

## RAMON DACHS: A CASE OF INTERSTITIAL ERGODICITY

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*Euràsia: tot u* is the “complete cycle of poetry” by Ramon Dachs (1960) that covers over twenty years of literary creation summarised in ten basic books and two *post-scriptum*. This range of creative adventures described by the collection can be grouped thematically around four structural axes. In an interesting and extensive interview given to José Antonio Martínez Muñoz in “Movimiento actual<sup>1</sup>”, the poet maintains that *love*<sup>2</sup>, *the others*<sup>3</sup>, *the universe*<sup>4</sup> and *words*<sup>5</sup> are the four great fronts in which his poetry operates. In my opinion, however, *Eurasia* is a unique project comprising four blocks introduced by four pictorial reproductions: “The origin of the world<sup>6</sup>” by Courbet (1866), “On the bank, in the moonlight” (anonymous, tenth-eleventh century), “Circle, triangle, square” by the Zen master Sengai (eighteenth century) and “Composition with two lines” by Mondrian (1931) that “give away” with greater precision those which I see to be different – and convergent as a whole –aspects of poetry: the erotic-amorous, the architectural or epistemological, the intertextual and the numinous.

But to talk of literary creation in Ramon Dachs requires the reader to expand their notion of the literary to realise the underlying personal search for authenticity the length and breadth of a written journey. Notions such as “recreation”, “rewriting”, “palimpsest”, “intertextuality”, “textual fractality”, “written geometry”, or “hypertext” should be the object of meticulous reflection to access a textual land without precedent in the Catalan language<sup>7</sup>. The literary ergodicity<sup>8</sup> of Ramon Dachs is particularly evident in compositions such as *Escriptura geométrica. Escriptura fractal*, but also, and with different media, the hypertextual book of poems that brings together two of his works published in paper format: *Intermínims de navegació poètica* and *Blanc*, which is a book of reversible verses<sup>9</sup>.

Curiously, it has been poets rather than theorists, who have called for a necessary association in literature between the linguistic structures and the meaning of the text. Jorge Guillén, for example, talks of poetry as a "unit of meaning and sound" and Paul Valéry defines the poem as a "*hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens*". The ethics and aesthetics of Ramon Dachs that sees in poetry a form of knowledge, brings together these conceptions, while at the same time exploring and generating a closely-woven network of minimal connections, textual contacts, literary analogies that arise from an ambitious and open intellectual project in which – apart from looking into personal forms of literary evolution, of disciplinary transversality – a formidable exercise of opening the western literary canon has been carried out. This particular literary *queste* establishes a relationship with an entire poetic history that explains us as human beings in search of new literary expressions with which to feed our imagination and spirit: a history of experimentation and conquest.

### *Hypertextual ergodicity: Intermínims de navegació poètica*

*Intermínims de navegació poètica* is the first hypertextual book of poems that appeared on the Spanish network and the circumstance arises that it covered and uncovered two previously published poetic itineraries: *Poemes mínims* and *Cimbra blanca*, in Spanish and Galician, respectively<sup>10</sup>. Beyond the fascination produced by creative means whose aim was to juggle words and machines, it is a literary exercise that transcends the transparency of discourse and appeals decidedly to the complexity of time, which inscribes unpronounceable semantic instances in a traditional figurative presentation.

We know that poetry with Mallarmé established a new reality of self-representation. Since then, the production of texts has become an act of infinite self-reflection, without any kind of concessions to communication. In *Un coup de dés*, Mallarmé carries out his revolution of the poetic language. In this composition, originally published in 1897 in "Cosmópolis" magazine, the typographical composition – with the variations of the characters of the writing, the interpositioning of "blanks" between sections of writing and between one word and another – gives the text a rhythm that is not determined by the accents of the words or the accents of the verses, but by the

position of the word on the page. This way, a new art is made from space. Space takes the place of time. If, in traditional verse, even in free verse, it is the time, linear, word sequence that is according to rhythm, here scansion is spatial. It is, therefore, more a text for the eye than the ear. The “blanks” do not function as rhythmical indicators, as silent pauses inside the text. Insofar as the signs are written on the white surface of the page, the ones that surround the words are not silent pauses but words that are lost in space, giving rise to abstract creations, words that influence a background silence.

