

**Coincidence in Participatory Forms: The Proposal Poems of  
Grupo Texto Poético and Juan Luis Martínez**

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*Introduction*

In the late 1970s in Valencia, Spain and Valparaíso, Chile, strikingly similar poetic forms appeared from authors who were apparently unaware of each other's work. Grupo Texto Poético published their first work, *Texto Poético 1*, the same year that Juan Luis Martínez's first book-object, *La nueva novela* appeared in Chile (1977). Due to the limited distribution of these self-publications, it seems highly improbable that either work was informed by the other, although at first glance they seem to suggest some form of contact. Here is an example from each author that highlights the similarities in their poems, starting with a poem from the Chilean author, Juan Luis Martínez:

EL LENGUAJE

Tome una palabra corriente. Póngala bien visible sobre una mesa y descríbala de frente, de perfil y de tres cuartos (*La nueva novela* 24).

And the following is an example taken from, *Texto Poético* 7:

PROYECTO I

escoja la palabra que más le atraiga de este poema y sitúese frente a ella.

a continuación comience a caminar cuidadosamente sobre los trazos de ésta, cuidando de no perder el equilibrio, ya que de producirse esto difícilmente podría salir del espacio no impreso.

al llegar al final de la palabra dé un salto seguro y decidido hacia otra palabra y comience de nuevo a recorrerla. no tropiece con ningún obstáculo y no se deje impresionar demasiado por el paisaje.

cuando se encuentre cansado busque el punto más cercano y repose sobre él.<sup>1</sup>

Several points of similarity stand out, including: the use of formal commands to ask their reader to complete certain activities—activities that have to do with language—and a primary focus on the materiality of language as something that can be explored visually and/or topographically. In addition, the propositions both border on the absurd, asking the reader to complete a task that requires a bit of poetic imagination when a literal interpretation seems unlikely, and the result of reading these poems will often produce humor as the reader envisions the poetic exploration of the word.

Juan Luis Martínez (Chile) and Grupo Texto Poético (Spain) are not very well known in Spanish-language literature. Martínez was mostly known in Chilean literary circles in the 70s but has become a more visible figure in his country's poetry in recent years. Often referred to as the initiator of the neo-avant-garde in Chile, he delivered his first book to be published by the Editorial Universitaria in Santiago in 1971 with the title *Pequeña cosmogonía práctica*, but the printing delay became an indefinite suspension following the military coup of September 11, 1973 and the subsequent disappearance of the manuscript.<sup>2</sup> It wasn't until 1977 that Martínez decided to publish the book himself with the new title, *La nueva novela*.<sup>3</sup> The work could be called an artist's book or

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<sup>1</sup> Although this poem is from a later publication, it is one of the most similar in style to the above-cited poem by Martínez.

<sup>2</sup> Martínez's poetry has appeared in 1972 when five of his poems were included in an anthology printed in Buenos Aires by Martín Micharvegas, titled *Nueva poesía joven de Chile*. This anthology offers readers a rare glimpse at what some of the poems that would be published in *La nueva novela* looked like before the coup of 1973. Martínez also produced visual objects circa 1965 (titled "Su obstinado llamar nunca se apaga" and Juan "XXIII"), of a mixed media assemblage/collage style reminiscent of Braque, Picasso, Duchamp and other artists of the historical avant-gardes. These works first appeared in the exposition "Objetos de Juan Luis Martínez", organized by Hugo Rivera Scott in the Instituto Chileno Francés de Valparaíso in 1972.

<sup>3</sup> Critics like Carla Cordua ("Variedad poética de la negación") and Scott Weintraub (*Philosophical Poetics*) have noted that *La nueva novela* is not a "novel" in any traditional sense of the word. Likewise, the word "new" seems like a contradictory descriptor given the work's extensive use of intertextuality and citation. However, the book does align well with Ulises Carrión's description of the new book in "El arte nuevo de hacer libros" (1975). Carrión proposes, for example, that "En el arte nuevo cada página es diferente; cada página es creada como un elemento individual de una estructura (el libro) en la que tiene una función particular

a book-object, but above all a work that transcends traditional generic qualifications.<sup>4</sup> This book only saw 500 hand-printed copies in 1977, and since the poet preferred to meet with anyone who wanted to buy a copy, the circulation of the book was at first limited to friends and literary circles.<sup>5</sup> Today Martínez's status remains largely that of a cult artist, highly admired by those who are familiar with his work, but largely unknown by the general public. Nevertheless, the critical bibliography on Juan Luis Martínez is quite extensive and includes a recent book publication, *Martínez Total* (2016), dedicated to the oeuvre of the enigmatic poet.

The formation of Grupo Texto Poético is attributed to Bartolomé Ferrando, who started the first volume of experimental poems with David Pérez and Rosa Sanz in 1977.<sup>6</sup> From then until 1989 the group had numerous participants, including José Díaz, Mercedes Calpe, Josep Sou, Manuel Costa, Regina Balbastre, Vicente Plá, Carmen Navarro and Jiri Valech, alongside mainstay Bartolomé Ferrando. Although we can trace the participation of artists to each publication, the individual poems are not signed since the group wished to maintain a creative collective, perhaps related to the idea of undermining the traditional concept of authorship. In addition to their experimental style of poetry, the methods of production could also be termed "avant-garde" and have been described by the group as "austere": most of the poems are printed on slips of paper contained in a simple folder, although the later publications are of markedly

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que cumplir" (41); "Las palabras del libro nuevo pueden ser originales del autor o ajenas. Un escritor del arte nuevo escribe muy poco o de plano no escribe" (51); "El plagio es el punto de partida de la actividad creadora en el arte nuevo" (54); "El arte nuevo usa cualquier manifestación del lenguaje, ya que el autor no tiene otra intención que la de poner a prueba la capacidad que tiene el lenguaje de querer decir algo" (56); and "El texto de un libro de arte nuevo puede ser lo mismo una novela que una palabra, lo mismo sonetos que chistes, lo mismo cartas de amor que boletines meteorológicos" (56). A further study could investigate these and other coincidences in Carrión's manifesto of the new book and Martínez's "new novel."

<sup>4</sup> Some key studies that discuss the genre-blending object-book status of *La nueva novela* are those by Gwen Kirkpatrick, Elisabeth Monasterios, Patricia Monarca, Enrique Lihn, Eugenia Brito, Matías Ayala, Marcelo Rioseco, and Scott Weintraub.

<sup>5</sup> The 1977 edition was followed by a facsimile edition in 1985 of 1,000 copies, and a second reprint in 2017. The 1985 reprint is identical to the original with a couple of minor differences with regards to the type of paper used. A third edition was recently printed in 2016 under the care of Pedro Montes (Galería D21) and Eliana Rodríguez, Martínez's widow, with 700 copies. The new edition is a facsimile of the 1985 edition, including the reference to Ediciones Archivo as the editorial.

<sup>6</sup> See Josep Sou, *La Revista "Texto Poético": Convergencia entre la Poesía Experimental y el Arte Conceptual* (tesis doctoral, Archivo de Arte Valenciano, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Carlos, 2006).

better-quality materials and printing.<sup>7</sup> The texts are made up of a variety of different poems, including visual concrete, object, and proposals.

For this investigation I will focus specifically on the “proposal poem” in the works of Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético in order to explore the coincidence in style in their participatory poetic forms.<sup>8</sup> First I will trace the precursors that influenced their works in order to show how they arrived at such similar texts from mostly distinct literary currents. I argue that Martínez’s proposal poems and those of the Valencian group demand a creatively engaged reader who is able to think poetically about the propositions and riddles found in their work. This unique form of participatory art privileges the role of the imagination in readers as co-creators. Despite the similarities in style, I will also highlight their distinct characteristics and explore the reasons for these. For example, although these poets both use a brush with the absurd to produce a comic effect, I find that the different tones of the speakers elicit a slightly different form of laughter and feeling towards authority. The more pataphysical and satirical approach of Juan Luis Martínez undermines the author and authority, causing us to laugh at the speaker, while Grupo Texto Poético’s absurdist humor provokes laughter more in sync with the speaker of the text. Lastly, I propose that these different shades of humor may be due to the different cultural environments of the writers, in particular the movement towards and away from dictatorships and cultural closures in their respective countries.

