

## Ana María Uribe's Poetic Media Migration

Her web site was not simply a transposition of her earlier work to the new medium, however. The sense of motion and change, and the sense of the carnivalesque, the life of letters, the sense of proceeding via engagement and celebration of life comes into her Anipoemas in memorable and exciting ways (Andrews).

Ana María Uribe (1944-2004) was an Argentinian poet whose writing practices and poetry resonate with our historical moment of transition from analog to digital media.

For the past few decades writers have increasingly created their literary texts with digital tools, such as word processors, machines and software designed around the concept of the typewriter. In the literary world, computers have been mostly used to produce works optimized for the printed page space-- a writing interface that has shaped literary production and scholarship for the past few centuries. The impact of digital technologies on most writers' creative practices has therefore been minimal, with the exception of some early adopters who have engaged some of the capabilities of digital media to produce works unique to these environments. Uribe was inspired by a poetics that led to close affinities between the use of the page and the capabilities of digital media:

The concrete poets tied onto Mallarmé's innovation and revolutionized spatial conventions by turning space into an integral component of the poem with semantic significance. The flat, two-dimensional surface of the page, however, is fundamentally redefined on the computer screen once again, for the poetic space of the screen is radically different from that of the page on numerous levels. Firstly, it is kinetic and interactive: letters can move and migrate, positions of letters and words are no longer fixed and static, but in flux and transient; they are no longer predetermined but potentially open for creative interventions (Schaffner180).

Steeped in the Concrete and typographical poetic traditions from the 1960s Uribe embraced the computer's capability for producing animation and integrating sound. Like other Concrete poets, she was a visual artist of the word, arranging words and letters on the page to produce a "tension of things-words in space-time" (Noigandres). This genre led her to be flexible and experimental with media and production technologies, as she describes in her interview with Jorge Luis Antonio.

Given the nature of the genre, I tried different media. For example, "Dry Red Leaves" was one of my old Typoems, typed with a Lettera 22 typewriter in the Pica font, which looked like Courier. Later I started a movie of the poem in 8 mm, which I did not finish, and then a poster, stamped with rubber blocks. Those characters were strange. They were not standard fonts. In 1997, when I bought my first computer and started Anipoems, I copied the poster letters, drawing them one by one with Coreldraw, and thus I made the animated poem. So this work has been around for thirty years in various media and versions.

Her “Typoems y Anipoemas” (hosted at [Vispo.com/uribe](http://Vispo.com/uribe)), exhibit her movement into digital media by virtue of their arrangement into columns (see figure 1).