This last work by Mallarmé which, according to an expression by the young Valéry, was worthy of being considered “an act of dementia”, is only the coherent consequence of poetics that had never been discursive and which now approach a non-alphabetic reading with the possibility of playing with the page and paging. The text opens with “*Un coup de dés*” and concludes with “*Toute pensée émet un coup de dés*”, a perfect chiasmus structure. The following phrase is also clearly observed: “*Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard*”, a phrase that can be read from left to right and from top to bottom throughout the entire textual route, it is located according to the principle of dissemination and dispersion which fragments it, but which maintains its union based on the typographical coherence. Mallarmé develops a logic of the words and intervals between words: a logic, therefore, of the spatial distribution, the typographical aesthetics of the page. The linearity is interrupted and we must read it at a distance. Almost analogically with the *leitmotive*, musicals create an architecture and a music of words, new writing for the eyes and for the mind: a real visual score. Similarly, but keeping to an experiment of textual exploration, intertextual developed to the maximum by electronic hypertextuality, Dachs’ *Intermínims* – the title of which combines the idea of interrelating the poems which are already themselves minimal that made up the homonymous book – embody the breakdown of conventional poetic discourse while offering a new language based on the capacity of evocation and conceptual connection between the various references that comprise the work.ordered

This poetry, the victim of the temptation of silence, seeks its reason for being in the expressive concision and condensation. Each “poem” has a degree of brevity that leads us to deduce that the poet has carried out a work of extreme synthesis, similar to a Japanese haiku<sup>11</sup>. In contrast to this, I believe that it is rather “another” way of showing us the experience of the totality, now characterised by a briefness that in itself is fully sufficient, it satisfies the

communicative need of the creator as though it were a larger text. There, in that hard-to-grasp virtuality of the barely dilated screen-page are the essences of a reflection of life. The determination of textual minimisation is such that, at times it seems to me that I am not reading poetry, but that my reading flows over a sea of fragmentary, almost epigrammatical, texts. I quickly realise, however, that in the case of Dachs, the fragmentation has a huge creative force in that the object of textual realisation moves topographically and it is this nomadism that enables dark or transparent associations to flower (depending on the circumstances) that blend words and verses of the whole poetical body. Consequently, the word bursts into this poetry with an overwhelming force that unmistakably leads to the cosmovision of its creator. This way, the text is integrated as an incessant and personal poetic flow in which each reader configures and covers their reading itinerary, in other words, their particular book of poems. Compositional simplicity does not detract even a jot of strength from the break-up of all the limits of thought out, regular and preconceived structures that comprise the known territory of analogical literature. We have before us, therefore, poems that do not cease, but that simply stop a while – as decided by the reader – to then continue with another poem, another association, another link...

These shifts in reading reorient it with each click towards unsuspected meanings that appear and which add in the text the allusions that they generate. They are also ideally out of the range of the author who, at the same time, through the accumulative structure of verse indexation and hypertextual association through links towards the cadence of appearance of the words in the book of poems, has wanted to reveal to us the secret association of each element present at all times during the creation of his discourse. Unlike sequential reading, which is also possible in *Intermínims*, the hypertext creates the feeling of an almost unlimited vastness that the poet has wanted to give us in a minute manner. This way, despite the profound seriousness involved in knowing the purified wisdom that is exuded in multilingual verses, I feel that we should also consider that the same existence of the hypertextual mechanism gives the word a high, if not entertaining meaning, which is at least open, easily manipulated and, therefore, experimental.

## *Geometric and fractal writing*

Ramon Dachs' geometric writing comes from a dual desire. The ambition of conquering the temporary nature of the word ("writing versus the voice"), which he considers to be the consequence of its oral dimension, on the one hand, and of the willingness to substitute the temporal linearity with a simultaneous layout in space ("geometric writing") that modifies the usual structure of the written text, developing a new verbal syntax where associations take place in the space, rather than in time, of the other<sup>12</sup>.

