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DISAPPEARING ACTS: OCTAVIO PAZ, JOHN CAGE, HAROLDO DE CAMPOS, AND THE
SILENT TURN IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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In my dissertation, I use a hemispheric American framework to explore how changing understandings of silence have shaped the development of experimental poetry since the 1950s. I begin by showing how silence has become a key concept in mainstream criticism's devaluation of experimental literature and art. Midcentury critics, citing such works' refusal of conventional sense-making, were the first to describe them as "silent" – unconcerned with shared cultural meaning, incapable of political engagement, and therefore negligent of the duties previously embraced by avant-garde art. Responding to these claims, writers like Mexican poet Octavio Paz, Brazilian intellectual Haroldo de Campos, and U.S. composer John Cage worked to imagine silence not as a lack of content but as a culturally mediated way of being and behaving. They challenged lyric poetry's traditional reliance on notions related to speech (voice, breath, rhythm, etc.) to reimagine avant-garde poetry as an activity whose power for opposition to the status quo lies not in speaking out but in falling silent. For example, in my third chapter I examine the ideological stakes of this silence, arguing that while U. S. cultural policy increasingly made a spectacle of inter-American cultural communication, literary silence provided a means of strategic *non*-communication. These changing ideas about silence suggest an

alternative narrative about modernism's transition to postmodernism: one driven not by an evolving understanding of discourse but by changing conceptions of that which disrupts it. Here the "linguistic turn" is simultaneous with a "silent turn." While my dissertation focuses on the work of Cage, Paz, and de Campos, I open the discussion to include these poets' interaction with the "silent" work of writers and artists like Alejandra Pizarnik, Jackson Mac Low, Robert Rauschenberg, and others.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Kelly, who graciously made space for it during the first years of our marriage. May I never find the end of her patience.

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Introduction

Silence is difficult to talk about. Our definitions of it are as varied and changeable as our understanding of the language that intersperses, disperses, or opposes it.

Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty claimed that "we should be sensitive to the thread of silence from which the tissue of speech is woven," and modern linguists take for granted that the silences in our speech and writing make language possible. Spanish philosopher Ramón Xirau, on the other hand, adopted a mystical interpretation of silence as a transcendence of speech, while George Steiner saw it as language's ultimate failure, threatening to invade our words and deprive them of meaning and usefulness. As scientific, philosophical, and literary thought in the 20th century turned increasingly toward the study of language, an accompanying shift brought our attention to silence. To change our understanding of discourse demands a changed understanding of the silence that always undergirds it, often disrupts it, and sometimes even destroys it.

Part of this "silent turn" has always been poetic. Especially after the 1960s, as poetry increasingly participated in mainstream philosophical debates about the nature of language and its role in politics, experimental poets turned their focus toward silence. In this dissertation I discuss a wide range of such experimental poetry and art from around the globe, but I focus particularly on the work of four of the 20th century's most influential thinkers on the subject of silence: Mexican poet Octavio Paz, U.S. composer John Cage, and Brazilian intellectuals Haroldo and Augusto de Campos. Despite being acknowledged for their contributions to our understanding of silence, these poets' work is rarely if ever cross-referenced, let alone discussed in the context of a broad cultural

fascination with silence. Literary explorations of silence abound, and yet the nature of the subject has led critics to treat these works in isolation – as necessarily anomalous, anachronistic, or unconcerned with their contexts and contemporaries. In this comparative and interdisciplinary study I explore these poets' role – and, by extension, the role of avant-garde thought – in shaping broader literary, philosophical, and cultural engagements with silence.

Within their respective experimental traditions, Octavio Paz, John Cage, and the de Campos brothers explored silence as a means of revolutionizing literary practice.¹ Their work challenges lyric poetry's traditional reliance on notions related to speech – voice, breath, rhythm, etc. – to re-imagine avant-garde poetry as an activity whose power for opposition to the status quo lies not in speaking out but in falling silent. Silence, rather than speech, becomes poetry's foundational principle. Silence is an organizing structural element of all text but it is also, like poetic voice, a trope whose use is culturally and historically mediated. This evolving understanding and use of silence has been central to shaping many of the most influential movements in global experimental poetry, as well as broader trends in avant-garde music and visual art. The poetry at the center of this study, together with associated trends in "silent" music and "white" or

¹ Fascination with silence in the work of de Campos and Paz, for example, engages their contemporaries among French poststructural philosophers like Derrida, Barthes, or Foucault, for whom writing itself reveals the absence of authorial intention or presence--a silence that contrasts with a conventional privilege given to speech as present, immediate, and originary. These thinkers, in turn, drew much of their insight from early poets like Mallarmé, whose experiments with the white space of the page and the materiality of the signifier would prove an important precedent for ensuing experiments with poetic silence. While Cage's chance-determined poetic play with silence similarly looks to Mallarmé, it also engages the Dada aesthetics of Marcel Duchamp. By the postwar period, marginalized traditions in Western letters provided a means of rethinking poetic tradition. But for Cage, Paz, and the de Campos brothers silence also represented a wealth of thought that lay well outside of conventional contemporary Western artistic practice, like Zen and Tantric Buddhist philosophy, Catholic mysticism, or Baroque cosmology.

"blank" painting, provide an alternative history of 20th-century experimental art: from Kasimir Malevich's 1918 Suprematist canvas, "White on White," to Robert Rauschenberg's mid-century all-white field paintings; from the measured silences of Anton Webern's twelve-tone musical compositions to the silent performances of the FLUXUS group; from the *blanchure rigide* of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de Des* to the *cubo blanco* of Cuban poet Severo Sarduy.

I use the work of Paz, Cage, the de Campos brothers, and others to argue that silence became not only an object of investigation but also its very means. For these poets, silence is a way of engaging and interacting with others through literature and art. Like speech, silence is a form of being in the world, a way of inhabiting it with others, and even a means of changing it. In this dissertation I explore how silence – understood as the act of not speaking – serves as an experimental and even avant-garde practice or performance. This definition is expansive enough to accommodate the range of its implementation in various avant-garde aesthetics, but it also intervenes amid a recent wealth of culturally oriented studies of silence, which are quickly cohering into a field of their own.

Silence as Practice, Process, and Performance

I approach silence as a necessarily interpersonal phenomenon. That is, silence is a phenomenon affecting – and even effecting – communication or interaction between people. I am interested in how silence serves as a social strategy. Literary studies of

silence up until now have discussed silence in terms of single texts and single authors,² but what can it also tell us about our relationship with the author of a text, or with other readers of that same text? Language is a means of being with others, and so is silence. This dissertation explores how silence serves as a strategy for negotiating one's relationship with others in both time and space.

I am interested in how silence shapes several distinct interactive literary processes: translation, correspondence, homage, exegesis, and inter-arts adaptation. While silence played a part in how texts were produced it also affected how they circulated and were transformed. These literary practices allow us to explore these works in motion between languages, media, and interpretive communities. They also provide these writers with a means of realizing their view of literature as a means of action. As poets and theorists after mid-century increasingly acknowledged, poetry itself is a process rather than a stable product. To analyze a poem is to explore its means of acting on us, our means of acting on it, and through this our means of interacting with others. I investigate how poetics of silence affect a text's relationship with materials outside of the poem proper. I have collected correspondence, adaptations, and translations as an expanded group of texts. It is through the investigation of these materials that I tease out the ambivalences, tensions, and felicitous coincidences that silence allowed and encouraged between these three writers and within their individual oeuvres.

My approach to the avant-garde is unconventional, partly because I depart from Peter Bürger's understanding of it as a historical phenomenon belonging exclusively to

² With the notable exceptions of Eduardo Chirinos and Cheryl Glenn, whose work I will address in the following sections of this introduction.

the early 20th century, but also because I follow Vicki Unruh's lead in examining what she calls "performance texts." Unruh focuses her attention almost exclusively on the potential of avant-garde manifestos to perform their particular ideologies by invoking unconventional relationships with their audiences and with their authors. But this approach need not be limited to the manifesto. An eye to how a text performs – what it *does*, rather than just what it says – within a given context helps us re-evaluate the range of interactive literary processes described above as potential avant-garde activities in their own right. Correspondence, translation, homage, and adaptation can become avant-garde activities just as easily as poetic composition itself.

In approaching silence itself as a potentially avant-garde performance, I adapt the view of silence proposed by Bernard Dauenhauer in *Silence: The Phenomenon and its Ontological Significance* (1980). For Dauenhauer silence is both a state of being and an active performance. As he says, "silence is not merely linked with some active human performance. It is itself an active performance" (4). Crucially for his argument, Dauenhauer distinguishes between silence, which is active and elected, and muteness, which is passive and often externally imposed. I find such a distinction between chosen and enforced silence to be helpful, but Dauenhauer's analysis is limited by the vacuum in which it occurs. While he claims that a consideration of discursive context is key for examining the ways in which silence serves as a performance, his discussion almost never includes concrete examples. By considering silence as it is practiced and performed in particular circumstances, I aim to show that not all passive silence is negative or reactionary, just as not all active silence is politically engaged.

A perfect example of silence as performance is Marina Abramovic's MoMA performance piece, *The Artist is Present* (2010). Here Abramovic sits at a table without moving or speaking, allowing audience members to sit opposite her. The artist's abstention from action is the performance itself: Abramovic performs her own absence by defying our expectations of what it means to be present. Some of the texts examined in this dissertation – like Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" – are meant to be performed in similar ways, paradoxically embodying absence itself. Cage's lecture uses chance to determine the text of his talk, so that the words he speaks are devoid of any authorial intention. In the case of Augusto de Campos' "Leitura sobre a nada," we even have a recording of de Campos' performance of his translation of Cage's lecture, which draws attention to both the silence of Cage (who is literally absent) and the silence of the translator (who suppresses his presence in the name of "faithful" translation).

But analysis of silence as performance becomes decidedly more difficult when we talk about its role in text. Taking J.L. Austin's notion of "performative utterance" as a point of departure, I argue that abstaining from utterance can be performative as well; while silence cannot *say* anything, it can *do* many different things. The problem is that we do not have access to the acts of reading and writing where this silence is performed. For example, while Stanley Fish has described the act of reading as a performance or an "event," this is an event we cannot witness and whose context can never be fixed. In the case of much of our "silent" poetry this event is doubly absent: an absent performance of absence itself. What we do have, however, are a series of texts and images that call attention to these various absences. They make meaning of them or refrain from making meaning. They also transform that silence, reiterating it, reinterpreting it, or even

transposing it to the context of a different medium or language. These processes of transformation are dynamic and active in their own right.

Beyond this central theoretical framework, I allow my methodology to find appropriate theoretical expression according to its object of study: translation theory, performance theory, or inter-arts theory. In each case, I use Stanley Fish's concept of the interpretive community as a means of examining how each of these literary processes finds unique practice and performance among specific communities of writers and readers of avant-garde texts. While such a choice of framework might initially seem outdated, the poetry I examine belongs to a period in which reader response criticism, as well as theories about the "openness" of text, were shaping and responding to radically changed reading practices that informed both the consumption and creation of poetry. Reader response criticism's understanding of reading as a socially mediated practice helps us see how these other literary activities – translation, adaptation, homage, correspondence – produce and are produced by communities of their own. It is in this way that I examine how silence radically changed literary practice.

An investigation of the literary practice of silence allows us to explore it as a phenomenon mediated culturally, politically and historically. To this end, I examine how silence's effect on interactive literary processes impacts several distinct historical and geographical narratives surrounding experimental poetry. First of all, it changes the way that we think about the active and "outspoken" nature of avant-garde art. What happens to the avant-garde when it adopts a listening posture, rather than one of speaking or "speaking for"? This in turn impacts how we talk about the circulation and reception of experimental poetry. Ideas about silence, much like notions related to voice, shape the

way that poetry travels between readers, authors, and languages. Additionally, an attention to changing ideas about silence (and its relationship to corresponding shifts in ideas about language) suggests an alternative narrative about modernism's transition to postmodernism: one driven not by an evolving understanding of discourse but by changing conceptions of that which disrupts it. Finally, altering such a chronology also changes its attendant geographies. The critical nomenclature of avant-garde, neo-avant-garde, or experimental is charged with assumptions and implications about cultural geographies. Can we use criteria developed to discuss the historical European pre-WWII avant-garde to describe experimental art and literature produced in other parts of the world in the post-war period? What happens to the politics of nomenclature when our frame of reference is inter-American rather than trans-Atlantic? Does a focus on discourses and poetics of silence demand a different framework entirely – one not dependent on notions of speech, voice, discourse, or dialogue as the basis for avant-garde internationalism? As we will see, silence served as a novel and unconventional means of relating to others in both time and space, allowing poets to re-imagine their roles with respect to their audiences, their colleagues, their literary and artistic traditions, and even their works themselves.

Ultimately, with my focus on experimental and avant-garde poetry, I explore the relevance of radical poetic practice for the discipline of comparative literature. Haun Saussy, in his introduction to the 2006 State of the Discipline report to the American Comparative Literature Association, entitled *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, claims that "every comparative project is in some measure an experiment" (24). As he admits, the practice of comparative literature has become a search for

disciplinary self-definition. For Saussy this is a productive point of departure. The indefiniteness, uncertainty, and provisional nature of comparative study are not its weakness but rather its mission: to destabilize the discourses and narratives surrounding international cultural relations. Rather than searching for a stable theory or object of study, Saussy says, comparative literature needs "a poetics (an elucidation of the art of making, as applied to its own practices" (23-4). I would like to connect these two contiguous thoughts to suggest that what comparative literature needs is not just a poetics but an experimental poetics. If the task of the comparatist, as Saussy claims, is to destabilize established disciplinary models, then its most apt poetics would be those that depart from conventional methodologies. Experimental poetry, in my understanding of it, does just that: it searches for new forms in hopes of finding new ways of experiencing, understanding, and relating to the world.

Charles Bernstein, one of the foremost practitioners of U.S. experimental poetry and criticism, has suggested translation or multilingualism as an engine for poetic experimentation: "to come to a language as a second tongue, to rethink and relearn the world in new and strange sounds, may inhibit a natural or unconscious acceptance of the relation of words to things. It may bring home the artificialness of language" ("Time Out of Motion" 108). Bernstein suggests that an awareness of artifice is something that one could "bring home" from linguistic and literary travels abroad. Translation itself becomes a model and means for wider experimental poetic practice. If comparative literature needs an experimental method, experimental poetry needs a comparative method. Critics of experimental and contemporary avant-garde poetry overwhelmingly avoid the comparative, turning the insights of poetic experimentation instead toward the canons and

discourses of national poetic traditions. This dissertation explores how experimental poetry offers new insight into comparative literary study, and vice versa. I argue that the poets whose work I examine turn to experimental poetry as a way of finding new means of relating to others across national, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. Through it, they rupture and rearrange the familiar canons that so often serve to solidify nationalist literary frameworks; they build new intellectual networks and bring explicit focus to the ways in which these networks are constructed; and they invite us to explore how breaking poetry out of our conventional understanding of it necessarily alters our perception of the publics, politics, and cultural contexts to which it responds.

Theory: Historicizing Silence Since Mid-Century

In 1974 Octavio Paz published what has become one of Latin America's most famous meditations on modernity: *Los hijos del limo*, an expanded compilation of the Charles Eliot Norton lectures he had delivered two years earlier at Harvard University. Like much of Paz's work throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, *Los hijos del limo* explores the modern world's loss of what Paz refers to as analogy: "la visión del universo como un sistema de correspondencias y a la visión del lenguaje como el doble del universo" / "the vision of the universe as a system of correspondences and the vision of language as a reflection of the universe" (10). As Paz defines it, analogy is the force by which a word is bound to its referent, and by which a language operates according to the same rules as the world it describes. However, Paz says, the history of poetry in the twentieth century tells the story of an eroding faith in language's ability to express

contemporary realities. Words separate from the things they refer to; "El mundo pierde su realidad y se convierte en una figura de lenguaje. En el centro de la analogía hay un hueco: la pluralidad de textos implica que no hay un texto original" / "The world loses its reality and becomes a figure of language. In the center of the analogy there is a hole: the plurality of texts implies that there is no original text" (106). Paz locates the fall of Babel not in biblical history but in the recent past, not only with the failure of the avant-gardes to merge literature and revolution, but with their failure to merge the word and its thing. Experience cannot be translated directly into words, and the world finds no clear verbal expression. Paz, who after the 1930s increasingly fights to maintain a separation of poetry from politics, would see the real failure of the avant-garde not as political but literary.³

As Paz repeats throughout his commentary on twentieth-century poetry, "la analogía termina en silencio" / "analogy ends in silence" (112). Charged with the stewardship of a language that no longer serves as a reflection of reality, poetry merely becomes a "máscara de la nada" / "the mask of nothingness" (112). With no coherent image of the world for language to express, it instead expresses the loss of that image: "el reverso del lenguaje; el otro lado, la cara vacía del universo" (*Marcel Duchamp* 78). Increasingly, Paz sees the task of poetry after the avant-garde not as maintaining

³ Throughout his career (and especially after his experiences in Spain and Paris during the 1930s) Paz would insist on a separation between literature and political engagement. However, even as avant-garde literature saw a progressive waning of political activism (especially after the mid-1960s), Paz himself never stepped away from politics. Despite his claims for separation between literature and political life (and often in fact because of them) we constantly see Paz's skills as a career diplomat carry over into his life as an influential literary editor, a prolific correspondent, and an astute negotiator of literary credit and debt. To claim that Paz's poetry is apolitical simply because he says so, or because it gives politics no explicit representation, is as reductive as it is naïve. Paz's legacy as a diplomat and cultural commentator includes moments of leftist protest as well as ant-communist activism, and so we should approach his poetry should allow it at least such a range of possible expression.

language but rather mediating language's relationship with that which escapes it – silence. As he says of post-avant-garde poets like Nicanor Parra, Cintio Vitier, Charles Olson, and Allen Ginsberg: "en cierto sentido fue un regreso a la vanguardia, pero una vanguardia silenciosa" / "in a sense it was a return to the avant-garde, but an avant-garde that is silent" (192).

Paz's blanket characterization of all post-avant-garde poetry as a "silent vanguard" seems overstated, but it echoes what had been an influential trend in literary studies throughout various schools of criticism during the 1950s and 1960s. While critics would find any number of ways to talk about a final collapse of modernist literature's faltering faith in language's ability to express contemporary social realities, this discourse of silence becomes noteworthy through its repetition. After the mid-1950s, criticism that characterized postwar and post-avant-garde literature as "silent" grew into a genre in its own right. To understand how Paz, Cage, and the de Campos brothers use silence to intervene in debates about the nature and contribution of the avant-garde, we must first understand that critical context.

At a time when the question of what constitutes language seemed increasingly uncertain, it became just as easy – and in some cases easier – to talk about literature's acts *against* language. Like Paz, Roland Barthes understands silence as a force opposed to language, and specifically literary language. In *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), the first major postwar study to theorize contemporary literature as "silent," Barthes argues that modern literature has always been a search for new forms, and that this search finally has exhausted itself. Writing, he claims, "has reached in our time a last metamorphosis, absence" (5). This is the "degree zero" of writing. Like Maurice Blanchot, who follows

Barthes in claiming that "literature is going toward itself, toward its essence, which is disappearance" (*Book to Come* 195), Barthes argues that literature finally finds "purity" of form in the abandonment of meaning. While Barthes and Blanchot claim that the disintegration of language "can only lead to the silence of writing" (75), that silence is not an absence of writing but rather a writing that is capable only of expressing absence.

As the 1950s and 1960s progressed, critical discourses surrounding silence increasingly viewed it as negative and reactionary, and increasingly used it as an epithet for avant-garde aesthetics. As avant-garde writers questioned what to make of a literary language that apparently had failed so completely in its liberal and utopian projects, critics like Ihab Hassan pointed out that the avant-garde advance seemed to have turned into a retreat. "If there is an avant-garde in our time," Hassan quips in *The Literature of Silence* (1967), "it is probably bent on discovery through suicide" (3). Hassan argues that without faith in its own ability to enact social change, the only reality literature can express is one of absence and disappearance. Literature becomes the medium through which language destroys itself in order to express its own lack and insufficiency. Like Barthes and Blanchot, Hassan argues that "literature has adopted a new attitude toward itself, and [. . .] silence is its metaphor" (xi). For Hassan, silence is the final metaphor, risking the destruction of meaning-making through an escape into non-meaning. Even as he employs it, the term silence threatens to dissolve into the same paradox and non-meaning that he criticizes in contemporary literature. Literature becomes a self-destructive act that serves self-perpetuation, and a disappearance through proliferation.

In his introduction to *The Literature of Silence*, Hassan repeats George Steiner's denunciation of contemporary literature's "retreat from the word." For Steiner, however,

the failure of language in contemporary literature stems not from a surrender of the principles of a previous avant-garde, but from a too-stubborn adherence to them. He claims that, through a growing realization that "in cardinal respects reality now begins *outside* verbal language," expressible only through mathematics, "the ambitions of scientific rigor and prophecy have seduced writing from its veritable nature, which is art" ("Retreat from the Word" 193). For example, implicitly pointing to Cage's musical and poetic experiments, Steiner remarks that any attempted artistic application of indeterminacy – a phenomenon properly belonging to mathematics – "is merely talking nonsense" (192). For Steiner, the silence of contemporary literature is two-fold: the silence of that which language is unable to formulate or express, and the silence of "nonsense," non-communicative language in its attempt to express the inexpressible. Later, Steiner would expand this work in *Language and Silence* (1967). Here, his contention is that the atrocities of the 20th Century – the world wars, the Holocaust, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – destroyed language by confronting it with the inexpressible and forcing it into the service of acts that defy all reason and compassion.⁴

Steiner and Hassan, like Blanchot, Barthes, and Paz, write about the silence of contemporary literature with a morbid fascination and a rhetoric that periodically strays into the apocalyptic. As Steiner reminds us at the outset of his 1961 essay, "the Apostle

⁴ *Language and Silence* inevitably echoes Theodor Adorno's proclamation that there can be "no poetry after Auschwitz." The inexpressibility of atrocity has been a central issue among critical and literary approaches to the Holocaust. While a debate over the appropriateness of silence in response to atrocity necessarily forms a backdrop for the critical and poetic works investigated in this dissertation, it also falls outside of the focus of my investigation.

Mostly this is a function of the poetry itself, which rejects the discourse of silence that would emerge from both sides of this debate. For reactions against Steiner's approach to silence and the Nazi genocide, see Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death* or Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*.

tells us that in the beginning was the Word. He gives us no assurance as to the end" (187). Later, he ends his essay on a cautionary note: "'To perish by silence': that civilization on which Apollo looks no more shall not long endure" (216). (In its original 1961 publication in *The Kenyon Review*, these lines are followed by a sketch of the Tower of Babel.) As in Hassan, the tone here is of indignance but also anxiety. These writers fear not the indescribable but rather indescribability – not that which exceeds the capacity of language, but the incapacity of language itself. As Elisabeth Marie Loevlie notes in her study of silence in Pascal, Rousseau, and Beckett, a sense of language's insufficiency has long been coupled with a fascination with the "seductive" nature of silence – its resistance to study as an empirical object and its slipperiness as a term (*Literary Silences* 9). In Hassan and Steiner, however, silence becomes sublimely terrible. Their treatment of silence calls to mind the words of Edmund Burke: "all *general* privations are great, because they are all terrible; *Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude, and Silence*" (*On Taste* 63). For Burke, silence is sublime because it forces us to strain our senses of perception. For Hassan and Steiner, silence is terrible because its full comprehension is impossible, forcing us to confront the limits of our means of perception and expression.

Susan Sontag presents a departure from previous thinkers of silence during the 1960s, and the beginning of a push among literary critics to approach silence as potentially positive or generative. In "The Aesthetics of Silence," published in 1967, Sontag looks back on two decades of literature, art, and criticism that theorize the place of silence in contemporary cultural production. Dividing her essay into twenty numbered sections, she attempts to bring these diverse sources together as evidence for a trend

toward a deeper cultural engagement with silence. Unlike most of her sources, however, Sontag interprets silence as a positive future goal rather than a past failure:

As the activity of the mystic must end in a via negative, a theology of God's absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowingness beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech, so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the 'subject' (the 'object,' the 'image'), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence. (NP)

Like Hassan, Steiner, Barthes, and Blanchot, Sontag points to contemporary art's gradual self-negation, its self-destructive attempt to express that which lies outside of itself. However, while she argues that this quest for silence could be a means of radical renewal, she continually returns to her contemporaries' apocalyptic interpretation of it. She does not alter their sense of inevitable decline, but uses mysticism to claim this disappearance as potentially positive.

Sontag's essay attempts to break with the defeatist conclusions of Hassan or Blanchot, but also serves as their perfect illustration. "The Aesthetics of Silence," in its tendency toward wistful mysticism and aphoristic paradox, loads the term silence with a host of contradictory definitions accumulated in two decades of literature and criticism. While the essay emphasizes a common decision to see silence as opposed to language, it also underscores the resulting fact that there are as many understandings of silence as there are understandings of language. Sontag attempts to synthesize and redeem these formulations as a single tradition, but does so by resorting to exactly the sort of writing that Hassan, Blanchot, and Barthes had decried. Even Sontag herself allows the essay's

optimism to wear thin in places. "In my opinion," she states in her fifth section, "the myths of silence and emptiness are about as nourishing and viable as one could hope to see devised in an 'unwholesome' time."

A New Moment

During the 1960s and 1970s, the poets whose work I investigate in this study – Paz, Cage, and Haroldo de Campos, as well as Augusto de Campos, Severo Sarduy, Jackson Mac Low, and others – were at the forefront of experimental poetics. In previous decades most of these poets had understood the duty of poetry as the stewardship of language. During the 1950s, for example, both Paz and de Campos would practice what they called "critical poetry,"⁵ which serves to dismantle and rebuild language, constantly renewing it through poetic practice. But after the late 1960s their poetry evidences a suspicion that this project finally has reached its end. The year 1968 in particular provided a breaking point for avant-garde movements around the globe. In addition to the failed student uprising in Paris, which finally ended the Situationist International and represented a crushing defeat for various politically active continental avant-garde movements, 1968 also saw the Mexican government's massacre of its own citizens at Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City, an event that led Paz to protest by resigning his post as Mexican ambassador to India. 1968 was also the year that the repressive regime of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil consolidated its power and escalated its sweeping censorship policies. In the United States, race riots rocked cities across the country while its number

⁵ Both de Campos and Paz adapt their ideas of critical poetry from Stéphane Mallarmé and Ezra Pound. For more on this adaptation, see Chapter 1.

of troops in Vietnam approached its peak. Widespread among practitioners of avant-garde poetry was the impression that language was not only insufficient but inappropriate for representing, responding to, or making meaning of such tragedy. For some of these poets this means that the journey toward a more perfect language has ended in the destruction of language itself. For others it merely means that the Word, finally, has been divested of its mythologies. In each case there is a sense that the mystery now lies not within language itself but rather with that which destroys it, and that the proper material of experimental poetry is silence itself. To write poetry in an age that suffers not from a lack of order but from its clear excesses demands that poetry find new ways of dissolving the autonomous ego and the speaking "I;" to intervene among and dissolve the overabundance of positivistic discourses; and to make use of the nonsense or non-meaning that is left to it.

The poetry that I have selected to investigate in this dissertation is all poetry that explicitly engages the discourses of silence that circulated with increasing cohesion throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. That is, along with the critical texts by Barthes, Blanchot, Sontag and others, this poetry takes silence as its subject, exploring silence's relationship to language and engaging a body of surrounding theories. Nevertheless, these poems participate in these discourses of silence in a way that the theoretical texts could not: by experimenting with various means of making silence not only the subject of the text but also its organizing principle or even its *materia prima*. They engage the discourse of silence by silencing discourse itself, exploring what lies beyond a conventional, discursive understanding of language.

In 1952, Cage used chance to excerpt from previously composed texts and then organized these excerpts at random into a "Lecture about Nothing"⁶ – a non-discourse that emerges from and constantly returns to meaninglessness. Cage imagined that the silence of the poet's intention allows for and encourages the action of others: exasperated sighs from the audience, the anxious shifting of chairs, and eventually the sound of the door opening and closing. For Hassan and Blanchot, this is the silence that belongs to babble – language that achieves meaninglessness through profusion. In contrast, the concrete poetry of Haroldo and Augusto de Campos approaches silence by fracturing words and isolating them on the page in increasingly terse and minimalistic formations. Just as Clement Greenberg would claim that painting reaches the limit of its flatness in Robert Rauschenberg's "empty" *White Paintings*, or as Barthes identifies the "degree zero" of prose writing, the de Campos brothers search for the point at which poetic form achieves nothingness. While this dissertation focuses on works by Paz, de Campos, and Cage, its discussion includes works by a range of experimental poets: Severo Sarduy, Jackson Mac Low, Alejandra Pizarnik, Jerome Rothenberg, Thomas Merton, Charles Bernstein, the Oulipo poets, and others.

Like the texts by Hassan, Steiner, or Barthes, this silent poetry appears to indulge in the apocalyptic rhetoric that the seductively dramatic and often vague discourse of silence affords. While various modernisms attempted bring the past and future into the present, these works often seem to imagine silence as a means of escaping history altogether. Claiming that the attempted construction of a new language – or the

⁶ As Kay Larson notes, determining the date of Cage's first performance of the "Lecture on Nothing" means sorting through tangled accounts. For more on this see Larson, *Where the Heart Beats* (2012).

destruction of an old one – has failed to revolutionize social realities, they appear to separate language from the social realities and cultural contexts from which it emerges. Language only escapes these contexts by ceasing to circulate and communicate – through silence. Like Cage, whose search for true silence leads him to lock himself in an anechoic chamber, these works seem to exist in self-imposed solitary confinement. Where avant-garde literature often worked to find a communal space in developing understandings of language and discourse, these works' recourse to silence drew criticism that they were unconcerned with shared cultural meaning and incapable of political engagement. These poets all come from distinct avant-garde traditions, which find the reconciliation they sought only in their own absence – as if these poets could achieve this goal of avant-garde literature only by declaring the death of the avant-gardes. Individually, these works seem as if they try to find in silence the last possible means of utopian unity and simultaneity – as if finally, in silence, we find sameness.

Despite appearing at first to be mere illustrations of the apocalyptic predictions that theorists and critics made for the silent art of mid-century, almost all of the works themselves imagine silence not as an end but as the means for a new beginning. As John Cage remarks, looking at Rauschenberg's infamous erasure of a drawing by Willem De Kooning, "it's a joy in fact to begin over again" (*Silence* 101). Similarly, Haroldo de Campos's *Galaxias*, like Severo Sarduy's *Big Bang*, dispenses with the apocalyptic rhetoric of Steiner or Hassan to imagine a silence not after the universe's end but before its beginning. For both of them, as will become clear in Chapter 1, all meaning depends on the non-meaning from which it emerges. As Paz says, the task of the poet is now "convertir esa contemplación del vacío en la materia de [la] poesía" / "to convert that

contemplation of the void into the material of poetry" (*Hijos del limo* 106). Facing the conclusion that language has given way to silence, these poets choose not to give up their craft, but attempt instead to create poetry from silence itself. But is this celebration of a new beginning any less apocalyptic than the texts by Hassan or Steiner? Are these claims for silence as a positive force any less mystical or inexplicable than they are in Sontag's essay?

As evidenced by the diverse treatments of silence by Blanchot, Steiner, and Hassan, the term silence often serves as a repository for that which opposes language or destroys it, whether it does so from within or without. But over the last fifty years, there also has been an opposing push to view silence as generative or even productive. This kind of thinking about silence has been done most rigorously and systematically in the fields of rhetoric, communications, linguistic pragmatics, and discourse analysis. The major trend in these disciplines has been to view silence as a rhetoric in its own right. George Kalamaras, for example, argues in *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension* that silence "is not opposed to language" but that instead "silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge" (8). For Kalamaras silence shapes language and aids in the production of discourse and meaning. Cheryl Glenn, in *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*, follows Kalamaras to claim that "silence can be as powerful as speech" and can in fact serve "as a rhetoric, as a constellation of symbolic strategies that (like spoken language) serves many functions" (xi). But while Glenn's move to understand silence as a rhetoric or even as a grammar allows us to think about its use and effect in concrete ways, it also risks normalizing it. Paz, Cage, de Campos, and others sought to draw on the oppositional potential of silence to make it into a means of

interaction that disrupts normalized systems of discourse and rhetoric. To use these same systems to characterize and explain its function is to limit or even destroy that oppositional potential. That is not to say that silence cannot or does not play a part in our daily interactions or even (as Glenn beautifully illustrates) in gendered and racialized struggles against inequality, but that these poets also saw in it the potential for something that goes well beyond familiar discourses about silence (or rhetorics *of* silence).

Paz, Cage, and de Campos also allow us to amend a phenomenological tradition of thinking about silence that informs much of the criticism I have mentioned so far. Max Picard's 1948 *Die Welt des Schweigens* (The World of Silence), was the first major phenomenological study of silence in the 20th Century. Picard, who opposes the Western tendency to think of silence as purely negative, describes it as an "autonomous phenomenon," a spiritual essence, or an "independent whole, subsisting in and through itself" (15). As he has it, "silence contains everything in itself. It is not waiting for anything; it is always wholly present in itself and it completely fills out the space in which it appears" (17). For Picard, silence came before speech. Both Dauenhauer and Kalamaras build on Picard's insights. For Kalamaras, silence constitutes a mode of knowing which acts with language "in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge" (16). For Dauenhauer, similarly, an essential or ontological silence is a state of being and an active performance: "silence is not merely linked with some active human performance. It is itself an active performance" (4). While Paz drifts progressively further away from any belief in an essential silence (and while Cage and de Campos flatly deny it), their work lets us see how silence serves as a unique mode of action and performance. The important difference here is that while the studies by Picard,

Dauenhauer, Kalamaras all strive to describe the ways in which silence shapes the world we already know and language as we already use it, these poets strive to make silence into an avant-garde practice. For them, silence presents new or different ways of being and behaving.

In the work of Octavio Paz, John Cage, and the de Campos brothers, we find an attempt to make silence function in ways that they see language as no longer being able to. They use silence (the disruption of discourse) not to replace language but to reclaim for the word that which it supposedly has lost. For example, in his first major treatise on poetry, *El arco y la lira* (1956), Paz claims that "el lenguaje, en su realidad última, se nos escapa. Esa realidad consiste en ser algo indivisible e inseparable del hombre" / "language, in its ultimate reality, escapes us. That reality consists of something indivisible and inseparable from man" (31). Ten years later, Paz would begin to say the same thing about silence. While in his early work silence is that which invades language from the outside to rupture the binding force of analogy, his later work explores the ways in which silence functions within language as a force that generates passionate attraction. For John Cage, similarly, the silence of words divested of their meaning becomes a means of reconciling words and things – not through reference but through behavior, by *becoming* things themselves.

Cage's rhetoric of silence, like Paz's, partakes of a mysticism that brings it closer to the characterizations of language by the early Dada thinkers on whose work he draws so heavily. Wassily Kandinsky, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), would claim that "the apt use of a word (in its poetical meaning), repetition of this word, twice, three times or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to

intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself" (15). Cage, whose poetry often strives for a similar transformation of language into pure sound, characterizes this phenomenon as silence. Like Cage, the other poets whose work I examine in this dissertation reimagine avant-garde poetry as an activity whose power for opposition to the status quo lies not in speaking out but in falling silent. Their works, which consistently refuse definitive interpretation, no longer use the hortatory and the declarative to instruct and inform, but rather invite the reader to participate in the production of the poem. To be silent is to witness without attempting to impose one's own order, to respond without shifting the focus to one's self or perspective, and to be with others without setting the terms of that relationship.

The Cultural Geographies of Silence

Because this dissertation explores silence in practice (through correspondence, translation, adaptation, homage, etc.) it centers around three poets whose relationship was shaped by their thoughts about (and performance of) silence. In the case of Octavio Paz and John Cage, their mutual investment in Zen and Tantric Buddhism brought them together in the mid-1960s in Delhi, India. Paz at the time was serving as Mexico's ambassador to India, while Cage was touring with the company of his partner, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. After meeting at a garden party they remained in touch until Cage's death in 1992. At first glance, these two writers apparently have little in common: while Cage expressed distaste for surrealism, Paz was a self-proclaimed surrealist and one of the few Latin American writers to be bestowed with that title by

André Breton himself; Paz was interested in language as the basis for human experience, while Cage spent his career trying to escape it; Cage would remain steadfastly silent about his own sexuality throughout his career, while Paz devotes much of his *oeuvre* to meditations on desire, and in fact saw silence as its deepest expression; Paz was never shy about situating himself among the great poets of the Western canon, while Cage made constant efforts to reject such conventional success. Furthermore, Paz and Cage each participated in broad international intellectual communities with remarkably little overlap. But despite these apparent tensions – and often because of them – Paz and Cage maintained a dialogue throughout the better part of thirty years.

While Haroldo de Campos adamantly maintained that Brazil and Mexico belonged to separate and non-intersecting avant-garde traditions, Haroldo and his brother Augusto worked together with Octavio Paz throughout the 1960s and 1970s to popularize the experimental, visual, and concrete poetry that they each had helped to pioneer in Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking America. They published in many of the same journals, cited many of the same poets and theorists, corresponded with many of the same intellectuals, and translated many of the same works from foreign languages. They never would go so far as to declare themselves part of a shared movement, but in practice they worked to advocate for each others' work. Meanwhile, the de Campos brothers' relationship with Cage was forged and sustained mostly through intermittent correspondence throughout the 1970s and 1980s. They dedicated a number of visual and poetic works to one another, and held public events and private meetings in both New York City and São Paulo.

