

*An article by:*

**Fernando Aguiar**



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Translation from Portuguese  
by Harry Polkinhorn  
*Visible Language*, 27.4  
Fernando Aguiar, pp. 444-466  
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## Portuguese Visual Poetry

The emergence of contemporary experimental poetry in Portugal began in 1959 with the publication of an article by Ana Hatherly in which a concrete poem was included, and with the publication of E. M. de Melo e Castro's *Ideograma* in 1962. However, even though there was never an organized group of experimental poets, this has not stopped some poets from joining forces to publish magazines and to sponsor exhibitions, nor has it stopped their work from being as creative and productive as that of other, analogous, foreign movements.

In addition, the activities of Portuguese poets actively contributed to the spreading of avant-garde poetry on the international level. As a demonstration one can point, for example, to a letter which E. M. de Melo e Castro sent to the literary supplement of the *Times* which strongly influenced various English and Scottish concrete poets, according to the testimony of Dom Sylvester Houédard in the exhibition catalogue *Quadlog* (1968), and that of Bob Cobbing and Peter Meyer in *Concerning Concrete Poetry* (1978).

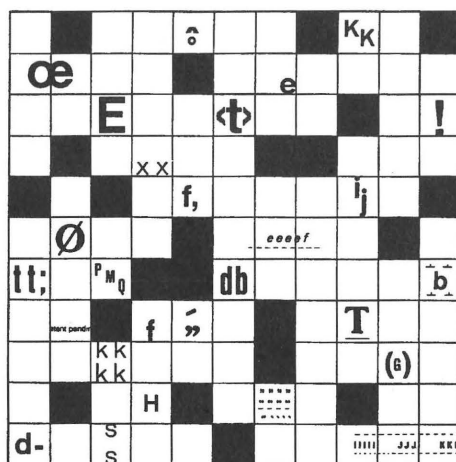
Principally during the second half of the 1960s, concrete poetry was sharply attacked and ridiculed by official criticism as



António Aragão  
 Electrography  
 Electrography

António Aragão |  
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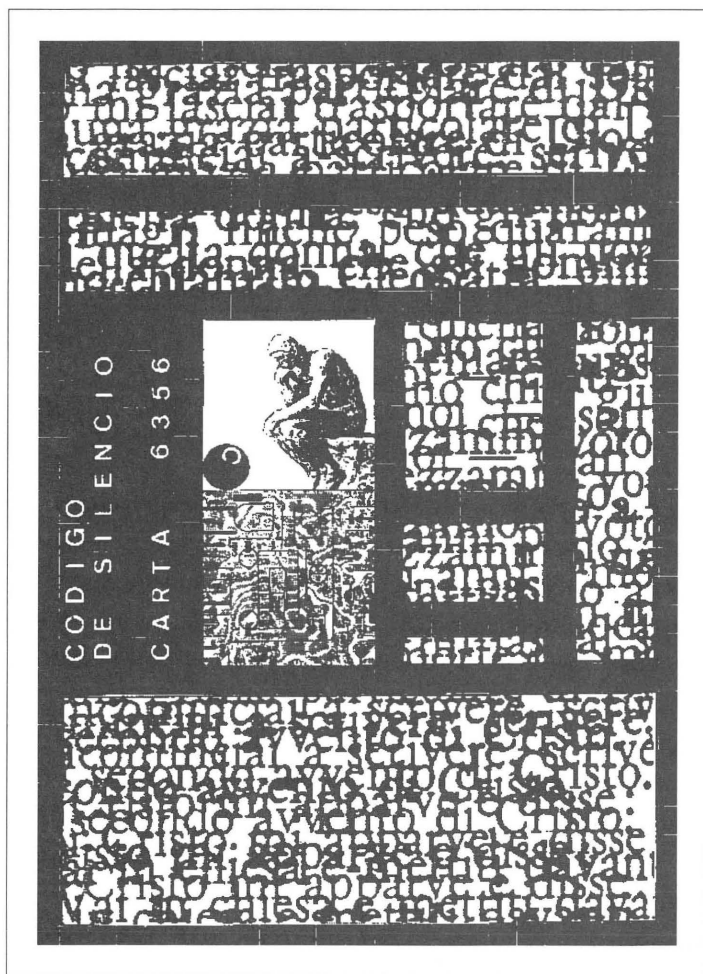
**Fernando Aguiar**

