

## FROM IDEOGRAM TO MONTAGE: EISENSTEIN AND BRAZILIAN CONCRETE POETRY

DEL IDEOGRAMA AL MONTAJE: EISENSTEIN Y LA POESÍA CONCRETA BRASILEÑA

DE L'IDÉOGRAMME AU MONTAGE: EISENSTEIN ET LA POÉSIE CONCRÈTE BRÉSILIENNE

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Fecha de recepción: 10/07/2024

Fecha de aceptación: 17/03/2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30827/tn.v8i2/31250>

**Abstract:** This paper examines the relevance of the Japanese writing system known as ideogram in the elaboration of the theory of film of Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, especially in his understanding of montage as the filmic principle, *par excellence*. It will then consider how Eisenstein's ideas on the ideogram and montage were incorporated decades later by the Brazilian concrete avant-garde, and how it became seminal in their first manifestos. The concrete poets merged Eisenstein's reflections with that of the American scholar Ernest Fenollosa, whom they read via Ezra Pound, to elaborate their own theory.

**Keywords:** Eisenstein; Soviet cinema; Montage; Ideogram; Brazilian concretism.

**Resumen:** Este artículo examina la relevancia del sistema gráfico japonés conocido como ideograma en la elaboración de la teoría fílmica de cineasta soviético Sergei

Eisenstein, en especial su entendimiento del montaje como principio fílmico *par excellence*. Tras ello, se va a considerar cómo las ideas de Eisenstein acerca del ideograma y el montaje fueron incorporadas décadas más tarde por la vanguardia concreta brasileña, y cómo se tornaron seminales en sus primeros manifiestos. Los poetas concretos combinaron las reflexiones de Eisenstein con las del erudito estadounidense Ernest Fenollosa, a quien habían leído vía Ezra Pound, para elaborar su propia teoría.

**Palabras clave:** Eisenstein; cine soviético; montaje; ideograma; concretismo brasileño.

**Résumé :** Cet article examine la pertinence du système graphique japonais connu sous le nom d'idéogramme dans le développement de la théorie cinématographique du cinéaste soviétique Sergei Eisenstein, en particulier sa compréhension du montage comme principe cinématographique par excellence. Nous examinerons ensuite comment les idées d'Eisenstein sur l'idéogramme et le montage ont été incorporées des décennies plus tard par l'avant-garde concrète brésilienne, et comment elles sont devenues fondamentales dans ses premiers manifestes. Les poètes concrets ont combiné les réflexions d'Eisenstein avec celles de l'érudit américain Ernest Fenollosa, qu'ils avaient lu via Ezra Pound, pour développer leur propre théorie.

**Mots clés :** Eisenstein ; cinéma soviétique ; montage ; idéogramme ; concrétisme brésilien.

## 1. Russian and Brazilian Avant-Garde

The concrete poetry movement in 1950s and 1960s Brazil represented a unique moment of appropriation of Soviet avant-garde in the Brazilian cultural panorama. Having as chief figures the poets Décio Pignatari (1927-2012) and brothers Haroldo (1929-2003) and Augusto de Campos (1931), Concretism brought together many diverse references to create a new artistic language in mid-century Brazil. Chief among such references was, as mentioned, those spawning from the October Revolution in early 20th century Russia, especially the cinema of Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948).

However, to better understand and appreciate what that meant, it is necessary to put it into perspective as one step in a more complex movement of identification and appropriation of the avant-garde produced in the post-revolutionary Soviet Union. One must also consider the amount of risk and political statement that appropriating Russian avant-garde represented in the context in Brazil during the 1950s and especially

1960s, after the military coup and the ensuing dictatorship, marked by anticommunist propaganda. In such a context, advertising Soviet art does mark a political stance, which questions the accusations of *apolitical* and *formalist*, that have been directed to the concrete poems by some of their critics.

Eisenstein appears prominently in one of the earliest and most important manifestoes of the Concretist movement, the “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry” (Campos, *Selected Writings* 217-219), published in 1958. The three subscribers of the text list a number of forerunners and references to concrete poetry, and mention as one of them Eisenstein himself, via the two pillars of Eisensteinian film theory: “ideogram and montage”<sup>1</sup> (217). The “Pilot Plan” received a post-scriptum in 1961, in fact, a simple sentence, attributed to Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930): “there’s no revolutionary art without revolutionary form”<sup>2</sup> (219).

The role ideogram and montage played on Brazilian concrete poetry has yet to be measured. In order to do so, one would better go to the source material, Eisenstein’s writings, and understand what each of those terms meant to him.

