

## **4 A Poetics of Accumulation of Likenesses**

### **From the “Notes on the Sea” to the *Stone Poems***

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#### **4.1 Introduction: Neither Chaste nor Mutilated, nor Academic Images**

The “Notes on the Sea” are a group of six remarkably short paragraphs that were originally put together in *L'Amic de les Arts* in 1926.<sup>1</sup> In that context, these notes were displayed to the right of a painting by Cézanne, *La Maison Maria avec une vue du Château Noir* (ca. 1895). On the previous page, Sebastià Gasch published a three-column essay devoted to the piece by the painter from Aix-de-Provence. Gasch was a detractor of Cézanne’s approach to painting itself, which he accused of relying only on the senses and not on a pre-conceived and strongly interiorized idea of composition, derived from architectonic laws, “the offspring of number and of reason” (Gasch 1926, 4). Without mentioning it, Gasch echoed some elements of the

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**1** Published in the sixth issue of *L'Amic de les Arts*, in September 1926.

aesthetic doctrine of ‘arbitrarism’,<sup>2</sup> popularized by Eugeni d’Ors some years earlier. It consisted in the imposition of a balanced, intellectual dominion over the work, which would free creators from sensory contingency and place them equally distanced from romantics and realists (Ors, “Sobre una alusió”, 1906, 1). To the critic, who titled the article “Cézanne’s Tragedy”, the painter’s works must be comprehended in tragic terms, because he constantly revised, repeated and varied his paintings in pursuit of a balance between forms and colors that he could never find. In sum, Gasch accused Cézanne of lacking an intellectual method of painting, thus mixing up Nature and Art.

As mentioned above, Foix’s poems wonder – often explicitly – about the modes of knowledge and the possibilities open to the senses and to reason regarding poetic composition and existential questioning. However, he did not completely align with Gasch’s radical separation between Nature and Art, nor did he consider the former to be just “a dictionary of forms” for the artist (Gasch 1926, 4), but rather the source of the communication to which the poet corresponds in the composition. In the prose poems gathered under the title *Quatre nus* (Four Nudes) and included in the first collection of Foix’s *Poetic Works* (Nauta, 1964), a poetological statement is laid out in a straightforward manner:

I want to say, with the ambition of grasping, between desire and dream, many images that murmur to the ears and are sensual to the soul. (QN, 287)

Each poem unfolds an image derived from a previous verse of his own, cited as an epigraph: a tree, a rock, a girl, and a horse become the objects of deep poetic exploration. But Foix filled the poems with dark likenesses – that is, with disorganized, accumulative, and de-contextualized images, and with recurring transformations and disappearances. From these operations result simple images – hardly sketches – that the poet called “Nudes”: “the dry sketch of a tree” (QN, 288), “a monolith without alphabet or horoscope” (QN, 289), “a naked girl” (QN, 291), and “the body, of divine appearance, [...] of a horse that neighed quietly” (QN, 292). And the poet concluded:

Thus: rock, tree, horse, pugilist, or girl, naked, are neither chaste nor mutilated, nor academic, but are, for those who know how to contemplate them in their permanent ground of butcher’s broom, pure. (QN, 292)

<sup>2</sup> With *arbitrarisme*, thinkers like Gabriel Alomar (1873-1941) and Eugeni d’Ors (1881-1954) rejected romantic spontaneity, instead championing reason as the sovereign arbiter of the rules of creation beyond perception and representation.

It is worth noting that Foix continuously sought poetic answers to the questions raised by the common consideration of real and fantastic likenesses as obscure. Boehne (1980, 69) interpreted that “existence for Foix departs from a concrete reality, but only acquires a temporary semblance of a specific reality for the beholder”. This temporary semblance, offered to himself and to the readers in a fragile form of communication, asserts the resemblance, difference, and relation between real and poetic objects, which is actualized and brought to the foreground by poetic practice.

According to both the initial and the final statements of *Four Nudes*, to understand loftily means to contemplate pure forms that reject academic conventionalisms and, at the same time, “murmur to the ears and are sensual to the soul”. These are not dry, intellectual *schemata*. Since at least Baumgarten pointed it out, in poetry, the sensual and the imaginary fall under the common regime of perception and aesthetic knowledge.

## 4.2 “I Worship the Nothing in Myriad Images”

The short prose poems of “Notes on the Sea” do, in some way, nothing more than what the title suggests. They superimpose perceptions, opinions, and sayings about the sea, coming from an array of diverse and extravagant characters. There is nothing systematic about these notes: they are always concrete and not particularly homogeneous or coherent. The speaker’s first person, which can be both singular and plural, is part of the thematized space, and the transforming landscapes and objects disorient him just as much here as in the poems mentioned above. Foix wished to avoid conventional, symbolic formulations that could lead to the consideration of poetic space as a formal pretext. The unexpected juxtaposition of images enables the communication of frustration and disorientation. The first of the “Notes” reads:

The surprise occurred when, after spending much effort to remove the scenery where various maritime motifs had been painted, we discovered the mysterious corral of the black horses. Come night-fall, they wander the beach by the thousands, a star on their foreheads. (G, 25; Venuti, 41)

Expectations are set, focusing on the efforts needed to overcome obstacles and attain some form of revelation that lies beyond a space which, though not literally a cave, harbors deceptive realities. These falsehoods are uncovered by those attempting to dismantle the structures supporting the paintings. In the first half of the poem, all significant terms point toward a maritime and theatrical reinterpretation

of the traditional theme of knowledge as revelation – or unveiling. The surprising conclusion of the text subverts the logic of the poetics of genius, as the thwarted expectations of ἀλήθεια give way to the discovery of the most unexpected wonders beyond understanding.