Nowhere did silence find such avid and experimental practice as in the poetry of the Americas. All of the poets at the center of this study – Paz, Cage, the de Campos brothers, Severo Sarduy and others – are from the American hemisphere, but silence is not a uniquely American aesthetic. Each of these poets relies heavily on the earlier Western work of poets like Stéphane Mallarmé and Guillaume Apollinaire, or visual artists like Kasimir Malevich and Marcel Duchamp. Additionally, many of the first critics to theorize literary silence were among the marquee names of French Continental philosophy during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, with thinkers like Jacques Derrida joining Barthes, Blanchot and Steiner. Sarduy would publish actively in *Tel Quel*, and Octavio Paz would solicit contributions to his journals *Plural* and *Vuelta* from the likes of Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, George Steiner, and others. In 1996, Jacques Derrida would join Octavio Paz, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, and others in a public homage to Haroldo de Campos, where the French philosopher would praise de Campos's "absolute, atemporal, definitive, inalterable, indubitable knowledge" (*Homenagem a Haroldo de Campos*). But the American poets examined in this dissertation were able to reclaim or re-imagine Western or continental traditions of thinking about silence largely thanks to the insights provided by various strains of East Asian and South Asian philosophical and religious thought: Tantric Buddhism or Zen Buddhism, for example. By drawing on both Eastern and Western thought, this American conversation about silence could only be possible by negotiating between these various traditions. Taken together, these various strains of thought – from Tantric Buddhism to French Poststructuralism – testify to the truly global scope of the work with which silent poetry engages.

Silent poetry at mid-century arises in the context of a perceived historical, literary, and linguistic distance from the European avant-gardes of the pre-war period, but that distance is equally geographical and cultural. The poets whose work I investigate in this dissertation belonged to a generation of (hemispherically) American poets concerned with the creation of a uniquely American avant-garde idiom. Many of the aesthetics in which silence plays a transformative role – the *neobarroco* or Abstract Expressionism, for example – were among the first major experimental aesthetic movements to be characterized as uniquely American.⁷

Over the past fifteen years an increasing number of studies have employed inter-American, trans-American, or hemispheric American frameworks for literary and cultural analysis. From José David Saldívar's *Dialectics of Our America* (1991) and Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *Do the Americas Have a Common Literature?* (1990) to more recent works like Rachel Adams' *Continental Divides* (2009) or Claire Fox's *Making Art Panamerican* (2012), these studies have helped to break American studies out of its sometimes implicit (and often explicit) focus on the United States. However, the title of Saldívar's book attests to the axis of opposition that these frameworks establish between North and South America, even in their occasional attempts to overcome it. In contrast (and often in response) to this tendency of inter-American studies to search for commonality, cooperation, or continuity across the hemisphere, Latin American Studies tends to focus on cultural and political difference. However, in addressing the United States as a center of power and imperialism in the region, Latin American studies too

⁷ As Paz notes in *Los hijos del limo*, Latin America developed major regionalist avant-garde presence before the United States, which saw the dominance of a more cosmopolitan modernist movement until the 1950s.

often maintains the Americas as a set of opposing narratives precisely to resist the sort of hemispheric narrative that would formulate the Americas as a whole. My own approach to American literature borrows its hemispheric scope from inter-American studies while maintaining a focus on the difference, discord, misinterpretation, and even ignorance that so often characterizes trans-American exchange.

While the current study acknowledges and responds to the hemispheric scope of the United States' political dominance and cultural imperialism during the late Cold War, it does so by reconceptualizing a North-South opposition as a sort of triangle, investigating the cultural transfer and political tension between works from three national/linguistic traditions: Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. Because the focus of this dissertation is on the transit and transformation of certain works between different languages and media, each chapter focuses on the interplay between works from two or more of these traditions.

The Chapters

My first chapter points to a rich history of "blank" poetry, "white" painting, and "silent" music that extends both well before and well after the 1950s. From there, I discuss Latin American book objects from the late 60s and 70s that all develop this aesthetic of silence within poems that focus on, and make creative use of the blank page that surrounds the text. Critics have treated these works as enigmatic and isolated – not only isolated from works by other Latin American poets but also isolated within each poet's larger body of work. The main goal of this chapter is to draw together poems that

so far have been treated separately. I argue for the blank page as a site of shared aesthetic and cultural significance that enables intertextuality – rather than enforcing isolation – between experimental poets in Latin American literature during this period. All of these poems, I argue, allow us to trace a transition between modernism and postmodernism that is marked by changing approaches to silence. Until now scholars have struggled to reconcile these poets' minimalist aesthetics of the 1950s with the excessive, baroque aesthetics of their later poetry. I show how a shared exploration of silence serves as a transition. While poems like de Campos' "Branco" (a single word, "white," isolated on an otherwise empty page) flirt with the limits of modernist minimalism and negation, they ultimately draw their treatment of silence from the diverse non-rational sources that would prove instrumental for Latin American postmodern poetry: Catholic mysticism, Baroque cosmology, and Tantric Buddhist philosophy.

Having pointed in my first chapter to the importance of silence as a shared transformation of modernist aesthetic and critical discourse across a range of poetic traditions, I focus my attention in my second chapter on how this works within the exchange between two of these poets: Haroldo de Campos and Octavio Paz. Here I turn to de Campos' Portuguese translation of Paz's famous poem, *Blanco*. Amending José Quiroga's understanding of *Blanco* as determined by an attendant "archive" of other texts by Paz, I stress the ways in which this archive functions according to what Paz himself would posit as the "open" character of the poem itself. I argue that a similar reading of de Campos's translation, *Branco*, published within a larger collection of texts in *Transblanco*, allows us to read de Campos's apparently servile and "faithful" translation of *Blanco* not as an homage (as it generally is accepted to be), but rather as a critical

appropriation of its source text. A consideration of de Campos's correspondence with Paz, published as part of the *Transblanco* archive, as well as a reading of de Campos's accompanying critical essays, reveals the myriad ways in which de Campos appropriates *Blanco* and attempts to alter it through translation. I argue that de Campos models this appropriation, hidden behind the translator's apparent silence, as a revision of the treatment of silence in Paz's original poem.

While in general any translation signals a lack in the receiving culture (and begins the work of filling it), I suggest that this lack itself – the "void" that Paz invokes in *Blanco* – is precisely what de Campos attempts to translate and to appropriate. Just as Paz makes poetry into a process of dissolving established discourses, de Campos transforms translation from a process of meaning-making into one that preserves non-meaning within a new linguistic and cultural context. Paz and de Campos participate in widely divergent avant-garde traditions from their respective positions within Mexican and Brazilian literary cultures, but each poet invokes silence as means of reimagining these traditions. Adopting a listening posture became central to reconceptualizing over-determined and institutionalized avant-garde thought and practice.

My third chapter, which focuses on the interactions between Octavio Paz and John Cage, further explores the ideological stakes of these poets' aesthetic silence by focusing on the inter-American relations that serve as a backdrop for my project. I argue that by approaching aesthetic silence not as a lack of content but as a distinct way of being and behaving, we can see the potential for such a silence to be performed in diverse and often conflicting ways. After World War II, Paz and Cage increasingly denounced the silence of one movement in particular – Abstract Expressionism – as being "closed,"

refusing to communicate with its audience. As Abstract Expressionism gained popularity as a cultural ambassador of U.S. democratic liberalism (especially within Latin America), its detractors were quick to point out the irony of a movement that would "speak with" the world by refusing to speak at all. U. S. cultural policy increasingly made a spectacle of international communication, but such silence proved a powerful means of strategic *non-communication*. I argue that in their adaptations of Abstract Expressionist works, Paz, Cage, and others transform this silence by reenacting and "reinterpreting" it through text. What was a "closed" silence now becomes "open," an invitation for intervention by its audience.

While most of my dissertation explores the revolutionary and transformative potential of aesthetic silence, my fourth and final chapter addresses the undeniable privilege of having one's silence heard. This chapter focuses on the decades-long exchange between John Cage and Augusto de Campos as a way of exploring the ideas of poetic muteness and poetic deafness and their role in the circulation and publication of recent experimental poetry. While Cage famously would declare that sometimes "the best communication between men happens in silence," Augusto de Campos (brother of Haroldo de Campos) points to the forms of silence with which Cage never had any experience: the silence of those who cannot hear, and that of those whose material circumstances cut them off from the forms of media that would allow them to "commune" with the world. In an essay dedicated to Cage's work, de Campos would remark that Brazilians suffer from what he calls an "informational deafness" that separates Brazil from the world. Such silence is not freely chosen. In this chapter I explore how the tensions between de Campos' and Cage's conflicting understandings of

silence shaped the previously unexamined letters, translations, and poetic tributes that they exchanged during their twenty-year correspondence. While for Cage the rejection of individual voice meant liberation from rigid notions of unified subjecthood and original authorship, de Campos suggests that "having a say" in international literary communities often depends on possession of such a voice (even if one chooses not to use it). By expanding this discussion to include de Campos' and Cage's interaction with poets Jackson Mac Low and Charles Bernstein, I investigate how a poetics of silence therefore finds its fullest realization outside of traditional publishing formats.

Chapter 1:

Big Bang, Blank Space, and the Book Object
in Octavio Paz, Haroldo de Campos, and Severo Sarduy

*tinta branca
sobre
carta branca*

*escrever é uma forma de
ver*

– from "leitura de novalis," Haroldo de Campos 1977

Octavio Paz argues that for the mystics of the middle ages, language followed the laws of nature, "fundado en la armonía cósmica" / "founded in cosmic harmony" (*Hijos del limo* 101). There was no need to reconcile the word and its referent because the force that binds them – analogy – was considered the universal law of attraction. As Paz explains:

La creencia en la analogía universal está teñida de erotismo: los cuerpos y las almas se unen y separan regidos por las mismas leyes de atracción y repulsión que gobiernan las conjunciones y disyunciones de los astros y de las sustancias materiales. Un erotismo astrológico y un erotismo alquímico. (101)

[A belief in universal analogy is tinged with eroticism: bodies and souls come together and come apart according to the same laws of attraction and repulsion that govern the conjunctions and disjunctions of the stars and of all material substances. An astrological and an alchemical eroticism.]

During the pre-modern period, as Paz recounts it, philosophers understood language to follow the laws of astrology, which were indistinguishable from the workings of magic. As Paz later acknowledges, the true loss in the modern age is not the loss of a prelapsarian paradise but rather the loss of our belief that it ever existed. Nostalgia pervades the passage because, as Paz explains later, he narrates from the empty space that modern literature has conserved in memory of that lost vision of the universe. As he says, "el centro de la analogía es un centro vacío para nosotros" / "the center of the analogy is for us an empty center" (111). At the center of the cosmic analogy is not the Word but its absence – silence. In contrast with the middle ages' Book of Nature, Paz claims that modernist literature has turned toward its opposite: "la nada que es el mundo se convierte en un libro, el Libro; el libro no existe. Nunca fue escrito. La analogía termina en silencio" / "The nothingness that is the world becomes a book, The Book; the book does not exist. It was never written. Analogy ends in silence" (112). In *Blanco* and in the writings that surround it in his *oeuvre*, Paz claims that silence, rather than language, provides an image of the universe.

Two of Paz's contemporaries, Cuban writer Severo Sarduy and Brazilian intellectual Haroldo de Campos, turn his lamentations upside down. In Sarduy's *Big Bang* (1974), as in de Campos' *Galaxias* (1984), silence is not the loss of a coherent image of the universe but rather its most faithful reflection. Like Paz, both de Campos and Sarduy take certain lessons from structuralism and poststructuralism – the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified, or the relational nature of all meaning – to imply a non-meaning center from which all discourse radiates. That is, meaninglessness and silence are the inherent precondition of a linguistic system in which all meaning is

relational and circumstantial. De Campos and Sarduy imagine silence, rather than the Word, as the universe's generative force. For Sarduy, the Big Bang is the universal point of non-origin. As he elaborates in an interview with Danubio Torres Fierro in 1978,

La escritura, pues, es decir, el ejercicio de escribir, no conduce, por sí mismo, a ninguna percepción otra, a ningún conocimiento. Si nos atendemos a la práctica de la forma – ¡o del contenido! – más bien limita y empobrece. Es en tanto que reflejo de la ilusión, en tanto que armadura que reproduce y da a ver la vacuidad de lo real, la vacuidad fundamental de lo más presente y palpable, que es importante. En ese sentido sí que ver con la realidad, sí la reproduce, debe ser tan material, tan barroca, tan seductora, tan llena de colores y formas como ella, pero tiene que estar sustentada (igual que la realidad) en un vacío fundamental, germinador.⁸

[Writing – well, that is to say, the practice of writing – does not lead, on its own, to any particularly unique perception or knowledge. If we limit ourselves to an attention to the practice of form – or content! – it merely limits and impoverishes. It is as a reflection of illusion itself, or as an armature that reproduces and reveals the vacuity of the real – a vacuity foundational to everything present and palpable – that writing is important. In this sense it is indeed related to reality, indeed reproduces it and needs be as material, as baroque, as seductive, as full of color

⁸ This interview excerpted in Gustavo Guerrero, "La religión del vacío." In this chapter my thoughts on Sarduy owe much to Guerrero's essay, especially his discussion of the importance of the void in Sarduy's work as an imaginary that defies the rationalizing impulse that otherwise characterizes so much of Sarduy's thought on the Neobaroque.

and form as reality is. But it must be supported (like reality itself) in a fundamental, germinating void.]

While Paz understands language as following the laws of the universe, for Sarduy the universe *is* language. To alter discourse is to change the position of the stars themselves. Paz would claim that, in the pre-modern age, "si el arte es un espejo del mundo, ese espejo es mágico: lo cambia" / "if art is the mirror of the world, that mirror is magical: it changes it" (*Hijos del limo* 92), but Sarduy and de Campos vindicate this claim by championing that which was supposed to invalidate it: silence. Together, Sarduy, de Campos, and (eventually) Paz would revisit and reclaim the idea of writing "como el doble del cosmos" / "as the double of the cosmos" not by positing an essential link between words and their things but by pointing to the emptiness from which both words and worlds emerge.

In Paz's adaptations of Stéphane Mallarmé's "constellation" poem, or Sarduy's *Big Bang*, or Campos' *Galaxias* and *Xadrez de estrelas* ("Chess of stars"), astronomy serves as an imaginative model for linguistics and, by extension, a particular poetics. But while the central analogy here is between words and stars, the foundational principle of this poetics is the space in between: the blank space that separates words on the page and the outer space that separates the stars themselves. These poets imagine such a void as the point at which the limits of rational or empirical understanding meet the mystic and spiritual. After all, when Sarduy published *Big Bang* in 1974, the theory of universal expansion had only been favored over a "Steady State" model for fewer than ten years. Brought together with notions of nothingness in *Maya* Buddhism, Fregean mathematics,

and Catholic mysticism, it becomes a means of exploring that which Sarduy, Paz, and de Campos identify as unknown – or unknowable – about language itself. In their poetry the "linguistic turn" is simultaneous with a "silent turn." Even as they adopt the view that there is no truth outside of discourse, these poets increasingly explore the notion that the workings of discourse itself (and of non-discursive language) are not entirely known. They experiment with novel, non-normative, and non-discursive forms of silence as a means of disrupting the normally functioning discourse on which lyric poetry traditionally relies.⁹

These poets' treatment of silence in turn suggests an alternative account of modernism's transition to postmodernism: one driven not only by developing understandings of discourse but also by changing notions about that which ruptures, disrupts, or disperses it. By exploring how an engagement with the unknown shapes the ethos behind the two major experimental poetic movements in Latin America and Brazil during this period – the Concrete and the Neobaroque – I argue for a moment of transition characterized by various internal tensions rather than a series of clear oppositions. This is a moment when a changing understanding of the "experiment" itself leads to a radical reconception of what it means to create experimental poetry.

Blank Space and the Book Object

⁹ There *are* discursive uses of silence as well. Discourse analysts like George Kalamaras (in *Reclaiming the Tacit Dimension*) and Adam Jaworski (in *The Power of Silence*) point out the ways that silence plays a role in everyday speech, and in *Unspoken*, Cheryl Glenn argues for a "rhetoric" or "discourse" proper to silence itself.

The poetry of Paz, de Campos, and Sarduy had always been a means for exploring the workings of language, but also for telling stories about it, transforming an ever-evolving understanding of language into the subject of its own epic, comic, or tragic narratives. Adapting genres once used as appeals to lovers, lamentations for friends, or testaments to gods, these writers create poems whose subject matter and central protagonist is language itself. The current chapter is concerned with a moment of transition in this Latin American formalist poetry of linguistic experimentation during the late 1960s, when there is a move to make the subject of this poetry not language but silence. This chapter looks at Latin American book objects from the late 60s and 70s that all develop what I call "blank" poetry: poems that focus on, and make creative use of the blank (or "silent") page that surrounds the text. These works overwhelmingly have been treated as enigmatic and isolated – not only isolated from works by other Latin American poets but also isolated within each poet's larger body of work. But the blank page, in these works, becomes a site of meaning-making and cultural significance that enables intertextuality rather than isolation between experimental works in Latin American during this period.¹⁰

Because this chapter aims to analyze the role of silence in the work of three of the most prolific Latin American literary figures of the twentieth century, my treatment of silence follows a strict framework. As I discuss it, silence manifests itself in these writers' work in three distinct ways, each interconnected yet not always harmoniously or without

¹⁰ Here I draw on Susan Vanderborg's concept of paratextual communities. According to Vanderborg, extra-textual materials such as essays, footnotes, or book reviews served as primary means of forging community among United States poets after the 1950s. In the case of the poetry that I am investigating, the extra-textual refers to elements of the poems themselves, and to the complex set of practices and meanings (or non-meanings) that such elements accrued.

contradiction: as a plastic element of poetic style; as a discourse or content within the poem; and as theorized within the writer's larger body of essayistic work. For example, as this chapter will further explore, the final section of *Blanco* serves to gloss the structure of the poem and its relationship to the silence of the blank page. It does so, however, in a way that is only partially consistent with Paz's discussion of silence in works like *Los hijos del limo* or *Claude Levi-Strauss o el nuevo festín de Esopo*. In many ways, the ideas of silence posited in *Blanco* find clearer correspondence with certain poems by de Campos and Sarduy. This chapter focuses on a limited number of these: de Campos's "O âmagô do ômega" (1955-6), "Fala prata cala ouro" (1955), and "Leitura de Novalis" (1977); Sarduy's "Páginas en blanco" (1965), "Dentro de un cubo blanco" (1969), "En el espacio de lo blanco" (1969), and "Oye, qué acordeones falsos" (1969); and Paz's *Blanco* (1966).

While Stéphane Mallarmé's turn-of-the-century work, *Un Coup de dés*, is the most commonly cited intertext for many of these Latin American "blank" poems, a traditional understanding of intertextuality becomes insufficient for discussing the most immediately remarkable aspect of these works: the visual impact of words against the white space of the page.¹¹ Like Mallarmé's poem, Octavio Paz's *Blanco* plays with the plasticity of the poetic medium to imitate other forms of art. It scatters words across the page, calling attention to the white space behind it. By conjuring images of the canvas or

¹¹ Willard Bohn claims that Octavio Paz's term *poesía crítica* "stems from a serious misunderstanding" of Stéphane Mallarmé's *poésie critique* (Bohn 13). While Paz conceives of critical poetry as "aquel poema que contiene su propia negación" / "that poem which contains its own negation," Bohn uses Mallarmé's term to describe poetry that turns not inward but outward toward other texts. It is poetry that also functions as art criticism, and "recreates the original work of art by transposing it into a different medium or a different idiom" (20). However, like most critics, Bohn peruses Paz's essays without looking to his poetry. Paz's *Blanco* is a meditation on Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, approaching this text not only as poetry but also as a visual and plastic work.

the musical score, these poems emphasize a physical presence meant to press the boundaries of traditional lyric. Critics of *Blanco*, however, have gone beyond Mallarmé to suggest other comparisons: to the Chinese painting scroll, the mandala, or the Aztec codices. Like much of Paz's poetry, *Blanco* is prismatically suggestive rather than directly allusive, and this suggestive quality functions first as a visual effect.

While the plastic aspect of *Blanco* undeniably conjures images of *Un coup de dés*, Paz's poem appears more regular in its march across the page, mostly distributed between three regularly spaced columns. Even in its most disperse moments it still maintains the sharp line of the left-justified margin. Held up against Mallarmé's poem, *Blanco* seems surrounded by white space rather than scattered across it. Paz's original poem was also a very different object from Mallarmé's. When he first composed *Blanco*, Paz imagined publishing it as a scroll. As a reader progressed through the poem scroll, new words would appear as the already-read portions disappeared, creating a poem in which only the present words are accessible. However, once the practicalities of the publishing industry intervened, Paz settled for a sort of accordion bound between two covers. In this first edition, the reader is free to turn the pages like a book, to fold them outwards in a continuous reading, or, like Margaret Sayers Peden, even to hang the entire thing as a sort of mobile from the ceiling, displaying the whole work all at once.¹² As Kelly Austin has pointed out, *Blanco* is a book-object, even an art book. Any such art book, Austin explains, "presses materiality to the center of the reading experience. Its life is unlike that of a trade book designed to convey information. The page, the ink, and the binding shape

¹² See Sayers Peden, "A 'Meditation' on *Blanco*" in Chantikian 183-90.

the meaning of the words. They actually interpret words" (Austin 2). No matter how the poem is read, Paz forces any interpretation to consider the blank space of the page as a material presence that shapes its meaning.

Paz celebrates his debt to Mallarmé throughout his writings on *Blanco*, but he tends to avoid discussing any possible analogues or influences among other predecessors or peers. Critical reception of *Blanco* overwhelmingly has followed this lead. Especially with regards to the poem's treatment of silence through visual, plastic, and typographical innovations, Paz and others would approach *Blanco* as unique, even to the point of idiosyncrasy. However, *Blanco*'s treatment of the blank page finds immediate echoes in books of poetry published by Haroldo de Campos and Severo Sarduy.

Sarduy's *Flamenco* (1969) and *Mood Indigo* (1970) (both later included in *Big Bang*) are also elaborate book-objects.¹³ In these works, Sarduy plays with typography and layout in a way that constantly creates new means of emphasizing and using the white space of the page. At times he rotates his text so that, as in later editions of *Blanco*, certain poems flow downward across two pages at a time. At other moments he arranges text in geometrical patterns, or in broad diagonal bands or swaths, as if to imitate the strokes of a brush or palette knife. Andrés Sánchez Robayna refers to these books as "libro-objetos," arguing that "la página blanca es en ellos una suerte de 'escena' en la que se opera el diálogo de la imagen y de la palabra, el ámbito propicio para un superior intercambio entre la imagen poética y la imagen plástica" / "in them the blank page is a sort of 'stage' in which the dialogue between word and image takes place – the perfect

¹³ As Rolando Pérez claims, "their physicality was as important--or more so--than the printed words contained therein. Such 'works' bespoke the idea that words are images, and the white or 'blank' page is their canvas" (Pérez 125-6).

space for a heightened exchange between poetic image and plastic image" (Robayna 1554). Like Paz, who would himself suggest analogues for *Blanco* in the mandala and the Chinese scroll, Sarduy often likens his own poems' treatment of the blank page to the white canvas in the work of various abstract and expressionist painters.

In their innovative use of the blank page, Sarduy and Paz both would look to the poetic experiments of Haroldo de Campos. Visual poetry by Paz and Sarduy often draws comparisons to the concrete works of de Campos and the Noigandres poets, but I would like to suggest that by the mid-1960s, the strongest link between them was their common approach to silence.¹⁴ Like Paz and Sarduy, de Campos would use the example of Mallarmé's experimentation with the blank space to create works that focus on the plastic presence of the page, and would also later compile these poems and others into elaborate book-objects: *Xadrez de Estrelas* (1976), *Signantia: Quasi Coelum* (1979), *Galáxias* (1984).¹⁵ The following sections takes a closer look at the development of de Campos' use of the blank page throughout these works, and at the importance of this development as a context for works by Sarduy and Paz.

Silence Between Movements: From Concretismo to the Neobarroco

¹⁴ In their discussions of Sarduy's book-objects, various critics point to the formal affinities between *Flamenco*, *Mood Indigo* (recompiled in 1974 in *Big Bang*) and the concrete poetry of the Noigandres poets. For example, as Pérez notes, following Sánchez Robayna, "the pictorial aspect of Mallarmé's semantically enigmatic but visually suggestive poem [*Un coup des dés*] was of pivotal influence on the Brazilian concrete poets and on Sarduy, the poet" (Pérez 127). However, I argue in this chapter that the strongest basis for comparison is not their approach to language but rather their understanding of silence.

¹⁵ It should be noted that while de Campos finally published *Galaxias* as a book in 1984, he began to compose its constituent texts in the mid-1960s.

While this chapter draws together various poetic uses of the blank page during the 60s and 70s, de Campos's early Concrete poetry stands on its own in this respect. At least in this early phase, as Merjorie Perloff points out, de Campos attempts to make words function according to Pound's understanding of the ideogram: in a meaningful visual relationship with one another. However, Paz argues that de Campos differs from Pound in one important respect. He claims that "Pound's poetry – fundamentally discursive – does not actually make use of ideograms, but rather *descriptions of ideograms*" (*Transblanco* 100-101). Pound's poetry in Romance languages remains discursive even when it shares the page with foreign characters.

Campos's interpretation of the ideogram's function in Pound's poetry would also determine his understanding of Mallarmé's "constellation" poem. Mallarmé himself understood *Un coup de dés* as fundamentally discursive, as is evidenced in his 1897 introduction to the poem:

Les "blancs" en effet assument l'importance, frappent d'abord; la versification en exige, comme silence alentour, ordinairement, au point qu'un morceau, lyrique ou de peu de pieds, occupe au milieu, le tiers environ du feuillet; je ne transgresse cette mesure, seulement la disperse. (Mallarmé 121)

[The "blanks," in effect, assume importance and are what is immediately most striking; versification always demanded them as a surrounding silence, so that a lyric poem [. . .] generally occupies about a third of the leaf on which it is centered: I don't transgress this order of things, I merely disperse its elements.] (Mallarmé 121; quoted in Perloff 42)

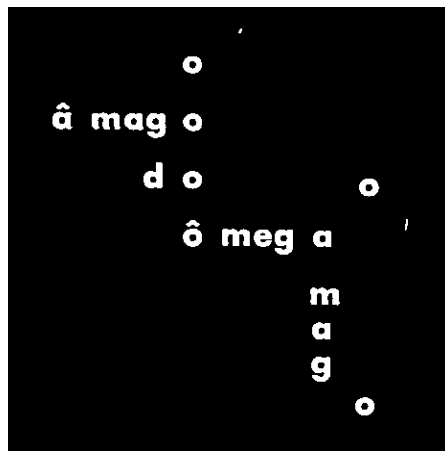
As Marjorie Perloff notes in her analysis of the passage, "the conventions of phrasal and clausal structure remain intact" in Mallarmé's poem, despite its dispersal across the page (Perloff "Refiguring" 40). The titles of various of de Campos' works, like *Xadrez de estrelas* (1974) or *Galáxias* (1984), suggest that he sees his poetry as continuing a tradition of the Mallarmean constellation, but his understanding of the term diverges from Mallarmé's use of it. Whereas Mallarmé claims not to transgress the "order of things," maintaining the essentially discursive quality of traditional verse, de Campos understands words within the constellation as functioning like ideograms, within a meaningful visual relationship.¹⁶

In much of de Campos' poetry, words themselves fragment and disperse across the page. The Noigandres poets, in their "Plano piloto poesia concreta," cite as a primary influence Mallarmé's "'subdivisions prismatiques de l'idée;' espaço ('blancs') e recursos tipográficos como elementos substantivos da composição," but their understanding of the constellation leads to a radically different treatment of the page across which it disperses (*Teoria da poesia concreta* 215). Wendy Steiner notes that "when concretists represent what might be taken as a Mallarméan silence, [. . .] what they in fact achieve is a reification of silence itself, an inversion of the very absence marking the conventional attempt to make a poetry of presence" ("Res Poetica" 538). Unlike *Un coup de dés*, which presented a sort of sublimation of the word into pure idea, de Campos' early poetry

¹⁶ That is, de Campos sees words functioning according to Fenellosa's understanding of the ideogram. Unlike Paz, who notes that Pound's poetry remains fundamentally discursive, de Campos interprets this poetry as engaging non-syntactical relationships between words.

approaches the page itself as a concrete element capable of shaping (or refusing) meaning.

In "O âmag do ômega," an early concrete poem later republished in *Xadrez de estrelas*, de Campos literalizes his treatment of absence as presence. Here he inverts text and page by setting white type against a solid black background. While writing is normally a process of placing marks on a blank page, here the words *are* the blank page, which shows through the black ink. Despite de Campos' constant insistence against concrete poetry as visual representation, he here plays with the page as a night sky against which letters and words appear like stars. The title of the poem, itself a concrete poem in its own right, emphasizes this visual play:



Here the repeated "o" and "a" of the title emphasize the visual suggestion of stars against a night sky. Words form constellations that condense and disperse in configurations that range from rigidly geometrical to haphazard, randomly placed as if scattered not by the author but by some force internal to the poetry itself – a sort of semantic "big bang." In

the first section, the initial burst of words ends in a progressively fractured group of incoherent syllables, ending with "ps," as if having disappeared into the ink. Both Sarduy and Paz, who theorize the word as a manifestation of the blank of the page from which it emerges, will find no better expression of this concept than in de Campos' "O âmago do ômega." As if to reinforce this understanding of language, de Campos fractures the word "SILENCIO" into its constituent syllables and scatters it throughout the poem. The poem ends with the words "ex nihilo," which here perform their meaning: literally, "from nothing." The words become a manifestation of the very blank page from which they emerge.

Throughout *Xadrez de Estrelas*, in which de Campos would publish a range of his concrete work, there appear a number of brief poems like "bis in idem" (1971):

garças no papel
 contra um branco
 mais seda
 o branco
 esgarça

[Hérons on the page
 against a whiteness
 more silken
 this whiteness
 tears]¹⁷

¹⁷ Because this dissertation deals with poetry whose visual appearance against the page is of primary importance, I have opted to reproduce spacing and font as closely as possible.

Like *Blanco*, de Campos's poem names the blank against which it sits. In doing so, however, it departs from his earlier Concrete poetry. De Campos draws attention to the materiality of words, treating signifier as sound and image, but he also plays with the possibility of a simultaneous transparency to language. As words, like herons (*garças*), drift across the page, they become an emptiness that rends (*esgarça*) another emptiness. Paradoxically, words describe their own meaninglessness by referring to the surface on which they sit. De Campos takes the poem's title, "bis in idem," from the Latin "ne bis in idem," which refers to what we know as a "double jeopardy" clause. Here that law is broken: one nothingness becomes two. Accordingly, "mais seda" can modify either the first or the second "branco," effectively allowing each "branco" to rend the other. "Bis in idem," like *Blanco*, imitates the Zen Buddhist *koan*, presenting an impossible image whose full comprehension is unattainable. Within *Xadrez de Estrelas*, "bis in idem" sits between imitations of Japanese haiku and Ezra Pound's *Cantos*, in which ideograms share the page with Romance languages.

"Bis in idem" and "O âmagô do ômega" represent only two of de Campos' concrete poems structured visually and discursively around a treatment of silence as a plastic element of style. Other examples could include the iconic "fala / prata / cala / ouro," in which de Campos plays with the adage that silence is golden. De Campos's later concrete work, collected in volumes such as *Signantia: quasi coelum*, include poems like "Leitura de Novalis," which provides the epigraph for this chapter. Here, "tinta branca / sobre / carta branca" once again presents the *koan* of one blank against another, emphasizing either the emptiness of the word or the fullness of the page. This aesthetic reaches its conclusion later in *Signantia: quasi coelum* with a poem entitled "BRANCO"

(not to be confused with de Campos's Portuguese translation of *Blanco*), in which the first page contains only this one word, centered halfway down the right-hand margin. At first this seems an experiment with minimalist poetics carried to its most radical conclusion – nothingness. But while the poem approximates an empty page, it *isn't* literally blank. The word *branco* – "white" – is written in black ink. While it points to the potential emptiness of the signifier, reflecting the empty white page behind it, the word's stark black letters create a tension between the emptiness described and the presence of the word on the page. In de Campos's earlier Concrete work, assertions about language take the form of hypotheses – as proposed knowledge to be proved or disproved – but this poem fails as a proof. It *doesn't* reach the nothingness it describes. Instead it points to a paradox. Here, the nature of language's relationship to silence can't be proven empirically. It must be taken on faith. If, as concrete poems, de Campos's various "blank" works treat language as an object of scientific knowledge, they also treat it as not completely knowable. This is a transformative moment in de Campos's career. Logical, linear concrete poetry reaches its culmination to transform into something entirely different.

Campos's critics have struggled to reconcile the two seemingly polar opposite phases of his career: his modernist Concrete phase and the postmodern Neobaroque of his later work. His blank poems provide one possible bridge between these two, the culmination of one and the beginning of another. Silence is not an ending, but a moment of transition. From the remains of his rational, minimalist, positivist concrete poetry de Campos calls forth a poetics that embraces the irrational, the excessive, and the baroque that he increasingly aligns with Brazilian experience. Often during his career de Campos would look for expression of Brazilian character in the country's music – samba, bossa

nova, tropicalia – but here he searches for it in silence. Silence becomes a culturally significant moment of transition.

Campos' epic prose poem, *Galáxias* (which he composed from 1963 to 1974 and finally published in 1984) presents a drastic shift in his treatment of typography and composition. Visually, the difference between *Galáxias* and his earlier concrete work seems to place them at opposite ends of a spectrum. Instead of scattering a few words across an otherwise empty page, de Campos here lets each individual passage fill an entire page with text. Although de Campos uses left-aligned text rather than justified margins, every one of the fifty passages expands to fill all the space allotted to it, from the top left to the bottom right. Devoid of all punctuation, capitalization, and page numbers, the visual effect of the book as a whole is one of disorienting uniformity and repetition. An introduction and conclusion frame the book, but de Campos has stressed that there is otherwise no prescribed order in which the individual passages should be read. The work's unifying trope is the book-as-voyage, and the experience of navigating the *Galáxias* is one of drift and disorientation. With de Campos, we are lost in space.¹⁸

Although Marjorie Perloff argues that *Galáxias* does away with the constellation,¹⁹ the title of the work itself indicates that Mallarmé's idea of the poem as

¹⁸ K. David Jackson, in "Traveling in Haroldo de Campos's *Galáxias*: A Guide and Notes for the Reader," cites James Joyce's *Ulysses* as de Campos's most important precedent, and provides a guide to the text like that created for *Ulysses* by Stuart Gilbert. Using Gilbert's categories, Jackson divides his table into four columns: rhythm, technique, scene, and symbol. This approach to *Galáxias* treats each passage in the text as a separate unit. As Jackson explains, each passage presents a new narrative voice, a different historical moment, and a distinct setting. Yet, as Marjorie Perloff points out, the work's language itself often "leaves the 'narrated matter' unresolved" (Refiguring 51).

¹⁹ By breaking conventional syntax de Campos refuses closure, and each passage becomes a fragment. Perloff cites a passage from the famous fragment that begins, "isto não é um livro: "naquele día / em génève abrindo genf machetes nos jornais miss stromboli explodindo / como um geyser dos cabelos ruivos [. . .]" / "this is not a book: "that day / in Geneva opening peop machetes in magazines miss stromboli

constellation remains an important point of reference. If "constellation" describes the relationship between words or lines within a single poem, the term "galaxies" suggests a similar relationship on a different scale. *Galáxias* represents a drastic departure from the minimalist use of the page in de Campos' earlier "silent" poetry, but it nevertheless emphasizes the visual presence of blank space. Each page of text faces an opposing page left blank. While *Galáxias* no longer uses blank space to suggest possible recombinations of individual words, these blank spaces emphasize the distance between the book's non-continuous fragments. Perloff points out that, unlike de Campos' earlier concrete production, *Galáxias* no longer treats "graphic space as structural agent," but the title's structuring trope suggests that the blank page still represents interstellar space. Each reading produces a different work by traveling through that space differently. At its most radical, de Campos' concrete poetry treats silence as a vehicle for minimalism, but in *Galáxias* it becomes the vehicle for profusion, linking these galaxies into an ever-changing and never-realized universe.

