



***El Corno Emplunado* and the avant-garde on the threshold of the new era.¹**

El Corno Emplumado y la vanguardia en el umbral de la nueva era.

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the case of the Mexican magazine *El Corno Emplumado* and its role as an avant-garde publication based on Renato Poggioli's idea of avant-garde movement and the notions of epoch threshold and aesthetics of threshold formulated by Hans Robert Jauss and Luciana del Gizzo, respectively. The intention is to examine the way in which the magazine edited by Margaret Randall and Sergio Mondragón updates the utopian impulse of the avant-gardes based on their vision that social change at the beginning of the 60s of the 20th century would come thanks to renewal spirituality that only art and poetry could provide. Additionally, it investigates the way in which the magazine reconfigures the avant-garde myth of the new beginning from its postulate of the advent of a new era, the era of the man of air. All this in order to discuss the possibility of thinking about the presence of an avant-garde continuity in Mexican literature throughout the 20th century.

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Keywords: Mexican literary magazines, *El Corno Emplumado*, Latin American Avant-garde, Twentieth century poetry.

RESUMEN

Este artículo aborda el caso de la revista mexicana *El Corno Emplumado* y su papel como una publicación de vanguardia desde la idea de movimiento de vanguardia de Renato Poggioli y las nociones de umbral de época y estética de umbral formuladas por Hans Robert Jauss y Luciana del Gizzo, respectivamente. La intención es examinar la manera en que la revista editada por Margaret Randall y Sergio Mondragón actualiza el impulso utópico de las vanguardias a partir de su visión de que el cambio social a inicios de los años 60 del siglo XX habría de llegar gracias a la renovación espiritual que sólo podrían proporcionar el arte y la poesía. Adicionalmente se indaga la manera en que la revista reconfigura el mito vanguardista del nuevo comienzo desde su postulado del advenimiento de una nueva era, la era del hombre de aire. Todo ello con el fin de discutir la posibilidad de pensar en la presencia de una continuidad vanguardista en la literatura mexicana a lo largo del siglo XX.

Palabras claves: Revistas literarias mexicanas, *El Corno Emplumado*, Vanguardias latinoamericanas, Poesía del siglo XX.

The month of January 2022 will mark 60 years since the publication of the first issue of *El Corno Emplumado*, with an existence of seven years and 31 published issues, it is undoubtedly a magazine whose important role in contemporary Mexican letters has not been sufficiently appreciated. The project edited by the American poet Margaret Randall and the Mexican Sergio Mondragón had as its axis the conviction that at the beginning of the 1960s a social renewal was necessary, whose possibility rested on art and from that perspective assumes as its task the dissemination of poets and plastic artists who bet on this transformation.

The magazine played a fundamental role in promoting the work of young poets and artists from Mexico, Latin America and the United States who, from a personal or collective activity, bet in the same way on an aesthetic transformation. From this work, some critical approaches consider *El Corno Emplumado* as an expression of the Latin American avant-garde or neo-avant-garde with activity in the decade of the 60s (Galindo, 2013).



By making a retrospective assessment of the years of existence of the magazine and reflecting critically on the possibility of talking about a resurgence of the avant-garde in the 60s, Sergio Mondragón refuses to speak of a "second" avant-garde, as a "reappearance" of the one that emerged and declined towards the 20s of the last century to return in later decades. Faced with the question, the editor and poet postulates the possibility of thinking rather of the avant-garde phenomenon as a permanent constant in poetic art, for which he resorts to the formula of the tradition of rupture and postulates as a hypothesis:

[...] the existence of a permanent avant-garde in literary art, associated with a tradition of rupture, generator and recipient of novelties and metamorphoses of written forms, that which implies the abandonment of previous conventions, reverberations of language that in its perennial mobility always reminds us that the central event of life and literary art is the perpetual change [...] (Mondragón, 2006, s/p)

Mondragón's statement becomes especially relevant when we find ourselves on the eve of the Mexican avant-garde reaching its centenary – if we take as a reference the irruption of stridentism in December 1921. Faced with the position of the poet and editor, it seems necessary to reflect on the use of the notion of the avant-garde to refer precisely to more contemporary products, such as *El Corno Emplumado* or the infrarealist movement of the 70s. In this regard, Julio Premat (2013) warns that the term avant-garde has become semantically confusing and that due to its excessive use it ends up being more than a relevant denominator, the "trademark of modernity" (2007, p. 51). The critic points out that indiscriminately using the term avant-garde is reduced to "a way of transferring the unknown to a known and well-delimited terrain and to a literary history that is intended to be definitive" (p. 51).

In this context, Premat (2013) affirms that the critical task should omit to affirm whether this or that current is inscribed in the avant-garde, since the term itself does not define a literary category and points out on the contrary that the task of criticism should consider the notion of avant-garde



more as an "effect of which it is necessary to analyze, in each occurrence, the origin and functioning" (p. 52).

From this perspective, the intention of this work is to raise a series of questions around *El Corno Emplumado*, taking as a horizon the notion of avant-garde. In that sense, it is worth asking what implications the possibility of postulating a permanent avant-garde has, as Mondragón points out and of which *El Corno Emplumado* would be an important component: In what sense is it feasible to postulate that the avant-garde of the early twentieth century are part of a continuity that expands throughout the century? resources or epistemes that for the 60s a magazine like the *Corno* reactivates or transforms in order to identify it as an avant-garde expression? If we visualize the avant-garde from its configuration as a collective work (think of the so-called *isms*), that is, as a movement, how does *Corno* itself articulate your literary praxis to set yourself in motion? And finally, how does the reactivation of the avant-garde program affect the discourse of the magazine and the formal and thematic aspects of the texts it hosts and disseminates?

To this end, the proposal is to address primarily the subject by recovering the notion of threshold aesthetics developed by Luciana del Gizzo from the idea of period threshold of Hans Robert Jauss in *Las transformaciones de lo moderno* (2004). In the second instance, the theme of the relevance of being able to characterize a magazine as a collective, in the manner of avant-garde *isms*, appears, for which I resort to the notion of avant-garde movement of Renato Poggioli and the conception of the avant-garde as a cultural movement. Finally, the program of the magazine that reconfigures the avant-garde myth of the new beginning of history by postulating in a millenarian tone the advent of the Age of the Air Man as an era of universal renewal and fraternity is examined.