### *The Proposal Poem*

Before beginning my analysis of the specific works, I would like to further elaborate upon the idea of the proposal poem or “poema-propuesta.” This term describes a text that is comprised of a set of instructions that asks the reader to create a poem, although not always in a literal fashion, as is evident in the examples cited above. I will analyze existing definitions of the proposal poem and explore other aspects that are salient in the works of Juan Luis Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético.

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<sup>7</sup> They are also difficult to obtain. I would like to thank the Gettysburg Institute and the Biblioteca San Miguel de los Reyes for sending me selections as electronic copies. In addition, I am very grateful to Bartolomé Ferrando for allowing me to view his private collection of works.

<sup>8</sup> In order to differentiate the particular facet of literary participation that these texts prescribe, I will use the term “proposal poem”, which I borrow from the Spanish “poema propuesta.” A discussion of the definition of this term will follow in the next section.

One of the literary critics (and poets) who has offered a definition of the proposal poem is Juan Carlos Fernández Serrato; in *¿Cómo se lee un poema visual?* he writes, “Se trata en definitiva de que lo que se nos ofrece en el texto enunciado es tan sólo una propuesta, un poema en potencia, las instrucciones para una acción comunicativa susceptible de ser entendida como poema o el recuerdo de una acción comunicativa estética de carácter efímero...” (177) He further distinguishes the proposal poem from a mere set of instructions by noting how it is susceptible to being perceived as an aesthetic object due to its visual or typographic aspects, and it may be designed so that it only takes place in the imagination of the readers.<sup>9</sup> This type of poem reduces the role of the author by opening up the artistic process to anyone who wishes to partake: “Éste, en realidad, reduce [el trabajo del autor] a la mera actividad de proyectar una ocurrencia estética que cualquiera podrá materializar” (177). Since this practice leaves work left to be done, the proposal poem is well-aligned with the agendas of both Juan Luis Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético in undermining the traditional role of the author as sole producer of the discourse of the work.

In an anthology of experimental poetry, titled *Poesía experimental española (1963-2004)*, Félix Morales Prado also provides a definition for the proposal poem: “El poema propuesta parte de un proyecto poético diseñado por el autor y del cual cada receptor tendrá que montar su versión” (11). He further qualifies the proposal poem by indicating that it acts as a script for the reader’s performance: “el poema propuesta podría verse como el guión para poner en marcha un poema acción, si bien no siempre resulta realizable como tal. Hay poemas propuestas pensados para desarrollarse sólo en la imaginación del lector” (15). Morales Prado also notes that the response to the proposal is sometimes only carried out mentally, citing the same poem (“Proyecto I”) by Grupo Texto Poético that is referenced in the introduction.

Josep Sou, once a member of Grupo Texto Poético, describes the proposal poem in his doctoral thesis, referring to this practice as “Propuesta de Acción”, and identifying it as a result of the combination of experimental poetry and conceptual art.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This assertion matches well with conceptual artist Sol Lewitt’s claim that “Ideas alone can be works of art; they are in a chain of development that may eventually find some form. All ideas need not be made physical” (“Sentences on Conceptual Art”, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> In “Art After Philosophy” (1969), Joseph Kosuth refers to the change toward an emphasis on the concept of art: “the beginning of ‘modern’ art and the beginning of conceptual art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually” (Qtd. in *Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990*, [MIT Press: Cambridge, 1991], 18). Conceptual art can thus be described as a form of art in which the concept for the piece supersedes other aesthetic concerns. As noted by Kosuth, Marcel Duchamp is an important initiator of conceptualism with his ready-mades. The installation of *Fountain* (1917) is an

His analysis of these two influences shows what proposal poetry (or action proposal) has absorbed from each branch of art and poetry:

**\*La propuesta de acción toma de la poesía experimental:**

- la libertad gráfica
- el uso de formas verbales no tradicionales: imperativo e infinitivo
- uso de formas pronominales de segunda persona con cierto matiz de distancia
- espacialización, y valor del espacio en blanco del texto en la página
- incorporación de materia objetual en los textos poéticos

**\*La propuesta de acción toma del arte conceptual:**

- el uso del lenguaje como soporte artístico
- la reflexión lingüística como obra de arte
- la desmaterialización del objeto
- la implicación del receptor en las propuestas y llega a prevalecer la idea, así como la realidad física del lenguaje, por encima de cualquier otra consideración (23-24).

These characteristics outlined by Sou help to further circumscribe the idea of the proposal poem. From experimental poetry, he notes that the proposal poem uses the direct appeal to the reader, using second person pronouns as well as imperatives and infinitives to instruct him/her. From conceptual art, there is an emphasis on the idea of the physical materiality of language and the notion that linguistic reflection on its materiality is a form of aesthetic experience. In the poems cited above from Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético, the reader is asked to confront exactly this, the physical aspect of language and to make an account of his/her verbal exploration.

Similar to Fernández Serrato and Morales Prado, Sou's analysis of the proposal poem (or action proposal) emphasizes the importance of the reader's participation in the poem, although it may be impossible to carry out a concrete action based on the

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excellent example of the challenge to the notion of the work of art by presenting a urinal, an object not designed with explicit artistic intent, as a work for an art gallery. Conceptualism, however, has played a different role in Latin America compared to Europe since it not only challenges the art institution but is mobilized as a political strategy in Latin America, according to Luis Camnitzer (*Conceptualism in Latin American Art: Didactics of Liberation* [University of Texas Press: Austin, 2007]).

proposal. Sou writes: “Se trata, así pues, de una idea que reclama ser repercutida sobre el receptor, o seguida por éste, aunque en muchos casos la propuesta resulte de imposible ejecución, rozando las fronteras del absurdo” (24). If the proposal poem were entirely logical, it would simply be a proposal for action, perhaps a poetic action (similar to happenings and instructional poems of the ‘60s). Likewise, if it were completely impossible or absurd, it would generate a feeling of ironic humor, but not any kind of real response. It is precisely the poem’s position of bordering on the absurd, of straddling the frontier between logic and illogic, which makes it a unique genre of poetry. I will refer to this playful blending of logic and illogic, sense and nonsense, seriousness and humor, as a pataphysical aspect of the proposal poems.<sup>11</sup>

The field of pataphysics is difficult to define. In fact, in *Pataphysics: A Useless Guide* Andrew Hugill says, “This is a word that tries to exclude itself from the dictionary” (1). For a definition, Alfred Jarry’s formulation that “Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments” (145) is a good point of departure. Pataphysics constitutes an investigation into the exceptions and the illogical side of reality. Jarry coined the term *La ‘Pataphysique* (with an apostrophe at the beginning), which has led to some speculation regarding the etymology of the word (such as, “épataphysique: épater les bourgeois” [Hugill 3]). Raymond Queneau (a French poet who, interestingly enough, is cited by Martínez in *La nueva novela*), has provided a nice summation of the discipline’s paradoxical nature in his statement that pataphysics “rests on the truth of contradictions and exceptions” (in Hugill 5). In this way, pataphysics examines topics that lie beyond the realm of both physics and metaphysics, investigating the exceptions and paradoxes present in both of these.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of pataphysical elements in the work of Juan Luis Martínez, see Eugenia Brito’s *Campos Minados* (Santiago: Cuarto Propio, 1994); Scott Weintraub, “Juan Luis Martínez y las otredades de la metafísica: apuntes patafísicos y carrollianos” (*Estudios* 18:35 [enero-julio 2010]: 141-168), and Weintraub’s book *Juan Luis Martínez’s Philosophical Poetics* (Cambridge: Bucknell UP, 2015). In his book, Weintraub describes the employment of pataphysical thought “not as a negation of escape from Western metaphysical thinking—which would constitute a dialectical strategy doomed to fall back into the Hegelian machine—nor as a third term representing a temporally localizable interruption in dialectical thinking, but rather as a way of putting into practice the ludic, yet rigorous reading that his poetry carries out of a number of topics” (36). Furthermore, Weintraub calls *La nueva novela* “a radicalization of Jarry’s literary-philosophical-scientific work” (36).

