

***Poèmes Paris 1925, Vicente Huidobro and Joaquín Torres García: Visual Image and Poetic Writing/  
Poèmes Paris 1925***

*Cedomil Goic*

The reader's participation or intervention in literature—as well as that of the spectator in contemporary art—is an integral, even hostile, part of the creative process. With this in mind, I am interested here in addressing the encounter of visual image and poetic writing in a dialogue between art and friendship, with respect to the serious modality of art illustrating poetry and of the co-participation of the arts.<sup>1</sup>

I will consider Joaquín Torres García's original artistic proposal to his friend Vicente Huidobro in *Poèmes Paris 1925*.<sup>2</sup> It is a hand-crafted book, 18.5 cm x 13 cm, which the Uruguayan painter prepared himself.<sup>3</sup> The lengthy hard-cover book, which can be found in the library of the Getty Research Institute, only contains five of the 32 numbered poems which comprise Huidobro's book, specifically, the first five—"1" through "5"—of *Tout à coup* (1925).<sup>4</sup> Torres García has accomplished here an original and innovative intervention in honor of his friend. The Uruguayan painter published a number of original books with the letter style he makes use of here and with a set of well-defined symbols which he applied widely in his Constructivist paintings.<sup>5</sup> Motivated by the text, Torres García introduces new visual signifiers which are not to be found in the repertoire or code of symbols he has established. We might call this dialogue between poetry and painting "illustrations" or "illustrated poems." The painter adds onto the original poetic text a drawing, a stroke of the pen, a figure which he inserts between lines of verse and between words.

The text of the poems is handwritten in imitation of print type in both the lower and the upper-case and, occasionally, only in the upper-case.<sup>6</sup> The letters are in italics with a slight inclination to the right in both the lower and upper case. The family to which the characters belong is the Grotesque, Antique or Sans Serif, with distinctive traits on the foot except for the words "Torres García," the letter "M" and, in a few distractions, the letter "A." In the Uruguayan painter's writing, the stems of the letters "b," "d," "l," and "h," have an original flourish or ornament toward the left, and the "g," toward the right.

### Modalities of Intervention and Dialogue between Poetry and Graphic Design

The originality of the Uruguayan Constructivist painter's proposal consists in mixing or interlacing the lines of verse and the words with visual figures, small hieroglyphics, or symbols entwined with the words. In some cases, these establish equivalences with words and, in others, with phrases of varying length.

Torres García has intervened in the poetic space in several ways, all of which generate a variety of meanings: (1) the original text of Huidobro's poems is organized in a series of lines justified in each case at the left margin, in complete lines of verse or in segmented lines of verse or enjambments; the Uruguayan painter's intervention modifies the original disposition, introducing several breaks and enjambments, fragmenting the continuous lines of verse, thereby giving way to a new spatial organization of the poems; (2) the original poems do not extend for more than a single page in length; Torres García's versions extend each of the poems to 5, 4, and 5 pages respectively; (3) in the original text of these poems, there are no words or lines of verse in upper-case; the Uruguayan painter uses upper-case in several instances in each of the poems; (4) the painter is unaware, in two cases, of a mistake made by the printer of the original text who introduced a period in the middle of a verse, and another one at the end of each poem; (5) finally, he does not correct one of the misprints in the original text, which he repeats, and misspells three additional words.<sup>7</sup>

If we focus our attention now on the first poem, we are able to observe that in poem "1," each page includes one small symbolic drawing. Each of these is the direct signifier of a word which the text modifies with prior and subsequent qualifiers, which, in turn, poetically alter the immediate meaning of the visual image: "Les deux ou trois / charmes des escaliers / du hasard sont / INCONTESTABLES" (The two or three / charms of the stairs / of chance are / UNDENIABLE). Torres García writes in upper-case a word that in the original is in lower-case. This is another modality of intervening in the text. Nonetheless, the painter is unable to represent the "two or three charms of the stairs of chance," which cannot be conveyed visually. The painter can only limit himself to drawing the steps of a staircase which begins and ends nowhere, remaining faithful to the "created image" of "des escaliers du hasard" and its other qualifiers.