Severo Sarduy, in "Rumo à concretude," argues that "As *Galáxias* concluem, de certo modo, a trajetória na poesia concreta, que se iniciara com a fundação de *Noigandres*" / "The *Galáxias* conclude, in a certain sense, the trajectory of concrete poetry, which began with the founding of *Noigandres*" (125). Nevertheless, Sarduy goes on to contrast the "barroco frondoso, salvático, furioso" / "telluric, furious Baroque" of *Galáxias* to Concretismo's "geometria legível, despojada até a transparência do projeto, como as fachadas mineiras do Aleijadinho." / "legible geometry drained until

exploding / like a geyser of red hair". As Perloff argues, conventional syntax represents only one way to make sense of the words together. Here "constellation, in the Mallarméan form of the self-contained poem, gives way to a sequence of ideograms, where words like 'stromboli' and 'geneve' become ciphers--what Paz called 'magic traces,' untranslatable into a discursive equivalent" (51).

transparency, like Alejandrino's mining façades." Like various other critics, Sarduy suggests an affinity between the Concrete and the Neobaroque while pointing to their stylistic disparities. Despite these apparently opposing styles of de Campos' earlier Concrete poetry and the Neobaroque of *Galáxias*, de Campos himself would work throughout his career to theorize the two as continuous. De Campos himself coins the term "Neobarroco" in an early essay entitled "A Obra de Arte Aberta" / "The Open Work of Art" (1955), in which he elaborates an idea of the Neobaroque in the service of his developing notions of the Concrete. For de Campos, the Concrete poem may be characterized as Neobaroque in its refusal of any singular or linear reading.²⁰ As a formative example of this refusal of completeness de Campos describes the "estrutura pluridividida ou capilarizada que caracteriza o poema-constelação mallarmeano, liquidando a noção de desenvolvimento linear seccionado em princípio-meio-fim" / "multiply divided or capillaried structure that characterizes the Mallarméan constellation-poem, dissolving the notion of linear development of beginning-middle-end" (*Teoria* 49-50).²¹ While Rolando Pérez views *Galáxias* as the moment "where the concrete became fluid," giving way "to a universe of linguistic expansion and dispersion rather than one of contraction," de Campos stresses that the Concrete already strives for expansion and dispersion but through different means – structurally, rather than semantically (Pérez 128).

²⁰ Here de Campos uses the term "open work" some seven years before Umberto Eco's book of the same name.

²¹ Citing similar examples from Joyce, Cummings, and Pound, de Campos makes a case for Neobaroque openness as a discreet element of style. In "A temperatura informacional do texto" / "The Informational Temperature of the Text" (1960), de Campos builds on his previous characterization of the Concrete poem as an "open work," responding to accusations of Concretismo's simplicity or reductionism by arguing for a "richness of structure" in place of a richness of vocabulary.

By the time that de Campos publishes "Da razão antropofágica" / "The Rule of Anthropophagy" (1980), long after Noigandres had disbanded, his approach to the relationship between the Concrete and the Neobaroque has changed. Now, rather than theorizing the Neobaroque through the Concrete, he attempts to theorize his previous Concrete work through his developing work on the Neobaroque. "Despite its divestiture and voluntary limitation of means," de Campos says, Brazilian Concrete poetry "seemed irrevocably Baroque, pluralist, poly-faceted" ("Rule" 332-3) / "apesar de seu despojamento e de sua voluntária delimitação de meios [. . .] parecia irremediavelmente barroquista, plúrima, polifacética" ("Da razão" 248). The Concrete becomes Neobaroque according to de Campos because it exemplifies the way in which all literature metalinguistically "rethinks its own code" or presents a "specific redistribution of the available configurative elements" (329-30).²² Unlike Sarduy, whose essayistic work painstakingly identifies individual elements of Baroque style, de Campos' later work avoids discussing the Baroque in terms of technique. This in itself contrasts with his earlier style-centered manifestoes of Concretismo. Treating the Baroque not as a defined style but as a series of properties universal to all literature, de Campos finally discusses Concretismo as the condensation or concentration of those properties within the realm of style.

Campos's is a delicate dance as he attempts to smooth the discord between his two major poetic projects. However, as Sarduy so constantly stresses, stylistic discord is itself the privileged province of the Neobaroque. I would like to suggest that it is in their use of

²² This inclusion of the Concrete comes at the expense of his definition of the Neobaroque as a distinct style. What was a poetics of the "open work" now opens even further to become a sort of universal property of literature. As de Campos says, "the Baroque for us is the non-origin, because it is a non-infancy," explaining that "literature, in the colonies as in the metropolis, was made from literature" (325, 327).

the blank page that de Campos' Concrete and Neobaroque styles most radically exploit the tension between contrary impulses toward minimalism and profusion. We can find this use of silence as early as "A Obra de Arte Aberta." Returning once again to the paradigmatic example of Mallarmé, de Campos stresses the importance of silence for the Neobaroque:

Dessa verdadeira rosácea verbal que é *Un Coup de Dés* emerge, como elemento primordial de organização rítmica, o silêncio, aquele silêncio que é, para Sartre, 'um momento da linguagem' e que, 'como a pausa, em música, recebe seu sentido dos grupos de notas que o cercam,' permitindo-nos dizer da poesia o que Pierre Boulez afirmou da música, em 'Homenagem a Webern': "É uma verdade das mais difíceis de pôr em evidência que a música não é somente a *arte dos sons*; ela se define melhor por um contraponto do som e do silêncio. (*Teoria* 50)

[From that verbal rosacea that is *Un coup de dés* emerges, like a primordial element of rhythmic organization, silence – that silence that is, for Sartre, "a moment of language" and that, "like the pause in music, receives its meaning from the groups of notes that surround it," allowing us to say of poetry that which Pierre Boulez affirmed for music, in "Homage to Webern": "It is a most difficult truth to prove that music is not merely an *art of sounds*; it is better defined as the counterpoint between sound and silence.]

Campos follows Boulez in imagining silence *as music*. He uses the analogy not to argue that poetic language depends on a silence that is external to it, but rather that all language simultaneously expresses meaning and non-meaning.

In *Galáxias*, the silence of the blank page becomes the means for radical profusion, but also the means of stressing that non-meaning remains an important element of language. While *Galáxias* undeniably represents what Sarduy characterizes as the "barroco frondoso," it also strives to be, like the Concrete, "despojada até a transparência." It is at once empty and full. As the narrator explains at the beginning of one of the fragments:

o que mais vejo aqui neste papel é o vazio do papel se redobrando escorpião
de palavras que se reprega sobre si mesmo e a cárie escancárie que faz
quando as palavras vazam de seu vazio o escorpião tem uma unha aguda de
palavras e seu pontão ferra o silêncio unha o silêncio uno unho escrever
sobre o não escrever e quando este vazio mais se densa e dança e tensa
seus arabescos entre escrito e excrito tremendo a treliça de avessos
branco excremento de aranhas supressas suspensas silêncio onde o eu se
mesma e mesmirando ensimesma emmimesmando filipêndula de texto extexto

[but what i see on this paper is the void of the paper pleating scorpion
of words that plaits itself and the cavity crackavity it creates
when the words vacate their void of the scorpion with its cunning claw of
words and its piercing stabs the silence jabs the silence I grab scramble to write
over the not-writing and when this void condenses dances and tenses
its arabesques between inscribed and exscribed the tremendous trellis of opposites
white waste of suspended suppressed spiders silence where the i in the
me mesmerizing in myself memyselfandi filipendula of text extext]

As the speaker claims here, the poem itself, like the act of writing, finds its reflection in the blank page it faces. The monster – speaker/absence/scorpion – recognizes itself in the empty mirror. By placing the blank paper across from the full page of text, de Campos

creates an opposition that also becomes an analogy. This "trellis of opposites" presents empty or absent arabesques – the profusion of the void itself. While the text could not appear more opposed to the extreme minimalism of "Bis in idem" or "Branco," *Galáxias* remains a function of that minimalist ethos. Just as de Campos would argue that his Concrete poems strive for profusion, so his Neobaroque empties into the nothingness it faces, even while it expands expressively. As with de Campos's concrete poetry, silence becomes a plastic element of style in *Galáxias* because de Campos demands that any reading of the poem engage that silence in a meaningful way.

In *The Literature of Silence*, a book that generally argues for silence in literature as an expression of fatalism and an index of Western cultural decline, Ihab Hassan nevertheless allows moments of optimism: "mystics have always maintained that the way down is also the way out and that the end of things heralds a new beginning – negative transcendence, as we call it today, is a form of transcendence nevertheless. And therefore silence in literature does not necessarily augur the death of spirit" (Hassan 3-4). For Hassan, silence becomes a means of passage rather than a permanent state. Similarly, Susan Sontag claims in "The Esthetics of Silence" that "silence is a strategy for the transvaluation of art, art itself being the herald of an anticipated radical transvaluation of human values. But the success of this strategy must mean its eventual abandonment" (Sontag NP). For Sontag, as for Hassan, silence is a moment of transformation. While this remains largely metaphorical in their treatment of it, de Campos's poetry literalizes this transformation at the level of style. Through a poetics of silence, de Campos transforms his modernist Concrete into a postmodern Neobaroque.

In many ways *Flamenco*, which represents an early experiment with Sarduy's developing reinterpretation of the Baroque, also experiments with typographical techniques borrowed from concrete poetry.²³ Not least of these is its treatment of the page. For example Sarduy, like de Campos, plays with the image of writing as empty "arabesques." In the brief prose fragments that precede the poems composing *Flamenco*, Sarduy introduces the book as a reflection of the architecture of Córdoba in a clear pool, and the play of shadows across whitewashed walls. The poems that follow vaguely take on the shapes of columns, archways, and geometrical ornamentation. Against the book's succession of pages, the poems scatter in apparently haphazard fashion: sometimes separate, sometimes continuous, and often overlapping. As Sarduy says: "DENTRO DE UN CUBO BLANCO / aristas superpuestas / anamorfosis del espacio" / "WITHIN A WHITE SQUARE / superimposed ridges / anamorphosis of space" (19). As de Campos would claim retrospectively of his Concrete poetry, rigid geometry here becomes a means for creating a profusion of possible readings.

Poetry as Prism and Void

Sarduy, following Paz, would declare a "vacío fundamental, germinador" / "fundamental, germinating void" (Interview with Danubio Torres Fierro; quoted in

²³ In his discussion of Severo Sarduy's *Flamenco* in "El ideograma y el deseo," Andrés Sánchez Robayna points to the various "analogías existentes entre la radical condición materialista y constructiva de la palabra poética de Sarduy y la indagación *verbi-voco-visual* de los poetas concretos" / "existent analogies between the radical materialist and constructivist condition of Sarduy's poetic word and the *verbi-voco-visual* investigation of the concrete poets" (Sánchez Robayna 1557-8; emphasis his). As Gustavo Guerrero notes of Sarduy's poetry of this period, "parece más propia de una poética del silencio que de los fastos de una literatura neobarroca," / "it seems more a poetics of silence than a celebratory neobaroque literature," yet that impulse toward profusion is present in the poems as well (1691).

Guerrero 1698). While Gustavo Guerrero focuses on the importance of various Buddhist or Taoist concepts like *maya* and *sūnyatā* for Sarduy's understanding of the void,²⁴ Rolando Pérez adds diversity to this list: the precedent of Mallarmé's typographical experiments with the "blancheur rigide" of the page; developing work in astronomy on theories of the Big Bang, which Sarduy uses to understand nothingness paradoxically as a single point of origin; even the work of Abstract Expressionists like Franz Kline, who treat the white space of the canvas itself as a plastic presence equally important as the paint applied to it. Unlike Guerrero, Pérez's more exhaustive list of Sarduy's sources makes no mention of Paz, but his treatment of the Cuban's void brings it even closer to that conceived by the Mexican poet. Like Paz, Sarduy liberally cites the sources from which he picks and chooses at his convenience. Nowhere is this tendency so pronounced as in these poets' respective treatments of the void, whose explanation lies somewhere between systems of thought as diverse as theoretical cosmology, Dada, Fregean mathematics, and Tantric Buddhism.²⁵ But how can we reconcile Sarduy's deconstructionist approach to questions of lack and absence of a transcendental signified with his citation of Buddhist notions of transcendence through silence? How can such a plentiful, replete silence coexist with absolute negation?

²⁴ In "La religión del vacío," Gustavo Guerrero argues for the "void" as a central, generative concept within Sarduy's work, and points out that here the influence of Octavio Paz would become especially formative. For Sarduy, as for Paz, the void represents "toda una concepción del mundo, el comienzo y el fin de la más alta experiencia de lo real" / "an entire conception of the world, the beginning and the end of the highest experience of the real" (1691). As Guerrero has it, "este concepto fundamental en la enseñanza del budismo Mahayana expresa la diferencia entre la vacuidad oriental y la nada occidental al señalar que vacío y no-vacío coexisten no ya en la alternancia sino en la total identidad" / "upon signaling that the void and the not-void coexist not in alternation but in total identity, this fundamental concept of Maya Buddhist teaching expresses the difference between an Eastern void and a Western nothingness" (1698).

²⁵ Pérez, in a section of his book entitled "The Eastern White Body of 'Emptiness,'" speaks eloquently of Sarduy's fusion of the latter two sources, but this discussion glosses over the unavoidable dissonance when we consider them alongside Sarduy's other sources.

In *Flamenco*, Sarduy provides an answer to the conundrum he has created.

Toward the end of the volume appears this poem, of which I reproduce an excerpt here:

EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO, donde las sombras se anulan,
la luz va royendo las bordes, plegando los colores, destruyendo las formas,
EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO, pasando del otro lado de la banda,
irrumpiendo en el ámbito sin límites (sin sombras)
esfera
rectángulo amarillo, manchas verdes
triángulo, convergencia del iris
piezas cuyo mármol es apenas visible

[IN THE WHITE SPACE, where shadows cancel each other,
light gnaws at the borders, folding all colors, destroying all forms,
IN THE WHITE SPACE, passing through the other side of the band,
emerging in a place with no limits (no shadows)
sphere
yellow rectangle, green blotches
triangle, convergence of the spectrum
pieces whose marble is barely visible]

Earlier in the volume Sarduy likens words to shadows playing across a blank wall, and in the first lines of this poem he presents the white page as the space in which those shadows negate one another. Here distinct forms fold into each other. This is the poem as prism, "convergence of the spectrum." As de Campos says in an essay entitled "Light: Paradisiacal Writing," we find "all colors united in white" (*Novas* 351). More than a merely potential fullness, it is a simultaneous fullness and emptiness. Demonstrating what he describes, Sarduy creates an image of the page as prism, across which there is a play of yellow rectangles, green splashes, and blue ovoids. Emerging from the surface of the page, silence manifests itself in words, just like transparent light becomes perceptible through shape and color.

The work of Octavio Paz represents the most immediate influence on Sarduy's concept of the void as simultaneously replete with meaning and devoid of it. "EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO" puts this concept to poetic practice, and in doing so it also serves as a means of rereading Paz's own experiment with the void of Tantric Buddhism – *Blanco*, published only two years before Sarduy's poem.²⁶ While Sarduy describes the prismatic as a function of all poetic language, his poem remains essentially linear and discursive.²⁷ *Blanco* manifests that prismatic quality formally, allowing the poem to change according to the viewer's approach to it. As Paz would claim of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de dés*, the poem's innovation lies not in its multiple meanings but in its multiple readings. Sarduy's understanding of the prism/poem as a nexus of dissonant elements allows us to reconsider Paz's understanding of the relationship between the multiple readings of *Blanco*. While Paz discusses his poem as the never-realized summation of all possible readings, it need not necessarily be a process of addition. The readings themselves constitute an ever-shifting set, but these individual elements often contradict or even negate one another. *Blanco* presents a full "spectrum" of infinite shades, but Sarduy's understanding of the prism highlights possible dissonance rather than potential harmony. The blank space of the page becomes a means of staging contradiction.

²⁶ "EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO" shares many of its central tropes with *Blanco*: words as shadows; the page as the lover's body; the ultimate identity between words and the page on which they rest. Even Sarduy's invocation of poetic language as shifting and variegated geometric forms recalls Paz's characterization of *Blanco* as a mandala. It is perhaps in Paz's poem, rather than "EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO" that we find a poetic form more suited to Sarduy's own conception of the prismatic poem.

²⁷ For example, unlike de Campos's Concrete poetry, in which words or letters can break down into purely non-signifying material, the plastic quality of "EN EL ESPACIO DE LO BLANCO" relies on explanations provided discursively within the text. That is, if Sarduy's poem functions as a prism, it is because the poem itself says so. As the poem moves through successive transformations of light, temporal markers like "otra vez," "un instante después," and "ya" reinforce the way that its reading unfolds in time as a work of traditional verse.

Paz observes of structuralist linguistics that "un signo nos remite a otro signo. Respuesta circular y que se destruye a sí misma: si el lenguaje es un sistema de signos, un signo de signos, *?que significa este signo de signos?*" / "each sign sends us to another sign. A circular and self-destructive answer: if language is a system of signs, a sign of signs, *what is the meaning of this sign of signs?*" (Claude Levi-Strauss 255). For Paz, the relationality of all meaning ultimately points toward the non-meaning at the center of language. However, in *Claude Levi-Strauss*, Paz uses Buddhism to formulate a different possible relationship between language and silence. There he says that "si el silencio del Buda fuese la expresión de este relativismo no sería silencio sino palabra. No es así: con su silencio cesan el movimiento, la operación, la dialéctica, la palabra." / "if the silence of Buddha was the expression of this relativism it would not be silence but words. It is not: with this silence comes the end of all movement, operations, dialectics, words." As Paz says, "el silencio del Buda es la *resolución* del lenguaje" / "the silence of Buddha is the *resolution* of language" (127). Silence is at once a product of linguistic relationality and external to all language. Enrico Mario Santí attempts to explain this shift by reconciling these two positions as separate "moments" of the transit of language from silence to silence (263). His argument is eloquent but forced. Paz himself leaves this contradiction exposed. Like Sarduy's void, Paz's *vacío* emerges in his work not despite contradiction but through it.

Blanco's title serves as a sort of key for the work. As Enrico Mario Santí notes, "la palabra 'blanco' tiene muchas acepciones que resuenan en el título de esta composición" "the word 'blanco' has many meanings that echo in the title of this work" (*Transblanco* 267). At length, he enumerates these possible meanings and associations, based on their

apparent relevance to the poem – from "blank" and "target" through a litany of idiomatic expressions like "tiro al blanco," an expression "de las ferias o de los *pubs* ingleses" / "from festivals or from English pubs" (268). Although Sant  does critics of *Blanco* a favor by creating his exhaustive list of possible meanings, such a list becomes most valuable as it demonstrates the way in which Paz's definition of silence is playfully overdetermined, often opaque, and at times contradictory – what Sarduy would identify as its "prismatic" quality.

Given Paz's treatment of silence, any attempt to fix a particular set of meanings or associations for the word "blanco" misses the point. Rather, Paz gestures *through* these various meanings toward the relationality of the word itself. Paz presents "blanco" as unique within language – as a word that manages to describe itself by describing the ultimate emptiness and contingency of all signifiers. Like the words "ex nihilo" in de Campos's "O âmagos do ômega," it is a word that bears a uniquely felicitous relationship to its (lack of a) thing. The rest of the poem becomes a sort of meditation on the word that names it.

Various critics have referred to *Blanco* as "prismatic," although they have not necessarily agreed on what this means. Jaime Alazraki, for example, claims that "the poem is a ladder of words that, upon reaching silence, throws away the ladder and remains in that blank space which is not an absence of color, but the resolution of all colors. Like light, which integrates in its whiteness all colors, the second silence of poetry is not absence, but presence of words, though now integrated in the poem as the 'resolution of words'" (Alazraki 150-151). For Alazraki, the prismatic synthesis of all colors in white expresses *Blanco*'s ultimate transcendence of language. In contrast, Mario

Santí, who notes that white "es uno de los siete colores y, cromáticamente, es la suma de todos los del espectro," / "is one of the seven colors and, chromatically, is the sum of the entire spectrum," acknowledges Paz's claims for transcendent silence but ultimately provides a reading of the poem's "blanco" not as transcendent but as a function of its formal openness. According to him, "la relación, o relaciones, que establecen entre sí sus diferentes partes o secciones postula(n) un vacío: un 'blanco'"/ "the relation, or relations, established between the poem's different parts or sections propose a void: a 'blank'" (Transblanco 267). Paz, in turn, plays with Mallarmé's description of *Un Coup de dés* as displaying the "prismatic subdivisions of the idea." Unlike Mallarmé's symbolist vision of words in poetry as transcending their materiality to achieve a fixed state as ideals, Paz indicates this transcendence as a possibility while also indicating its failure.

Fifty years after *Blanco*'s initial publication, the considerable body of criticism surrounding Paz's poem remains divided over even its most basic characteristics. Does the text posit a transcendence of language, as Alazraki argues, or is it, like Jean Franco claims, "un poema que no permite la trascendencia, que nos centra en el presente" / "a poem that does not permit transcendence, that roots us in the present"? (Franco 160). Does Paz's introductory note rigidly direct any approach to the text, as José Quiroga claims, or is *Blanco* a work radically permissive in its offering of a plurality of possible readings? In *Toward Octavio Paz*, John M. Fein champions the latter interpretation, using a reader response approach to demonstrate the way in which Paz's poem accommodates a wide range of critical opinion. As Fein has it, such diverse critical interpretations are "mutually complementary rather than exclusive. They thereby reflect the intention and structure of the poem. Paz's introductory explanation of the different ways in which the

poem may be read represents an invitation to a multiple reading" (Fein 66). However, this approach sets contradiction aside as inconsequential or beside the point. As Sarduy's poem allows us to see, *Blanco* in fact brings such contradiction to the center of its project. Its invitation to multiple reading is also an invitation to contradiction and dissonance.

Heinrich Wölfflin, in *Principles of Art History*, argues for the Baroque form as radically open, a characteristic that allows it to embody antitheses: nature and artifice, sensuousness and spirituality, surface and depth. Sarduy approaches the Baroque in a similar manner, and his poem's reconfiguration of Paz's formulation of the Buddhist void allows us to amend Fein's treatment of *Blanco*'s divided critical following. Rather than being radically permissive, *Blanco* sets its prismatically diverse readings against one another. *Blanco* hardly participates in the cultural project of the Neobaroque as conceived by Lezama Lima or Carpentier, but as an experiment in poetic style it is inseparable from Sarduy's developing Neobaroque.

Silence, Science, and the Mystic

Almost without exception, critical discussions of the Latin American Neobaroque elide the role of religion and spirituality within the historical Baroque on which it builds. Setting aside any religious orthodoxy, the spiritual becomes central to the rhetoric surrounding the formal experimentation with the blank page during this period. Although Sarduy, in an essay entitled "Paz en Oriente," argues against treating Buddhism as a religion, Gustavo Guerrero points out that the religious becomes important in Sarduy's

treatment of the void.²⁸ While Sarduy's treatment of silence invokes the Catholic mysticism of the Baroque period, his Neobaroque now also finds the impulse for its mysticism in Buddhism and in Zen. In its fusion of diverse mystical traditions of silence, Sarduy's work at once resembles that of Paz. In *El laberinto de la soledad* and elsewhere throughout his oeuvre, Paz cites the importance of a mystic silence in the verse of Baroque poet Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz. "Su imagen es la de una solitaria melancólica que sonríe y calla," Paz says. "El silencio, dice ella misma en alguna parte, está poblado de voces" (159). Even before his interest in Eastern religions, Paz sought in Catholic mysticism a means of conceiving of silence as possibly full. Within Sarduy's neobaroque poetics this impulse becomes even more apparent.

While Guerrero argues for a scientific rhetoric of the Big Bang as ultimately dissolved within Sarduy's spiritualist/mystic rhetoric of the void,²⁹ Sarduy treats science as more than mere rhetoric. Much of his poesis invokes scientific method. *Big Bang*, for example, reprocesses the language of scientific discovery, but does so to present poetry as an exploration of these theories within the realm of language, as active

²⁸ Speaking of fragments that Sarduy published posthumously under the title "El estampido de la vacuidad," Guerrero claims that "en ellos, la *noche* del místico español convive con la revelación de la irrealidad del *atman* o del *brahmin*, alma universal o conciencia cósmica; en ellos se evoca la muda palabra del carmelita junto al silencio final del Buda, como dos caras de un solo misterio o dos misterios de un solo rostro" / "in them, the *night* of the Spanish mystic coexists with the revelation of irrealty of the *atman* or the *brahmin*, a universal soul or cosmic consciousness; in them is evoked the mute word of the Carmelite next to the final silence of the Buddha, like two sides of a single mystery or two mysteries with a single face" (Guerrero 1702).

²⁹ In "La religión del vacío," Guerrero identifies in Sarduy's work an imbalanced exchange between science and religion--"un desigual intercambio entre ciencia y religión." As Guerrero explains: "digamos que Sarduy aborda la ciencia menos como un conocimiento sistemático del mundo de la representación como una pura representación del mundo, como una hermosa ficción" / "that is to say that Sarduy treats science not so much as systematic knowledge of the world of representation but instead as a representation of the world, as a beautiful work of fiction" (1701-2). Guerrero cites the example of Sarduy's use of theories of the Big Bang. Just as Sarduy finds the historical Baroque tied to Kepler's cosmology, he builds off of contemporary theories of astronomy to found the Neobaroque. However, Guerrero argues, this science becomes merely a point of departure for what bears a closer relationship to Baroque mysticism--a theorization of the void.

experimentation with words on the page. As in *Flamenco*, Sarduy's poetry in *Big Bang* uses the blank page not only as a space for experimentation but as the particular material to be investigated. Guerrero accurately points to a tension between the spiritual and the scientific in Sarduy's work, but he needn't resolve that tension. Sarduy's own treatment of it reaches no such resolution.

As José Quiroga argues of Paz's *Signos en rotación*, "words in the modern age do not have the status that religious icons once possessed; a poem cannot validate the acritical gesture of faith and belief, except as a belief in its own act of criticism" (Quiroga 141). However, as Quiroga notes, *Blanco* flirts with absolute hermeticism, "an act of faith in which words aim to create their own nature, and not a copy, metaphor, or supplement to an empirical reality that is beyond the page" (140). Paz constructs *Blanco*, Quiroga says, "like a cathedral of words, a sacred place whose building blocks are words" (141). If *Blanco* is read as such a "sacred place," then the silence outside of language is that which the poem invites to fill it. However, as we have seen, Paz's treatment of silence places it both outside language and within it, both as a function of relation and as a mystical force acting on words from without. Paz draws equally on linguistic and religious authority, setting Saussure and Levi-Strauss beside Buddha.

Campos's poetry, unlike the work of Paz and Sarduy, appears less immediately influenced by the spiritual or mystic. While his work on silence is inseparable from similar work by these other two writers, de Campos never seeks any transcendence of language. If anything, critics generally have focused on the high modernist scientism of de Campos's Concretist rhetoric. De Campos himself, in "poesia concreta – linguagem – comunicação" (1957) would claim that "o cosmovisão que nos oferece o estágio atual das

ciências (a geometria não-euclidiana, a física de Einstein etc.) exigem uma análoga revolução na estrutura da linguagem, que a torne capaz de se adequar com maior fidelidad à descrição do mundo dos objetos" / "The current worldview offered to us by science (non-Euclidian geometry, Einstein's physics, etc.) demands an analogous revolution in the structure of language, one that could make it better able to describe the world of things more faithfully." (*Teoria da poesia concreta* 107). Taking as a point of departure Alfred Korzybski's theory of general semantics, which posited that because "words are not the objects they represent [linguistic] structure appears as the only possible link between the objective, un-speakable, and the verbal levels," de Campos argues for a poetic "método matemático" / "mathematical method" that would imitate nature by treating language as pure structure (Korzybski, "Physio-Mathematical Rigour" 751). A year later, in their "plano-piloto para poesia concreta" (1958), Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, along with Décio Pignatari, would invoke scientific method in describing Concrete poetry's objective: "criar problemas exatos e resolvê-los em termos de linguagem sensível" / "create exact problems and resolve them in terms of sensible language" (*Teoria da poesia concreta* 218). They end essay with a call for the poem to be utilitarian: "o poema-produto: objeto útil."

Concrete poetry's status as utilitarian object is debatable, but de Campos certainly creates a utilitarian poetics. His goal is not to transform the nature of language, but to demonstrate objecthood as its inherent state. By treating words as objects, he reveals the way in which they have existed as objects all along. Within the scientific ethos of de Campos's early Concrete work, belief about language takes the form of hypothesis – as proposed knowledge to be proved or disproved. Poetry serves as proof. As de Campos

achieves this primarily by drawing attention visually to the material presence of language, the blank page plays a privileged role within this process. Visually, the blank page is what makes this experimentation possible, serving as a sort of laboratory. But the reverse could also be true; by foregrounding the materiality of language, de Campos also foregrounds the materiality of the page as well as the active presence of non-meaning within the everyday functioning of language. If de Campos aims to investigate materiality as a function of the word, he also investigates the impact on language's material presence of non-meaning itself.

Although de Campos's formulation of Concrete poetry as object seems to preclude any possibility of transcendence of the word (even in referentiality), his later work appears to depart from this stance. His essay, "Light: Paradisiacal Writing," provides a perfect example. As a point of departure for his essay, de Campos would translate a brief passage from Pound, who in turn had translated it from Cavalcanti:

E non si po conoscer per lo viso
compriso
bianco in tale obietto cade,

Nor is he known from his face
But taken in the white light that is allness
Toucheth his aim,

O rosto não vê de Amor que tal
Na luz total
alveja branco no alvo. (*Novas* 351)

Campos claims that each poet successively "translights" the passage, gradually altering the image of light presented by the original three lines of verse. Summing up this series of translations, de Campos says: "'Augustinian *dealbatio*' – Pound would conclude. Transcultural synchronicity. Malevich: white on white." For de Campos, this *dealbatio* – "whitewashing" – presents a unique intertextual relationship. Describing the operation whereby each poet successively "translights" the image of whiteness presented in the original fragment from Cavalcanti's text, de Campos claims that "the work of translation aims for, at its limit, the same goal as the one defined by Benjamin: to liberate, in the language of translation, the pure language veiled in the original, in relation to which the sense of communication (*Bedeutung*) is but a tangential reference." Invoking the Benjamin's utopian *urspracht*, de Campos describes this as "a spiritual experience close to *enlightenment*" (*Novas* 356; emphasis his). Like translation, which according to Benjamin moves each language closer to a perfect and impossible fusion of all languages, the individual poems within de Campos's series of translations represent "the verbal configuration of eternal light that itself alone understands, of itself alone thinks, and by itself alone is understood" (357). Unlike his Concrete poetry, which was to express its own being and objecthood, poetry here points toward that which it can only ever approximate.

In contrast to early Concretism's radical stance against metaphor, poems like "bis in idem" describe or even dramatize a relationship between word and silence without attempting to move past metaphor. Such a poem *is* metaphor. That de Campos, in order to express the ultimate emptiness of language, must rely on its capacity to convey meaning discursively, is a contradiction that constitutes the poem itself. Here the proposed identity

between silence and word relies on belief. Within the scientific ethos of de Campos's early Concrete work, belief about language takes the form of hypothesis – as proposed knowledge to be proved or disproved – but here the nature of language's relationship to silence must be accepted on faith. When de Campos, like Paz or Sarduy, forms a poetics of silence around an act of faith, it is not necessarily nor properly spiritual.³⁰ It is a poetics that takes the spiritual as analogue, or uses a rhetoric of the spiritual to signal that poems, like hymnals, can demand acts of faith. In Concrete poetry silence serves as a function of normal language that must be rationalized, explored, and experimented with; and in the Neobaroque as that which both escapes and acts upon normally functioning language. Critics like Irlemar Chiampi approach the Neobaroque as a reaction against modernity,³¹ identifying it as a decisive moment of rupture with movements like the Concrete, but I argue for a moment of transition characterized by various internal tensions rather than a series of clear oppositions.

Despite the apparent reversal in de Campos's stance on the relationship between language and that which lies outside of it, poems like "bis in idem," published some four

³⁰ Like Paz and Sarduy, de Campos is interested in Buddhism primarily as a series of useful models for thinking about the function of poetic language. Various other poets of the 50s, 60s and 70s would perceive themselves as writing Buddhist or Zen poetry, but these three remain content to abstract certain attractive elements from their place within larger systems of thought.

³¹ In *Barroco y modernidad*, Chiampi claims that "si el barroco es la estética de los efectos de la Contrarreforma, el neobarroco lo es de la contramodernidad" / "if the Baroque is the aesthetic of the Counter-Reformation, the Neobaroque is the aesthetic of countermodernity" (Chiampi 36-7; *Baroque New Worlds* 522). Chiampi argues that the Neobaroque provides a means of mobilizing the seventeenth-century Baroque's archaism "como un trabajo arqueológico que no inscribe lo arcaico del barroco sino para alegorizar la disonancia de la modernidad y la cultura de América Latina" / "as a way of allegorizing Latin America's dissonance with modernity" (Chiampi 29; *Baroque New Worlds* 517). The Baroque performs Latin America's historical difference from dominant European and United States narratives of modernity. By espousing alternate visions of history, the Neobaroque subverts modernist historicism.³¹ However, Chiampi's focus favors moments of clear opposition between the modern and the postmodern. Her discussion of the Neobaroque of the 1970s and 1980s focuses largely on an opposition between the "new novel" and a subsequent *posboom* reaction. By shifting the conversation to the realm of poetry, and specifically to the relationship between Concrete and Neobaroque poetics, we begin to see this as a moment of transition characterized by various internal tensions rather than a series of clear oppositions.

years before "Light: Paradisiacal Writing" (1975), present instances in which these two impulses collide. As in de Campos's earlier Concrete poetry, the minimalist "bis in idem" emphasizes the visual presence of words arranged on the page, but here de Campos departs from more radically Concrete poems like "O âmago do ômega," in which almost all syntactical relationships are replaced by visual and aural relationships. "Bis in idem," despite its dispersal on the page, remains essentially discursive. However, while that discursive quality contrasts formally with earlier Concrete poetry, the poem's discursive content brings it back toward Concretism's treatment of the signifier as empty. Where de Campos's earlier Concrete poetry actively empties language of its referential quality, his later poetry presents a similar emptiness as now no longer against normally functioning language, but rather *through* it – as a function of it. The *koan* in "Bis in idem" – of one emptiness rending another – points to the simultaneous emptiness and fullness of the words themselves. Rather than continuing to maintaining a scientifically driven poetic method, here de Campos uses a rhetoric of mysticism to describe the discoveries of linguistics.

Campos makes a point of separating Brazilian experimental poetry from Surrealism, agreeing with Marjorie Perloff that Surrealism represents a sort of "throwback to romanticism" (Perloff and de Campos, "Brazilian Concrete Poetry" 175). However, in his writings on silence, de Campos would constantly look to the work of Novalis and Goethe. His poem "Leitura de Novalis" (from which I excerpt the epigraph for this chapter) provides an apt example:

tinta branca
sobre
carta branca

escrever é uma forma de
ver

alles ist samerkorn
tudo é semente

flamíssono

[white ink
on
white page

writing is a way of
seeing

alles ist samerkorn
all is seed

flamingsound]

As in "bis in idem" or "BRANCO," "Leitura de Novalis" centers on the image of empty words – tinta branca – against the white page. Recalling the opening metaphor of *Blanco*, in which Paz describes the empty word as the "simiente latente" / "dormant seed," here language is the "semente" that eventually flowers in the poem's final neologism. First invoking the fiery "flamífero," "flamíssono" plays with the various meanings of "sono" to suggest either a "fiery song" or a "fiery sleep." As a neologism, it is both – an extra-lexical signifier with a range of latent meanings, empty sound and image suggesting much but signifying nothing. Like all of de Campos's later poetry about silence, "Leitura de Novalis" treats the blank page with a passion and awe reminiscent of the Romantic contemplation of the sublime. In Novalis' work, art could express the

sublime that Kant was to find only in nature.³² Here, in de Campos' post-Concrete phase, he achieves a sort of fusion between these stances. This poem presents a contemplation of the unspeakable or inexpressible as a function not of the author's interiority but of language itself. As in much of de Campos's poetry of this period, we find here both an invocation of the Romantic sublime simultaneous with the scientifism against which such rhetoric was meant to rebel.

In "Light: Paradisiacal Writing," de Campos uses light – whiteness, blankness – as a means of reconciling a philosophical poetics of rationality with a philosophical poetics of mysticism. To this end, he tracks a tangled succession of philosophical and theological formulations of light through various works by Guido Cavalcanti, Dante, and Ezra Pound. The cornerstone of de Campos's argument lies in Dante's approach to light as both substance and accident:

In the *Paradiso*, invested in conciliating the Thomist system with the mystic-amorous ideology of *cor gentile* (Auerbach), Dante stretches, sustains, and totalizes that radiant speculation on the kind of Love that is Light. He moves from *accident* and towards *substance*, since in God, *simplicissima substantiarum*, Eternal Light, *nihil accidens*: substance, accident and its manifestation unite in the same knot (*Paradiso*, canto 33, 88-91). (*Novas* 350)³³

Campos describes the way in which, within Dante's poetry, light provides a means of imagining a point of identity between substance and accident. As he indicates in the

³² Jane Kneller. "The Poetic Science of Moral Exercise in Early German Romanticism." *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, vol. 6, 2008. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. 155.

³³ Where possible, I have included quotations in the original. In some instances the original text is inaccessible.

passage above, he draws his understanding of substance and accident in Dante's *Paradiso* from the work of Erich Auerbach. A closer look at Auerbach's *Dante: Poet of the Secular World* helps to unpack de Campos's dense prose:

Just as Thomas Aquinas sought to combine Aristotelianism with the Christian Platonism of Augustine, so Dante tried to reconcile the [rational] Thomist system with the mystical ideology of the *cor gentile*. Only a poet could effect a concordance of that kind. [. . .] It is no mere love of paradox which leads us to say that after St. Thomas scholastic philosophy was in need of poetry. Ordering reason reaches a certain end point (there are several other instances of that in the history of ideas, though none so striking as the present one) when it is no longer able to express itself, to perfect and resolve itself, except through poetry. [. . .] Though transposed into rational allegory, the personal content is not lost, but is preserved as a foundation. The reader can take in both meanings together, for the poet, appearing as a man with his human experience, serves as a connecting link between them. (Auerbach 71-3)

For Auerbach, who separates poetry and philosophy into complimentary but separate categories, Dante's "philosophical poems" reach the perfection of both by bringing them together. To Thomist philosophy's rational systems, Auerbach argues, Dante adds "the figures of his poetic fantasy," born of "irrational inspiration" (73). De Campos takes this argument as his point of departure for his discussion of light in Dante. Recasting the "radiant speculation" of mystic poetry within the Thomist language of substance and accident, de Campos characterizes Dante's treatment of light as a moment in which substance and accident "unite in the same knot" – love that *is* light.