Foix interrupts the traditional dramatic structure of narration, which typically fosters the readers' belief in the possibility of encountering a revelatory meaning in the lofty heights of the suprasensible. The speaker's failure in the processes of comprehension and satisfaction of desire is, however, not absolute; rather, it underscores, through poetic means, the acknowledgment of the permanently unstable condition of both life and poetry. The latter is consequently revealed as the medium that illuminates this instability through an accumulation of a particular kind of poetic object: the wonder that arises from each attempt at unveiling.

The task of the poet is thematized with the aid of enshrouding darkness, shared between closed and open spaces. It is not a coincidence that the space beyond the painted theatre supports transforms into a nocturnal scene, in which black horses ride and mirror the stars above. The pen, from which the dark animals sprouted, is "mysterious", as it is also the source of proliferation of dark likenesses. Carles Miralles pointed out that "the black horses represent a world beyond appearances, shaped by the sea, to which the 'I' in the poems must have access" (Miralles 1993, 95). While it is clear that poetry grants access to other realities, these are hardly ever a world "beyond appearances", because appearances and likenesses are their very own fabric. Foix's poetic practice does not represent a different reality, but rather brings poetic matter into existence as reality, as a reality that is certainly different but inextricably united with the totality of reality – material, immaterial, poetic, imaginative. The discovery neither removes any veils nor overcomes appearances; it merely reveals its inherently confusing nature.

When this note on the sea is compared with the final two verses of the poem "The Difficult Encounter", from the book *Where Did I Leave my Keys...*, its negative language showcases the fragile and fleeting opportunity to escape self-referentiality and avoid discursive language:

In night's rustlings upon beaches  
I worship the Nothing in myriad images.  
(OHD, 169, vv. 17-18; Rosenthal, 49)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Rosenthal's translation interpreted the emphatic "el Res" as 'the Thing'. It is true that Foix continuously uses 'no res', the negation of all things, but 'res' preserves its original Latin meaning only in a few very specific cases and commonly means 'nothing'. Rosenthal acknowledged and emphasized – perhaps a bit too much – the ambiguity of Foix's choice, which is hopefully preserved and rendered more precisely as "the Nothing".

Agamben traced this tradition to “Farai un vers de dreyt nien”, by the Provençal Guilhem de Peitieu, a prominent example of poetry understood as a mediation between wakefulness and sleep, addressing the unrest caused by the perception of the emptiness of language (cf. Trueba 2018, 194). This unease had long been shared by religious apophysis, which utilized negative discourse about God as evidence of the inadequacy of conventional theological language to encompass its divine object (Turner 1995, 20-5). Foix occasionally adopted terms and notions close to nocturnal mysticism, derived from the *Psalms* and the *Song of Songs*, and spectacularly exploited by Early Modern Spanish mystics, and employed them in service of linguistic and semantic strategies of displacement and transformation:

We, dwellers of the new city, have no night, and we have never  
[known what our night is.  
In the night of the Night,  
The abysses of darkness are light to us.  
(DLCB, “Blinded by the True Night’s Brightness...”, 325, vv. 16-18)

Among the sonnets of *Alone, and Mourning*, the quest for the discovery of some stability in the poetic signs and its frustration is metaphorized as immaturity, embodied in the figure of an arrogant adolescent destined to err:

Like the wandering boy through rooms  
And among sages, hurting from unrest,  
Rises sublimely and affirms Virtue  
And on the morrow weeps treasons under the willows  
Just like that I, a grown man, inebriated with words,  
Affirm the Good, and right away the Evil, and, enthralled  
By the merry fights of cults, or cunning,  
I proclaim the false to be true. And in many fables  
Pride dominates; but I am not elated  
And, penitent, I try out a compromise  
Between the bright Reason and the craving of my fibers.  
Oh, fool! I look for light in my sleep, imprecise,  
And I am then great, and I exalt myself, or submitted,  
I call myself: “Miserable”, and I light a pyre with my books.  
(SIDD, 78)

