



## GÖRSEL ŞİİR: AVAN GART ŞİİRDE BURJUVA ESTETİĞİN YIKIMI

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**Öz-** Bazen somut şiir ya da desen şiiri olarak da adlandırılan görsel şiir, en eski şiir türlerinden birisidir. Cizvit desenlerinden kaligrafik Çin metinlerine kadar uzanan tarihsel bir arkaplanda kendine yer bulan görsel şiir şairlere dil ve biçimi eğip bükerek denemeler yapma imkanı sağlamış ve kendilerine ait bir dil oluşturmalarına olanak sağlamıştır. Aynı zamanda, görsel şiir sanatçı ile okuru arasında daha önce eş görülmemiş, kendiliğinden oluşan ve samimi bir bağ kurulmasına yardımcı olur. Burjuvanın öngördüğü ve dayattığı normların sanatı hayattan koparttığı ve kitleleri özgün sanatın üretim ve tüketim süreçlerine yabancılaştıran bu çağda böyle bir bağın kurulmasının elzem olduğu inkar edilemez. Görsel şiir farklı biçimleri, kalıpları ve dilsel yapıları bir araya getirir, böylelikle şiir tek bir görsel imgeye dönüşür ve okuyucuyu anlamın yaratılması sürecine dahil olmaya zorlar. Bu bağlamda, bu makale görsel şiirin, ve daha geniş bir çerçevede avantgard sanatın, burjuva estetiği normları ve değerlerini nasıl dönüştürdüğü ve ne ölçüde sanatın politik yönünü ve gündelik hayatın pratik yönlerini bir araya getirebildiği Avrupa avantgard akımları ve Amerika'da avantgardın gelişimi açısından değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler-** Görsel şiir, avantgard sanat, dil, biçim ideoloji.

### VISUAL POETRY SUBVERSION OF BOURGEOIS AESTHETICS IN AVANTGARDE POETICS

**Abstract** – Visual poetry, sometimes named as concrete poetry or pattern poetry, has been one of the oldest genres in poetry. Ranging from Jesuit and Chinese calligraphic design to modern-avantgarde and contemporary media design, visual poetry inspired poets to experiment with language and form and provided a unique opportunity to create their own language. It also ensured an unprecedented, instant and intimate communication between the artist and the audience in an age when bourgeois ideology separated art from life and alienated the masses to the production and consumption processes of authentic art. Visual poetry assembles forms, frames, and linguistic structures so that the poem itself becomes one single visual sign and urges the reader to engage in the creation of meaning. This study, in this regard, will discuss how visual poetry, and avant-garde art in general, served to radically transform the norms and values of bourgeois aesthetics and to what extent it enabled to reunite politics of art and practicality of everyday life with particular references to European avant-garde as well as American avant-garde.

**Keywords** – Visual poetry, avantgarde art, language, form, ideology

Poetry is primarily visual and every poem is seen before being read. Visual recognition of forms always precedes verbal comprehension, poetry primarily addresses to the sensory perceptions and therefore it interacts with an audience of a visual performance rather than readers of a written text. Conventional practices of reading poems are based on decoding certain visual signs of poetic discourse and reinforcing the reader's visual and auditory senses, poetic conventionality establishes one single possible reading of the poem, urging the poet's *dictum* as the center of meaning and signification (Huisman, 1988:33). However, poetry is also an art of possibilities, reconciliations and subversions and it has survived through the ages by taking new forms, reviving old forms, and defying the conventionality and monopoly of hegemonic categorizations of art and aesthetic.

In this regard, visual poetry, also known as concrete poetry or pattern poetry, opens up new possibilities for the formal design of poetry and replaced horizontal lines and words with chaotic Bauhaus aesthetics, eventually taking poetry off the page, which inspired poets to create game-like interactive poems on numerous media ranging from video art to murals. By experimenting with the medium of poetry, the poet investigates the tidal movements between the discovery of meaning and the loss of meaning, legitimacy and illegitimacy and communication and miscommunication. The poet's task in visual poetry is to revolutionize the reception of poetic experience by suggesting that poetic text is fundamentally composed of a set of words with a visual potential instead of a set of condensed emotions. Visual poetry reduces language to its particulars and combines letters with esoteric signs, hieroglyphs, graphic elements and schematic drawings which compose one single sign altogether (Druckerr, 1998:152) so that the work of art can establish a direct communication with the audience through reuniting art with the praxis of life and a pure and primitive, refined and potent, and universal and subjective iconic attachment. In visual poetry, forms, frames, linguistic structures literally leak into each other so that the poem itself becomes a sole visual sign, which invites the reader to be a part of the illusion and urges him to engage in the creation of meaning rather than being a passive recipient.

