

*Let The Stars Compose Syllables
Xul and Neo-Creole **

*Deixe as Estrelas Comporem Sílabas
Xul e o Neo-Crioulo*

*Deja que las estrellas compongan sílabas
Xul y el neocrioll*

Jorge Schwartz

Abstract: *This article analyzes the neo-creole, a utopian Latin American language, in the midst of the historical avant-garde era, the 1920s and 1930s, although Xul Solar (1887-1963) was faithful to his project until his last days. Neo-Creole is a binding language, basically a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese, thought in terms of a utopia of Latin American brotherhood. Ideologically, it borders on Esperanto. This linguistic production is related to the cosmopolitan aspect of Buenos Aires, a multilingual city with a huge flow of immigrants in the first half of the twentieth century. His two great interlocutors in this invented language have been his wife Lita Cadenas, and Jorge Luis Borges, who wrote several lectures on the painter. Furthermore, this essay mentions the artist's permanent inventive character: the duodecimal system instead of the decimal (1961 = 1775), the influence of the Kabbalah on his paintings (the pan trees), as well as an impulse to permanent change, the never definitive, fruit of a permanent desire for correction and perfection.*

Keywords: *Xul Solar; Alejandro Schulz Solari; Jorge Luis Borges; Neocriollo; Latin American Vanguardas.*

Resumo: *Este artigo analisa o neo-crioulo, um idioma latino-americano utópico, em meio à vanguarda histórica das décadas de 1920 e 1930, embora Xul Solar (1887-1963) tenha sido fiel a seu projeto até seus últimos dias. O neo-crioulo é uma língua vinculativa, basicamente uma mistura do espanhol e do português, pensada em termos de uma utopia da confraternização latino-americana. Ideologicamente, faz fronteira com o esperanto. Essa produção linguística está relacionada ao perfil cosmopolita de Buenos Aires, uma cidade multilíngue com um enorme fluxo de imigrantes na primeira metade do século XX. Seus dois grandes interlocutores com essa linguagem inventada foram sua esposa Lita Cadenas e Jorge Luis Borges, que escreveu várias palestras sobre o pintor. Ademais, o artigo menciona o permanente caráter inventivo do artista: o sistema duodecimal em vez do decimal (1961 = 1775), a influência da Cabala em suas pinturas (as "pan trees") e um impulso em direção à mudança permanente, nunca definitiva, fruto permanente de um desejo de correção e perfeição.*

Palavras-chave: *Xul Solar; Alejandro Schulz Solari; Jorge Luis Borges; Neocriollo; Vanguardas da América Latina.*

Resumen: *El artículo analiza el neocriollo, un lenguaje utópico, latinoamericanista, en plena era de las vanguardias históricas, los años veinte y treinta, aunque Xul Solar (1887-1963) fue fiel a su proyecto hasta sus últimos días. El neocriollo es un lenguaje aglutinante, mezcla básicamente de español y portugués, pensado en función de una utopía de confraternización latinoamericana. Ideológicamente roza con el Esperanto. Esta producción lingüística tiene mucho que ver con el perfil cosmopolita de Buenos Aires, una ciudad multilingüe con enorme flujo de inmigrantes en la primera mitad del siglo XX. Sus dos grandes interlocutores en esta lengua inventada han sido su esposa Lita Cadenas, y Jorge Luis Borges, que escribió varias conferencias sobre el pintor. El artículo menciona también el carácter inventivo permanente del artista: el sistema duodecimal en vez del decimal (1961 = 1775), la influencia de la Cábala en sus pinturas (los pan trees). También un impulso al cambio permanente, lo nunca definitivo, fruto permanente de un afán de corrección y perfección.*

Palabras clave: Xul Solar; Alejandro Schulz Solari; Jorge Luis Borges; Neocriollo; Vanguardias latinoamericanas.

For Juan Manuel Bonet

What are you?

A painter, a utopian by profession.

Xul Solar in an interview from 1961

The interesting thing -the surprising thing- is that nothing, absolutely nothing, distinguishes true writings from false ones: there is no difference whatsoever, except in context, between the undeciphered and the indecipherable. It is we, our culture, our law, who decide the referential status of a given writing. What does this mean? That the signifier is free, sovereign. Writing does not need to be “legible” to be writing with all the rights pertaining thereto.

Roland Barthes

Genesis of Neo-Creole

The Spanish language Xul Solar was destined to be born into is a phenomenon typical of the Babelic cosmopolis that Buenos Aires was transformed into after the end of the nineteenth century. “A century ago it was a small city of 41,000 inhabitants, now it has 2,500,000; and not because of its own fertility rate but because of a flood of immigrants from all the nations of the earth”, records an astonished Amado Alonso in an article from 1932, five years after having immigrated to Argentina. The renowned philologist is the witness of a language in an unprecedented state of crisis¹.