Foix’s playful irony is indebted to the transcendental weight that irony bears since Friedrich Schlegel and the romantics, as a sign of the mysterious connection between the highest, supernatural images and the humblest ones, in a paradoxical gesture that reveals poetry’s intrinsic mystery and mediumistic scope (Geisler 1988, 76; 2016, 156). The same sensation of misery, tied once again to childhood and to the inevitable

darkness that veils the origin and the destination of one's own life, appears in the sonnet that reads, in the first two verses: "Miserable and sad I go deep into the dark | Ice on the eyes and exiled from the plaza" (*SIDD*, 108, vv. 1-2; Boehne 1980, 60). Unquenchable desire is the opposing, resisting force, enabling movement through the shadows into the multiplying appearances: "But I crave salt, mistletoe, and rime ice | Through river basins – and with pleasure! And I flee, and I return" (vv. 5-6). The last tercet in "Miserable and Sad..." manifests the religious dimension of Foix's last sonnets of *Alone, and Mourning*. The speaker, turned into a preaching believer, accepts his own undoing and his transformation into a missionary, a child, and an illiterate, but only if his divine interlocutor – expressively invoked with a capital letter – shares with him the real nature of finitude (Romeu 1985, 72):

Fix, Lord, my limits and their confines,  
Surround me swiftly, and I will put on  
Child's clothing, and awkward speech.  
(*SIDD*, 108, vv. 12-14; Boehne 1980, 60)

Needless to say, this prayer remains also unrequited, while the poet dives deeper and deeper into the dark (Boehne 1980, 59).

### 4.3 Realism and the Proliferation of Metaphoric Material

Confusion, as has been argued, is intimately related to the overflowing darkness of the world around the poet, his own interior space, and the metaphoric matter with which poems are built. Each discovery, that is, each process of transfiguration of poetic objects, leads to a state of darkness that is remarkably close to indistinction, but never thoroughly. The fifth of the "Notes on the Sea" reads:

As the ball comes to an end, sky and sea form a single darkness.  
The last star founders on a frightening reef, and at the line of the  
horizon a vague phosphorescence lingers from the arabesque of  
stony coral, so monstrously enormous. (G, 26; Venuti, 49)

Even though Foix's poetic objects do not adequately and comfortably fit into the formal philosophical categories of clarity and distinctness, they are neither absolutely impenetrable nor impossible to distinguish. The "vague phosphorescence", just like the "thousands of stars glittering in the celestial blackness" (G, "She Assured Me...", 11; Venuti, 7), and the "light in my sleep" (*SIDD*, "Like the wandering boy...", 78, v. 12), showcase that the metaphors' condition of darkness – the higher they are, the higher understanding climbs up despite their obscurity – is a condition of visibility.

Foix's poetic use of oneiric images is most often a thoughtful creative practice, in which the deliberate exploration of the automatic depths of dreaming is connected with images derived from personal memories, everyday life, and facts read on the newspapers. In an interview from the 1980s, he stated:

dream holds an advantage for us in that it doesn't give us the entire poem, but rather one of its elements. Sometimes, this element isn't the most important one – it may just be a fragment of the dream or a possible dream. (Foix 2014, 106)

This idea pervades Foix's lifetime, particularly in the first half of the century, whether as a creative branch of psychoanalytic practice, a consequence of the willful Nietzschean verb, or a nuclear element of Bergsonian metaphysics (Sansone 1962, 14). In the ninth poem of *Where Did I Leave my Keys...*, the tone is celebratory, and the speaker identifies with a foolish dreamer journeying along apparently familiar routes that are nevertheless subject to the usual processes of transfiguration, transforming into new paths never before taken.

When it rains I dance alone  
Dressed in algae, gold, and fishscales.  
There's a stretch of sea at the turning  
And a patch of scarlet sky. (*OHD*, 167, vv. 1-4; Rosenthal, 43)<sup>4</sup>

Sea and sky, which were a single darkness in the fifth of the "Notes on the Sea", now meet again at the turning of the road. Wearing a dress crafted from odd maritime attributes, the speaker finds himself in the rustic landscape of a coastal village, between streets and houses and close to fields and hills. This fragmentary image of the horizon is presented as a fleeting and partial vision seen at the bend or the corner. This is an unsettling space that denies a comprehensive view, as readers walk the path alongside the fool. In the second stanza, a frantic rhythm of transformations affects him, driven by various stimuli and desires:

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding this poem, Albert Manent commented on Foix's automatic creative process and its relationship with oneiric visions. He recalled that he and other friends were present when the poet, out loud, improvised this piece, departing from one of its verses: "Crazed by a sweet poison". This rules out the possibility of the poem being originated by an oneiric vision immediately transcribed (Foix 2014, 74). Díaz-Plaja (1932) and Montanyà (1936) had highlighted Foix's creative spontaneity, but Veny-Mesquida, who scrutinized all philological evidence of this and other poems, requested caution to the hermeneuts allured by Foix's almost magical ability to improvise long poems. According to the critic, Foix would have had the structure of most compositions already built on his mind – if not in writing – before letting them bloom, either all alone or with friends, with the images and motifs he encountered along the way (Veny-Mesquida 2004, 92).