In a complicated series of critical leaps, de Campos uses his understanding of light in Dante as a point of departure, proceeding to read Cavalcanti via Dante via Pound via Robert Grosseteste. When Pound translates Cavalcanti's "compriso bianco" as "the white light that is allness," de Campos interprets Pound's image of light as coinciding with Grosseteste's philosophy, in which light, "the first form created in matter, [. . .] diffuses itself in every direction" (Grosseteste, quoted in *Novas* 350). From the union of substance and accident that he locates in Dante's poetry, de Campos finds in Pound a means of bringing together an understanding of light as prismatic ("all colors united in white") with Grosseteste's formulation of light as a divinely diffused *materia prima*.

Ultimately, "Light: Paradisiacal Writing" is an essay on the workings of text. While de Campos begins with a sort of history of poetic meditation on prismatic light, he ends by focusing on the prismatic diffusion of meaning within the language of that poetry. De Campos' essay ultimately relies on the radiant possibilities of *imbiancare*, a verb that he finds first coined in Dante's verse. De Campos quotes from *Paradiso*, canto 8, 112 ("vuo' tu che questo ver piu ti s'imbianchi?") and canto 7, 81 ("per che del lume suo poco s'imbianca"). From *imbiancare* de Campos draws the verb "translight," which he uses to describe the particular kind of translation carried out between these poets. Within de Campos's essay this word serves as skeleton key. By tracing echoes of the word through Cavalcanti and Pound, he brings their various formulations of light together. Rather than merely describing all of these theories of light as united within a larger understanding of light as prismatic, de Campos uses these texts to mutually deconstruct each other.

De Campos is most interested in the way in which these formulations of light can serve as a model for the functioning of poetry. If, at the outset of his essay, de Campos compares Cavalcanti's championing of "sensorial proof against the 'tyranny of syllogism'" to Derrida's critique of a "'logocentric' tendency in Western philosophy" (349), he eventually uses contrasting theories of light to imagine deconstruction as the basis for a poetics. Any text, de Campos implies, will yield a prismatic spectrum of possible meanings. The poem serves as the prism itself – the technology that allows all of these meanings to exist simultaneously. However, when de Campos imagines this rational poetics of deconstruction as a means of bringing together poets from different historical epochs and philosophical traditions, it becomes mystical. Together, de Campos suggests, the poems by Pound, Cavalcanti, and Dante constitute contradictory moments of a single text whose subject – and nature – is light itself.

While de Campos' characterization of a prismatic poetics provides a means of bringing his "blank" poetry together with that of Paz and Sarduy, these works are both incredibly similar and decisively incompatible. The Concrete and Neobaroque represent radically differing perspectives on language, and Paz's poetic philosophies sit uneasily amid the social projects associated with either of these frameworks – and yet, in their treatment of silence, they demand the contextualization that they mutually provide. Like the pieces of the world they imagine, these poems are both incompatible and inseparable.

These works also provide us with a "silent turn" to accompany the "linguistic turn" in philosophy during these years. While we normally think of the transition from the modern to the postmodern as marked by rapidly changing ideas about discourse and

how it functions, there is an alternative narrative: one defined by shifts in our ideas about the ruptures, failures, absences, and lacunae in discourse itself. As Ihab Hassan points out in "Toward a Concept of the Postmodern," these breakdowns in discourse are the subject of a postmodern discourse of their own: "a discourse of ironies and fragments, a 'white ideology' of absences and fractures, a desire of diffractions, an invocation of complex, articulate silences" (7). But as Paz, Sarduy, and de Campos show us, this is also a shift in our uses of non-discursive language. The avant-garde had always exposed language's inability to express contemporary realities, but with the postmodern notion that there is no reality outside of language also came the realization that there are aspects of discourse itself that escape coherent formulation. These poets use silence as a means of setting off into those spaces.

Chapter 2:

Translating Silence: *Transblanco* and the Open Work

More often than not, the images we have of Haroldo de Campos show a man at rest, seated quietly at a desk or a dining table, relaxing on a sofa, or lost in casual conversation or in thought. His reputation, however, has become that of the wild child of translation studies. Remembered most widely as the Brazilian *Concretista* poet who championed cannibalism as an aesthetic creed, de Campos himself described his translations as a project of "milîtância cultural:"

Implicou, inclusive, uma cunhagem neológica de termos 'especificadores:' recriação, transcrição, reimaginação (caso da poesia clássica chinesa), transparadisação ou transluminação (*Seis Cantos do Paradiso de Dante*) e transluciferação mefistofáustica (*Cenas Finais do Segundo Fausto* de Goethe). Essa nova terminologia visava a polemizar com a idéia 'naturalizada' de tradução literal, fiel ou servil, vista quase sempre como uma atividade subalterna diante do texto original, 'autorático' e 'verocêntrico,' no confronto com o qual o tradutor deveria modestamente 'apagar-se.' (*Tranblanco* 185)

[It implied, as well, a coining of neologisms, or "specifying" terms: recreation, transcreation, reimagination (the case of classical Chinese poetry), transparadization or translumination (*Seis Cantos do Paradiso de Dante*) and mefistofaustical transliciferization (Final Scenes in *Faust: The Second Part* by Goethe). This new terminology attempted to polemicize the "natural" idea of literal, faithful or servile translation, almost always seen as a subaltern activity

next to the original, "authoritative," "truthful" text, in which confrontation the translator must modestly 'turn off.']³⁴

Campos pointedly conjures the rhetoric of the historical avant-gardes, opposing the accepted logic of "servile" translation with a litany of neologisms whose primary purpose lies in their unignorable presence on the page. De Campos comments elsewhere on the power of neologism within the poet's role as inventor, unmaking and remaking language through a "glossolalia desacralizadora" / "desacrilizing glossolalia" (*O arco-íris branco* 193). Here he highlights the importance of that inventive impulse to the project of creative translation. The examples he lists – especially his translations of Dante and Goethe – abound in the sort of creative self-assertions that set most professional translators' teeth on edge.

After claiming that he opposes the idea that the translator should "modestamente 'apagar-se,'" laying out his own résumé as a creative translator, de Campos continues on to declare that "*Transblanco* (Editora Guanbara, Rio de Janeiro, 1986) é a última etapa, até o momento, dessa prática tradutória de coloratura crítica e objetivo transcultural (histórico, portanto)" / "*Transblanco* (Editora Guanbara, Rio de Janeiro, 1986) is the latest stage, until now, of that translating practice of critical coloratura and transcultural (not to mention historical) objective." (185).³⁵ He situates *Transblanco* as the culmination to-date of his work as a creative translator. However, as Stefan Tobler points out,

³⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Portuguese into English are mine.

³⁵ Although critics occasionally use the title *Transblanco* to refer to de Campos's translation of "Blanco," *Transblanco* in fact is the title of the larger work in which de Campos publishes the original poem along with his own version, entitled "Branco." Also included in the volume are selections from the correspondence between de Campos and Paz, various critical essays by de Campos on Paz's work and on the process of translating it, and a handful of related essays by other scholars.

Transblanco is almost totally lacking in the appropriative departures for which the *antropofagista* poet has become famous (Tobler 195). Given *Branco*'s overwhelming reliance on cognates shared between Portuguese and Spanish, it is little wonder that various critics have referred to *Transblanco* not as a transcreation but as a tribute.

Despite *Transblanco*'s apparently faithful, seemingly "servile" reproduction of its target text, scholarship on *Blanco*, as well as Octavio Paz's own thoughts about his original poem, allow us to alter the way in which we approach *Branco* as a textual object. Just as José Quiroga finds Paz's poem making use of an "archive" of associated texts, de Campos does the same in *Transblanco*. Through this particular mode of intertextuality, in what I read as a play on the "open" form of the original poem, an apparently servile translation asserts itself as a critical reappraisal of *Blanco*. I construct my argument by looking to the "archive" of essayistic material surrounding *Branco* in its original publication, as well as to the material de Campos publishes during the period in which he was composing and compiling *Transblanco*. Ultimately, I argue that the explicit subject of the translated poem becomes the process of its negotiation between the translator and the translated.

Transblanco's title suggests the sort of creative appropriation that accompanies de Campos's gleeful coinage of neologisms like "transparadisação" or "transiluminação." As with these latter terms, I will argue, "transblanco" goes beyond the merely gestural to describe the specific functioning of the intertextuality through which de Campos's translation leaves the source text altered in the wake of translation. As in the case of "transluciferação mefistofáustica," for example, where translation becomes the process of demonic "possession," "transblanco" describes a particular relationship between the

Spanish source text and its recreation in Portuguese. Specifically, I argue, the unique intertextual practice suggested by the neologism "transblanco" is modeled on the way in which the "blanco" functions in Paz's original poem. Just as Paz builds *Blanco* around a prismatic void, de Campos' transcreation functions according to the same principle. The title, *Transblanco*, mirrors the refracted, kaleidoscopic nature of silence in Paz's original *Blanco*. It implies the union of two distinct "blanks" – a Spanish "blanco" with a Brazilian Portuguese "branco." The title signals that this is a collision between distinct conceptions of silence.

The various, and often conflicting, manifestations of silence that *Transblanco* brings together are in turn tied to distinct understandings of modernism and its meaning in the Americas. De Campos's *Transblanco* stages an encounter between two divergent modernist traditions, while at the same time positioning itself after the end of these traditions. For both Paz and de Campos, the avant-gardes were most important for their conceptions of utopia, and for the ways in which they linked utopia with aesthetics. By creating a translation in which a seemingly placid poetic interaction belies radical ideological disagreement, de Campos and Paz stage a struggle over the meaning of what once was utopia. I argue that, in place of utopia, both de Campos and Paz have placed a void, but they battle over the political charge of that void, as well as its relationship to the aesthetics of *Blanco*.

Haroldo de Campos, Anthropophagy, and Intertextuality

The passage quoted at the opening of this chapter, in which de Campos colorfully declares the translator's cultural militancy, is among the most oft-cited in de Campos's work. However, in critical studies it is rarely accompanied by a close reading (or, indeed, any reading) of his translations themselves. As Tobler notes, critical fixation on de Campos's formative presence within the "Antropofagia" movement often overshadows the fact that in practice his implementation of creative translation tends toward what de Campos identifies as "hyper-literalism" (Tobler 203): "It has to capture all the elements, the phonic as well as the semantic" (Jackson 178). Departing from the traditional tension between "mimetic" translation (translating for certain effects) and "literal" translation (translating for semantic meaning), de Campos declares that literary translation must attempt also to reproduce the concrete aspects of the work: its visual appearance and its sound. As he explains elsewhere, this is the starting point for any creative *recriação*: "não se traduz apenas o significado, *traduz-se o próprio signo*, ou seja, sua fisicalidade, sua materialidade mesma [. . .]. Está-se pois no avesso da chamada tradução literal" / "The signified is not that which is translated. *The sign itself* – that is, its physicality, its very materiality – is that which is translated. This is in fact the reverse of literal translation" ("Da Tradução" 35).

A brief look to de Campos's "reimaginação" of a classical Chinese poem by Wang Wei, placed alongside a translation of the same poem by Octavio Paz, provides an illustration of de Campos's "hyper-literalism":

"O REFÚGIO DOS CERVOS"

montanha vazia não se vê ninguém
ouvir só se ouve um alguém de ecos

raios do poente filtram na espessura
um reflexo ainda luz no musgo verde³⁶

Haroldo de Campos

"En la Hermita del Parque de los Venados"

No se ve gente en este monte,

sólo se oyen, lejos, voces.

Bosque profundo. luz poniente:

alumbra el musgo y, verde, asciende.³⁷

Octavio Paz

In discussing their respective translations of classical Chinese poetry, both Paz and de Campos cite Ezra Pound's translations as a formative influence. However, the two take Pound in profoundly different directions. Marjorie Perloff points out that while de Campos believes in the capacity of Western languages, like ideograms, to create meaning from their visual arrangement on a page, Paz sees the ideogram as antithetical to the necessarily discursive function of these Western languages. As Paz would argue in his correspondence with de Campos, "Our languages are the extreme opposite of Chinese, and the most that can be done is what you people (not Pound) are doing: to create plastic and syntactic procedures that, more than imitating ideograms, become their metaphor, their analogic double" (Cited in Perloff, "Refiguring the Poundian Ideogram" NP).

Paz's and de Campos's divergent beliefs about the nature of Western languages manifest themselves in their treatment of the short poem by Wang Wei. Paz, taking literal

³⁶ *O arco-íris branco*, 186.

³⁷ *19 Ways of Looking at Wang Wei*, 49.

translation of the signifier as an impossibility, contents himself with a translation he perceives as faithful despite its traditional Western lyric form. De Campos, however, translates literally at the expense of Portuguese syntax and punctuation. Additionally, in contrast with the caesura of the Western lyric, which marks a pause, de Campos uses the visual effect of lines broken on the page to translate the Chinese "cesura prosódica de efeito 'contrastivo'" / "prosodic caesura, characterized by a 'contrastive' effect" (*O arco-íris branco* 175). To call de Campos's translation "literal," however, is not to presume that he naively assumed it to be mimetic (that is, translated for an analogous effect). Paz rightly refers to de Campos's translation of the ideogram into Portuguese as analogy rather than imitation; its mimicry is precisely that which creates the greatest difference in effect. By remaining "faithful" formally, de Campos takes creative liberties of the sort that would lead him to compare the spatial arrangement of another of his Wang Wei translations to a mobile by Calder (*O arco-íris branco* 172).³⁸

The "militância cultural" of de Campos's *transcrições* generally has been understood as a function of the creative transformation of a target text through the act of translation from its original language into de Campos's Brazilian Portuguese. This is *antropofagia* – the "consumption" and "digestion" of a text such that it emerges as permanently altered through its translation. However, while this *antropofagia* is rooted in an understanding of translation as altering and appropriating the source text, it relies on a more broadly defined intertextuality in its claim that translation accordingly alters the original text in its relationship to this new version of itself.

³⁸ I am grateful to Mavis Cheng for her willingness to discuss Wang Wei's original poem with me.

In the case of "O REFÚGIO DOS CERVOS," published alongside an essay in which de Campos discusses his translation of this and two other Wang Wei poems, any cultural militancy seems directed not at the Chinese text but at other Western translations of this work – especially those translations by Paz. Throughout the essay in which de Campos publishes "O REFÚGIO DOS CERVOS," he reproduces several of Paz's translations alongside his own. However, unlike his briefer citations and discussions of versions by translators like Burton Watson or Wai-Lim Yip, de Campos's discussion of Paz's work avoids any direct statement of its influence on his own translations. While praising Paz's choices, de Campos structures his essay in a way that highlights the divergence between Paz's translations and his own. In one instance, for example, de Campos cites Paz's justification for his choice of the word "alumbrar" over "reflejar" – a decision that de Campos deliberately reverses in the Portuguese. Here intertextuality between two juxtaposed translations functions negatively.

The divergence between de Campos's translation of the Wang Wei poem and those by Paz is greatest in their treatment of silence. Both poets allow an understanding of the Buddhist "vazio" – the moment of enlightenment dramatized by the poem – to structure the form of their translations, though they do so in different ways. Paz, whose translation retains Western lyric form, presents the poem as a narrative leading up to a moment of enlightenment that he symbolizes through the ascending light of the last line, the rhythm of which he breaks up so as to stress this final moment of arrival. Unlike de Campos's more literal title, "refúgio dos cervos," Paz has entitled his poem "En la hermita del parque de los venados," arguing elsewhere that the poem is an allusion to a Buddhist hermitage visited by the Amida Buddha. The version by de Campos, as a series

of strictly metered, five-syllable lines, contrasts sharply with the sculpted and irregular rhythm of the Paz. Where the form of Paz's translation dramatizes the Buddhist void narratively, de Campos structures his version around the visual manifestation of silence – the "marcação da cesura por um branco na página" / "The demarcation of the caesura with a blank space on the page" (*O arco-íris branco* 179). As in his concrete poetry, de Campos here draws attention to the materiality of words situated on the blank space of a page.

The Chinese literary tradition remembers Wang Wei as a painter as well as a poet – indeed, as a poet/painter – and de Campos picks up on the importance of the visual in the original poem, adding a concrete visuality to the original's representation of a landscape. However, he does so at the expense of the original poem's treatment of this as a moment in time. In a poem limited to a mere twenty characters, Wang Wei devotes two characters (the eleventh and sixteenth) to the idea that the sunlight in the poem is *returning*. The original version depicts a mere moment, but it nevertheless remains a moment in time. De Campos replaces that "return" with the word "ainda" – *still* – transforming this dynamic moment into an essentially static one. If Wang Wei's original, like Paz's translation, dramatizes a moment of Buddhist enlightenment through representation of a landscape, de Campos's concrete translation draws attention both to the materiality of the Portuguese and to the unique form of the Chinese poem, as if gazing not at a landscape but at a painting of one. Most significant here is that while de Campos foregrounds this contrast with Paz, his own interpretation – utilizing the blank space of the page to dramatize a moment of Buddhist enlightenment – draws its central

trope from his own favorite of Paz's poems, *Blanco*. Silence here becomes a space of intertextual confrontation. Like Wang Wei's forest, it is empty but full of echoes.

Tobler argues for *Branco* as creative precisely through its hyper-literalism. However, even in this hyper-literalism *Branco*'s creative appropriation of its source text pales in comparison with other similarly literal translations by de Campos. Unlike de Campos's translations of classical Chinese poetry, for example, in which an attempt to reproduce Chinese syntax creates translations in which a syntactically fractured Portuguese produces an effect distinct from that of the source texts, *Branco* relies on the similarities between Spanish and Portuguese – cognates, syntactical structures, etc. – to forge a translation that imitates both the form and effect of the original.

Opening the Work: *Blanco*, *Transblanco*, and the Open Archive

In a note originally published at the end of *Blanco* (and in subsequent versions reproduced as a preface), Paz observes that *Blanco* "es una composición que ofrece la posibilidad de varias lecturas" / "is a composition that offers the possibility of several readings." In what follows he includes a list of instructions for reading the text: first in its totality, followed by five alternative readings that fracture the text into its constituent columns, creating a series of separate poems from its various sections. For example, when the poem splits into two parallel columns, a reader may choose to read only one of two columns, or may read both of the columns together. Critical readings of *Blanco* generally have begun with a discussion of this poetic instruction manual. The note aims

to guide and define the poem, and in posterity it has done just that. Any reading must be carried out either with or against it.

In his introductory note, Paz characterizes his poem as marked by openness and "possibility" at the same moment that he schematically diagrams the range of those possibilities (*Ladera este* 145). José Quiroga cites this as an index of a structuring tension in the poem between organicity and technology – between the spontaneity of the possible and artificiality of the previously proscribed (Quiroga 144). However, when Quiroga resolves that tension by deciding that the poem's artifice ultimately becomes its structuring element, his methodology undermines his thesis. Quiroga suggests the logic of archive as internal to the text (via the indications of the introductory note), and yet the boundaries that Quiroga sketches around that archive remain essentially arbitrary. While I agree with Quiroga that *Blanco* suggests an intertextual relationship with other works by Paz (and this is hardly exclusive to *Blanco*), the sheer openness of that proposition defies the rigidity of control implicit in the organization of an archive. Instead, this openness of form suggests what de Campos characterizes as the organic, "capillaried" quality – the "verbal rosacea" – of the open work.

Like Quiroga or like Enrico Mario Santí, whose *Archivo blanco* published Paz's poem alongside various related documents and criticism, de Campos understands *Blanco* through a collection of surrounding material, declaring Paz's essay, "El pensamiento en blanco," to be the poem's "melhor hermenêutica" (*Transblanco* 192). However, the first – as well as the most sustained – meditation on the intertextual aspect of *Blanco* is *Transblanco* itself.

In 1978, in a letter responding to a joint publication proposed by de Campos, Paz replies: "Comove-me sua idéia de traduzir 'Blanco' e de publicá-lo acompanhado de nossa correspondência de 1968 e de alguns textos mais" / "I am intrigued by your idea of translating 'Blanco' and publishing it accompanied by our correspondence" (*Transblanco* 115). Eventually published in 1986, *Transblanco* would do just this. Along with both the Spanish and the Portuguese versions of the poem, as well as a collection of short critical pieces by de Campos and other critics, the volume reproduces a series of letters between the two poets. Beginning in 1968 and spanning over a decade, the excerpts from this correspondence track the development of *Transblanco* from its inception through the completion of de Campos's translation.

Just as Paz's explanatory note, published alongside the original poem, serves as a guide with or against which any reading of *Blanco* must be conducted, so the correspondence comes to function here in *Transblanco*. Later in the volume, in an essay devoted to examining his own translation, de Campos notes:

Em minha 'transcrição' de *Blanco*, como se poderá ver confrontando-a com o original e lendo os comentários contidos na correspondência incluída no livro, pratiquei em diferentes graus a operação 'paramórfica' (ora mais 'analógico-metafórica,' ora mais 'metonímico-alegórica'), segundo me sugeria a reinvenção do texto em minha língua. (190)

[In my 'transcreation' of *Blanco*, as can be seen when confronting it with the original and reading the commentaries in the correspondence included in the book, I utilized, to differing degrees, the 'paramorphic' operation (variously more

'analogical-metaphorical' or more 'metonymical-allegorical'), according to what was suggested by the reinvention of the text in my own language.] (190)

As with *Blanco*'s accompanying note, de Campos here signals that the correspondence, while outside of the translated poem, nevertheless forms as much a part of the translation as does the original poem in Spanish. Both Paz and de Campos would follow Pound in their thoughts on the critical function of translation, though de Campos's understanding of intertextuality within this process allows him to posit the original poem, its translation, and *Transblanco*'s other critical material (especially the correspondence) within a reciprocal relationship. Here in his essay de Campos glosses the correspondence, which serves to gloss the translation, which in turn becomes criticism of the original Spanish poem. And yet the radical gesture of de Campos's *antropofagia* is not to treat any of these texts as secondary to the others. Just as *Blanco* is a poem about its own composition, *Transblanco* becomes an explicit meditation on the process of its negotiation between two poets.

Despite the extent to which de Campos emphasizes the critical function of his translation, or the potential for mutual transformation presented by the particular relationship between the various texts that comprise *Transblanco*, the translation itself seems more a reproduction than a reinvention. In the "Nota de Haroldo de Campos á Tradução" (reproduced directly after a translation of Paz's original explanatory note), de Campos claims that "numa tradução como esta, que se passa entre línguas tão próximas e aparentemente solidárias como o espanhol e o português, os avatares obsessivos do mesmo se deixam, não obstante, a cada momento, assaltar pelos azares perversivos da

diferença" / "in a translation like this one, which takes place between two languages so closely related and apparently allegiant as Spanish and Portuguese, the obsessive avatars of sameness nevertheless allow themselves, at every moment, to be overtaken by the creeping vines of difference" (*Transblanco* 92). Here the difference of the translation emerges from the difference of languages themselves – pointing to the difference that hides behind apparent similarity. That is, by reproducing the signifiers as closely as possible, the translation draws attention to the linguistic and cultural differences that exist between two.

Even in its hyper-literalism, *Branco*'s creative appropriation of its source text pales in comparison with other similarly literal translations by de Campos. Unlike de Campos's translations of classical Chinese poetry, for example, in which an attempt to reproduce Chinese syntax creates translations in which a syntactically fractured Portuguese produces an effect distinct from that of the source texts, *Branco* relies on the similarities between Spanish and Portuguese – cognates, syntactical structures, etc. – to forge a translation that imitates both the form and effect of the original. While *Branco* might draw attention to differences between the two languages, it tends instead to emphasize the striking similarities. It remains primarily a transliteration of the sort that is not possible between Chinese and Portuguese.

Like many of his critics, de Campos spends the majority of his essay, "Reflexões sobre a transcrição de *Blanco*," discussing his theory of translation. Only in the last two paragraphs does he finally cite directly from his text. After discussing two minor alterations to his source text, he declares: "Guardo, para o final, um exemplo expressivo, no qual a intervenção do tradutor se deixa exhibir como uma tatuagem de batalha" / "I

have saved for last one final telling example, in which the translator's intervention appears like a battle scar" (*Transblanco* 191). This violent change – the "battle scar" inflicted on the original – is his choice of the Portuguese "som" over "são" as a translation for the Spanish "son." Thus, de Campos chooses "sound" over "they are." On its own this example, placed here at the end of the essay, comes as something of a deflation, and is only more so when de Campos explains that he has passed over the more conventional "são" because he feels it to be a less faithful translation. This change appears twice in *Branco*. In the case of a third instance of "son" in the Spanish, de Campos includes both "são" and "som."

Andrés Sánchez Robayna, in his essay on *Transblanco*, identifies a moment in the translation in which the creative faculty of the translator manifests itself more clearly than in those examples provided by de Campos himself. Since as Sánchez Robayna points out there is no satisfactory approximation for the Spanish "cabrilleo" in Portuguese, de Campos chooses to coin his own term, "corusqueio." However, having chosen this instance as illustrative of what he terms the "diálogo criativo" of *Transblanco*, Sánchez Robayna allows his discussion to end there. "Não pode esta nota," he explains, "em sua brevidade, dar conta detalhada da beleza dessa *diamantização* que o poeta brasileiro efetua sobre 'Blanco'" / "This note, in its brevity, cannot give a detailed account of the graceful *diamondization* that the Brazilian poet enacts upon 'Blanco'" (*Transblanco* 175; emphasis his). Like most critics, Sánchez Robayna merely gestures at the creative appropriations that he assures us are present in the translation.

Like *Branco* itself, the correspondence in *Transblanco* appears at odds with de Campos's essayistic treatment of the work. While in his essays de Campos loudly

denounces "servile" translation, the letters show a translator who signs his correspondence as "amigo e 'transcriptor,'" and who ultimately defers to the judgment of the poem's original author. Toward the end of the correspondence, Paz responds to de Campos by acknowledging each instance in which he has found a discrepancy between the two versions, either lending his approval or requesting a revision. In a work apparently structured around the understanding of translation as a critical act, all of the evidence reproduced points instead toward a process over which Paz himself presides. Waiting for some decisive expression of disagreement or dissent from de Campos, we receive only silence. This is the most significant silence in *Transblanco*, the most charged blank space left on the page.

Emphasizing as it does the process of its creation as a collaborative translation, *Transblanco* constantly points toward the tension between claimed creativity and apparent servility or humility. The divergence between *Blanco* and *Branco* emerges when, like Quiroga, we extend the translation's "archive" to include the immediately surrounding work – that is, the essayistic material de Campos will publish during the immediate period in which he publishes *Transblanco*, in addition to his essays in that volume itself.

Any foreign text in translation, as Lawrence Venuti phrases it in "Translation, Community, Utopia," "is not so much communicated as inscribed with domestic intelligibilities and interests" (Venuti, *Translation Studies Reader* 483). The text itself is not so much transported *to* a different context as recreated *from* the materials provided by that new context. As Venuti elaborates in a more recent essay, "The Poet's Version, or an Ethics of Translation" this inscription begins with linguistic and cultural difference, but

also includes the very materiality of the publication medium itself. Likewise, Kelly Austin notes in "Two Art Books" that while any art book or book object "presses materiality to the center of the reading experience," *Blanco* – and its physical refashioning by Adja Yunkers in Eliot Weinberger's 1974 English translation – stresses the importance of visual as well as textual aspects of the work. Of *Transblanco*, Tobler similarly notes that the Portuguese translation lacks the accordion format and varied font colors of Paz's original. However, de Campos does not lose sight of the importance of the materiality of the print medium. Acknowledging the original's reliance on an attendant archive of textual material, de Campos changes *Blanco*'s format (as a single-poem book) to the varied collection of materials that is *Transblanco*, physically surrounding both "Blanco" and "Branco" with a new archive of texts.

Although I will discuss "Constelação para Octavio Paz," an essay on Paz's work that de Campos publishes as part of *Transblanco*, I also base my discussion on a related essay by de Campos, "Poesia e modernidade" (1984). Just as de Campos cites Paz's "El pensamiento en blanco" as *Blanco*'s "melhor hermeneutica," I argue that "Poesia e modernidade" performs the same function for *Transblanco*. The first presentation of this essay in August of 1984, at an event in celebration of Paz's seventieth birthday, falls directly between the completion of *Branco* in 1981 and the final publication of *Transblanco* in 1986. For both de Campos and Paz, this period would be one of transition. Their work together on *Transblanco*, as de Campos stresses in "Poesia e modernidade," is a recognition of age, a celebration of change, and a bitter dispute over the meaning they give to their memories of the modern.

A Collision of Modernisms

The Americas have known any number of modernisms – from the *Modernismo* of Rubén Darío and Leopoldo Lugones to the Anglo-American modernism of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound to the regionalist and avant-garde strains of Brazilian modernism. Octavio Paz's approach to modernism would both confirm and deny the polyvalence of the term itself. Toward the beginning of his seminal meditation on modernism, *Los hijos del limo*, Paz poses a question: "La literatura moderna, ¿es moderna?" / "Is modern literature modern?" Immediately he offers an answer: "Su modernidad es ambigua" / "Its modernity is ambiguous." (54). In Paz's formulation, modernity refers not primarily to a period but to a specific function of art during that period. It is, for him, the "tradition of the rupture": art defined through its impulse to break with its past. Modern literature becomes "ambiguous" because, as he explains, "la literatura moderna es una apasionada negación de la modernidad" / "modern literature is a passionate negation of modernity" (55). Modern literature becomes defined through a negation of its own modernity.

Despite his paradoxical definition of modern literature as that which attempts to break with modernity, Paz ends *Los hijos del limo* with an attempt to place contemporary literature outside of the modern. He argues that the vanguardist notion of a linear historical progression that underwrites the tradition of the rupture is no longer viable. Now, he says, "la historia no es una: es plural. Es la historia de la prodigiosa diversidad de sociedades y civilizaciones que han creado los hombres. Nuestro futuro, nuestra idea del futuro, se bambolea y vacila: la pluralidad de pasados vuelve plausible la pluralidad de futuros" / "History is not singular: it is plural. It is the history of the prodigious diversity of societies and civilizations that man has created. Our future, our idea of the

future, wavers and vacillates: the plurality of pasts makes plausible the plurality of futures" (199). The final proposal of Paz's book – that the critical function of literature must change when dispossessed of a dialectical understanding of history – provides the impulse for *Blanco*. For Paz, *Blanco* is a poem that belongs to what he terms the "postvanguardia."

Campos, in opening his own meditation on modernism's end in "Poesia e modernidade," conjures Paz: "A expressão 'modernidade' é ambígua" / "The expression 'modernity' is ambiguous" (*O arco-íris branco* 143). For the Brazilian, however, this ambiguity only takes Paz's understanding as a point of departure. De Campos characterizes Paz's understanding of modernity as purely synchronic, and attempts to reconcile it with an accompanying understanding of modernity as diachronic. Having done so, he stresses that his own modernity differs from Paz's in both respects. At various points throughout de Campos's work on Paz, he would emphasize that while both poets had been prominent exponents of vanguardist technique in the Americas, the Mexican poet emerged from a distinct and wholly separate tradition of the avant-garde. As de Campos explains in an interview with Marjorie Perloff, Paz gained importance as the foremost propagator of Surrealist aesthetics in Latin America. In contrast, he claims, "in Brazil we have no surrealism at all. We care much more for Italian futurism and dada " (Perloff and de Campos, "Brazilian Concrete Poetry" 175). De Campos refers to Surrealism as a "conservative avant-garde," agreeing with Perloff that it represents "a kind of throwback to romanticism." He sides with Futurism and Dada because "they are much more radical." Here, as in his treatment of *Los hijos del limo*, de Campos holds Paz's modernist lineage at a remove from his own.

In the formal experimentation of Mallarmé, as de Campos notes in "Constelação para Octavio Paz" (published as part of *Transblanco*), de Campos and Paz find an exceptionally strong point of encounter. As discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, Mallarmé's *Coup de Dés* would provide a point of departure for de Campos and his Brazilian Concretista movement, as well as a point of constant return. For Paz, Mallarmé's influence would become increasingly important, culminating in the mid to late 1960s with the creation of Paz's handful of concrete "topopoemas" and with *Blanco* itself. Quiroga, like de Campos, discusses *Blanco* as a meditation on Mallarmé, and Fernando Vallejo has not been alone in accusing Paz of being a "Mallarmé criollo" (*El mensajero* 156). However, even here de Campos searches to separate his own modernist tradition from that of Paz. In "Poesia e modernidade" he carefully sketches a distinct "linhagem Mallarmaica" for both Hispanic and Brazilian modernist traditions. Moreover, it is with Paz that de Campos locates the culmination of a distinct Hispanic lineage:

Mas é em Octavio Paz, no poema *Blanco* (1967), que ela encontra, por assim dizer, *a sua harmoniosa figura de conclusão*. Nesse poema de leitura múltipla, desdobrável como um livro oriental, a neotradução mallarmeana da sintaxe estrutural se enfrenta com outra tradição, fortemente ibérica, a da metáfora, de áurea herança barroca, que a revalorização de Góngora pela geração de García Lorca represtigiou; por uma dialética tântrica do SIM e do NÃO, em convívio não-excludente, esse poema visual é metáfora e crítica da metáfora, matriz combinatória que se faz e refaz, segundo uma eidética do texto e uma erótica da imagem ('A imagem do corpo como peregrinação nos devolve a imagem do corpo

como escritura" [O. Paz, '*El Pensamiento en Blanco*']. Este, em traço esquemático, o curso hispano-americano do processo. (263)

[But it is in the work of Octavio Paz, in the poem *Blanco* (1967), that it encounters (so to speak) *the harmonious manifestation of its conclusion*. In this poem – characterized by multiple readings, unfoldable like an Oriental book – the Mallarmean neo-tradition of structural syntax confronts another, decidedly Iberian, tradition: that of the metaphor, the sonorous inheritance of the Baroque, whose prestige was restored through the revaluation of Góngora by García Lorca's generation. Through a Tantric dialectic of YES and NO, in non-exclusive coexistence, this visual poem becomes both metaphorical and critical of metaphor, a combinatory matrix that makes and remakes itself according to an eidos of the text and an eroticism of the image ('The image of the body as pilgrimage leaves us with an image of the body as writing' [O. Paz, '*El Pensamiento en Blanco*']. This, in a sort of schematic shorthand, is the Hispano-American course of the process.]

Like Paz, de Campos draws a distinction between the postmodern and the post-vanguard. For him, Mallarmé is already a postmodern poet upon the publication of *Un Coup de Dés*, but he is also at the heart of the avant-garde. Against Paz's own understanding of *Blanco*, de Campos's figuration of the poem as the pinnacle of a Spanish Mallarmean tradition reinserts it into the vanguard tradition. As he reiterates in "Constelação para Octavio Paz," "Octavio Paz significa o repensamento, na América Hispânica, da linhagem Mallarmé" / "Octavio Paz represents the reworking, in Spanish America, of the

Mallarmean tradition" (*Transblanco* 194). Although he claims at the beginning of the essay that "a posição de Octavio Paz, no quadro da atual literatura hispano-americana, traz a marca da singularidade," / "The position of Octavio Paz, within the current literary scene in Spanish American, bears the mark of singularity" the essay itself serves to situate this "singularity" as the most recent moment in an established modernist tradition. Here, as in "Poesia e modernidade," *Blanco* is the vanguard poem *par excellence*, and not, as Paz argues, the first poem of the "post-vanguardia."

Campos's decision to treat the vanguards as postmodern, in opposition Paz's conception of the historical avant-garde as the culmination of a modernist "tradition of the rupture," is less important here than the Brazilian's reinsertion of *Blanco* back within the avant-garde. Because de Campos follows Paz in understanding the avant-garde as defined synchronically, the stakes of this disagreement over *Blanco*'s categorization as avant-garde or post-vanguard go beyond a mere question of terminology or periodization. It cuts to the heart of what de Campos understands to be the utopian project that underwrites avant-garde artistic production.

For de Campos, his own Brazilian Concretista movement of the 1950s and early 1960s was defined through the utopianism of its aesthetics. As de Campos points out, the moment was right: Juscelino Kubitschek launched the progressive "Plano de Metas;" the diplomat and "engenheiro" poet João Cabral was championing a stark modernist poetics; and Marxist architect Lúcio Costa e Niemeyer was constructing a Brazilian capital from scratch, "a capital futuroológica, barroquizante e construtivista a um tempo" / "a capital at once futurological, constructivist, and baroque" (*O arco-íris branco* 266). Accordingly, the young Concretista movement, while politically independent and artistically marginal,

"não poderia deixar de refletir esse momento generoso de otimismo projetual" / "could not fail to reflect this generous moment of projective optimism." Adopting for their manifesto Brazilia's utilitarian ethic – as well as the futuristic airplane formation of its physical design – the Concretistas launched their *Plano Piloto*. Reflecting the utopianism of Brazilia's modernist architectural and infrastructural campaign, de Campos calls concrete poetry "uma arte geral da palavra, o poema-produto: objeto útil" "a general art of the word, of the poem-product: useful object" (*O arco-íris branco* 267). Ultimately de Campos replaces the term "avant-guard" with the term "utopian."