If Borges was born into a bilingual home, Oscar Agustín Alejandro Schulz Solari was destined to be trilingual by antonomasia: German comes to him through his father Emilio Schulz Riga (1853-1925), from Riga (Latvia), and Italian, through his mother Agustina Solari (1865-1958), from San Pietro di Roveretto (Italy). This first crossing of Germanic and Romance linguistic families, combined with an innate vocation for language learning and the vital experience of twelve years of residence in different European cities —especially in London, Paris, Florence, Milan, Munich and Stuttgart— transforms him into an outstanding polyglot.

“The mastery of several languages permits Xul to read authors in their own language, an advantage that no one denies. He speaks French, English, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian and Guarani. He is familiar with Latin, Greek, Chinese and Sanscrit”, comments his interviewer Wells in 1956.² It is in Europe that the first signs of a new kind of writing take shape which will later evolve into Neo-Creole: an agglutinative language, a mixture of Spanish and Portuguese, conceived to facilitate the creation of a utopian Latin American brotherhood.

In 1915 the title of the painting *Dos Anjos* [Two Angels], no doubt painted in Europe—possibly in Paris—, already reveals the crossing of the two basic linguistic matrices of the future Neo-Creole. The angelical sesame gives the title early mystic connotations that will form part, in the coming years, of a complex system of esoteric painting and writing. Surprisingly, Xul Solar is the only Spanish American vanguardist who, instead of using French as a foreign language—*lingua franca* of the Latin American culture of the period (as, incidentally, did Vicente Huidobro, César Moro, Oswald de Andrade and even Torres-García’s texts-manifestoes)— follows an unusual linguistic path, determined by a geopolitical principle and chooses, as part of his project, Brazilian Portuguese.

Neo-Creole is the fruit of a process that has, as its point of departure, the written adaptation of a gauchoized, colloquial language, definitive of what is supposedly an Argentine stock, with linguistic expressions that are typical of the Creolist vanguard of the period.³ This search for “Argentine authenticity” in Xul’s first texts is very similar to what we might call the “variants” of the first versions of *Fervor de Buenos Aires* [Fervor of Buenos Aires] (1923) that Borges himself would take on the task of standardizing in several reprintings during his lifetime. The “vanguardist Creolism”, studied and defined by Beatriz Sarlo,⁴ doubtlessly follows the dictates of a language that seeks to forge an identity, whether as a gesture of linguistic independence with respect to the rigid norms of the Academia de la Lengua Española [Spanish Language Academy]—which would still in 1927 lead Guillermo de Torre, with rather serious consequences, to defend a “Madrilenian intellectual meridian” for Hispanic America—, or as an attempt to neutralize the contamination of the foreign expressions introduced by the immigrant masses of the period. (“Aki hay mucha cancha polémica” [There is a lot of polemical room here], Xul would no doubt say to de Torre).

To this overall picture is added, in the case of Borges and of Xul, the longing for a distant and absent geography, but one that is registered in the memory and in the desire for a place of origin. After seven years in Europe, Borges returns to his native city to recreate or ‘found’ a Buenos Aires that turns toward the past, towards its myths, national heroes, and traditions, in a gauchesque and very oral language, thereby diminishing the distances between the rigid norms of written language and the lively modifications of speech. A Buenos Aires that is as Argentine as possible, to the detriment of the European and the cosmopolitan.⁵

Xul’s trajectory conforms to mechanisms and motivations that are similar in principle, but with totally different consequences: the result culminates in an imaginary, esoteric city that looks toward the future and is more universally cosmic than cosmopolitan, inundated with flags, in a language in which, instead of being the heir of a collective experience of speech, the colloquial element corresponds to the invention of a new language for the new man of the Latin American continent. Could Xul be rejecting the European in the same way that the vanguardists themselves rejected their continent, by importing, as a solution, African or Polynesian primitivism? From London, toward the end of the decade of 1910 (1919-1920?), Xul writes to his father in an incipient Neo-Creole: “Mi kerido tata: Esperaba ya este año volverme á la patria desde Londres. Envez estoi aqui desde ha poco i kedaré 2 ó 3 meses.

Cansado de tanto salvajismo i atraso ke hai en Europa...” [My dear papa: I hoped this year to return to my homeland from London. Instead, I have been here for a little while and will remain 2 or 3 months. Tired of all the savagery and backwardness that there is in Europe].⁶ Ten years before the proposals of Oswald de Andrade’s *Antropofagia* [Anthropophagy] and several decades before Torres-García’s *Universalismo Constructivo* [Universal Constructivism], Xul rejects the “European and civilized” and imagines a local or, rather, mental solution. Cosa mentale.