In principle, the symbolic drawings that accompany words such as "yeux," "lune," "oiseau," represent graphically only the *signified* of these words and not the "created image" of the phrase of which they are but a part. Torres García writes, for example, "Là-haut / Montez / vers l'avenir précis" (Up there / Ascend / toward the precise future). Rather than point toward a distant horizon, the painter draws the image of a cliff or peak which the text

urges the reader to ascend “vers l’avenir précis.” Thus, here he privileges the literal transcription over the reference to the distant horizon and the sunset (the actual reference here), though he does put the semantic stress on the ascent itself. The painter intervenes in the text a second time by writing in the word “CIEL” in upper-case. In this instance, moreover, Torres García repeats the typographical error of the first edition, where a period is introduced after the word “externes.” It is understandable, however, that the poems should have no punctuation marks of any sort, for these had already been eliminated by Huidobro in his earlier “spatialist” stage and, programmatically, from the moment of his involvement in *Nord-Sud*.

Torres García subsequently writes, “les vagues du / CIEL / caressent les sables” the waves of / THE SKY / caress the sands). In these lines of verse, it is in the visual image of the inverted undulation of “les vagues du CIEL,” or else, in the undulated formations of the sand dunes—representing the horizon as a place of synthesis of contraries—that the painter gives tribute to the poet’s *Creacionismo* and the poetic experience of the unusual. This synthesis is one in which the painter’s symbolic drawings and the text and its meaning bear the closest correspondence to each other.

The lines of verse that immediately follow introduce the poetic experience of the unexpected or the unusual—*tout à coup*—which correlates with the poetic experience of the five poems, and, in fact, with of all the poems that make up Huidobro’s book *Tout à coup*: “Une certaine chaleur / s’échappe / des plis des drapeaux / secoués para le vent / De mât à mât / les / mots se balacent” A certain color / escapes / from the folds of the sails / lashed by the wind / From mast to mast / the / words swing to and fro). Note the alliterative and paronomastic play that illustrates the movement—“De mât à mât / les / mots se balacent.” In this case, the graphic symbol of the double-masted sailboat appears in metonymic response to the mention of the sails and the masts; that is, as parts for the whole. It is interesting to note that the double-masted sailboat, which is one of the symbols recurrently used by the Uruguayan artist in his other Constructivist pieces, is here fitted with sails as a way to establish a closer correspondence with the image suggested by the poet. The painter repeats the typographic error of the first edition in his transcription of the original poem: “du plis,” which should read “des plis.” The poem concludes with the lines “Et un oiseau / mange les / fruits du / LEVANT” And a bird / eats the / fruits of the / EAST). Once again, the artist intervenes in the text as he alters the letter-case by writing the word “LEVANT” in upper-case within the visual image of the rising sun. This solar image represents the bird composed of two curved strokes (suggestive of wings), which are added to the semicircle and to the rays of the sun: it is the bird that devours and is itself devoured during the moment of poetic creation.

In poem “2,” Torres García alters the distribution of the symbolic drawings of each page. Of its four pages, two contain only one symbolic drawing, another contains two and one has no drawings at all. The first page is illustrated with the image of the spider on a mirror: “Sur le miroir / une araignée qui / rame comme une / barque régulière” (On the mirror / a spider that / rows like a / steadily moving boat). Of all the visual images, this one is the most direct, though, naturally, it does not allow for any movement. On the next page, the artist writes the words “LES GESTES / DERRIÈRE” in upper-case; a few lines down, he writes “NAUFRAGE.”

The third page opens with the image of the clock, another of the recurring graphic symbols in Torres García’s repertoire, which precedes and refers to “À l’heure des hirondelles” (At the hour of the swallows). The final lines of verse on this page are preceded by the visual image of a pair of eyes, though the design of these eyes does not convey the imaginative transformation that modifies them: “Ta femme a les / cheveux blonds / neufs / (graphic drawing of eyes) / Ses yeux sont / de jaunes d’œufs” (Your woman has her / hair blond / and new / [graphic drawing of eyes] / Her eyes are / egg yolks).

