character</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetal writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geometric writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bordure writing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Zodiac Signs and consonants associated to the Air element, fricative and sibilant sounds and the circle. Zodiac Signs and consonants associated to the Fire element, vibrating sounds and the triangle.
The analysis of Table 9 reveals that the principle of coupling of consonants was systematically used by Xul Solar in order to produce his geometric, vegetal and bordure systems of picture writing. Besides the consonants N, Ñ, L, H, R and S which stand on their own, all the remaining consonants have been arranged into pairs by the artist. In the case of the letter “H,” the vertical symmetry of the Latin character has been conserved in the vegetal, geometric and bordure writings, while the new representations of the letter “S” maintains the sinuous curves of the Latin script. The vegetal writing of the letter “R” repeats almost point by point the shape of the corresponding Latin script character, but the picture writing of the consonants “N” “Ñ” do not
The Universal Writing

seem to present any morphological resemblance with the Latin script. Letters “N” and “Ñ” are based on the shape of the half circle (Table 4) and couple with the letter “M” which is linked to Scorpio (and not to Cancer) and is the graphic inversion of the other two letters. The remaining consonants are all coupled in relation to their astrological character and follow the system of inversion (in the vertical or horizontal axe) of a basic motif. The letter “C,” is outside the system of astrologic relations since its phonic value in Spanish (and Neocriollo) is the same of the letters “K” or “S.”

The true symmetric couples are the following: For the earth element we found the pair “B-P” related to the sign Taurus, the pair “K-G” related to the sign Virgo, and the pair “D-T” related to the sign Capricorn. For the air element we find the pair “V-F” is associated with the sign Aquarius; and for the fire element we have the couple “X-J” associated to Aries. There are no symmetrical couples assigned to the water element while earth is the only element completing three solid pairs of consonants linked to each one of the three earth signs. It is significant that the earth element is represented by the square and that the stability of the shape and of the element as grounding forces is expressed in the iconoscripture itself. Needless to say, Xul Solar was not the only one at the time investigating the symbolic, synesthetic and spiritual associations of geometric figures. Wasily Kandinsky had already referred to the square as the proto sound of the straight line. “The most objective form of the typical BO is the square, both pairs of boundary lines possess equally strong sound.” (Kandinsky 1947, 115) In *Punkt und Linie zu Fläche*, Kandinsky describes the relations between what he considers the most severe color and figure: the color red and the square. “The cold-warm of the square and its definite plane-like nature, immediately become sin-posts pointing to red”(Kandinsky 1947, 72). Red is distinguished from yellow and blue by its characteristic of lying firmly on the plane. Such stability and binarism (the square is constituted from two pairs of parallel lines) is actualized by Xul Solar in the system’s coupling of the consonants of its geometric, vegetal and bordure writings. The square is firm and stable because it’s inner nature is double, both cold and warm. The zodiac signs Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn are related to earth and to the geometric shape of the square. They are also the realistic or earth grounded signs according to Solar’s *Panheldeike* containing an opposition of two complementing forces. Within this system of symbolic geometric associations is thus understandable why Xul Solar maintained a rigorous correlation in the couples of earth letters B-P, K-G, and D-T: they express the geometric plane and its vertical-horizontal tension.
7.3. Tiahuanaco, Inca and Nazca Influence in the Constructive Work of Joaquín Torres-García

Profiting from his visits to the library of the *Cercle artístic de Sant Lluc* in Barcelona and of his artistic preparatory voyages to the Italian peninsula between 1910 and 1916, Torres-García thoroughly studied Platonic philosophy, Italian art and some variations of Art Nouveau which provided the painter with the technical preparation needed for the execution of his Barcelona mural works. Departing from a general interest in archaic arts and crafts and after being confronted with the need to actualize his own Mediterranean classical style, the Uruguayan directed his interest towards the arts of the pre-Columbian civilizations of the ancient Americas, not with the idea of extracting precise pictorial motifs from their painting, but in the search of constant rules uniting the arts of all times.

Torres-García systematically studied the art and culture of the pre-Colombian civilizations of the Americans, first from a general perspective in the 1920s with special emphasis on Inca and pre-Inca art during the 1930s and then focusing on the ancient art of North America in the 1940s. As Cecilia de Torres commented in a recent interview (Brandrymer and Pontet 2006), the master’s first contact with the products of the pre-Columbian cultures took place in 1919 during his visit to the collections of the Museum of Archeology in Madrid, followed by investigations in the Museum of Natural History in New York in 1920 where he studied African and ancient Peruvian art. Later on in 1928, Torres-García visited the exhibition “Ancient Art of the Americas” in the Museum Trocadero in Paris at a time when he was also being introduced to medieval cathedral architecture by the Spanish painter and freemason Luis Fernandez. Finally as a result of intense archive investigations into pre-Inca (more precisely Tiahuanaco art, although the painter ignored this categorization) and Inca art which had begun in the summer of 1935, Torres-García wrote *Metafísica de la Preshistoria Indoamericana* (1939) where the author manifested his solidarity with the Inca civilization, something already foreseen in the seventh issue of the magazine *Círculo y Cuadrado*, which explored the relations between modern constructive art and the geometric order of ancient Inca architecture. The
The Universal Writing

programmatic text opening the issue sets the new orientation of the Asociación de Arte Constructivo (AAC) as follows.

AMPLIACIÓN DE ESTUDIOS

La Asociación de Arte Constructivo, al abrir una nueva serie de estudios sobre la Tradición Constructiva en América, es con el fin de poner en evidencia que las teorías que hasta hoy sustentó, pueden equipararse a la cultura arcaica del continente, y que por esto, al propugnar tales teorías, no es con el fin de formar una escuela más, sino de dar debida orientación, que sería la que unificaría, como ya lo hemos dicho en otras ocasiones a todo el continente.

Muchas veces hemos señalado el parentesco existente entre el Arte Constructivo y el Arte Precolombiano (sic) que en primer lugar, nos coloca en un mismo plano, pero sobre todo, y eso es lo más importante, en estrecha relación de teorías. (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1938)

The rational element found in Torres-García’s enterprise, clearly visible in the discussion relating abstraction with geometry found in La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto, was rightly interpreted as a counter-colonialist gesture by Mari Carmen Ramírez who underlined that “García’s conceptualization of pre-Columbian art opposed atavistic irrationalism with which the pre-Hispanic world was characterized in colonial and romantic literature” (Ramírez 1992, 258). Nonetheless, as indicated by Mario Gradowczyk, (Gradowczyk 2007) while fighting for an art based on Indo-American roots but extended to its cosmic dimensions, Torres-García refused political action and any connection with important Latin-American social reform movements such as agrarismo and aprismo and thus marginalized himself and the group of young artists who had followed him on his constructive Universalist project. The bitter discussion with the painter Norberto Berdía, member of the Confederación de Trabajadores Intelectuales del Uruguay, since the arrival of Torres-García to Montevideo, shows how his artistic agenda was read by the politically active artistic factions of Uruguay. Berdía accused the author of Universalismo Constructivo of defending bourgeois and individualistic values, while the accused replied in his Manifiesto Uno that the new art of Uruguay was collective and anonymous, anchored in the tradition of the workers and constructors of all times; words which did little to transform the image of the group of artists into that of an organization of social reformers working for a communal art.

Beyond the political and pedagogical implications extracted from his defense of Inca arts and culture, it is indeed possible to establish compositional, stylistic and chromatic relations between the Nazca, Tiahuanaco and Inca art of South America and the constructive work of Torres-García which has been insufficiently studied until now. In order to achieve a clearer
exposition of the results in this area we will now deal exclusively with examples in which no textual-visual merging takes place. Once the pictorial analysis has been done, we will come back to the problems of a mixed system of pictorial and alphabetic writing. In the latter, the understanding of Egyptian and Maya hieroglyphs will prove fruitful; for now an understanding of the pictorial and architectonic regime developed by the civilizations of Andean South America is more pertinent.

For the Nazca, the geometric perception of inhabited space was represented in the network of lines, spirals and effigies stretching for more than 60 kilometers in the valleys of the Nazca basin. This “architecture of two-dimensional space” (Kubler 1971, 299) finds its volumetric counterpart in the capital of the Tiahuanaco empire (from which the Nazca people were independent) whose center was the stepped pyramid of Akapana. The city divided in two complementary halves headed by the public buildings Klaskaya and Pumapunko was ordered according to the cardinal directions and followed a rigorous orthogonal design. According to Patricia Montaño Durán, the bilateral division of the city between its south and north halves influenced the whole of the social life of the empire which was also regulated by a system of bilateral oppositions. The south, the moon, the night and the feminine were at one side of the equation while the north, the sun, the day and the masculine were in the other. This division was kept long after the Spanish conquest and during the colonial period, regulating the formalities of tribute payment. Parallel to this geopolitical division, Tiahuanaco was itself conceived as the center of the universe, a middle level between the higher world of alajpacha and the underworld, makhapacha, where creation had begun. (Montaño Durán 2011, 179) Schematically expressed, this means a vision of the universe as divided into three levels in which the middle one is controlled by complementary opposing forces.

The organization of the urban space in the shape of a grid might be the first and more general point of contact between Tiahuanaco architecture and the constructivist art of the Uruguayan artist, which from circa 1929, conceived the orthogonal space (and its sub-division directed by the golden section) as the basic unit of his work. Nevertheless, the same also holds true for the more precise organization of a magnetic or polar system found inside a bigger three-part order. The pictograms used by Torres-García were classified by the artist in the table Forma
símbolo in three groups: the intellectual, magnetic and physical planes. Just as it is the case in Tiahuanaco cosmology, the middle plane is a polar system on its own.

In the right pole of the middle level we will find the right hand, the sun, the male representation, the astrologic symbol of Mars and the hammer (representing physical work and law). In the left side we will find of course the left hand, the moon, the female body, the astrologic symbol of Venus, and the key (symbol of reason). Surrounding these sets of magnetic division, the intellectual and physical planes associated with specific pictograms by Torres-García work as the Alajpacha and Makhapacha levels which are found on the top and bottom magnetic levels.

There is still another element added to the compositional norm regulated by the orthogonal division of the canvas: the presence of very narrow elongated sections dialoguing with golden section quadrilaterals. This generates a visual effect very similar to the one achieved by fifteen century Inca and colonial weavers in the textile products of the Cuzco area. There is a striking similarity in the way the painted surface of Torres-García’s Constructivos is organized according to what in Peruvian woman’s wedding mantle is called a Pallai-Pampa design. This is especially recognizable in the works that Mario Gradowczyk has catalogued as symmetric constructive works. Narrow bands contain geometric zigzag patterns and wider bands hold the symbolic pictograms used by the painter. In works such as Constructivo doble línea (1932) Constructivo simétrico (1932) or Composición simétrica universal en blanco y negro, (1931) (see table 14) the viewer can clearly appreciate how the canvas is divided into panel-like spaces, where suns, men, houses, clocks and faces are inserted (the pampa) and column-like narrow sectors (Pallai) which are not filled with symbolic pictograms but with geometrical zigzag patterns, chains, dots or lines, just as the Peruvian textiles Liclla are.

Although according to Mario Gradowczyk between 1933 and 1942 Torres-García started including clearly distinguishable pre-Columbian symbols in his work, this happens only

---

80 The table Forma símbolo is an originally untitled document transcribed and published under that name by Gradowczyk (Gradowczyk 2007, 225). This is not the only document attesting such division. During the decade of 1930s, at least three variations are found in the work of Torres-García. In the pages of Estructura, the three planes of existence are reason and geometry; manifestation and emotion; organization and matter. In an ink drawing found on Notre boussole de navigateur dans la vie (unpublished) as well as in the 1933 ink Composición Cósmica con Hombre Abstracto, these planes present certain variations, the first being the realm of reason, architecture, structure and geometry, the second of feeling, shape, magic and unconscious and the third of the instinct, color, sensation and body.
episodically and corresponds to the most external aspect of the relation between his works and that of the ancient civilizations of South America. From 1929, the presence of what can be distinguished as archaic masks placed in the lower sections of the paintings of the Uruguayan becomes more abundant. Nevertheless, these are not recognizable as pre-Columbian designs but vaguely closer to Oceanic examples. Only in a few 1933 paintings such as *Formas trabadas anímicas* (1933) and some paintings and drawings signed 1938–1941, such as *Pachamama* (1938), *Indoamerica* (1938) or *Magic graphism* (1938) did Torres-García mimic the archetypical human and bird shapes seen in Nazca textiles and Quimbaya anthropomorphic gold pectorals and miniatures. Simplified representations of the image of the god *Viracocha* as seen in the 3m x 4m Tiahuanaco megalith known as *Gate of the Sun* is found in the drawing *Constructivo* (1939), and in the oil on leather drawing *Indoamerica* from 1941. The stepped pyramidal shape of Akapana, a free representation of the *Pachamama* goddess as a simple eyed mountain, is present in *Indoamerica* and in other sketches of the same year. Besides these four precise iconological coincidences it would be farfetched to assume that representations of birds, fish and basic metal tools (the latter being rarely used by the pre-Columbian artisans) present in the work of Torres-García have any pre-Columbian descent. These figures seem to contradict the detailed visual zoomorphic universe of ancient Mexican and Andean civilizations and are not simplified representations of more complex ancient American motifs but much more universal forms representing a general archaism.

Perhaps more important than the iconological coincidences is the structural transformation of the grid system and the chromatic enlargement of the pictorial vocabulary observable in 1933 and 1938 works resembling the designs found on polychrome pottery vessels of early Nazca style. Nazca pottery painting does not represent objects as they look—it is “restricted to symbolic conventions for abstract ideas by means of solid and ungraded tones.” (Kubler 1971, 303) This art of the singularity, which chooses the ideal representation of one individual in opposition to the expressive representation of social groups (in which the ancient Mexican artist excelled), fit the ideal and geometric expectations of a man inclined towards depurated and severe schematic representation, which Kubler has observed in the case of Nazca painting:

> From the earliest period, the polychrome decoration stresses conceptual abstraction and combinations more than pictorial descriptions of environment. The representation of action shared by several figures is totally lacking. There are no conventions for showing landscape or housing. (Kubler 1971, 300)
Absence of mundane contextualization of the represented object is present in all the constructive works of Torres-García in which a key might be placed next to a fish or a ship next to a human heart in a system of purely symbolic connections opposed to the usual placement of objects in the world. This relates to surrealist hasard objective defined by Andre Breton in *Les Vases Communicants* (1932) but conceived five years earlier in *Nadja*. In these works the link between people and objects is not given by routine and contingency but through a fatal universal necessity. Although such non-mundane linkage is close to Surrealism, Torres García’s symbolism differs from surrealist hasard objective in so far as the function that relates objects and individuals is found in religion and ancient cosmology and is the representation of a general rule of unity. This Unitarian religious thinking is closer to Franc masonry than to Surrealism, although the first was an important influence for the latter.

Precise coincidences between the work of Torres-García and Nazca pottery decoration are the unification of the space, conceptual abstraction of the figure, and the use of a few solid ungraded colors in order to fill fore and background. These features are clearly visible in works like *Formas Trabadas Anímicas* (1933), *Constructivo con Formas Entrelazadas* (1933) or *Constructivo con línea Blanca* (1938) in which pre-Columbian iconology is also present. In these Nazca-influenced works, Torres-García has created a new relation between figurative elements and grid. Choosing to depict the outline of the object with one continuous line, object and structure are mixed into one representational-structural unity. Instead of locating pre-Columbian iconography into the niches of the constructive grid, the artist has transformed the structure itself under the influence of their art. Following the use of a continuous line dividing areas of color but representing only one character, Torres-García has also opened his pallet to the use of white and red (the imperial colors of Tiahuanaco) as well as yellow and orange which were commonly present in early Pre-Inca pottery. As it will be demonstrated in the following chapter the evolution and transformation of the relations between text and image in the constructive work of Torres-Garcia is intimately related to his interest for pre-Colombian and ancient African cultures. While alphabetic transformation and merging of linguistic and visual vocabulary is a key development of Torres-García’s art more clearly visible in his ink drawings than on his constructive work, one cannot disregard the true value of the recuperation of Nazca and Tiahuanaco pictorial and architectonical language in the constructive canvases. In his critique to Rousseau’s *Essai sur l’Origine des Langues* Jacques Derrida discusses the matter of
necessity and passion as the fundamental causes for the emergence of human gestures and language. According to Warburton the first language, that of the primitive people would be metaphoric, passionate and imprecise. Rousseau complements this theory by adding that people in the north strived towards rationality leaving behind the language of action and passion in order to achieve precision. In his frame of thought time has its own coordinates. While south is the past, the future is found in the north. As Derrida summarizes: “Sur la trame de ces difficultés et de ces différences l’intention de Rousseau se précise. L’histoire va vers le nord en s’éloignant de l ‘origine” (Derrida 1967, 387). In the line of Derrida’s grammatologic enterprise, but before him, Torres-García completely shifted the questions of north and south, of barbarism and culture, of spoken and written language. The famous 1943 drawing America Invertida sets our sailing route towards the south, not as a return to barbarism (a concept abolished by the Uruguayan) but as the future of a better society. It is the severity, the precision and rationality that Torres-García recuperates from Nazca textile and pottery. Geometric patterns and marks are the fundamental universal writing that the tradition of the abstract man must recuperate in order to oppose the modern split between reason and spirit. “Tradition of knowledge engraved in the stone” (Torres-García 1974. Trans. Cortés 2015). Such writing cannot be vocalized, because the true symbol for Torres-García cannot be put into words, it is a geometric pattern, a structure, a pictogram or a wall (Torres-García 1944, 100.)

During the late fourteenth century, under the ruling of the Inca Roca, Tiahuanaco became “an open concourse surrounded by a network of walled courtyards, divided by the highway connecting the capital to the four quarters of the empire” (Kubler 1971, 327). The monumental wall masonry of the Inca, whose building methods prevailed during the colonial period, impressed Torres-García who in the 1930s painted a series of works exclusively devoted to the reproduction of this type of masonry. The reproduction of Inca walls in paintings such as Estructuras en blanco y Negro, (1937) Composición abstructa tubular, (1937) or Estructura (1935) make it clear that the Uruguayan had found a direct objective expression of the structural order that had always directed his art. For the first time the constructor renounces schematic representation and uses detail to emphasize the material qualities of the object from which nothing can be removed, erecting it to the status of pure construction. Inca masonry achieves structural stability not by piling perfect hexagons one on top of the other, but by creating concave depressions on every stone on top of which the next one is set. Torres-García exaggerated this characteristic in order to make it clearly visible through frontal representation.
In *Estructuras en Blanco y Negro*, the stones are completely curved. The painter shows the most characteristic features of the object without using a cross section and respecting the principle of frontalilty that directed his art since his early Barcelona production. The reproduction of wall structures reveals an interest for architecture beyond the purely metaphorical association of the painter as a constructor. Architecture is a form of writing in the space. It is literary a “concrete writing,” since it is a mark of culture and a wound in the natural space.