*Palavras Cruzadas - Problema No. 01*

Crossword Puzzle - Problem No. 1

intellectually retrograde, very little open to experiences and innovation. However, one should not forget that this was during the ferocious censorship of a right-wing dictatorship which monitored all artistic activities that showed any kind of innovation. Beyond the transgression of the traditional rule of poetry, experimental poets clearly linked themselves with a leftist ideology. Thus their works were doubly suppressed: whether in relation to the poems' formal aspect or their contents.

It was in this context that there appeared in July of 1964 the first issue of the magazine *Poesia Experimental*, organized by António Aragão and Herberto Helder, which in 1965 inaugurated the exhibition "Visopoems" in which the following artists participated: António Aragão, Salette Tavares, E. M. de Melo e Castro, Herberto Helder and António Barahona da Fonseca. The first Portuguese happening, "Concerto e Audição Pictória," was held in the concrete framework of this exhibition. Also in 1965 the *Jornal do Fundão* published a special supplement dedicated to con-



**César Figueiredo**

*Código de Silêncio — Carta 6356*

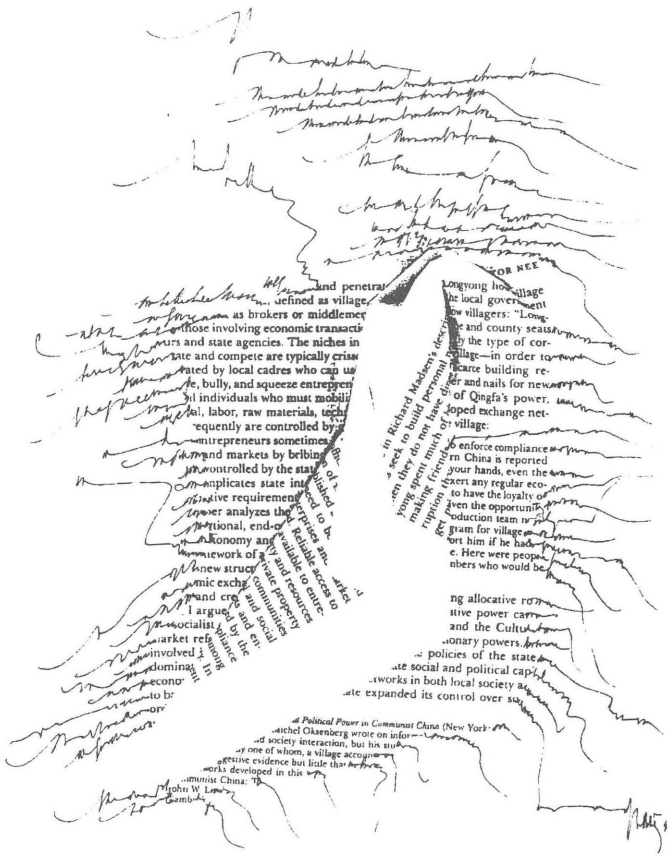
Code of Silence - Letter 6356

crete poetry. Organized by António Aragão and E. M. de Melo e Castro, this contained critical articles and experimental poems of António Ramos Rosa, Salette Tavares and José-Alberto Marques, among others. These happenings, as well as the publication of *Proposição 2.01 — Poesia Experimental* (1965) of E. M. de Melo e Castro, and the publication of the magazines *Operação* and *Hidra*, witnessed the esconcing of experimental poetry within Portuguese literature.

In the meantime, and in spite of all editorial, social and political constraints, the activity of a few experimental poets at that time — Ana Hatherly, E. M. de Melo e Castro, António Aragão, Salette Tavares and José-Alberto Marques — was truly extraordinary, with the publication of books, the above-mentioned magazines and the sponsorship of exhibitions.

After this first somewhat polemical phase, and following the 1971 publication of António Aragão's *Um Buraco na Boca*, the first Portuguese experimental romance, the first *Antologia da Poesia Concreta em Portugal* was brought out, put together by José-Alberto Marques and E. M. de Melo e Castro. This book brought together poems by fourteen authors, among them Abílio-José Santos, Alberto Pimenta, Ana Hatherly, António Aragão, Salette Tavares and Silvestre Pestana, as well as those by the anthologists.