Because, for de Campos, the historical avant-garde gains meaning primarily through its utopian agenda, his characterization of *Blanco* as the culmination of a certain avant-garde aesthetic in Spanish necessarily recenters his disagreement with Paz around the question of *Blanco*'s potential utopianism. Above all, this has to do with the utopian potential of language. De Campos claims that "vanguardia, enquanto movimento, é busca de uma nova linguagem comum, de uma nova *koiné*, da linguagem reconciliada, portanto, no horizonte de um mundo transformado" / "The avant-garde, as a proper movement, is the search for a new common language, a new *koiné* of reconciled language, as part of a transformed world." (266). It follows for him, then, that the valorization of translation as poetic creation, stressing difference over identity, marks the arrival of a new era in literary production. He ends his essay by claiming that "a tradução – vista como prática de leitura reflexiva da tradução – permite recombina a pluralidade dos passados possíveis e presentificá-la, como diferença, na unicidade *hic et nunc* do poema pós-utópico" / "translation – seen as the reflective reading of translation – allows the recombination of the plurality of possible pasts into the present, as difference, in the

unicity *hic et nunc* of the post-utopian poem" (*O arco-iris branco* 269). If *Blanco* was the culmination of an avant-garde Mallarmean aesthetics – and implicitly the last of the utopian line – then *Transblanco* marks the first step of that poem into a radically new tradition. De Campos, treating *Blanco* as the swan song of the avant-garde, implicitly creates *Transblanco* as its eulogy – requesting, as it were, a moment of silence.

In dispute here is the significance of the "blanco" itself. For both poets, the void is the space left in the absence of avant-garde utopia. Paz and de Campos both would understand utopia as the generative force behind – respectively – historical Surrealist and Dada aesthetics, and would seek to understand the afterlife of those aesthetics through their relationship to whatever had come (or not) to take the place of those utopian imaginaries. For this reason de Campos, citing translation itself as a form of post-vanguard aesthetics, defines it as "post-utopian." *Transblanco* enacts this transformation. Taking a poem he views as vanguardist, de Campos transforms the poem through translation, recreating it as post-utopian. The result, for de Campos, is the collision between the utopian *Blanco* and the post-utopian *Branco*.

Paz, like de Campos, understands the "blanco" in his poem as an essentially utopian imaginary, but unlike de Campos he does not find this utopianism to be a function of an avant-garde aesthetics. For Paz, *Blanco* can be both utopian and post-vanguardist. Paz situates his own poem as post-avant-garde because it comes after the failure of a dialectical understanding of history, but unlike de Campos he does not draw his definition of utopia through that dialectical progression of history. Instead, he adopts the utopianism that he sees Breton taking from Fourier. Breton's utopianism, Paz asserts, is one constituted through passionate attraction: between distant people, between

disparate images, between the sign and its signifier, between words and their things.

However, as Paz explains, the course of this thought – from Dante through Fourier and Breton – has seen it change radically:

Dante presenta a la unión de substancia y accidente como un *nudo* y ese nudo es la forma universal que encierra a todas las formas. El nudo es el jeroglífico del amor divino. Fourier diría que ese nudo no es otro que la atracción apasionada. Pero Fourier, como todos nosotros, no sabe *qué es* ese nudo ni de *qué está hecho*. La analogía de Fourier, como la de Baudelaire y la de todos los modernos, es una operación, una combinatoria; la analogía de Dante reposa sobre una ontología. El centro de la analogía es un centro vacío para nosotros. (HL 110-111; emphasis is Paz's)

[Dante presents the union of substance and accident as a *knot* and this knot is the universal form that contains all forms. The knot is the hieroglyph of divine love. Fourier would say that this knot is passionate attraction. But Fourier, like ourselves, does not know *what* this knot is nor *of what it is made*. Fourier's analogy, like that of Baudelaire and all his modern contemporaries, is an operation, a recombination; Dante's analogy rests on an ontology. For us, the center of the analogy is empty.]

Analogy, for Paz, is an operation of passionate attraction, and at the center of this attraction is a void. At the same moment that this void is a lack or an absence, it does not mean a negation of Fourier's utopianism, but rather a transformation of it. The void becomes the generating force behind this passionate attraction. As Eduardo Milán

beautifully notes in his essay, "Tensão do Dizer em *Blanco* de Octavio Paz," the utopian effort to reconcile the word and the world through metaphor becomes instead the reconciliation of the word with silence (*Transblanco* 166). In Paz's own formulation this becomes a passionate reconciliation.

Campos is justified in claiming Paz's essay, "El pensamiento en blanco," to be *Blanco's* "melhor hermenêutica." Tantric Buddhism, for Paz, is that which allows him to rework the utopian passion of Breton and Fourier into a post-vanguard aesthetic of "signs in dispersal." Just as Paz would characterize Breton's Fourierism as "la búsqueda del comienzo," he claims that Tantric Buddhism attempts "la reconquista del tiempo original, ese tiempo que contiene a todos los tiempos, se resuelve en la disolución del tiempo" / "the re-conquest of the originary time, that time that contains all times, finds resolution in the dissolution of time itself" ("El pensamiento en blanco" 57). This is what Paz attempts in *Blanco*. As Quiroga notes, *Blanco* is Paz's effort to break with history, striving for a space outside of that history. "En el tantrismo," Paz says, "estamos [. . .] ante una erótica que culmina en un ritual de transmutación de la naturaleza humana" / "In Tantrism, we [. . .] find before us an erotics that culminates in the ritual transformation of human nature." Bodies become constellations of signs and "las palabras se vuelven corpóreas" / "words become bodily" (58). The "vacío" at the center of poetic analogy becomes the "blanco" of Tantric enlightenment. Words create shifting constellations on the blank page in a "rítmica conjunción y disyunción," a splitting and fusion that Paz characterizes as erotic (57). Tantrism is that which allows Paz to retain Breton's utopianism in a poem he characterizes as post-vanguard.

For Paz, the void is a space outside of dialectical history, the new face of radical negation but therefore also of radical possibility.³⁹ De Campos, accepting this treatment of it, turns that critical function back on the original poem. While Ihab Hassan, claiming postmodern literature as the "literature of silence," understands this silence as exhaustion, de Campos treats it instead as a literary space whose critical function has been reinvigorated. In "O Arco-Iris Branco," the titular essay from the collection in which he publishes "Poesía e modernidade," de Campos uses the white rainbow as a symbol for that reinvigoration. Citing the white rainbow as the image that Goethe created to mark a new and prolific phase of his career that began in his seventies, de Campos also allows that reading to temper "Poesía e modernidade," the last essay in his volume.

Characterizing his encounter with *Blanco* as the confrontation between two poets defined by an avant-garde moment that has passed, de Campos nevertheless works to shape this encounter into a moment of transformation and possibility. The white rainbow, like Paz's "blanco" itself, is not the silence of exhaustion but rather a kaleidoscopic silence replete with possibility.

Paz, Pluralidad, Politics of the Void

In an essay entitled, "The Poet's Version; or, An Ethics of Translation," Lawrence Venuti claims that "the ethics of [a poetic or "creative" translation] hinges on whether it points to a lack or plenitude in the translating language and culture, challenging or confirming institutionalized knowledge" (230). That is, for Venuti, a translation's ethical

³⁹ For more on this, see Chapter 1.

responsibility lies not necessarily in its relationship to the original text but rather to the new cultural context into which the translation emerges. Venuti argues that rather than "foreignizing" a text within a target language, a translation should demonstrate a lack within the receiving culture. However, implicit here is that while the translated text only draws attention to what *was* a lack, the translation at least in part begins the work of filling or compensating for that lack. But what if the lack itself is that which a poet wishes not to identify as already existent but rather to communicate and preserve?

When de Campos translates *Blanco*, he alters Paz's understanding of the void because the void indicated by the new text acts within a cultural context that de Campos resolutely strives to maintain as distinct from the context of the original. To limit discussion of this cultural context to national terms – of Mexico and Brazil – would be reductive as well as misleading. Certainly those contexts play a role, but both de Campos and Paz explicitly discuss their work in terms of its place within distinct international cultures of the avant-garde. Both would identify the necessity for a silence within the avant-garde to allow for that which could subsequently emerge from it. In "The Poet's Version" Venuti identifies a bad translation as that translation which adds to a discursive "plenitude" – a field already established or institutionalized. Paz and de Campos focus on the plenitude of the possible precisely by attempting to maintain a blank space in the overdetermined and already-institutionalized forms of the avant-garde.

By the time that they publish *Transblanco*, both de Campos and Paz see Socialist utopianism as a failed project. Paz would be variously lauded and condemned for his vocal critique of Stalinism, Castro, and those poets who continued to dedicate their work to Communist ideals. Similarly, despite his professed identification as Marxist, Haroldo

de Campos discusses the revolutionary allure of the Cuban Revolution as a thing of the past. For both poets, the void would embody a poetics centered around ideas of multiplicity, but the political charge of the void would be distinct in each case.

In her essay, "Poéticas de la multiplicidad: Octavio Paz y Haroldo de Campos," Maria Esther Maciel compares the multiplicity posited by Paz's critical poetics of analogy to the multiplicity inherent in de Campos's theory of "deglução crítica." Maciel argues that, while Paz "relativiza a un sólo tiempo las semejanzas y las diferencias de una relación," de Campos "le da prioridad a la fuerza de las diferencias, en un proceso que él llama deglución crítica, o sea, la asimilación orgánica por parte de los escritores brasileños e hispanoamericanos del otro, del extranjero" / "While Paz simultaneously relativizes the similarities and differences of relation, [de Campos] gives priority to the force of difference, in a process that he calls critical digestion – the organic assimilation of the foreign by Brazilian and Hispanic writers" (NP). Maciel points out that, where Paz's poetics rely on the play of similarity and difference, de Campos prioritizes difference in his own poetics. However, like most critics, Maciel draws her discussion of de Campos's work from his writings on anthropophagy. An eye toward de Campos's treatment of the fall of the historical utopian avant-garde complicates this.

Despite his efforts at a celebratory tone in "Poesía e modernidade," nostalgia tints de Campos's discussion of his post-utopian artistic output. As he says of Ernst Bloch's utopian "principle of hope:"

Sem esse 'princípio-esperança,' não como vaga abstração, mas como expectativa efetivamente alimentada por uma prática prospectiva, não pode haver vanguardia

entendida como movimento. [. . .] Em seu ensaio de totalização, a vanguarda rasura provisoriamente a diferença, á busca da identidade utópica. [. . .]

Vanguarda, enquanto movimento, é busca de uma nova linguagem comum, de uma nova *koiné*, da linguagem reconciliada, portanto, no horizonte de um mundo transformado. (266)

[Without that "principle of hope" – not as a vague abstraction but as an expectation effectively nourished through a prospective practice – there can be no avant-garde understood as a movement. [. . .] In its attempt at totalization, the avant-garde provisionally erases difference in its search for utopian identity. [. . .] The avant-garde, as a proper movement, is the search for a new common language, a new *koiné* of reconciled language, as part of a transformed world.]

Campos understands the utopian as a search for identity and, in a gesture reminiscent of Benjamin's conception of translation, imagines the historical avant-garde as attempting the journey towards a universal *urspracht*. For de Campos, the vanguard movements were characterized by the desire for a community based in universality and sameness, and implicit in his formulation of a post-utopian aesthetics of difference is the assumption that community is no longer a primary concern. As with Pound, the prolific production and astounding scope of de Campos' translations brings together poetic work separated by thousands of years and whole hemispheres.⁴⁰ Unlike Pound, however, de Campos

⁴⁰ From early in his career, de Campos models both his theory and practice of translation on the example provided by Ezra Pound. As Yao acknowledges in his brief summary of translation's importance for the development of Modernism in English, Pound stands out clearly as the preeminent Anglo-American practitioner and theorist of translation. Yao says that "by the time he declared the importance of translation to the evolution of English literature in 'How to Read,' he could have made a respectable case based virtually on his individual output" (Yao 5).

acknowledges that his translation brings these works not into the center of an exploding and lucrative literary scene but rather into the margins of this world republic of letters. By midway through his career de Campos would celebrate translation as an engine of difference, but this is no longer Pound's utopian project of literary translation. In "Poesia e modernidade" de Campos is unable to conceive (utopian) community across difference. However, Paz's own treatment of the void allows for a revision of de Campos.

Like de Campos, Paz describes modernism's arc in biblical terms. At the outset of his acclaimed essay, *Signos en rotación* (1964), he briefly sketches the genesis of modernist utopianism and its apocalyptic self-destruction. For Paz, as for de Campos, the pre-lapsarian moment of the revolutionary avant-garde is its desire for utopian identity and sameness. Paz, however, goes further, claiming that the vanguards' truly utopian gesture is not its attempts at unity but its efforts to maintain that unity in balance with difference: "La idea cardinal del movimiento revolucionario de la era moderna es la creación de una sociedad universal que, al abolir las opresiones, despliegue simultáneamente la identidad o semejanza original de todos los hombres y la radical diferencia o singularidad de cada uno" / "The cardinal idea of the revolutionary gesture of the modern era is the creation of a universal society that, upon abolishing all oppression, simultaneously releases the original similarity between all men as well as the radical difference of each one" (311). This utopian balance finally meets its undeniable failure, Paz says, not with the loss of sameness but with the loss of difference. What was a journey forward becomes a "proceso circular: la pluralidad se resuelve en uniformidad sin suprimir la discordia entre las naciones ni la escisión en las conciencias; [. . .] Vamos de ningún lado a ninguna parte. *Como el movimiento en el círculo*, decía Lulio, *así es la*

pena en el infierno" / "circular process: plurality returns to uniformity without suppressing the discord between nations nor the rift within individual consciousness; [. . .] We go from nowhere to nowhere. *Like the motion of a circle*, Lulo said, *that is the agony of the inferno*" (312, emphasis his). For Paz, utopia is not predicated on sameness.

As John King notes, Paz "traces a lineage of thought from Fourier to [himself], via André Breton" (King 129-30). However, it is Tantric Buddhism that allows Paz a way to radically rethink what he identifies as Breton's Fourierist eroticism. Tantrism becomes the reformulation of the erotic poetics of analogy and irony that Paz first posits in *El arco y la lira*. *Blanco*, as an exploration of Tantrism as a poetics, is for Paz a utopian poem. However, its utopianism depends on its embodiment of what Paz would refer to as "pluralidad." Like many of Paz's terms, "pluralidad" drifts in and out of his writings without finding any single clear definition.

While Paz is well known for his attempted separation of poetry and politics, his concept of "pluralidad" would also come to characterize his political stance. In practice, King suggests, the title of Paz's famous literary magazine, *Plural*, alludes to the position that it attempted to establish for itself politically. After the dissolution of Emir Rodríguez Monegal's *Mundo Nuevo*, Paz felt the need to establish a journal that could provide a space for discussion not determined by polarized Cold War politics. That is, while he assiduously declined to include in the magazine voices like Neruda or various of the literary figures in support of Castro's Cuba, he also spoke out against the oppressive force of United States libertarianism and its role in the 1968 massacre at Tlatelolco. King notes that while Paz, in answer to this binary, seems to call for "some form of democratic socialism," he never clearly articulates what this might look like or how it might emerge

(King 80). Paz's own particular brand of anti-communism often has been confused with an active advocacy on the part of capitalism or neoliberalism. In his political writings Paz was an active proponent of democracy, but he never, like Llosa, would defend neo-liberal economics nor United States imperialism. Furthermore, while it is necessary to note Paz's gradual trend toward political and cultural conservatism, we needn't follow Paz's own practice of reading his entire *oeuvre* through his most recent works.

King, in his discussion of the inception of *Plural*, points out that Paz initially wanted the magazine to be called *Blanco* (King 55). This at least suggests that the affinity between these terms was one that Paz had noted as well. As in the work of Sarduy, who understands Baroque proliferation of difference as born in an empty center (see Chapter 1), Paz's conception of the void becomes inseparable from his thoughts on plurality. *Transblanco* embodies this perfectly. While Quiroga notes that Paz's desire to treat *Blanco* as a hermetically sealed poetic space contradicts his understanding of it as "critical poetry," de Campos's reinsertion of the poem into an open archive reactivates its critical function. "Branco," like *Blanco* itself, is an apparent appeal to a utopian universality that nevertheless serves to contradict, rather than affirm, its intertexts. Paradoxically, *Blanco* becomes most critical and contentious precisely in its treatment of utopia as negation, and not mere affirmation. As silence became the medium through which radical modernism became radically other, silence itself would gather specific – and contradictory – meanings.

Ihab Hassan has claimed the "literature of silence" as a moment of post-modern apathy, but in *Blanco* and *Transblanco* it becomes a space of possibility. If silence, for Hassan and Sontag, is merely a moment, so is silence in these works. They become a

moment between translations – the translation that has just happened and that which they invite. The silence that each work invokes is one that invokes its own transformation.

Chapter 3: Disappearing Acts: The Textual Performance of Silence

su grito blanco,
desmoronamiento del horizonte
*sobre metros y metros de tela desierta*⁴¹
 -Octavio Paz, from "Piel / sonido del
 mundo"

In 1971, not long after he returned from his tenure as Mexico's ambassador to India, Octavio Paz composed a poetic tribute to the Abstract Expressionist painter Robert Motherwell. Like many of Paz's most famous poems from the 1960s and 1970s, "Piel/sonido del mundo"⁴² is a poetic work of art criticism. It is a collection of associative, impressionistic musings on the experience of viewing various Motherwell canvases. Taking conventional ekphrasis as a point of departure, the poem apes the paintings' abstract forms visually, scattering text between the margins to suggest that words have been flung on the page as impulsively as the painter's "gruesas gotas / negras." However, while Paz imitates Motherwell's brushstrokes – "los hachazos del negro" – he also mimics the painter's inventive use of unpainted canvas. Paz refers to the visually dominating force of this white space as a "grito blanco" – a silence that screams. Citing works like Motherwell's "Elegy to the Spanish Republic" series as models, Paz's poem draws attention to the empty white space that dominates the page.

⁴¹ "its white scream / the horizon collapsing / across meters and meters of deserted canvas." From Octavio Paz, "Piel / Sonido del mundo," *Vuelta* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1976), p. 76-77. All translations from the Spanish are mine.

⁴² Five years later, this poem would be published as part of his collection, *Vuelta* (1976). The following year, Motherwell would begin responding to this and two other poems with a series of 26 lithographs that he eventually would publish as *Three Poems*, trans. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Limited Editions Club, 1987).

Throughout his tribute to Motherwell, Paz suggests a parallel between the blank white canvas and the "silent" abstract forms that cover it. As he claims elsewhere, the Abstract Expressionist painter attempts to forge a private language, which is no language at all. Paz explains that "if everyone were to speak his or her own language," the only possible expression is *el grito*—the scream—or silence (9).⁴³ Even after Motherwell has finished a painting, the work remains a "tela desierta" (empty canvas). For Paz, this is a silence that closes the work. It bars its audience from intervening or interacting with it. And, most importantly, it does so in the context of a movement privileged enough to have its silence not only heard but broadcast. After World War II, Abstract Expressionism benefited from CIA funding as well as from the increasing privatization of the art market. In various of his writings on Abstract Expressionism, Paz suggests the irony of an art that attempts to "speak" with the world by refusing to speak at all.

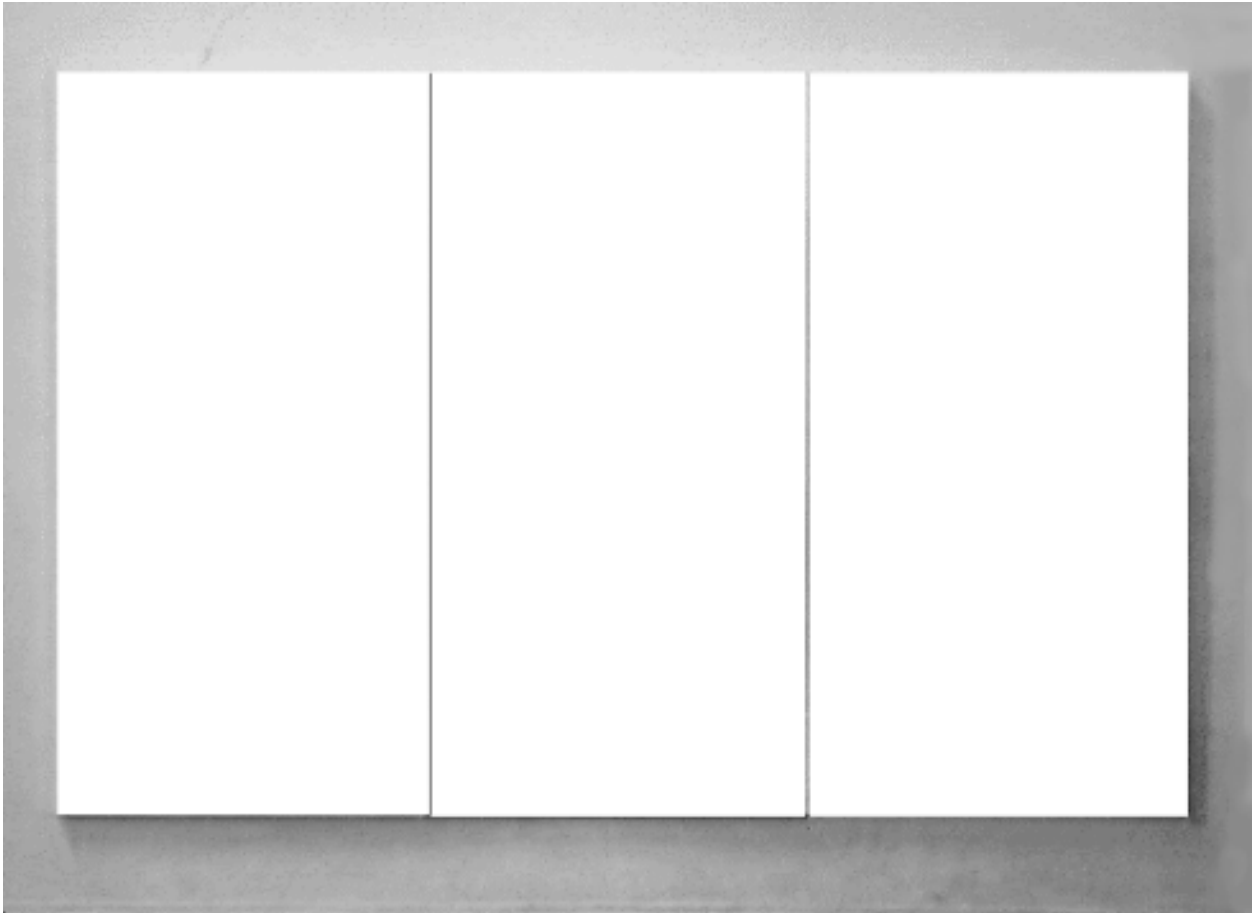
In this chapter I argue that, during the Cold War, aesthetic silence became an ideologically charged tool for shaping art's relationship with its audience. Artistic silence – especially that of Motherwell and his Abstract Expressionist colleagues – exerted influence through the myriad critical discourses surrounding it, but also through its ability to influence the way that we approach, consume, or understand a work of art. As Paz points out in "Piel/sonido del mundo," silence is a means of action. But while Paz criticizes the isolating silence of Abstract Expressionist art in poems like "Piel/sonido del mundo," he proposes a different sort of silence that serves to open the artwork and invite participation from its audience. Susan Sontag would claim that "silence is the furthest

⁴³ "si cada uno habla un lenguaje propio, el resultado es la incomunicación, la muerte del lenguaje. [. . .] En un caso desemboca en el silencio y en el otro en el grito." All translations from the Spanish are mine.

extension of [a] reluctance to communicate" (*Styles of Radical Will* NP), but Paz shows how silence merely demands that we understand communication differently. By investigating the correspondence and artistic tributes that Paz would share with two of his colleagues, composer John Cage and painter Adja Yunkers, this essay explores the ways in which these artists conceived of silence as a means of relating to and acting upon others through painting, music, and poetry.

Silence at Mid-Century

In 1953 Robert Rauschenberg displayed a series of works that would quickly become among his most controversial – the *White Paintings*. Here Rauschenberg used smooth paint rollers to apply white house paint to his canvases, leaving them devoid of any distinguishing mark. As Branden Joseph notes in his discussion of the *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg seems to have composed them as an experiment with the limits of Clement Greenberg's formulation of modern painting as a medium defined by its flatness. "In this way," Joseph says, "Rauschenberg's pure white, monochrome canvases occupy a terminal point in this modernist development, reprising the historical role played by the monochrome as the degree zero of painting."¹ The *White Paintings* could thus represent the culmination of a tradition of all-white field painting. This tradition had flirted with absolute negation since Kazimir Malevich's Suprematist canvas *White on White*, in which a white square appears barely visible against a white background. Now that tradition would find its most radically negative gesture in Rauschenberg's pure white canvases (1918).



Throughout his career Rauschenberg would position himself against Abstract Expressionism's celebration of the individual artist's ego, and his *White Paintings* embody that opposition. Where his Abstract Expressionist colleagues like Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning discussed their painting as a projection of their interior selves or their psychological states, Rauschenberg created a series of canvases in which no visible trace of his own hand remains. To Abstract Expressionism's critical language of drips, splashes, and fractals, the *White Paintings* reassert a radical focus on surface and stasis. Nevertheless, critical discussions of them would also participate in one of the dominant discourses surrounding Abstract Expressionism – that of silence. As James

Heffernan has noted, abstract art "seems to renounce any reference to recognizable objects and thus to stories we might tell about them," and therefore "has become notorious for its taciturnity, its will to silence" ("Speaking for Pictures" 25).⁴⁴

Rauschenberg's all-white field paintings capitalized on just such a notoriety. Despite their supposed opposition to Abstract Expressionism, the *White Paintings* drew praise and disdain couched in much the same language used to discuss Pollock, Motherwell, or de Kooning. Allen Krapow, for instance, would testify to the *White Paintings*' "numbing, devastating silence" (quoted in Reed, *Art and Homosexuality* 155). Critics frequently accused the Abstract Expressionists of creating works that were cryptic or that defied explanation, and Rauschenberg's own description of the *White Paintings* playfully seems to indulge such an accusation. According to him, the paintings deal with "suspense, excitement and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing, the point a circle begins and ends" (Rauschenberg, letter to Betty Parsons, 18 Oct 1951; qtd in Joseph "white on white" 91).

During the 1950s and 1960s, critics of Abstract Expressionism increasingly characterized the movement's rejection of figuration as a refusal to speak. Harold Rosenberg, who was among the movement's greatest champions, claimed of William Baziotes' work in 1947 that "the textures seem to absorb silence as if the paints had been mixed in the medium of sleep" (quoted in Sandler, "Baziotes" 66). Another prominent critic and theorist, George Steiner, claims of the movement as a whole that "the work

⁴⁴ In fact, Heffernan positions the birth of abstract painting at about 1900, and points out that by 1918 Kasimir Malevich had already created his notorious all-white field painting, *White on White*. Such experiments with absence and silence had then accompanied the mainstream of abstract art since its inception.

stands mute or attempts to shout at us in a kind of inhuman gibberish" ("Retreat" 201). Dismissing the painting of Jackson Pollock and his colleagues as "vivid wallpaper," Steiner argues that Abstract Expressionism participates in a general trend whereby modern societies rely less and less on language to communicate experience of the world. As Steiner says, "the world of words has shrunk" (203). Where art previously relied on language and representation, it now responds to realities – indeterminacy, quantum mechanics, electronic relation – that belong to "the sub-languages or anti-languages of non-objective art" (203).

While Paz, Steiner, and others highlight the ways in which Abstract Expressionism's silence discourages or disrupts sense-making, these same statements in turn participate in the construction of a recognizable and politicized discourse surrounding that silence. Silence eventually would be the subject of a critical discourse so saturated that in 1961 Susan Sontag could bemoan a contemporary art scene that had become "noisy with appeals for silence" (*Styles of Radical Will* NP). At the same time that Sontag declared that much contemporary art presents a "plenitude to which the audience can add nothing," others were quick to point out that Abstract Expressionism's refusal of figuration and representation made it dependent on the stories told about it by its critics (Sontag NP). Steiner, Rosenberg, and others apparently resolved this contradiction by turning their focus on silence itself. They filled this silence by describing it.

Like many of Abstract Expressionism's critics, Paz would express the necessity of transposing Abstract Expressionism's silent image into words. However, in poems like "Piel/sonido del mundo," he does so not to fill that silence but to preserve it. As Paz's

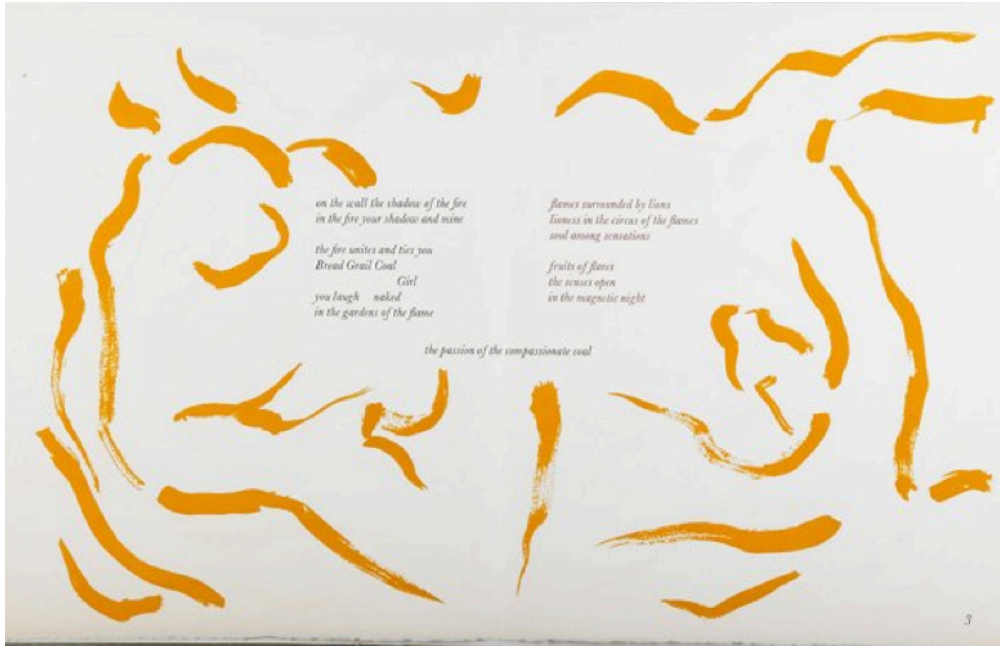
work would demonstrate with increasing precision throughout the 1960s, silence does not have to be the absence of meaning or communication. Instead it can accrue meaning, participate in its creation, and shape it in unconventional ways. "Piel/sonido del mundo," for example, constantly guides our attention to the ways in which blank space determines our approach to the text of the poem. For Paz, recreating the experience of viewing a Motherwell in poetry means reproducing, conveying, or translating Motherwell's own silence. However, while Paz characterizes the Abstract Expressionists' silence as prohibiting the participation of its audience, he makes silence into an experience to be shared with others. Sontag claims that silence "is a metaphor for a cleansed, noninterfering vision, in which one might envisage the making of art-works that are unresponsive before being seen, inviolable in their essential integrity by human scrutiny," but for Paz silence is precisely that which invites the viewer's participation (Sontag NP).

Octavio Paz's *Blanco* (1966) remains Latin America's most iconic literary experiment with silence. Originally published on one continuous ream of paper that folds out in accordion fashion, the poem invites its readers to approach the work in a number of ways—turning the pages like a book, folding them outwards in a continuous reading, or, as one critic does, even hanging the entire thing as a sort of mobile from the ceiling.⁴⁵ But *Blanco* demands that any reading take into account the silent space of the page behind the text. As the title suggests, it is a poem about blankness. *Blanco*, in Spanish, means both "blank" and "target." Here, the empty white page is not merely the poem's point of

⁴⁵ See Sayers Peden, "A 'Meditation' on *Blanco*" in Chantikian 183-90.

departure but also what it aims for. *Blanco* is a journey toward emptiness through poetry. Calling attention to the ultimate meaninglessness of all signifiers, the poem establishes an analogy between the emptiness of its words and the emptiness of the page behind them. As the poem argues, its words are merely a translation of this other silence. To read *Blanco* is to confront silence through language. As the title playfully suggests, the poem *is* the blank expanse of paper on which it rests.

Because the text of *Blanco* is comprised of multiple fragments and columns that never find any definitive or final configuration, Paz would characterize it as a work waiting to exist through its readers, continually reborn with each new interpretation. To substantiate this claim is a wealth of translations, illustrated editions, annotated manuscripts, poetic interpretations, a short animated film, a musical score, and even an iPad app. Among these many reinventions of Paz's poem, one of the most remarkable is the 1974 edition from New York publisher The Press, translated into English by Eliot Weinberger and illuminated by Abstract Expressionist painter Adja Yunkers. Like the poem's first edition, this version comes collected in a box rather than bound in book form. It includes a lithograph of Paz's original manuscript, followed by Weinberger's translation of the text, which Yunkers intersperses with his own illuminations. Yunkers' artwork is varied but uniformly abstract. At times he pastes bits of colored paper to the page, or dips crumpled paper in ink and uses it as a print. At other times he drags tempera paint in broad swaths below the text, or dabs spots of it onto blank pages. Some of these images are hand-crafted, while others are reproductions, and still others feature a mixture of hand-crafted and reproduced elements.

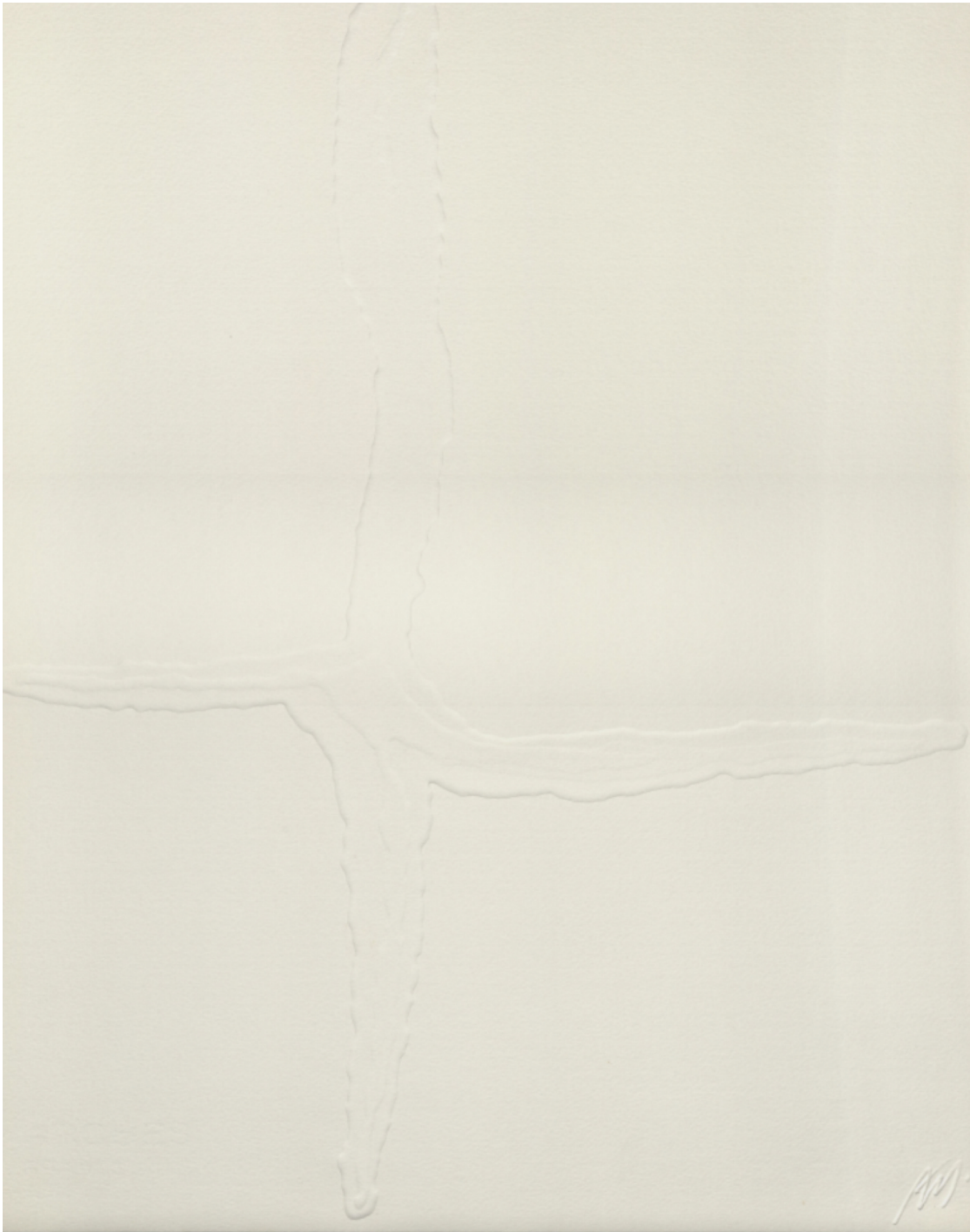


In 1972, two years before the publication of Yunkers' illuminated edition of *Blanco*, Paz had written of Yunkers' work that it brilliantly manages both to fill space and to empty it (*In/mediaciones* 272).⁴⁶ Yunkers, Paz says, alerts us to the ways in which the blank space of the canvas itself acts as a material presence, allowing us "to hear what the blank wall says, to read the empty sheet of paper, to contemplate the apparition of forms upon a neutral surface"⁴⁷ (272). In his own interpretation of *Blanco*, Yunkers appears to bring this praise back to Paz's own work. Playing with the idea of "reading" an empty sheet of paper, Yunkers embosses certain passages of text rather than printing them in ink. Even as early as the work's title page, where the word *Blanco* has been pressed into the paper, we are confronted once again with the idea that the poem itself *is* the blank

⁴⁶ Paz's essay on Yunkers, composed in 1972, was published seven years later in *In/mediaciones*.