In the light of these notions, the first years of the magazine *El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn*, are briefly examined, in order to provide elements to identify certain components assimilated to the avant-garde that the magazine updates from its discursiveness.



A novelty made to last

When we talk about Latin American avant-gardes, there is a certain tacit agreement among the critics that it was a phenomenon whose beginning and end can be dated. In this tenor and depending on the source, its appearance can be located towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century and its subsequent extinction in the 30s. There is also the more or less general idea that this set of movements, magazines and artists that is assimilated to the notion of avant-garde maintained a common character associated with the concept of the new. Thus, for example, Hugo J. Verani synthesizes the theme:

In the Latin American continent the temporal limits of the avant-garde are, approximately, 1916 and 1935. The renewing concerns channel towards 1922 – the key year of the Latin American avant-garde emergence – in an accelerated succession of manifestos, polemics, exhibitions and movements aimed at different purposes, but infected with the fury of novelty of which Jorge Mañach speaks in his essay "Vanguardismo" [...] (1990, p. 11).

The two elements enunciated by Verani: the chronological framework of the existence of the avant-garde and the pre-eminence of novelty as its mark of identity, in addition to representing a problem from the point of view of a Sergio Mondragón who denies the disappearance of these avant-gardes, have also been the subject of more recent critical debates, both in relation to the idea of the avant-garde as a clearly dated phenomenon, as well as in the subject of its novelty.

From this perspective, the researcher Luciana del Gizzo wonders about the possibility that the avant-garde can remain in time throughout the twentieth century and if from criticism it is possible to apply the category of "avant-garde" to artistic and literary expressions that arise decades after the time of the so-called historical avant-garde.

Del Gizzo formulates the idea that, for a broader understanding of the avant-garde as an integral object, it must be considered that, if the notions of novelty and rupture appear as a foundational paradigm in the avant-garde, they do so as a discursiveness that arises from the fact



that only in the twentieth century are the conditions of possibility that would justify the feasibility of such a break with the past and thus be able to build permanently the novelty:

More clearly, novelty or rupture are not characteristics of art, but a discursiveness typical of the avant-garde as an aesthetic modality of the twentieth century, which could take place in certain conditions of possibility of these statements which, as will be seen, coincide with a historical need for profound change and restarting. Only in these terms, which here will be referred to as *threshold aesthetics*, is it possible to think of the avant-garde as an aesthetic category persistent throughout the century (2015, p. 5).

For the author, when one thinks that the idea of novelty is central to the avant-garde, the possibility that this novelty constantly returns is undoubtedly a problem when it comes to thinking of the avant-garde in its aspect of absolute novelty as a constant. Del Gizzo then pronounces himself to look for theoretical references that account for the avant-garde not as a fragmented project, but as a category with a permanent presence throughout the twentieth century. Faced with this problem, the researcher resorts to the concept of period threshold proposed by Hans Robert Jauss.

In the collection of essays that he groups under the title of *Las transformaciones de lo moderno*, Jauss states that aesthetic modernity is transformed from its beginning to its decline in a series of moments that he calls period thresholds, in which artistic concepts and practices are substantially transformed. Precisely the irruption of the avant-garde supposes for Jauss one of these thresholds of epoch, which figures in the year of 1912 (2004, p.14) and would be made up of two waves, the first arises before the First World War and the second after the armed conflict. In the first wave it includes Futurism (Italian and Russian), Dadaism, Expressionism and Constructivism, while in the second wave it places Surrealism as its fundamental expression.

Jauss's model has the advantage that it does not understand the avant-garde as a flare that begins and concludes at a specific and restricted moment, but from the perspective of the thresholds of epoch, it is understood that the avant-garde occurs in recurrent waves throughout the twentieth



century as a response to different specific and conflicting historical scenarios, which constitute the opening of new historical horizons, which can only be fully apprehensible from aesthetic experience:

[...] within the consciousness, still undivided, of the epochal unity of the twentieth century, there is a progressive separation from the past. It seems that the new that begins is not susceptible to being articulated as experience, but that the old that separates is graspable in its evanescent figure. It is precisely the aesthetic experience that can illuminate this change of horizon (2004, p. 68-69).

For Jauss, in the face of the profound historical transformations that take place very quickly in the period of modernity, the aesthetic experience that occurs at the very moment of change, is established as the necessary resource to establish a hermeneutic process in the face of the change of historical horizon:

If we believe rigorous historicism when it maintains that the new *in eventu* tends to escape from conscious experience and that only *ex eventu*, retrospectively, is recognized as the limit between what "is no longer" and what "is not yet", will not the aesthetic experience have that opportunity, always confirmed, to apostrophize, in the face of historical experience, the appearance of the new, of raising to consciousness the possibilities that are announced, or even of dramatizing, as a new beginning or as a unique turn in the manner of the Pauline-Christian paradigm ("look, everything is new"), that change of horizon still imperceptible? (2004, p. 71)

From these notions of Jauss, the researcher Luciana del Gizzo proposes to understand the emergence of the different avant-garde groups, even those that arise beyond the 20s, as the presence of a constant practice in the twentieth century. In short, it is about understanding the avant-garde as a unitary praxis typical of modernity in its last stage. Thus, the different groups or expressions of the avant-garde are articulated through an aesthetic experience of threshold, therefore, says Del Gizzo:

Every avant-garde is a turning point in the artistic evolution that substantiates what is no longer and what is not yet, thus pointing out the historical caesuras; in this parenthesis he



displays his hesitant, inaccurate and incomplete experimentation, which shapes his threshold aesthetics (2015, p. 54).

On the other hand, Del Gizzo conceives avant-garde groups as cultural objects with the power to stop the temporal evolution and open time to alternative visions from the aesthetic experience they propose. Relying on ideas of Susan Buck-Morss, Del Gizzo proposes that the aesthetic experience postulated by the avant-garde has the potential to remove the individual from moral complacency and political resignation (2015, p. 54).