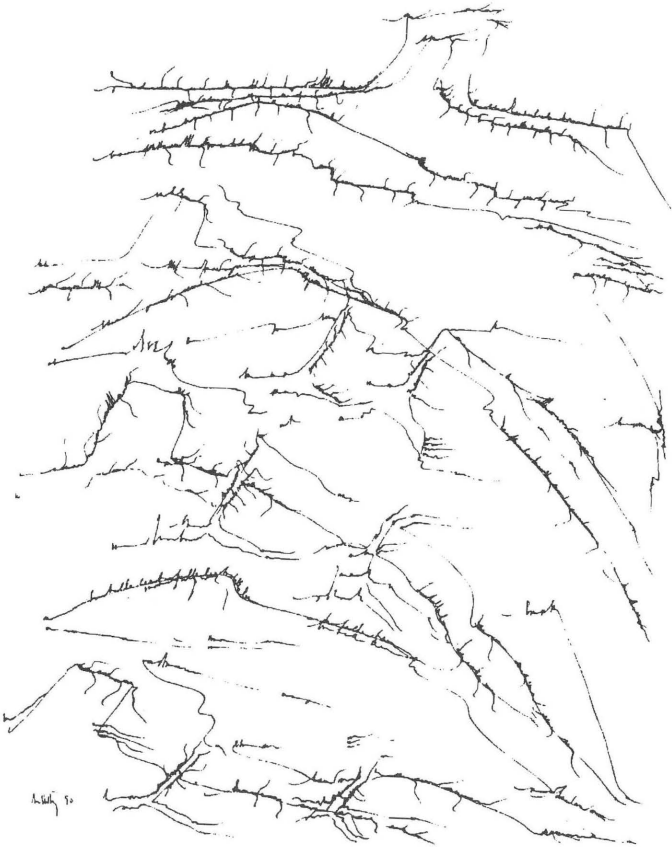
During the 1970s, with book publication picking up, Portuguese experimentalism underwent a rapid evolution, just before 1974 and, especially after the coming of democracy. Letters, words and spatial games on the page were no longer the principal elements in poetic creation and other signs, images, as well as other materials and supports, were beginning to be used. Poem-objects, installations, experimental films and poetic events were realized which transcended the two-dimensional page, giving to poetry color, mass, sound and movement, making it more expressive and communicative.



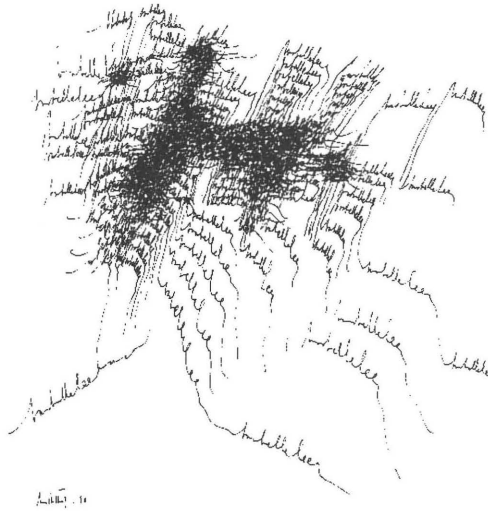
Ana Hatherly  
Le Pli - No 1



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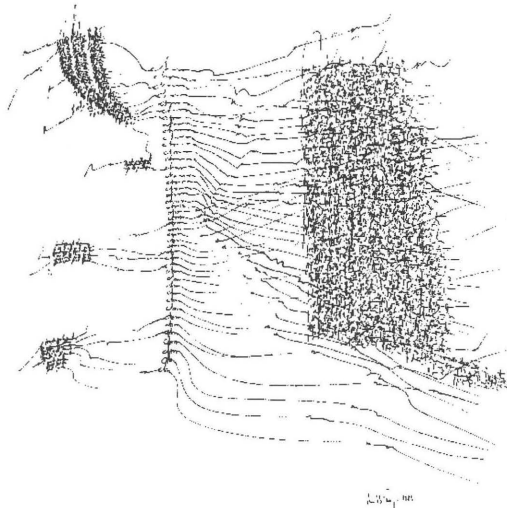
**Ana Hatherly**  
*Homage to Edgar Allan Poe*