⁴⁷ "oír lo que dice el muro vacío, leer la hoja de papel en blanco, contemplar la aparición de las formas en una superficie neutra."

space of the page, and that its words (and Yunkers' images) merely allow us to see that space differently.



Kelly Austin has commented that Yunkers' version of *Blanco* is unusual because it treats silence visually, highlighting "the fact that a translation goes through at least two orders of refashioning: moving from one language to another and from one visual format to another" (Austin 2-3). However, this in turn calls attention to a third order of refashioning through which *Blanco* (and its silence) has passed: from one process of artistic production to another. Yunkers, who was strongly associated with the Abstract Expressionists, participated in a movement that professed to value the act of art over its product. In 1952 Harold Rosenberg famously declared that the subject of this new "action painting" was the process of its own creation. Throughout "The American Action Painters," Rosenberg discusses painting in the language of theatre. The painter, he says, "has become an actor," creating "dramas" by transforming the canvas into "an arena in which to act" (22).

By constantly calling attention to the hand behind the brush (through signature, spontaneous and hand-painted brushstrokes, or even what appears to be finger painting) Yunkers' illuminations of *Blanco* discourage a search for formal correspondence between image and text, instead suggesting parallel acts of creation, as if the book could serve as a record of a duet or inter-artistic "happening." Yunkers treats *Blanco* as a dramatic text that demands performance. In Paz's poem, the text describes and thematizes the poet's act of releasing his words onto the page. Yunkers "illuminates" this aspect of *Blanco* not by representing what it describes, or "translating" it to another medium, but by emphasizing his own artistic process in parallel ways. Each book is unique, with its hand-crafted and

hand-painted elements that should, according to Abstract Expressionist thought, draw our attention to the physical act of their creation.

But to consider *Blanco* as a dramatic text demands an unconventional understanding of performance. Rosenberg would claim that "what was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event," an imagined performance supposedly recreated before us through the traces it has left behind (1952: 23), but *Blanco* turns this on its head. As a poem always waiting to be reconfigured and (re)composed, *Blanco* draws attention to a series of absences: of the author or "actor," of any originary "event" of creation, and of any stable meaning in the poem. Here the author's most important performance is his or her withdrawal from the process of the text's creation, leaving us with a performance that is doubly absent: an absent performance of absence itself. As Yunkers' version emphasizes, *Blanco* calls not for embodiment but for disembodiment and disappearance.

While *Blanco* suggests the ways in which silence can become an author's means of performance, Yunkers shows how it can be a means of action for the reader as well. Rather than merely interpreting *Blanco*'s silence, Yunkers "reinterprets" it, reenacting the text's silence by drawing attention to it in different ways. Just as sections of his edition of the poem are embossed upon on a blank page, crafting a poem that literally disappears as one reads it, Yunkers' signatures throughout the book are similarly embossed. The signature constantly threatens to disappear, even as we are reminded that this is not in fact a signature at all: it is the mechanical reproduction of one. Placing this impersonal stamp on each page that contains hand-crafted elements, Yunkers draws attention to his own hand while simultaneously emphasizing its absence. An act of creation instead

becomes a disappearing act. Elin Diamond points out that "each performance marks out a unique temporal space that nevertheless contains traces of other now-absent performances, other now-disappeared scenes," but Yunkers draws attention to this absence itself as the substance of the performance (1996: 1). Rather than invoking the presence of a creator who refuses to speak (as in most Abstract Expressionist art), Yunkers' silence signals the absence of authority and invites the participation of his audience. Just as Yunkers interprets Paz's silence, he encourages his audience to do the same.

Finally, both Paz and Yunkers' versions of *Blanco* call attention to the ways in which silence itself acts upon us as readers. It shapes our experience of the text. As Bernard Dauenhauer argues, "silence is not merely linked with some active human performance. It is itself an active performance" (*Silence* 4).⁴⁸ Dauenhauer approaches silence from a phenomenological point of view, treating it as a force in its own right. However, while he claims that a consideration of discursive context is key for examining the ways in which silence serves as a performance, his discussion almost never includes concrete examples. Wolfgang Iser, who makes similar claims to Dauenhauer within the realm of textual analysis, argues that "blanks can perform in a literary text" (*The Act of Reading* 183). For Iser, these blanks – moments of what he identifies as textual indeterminacy and readerly confusion – constitute a "suspension of connectability." However, Iser focuses on the role of textual "blanks" in narrative works that remain

⁴⁸ Here I also draw on Vicky Unruh's understanding of the avant-garde text as a "performance text." As Unruh argues, these texts become performative by calling attention not only the process of their creation but also to the processes by which the reader interacts with them—their "concrete playing out, their 'doing,' of specific aesthetic positions" (1994: 43, 48).⁴⁸

linear. In Paz and Yunkers' versions of *Blanco*, silence is not a mere suspension of connectability, but rather the complete dissolution of it.

Yunkers' departure from Abstract Expressionism's critical discourse of silence finds precedent in the work of John Cage, who would do more than any other postwar artist or intellectual to popularize the idea of "silent" art. In 1961, for example, Cage would change the art world's understanding of Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* by describing their silence in terms of actions rather than surface. He characterizes them as "airports for lights, shadows, and particles," no longer constituted as mere surface but rather as the chance play of ambient elements across that surface (*Silence* 102). The artist's silence allows chance to intervene. In much the same way that *Blanco* inspires Yunkers' illuminations, Cage would claim that the *White Paintings* provided the inspiration for his own most famous musical piece, *4'33*. "Here a pianist sits without playing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds, allowing the performer's silence to become a celebration of ambient sound: air in circulation, traffic outside the auditorium, or even the sound of someone rudely talking during the performance. As Branden Joseph explains, Cage's interpretation of Rauschenberg's blank canvases turned a gesture of indeterminate negation into one of equally open affirmation. Rauschenberg's purely negative gesture, the culmination of what one critic described as "dada shenanigans," becomes something else entirely (Crehan 25; quoted in Joseph 94). Cage's music, visual art, and poetry would all explore the silence of the artist as creator, who now renounces

authorial control by relying on chance operations of composition and performance.⁴⁹

Cage retains an understanding of 4'33" as performance while getting rid of the idea of a solitary performer. Even while silence, for many critics of Abstract Expressionism, could embody Abstract Expressionism's attempt toward absolute subjectivity, for Cage it became exactly the opposite.

Silence in music, Cage says, traditionally has been conceived as "pause or / punctuation," serving to stress relationships between sounds, where "the in- / troduction or / interruption / of silence might / give definition." However:

Where none of these
other goals
is present, si-
lence becomes some-
thing else—not si-
lence at all, but
sounds. The na-
ture of these is
unpredicta-
ble and changing.
These sounds (which are
called silence on-
ly because they do not form part
of a musi-
cal intention)
may be depen-
ded upon to

⁴⁹ Although Cage would collaborate with members of the Abstract Expressionists at various points throughout the 1950s, co-editing a journal with Robert Motherwell and participating in the influential Artists Club, his ambivalent stance toward the movement grew increasingly critical. By 1966, speaking of the Abstract Expressionists' attempts to transfer the self to the canvas, Cage could say bluntly that he had become "disgusted with such ideas" (Sandler, *A Sweeper-Up* 257). Cage agrees with De Kooning, who told him once, "We are different. You don't want to be an artist, whereas I want to be a great artist." It is at this level of personal identity—and the role of that identity in the creation of art—that critics have opposed Cage's work to that of the Abstract Expressionists. Caroline A. Jones, for example, claims that Cage worked to combat "the problematic of the abstract expressionist ego." Through "word, deed, and negativity," Jones argues, Cage would "address what would come to appear hegemonic in American modernism of the 1950s: the cultural construction of the artist as a masculine solitary, his artwork as a pure statement of individual genius and autonomous will" (Jones 630).

exist. The world
 teems with them, and
 is, in fact, at
 no point free of
 them. (*Silence* 23)

This passage from *Silence*, adapted from notes for a lecture that Cage delivered at Rutgers University in 1958, looks to introduce silence into the text as more than mere negative space. As in Cage's chance-composed lectures, in which he often would stand at a podium without speaking for a determined amount of time, this textual meditation on silence makes use of the blank page as an element equally important as the text itself. Cage composes the essay in narrow columns separated by solid lines, and leaves large blank spaces—sometimes between paragraphs and sometimes within them. As in *Blanco*, the effect of this use of the blank page is two-fold; while it performs what the passage describes, participating in the meaning of the text, it also performs Cage's understanding of silence by actively dissolving meaning. If silence can join the words in creating meaning within the essay, Cage likewise encourages his readers to ignore the meaning of the words and to consider them precisely as they might consider the blank page—as empty and enjoyable merely as sound and image independent of meaning.

It is Cage's unique textual play with silence that would lead Octavio Paz to exclaim, in a letter to Cage dated February 1, 1968, "I've been reading and rereading *Silence* and *A Year from Monday* and I think more and more that you are one of the real poets of the English language." That same year, Paz would compose "Lectura de John Cage," published in *Ladera este* (1969) alongside *Blanco* and other poems written during his time as Mexican ambassador to India. In a letter dated December 19, 1969, Paz explains to Cage the deceptively simple concept behind the poem: "I've written a small

text in the form of a poem to tell the thoughts I thought while reading *A Year from Monday*." Paz opens the poem, "Lectura de John Cage," with a reflection on his own personal experience of reading Cage:

Leído
 Desleído
*Music without measurements,
 Sounds passing through circumstances.*
 Dentro de mí los oigo
 Pasar afuera
 Fuera de mí los veo
 Pasar conmigo

[Read
 Unread
*Music without measurements,
 Sounds passing through circumstances.*
 Inside of me I hear them
 Move outside of me
 Outside of me I see them
 Move along with me]

Excerpting from Cage's book, *A Year from Monday*, Paz invites us to read along with him. He takes Cage's conception of chance-determined music as a starting point, and begins the poem by building it around the experience of sounds "passing through circumstance." Describing an effect like that in the above passage from *Silence* (or in Yunkers' New Directions edition of *Blanco*), Paz here posits the words on the page as reduced to sounds and images that pass in ("read") and out of ("unread") his experience of them. Like Cage's use of the blank page in his essay from *Silence*, Paz's typography

does not disrupt syntax but nevertheless forces us to consider the white space against which the text is set.

Like Yunkers' edition of *Blanco*, Paz's poem presents itself as an homage. It excerpts from Cage's texts with reverence and care, and dispenses with Paz's accustomed solemnity and sonority to adopt instead the casual tone and essayistic character that mark so much of Cage's own poetry. Like Cage, who often would transform randomly chosen excerpts from his diaries into poetry through chance composition, Paz finds a rhythm that is at once conversational and unnatural; casual but also stilted and repetitious. Perhaps Paz's greatest gesture of homage is his presentation of his poem not as interpretation or criticism of Cage's ideas about silence but as an illustration of them. Like Yunkers, Paz appears to attempt to perform Cage's philosophy of silence through text, "reenacting" Cage's silence by repeating it.

Where "Reading John Cage" departs radically from Cage's own professed ideas about silence is in Paz's presentation of his poem itself *as* music. For Cage, language and music would be mutually exclusive. That is, as he explains elsewhere:

When I hear what we call music it seems to me that someone is talking, and talking about his feelings or about his ideas—of relationships. But when I hear traffic—the sound of traffic—here on Sixth Avenue, I don't have the feeling that anyone is talking. I have the feeling that sound is acting, and I love the activity of sound. [. . .] I don't need sound to talk to me. (*Écoute*)

Implicit in this understanding of traditional music as based in the relationships between sounds, and as being like someone "talking," is an understanding of this music as

attempting to imitate language. But Paz's "Reading John Cage" equates music with language.

In "Reading John Cage," music becomes the dominant metaphor for language itself, but Paz's poem also functions like a musical score, with the blank space of the page indicating the silence between words—a silence through which words relate to one another, and whose existence makes meaning possible. As Paz further explains to Cage in his letter of December 19th: "I wrote ["Lectura de John Cage"] partially following your method: chance and numbers selected the pages of *A Year from Monday* where I could extract some sentences; then I chose the sentences and wrote them on some sheets of paper; then I wrote in the vacant spaces." Paz adopts Cage's method only as a point of departure. He uses it to create blanks, which he then fills with a poem that constantly points to the silent space that underwrites it. By the time that Cage writes *Silence*, he specifically writes against the traditional view of silence as merely "vacant space" to be filled with music.

For Cage, silence is an imperative not to speak at all. For Paz, silence needs to be spoken, expressed *through* language. As in *Blanco*, Paz uses "Reading John Cage" to point to the silence of non-meaning *within* words themselves. Paz is interested in silence as structuring all communication, undermining authorial intention and control from within language, rather than from without. While Paz's poem presents itself as homage, it consistently contradicts the theories of silence presented in the works from which it excerpts. In many ways, "Lectura de John Cage" glosses Paz's own *Blanco* more effectively than it illuminates Cage's thoughts on silence. Like Yunkers, Paz creates a poem that reinterprets and reenacts Cage's silence, but in the process this silence is

altered. Paz alters the act of falling silent through poetry, as well as its significance. Paz returns Cage's silence to a place within discourse.

Cage's homage to Paz, "White on Blanco for OP" (1980), operates precisely in reverse. Where Paz excerpts from Cage's work to return his conception of silence to a place within the overall functioning of language, Cage attempts to disrupt any possibility of normally functioning language in Paz's poetry. Cage excerpts from *Blanco* in order to rework the text so that it operates according to his own understanding of silence as opposed to language.

el cOmienzo
 Con
 los ojos abierTos inocente
 promiscuA
 alto en su Vara
 cabeza en una pIca
 un girasOl

 un Pulso
 oleAje de sílabas húmedas
 aguZar

Cage turns *Blanco* into one of his own so-called mesostic poems.⁵⁰ Like Paz's original work, which plays with multiple possible configurations of a single text, Cage's mesostic

⁵⁰ Cage's method in composing mesostic poems would vary throughout his career, but always used chance to arrange excerpted text around a central axis, which in turn spells a word or a repeating series of words. In the case of this poem, composition has followed the rule that no capitalized may appear in the space between itself and the capital letter preceding it. Together, capital letters form the name "Octavio Paz," which repeats along the vertical axis.

form excerpts from its source text and reconfigures it according to chance. For Paz, *Blanco*'s recombinant form draws attention to the never-achieved totality of the poem. There is never any final form nor definitive way of reading *Blanco*, which for Paz creates a poem that constantly dissolves back into non-meaning and silence. Similarly, for Cage the mesostic form's reliance on chance operations allows the composer's silence to become the structuring element.

"White on Blanco for OP" manages to follow Cage's own prescribed poetic rules much more closely than do the great majority of his other mesostics. In addition to following Cage's strict order of operations, this poem is the only among Cage's many mesostics excerpted entirely from a foreign language. Cage would have had access to Weinberger's 1974 English translation of *Blanco*, and yet he chose to excerpt from the Spanish, which he could not read. Perhaps it is as a result of this that the reconfigured text bears none of the marks of the "corrected chance" that characterize most of Cage's mesostics. That is, instead of adjusting the final product so as to comply with conventional syntax, Cage leaves the poem fractured. With the exception, perhaps, of the last three lines ("el esPíritu / es unA / el comienZo el cimientO") the poem presents no clearly complete sentences. While for Paz *Blanco* is a poem about the non-meaning silence from which all language emerges and eventually returns, Cage fixes that non-meaning by fracturing the poem. The text of the *Blanco* always exists in relation to the non-meaning space of the page itself, and Cage once again presses that materiality to the forefront by attempting to turn Paz's poem into just that—the image and sound of words as material.

By refusing to be a "reading" of Paz's poem in any conventional sense, Cage's "White on Blanco for OP" resists Paz's understanding of silence as already operative within language. But Cage's poem nevertheless remains an interpretation of *Blanco*—not merely a manipulation, appropriation, or mangling of it. Like Yunkers' illuminated text, "White on Blanco" treats its source text as an invitation to participate in the process of "speaking" silence. While Cage's title signals a translation from English to Spanish, the fact that the poem offers only a reconfiguration of the original text suggests that the translation is not of the text itself but somehow of the silence behind it. Like the logical paradox of *Blanco*, which attempts to equate silence with speech, or fullness with emptiness, "White on Blanco" confronts its readers with an irresolvable puzzle resembling that of a Zen Buddhist *kōan*. Playfully, Cage encourages us to ask whether adding "white" to "blanco" could constitute translation, adaptation, erasure, or palimpsest—or perhaps all of these at once.

Like much of Cage's work, his nonsensical reconfiguration of *Blanco* suggests that the poem is more important for what it *does* than for what it *is*. It pays homage, but also suggests irreverence. Here, Cage again appears to play with a precedent set by Rauschenberg, who experimented with creating his "all white" paintings by first erasing an existing drawing. The resulting work, "Erased de Kooning" (1953), has become one of Rauschenberg's most celebrated. As Irving Sandler points out, Rauschenberg's erasure of De Kooning's drawing generally was viewed as an act of "wiping the slate clean of Abstract Expressionism," but that the ghost of the original shows through (*New York School* 177). It is a celebration of the master's work and a celebration of his own work at the master's expense. Although Rauschenberg physically erased the work (painstakingly,

over the course of several weeks), Cage discusses the erasure as a "painting over:"

"Rauschenberg walks in. No one home. He paints a new painting over the old one. [. . .]

It's a joy in fact to begin over again. In preparation he erases the De Kooning" (*Silence* 101). Indeed, Rauschenberg's gesture demonstrates that erasure can *become* palimpsest.

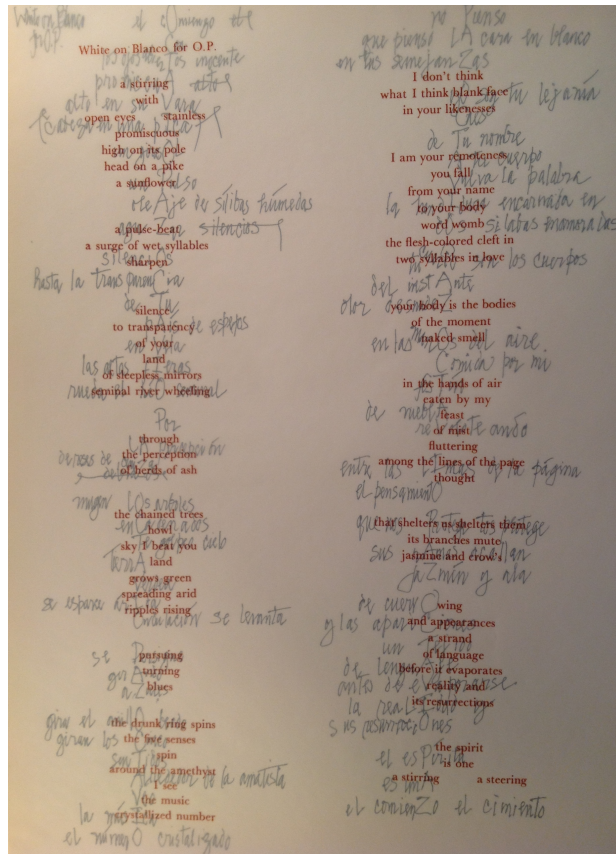
The act of erasure can take on meaning of its own. As Cage would explain, this is not the subtraction of something (in this case, a valuable work by a celebrated master) but rather the *addition* of nothing. In the same spirit, Cage adds "white" to "blanco," turning one act of artistic silence into another. Conceptually, Cage has erased what already aspired to be "blank"—"blanco." Rather than transforming something into nothing, he transforms one nothing into another. The poem playfully encourages us to consider whether this is possible—and how it might matter at all.

In 1989, Weinberger would again participate in the creation of an art book dedicated to Paz's work—this time for an illustrated compilation of the poems that Paz and Cage had dedicated to one another. With Ilse Schreiber-Noll, who provided paintings and directed the book's composition, Weinberger contributed translations of "Lectura de John Cage" and "White on Blanco for O.P." The work was printed in an edition of 14 at the Center for Editions, SUNY-Purchase, and is comprised of an assortment of single sheets, folded sheets, and pages folded in an accordion style, all bound within a large folio. It includes a number of texts: first, the original Spanish of Paz's poem, "Lectura de John Cage;" next, Weinberger's English translation of Paz's poem with illustrations by Schreiber, which takes up the majority of the volume; a reproduction of Cage's original manuscript for "White on Blanco for O.P.," along with Weinberger's translation of it; and

finally, pasted to the inside of the back cover, a mesostic poem by Weinberger himself, "White on *White on Blanco for O.P. for John Cage.*"

As with the New Directions edition of *Blanco*, the size of this art book—in excess of a foot in width by two feet in height—lends to this tribute an air of the monumental. Like the front of its box suggests, with its twin engraved portraits of Paz and Cage, the book commemorates a friendship between two poets. It does so by reproducing side-by-side two poems originally published years apart—as if, more than merely testifying to a friendship, the compilation could recreate a moment of encounter between the two poets. So much of the work seems bent on invoking their immediate presence within the work: the personally penciled signatures of both poets on the title page; the hand-painted calligraphy of "Reading John Cage;" the mimeographed reproduction of Cage's original manuscript for "White on Blanco." And yet, as in Yunkers' edition of *Blanco*, all of these measures stress the poets' absence, and the absence of the act on which the volume centers.

Despite the book's attempted recreation of a moment of encounter between Paz and Cage, the most immediate presence is not that of the poets themselves but rather the illustrator and translator. After all, the calligraphic script of "Reading John Cage" is in Schreiber's handwriting and Weinberger's translation. A reproduction of Paz's poem in the original Spanish, meanwhile, is printed in a conventional type and occupies only a few sheets. And while Schreiber provides a mimeograph of Cage's original manuscript, she also includes Weinberger's translation on a transparency that serves as a sort of overlay, providing a simultaneous translation of a text that becomes barely legible in the background:



While the book recreates a moment of encounter, it does so in much the same way as actors might in a historical play, reenacting a moment accessible to us now only through the mediation of the players on a stage. Building a collection of poems around a moment of encounter that cannot be recovered, Schreiber and Weinberger treat translation and illustration in a way that suggests an act of dramatic interpretation.

Throughout her illustrations of "Reading John Cage," Schreiber's treatment of the poem mimics Paz's own approach as a reader of Cage's texts. Paz writes as if narrating his encounter with *Silence* and *A Year from Monday* in real time. We "read with" him as he navigates these materials. Accordingly, Schreiber's illustrations not only emphasize a progressive movement through time but provide a sort of stage across which the action of reading unfolds. The volume's cover sets this stage: a densely wooded forest in black and

green, set against the burn sienna wash that will provide a background for the rest of the poem. As the text progresses across the pages, the continuity of various landscape elements—trees, telephone poles, and railroad tracks—forces us to consider our own role in creating the movement of the poem. As Paz stresses throughout his works, writing is a journey that the reader undertakes. At various points we must lift up flaps, moving the landscape to reveal the text. At other times we are confronted with pages of painting without text, left to ponder the image or turn the page. With its varied sizing and spacing of the calligraphic script, Schreiber's version lends the translated poem a rhythm not found in the original. The effect is at times that of increasing speed, with more and more words on each page, or of sudden dramatic pause, as when we turn the page to find a large portrait of Cage staring back at us.

While Schreiber's illuminations of "Reading John Cage" emphasize the dramatic movement within the poem, the folio edition as a whole creates a parallel movement between the individual poems that comprise it. Like the poems themselves, the collection treats silence as an act to be interpreted—and reinterpreted—through poetry. The act of silence is ambivalent: speaking by not speaking, or vice versa; both appropriating and renouncing the source text; offering homage and critique. As in the interplay between the individual poems by Paz and Cage, the silence presented in Schreiber's folio edition is one achieved collaboratively, with each artist speaking—and not speaking—together.

As Schreiber and Weinberger's edition of these poems emphasizes, Cage and Paz disagreed drastically about the nature and proper artistic application of silence, but at the same time they would strike up a friendship and long-term correspondence that has everything to do with their shared fascination with silence in art. Neither Paz nor Cage

ever backs away from their totally opposing opinions about silence's proper relationship to language, and yet this seems to serve a sense of solidarity. Strong misreading becomes the basis for a strong friendship—or perhaps vice versa. It is the task of the following section to investigate this apparent paradox; if Paz and Cage hold opposing views on silence's relationship to language during a time when this debate drew a political line in the sand, what do we make of the fact that these two writers appear to inhabit this debate as a means of expressing affinity, solidarity, and friendship?

Criticism that explores the role of silence in *Blanco* or in Cage's work overwhelming seems to bear out the claims of Hassan, Barthes, or Blanchot. Indeed, contemporary criticism of their work in general tends to remember both men for a formalist flight from political engagement. When they first met in Delhi in the summer of 1967, Cage and Paz were busy independently elaborating radically formalist poetics of silence. However, it was precisely this fascination with silence that would bring them together to sustain a friendship and correspondence that lasted for nearly two decades. Critics generally approach experimental poetry as a solitary exercise, and often assume that a poetics of silence necessarily represents an extreme case of hermeticism or isolation, but silence in the work of Cage and Paz becomes exactly the opposite. Behind their correspondence and their exchange of poems lies a question: if the lot of contemporary literature is silence, how might one convert this silence into a participative, collaborative act?

Cage and Paz, like Yunkers, approach poetry, art, and music not as artefacts or objects but as distinct forms of being and behaving. They signal the ways in which falling

silent through these media becomes an act charged with significance and precedent. These acts of silence are rich with allusion—to each others' work and to that of their contemporaries, like Rauschenberg or Yunkers, but also to a long line of "blank" poetry, "white" art, and "silent" music. The "blanchure rigide" of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un coup de dés* looms large behind Paz's *Blanco*, just as Cage's "White on Blanco for O.P." plays with the title of Kazimir Malevich's suprematist masterpiece, *White on White*. To view artistic silence as an act is to change one's relationship to these precedents. For both Cage and Paz, what is important is not simply being silent, but being silent together. As Cage was fond of saying, sometimes the best communication happens in silence.

In the rich weave of allusion that runs throughout their silent works, Cage and Paz turn their own silence into a means of pointing to the silences of others. At the same time, however, their exchange of poetic silences becomes exactly the opposite. In celebrating the other's work, each poet also drastically reconfigures it. Cage and Paz demonstrate that silence can never merely be transmitted. In art, poetry, or music, any silence is an act that must be interpreted and reinterpreted. "Reenacting" another's silence, as I argue that they do in their poetry, necessarily changes that act and brings it to a new context and audience. This is what often makes these works so difficult to characterize or discuss. The exchange between Paz and Cage is structured by a series of logical paradoxes of the sort with which they both had become so fascinated. They represent both homage and rejection; open affirmation and indeterminate negation; an assertion of mutual presence and simultaneous disappearance; a way of being in the world and a way of retiring from it. These poets use silence to revise the ways in which poetry serves as a means of relating to others.

For both Paz and Cage, silence is that which destroys language, but also that which renews it. Silence ruptures discourse, but at the same time opens new spaces and opportunities within discourses that have become calcified or overdetermined. While these poets would agree with Barthes, Blanchot, and Steiner that avant-garde language had reached a moment of crisis, they see silence not as the end of literature but as its means of transfiguration. They use silence not to replace language, but to restore to the word that which it supposedly had lost: a sense that the workings of language itself are not fully known or even knowable. For this reason, Paz and Cage seek to renew Western avant-garde tradition by searching outside of it. They turn not only to pre-avant-garde figures like Stéphane Mallarmé, whose *Un coup de dés* visually materializes the silences of traditional verse, but also to treatments of silence found in various Eastern literatures and philosophies. *Blanco's* epigraphs, for example, place Mallarmé alongside Tantric Buddhism, from which Paz would borrow a mystical rhetoric of emptiness as fullness. While in the mid-1950s Paz would draw on Surrealism to claim that "the reality of language ultimately escapes us,"⁵¹ his work throughout the 1960s increasingly projected that indescribability onto silence (*El arco y la lira* 31). Similarly, Cage's rhetoric of silence partakes of a mysticism that brings it closer to the characterizations of language by the early Dada thinkers on whose work he draws so heavily. Wassily Kandinsky, in *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1911), would claim that "the apt use of a word (in its poetical meaning), repetition of this word, twice, three times or even more frequently, according to the need of the poem, will not only tend to intensify the inner harmony but also bring to light unsuspected spiritual properties of the word itself" (15). Cage, whose

⁵¹ "el lenguaje, en su realidad última, se nos escapa"

poetry often strives for a similar transformation of language into pure sound, characterizes this phenomenon as silence. The silence of words divested of their meaning becomes a means of reconciling words and things, not through reference but through words' transformation into things themselves.

Ultimately, the exchange of poems between Cage and Paz reflects the tensions that increasingly structured the art world in which their work circulated. Battles over abstraction and figuration grew more heated, and art's increasingly privileged position in the spheres of international politics and cultural policy was met with suspicions that its relevance was fast disappearing. However, while critics like Barthes or Steiner saw literary silence as a capitulation in the face of these tensions, Paz and Cage make silence into a strategy for negotiating them. Through silence, they seek to reimagine poetry's means of acting on us and our means of interacting with others.

In a 1948 essay entitled "Black and White," Robert Motherwell would remark that "a fresh white canvas is a void, as is the poet's sheet of blank white paper" (*Collected Writings* 72). Rather than attempting to describe such a void, he concedes that "there is a chapter in *Moby Dick* that evokes white's qualities as no painter could, except in his medium" (72). Motherwell refers to the following passage:

But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous—why, as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of

spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind.

Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink? (Moby Dick 188 chXLIV)

While Motherwell claims that his own words are an inadequate medium for describing "white's qualities," the primary quality of whiteness in the passage he cites is "indefiniteness" itself. For Ishmael whiteness is characterized by a sense of the ineffable.

Like Ishmael, who points out that "whiteness is not so much a colour as an absence of colour," Richard Dyer has noted a "slippage between white as a colour and white as colourless" (Dyer 47). Cage would characterize Rauschenberg's all-white canvases as indeterminate, but we can see how they also capitalize on a popular understanding of whiteness itself as indefinite. While indeterminacy, for Cage, is the principle by which human agency is removed from the production of art, Motherwell and Dyer signal the ways in which the indefiniteness of whiteness is a well-established discourse that we bring with us to images like Rauschenberg's. As a trope for

universality, such whiteness sends us off like Ishmael in search of its dizzyingly diverse associations.

This essay has argued that in art, silence is always doing something. For the Abstract Expressionists, signaling the silence of a painting meant activating its potential for universality. In an essay entitled "Price and Meaning," Paz would describe Abstract Expressionism's particularly "Yankee" brand of universalism:

The new painting in the United States is born around 1940, with so-called action painting, or Abstract Expressionism. The movement began as a break with tendencies that up until then had prevailed in that country. Did it thereby break with the idea of finding an expression that was new and American? On the contrary. [. . .] The idea, never completely formulated, that inspires all these declarations is this: America (by which they mean the United States) has reached the point of universality, and it is up to its artists to express the new universal vision. [. . .] A twofold rebellion: against Europe, the symbol of history, and against the simplistic nationalism of their forebears. [. . .] Whether the proponents of Abstract Expressionism were conscious of the fact or not, its primary aspiration was not so much to be a continental American cosmopolitanism as to convert modern cosmopolitanism into a Yankee Americanism. (286)

Although Paz himself would be increasingly criticized for his belief in the universality of Western art, here he displays a critical awareness of the problematic nature of claims for universality. Throughout his career Paz would criticize attempts to purge art of its influences—especially when it came to European precedents for art in the Americas.

However, as he points out, Abstract Expressionism does not search for a break with Europe but rather attempts to reverse the way in which that trans-Atlantic relationship had been characterized. Implicitly, in working to define the terms of modern cosmopolitanism, these United States artists (according to Paz) strive to usurp a privilege long held by the Europeans.

Abstract Expressionism has earned a reputation among scholars as institutionalized artistic imperialism.⁵² As its popularity grew during the 1940s and 1950s, it was hailed by critics of the era as the movement that brought the center of the art world to the Empire State. As Serge Guilbaut says, "the Cold War was being waged furiously, its weapons had been chosen and honed" (204). Abstract Expressionism made a particularly well-suited tool for extending international cultural influence because of its popularity in emerging art markets and its robust surrounding critical apparatus, but also because of its silence. Unlike the popular Socialist muralism in which artists like Jackson Pollock based the monumentalism of their own works, Abstract Expressionism (and the critical apparatus that generally accompanied it to official exhibitions, art journals, and reviews) kept conveniently quiet about questions of social justice. Furthermore, Paz claims, the movement's silence was one that permitted no intervention on the part of the viewer. As a manifestation of the artist's own thoughts and emotions, the viewer's response to the work is inconsequential.

⁵² In *Made in U.S.A: An Americanization in Modern Art*, Sandra Stich points toward a growing body of criticism that examines the role of Cold War politics in determining the global dissemination and influence of Abstract expressionism as a "propaganda weapon" (Stich 4). Serge Guilbaut, for example, in *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, describes the "rising tide of abstract expressionism" during the 1950s, arguing that "by 1948 their once disturbing vision could be integrated into the new anti-Communist rhetoric. Avant-garde radicalism did not really 'sell out,' it was borrowed for the anti-Communist cause" (183, 202).

By now it is widely acknowledged that Donald Duck and Jackson Pollock often were made to bear the US standard abroad together, especially to Latin America. Exhibitions of Abstract Expressionist art would appear across Latin America and the Caribbean—even in Fidel Castro's Cuba. As the United States sponsored cultural policies aimed at extending influence among its American neighbors, abstraction became a broadly popular aesthetic. Few Latin American art critics paid closer attention to Abstract Expressionism than Cuban poet, novelist, and critic Severo Sarduy. In 1967 Sarduy would publish a series of short poems dedicated to the work of Abstract Expressionist painter Franz Kline, giving the collection the title "Páginas en blanco (cuadros de Franz Kline)." The following is an excerpt from the first poem in the series, "wax wing":

No hay silencio
sino
cuando el Otro
habla
(Blanco no:
colores que se escapan
por los bordes).
Ahora
que el poema está escrito
La página vacía⁵³

[There is no silence
except
when the Other
speaks

⁵³ Originally published in *Margen* (Paris) no. 5, 1967. pp. 92-3. Later these poems would be included in Sarduy's poetic collection, *Big Bang* (1973).

(Not blank:
 colors that escape
 from the edges).
 Now
 that the poem is written
 The page empty]

Like Paz, Sarduy characterizes the blank canvas as a silence that speaks or is spoken. Both poets would use Abstract Expressionism to imagine silence not as the absence of art but as a means or even a medium for creating it. However, as "wax wing" indicates, Sarduy's poetry strives for silence by drawing attention to the ultimate meaninglessness of signifiers as mere sound and image. As the poem says, "Ahora / que el poema está escrito / La página vacía." "Blank" words find their reflection in the blank page. Like much of Paz's work, Sarduy attempts to reenact a painterly silence in words. However, as he says, it is a silence that is prismatic. In his more expository writings Sarduy generally would follow Jacques Lacan's definition of the Other as the form of language itself. For Sarduy, as for Lacan, language itself presents a form of alienation, our only means of speaking and yet a means always owned by others. Here, the signifier signifies multiply, in ways that its speaker or writer could never imagine. Ultimately it is both meaningless and full of meaning. Sarduy's poem takes an abstract silence—one that refuses to signify—and turns it into a silence inherent in all signification.

Like Paz or Cage, Sarduy responds to one silence with another. Generally we think of the aesthetic battles during the postwar period as being waged over interpretations of language and its function, but here the focus of that debate falls on silence. These writers propose an aesthetics and an ethics that are directly opposed to the

rhetoric of silence that accompanied Abstract Expressionism along its rapid ascent in developing art markets. As both Umberto Eco and Haroldo de Campos would declare (and I as I explored in my first chapter) this was the era of the "open" work, against which Paz and Cage hold up the example of Abstract Expressionism's "closed" silence. But while silence is the subject under debate, it also constitutes the means of contention. Guarding silence allows Paz, Cage, and Sarduy to dissent in a way that seems particularly suited to the inter-American politics of the Cold War, when silence became a politicized cultural practice in its own right, and when refusing to communicate could be just as calculated a display as any.

Chapter 4:
Waging Silence: Inter-Medial and International Relations
in Post-War Avant-Garde Poetry

While the notion of poetic voice has been a foundational formal principle for lyric poetry, bringing with it any number of related tropes (apostrophe, caesura, elision), formal categories (rhythm, cadence, meter), or genres (ballad, ode, dialect verse), the idea of the human voice does more than influence how we write or recite poems. It also shapes their reception, publication, promotion and circulation. Young poets are publicized as "new voices," and others are "the voice of a generation." Poets from underprivileged groups often are said to "give voice" to their communities, while writers' workshops talk about "finding your poetic voice." Poets hold readings to promote their books, and make recordings that are sold in collections with titles like "Poetry Speaks." But while poetry persists in the popular imagination as a form particularly premised on the intimacy, presence, and candidness of personal conversation, Cage would note that this reliance on voice as a trope for (and index of) authorial intention appears also in the dominant discourses surrounding music, painting, and sculpture. Indeed, notions of voice long have determined poetry's relationship to other media. The classical and neo-classical traditions followed Plutarch's dictum that poetry is "a speaking picture" and painting is "mute poetry." For Cage, even music, while not properly able to signify, relies heavily on intentional processes inseparable from notions of speech and voice.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For more on the importance of notions of voice for the visual arts and music, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, see chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation.