### 7.4 Textual-Visual Reorientation and Transformation of the Latin Alphabet in the Work of Joaquín Torres-García

Well established and renowned in the Catalan city of Barcelona, Torres-García started working on the frescoes of the *Saló de Sant Jordi* of the Municipal Palace of Barcelona in 1912.⁸¹ These works, which timidly announce the constructions later developed by the master, were hardly criticized by the republican party of Lerroux and by Eugeni d’Ors himself who expected the Uruguayan to use a refined academic vocabulary in order to express the glory of the Catalan region. The Spaniards were negatively surprised by the severity and austerity of the Uruguayan’s work, which even during this classical stage was condemned as childish and rigid. (Haber and Torres 1988, 2)

On September 23rd 1916, a few months before being dismissed from his commission by the city administration, Torres-García finished what may be his most representative Barcelona mural; the fourth composition entitled *Lo temporal no es mes que simbol*, known under this title because of the inclusion of this explicative sentence at the bottom of the mural in a rectangular niche. It is possible that this refers to the ephemeral aspect of the sensual pleasures depicted in the scene.⁸² After leaving behind his Barcelona murals, Torres-García had his first contact with

---

⁸¹ Eugeni d’Ors, the influential Spanish writer who from around 1906 developed the theoretical bases of literary *Noucentisme*, was impressed by Torres-García’s work and managed to persuade the local government to allocate this significant commission to the foreigner painter.

⁸² Alicia Haber has pointed out the influence of Goethe’s *Faust* over this representation in which conflict between heavenly and earthly orders is evident (Haber and Torres 1988, 5). This could also hold true in the
Futurism and Cubism through his friend, the Vibracionista painter Rafael Barradas, who had traveled to Italy in 1913 where he had been in contact with the work of Carrà and Severini. In Figura con Paisaje en la Ciudad (1917) as well as in the untitled ink (figure 35) reproduced in the fifth issue of Un enemic del Poble on June 1917 Torres-García dislocates the landscape and achieves a collage-like effect juxtaposing heterogeneous elements nestled in a basic geometric structure, something which would have been unimaginable in his visual production of the previous year. The presence of numbers (representing time, addresses and routes of public transportation), newspaper headings, store ads, names of cities, popular venues, traffic signs, and other types of text found in the modern city are extremely popular in Torres-García’s canvases from 1917 until around 1921, when the painter became increasingly busier with the construction of his wooden toys revealed to the public for the first time in a 1918 Barcelona exhibition. The dominance of a static orthogonal structure and the absence of faceted layers in metropolitan canvases of the early 1920s (such as Nueva York from 1921) demonstrates that the Uruguayan did something more than assimilate the Cubist and Futurist aesthetics. Nevertheless his use of text and numbers subordinated to their factual presence in urban space which seems to contradict his earlier developments towards the dissolution of the illusory pictorial space which was already a visible focus in his mural compositions in Barcelona.

During the 1929-1930 Circle et Carré experience which gathered Torres-García, Hans Arp, Piet Mondrian, van Doesburg, Seuphor, Vantongerloo, Russolo and almost 80 other artists for a few months around the principles of abstraction and construction, Torres-García developed the unmistakable style of his grid-based Constructivos which was to cause discussion and in many cases overt rejection in Montevideo after 1934. After going through a first phase of artistic preparation represented in his neoclassical Mediterranean murals and leaving behind an a stage of clear Futurist and Cubist influence in which urban landscapes provide the first models for a reticular construction, it is in the city of Paris under the influence of Neoplasticism and Constructivism, that the artist gave shape to what would later be summarized under the name Universalismo Constructivo. These works defined the aesthetic vindicated by the master upon his arrival to Montevideo and became the trademark of his pictorial style. They are a definitive benchmark of his work due to the incorporation of written text in a completely new case of Xul Solar’s San Signos. Nevertheless, however fruitful the field of investigations concerned with the persistence of the romantic image in Avant-Garde manifestations might be, such questions are outside the area of influence of the present investigation.
manner when compared to paintings from the late 1910s and 1920s. Here text and numbers are not taken directly from the urban space, as if they were a piece of reality pasted on the painterly surface, but represent moral and aesthetic values, creating a self-contained ethical universe symbolically evoked by visual clues and signs. An early work, the oil on cardboard *Constructivo dedicado a Manolita* (1930) (figure 36), clearly exemplifies the new approach taken by the artist. The painter resumed the moral preoccupations presented in his mural paintings around 1914 and placed symbolically charged morphemes either in a single case of the orthogonal grid or sharing positions with other pictorial symbols in order to deliver a doctrinal message. In this case text is distributed in a balanced fashion all around the painted surface as follows:

MANOLITA

SCIENCE

LIBERTÉ

EQUILIBRE

Opening a dialogue with Huidobro’s *Poèmes Peintes*, the text found in this *Constructivo* is written in French and shares the space along with the visual sign. Moreover, much in the style of Xul Solar’s early watercolors, *Constructivo dedicado a Manolita* (figure 36) is reminiscent of the 1919 painting *Podré* (figure 7) where single morphemes, also written in capital letters and framed by rectangular banners, interact with the rest of the pictorial elements producing a semantically coherent iconotext. The word “MANOLITA,” which makes reference to the painter’s wife to whom the whole composition was dedicated, is placed at the very top of the *constructivo* dominating the depictions of the columns, the wall, the house, and the triangle, all of which are part of the high intellectual and magnetic levels associated by the painter with abstract and constructive art. Furthermore, the concepts of freedom and balance are suggestively placed almost in the center of the composition and are “repeated” in the schematic representation of the weighing scale and the key while the concept of nature is symbolically expressed by the depiction of the sun at the right side, and those of the fish, the snail and the apple at the left side. The same kind of redundancy is present in many other works of the 1930s.
and 1940s. Two more examples, one from 1930 and the other one from 1943 will suffice to demonstrate this. The watercolor on paper *Viaje Rápido Hacia el Sol* (1930) has the following text evenly distributed over the paper surface: “DÉPART / VOYAGES RAPIDES / VERS LE SOLEIL / ESPOIR.” In this example the word “DÉPART” is written over the depiction of a sailing ship; the sentence “VOYAGES RAPIDES” is connected to the navigation compass and the word “ESPOIR” is placed next to a Christian temple, while “VERS LE SOLEIL” is the only sentence left without a clear visual complement. In *Constructive painting 12* (1943), Torres-García made use of an unusually high number of different pictograms and symbols belonging to such diverse cultures as Sumerian, Egyptian, Arabic, Greek, pre-Columbian and modern western culture. The painter places the Spanish words “EDAD MEDIA,” “GRECIA,” “EGIPTO,” and “ABSTRACION” one on top of the other inside single niches sharing the space with very small drawings which directly represent visually what is already textually expressed. A medieval castle, a Greek colonnade, a pyramid and a key are respectively connected to each of the words, achieving a very explicit semantic reinforcement.

One could refer to this kind of redundant visual-linguistic relation using the same expression coined by Waldemar George in 1922 to refer to Huidobro’s *Poèmes Peintes*: they are “lyrical pleonasms” (DeCosta and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía 2001, 5) which is to say there is almost a one to one relation between word and image, or at least a complementary relation pointing to only one semantic direction. In this aspect the sentence of George fits more precisely the work of the painter than that of the poet. As we have strived to demonstrate, the text-image relation in the work of Vicente Huidobro is interactive but not mimetic. In the *Poèmes Peintes*, the visual level says something that cannot be written, or points to secondary messages and metaphoric associations which lay in the large symbolic level triggered by the text but also transformed by the image itself. From this perspective the work of Torres-García lies behind the experiments of his Chilean and Argentinean contemporaries. In his 1919-1923 works, Xul Solar juxtaposes the image not only with words but with sentences which enlarge or clarify the graphic message and which might also decontextualize and shift the value of the figures. That was the case in the 1919 watercolor *Podré* (figure 7) where the otherwise positive associations produced by the presence of the snake were reversed into a symbol of greed due to the linguistic framing that transforms the general message and adds clear political undertones to the composition.
After the development of his constructive system around 1929-1930, contemporary with the inclusion of linguistic elements in the paintings, Torres-García experimented with the graphic variation of the Latin alphabet using the Phoenician, Greco-Iberian and Runic ones as models. Mario Gradowczyk generated a conversion table between the Latin alphabet and the one created by Torres-García, extensively used by the artist in a series of 1936-1938 ink drawing on paper, most of which were reproduced in his magnificent artisanal book *La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto* (1938). The linguistic study of works like *Indoamerica* (1938), *Pachamama* (1938) or *Hombre Constructivo* (1938) (figure 37) reveals the importance of Mario Gradowczyk’s work of conversion of Torres-García’s alphabet but also the necessity to add some minor corrections to his work. The graphic representation of the letters “A,” “L,” “R,” “O” “Z” and “S” in Torres-García’s work seems to be more ambiguous than what Gradowczyk’s table shows. The following conversion table complementing Gradowczyk’s work aims to show those aspects.

---

83 Many of these ink drawings are scattered in collections in the Americas and Europe making it difficult to assess the quantitative dimension of the series.

84 The 1938 ink drawing *Hombre Constructivo* can be found under that name in Gradowczyk’s *Torres-García: Utopía y transgresión* (Gradowczyk 2007, 278), but it was first published untitle d along with many others, much earlier in 1969 in the facsimile edition of *La Tradición del Hombre abstracto.*
Table 10.
Conversion table of the Latin alphabet and the one developed by Torres-García showing the use of more than one symbol to represent one Latin character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latin character</th>
<th>Symbol (s) used by Torres-García to designate each Latin character.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Symbol" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Various discrepancies come to light when comparing this table with the larger one proposed by Gradowczyk. The study of the constructive inks and other scattered drawings found in *La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto* reveals that Torres-García repeatedly made use of only one graphic symbol in order to represent the Latin characters “A” and “O” in the group of 1936-1938 ink drawings reproduced in the book, but probably as well in other drawings of the same period not yet known to the public. By the same token, the circle with a dot in the middle - which as Gradowczyk has demonstrated usually represents the letter “T,” can also
stand for the Latin character “O.” Something similar holds in the case of the letters “G” and “R” which are not always differentiated but are represented with the same double square.

### Table 11

Transliteration into Spanish and English of the texts found in the 1938 ink Indoamerica.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morphemes or acronyms written in the modified Latin Alphabet of Torres-García.</th>
<th>a) Spanish transliteration.</th>
<th>b) English translation.</th>
<th>c) Explanation of the acronym or proper name when needed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>น ร</td>
<td>a) N S</td>
<td>b) N S</td>
<td>c) North South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>キロメ</td>
<td>a) Cosmos</td>
<td>b) Cosmos</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ヴア</td>
<td>a) Vida</td>
<td>b) Life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>イア</td>
<td>a) Arte</td>
<td>b) Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>イン</td>
<td>a) Ley</td>
<td>b) Law</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>イミ</td>
<td>c) Inti</td>
<td>d) Inti</td>
<td>e) Sun God of the Inca Civilization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ジョビ</td>
<td>a) JTG</td>
<td>b) JTG</td>
<td>c) Joaquín Torres-García</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>フィミム</td>
<td>a) Pacha Mama</td>
<td>b) Pacha Mama</td>
<td>c) Fertility goddess of the Inca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>シュウ</td>
<td>a) AAC</td>
<td>b) AAC</td>
<td>c) Asociación de Arte Constructivo.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lastly, the analysis of the constructive work *Indoamérica* undertaken on table 11 reveals that letter “S” can be represented as a variation of a vertical wave form but also as a continuous horizontal zigzag, an alternative not considered until now. Using Mario Gradowczyk’s table and following the small corrections proposed here, one can successfully read and interpret the text found in 1938 inks as *Indoaamérica* or *Hombre constructivo* (figure 37) while also disclosing the intimate relation between the pictograms and the text.

In chapter 7.2 our analysis of Xul Solar’s *Grafía El sey rey wan. Telud* (…) revealed the presence of two simultaneous symbolic systems: the geometric alphabet representing a *Neocriollo* message, and the scattered figurative representations of the palm tree or the star belonging to an emblematic regime. Going back to our constructive artist, it is clear that the 1938 ink *Indoamerica* by Torres-García makes use of a modified Latin alphabet in order to write a text in Spanish; but what can be said of the pictograms accompanying the Spanish words? Motifs like the fish or the anchor can of course be searched for in emblem dictionaries and be interpreted in the light of one or many religious systems. Nevertheless, Torres-García’s theoretic and pictorial work provides enough clues to accomplish an intrinsic interpretation of the symbols which, according to the painter, were meant to be intuitively understandable. For Torres-García art is not to be read or deciphered, but to be felt “without the intermediacy of any explanation” (Torres García 1944, 302. Trans. Cortés 2015)

"Una marca de una fábrica, de una sociedad náutica o deportiva, no serán jamás simbólicas en el sentido que decimos, ni la cruz lo es de una religión. Símbolo que pueda traducirse en lenguaje, en idea, no es símbolo tal como lo entendemos. Nuestro símbolo es aquel que viene de la intuición y solo es interpretado por ella"(Torres-García 1944, 100.)

Torres-García’s art is found on the verge of contradiction. While proposing a purely intuitive approach to the symbols, he is also providing the viewer with their immediate and objective interpretation, which becomes evident when exploring the ink *Indoamerica* niche by niche. The anchor is placed next to the schematic representation of the waves (which are themselves the synecdoche of the ocean, as it was the case in Huidobro’s 1921 *Marine*) and between the two opposite geographic directions; north and south, which can be read as a symbol of movement.
or global navigation guided by a system of coordinates. By the same token all the other symbols seem to have a precise value when read inside the system conformed by the totality of the artist’s painting. In the other hand the painter has shifted the center of gravity of the definition of symbol itself. “A symbol which can be translated into language or idea is not a symbol in the sense given to it by us.” (Torres-García 1944, 100) Just as Vicente Huidobro set doubt on the use of language as a communicative system, Torres-García wished to enlarge the notion of symbol. A true symbol for him bears a historical and even pre-historical dimension. Two fundamental elements of modern linguistics are questioned by the artist: logocentrism and arbitrariness. For him symbols can be intuitively appreciated since they are inserted in a Universalist tradition and they are not phonetic representations since their meaning cannot be directly expressed into words, but translated into a constructive system.

In the drawing Indoamerica the human body represents a micro-cosmos in itself (as stated in his 1935 Estructura); the simple clay pot engraved with the word “arte” reminds us of the crafts and anonymous art of the creators throughout the ages (synthetized in Torres-García’s project of forging a School of the South and clearly expressed in Metafísica de la Prehistoria Indoamericana) and the hardness of the hammer (morphologically close to the Latin letter “T”) represents the great or eternal law while the triangle is the symbol of unity inside plurality (as proposed in the books Estructura and Raison et Nature). The precise symbolic value given to the letter “T” as a representation of the totality (Gradowczyk 2007, 275) but also of straightness, force and cosmic law, was shared point by point by Xul Solar in a 1953 text85 published in El Hogar describing the Panlingua, Xul Solar’s project of a synthetic a posteriori language left unfinished by the artist.

La panlingua Se lee como se escribe, sin gramática, de raíces invariables y sin expresiones, donde cada consonante representa una categoría de ideas calificadas por las vocales dispuestas en polaridad positiva y negativa. La letra más dura, correspondiente a Saturno y que representa cantidad, que es como la ley de este mundo es la T. Ta significa cuanto; Ti: poco; Tu: mucho; Te: menos y To mas. (Xul Solar 2005, 82)

One should not forget that the ideographic system produced by Torres-García, his systematic use of vertical space hierarchies, the precise pre-Columbian and architectural structuring

---

85Without explicitly referring to Xul Solar, Jorge Luis Borges made an ingenuous critique of such analytical linguistic systems in El idioma analítico de John Wilkins, where an analysis of Wilkins’ philosophical language crosses fictitious references as the Chinese Emporio celestial de conocimientos benévolos or the division of the universe done by the Instituto Bibliográfico de Bruselas (surely based on the Belgian Universal Bibliographic Repertory) into a thousand absurd categories.
achieved in many works and his geometric symbolic portraits or *psycogramas* (we will come back to these), were meant to be types of universal writing challenging phonetic and alphabetic reduction. More importantly, Torres-García restores the value of pictorial communication without opposing it to other systems of alphabetic writing but wishing to merge them in a new unity. Whereas Xul Solar’s writing systems might be extrapolated as effectively used in many contexts (as long as the user is in possession of the right code), Torres-García’s pictograms cannot be isolated from the constructive system into which they are inserted. His writing is something much more primordial; it is not the secondary system of representation of a phonetic language (as the systems of pictorial writing invented by Xul Solar are) but a language on its own.

### 7.5. Elements of Hieroglyphic Writing in the Work of Joaquín Torres-García and Xul Solar.

After the immense success achieved at the beginning of the twentieth century deciphering the numerical and mathematical system of the Maya and their use of individual glyphs to express zero, the number 20, the cardinal directions, the colors, the months and the names of the planets, research on the Mayan writing system was stagnated for many years. In the 1960s while Tatiana Proskouriakoff “published for the first time evidence that the texts of Maya monuments did indeed contain historical records,” (Helmke 2004, 11) more skeptical voices (J. Eric S. Thompson and Sylvanus G. Morley) declared that no linguistic content whatsoever could be found in the glyphs which were merely copied from stelae and monumental sculpture into smaller ornaments and statuary.

Today we know that from its beginnings around 700 BC until the Spanish conquest in the early sixteenth century, Mayan hieroglyphic writing used around one thousand different signs, although no more than 500 hundred were used at one given historical period. Like the Egyptian system, Mayan writing is both logographic (or ideographic) and phonetic, which
The Universal Writing

means that its symbols can be used both to express an idea or a sound. However, the basic phonetic unit of the Mayan system is the syllable (and not single consonants or vowels), which is why it is known as a logogramsyllabic system of writing. The use of determinatives, complements, diacritical signs as well as “word order” in Mayan writing is complex and subject to variation. Besides the evident graphic differences, depending on the degree of zoomorphic or anthropomorphic stylization of the symbols, two characteristics relevant to this study differentiate Mayan and Egyptian Hieroglyphics. The first is the partial or total superposition of one glyph on top of other, or the merging of too glyphs (or its parts) into one new unit, for economic or aesthetic reasons, which is persistent in the Mayan system (Helmke and Ketunen 2004, 7) but absent in the Egyptian one. (Allen, James 2000) The second is a higher level of abbreviation or suppression of a greater number of phonemes in the Mayan writing system than in the Egyptian one.