Ana Hatherly, 1998

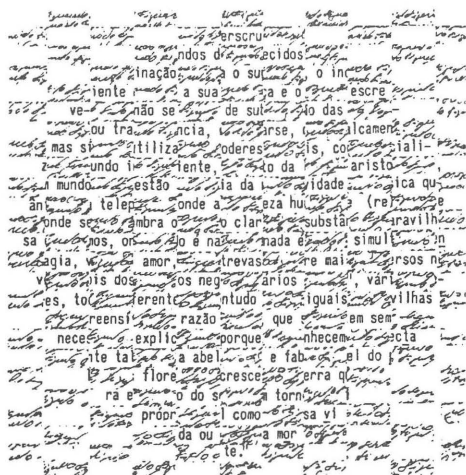
Ana Hatherly  
*Anabelle-Lee*

Ana Hatherly  
*Homage to Edgar Allan Poe*



Ana Hatherly, 1998

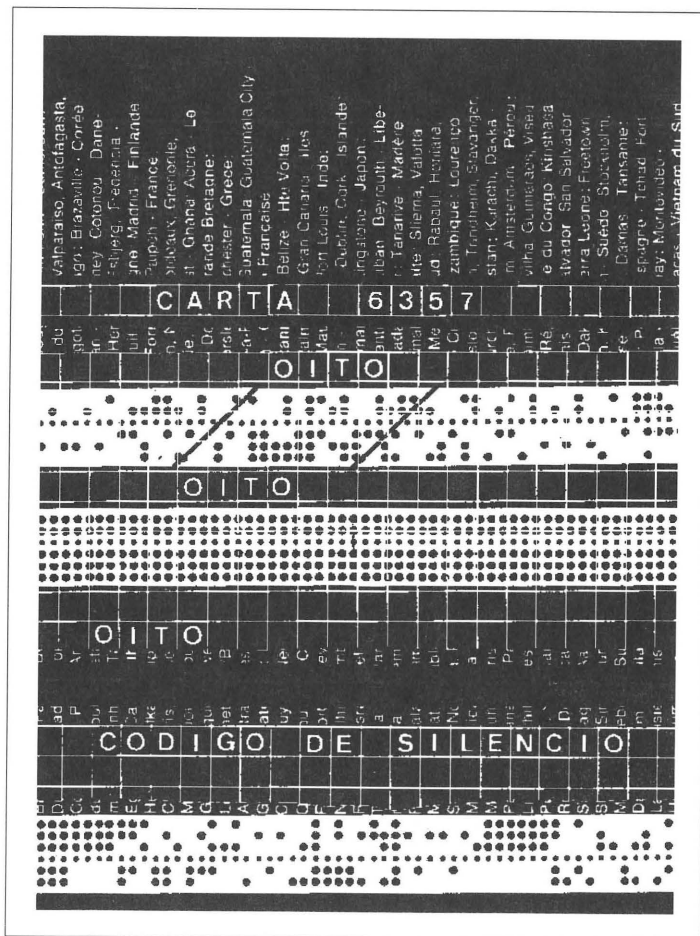




| César Figueiredo, *Explosivo Solar I*, Solar Explosive I

In 1977 three events witnessed the beginning of the idea of poetic performance of poetry as act and living presence. The first took place in the Quadrum Gallery in Lisbon, where Ana Hatherly presented a performance entitled “Rotura.” The second was a group show “Anima,” a dramatization of experimental poems, by the Portuguese Society of Writers. The third of these events occurred in the Lisbon Zoo, where Alberto Pimenta scandalized the public by exhibiting himself in a cage (with the sign “Homo Sapiens”) next to the other cages containing monkeys in the Chimpanzee House. Also in 1977, twelve experimental poets participated in the XIV Biennial of São Paulo, Brazil, included in the section “Great Confrontations — Space Poetry.”