When I laugh I look hunchbacked  
 In the pool beneath the threshing floor.  
 I dress like an old gentleman,  
 I chase the custodian's wife,  
 And between pinegrove and kermes oak  
 I plant my banner.  
 With a sack-needle I kill  
 The monster I never name.  
 When I laugh I look hunchbacked  
 In the pool beneath the threshing floor.  
 (OHD, 167, vv. 11-20; Rosenthal, 43)

In the third stanza, he closes his eyes, but the processes of transformation do not cease. He conversely transforms into various natural elements. As he embraces the darkness of vision and his own confusing yet willful actions cease – he submerges himself in the world of dreams –, he takes no further distance from surrounding reality:

When I sleep, then I see clearly  
 Crazed by a sweet poison  
 With pearls in both hands  
 I live in a seashell's heart,  
 I'm a fountain on the canyon floor  
 And I wild beast's lair,  
 – Or the waning moon  
 As it dies beyond the ridge.  
 When I sleep, then I see clearly  
 Crazed by a sweet poison. (vv. 21-30; Rosenthal, 43-4)

Such a closer connection suggests a renewed expectation of understanding and communication, opened by the acknowledgment of the common darkness that veils both sea and sky, both life and poetry, both sleep and wakefulness. A poem from 1963, titled "Pictorial value of the forestal rhyme", and first published in the collection of works by Nauta (1964), thematizes this topic, as the speaker wonders about the fleeting appearance of light amidst distinct likenesses: "Will light spark | Amidst image and word?" (AP, 502-3, vv. 33-4). The accumulation of likenesses does not only connect the terrestrial and the celestial, but it also expands in all directions and gives way to the question:

Will light spark  
 Amidst image and word?  
 The stone, is it a flower  
 Whose juices are nourished by the stars?  
 Pollen: is it the flock?



Bark: is it a bustling world  
 Amidst jolly foams  
 And salty pools?  
 Sand: is it a starry sky  
 With golden trails?  
 Heathers: are they the downfall  
 For strange, impenitent people? (vv. 33-44)

The expectation of glimpsing light between word and image explicitly addresses the complex relationship between the sensible and the intellectual in poetic expression. Through Foix's repetitive and kaleidoscopic questioning, both spheres converge due to their common origin and the continuous integrity that unites them. The poet wonders whether poetry is a fruitful medium to contribute to the scintillation of light and, consequently, to the finding of some communicative value between fantastic images and between those and the real ones. "Pictorial value of the forestal rhyme" positions Foix in a hybrid stance amidst the overflowing omnipresence of images in the modern world: his expanded concept of poetry allows words to elaborate on imaginal attributes and bring new images into existence.<sup>5</sup> Thirty years before the publication of this poem, Foix highlighted the visual ideal of poetry in an article in *La Publicitat* (27-08-1933):

If a pinch of disorder elevates good poetry and vivifies it towards the mystery, is it not perhaps due to the fact that poetry is an emulation, in a certain sense, of painting? *It emulates, it does not imitate. Hence, the already underscored coincidence of the plastic "discoveries" made by modern poetry and painting.* ("Pintura i poesia", 27-08-1933, 4)

The poet thus manifested the wide imaginal and verbal significance of metaphors, and he pointed out that such a conception of poetry allowed for the consideration of its products as intertwined with images and other objects. In "Pictorial value of the forestal rhyme", the accumulation of questions disrupts the most common mechanism of construction of a metaphor. Such a suspension of poetic convention prevents the enclosure of any object within a passive, accessible unit of meaning, and turns both terms of the metaphorical construct into likenesses, metaphors descended from but not reducible to any real referent. Foix was clearly opposing the autoreferential aesthetics of representative realism, to which he imputed coldness, solipsism, and miscommunication:

<sup>5</sup> Rafael Santos Torroella believed in the solidarity and interpenetration of the arts present in Foix's poetry. He understood that the plastic materiality of his images generates 'presences' and concretions, which demand from readers immediate adhesion, just as painting or sculpture demand it from the spectator (Santos Torroella 1984, 19).

O chills of the sphere  
 And the monomorphism!  
 The frivolous killers  
 Of the literalist spies. (AP, 503, vv. 45-8)<sup>6</sup>

And alongside them, he spared no critical remarks against other kinds of poets:

The apparent magnates  
 Of the graphism and the enigma  
 And of the flaccid scribbles,  
 The laureate chorists  
 Of the vague landscape  
 And of the untouched grotto,  
 And the technicians bewitched  
 By metamorphosis. (vv. 49-56)

Foix confronts, all at once, the versifiers who imprudently dissolve interrogations in favor of formal and conventional effects, as well as those who believe they can transmute the real world through mere words. In the fictional *Lletra a En Joan Salvat-Papasseit* (Letter to Joan Salvat-Papasseit [*Serra d'Or*, March 1962]), addressed to his late friend and avant-gardist poet (1894-1924), Foix was discreet but firm:

What can I say? There is perhaps something more of poetry and chance – lyrical, radiant or epicurean, or tragic, harmful, and sinister – in today's mobile reality than in the bucolic and anachronistic descriptions of any florifier,<sup>7</sup> from any faction and any era. (*LJSP*, 246)

In "Pictorial Value of the Forestal Rhyme", Foix carefully displayed concrete and particular objects, either mineral, maritime or vegetal, as well as their corresponding pairs, in a non-dichotomous

<sup>6</sup> In the fifth issue of *Trossos*, from April 1918, the "Remarques" on avant-garde art, published anonymously but written by Foix, displayed a severe criticism of realistic literature and an appraisal of cubist analysis: "And there you have it, that today's Art is an art of great *reality*. We must, however, understand *artistic reality*, and not realism, which is the genre we despise the most" ([Foix] "Remarques" 1918, 8). According to Marrugat (2009, 226), this fragment and opinion correspond to Foix's formation period within the postsymbolist cultural *milieu*.