## 2. Eisenstein: From Montage to Ideogram

Those who are reasonably familiar with the theoretical writings of Eisenstein on cinema probably know that he held montage as the chief principle of film. On top of it, Eisenstein’s investigations on Chinese and Japanese writing systems and Kabuki theater, were crucial to formulations on film. As the Italian scholar Antonio Somaini observes, Eisenstein drew much of his formulations on montage and its role in film from his observation of aspects of “pre-cinematographic [...] Japanese traditions such as Kabuki theater, haiku and tanka lyrical epigrams, the portraits of Kabuki actors by the painter Sharaku, as well as in the Japanese ideograms, which Eisenstein considered as ‘hieroglyphs’” (Somaini, *Ejzenštejn: il cinema, le arti, il montaggio* 36; original emphasis, our translation).

In fact, some of the most seminal texts by Eisenstein deal directly with either Japanese ideogram (or “hieroglyphs” in his own words) or Kabuki. The most representative

1 Another important forerunner listed in the manifesto is James Joyce (1882-1941), a chief figure for Brazilian concretism, who also attracted the interest of Eisenstein.

2 The concrete poets were crucial in the divulgation of Mayakovsky in Brazil, and not only him, but many other Soviet poets, both pro and against the Stalinist regime. With the help of Boris Schnaiderman (1917-2016), a Ukrainian-born Russian scholar based in Brasil, the Campos brothers prepared in the 1960s a volume with translations of Mayakovsky poems, directly from Russian (something then rare in Brazil, as most translations of works of Russian literature in Brazil at that time were indirect), with a rich critical companion. Later on, the same group organized the anthology *Poesia Russa Moderna (Modern Russian Poetry)*, with reunited translations of Velimir Khlebnikov, Sergei Yesenin, Anna Akhmatova, Marina Tsvetaeva, Boris Pasternak, and many others. Russian formalism also played a significant role on the early theory of Concretism.

of those is probably “Beyond the Shot” (*Selected Works* 138-150), written in 1929 as a postface to a book by Naum Kaufman on Japanese cinema, something which, according to Eisenstein, “does not in fact exist” (138) at the time. That, however, did not prevent Eisenstein from seeing copious signs of cinematographic culture in Japan, from its very writing system, that works on the same premises as cinema, that is, “first and foremost, montage” (138). According to Eisenstein:

The point is that the copulation —perhaps we had better say the combination— of two hieroglyphs of the simplest series is regarded not as their sum total but as their product, [...]. The combination of two ‘representable’ objects achieves the representation of something that cannot be graphically represented (139).

Eisenstein refers to this dynamic as “collision” (140), thus stressing the point that that the principle of ideogram —hieroglyph, in his terms— is not amalgamation, but rather the production of an entirely new element from the friction of two previous elements. Therefore, “this method, which in hieroglyphics provides a means for the laconic imprinting of an abstract concept, gives rise [...] to similarly laconic printed imagery” (140).

In another 1929 essay, Eisenstein further elaborates on the role of “collision” in film and its relation to montage, which, according to him, has been stipulated as the nerve of film by Soviet cinema:

[I]n my view montage is not an idea composed of successive shots stuck together but an idea that DERIVES from the collision between two shots that are independent of one another [...]. As in Japanese hieroglyphics in which two independent ideographic characters (‘shots’) are juxtaposed and *explode* into a concept (*Selected Works* 163-164; original emphasis).

Likewise, Eisenstein seems to regard the Kabuki theater as a development and an extension of the conciseness —or rather, “printed imagery”, in his words— that Japanese writing carries *in nuce*. Such conciseness carries an intrinsic cinematic principle, which gives Kabuki theater its filmic quality, in Eisenstein’s eyes. This argument was particularly strong in the context Eisenstein wrote, as he witnessed the emergence of sound films, which motivated heated debates among USSR filmmakers —and all around— divided between those who saw film as an essentially visual medium, thus regarding sound as a distraction, and those who saw it as an important element of filmic composition, which was bound to be incorporated.

Eisenstein took the side of the latter and used Kabuki theater to make his point. In a 1928 essay, “An Unexpected Juncture” (*Selected Works* 115-123), he refers to Kabuki as “the most remarkable phenomenon of theatre culture” (115), and, at the same time, defends that it partakes in a series of “experiments in theater in which it has already

ceased to be theater and has become cinema. What is more, it has become cinema at his latest stage of its development: sound cinema”<sup>3</sup> (116).

