

Giovanna Enríquez\*

# The Question about the Image Is the Answer about the Text

## I

Every piece of embroidery has another image on the back: two images join together with the agreement of the threads tearing at the main weave. When the thread moves into the fabric, perforating, it creates two different images. The word and the image interact in the same exact way, creating a hybrid of codes amplifying language.

Some dictionaries say that the word “hybrid” comes from a linguistic contamination of Latin and Greek (metaphorical hybridization in the word itself), and that its meaning is close to the word “bastard” in Spanish, that is, to the word for an undesired human being, born out of wedlock, or the mixture between races or migrants. This is why it is important to defend the word. If “hybrids” were understood in their origin as transgressions against “purity,” today’s world embraces them, seeing them as potentials swollen with possibilities.

In this sense, word and image hybridizations operate in the same way. I propose here to add a plus sign that visually simulates a mathematical formula without any scientific results but enunciated with a symbol of union: word + image. In the multiplicity of the results of this sum, we find pieces by Anaïs Abreu, Canek Zapata, Cindy Zetina, Daniela Bojórquez Vértiz, Foreman, Iván Edeza, @migueherr, and Verónica Gerber, to mention only a few of the Mexican artists whose work may be the result of long artistic research or a chance discovery, but at the end of the day makes use of both the word and the image to brilliantly execute language.

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## II

The pieces I will mention here make me ask whether the text is image; whether word and text are the same; whether the word is a code in the image; how we move from the word to the text and back again; whether the word is one of the units of the text; whether we are aware of how we produce text in our daily lives; whether we make, produce, or create text; whether the text can grow over into image; what political dimensions text and word have; whether text is a technology.

The answers — if there are any — are not important. The important thing is that pieces such as the following make it possible to ask questions about the recognition of axioms like that of the word and the image in contemporary art. Art history studies have shone light on different moments in which this relationship of signs has moved the foundations of classical production. This is the case of the European and Latin American avant-gardes, which found in the word destabilizing and beautiful graphic power. Without going any further, the artistic production of the pre-Hispanic and pre-Colombian period incorporated the word + image sum as a unit, and that is why a great deal of the production from that era has been difficult to decipher because so many of the native languages were annihilated.

## III

If the image is an emulation, an imitation of the thing but not the thing itself, wouldn’t the word be similar? A large part of Verónica Gerber’s and Anaïs Abreu’s artistic production corresponds to both artists’ determination to destabilize the concepts and postulations of visual artistic practice, and, of course, of writing. Verónica introduces

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herself as a “visual artist who writes,” while Anaïs situates herself in an impossible practice of limiting herself only to prose fiction, poetry, visual art, or photography. Both their productions are so crisscrossed with a diversity of passions that it is better to let ourselves be guided by the road that they propose.

Verónica Gerber’s “Women moths” (2018) is a 2018 series of linotype prints based on an urgent, critical reading of Semonides of Amorgos’s sixth-century-BC *Types of Women*, one of the oldest misogynist poems. The artist’s current view shows it content up for just how despicable it is. Verónica becomes a moth woman that eats away at this text to devour its content, destroy it, nullify it, and open the way to occupy in an image those spaces of written language, which have perpetrated violence against women for many years. The moth women re-write in an image and impact on the word to rethink vocabularies.



Verónica Gerber Bicecci, *Women Moths*, 2018 (repography).  
Ramiro Chávez and Galería Proyectos Monclova.

On a similar stage of feminist resistance, Anaïs Abreu’s “Against the Waves” (2022) is a body of work of twenty-one pieces that include words, photography, self-portraiture, objects, weaving, sculpture, collage, and the appropriation of Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* to tie them all together in highly potent possibilities that critically respond to cycles of depression and call on us to recognize their mutations. This grid of poetry in word and image is shown as an installation with which the artist proposes relationships that range from texts to images and from images to text with a sensitive, critical precision, but also with the very brave doubt on the part of one who does not need certainties to poetically represent the encounters where the code word occurs as image.



Anaïs Abreu, *Against the Waves-Stepping on Words*, 2021  
(cyanotype and collage).