Visual poetry, like many other art forms, dates back to early ages of human history, which, therefore, makes it even more difficult to clearly describe. It is generally characterized with the visualization of texts or textualization of images at the threshold of writing and visual arts, enabling the artist and the audience to combine visual and literary impulses to simultaneously comprehend them as a whole (Elleström, 2016:437-438) On the other hand, visual poetry does not necessarily refer to a process of simply putting words and images together, rather it presupposes the elevation of the perception of words and images in a completely different dimension, that is, it urges the transformation of the conventional ways of reading, understanding, and performing poetry, which, eventually, revolutionizes the way in which signs potentially produce meanings and ideological constructions. Visual poetry deliberately elaborates political dimensions of the image as a commodity and an ideological apparatus. In an age of the mechanical reproduction of images when mass media, political propaganda machines, and visual archives of fabricated histories offered a plethora of visual images, modern subjects, and their perception of reality and truth, are even more frequently constituted with disorientating images through a complex process of seeing and believing Polkinhorn, 1993a:393). Therefore, any deconstruction of such visual constructions would inevitably lead to a political and ideological upheaval against the hegemony of visual culture to reclaim an authentic definition of the subject and their imaginary relationship to the Real.

Visual poems do not only present a two dimensional alignment of words but rather they are three-dimensional objects that employ the arrangement of words and images on a canvas, sometimes using blank space as an iconographic symbolization of Pinteresque silence and rhythmic pace of reading in the text (Davidson, 2004:100). Three-dimensionality of visual poetry liberates the poet in the formation and formulation of the poetic form and the content whereas it forces the audience to collaborate with the poet in performing and interpreting the visual construction of the work of art. Such a spatial and contextual liberation also enables the poet and the audience to emancipate from time and space, escaping from the linearity of language, history, and subjectivity.

Indeed, at the beginning was visual poetry even before the invention of writing. The iconographic use of symbols and patterns in ancient cultures provided examples of early poetry and juxtaposed hieroglyphic writing with certain formal arrangements which shaped the text in the shape of things, for instance an axe, a tree, an animal, a mountain, for magical and mystical purposes such as healing the wounds, protecting the tribe or breaking the spell. The genre was called *technopaegnelia* in Ancient Greece and *carmina figurata* in Roman culture and immediately became popular among religious and philosophical poets (Bohn, 2001:16). The Greek examples of visual poetry was obviously influenced by the Hebrew scripture and geometrical art of writing of Sanskrit *citra-kavyas* which, in turn, also influenced Roman and early medieval examples of visual poetry. Islamic and Hebraic artists used calligraphic writing as a subtle way to eliminate the religious injunctions against producing images (Kostelanetz, 1979:26). Chinese and Japanese poets embraced calligraphic design in order to reinforce the content of poetry which primarily aimed to imitate natural appearances (Bohn, 2011:50).

Interestingly enough, visual poetry became most popular among religious sects of Christianity in medieval ages, particularly in Jesuit culture, considering that any form of art except religious art was condemned as heretic (Higgins, 1987:9-13). Visual poetry was revived by Renaissance poets who served as a bridge between pagan legacy and modern forms in search of a new paradigm of aesthetics. The revival of visual poetry under Roman and Latin influence also had repercussions in Polish, Russian, Neo-Latin (Italian and Spanish), and German visual poetry as well. In Anglo-Saxon culture and literature, visual poetry were comparatively less appreciated except a few remarkable examples such as Henry Price's poem of 1587, *Nolviat Alas*, William Gager's poem of 1587, *D. Ph. Sidnaei Piramis*, John Lloyd's poem of 1587, *D. Philippi ARA* (Greene, 1992:11-14). George Herbert's poem of 1633, *Easter Wings*, Edward Taylor's poem of 1674, and *Tale of the Mouse* in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, (Higgins, 1987:110). It is also noteworthy that visual poetry was especially popular in Anglo-Saxon culture in the form of embroidery and visual decoration known as "lover's knots".