It is apparent that the ancient Maya used a system of writing that had the potential to record linguistic structures as complex as the syntax present in the oral manifestations of their languages. In practice, however, the writing system is a graphemic abbreviation of highly complex syntactical structures and thus many items omitted had to be provided by readers intimately familiar with the language of the script records. (Helmke and Ketunen 2004, 7)

These characteristics are important since they relate to two basic procedures used by Torres-García: merging and transformation of the linguistic signs through abbreviation. Examples of the former are everywhere: in Formas Trabadas Anímicas, foreground and background are one, in Hombre Constructivo (figure 37) the symbols are engraved on the body of the man without hiding it but being part of it. Most architectural work of the master is a blend of the reticular grid with the building, superposing façade and decorative elements with the niches of the constructive work. Abbreviation, on the other hand, can be proven by the widespread use of acronyms in Torres-García’s work growing in number during the 1930s. In wood carvings done in Paris, the painter made use of the acronyms JTG, MP and NS, while in the constructive canvases done during the following years in France, the repertory grows to include the abbreviations ARN, PH5, H4, ATN KPZ and AW. In Uruguay, the Asociación de Arte Constructivo was referred to as AAC and the Taller Torres García as the TTG, acronyms used by the members of this association to sign their works.

86 A derivative study of common etymology and shared phonemes in Mayan and Egyptian languages (based on transliteration of the glyphs into the Latin alphabet and thus not concerned with their graphic representation) can be found in William Johnson’s The sound of meaning. Comparative Linguistics of Ancient Egyptian, Maya and Nahuatl.
As already discussed in chapter 7.2, the systems of iconoscripture developed by Xul Solar are monosyllabic. However the totality of the written message is not only expressed through these symbols but also with the aid of color, vertical hierarchical differentiation and emblems. As it is also the case in the work of Torres-García, Xul Solar makes use of many different symbols (mainly astrological and esoteric) which interact and complement the messages transmitted by the texts themselves. These symbols act as semantic complements of the texts although they don’t overlap or merge with them. This being said, there are unmistakable graphic resemblances between Xul Solar’s creative writings and the Egyptian hieroglyphic system (see table 13) as well as a precise presence of the Mayan principles of superposition and abbreviation in his work as it will now be demonstrated. As argued by Kettunen and Helmke, the flexibility of the Mayan writing system allows the same statement to be written in different ways by virtue of various methods of combination and juxtaposition of two glyphs. According to the authors, the most frequent variations in the Mayan writing of a word were combining, infixing and conflating two different glyphs (Helmke and Kettunen 2004, 16). This is easily observable in the following example

| Table 12. |
| Possible variations in the position of the Mayan glyphs *Chum Tun* (the sitting of tun) as seen in Kettunen and Helmke (Helmke 2004, 16). |
| --- | --- |
| ![Variations](example.png) |

In these examples the glyphs *ChumTun* are a) combined, b) infixed and c) conflated. Through these variations the ancient writers of South America found aesthetically pleasing ways to economize space while retaining semantic clarity. The same is done by Xul Solar in his *Grafías Plastíñiles* whenever the artist makes use of his geometric writing. In table 5 of chapter 7.2 in which a partial conversion into *Neocriollo* of the monosyllabic symbols used by the artist has been done, the same procedure of blending can be observed. Regarding the geometric presentation of the morpheme “bei” in table 5 we can see that on top of the rectangle
used to represent the letter “b,” a triangle facing upwards has been added designating the letter “e,” while a red dot resting on the base of the triangle stands for the letter “i” forming the syllable “bei” by superposition of several phonetic symbols. It should be emphasized that this type of infixing only takes place in the geometric writing created by Xul Solar and is not present in other parallel systems of pictorial writing also used in the Grafías. The superposition of forms in the Grafías showcasing block, cursive, vegetal and bordure writing systems is not an actual mixing of phonetic values, and no infixing or conflation occurs between individual syllabic sounds. This is mainly due to the graphic characteristics of these alphabets, which contrary to the geometric system, do not allow one character to be placed inside another. An example of this is the 1961 work Xamine Todo retene lo bon! (figure 25) in which the Neocriollo text “XAMINE TODO / RETENE LO BON/ TO TE SALONIKA, SAN PABLO SAY” is written in cursive writing. Here superposition of the hook-like traces (words) is not to be understood as a semantic merge or combination of two morphemes, although it is representative of the formal freedom of this system of writing in which two different texts can cross without losing any legibility. Conversely, due to the phonetic value given to axial geometric placement, the possibilities of mirror writing or rotation of the signs in order to change the reading direction (used in Egyptian and Maya hieroglyphic writing) are canceled in almost all the works of Xul Solar. As discussed in chapter 7.2, we now know that in Xul Solar’s work writing systems are dominated by a principle according to which rotation leads to semantic alteration. The exception to this rule is the block writing system, which the artist used to write texts in which the reading direction was inversed. (Habkost 2009, 133)

It is clear that besides the intention to create a Pan-American language, the Neocriollo of Xul Solar was meant to shorten written and spoken communication by reducing sounds to their strict semantic function. Ellipsis and synthesis are two common features of the linguistic modification found in Xul Solar’s San Signos as well as in Huidobro’s Altazor. Xul Solar was at war with the unnecessary length of the Spanish adverb, (characterized by the ending “mente”) without mentioning his logical lack of interest in borrowing any elements from French for his Neocriollo project, due to the great variability between written and spoken forms in this language. As proven by Habkost, the five systems of pictorial writing that Xul Solar created are ideal phonetic systems in which each graphic element corresponds to only one sound and where all graphemes are pronounced. This precision could be related in a general way to the principle of abbreviation found in Mayan writing, but it does not correspond to the systematic omission
of phonetic particles, which is constitutive of the Mesoamerican code. As we will see in chapter 8 concerning the series of symbolic portraits that Xul Solar painted during the 1960s, it is only due to the constraints of blending picture and writing while preserving representation, that a type of abbreviation closer to the one present in Mayan texts is forced into his cursive writing. Otherwise Xul Solar avoids contextual references when it comes to the production and interpretation of his texts.

Now that an analysis of the grammatical bases controlling these systems has been done, we can investigate the graphic relations between the pictorial regime of Torres-García, the pictorial writing systems created by Xul Solar and the ancient Mayan and Egyptian glyphs. The revision of the available work does not yield any positive results concerning graphic coincidences between ancient Mesoamerican glyphs and the work of our two twentieth century artists. Whereas the representation of Mayan myths in Xul Solar’s early paintings is traceable, none of the writing codes developed by the painter bear any similarity to the Mayan glyphs. The basic quadrilateral outline and the intricate zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and vegetal shapes found in the Mayan glyphs contradict the stylized and non-representative bases of Xul Solar’s writing systems which are not ideographic. In the work of Torres-García, the intricate, expressive and decorative shapes achieved by the Mayan calligraphers are absent. His art is visually closer to South American ceramic decoration than to Mesoamerican writing. More importantly Torres-García made use of principles of combination and synthesis similar to the ones used in Maya writing. Torres-García experimented with creative interferences between the already modified alphabetic writing and his pictorial vocabulary. In the 1938 ink entitled *Hombre Constructivo* (figure 37), a very interesting case of crossing between two types of writing takes place. The piece, consisting of an anthropomorphic scheme shaping the constructive grid, is accompanied by the following text written in the upper right corner of the composition.

Here Torres-García has successfully merged his modified alphabet with two symbolic pictograms into one perfectly functional morpheme. Between the first and last letters “R” and
“N,” the painter has placed the schematic representation of a key and a light bulb (or a key-whole?). Both of them are symbols of reason. The first is the old motif of the key that opens the doors of knowledge and the second is inspired by the late nineteenth century invention, which has become the universal icon for ideas and enlightenment. However, besides their ideographic value, these two schematic representations can be read as the recombination of graphic elements found in the modified alphabet of the artist. The key can easily be divided into a lower area representing the letter “Z” and an upper section representing the letter “A,” while the bulb itself should be read as a variation of the letter “O.” Following this interpretative solution, the text reads “RAZON,” becoming a multidimensional sign which conveys the same meaning when read from two different interpretative codes: the alphabetic and the ideographic. Something similar takes place in an untitled 1938 drawing “pacha mama b” also published in La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto. Here the mixture does not take place between ideographic and alphabetic writing but between alphabetic writing and a variation of an element in that system (in this case the letter “S” transformed into a zigzag line) out of which a picture is formed. This is how the graphic representations of the mountain range of the Andes in South America is also a representation of the letter “S,” the last letter in the word “Andes” which has been deliberately left uncompleted.

The creative interferences relating the repertory of symbolically charged pictograms and alphabetic writing (whether it is modified or not) present in the work of Torres-García creates a connection with the writing systems of ancient Egyptian and Mayan civilizations. The Egyptian hieroglyphic system uses pictures either as a) ideograms, b) phonograms or c) determinatives (Allen 2000, 3) in one and the same text. Some pictures (such as the “house” sign) were used in all of these manners while others were only consistently used as phonograms or determinatives. Most of the sacred texts produced during the Classical Egyptian period

87 The association between the key and reason is clearly found in Torres-García’s 1938 book, La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto, where the author writes: “la razón es la llave del conocimiento” and immediately after depicts the same type of schematic key found on the ink on paper Hombre Constructivo.

88 A variation of the same mixed pictographic-alphabetic representation of the Word “RAZÓN” appears in two other drawings found on pages 20 and 50 of La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto (not numbered).
The Universal Writing

(2100-1600 BC) were written by making simultaneous use of these three functions. In drawings such as *Hombre Constructivo* (figure 37), *Pacha Mama* and other untitled drawings found in Torres-García’s *La Tradición del Hombre abstracto*, the pictorial symbol system is used next to the words written in Spanish with a modified Latin alphabet (the phonetically based system). A phonetic and ideographic code is needed in order to read each *constructivo*, similarly to the process taken place when reading hieroglyphic writing systems. However—and this difference is fundamental—in Torres-García’s work there is no phonetic attribution to any of the pictograms. Contrary to the rebus principle, in his art there is no “message spelled out in pictures that represent the sounds rather than the things they are pictures of.” (Allen 2000, 3)

One could argue that the constitution of the words “RAZÓN” and “ANDES” in the above mentioned examples is exceptional and that the pictograms are being simultaneously used as phonograms and ideograms, as is the case for the multifunctional signs (those being ideograms and phonograms at once) in hieroglyphic writing systems. But this would not be exactly true. It is only by virtue of their alphabetic composition that the pictograms used to represent the key (conformed by the letters “A” and “Z”) and the mountain range (made out a variation of the letter “S” as a zigzag line) retain certain phonetic qualities. The sounds found on the morpheme *llave* (key) are irrelevant to the phonetic formation of the morpheme *razón* (reason). Even whenobliterating the vocalic sounds and only retaining the consonants (as the Egyptian hieroglyphic system does) the pictogram *llave* does not share any of the sounds of the word “RAZÓN”; and thus does not comply with the characteristics of signs being at once ideograms and phonograms.

While the symbols created by Torres-Garcia are not graphically based in Maya glyphs, some of the pictograms used by the painter in his drawings are very similar to Egyptian hieroglyphs. These can be grouped under the symbols used to represent the hand, the pipe, the eye and the sun, which are found in both systems. Although only the representation of the eye (D2789) found in the upper section of *Constructive painting 12* and the circle with a dot in the middle used by Torres-García to represent the letter “T” (N5 Egyptian determinative and ideogram of the signified “sun”) are clear copies of the Egyptian shapes, the linear style of Torres-García’s pictograms transmit a general feeling of hieroglyphic presence. Since Middle Egyptian hieroglyphic writing was based on representations of elements found in the natural

---

89 I am following Allen’s Egyptian hieroglyphic nomenclature, which was at its time based on Gardiner’s *Egyptian Grammar*. 

213
African environment and in artifacts and architectonic productions of the Egyptian civilization, it would be possible to find analogies between these representations and many of the 32 elements placed on Torres-García’s table *Forma Símbolo* where Torres-García classified most of the symbols used in his constructive work. This is especially true for the pictograms gathered under the title *Plano físico* as well as many of those classified under the title *Plano magnético* where the figures of women and men, hands and some working tools are found. Since the elements belonging to the so-called *Plano Intelectual* are mostly geometric and mathematical symbols of Hindu-Arabic origin, there is no intersection between them and the hieroglyphic system. However, even when the analogies are suspected, the pictograms that Torres-García used are so schematic that they cannot be precisely related to any hieroglyphic picture, rather pointing to too many directions at the same time. Torres-García’s use of diverse writing systems indicate his interest in constructing a universal writing system by combination, inclusion and synthesis (a synthesis which is formally present by merging words and pictograms in the same text). The symbol that Torres-García used to represent the sun, for example, is closer to a schematic variation of the baroque sunburst found in seventeenth century religious architecture and its value is constantly associated to that of the Inca sun God *Inti* (with which it bears no morphologic relation). Torres-García was interested in a visual unity of graphic symbols, which very often takes the shape of indigenous and catholic syncretism.⁹⁰⁹

If frontal style, the absence of filling colors and the stone texture that Torres-García gives to the canvas, unlocks stylistic associations with the surface of Egyptian stelae engraved with hieroglyphs, isomorphism between Xul Solar’s writing systems and Egyptian hieroglyphs is even more striking. Their comparative morphological analysis reveals a similar understanding of the contextual space, which can be occupied by vertical, horizontal or diagonal line-based elements and stylized shapes based on the basic geometric shapes of the circle, the square and the triangle. Whereas no semantic relations exist, it is clear that from a purely

---

⁹⁰ In a letter to Guillermo de Torre Torres-García refers to his cathedral style as follows. “El día que pueda por medio de fotografías u otra reproducción, le haré conocer lo que he hecho últimamente. Es cosa de un estilo que podría llamar catedral. Algo fuerte, muy maduro (síntesis de toda mi obra), muy justo, en sentido constructivo, y lo que es mejor. Algo nuevo porque es lo más antiguo, como dice Lipschitz, prehistórico.” (Carta a Guillermo de Torre, 8 de noviembre de 1931. Examples of Torres-García cathedral style are *Composición Simétrica Universal en Blanco y Negro* (1932), *Constructivo Simétrico* (1932), *Constructivo doble Línea* (1932) and *Composición* (1931) which reproduce the basic architectonic elements of Arequipa (Peru) baroque church facades. The architectonical style of this region has been defined as Andean Hybrid Baroque: “virtuoso combination of European late renaissance and Baroque forms with Andean sacred and profane symbolism, some often deriving from the Inca and pre Inca past.” (Bailey 2010, 1)
The Universal Writing

graphic point of view, Xul Solar had the chance to study the Egyptian glyphs in order to produce his own codes, with the exception of the letter block, which is a variation of the Latin alphabet. As a consequence of the principle of axial rotation (Habkost 2009, 151) used by Xul Solar to produce the vocalic values of the syllables present in the cursive, geometric, and bordure alphabets, all syllables containing the vowel “a” (based on a basic horizontal bar) are broadly similar to any of the glyphs grouped under Allen’s category “horizontal sign” (Allen 2000, 450), while all syllabic phonemes belonging to the cursive, geometric and bordura alphabets containing the vowels “i” an “u” (whose base is the vertical bar) will inevitably bear strong resemblances to any of the glyphs grouped under the category “vertical sign”(Allen 2000, 451).

For instance, the glyphs N16, N18, S130a and X4, which are variations of a simple horizontal bar, are equal to the graphic representation of the vowel “a” in the cursive alphabet of Xul Solar. The sign S45 found in the group “Vertical Signs” has the same structure as the phoneme “ku” in Xul Solar’s cursive system, both being composed of a vertical trace to which a smaller diagonal appendix facing downwards is added. Following the same logic, vertical glyphs like S39, S38 and U11 (which are variations of a vertical trace in the shape of a cane with the handle facing left) are almost identical to the phoneme “ru” in Xul Solar’s cursive alphabet. These types of associations linking Xul Solar’s cursive alphabet with the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic system are widespread and can be found every time we are facing elongated hook-like glyphs based on a vertical, horizontal or diagonal trace.

The following table illustrates some of the most salient cases of isomorphism between the writing systems created by Xul Solar and Egyptian hieroglyphics described in this section.
Table 13.
Morphologic comparative table of Xul Solar’s writing and Egyptian Hieroglyphic.

Note. The graphic representation of graphemes corresponding to the bordure, and vegetation alphabets, as well as their phonetic correspondence is based on Habkost tables (Habkost 2009 307–311.) The analysis of the geometric alphabet is based on our independent research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grapheme used by Xul Solar</th>
<th>Transliteration of the grapheme into Latin alphabetic writing.</th>
<th>Egyptian hieroglyph</th>
<th>Classification in Allen 2000. Based</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“a” geometric</td>
<td></td>
<td>N16, N18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“da,” “ta” bordura</td>
<td></td>
<td>N4, O43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“vi” bordura</td>
<td></td>
<td>V. 28.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“wa” bordura</td>
<td></td>
<td>Water N35.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“d, t.” geometric</td>
<td></td>
<td>Q3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“ra” geometric</td>
<td></td>
<td>D27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“o” geometric</td>
<td></td>
<td>D12, N33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“c” geometric</td>
<td></td>
<td>O 24, pyramid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar observations hold true for the bordure and geometric alphabets designed by Xul Solar. The first system, based on embroidery-like patterns like waves, zigzags, ribs, or simple repetitions of polygons, remind us of the Pallai decorations of South American textiles, while also matching specific Egyptian glyphs. The “da” and “ta” phonemes of the bordura writing are very similar to the horizontal glyphs O43, O31, N4 and D61; the “vu” and “vi” phonemes in Xul Solar’s system correspond almost exactly to phonogram 28, (the wick) in group “V, Rope, Baskets and Cloth,” in Allen’s classification of the Egyptian hieroglyphic while the phoneme “wa” is the copy of the horizontal Egyptian ideogram for water N35. In this last case a semantic relation rises to the surface since “wa” is the first syllable of the English word “water.” We should remember that Neocriollo admits borrowings from the English language, and thus this coincidence must have been intended by the inventor of the artificial language.

Graphic isomorphism between the geometric writing of Xul Solar and classical Egyptian hieroglyphics is found in the groups of glyphs catalogued by Allen as “Small signs” and “O. Structures and Parts of Structures” for the simple reason that these are very often created departing from geometric shapes. Quadrilaterals, triangles and circles are the building forms of the geometric alphabet developed by Xul Solar and they are naturally related to highly geometrize hieroglyphic shapes. However, more precise morphological coincidences are also abundant. The small glyph Q3, a simple lineal square, represents the letters “d” and “t” in the

---

91 The same wave pattern was used by Vicente Huidobro in his poème peint “Marine” to represent water.
geometric writing of the painter; the small glyph D27, representing the eye in the Egyptian system is very similar to the syllable “ra” in the geometric alphabet of Xul Solar; and the circle representing the vowel “o” in Xul Solar’s system is present in the hieroglyphic writing in the signs D12 and N33. Moreover, the determinatives “stela” and “pyramid” (26 and 24 in section “O. Structures and Parts of Structures”) are found in the geometric writing of Xul Solar in the graphic representation of phonemes “n” and “c” respectively.