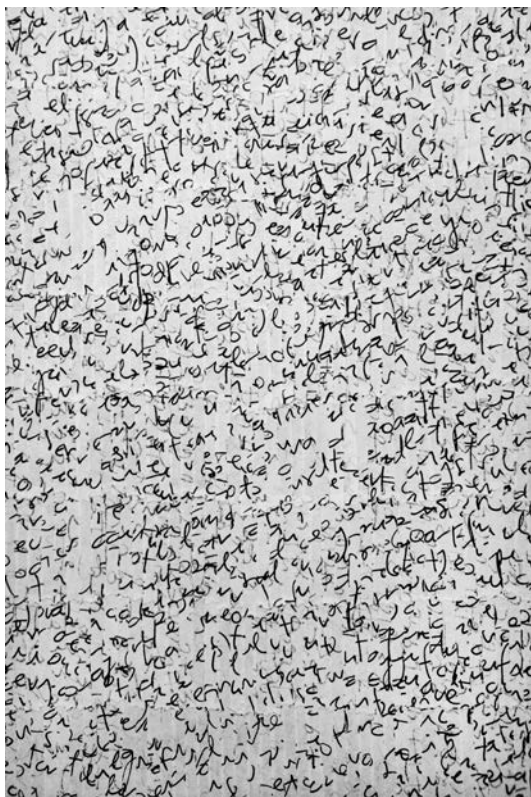
If the hybrid is the result of surpassing borders, both Verónica Gerber and Anaïs Abreu are absolute migrants, and with each piece, they create new, increasingly complex objects for reflection that wager everything on the multiple, relationships, interaction, and dialogue.

#### IV

In this act of building bridges, weaving networks and communicating, Daniela Bojórquez Vértiz proposes her piece *Content* (2018) from the point of view of the contamination of both visual and written languages. This superb project shows the materiality of words on a surface: a personal diary handwritten from 1997 to 2012 unfolds in space as an installation to accent the texture, color, form, and weight of these sheets with their illegible content.

In this piece, as well as the video that is part of it, *Content* (Wash, Wring Out, Sew, Trim, Hang Up) (2021), Daniela physically modifies the material to add other layers of reading on this word + image axiom, with the understanding that the image is a text that can be read or observed without its having to have words as such, just as some texts are actually image when they cannot be read as linguistic codes.

Some images are texts for those who agree to understand the registry of a stain on a surface as a word. Daniela then becomes a translator of graphic codes, playing with our perceptions, tensing the chords of representation, and that transfer of signs is sublime because it shows us as beings who read images.



Daniela Bojórquez Vértiz, *Content* (detail), 2018 (snippets of handwritten sheets from the artist's diary pasted on bond paper, affixed to a frame).

V

From the very title, *Explain What a Panopticon in Art Is* (2017) is a provocation by Mexican visual artist Cindy Zetina. Her piece calls for an impressive dialogue of signs based on drawings, engravings, and transfers onto Manila paper. Phrases and texts outside the realm of socially agreed

linguistic construction understood as “correct” and “appropriate” are mixed with images to create a clear critique of those who judge what is inappropriate, expressed wrong, pronounced wrong, said wrong, those who, also, on doing so, segregate those who do not participate in the “correct usage” of language or of feelings, or those who simply are not hegemonic actors of the realities approved by the few. Cindy Zetina’s creative, reflexive process pledges itself to point out that ablism is present, and in this piece, language, together with image create forms on paper that the viewer can see are enraged, cathartic, human.

Just as in mid-1900s Lettrism, an avant-garde that recognized in letters the wrappings of image, Cindy traces the continuity of drawing with letters to the point in which the graphite stain could be a linguistic root or an inked plant root.

The avant-gardes’ legacy regarding this hybridization has been clear for decades after their appearance in the history of art, and Mexican practice has identified the fertile terrain of the image for planting letters. We should remember Manuel Maples Arce, for example, and his *Comprimido Estridentista*. In Cindy Zetina’s case, her daring lettering that flows over the page, becoming an image, makes me think of the Lettrist continuity that reverberates even with the political characteristics of the avant-garde of that time.

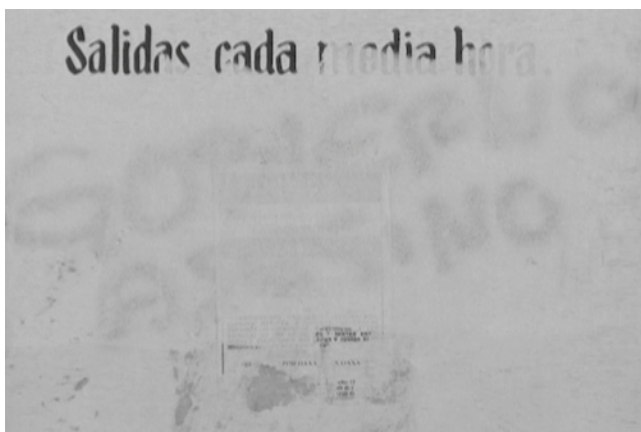


Cindy Zetina, *Explain What a Panopticon in Art Is*, 2017 (ink on Manila paper).