By placing themselves on their respective thresholds of epoch, the cultural objects that are the avant-garde have before them the task of denouncing what is no longer and, simultaneously, in a utopian eagerness, proposing what still has no form. Del Gizzo herself warns that such a task acquires for the avant-garde artist the signs of a struggle with the angel, before which it is essential to build specific strategies and thus succeed in the company. Thus, the most effective resource against the cyclopean avant-garde company will be collective action, since it is in the group and not in individuality, where the vanguards acquire their strength and capacity for action.

Located on this threshold of change, the avant-garde proposes a profound transformation that unleashes a violent response from an artistic environment that is suspicious of its renewing impetus. In the face of hostility, the vanguard faces the need to legitimize its own initiatives that do not accord with the dominant paradigm. In this environment, the avant-garde collectivity fulfills the function of giving legitimacy and coherence to the experimentation undertaken by the members of the collective and to which the quality of artistic is denied, therefore, says Del Gizzo:

If the avant-garde tests what is considered art in a given era, it can only do so because there is an instance that, based on its collective character, validates as such that which is not considered artistic by the traditional instances of legitimation. Acceptance of individual experimentation would be unlikely or would have resistance and a higher probability of failure. The group functions as an outward guarantor and inwardly validates practices (2015, p. 56).



Thus, it is feasible to think that the emergence of the avant-garde corresponds to one of the transformations that modernity is constantly experiencing in the twentieth century, which is inserted in a certain period threshold. On the other hand, we have that avant-garde practices are eminently group actions, since group work works as a mechanism of self-legitimization of the threshold aesthetics of the avant-garde.

The FeatheredHorn: magazine and movement?

While it is true that famous avant-garde magazines result from the action of a specific group, as in the case of *Irradiador* and *Horizonte*, the publications of Mexican stridentism, it is also true that there have been avant-garde magazines that, although they do not formally represent a group, operate from the consciousness of belonging or operating as representatives of a collective; remember for example the second era of the Argentine *Proa* or the Peruvian *Amauta* and *Boletín Titikaka*. In this sense, Pablo Rocca points out that the notion of group is indivisible from the project of a cultural magazine, since it is from the collectivity that the aesthetic project that the magazine represents is sustained in dialogue and debate with its cultural environment, for that reason he expresses:

There is a basic form or cell of the journal: the group. Is there another possible way than to make a magazine other than to build as a group so that each individual is, at the same time, supporting, complementing and putting in crisis of the other, of the others? (Rocca, 2004, p. 14)

Thus, a magazine represents in its materiality an aesthetic project, but also a political one when it is articulated as a will to question various social actors. For this reason, Beatriz Sarlo points out that the decision to found a magazine is due to the collective certainty – manifested grammatically in the use of "we" – that there is a void that must be filled. A magazine, he points out, is a bet that seeks to transform and influence a specific social and cultural space, in short, to make a magazine is to make cultural policy, therefore:



[...] "*let's publish a magazine*" means "*let's make cultural policy*", let's cut with the discourse the knot of an aesthetic or ideological debate. The phrase, whose foreseeable form is the plural, constitutes the collective that is usually represented institutionally in a classic form: the boards of directors (Sarlo, 1991, p. 9, italics in the original).

The idea of the magazine as a collective that aims to influence its reality, coincides with the definition of movement that Renato Poggioli makes to refer to the avant-garde project in his *Teoría del arte de vanguardia*. In reconsidering artistic groupings throughout history, Poggioli distinguishes between school and movement, noting that while the former pursues exclusively artistic ends, the movement "transcends the confines of literature and art and extends to all spheres of cultural and civil life" (2011, p. 32). That is why he warns:

A movement is constituted above all to obtain a positive result, a concrete end. The supreme desired result is, of course, the success of the specific movement or, on a higher and broader plane, the affirmation of the avant-garde spirit in all fields of culture and art" (p. 39).

According to Poggioli, avant-garde movements are characterized primarily by this impetus to transform life from art, into what he calls their "activist" moment. For Poggioli, avant-garde activism fundamentally seeks the success of the collective program, but, above all, "to change in any way the social or political system" (p. 41).

This projection from the artistic to the social body, is a practice that in the case of the Latin American avant-garde acquires special relevance as part of a process that Vicky Unruh defines as the "rehumanization" of art, in reference to the concept of José Ortega y Gasset:

I would also argue more specifically that the drive toward engagement –intellectual, social, or metaphysical– was a defining feature of the international vanguard movements and that this was particularly true in Latin America (Unruh, 1994, p. 22).



[También diría más específicamente que el impulso hacia el compromiso –intelectual, social o metafísico– fue una característica definitoria de los movimientos internacionales de vanguardia y que esto fue particularmente cierto en América Latina].²

Unruh argues that the Latin American avant-garde assumes artistic and intellectual enterprises in terms of activism and uses resources usual in the avant-garde, such as antimimetic techniques, as a way to bring art to the terrain of experience in more provocative terms (1994, p. 22).

For her part, Katharina Niemeyer, in reviewing the way in which the avant-garde is inserted into the social processes of modernity, explains that avant-garde practice, rather than seeking a reconciliation between art and life, presents a complex quality in which coexist, on the one hand, its will to emancipate as part of the process of autonomization of art and, on the other, his will to power. That is to say that the impetus of the avant-garde seeks at the same time to maintain the autonomy of art in relation to the other fields of social action, while seeking to "occupy from this autonomous base the other social spheres" (2004, p. 28). From this position, for Niemeyer, the avant-garde can be considered under the concept of "cultural movement" (2004, p. 28).

From the notions exposed, it would then be possible to identify in *El Corno Emplumado* attributes of a movement that seeks to constitute itself as a factor of transformation not only of art, but also of life itself and of the social body from an artistic action of a collective nature. To confirm this assertion, let's briefly review the origins and first steps of the journal.

It is well known that the momentum that shapes the *Corno* arises from the meetings that young poets and artists had in the apartment of the *beat* poet Philip Lamantia in Mexico City. These meetings were attended by poets from Mexico and Latin America who read his poems in Spanish and American poets who read his poems in English. The Mexicans Homero Aridjis, Jaime Augusto Shelley and Juan Bañuelos were regulars at the meetings; The Nicaraguan Ernesto Cardenal, the Peruvian poet Raquel Jodorowsky and the cartoonist of Salvadoran origin, Carlos Coffeen Serpas, also attended. Other artists were the English painter Leonora Carrington and the Mexican Felipe

² [Own translation]



Ehrenberg, as well as the American poet Ray Bremser. Also participating, of course, were the future directors of the magazine, Margaret Randall, Sergio Mondragón and Harvey Wolin, who would desist after the second issue (Silva, 2017, p. 55-56; Mondragón, 2006, s/p).