Finally, we should look into the morphologic relations between the vegetal writing of Xul Solar, systematized and interpreted by Habkost (HABKOST 2009, 291) and the analogue category of hieroglyphics organized as “M. Vegetation” by Allen. Both systems are based on a simplification of vegetal forms, although the one created by Xul Solar is much more schematic and geometric than the Egyptian one, and is solely based on ribbed structures: a vertical line or trunk across which a series of horizontal or semi-horizontal linear and curve traces are arranged. Instead, the Egyptian group of signs is not exclusively based on a ribbed or tree structure but contains leaves, flowers, sedges, rosettes, grains, thorns and fruits depicted with detail and grace. This being said, Egyptian vegetation pictograms such as the flowering sedge (sign 26 in list “M. Vegetation”) and its many variations, as well as the sheaf of emmer (sign 34 in the same list) are structurally similar to most of the signs used in Xul Solar’s vegetal writing. Especially alike are the graphemes “v” and “g” to sign 34, and the grapheme “d” to all variations of the sedge on which the horizontal traces crossing the central trunk are placed on a right angle.

7.6. The Illustrated Rustic Books of Torres-García.

As demonstrated in chapters 7.3 and 7.4 the reticular grid that Torres–García used in his constructive work is a space of visual-textual productive interference. Departing from a pictorial base it admits the use of text units, ideograms, and hieroglyphic-like writing. It is as well a space of transformation and experimentation which has become an icon of twentieth century South American constructivism without which experiences such as the Argentinean Asociación de Arte Concreto Invención and the MADI group would probably have not been
possible. Not only did Torres-García open the doors to new questions and innovative possibilities in South American painting, but much of the technical innovation developed by the young artists succeeding him was a result of their contact with, but also opposition towards the work of the master. The struggle to break free from the metaphysical values infused by Torres-García into geometric abstraction and concrete art became, indeed, a source of power for the artist revolving around the Arturo magazine. However, if the painting of Torres-García was familiar and directly available to the following generation, the same cannot be said about his short illustrated handmade books, which only in a few cases were edited and published during the author’s lifetime. The Uruguayan Comisión the Homenajes a Torres-García only re-edited the books Raison et Nature (first published in 1932 by the small publishing house IMAN) and Estructura (ALFAR, 1935) in 1974, while also publishing for the first time other hand-made rustic books written by the artist in the 1930s and 1940s. Until the late 1970s very few people were aware of the existence of handmade titles such as Poèmes Paris 1925 (1925), Ce que je sais et ce que je fais par moi-même (1930), Père Soleil (1931), La Ciudad sin Nombre (1941), and La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto (1938), all of which entered the book market in 1974, with the exception of Poèmes Paris 1925 whose only issue is found in the library of the Getty Research Institute in the U.S.A.

Although completely disregarded for years, some of these works are the dynamic and textually based counterpart of the Constructivos. Disclosing innovative relations between text and image and providing a textual-visual support to the painter’s theoretical work, these books are both methods and artistic products. More emphatic but less dogmatic than in his conferences, more dialectical and less contradictory than in his early Catalan texts, Torres-García gathers the essence of his aesthetic doctrine in these works. Written in a pseudo-typographic handwriting with predominant use of capital letters, these books are characterized by a completely unreserved use of different font sizes which can become enormous and rarely follow the paragraph structure while interacting with the drawings scattered all along the pages. In the following, I will elaborate an analysis of two of those oeuvres: La Ciudad sin Nombre (1941) and Père Soleil (1931), providing significant examples of the more recurrent types of iconotextual interaction also present (although with less saliency) in Torres-García’s other illustrated books. Later on we will examine the books Poèmes Paris 1925 and La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto (1938) only in reference to the intertextual relations linking them with the poetic work of Vicente Huidobro.
La Ciudad sin Nombre succeeds in creating a fictional narrative world while providing a depiction of a modern Kafkaesque city of guards, passwords and unspecified rules of cosmic weight. Unlike books such as Poèmes Paris 1925, Père Soleil or Raison et Nature where the graphic aspects of the textual sign are accentuated, in La Ciudad sin Nombre size font is only slightly altered through the pages while paragraph structure is respected. Although the editorial destiny of the book has been a different one and its early date of creation places it two decades before the debates about the graphic novel had begun in the United States in the 1960s, with La Ciudad sin Nombre Torres-García was producing a sort of non-serial comic book which fulfills the narrative and graphic aspects of the graphic novel genre. As defined by Stephen Weiner, graphic novels are “book-length comic books that are meant to be read as one story. This broad term includes stories in genres such as mystery, superhero, or supernatural, that are meant to be read apart from their ongoing comic book storyline.” (Weiner 2012, 5) If in place of the “ongoing comic book storyline” we put the rest of the visual and textual work of Torres-García, as the frame from which the work tries to gain its independence, the position of Torres-García’s book is very similar to that of the graphic novel. Clearly differentiated from his other books this is not a theoretical work but a narrative piece unfolding the vicissitudes of a character who discovers the functioning of a modern metropolis by interacting with a series of mysterious men, in an clear attempt to generate suspense and to maintain an interesting narrative line.

Responding very well to the most orthodox characteristics of the narrative genre (a plot, character development, a setting), from its graphic level it also derails from the rest of Torres-García’s production presenting a more descriptive use of the image, instead of striving to create a metaphysical symbolic graphic language. In La Ciudad sin Nombre detail and clear illustration of the scenes have taken the place of metaphoric schematic representation of the universalist symbols which are only very episodically present. Without going as far as representing the narrated action, drawing is used to produce a graphic image of the setting in which the action takes place; a procedure which is controlled by the painter in order not to contradict the principles of his own artistic doctrine. It is the city, with is geometric and
orthogonal shapes which is now represented with certain detail (in a manner close to the urban watercolors and drawings done during 1920s New York), keeping alive the essence of the grid structure which does not need to be added because an urban space organically produces it.

The critique of materialism and the agitated but senseless life lived by thousands of people in this nameless city (which is no other than Montevideo but which could be any other modern metropolis) is the narrative translation into the individual level of the urban modern experience. Reminiscent of foundational European modern texts such as Baudelaire’s *Petites Poems en Prose* or Benjamin’s *Das Passagen-Werk*, the narration of Torres-García reflects the early modern experience of a dislocated temporality and the impossibility of keeping up with change; “drawn into the stream, hurtled along, out of control, at once dazzled and menaced by the onward rush” (Berman 1982, 92), as Marshall Berman puts it in reference to Marx’s melting vision of modernity. In the eyes of the painter such urban landscape becomes a secondary reality, a representation of the modern pictorial space, which in itself defines our perception of the real by helping us to anchor its fleeting aspects which are somehow missed by pure perception. Reality seen through the eyes of art is here more real than what “pure” perception could be.92

Que visión más extraordinaria, ese descomunal puerto! esto es una realidad cubista-futurista; geometría, rojo, negro aire, humo, cables, letras, chimeneas, sirenas, banderas, señales y el gigante transatlántico, estático, firme como una isla. Mil lenguas diversas, en letras, brea, alquitrán, mil chimeneas humeando. Mil productos de la industria, en caja, botes, paquetes; y letras aún, y más letras, y números. (Torres-García 1974c, 24)

The value given to the sign (“letras aún, y más letras, y números”) is an obsessive theme in Torres-García’s work, usually embodied in his unorthodox treatment of the image and in the constant interference of linguistic and pictorial codes. *La Ciudad sin Nombre* is a different case. The reference to language is done through the experience of the character who wanders around in the city and realizes that everything has a name or a number, and that objects are constantly pointing to other objects or other ideas. Formally, textual and pictorial levels are kept separated; the message is carried by the text and the image is there to illustrate.

---

92 It is not unlikely that since technologic discourse has appropriated such function (Google Glass would free us from the opacity of reality by breaking the limits of our vision) the avant-gardist aspects of the cubist or futurist painting are precisely those which have more quickly been outdated becoming the repository of our own aesthetic nostalgia.
Contrary to the use of a factual setting framing the action used in La Ciudad sin Nombre, Père Soleil (1931) is an exploration of the human spirit in an abstract space. Here the only topology is the page itself, on the surface of which everything unfolds. Obliterated by artistic and literary criticism until now\(^93\), Père Soleil was finished by Torres-García by July 29 in 1932 and only posthumously published for the first time in 1974 by the Fundación Torres-García in cooperation with the Ministerio de Educación y Cultura of Uruguay. Along with La tradición del Hombre Abstracto, Père Soleil might be the work in which the cross-fertilization between the textual and visual levels has attained it’s most elaborated form. Some passages of the book challenge the reader with a rudimentary hybrid pictorial-textual code, close to the one used by the author in his ideographic-alphabetic representation of the signified “RAZÓN” (found in the three drawings published in La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto). In other cases the linguistic signs are used as complements to anchor or stabilize meaning, much in the way that some Poèmes Peintes of Vicente Huidobro as “Tour Eiffel”, “Moulin” or “Kaleidoskope” do.

Père Soleil begins with a graphic preface (figure 38): a medium size landscape placed at the top left corner of the first page which announces the themes that will be later developed in the book: the unity between the physical, magnetic and intellectual planes represented by the anchor, the fish, the ship, and the star\(^94\). What follows is the pictorial-textual re-presentation of the title achieved by placing the French word “Père” inside the drawing of the sun. Throughout the entire book the artist uses drawings to exemplify or expand written concepts. The word “nature” is represented by a landscape filled with animals and plants; “Les choses” (p. 8) are exemplified not only with objects but also with letters, geometric shapes and even a human stature; the cosmos is represented by celestial bodies (p. 10) (figure 40); Christ is depicted as being inside the sun or one with it (p. 18); and negative and positive types of vibrations (p. 46) are represented by diagrams of either destructive or positive wave interference. In other cases the artist will go beyond exemplification and will use the graphic representation of an object as the symbol of an idea. The depiction of the watch, for example, becomes a representation of

\(^93\) To my knowledge the only important exception is Miguel Angel Battegazzore, J. Torres García: la Trama y los Signos (Battegazzore 1999) where the author indicates how Torres-García used the homophony between the French noun “montre” (clock-watch) and the verb montrer (to show) conjugated in the third person of the singular in present tense (also “montre”) to conjure the phonetic value of the depiction of a clock found under the sentence “Notre Pere montre son visage.” (Torres-García 1974d)

\(^94\) The linkage between these objects and the three planes of reality is illustrated in Torres-García’s table Forma Símbolo.
time but also of the immediate present; the drawing of an irradiating sun represents eternity (p. 42); and the depiction of a lighthouse symbolizes moral strength and the connection with an upper level of existence when being accompanied by the words “En haut la lumièere. Ne mangez pas la viande. Ne buvez pas de l’alcool DE BASSES VIBRATIONS.” (Torres-García 1974d)

Such regime of simple metaphoric associations might turn into a more complex chain of signification in which each new symbol is unfolded on the basis of the interpretation of a previous one. This steeped symbolic process (also found in Vicente Huidobro’s poems Ecuatorial and Tour Eiffel) is found on page 44 of the book (figure 39) where the meaning of the concept “harmony” is explained through a hybrid textual-pictorial scheme departing from number 5 and ending with the human outline. The phrase “5 Armonie” is explained by the artist by means of two horizontal bars divided in seven sections and marked with numbers from one to seven in which the regions corresponding to the numbers one, three and five are shaded. With this scheme the artist is illustrating the half tone interval existing between each note of a simple major chord. Once the musical explanation is given Torres-García simplifies the musical definition of “harmony” in an ideogram formed by a triangle and a super index number 5 which represents the 3 elements of the major chord dominated by the fifth note in the chromatic scale. A schematic human body constructed in the base of five geometric shapes: three triangles and two squares, indicates that the relation 3-5 is found inside the human being and thus that harmony resides inside every person, as the text has actually explicitly expressed some pages before. With the division of the human figure at the left into three areas (physic nature, instinct and wisdom) and by setting a rule that goes from 1 to 7 at the right side of the drawing, Torres-García indicates the presence of an even higher level which has no name but which might correspond to the ideal or the divine for which there is no correct graphic nor linguistic representation. This spiritual level is conjured by the number seven (“7 échelle de la nature”) in page 43 (figure 39) and might be an explicit reference to the seventh chord in music: A four-note chord consisting of a bass note with a third, fifth and seventh above it (Sadie 1980, 201) comparatively more complex than the above mentioned three note major chord. As it was the case with the depiction of the clock (montre) at the beginning of the book; on page 43 of Père Soleil (figure 39) Torres-García uses the homophony between the French demonstrative adjective “cette” and the number seven (“sept”) in order to create a poly-semantic phrase: “cette échelle de la nature” (this stairway of nature) and “Sept: échelle de la nature” (Seven: the
staircase of nature) pointing both to the chromatic scale as to a symbolic way of ascension to higher spiritual levels.

Likewise, on pages 10 and 11 (figure 40) images are more successful than words in expressing a statement. The latter are mostly used to transport single semantic units without syntactic regulation. With the exception of the verse “tous les yeux font un œil” the other words are not coordinated inside a grammatical sentence. Their meaning irradiates the contiguous morphemes (precisely as it was the case in Chant VI of *Altazor*) while the images correlate in a more syntactical manner, dominated by norms of vertical hierarchy, geometric symbolism and parallelism. The law of unity, represented here by the artist with a square filled with a number one in the middle, is connected to a human representation by a vertical line which traverses the drawing and forms the line that divides the lower body of the character into right and left leg. The idea of the conjunction between unity and pluralism is found in the three sides of the triangle which together make one single figure, and in the human couple framed by a square which (if read in the context of the other pictorial elements as the framed number one, the human representation traversed by the law of unity and the triangle) is also a representation of the participation of unity in pluralism. The same idea is reinforced by the author in the verse “tous les yeux font un œil” and of course in the scattered words “LOI,” “UNITÉ,” “ÉTRE” (sic) and “PLURALISME.” A further development of the topic of plurality inside unity occupies the next page of the book, which graphically illustrates the participation of man in the community and the community itself as a brotherhood. An idea related to freemasonry, since the members of each loge considered themselves a brotherhood of architects.95

The possibilities of trespassing between different communicative systems were expressed by Torres-García not only in his articulation between pictorial and textual regimes, but also in his passage from Catalan to Spanish and French languages as systems of public communication. Just as Vicente Huidobro went back and forward from Spanish and French translating poems and ideas from one linguistic and cultural system to the other, Torres-García used the French language as a system of communication in the books *Poèmes Paris 1925* (1925), *Ce que je sais et ce que je fais par moi-même* (1931), *Père Soleil* (1931) and *Raison et

95 For a discussion about the relations between Torres-Garcia’s work and freemasonry see chapter 5.1 of this dissertation.
The Universal Writing

*Nature* (1932). The first book is a rare gem, and along with the two 1931 *Constructivos* including portraits of Vicente Huidobro, it is here where the transtextual permeation of the *œuvre* of the Chilean is most visible in the painterly work. Cedomil Goic was the first to draw attention to this handmade book where Torres-García transcribed the first five poems of Huidobro’s book of French expression *Tout à coup* (1925) into his unmistakable dense, rustic style. Here font size can get so large that the reader feels confronted with a constant zoom-in effect. Cedomil Goic accurately summarized the painter’s intervention in the work of the poet as follows:

We might call this dialogue between poetry and painting “illustrations” or “illustrated poems” The painter adds onto the original poetic text a drawing, a stroke of the pen, a figure which he inserts Between lines of verse and between words. (…) Torres García has intervened in the poetic space in several ways, all of which generate a variety of meanings: (1) the original text of Huidobro’s poems is organized in a series of lines justified in each case at the left margin, in complete lines of verse or in segmented lines of verse or enjambments; the Uruguayan painter’s intervention modifies the original disposition, introducing several breaks and enjambments, fragmenting the continuous lines of verse, thereby giving way to a new spatial organization of the poems; (2) the original poems do not extend for more than a single page in length; Torres García’s versions extend each of the poems to 5, 4, and 5 pages respectively; (3) in the original text of these poems, there are no words or lines of verse in upper-case; the Uruguayan painter uses upper-case in several instances in each of the poems; (4) the painter is unaware, in two cases, of a mistake made by the printer of the original text who introduced a period in the middle of a verse, and another one at the end of each poem; (5) finally, he does not correct one of the misprints in the original text, which he repeats, and misspells three additional words. (Goic 2010, 187)

Besides Cedomil Golic’s accurate remarks of this important document which attests the interest of the painter in the poetic work of Vicente Huidobro the visual analysis of this 1925 book does not yield particularly important results. The painter has chosen to illustrate concrete objects such as staircases, mirrors, eyes or the moon, found in the poet’s verses instead of translating in pictorial terms his particular reading of the poem, or elaborating a new product based on the first. The intervention of the painter in the poet’s work is thus less productive than what the article of Cedomil Goic suggests. Only in very few cases will we find a certain graphic polysemy in the representation of the objects, as well as a creative work departing from the use of synecdoche in the work of the poet. Such ambiguity is found in the semicircular pattern on page four whose simplicity makes it suitable to be both the representation of the clouds and of the sands placed contiguously by Huidobro in the verses “vers l’avenir précis où les vagues du ciel caressent les sables” (*Poèmes Paris 3*, 4) Torres-García’s pictoral intervention departing from Huidobro’s verses “Une certaine chaleur s’échappe des plis des drapeaux secoués par le vent. De mât à mât les mots se balancent” is done though the depiction of a sailing boat which
narrowed the meaning of the French plural noun “drapeaux” used by Huidobro in the double sense of “sails” and “canvases.” In this example, instead of representing a part of the whole (as the poet does), the painter restitutes the whole from one of its parts, while also taking a position in reference to what exactly that new reconstituted object will be. Unfortunately, this type of productive intervention is less abundant than the direct visual illustration of the noun which is the rule in Poèmes Paris 1925.

A less explicit but no less interesting example of textual transcendence of Vicente Huidobro’s work in Torres-García’s illustrated books is found in the 1938 La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto, which revises and expands concepts already present in other books of the Uruguayan, mainly the theme of rationalization of nature and humanization of art, to which we have already brought our attention in the context of the interaction of the concepts of creation and construction in the work of both authors. In La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto, the object seen through the painter’s eyes is presented simply as the means to achieve a certain color and a precise tone. Denying the opposition between foreground and background, Torres-García expands the meaning of the concept of structure, presenting it as a texture or wave which provides unity to the artistic craft. The decorative detail is fustigated since it is not determined by the totality of the work, while the notion of synthesis turns into a synonym of creation (just as it was understood by Huidobro since Pasando y Pasando) completing the fundamental triad of creative art: it is true to nature but it is not imitative, it is universally rational; and it is stripped of detail functioning as a “direct sign”: a necessary oxymoron which unveils the ideal nuances of Torres-García’s enterprise.