Dachs' first poetic cycle, *Poeta y muro*, at the end of spring 1978, had already been integrated by multilingual writings (basically in Spanish, with the presence of Catalan and French texts), but also by metapoetic objects, such as a "book by the artist" entitled *9000cm cúbico-poéticos*, a jar that collects the ashes of poetic output which the author ritually burnt to rid himself of texts that he considered insufficient or a painting covered in concrete that gives the book of poems its title, to name but two. The predominance of the plastic component transforms the piece into an unprecedented work: unpublizable due to its compositional variety and the nature of the elements that make up the textuality but, at the same time, which cannot be exhibited because of the amount of activity that the supposed "reader/visitor" would have to do and which the author describes as "boxes and drawers had to be opened, females unyoked, objects and papers unfolded and handled... to end up reading small letters<sup>13</sup>". It was, in short, a perfect example of the transgression of genres, halfway between art and literature that, to a large extent, marked Ramon Dachs' later output.

This way, at the start of the summer of 1978, the first geometric writing saw the light of day (1, 2, 3 of the present series of 6 exhibited at the UPC<sup>14</sup> and at the IVAM<sup>15</sup>) which ended up becoming part of exhibitions where literature is present as texture, as writing and which, altogether, make up a particular poetic-literary reflection. Taking glass surfaces on building façades as a textual inscription space, Ramon Dachs prints the text in the space (writing on the architectural writing that is represented by a building), plays with colour (for example at the Valencia exhibition the three basic colours of the arch of a rainbow served as the geometric text, while black was the colour of the fractal writing) and proposed that the visitor/reader made a set of associative projections between words that were linked to points and that had to be read using a geometric reading key, in other words, by following concepts such as

“symmetry”, “segment” “triangle”, etc. With regard to fractal writing, an added sample of transtextuality in Dachs, I consider that the mathematical relationship of the concept provided by Mandelbrot in the 1970s can be put forward here from the etymological and, if you like, conceptual point of view rather than from a strictly scientific point of view. In this sense, fractal geometry provides a description and a type of mathematical model for the complicated forms of nature and, therefore, despite the diversity, a fractal is, in essence, a complex and structurally detailed geometric figure at any level of magnification. Etymologically speaking, however, and due to the fact that “fractal” comes from the Latin *fractus*, it is also associated with the idea of part or fraction, since the quality that distinguishes the fractal is precisely its rarely whole dimension. Common to all fractals is that they are the product of iteration, repetition, of an elementary geometric process that leads to a final structure of an apparently extraordinary complication. Consequently, in the fractal writing model proposed by Dachs, besides the words-full stop structure that was a decisive trait in geometric writing, the words used in the structure from which they are derived are modified, which creates a file-textual effect that, in fact, is considered archi-textual.

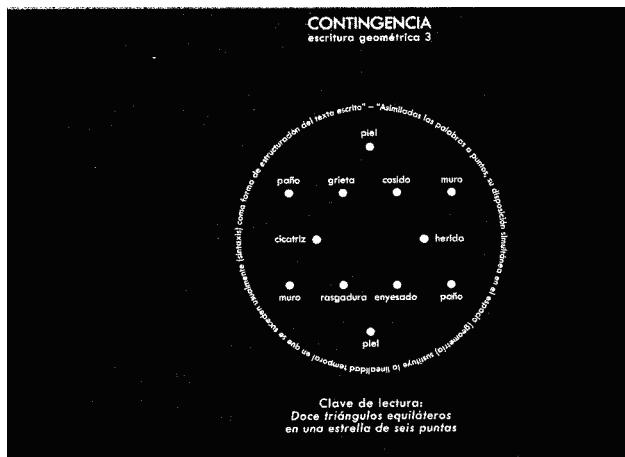


Figure 1. *Contingència. Escriptura geomètrica núm. 3* by Ramon Dachs.