According to the editor Margaret Randall, although among the collective there was a feeling of a brotherhood among the poets (cited in Silva, 2017, p. 14), they soon discovered that they only partially understood in the absence of good translations and that Spanish-speaking poets were unaware of the tradition and timeliness of poetry in the English language and vice versa, it was then that the project of a magazine began to be forged (Randall 2015, p.101). In turn, Sergio Mondragón highlights that during the discussions a group dynamic was quickly formed that drove the creation of the magazine:

In one of the sessions, the group "discovered" the need, and "saw" in the chance that had brought us together, the opportunity to edit a magazine that showed "the two worlds" – the orb of Latin American poetry and that of American poetry: the poetry that was being written at that time.

[...]

Margaret Randall and Harvey Wolin – another beat poet who visited us – were appointed in charge of the edition on the American side, and Sergio Mondragón for the Spanish part. The funds for the first issue, which appeared in January 1962, were gathered in the course of those sessions of reading poems (Mondragón, quoted in Willer, 2003, s/p).

Mondragón's statement shows that the project has its origin in an unformalized collective that promoted the publication. Thus, the magazine starts in principle as a means to disseminate the work of that group, in such a way that in the first issue appear several of the authors who attended the meetings, such as Jaime Augusto Shelley, Carlos Coffeen Serpas, Ernesto Cardenal, Philip Lamantia, Leonora Carrington, Homero Aridjis and Raquel Jodorowsky, in addition to texts by the editor Margaret Randall and the editors Sergio Mondragón and Harvey Wolin.

However, the magazine expands its horizon rapidly and the collective that sustains it grows and is nourished by contributions from different latitudes and areas to offer its support not only



morally, but also financially, including in the sale and distribution of the magazine. The data in this regard are provided by the same journal that in each issue included a list of those who contributed economic resources, as well as their representatives in different parts of the world. This solidarity support network highlights, for example, the auction that Mexican painters carry out to finance the magazine or the reading that a group of women poets carry out in New York, under the title "Cunts for *Corno*", in order to raise funds for the magazine (Mondragón 2006, s / p).

We see that *El Corno Emplumado* was born and developed as an expression of a collective of poets and artists. Additionally, the fact that the *Corno* acts as a cultural movement that postulates as part of its program a social transformation from the aesthetic sphere, is directly evident in the pages of the magazine, since each issue begins with a note from the editors in which they will express the objectives of the magazine, they go beyond the purely aesthetic realm to project themselves into the sphere of the social. This is the case since the inaugural issue, where the fundamental concern of the journal is announced:

[...] this is a magazine whose pages are dedicated to serving the word and with which it is intended to create the publication that is needed today... Today, when relations between the countries of America are worse than ever, we hope that *EL CORNO EMPLUMADO* is the best (*non-political*) proof that WE ARE ALL BROTHERS (*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1962, p. 5. Italics in the original).

From this brief note several important points for our exhibition stand out. First of all, as Sarlo pointed out, there is the certainty that a magazine *is needed*. Secondly, it becomes evident that, as in Poggioli's characterization of avant-garde movement, the magazine is proposed as a project that from literary art (*the word*) seeks to influence a social reality (*the relations between the countries of America*). Finally, the brief message proclaims the collective character of the journal by emphasizing the first person plural (*we hope*), which will be a constant in the editorial texts of the journal. Such a sense of community will be topped off by enunciating the conviction of universal brotherhood (*we are all brothers*).



This sense of aesthetic-political movement that acquires the *Corno* will be built over the months and years, until consolidating a network of articulations with other magazines and collectives that is formalized in the New Solidarity Movement whose action crystallizes in the First American Meeting of Poets that was carried out without official support the first days of February 1964 and that was attended by poets from 15 countries, according to the news provided by *Corno* himself in his editorial note of number 10. The meeting was organized mostly by *Corno* together with the magazine *Pájaro Cascabel*, also from Mexico, and *Eco Contemporáneo*, from Argentina. As a result of the meeting, "The Declaration of Mexico" of the New Solidarity Movement was disseminated, in which the project of a spiritual revolution led by artists with a view to achieving peace is exposed.

The document clarifies that this revolution originates in art, but goes much further to engage with social movements, such as the struggle for the defense of the civil rights of the black population in the United States or the struggles for emancipation of the still colonized peoples and even the demands for world disarmament. To achieve this aesthetic and political revolution, the document signed by the *Corno* and reproduced in its number 10, points out that the work of the magazines is paramount:

Magazines are nothing more than the external signs of this inner revolution, as are the rest of the events in the political, scientific and economic fields. It is important to say that this revolution is more than just literary [...] (*El Corno Emplumado* 10, April 1964, p. 112)

This conviction that the spiritual revolution of art must necessarily have an impact on the social future, would lead the editor and the editor of the *Corno* not to evade their duty of conscience and condemn from its pages the growing repression of the Mexican government against the student movement of 1968, a pronouncement that would ultimately trigger the persecution against the magazine and its consequent disappearance:

El Corno emplumado (sic) strongly protests against such a state of affairs. We are aware that those responsible for the whole problem are the heads of Government, who have demonstrated their ineptitude, their cruelty and their spiritual blindness. And we tell you: this



violence was unleashed by you, who have used young people for their political moves; it has been unleashed by you through a whole history of lies, through the creation of this system that has money as its center and absolute god, through the international gangsterism that sustains the Great System and that is based on the exploitation and stupidization of human beings, through the revolutionary demagoguery with which they have governed our country.

Young students are, deep down, fighting this corrupt system. They hold in their hands the future and the present. Poetry and life is theirs. You old men have nothing to offer. They give it their all. Some of them have already offered their lives (*El Corno Emplumado* 28, October 1968, p. 5-6).

The Threshold of the New Age

To the extent that they are concerned with declaring the objectives of the journal and the group it represents, the editorial notes that accompany each issue of the *Corno* function in the manner of the programmatic texts of the publications of the avant-garde. The editorial notes hint at the way in which the idea of poetry and art appears and is transformed throughout the 31 issues of the magazine, but also offer clues to the way in which they conceive the relationship between art, life and politics.