If silence is a means of disrupting the influence of notions of poetic voice for Western poetry, then it must go beyond upending poetry's traditional forms and tropes. It must also change that poetry's material existence, and the way that it moves in the world. But does a poetry premised on falling silent simply refrain from these activities? Is there an inherent contradiction in "silent" poetry like Cage's, which claims that traditional notions of authorship are irrelevant and yet still sells (copyrighted) books principally because Cage's name appears on the cover? Moreover, can we reconcile Cage's conflicting legacies—as both the twentieth century's most avid advocate for artistic self-effacement and as one of the most influential (and often overbearing) celebrities in post-WWII avant-garde circles?

If we are to take seriously Cage's claims about silence being the "best communication between men," then we need to look not just at how poetry dissolves meaning or disrupts sense-making, but at the ways that this (non)meaning circulates and is transmitted or translated. In this chapter I investigate these questions by looking closely at Cage's current reputation as a figure that united movements across a range of artistic media. Even as contemporary criticism supposedly has moved beyond a view of avant-garde art as a top-down practice presided over by a central patron, critical retrospectives of Cage's career overwhelmingly trace a narrative that mimics that of Cage's own mentor, Marcel Duchamp. Like Duchamp, whose avant-garde aegis encompassed Dada production across the arts (even when the man himself resisted inclusion in any such cohesive movement), and whose work often resisted conventional artistic categories, Cage increasingly has been understood in terms of his relevance for multiple disciplines.

In this chapter I investigate how Cage's thoughts on silence altered traditional notions about poetry's relationship with other media and with artists practicing those media.

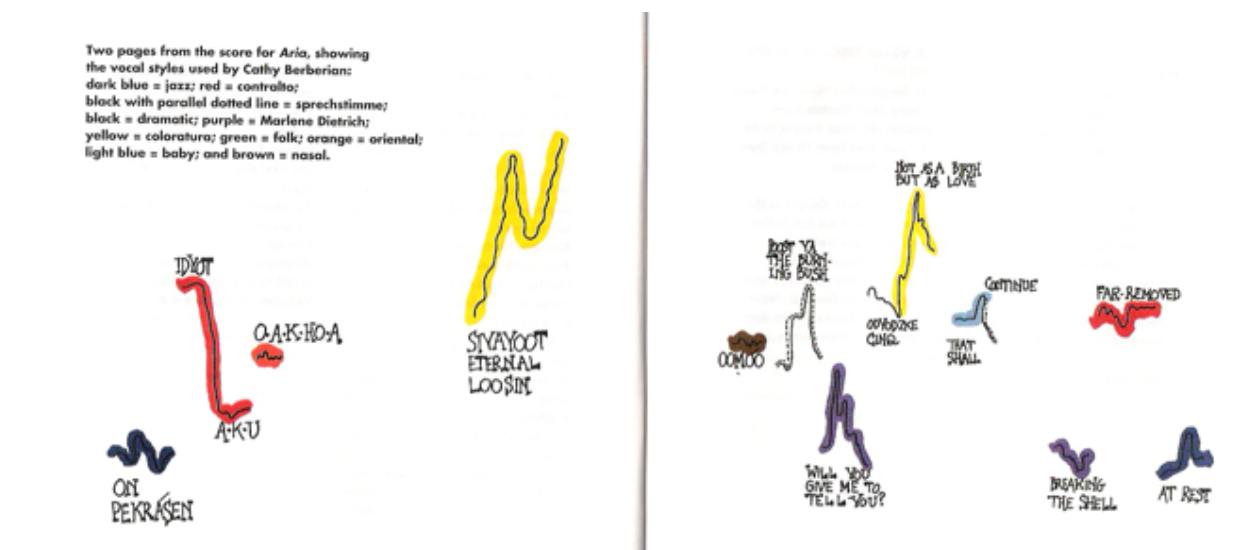
This chapter explores the material impact of Cage's philosophies of silence by focusing on Cage's interaction with Augusto de Campos, a friend and long-time correspondent. Like Cage, de Campos practiced an active disregard for artistic categories, but his work provides a useful counterpoint to Cage's. From his position as a Brazilian intellectual, de Campos criticized Cage's silence as representing a position of privilege. While for Cage the rejection of individual voice meant liberation from rigid notions of unified subjecthood and original authorship, de Campos suggests that "having a say" in international literary communities often depends on possession of such a voice (even if one chooses not to use it). While the chapter focuses on the interaction between Cage and de Campos, I end by suggesting the ways in which this dialogue has wider repercussions for the practice of contemporary experimental and conceptual poetry.

Settling the Visual Score: Interarts Relations in the Age of Silence

There Will Never Be Silence: Scoring Cage's "Silence," a recent MoMA retrospective of Cage's influence among post-WWII avant-garde circles, featured as its centerpiece Cage's score for *4'33"*.¹ Sitting on a pedestal in the center of an all-white room, surrounded by works that it supposedly inspired, was Cage's hand-sketched score: three or four mostly-blank sheets of paper marked only by a few horizontal black lines. Here the white space constitutes the piece itself, while the lines mark breaks between movements. As the program guides for the exhibition point out, *4'33"* impacted the field of visual art as much as it did modern music. While Cage would claim later that when he

composed this and other early experimental pieces he "had not thought of them as art" (Kostelanetz 191), they nevertheless inspired new conversations and controversy across various media.

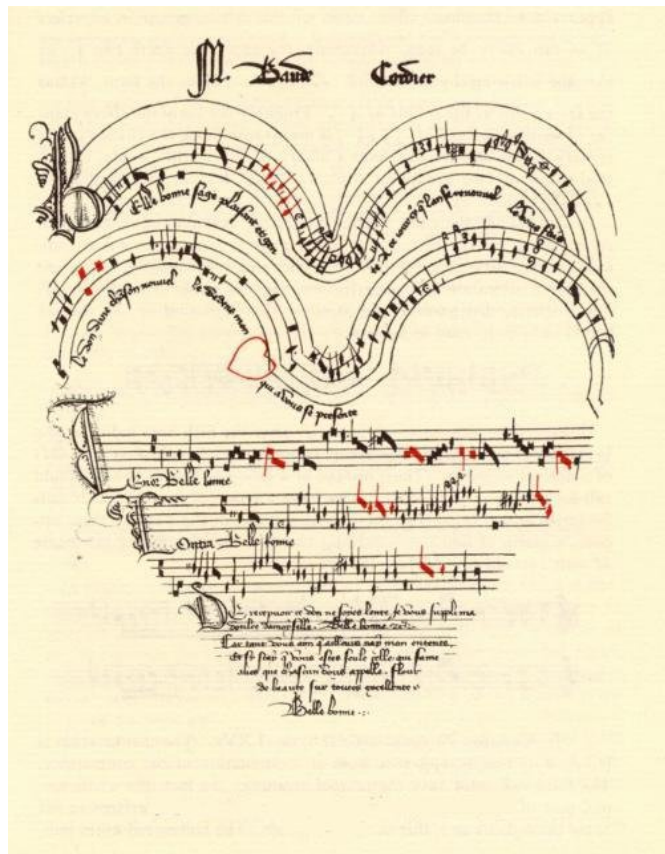
During the 1960s Cage became increasingly invested in the visual aspect of his musical scores. As he would admit toward the end of his life, "it was music that out of its own generosity brought me back to painting." (Kostelanetz 191). For Cage, "it became clear that there's a physical correspondence between time and space. And music is not isolated from painting, because one second of sound is so many inches on tape." In a similar way, he discovered that the reverse could be true; that any drawing could be used as a guide to produce chance-determined sound. Throughout the 50s and 60s Cage developed more sophisticated procedures for transforming visual markings into sound. One of Cage's more well-known visual scores is his notation for his "Aria" (1960):



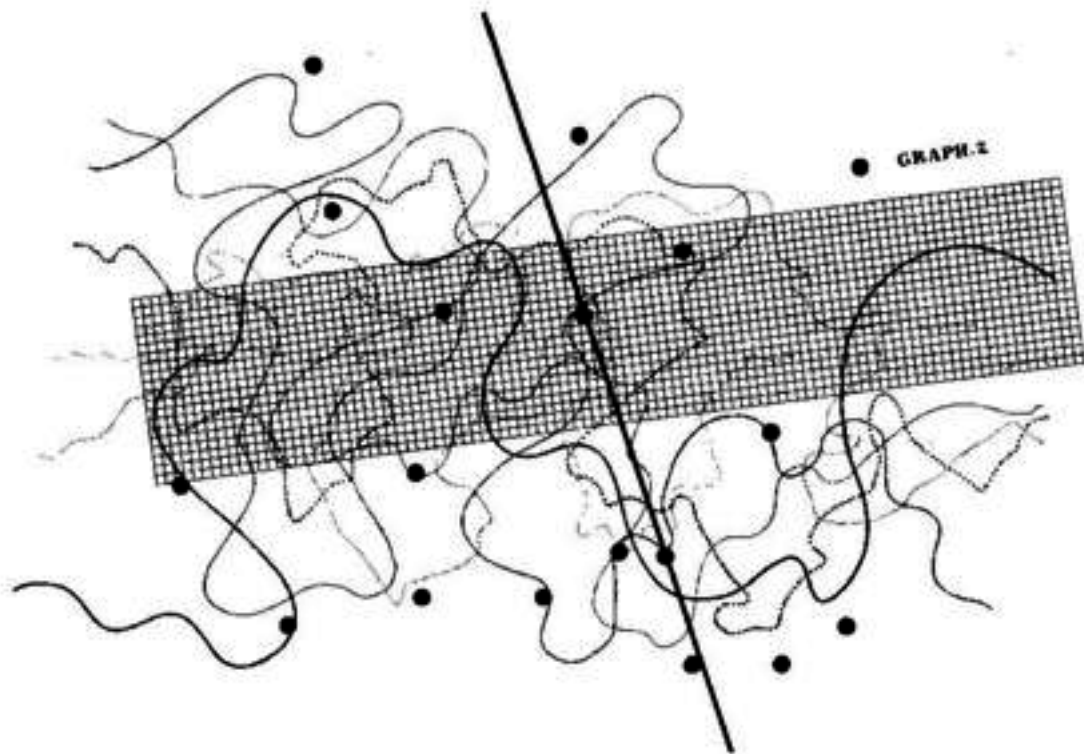
As in all of his visual scores, chance operations determine the form of what appears on the page, which in turns functions as a score. Here, Cage also uses different colors to

represent distinct voices, although he signals in the top left of the page that each color corresponds to a specific voice or style: dark blue for jazz; red for contralto; black with parallel dotted lines for sprechstimme; purple for Marlene Dietrich, etc.

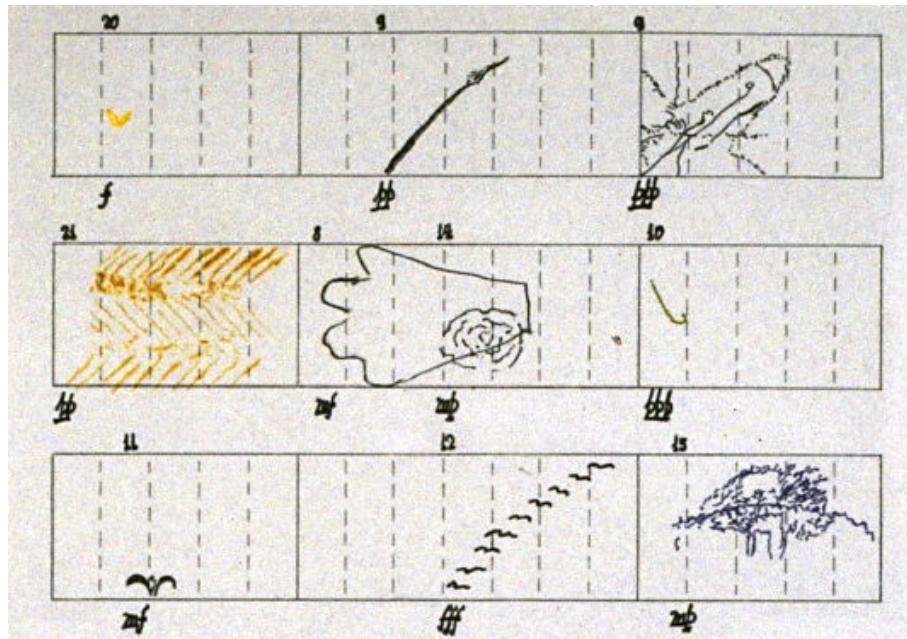
The unconventional nature of Cage's chance-driven method of musical composition gained him fame, but treating his scores as aesthetic objects in their own right is not as novel as the MoMA exhibit might suggest. As Pat Muchmore notes, the visual score (or "eye music") flourished as early as the 15th century ("Scoring Outside the Lines"). For example, the French Renaissance composer Baude Cordier created one of the most famous pieces of visual notation for his "Belle, bonne, sage:"



"Belle, bonne, sage" is a love song, and uses variation in ink color to indicate changes in the performance—here, using red notes to signal alterations in rhythm. As Elizabeth Eva Leach points out, Cordier's piece "is a literary heart offered most visually to the lady as it is being sung to her" (*Sung Birds* 114). Just as Horace's dictum "ut pictura poesis" suggests that painting and poetry could be bound more in spirit than in form (Lee), Cordier's piece presents both image and music serving the composer's love. However, in "Belle, bonne, sage" most of the visual elements are incidental. That is, while the red notes score variations in rhythm, the heart shape does not correlate directly with changes in performance. In many of Cage's pieces, the visual is once again a functional aspect of the score. His *Fontana Mix* series, for example, dispenses with standard musical notation to instead adopt a series of chance-composed lines and dots.



The piece is comprised of a grid and ten superimposed transparencies on each of which are printed dots, a straight line, or various curved lines. These graphic traces score elements of sound like amplitude, duration, and silence. In Cage's recent MoMA exhibition, viewers enter the exhibit to a display of various of the *Fontana Mix* series, each arranged under glass and displayed beside a placard that explains that the series "displaces the standard elements of a score to create something that is part visual art and part music." On the page, the *Fontana Mix* piece above looks variously like a trail map or a work of geometrical abstraction. These resonances were present with Cage, and played a part in his composition. However, while the MoMA exhibition characterizes his works as "part visual art and part music," Cage worked to dissolve such distinctions—usually at the expense of the term "art" itself. While Cordier and the tradition of "eye music" work to unite the arts as a more perfect means of expressing human emotion, Cage was interested in the ways that such visual materials could be repurposed precisely to escape interiority. His scores serve as guides for musical performance not determined by human intention. In one of his later visual scores, *Score (40 Drawings by Thoreau) and 23 Parts*, Cage created a score by filling a grid with drawings excerpted from Thoreau's *Journal*:



In *40 Drawings*, what previously had been representational elements—nature sketches, notes on the weather, or navigational indications—become directions for the production of sound. While visual artists like Piet Mondrian would take similar images of landscape and animals as inspiration for his own abstract compositions, Cage's work totally sets aside questions of visual abstraction and representation. In Cage's scores, the natural is a way of being and behaving, as much as a set of observed or imagined forms.

At the same time that Cage began experimenting in earnest with the visual score, his soon-to-be friend and correspondent, Augusto de Campos, published *Poetamenos*, an unconventional foray into the already unconventional genre of eye music. Like much of the poetry investigated in this dissertation, *Poetamenos* is most immediately remarkable in its visual composition. Even in the case of the first poem in the series, a relatively short and conventionally linear piece printed in subdued pastel tones of purple and yellow, the colored font captures the eye long before any sense can be made of the fractured text itself. It seems as much a painting of words as a poem in colors. Subsequent poems carry

this effect even further. The most famous piece in the series, "Lygia Fingers," uses five distinct font hues:



With his variegated fonts, Augusto introduces the striking visual aspects of the poem as being in the service of its function as musical notation. Augusto's brother, Haroldo, a beautiful reading of the poem as a musical score:

Like the ancient Germanic poets, who used colored stones to mark the phonemes of their composition, the concrete poet made use of his own notation, in which different colors distinguish different reading "parts" (in the musical sense). Each phono thematic collection must be executed by a different vocal timbre (five voices in all in the poem under consideration). (*Novas* 282)

Haroldo's comparison of *Poetamenos* to the Germanic poets' use of colored stones wonderfully (and somewhat wistfully) sets Augusto's poem within a poetic tradition, contrary to many critics' treatment of it as absolutely unprecedented. However, Haroldo's discussion still treats Augusto's poem as normally functioning musical notation, with the colors merely signaling aspects of a performance. Augusto himself would discuss the poem in terms of Anton Webern's theories concerning the ability of sound to stimulate other senses:

ou aspirando à esperança de uma

K L A N G F A R B E N M E L O D I E
(melodiadetimbres)

com

palavras

como em WEBERN:

uma melodia contínua deslocada de um instrumento
para outro, mudando constantemente sua cor:

instrumentos: frase/palavra/sílaba/letra(s), cujos timbres se definam p/ um tema gráfico-fonético ou "ideogrâmico".

[therefore] a necessidade da representação gráfica em cores (q ainda assim apenas aproximadamente representam, podendo diminuir em funcionalidade em ctos casos complexos de super-posição e interpenetração temática), excluída a representação monocolor q está para o poema como uma fotografia para realidade cromática.

mas luminosos, ou filmletras, quem os tivera!

reverberação: leitura oral—vozes reais agindo em (aproximadamente) timbre para o poema como os instrumentos na klangfarbenmelodie de WEBERN.

[or striving in the hope of a

K L A N G F A R B E N M E L O D I E
(melodytimbre)

with words

like in Webern:

a continuous melody passed from one instrument
to another, constantly changing its color:

instruments: sentence/word/syllable/letter(s), whose timbres are defined w/ a graphic-phonetic, or "ideogramic" theme.

[therefore] the necessity of graphic representation in colors (which even then barely approximate representation, being able in certain cases to diminish the functionality of certain complexes of thematic super-position and interpenetration), excluding monocolour representation, which is to poetry what photography is to chromatic reality.

reverberation: oral reading—real voices functioning (approximately) as timbre for the poem, like the instruments in Webern's *Klangfarbenmelodie*.]

The central trope of *Poetamenos*, as de Campos lays it out here in the poem's introductory passage, is a literal treatment of Webern's *Klangfarbenmelodie*, which translates to "tone-color-melody." In music, "timbre" refers to the characteristic sound quality of a particular instrument, and often is described figuratively as the unique "color" of tone that an instrument produces. In *Poetamenos* de Campos signals individual "instruments" by literally marking timbre with color. These timbres, de Campos says, are produced in oral reading by various voices—"real voices functioning as / timbre (approximately) for the poem, like Webern's / *Klangfarbenmelodie*."

At the time that Cordier composed "Belle, bonne, sage," conventional thought followed Plutarch in proclaiming painting to be "mute poetry" and poetry a "speaking

picture." Pieces like Cordier's serve as an idealized inter-artistic encounter in which painting "speaks" once more through human voice, more perfectly to express human love. *Poetamenos*, also a love poem, carries this wishful synthesis to an extreme, scoring not merely a musical performance but an entire synaesthetic experience. Synaesthesia, as broadly defined by researchers at the University of Sussex, is the "joining together of sensations that are normally experienced separately." The most commonly cited form of synaesthesia is color-graphemic synaesthesia, in which certain letters or numbers are perceived to correspond with distinct colors. While the correspondence between individual colors and elements of written language appears inconsistent in de Campos' text, his introductory piece suggests that the relationship between font color and "phrase/word/syllable/letter(s)" might not be entirely arbitrary. He never specifies what this relationship might be, just as he does not (as Cage does in his "Aria") provide a description of different tone colors. But his cryptic suggestion of correspondences is enough on its own to prompt a search for those relationships. Suddenly we are looking to experience written language in a way that lies outside of its normal function.

Poetamenos does not properly provide an experience of color-graphemic synaesthesia, but rather the simulation of that experience. We perceive the letters and words as colored because they were printed that way on the page. Likewise, any performance of the piece would merely simulate a correspondence between those graphemes and particular vocal timbres. However, de Campos' insinuation that these correspondences might not be arbitrary treats this score as a sort of key—as if, through the *right* performance of *Poetamenos*, we could access a higher order of perception.

In *Poetamenos*, the impossibility of reproducing synaesthesia in normally functioning language becomes inseparable from the poem's expression of love for Lygia, the poet's beloved. The implication is that only through the synaesthetic experience that the poem somehow scores can we approximate the paroxysms inspired by the poet's love for his new wife. Playing on the trope of love immortalized through poetry, *Poetamenos* does not pretend to preserve love, nor to reproduce the experience of it for the reader, but rather to provide the elements necessary for conjuring it into existence, calling it back to corporeal experience.

As synaesthesia becomes an incommunicable expression of the poet's love, it also serves, as in famous examples from Arthur Rimbaud or Vladimir Nabokov, as a model for harmony between the diverse artistic media that the poem attempts to bring together. However, while "Voyelles"⁵⁵ or *The Gift*⁵⁶ imply that the point of convergence between these arts lies somewhere within the speaker himself, *Poetamenos* leaves in doubt the existence of any such point of convergence at all. Like Cage, de Campos distrusts the idea that the autonomous ego could transmute the elements of art into a more perfect expression of itself. It is for this reason that Sergio Antonio Bessa's beautiful reading of

⁵⁵ In its treatment of synaesthesia as an ultimately incommunicable experience that literature nevertheless longs to reproduce for the reader, de Campos' work follows the precedent of Arthur Rimbaud's "Voyelles." Rimbaud's poem, first published in 1871, did much to popularize the phenomenon of synaesthesia, and remains among the most famous treatments of it in literature. To open the poem, Rimbaud lists direct correspondences between each vowel and a particular color, while the rest of the poem elaborates on this theme

⁵⁶ In *The Gift*, Vladimir Nabokov draws attention explicitly to the impossibility of reproducing synaesthesia through normally functioning language. His protagonist, a young poet named Fyodor, attempts to describe the experience: "If I had some paints handy, I would mix burnt sienna for you as to match the color of a 'ch' sound [. . .] and you would appreciate my radiant 's' if I could pour into your cupped hands some of those luminous sapphires that I touched as a child" (84). In this passage, the experience of synaesthesia becomes a gift that Fyodor is unable to give. His loving offer--to his fellow poet Koncheyev and to the reader--is incomplete. We take consolation in the beauty of his description because it is the closest we can come to what it describes.

Poetamenos as epithalamium, or spousal verse, skirts so quickly through its rigid reading of the poem. Bessa makes the related decisions to interpret the poem linearly—from top to bottom and from left to right—and to ignore the role that colors could play in dictating alternate possible readings. He claims that "the spacing between words and lines dictates the rhythm," but while Caetano Veloso performs the poem this way, there is no such indication in the poem's opening explication (Bessa, "Sound as Subject" 232). While de Campos' poem undeniably presents an erotic encounter, it frustrates any attempt to reconstruct that encounter as a sequence of moments in time. With its varied colors and multiple possible arrangements, the poem sets various media against one another; reading a poem in sequence might suggest one chain of events, while color associations between selected words often contradict or undermine such a reading.⁵⁷ Unlike Cordier's work, which emphasizes a parallel between the harmony of two arts and the harmony of two hearts, de Campos' piece suggests that the love he describes is one whose fullest realization will always remain in the realm of the ideal.

While W.J.T. Mitchell, in *Picture Theory*, claims that anxieties about intermediality code fears about merging with others, de Campos' work demonstrates the opposite: that intermediality can become an act of love, whereby an embrace of each media as impure or non-identical becomes a model for—and means of—merging with

⁵⁷ Johanna Drucker points to the way in which a consideration of the visual in multimedia works could disrupt conventional linear reading. Marjorie Perloff provides an apt summary of Drucker's argument in the collection's introduction: "the visual and aural do not always overlap and indeed cannot ever be perfectly congruent, because the different codes used to sort linguistic material--some audible and some visual--mobilize fundamentally different kinds of cognition" (12). Bessa argues forcefully for the "interconnectedness of sight and sound" in de Campos's poetry, but an attention to the possible discord between these elements of *Poetamenos* reveals the frustration of synaesthesia.

others.⁵⁸ As de Campos explains in an interview with J. Jota de Moraes, "Eu, particularmente, em meu trabalho, encontro muitas vezes mais afinidade com músicos e artistas visuais do que com literatos" / "In my own work particularly I often find more affinity with musicians and visual artists than with writers" (*Música de Invenção* 142). Here his desire to engage artists in other media is a half-articulated "affinity." It has as much to do with a sense of solidarity—an ethos, ethics, or curiosity—as with the "constructivist" or "verbivocovisual" theories of concrete poetry. Like Mitchell, de Campos dedicates much of his work to demonstrating the ways in which every medium is already "mixed"—containing verbal, visual and musical means of creating meaning—but de Campos also keeps in mind the social realities of artistic spheres separated by cultural convention.

Campos' production is notable not only for its prodigious scope and range, but also for the sheer number of artists, poets, and musicians with which it engages. Bessa points out that while de Campos brings to Brazil the modernist music of European composers like Webern and Stockhausen, or Americans like Ives and Cage, he also has a profound impact on the popular Brazilian musicians: Caetano Veloso, Elis Regina, Os Mutantes, and the Tropicalia movement in general. Poems like *Poetamenos*, Bessa says, provide "a bridge between twelve-tone theory and samba" ("The Image of Voice" 231).

Campos acknowledges that his keenly felt affinity with musicians and visual artists leaves him something of an artistic outcast, floating among various intellectual

⁵⁸ W.J.T. Mitchell, in *Picture Theory*, identifies what he calls "ekphrastic hope" and "ekphrastic fear." According to Mitchell, we hope for the successful union of the verbal and the visual at the same time that we fear that encounter: "ekphrastic hope and fear express our anxieties about merging with others" (163). Here I attempt to show that, in de Campos, the union of the verbal and visual (and aural) becomes charged not just with hope or fear but with desire.

scenes. As he admits: "Às vezes penso que sou menospoeta que músico e menosmúsico que artista gráfico. Carl Ruggles que, com Charles Ives, é um dos patriarcas da música moderna americana, costumava dizer: 'eu pinto música.' Quase uma definição para um expoeta como eu" / "Sometimes I think I am lesspoet than musician and lessmusician than graphic artist. Carl Ruggles who, with Charles Ives, is one of the patriarchs of American music, used to say: 'I paint music.' Almost a definition for an expoet like me" (*Não NP*). Increasingly throughout his oeuvre, de Campos would add a prefix to any characterization of himself as a poet: não-poeta, expoeta, menospoeta, poetamenos. Nevertheless, as *Poetamenos* indicates, this contingency or dependence on others merely becomes part of the process of loving. To merge with others—to devour and to be devoured—means relinquishing any autonomy of the self.

Like de Campos, Cage was dedicated to breaking down perceived barriers between media. As the two men exchanged artistic gifts and homages, a majority of these stand out as markedly intermedial. For example, Cage would send to de Campos a sculptural composition, *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel Duchamp*, which he had created with the help of graphic artist Calvin Sumsion. The piece is composed of eight free-standing plates of plexiglass, each laminated with lithograph paper. Not wanting to "say anything" about Duchamp, Cage subjected the dictionary to the *I Ching* to choose random words and letters, and then used chance again to determine their spacing on the eight pieces of lithograph paper. Pasted to the plexiglass plates, which in turn are stacked against each other, all the lithographs are viewed simultaneously, superimposed one upon the other. As de Campos says, the effect is that of "uma espécie de aquário pré-holográfico"—a sort of pre-holographic aquarium (*Musica de Invenção*

141). As with much of de Campos' own concrete poetry, Cage stresses the physical and visual presence of language over its capacity for signification and communication.

For Octavio Paz, Cage is a poet—"one of the real poets of the English language"—because poetry takes precedence over other arts. As Paz says, "casi siempre la poesía adelanta y prefigura las formas que adoptarán más tarde las otras artes" / "poetry almost always precedes and prefigures the forms that the other arts will adopt later" (*Apariencia desnuda* 75). De Campos, however, would never limit Cage to a single title. In an essay devoted to Cage, entitled "Músicaos," he would call Cage "o mais completo artista inter-semiótico de nosso tempo, e poeta dos multimedia: músicopoetapintor" / "the most complete inter-semiotic artist of our day, a multimedia poet: musician-poet-painter" (*Música de Invenção* 130). According to de Campos, Cage is a "profeta e guerrilheiro da arte interdisciplinar" / "prophet and guerilla of interdisciplinary art" (*Música de Invenção* 133). For de Campos the beauty of Cage's work emerges from its range and variety. Unlike the majority of Cage scholars, who attempt to maintain aesthetic categories even as they acknowledge Cage's relevance across them, de Campos is not anxious to trace Cage's importance within discreet traditions as a musician, visual artist, or poet. Instead, de Campos recognizes that Cage's work becomes exceptional precisely where it defies these generic boundaries.

While the letters that Cage and de Campos exchanged throughout the 1970s and 1980s tend to be short, devoted to the practical matters of publication planning and event organizing, their correspondence is accompanied by a rich exchange of images, translations, poetic texts, and performances. Cage, for example, would send de Campos works of visual art, like *Not Wanting to Say Anything About Marcel Duchamp*, and would

come to São Paulo to perform a concert. De Campos, in turn, would send work in various media: lyric and concrete poetry, visual pieces like the *Pentahexagram*, or brief notes penned on vibrant postcards from São Paulo's Museu de Arte Contemporânea. After Cage's death, de Campos would record and perform "Da Conferência sobre a nada," his translation of Cage's "Lecture On Nothing." But multimedia work does not merely compliment the correspondence between de Campos and Cage—it constitutes it. In its volume and variety the art they exchange tends to overshadow their brief letters, but it also reveals the way in which a traditional correspondence could be evaluated *as part of* their multimedia work. Both Cage and de Campos use multimedia art as both a model for imagining—and a means of conducting—interpersonal and international relations. For both of them, developments in media technology would provide the impulse and inspiration for experimentation across generic and political boundaries alike. Like Cage, de Campos would use developments in both printing and recording technology to push at the division between text, visual art, and music. Collaboration and homage across the arts becomes the norm for artistic production, rather than the exception. In theory as well as practice, reaching across media becomes a means of breaching divisions between nations and cultures.

MoMA's recent Cage exhibition perfectly demonstrates interconnected understandings of intermediality and internationalism. While it highlights Cage's influence among the heavily U.S.-based FLUXUS movement, it also features work by artists, musicians, poets, and painters from across the globe. At the center of the exhibition—nominally, spatially, aesthetically, and discursively—is Cage's musical philosophy of silence. *There Will Never Be Silence* argues for this silence as a "critical

pivot that unified a diverse array of artists [who] operate in a field of conceptual artistic production opened up by *4'33"*." Within the space of the exhibit, chance-determined pieces by Yoko Ono, George Maciunas, or Jasper Johns orbit around the unassuming pages of Cage's score, which sits at the center of it all. While this emphasizes Cage's imposing influence during the period, it also highlights the contradiction inherent in such a collection of pieces. In advocating for Cage's rightful place among a pantheon of post-WWII avant-gardes, the museum falls back on notions of authorship and influence that Cage himself worked so hard to combat. But if this contradiction is the MoMA's it is also Cage's. *There Will Never Be Silence* reveals the wishfully utopian nature of Cage's international imaginary. For Cage a renunciation of self becomes the means for realizing Buckminster Fuller's vision of a "spaceship earth," but in practice even silence cannot be divorced from power relations.

This is the fundamental difference between Cage and de Campos when it comes to their treatment of the relationship between intermediality and international relations. For Cage, differences between media become irrelevant when our means of creating art are no longer tied to ideas of self-expression. For this reason, Cage would remark that his visual scores like *Fontana Mix* could just as easily serve as guides for dance—or even the creation of other works of visual art. In 1962 he would recreate *4'33"* as *0'00"*, a "silent" composition whose performance can be realized in any medium. The score for *0'00"* is a single sentence: "In a situation provided with maximum amplification (no feedback), perform a disciplined action." Among the few specific conditions for performance of the piece were the stipulations that the performance fulfill an obligation to others and that it

proceed in whatever medium is at hand.⁵⁹ For Cage what is important is not bridging categories between media but setting aside the very idea of media. Because media no longer mediates, questions about the form it assumes are inconsequential. For de Campos, such synthesis is as impossible as it is undesirable. Relations between media, like international relations, represent an unrealizable whole. De Campos, like Cage, uses intermediality to renounce self, but in the service of ideas about the non-identical. For him the visual, oral, and tactile are necessarily separate spheres of existence. De Campos seeks to explode traditional notions of poetic voice in a way that goes beyond the disregard and dismissal that Cage often cultivated.

The Substance of Silence

Upon hearing about Cage's plans for *4'33"* in April of 1954, Helen Wolff, a friend of Cage's, sent him a concerned letter. "In terms of things I know about," Wolff says, "it corresponds to announcing a volume of poetry, and contributing a bound set of blank pages. If we did this, we would be considered not even jokers but frauds" (Wolff, cited in "Silence is Not What it Used to Be"). Some years later, Cage did precisely this. When asked to contribute a piece for inclusion in an anthology of contemporary poetry, Cage responded with a blank sheet of paper:

London publisher sent blank ("Fill out") so I'd be included in survey of contemporary poets of the English language. Threw it out. Week later urgent

⁵⁹ For a description of Cage's first performances of the piece in Tokyo and at Brandeis, see Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 138.

request plus duplicate blank arrived. "Please return with a glossy photo."

Complied. July, August, September. Publisher sent letter saying it'd been decided that I'm not significant poet after all: if I were, everyone else is too. (Kostelanetz 168)

To be labeled by a major anthology as "not [a] significant poet" was, for Cage, a sign that his work was succeeding. He disliked the idea that poetry was a unique form of production, and disagreed with the notion that the poet was a unique kind of person. For him, "everyone else" was equally capable of creating poetry, and he was happy to join their ranks. Cage playfully suggests that he would be content to be remembered not for the works he created but for those that he didn't.

One day in December of 1977 Cage opened his mail to find that de Campos had sent him a tribute very much like the piece he himself had submitted to the London publisher: a blank 8.5" x 11" sheet of cardstock with its white surface untouched. On the back of this de Campos had placed his signature beside a carefully printed title: "CAGE : CHANCE : CHANGE, Pentahexagram for John Cage." In a letter sent separately, de Campos explains that this blank sheet was a misprint of a piece he had composed in Cage's honor:

I could not refrain to send you one copy in which (typographic) chance intervened drastically: this time, nothing was printed on the front of the card. May this albino unique copy be a new chance homage to you: "what whiteness can one add to that whiteness?" (EP. quoting Mencius III, 1; IV, 13)

In his original piece (the one that wasn't printed) de Campos pays homage to Cage's famous "silent" work by playing with a visual representation of the Chinese *I Ching*, which Cage used to compose music entirely by chance. As de Campos points out, the accidentally blank copy of his tribute to Cage celebrates the composer's method even more effectively than the original piece—precisely because it happened by chance. This is felicitous, but also frustrating. "What whiteness can one add to that whiteness?" de Campos asks. The quotation, from the Confucian philosopher Mencius, comes from a passage in which an exasperated pupil confronts the fully realized work of his master. De Campos' blank square of cardstock is an homage, but it also suggests an indictment of an aesthetic of silence that, by its very nature, permits no intervention.

Cage founds his aesthetic philosophy, as well as his political beliefs, in the assertion that true silence does not exist, and that "silencing the sounded self" lets the outside world emerge in the absence of intentional action. He popularized the idea that such silence could be a means of communion with the world. To refuse meaning and sense-making was to refrain from imposing oneself on others. Cage often would quip that "sometimes the best communication between men happens in silence" (*Silence* 21). But, as de Campos would suggest in his blank piece of cardstock and in a wide range of adaptations of Cage's work, this philosophy was founded on the privileged assumption that such a silence was freely chosen, and that this silence would be heard. While Cage can be sure that the anecdote of his blank submission, as well as its implicit criticism, would be retold (as it has been, multiple times, by major critics), he fails to hear the silence of de Campos. In the reply that he sent some days later, Cage thanks his Brazilian friend for the "kind gesture" and moves on to other matters. Despite Cage's close

association with FLUXUS, which was actively experimenting with mail art, he does not appear give de Campos' blank tribute any such consideration. Unlike many of the FLUXUS mail art experiments, de Campos' piece has not been anthologized or placed behind glass in a museum.

While the blank pieces by Cage and de Campos are as formally similar as any two works of art can possibly be, the difference in their reception suggests that if we are to take seriously Cage's assertion that "sometimes the best communication between men happens in silence," we must look not just at the way that silence makes meaning or dissolves it, but at the ways that this (non)meaning circulates, translates, and is transmitted. After all, the notion of poetic voice that Cage's work opposes does not just determine how we write poems or read them, but also shapes how they circulate and are reproduced. If silence is to serve as an opposing foundational principle for poetry, it must upend traditional lyric's relationship with its audience, its market, and with other artists.