On the last page, the line “Les yeux des brunes / Sont des jaunes de LUNE” (The eyes of brunettes / Are MOON yolks) contains the simple representation of the word “LUNE” inside the drawing of the circle of the moon, as a “created image” of an egg yolk of cosmic dimensions. Moreover, Torres García writes the word “LUNE” in upper-case, in contrast to the poet’s version—although in both cases, no color is added to the visual image. And following the unusual images of the poem, some more familiar than others, the reader comes upon an unexpectedly “created” vision, complete with cosmic and luminous imagery: “Les regards satellites / Se promènent sous les arbres de l’orbite” (The satellite glances / Stroll under the trees of the orbit).

In poem “3,” the text opens with the lines: “Je m’éloigne en / silence” (I go away in / silence), and is followed by the partial image of a man representing the poetic subject of the poem as an itinerant “I.” The image of man—another symbol, together with that of woman, drawn from Torres García’s symbolic repertoire—that appears in full on the inside of the front cover of the hand-crafted book, shows only partially in the poem. It seems to reflect the uncanny reconfiguration of the poem’s speaker as a silent wayfarer who drowns under crops of prayers, as a traveler who resembles the four seasons.

Finally, Torres García writes, “Le bel oiseau navigateur / Était comme une / horloge entourée de / coton / Avant de s’envoler / m’a dit ton / nom” (The beautiful bird that navigates / Was like a / clock surrounded by / cotton / Before taking flight / it has told me your / name). This time, the painter

inscribes the word “nom” inside the drawing of a bird, in which the “n,” the “o,” and the “m” are so designed as to represent the bird’s claws.

The poem concludes with the visual image that constitutes the unexpected poetic experience: “L’horizon colonial est tout couvert de draperies” (The colonial horizon is all covered with draperies), and appeals to the reader in line with a natural and “Mundonovista” preference—the opposition between nature and artifice—: “Allons / dormir sous / l’arbre / pareil à la / pluie” (Let us go / sleep under / the tree / that looks like the / rain), followed by a period, and several strokes of the pen on the trunk and branches of a tree, suggestive both of an abstract representation of its foliage and of rain. Additionally, in this poem, Torres García writes the words “CATHÉDRALES” and “DRAPERIES” in upper-case, both of which refer to visual images defined by the metonymic allusion.

The other two poems of the book, poems “4,” and “5”—which we are not authorized to reproduce here—are also organized around the expression of a sudden and unexpected vision. Poem “4” begins with a highly original line of verse: “Tu n’as jamais connu l’arbre de la tendresse d’où j’extraits mon essence” (You have never known the tree of tenderness out of which I extract my essence), and goes on to reveal, toward the end, the surprising effect of the poem: “Cherche bien sous les chaises / Cherche bien sous les ponts / Il y a des morceaux d’âme sciés para mon violon” (Look carefully under the chairs / Look carefully under the bridges / There are pieces of soul sawed off by my violin). And, finally, poem “5” introduces the unusual experience of the “scaphandrier du roi” (royal diver). In the onomatopoeia of the unusual sounds “Le la bémol des belles histoires / Joué dans la harpe d’anciennes pluies / Nous montrent à peine ce qui luit” (The A flat of the beautiful stories / Played out on the harp of ancient rainfalls / Shows us but barely that which shines), we arrive at the “tout à coup” that properly makes the poem a part of the book.

## Conclusion

As we know, the poems of *Tout à coup* are identified by numbers, from 1 to 32, and lack titles, which draws our attention to the importance of the title of the book itself, *Tout à coup*—that is, to the fact that the book’s title is by extension the title of each poem in the book. The effect sought by each poem is none other than to elicit the revelation of the unexpected, of that which arises suddenly, as a surprise or revelation in the context of an unusual mode of representation, a dimension of the marvelous, the unusual, or the surprising. This means, finally, that the book’s title is also the textual matrix of the book as a whole and of each poem in particular.