That is the “unexpected juncture” to which the title alludes. Kabuki does so by means of what Eisenstein calls a “monism of ensemble”, in which “[s]ound, movement, space and voice *do not accompany* (or even parallel) one another but are treated as *equivalent elements*” (117; added emphasis). As Somaini puts it, the “monistic ensemble” Eisenstein refers to “is capable of editing together various expressive means (scenes, costumes, voices, gesture, music) in order to ‘stimulate’ the audience with a maximum of precision and effectiveness” (Somaini, “Cinema as ‘Dynamic Mummification’, History as Montage” 43). Hence, sound becomes an organic part of the filmic narrative, not an accessory or a distraction. The same principle of conciseness of the ideogram that Eisenstein had resorted to portray montage and its role in film is expanded to make the case for sound films, via Kabuki theater, which, to Eisenstein, is not but a maximized form of ideogram. The same principle of economy of means and collision.

It can be noted that ideogram and Kabuki are not merely exotic *chinoiserie* for Eisenstein. As limited as his actual knowledge of the Japanese language and culture might have been, those elements played an active role in his understanding of cinema and were crucial for the elaboration of some key-concepts of Eisenstein’s theory, most notably montage. Those same elements would be recuperated by the Brazilian concrete avant-garde a quarter century later.

### 3. Eisenstein and Brazilian Concretism

As stated above, Eisenstein’s presence was remarkable for Brazilian concrete poetry from its early stages. Not only is his name mentioned in one of the first and most important manifestos of the movement, the “Plano-piloto para a poesia concreta” (“Pilot-plan for concrete poetry”), first published in 1958, it appears in the very first paragraph, which outlines what exactly is concrete poetry:

Concrete Poetry: product of a critical evolution of forms. Assuming that the historical cycle of verse (as formal-rhythmical unit) is closed, concrete poetry begins by being aware of graphic space as structural agent. Qualified space: space-time structure instead of mere linear-temporistical development. Hence the importance of ideogram concept, either in its general sense of spatial or visual syntax, or in its special sense (Fenollosa/Pound) of method of composition based on direct-analogical, not logical-discursive jux-

3 As Antonio Somaini observes, “[M]ontage in here presented as a process whose manifestations can be detected in different media and throughout the history of the arts long before the appearance of cinema, even though such manifestations can only be recognized *après-coup*, from the retrospective vantage point” (Somaini, “Cinema as ‘Dynamic Mummification’, History as Montage” 53).

taposition of elements. “*Il faut que notre intelligence s’habitue à comprendre synthético-idéographiquement au lieu de analytico-discursivement*” (Apollinaire). Eisenstein: ideogram and montage<sup>4</sup> (Campos, *Selected Writings* 217; our emphasis).

The affinities between the Brazilian concrete project and that of Eisenstein are self-evident, as is the role of ideogram for each. In fact, both share with many vanguardist movements of the early 20th century not merely the desire to revolutionize the basis of art, but also to question the very principles of Western language and thought, resorting to Eastern systems of thought to bring that project to fruition.

In a 1977<sup>5</sup> volume called *Ideograma: lógica, poesia, linguagem* (*Ideogram: logic, poetry, language*), Haroldo de Campos, one of the founders of concretism and subscriber of the “Pilot-plan”, includes a translation of Eisenstein’s “Beyond the shot” and also a paper by S.I. Hayakawa (1906-1992) titled “What is meant by Aristotelian structure of language?”. In it, Hayakawa elaborates on some formulations made earlier by A. Korzibski on how Western philosophy and scientific method have been shaped by Indo-European linguistic structure, codified by Aristotle himself. That model, however, had met its exhaustion by developments in many fields of knowledge made along the 20th century, including quantum mechanics and Einstein’s relativity theory. “All of us brought up in western culture have internalized and therefore manifest in our patterns of reaction and behavior, the traditional Indo-European (Aristotelian) language structure”, argues Hayakawa. However, “these patterns of reaction are demonstrably not adequate for the solution of contemporary problems” (Hayakawa 220).