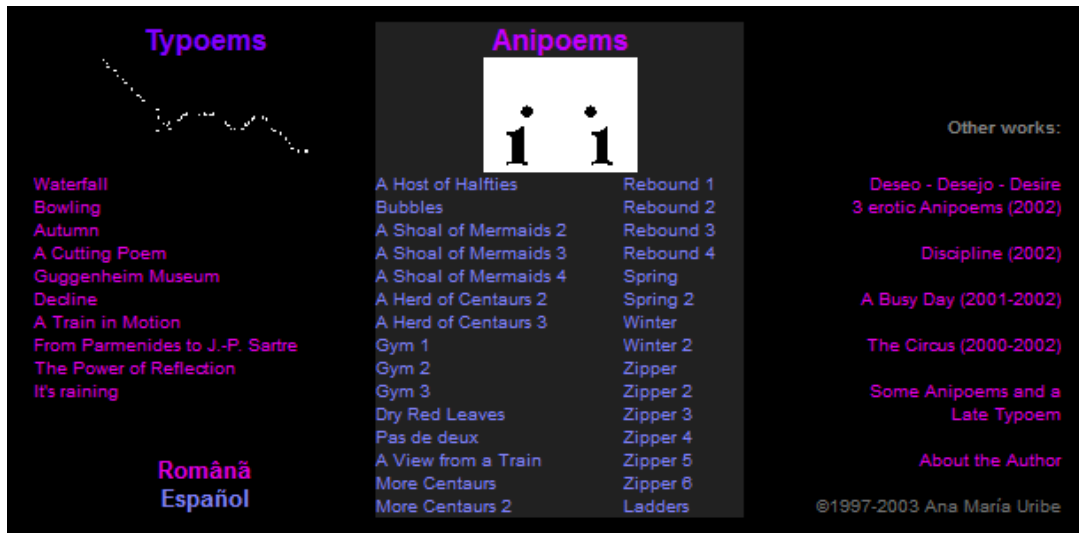


Figure : English version of Uribe's site

The tripartite visual structure of the site suggests a narrative of media use. Her “Typoems” are computer versions of concrete poems she created throughout her career, many of which go back to the late 1960s. She implemented these through the use of existing fonts and letters drawn in graphics programs (such as Coreldraw), and treating letters and words pictorially to reconfigure writing. The “Anipoems” in the middle column are composed based on the same principles yet are more minimalist in their visual approach, approximating the more atomistic *Lettriste* tradition. Words impart static visual poems with a sense of time and motion by virtue of the left-to-right sequential reading they require. Their spatial arrangement allows poets to shape the reader’s saccadic flow into circular, cascading, and other motions, as can be seen in Uribe’s “Typoems.” Time based arrangement creates the illusion of movement by sequentially displaying different images on the same space, which she achieved with that most basic of Web-deliverable kinetic technologies: the animated GIF. The need for a reading-based flow is relaxed with these “Anipoems,” which almost completely abandon the word as a structural unit to focus on characters. Both approaches express a poetics interested in the pictorial representations of motion, though using different technologies, as described by Dene Grigar in a curatorial statement for an exhibition of Uribe’s poetry.

Looking at Uribe's two collections side by side offered the visitor a fascinating study of the way artists take advantage of the affordances of digital media to experiment with form. In "Typoems" (1968-9), Uribe uses the computer medium to produce 10 works of concrete poetry. We see parentheses, for example, arranged to evoke a waterfall; the words "Guggenheim Museum" swirling in a circle just like the museum's own physical construction; the letter "i" arranged as bowling pins with a lone "o" hinting at the ball about to roll towards them, the movement of "Bowling" hanging in time as the kiss of Keat's urn. In 1997 Uribe makes good on this promise of motion in "Anipoems" (re: animated poems) afforded by the new technologies of production of the electronic medium. From a pipe blowing effervescent "Bs" in "Bubbles," to

letters I, P, and R dancing in a macabre "Pas de deux," these 30 poems both charm the reader with their wit and remind us of art's power to innovate.

These new technologies of production lead to increasingly complex works, as exhibited by the works in the third column of her website, humbly listed under "Other works." These poems use animated characters in the style she developed in "Anipoems" as building blocks for poem sequences and short videos. These poems incorporate several new aspects, such as different font colors, sound, and pictorial manipulation of the characters.

The addition of sound to some "Anipoems" (all of which are now incorporated to sequences in the "other works" column) was a response to the rhythm established by their animation, "I would say the main components are typography and motion, in that order. And once motion is added, rhythm becomes all important, since I work with repetition and short sequences of elements" (Uribe "The Letters"). Created at a time of low bandwidth Internet connections, the audio files would take longer to load and start playing than the animated GIFs which made synchronization between the two virtually impossible. This required retooling from HTML used to assemble animated GIFs and audio clips to Flash, as she discusses in a posting to the Webartery discussion group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/webartery>).

My anipoems were originally animated images, with no sound in them, except as a background sound added to the html, as you can still see in most pieces on my website. Now I have Flash versions of most of them, which I use whenever I send the pieces to be published elsewhere.

In some of the newer poems, where sound really matters (not in the earlier ones, where it is not important) like Orchestra Rehearsal (<http://vispo.com/uribe/2002b/ensayo.html>) or Discipline (<http://vispo.com/uribe/disciplina2/disciplina.html>) Flash or some other tool became absolutely necessary, as otherwise it would have been very difficult to coordinate sound and image. [links updated] (Re: [webartery] Flash)

Uribe already had experience with Macromedia Director, having produced a CD-ROM edition of her poetry, which facilitated her move to Flash as an authoring tool and publication format. This was the beginning of a more cinematic phase as can be seen in her 2002 piece, "Discipline" (see figure 2).

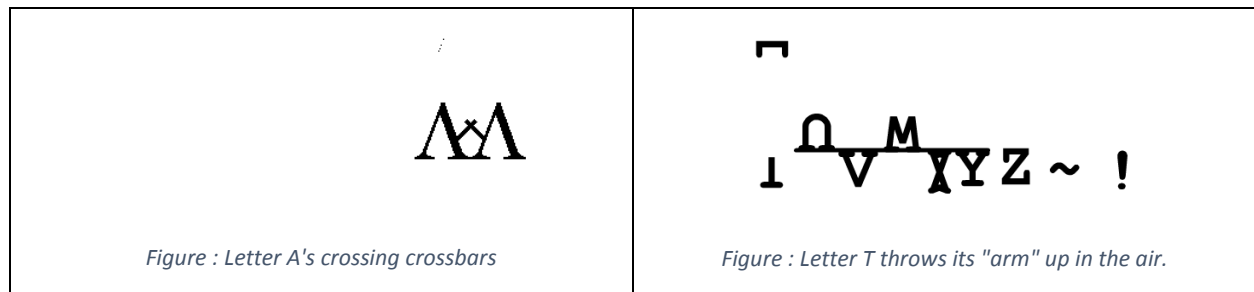


Figure : still from "Discipline"

This poem is built upon a single visual trope: the personification of a serified capital H into a row marching soldiers. This is achieved by arranging the multicolored characters on an organized row, extending the ascender and descenders to mimic the motion of arms and legs, through the marching of the row on the screen space, and by punctuating a dictatorial voice yelling commands in gibberish at the characters. As you read the poem, note the tension between the colorful diversity of the letters and the frustrated attempts at controlling their actions into disciplined sameness.