In this context, we need to return now to the unsettling verses of Huidobro’s Ecuatorial. We had referred to them in chapter 4 in relation to the similar presence of astrological references in the work of Huidobro and Xul Solar. This time they create a virtual dialogue with Torres-García’s 1938 book. Vicente Huidobro has written:

Ecuatorial
(…)
Los hombres de mañana
Vendrán a descifrar los jeroglíficos
Que dejamos ahora
Escritos al revés
Entre los hierros de la Torre Eiffel.
(Huidobro 1981, 48)
To which Torres-García replies in *La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto*:

Bajo tierra, otro día,
Los hombres encontraron los signos del HOMBRE ABSTRACTO, y no los supieron interpretar: creyeron que los otro los habían inventado solo para embellecer. Desde ese momento la idea de la belleza dominó el arte. Perdió su verdadero sentido, el arte tenía que divagar: diversión, noble pasatiempo, apariencia de realidad y sensualismo. (Torres-García 1974, 15)

These quotes disclose a hidden but persistent archeology of symbols found in both books. It is not by chance that *Ecuatorial* is at once the most visual and mythical book of the Chilean, a cinematic experience (Alfani 1987, 475-83) which measures time not in days or years but in historical ages while the poet sits on the imaginary lines of the parallels. The vision seen by both artists is that of the engraved sign on imperishable metal (the Eiffel tower) or stone (the pink granite of the *Monumento Cósmico*). In *Ecuatorial* the heart of Africa is open like a wounded fruit while the men of Egypt cry like crocodiles. It is underneath the earth, as the “gold carried by the explorers,” that the treasures are found. But they are not only gold and silver, they are the logos itself. As Torres-García puts it, they are “the signs of the abstract man” found under the earth, the “cardinal directions brought by a Norwegian explorer” (in words of Huidobro) as a war loot: the ancient knowledge of all civilizations which lies hidden waiting to be interpreted. Both discourses mix, united by an archeological work in past future—the signs that will have been discovered by future men. Present turns into past with the loss of the interpretative code which will make those signs indecipherable but also mythical. With his universe of symbols Torres-García confronts us with an impasse between literary interpretation and intuitive appreciation. The key to resolving it is in purely archaeological work: rediscovering what has always been there and excavating to find the truth, which seems to be that of a symbol which unites all types of writing.
8.1. The Symbolic Portraits and *Psicogramas* of Xul Solar and Torres-García

Between 1939 and 1946 Torres-García devoted much of his creative energy to the execution of a series of paintings which were as much a widening of his pictorial vocabulary as personal response to the violence and spiritual derangement that make peaceful human coexistence impossible. These works are no other than the group of expressionist portraits of public personalities, politicians, musicians, artists and philosophers with which the artist temporarily abandoned the use of the orthogonal grid embracing detail and a sense of individuality in the represented person, opposed to the anonymity of the human expression characteristic of his constructive work. In the words of Mario Gradowczyk:

> Torres-García se lanzó furiosamente a pintar una serie de “retratos.” Trabajados según una directriz casi caricaturesca y utilizando información iconográfica y la regla de Oro (...) los expuso en *Amigos del Arte* (Montevideo, octubre de 1945), bajo el título “Exposición de retratos de héroes, hombres y monstruos” serie muchas veces ignorada. (Gradowczyk 2007, 294)

As a result of the use of the golden rectangle as a frame adjusting the shape of the portrayed faces, a cartoon-like elongated style defines this series of portraits. A similar tendency can be traced back to Torres-García’s carved woods done in Paris under the influence of African art in which the anatomic proportions of the human figure were distorted as in much of the European Avant-Garde production influenced by tribal art at the opening of the twentieth century. Did Torres-García renounce to his austere idealism and become tempted by a use of deformation so emphatically rejected throughout his career, from the early *Escrits Sobre Art* to his late 1930s illustrated books? The concepts of proportion and rhythm seem to be the key to understand the
master’s attitude. As Torres-García claimed in the third issue of Circulo y Cuadrado: “Nuestro Plano de percepción no es visual, es intelectual. Nuestro propósito no es dar descripciones de cosas, sino buscar la belleza abstracta en el ritmo; es decir en un elemento más profundo que el literario o ilustrativo de la descripción.” (Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1937, 6) Amalia Nieto, one of the most influential names of the AAC—and maybe the most important individual talent of the association—superbly described the difference between the external measurement of the world and the inner proportion of the canvas as understood by the Uruguayan constructivists in the first issue of Círculo y Cuadrado dating May 1936. Here we might find the key that unites proportion with what is perceived as deformation in the portraits.

Esta mañana he ido al Puerto: había un barco blanco, un velero de velas francas (…) Un marinero cruza el puente – tengo la síntesis del puerto; vuelvo la espalda al rio y pienso en ese último símbolo: el marinero. Dibujo ahora; hago una figura ideal del marinero en el centro de un rectángulo y dejo que tranquilamente se ordena todo lo que me sugiere el puerto; no tendré en cuenta nada más que las proporciones; solo, los motivos se irán colocando sobre el papel. No tengo porqué sugerir planos distintos, todo lo he visto en una superficie. ¿Y el espacio? ¿El espacio? …es la realidad absoluta – es la horrible realidad que devora la pintura, - Un plano solo, eso es lo que siento, porque no puedo medir la distancia, ni sugerir tantos metros hasta la grúa, tantos hasta el barco grande y después hasta aquel barquito blanco…. “más atrás,” “más lejos” son palabras sin sentido para mí.
¡No quiero medir las distancias! Quiero otra medida: las proporciones de cada objeto y de otros con relación a mi cuadro y no al cuadro de afuera.(Asociación de Arte Constructivo 1936b, 5)

The proportions that mattered to these constructors were the proportions of the canvas and not those of the external world. Revealing their affiliation with the modernist tradition, and stressing their roots in Cézanne, the artists of the AAC saw questions about what is “beyond” or “far away” in a two-dimensional space as completely meaningless in pictorial terms. Before them, it was of course the Russian constructivists who around 1921 were furiously debating the concepts of construction and composition in such terms. As it was foreseen by A. Rodchenko, “the problem of construction arose when representational painting and it’s technique were abandoned.” (quoted in Gough 2005, 25) These artists worried themselves with the underlying motivations giving raise to the production of the work of art, seen as a pictorial or architectonic whole which derived solely from the physical and geometric relations between the materials composing that totality. Although the lesson might have come from that direction, Torres-García was more willingly to associate his corrective proportionality to Neo-Platonism (as Parada Soto argues) and to the schematic drawing of Nazca and Tiahuanaco Indo-American civilizations (specified as the geometric pre-Inca rule in Metafísica de la Historia
Portraits and Architectures

*Indoamericana* where the Uruguayan found both respect for the materials and the presence of a rule of proportion superseding any actual measurement of the represented object.

Besides preserving the preeminent value given to line and drawing that was characteristic of all the pictorial production of the Uruguayan artist, portraits such as *Mozart* (1946), *Rimsky-Korsakov* (1944) or *Velázquez* (1945) resolve the facial gestures in the most simple and severe geometrization. The artist also emphasizes the tension between volumetric representation and flat surface calling the attention to the last element in much the same way that Cézanne did in his still lifes of the late 1890s. While keeping the detail, or the most recognizable physiognomic features, the structure of these works is given by geometry (either the proportions of the head are adjusted to the golden rectangle or the totality of the composition is divided according to the golden ratio) while also enrooted in a symbolic regime of proportions. In Stalin’s portrait the upper part of the head is too small while the mustache is enormous, emphasizing a discordance between what is being thought and what is being said which will not be found in the portraits of writers and artists. Both symbolism and geometrization define the proportions of the portraits against representation. Thus, what at first sight is perceived as deformation is actually a correction of reality done by the painter on the basis of geometric and symbolic regimes coordinated by his idealism.

The most important precedent to this procedure is found in Torres-García’s 1935 book *Estructura* where the painter introduced his *Psicogramas*. These are schematic representations of men using nothing more than squares and triangles in order to express the dominant aspects of the human condition, be it emotional, intellectual or physical. These are portraits of the internal life of man, of that which is invisible but constitutes the essence of every person. Torres-García explains the utility of such *Psicogramas* and provides us with some graphic examples of them as follows:

No creo que sea difícil, para cada uno de nosotros determinar que domina en su naturaleza; si la parte física, si la emocional o la racional; si el amor a la vida material, si su consciencia moral, o si los problemas de la inteligencia. Y determinando esto es fácil ver en qué otra proporción entra lo demás. Unos Psicogramas podrán ilustrar esto, y cada uno podría hacer el suyo. Podrá determinar entonces si ha de dominar en él una pintura sensual, animista o intelectual; o esto en que proporciones. También poner en claro su edad psicológica estableciendo otros Psicogramas así:
In the late 1950s and 1960s Xul Solar engaged himself in a project animated by similar research as that which occupied Torres-García in 1935 with his *Psicogramas* and his 1939-1946 *Retratos de Héroes, Hombres y Monstruos* resulting in paintings of similar characteristics. These are the symbolic portraits of saints painted on the basis of the interlock of hock-like shapes which form Xul Solar’s cursive alphabet. Some years before Xul Solar had started working on this series of portraits he had developed his total aesthetic doctrine or *Panbeldoiке* made public in the catalogue of his sixth individual exhibition in the *Van Rie Gallerie* of Buenos Aires held from the 22nd of September to the 7th of October 1953. We should remember that besides the romantic influence present in this theory of total artistic correspondence, Xul Solar’s doctrine was based on the combination of elemental forces studied by theosophist and occultists. The arrangement of the four natural elements with the three polarities produces the twelve aesthetic modes in which all art is classifiable. Moreover for both Xul Solar and Torres-García numerical relations and vertical coordination are paramount. In the case of the *Psicogramas* of Torres-García the numeric system relates to a position in the moral hierarchy. The number one found on the head represents reason, the number two found on the torso represents emotion and the number three found on the lower limbs represents physical attachment. As we have already discussed Xul Solar followed a similar system of hierarchical vertical division in *San Signos* as well as in his paintings where the upper regions are associated with heaven and the presence of spiritual creatures whereas the lowest are inhabited by sub-human creatures or characters completely mobilized by instinct and desire. In an oil painting on cardboard dated 1920 the Argentinean painter Emilio Pettoruti made an expressive symbolic
portrait of Xul Solar in a colorful decorative semi-cubist style. In this painting the higher region of the model’s head is highlighted by the use of bright yellow colors which according to E.J Sullivan (E. J. Sullivan 2000, 8) symbolize the intellectual nature of Xul Solar’s character and his relation with the sun light present in the painter’s name itself. Did Xul Solar make use of a vertical hierarchical system in his 1960s portraits of saints? The answer seems to be negative. Already associated to a high spiritual sphere, characters as Rudolf Steiner, Paul the Apostle, Saint Ignatius or Christ are portrayed in close shots avoiding the representation of the torso which, in contrast, is sometimes visible in Torres-García’s Retratos de Héroes, privileging a medium shoot. While Torres-García uses the relation torso-head and the relations between the parts of the head to stress harmony between intellectual and affective life (as it is the case in the portrait of Fedor Dostoievsky) or on the contrary to mock such imbalance in characters considered monsters (as in Napoleon’s or Stalin’s portraits), the Argentinean occupies himself solely with characters whose moral strength and high position in the moral system is uncontested.

Bearing a fair similarity with other artistic representations executed by the great masters of the western pictorial tradition, (Xul Solar’s San Paulo de Torso retains the main physiological attributes given to the apostle by El Greco in his 1612 painting) the work of the Argentinean preserves only the most salient features of the models in order to make them recognizable while being essentially used as a medium to experiment with a more or less stable chromatic language and to emphasize the notion of the linguistic sign as both the carrier of the human spirit and a mechanism of pictorial representation. As it was proven (Habkost 2099 145-199) the graphic traces and hook-like shapes used by Xul Solar to achieve this series of portraits are actual Neocriollo words written in the cursive system invented by the painter, which holds clear relations to the anthroposophical belief according to which human inner qualities are written on the face of each person. In this series of portraits the same Neocriollo text is written twice, in two different codes: the cursive one with which the portraits are painted, and the transliteration in Latin characters found at the bottom of each painting, outside the pictorial space proper. The 1962 watercolor Gran Rey Santo Jesús Kristo (figure 27) is accompanied by the Neocriollo text: “GRA REY. Santo Jesús Kristo Mío. Senior. MORMETRO say si sisi. MAESTRO ANSIEAMI. BUENO IMENSO.” The same message written in the pictorial cursive code constitutes the depiction of the Christ itself. Using the code
tables created by Habkost (Habkost 2009, 188-202) one can clearly transliterate the cursive word “Jesus” written on the nose of the portrait into the Latin alphabet. The same holds true for the rest of the text, from the small wave-like traces that form the hair and which should be read “si”, to the word “bueno” written on the bottom left corner of the watercolor making use of three interlocking hooks. Due to problems of compatibility between the “needs of the plastic composition” (Habkost 2009, 336) and the rules of angular positioning which dominate the meaning of the text in the cursive writing of Xul Solar, not all syllables correspond to facial features, and the majority, but not all of the facial features can be depicted with the syllables. By the same token the reading order of the cursive text does not follow a left to right, top to bottom principle. The painter needs to follow a different principle: locate the syllables containing the vowels “i” and “u” wherever vertical traces are found in the painting, those containing the vowels “e” and “o” in the diagonal traces, while those with the phoneme “a” will only be used to depict horizontal lines. It is significant that finding themselves at the end of their pictorial careers, when the vocabulary they had developed was already mature and revised, Torres-García and Xul Solar decided to approach such an intimate painting genre heavily associated with psychological introspection and detail. In accordance with their philosophic and formal beliefs this could not be done in any other way than as an excuse to test an already organized system of chromatic, geometric and textual solutions. Four colors are extensively used by Xul Solar in his portraits: blue, red, yellow and green which were respectively associated by him to: 1) the spirit, 2) reflection, 3) mind, 4) reason. (Bendinger 2004, 58) Concurrently the colors black and violet are used in a more reserved but also symbolic way. Black is only present in the portraits of the theosophy masters Rudolf Steiner and Aleister Crowley. These are the most severe of all the series; the facial expressions do not convey serenity but determination, a feature which is enhanced by their perfectly round black eyes, impenetrable as stone gems. The use of the color violet which is the highest in the Solarian hierarchy, since it represents the divine realm, is reserved to the depiction of Christ, (in the form of the word “bueno” written using three interconnected graphemes on the lower left corner of the portrait) who is wearing a golden crown and whose blue eyes convey an impression of calmness and openness. A similar use of the celestial regard as a symbol of openness and tranquility is found in Torres-García’s portrait of Wagner. The light blue eyes of the old master do not reflect the majesty of the genius but the humanity of a soul which is open towards the infinite, connecting its inner beauty, which
Portraits and Architectures

opposes the wrinkles on his face and the unharmonious prominent nose, with the totality of the Gesamtkunstwerk.

8.2. Medieval and Modern Urban Architecture in Xul Solar’s Watercolors

With the intention of ordering the vast production of Xul Solar’s work done during five decades of continuous graphic production, Jorge Glusberg (Glusberg 1998, 34) proposed the classification of the Argentinean’s painting into eight moments or stages. According to the author the first four of those moments gathering the work produced between 1917 and 1941 were dominated by the presence of geometric shapes, pre-Columbian themes and heterogeneous symbolic iconography. The following three stages from 1941 to around 1958 were highlighted by the creation of utopian architectural projects and the depiction of rarified landscapes and geographies; they were immediately followed by the last Grafías series. Between 1941 and 1958 the painter achieved a fusion of natural landscapes and urban spaces which evolved in the middle of the 1950s into the creation of idealistic housing projects for the Delta of the Paraná River. Nonetheless the depiction of temples, pyramids and housing spaces is found all over Xul Solar’s work and cannot be clearly delimited to one period. Such framing, according to which the representation of architecture is restricted to the 1941-1958 period96 responds more to the curatorial needs of the exhibitions and to the organizational demands of the editors of the catalogues than to the characteristics of the Solarian corpus itself, which showcases repetitions, variations and progress instead of organized exploration of one theme after the other.

Architecture was part of Xul Solar’s life long before his artistic career began. His father, Emilio Schulz Salles, a Latvian immigrant who had departed for Argentina at age 20, was an architect and engineer himself. Before becoming Xul Solar, the young Alejandro grew

---

96 The false impression that the architectural paintings of the artist were produced during one homogeneous period was highlighted by exhibition catalogs such as Xul Solar en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (1997) and Xul Solar: Visiones y Revelaciones (2005)
surrounded by compasses, blueprints, technical drawings, rulers and measurement instruments, an environment which might have triggered his desire to enroll as a student in the Faculty of Architecture in 1905 where he studied for two years. Alvaro Abos has insisted upon the fact that the “Castillo Penitenciario” (the name under which the National Penitentiary of Argentina was locally known) with its imposing stone walls and towers erected in the fashion of a medieval castle, was an image deeply enrooted in the imagination of the young Xul Solar, who would recreate this system of towers, stone barriers and small grilled windows in his 1940s watercolors. Moreover the artist’s father worked on the “Castillo Penitenciario” for twenty years achieving the position of sub-director of the penitentiary while Xul Solar himself worked on the remodeling of the small printing house established inside the prison before his departure to London in 1912.

Early landscapes done by Xul Solar in the 1910s, such as the series Paisajes (1913) or the enigmatic Regione Rocciosa (1916), display a symbolist-expressionist understanding of natural scenery. This changes around 1919 when the representation of nature gives way to the depiction of urban spaces in which the subject begins to interact with architectural elements such as walls, staircases or windows. In these 1919-1923 paintings, in which the use of text was extensively explored, as it has been already demonstrated, we find a first contact between figure and architectural setting, the latter being not a stable scenery but a dislocated objectivity. During this period we can detect the presence of architectonical elements in two different variations. First as the depiction of multilevel structures, either in the form of futuristic towers of several levels in the shape of discs such as Ciudad (1921) or as apartment buildings based on pyramidal structures as seen in the 1922 watercolor Neo Bau. The second instance is the influence of medieval architecture which will be present also in works of the 1940s and 1950s comprising the influence exerted by the architecture of the Castillo Penitenciario in the imagination of the painter. Around 1924, once Xul Solar had established himself in Buenos Aires, he introduces man into the urban space (which at the time was not parceled or scattered but already seen as a unified scene) producing an urban universe which replaced the almost private atmosphere characteristic of his earlier work. This modern (but also spiritualized) city emerges as a dense space full of paths, buildings, scaffolding, tunnels, and staircases.