What Korzibski calls “Aristotelian structure of language” is actually the mechanism of Indo-European languages, which works with the principles of identity, enclosed in the “is of identity” (229). In epistemological terms, this means that for Western science, “the traditional philosophical quest has been to seek to ‘define’ the ‘essence of things. This tendency continues to show itself in the ‘natural logic’ of unreflective persons who feel that when a thing is named, one has discovered all he needs to know about it” (221). The structure of Indo-European languages has thus directly shaped scientific method, and, although neither Korzibski nor Hakayawa directly state it, art as well. That is what underlies in the Aristotelian principle. As Hakayawa puts it, “[t]he term ‘Aristotelian’ as used by Korzibski can be translated as ‘Indo-European’” (224). The corollary would be that non-Indo-European are not subject to this Aristotelian principle and offer thus different epistemological models. That is why ideogram became so appealing as a language

4 Translated by Jon Tolman.

5 When the Brazilian concretism had already receded as a unified movement, therefore. The importance of this volume and other texts included in it will be further appreciated in this same essay.

to Eisenstein, as well as to the Brazilian concrete poets after him, whose cinematic and poetic experiments, respectively, have taken place contemporarily to the epistemological twist in Western science. Ideogram works with the logic of collision, not identity.

Likewise, Apollinaire's citation present in the paragraph of the "Pilot-Plan" quoted above can be better understood under that light. What he calls analytical-discursive intelligence—as well as the "logical-discursive juxtaposition of elements" mentioned just before—has links to the "Aristotelic structure" and the "is of identity" of Korzibski and Hakayawa. What the "Pilot Plan" proposes, then, is that intelligence gets accustomed to understanding synthetic-ideographically or "direct-analogically" in the words of the subscribers of the manifesto.

Although the "Pilot-Plan" is considered the touchstone of Brazilian concrete poetry theory and Eisenstein's names features prominently in it, many more mentions to his name and his montage principle can be found in earlier texts of the members of the movement. For instance, Augusto de Campos, in an essay called "Pontos — Periferia — Poesia concreta" ("Points — Periphery — Concrete Poetry") (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 17-25) published in 1956, parallels Eisenstein experimentation with film montage with the experiments of musical dodecaphonic avant-garde<sup>6</sup> carried out along the same time period, referring both to the French poet Stéphane Mallarmé's (1842-1898) poem *Un Coup de Dés*:

*Un Coup de Dés* made Mallarmé the inventor of a poetic composition process whose signification seems to us comparable to the value of the "series", introduced by Schoenberg, purified by Webern, and, through means of the filtering performed by the latter, bequeathed to young electronic musicians, presiding the sound universes of Boulez and Stockhausen. From the start, we would define such process with the word "structure", meaning an entity in which the whole is more than the sum of its parts [...]. Eisenstein, when fundamenting his theory of montage, Pierre Boulez and Michel Fano, in relation to serial principle, have all testified—as artists—the interest on the application of Gestalt concepts on the arts<sup>7</sup> (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 17).

We can see how Augusto de Campos conjugated the musical and the ideographic dimension of the word, below, in one of the poems of the series *poetamenos*, from 1953<sup>8</sup>. In this poem, color is used to distinguish the two levels by which the poem can be read, giving it a musical sheet quality. The ideogramic principle comes in the juxtaposition of words, which turns them into compounds. We see that in the constructs "cimaueu", and

6 Augusto de Campos is also an accomplished music scholar.

7 All translation of passages taken from Brazilian editions are our responsibility.

8 All the poems were included in the anthology *Teoria da poesia concreta*. No copyright infringement intended.



“baixela”, which might be rendered as “*topme*”, and “*bottomher*”, thus graphically signaling the erotic content of the poem, further reinforced a few lines below by “semen(t) em ventre”, which combines “semen”, with “semente” (seed) and “em ventre” (in the womb). It is the sheer juxtaposition of the lexical elements that produce the erotic sense of the poem, without recurring to the usual articulatory elements of language.



Figure 1. Campos, Campos and Pignatari, 16.

On the same essay, Augusto de Campos brings attention to the role of ideogram on poetry, evoking the experiments of Ezra Pound (1885-1972) in his *Cantos*, via the writings of American sinologist Ernest Fenollosa (1853-1908). “The meaning of this true ‘revelation’ of Chinese ideogram to modern aesthetics is of utmost importance” (22), he states. “To the disbelievers, to those who regard this as an exotic idea, we recommend, as a culturmorphological<sup>9</sup> evidence [...] the essay ‘The Cinematographic Principle and the ideogram’ by Eisenstein” (22).