VI

Word-cut-image-texture-fade in-sound-noise-fade out-image censored-image erased-word hidden-text covered

with paint-cut-cut-image to blacks. Iván Edeza audio-visually creates an uncomfortable, rough, extremely critical and politicized piece, like in all his work, in *Untitled (Oaxacan School)* (2007). Through a censored text covered with a layer of paint, he proposes a re-reading and a denunciation of those words used in the street to shout what is urgent: in this context of Oaxaca in 2007, a time that still weighs heavily on us because of the terrible repression on all levels that local people experienced. In Iván's work, the word gives strength to his graphic texture to create what are always daring audiovisuals. And the audiovisual is a tool that the artist uses as a space for composition of sonorous times and times in images. In this sense, it is by no means by chance that the sound image in *Untitled (Oaxacan School)* is silent, given that the cry is on the other side; the noise happened at another time, and the images that Iván registers denounce the censorship of a voice.



Iván Edeza, *Untitled (Oaxacan School)*, Length: 5 minutes 27 seconds, 2007 (digital video).

Along that same line of tension between text and digital image, @migueherr's *How to create your online persona* (2021) intensely infringes on the axiom to unify the qualities of image with text at the same time that he winks at the comical or caricature-like to put some of today's most important questions on the table. @migueherr seems to have x-rayed the image to show its text-ness with each sketch. The lines of this piece consciously violate the screen, exceed it, disrespecting the margins; they are pure language and do not fit in any screen because he needs to make himself evident, grow, occupy everything.



Miguel Herrera, *How to Create Your Online Persona*, Length: 3 minutes 8 seconds, 2021 (digital animation, photogram to photogram, illustrated in Procreate).

The digital image, the pixelated word, and text knotted up with different colored graphics are characteristics of the conceptual and aesthetic richness of Canek Zapata's work. The *poems of space* gif, a direct and simple poetic digital piece, occupies the Internet universe to generate an analogy of stars and pixels in movement that co-exist with the phrase that gives the piece its name. The permanence of the gif adds to the poetic and ironical meaning of "space" as synonymous with "universe," as a description of a simple place or an analogy for virtual space. The weave of the pixels and the text in the image give it that texture that is almost a glitch that adds potency to an apparently simple phrase.

In much of Canek's work, language challenges his receptacles to take on a shape of its own, whether as an emoji, a gif, overflowing pixels, disobedient images, or free texts in his physical representation.



Canek Zapata, *Computer*, 2022 (dall-e 2, gimp, .gif).

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VII

Sometimes the word is arbitrary and a game, and, by involving others, it takes on meaning. But before being contextualized, it may be perceived as a random encounter of letters. By mixing with the image, the text seems to put down roots in the material the piece is made of.

Something like this happens in Foreman's *Chamula* (2020): words that seem to appear randomly settle into a mixed technique of vibrant colors and visceral forms. Titles of songs, names of musical groups, indecipherable phrases recognize each other in this piece as free lines that invite the viewer to imagine the reason for their presence. And perhaps the playfulness is precisely that: a conversation with the viewer to spark a broad spectrum of sensations, an invitation to decipher, a diagram that is missing connections that only the observer can add to give it meaning.

Foreman's work sometimes includes graffiti; in those cases, the artist's intention of dismantling the limits between text and image also reverberates through his treatment of the forms that should not be divided in binaries but are accepting of its mixed nature.

It is also worthwhile to put logic aside and ask the image and the text what they want to say to us; and, if we do not find meaning with our minds, to let the body take charge

and feel. Sometimes written language or language in images is an invitation to play.




Foreman, *Chamula*, 33 x 50.5 cm, 2020  
(acrylic, spray paint, and markers on paper).


VIII


At some time in the history of art, writing and drawing were simply moments in the day, lapses in which the word and the image followed each other at the same time. With the passing years, we have established a border between word and image through the history of styles; hyper-specialization; the differentiating study of phonemes, codes, and symbols; the anatomies of graphical forms, and the geographies of alphabets. Hopefully, these pieces, as well as many more in artistic production in Mexico and elsewhere, will be that point and line on the plane that Kandinski talked about almost a hundred years ago: an incisive obviousness to make it possible to spill over that agreement of strings in the form of words, in the form of images, that shreds all main fabric. ■■■


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