For our analysis, these editorial notes are fundamental to trace the discursiveness that expresses the awareness of the threshold of the time in which the *Corno* is located and how, from this consciousness, they will claim the necessary transformation of vital praxis from art, in line with the avant-garde project. Of course, the discursiveness built from these notes is not free of contradictions and ambiguities, and although they will be transformed in their tone with the same flow and development of the magazine in its seven years of life, it is possible to identify certain constants related to that awareness of the threshold of time as a moment of historical transition of which the collective around the magazine is assumed as the protagonist. For example, the editorial note of the second issue declares the advent of uncertain times against which the determinations by the collective become peremptory:

Our organ of diffusion EL CORNO EMPLUMADO needs the help of all of us brothers of the present hour in which such contradictory voices are heard and in which the winds presage



storms and stumbles. The masks are falling with surprising rapidity the events anguish we are in a paradox the painful condition of man is sharpened. One thing the world needs: our sincerity and inner detachment. That is fraternity. *EL CORNO EMPLUMADO* is open to all voices and all sorrows (*El Corno Emplumado* 2, April 1962, p.5).

From this note it stands out in the first place that the point of enunciation is located in a present that looks towards a dark and uncertain future. However, the anguish that the dark future can produce, the text constitutes a call to action and clearly formulates its position in this moment of change: universal fraternity as a way to free people from suffering.

As already mentioned, each issue opens with a note from the editors in Spanish and English, although regularly both versions coincided, in many cases they presented differences. In the case of the editors' note that opens number two, the English version offers a fundamental variant with respect to the Spanish text, which can be read as a continuation of that and in the face of the threat of that dark future, the hopeful advent of a new era whose sign must be action is opposed:

To lift the mask. The new era. Action undisturbed by reaction, up, down, left, right, inside – to the point from which is comes. And carried. Somehow to continue, giving what is being made, what is important and honest, carefully made

Unmade:

"damned be the prism of the eye!"

(*El Corno Emplumado* 2, April 1962, p.5)

[Abandonar las máscaras. La nueva era. Acción no perturbada por la reacción, arriba, abajo, izquierda, derecha, adentro, hasta el punto de donde surge. Y apunta. Una vía para continuar, para dar lo que ha sido dado, lo que es importante y honesto, hecho amorosamente y deshecho:

"¡maldito sea el prisma del ojo!"³

³ [Own translation]



Despite their cryptic tone, it can be seen that the notes are ascribed to one of the myths of modernity, inseparable from the avant-garde project: the new beginning of history. At this point, let us remember that Jauss places as one of the most important myths of modernity that which arises with the French Revolution, when the revolutionary fact is celebrated as the "fulfillment of the desire for a new beginning of history, as a fundamental act of a society of free and equal" (2004, p. 51). This myth of the new beginning takes concrete form with the establishment of the revolutionary calendar that implies not only a new way of measuring time, but the restart of history. This impetus to establish a revolutionary temporality would fail, a fact that added to the decline of the intellectual legacy of the Enlightenment would shape the myths of the end of humanity and history.

As a corollary of this process, Jauss explains that, as a product of this disenchantment, from the mid-nineteenth century the claim that the end of history is necessary to open a new beginning of the world begins to be built, an aspiration that acquires full form in the avant-garde. Thus, when it is observed that from the sphere of the political a new beginning of history becomes unfeasible, then it is postulated "that only art can suppose a new beginning of the world, in an apparently irrepressible process" (2004, p. 51). From Jauss' perspective, the result of this process is the passage from the avant-garde from the artistic to the political field "to fix in an aesthetic revolution the new beginning of history under the direction of art", hence precisely the origin of proclamations such as those of futurists such as Balla and Depero who arrogate to themselves the task of "building the Universe again" (p. 62).

This would explain why in the editorial notes of the *Corn is* recurrent the presence of this program that postulates the advent of a new era of humanity, which will come from the hand of art. However, the discourse of the magazine does not remain only in the testimonial form, as a mere prophecy, but proposes itself as the agent from which this renewal must arise, always as an expression of a collectivity. See, for example, the editorial note in number three:

Mountains, trees, windows, large buildings, children, landscapes and modern science; we accept all these things openly and without suspicion. *It is necessary that the creative expression of our time be seen in the same way.* Our time – Cuba, Africa, Chessman, the atomic bomb,



collective protests, abstract expressionism, electronic music, a million children born daily – reduces our action to a madness that fractures the light in which we move. The answers we seek are hidden from us behind the machinery, dogma, old hatreds and functionalism of society. *EL CORNO EMPLUMADO will continue on the basis that beyond those categories we are united by a fraternity called art (El Corno Emplumado 3, July 1962, p. 5. Italics in the original).*

Approaching its first year, the mission of the *Horn* is proposed as a work of search and proposal in that liminal and uncertain space. That madness that fractures certainties is assumed to be that temporary rift between what *is no longer* and what is *not yet*.

The awareness of being on the threshold of an era for the young editors of *El Corno Emplumado* is the result of the complex social context that has been experienced internationally since the mid-50s of the twentieth century. Although there is a certain faith in fraternity through art, the editorial texts of the magazine show the deep anguish that the youth of the early 60s experience in a threatening social environment.

There are still remnants of McCarthyism in the United States that unleashed a witch hunt against any hint of communism and dissent. With the imperialist expansion of the United States, in Latin America there are coups d'état and military dictatorships in the region. In the late 50s and early 60s, the cold war between the blocs aligned with the United States and the Soviet Union enters its peak and the fear of a nuclear conflagration spreads among the youth. However, the decolonial processes in Africa and Asia, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the incipient anti-racist struggle in the United States revive the hope that change is possible. In Mexico, the situation is also complex, since the Mexican miracle reveals its authoritarian facet and the model of stabilizing development begins to present its fractures, with which waves of workers' mobilizations are unleashed with the railroad workers and their leader, Demetrio Vallejo, at the front.