In many cases the colorful flat facades create the impression of being paper butterflies, weightless shapes that fold and unfold and have volume but no mass; thin walls climb towards
the sky in the painting *Pagoda* (1925) (figure 28) while seemingly feeble foundations sustain whole cities as depicted in *El tunel* from 1924. The city which in the 1920s was represented as the screen into which the ideas of progress and transformation were projected is left behind around 1932. What until then had been a more or less clear representation of the urban space of Buenos Aires, however modified by the artist’s personal spiritual preoccupations, turns into a radically abstracted urban scenery. At this point the painter starts reducing buildings to their most basic form: polygons and squares sharing the space with schematized towers and pyramids. This period, which lasted until around 1936, corresponds to the time when the painter was systematically taking note of his mystic visions materialized in the *San Signos* book bearing witness to a process of spiritual introspection and mysticism. Basic architectonic shapes reproduce and accumulate one on top of the other in a landscape that has been completely tamed. Nature has been receded under the pressure of a cosmic-urban space which admits vegetal and animal presences only as humanoid or architectural hybrids. As it is clearly described in *San Signos*, the heaven of Xul Solar is a giant web of shapes, a flying city, as seen in vision 12 dated October 6, 1925, where Xul Solar meets an angel builder, a constructor, to put it in the words of Torres-García and Huidobro.

The topic of the heavenly town will be explored by Xul Solar in his 1936 paintings *Vuelvilla* (Figure 30) and *Mestizos de avión y gente* (Figure 31). The first watercolor, described as a utopian project by the painter in a 1959 text only posthumously published in 2005, depicts a flying city dragged by helium balloons in which cultural tourism is proposed as the main source of income (Xul Solar 2005, 188). According to the same text, the *Vuelvilla* would be accompanied by a sister city carrying the heavy goods on land; a sort of immense train following the flying cruiser and providing the products necessary for the support of that giant flying theatre of all the arts. The second watercolor *Mestizos de avión y gente* (figure 31) depicts two giant flying humanoids enhanced with mechanical wings, a frontal propeller, wheels and a

---

97 Patricia Artundo proposed the approximate date of 1959 as the writing year of this posthumously published text. (Xul Solar 2005, 188)
Portraits and Architectures

precarious steam motor. These giant flying bodies are related to the articles “Esbozo de un proyecto de cambios en el cuerpo humano” (Xul Solar 2005, 25) where the author imagines a future of prostatic, mechanically enhanced humans, and “Autómatas en la historia chica” published in 1957 in the magazine Mirador: panorama de la civilización industrial. In the second text Xul Solar makes an account of celebrated historical and apocryphal inventors of automation from Archytas, disciple of Pythagoras and inventor of a wooden flying dove, and Johannes Müller, the inventor of an iron fly; to the chess player constructed by Wolfgang von Kempelen, a mysterious (but of course not true) automaton who at the end of the eighteenth century defeated Napoleon in a chess match in Berlin before disappearing in a fire in Philadelphia, U.S.A.

As this short summary aimed to illustrate, it is impossible to limit the depictions of architectonic construction to two decades of painting in the work of the Argentinean. On the contrary, in a process that goes from the depiction of scattered architectural elements, passing by the design of modern urban spaces and finally abstracting the structure of the buildings into hexagonal and conic structures, the presence of architecture is constant in his work.

In 1906 Xul Solar began gathering articles and paper cuts from magazines and newspapers related to scientific developments, politics, history, arts, architecture, engineering, war machines and medicine. As his interest expanded and the collection of paper cuts grew bigger, Solar started organizing his documents around 1939 into folios which then constituted folders and books of cut-outs. This archive in which the artist worked until 1953 provided themes and images for his own painterly work and is formally consistent with his universalist enterprise and the idea of a Neocriollo man. Solar’s books of Cuts-Outs present very few entries on modern architecture but they showcase abundant examples of gothic and baroque architecture as well as examples of richly decorated interiors which might have been used as inspiration on his urban and architectonic watercolors. In contrast to his enormous private library which was at once eclectic but also highly selective, the articles that Xul Solar extracted from the international press (Italian, Argentinean, German, Spanish, American, English, and Portuguese) were not always taken form reliable sources. His collection of Cuts-Outs gathered heterogeneous, curious and in many cases clearly fictional news taken from tabloids specialized in mysterious and paranormal events. The 36 books of Cuts-Outs preserved by the Xul Solar museum are also rich sources of visual inspiration, since there are hundreds of pages filled with
the most diverse photographs of inventions, maps, machines, schemes, mathematical formulas, and works of art, calligraphy and even signatures.

Drawing inspiration on Marino Auriti’s project of an imaginary museum holding all human knowledge, Massimiliano Gioni curated in 2013 the 55th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, entitled Il Palazzo Enciclopedico. Along with Nicola Costantino and Varda Caivano, Xul Solar was one of the three Argentinean artists whose work was chosen to be part of the exhibition convening artists from 38 different countries. Whereas Solar’s watercolors and all his painterly work were excluded from this exhibit, works exposed at the Sterling pavilion comprise the Panchess, 29 hand-made astral cards, 150 letters related to Panlingua, a giant puppet and all of the 36 boos of cuts-outs conserved by the Xul Solar museum. Sharing the goal of gathering universal knowledge and creating a copious encyclopedic archive, it is understandable why Massimiliano Gioni decided to include Xul Solar’s work in the Palazzo Enciclopedico exhibit inspired by Auriti.

The notion of archive seems to be intimately related to the universalist projections of Solar and to the ever presence of hybridity in his paintings. His struggle for religious and ethnic communion found on his earlier watercolors; the creation of mixed creatures which are at once mineral and vegetal; the Neocriollo and Panlingua projects and finally the icono-textual nature of his work are mirrored on his collage of images and texts. The eclecticism found on Solar’s folders of cuts-outs is not an eccentricity but a representation of his system of thought: the system of a creator who collected in order to improve and transform.

In the creation of his Panchess Xul Solar must have been inspired both by medieval inventions well as by the less virtuous modern mechanical inventions and war machines whose descriptions and photographs have a considerable place in his books of cuts-outs. The Panchess was a modification of the traditional chess game whose playing rules are transformative and controlled in accordance to the relative movement of the planets, music theory and the duodecimal numerical system. It gathers various systems of expression and it is not controlled by one set of rules but by several systems which nevertheless are supposed to represent the drama of human existence. The game, which was only played by Xul Solar, his wife and Jorge Luis Borges, was described by the painter as follows:

*Cada escaque representa diez minutos de tiempo, una nota musical o dos grados y medio de arco; el tablero tiene trece casillas, por lado, siendo la primera superposición de la última, tal como en*
This peculiar mix of mechanical, architectonic and spiritual imagination is difficult to dissociate from masonic thought which was also vividly present in the work of another mysterious man whose texts have only been partially saved in the archives of the Bibliothèque National de France: Villard de Honnecourt, the thirteenth century French artist whose famous portfolio is the earliest collection of sketches, schemes and techniques of gothic architecture and masonry. Roland Bechmann (Bechmann 1991) has recognized seven fields of knowledge dispersed in Honnecourt’s work, the last one being the universe of inventions and automation, where we find the perpetual movement machine, an early example of gimbal suspension, and an angel machine that follows the relative movement of the sun, among others. Xul Solar was the modern continuator of such tradition both as an archivist and as a creator. Solar’s books of cuts-outs collect and organize information in a similar fashion as Honcourt’s portfolio does, while also providing the fuel or raw material later transformed, incrusted and potentiated by the artist in his icono-textual art. According to Álvaro Abós Xul Solar shared with freemasonry the image of God as the ultimate and perfect architect of the universe (a concept visually spread through medieval bible illustrations since the thirteenth century) and was particularly interested in the comprehension of the geometric and linguistic symbols found on Italian, English and French gothic cathedrals, as it was the case of Notre Dame de Paris where the Argentinean found several carved Masonic symbols which were not unfamiliar to him, particularly astrological planetary signs and the letter “G” which stands as the symbol for God in Masonic architecture (Abós 2004). In fact, several masonic symbols and photographs of gothic architecture can be found among Solar’ cut-outs, along with examples of astrological symbolism highly appreciated by the artist. Without being a freemason himself, Xul Solar was acquainted with the knowledge transmitted by that group of wandering specialized architects, who between 1550 and 1700 had ceased to be an illegal union of specialized workers to become an organization of influential men whose religious tolerance made them the perfect repository of heterogeneous occultist and religious knowledge of Eastern and Western origins. (Ridley 1999) The painter’s own interest in Hinduism, Buddhism and Egyptian cultures and religions is at one with the Eastern elements of gothic architecture developed by the freemasons.
It is only from Eastern sources that the Western architects can have acquired the pointed arch which was to become the symbol and chief mark of the Gothic style. To this extent it must be accepted that Sir Christopher Wren was right in supposing, some three centuries ago, that the origins of the Gothic style were to be found on the Eastern buildings seen by the crusaders. (Harvey 1971, 100)

The work of Honnecourt was not only pivotal for the constitution of Solar’s 36 folders of Cuts-Outs but it was also crucial as a model of interaction between the arts. Xul Solar saw his own archive of cuts-outs as an edifice, but the idea of the constructor went beyond the organizational aspects of his work. Medieval and modern architecture were directly represented on his work. Direct influence of medieval architectural shapes in the work of Xul Solar can be found in works from his early period (1918-1921) while being essential for the 1943 - 1953 production. Taking advantage of the morphologic affinity between natural mountain landscapes and the acute oval arch commonly used in XII and XII century gothic cathedral architecture, Xul Solar produced depictions of hybrid facades which lay somewhere between cathedral and mountain-like shapers in 1918 works such as Estílos 3 or Proyecto (figure 32). The linkage between these geological formations and gothic architecture will also be visible in interior spaces like the ones depicted in 1921 paintings representing what is recognizable as interior views of temple vaults where ribbed arches are partially visible, as in the 1922 painting Escena I.

In watercolors like Fiordo (1943), Valle hondo (1944), Muros y escaleras (1944) or Ciudá y abismos (1946) (figure 9) Xul Solar resumed the merging of natural formations and architectonic constructions, although making use of a very restricted pallet constituted by black, white and light tonalities of brown and yellow, which is very different from the rainbow of colors used in his early works. Allusive to the enclosed cellular spaces of the Castillo Penitenciario but also clearly connected to the situation of distress experienced by the millions of people affected by World War II, these somber watercolors eliminate outdoor urban spaces such as squares, streets, parks, or even sidewalks, producing an army of mountain-like towers surrounded by water and abysms connected by a net of elevated narrow tracks and staircases which sometimes lose themselves in the midst. Medieval fortresses come into the mind of the viewer confronted with these secured towers and impenetrable stone walls. In this dark period volumetric representation, rather than opening or enlarging the space, enhances the impression of imprisonment and proposes a negative version of the spiritual transcendence seen in the watercolors of the 1930s. The reversal of the spiritual elevation is achieved through the deepening of the pictorial space and through the gain of mass and volume of the now solid
world of mountains whose background is an even more terrifying nothingness. The eye loses itself in the white blindness (Fiordo 1943) or crashes against a wall of darkness (figure 9) where there is no movement, no time and no difference: an immutable eternal moment which closes the possibilities of transformation. No hybrid creatures inhabit these worlds; the doors of the I Ching have been closed.

After having recuperated the use of color at the end of the decade of 1940s in a series of desert landscapes, Xul Solar produced two more series of architectural watercolors in the 1950s. Born in San Fernando, the nautical capital of Argentina just below the beautiful flood plain of the delta of the Paraná River, Xul Solar was acquainted with the local housing architecture of the region whose most salient characteristic is the use of stilts to elevate the houses and control the high risk of flooding. This type of over-water architecture might have inspired Xul Solar in the creation of the small group of watercolors Proyecto Fachada Delta (1954) in which the painter proposed a series of wooden interconnected dwellings resting above the water on top of fragile wooden stilts. Clearly Xul Solar’s depictions are more picturesque than their actual counterparts. The houses Xul Solar painted are not anchored in the flood plain of the river, but stand directly above the body of water (as Thai bungalow overwater residences do) and they are as colorful and delicate as paper kites.

A few years before working on the cycle of Grafías Plastiútiles, and parallel to the creation of his Proyecto Fachada Delta paintings, Xul Solar produced a few watercolors in which blocks of letters interact with a few architecutonic elements representing the facades of buildings and churches, stressing as it was never done before the purely material and concrete value of written sign. This fusion of architecture and text is somehow the artistic conclusion of a project sketched on his folders of cut-outs, for they were metaphorical buildings of knowledge, palaces made out of words. The watercolors painted during the fifties explored that same idea, although expressed through purely plastic means. In the 1954 watercolor Iglesia de María (figure 33) as well as in other works of the same period such as Proyecto Estructura Para una Ciudad, Xul Solar uses single letters or words as bricks in the construction of the depicted buildings, stressing not only the purely graphic level of the linguistic sign (as visual poetry does) but also its massive, concrete possibilities as bearers of structural weight. In

98 A coetaneous theoretical proposal for the utilization of the concrete value of the letter was done by the Romanian-born French poet Isidore Isou who founded the magazine La dictature lettriste in 1945. In his
Portraits and Architectures

Proyecto Estructura Para Une Ciudad the letters (corresponding to the syllabic block writing created by Xul Solar) form all the structural elements of the building while at the same time writing a text. In the middle column of letters forming the façade of this watercolor it is possible to read the sentence “A ty lyta” (for you Lita) written from top to bottom in Neocriollo language. The painting is thus a symbolic gift to the wife of Xul Solar: a house made of symbols, an architecture of letters. Xul Solar’s Iglesia de María (figure 33) represents a church façade using letters which in some cases replace structural elements of the building. The Latin sentences Davidica Eburnea Turris Domus Janua (translatable as the door of David’s ivory temple tower) and Aurea Coeli (the golden heaven) written in the building’s façade are direct references to Christianity. In the church a representation of the Holly virgin is placed in a niche shaped by the letter “M” which stands for the virgin’s name. This figure is immediately placed on top of the sentence Aurea Coeli as if the place of the virgin was found in such a golden heaven. However the unrestricted use of colors in this work creates the effect of a rainbow of letters symbolically linked to the acceptance of multiple religions. The large size of the main entrance where the word Janua (door) is written in immense characters is a symbol of acceptance and inclusion reinforced by the presence of two crescent moons along with the multiple Christian crosses symbolizing religious understanding, possibly between Islam and Christianity. The Neociollo project is here presented on its symbolic and religious aspects, while also aiming to the formal fusion between sign and structure.

With his architectural work, Xul Solar materialized the principles of creation and construction expressed by Huidobro in his article “Época de Creación” and by Torres-García in La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto. All art is architecture and all artists are constructors. As Torres-García wrote on the pages of Circulo y Cuadrado: “¡Arquitectura, construcción: a nada más yo llamaría arte y fuese para componer con sones o voces, o con ladrillos o piedras.” (Asociación de Arte Constructivo Marzo1938. 6)

Manifeste lettriste Isou proposed the unmaking of words into their letters: “creating architecture of lettric rhythms” (Isidore Isou1983, 2).
8.3. The Cathedral Constructive Paintings of Torres-García

In 1925 the architect and engineer Ángel Francisco Guido, most remembered in Argentina for the construction of the independence monument of his country erected in the city of Rosario (Monumento Nacional a la Bandera 1956), published *Fusion Hispano-Indígena en la Arquitectura Colonial*, a short volume where the author summarized three hundred years of Spanish architectural history from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, proposing the existence of a synthesis between the rigorous and severe stone architecture of the Tiahuanaco and Inca cultures and elements of the gothic, plateresco and baroque Spanish architecture in the Peruvian and Bolivian churches of Potosi and Arequipa. The judicious formal analysis made by the founder of the first Faculty of Architecture of Argentina, revealed a) the synthesis of baroque and pre-Inca elements in the structural foundations of the San Lorenzo and La Compañía churches, b) the presence of a decorative system of symmetrical repetitions and alternations in the same buildings bearing clear resemblance to the decoration of pre-Inca handmade fabrics; and c) the presence of native-American ornamental units catalogued by the author as: symbolic, zoomorphic, philomorphic, anthropomorphic, geometric and folkloric, present in various Peruvian and Bolivian seventeenth century churches. If by 1916 the young generation of the Centro de Estudiantes de Arquitectura had already shown interest in the study of the Hispanic-American and pre-Columbian architecture as the basis of a modern American school, it was with the work of Guido that a systematization of the Hispanic-indigenous forms in architecture was achieved. Although Guido’s name is hardly remembered nowadays, along with other architects like the Peruvian Emilio Harth Terré, the Chilean Alfredo Benavides Rodriguez, and the Argentinian Martin Noel, Ángel Guido was the theoretician and architect of a movement of revival interested in the study and the modern recreation of an architectural hybrid style which had gained prominence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries merging catholic renaissance and baroque architecture with Inca and pre-Inca visual regimes.

Certainly, Ángel Guido succeeded in the recreation of the Hispano-Indígena style in the 1927 restoration of Ricardo Rojas’ residence, which was inspired by the façade of the San Lorenzo de Potosi church. As Virginia Bonicatto argues, “La casa es, en suma, una
representación de la influencia estética indígena y la Europea.” (Bonicatto 2010, 23) Guido’s enterprise was, thus, not only the conceptualization of a colonial architectural creole system but a new Hispanic-indigenous fusion on its own - both the history and the concrete actualization of two convergent styles. Although it is improbable that Torres-García knew Guido’s investigations, the position of the Uruguayan can be read in the same context of pre-Columbian revival and baroque hybridization ratified by the Argentinean. Torres-García wished to assimilate the art of the ancient cultures of the Titicaca region to the modern development of painting through concepts like structure, abstract tradition, construction, flat schematic representation and geometry, which could be accommodated in his Universalismo Constructivo thanks to the common points of contact that Modernism had established with primitive arts, first in the form of exoticism in the nineteenth century and later as a politicized gesture of rebellion against a long tradition of Western pictorial representation under the banners of Cubism, Dadaism, or Expressionism, to name a few. As it will be proven by the structural analysis of a series of Constructivos Simétricos painted between 1931 and 1932 by the Uruguayan master, Torres-García was reproducing a variation of the hispano-indígena fusionist architectural style in his own painting, but without assuming a clear ideological position of support towards colonial Latin-American art. His Escuela del Sur project could not be openly based on the recuperation of a colonial aesthetic even if this regime had undermined the purity of the Spanish architectural codes and had become the only means of survival and actualization of indigenous art. Even if this señor barroco (the expression used by Lezama Lima to refer to the first truly American art of Sor Juana, Kondori, Dominguez Camargo and Aleijadinho) was the link between the other and the self, and the most imaginative reinvention of Hispanic Baroque art, Torres-García could not claim adherence to a colonial artistic scheme, mostly when his Universalismo Constructivo was already dealing with accusations of individuality and conservatism.