Also in 1956, another member of the group, Décio Pignatari, publishes a manifesto, “Nova Poesia: Concreta” (“New Poetry: Concrete”) (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 41-43). He too ranks Eisenstein among the phenomena responsible for the aesthetic and epistemological upheaval that took place in the first half of the 20th century. Pignatari notes: “the headline technique and §un coup des dés§. calder and §un coup des dés§. mondrian, architecture and joão cabral de melo neto. joyce and cinema. eisenstein and ideogram. cummings and paul klee. webern and augusto de campos. gestalt psychology” (43). According to Pignatari, the reasoning of this assemblage was to “found a tradition of strictness”<sup>10</sup> (43).

9 The notion of “cultural morphology” was taken by the Brazilian concrete poets from Ezra Pound, who, in his turn, took it from German ethnologist Leo Frobenius (1873-1938). The term appears somewhat regularly in their texts of the time.

10 The § and lower case letters are used in the fragment and in many other concrete texts.



In a later text, “Poesia Concreta: Organização” (“Concrete Poetry: Organization”) (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 86-92), Pignatari mentions a passage of Eisenstein’s *The Film Sense*, in which the filmmaker elaborates on a poetic passage from Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837). Eisenstein makes a “shot by shot” analysis of a stanza by Pushkin to make his point that montage both pre-dates and extrapolates actual cinema. Pignatari, in his turn, argues that if such a thing could happen in poetry before the turning point set by film, it could happen even more so after it and using the method of film. The passage referred is the following:

But no one knew just how or when

She vanished. A lone fisherman

In that night heard the clack of horses’ hoofs,

Cossack speech and a woman’s whisper.

Three shots:

1. Clack of horses’ hoofs.

2. Cossak speech.

3. A woman’s whisper.

Once more three objectively expressed representations (in sound!) come together in an emotionally expressed unifying image, distinct from the perception of the separate phenomena if encountered apart from their association with each other. The method is used solely for the purpose of evoking the necessary emotional experience in the reader (Eisenstein, *The Film Sense* 48).

This montage principle may be observed in motion in a poem by Pignatari, “hombre hambre hembra” (1957), which, in a more concise way than Augusto de Campos’s aforementioned poem, also tells of a heterosexual erotic encounter. Pignatari’s poem juxtaposes the Spanish signifiers *hombre* (man), *hembra* (female) and *hambre* (hunger/famish), also taking advantage of the sound proximity of the three nouns:

<b>hombre</b>	<b>hombre</b>	<b>hombre</b>
<b>hambre</b>		<b>hembra</b>
	<b>hambre</b>	
<b>hembra</b>	<b>hembra</b>	<b>hambre</b>

Figure 2. Campos, Campos and Pignatari 124.

Pignatari's poem is also revealing of how montage is regarded by the concrete poets in a microstructural level as well, that is, in the level of the word as a unit of meaning in itself. The reference for that is James Joyce (and, more remotely, Lewis Carroll), and the portmanteau word, which Pignatari defines as a "new qualitative unity, resulting of the juxtaposition of two or more words" (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 86). Joyce, as it is known, was counted among Eisenstein's preferred writers<sup>11</sup>. He was also one of the most distinguished members of Brazilian concrete *paideuma*<sup>12</sup>. Haroldo de Campos in a 1957 article titled "Aspectos da Poesia Concreta" ("Aspects of Concrete Poetry") (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 96-108) brings attention to the fact that Eisenstein makes the case for the intrinsic relation between ideogram and montage by "exemplifying his thesis, from the literary perspective, with the Joycean technique of *Finnegans Wake*" (98). In fact, in *Film Form*, Eisenstein states:

The full embrace of the whole inner world of man, of a whole reproduction of the outer world, cannot be achieved by any one of [the forms of art].

When any of these arts strives to accomplish this end, by venturing outside its own frame, the very base that holds the art together is inevitably broken.

The most heroic attempt to achieve this in literature was made by James Joyce in *Ulysses* and in *Finnegans Wake* (Eisenstein, *Film Form* 184).

We get to see that principle take a poetic form in a 1958 poem by Haroldo de Campos, "nasce morre". The poem articulates the third person singular present form of the verbs *nascer* (to be born) and *morrer* (to die) and adds to them the prefixes *re* and *des*, indicative of repetition and negation, respectively. The result is both a lexicalized form, such as *renasce* (it is born again), and mostly neologisms, such as *desnasce*, *desmorre*, and *remorre*, which may be rendered, in order, as "it is unborn", "it is undead", and "it is dead again". The *se* which both opens and closes the poem may be read as either the conjunction *if*, or as the third person singular reflexive pronoun, which makes the verb an impersonal—and thus general—form. Both possibilities admitted, the particle sets the poem in a sort of loop, which is graphically reinforced by having it both initiate and end the poem. This looping motion further stresses the montage and filmic aspect of the poem.