<sup>12</sup> Jarry: “the science of that which is superadduced upon metaphysics, whether within or beyond the latter’s limitations, extending as far beyond metaphysics as the latter extends beyond physics” (145).

French poet and pataphysician René Daumal describes pataphysical humor as the result of the conjunction of two contradictory planes of thought: “Pataphysical laughter is the keen awareness of a duality both absurd and undeniable. In this sense it is the one human expression of the identity of opposites” (4). In his analysis of pataphysical humor in *La nueva novela*, Weintraub cites Gilles Deleuze to explain the ironic and comedic effects of Martínez’s logical fallacies: “The tragic and the ironic give way to a new value, that of humour. For if irony is the co-extensiveness of sense with nonsense, humour is the art of surfaces or doubles, or nomad singularities and of an always displaced aleatory point” (in Weintraub 2015, 43). Pataphysics is thus an intriguing blend of logic and absurdity, the synthesis of which often produces a humorous result. It takes as a point of departure the paradoxes and exceptions of science and pursues a method of inquiry (albeit with its own internal illogical consistencies) of these contradictions. Daumal describes this journey into pataphysics as a process of reciprocal profundity and ridiculousness:

*Evidence cloaks itself in absurdity as its only means of being perceived. Whence the humorous appearance of pataphysical reasoning, which at first glance seems ridiculous, then on closer examination seems to contain a hidden meaning, then at even closer range indubitably ridiculous, then again even more profoundly true, and so on, as the evidence and the ludicrousness of the proposition go on growing and mutually reinforcing each other indefinitely.* (9)

As regards the pataphysical humor of Juan Luis Martínez, Marcelo Rioseco’s book, *Maquinarias deconstructivas: Poesía y juego en Juan Luis Martínez, Diego Maquieira y Rodrigo Lira*, discusses the effects of games and humor in *La nueva novela*. Rioseco postulates that the type of humor found in *La nueva novela* is based on a series of techniques that create a ludic labyrinth without a guiding authority: “*La nueva novela* es así una plataforma interpretativa que invita a un lector competente a un juego interminable cuyo autor no asume ninguna responsabilidad hermenéutica” (170). Similar in flavor to the pataphysician’s playful use of scientific investigation, Rioseco notes how Martínez puts scientific and poetic language on the same plane, subverting “causalist” logic and even the principle of non-contradiction (173). And, as previously mentioned, the identity of opposites is one of the sources of pataphysical laughter, according to Daumal.

Pataphysical humor as described above is an important aspect of the proposal poems of Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético, although previous definitions of the proposal poem, such as those by Juan Carlos Fernández Serrato, Félix Morales Prado, and Josep Sou, lack engagement with pataphysics. By incorporating illogical logic into



the syllogisms and word problems of the poems, the speaking subjects becomes ironized, and the voice of the author who gives instructions becomes undermined from within. A particularly illustrative example of this effect can be found in this poem/task from Martínez's *La nueva novela*:

TAREAS DE POESIA

Tristuraban las agras sus temorios  
 Los lirosos durfían tiestamente  
 Y ustiales que utilaban afimorios  
 A las folces turaban distamente.

Hoy que dulgen y ermedan los larorios  
 Las oveñas patizan el bramante  
 Y las fólgicas barlan los filorios  
 Tras la Urla que valiñan ristramente.

EXPLIQUE Y COMENTE:

1. ¿Cuál es el tema o motivo central de este poema?
2. ¿Qué significan los lirosos para el autor?
3. ¿Por qué el autor afirma que las oveñas patizan el bramante?
4. ¿Qué recursos expresivos encuentra en estos versos?

“Y las fólgicas barlan los filorios  
 Tras la Urla que valiñan ristramente”.

5. Ubique todas aquellas palabras que produzcan la sensación de claridad, transparencia.
6. ¿Este poema le produce la sensación de quietud o de agitado movimiento? Fundamente su respuesta. (95)

In his analysis of this poem Weintraub argues that the task of identifying moments of clarity in the poem “mobilizes the ironic indeterminacies that blur the line between sense and nonsense,” and moreover, that the unreadability of the poem sets in motion an exploration that disrupts the placement of Martínez's philosophy within Western metaphysics (2015, 47). The dissonance between the logical form of the questions of the speaker and the nonsensical feeling of the poem to be analyzed lead to the delegitimization of the speaker. The poem is written in the style of “nonsense” literature, à la Lewis Carroll (“Jabberwocky”),<sup>13</sup> which contrasts drastically with the

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<sup>13</sup> Weintraub points out the possible influences of this poem, including: Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, Vicente Huidobro, and from a theoretical perspective, Vitcor Shklovsky's idea of

clarity of the didactic questions that follow.<sup>14</sup> None of the words of Martínez's poem exist in Spanish, except for some prepositions (“a”, “tras”), conjunctions (“y”, “que”), articles (“las”, “los”, “el”, “la”), a possessive adjective (“sus”), and “hoy.” The other words are “nonsensical” (in quotations) because, despite the fact that they are neologisms, they are not entirely without sense. The first word, for example, “tristuraban”, sounds like “tristura” with a past imperfect ending “-aban,” conjugated according to the subject, “las agras,” which in turn sounds like a combination of “aguas” and “agrío.” This analysis is also similar to Humpty Dumpty's explanation of “Jabberwocky” to Alice: “‘lithe and slimy’... You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word”) and *outgrabe* (“something between bellowing and whistling, with a kind of sneeze in the middle”) (165). I believe that Martínez constructs a similar riddle in his poem, using Carroll's poetic portmanteau technique to create the feeling that there is an underlying sense behind apparently nonsensical verse.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that the poem offers a hint of meaning to the reader, this hermeneutic task turns out to be immediately ridiculed by the type of questions that follow and are meant to be applied to the poem. Questions such as “¿Qué significan los lirosos para el autor?” parody the attempt of literary analysis to discover what the author means to say with the poem. If the reader cannot understand what a made-up word like “lirosos” means, how can he/she be able to identify what it means for the author? The difficulty of deciphering authorial intention is doubled by the fact that the poem presents itself as almost nonsensical, and the speaker's treatment of it as a serious question makes us question his/her sanity. Can the speaker really expect us to be able to answer any of these questions? Is there any part of the poem that produces the sensation of “claridad, transparencia”, as he/she urges us to find? Once we come to mistrust the speaker, this mistrust leads us to question the validity of the questions and

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*ostranenie* and Ferdinand de Saussure's discussion of the arbitrary nature of the sign (2015, 45-47). One could also postulate Julio Cortázar's invented language *gliglico* from *Rayuela* as a precursor.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Stewart defines “nonsense” as “language lifted out of context, language turning on itself, language as infinite regression, language made hermetic, opaque in an envelope of language” (*Nonsense: Aspects of Intertextuality in Folklore and Literature* [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989]), 3. On the humor of intertextual contradiction, she writes, “the humor of nonsense often comes from the contradictions that arise when the abstract and systematic nature of discourse is brought to the fore” (37-8).

<sup>15</sup> Overall, I would argue that this poem has a pastoral feel (related to poetry about the idealized life of shepherds), based on portmanteaus that are phonetically reminiscent of a pastoral scene. Some of these words include: “lirosos” (lira), “oveñas” (ovejas), “patizan” (patas/pastar), and “bramante” (bramar).

whether they're really meant to be answered. In this way, the discourse of the speaker is often subverted by the juxtaposition of incongruous elements in the poetry of Martínez.