In the midst of this breeding ground, it is therefore not surprising that the young members of the collective around the *Horn* felt the urgent need to act, therefore, Margaret Randall, remembering



those years highlights: "That feeling of imminent disaster (despair) counteracted by a passionate poetic vision (hope) permeated each of the issues of the publication" (2015, p. 114).⁴ Proof of this is the poem "Quetzalcoatl: 1961" that Randall publishes in the first issue of the *Corno*, where he expresses: "even now/ your Mexico/ has become/ the last bomb shelter" (*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1962, p. 14).

Although in the project of the Horn the anguish *is* present in the face of a convulsive environment, at the same time the publication raises a concrete activism that sees in art the only possibility of a profound renewal based on poetry – in the same way that Jauss pointed out for the avant-garde – therefore, in the editorial note of number six they declare:

We live in a new age, the Age of Man. It is new because it has been determined by cosmic processes, but it is also new because a new man has appeared – and is appearing – in us. And the poets, who are the voice of the tribe, sing to this new man; or better: from this new man.

They sing with the rhythm of psalm and words of air, simple as the wind, confident as the water that follows its course. They sing in every tone, full of all colors and all hopes. Sometimes they scream like children and their screams hurt the old man's ears, but they all sing the very act of witnessing to the new.

EL CORNO EMPLUMADO is an instrument to transmit the new word, which, that is, the new spirit. EL CORNO EMPLUMADO has its part – small and humble – in this miracle.

EL CORNO EMPLUMADO greets the Man of Air

(*El Corno Emplumado* 6, April 1963, p. 5).

4 As for the complex and contradictory way in which the agents of the avant-garde face their different historical thresholds, in which modernity is both promise and threat, it is worth recalling Evodio Escalante's analysis of the poem. *City*, by the stridentist Manuel Maples Arce: "... this oscillating character is one of the elements that have made it difficult for critics to correctly assess this master poem of stridentism. The old and the new are the protagonists of a struggle that is not yet fully decided, even if the theme and language of the text surprise by its topicality at the same time machinic and collectivist. The greatest paradox is that stridentism presents itself as a progressive movement that, however, at a certain level of the text, resists progressivism. Modernity is embraced at the same time as it is feared, even if unconsciously. It is enough to compare Maples' text with those of Mayakovsky, or to see it in the light of Soviet Soviet cinema of the time (I refer in particular to *Lo nuevo y lo viejo* by Einsenstein, 1929), to warn to what extent Mexican stridentism does not believe in progress blindly, or unconditionally: the triumph of tragedy is noticed at the same time. The future is also dark, and it opens the abyss of contingency, to put it another way. It is both promising and catastrophic. After reading *City*, one is convinced that the text obeys a complex process of gestation..." (2002, pp. 53-54).



In support of this program of action in the face of the advent of a new era, Mondragon and Randall will collect in the pages of the magazine poetic works in which precisely the need for a profound change in society resonates and the myth of the new beginning appears, where fraternal union will be the norm. An example is the poem "La ventana" by the Ecuadorian Ana María Iza:

A new definition of man will emerge
in the great dictionary of life.
Peace will enter the universe
on a donkey with a clean look.
In short: we will all go together,
through the sun and fog.
(*El Corno Emplumado* 6, April 1963, p. 38)

In a similar sense, in the same issue appears the Guatemalan Otto-Raúl González with the poem "El águila encumbrada", where the proximity of an era of renewal is also proclaimed:

I am the aurora. I am the day
and the night at the same time.
[...]
I am a man who lives
socialist has risen
than sidereal winds
with din they say hello.
[...]
I'm tomorrow. I am the people.
I am a lofty eagle.
I am the bread of the inhabitant
of the land of the future.
(*El Corno Emplumado* 6, April 1963, p. 140-141)



Of course it is foreseeable that the selection of the poems by the editor and the editor will be made looking for texts in line with this future program, however, there are elements to suppose that it would be an idea that spreads generationally and is shared among the collaborators of the magazine. In this vein, it stands out that the editorial note of number seven reiterates the idea of a new era where the new man is built while suggesting that the community of poets around the *Horn* participates in this program:

A new world is being developed, a new kind of man is already shaping up. Signs appear everywhere.

[...]

And although the storm rages and the pegs tighten, the poets remain dedicated to the task of knowing and expressing their inner world. The poets, those beings who suddenly stop to listen to the whistle of the wind. And the horn is his home, and here are his poems from the last three months.

(*El Corno Emplumado* 7, July 1963, p. 5).

As a confirmation of this program, in the same number seven, in the selection of Cuban poetry, the poem "Y lo nuestro es la tierra" by Regino Pedroso is integrated, which predicts:

The big days will come
like new coins rolling over life,
and then our hands will be filled with joy!

[...]

And ours
is the great voice of the wind,
that is mowing in the morning bunches of future!

(*El Corno Emplumado* 7, July 1963, p. 43)

To strengthen the assertion that the construction of a new era is a program shared by the community of poets who converge in the magazine, in the same number seven a series of letters from the



collaborators are reproduced where they express their conviction in this regard. For example, in the letter of Santiago Mathieu the same perception of that liminal state is hinted at, in which the old order is ceasing to exist to give way to renewal:

The day is near you feel it you smell it you can hear it galloping in the distance if we place our Indian ears on the ground where everyone will have RISEN in which the tombs will be opened and cries of newborn children will be heard and new songs and new laughter will be heard [...] (*El Corno Emplumado* 7, July 1963, p. 172)

Before concluding, it is necessary to dwell on the reference to the "Hombre de Aire", as the new man who will inhabit the new era, since it is a notion with profound implications in the renovation project that the magazine represents.