11 Indeed, one of Eisenstein's projects that did not come to fruition was a filmic adaptation of Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, which would use techniques akin to the ones Joyce used in his novels, *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* (see Somaini, *Ejzenštejn*).

12 A notion derived from Ezra Pound that was incorporated by the Brazilian concrete poets.

se  
 nasce  
 morre nasce  
 morre nasce morre  
     renasce remorre renasce  
         remorre renasce  
             remorre  
                 re  
             re  
         desnasce  
     desmorre desnasce  
 desmorre desmorre desnasce  
             nascemorrenasce  
             morrenasce  
             morre se

Figure 3. Campos, Campos and Pignatari 56.

Translation is also a vital chapter in the incorporation of the ideogram principle by the concrete poets, especially in the case of Haroldo de Campos, who, in later years, dedicated to translating classical Chinese poetry, as well as the Noh theater<sup>13</sup>. The topic of translation inside the concrete movement, however, is so rich and complex it deserves a study of its own<sup>14</sup>. What is most noteworthy for the purposes of this study is how the concrete poets reassessed Eisenstein's formulations on ideogram and montage and took them to a different realm<sup>15</sup>.

#### 4. The Fenollosa Factor

It can very much be established that ideogram, or rather, an ideogram logic, was a fundamental aspect of concrete poetry and its theory. In "Aspects of Concrete Poetry", Haroldo de Campos elaborates on the role of ideogram in Ezra Pound's poetry, via Fenollosa, and why it caught the eye of the concrete poets: "[In Pound's Cantos], the ideogram is the structure principle which presides the interaction of blocks of ideas, that criticize, reiterate and enlighten each other mutually" (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 96).

Quoting Hugh Kenner in his study *The Poetry of Ezra Pound*, Haroldo de Campos refers to ideogram as a "forma mentis" (Kenner 105), which allows for a maximum of

13 For Campos's translations from the Chinese, see the volume *Escrito sobre Jade* (1996). The Noh play is translated in *Hagoromo de Zeami* (1994). Some theoretical texts on the topic of Chinese poetry and Noh theater may also be found in the volume *A arte no horizonte do provável* (2010).

14 For a comprehensive study on the importance of translation, especially for Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, see Isabel Gómez's *Cannibal Translation* (2023).

15 Argentine scholar Gonzalo Aguilar mentions an interview he did with Augusto de Campos, in which the poet tells him the concrete group used to frequent the Cinemateca Brasileira (Brazilian Cinematheque) where, among others, they watched the films of Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) (see Aguilar 79).

economy of means. Also, according to Campos, the notion of ideogram was fitting to Pound's own conception of poetry as mostly a work of condensing meaning ("dichtung = condensare"; see Kenner 115), for which poetry consists of "gists and piths" (115). With that in consideration, Campos ponders: "[I]t is easy to understand the importance to modern poetry aesthetic of the writing system of Chinese—ideogram" (Campos, Campos and Pignatari 99). However, Campos considers it "should not be taken merely as an intention of replacing a linguistic order with another" (99). Rather, it has a great deal to do with that desideratum expressed by Apollinaire of getting intelligence to learn synthetic-ideographically instead of analytical-discursively, which the concrete poets took as their own.

As it is known, Pound's appropriation of ideogram happened via the works of Fenollosa. In an essay that would gain considerable notoriety after his death, "The Chinese written character as a medium for poetry", Fenollosa not only analyzes the structure of Chinese ideogram, but also explores its similar traits with English language poetry. According to Fenollosa, the main principle that presides ideogram is that "[t]wo things added together do not produce a third thing, but suggest some fundamental relation between them" (Fenollosa 82). That aspect of ideogram made it so propitious to poetry, according to Fenollosa: "the baldest symbol of prosaic analysis is transformed by magic into a splendid flash of concrete poetry" (89), he states. Evidently, by the time he wrote this essay there was no such thing as *concrete poetry* as it came to be known later, but the reference only makes Fenollosa's point more instigating and is very revealing of his understanding of poetry. In fact, Fenollosa poses that "[p]oetry differs from prose in the concrete colors of its diction" (93). Therefore, what interests him on ideogram is its power of synthesis and its extensive use on verbal elements in construction<sup>16</sup>.