However, on another level we infer a meta-discourse occurring beyond the words of the poem and its accompanying analytical questions. The result of this juxtaposition is that we posit a third speaker (something closer to the author) who is beyond either of these texts. We infer that someone has combined these two texts for a reason, which we assume is to make a criticism of literary analysis, namely, the vain attempt to decipher what the author means and the mistaken expectation of encountering clarity or transparency in poetry. This “superspeaker” is entirely silent, never uttering a word, but yet speaks through the selection and juxtaposition of texts/voices.

Another result of the proposal poem's flirting with the absurd is that it gives the poem a dual nature—as a poem, and as a proposal for other poems to be written. If a proposal were entirely feasible, such as, “bake a pie at 360° for 1 hour,” there would be nothing poetic about the instructions or the realization of the task. It is only when the instructions of a proposal present something unexpected or nearly impossible that one sees it as poetic. In this poem from *La nueva novela*, for example, Martínez has us contemplate the difficulty of expressing a unique individual situation using abstract language:

Encuentre un solo verbo para significar el acto que consiste en beber un vaso de vino blanco con un compañero borgoñón, en el café de Los Dos Chinos, a las seis de la tarde, un día de lluvia, hablando de la no-significación del mundo, sabiendo que acaba usted de encontrarse con su antiguo profesor de química y mientras cerca de usted una muchacha le dice a su amiga: “¿Sabes cómo hice que le viera la cara a Dios!” (24).

The impossibility of finding a word that signifies such a complex situation calls our attention to the relationship between language and reality, a principally poetic concern. Martínez ironizes our attempt to capture a single moment of reality using a language made of abstract terms, much in the way that Borges does via his character Funes.<sup>16</sup> For Funes, everything is in such a state of flux that the concept of persistent identity through time escapes him: “le molestaba que el perro de las tres y catorce (visto de

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<sup>16</sup> In the short story “Funes el memorioso”, Borges explores the idea that abstraction is a necessary part of communication and knowledge. After suffering an accident, Funes is left without the ability to understand how individual instances can be transformed into linguistic abstraction, and thus is unable to form concepts and communicate.

perfil) tuviera el mismo nombre que el perro de las tres y cuarto (visto de frente)".<sup>17</sup> Martínez's poem further ironizes the act of linguistic abstraction by asking the reader to invent a single word that summarizes the entire situation stated in the poem. The absurdity of this request allows for the creation of a poetic experience in which the reader reflects on the relationship between word and reality.

### *Influences*

The first and foremost influence on Martínez's proposal poems is the French surrealist poet and dramatist, Jean Tardieu, whose work was directly appropriated by Martínez and whose proposal poems predate those of Fluxus and other experimental artists of the '60s. "Un mot pour un autre" was published in 1951 and included not only the theater work by this name but also a set of poems called "Petits Problèmes et Travaux Pratiques" which Martínez rewrote and responded to in *La nueva novela* (1977).<sup>18</sup> A few examples include these poems from Tardieu:

Aimez-vous les en-soi?  
Ou bien, préférez-vous les pour-soi?

On dit communément que 'le temps, c'est de l'argent'.  
Faites le calcul, au cours du dollar.

Comment vous représentez-vous l'Être?  
A-t-il des plumes dans les cheveux?<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2001), 134.

<sup>18</sup> Cristián Gómez Olivares revealed that part of *La nueva novela* was a direct translation of some poems from Jean Tardieu's *Petits problèmes et travaux pratiques* in the article "Esto es esto es esto es esto es [consideraciones previas para un acercamiento a la obra de J.L. Martínez]". That Martínez translated the texts himself seems doubtful. In the essay "The Copy is the Original: The Problematics of Juan Luis Martínez's Posthumous Works" (2017) and based on interviews with Ronald Kay, Hugo Rivera-Scott, Gustavo "Grillo" Mujica, and Raúl Zurita, Scott Weintraub argues that Martínez's French proficiency was insufficient to produce the translations of the other Juan Luis Martínez (no accent) found in *Poemas del otro*. (For more information regarding the authorship and translation of the poems from *Poemas del otro*, see Weintraub's *La última broma de Juan Luis Martínez* [2014]). Moreover, Eduardo Llanos Melusa assures us that the texts from Tardieu were taken from an anthology of absurd humor by Eduardo Stilman ("Juan Luis Martínez o lecciones de un maestro involuntario", *Martínez Total* (2016). Martínez, however, expounds upon Tardieu's texts, providing his own answers to Tardieu's questions and posing questions to the French author in return. Gómez Olivares also explains in his article (2006) that some of Tardieu's texts have been transformed into visual poems by Martínez. In a footnote he writes, "Este tipo de estructura, en la citada primera parte, no es otra cosa que la traducción casi completa de los 'Petits problèmes et travaux pratiques' del arriba citado libro de Tardieu. Martínez introduce sólo algunos cambios en el orden de los poemas y, magistralmente, convierte los textos originariamente de Tardieu en los poemas visuales de J.L. Martínez (aspecto ausente en el poeta francés)" (Gómez Olivares).

<sup>19</sup> "Do you like things-in-themselves?  
Or do you prefer things-for-themselves?"

An integral aspect of these poems is their capacity to produce a humorous reaction in the reader (like the pair of questions above, “How do you represent Being? Does it have feathers in its hair?”), based on a sort of pataphysical joking. The humoristic element seems to arise from the clash of two disparate planes, the simplistic didactic voice of the instructor who gives you word problems to solve, and the quasi-metaphysical, pseudo-philosophical nature of the pataphysical game. The first question has a simple, “do you prefer A, or do you prefer B?” structure, but instead of two categories that lend themselves to subjective opinions, Tardieu uses ontological categories, like “things in-themselves”.<sup>20</sup> The second question takes a common phrase, “time is gold,” and overloads the quantifiable dimension, asking the reader to calculate time’s value in dollars.

The collision of these two planes (logic and illogic) not only creates a humorous response, but also ironizes the speaking subject, destabilizing his/her position of authority.<sup>21</sup> The reader begins to distrust the implied author’s capacity to produce sensible questions. In fact, as Eduardo Llanos Melussa argues, these questions are designed to produce “divergent” and not “convergent” thinking. Llanos Melussa postulates that Tardieu’s problems not only imitate the style of tests and study guides, but: “En un segundo plano, esta parodia del discurso pedagógico va más lejos, ya que si bien finge desafiar al lector para que razone hasta dar con las respuestas ‘correctas’, las incógnitas de Tardieu no apuntan a la mera cognición y no admiten respuestas ‘correctas’” (114). Furthermore, the reader will probably wonder whether these interrogatives are meant to be answered at all, or if they are not simply rhetorical questions meant to solicit laughter. In this way, Tardieu’s pataphysical questions undermine their own participatory structure by posing apparently unanswerable questions, at least from the perspective of traditional logic.

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It is often said, ‘time is money’  
Make the calculation, in dollars.

How do you represent Being?  
Does it have feathers in its hair?” (Qtd. in *Le Professeur Froeppel* [Paris: Gallimard, 1978], 70, my translation).

<sup>20</sup> The “thing-in-itself” (*das Ding an sich*) is a term from Immanuel Kant’s philosophy used to describe an object that exists independently of sense perception. See Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

<sup>21</sup> On this section of poems (“La metafísica”), Scott Weintraub comments: “this section of *La nueva novela* can be read as a pataphysical encyclopedia in which the exception is the rule. This is an aspect of the book that tends to call into question and destabilize the authorship of the remaining texts included in *La nueva novela*, and it also evinces the radically subversive and pataphysical character of Martínez’s entire poetic project” (2015, 41).