Despite its relative popularity, the genre was widely neglected until its rebirth at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The modern practice of visual poetry incorporated a variety of avant-garde movements such as Futurism, Vorticism, Dada, De Stijl, Cubism, Surrealism, and Anglo-American modernism (Drucker, 1998:133). It was widely agreed that the modern visual poetry practically began with Stephane Mallarme's poem, *Un Coup de dés Jamais N'abolira le Hasard*, and it immediately became popular among a variety of avant-garde circles. Octavia Paz distinguishes Mallarme from the poets of the past as follows:

Unlike the poets of the past, Mallarme does not offer us a vision of the world; nor does he say one word to us about what it means or

does not mean to be a man. The legacy to which *Un coup de des* expressly refers-without an express legatee- *a quelqu'un ambigu*-is a form; and more than that, it is the form of possibility itself: a poem closed to the world but open to the space without a name (2009:254)

The first visual poems of the twentieth century were obviously indebted to the new typographic design of mass media and especially commercial iconicity of advertisements as well as premodern examples of calligraphic design. Mary Ellen Solt underlined the connection between the new design culture and visual poetry: "If the visual poem is a new product in a world flooded with new products, then it must partake of the nature of the world that created it. The visual poem is a word design in a designed world" (1968:para3). The modern poets easily aspired the principles and aesthetic formality of advertisements who regarded commercial design as a chance to restore the communication with the masses and seemingly appalled by the the power of visual image in conveying the message.

On the other hand, visual arts and *belles lettres* in the United States remained heavily influenced by their European counterparts almost until the nineteenth century. A declaration of independence in arts and letters was only possible with a national awakening in *fin-de-siecle* America, especially after the International Exhibition of Modern Arts, or the Armory Show, in 1913 that marked an era of revolutionary ideas and forms in the perception and evaluation of the works of art (Martinez, 1993:32). Especially in the first phases of modernist poetry in the United States, visual poetry found only a humble recognition among American poets, with the heavy influence of European dadaism and surrealism as well as imagism and figurative collages (Nelson, 1989:71). Still, apart from Pound's ideograms and imagist poetry, visual poetry was not heartily welcome by mainstream literary culture and it was consciously neglected and underestimated. One reason for this critical indifference was that visual poetry, as a formalist experimentalism, was often cited, sometimes confused, with numerous avant-garde movements, which, in the final analysis, made it impossible to draw descriptive lines. Besides, it was not practical enough for the taste of rising new middle class of 1920's and too European for a nation which was not exalted with the foreign influence when American intellectuals were striving to establish an American tradition in arts.

However, visual poetry became surprisingly popular in postwar America when a great number of poets and art performers, Fluxus artists in particular, were seeking ways to sew a new skin to "the dreams of future" (Cook, 1979:141). Poetry was performed rather than being merely read and the form and performance of visual poetry were extended so as to include hypermedia, digital art, and performance arts (Polkinhorn, 1993b:483). Especially with the overarching influence of the Beat Generation, poetry was coalesced with music and photography and poetry performances became a prominent way to unite poetry with the praxis of life despite an obvious lack of critical interest or, at best, a frequent disdain of mass media as popular entertainment (Bernstein, 1998:5).

Indeed, the rising popularity and wide appreciation of the theory and practice of avant-garde art, and visual poetry in particular, in postwar America was redefined in accordance with "the special American conditions" with depotentiated emphasis on politics and ideology. However, language in the aesthetic tradition of America, on the other hand, has always been affiliated with a certain political discourse. The discourse of Puritan forefathers, for example, was reflecting their xenophobic and paranoid authoritarian voice and understanding of social hierarchy (Zafirovski, 2007:261). In addition, the simple and witty language of the 19<sup>th</sup> century American realism was celebrating the idea of humanitarian democracy and