<sup>7</sup> The *Jocs Florals* are annual poetry contests inspired by those held in Toulouse between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. Re-established in Barcelona in 1859, they awarded prizes for patriotic, romantic, and religious poems, reflecting romantic values. Foix and his contemporaries used the term 'floralista' (here 'florifier') pejoratively to describe poets who clung to outdated, conservative styles and unremarkable aesthetics, and who sought only fame by participating in such contests.

relationship, according to which one member of the pair must vanish or lose preeminence for the other term to fulfill its metaphorical role: "Sand: is it a starry sky | With golden trails?" (AP, 503, vv. 41-2). Always from within the scope of poetic words, which have since now been proven remarkably insufficient to provide any stable image, Foix's faith in the scintillation of light amidst the rhymes never faltered, as he proposed a form of vision that was not limited to imaginal correspondence between signifier and signified, nor to arbitrary lyrical manipulation. It is precisely the interrogation, that is, doubt and uncertainty, that continually reopens the possibility for playful and experimental poetry research.

Rather than falling silent in the face of the limited clarity that poetry could offer about the world's and one's own confusing nature, Foix embraced the proliferation of metaphorical material. This kept both himself and his poetry in a perpetual state of *chiaroscuro*: open to the distant glow of the horizon or the faint twinkle of the dark, open to an eventual, perhaps minimal, attainment of meaning. Rather than abandoning his poetic practice and burning all his books – a ubiquitous threat throughout his works – he layered perplexing images, unfolded without hierarchy, viewing them as dark likenesses that, one after another, or perhaps side by side, described reality, including poetic and fantastic realities, with unspeakable faithfulness. As he remarked in his essay "Some Considerations on Current Art and Literature":

No one can avoid the fact that I consider my prose texts to be realistic while demanding legitimacy for an appellative that has been appropriated by those who so delightfully cultivate infrarealism or the false copy of a reality, a human notion of reality, before which a great number stand with eyes closed and heart paralyzed. (AC1927, 3; Venuti, 136 [OC 4, 33])

The critics Joaquim Molas and Josep Maria Castellet, who championed social realism, commented on this point in their 1963 anthology of Catalan poetry. They believed that Foix was a writer "of realistic intentions, who, due to an expressive insufficiency, had to erect an entire rhetorical edification", the autonomous poem (Molas, Castellet 1963, 91). In his poems, according to them, the intervention of oneiric and magical, rationalist and mediumistic, elevated and popular elements, together with realistic components, leads to an abyss between "the truth initially sung and the poem", impossible to overcome, which completely disorients the reader (91). Two years later, Castellet (1965, 69) defined realistic poetry as a practice oriented "to the artistic understanding and experience of an objective reality that is independent of us". Most of Foix's aesthetic statements and creative choices can be understood within this framework, as his

practice is consistently imbued with the hope of grasping reality, both within and beyond the poetic realm. His verses and prose poems, in turn, form a continuous, unfolding exploration of objective reality. However, Foix never considered objective reality to be independent from us, and he always underscored the unity and interrelation of the real and the fantastic in poetic space (Boehne 1980, 86).

#### 4.4 Poetic Objects as Material Novelties

As the authoritative voices gathered by Foix in the “Meridians” and elsewhere show, ‘realism’ is no univocal term, and its claimants and detractors change over time, pivoting around the possibility of somehow rendering an accurate image of reality through artistic means. The philosopher Christoph Menke (2011, 311-14) noted that in 1968, Theodor Adorno claimed that Samuel Beckett had to be labeled a ‘realist’. According to the philosopher, the writer accurately displayed reified life, as well as the deprivation of any means of resistance against omnipresent social regression, in a literary practice that surpassed all forms of mimesis. In his critique of the notion of objectivity in the Enlightenment, Adorno highlighted that corporeality was the crucial epistemic moment that blurred any intellectual, totalizing claims. Even the faintest trace of absurd suffering signifies a complete denegation of the philosophy of identity, prevents its satisfactory resolution, and exposes its mythological and theological foundations (Adorno 2004, 203).