Such a poetics forms part of a new stage in the development of Huidobro's *creacionismo* and is itself a response to the Surrealist manifestos of 1924 and to manifestos published by other avant-garde movements at the time. Huidobro rejected the pretended meaningfulness of automatic writing, the role of chance, and madness, marking off the differences between *creacionismo* and Surrealism in his book *Manifestes* (1925). In this work, he revives the notions of Platonic delirium and of a creative superconsciousness. In his two books published in 1925, *Automne régulier* and *Tout à coup*—especially in the latter one—Huidobro stresses the autonomy of the “created image,” the “created description,” and the “created object.” In this way, the autonomous poem challenges the reader with the introduction of new and daring imagery, and achieves the particularly original revelatory effect and expressivity of the unexpected, the surprising, the unusual, and the marvelous.

The dialogue between art and poetry established by Torres García in his intervention in Huidobro's poem “1” intersperses the text with small symbolic drawings in order to stress the semantic traits of ascent, horizon and sunset—all well-defined Huidobrian motifs concerning the moment of poetic creation. In poem “2,” he represents the luminous cosmic beauty in which the human meets the celestial; in poem “3,” at issue is the vision of the traveling poet who rejects the colonial landscape in favor of nature. And finally, poem “4” speaks of poetry's own ambiguity, while poem “5” emphasizes the difficulties of apprehending the effective luminosity of ancient poetry.

## Notes

1. There are, of course, other possible forms of intervention, particularly in poetry and in visual poetry. Some of the modalities of intervention of literary writing by the art of painting include translating the text into another language, changing the color or the formal aspects of the poem, adding color where there is none in the original, and inviting the reader to intervene in the original poetic text. In fact, one of the distinctive traits of Vicente Huidobro's “painted poems” consists in blending the text with a visual representation of its semantic and suggested content.
2. We reproduce part of this text with the permission of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California, USA. VICENTE HUIDOBRO, *POÈMES*, PARIS, 1925. The inside cover reads: “Tout a coup [*sic*], 1922–1923; the poems follow, numbered ‘1’ through ‘5.’” In the pages of coated paper included in this issue, only three of the five poems from Torres García's book are reproduced. In my edition of Vicente Huidobro's *Obra poética* (Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2003, p. 676), I called attention to the following: “It is important to point out the existence of a slender hand-crafted, hard-cover volume in the Library of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, California, the front cover of which reads: “For Vicente Huidobro this ‘document’ witness to our old and fraternal spiritual friendship. J. Torres García. Montevideo, October 16 1945.” It has a total of 28 handwritten pages, while several others are

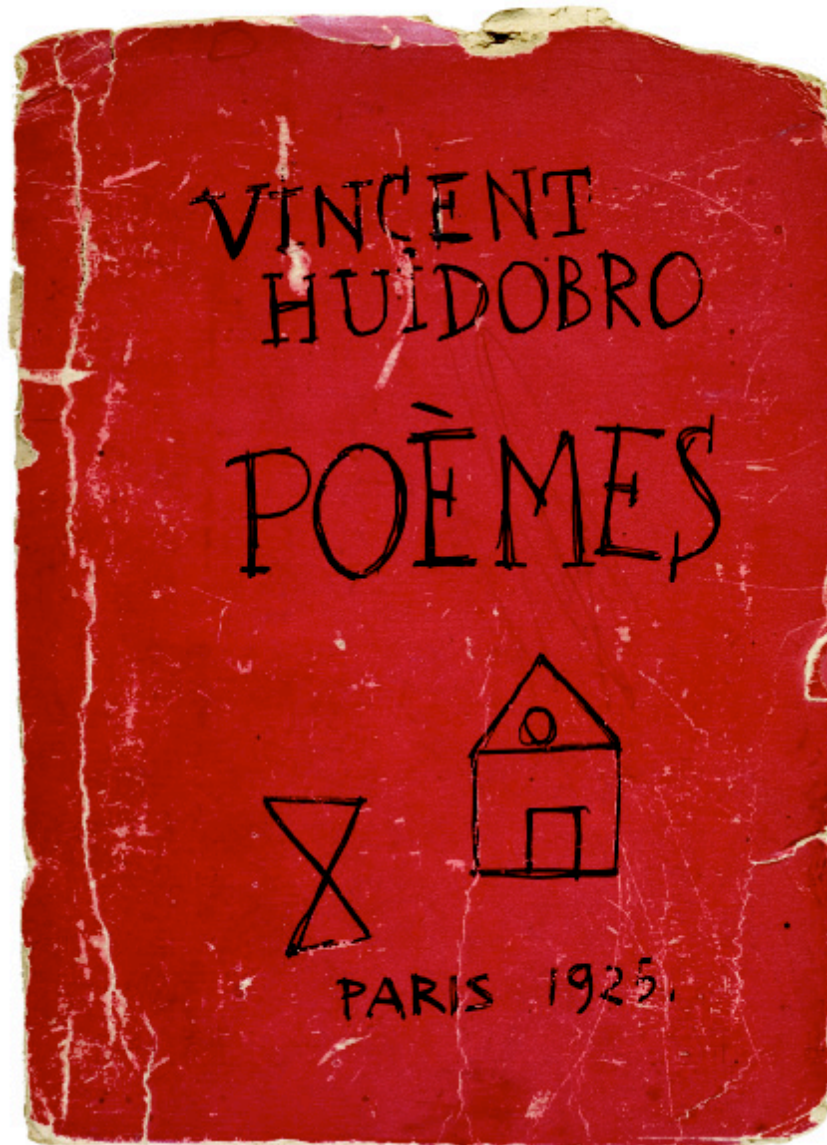
entirely blank. It is a beautiful handwritten edition, with calligraphic characters, of the first five poems of the book: 1 through 5. The Uruguyan Constructivist painter intersperses the text of each poem with small drawings in an entirely original manner, and it is a shame that the project was not completed. All in all, it would be of great interest to see this remarkable ‘document,’ hitherto unknown, finally published.”