In 1980 “PO.EX” was inaugurated in the National Gallery of Modern Art. This was an important exhibition of visual and avant-garde poetry. Working in visual poetry, experimental film and video, installations and poetry performances were António Aragão, António Campos



**César Figueiredo**

*Código de Silêncio — Carta 6357*

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Rosado, Ana Hatherly, António Barros, E. M. de Melo e Castro, José-Alberto Marques, Salette Tavares and Silvestre Pestana. The book *PO.EX — Textos Teóricos e Documentos da Poesia Experimental Portuguesa* by Ana Hatherly and E. M. de Melo e Castro was published in 1981. This featured a rather comprehensive study of the experimental movement from the beginning of the 1960s.

Accompanying early 1980s technological developments were the first experiences in the fields of photocopy, computer and videopoetry. Also, visual poetry was increasingly becoming the focus of creative interest, removing itself from a concept of poetry as a form of expressing sentiments and emotions. After the second half of the 1980s, experimental poetry gained a new dynamic with the realization of diverse exhibitions, both national and international, and with the participation of Portuguese poets in innumerable magazines, exhibitions, anthologies and festivals abroad.

In 1985 Fernando Aguiar and Silvestre Pestana organized the project “Poemografias,” made up of an exhibition and the publication of a book. The exhibition was presented in four cities and contained unpublished poems by Abílio-José Santos, Alberto Pimento, Ana Hatherly, Antero de Alda, António Aragão, António Barros, E. M. de Melo e Castro, Fernando Aguiar, José-Alberto Marques, Salette Tavares and Silvestre Pestana. The book *Poemografias: Perspectivas da Poesia Visual Portuguesa*, contained critical texts and recent visual poems by the poets mentioned above and included contributions by the critic Egídio Álvaro and of the musicologist Jorge Lima Barreto.

In November of that year, these same poets and António Nelos, António Dantas, Emerenciano and others made up a representative Portuguese “Poemografias” which opened in the Zenzontle Gallery at the International Biennial of Visual and Experimental Poetry in Mexico, whose participants came from over forty countries.



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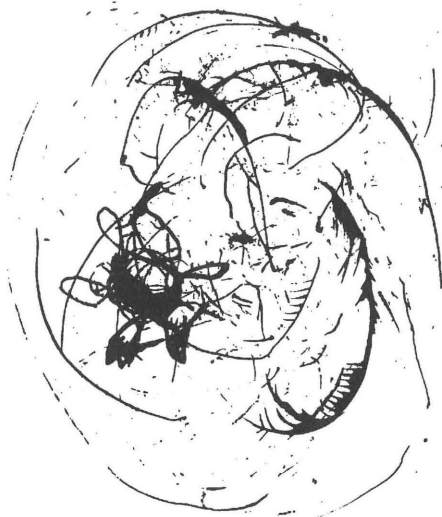
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**Alberto Pimenta**  
*The Birth of a Flower*  
(sequence of five parts)

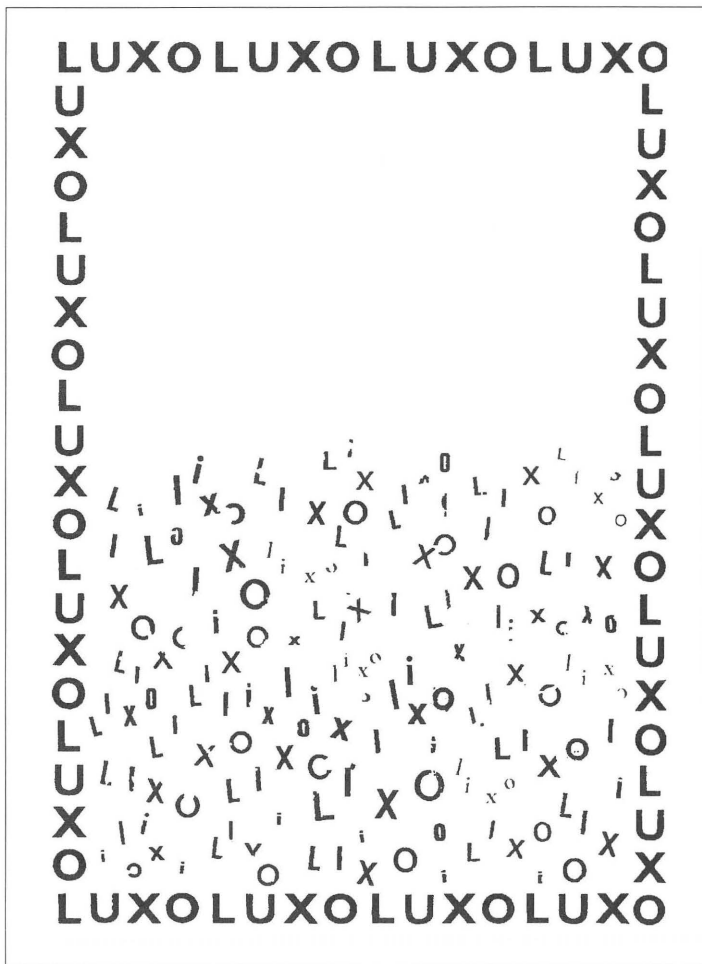
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Aguiar