Similarly, the “Notes on the Sea” form a palimpsest of diverse and peculiar opinions, drawn from disparate voices. Together, they create not but a kaleidoscopic image of the sea that darkens and blurs the line on the horizon. Thus, each narration might represent an enactment of the fall foreseen by Nietzsche’s madman for the assassins of God in *The Gay Science* (2001, § 125, 119-20). George Steiner (1989, 83) defined art as “*the maximalization of semantic incommensurability in respect of the formal means of expression*”. In the creative movement, the bewildered speaker remains inevitably exposed. In Foix’s own words, the poet is constantly on a journey, embarking on an adventure. The line of the horizon blurs, and a compass would be useless: he is always exposed to frustrating processes of understanding:

I cannot, in the night, and on an adventure  
Write the Name on the front of the wall  
That conceals the Everything from me at the impure hour.  
(*DLCB*, “I Cannot, in the Night...”, 322, vv. 11-13)

The combination of very different elements, freed from the expectations of a totalizing mimesis, keeps the possibility of finding an extraliterary correspondence open. The realistic “false copy of a reality”, conversely, remained oblivious to its own limitations. With no line on the horizon, the entire realms of dream, the domains of the invisible, and the space of the unprecedented, which were often neglected in the field of experience by the “human notion of reality”, expand now the range of objects near at the poets’ hand.<sup>8</sup>

In the second of the “Notes”, a boatman, an “Anglican priest”, points out that the world, “the great unknown among men was a spherical fish bowl wandering through celestial space for the diversion of the angels” (G, 25; Venuti, 43). In the third, some “fishermen” are momentarily raptured by the vision of “celluloid figures, strange and *sui generis*, projecting themselves obliquely in long, immeasurable shadows shaped like cones and cylinders”. Their response is as imaginative as it is puzzling:

The fishermen, after recovering from their surprise, affirmed that they were the skeletons of stars, expelled from the depths of the sea when that phenomenon was produced. (G, 26; Venuti, 45)

Further below, the passionate immersion of “a multitude of men and women, naked as the sea itself” (G, 27; Venuti, 51) in the coastal landscape, is disrupted by an unforeseen interruption of expectations. The improper adjustment between exterior objects and human sexual fantasy is manifested:

They thought their brown skin would prove to be an aphrodisiac to the sea, arousing its double, hermaphroditic passion. But the sea modestly withdrew beneath its golden mantle where the captive shadows of the multitude weave, with vague, vainly obscene images, an irregular fringe. (G, 27)

The frustrated challenge concludes with the withdrawal of the sea towards a golden veil, a *chiaroscuro* generated by “the captive shadows of the multitude”. The poet despises the frivolous, bourgeois attempts of these men and women to expand their voluptuousness, and labels their images as just “vague, vainly obscene”. Among the shadows and in the indefinite and blurry line on the horizon, he hopes to find a meaning that is, however, always fading. The common element in all

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<sup>8</sup> During the first decades of the twentieth century, during Foix’s youth, a vast array of previously invisible realities was brought to the foreground by the arts, experimental sciences, and occultism. Through rigorous, imaginative, and deceptive means, microbes, dreams, and spirits suddenly appeared before everyone’s eyes (Dalrymple Henderson 1995).

the “Notes on the Sea” is precisely the proliferation of vague images that do not exhaust the significance of the sea, nor inscribe its attributes within a logic-discursive framework. On the contrary, the disappearances and the transfigurations, as well as the incessant hammering of the frustration of desire, reveal once again that Foix is not trying to dispel the obscurity of his likenesses. Each exercise of recognition becomes fragile and futile:

On the far shore, way over on the far shore, we remembered [...], way over on the far shore, on the far shore, likewise with raucous laughter, we endeavored to remember, standing before the country with the orange sea, which century it was when all four of us once discussed which planet contains the sea where the three of you and I, all in black, and laughing, once strained to remember. (*G*, 26; Venuti, 47)

Foix’s poetry is concrete and hermetic at once. It admits critical and biographical assessments of each separate image, and it even seems to be shaped in such a way that it posed a deliberate challenge to its contemporaries, who would have to discover each form’s real referent. But the infinite variation and transformation of his images, obsessively multiplying, capture the liveliness of his practice, which is not reducible to the mere identification of such contingent signifiers. Paul Celan, perhaps even more hermetic, offered in each poem a *verzweifelttes Gespräch*, a desperate conversation, entrapped between the contingency of existence and the conviction of the communicative possibilities opened by poetry (Eldridge 2016, 198). Celan’s neologisms “produce a semantic surplus, as if meaning more than anyone could comprehend according to the classical model of a whole superior to its parts” (Bruns 2020, 686), but they also maintain a sort of tension between disorientation or miscommunication, and the contingent context that might reveal their meaning.

Foix deemphasized and hid the expressive mechanisms of mimetic referentiality by means of an accumulative unfolding of a hermetic, semantic excess. In a few words, he professed a lack of clarity.<sup>9</sup> The real referents of his images were always near at hand, and they formed a *collage* shaped by his own experiences, anecdotes heard on the streets, newspaper chronicles and telegrams, and visions of all kinds (Santos Torroella 1984, 20). Even though these hermeneutic keys are gradually fading, and more biographical details become inaccessible to those who were not contemporaries of the poet, the

<sup>9</sup> “Ne nous reprochez pas le manque de clarté puisque nous en faisons profession” (“Let no one blame us for lack of clarity, since we profess it”) are Pascal’s words, cited by Celan from Lev Shestov in *Der Meridian* (1960). With them, Celan highlighted the poet’s habit of distancing themselves into the strange and the remote, so that an encounter may be fostered (Celan [1960] 2003, 46; cf. Vega 2011, 123).

significance of his poetic practice, his choice of darkness, or distance, as a mode of communication, remains open. As suggested, the corporeality of Foix's poetic objects partially explains his understanding of the poetic endeavor, thus making his forays into sculpture or *objet trouvé* particularly noteworthy.