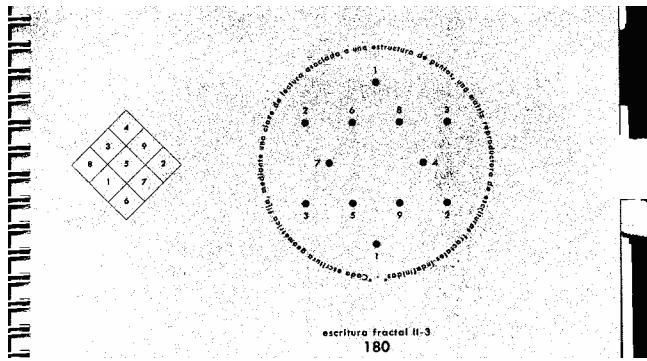


Figure 2. *Escriptura fractal II-3* by Ramon Dachs.

In effect, it is worth paying attention to the textual scenario, since the text is contextualised, supported and presented in a logic of confluences – both geometric and semantic – that give meaning and materialise their presence and meaning. I am now thinking of *Contingència. Escriptura geomètrica núm. 3*, where the key to reading are the twelve equilateral triangles compressed into a six-point star, each of the vertices of which (like each of the geometric figure that they constitute, in other words, the triangle) correspond to a word<sup>16</sup>. The space is the text because the words have locations, points, and reading occurs based on the relations between spaces, by means of the routes that are the lines – the first dimension of geometry – that join the points and determine a consequently geometric reading itinerary. The eagerness for simultaneousness or reading parallel, co-existing and multiple linearities is more present here than ever. In this sense, therefore, the reasoning that present the “text” as a possible discourse transform it into an architext, in other words, a vectorial muddle that awards relative coherence to the universe of the page inscribed and written on and to the semantic game that is established between concepts such as “pell-drap-mur”, “pell-ferida-cicatriu”, “drap-estrip-cosit”, “mur-esquerda-enguixat”, “pell-esquerda-cosit”, “mur-estrip-cicatriu”, “ferida-estrip-esquerda” or “cicatriu-cosit-enguixat”, which designate, respectively, three similar materials, the process of the leather, the fabric and the wall, the first and fifth process in a simple metaphor and three contingencies and three similar resolutions.

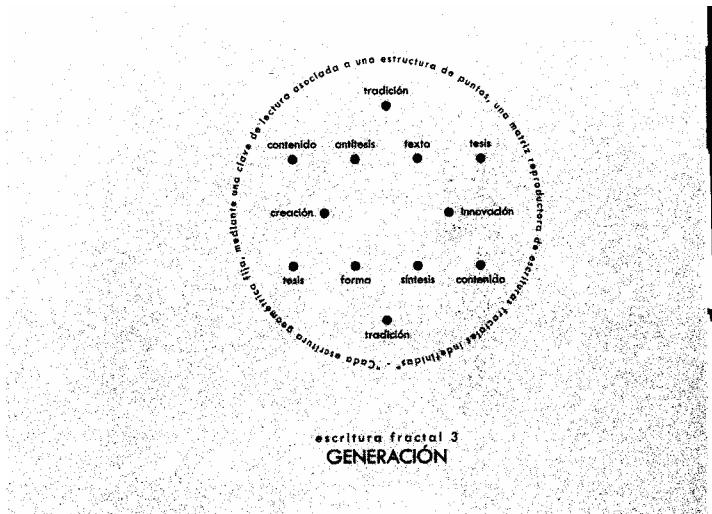


Figure 3. *Escritura fractal 3: Generación* by Ramon Dachs.

As I see things, it would be a mistake to look for the underlying literary interest in a sample of conceptual writing such as this which makes an effort to display a certain cognitive operating mechanism, according to which understanding would be a geometrisation in the quality of the text created. Rather, its interest lies – apart from its undeniable ergodicity – in the capacity that this device has to produce, considered fractally, *ad libitum* “texts”. At the same time, it should also be pointed out that the interest caused by writing that willingly positions itself at the limit of consideration between what is literary and what is artistic, the scientific and the literary, subverting frontiers, making them problematic, fusing them, presenting itself even as an exhibition – a common resource for the plastic arts – but eminently textual. In a highly unique context with an innovative and extremely personal artistic commitment, creativity is more clearly aimed at the task of conceptualisation, choosing textual or fractal structures, creating formal reading procedures, the conception of the cyber text<sup>17</sup>, in the final analysis; not in the resulting text, which is no more than the reflex repeated to the infinity of a fixed initial matrix. In this context – and in a very similar way to what occurs in electronic computer-generated poetry – it could be said that its originality does not lie so much in the result of its textual output as in the procedures of its creation. We should take into account these procedures which have a lot to do with the language of mathematics and algorithmic operations where the written materiality of the text is