In 1987 the First International Festival of Living Poetry was held in the Dr. Santos Rocha Municipal Museum in Figueira da Foz, Portugal, organized by Fernando Aguiar. The Festival displayed works of some 219 participants from twenty-nine countries, presenting original pieces of visual poetry, poem objects, poetry installations and holographic poetry gathered from some 1,300 documents on avant-garde poetry.

During the Festival's symposium, various poetry performances and interventions were offered by poets of different nationalities and a huge selection of video poems, videos of poetry performances, records and cassettes of sound poetry, as well as computer poems and films of experimental poetry was presented, making up the most significant manifestation of avant-garde poetry realized in Portugal. Meanwhile other names became identified with this movement, of whom we should mention César Figueiredo, Gabriel Rui Silva, Rui Zink and Gilberto Gouveia.



**Fernando Aguiar**  
*Retrato Social*  
Social Portrait



**António Aragão**

*Urra Urra/Ora Ora/Mesmo Mesmo*  
Roar Roar/Same Same/Well Well



**António Aragão**

*S.O.S. — Céu*  
S.O.S. — Sky

Currently experimental poetry finds itself in an interesting situation: on the one hand we can draw the balance from these thirty years of poetic activities, as much in the exhibition “Concrete. Experimental. Visual — Poesia Portuguesa 1959-1989,” organized by Fernando Aguiar and Gabriel Rui Silva, just presented in Bologna, Italy, and in Paris, France, as in the publication of the complete poems of Alberto Pimenta, E. M. de Melo e Castro, and soon, of Ana Hatherly and Salette Tavares. On the other hand, and above all, the newer poets continue their intensive poetic research on different levels with varying physical supports. Overall, Portuguese experimental poetry can be characterized as having a great creative capacity and an enormous poetic and theoretical production, in spite of the fact that the poets who have systematically dedicated themselves to experimentalism are very few.

## Selected Resources

(organized by date)

Among some 150 publications of Portuguese experimental poetry (books, anthologies, catalogues, magazines and newspaper supplements), the following have been selected as historically important.

Aguiar, Fernando. 1990. *Visuelle Poesie aus Portugal*. Siegen: Ed. Experimentelle Texte.

de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1990. *Trans(a)parências*. Lisbon: Tertúlia Editora.

Pimenta, Alberto. 1990. *Obra Quase Incompleta*. Lisbon: Fenda Edições.

Aguiar, Fernando and Rui Silva, Gabriel, eds. 1989. *Concreta, Experimental, Visual — Poesia Portuguesa 1959-1989*. Lisbon: Ed. ICALP.

Aguiar, Fernando, ed. 1987. *1o Festival Internacional de Poesia Viva*. Figueira da Foz: Ed. Associação Poesia Viva.

Cavallo, Giancarlo. 1987. *Mappe dell'Immaginario — Poesia Visuale Portoghese*. Salerno: Ed. Il Campo.

Pimenta, Alberto. 1986. *Metamorfoses do Vídeo*. Lisbon: José Ribeiro Edições.