As Gabriela Silva has explained in her extensive analysis of *El Corno Emplumado*, the idea of the new man is an idea synthesized as the possibility that the contemporary individual can become a superior being from a profound transformation of his consciousness. Towards the 60s, this topic spreads in Latin America from two aspects: on the one hand, a spiritual and abstract vision and, on the other, a social and political vision, assumed by the revolutionary groups of the region (Silva, 2017, p. 145-146).⁵

The researcher herself points out that in the editorial project of the *Corno* the two positions converge: one more oriented to the spiritual in the first years of the publication and one more politicized towards the end. Silva postulates that the development of the journal occurs in three stages that respond to the divergences that the aesthetic and political positions of Randall and Mondragón acquire progressively. In her examination, the author highlights that the journal's

⁵ The idealized possibility of the advent of the New Man was a mark of the time shared by other poetic collectives in Mexico, for example, among the members of the group. *La Espiga Amotinada*, Juan Bañuelos, Óscar Oliva, Jaime Augusto Shelley, Jaime Labastida and Eraclio Zepeda, some of them they are also published in the *Cornel*. About that, you can see the work of Ali Hassan Rafael Franco, *Hay que heredar la tierra, hermanos. El poeta y el hombre nuevo en La Espiga Amotinada*. (2018).



position on the impact of art on social transformation will move from an approach that idealizes spirituality and art as a way of social change, to a position that demands concrete political interventions (2017, p. 139 et seq.). Thus, the author concludes that the first stage of the *Horn* would be marked by a central idea: "contemporary man is capable of becoming fully aware of himself and of transforming himself into a superior being, in the spiritual and human sense of expression" (p. 145).

From their spiritual and esoteric perspective, immersed in the ideas common to the counterculture of the 60s, the editors of the *Horn* were convinced that humanity was on the threshold between two astrological eras: the age of Pisces that was coming to an end, to give way to the age of Aquarius, which was announced as the great era of transformations. In this regard, Mondragón himself wrote to his colleague and friend Miguel Grinberg, editor of the Argentine magazine *Eco Contemporáneo*:

[...] Tibetan astrologers have announced the end of the age of Pisces, and the beginning of the age of Aquarius, an age of awakening, which translated into our Western language would be more or less the age of man (Mondragon, quoted in Manzano, 2017, p. 122).

This conviction of being located in the period of the change of the astrological era will be reiterated by the editors in the presentation note of number nine of the journal, which reads:

In eight issues we have published poetry, prose, theater, letters, art, and spoken about a New Age inhabited by a New Man. Many still ask who this new man is and what new era he lives in. One can even feel the change within oneself and resist—as we sometimes do—to give it a name. Pisces/Aquarius. A spiritual revolution that is historically compared to the industrial revolution: a leap from the machine to the mind and heart. (*El Corno Emplumado* 9, January 1964, p. 5)

The astrological sign of Aquarius, remember, despite its name corresponds precisely to the element air, but according to the *Dictionary of Symbols*, its "aquatic resonance testifies to a nutritive substance more destined to quench the thirst of the soul than that of the body", it is a sign that "raises the world of elective affinities, who turn us into beings who live in a spiritual community and in the



full universal sphere" (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1993, p. 48). Even, explains the same dictionary, there is also a Uranic and Promethean Aquarius, which is "the being of the avant-garde, of progress, of emancipation, of adventure" (p. 48).

In short, from the perspective of the magazine, the new man is the man of the air, of the age of Aquarius, the era of the transformation of the Spirit and of fraternity, the man of the avant-garde, of innovation and libertarian search. This esoteric dimension acquires in the pages of the *Horn* a decisive impact that affects both thematic and formal aspects of its contents.

In the first place, it is evident that the very title of the magazine contains this transcendent aspect of the spiritual breath in the figure of the horn or trumpet, which by itself contains various reminiscences linked to the announcement of the great historical and cosmic events (Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1993, p. 1027). As for the genesis of the name of the magazine, Randall and Mondragón have referred that with it they sought to synthesize on the one hand the world of jazz, with all its creative freedom and its affiliation to the counterculture and, on the other, the power of the pre-Hispanic cultures embodied in the myth of Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent (Randall, 2015, p. 102).

This idea of the primordial breath that feeds the music and the expressive freedom typical of jazz improvisation, beyond the mere occurrence, is a paradigm that had great diffusion among the young poetry of the continent, in such a way that it came to constitute a paradigm of formal innovation of the principles of composition of the time.

In this sense, Gabriel Ramos (2018) points out that hand in hand with the explorations that the Beats poets had made in the 50s, in terms of the conceptualization of poetry as a vital and musical breath, as a song determined by the rhythm of the inspiration-exhalation flow, the use of free verse is disseminated among young Latin American poets, without restrictions either in form or in its sense, since:

The form is confirmed in a free discourse, motivated by a vital rhythm common to the individual, nature and history. The poem is the record of the search for images, not their



conclusion or condensation; without a restrictive order, it sometimes appears neat (2018, p. 18).

Ramos himself refers that faithful to the spirit of the time, in the *Corno* appear poems that respond to this compositional principle and cites as an example the poem "Occidental saxo" by Jaime Augusto Shelley, published in the first issue, where it reads:

Edgar Blackie, black double bass
Up
climb the rungs
of an endless ladder in search of work
[...]
Edgar goes down infinite steps
stairs retrace corridors and elevators
always stumbling with his laughter to five fingers
[...]
Mr. Blackie musician and traveler
tañedor of the twentieth century.
(Shelley cited in Ramos, 2018, p. 23)

As for the cosmic-spiritual sense that the notion of the man of air acquires in the pages of the magazine, Margaret Randall herself publishes in the number one of the magazine, the poem "The joining of the sign" -perhaps in reference to the sign of Aquarius-, in which the air is associated with the spirit as a pneuma or vital breath that breathes of consciousness awakens to the enunciative voice, in an apparent reminiscence of the religious practices of the East:

great spirit descending descending
where
why where battering
web of complications silence of complications / to



breathe away a w a y
glorious (they know) glorious
in quiet places
filling / casting off of before
the questions
and filling time.
(*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1961, p. 12)

[El gran espíritu desciende desciende
dónde
por qué, dónde palpita
en la red de los dilemas en el silencio del dilema / para
respirar exhalar e x h a l a r
y es glorioso (lo saben) es glorioso
en el espacio y el silencio
es pleno / y en el origen expulsa
las dudas
plenitud del tiempo]⁶

The poem also proposes a set of symbols, in which air is assimilated to sunlight, in its aspect of genetic force, while divine power (air-light) that illuminates and expands consciousness:

happening in the sun
light / air full of sun sun
full of air
here happening in brightness
the sun
when before a womb of rain

⁶ [Own translation]



was web of consciousness

(*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1961, p. 13)

[Acontence en el sol
luz / aire pleno de sol sol
pleno de aire
aquí emerge el brillo
el sol
así, ante el vientre de la lluvia
fue lienzo para la conciencia]⁷

As for its form, the poem stands out for interspersing broad verses with very brief ones that both musically and graphically replicate the leisurely rhythm of controlled breathing of meditation practices.