Aware of this, Torres-García interpreted Latin-American Baroque architecture through the lens of his own universalist ideology and his praise of the communal anonymous art of all times. In a letter sent to the Spanish writer Guillermo de Torre dated November 8, 1931, Torres-García points to his own interest in religious architecture which had influenced his most recent works, without forgetting to trace a connection between what he would begin to call a “cathedral
style” and the severity of the ancient forms which are ever-present, even in the most modern artistic displays.

As it has already been confirmed, by 1929 Joaquín Torres-García had already been in contact with pre-Columbian arts and architecture on his travels to New York, Barcelona and Paris. At that time, and especially after his arrival in Paris, the Uruguayan was also absorbed by the study of the imperishable structure of gothic and baroque churches which had also caught the attention of Xul Solar and whose Panbeldoiike also relates to the recuperation of pre-modern artistic styles. The transcendent symbolic value of geometry as well as the interpretation of symbols carved on the Parisian churches was introduced to Torres-García by the Spanish painter Luis Fernandes, a freemason interested in occultism and metaphysics who also befriended the Uruguayan’s older son and might have been the introducer of the notion of the golden section to both father and son. Two traditional elements belonging to Masonic architecture were shared by the constructivist artist, whose interest in anonymous and collective work allied him with the sense of community directing the functioning of the Masonic lodges. The first and more simple of these elements was the necessity to mark the stone used to create the structure. In the case of the masons marks were first used to indicate the individual responsibility for work done, and later to give permanence to the esoteric symbols used by each group. In Torres-García’s early wooden works of 1929 and 1930 it is possible to find marks indicating the use of the golden section in the construction of the orthogonal reticule. This is taken into the stone in what could be his most reputed individual work: the Monumento Cósmico Constructivo (1938) (figure 41), the pink granite wall engraved with the symbols of the Universalismo Constructivo found in the Rodó park in Montevideo. The second point of contact between freemasonry and the constructive work of Torres-García was the use of a self-contained system of proportions where elements repeat themselves in different sizes responding to an invariable module. As Harvey (Harvey,75) has summarized it, such system of multiples, submultiples and combinations was not necessarily the same in each building or for each mason master, varying from the Roman foot of 0.29 meters, to the pied du roi measuring 0.3248 m. Such a module is also present in the work of Torres-García in the form of the golden ratio which was taken by
the artist as the guiding proportion of all his art, defended in the lecture “La Liberación del Artista,” the very first talk given by the master upon his return to Uruguay in 1934:

Nuestro sistema de proporciones se basa en la llamada sección áurea, (el segmento dividido en media y extrema razón) que (…) se reduce a esto: A es a B, como B es a C. Numéricamente, la proporción es 0,618 = 1.

La manera práctica de encontrar tal proporción (aparte de la matemática) se reduce a trazar un pentágono y luego con él, la estrella de cinco puntas cuyas intersecciones nos darán la sección áurea. Pues bien: hallada la proporción no tenemos más que fabricarnos un compás basado en ella, y que será éste: No moverse de esta regla, sea para lo que sea. (Torres García et al. 2004, 30)

In opposition to the freer use of the line present in continuous lineal constructions (Gradowczyk 2007, 208) influenced by Nazca pottery, as Formas Trabadas Anímicas, the so called “cathedral works” reproduce with precision the main elements of baroque Latin-American cathedral facades. This association which has not been explored until now responds to the theoretical interests of the painter and was expressed in several 1931-1932 canvases where the typical decorations and structures of the seventeenth century Andean church facades are present.
The constructive works directed by vertical symmetry such as *Composición Simétrica Universal en Blanco y Negro* (1932), *Constructivo Simétrico* (1932), *Constructivo doble Línea* (1932) or *Composición* (1931) (see table 14) clearly dialogue with Guido’s Hispanic-indigenous fusion in architecture, while also presenting similarities with what Gauvin Alexander Bailey has recently baptized Andean Hybrid Baroque: “virtuoso combination of European late renaissance and Baroque forms with Andean sacred and profane symbolism, some often deriving from the Inca and pre Inca past.” (Bailey 2010, 1)

In the above mentioned constructive paintings the representation of the divine (expressed by the triangle and the number 1) is placed in the topmost center section of the composition, surrounded by minor astral symbols like the sun and the moon at each side. While
unity rests in the middle, polar entities are located at the sides in a descending order according to their importance, beginning with the level of reason followed by emotion and matter as it is customary in the Uruguayan’s work. Such a scheme is reminiscent of the decoration of the façade of the Puno Cathedral (table 15). In this example a humanized depiction of God with open arms watching over the city of Puno crowns the façade immediately followed by the Holy Spirit taking the shape of a dove representing the Christian mystery of the holy trinity. Under the empty niche found just below them, the panel presents carvings of Saint Dominique, the immaculate Virgin standing on top of the moon (the female counterpart of the sun) surrounded by six cherubs, and Saint Francis of Assisi, all of whom have a secondary importance but also accompany the divine unity of God and the holy spirit. Below the virgin in the panel dividing the first and second stores, the archangel Saint Michel stands armed with a sword and shield on top of the defeated devil who unsuccessfully struggles to brake free. Schematically the symbolic relation between the “cathedral” canvases of Torres-García and the Puno Cathedral is expressed as follows. In the Andean church the pediment or level “C” (table 15) is occupied by a sacred trinity: God represented as the mystery of the unity between father, son and spirit, while the same spiritual-numerical relation is geometrically rendered in the constructive canvases by use of the triangle whose specific structural and spiritual values in the universe of Torres-García have already been discussed. Level “B” is inhabited by complementary pairs: men and women; left hand and right hand; key (reason) and shovel (physical work). Finally the bottom level “A” which is the portal of the temple itself (the embassy of the realm of God in the earth) but also the entrance to the painting itself, provides the physical basis of the intellectual and spiritual orders.

Besides sharing a similar distributive system the symbolic system present in the churches of the Andean Hybrid Baroque and in Torres-García’s symmetric constructive works are linked by their merging of Christian and Pre-Columbian codes. According to Bailey it was thanks to the work of indigenous stone masons who were recruited by religious orders like the Jesuits and Franciscans that motifs like the Kantuta flower (the imperial flower of the Inca), local small papayas, cactus stalks, ears of corn, Pre-Columbian masks, indigenous busts, monkeys, jaguars, condors (symbol of the Inca dynasty), mermaids and celestial bodies made part of the iconography of the seventeenth century Peruvian and Bolivian churches. Some of these motifs had double Christian and Inca meanings. The sun was the symbol of Christ, while simultaneously representing Inti, the sun deity Tiahuanaco; the mermaids, well known for
subjugating the will of the astute Odysseus, were later absorbed by the Christian tradition in the shape of the “singer virgin-mermaid” (Lopez 2007, 10), while having been already present in pre-Inca mythology as the dwellers of Lake Titicaca. By the same token the symbols found in Torres-García’s symmetric works merged pre-Columbian and Christian life, while also adding modern pictographic elements. In Composición (1931) the pictorial space is dominated by the triangle placed like an icon in the topmost center niche. Nevertheless several calices are also distributed in the lateral grids while a cross is in the center of the painting. Fish, sea shells and geometric patterns add the Amerindian content to the work while the pictograms of the clock, the key and the outline of female and male human beings place it in a modern but also universal temporality. With certain variations, like the replacement of the cross by the heart – (symbol of the holy spirit) or the presence of a compass instead of a clock, the same merging of Christian, pre-Columbian (not necessarily Tiahuanaco) and modern symbols is found in the other 1931-1932 Constructivos Simétricos of the artist (see table 14.)

An equally important feature paralleling architectural examples of the Hybrid Andean Baroque and Torres-García’s constructive work is their common use of the binary Pampa-Pallai decorations and the resulting façade-like arrangement appreciated in the painter’s works. According to Bailey the way the native South American carvers decorated many of the seventeenth century church facades in the Lake Titicaca region was inspired by this Incan binary system, which we associated with the influence of Inca geometric patterns in Torres-García’s work. As Bailey has claimed regarding the division into narrow and wide sections in the Andean church facades, the Pallai are “the narrower bands – including columns, friezes, dadoes, jambs, voussoirs and borders – holding tighter more geometrical patterns like scrolling grapevines, zigzags, and foliate scrolls (...);” (Bailey 2010, 333) while the wider more loosely decorated regions of the church, such as the decorative panels containing portraits of saints, and niches, can be compared to the pampa section of Peruvian textiles. According to Bailey, this results in a translation of decorative and mental schemes from textile to stone since the Pallais are related to reason and the Pampa to primitive disorder.

Instead of employing convex and concave flowing curves in the façade and section as the most lavish examples of baroque architecture do, the Puno Church achieves volumetric dynamism by the use of round columns which dialogue with the bays and the uncommonly large and copious niches found on the second and first levels of the structure.
architectural characteristics, as well as the presence of the local iconography identified by Bailey (like humming birds, shells and kantuta flowers) plus the marked Pallai-pampa structure, provide with the typical South-American accent to this baroque building. Moreover one of the church’s naves, as well as the presence of only two orders on each side of the entrance framing the lateral niches, are not general baroque characteristics, but elements of the South American Andean Baroque also found in the paintings of Torres-García reproduced in table 15. In order to facilitate a structural comparative analysis of Andean baroque architecture and the symmetric constructive works of Torres-García, we have highlighted the two store division present in the façade of the Puno Cathedral with the letters “A” and “B” (table 15). The small pediment which heads the structure, also found in Torres-García work is named after the letter “C.” The high number of niches filled with symbolic images (section B) which are especially abundant in the uppermost half of all the four constructive paintings reproduced in table 15 is also an Andean Baroque characteristic and not a general feature of Baroque architecture. This being said it should be noted that the presence of an aedicule (section A) which frames the entrance of the buildings in the example paintings is absent in the Puno Church and was not a common feature of Andean Baroque architecture, while being an important development of early Italian Baroque as can be seen on the work of Carlo Maderno or Francesco Maria Richi. (Witkower 1999, 83)

It is clear that the emphasis put on the notions of structure and construction and coeval references to the concepts of geometry and harmony found in the texts of Joaquín Torres-García, were grounded in a pictorial praxis directly linked to ancient Peruvian stone architecture and XVII century religious architecture of Europe and South America. Besides being a theoretical direction taken by the master and reinforced by the high status of the architectural praxis in Montevideo, the canvases of Torres-García are architectonic in so far as they assimilate the formal regime of the Andean Hybrid Baroque which merges early modern architecture with pre-Colombian shapes and structure. In the other hand the value given to the symbolic regime found in the constructive work of Torres-García and in Xul Solar church facades is closely linked to the proselytist characteristics of baroque art. The medieval idea of the world as a text or even as a *Theatrum mundi* was recuperated by both painters in so far as their works are texts intended to transmit specific messages written in a symbolic language.

With the concrete use of writing in the form of architectural blocks, Xul Solar showed to be ahead of his time and being even more daring on his erasing of the difference between
writing and painting than the following generations of artists debiting from concrete poetry. Parallel to these, the cathedral works of Torres-García, most of which were done as early as 1931, were the artist’s bet to merge architecture, painting and symbolism while consciously controlling the use of perspective, trying to get the highest communicative, symbolic and artistic effects with the most restricted means of expression, ordering everything in reason of the canvas’ two dimensional surface. Torres-García aimed to go beyond the creation of a pictorial style in order to develop a doctrine of life and a universal system of writing. Wooden toys and stone works, symbolic pictograms and Psicogramas, words and diagrams are the elements of that universal experience aiming to communicate high values and messages. The same intention of expressing important ethical maxims through the work of art are found in the Grafías plastíútiles of Xul Solar which were meant to express spiritual truths appreciated in different medial levels. While directly working with language (by the creation of an artificial system and its various alphabetic-syllabic representations) and taking his artistic premises outside the canvas in the form of transformed objects and texts, the total artistic doctrine of Xul Solar shares the preoccupations of the constructive Universalism of Torres-García who was also a constructor outside the canvas, on wood and stone. Both were spiritual architects informed by ancient traditions, but also, two of the most radically modern and revolutionary South American artists of the twentieth century.
Conclusion. The Creative-Constructionist Solution to the Antagonist Panorama of Latin-American Avant-Garde

Marta Traba’s hypothesis (Traba 1973) about the presence of positive antagonisms between formalist and indigenist artistic products operating in Latin-American Avant-Garde since the beginning of the twentieth century has been an influential methodological tool of classification of modern art of the continent. Parallel to her differentiation between geographically determined “open” and “closed” regions, Angel Rama’s thesis of the two Avant-Gardes (Rama 1994) has been a tacit point of departure for most current research concerning early twentieth century literary phenomena. According to the thesis presented by Angel Rama in his essay “Las dos Vanguardias,” a constitutive tension between openness towards formal innovation and withdrawal into the local delimits the Avant-Garde field in the region. While some authors were refractive to international influence and mainly concerned with local social issues, others preferred a purist aesthetic of formal innovation and acceptance of the newest international avant-gardist solutions, which created a space of oppositions dominating literary and cultural relations. This basic systematization of the phenomenon has permeated most of the subsequent interpretation of Latin-American Avant-Garde. Whether it is Schwartz’s (Schwartz 1991) proposal of a process going from a formalist Avant-Garde to politization of the discourse in Latin-America around 1930 or Pini and Ramírez Nieto’s (Pini and Ramírez Nieto 2012) idea about the simultaneous presence of socio-political preoccupations and formal transformation in the 1920-1940 literary and artistic panorama, this fundamental premise persists.

Since the sets of tensions between ideology and aesthetics, renovation and tradition, local and foreign influence have been established as the principal frames of reference of contemporary research in the study of the Latin-American Avant-Garde (see chapter 3), the activities of early twentieth century artists, poets, performers and theoreticians have been filtered according to how well they can adapt inside these subfields of interest. While important progress has been made in the fields of inter- and transmediality by updating the Avant-Garde discourse in the light of the relations between arts, literature and the new technologies; such developments have not sufficiently contributed to a) provide a precise mapping of the regional
channels of communication between artists and writers in the region or b) complement or substitute the image of a Latin-American Avant-Garde as divided between antagonistic fields.

In order to develop a comprehensive theory of the Latin-American Avant-Garde it is of paramount importance to disclose the network of theoretical and productive connections between artists and writers as well as to measure the extension of this web. This investigation was set out to explore those channels of communication taking as a case of study the creative-constructionist aesthetic vindicated by Vicente Huidobro, Xul Solar and Torres-García. Belonging to the geographic region of the Rio del Plata considered as “open” in Traba’s classification, a high level of homogeneity between the three urban centers associated to each author was expected, as well as an absence of social and indigenous preoccupations in their theories and artistic praxis. As proven in chapter 2, the differences in the cultural process lived by the cities of Buenos Aires, Montevideo and Santiago de Chile at the beginning of the twentieth century were very significant. Buenos Aires’ entrance into modernity was triumphal from the viewpoint of an art market in so far as the transformation of discursive and social practices was paralleled by the acquisition of artistic goods. New commodities not only included electrical appliances, modernist furniture or wellness services, but also futurist and surrealist painting. Conversely, Montevideo did not assimilate the Avant-Garde aesthetic and only accepted the work of Torres-García as a reputed master with a large European trajectory without ever providing a space of discussion or a solid market niche for the distribution of the art produced in the Asociación de Arte Constructivo and in the Taller Torres García. Santiago de Chile lived a belated process of assimilation of the most revolutionary artistic forms while inversing the mechanisms of diffusion of such art. In the Chilean capital it was the academy itself which ended up forwarding the art of abstract painters, surrealist and futurists. Likewise, the influence of Pre-Columbian art in the transformation of the painting of Solar and Torres-García, and above all, the epistemological turn produced by that influence in their art, is unexpected and even contradictory from within the frame of a theory of the open and closed regions.

Departing from a regional and inter-arts perspective in the study of the Latin-American Avant-Garde, this investigation has demonstrated the existence of a coherent aesthetic theory prompted by the artists-writers Joaquín Torres-García, Vicente Huidobro and Xul Solar providing innovative elements for a more comprehensive understanding of the Latin-American Avant-Garde. While the visibility given to the interrelations between the theory and praxis of
these three authors is an important development in the field, this investigation has also provided more high-reaching conclusions by demonstrating the existence of a revolutionary theory of language and writing advanced by these three authors, which has not been sufficiently studied until now.

Epistolary evidence proved the solid friendship and professional solidarity between Huidobro and Torres-García who openly admitted the equivalences between poetic creationism and the constructive Universalist doctrine. Furthermore, the homogeneity in both the development of an aesthetic theory and the artistic results achieved by Xul Solar, Torres-García and Vicente Huidobro created a consistent transversal system based on inter-artistic translatability, Universalism, correlation of the concepts of creation and construction and linkage of rationalism and Pre-Colombian thought. Aiming to create an artistic school combining visual arts, architecture, sculpture, engraving, metallurgic, textile work, pottery and literature in his Asociación de Arte Constructivo and later on with more consistency in his Taller Torres-García, the Uruguayan master believed in the necessity of inter-artistic cross-fertilization. Likewise, the proposal of a Panbeldoike (total aesthetic doctrine) by Xul Solar pointed to the fusion of musical, visual and textual horizons, although from a more personal and less belligerent point of view than the one from which Torres-García departed. The theory of inter-artistic translatability of Vicente Huidobro (“El Creacionismo” 1925), his visual poetry and his inter-artistic projects with painters such as Robert Delaunay and musicians like Edgar Varèse, reveal the same spirit of conjunction of the arts. Whilst this tendency is not particular of the authors gathered in this dissertation, but a trend shared by many artists on the international level, the implications that such approach produced in their artistic and literary praxis is unique.

A close reading of paintings, texts and visual poems demonstrates the evolution from interarts experimentation to alphabetic transformation and word recombination in their work. These are the two elemental principles which later will set the basis of the creation of novel systems of writing. The first stage, which can be catalogued as visual textual hybridity, is present in the 1922 Poèmes Peints of Vicente Huidobro, in the 1919-1923 watercolors with text of Xul Solar and in the constructive canvases done by Torres-García in the decades of 1930 and 1940. The second stage, word recombination, sets the bases of the Neocriollo language used by Xul Solar to write San Signos as well as the last chant of Huidobro’s Altazor, while also
being present in a few ink drawings done by Torres-García in the 1930s and 1940s to which almost no critical attention had been given until now.