Aguiar, Fernando and Fagundes Duarte, Luis, eds. 1985. *Poesia Visual: E Preciso Mexer com a Palavra*. Supplement of *Jornal de Letras, Artes e Ideias*, No. 145, April 16, 1985.

Aguiar, Fernando and Pestana, Silvestre, eds. 1985. *Poemografias — Perspectivas da Poesia Visual Portuguesa*. Lisbon: Ulmeiro.

Hatherly, Ana. 1983. *A Experiência do Prodígio— Bases Teóricas e Antologia de Textos-Visuais Portugueses dos Séculos XVII e XVIII*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda.

Hatherly, Ana and de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1981. *PO.EX — Textos e Documentos da Poesia Experimental Portuguesa*. Lisbon: Moraes Editores. 1980. *PO.EX/80* (exhibition catalogue). Lisbon: Galeria Nacional de Arte Moderna.

Pimenta, Alberto. 1978. *Il Silenzio dei Poeti*. Milan: Feltrinelli.

Marques, José-Alberto. 1973. *Sala Hipóstila*. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim.

de Melo e Castro, E. M. and Marques, José-Alberto. 1973. *Antologia da Poesia Concreta em Portugal*. Lisbon: Assírio & Alvim.

Aragão, António. 1971. *Um Buraco na Boca* (first Portuguese experimental novel). Funchal: Livros Comérico do Funchal.

Tavares, Salette. 1971. *Lex Icon*. Lisbon: Moraes Editores.

Hatherly, Ana. 1970. *Anagramático*. Lisbon: Moraes Editores.

Aragão, António. 1968. *Mais Exactemente P(ro)(bl)emas*. Covilhã: Col. Pedras Brancas.

de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1967. *Operação 1* (magazine). Lisbon.

Aragão, António, de Melo e Castro, E. M. and Helder, Herberto. 1966. *Poesia Experimental 2* (magazine). Lisbon: Ed. Cadernos de Hoje.

de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1965. *Poesia Experimental* (a special section in *Jornal do Fundão*, January 24, 1965).

de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1965. *A Proposição 2.01* (first theoretical essay on Portuguese experimental poetry, followed by an international anthology). Lisbon: Editora Ulisseia.

de Melo e Castro, E. M. 1962. *Ideogramas*. Lisbon: Guimarães Editores.

Hatherly, Ana. 1959. *O Idêntico Inverso*. Article published in *Diário de Notícias* on concrete poetry, accompanied by a proposal for a concrete poem.

## Poet Notes

**Aguiar, Fernando.** Aguiar, born in Lisbon in 1956, works primarily as a visual and performance poet. He has published books of poetry and anthologies of experimental poetry. He has had various one-man exhibitions and participated in some 130 group exhibitions around the world. He has participated in poetry and performance festivals world-wide and regularly organizes exhibitions and festivals of performance and poetry in Portugal.

**Aragão, António.** Aragão, born in Madeira in 1924, is a painter, poet and historian. He was the author of the first Portuguese experimental romance (*Um Buraco na Boca*) and has written several books of poetry. Aragão has participated in various exhibitions of painting and visual poetry. In recent years he has dedicated himself to photocopy art, through which he has created his most recent poems.

**Figueiredo, César.** Figueirdo, born in Porto in 1954, is interested in photocopy art, a medium in which he has created the major part of his work. He has participated in various international group exhibitions and collaborated on art and literary magazines. He regularly curates exhibitions of photocopy art.

**Hatherly, Ana.** Hatherly, born in Porto in 1929, received a doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley and is professor at the Universidade Nova of Lisbon. She is author of various books of poetry, fiction and literary criticism. In recent years she has been interested principally in baroque poetry, having written numerous articles on this subject, as well as the book *A Experiência do Prodígio: Bases Teóricas e Antologia de Textos-Visuais Portugueses dos Séculos XVII e XVIII*. She has created a television program on the art of the avant-garde.

**Pimenta, Alberto.** Pimenta, born in Porto in 1937, has written around thirty books of poetry, prose and criticism. His poetic works are collected in the book *Obra Quase Incompleta*. Pimenta has created two television programs, the second of which shows various contemporary poets. He has staged poetry performances and happenings in different countries. Pimento has books published in Italy, Spain and Brazil.