3. See Joaquín Torres García (Montevideo, Uruguay, July 28, 1874–1949, August 8, Montevideo).
4. See *Tout à coup* (Poèmes). Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 27, avenue Kléber Dépôt, 1925. 49 pp. 21x16 cm.
5. See “Ce que je sais” (1930), “Pire soleil” (1931), “Foi” (1938), “La tradición del hombre” (1938), “La ciudad sin nombre” (1941), “La regla abstracta” (1946), and “Raison et nature: théorie” (1954).
6. The Estudio de Diseño OBRA from Uruguay introduced a new font type taking Torres García’s particular alphabet style as a model, naming it MontevideoJTG(TrueType) for the characters, and MontevideoJTGSymbol(TrueType) for the graphic symbols. Vid. [www.montevideo.gub.uy](http://www.montevideo.gub.uy).
7. Torres García’s transcription of Huidobro’s texts contains the following misprints: *du plis*>des plis, which repeats the misprint of Huidobro’s first edition, as well as new ones: *nuefs*>neufs; *ruiseaux*>ruisseaux; *nuuit*>nuit.

## Works Cited

- Huidobro, Vicente. *Automne régulier. Obra poética*. Edición crítica. Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Tout à coup. Obra poética*. Edición crítica. Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2003.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Manifestes* (Paris: 1925). *Obra poética*. Edición crítica. Madrid: ALLCA XX, 2003.