Fenollosa indeed spends a great amount of the essay theorizing about how faint English verbal syntax reliance on transitivity (i.e. a preposition linking a verb to its complement) looks next to Chinese and its isolating character. That very character made Chinese so appealing to poetry, which, in his view, dealt with the "concrete" facet of language:

I have alleged this, because it now enables me to show clearly my reasons for believing that the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built up with it a second universe of metaphor, but has through its very pictorial visibility been able to retain its original creative quality of poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue (96).

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<sup>16</sup> Stressing that is Fenollosa's view of ideogram, which must certainly be defective compared to later theories and studies.

Western language<sup>17</sup> poets would do well to learn from those guidelines, and, in fact, that is what Fenollosa advises them to do<sup>18</sup>:

We should beware of English grammar, with its hard parts of speech, and its lazy satisfaction with nouns and adjectives, and demand the verbal undertone of every noun. More than all should we eschew the verb “is”, and bring into play the splendid, but usually neglected, wealth of English verbs. Most of the existing translations conspicuously violate all of these rules (100).

One does not need to stretch too far to see the similarities between Fenollosa's proposition that “two things added together do not produce a third thing, but suggest some fundamental relation between them” (82) and Eisenstein's formulation on collision and its role on montage: “The combination of two ‘representable’ objects achieves the representation of something that cannot be graphically represented” (Eisenstein, *Selected Works* 139).

In fact, that is precisely what the concrete poets saw, particularly Haroldo de Campos. In the 1970's, the concrete movement of poetry had already been disbanded as a cohesive group, and its former members had moved on to individual projects. However, in 1977, Haroldo de Campos published the aforementioned collectanea, *Ideograma: Lógica, Poesia, Linguagem* (*Ideogram: Logic, Poetry, Language*). The volume brings together a series of texts on ideogram, with a presentation by H. de Campos. Among those texts are “The Chinese written character as a medium for poetry” and “The cinematographic principle and ideogram”.

In his presentation, “Ideograma, Anagrama, Diagrama: uma leitura de Fenollosa” (“Ideogram, Anagram, Diagram: reading Fenollosa”), Haroldo de Campos brings attention to the fact that when Eisenstein first elaborated on the ideogram, he was using sources that were preserved thanks to the work of a “North American philosophy professor, for whom Hegel had made a mistake when he underestimated the creative energies of Japanese civilization” (Campos, *Ideograma* 33). According to Campos, Eisenstein defended that “relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate” (94), and he “described [that process] under the name of *montage*, replacing Fenollosa's dynamic-organicist focus with a ‘materialistic’ approach, on the terms of a dialectic ‘conflict’” (94). By doing so, Campos goes on, Eisenstein inadvertently replicated with the “North American Hegelian buddhist [Fenollosa] what Marx had done with Hegel himself” (71). Campos insists on the convergences between the two, bringing

17 Although Fenollosa writes specifically about English.

18 Fenollosa's formulations share some similarities with certain formulations of futurist poets.

attention to the fact that Eisenstein had no knowledge of Fenollosa's work, what would make such convergences all the more awe-inspiring. According to him, "Eisenstein takes the study of his predecessor to its ultimate and necessary consequences, giving it, by means of the cinematic example, an ulterior inter semiotic dimension of extreme contemporary interest" (71).

However, to Campos, Eisenstein has the merits of insisting on the non-imitative aspect of ideogram as a servile copy of exterior nature. Indeed, Fenollosa does state that:

I have alleged this, because it now enables me to show clearly my reasons for believing that the Chinese written language has not only absorbed the poetic substance of nature and built up with it a second universe of metaphor, but has through its very pictorial visibility been able to retain its original creative quality of poetry with far more vigor and vividness than any phonetic tongue (Fenollosa 96).

To Eisenstein, on the other hand, the iconic aspect has precedence, giving his interpretation, in Campos's view, "expressive deformation and psychological disproportion" (*Ideograma* 72). This, to Campos translates in the "metonymic momentum taking precedence over the metaphorical one, which surfaces in Fenollosa at first sight"<sup>19</sup> (72). This, however, does not imply mutual exclusion between Fenollosa and Eisenstein, but rather complementarity, since, as Campos observes, "Metonym is in metaphor" (72). The former is contained within the latter and works as a selective approach of it, "as Eisenstein, the 'intersemiotic' thinker of cinema knew" (93).