The theme of breath/breathing/music/singing also appears in the selection of poems that the other editor, Harvey Wolin, included in the inaugural issue of the *Horn*. Like Randall's texts, Wolin's poems are organized into irregular verses and singular paronomasias games to allude to breathing, for example, in the poem "Momma blues", whose musicality is obviated in its title:

im (*sic*) everything in the morning
nothing by time of night
i hear my vespersed breathing
whisper Sister Whisper
repeat the rhyme of blood

(*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1961, p. 38)

[soy totalidad matutina

⁷ [Own translation]



nada soy en la hora nocturna
escucho mi aliento vespéral
susurra Hermana Susurrante

repite la rima de la sangre]⁸

For his part, Sergio Mondragón presents a series of two poems, "Altarpiece first" and another untitled, in the first of which he questions the possibility of knowledge from Western rationality, exemplified in the number Pi, while in the second the theme of breath appears again, characterized here as a possible response to a vital search that seems fruitless:

I look for your face in the trees
I look for your eyes in the dark
of my fever nights
I find your breath.
I take your blood.

(*El Corno Emplumado* 1, January 1961, p. 80)

Conclusions

At the end of the 1950s the world was experiencing a series of rearrangements in politics and economics, dark shadows rising on the horizon while evidence emerges that a social transformation is viable. In the words of Jauss, we are facing an epochal threshold: the situation is that of a world that *does not end* and a new horizon that is *not yet*. In this context, the magazine *El Corno Emplumado/The Plumed Horn* emerges as a company of a group of young poets and artists in their process of becoming aware of the need to be protagonists of this historical threshold.

As part of this process, *El Corno Emplumado* updates a series of attitudes and procedures assimilated to the avant-garde. In principle, the creation of the magazine results from the meeting of a collective that recovers the utopian impulse that places in art the reformulation of a vital praxis that

⁸ [Own translation]



affects social transformation, where poetry should be the paradigm and axis of reference. In order to assume itself as an actor of this threshold of epoch that should lead to social transformation, *El Corno Emplumado* updates the avant-garde myth of the new beginning and (re)constructs discursively the utopia of the imminent advent of a New Age, the era of the New Man, the Man of Air, as an era of aesthetic and spiritual revolution that will bring with it universal fraternity. Once consolidated as an editorial project, *El Corno Emplumado* will strengthen its ties, adding sympathies and support to configure an authentic cultural movement that maintains on its horizon the primary task of transforming life from art.

In short, the long-lived publishing company of the *Corno* is evidence that for the 60s certain elements of the avant-garde project survive in the social horizon as a viable practice that offers the conceptual and discursive bases to face a reality that demands of the artists a position. Sergio Mondragón and Margaret Randall manage to shape the manifestations and attitudes of a broad collective that, still diverse and heterogeneous, shares the vision that a transformation is necessary and possible. From this point of view, it can be postulated that, as a cultural movement of an aesthetic and political nature, the *Corno* means an element of continuity of the avant-garde project, updated and transformed to adapt to the specific reality that the young people of the 60s face.

The avant-garde attitude of distrust towards instrumental reason is replicated in *the corn* program as a rejection of Western science, perceived as the progenitor of nuclear weapons. Therefore, the searches of the young poets grouped in the magazine lead them to look for alternative knowledge and explore in Eastern religions, esotericism, astrology and tarot. These elements, as we saw, shape the programmatic discourse of the journal and affect formal and thematic aspects of the works they publish.

Although in the pages of the same *Corno* does not explicitly manifest an intention or interest to assume itself as a continuity of the avant-garde, it can be seen that when a mature Sergio Mondragón reviews in retrospect the youthful magazine, he understands that the publication operated in the context of what we can call an *avant-garde continuum*.



In that sense, let us remember that in 1988 Mondragón wrote the prologue for the first edition of *Poemas estridentistas* by Germán List Arzubide, where he points out that the avant-garde impulse, represented in Mexico by stridentism, continued to nourish an important part of Mexican poetry, the most experimental, which became more visible in the 60s, it is disseminated in independent magazines such as *Pájaro Cascabel*, *Cuadernos del Viento*, *Mester*, *El Rehilete* and, of course, *El Corno Emplumado*. Thanks to this avant-garde persistence, Mondragón points out in the same prologue, "a genealogy has been built that extends to this day, in the youngest poets, those who make the volatility and asymmetry of their language the adventure par excellence of their lives" (1998, p. 21).

In these words of Mondragón his conviction is inferred that the avant-garde impulse is not extinguished at a certain moment in history, but that it is a power capable of surviving in each present, in the form of waves, as permanent transformations, in the manner pointed out by Jauss and Del Gizzo, and as the editor himself mentioned in his aforementioned hypothesis of a permanent avant-garde.

Although the idea of identifying the work of the first avant-garde as an ephemeral episode is usual, there were some of its protagonists who visualized their transformation project as a task that, to be realized, necessarily had to be prolonged in time. Proof of this is the thought of José Carlos Mariátegui, who for the second anniversary of *Amauta* – an indispensable magazine for the Latin American avant-garde – after having suspended the edition of it, clarified:

But *Amauta* was not born to stay in episode, but to be history and to make it. If history is the creation of men and ideas, we can face the future with hope. Of men and of ideas, it is our strength.

The first obligation of every work, of the genre of which *Amauta* has imposed itself, is this: to last. History is duration. The isolated cry is not worth it, no matter how long its echo may be; it is worth the constant, continuous, persistent preaching. (*Amauta* 17, September 1928, p. 1. Reproduced in Müller-Bergh and Mendoza, 2005, p. 175)

Finally, it is clear that, with the perspective of the years, the editor of *El Corno Emplumado* identifies his magazine as the protagonist of this avant-garde continuum. Such a formulation opens new



questions as to the particularities and components of this hypothetical "permanent avant-garde" and about what would be the role of *El Corno Emplumado* in this articulation and, above all, how the collective agents associated with the avant-garde idea that precede the *Corno* and those that appear later would participate in this series, such as the poeticist group, the collective of *La Espiga Mutinada* and the infrarealist movement.

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