The addition of sound is essential to establishing a political frame of reference suggested at by the design, arrangement, and movement of the letters. The same characters are framed in a completely different way in "The Stilts" (<http://vispo.com/uribe/2000/circo/zancos.html>), part of an earlier sequence titled "The Circus." Accompanied by the same music, which reinforces the rhythm of their motions, this simpler sequence portrays these characters as a troupe rather than a troop. This attests to the power of Uribe's minimalist aesthetics, which reinvents a work with a title, sound, graphical manipulation, or motion on the screen.

Her graphical manipulation of characters is another significant difference from her earlier "Typoems." In her typewriter, fixed characters were stamped on a page by exerting pressure on its surface through an ink ribbon. The computer's capability to render a sequence of images over time on the same space (publishable via the animated GIF), freed Uribe from needing the saccadic momentum of reading generated by words, leading her to an exploration of letters in motion in her "Anipoems." Her ability to shape letters, in combination with sound integration (via Flash) led her to longer pieces, like "Discipline," "The Circus," "Desire," and the rest of the poems listed in the "Other Works" column of her website. The poems in "The Circus," for example allowed her to deconstruct letters, such as the fencing "A"s in "Skirmish," the bar-throwing "T" and the scissoring motion of the "X" in "The Grand Parade" (see figures 3 & 4 below).



Uribe's trajectory as a digital writer was leading her in a trajectory of increased atomization of language, as she described in her interview with Jorge Luis Antonio.

When I started Anipoems in 1997, I gradually moved from words to letters. Only "Hojas rojas secas" ("Dry Red Leaves", 1997, [vispo.com/uribe/leaves2.html](http://vispo.com/uribe/leaves2.html)) contained words. I found letters could be independent; they had a life of their own. For five years, characters were the heroes of my pieces.

Then I found I was really worried. Would letters also dissolve into smaller and smaller fragments (as words had done) and thereby cease to exist? Instead of being nurtured in the warm womb of the word, would they atomize and disappear forever?

Then I wrote "Deseo - Desejo - Desire", which marks my return to words.

This suite of "erotic anipoems" return to words, but the letters are still the leading characters (<http://vispo.com/uribe/deseo/deseo.html>). The sinuous, feminine, teasing letter s encounters some hungry vowels, devours some of her own, and dances a tango with the stiff serifed i (who can still dip the s in an italic flourish) (see figures 5 & 6 below). In the tango portion of the poem consider also how the flirtation of the dance is echoed by the double meanings of "si" in Spanish ("yes" and "if") and "is" in English.



There is a sense of humor to these poems, each taking surprising turns in how one imagines they might develop. Watch and listen to these poems and reflect upon what they have to say about desire, particularly in the realization about our own desires we must reach at the end.

"Desire" is exemplary of Uribe's multilingual poetics because each of the three parts of the poem uses the title word in a different language: "deseo" in Spanish, "desejo" in Portuguese, and "desire" in English. Is this a comment on gender politics typical of each language? A world traveler and speaker of many languages, Uribe's focus on letters and bilingual Web design allowed her to transcend some language constraints, though how readers in different cultures received her work was beyond her control.

It is true that although most of my work is meant to be free from language constraints-- inasmuch as it detaches itself from the word and relies more on letters and typographical signs-- nevertheless, English- and Spanish-speakers tend to approach the work from different angles. They are attracted by different pieces (Uribe "The Letters").

To read the late Ana María Uribe's animated poetry and see how much she was able to do with the letter and relatively simple digital tools, lends credence to this bold proclamation by Philippe Bootz: "The recent intrusion of animation into the arts is likely to instigate an era as fecund as that of Gutenberg." I believe it when I witness what she accomplished in just a few years of experimentation with digital media.

Uribe's example is already showing in the literature and scholarship of electronic literature. The poets and writers who knew her in the Webartery group, and beyond, were influenced by her Concrete and Lettriste sensibilities. She is regularly exhibited in international electronic literature exhibitions by Dene Grigar, Kathi Inman Berens, was featured in *I ♥ E-Poetry*, and continues to inspire writers and poets to this day.

As the animated GIF becomes popular again as a generation of young writers born after the launching of the Web comes of age, writers like Uribe show a path into a kind of writing that is still not taught in schools. The age of digital writing is upon us.

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