raising the voices of immigrants, vagabonds, and slaves despite prudish elitism of the genteel tradition (Anesko, 1995:79). Similarly, the twentieth century avant-garde movements were striving to respond to the changing temperaments of people and used language as a tool for raising their dissent and protest as a political protest. However, political agenda of European aesthetics and critical schools have always been translated to American pragmatism and practicality of art and politics critical thought had slightly different echoes in the American grain (Denning, 1986:357-358). Therefore, not all avant-garde movements or groups were ideologically motivated in the United States in the sense that they were in Europe and a great majority of avant-garde movements did not particularly identify themselves with European avant-garde heritage. It was often the case that a variety of avant-garde groups were limited to a certain ethnic, racial, or sexual minority, or geographical location and that they frequently changed their name and focus, sometimes splitting apart into different groups and sometimes fusing into one another. The New York School, for instance, was not deliberately political in handling the issues of aesthetics and did not intend to adopt a flag-carrying avant-garde approach to art. New York Dada movement, Black Mountain movement, or even even Imagism were largely founded upon the powerful persona of representative figures. American avant-garde artists were too ready to be appreciated and accepted by a wider mainstream audience (Perloff, 2005:para 10-15). Bernstein also points out that all poetry reading in contemporary American poetry, despite not always being politically motivated, was still an embodiment of poetry transforming two dimensional texts into three dimensional sound/visual objects. For Bernstein, whether reading aloud rhythmically as in the Beat poetry or visualizing images, performing poetry was an act of reformulating temporal and spatial perception of the poet and the audience (Bernstein, 1998:3). Perloff also argues that visual poetry in the United States enjoyed the freedom of refusing all linear forms and spatial organization of the poem taking one step beyond free verse that broke down the constraints of metrical verse (1998:156), which eventually implied a rejection of bourgeois art and a dedication to reunite art and praxis of life.

Although American avant-garde, and visual poetry in particular, had a subtle political tone, all in all, avant-garde art's critical power always operated beyond a self-critique or revision of aesthetic values within the limits of institutionalized hegemony of bourgeois art. Rather, it subverted and revolutionized the very foundations of art and ideology. Avant-garde poetry basically elaborated its potential to allow the transformation of form and language of poetry, which was at the heart of ideological and philosophical debates. Keeping in mind that every poem is an endeavor to exhaust language and a challenge to transgress the formal and semantic limitations, poetic creation no longer aims to ensure the communication of meaning but to maintain an aesthetic and linguistic autonomy and exteriority (Bruns, 2005:65). Poetry is what is lost in language and the function of poetic discourse is to overcome the poverty of language and to reconcile with desubjectivity and atemporality of its material existence.

Visual poetry, therefore, feeds on the poverty of language, takes advantage of the destitute of poetry while it potentially posits a potential form of *écriture* (in Derridean sense) to explore the infinite possibilities of structure and form of poetry. Jacques Derrida suggested that the source of language is *écriture* which necessarily includes restructuring all signification systems and establishing semantic correlations (1973:92). Therefore, the nature of *écriture* is chaotic and multi-faceted in contrast to the classifying, restricting and monopolizing logocentrism, which can only be defied by a reassessment of the subaltern forms of expression (Leitch, 1989:271). Literary texts intrinsically convey an infinite number of

readings and the density of significations embedded in a text paradoxically reaffirms the poverty of language. Because there are numerous readings, not one single reading is complete and correct and each text can be only meaningful in relation to other texts. Language does not function as a window opening to the reality nor as an intermediary tool to mirror the real; language is the ideology itself, a suppressing, banishing and disdaining constitutive element of hegemony. It absorbs the real and becomes the self-referential center of signification systems (Volosinov, 1986:158). The idea that there can not be, indeed, nothing outside the text inevitably suggests that each text is just a rewriting and that the text can only potentially write itself. The subject, as a discursive structure, has lost its potential as the creator and organizer of the meaning and turned into another grammatic code (Baldick, 2014:163). Therefore, any struggle against the dominant ideology and any attempt to regain the subject positions evidently and primarily necessitate an aggressive revolt against the language itself; a revolutionary project can not be accomplished without revolutionizing the linguistic structures.

In fact, the work of art was often conceived as utterly a product of the artist's imagination or a dream play that eventually resulted in marginalization and underestimation of the political functions of the work of art and the artist. Nevertheless, Peter Bürger argued that Dadaism "no longer criticizes schools that preceded it but criticizes art as an institution, and the course its development took in bourgeois society" (1984:22). Bürger further states that "the separation of art from the praxis of life becomes the decisive characteristic of the autonomy of bourgeois art" (1984:49). Therefore, one can reasonably argue that by reintegrating art into life, avant-garde artists also disrupt the reconciliatory power of art as an ideological apparatus to legitimize and universalize bourgeois norms and values while creating a new paradigm of artistic production and social practice.