The ideogram, thus, obeys, in Eisenstein —and, indirectly, Fenollosa— what Campos calls a "filmic chain of the sentence" (93), which counters the model of the "Aristotelian structure of language", as Hayakawa called it. It does so by creating meaning on the basis of relation, not identity, the angular stone of classical Aristotelian philosophy. Alternatively, the principle of relation lies on the very foundation of both Eisenstein's ("relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate") and Fenollosa's ("two things added together do not produce a third thing, but suggest some fundamental relation between them") interest in ideogram.

In fact, Fenollosa's formulation could be regarded as a direct response to the famed *principium tertii exclusi*, drawn from Aristotle<sup>20</sup>. Fenollosa addresses the question directly in his essay, when he mentions the "tyranny of mediaeval Logic over Europe" (Fenollosa 97). Read in that light, as Campos observes, Fenollosa's essay becomes a

19 Fenollosa: "This process is metaphor; the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations" (Fenollosa 94)

20 Given Fenollosa's background as a philosophy professor, the hypothesis is plausible.

sort of *j'accuse* of classical Western epistemology, from Aristotle to Descartes, and not just a study of the Chinese character.

Instead of a “logic of identity”, Chinese thought would answer to “logic of correlation” or “correlative duality”, in which opposites do not exclude, but integrate in a dynamic, mutually complementary inter-relation. [...] corroborating, in this respect, Fenollosa’s (and Eisenstein’s) emphasis on the importance of the concept of *relation*. The interest in the inter-relation of *signs* (characters), not on substance (Campos, *Ideograma* 78-79; original emphasis).

In that sense the role and value of metaphor (and metonym, in extension) can be further appreciated, because it allows for a reconsideration of the Aristotelian principle. Metaphor, thus, “is not presided by logic of the ‘excluded third’, but rather a camouflaged dissidence of said logic” (80).

As Campos observes, Fenollosa’s questioning of Western logic also likens his thought to that of Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)<sup>21</sup>. In fact, Derrida himself lists Fenollosa as a reference in *Of Grammatology*, acknowledging on Fenollosa’s researches many formulations that would foreshadow his own reflection on *écriture*. Derrida recognizes Fenollosa contribution to a grammatological science, and that of Pound, as an “irreducibly graphic poetics [which was], with that of Mallarmé, the first break in the most entrenched Western tradition. The fascination that the Chinese ideogram exercised on Pound’s writing may thus be given all its historical significance” (Derrida 92).

Derrida accurately observes that “by questioning by turns the logico-grammatical structures of the West (and first Aristotle’s list of categories), showing that no correct description of Chinese writing can tolerate it, Fenollosa recalled that Chinese poetry was essentially a script” (334). Indeed, Fenollosa recommends that “we should beware of English grammar, with its hard parts of speech, and its lazy satisfaction with nouns and adjectives, and demand the verbal undertone of every noun” (334), which, according to him, is one of the main traits of Chinese and ideogram.

Likewise, Fenollosa defends the elimination of the copulative verb, which, to him, has no force: “more than all should we eschew the verb ‘is’ and bring into play the splendid, but usually neglected, wealth of English verbs. Most of the existing translations conspicuously violate all of these rules” (100). Campos, in his turn, mentions that Derrida was the first real interlocutor of Fenollosa<sup>22</sup>. He also brings attention to the “brutalist”

21 Campos sustained a very prolific dialogue with Derrida, from the 1970s until his passing in 2003. Derrida even sent a text to be read during Campos’s memorial service at the Catholic University in São Paulo. The dialogue between the two can perhaps be most perceived and appreciated in Campos’s famous essay “The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the Sign of Devoration” (see Campos, *Novas: Selected Writings*).

22 That is, apart from Pound, who was the first who divulged Fenollosa’s writings after his death.



aspect of Fenollosa's "anti-Logic" (*Ideograma* 83), that was appropriated by Derrida, who widened its scope from the field of poetics to that of philosophy and epistemology.

## 5. Conclusion

As flawed, biased and incomplete as Fenollosa's or Eisenstein's knowledge on ideogram and the Chinese—or, in Eisenstein's case, Japanese—language can be, that is hardly the point for the interests of this study. What is most compelling is what they did with that knowledge. They both elaborated systems of thought that took ideogram as a premise to elaborate on different languages: poetry in Fenollosa's (and Pound's) case and film for Eisenstein<sup>23</sup>. Another aspect of interest is how, decades later, their formulations were reconciled in the work of the concrete group in Brazil, which not only produced a whole theory on art based on that foundation, but produced an entire oeuvre guided by this principle.

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<sup>23</sup> Even though, as has been elaborated above, Eisenstein acknowledged the prevalence of montage prior to the advent of film.

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