While these formal principles are fundamental for challenging both media stability and alphabetic writing, the turning point towards a groundbreaking notion of writing in Torres-García is given by the inclusion of Tiahuanaco urban space organization and Nazca chromatic and geometric elements in his work. By unifying background and figure, the severe and depurated expression of Nazca and Tiahuanaco art opens the doors of a second stage of the Universalismo Constructivo in which words do not need to be added to the painting since geometrical shapes, colors gradients and patterns are directly taken as a type of writing. This represents writing without alphabetic characters rooted in the primordial manipulation of nature. The master’s idea of the symbol is enlarged by his encounter with Pre-Colombian art. “Tradition of knowledge engraved on stone, hidden behind the symbol. The truth as it was yesterday and today, like the sun. (…) A character: a sign engraved on stone: the trace, the footprint of the Abstract Man” (Torres-García 1974, 8. Trans. Cortés 2015). In his linear symmetrical constructive works influenced by South American pre-Colombian art, Torres-García proposes one continuous entity of signification by a synthesis of color and form and the transformation of figure into structure. This last element is especially important for the understanding of those enigmatic canvases in which Inca stone walls are reproduced. Torres-García fused foreground and structure as a way to stress the value of the latter: the only true content is that which directly expresses the form while forms are not determined by content but by structural relations. In the canvases reproducing Inca stone walls, the artist reduces the painting to its most basic structural elements, not departing from the developments of Russian constructivism or any other international Avant-Garde but from a pure Pre-Colombian stance. The severity, solidity and structural stability of the stone structure represent the bases of a more depurated Universalismo Constructivo.

In this context the creation of rustic illustrated books and the production of iconotextual ink drawings fusing visual and textual horizons are an alternative for superseding alphabetical writing which uses principles closer to the ones established by Xul Solar in his six systems of picture writing. With them, Torres-García upgraded the principle of word recombination into alphabetic modification. While in all of his illustrated books words acquire pictorial characteristics in virtue of their changing size and rusticity, the ink drawings gathered in the
last pages of *La Tradición del Hombre Abstracto* transform the Latin alphabet and then merge those alphabetic modified signs with pictograms and schematic drawings. Sentences lose grammatical consistency while images become more precise and completely indispensable for the comprehension of the message.

The project of a School of the South, with which Torres-García wished to transform the local artistic scene, went far beyond the creation of a painting school. A new concept of modern man born in the 33 south parallel was being discussed with his colleagues and students of the AAC and TTG. Expressed in similar terms as the ones used by the Brazilian cultural anthropophagous movement a decade earlier, he inverted the world’s map and planned to “culturally colonize Europe” (“Joaquin Torres-García y el arte prehispánico” by Juan Flo in Larnaudie 2006, 64) by constructing a novel spiritual and epistemic paradigm of universalist bases; that is: a modern man inside an archaic tradition of reason, order and spirit. In the case of Xul Solar the proposition of a new language and the transformation of the concept of writing were also clearly derived from a larger social project of human transformation. *Universalismo Constructivo* was a formal and humanistic enterprise just as *Neocriollo*. Xul Solar created an ideal system of Pan-American communication because the future creole man could not be limited by national boundaries and because a new message could not be expressed in an old form. In both cases the possibility of a truly modern society was conditioned by its insertion in a long archaic tradition of reason and spirit.

From a linguistic perspective, *Neocriollo* was a modification of the Spanish language based on borrowings from 14 other linguistic systems achieving a high degree of synthesis by the use of ellipsis, word recombination and transformation of the verbal unit. The six types of picture writing, in which Xul Solar started working in the 1930s, but which were systematized in the late 1950s, are the phonosyllabic representation of the *Neocriollo* language. These works, which until recently had only been studied from a pictorial and iconological viewpoint, (Artundo 2005, Gradowczyk 1997, 1998) were deciphered by Habkost (Habkost 2009) in 2008 demonstrating the syntactic and semantic efficiency of all six systems of writing. However, since the translation of *San Signos* into Spanish was done after Habkost had completed his own research on the six systems of picture writing, he did not have the possibility of completely disclosing the semantic aspect of the studied works. There were no serious investigations on *Neocriollo* until 2012. Consequently, creations such as the geometric, cursive, vegetal and bordure writings, were analyzed solely from the technical aspects of a phonosyllabic system
without understanding that a process of synthesis and language transformation preceded the creation of the iconoscriptures. Within the iconic and pictorial ecology of the 1960s’ *Grafias*, the six systems of picture writing do not constitute the only textual elements found in the paintings. Emblematic and chromatic symbolism interact with the iconoscripture in order to form a text where position and size also intervene. Being phonetic representations of Neocriollo language, these systems of picture writing have already undergone a process of vocalic simplification and unification which has points of contact with Mayan glyph writing. Thus, when we read the *Grafias* produced in the 1960s, the textual elements are not only the phonosyllabic symbols found in the painting but a combination of these and other symbolic systems.

Although Vicente Huidobro did not create a system of picture writing, his theories and poetic praxis did point to a new notion of text and to a complete revaluation of poetry as a praxis dependent on a linguistic system. Vicente Huidobro enlarged the notion of poetry as an activity almost completely independent of the medium. The linguistic and pictorial translatability of creationist poetry seen in the books *Horizon Carré* and the group of 1922 *Poèmes Peintes* respectively, are Huidobro’s statement about poetry going well beyond the forms used to represent it. The system of metaphors built on top of previous ones and the continuous deployment of images and meanings found in *Ecuatorial* and in the visual poem “Tour Eiffel” (figure 13) (chapter 4.5) destabilize both linguistic and visual systems. Both seem to be too rigid, too crystalized, to hold the plastic properties of the metaphor that wishes to fly higher than any plastic or textual system might go. The paradigmatic level is no longer anchored in the morpheme, it becomes virtual or purely conceptual. This means that the chain of possible substitutions in the semantic (and spiritual) vertical space expands beyond the limits of articulated language and painting. This lack of proper localization of meaning provokes fractures, especially in the Spanish language which being the mother tongue of the poet directly bears the highest pressure of his linguistic revolt. A theory of writing is thus problematic for a poet who is on the threshold of pure conceptualization. Whereas painters depart from the ordering of shapes and colors on a surface and are thus immediately confronted with a process of fixation of the forms, the poetry of Vicente Huidobro still departs from vocalization. The earliest poetry is a song, not a text. While recuperating the material qualities of language-tongue (*lengua*), turning it into an amphibian animal, providing it with a life of its own outside the realm of signification as it occurs in the last two chants of *Altazor*, those verses are also the
song of a bird, a musical expression. Although Huidobro’s theory of mutual translatability would not accord with Walter Pater’s conclusion that “all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music,” (Pater, 2011, 131) Huidobro thinks in terms of poetry and language more often than in terms of writing.

Huidobro’s poetic theories, the development of visual poetry and his experimentation with word transformation are intimately linked to the use of similar procedures in the art of Solar and Torres-García while responding to parallel expressive needs, mainly the superseding of the frontiers between arts and a creative reaction produced by the certitude that articulated languages are somehow limited or insufficient to express the complexity of the artistic message. Since his early beginnings in Adan, the intention of Vicente Huidobro was creating a new language in which contemporary reality could be expressed but also a language for imagining totally new realities. Creacionismo was a productive and active poetic idiom for the emergent poetry or even better for the new poetry to come. Huidobro set the principles of construction-creation, synthesis, rejection of imitation and a profound sense of the value of reason in terms of its compatibility with the life of the spirit, which are fundamental for the Creative-Constructionist aesthetic. Huidobro was a pioneer not because of his discussed primacy in setting the principles of artistic creation in total opposition to mimesis, but because he proposed a new way of imagining the relation between objects, because he re-framed modern reality and created a truly novel poetic vocabulary of images coherent with his theories but also going far beyond them. The paradigmatic or metaphoric renewal of modern Hispanic poetry would have not been possible without the intervention of Huidobro’s work which began by proposing the creation of a new language before insisting in interartistic cross-fertilization. Instead of being the chronologically endpoint of Huidobro’s thinking or a development following visual-textual combination and word transformation, Creacionismo was the transversal foundation of those two formal principles. Vicente Huidobro departed from the belief that the reality experienced by his generation was substantially different from the one lived by the Modernista generation and that Latin-America was called to play a pivotal role in the Modern world. Creationist poetry was nothing less than necessary.

Following the results of this investigation, it follows that the concepts of Avant-Garde and Modernism framed by the antagonist oppositions between openness and closeness, do not provide a precise image of the Avant-Garde expressions of Latin-America. Albeit of its complexity and mutability, which augments with the high amount of works continuously being
edited at the international level on the subject, the concept of Modernism is especially problematic. Framed by this discussion, the Creative-Constructionist project proposed a “constructive libertarian praxis” in the sense proposed by Dussel (Dussel 1999) which confronts the challenges of insecurity produced by the accelerating modern transformation. Instead of following the changes of their époque in cultural, technological or artistic terms, Huidobro, Solar and Torres-García projected their own emancipatory and creative energies in the shape of a School of the South, a Neocriollo (human and language at once) and a creationist poetic of total translatability. The antagonist opposition between multiculturalism and orthodoxy does not seem to be adequate to frame the goals and achievements of the Creative-Constructionist project anchored in pan-Americanism and not a peripheral multiculturalism as the one endorsed by Eduard Glissant. Instead of managing a “fragmentary Modernism,” (Craven 1996) Torres-García, Solar and Huidobro believed in a universalist trans-historical continuity, in the necessity of a center expressed as the eternal rule of reason. In this sense, although wishing to differentiate themselves from late nineteen century literature and painting, the Creative-Constructionist project is derived from the poetic revolution of Hispanic-American Modernism which did not end with the nineteen century but which continued to be visible during the first decades of the twentieth century. Late nineteenth century Latin-American poets renewed the rules of Spanish versification creating new types of rhyme and a complete repertory of images giving Latin-American poetry international notoriety. Latin-American Avant-Garde actors began a second revolution on the basis of the transformations and directions indicated by them. These Hispanic modernist elements as well as the formal aspects of modernist painting provided important tools for the definition of the concepts of structure, plasticism, abstraction, and construction to the painters discussed here as well as to many other Latin-American artists such as Pettoruti, Pelaez, do Amaral or Vargas Rosas.

The Creative-Constructionist aesthetic is thus a program of cultural transformation which rehabilitates archaic elements placing them in a universalistic and modern perspective. Including formal and ideological pre-Columbian and modernist elements, aiming at utopian spiritual and social change, it emphatically questioned inherited artistic and poetic languages. In relation to the use of the terms “open” and “close” regions, this dissertation has demonstrated that some authors belonging to the regional area known as “open region,” share elements such as the pre-Colombian revival and social projection which were normally associated with regions like Peru, the Antilles and parts of Mexico and of the Andean countries. However, this
investigation was not the proposal of a third alternative challenging the previous dichotomy. The panorama will be uncomplete if we propose a Latin-American Avant-Garde composed by indigenous manifestations, formalism open to European influence and a Creative-Constructionist aesthetic. While a regional comparative and interartistic approach is crucial to understand the literary, artistic and cultural dynamics of the continent, our investigation has explored only one sub-field among many possible lines of research. Within a regional perspective, this investigation only focused on the work of three artists and was not intended to map the national artistic and literary production of three countries. Much more is ahead, we are only beginning to explore a vast array of possibilities. For instance, the latest research on Colombian Avant-Garde and “Anti Avant-Garde,” 99 which has yielded fundamental results in the analysis of primary documentation overlooked until very recently, should be linked to historiographical research on the visual arts, especially cartoon and drawing, a field in which primary documentation is also in its explorative phase. Furthermore, such exploration should be understood inside a net of discursive relations between coastal and Andean areas belonging to countries such as Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru which have not been traditionally recognized as significant centers of Avant-Garde production. This is so, not because the results obtained by national investigations have demonstrated the absence of Avant-Garde discourses in those areas, but because continental investigations might omit “unanticipated” results which problematize a clear regional characterization.100

Huidobro, Solar and Torres-García transformed the notion of writing itself, anticipating, from an artistic standpoint, the sophisticated grammatological analysis of post-structural theory. They gave new significance to the concept of reason taking it outside the realm of European Enlightenment thought by linking it to spiritual improvement and pre-Columbian knowledge. The originality and consistency of their project was a major contribution to western modernism

100 As Ardila Ariza has pointed out (Ardila Ariza 2013, 63) important books as Manifiestos, Proclamas y Polémicas de la Vanguardia Latinoamericana (1988) from Nelson Osorio, Las Vanguardias Latinoamericanas. Textos programáticos y críticos from Jorge Schwartz (1991) and Lectura Crítica de la Literatura Americana. Vanguardias y Tomas de Posesión (1997) from Saúl Sosnowski, do not mention the name of Luis Vidales, the most important Avant-Garde writer of Colombia, who in 1926 published Suenan Timbres a book as revolutionary and innovative in formal terms as the famous Veinte Poemas Para Ser Leídos en el Tranvía from Oliverio Girondo. In the field of literary studies this panorama has begun to change in the last year five years. A proof of this is Las vanguardias literarias en Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Perú y Venezuela: bibliografía y antología crítica (Pöppel 2008) where new findings concerning the Andean literary Avant-Garde are presented. However such development seems to be absent when it comes to the study of painting and the visual arts in those countries.
and Avant-Garde. The relations linking these three authors have now been explored and analyzed, but many questions persist. Did Xul Solar succeed in the creation of a *Panlingua*? Was the creation of novel systems of writing continued by Torres-García in other constructive canvases and drawings which are still not available to public domain? Is the Creative-Constructionist aesthetic a much larger project including the work of other South-American painters and writers interested in the structuration of painting and linguistic transformation? Elements introduced but not thoroughly analyzed in this dissertation point in that direction. Only future exploration into this field will provide answers to these questions which need to be debated in order to obtain a satisfactory mapping of the artistic, literary and cultural dynamics of Latin-American Avant-Garde during a puzzling period highlighted by some of the most radical and inventive developments in the modern history of the art.
Figures

**Figure 1.** Xul Solar, *Nana Watzin*. 1923. Watercolor. (25.5x31.5 cm) © Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar.

**Figure 2.** Xul Solar, *Tlaloc*. 1923. Watercolor. (26x32 cm) © Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar.
Figure 3. Xul Solar, *Banderas, amor te alcanza*. 1919. Watercolor. (21x7.5 cm) © Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar.

Figure 4. Xul Solar, *Poco podré alzarme sino la rompo*. 1920. Watercolor. (21x7,5 cm) © Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar.
Figure 5. Xul Solar, *Apoyo moral doi*. 1920. Watercolor. (10x23.5 cm)
©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 6. Xul Solar, *A los Astros*. 1920. Watercolor. (15x21 cm)
©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 7. Xul Solar, *Podré*. 1919. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 8. Xul Solar, *Drago*. 1927. Watercolor. (25,5x32 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 9. Xul Solar, *Ciudá y abismos*. 1946. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 10. Xul Solar, *Palacios in bria*. 1932. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 11. Xul Solar, Pais duro en noche clara. 1933. Watercolor. (35x40 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 12. Vicente Huidobro, Ocean I. 1921. Watercolor. (66,5x51 cm) ©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 13. Vicente Huidobro, Tour Eiffel. 2001.
Reconstruction based on a photography and a sketch of the 1922 Salle XIV exhibition, by MNCARS. Serigraphy. (71x53 cm)
©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 14. Vicente Huidobro, *Piano*. 1922. Collage and gouache on paper. (61.5x47 cm)
©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 15. Vicente Huidobro, *Marine*. 1921. Gouache on paper (3,5x49 cm) ©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 16. Vicente Huidobro, *Minuit*. 1920-1922. Gouache on paper. (66x53 cm) ©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 17. Vicente Huidobro, *Couchant*. 1922. Gouache on paper. (73x53 cm) ©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 18. Vicente Huidobro, *Kaleidoscope*. 1922. Gouache on paper. (73x53 cm) ©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 19. Vicente Huidobro, Moulin. 1922. Ink on paper. Found as separate sheet on the catalogue of the Salle XIV exhibition
©Fundación Vicente Huidobro
Figure 20. Xul Solar, Grafía Antica. 1939. Watercolor. (34x55 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 21. Xul Solar, Todo Ta Hecho. 1961. Watercolor. (22.6x30.4 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 22. Xul Solar, *El Sei rey wan. Telud. / Konra to kredu diu / Lujan se / Bei Santa. Worker.* 1959. Watercolor. (29,2x38,8 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 23. Xul Solar, *No sabe no parle / no parle si no sabe / Pués ke on tru hier / Segure to se mi otro mort / No Hotri / San Lao Tse* Say, *Nel Tao Te King*. 1959. Watercolor. (29.1x 38 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 24. Xul Solar, Xamine Todo. 1962. Watercolor. (21,9cm X 26,4) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 25. Xul Solar, Xamine Todo retene lo bon. 1961. Watercolor. (22,5cm X 27,1cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 26. Xul Solar. *San Pablo Say*. 1961. Watercolor. (16.8cm x 22) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 27. Xul Solar, *Gran Rey Santo Jesús Kristo*. 1939. Oil on cardboard. (51.5 x 35 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 28. Xul Solar, *Pagoda*. 1925. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 29. Xul Solar, *Ciudad*. 1921. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 30. Xul Solar, *Vuelvilla*. 1936. (34 x 40 cm) ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 31. Xul Solar, *Mestizos de avión y gente*. 1936. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 32. *Proyecto*. 1918. Watercolor
©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 33. *Iglesia de María*. 1954. Watercolor.
©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar
Figure 34. Marina 1939. Watercolor. ©Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar

Figure 35. Torres-García. Untitled. 1917. Ink on paper. ©Museo Torres-García.
Figure 36. Torres-García. *Constructivo dedicado a Manolita*. 1930. Ink on paper. (44 x 43 cm) ©Museo Torres-García.
Figure 37. Torres-García. *Hombre constructivo*. 1938. Ink on paper. (40 x 29 cm) ©Museo Torres-García
Figure 38. Torres-García. *Drawing found on page 1 of Père Soleil*. 1932. ©Museo Torres-García
Figure 39. Torres-García. Drawings found of pages 43 and 44 of Père Soleil. 1932. ©Museo Torres-García

Figure 40. Torres-García. Drawings found of pages 9, 10 and 11 of Père Soleil. 1932. ©Museo Torres-García
Figure 41. Torres-García. *Monumento Cósmico Constructivo*. 1938. Pink Granit. ©Museo Torres-García
Bibliography


Montaño Durán, Patricia M. EL Imperio Tiwanaku. La Paz: Fundapac, 2011.


——. RAISON ET NATURE. Montevideo: Comisión de Homenajes a Torres García. Ministerio de la educación y Cultura, 1974.


Torres-García, Joaquín. “Carta de Torres-García a Vicente Huidobro Montevideo 28 de Marzo 1936,”. CC 732. FUNDACION VICENTE HUIDOBRO Oficinas y Centro de Documentación y Archivo: Merced 860, Santiago, Casa Colorada - Museo de Santiago, 1936


——. Manifiesto 2: Constructivo 100%. Montevideo: Publicaciones de la Asociación de Arte Constructivo, 1938.