A participatory form developed in the '60s, which resembles both the “pedagogical” poems of Jean Tardieu and the proposal poem, is the “instructional poem”. A couple of examples of this “instructional art” include *Fluxkit* by George Brecht and Yoko Ono’s *Grapefruit*. Many of these poetic forms originated from Fluxus, a group of experimental conceptual artists centered around New York with George Maciunas as spokesman. In his analysis of the connection between Juan Luis Martínez and Fluxus, Scott Weintraub writes: “Their notion of printed work as performance event was an innovation in the reconceptualization of the writer-reader interaction.” He goes on to cite Johanna Drucker on “making the audience member a performer through the structure of the piece. One does not ‘read’ this work, but enacts it” (Qtd. in Weintraub 2015, 110). As Weintraub and Drucker note, these instructional pieces inaugurate a new form of “reader” participation by transferring the full realization of the text to the readers’ performance of it. Some examples of these instructional poems can be seen in Yoko Ono’s *Grapefruit*, cited below:

SYLLABLE PIECE

Decide not to use one particular  
syllable for the rest of your life.  
Record things that happened to you in  
result of that.

PAINTING TO BE CONSTRUCTED IN YOUR HEAD

Observe three paintings carefully.  
Mix them well in your head.

COLLECTING PIECE

Collect sounds in your mind that  
you have overheard through the week.  
Repeat them in your mind in different  
orders one afternoon (np).

This work is also relevant to Martínez, not only because it has the feel of a proposal poem, but because he cites Ono’s work in a footnote to his text on the disappearance of Sogol; in said footnote, he quotes her in translation: “Todas las calles son invisibles. Las visibles son las falsas, aunque algunas visibles son la parte final de las invisibles” (1977, 81).

As mentioned above, Fluxus may be one of the most important influences that led to Texto Poético’s poetic proposals and avant-garde style, but there are others as well. In Josep Sou’s analysis of the group, he emphasizes their attempt to exist in a

heterodox or liminal space between the boundaries of literary and visual arts. He calls this the group's strong interdisciplinary component, citing their influences from Dadaism, *Fluxus*, John Cage and others in bringing together a collection of diverse poems (*poemas propuestas*, visual poems, sound poetry, semiotic poetry, etc.) that, he says, “sirven de muestra diversificada de la abolición, en cierta medida, de las fronteras entre las artes literarias y las visuales” (6).

In addition to Fluxus, there are also examples of Spanish artists and poets that have used the proposal poem, including the group Zaj, Valcárcel Medina, Joan Brossa, and José Miguel Ullán (Fernández Serrato 177). Zaj was formed in Madrid in 1964 by Juan Hidalgo and Walter Marchetti (important additions include Ramón Barce, José Luis Fernández Castillejo, and Esther Ferrer) as an experimental music and performance art collective inspired by the work of John Cage, and at times in collaboration with Cage and Fluxus.<sup>22</sup> Although their avant garde experiments were often ephemeral performances (like their “música de acción”), some of their written work includes mail art, artists' books, musical scores, photographs, collages, Duchampian objects, and proposal poems. One such poem can be found in *Zaj: colección archive Conz*:



Figure 1. Zaj: colección archive Conz

<sup>22</sup> Cage's influence can be seen in the work of Martínez, in particular through the incorporation of the uncertainty principle, the *I Ching*, and aleatory composition procedures. In Martínez's *Aproximación del principio de incertidumbre a un proyecto poético* the Chilean poet “riffs on indeterminacy” (Weintraub 2015, 177).

The poem, by Esther Ferrer, is similar to those by Fluxus and Ono, as well as to those by Grupo Texto Poético in that it includes a set of instructions that ask the reader to perform, or imagine performing, an action bordering on the absurd.

Likewise, Joan Brossa (Catalan poet, playwright, and visual artist) produced proposal poems such as these from his poem “Proyectos de poemas”:

1. Una A pintada sobre una bola de billar.
  2. Recitar poemas con unas gafas en la boca.
  3. Con un sello pegado en los labios meter la cabeza en un saco y contar hasta cien.
  4. Hacer sombras chinescas con una letra pintada en cada mano.
  5. Ponerse un brazalete amarillo y fumar un cigarro; ponerse un brazalete rojo y beber un vaso de agua.
  6. Dibujar en una pared un paraguas abierto y titularlo Diana; dibujar una flecha clavada en una diana y titularla Paraguas.
  7. Escribir un poema sirviéndose de mondadientes para formar las letras.
  8. Arrancar una hoja de un libro de poemas y quemarla, concentrando sobre ella los rayos del sol con una lupa.
- [...] (349)

Although the imperative form is notably different (these verbs are in the infinitive form, signaling an informal command, whereas Grupo Texto Poético and Martínez use the formal “usted” commands), the proposed activities are quite similar to other proposal poems. Thus, Zaj and Brossa offer concrete examples of possible inspirations for Grupo Texto Poético, connecting their work to precursors such as Fluxus, Ono and Cage.

#### *Comparing Juan Luis Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético*

The first two numbers of Grupo Texto Poético’s works show a tendency towards concrete, visual, and object poetry, while later publications contain more proposal poems and open forms for reader collaboration.<sup>23</sup> For example, we find the following poem in *Texto Poético 1*, which is more representative of the early poems: “el

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<sup>23</sup> In addition, the epigraphs and manifestos that function as introductions to each work reveal a similar progression. The first publication, for example, begins with a description of the importance of concrete poetry: “La poesía espacio-temporal se manifiesta con toda su intensidad en los poemas concretos. La poesía concreta supone un recurso contra el discurso, supone cortar la posibilidad al discurso de transcurrir, lo que nos posibilita la captación sensorial no solo a través de lo visual sino también por medio de los demás sentidos, al predisponernos a ello” (1). In contrast, numbers 5-9 are accompanied by either a proposal poem or activity, instead of an introduction. Number 4 is the last one to have an introductory text, which consists of a quote from Roland Barthes. The final paragraph of the Barthes quote highlights the nature of language, and more specifically of poetic language, to produce unforeseen results: “Cada palabra poética es así un objeto inesperado, caja de Pandora, de la que salen todas las categorías del lenguaje...” (4).



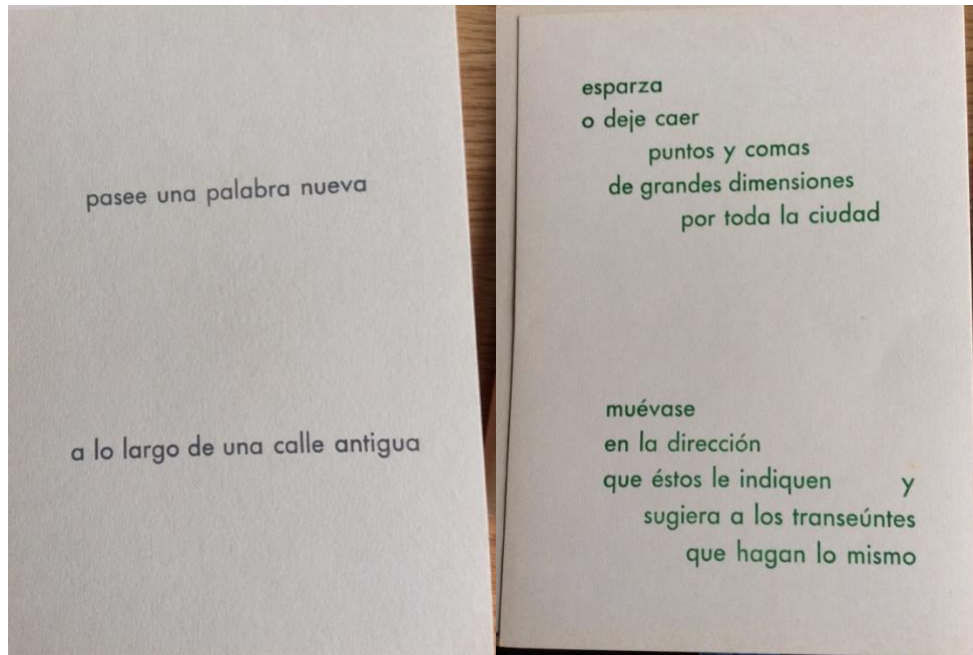
espacio / anterior se / encontraba, al / igual que éste, / perturbado por tu mirada” (6). This poem feels like a proposal poem, but instead of giving the reader an activity to carry out, it shows us an action that the reader has already done: having perturbed the text with his or her glance. In this way, the poets show their awareness of the reader’s participation and how it affects the text (somewhat in the vein of quantum physics, where it is affirmed that any observation disrupts the object observed), and it makes this apparent to the reader through the text, which is an explicit articulation of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, this text is more of a commentary on the reader’s impact on the text, rather than an invitation to collaborate.