*Poèmes Paris 1925*





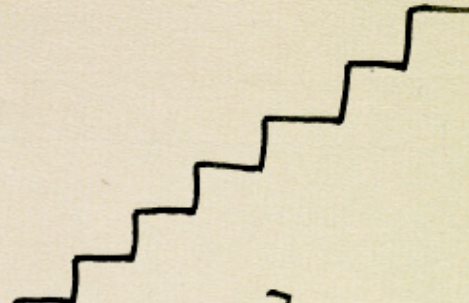
TOUT A COUP

1922 - 1923,



1,

Les deux ou trois  
charmes des escaliers



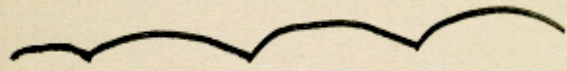
des hasard sont

INCONTESTABLES

Tout est calme derrière  
les miaulements exter-  
nes. Là-haut  
Montez

vers l'avenir précis  
ou les vagues du

CIEL  
caressent les sables

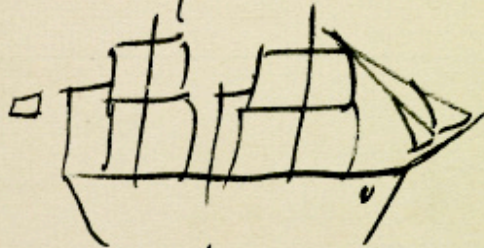


Mais il ya quand  
même  
dans les surprises  
de l'eau

Quelques îles  
semées  
par les explorateurs

qui nous  
devancent

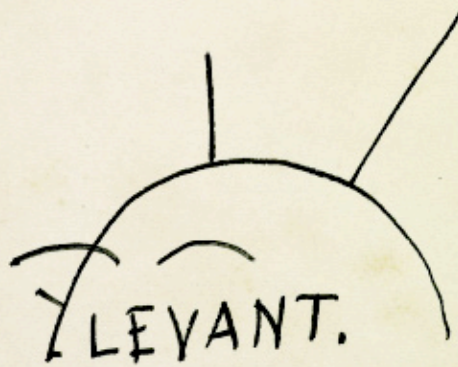
Une certaine chaleur  
s'échappe  
du plis des drapeaux  
secoués par le vent



De mât à mât  
les

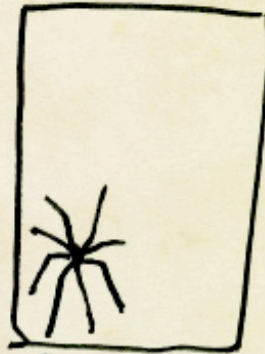
mots se balancent

Et un oiseau  
mange les  
fruits du



2.

Sur le miroir



une araignée qui  
rame comme une  
barque régulière

Vers les chansons  
du marécage

Elle chatouille


SOUVENIRS à la <sup>les</sup>  
surface et

LES GESTES  
DERRIÈRE

AU milieu du  
silence la

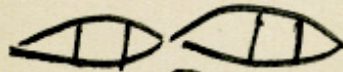
mer NAUFRAGE




 A l'heure des  
 hirondelles

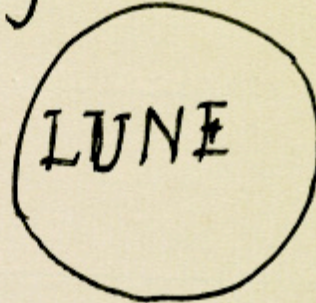
Dieu que les fem-  
 mes sont belles

Ta femme a les  
 cheveux blonds  
 mûrs



Ses yeux sont  
 de jaunes d'œufs

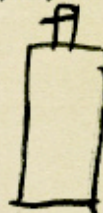
Les yeux de brunes  
Sont des jaunes de



Parmi les eaux  
sans musique  
Les regards satellites  
Se promènent sous les  
arbres de l'orbite.

3.

Je m'éloigne en  
silence



comme un ruban  
de soie

Promeneur des  
rues

Tous les jours je me  
 Au milieu des <sup>NOÏE</sup> plantations de  
 prières  
 Les CATHÉDRALES  
 de mes tendresses  
 chantent  
 la nuit sous l'eau  
 Et

ces chants font les  
îles de la mer.

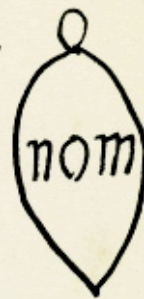
Je suis le prome-  
neur

Le promeneur qui  
ressemble aux quatre  
saisons

Le bel oiseau  
navigateur

Était comme un

horloge entourée de  
coton  
Avant de s'envoler  
m'a dit ton



L'horizon  
colonial est  
tout couvert de  
DRAPERIES

Allons




---

Goic, Cedomil. "Poèmes Paris 1925, Vicente Huidobro and Joaquín Torres García: Visual Image and Poetic Writing/ Poèmes Paris 1925." *Huidobro's Futurity: Twenty-First Century Approaches*. Ed. Luis Correa-Díaz and Scott Weintraub. *Hispanic Issues On Line* 6 (Spring 2010): 187–209.  
[http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010/10\\_Huidobro\\_Goic.pdf](http://hispanicissues.umn.edu/Spring2010/10_Huidobro_Goic.pdf).

---