The avant-garde art, thus, rejects the institutionalized forms of art production and distribution (via publishing companies, museums, and galleries) as well as the reception and devaluation of the work of art by critics and the audience. The aesthetics of hegemony, in this sense, detached the works of life from the praxis of life that deprives the work of art and the artist from having a social and political function. Moreover, Walter Benjamin in his *Author as Producer* affirms that artists are obliged to produce an aesthetic form and awareness towards the conditions of production compatible with the institutional power relations of its time (1999:769) and he goes on to argue that "a political tendency is a necessary but never sufficient condition for the organizing function of a work. This further requires a directing, instructing stance on the part of the writer" (1999:777). In this sense, the function of the avant-garde poet is not only to politicize the work of art but also to become an *exemplum fidei* for the future generations by reestablishing the norms of art production. Radical transformation of art forms through montage, pastiche, atemporality, discontinuity, defamiliarization, and appropriation would clearly promote debunking institutional hierarchies of art and direct, if not always voluntary, participation of the audience in decoding the iconic signification of the text.

Furthermore, given that subjectivity is fragmented and discontinuous, lacking totality and meaning in modern ages, the work of art should equally correspond to the material conditions of life and the institutional networks of power that produced the subject positions for the masses. The avant-garde artist's attempt, therefore, is not only to alienate and defamiliarize the work of art and the audience, rather they aim to reunite the artist and their audience by bringing art forms back to basics, eliciting the raw material of art production, and addressing the primordial sensations of the

audience. The poetics of avant-garde, therefore, seeks to redefine the boundaries of art within a necessarily political context and unraveling the overwhelming impact of institutional hegemonies on the perception and assessment of the work of art by blurring the legitimate framework of conventional (and therefore inevitably ideological) definitions of art and marginalization of alternative forms and discursive practices of art production (Murphy, 1999:24).

As for the interplay between the construction of language and bourgeois ideology, visual poetry stands out the most remarkable and controversial genre in avant-garde tradition. Modern avant-garde was born out of modern individual's alienation and disillusionment with the promises of bourgeoisie and their search for a sense of completion and meaning (Hobbs, 2000:42). The crisis of modernity was an apocalyptic social and cultural crisis in which all significations, all norms and values underwent an irreversible transformation. It swept away all social and philosophical referential grounds on which artistic and discursive practices could be built upon and only offered interminable angst, chaos, ambiguity and oblivion.

Therefore, visual poetry's irreconcilable disposition in distorting and destroying language stands out as a true form of opposition. Visual poetry deaestheticizes and desanctifies the text and the image while gathering all misfit, marginal, grotesque and unadaptable forms and discourses together. It also enables the poet to establish a new form of aesthetics and a formal structure of poetry, a new aesthetic paradigm to reunite art and praxis of life (Murphy, 1999:56). The aesthetics of visual poetry glorifies the artificial, the meaningless, the fragmented, the disharmonious and the transgressive. Through grafting, collage, fragmentation, repetition, and appropriation, visual poetry urges the reader to quit their conformist quest for a sense of completeness and perfection. Furthermore, visual poetry deterritorializes language in such a fashion that it fuses the past and the present, the *hochsprache* and slang, the supreme and the profane in order to vulgarize the sacralizations and idealizations of bourgeois art. Hence, it would be reasonable to argue that the theory and practice of visual poetry is a desperate attempt to return to primordial and primitive art where art was inseparable from the praxis of life and indefinable in modern aesthetic terms and when art was still functional and useful as well as being inspirational and insightful. Considering that the "avant-garde spirit has sought to the past in a different way; it disposes over those pasts which have been made available by the objectifying scholarship of historicism, but it opposes at the same time a neutralized history, which is locked up in the museum of historicism" (Habermas and Ben-Habib, 1981:5), visual poetry's elaboration of the primitive and the primordial characterizes a search for authenticity and emancipation from the bourgeois norms of art.

The resurrection of visual poetry in the postwar America, therefore, marks an epistemic necessity rather than an aesthetic choice for a couple of reasons. Firstly, the changes in the technologies of writing and reading have always escorted the transformation of the ways one perceives reality and produces literature. While the invention of writing considerably wiped out oral forms of literature and the whole rich universe behind it, it created new forms and conventions of narration, sacralizing and monopolizing the writing activity in the hands of the religious and scholarly elites. The printing technology facilitated a relative democratization yet handing over the canonical hegemony to the newly emerging bourgeoisie (Benjamin, 2019:168). The advancement of printing technologies and media industry and the introduction of televised and computerized forms of text production in the twentieth century blurred the boundaries between the text and the image. The advancing domination of visual communication in postmodern culture identified visual language as

a key element; the perception of the reader has gradually been mass-mediated, so why shouldn't poetry be ?