There are invitations to collaborate in the early publications, such as the create-your-own poetry activities found in numbers 1 and 2. In *Texto Poético 1* there are a couple of clear plastic sleeves (that resemble name tag holders) stuffed with parts of words and letters. The implication of this object seems to be that the reader can put together words and phrases akin to magnetic poetry. Below are two examples taken from numbers 1 and 2:



Figures 2 and 3. Selections from *Texto Poético 1* and 2.

Although these proposals call on the reader to rearrange the words and letters according to his or her own prerogative, the scope of participation is comparatively limited due to the content of the words and letters selected for the reader to use. Let us look briefly at a couple of poems from *Texto Poético 9* to highlight the difference:



Figures 4 and 5. Selections from *Texto Poético 9*.

Both poems treat the topic of externalizing language somewhat explicitly, perhaps too explicitly to be taken seriously; what would it be like to take a stroll down an old street with a new word? Not only is the election of the specific word and street completely up to the reader, but also the interpretation as to how one would carry out the proposal is left ambiguous. Does strolling down the street with a new word mean that you have it on a sign, or that you are interspersing it in your conversations, or that you are singing it to passersby? The second poem proposes a similar juxtaposition of language and city space, this time suggesting that the reader scatter commas and periods through the city, following their trail, and having others do the same.

In *Texto Poético 4* we find a similar proposal poem that asks us to stroll through a city map, or to try to escape from it. This is similar to a text from Juan Luis Martínez (found on the back cover of *La nueva novela*) in which the reader is asked to draw his or her house and mark two escape routes for each member of the family.<sup>24</sup> Both texts are reproduced below:

<sup>24</sup> A similar image is found on page 136 of *La nueva novela*, with a slightly different text (Cada cuadradito equivale a 2 km.<sup>2</sup>) and an image of a rabbit with a black bar over its mouth. Michael Leong argues that the figure of the rabbit (“an allusion to Lewis Carroll’s *March Hare*”) suggests a ‘pataphysical solution problem: “the way out is through the rabbit hole” (“Poetry Homework”: Pedagogy, Memory, and Politics in the Visual Poetry of Juan Luis Martínez”, *A Contracorriente*. Vol. 14, Num. 2 [Spring 2017], 170).



Figure 6. Selection from Texto Poético 4.

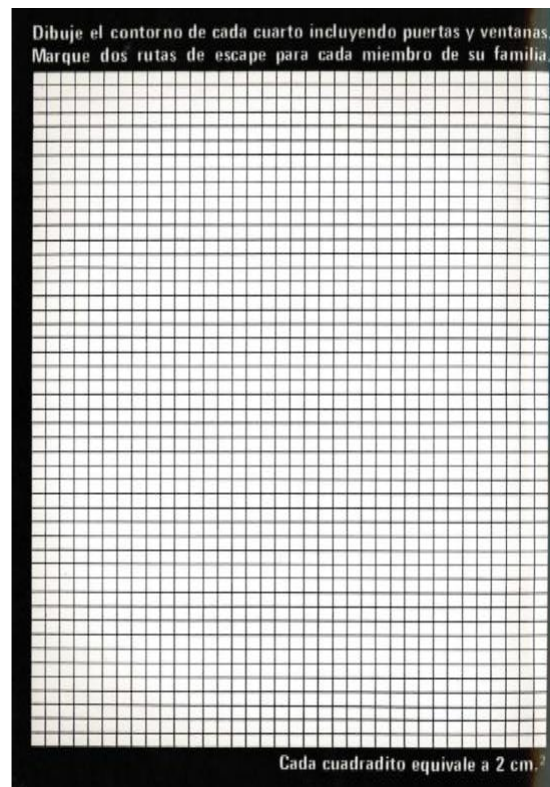


Figure 7. Back cover of La nueva novela.

The first text (from Grupo Texto Poético) has a lighter tone since we can stroll through any part of the map, although we are also told that we may want to escape, perhaps since we hear a sharp quick sound coming from the open spaces. In contrast, the Martínez text is a bit more ominous. We are told to draw our house, including all of the windows and doors, and then to draw two escape routes for each member of the family. What is threatening the usually safe space that the house represents?<sup>25</sup>

Although the poem leads us to think of the forced disappearances of individuals considered “subversive” by the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, most political readings of Martínez’s work are complicated, not only by his oblique approach, but also by the composition and publication dates of *La nueva novela*.<sup>26</sup> As stated above, the book was ready for publication prior to the *golpe de estado* of 1973, and so texts such as this one may have been composed prior to the post-*golpe* disappearances. Nevertheless, the decision to publish poems like this one in 1977 means that the author would have placed them with the interpretive context of the dictatorship and political violence.

In the poetic forms of the Valencian group and the Chilean poet these proposals are also used to question the role of the author as producer of the text. In *Texto Poético 4*, for example, there is an envelope stamped with the verb “Participaron”, which contains slips of paper with the names of the poets (Ferrando, Pérez, Sanz and Calpe).<sup>27</sup> Since none of their names are attached to any of the poems and their names are given on these slips of paper, the reader could decide to match names with poems by placing the slips of paper alongside of the texts, toying with the notion of authorship as provisional, not definitive. There are also four blank slips, which could be read as an

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<sup>25</sup> Gaston Bachelard privileges the site of the home as “one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (*The Poetics of Space*, translated by M. Jolas [Boston: Beacon Press, 1994], 6).

<sup>26</sup> What often seem to be overtly political allusions prove to be elusive in meaning given a closer look. When Martínez mentions, for example, the “dense and tragic” psychological climate in Chile, it is unclear whether he is referring to a pre- or post-*golpe* Chile. This statement, found on a dedicatory page of *La nueva novela*, reads: “El clima psicológico que envuelve a Chile es denso y trágico. Una fuerza irresistible tira hacia el abismo e impide que ningún valor...” (6). Matías Ayala, in his book *Lugar incómodo: Poesía y sociedad en Parra, Libn y Martínez*, notes that the multiple contexts of suggestive texts like this one make it difficult to argue for a single interpretation. He observes how this quote about Chile’s dense and tragic climate could easily reference the building sense of crisis before the *golpe*, and so he concludes, “Por lo tanto, cualquier lectura políticamente simplista se encuentra socavada, o al menos, puesta en duda” (*Lugar incómodo: Poesía y sociedad en Parra, Libn y Martínez* [Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2010], 153).

<sup>27</sup> This example is from *Texto Poético 4* (1979), but it is similar to the way in which they ascribe authorship in the other numbers as well.

invitation to the readers to participate in the creation of the work by adding their names to the envelope of “authors.” In addition, one could “randomize” the authorship of a work by shuffling the slips of paper together in the envelope and selecting one at random to apply to a poem. This aleatory procedure, among others, highlights the group’s use of participatory forms of art, albeit with a certain ironic twist.

The decision to challenge traditional notions of authorship is also apparent from their first publication. In *Texto Poético 1* (1977) the names of the contributors can be found buried within a list of material (and nonmaterial) textual supports, including “el azar/cartulina negra/cartulina rosa/un clip/cuartillas blancas/el espacio/una etiqueta...” This list of elements that intervened in making the edition (in which appear the names of the poets alongside objects such as a paperclip, printed letters, an arrow, “space” and “time”), as well as the invitation to collaborate with an address where submissions will be received, places the role of the author on the same plane as the textual supports and the readers who wish to collaborate. These somewhat ludic elements (in which the importance of the poets is placed on the same level as a paperclip) can be read as a form of self-parody, challenging the importance of authorship, which can also be seen in Martínez’s works (for example, in crossing out his name from his books and in his use of intertextuality as a mode of composition).