Cage delights in his rejection from the ranks of "significant" poets, but he retells his anecdote about the anthology precisely because this silence constitutes his legacy for contemporary poetry. Twenty years after his death, he has become the most famous insignificant poet of his generation. He is excluded from poetry anthologies precisely because he resisted the notions of authorship and originality through which most poets are measured, but his name is still central to most genealogies of avant-garde artistic movements in the United States after World War II. In many cases, Cage retains his place in these conversations precisely because his work so thoroughly defies categorization. His exclusion from conventional canons of composers, poets, and visual artists has gained him pride of place among those who resist these conventions.

At the same time that he sent his blank tribute to Cage, de Campos was in the middle of what would be his most elaborate—and most frustrating—engagement with Cage's work: an extended fight to publish a Portuguese translation of Cage's second book, *A Year from Monday*. Throughout nearly fifteen years, de Campos would confront a series of technical issues, bureaucratic complications, and difficulties in funding the project. The process left him exasperated and disillusioned. In an essay commemorating Cage's death, de Campos would remark that Brazilians suffer from what he calls an "informational deafness" that separates Brazil from the world (*Música de Invenção* 135). As de Campos subtly points out, deafness isn't a word or an idea that we find in Cage's writings. While Cage famously would declare that his experience in an anechoic chamber proved to him that absolute silence is impossible, de Campos points toward the forms of silence with which Cage never had any experience: the silence of those who cannot hear, and that of those whose material circumstances cut them off from the forms of media that would allow them to "commune" with the world. This is the bitter note on which de Campos ends his essay. Mixed with de Campos' praise for his colleague is a biting criticism.

Like much of his poetry, de Campos' blank tribute to Cage manages to turn seemingly flippant nonsense into measured critique. It does so by playing with Cage's own most famous work, *4'33*, "a silent piano piece in which a pianist sits at his instrument without playing for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. While de Campos expresses frustration that his piece merely adds silence to silence, Cage in turn would claim that *4'33*" itself was merely a copy of Robert Rauschenberg's all-white field paintings. Cage suggests that his silent reprisal of Rauschenberg's blank canvases could

somehow constitute a transposition, adaptation, or even translation of one silence to another—that it might be possible to recreate, adapt, or translate silence itself. Above all, Cage sees this as a renunciation of power. As he explains in his intro to *M*, a radical revision of our definition of poetry allows for a new vision of interpersonal and international relations:

Syntax, according to Norman O. Brown, is the arrangement of the army. As we move away from it, we demilitarize language. This demilitarization of language is conducted in many ways: a single language is pulverized; *the boundaries between two or more languages are crossed; elements not strictly linguistic (graphic, musical) are introduced*; etc. Translation becomes, if not impossible, unnecessary. Nonsense and silence are produced, familiar to lovers. We begin to actually live together, and the thought of separating doesn't enter our minds. (*M: Writings* x)

Cage applies Brown's thoughts on language to media forms more generally. Language becomes just one more medium whose function is found in its capacity for non-meaning—"nonsense and silence." For Cage, a move away from meaning in language toward the graphic and musical is a movement toward others in solidarity, not at the cost of difference but at the cost of a system of thought in which that difference matters.

For de Campos, silence can't be divorced from power relations. He entrust silence with a potential for critical intervention and political action, showing that it can be *used* actively through art. Like much of his work with Cage, his blank tribute is not merely a testament to a friendship, or to a fundamental misunderstanding; it actively shapes these things. It continues de Campos' correspondence with Cage at the same time that it

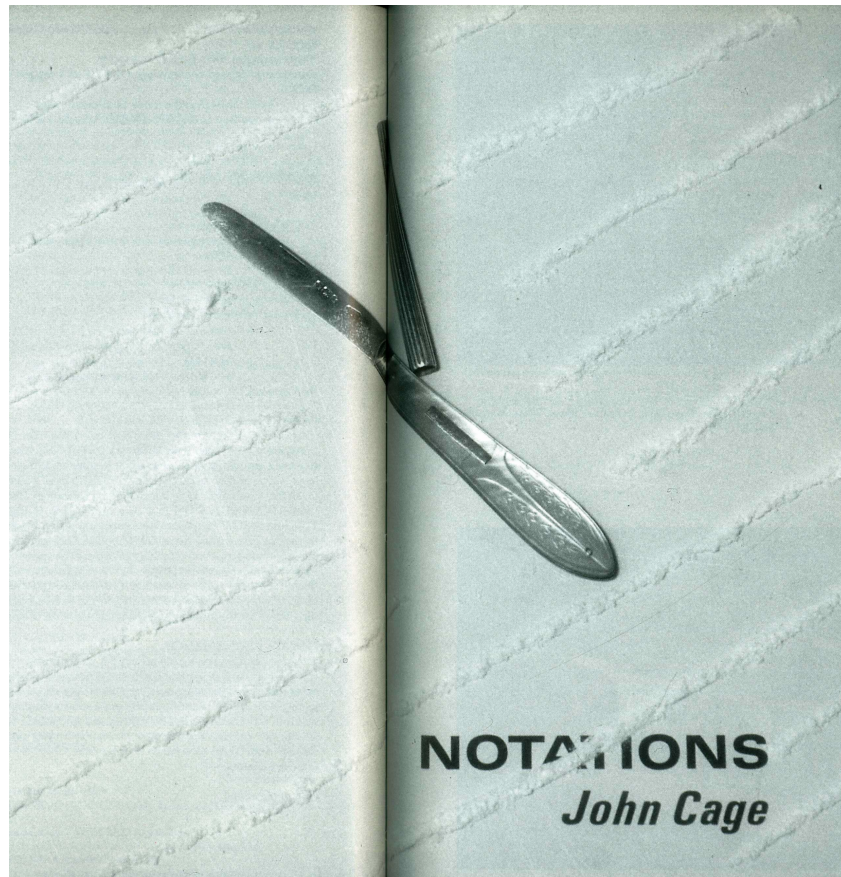
ruptures it. It is also the point at which this correspondence begins to diminish. Within a few years, it would drop off altogether. As de Campos reveals, silence is not a means of speaking, but it can be a means of doing. Here, silence doesn't bridge distance. It creates it.

In "Alguma Coisa Sobre o Nada: A Anticrítica," Daniel Lacerda compares de Campos' poetic practice of anti-criticism (*anticrítica*) with Cage's nonlectures and non-diaries. As Lacerda points out, all of these works present language that turns inward on itself, reveling in the act of self-negation (233).⁶⁰ In de Campos' collection of poems and translations, *O anticrítico*, he reserves the final pages for a translation of the text that implicitly inspired his own: Cage's "Lecture on Nothing." Just as Cage will declare, "i have nothing to say / and i am saying it / and this is poetry," de Campos will translate: "Eu não tenho nada a dizer / e o estou dizendo e isto é / poesia como eu quero" (*O anticrítico* 229). De Campos plays with the "anti-criticism" of translation in a way that imitates Cage's wordplay in his nonlecture: as in de Campos' "albino" pentahehexagram, one "nothing" is best served with another, and to the nothing that Cage speaks de Campos himself attempts to add nothing. However, Cage's and de Campos' contrasting definitions of silence and nothingness become clearer when we compare their performances of the piece. By making the speaker a mere mouthpiece for chance composition, Cage's "Lecture on Nothing" also encourages the audience to participate in the non-scripted elements of the piece—by shifting in their seats, complaining out loud, or walking out of the venue. Cage's stated goal with his piece is to undermine the most basic assumptions

⁶⁰ Along with this article, Lacerda has published "John Cage - Augusto de Campos: Um Diálogo," a detailed explication of the musical references in de Campos' poem, "CAGE: CHANCE: CHANGE."

about what constitutes a lecture: intentional communication of meaning by a speaker to an audience. De Campos, in his own performance of the translated nonlecture, undermines these same conventions but in a different way: by lecturing to an empty room. At various points in his recorded talk, the camera pans from de Campos to the vacant auditorium before him. Unlike Cage, for whom the speaker's silence is merely a means of allowing (or provoking) a surrounding fullness of action and sound, de Campos sees silence as absence—as negative space. His own silence as creator finds its echo in the empty room. Here, de Campos playfully turns Cage's work into an exercise in futility and self-isolation.

Campos would dedicate poems, visual art, and essays to Cage, but these critical and often ironic tributes find an extreme example in the work of de Campos' friend and follower, Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. Among de Campos' many collaborators in Brazil, Oiticica would become especially invested in what he would call de Campos's aesthetic of "WHITE ON WHITE," declaring his friend to be "a previewer of the void in the concept of nakedness [. . .] nakedness void of significance" (Parangolé 2). Although also a professed admirer of Cage, Oiticica takes a cue from his compatriot's ambivalent approach to Cage's work. To the question, "what whiteness can one add to that whiteness?" Oiticica gives a playful response: "Cosmococa sobre John Cage," a series of photographs of the blank white cover of Cage's *Notations*, over which Oiticica has arranged long lines of cocaine.

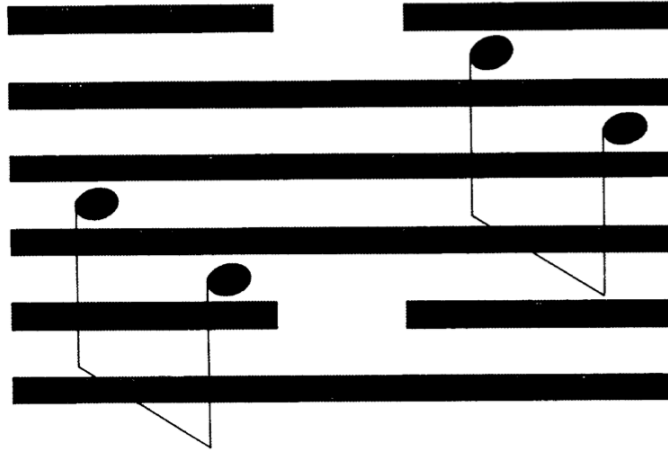


Oiticica declares these images void of signification, and yet they are clearly a transgression and a provocation. For Oiticica, an aesthetic of silence represents an "abolition of moral judgments"—a lack of value both literal and figurative—and yet his piece seems aimed to provoke precisely that sort of judgment. Like de Campos, Oiticica adapts Cage's work in a way that repeats its meaninglessness, not as passive homage but as active provocation. We think of silence as static, and yet this is a work that emphasizes its action: the act of consuming art, the shock that this particular piece delivers, the transgression that it presents. Like de Campos, Oiticica uses silence to parody and to distance. Silence becomes a means of relating to others, but not necessarily in the peaceable, harmonious way that Cage had imagined.

In an essay entitled, "The Image of Voice," Sérgio Antonio Bessa describes what he identifies as the "cacophony" of *Poetamenos*. "Words, syllables, and phonemes mirror each other," Bessa says, "creating the effect of an echo chamber" (232). Here, echo takes on the shades of its literal Latin translation—*imago vocis*, or "the image of voice." In Brazilian concrete poetry, Bessa argues, image becomes a means for engaging sound, and in *Poetamenos* this leads to an excess of both. However, if *Poetamenos* can be described as a literary echo chamber, later works by de Campos become the opposite—an anechoic chamber. To the excess of sensory information in *Poetamenos*, others of de Campos' works play with sensory deprivation.

As Cage does during the early phases of his work on silence, de Campos draws inspiration from the music theory of Anton Webern. In *Música de invenção*, de Campos would explain what he identifies as the "'brancos' sonoros"—sonorous blanks—of Webern's music. "Em Webern encontramos um uso sem precedentes da concisão formal," de Campos says, "da dialética entre som e silêncio (este, pela primeira vez, tornado 'audível,' empregado não como pausa mas como elemento estrutural, em pé de igualdade com os próprios sons." / "In Webern we find an unprecedented use of formal concision, of a dialectic between sound and silence (this, for the first time, becoming 'audible,' employed not as a pause but as a structural element, treated as equally valuable as sounds themselves" (96). During the 1940s Cage would acknowledge his debt to Webern's valorization of silence while moving away from Webern's understanding of silence as the absence of sound. De Campos, however, would incorporate the idea of the "branco sonoro" into a poetics that values negative space as a productive structural element.

Campos' original "Pentahexagram for John Cage" (as he intended it to appear) provides an apt example:



As K. David Jackson notes, the breaks in the lines of this musical staff could be visual representations of silence. Cage's friend Morton Feldman would experiment with similar notational systems in his own experiments with musical silence. While Bessa discusses *Poetamenos* as figuring voice visually, here de Campos perhaps figures the presence of silence in a similarly visual fashion, leaving a "branco sonoro" on the page. While Craig Saper points out that de Campos' poem plays with the letters of Cage's name in a way similar to Cage's play with names in his mesostic poems (*Networked Art* 81), the difference in their compositional methods is essential. Cage uses the *I Ching* to compose his mesostics, but de Campos incorporates the *I Ching* into his work visually, combining its black bars with a standard musical staff. By joining these two forms of notation, de Campos ensures that neither can be performed. We accept the poem as a cipher because he decodes it for us, but the notes are without meaning. Not only has de Campos broken two bars of the staff, but he has also included an extra line, denaturing both traditional Western musical notation as well as the *I Ching*. Rather than being a visual work of art

that codes a certain performance, as is *Poetamenos* (even if that performance can never be achieved), the pentahexagram becomes instead a work whose performance is impossible from the outset. While scholars like Jackson have pointed to the pentahexagram's visual notation for silence, it in fact frustrates even this. It becomes visual notation for nothing at all.

Within de Campos's various retrospective collections, "Pentahexagram for John Cage" marks a turning point. Like the pentahexagram, much of de Campos's subsequent poetic production during and after the 1970s becomes concerned with the potential silence and emptiness of poetry. De Campos discovers that each medium, while expanding the possible means of personal expression, also necessarily serves as an expression of the limitations it imposes. As each art gives us new ways of speaking, it also creates new ways of keeping us silent. Take, for example, de Campos' poem entitled "Oco" (1998):

D O I	D O I	S O O	E S O
O D I	O Δ R	▽ Δ C	E U R
Δ D O	E Δ T	U O O	E S S
I Δ ▽	E O S	▽ Δ Z	O O O
I D Δ	I L E	I O O	S O M
E T U	N C I	B R Δ	S E M
D O O	O C O	N C O	S O M
Q U E	M O U	Q U E	Q U E
E U T	M S	I N ▽	S U F
O C O	O C O	O C O	O C O

This poem's rigid composition could not be further from the exuberant, variegated, and apparently disordered typography of *Poetamenos*. By choosing a font that draws attention to negative space within individual words, de Campos creates a poem in which words simply seem to contain more of the emptiness that surrounds them. Composed in four vertical columns, each reading from top to bottom and ending in the word "oco," the work discards conventional lineation in favor of a form that more closely resembles a mathematical table of sums. In each column the poet records his words and calculates the total: nothing. The work constantly points to what the poet calls, in the third column, "o vacuo o vazio o branco que invoco" / "the vacuum the void the blankness that I invoke."

Of the void that the work invokes, the poet says in the fourth column that "eso eu ressoo o som sem som" / "that i make resonate the sound without sound." As in his pentahexagram, de Campos attempts to bring silence—as absence—into his work as an element of composition and not merely a placeholder. However, just as in the pentahexagram, even this fails. In the poem's final words the poet admits that even this silence "eu sofoco" / "I suffocate." As "Oco" announces from its first word, the poem's compositional principle is the pain of absence. Where Cage's art presents the creator's silence as a joyful affirmation of plenitude and possibility, de Campos's work here treats silence as isolation, deficiency, or lack.

Silence and Technology

In one of the program guides for the MoMA's Cage exhibition, a text entitled "Silence Is Not What It Used to Be," David Platzker begins by noting that "in an era

when no cell phones or other digital devices existed, silence was a more common facet of everyday life. Perhaps attention spans were longer, distractions fewer, and maybe the pace of the world was slower." While it is tempting to read something of a Luddite ethos into Cage's advocacy for silence, de Campos points out that silence itself can be a technology. In "Musicaos," the collection of essays dedicated to Cage's life and work that de Campos publishes in *Música de Invenção*, de Campos suggests that the "chaos" that Cage's silence encourages is not a reversion to a more primal state but rather the realization of carefully composed political and aesthetic thought. As de Campos explains:

Inspirado na melhor tradição norte-americana, a da desobediência civil e a da não-violência, de Thoreau a Martin Luther King, esse compositor rebelde é um notável compósito de anarquista e construtivista, além de ser o profeta da arte interdisciplinar, da música à poesia, da dança ao vídeo, do teipe à vida. (135)

[Inspired in the best of North American traditions, that of civil disobedience and nonviolence, of Thoreau and Martin Luther King, this rebel composer is a singular composite of anarchist and constructivist, in addition to being a prophet of interdisciplinary art: from music to poetry; from dance to video; from film to life.]

As de Campos points out here, Cage's anarchism, also a constructivism, is not anti-technology but rather a technology in itself. Indeed, when Cage visits São Paulo he will meet with a local anarchist group, remarking later in *M*: "Advice / to Brazilian anarchists: improve / telephone system. Without telephone, / merely starting revolution'll be / impossible" (60). Cage's thought presents a mutual dependency between anarchism and

media technology. Rather than abolish existing technologies, Cage (like de Campos) calls for an end to the policing of boundaries between media.

Unsurprisingly, Cage's work has found its most robust afterlife not in museums but in digital media. When asked about the computer in 1965, Cage would reply, "I don't particularly like it," but by the mid-1980s he began to see it as the natural medium for his work (Kostelantetz 77). In 1985 he would admit that his computer was a "great liberation" (77). As he explains, computer programming allows him to complete his mesostic poems with greater ease and a greater degree of chance: "I'm having a program made shortly so that I could every hour or every minute make a new poem on the same subject so that could kind of be as though poetry was put on the stove and was cooking, and you could taste it, and each time it would taste different" (77). Through digital media, Cage imagines making poetry a domestic part of his daily routine. Distinct media categories become inconsequential when art's importance lies not in expressing a reality outside of itself but in becoming a means of gaining a new awareness and appreciation of everyday experience. "I think we're almost at a point of change," Cage would say in the mid-1980s. "What must be done eventually is elimination not only of the publication but of the need for photocopying, and connect it with the telephone so that anyone can have anything he wishes at any time" (160-161). For Cage, print publication represents an obstacle to integrating art with everyday lived experience. If art is to help us to "wake up to the life we're living," as he often would urge, then access to it should connect us with others in the most immediate ways that technology will allow.

Cage's *4'33"* has been reimagined in various media—poetry, visual art, film—but finds its most radical reinvention in a recent mobile application of the same title. This

app, according to its user's guide, "allows you to record and share personal performances of John Cage's *4'33*.'" The program records ambient sound, divides it into three movements, and publishes it as an audio file accessed through a pin placed in a map of the world. By clicking on a pin in Vancouver, we hear four minutes and thirty-three seconds of audio recorded in tattoo parlor. Other pins bring up audio from the breakfast room of a suburban home just outside of Chicago, or an access road on the west coast of Puerto Rico. Just as *Blanco's* iPad app finally publishes the poem as Paz originally imagined it, the *4'33*" app realizes the sort of connectivity that Cage had dreamed of for indeterminate art.

For de Campos, digital technology provides a similar opportunity for transforming poetic practice. As he explains in an interview with Roland Greene,

the virtual movement of the printed word, the typogram, is giving way to the real movement of the computerized word, the videogram, and to the typography of the electronic era. From static to cinematic poetry, which, combined with computerized sound resources, can raise the verbivocovisual structures preconceived by CP [concrete poetry] to their most complete materialization" (Greene NP).

For de Campos, digital poetry represents a natural culmination of concrete poetry's emphasis on the material form of language itself.⁶¹ De Campos would create a series of digital poems that he would call "clip-poemas," "poemas interativos," "inter-poems," or "morphograms." Some of these are previous concrete poems that now move across the

⁶¹ For more on the relationship between de Campos' concrete and digital poetry see Chris Funkhouser, "Augusto de Campos, Digital Poetry, and the Anthropophagic Imperative."

screen or can be altered with the click of a cursor. Others are original compositions that incorporate motion and sound. Another piece, "Caoscage," incorporates Cage's words, face, and voice into a program that randomizes their appearance on the screen. De Campos further explains in an interview with Chris Funkhouser that he

took a musical cell of Boulez and united it with a Cagian fragment. So you cannot recognize what is Cage and what is Boulez. There are in a single musical cell. Sounds that appear when you interact with the image of that circle, the image of chaos, because Cage recalls the anecdote, the story of Kwang-Tse, so the seven signs that compound the face arrive at the end. When the face is completed, chaos appears and then Cage (Funkhouser NP).

De Campos' piece, like the 4'33" app, submits fragments of Cage and his work to indeterminate operations that were never available to him during his lifetime. De Campos takes his imagination of Cage as a *músicopoetapintor* and realizes it through digital media.

But while Cage imagines a new universal connectivity, de Campos increasingly draws attention to questions of unequal access to developing media technology. Intermediality serves as a model for international relations, but de Campos reveals that the reverse also increasingly becomes true: material inequality determines what is possible in the realm of inter-artistic production. Digital media allows de Campos to create what Keine Brillenburg Wurth calls "medially complex" poetry, where the relationship between diverse media becomes unusually fluid or unstable, but this is not some perfect multimedial synthesis. Even from de Campos' earliest concrete work,

exploring the materiality of language as a medium for expression necessarily meant confronting the material limitations of the means available for reproducing that language. Many of the early publications of concrete poems like *Poetamenos*, for example, could only vaguely suggest their variegated colors through black and white print. Just as Funkhauser points out that much of de Campos' early Concrete work finds a more complex realization when transposed to digital media, much of his work in digital media seems to draw attention to the insufficiency of the tools available to him, rather than their limitless possibilities.

Campos' approach to Cage is fraught. In this chapter I have tended to focus on his skepticism because it is sorely lacking in most Cage criticism, which tends to settle too easily into unconditional celebration or off-hand dismissal. But de Campos' is a caution driven by admiration. Even after he allowed their correspondence to drop off in the mid-1980s, de Campos continued to write about Cage's work, and would create a long poem to honor Cage upon his death. Following Cage, de Campos treats silence as an artistic medium in its own right, testing both its possibilities and its limitations. For de Campos, a medium can only be exploited to its fullest if it is used in a way that does both these things at the same time. While he criticizes naïveté of Cage's philosophies of silence, he also makes use of silence in ways that radically revise his own previous work: his concrete treatment of language as always full; his reliance on multimedial art as a means of reaching across international lines; his approach to print and digital media in general. While de Campos cannot resolve the contradictions evident in Cage's work and legacy,

he shows us how an awareness of these contradictions can lead to a richer understanding of the silence that Cage helped to pioneer.

Conclusion: White Noise, Silent Skin

In 2009, Brazilian multimedia artist Raquel Stolf displayed her "lista de coisas brancas," an installation where the walls of an all-white space displayed, in glossy white text, lists of things that are always, sometimes, or in some way white:

arroz. açúcar. nuvem. sal. isopor. caderno novo. tontura. neve. pérola. céu
nublado. sussurro. borracha de apagar. concha. minha geladeira. cabelo branco.
vermes. pasta dental. eco. naftalina. dia de sol forte na praia. ovos. morte. tinta de
parede. vômito.

[rice. sugar. cloud. salt. styrofoam. new notebook. silliness. snow.
saucepan. cloudy sky. whisper. pencil eraser. conch. my freezer. white hair.
worms. toothpaste. echo. mothballs. day of strong sun on the beach. eggs. death.
wall color. vomit.]

This small sample of Stolf's extensive list of white things demonstrates how she plays with the precedent of all-white visual works by artists like Malevich and Rauschenberg. Like the *White Paintings*, Stolf's work seems to be amenable to any association one might have with the color, including abstract concepts like death, categories like "used things" and "new things," and even silence itself. But while Rauschenberg's work is disarming in its seeming simplicity, Stolf's installation presents us with more than we can grasp at one time. Even the text on its own (as published on her web site), a dense block of closely-set text, is overwhelming. Rather than supplying our own associations to the work, as Rauschenberg had hoped in the case of the *White Paintings*, we find ourselves futilely sorting through the seemingly never-ending associations with which someone else has

surrounded us. Later, Stolf would adapt this visual and tactile "lista de coisas brancas" into an audio work, "assonâncias de silêncios." Here, Stolf collects a series of silences recorded in different contexts. As in her list of white things, Stolf creates a seemingly all-inclusive list of silences: "silêncios preparados; silêncios modificados; silêncios acompanhados; silêncios ruidosos e ruídos silênciosos; silêncios com falhas; com defeitos em suas gravações-capturas," / "prepared silences; modified silences; accompanied silences; noisy silences and silent noises; flawed silences; silences with defects in their recordings." And the list goes on.

In a sense my own project has been a "list of silent things." The works of the poets, visual artists, and composers discussed here all demonstrate that no two silences can be exactly the same. From the prismatic silence of Paz's *Blanco*, to the mischievous silences of Cage's mesostic poems, to the frustrated silence of Augusto de Campos' "pentahectagram," these silences demand consideration within their respective historical, cultural, and material contexts. Poetry that refuses conventional sense-making often is dismissed as unconcerned with questions of cultural difference, political engagement, or historical context, but the works examined here clearly serve not just to engage these contexts but to actively shape them.

Both the champions and detractors of contemporary experimental and conceptual poetry often claim that the idea behind the creation of these works is worth more than their apparently inconsequential form and content: an indecipherable jumble of letters on an otherwise blank page; a nonsensical and seemingly unreadable collection of chance-composed "mesostic" poems; a blank piece of cardstock tucked in an envelope and mailed to a friend. The material existence of such texts initially appears inconsequential,

and so questions of circulation, reception, translation, and readerly response seemingly become irrelevant. However, I have argued that such experimental, concept-based poetry is as important for what it *does* as for what it *is*, and that it has much to gain from a conversation with its supposed antitheses: reader response criticism, performance theory, translation studies, or even close reading.

What initially drew me to this project was a fascination with postwar poetry's attempts to answer the questions: how do we write with a literary language that has failed so completely? How do we create visual works within artistic idioms that fell so short of their projected social goals? In the totally reconfigured economic, political, and philosophical landscape after World War II, it seemed that the task at hand for any avant-garde was to find a way out of the void left behind by the prewar movements like Surrealism and Dada. Poets like Paz, Cage, and the de Campos brothers, who had trained within these traditions, sought to escape from the silence to which their lack of a common artistic project seemed to condemn them. But for these writers silence gradually became a generative force. Rather than escape the silence that they perceived as their lot, they sought to use it in new and different ways. As ideas about silence replaced notions of voice as poetry's foundational principle, this generated entire genres of "silent" works while also shaping a range of attendant literary practices and phenomena: translation, circulation, adaptation, or even correspondence. Throughout this dissertation we have seen that even while silence does not say anything, it can do many different things. Abstention from utterance can also be a performance. Silence serves as a way of being and behaving with others. It is a means of inhabiting the world, and for these poets it became a way of changing it. The task of the avant-garde was no longer to "speak out" or

"speak for" but to fall silent. Because the goal of this dissertation was to explore the ways in which silence served these poets as an ethical stance before the world, my method has centered around an examination of how it shaped their interactions with each other.

One difficulty I encountered in writing this project is that while Paz, Cage, and the de Campos brothers each attempt to fashion silence into an avant-garde form of activity, the ways in which they use silence are widely divergent and often at odds with each other. They adopt silence as a strategy within vastly different contexts and often for very different political and aesthetic ends. Each uses silence to oppose conventional poetic notions of speech and the self-identical authorial voice, but their ways of doing so often were not mutually intelligible. For example, Cage was largely unconcerned with (and apparently unaware of) most of the continental philosophy that inspired the work of Paz and the de Campos brothers, even while its attempts to destabilize notions of authorial intention coincided so well with Cage's own project. Paz, for his part, delved deep into Cage's work without much consideration of the musical and visual traditions from which that work most immediately emerged. Even the aesthetic agendas of the de Campos brothers grew apart during the sixties and seventies, with Haroldo leaving behind the concrete poetics that Augusto continued to develop. However, where the project of these poets broadly coincides is in their attempts to imagine silence as a more ethically sound means of internationalism. They all were writing at a time when art's relationship to international relations—especially within the American hemisphere—seemed particularly in question. By the late 1960s the utopian internationalism of Dada and Surrealism seemed to have dissipated, and in what Haroldo de Campos called the "post-utopian" world that these movements left behind, the clearest way to avoid falsely

"speaking for" others lay in avoiding speech altogether. Cage increasingly positioned silence as an alternative to the sort of imperialism carried out by the U.S. in places like Viet Nam and Puerto Rico, and the de Campos brothers' nonsensical concrete poetics aimed to absorb and disintegrate invasive foreign cultural material, atomizing and appropriating imported discourses and aesthetics. Paz, who simultaneously performed the roles of poet and professional diplomat, often made poetic collaboration into public overtures of cultural diplomacy. Experimental poetry games like Japanese *renga* made this collaboration into a process of dissolving individual voice and authorial intention, rather than imposing or extending it.

As evidenced throughout this dissertation, these poets' treatment of silence displays a certain amount of slippage between the aural and the visual. They often explain the auditory experience of silence in terms of visual phenomena, as if an understanding of nothingness could be found by displacing explanation from one realm of experience to another. This works both ways: the white space of the blank page becomes "silent" while silence itself becomes "white." This necessarily emerges from these poets' choice to privilege the sound and appearance of a word over its sense. If the experience of literary language is—as James Joyce claimed and as the de Campos brothers often repeated—"verbivocovisual," then a reader's experience of the blank page itself must be similarly aural and visual. The whiteness of the blank page is a condition of its silence, and vice versa.

This dissertation focuses almost exclusively on poetry's engagement with discourses of silence, but the "blank" works explored in this chapter also engage related discourses of whiteness. In works like *Blanco*, silence is given a skin color. Paz proposes

his poem as a textual practice of Tantric ritual. As he explains in "El pensamiento en blanco," "en el tantrismo hindú, el yoguín ofrece su esperma como una 'amarosa oblación al fuego' y lo abandona en su pareja" / "in Hindu Tantrism, the yogi offers up his sperm as an 'amarous oblation to the fire' and abandons it on his partner" (37). In *Blanco*, both poet and reader abandon words to the white space of the page, which the poem likens to a woman's body:

Mírala fluir
 Entre tus pechos caer
 Sobre tu vientre
 Blanca y negra

[Watch it flow
 Between your breasts fall
 Over your abdomen
 Black and white]

As black words fall against the white page, the poem explicitly engages Western discourses of the white female body as receptive, pure, submissive, and finally silent, ready to receive the words of an explicitly male-gendered poet/reader. As this indicates, there are silences I have not addressed in this dissertation. While part of my project has been to explore the diversity of silences that flowered in the postwar period, this diversity in itself serves to highlight uncountable silences upon which I have not touched. These are the silences that Dauenhauer would label as "muteness"—the inability to speak. I have touched on Augusto de Campos' criticism of Cage's inexperience with muteness

imposed through economic disparity, but there also is the muteness forced upon those whose gender or skin color often has marked them as unauthorized or unable to participate in dominant discourses surrounding poetry and art.

In 1951, Robert Rauschenberg wrote a letter to a friend explaining his *White Paintings*: "they are large white (1 white as 1 GOD) canvases organized and selected with the experience of time and presented with the innocence of a virgin" (letter to Betty Parsons, quoted in Hopps 230). Here whiteness is innocence and virginity as a function of Christian holiness and divine mystery. Although, as Richard Dyer notes in *White* (1997), "the power value of whiteness resides above all in its instabilities and apparent neutrality, the colour does carry the more explicit symbolic sense of moral and also aesthetic superiority" (70). As in Rauschenberg, we can detect a similar reliance on this Christian discourse in de Campos' characterization of writing as "transliteration," a process characterized by divine mystery and beauty. However, unlike Rauschenberg, who insists on a discursive purity to accompany his works' aesthetic purity ("1 white as 1 GOD") de Campos' works reveal themselves as the point of encounter between various competing discourses of whiteness. Here, the mysterious purity of Christian whiteness transitions uneasily to a whiteness associated with the cleanliness, sterility, and certainty of the scientific. His poetry emphasizes these discourses as distinct ways of knowing and approaching the unknown, and draws attention to their potential incompatibility.

While Dyer points out that in Western tradition "white is beautiful because it is the colour of virtue" (72), Paz, Cage, and de Campos experiment with the ways in which Eastern discourses of whiteness can both uphold and undermine more familiar Western understandings of it. Their poetry suggests these associations and dissonances, and sets us

in search of them. Paz, for example, opens *Blanco* with epigraphs from two iconic Western and Eastern sources from which he draws ideas of whiteness' relationship to silence: the *Hevajra Tantra* and the work of Stéphane Mallarmé. Like the blank poetry of de Campos or Sarduy, *Blanco* dramatizes the polysemy of the word "blanco," but also on a resulting proliferation of related discourses. *Blanco* presents a suggested encounter between Western and Eastern understandings of silence.

Throughout the work of these three poets, the relationship between these various discourses is rarely stable. If at times a Zen or Tantric understanding of whiteness merely seems to be in the service of Christian symbology, at other times the reverse is true, with the demanded discursive purity of Western whiteness constantly compromised and even subsumed in various discourses from other traditions. This poetry discourages any easy resolution of these tensions. They seek to cast the poem as a site of radical openness, inviting other ways of knowing into what Dyer characterizes as one of the most secure and sealed discursive positions in Western society. While Dyer locates the power of whiteness in "the slippage between white as a colour and white as colourless" (47), these poets exploit this aspect of whiteness by drawing attention to it, destabilizing the discourse by exposing its contradictions.

Stolf's "lista de coisas brancas" also highlights another shortcoming of this dissertation: it has dealt mostly with poetry produced by (and circulated between) men of privilege. As Stolf's audio recording of her piece seems to emphasize, her own meditation on silence is one that gets lost as white noise. Like bp nichols' better known sound poem, "White Noise," the audio version of "lista de coisas brancas" presents us with words that are almost indistinguishable, overlapping to the point where we cannot differentiate

between them. They become "noise" in much the same way that Cage's mesostic poems do, but unlike in Cage's work we here get the sense that there *could be* a coherence to the work, if only we could untangle and extricate the individual words. Cheryl Glenn has pointed out in *Unspoken* that women and minorities often are forced to inhabit silence in ways that would not apply to poets like Paz, Cage, or the de Campos brothers.

Take, for example, the case of Argentinean poet Alejandra Pizarnik. Pizarnik's poetry, perhaps even to a greater extent than that of Paz or even Cage, is full of meditations on the nature of silence. Like the silence in *Blanco*, this is a silence heavily associated with the mute female body:

from "Silencios" (from *La última inocencia*, 1956)

silencio yo me uno al silencio

yo me he unido al silencio

y me dejo hacer

me dejo beber

me dejo decir

["Silences"

silence i join silence

i have joined myself to silence

and i let myself be made

i let myself be drunk

i let myself be spoken]

While in Paz's poem the beloved's silent body is spoken for and written onto, Pizarnik lets her own silence "speak," standing out on the page through its constant repetition. She

plays with the language of marriage, "uniting" herself to a silence that speaks and acts in her place. Here, adopting silence means becoming passive. As Suzanne Chávez Silverman has pointed out, Pizarnik's silence never seems triumphant or transcendent as it often does in Paz's work. Also unlike the silence in Paz's poetry, Pizarnik's silence remains intensely personal and private. Eduardo Chirinos notes that Pizarnik's work becomes a repository or sanctuary for silence—*la morada del silencio* or "the house of silence," as Chirinos puts it—but it was a house that trapped and confined. Only after Pizarnik's suicide did silence become a topic of study among her critics. Even when Paz himself takes note of Pizarnik's silence, it is praise that seems as unperceptive as Cage's response to de Campos' blank tribute. In a letter to Pizarnik that he sent from Delhi in April of 1967, Paz claims that the poems she had sent him were surrounded by a "circle of silence," and that her poetry in general "se extiende en círculos silenciosos — el sonido de la piedra o la mano al caer en el agua" / "extends in silent circles — the sound of the stone or the hand upon hitting the water." Especially in light of Pizarnik's suicide some years later, Paz's praise of her silence in aesthetic terms seems misguided, unperceptive, or even misplaced. Pizarnik would confess to Paz that she felt trapped. In her letters, as in her poetry, the unsaid or unsayable—the ever-extending "circles of silence" that Paz describes—serves to confine.

My hope is that these under-explored aspects of my project signal opportunities for future investigation. Not incidentally, these areas also point toward artistic traditions of silence that extend both before and beyond the decades that frame this study. I largely have excluded discussion of more contemporary engagements with silence, like those of Stolf or Marina Abramovic. Similarly, while the project occasionally references

treatments of silence in the mysticism of Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz or the *Hevajra Tantra*, a richer exploration of non-modern and non-Western sources could cast further light on the treatment of silence in both the postwar period and among earlier modernist poets like Stéphane Mallarmé or Guillaume Apollinaire.

As Ihab Hassan has claimed in *The Literature of Silence*, silence provides a means of transvaluation. For Paz, Cage, the de Campos brothers, and other poets, this first of all meant transforming our notions about silence itself. They experiment with it, and explore new ways of building their poetry around it. As we have seen in these pages, these poets existed among vast and tangled networks of silence. This silence was constantly transforming, gathering new meanings as it helped to dissolve old ones, never forming a coherent genre or movement but instead helping to inspire a sea-change in poetic composition. In many ways, contemporary experimental and conceptual poetry in a range of languages and traditions emerged from this silence. It is a common point of non-origin, the invocation of tradition through an indication of lack, and an ever-changing way of being in the world with others.

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