The growing interest in visual poetry in the postwar era inspired the artists and poets to produce intermediated poems on different mediums ranging from canvas to digital screens while exploring the potential of visual language in getting in touch with the reality of everyday life. Nevertheless, this should not be regarded as a surrender to the overwhelming and crashing authority of image over the word; postwar poets in America just went by the book to reach their audience. In a time people communicate with international and transcultural iconic signs ranging from airport signs to online emoticons, in a time the global mass media hammers people's imagination with an torrent of simulated images, in a time visual language has overthrown the sovereignty of the logocentric power of the written culture, in a time the cognitive reception of the written language has only produced discrepancy and carnivalesque disruption and no meaningful communication whatsoever, the poet inevitably embraces the visual language transcreating the inscription of time. If the primary purpose of writing is to make language visible and language is already visual, visual poets in postwar era are convinced that the other way round is also possible; visual images constitute a language in itself.

Another reason why the resurrection of the iconicity of language is inevitable in postmodern era is that visual poetry has a lot in common with postmodernism. Although it is widely assumed that modern avant-garde left its political agenda back in 1920's to a considerable degree and focused more upon aesthetic renewal rather than political revolutions, visual poetry in postmodern era still professes a radical transformation of aesthetics, reception of art, and construction of subjectivity. If postmodernism is partially an extension and elaboration of modernism, then visual poetry serves as a bridge between agitprop modern avant-garde and post-avantgarde, carrying the revolutionary aesthetic and political claims of modern avant-garde to postmodern era. Roland Greene also confirms that

Postmodern material poetry cultivates a consciousness of-sometimes almost a scholarly attention to how its distant antecedents struggled against the literary and cultural order of their times. Following the examples of Ezra Pound and Charles Olson, both of whom maintain a politically tinged Renaissance scholarship within their poet-ics, these two or three generations of poets innovate in a trans-historical context (1992:15)

Therefore, postmodernism, like visual poetry, is a "revenant, the return of the irrepressible; ...it eludes definition" (Hassan, 2001:1).

Besides, postmodernism, in a very similar manner to visual poetry, brings out "a noticeable shift in sensibility, practices, and discourse formations.... what needs further exploration whether this transformation has generated genuinely new aesthetic forms in the various arts, or whether it mainly recycles techniques and strategies of modernism itself, reinscribing them into an altered cultural context" (Huyysen, 1984:8).

Additionally, visual poetry's focus on reconnecting with the primitive forms of art similarly represents an essential component of postmodern avant-garde. Taking into account that history is only accessible in narrative forms, the revival of the primitive in visual poetry is only available through bastardization of primitive art, which could be constituted as "the renunciation of the claims of modernism and the inauguration of postmodernity" (Wiseman, 1990:22). In other words, the project of primitivizing the form and the context of art might have been initiated with the modern avant-garde but it was a project that could be accomplished with a postmodern approach that recontextualized the Eurocentric modern avant-garde.

As a result, production of literary texts as the linguistic capital seldom represents a consensus of a community of readers but, indeed, it is a product of power relations that create the hegemony of institutionalized aesthetics. Pierre Bourdieu suggested that "the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy" (1993:42). Therefore, the power of visual poetry relies on its potential to demonopolize the literary canon and institutions of bourgeois art, disregarding literary classifications and canonical judgments. While bourgeois art commodified conventional art forms and separated art from the praxis of life, visual poetry strived to reformulate bourgeois aestheticism and built a bridge between primitive forms of art and modern avant-garde. Visual poetry invited the reader and the poet to collaborate in a political experience rather than an aesthetic ecstasy in order to reestablish functionality and materiality of art. Thus, visual poetry provides a unique opportunity to create a personal and subjective language and unprecedented, instant and intimate communication between the artist and the audience in an age when the academia and the literate class were joyfully reading eulogies after the death of language and the subject. Poetry is not completely dead after Auschwitz, it still survives in avant-garde forms, in writing, in images, in sounds, in the streets of Brasil and Russia, in independent art galleries in New York and Berlin, on the internet, and in small sanctuaries of revolutionary art of young people. Poetry is still inspiring, visual poetry still holds a revolutionary power to bring art back to life.