These observations are also supported by their theory and praxis. Josep Sou writes that their principal aim was to present the readers with a provocation which demands their participation. With regards to the commonalities between experimental poetry and conceptual art, he highlights the element of provocation: “la presencia del receptor que resuelva la provocación hacia una poesía del hacer, por tanto poesía que reclama la participación del lector” (14). In addition, during a personal interview with Bartolomé Ferrando, the poet told me that the goal of the journal was not self-expression, but rather an invitation for the other to produce something.<sup>28</sup> For this reason, one of the reoccurring genres of poetry that is utilized in their works is the proposal poem, and there is an explicit attempt to implicate the reader in the creative process of making poetry.

Additionally, the role of humor is evident in the proposal poems of Grupo Texto Poético and Martínez. An analysis of some of the texts from the Valencian group shows how they subvert many forms of experimental poetry through the use of humor

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<sup>28</sup> In this interview, Ferrando stated that his group aimed to create “poesía no para expresarse, sino para invitar al otro a hacer algo” (July 8, 2015).

and the solicitation of the reader's involvement in the text. The following poem, entitled "Poema sonoro", asks the reader to create a sound poem through the act of writing and listening to the sound that the pen produces as one writes. Sound poetry bases its poetic production on a series of complex permutations of morphemes and phonic associations. This poem, on the other hand, requires the reader's participation while it also pokes fun at experimental sound poets who perhaps take themselves too seriously.

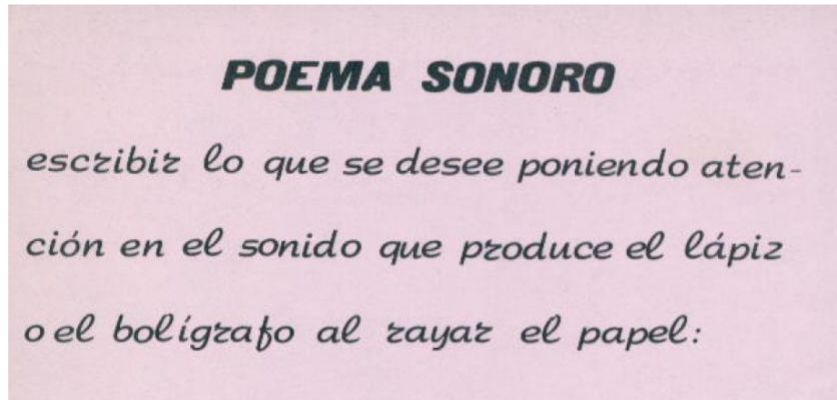


Figure 8. "Poema sonoro".

Another poem that exemplifies this strategy is unnamed and brief; it reads: "pronunciar una palabra / separarla en sílabas y sonidos / abrir cada sonido para observar qué hay dentro de él". This poem bears a striking resemblance the following poem by Martínez: "Repita una palabra tantas veces como sea necesario para volatizarla. Analice el residuo" (1977, 34). In both poems, the reader is challenged to contemplate the meaning of words once their material aspect has been removed (or destroyed). These poems ask us if there is meaning inside of the word's syllables or in the residue of a word once it has been volatized, or if it lies elsewhere. They can be read as deconstructions of the linguistic sign, revealing the arbitrary nature of signifier (acoustic image) and signified (concept).<sup>29</sup>

Although there are many similarities in the proposal poems of Grupo Texto Poético and Martínez, the differences in tone and style result in a nuanced distinction between the type of humor and irony employed in these ludic participatory poems. Martínez's poems tend more towards pataphysical humor (which, as we recall, means taking humor quite seriously) and caustic philosophical irony, while Grupo Texto

<sup>29</sup> Part 6 of Martínez's posthumous book *El poeta anónimo (o el eterno presente de Juan Luis Martínez)* uses the Saussurean distinction of signifier/signified as the section title ("El significante y el significado").

Poético's sense of humor is a bit more lighthearted and the irony more playful. The results of these differences may be in part due to the distinct cultural climates in which they were composed: while Spain was moving away from the shadows of dictatorship, Chile was entering into the depths of the shadows; thus, we can see more carefree humor of a cultural opening versus more enigmatic and dark humor of a cultural closure. These conjectures about the differences in socio-cultural milieu are probably part of the reason for their points of departure. In addition, we have seen how different influences have shaped these poets: for Martínez we can focus on Jean Tardieu, while Grupo Texto Poético inherits more from Zaj, Fluxus, and '60s artists like Yoko Ono. These differences in tone and style produce parallel but distinct experiences for the reader/participant as well: both invite us to participate in creating poetry through ludic scenarios and riddles, but they elicit slightly different types of laughter and distinct ideas regarding the speaking subject. To clarify the latter consideration, although the concept of authorship is undermined in both cases (both writers make it unclear to what extent a text was produced by a single author), in Martínez we feel a deeper mistrust of authority figures, while in the work of Grupo Texto Poético we feel like part of an artistic community without a leading authority.

Let us take a more nuanced approach to their use of humor in proposal poems to highlight the distinctions. As was mentioned above, both the Chilean poet and the Spanish poets employ a technique of casually brushing up against the absurd in order to produce their comic effect. I have mentioned how this approach is similar to pataphysical humor and may have its source in ludic philosophical writers such as Jarry, Queneau, Daumal, Duchamp, Arrabal, Tardieu etc., but we actually find much more influence from these writers in Martínez. We can also look at how Martínez's poetry not only uses far more pastiche of, and intertextuality with, these writers through citation and juxtaposition, but also contains his own version of pataphysical investigations. A few examples may help illustrate these points:

OBSERVACIONES RELACIONADAS CON LA EXUBERANTE  
ACTIVIDAD DE LA "CONFABULACION FONETICA" O "EL  
LENGUAJE DE LOS PAJAROS" EN LAS OBRAS DE J. P. BRISSET, R.  
ROUSSEL, M. DUCHAMP Y OTROS

- a. A través de su canto los pájaros  
comunican una comunicación  
en la que dicen que no dicen nada.
- b. El lenguaje de los pájaros  
es un lenguaje de signos transparentes

- en busca de la transparencia dispersa de algún significado.
- c. Los pájaros encierran el significado de su propio canto en la malla de un lenguaje vacío; malla que es a un tiempo transparente e irrompible.
  - d. Incluso el silencio que se produce entre cada canto es también un eslabón de esa malla, un signo, un momento del mensaje que la naturaleza se dice a sí misma.
  - e. Para la naturaleza no es el canto de los pájaros ni su equivalente, la palabra humana, sino el silencio, el que convertido en mensaje tiene por objeto establecer, prolongar o interrumpir la comunicación para verificar si el circuito funciona y si realmente los pájaros se comunican entre ellos a través de los oídos de los hombres y sin que estos se dan cuenta.

NOTA:

Los pájaros cantan en pajarístico,  
pero los escuchamos en español.  
(El español es una lengua opaca,  
con un gran número de palabras fantasmas;  
el pajarístico es una lengua transparente y sin palabras) (1977, 89).