constructed to understand how the text is presented to the reader on this page/screen that is the space – a space, the materiality of which disappears as it is made of glass, which greatly reinforces the total spatial inscription for which it aims, at the same time as re-dimensioning the fractality to which it aspires and in which it is recognised.

The way in which Dachs wants to make artistic-literary creation problematic seems to me more than notable. His work reveals substantial differences regarding the classical notion of a “text”, a concept which, in fact, is modified according to how it is positioned in relation to the “author/text” vertex, or in relation to the “reader/text” vertex that in some convincing way has been theoretically explained in relation to electronic poetry by Philippe Bootz<sup>18</sup>. He specifically talks of "written-text" (*text-écrit*), "visual-text" (*texte-à-voir*) and "read-text" (*texte-lu*). For Bootz, the "written-text" is the one created by the author and is structured according to the author's own, specific logic. The “visual-text” (*texte-à-voir*), for its part, will be the text seen by the reader. This is a text that is inserted into time (in this case, individual reading time would correspond to the duration of the visit to the exhibition) upon which the reader makes a mental image, a “read-text”, which is the space of the construction of the sense. In short, therefore, the “written-text” would be characterised by a structured created by the author and applied by him to a series of geometric codes – in the case of the example provided, the six-pointed star – that produces the “visual-texts”, which, in turn, and following the fractal metaphor, put forward by the author himself, generates different reading routes. To a certain extent, we can consider that two different readers would understand two different “visual-texts” that correspond to two different generations of the same “written-text”. This conception created by Bootz which is useful when trying to account for a question that is central to the purpose of the relationship between literature and computing, interactivity, can be applied here to geometry. The level of interactivity that emanates from the reading key put forward by the author in the UPC exhibition leaflet, for example, is decidedly limited. However, if we take the potential of geometric reading *per se* and if we also consider the potential offered by Sierpinski's fractal triangle model – obtained when a triangle is extracted from the original triangle formed by the middle points of its sides and we repeat this process indefinitely with each of the triangles obtained – then the introduction of the reader/visitor into the text, i.e. their interactivity in its broadest sense, would also be

possible and would allow reading routes or “read texts” not considered *a priori* by their author. In the example to which we have been referring up until now, textual cadences emerge that have been visually and geometrically established by the reader: the rectangle that brings together contingencies with “esquerda-estrip-cosit-enguixat” resolutions, or the hexagon: “cicatriu-esquerda-cosit-ferida-enguixat-estrip” or, according to Sierpinski’s model and imaging a nerve centre that, in light of “nominal” choice could very well be “pain”, with textual sequences appearing, such as: “cicatriu-estrip-dolor” or “ferida-enguixat-dolor”, to name but two.

I do not want go on at length because in the small space that I have, I would not be able to touch on any other consideration in sufficient depth which the work of this author, who strives to revive the essence and the limits of each new output, deserves. However, as far as we can add the consideration of the poet on his poetry, which sees silence as the centre of gravity<sup>19</sup>, to the structural complexity and palimpsest of his multi-dimensional writing, the resulting combination seems to me to be a great intellectual and literary coherence.

Without a doubt, over time a line of poetic continuity emerges in the literary creation of Ramon Dachs. A space and a passage through a precise and measured name, poetry with elements which insists, which reiterates conscience. Deep down, the construction of an elementary world is an architectural exercise. Ramon Dachs learnt to write by taking his time, and he continues to do so. In light of the results, this has been a wonderful apprenticeship.