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## EXTENDED EBSTRACT

Visual poetry is one of the oldest art forms and ironically, it has remained underrated and neglected over the ages. Visual poetry is a combination of texts and images, letters and icons, literature and visual arts. But it is not merely a process of putting words and images together. On the contrary, visual poetry encourages the perception of words and images in a completely different dimension. It also prompts the transformation of the conventional methods of reading, understanding, and performing poetry. In the long run, visual poetry enables a revolutionary understanding of art and ideology. It might reasonably be concluded that any deconstruction of language and images in an age of mass media would inevitably lead to a reconsideration of the hegemony of visual culture to reclaim an authentic definition of the subject and ideology.

Visual poetry also enables new horizons for the formal design of poetry and substitutes horizontal lines and words with chaotic avant-garde aesthetics, eventually taking poetry off the page to numerous media ranging from video art to murals. Visual poets experiment with the form and the content of poetry, stagger between the discovery of meaning and the loss of meaning, legitimacy and illegitimacy and communication and miscommunication. The visual poet aims to revolutionize the reception of poetic experience and suggests that poetry is composed of a set of words with a visual potential instead of a set of condensed emotions. Visual poetry reduces language to its particulars and combines letters with esoteric signs, hieroglyphs, graphic elements and schematic drawings which compose one single sign altogether.

The history of visual poetry dates back to the iconographic use of symbols and patterns in ancient cultures. It was called *technopaegnelia* in Ancient Greece, *carmina figurata* in Roman culture, *citra-kavyas* in Ancient India. More interestingly, visual poetry was the most popular in religious art such as Islamic and Hebraic calligraphy or Jesuit culture. Visual poetry was especially popular among Renaissance poets but it was comparatively less appreciated except a few remarkable examples in English and American literature.

The modern practice of visual poetry began with Stephane Mallarme's poem, *Un Coup de dés Jamais N'abolira le Hasard*, and it immediately became popular among a variety of avant-garde circles. However, modern visual poetry in the twentieth century was certainly inspired by the new typographic design of mass media and commercial iconicity of advertisements. The modern poets easily aspired the principles and aesthetic formality of advertisements who regarded commercial design as a chance to restore the communication with the masses and seemingly appalled by the the power of visual image in conveying the message.

However, the true inspiration that visual poetry brought to modern avant-garde was a chaotic and multi-layered reconsideration of the form and the purpose of poetry, opening the poverty of language in creating art to question. Considering that language is a social and ideological construction and the ideology itself, a suppressing, banishing and disdaining constitutive element of hegemony, visual poetry's interrogation of poetry was both philosophical and ideological. The subject and the poets have lost their potential as the creator of the meaning and turned into just another grammatic code. Therefore, any struggle against the dominant ideology and any attempt to regain the subject positions evidently and primarily necessitate an aggressive revolt against the language itself; a revolutionary project can not be accomplished without revolutionizing the linguistic structures.

In fact, bourgeois ideology often conceived art as a product of the artist's imagination or a dream play and it eventually marginalized and underestimated the political functions of the work of art and the artist. Therefore, visual poetry's primary aim was to reintegrate art into life, disrupt the reconciliatory power of art as an ideological apparatus to legitimize and universalize bourgeois norms and values while creating a new paradigm of artistic production and social practice. Visual poetry, and the avant-garde art in a broader perspective, reject the institutionalized forms of art production and distribution (via publishing companies, museums, and galleries) as well as the reception and devaluation of the work of art by critics and the audience. The function of the avant-garde poet is to politicize the work of art and to establish a radical transformation of art forms through montage, pastiche, atemporality, discontinuity, defamiliarization, and appropriation. The poet in visual poetry endeavors to alienate and defamiliarize the work of art and aim to reunite the artist and their audience by bringing art forms back to basics, eliciting the raw material of art production, and addressing the primordial sensations of the audience.

In light of such a theoretical background, this paper seeks to discuss a historical and political function of visual poetry with particular references to European and American avantgarde. Having emphasized the visual poetry's irreconcilable disposition in distorting and destroying language, this paper will analyze to what extent visual poetry is capable of deaestheticizing and desanctifying the text and the image while gathering all misfit, marginal, grotesque and unadaptable forms and discourses together. With a particular reference to European and American avantgarde movement, this paper will eventually investigate visual poetry's desperate attempt to return to primordial and primitive art where art is inseparable from the praxis of life and when art is still functional and useful as well as being inspirational and insightful.