The principal discourse of the poem concerns communication, and more specifically the role of silence in communicating. Without silence, we are told, there would be no way of testing the “circuit” of communication to be sure that it works. If we look at this poem from a pataphysical angle, we could say that the somewhat paradoxical notion at play is that silence is a form of communication, and that without it, we would not be able to communicate or verify that we have been understood. The approach has what appears to be a visibly logical form, employing a sort of syllogistic argumentative style, planting premises and expanding upon them. The actual significance of the text, however, is somewhat at odds with the exposition, or at least it strikes us as being somewhat absurd: birds communicate through the ears of people without our knowledge? And birds communicate a communication in which they say that they are saying nothing? The poem has the feel of a riddle, but also creates a comic effect by juxtaposing a logical, philosophical, and argumentative style of exposition



while treating a topic of paradoxical nature. This mix of a serious tone with the nonsensical or absurdist investigation produces a unique sort of pataphysical humor.<sup>30</sup>

If we compare this text to the proposal poems by Grupo Texto Poético, we can find a similar absurdist humor, but the Spanish poets solicit a more congenial experience, lacking the strong didactic and scientific tone we find in speaking subject of Martínez's work. This is not the same as saying that Martínez's sense of humor is more serious. Behind the serious speaking subject of an individual text (like the ones above) we sense the work of a meta-author who arranges these texts and shares a smile and a wink with us at the speakers' amusing incongruities. On the other hand, when we read the proposal poems of Grupo Texto Poético we feel less distance between author and speaking subject, since the speaking subject is less of an object of ridicule. Let us take a look at a few examples that illustrate this difference:

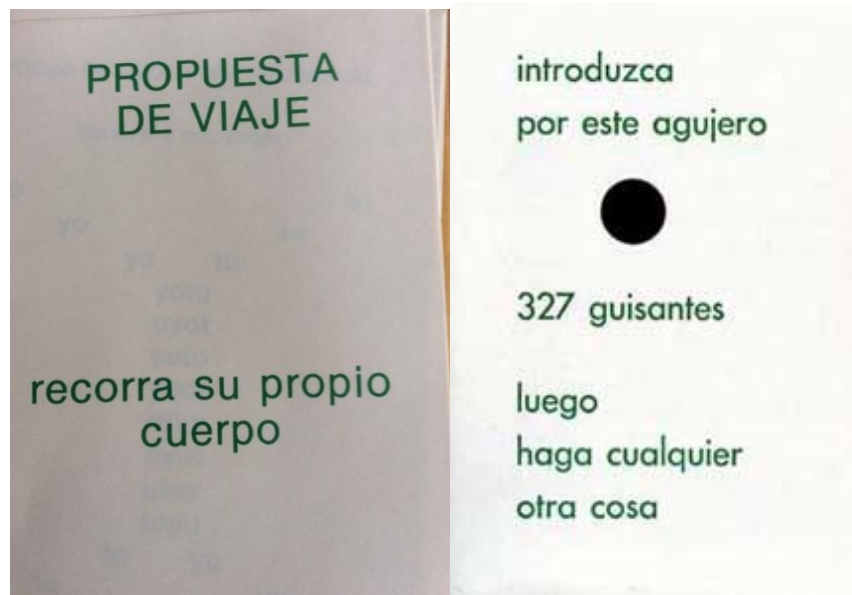


Figure 9. Selections from *Texto Poético 6* and *Texto Poético 9*.

The first poem makes light of instructional poetry through a playful twist. The poem solicits a performance from the reader but also produces a comic reaction simply through the juxtaposition of taking a trip and touching oneself based on the confluence of the notion of “travel” (geographical or sensual). The difference in humor is that here

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<sup>30</sup> In addition, the writers who are cited in the title of the poem have a pataphysical aspect to some of their works as well. J. P. Brisset, for example, wrote in *La Science de Dieu ou la création de l'homme* that mankind descended from frogs by comparing French and frog languages, but more importantly, he took these investigations seriously, or at least gives his work a serious tone, despite the puns and poetic permutations.

we feel that we are laughing with the speaking subject and not at him/her. We can sense that the one who speaks in this poem is cognizant of the humor of the proposal, whereas in the Chilean poet's work (as we saw above), the humor often results from the juxtaposition of a serious speaker who is being ridiculed by the metaspeaker who has organized the discourse.

The second poem has a more absurdist feel. The apparent arbitrary nature of the number of peas (327) makes us think that the speaker has a specific scientific reason for the experiment to be undertaken. However, when we arrive at the second step, "then / do any / other thing", we realize that the speaker does not have a coherent purpose, and thus the logic of the first step appears questionable. We can conclude that if steps 1 and 2 are disconnected and nonsensical, the number of peas is probably just as irrational and absurd. Hence, we come to doubt the capacity of the speaking subject to produce a sensible discourse and we laugh at his/her absurdity. In this way, this proposal poem is much more similar to those of their Chilean contemporary.

### *Conclusions*

The poems of Grupo Texto Poético thus oscillate between these two variations of absurdist humor. On one hand, we find light-hearted imaginative proposal poems similar to those of Ono, Fluxus, and Zaj, while on the other we see elements of pataphysical humor more along the lines of Tardieu and Martínez. Although at times the poets from different continents seem to be channeling the same sense of humor, the kind of satire found in Martínez's "Tareas de poesía" where we laugh at the speaker's ridiculous questions (such as: "Qué significan los lirosos para el autor?", "Por qué el autor afirma que las oveñas patizan el bramente?", [1977, 95]) is less typical in Grupo Texto Poético.

This distinction, albeit minor, produces a different relationship between author and reader. In the works of Grupo Texto Poético the many invitations to collaborate take the form of a collective that solicits its readers to become participants in a new art scene emerging from the twilight of Franco's dictatorship, and these texts date from the end of this period into the *movida* and wider cultural (re)opening of the '90s. In contrast, Martínez's early works date to the period leading up to the Pinochet dictatorship and during the *apagón cultural*. It therefore makes sense that Martínez appears to his readers as an enigmatic Cheshire Cat, a nebulous and unstable speaking subject who delivers riddles and disappears, often leaving us with more questions than

answers.<sup>31</sup> The author as authority figure is undermined in Martínez's works, not only with the striking out and suppression of the author's name (~~Juan Luis Martínez~~) but also in the poetic of pastiche and recycled materials, which suggest that the author is a mere collector and *scriptor*.<sup>32</sup> In a similar way, Grupo Texto Poético does not assign names to their poems, but instead gives the impression of a collaborative creation by giving us the name of the participants without attaching them to the individual works. These considerations on the figure of the author and the figures of authority in society are important to keep in mind when formulating a comparative analysis of the Chilean and Spanish poets as I have attempted above.

Perhaps what is unique about the work of the Juan Luis Martínez and Grupo Texto Poético in comparison to their predecessors is the way they challenge the somewhat naïve notion that the author of a participatory event/work does not occupy a privileged site from whence he or she can instruct the audience in how to make art. I believe that their work reveals this problematic relationship through the use of irony and absurdity, making the reader question the logic of the authorial voice and casting doubt on the very process of participation that they seem to promote. In addition, the absurd nature of some of the proposals and/or questions allows the audience to escape from the sort of limited responses available in most forms of participatory art. This parody of the typical participatory art, in which these poets lead us to question the authoritative voice inviting the spectator to complete a specific task, is what I see as their unique contribution to the practice of participatory poetry.

Although these poets both use a brush with the absurd to produce a comic effect, I have argued that the different tones of the speakers elicit a slightly different form of laughter and feeling towards authority. The more pataphysical and satirical approach of Juan Luis Martínez undermines the author and authority, causing us to laugh at the speaker, while Texto Poético's absurdist humor provokes laughter more in sync with the speaker of the text. This is due in large part to the different genealogies that have inspired work, from the more scientific pataphysical authors in Martínez's repertoire to the more ludic and open-ended participatory art of Texto Poético's

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<sup>31</sup> In the article "*La nueva novela: el texto que ríe*" Elizabeth Monasterios suggests the comparison between Martínez and the Cheshire Cat (*Revista Iberoamericana*, 60, [1994]: 859-72).

<sup>32</sup> Marcelo Riosco uses the term *Scriptor ludens* to describe Martínez and the mode of writing of the Chilean neo-avant-garde (additionally, Diego Maquieira and Enrique Lihn). He writes, "el *Scriptor ludens* no se restringe solamente a la combinatoria lúdica de elementos heterogéneos. La operatoria del *Scriptor ludens* va más allá, tiene una dimensión política, impugna o directamente destruye otros discursos. Es lúdico, pero también humorístico. Juega, pero deconstruye. Su discurso está plagado de trampas y dobleces..." (15).

inspirations. Lastly, I have suggested that these different shades of humor may be due to the different socio-political environments of the writers, in particular the movement towards and away from dictatorships and cultural closures in their respective countries.

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