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## NOTES

1. Martínez Muñoz (2003).
2. *Obagues* (1985), *Fosca endins* (1993), *Vacant* (1995), *Llibre d’amiga* (1998).
3. *Cent un jueus de XinaTang* (1997)
4. *Poemes mínims* (1995), *Cima branca* (1995), *Quadern rimbaldià* (1996), *Intermínims de navegació poètica* (1996) and *Blanc* (1998).
5. *Escriptura fractal* (1999).

6. This painting, which was not exhibited at a museum, specifically The Brooklyn Museum of Art, until 1988 and only in 1995 was it integrated into the French national collections, has been a key reference, the driving force for reflections by Lacan or Heidegger, to name but two.
7. The example of Ramon Llull which Dachs has provided as the fundamental reference in his literary tradition is of no use to me now since this truly exceptional case in Catalan literary history is an example that can only be understood within the setting of its time and circumstances. Having taken into account the radial otherness of procedures and intentions of the devout Mallorcan, the approach to Lullian texts, to a whole literary system must be made from the perspective of a “new literature”. In this vein, his textual output has been placed in relation to a level of reasoning and difficulty similar to a computational one.
8. Ergodic literature is the type of literature, which, according to Espen Aarseth, expects and calls for non-trivial effort on the part of the reader. Aarseth has coined the term using the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos* which mean "work" and "path", respectively, and uses it to refer to literary creations that call for an effort that is in no way trivial which enables the reader to cross the text, to penetrate its meaning. This takes us to a literary universe that is not exclusively digital, but which also embraces production on paper. A clear example of ergodic literature would be *Rayuela* by Cortázar.
9. In *Blanc* (1998), Ramon Dachs offers us a poem made of twenty-four poems, each of which comprises two monostics that mark out and qualify themselves respectively and in a complementary way in Catalan and French, culminating in a distich. Conceived as a “reversible bilingual book”, where each unnumbered page contains a single verse, it is a simultaneous and bilingual poem, without beginning or end, since the imposed alphabetical order is conventional.
10. *Intermínims de navegació poètica* has been translated and can be found on-line in Spanish (<http://www.llibreweb.com/interminims/pcsearcc.htm>, trans. by Anne-Hélène Suárez Girard), English (<http://www.llibreweb.com/interminims/pcsearch.htm>, trans. by Karel Clapshaw) and French

(<http://www.llibreweb.com/interminims/pcsearcf.htm>, trans. by Anne-Hélène Suárez Girard).

11. The importance that oriental poetry had for Dachs should not be overlooked here.
12. Although, in essence, the temporal component cannot be disassociated from the word, be it written or spoken, because reading, not perception but reading, occurs in a linear way.
13. Dachs (2004, 18).
14. The exhibition entitled *Escriptura geomètrica* was held at the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya from 10 to 27 November 1998.
15. The *Escriptura geomètrica, escriptura fractal* exhibition was held at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern from 28 September to 1 October 1999, extended twice until 9 January 2000.
16. One might think that there is a certain contradiction in conferring the same word to two points, which occurs with "fabric" and "wall".
17. Here, I see "cyber text" as a mechanical device for the production and consumption of verbal signs; of a textual machine irrespective of the support with which these signs are associated.
18. In this sense, as explained by Joan Elies Adell (2004), the concepts used by Bootz (1997 and 1999) are very similar to the other words conceived previously by Juan Miguel Company and Jenaro Talens when they established an interesting and productive distinction between "textual space" and "text", which complements the theory put forward by Bootz. For Company and Talens, consideration of literature and even art in general as a means of communication must be displaced by its consideration as a production, both in the creative and the reading process, and, finally, polarised from the receptive nucleus, recognising different, but non-essential, degrees between the creation and reading processes. Consequently, the textual space would be a "place" to which, with the aim of reconstructing and decoding the presence of the other, we give meaning: "*text* is the result of reading/transformation work carried out on the textual space; work, the aim of which is not only to give it *meaning* (something inherent to the space in such updating of the language and in no

way added to it), but to possess meaning” (Company & Talens 1979, 44).

19. Interview in “*Movimiento actual*” (129, January 2003).

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