In 1946, Foix bought a small property in the coastal village of Port de la Selva, on the northern side of the Cape of Creus. He had first visited the area in 1925 – five years before Dalí began sojourning in nearby Port Lligat – and, after acquiring the house, he would invariably spend his summers there (Guerrero 1996, 344-5). The poet enjoyed sailing on a small boat, navigating across rocky shores and islets around the cape, and contemplating the abrupt shapes of cliffs and the foamy encounter of land and sea. During these years, he took several rocks with him, selected for their inspiring and unusual forms. Later, these became known as *Poemes de pedra* (Stone Poems). He placed them on platforms and gave them titles such as *Nile Boat* (PDP 1, 39) or *Bather Lying on the Rocks* (PDP 24, 83). A single exhibition of the *Stone Poems* was ever arranged during Foix's lifetime, in 1961, at the Fòrum Vergés in Barcelona (Salvo Torres 2006, 13).

Each one of these objects is, just like the written poems or each metaphor in them, both a fixation and a variation at once of some found reality. Beyond the genealogy and taxonomical classification proposed by André Breton and Paul Éluard in the entry "Objet" of the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* (1938),<sup>10</sup> Foix's approach to coastal rocks as poetic objects illuminates his general conception of poetry. In 1932, Foix commented on surrealist objects and vehemently opposed Miró's approach (cf. Salvo Torres 2006, 20-3):

they are data for the finding of other marvelous objects with their own automatism. Are these investigations not futile, however, because of the fact that true surrealist objects are given in a state of Nature, and that only in this state they are not art but document? ("[Joan Miró mostrà...]", 21-04-1932, 5)

Thus, Foix favored unaltered objects and embraced the complete omission of any explicit intentional mark, allowing appearance – or, more precisely, apparition – and nature to merge through the contingency of the encounter. Even though they all similarly criticize

<sup>10</sup> "Only a very careful examination of the numerous speculations to which this object has publicly given rise can allow one to fully grasp the current allure of surrealism (*real and virtual object, mobile and mute object, phantom object, interpreted object, incorporated object, being-object, etc.*). At the same time, surrealism has drawn attention to various categories of objects existing outside of it: *natural object, disturbed object, found object, mathematical object, involuntary object, etc.*" (Breton, Éluard 1991, 18-19).

retinal art's overloaded conventions, Foix's position regarding the *objet trouvé* lies somewhat between the pure nakedness of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven's *Enduring Ornament* (1913), a simple, rusted iron ring, and Marcel Duchamp's already stylized *Bottle Rack* (1914). The one who finds the objects is the poet, but these objects "in a state of Nature [...] are not art but document?". Their living presence is determined by their fortuitous encounter, which is a process of selection and rejection, that is a displacement. Foix did not argue that the true surrealist object had to remain in a "state of Nature", but that it was constituted as such by its nature as a "document", which the artistic gesture dislocated but did not rectify.

The stone poem *Abduction* (PDP 17, 71) resembles in shape and volume Giambologna's famous sculpture *Abduction of a Sabine Woman* (ca. 1580), displayed at the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence. This clear resemblance exemplifies the concrete nature of Foix's metaphors while highlighting the fortuitous and accidental connections forged by the objects of reality. The artist points them out and tries to fixate them; such a gesture neither encloses nor determines the plural significance of the forms completely. Sylvia Plath devoted a poem, titled "Poems, Potatoes" (1958), to the inherent resemblance of poetry, potatoes, and stones, as they are all *sturdy* and *blunt*. She vindicated for poetry an original space of its own and emphasized the opaque and concrete materiality of her verses. Her metaphorization strategy alludes to the potentially infinite productivity of such a conception of writing:

More or other, they still dissatisfy.  
 Unpoemed, unpictured, the potato  
 Bunches its knobby browns on a vastly  
 Superior page; the blunt stone also. (Plath 2012, 21, vv. 10-13)

Plath's comparison of poems to potatoes is not just an ironic gesture of humility. Like the *Stone Poems*, her metaphors synthesize complex visions on poetry and its conventional units of meaning. In his celebrated essay *The Dehumanization of Art* (1925), the philosopher José Ortega y Gasset demanded that poetry be granted the domain of evasion:

Metaphor disposes of an object by having it masquerade as something else. Such a procedure would make no sense if we did not discern beneath it an instinctive avoidance of certain realities. (Ortega y Gasset 2019, 33)

Such an evasion, however, has a creative dimension. In a previous, shorter essay from 1914, Ortega reflected upon the real entity of metaphors, and drew inspiration from a verse by López-Picó, who said that



the cypress “is like the ghost of a dead flame”: “One shall note that the likenesses on which metaphors lean are always inessential from the point of view of reality” (Ortega y Gasset 2017, 169). The geometric likeness between the cypress and the flame is irrelevant, for such a straightforward resemblance has nothing to do with the poet’s aim in the process of metaphorization. The resulting object assumes an almost absolute distance from its real referents, which are nonetheless necessary:

It is all about creating a new object, that we shall call the “beautiful cypress” in contrast with the real cypress. To reach it, the latter must be subject to two operations: the first one consists in freeing us from the cypress as a visual and physical reality, in annihilating the real cypress. The second one consists in giving it that new and so delicate quality, which grants it the feature of beauty. (Ortega y Gasset 2017, 169-70)

The philosopher Graham Harman referred to this article by Ortega and argued that metaphors showcase the substantial dissimilarity between likenesses, unfolding an indeterminate array of possible relations with anyone and anything that perceives and feels them. This, in turn, affirms both objects’ real, separate entities:

This new being may be constructed out of feelings, but given Ortega’s object-oriented concept of feeling, it is actually a new thing that has entered the world, and not just a private mental state of mine. (Harman 2005, 109-10)

This interpretation is interesting because the disposal or disappearance of images is one of Foix’s most recurring techniques. Its purpose is not to avoid certain realities but to face the perennial proliferation of new objects that is common to poetry, to dream, and to life. His unforeseen images, which appear disorganized and purposeless, eliminate the substantial caesura between literary and real objects, as well as between fine arts and creation, either natural or human.

Various examples taken from Foix’s poetic works have shown that poetry’s metamorphic and material condition, articulated from his very first prose poems through a never-ending process of horizontal juxtaposition of metaphors generating new objects, is intimately related to the consideration of poetic space as real space, as real as life and dream. His creative goal is neither to convey his feelings nor to reveal the “actual functioning of thought”, in Breton’s words ([1924] 1969, 37). The poetic space remains described as exterior, confusing, and indecipherable, much like life and dream. Arthur Terry (1985, 123) drew attention to Foix’s own words in regard to the “objective

reality of poetry” in a prologue to *La nostra nit* (1951) by Albert Manent (1930-2014):<sup>11</sup>

[P]oetry, in spite of the chaos of tendencies and conventions that appear to affirm the contrary, is exterior to us. By this I mean that there is a poetic reality, with its own magic and its own singular mystery, which that who investigates its secrets [...] tries to describe. (Foix 1951, 9)

Terry pointed out that Foix’s poems do not describe “the world of ‘regular’ experience” and added that in such a poetic space

one acknowledges that reality is only revealed by the words. This means that apparently objective things do not exist outside the language, and that this is what determines their condition of “things”. (Terry 1985, 123)

While the recognition of the poetic space’s substantial independence is accurate, there is one detail – particularly evident in the “Notes on the Sea” and the *Stone Poems* – that must not be overlooked. To Foix, the possibility of considering poetic likenesses ‘real’ necessarily implies the analogous consideration of dark likenesses in the world and oneself as ‘real’, for they are the substantial matter from which the former descend:

Inner life or outer life, subjectivity and objectivity, are not perchance, my dear Manent, autonomous worlds, but a sole entity, which is the one that the poet experiences. (Foix 1951, 11)

In this prologue, moreover, Foix upheld an unchanging idea of the poet, transcending ages and overcoming styles, conditioned by this fundamental conception of poetry. And he did that by dislocating the axis of clarity and obscurity, as has been exemplified above, allowing for the emergence of an accumulative, obsessive poetic practice grounded in the dark likeness of the confusing:

There are no illuminated poets, because they are the ones who illuminate, or obscure poets – they are blinded by so much clarity –, or accursed poets, for the kingdom belongs to them. Every poet is chosen, and the bad one is chosen because he lacks gifts. The poet is always the same throughout the centuries, and, as a speleologist or an aeronaut, he is a seer in the nocturnal midday and an

<sup>11</sup> Manent is a representative of the younger generation of poets and artists who admired Foix and visited him regularly, both in Barcelona and Port de la Selva. See their letters (Foix, Manent 2015).

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oracle of the solar dream. A seer and oracle of what has been given to all since the beginning and forever, not of anything personal, as uncouth souls might wish – oh, human frailty! –, haruspices of their own insides. But their omens foretell their imminent death. (Foix 1951, 10)

Julien Benda offered a beautiful definition of the poets who are able to combine aesthetic sensibility and elevated moral ideals, leading them to become the fiercest defenders of human freedom: “They have achieved this success of affirming human dignity without sacrificing the values of dream and mysticism” (Benda 1946, 175).

This section has shown that Foix’s expansive and inclusive approach to poetry, which weaves together material reality, lived experience, dreams, and visions, reflects his intention to embrace everything that belongs to the world. His threefold classification of poets is not a systematic categorization of mutually exclusive standpoints. An overarching comprehension of the poetic stance surpasses usual taxonomy, as it encompasses both introspective and expansive practices, and is connected to an attentiveness to paradoxical and unexplainable images arising in both day and night. Having addressed Foix’s poetological notion of ‘likeness’ and exemplified its particular mode of relation with reality, the following chapter will exemplify the meaning and purpose of poetry research and of such an apparently atemporal and unitarian conception of the poetic standpoint.