The first texts by Xul that indicate the possibility of creating a new written and oral language are domestic: they emerge in the correspondence that, from Europe, he maintains with his family in Buenos Aires, especially with his two “old ladies” (his mother Agustina and her sister Clorinda Solari). When Xul, in 1912 and at twenty-five years of age, leaves for England, there is nothing to indicate —or, at least, we have no record of— a practice of modification of language. In his initial correspondence from 1913 addressed to his father, Oscar Alejandro reveals a total mastery of Italian and standard Spanish with no variations, which can be equated with the language in general.⁷ He also writes to his father in French and in German. Later, all his family correspondence will be written in an “Argentinized” language: oralized, phoneticized and with a use of contractions that permits the agglutination of words.

At this moment, Xul, who still signs his name as Alec in many of his letters, writes in Creole or Precreole: “después deste destierro ya muy largo kiza cuando será la reunión de nuevo en la kerencial” [after this perhaps already very long exile when will we meet again in the homeland!] (Genoa, 9 July 1917?); “Ya estoi aqui, pero no instalao, no sencuentra pieza, quizas acabaré en una pensión, aunque sea Casa serálo menor quel hotel. Ya empecé a ir a lácademia...” [I am already here but not moved in, I can’t find a room, perhaps I will end up in a boardinghouse even if it’s a house it will be less than the hotel. I have already begun to go to the academy...] (Munich 1921). The process of Creolization of the language is slow and oscillates. Even in his correspondence with his “old ladies” one can detect contradictions in the verbal inflections: a very Hispanicized usage crossed with Creolized forms (“me teneis alarmao” [you have me worried], “vos escribi regularmente” [write regularly], or “Si estuvieseis aqui llamadme pues” [If you are here, well call me] (Munich, March 1923). At what point in time and for what reason did Xul transform these linguistic expressions into a plan for a utopian language?

The Desire to Correct

Xul does not propose to deny his mother tongue,⁸ Spanish, but rather intends to “correct it” and “improve it”, to use a terminology of his own invention. It is a desire that will accompany him all his life. Seven months before his death, at 75 years of age, in his important “Conferencia sobre la lengua” [Conference on Language], Xul emphasizes the fallacies and errors of the existing language and his dream of correcting it: “At some moment the time to criticize the good faith and to *correct the defects and failings of our language must come...*”⁹

Xul’s invention of language —in the case of Neo-Creole as well as in that of Panlanguage—, besides constituting a utopian plan, justified by a humanist ideology of the brotherhood of peoples of different origins, is based on a permanent desire to correct. Xul is a person who not only invents and modifies, but who has as his point of departure a vision of what exists as something mistaken, that must be corrected, beginning with language itself. His disciple and wife Lita (Micaela) Cadenas, recalls: “The ambiguities of our language annoyed him. For example he hated hearing the word *suculento* ‘Why not sucurápido?’, he used to ask.

And in an almost anthological expression of his neocriolo, he was in the habit of asking—even of those he had only just met— ‘¿Me fona plis?’ [Will you call me on the telephone, please?] No one ever asked him what he meant”.¹⁰

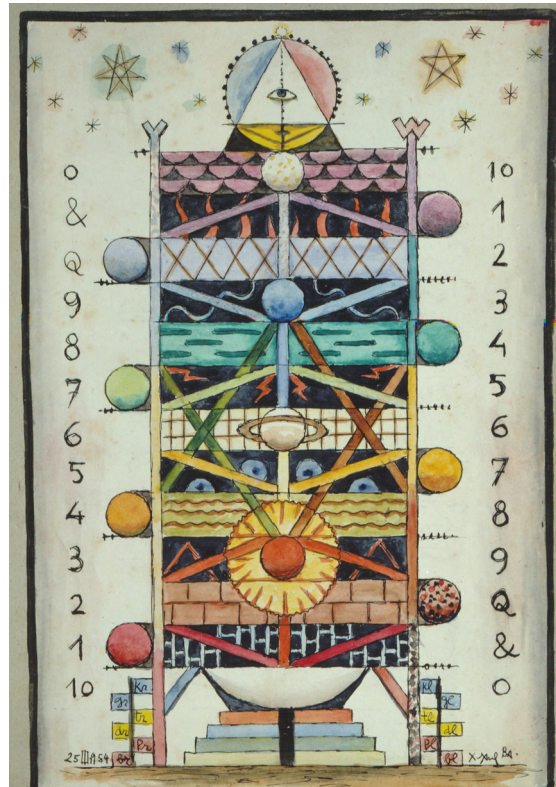
The number of things that one had to ‘improve’, to use his own terminology, is innumerable. In arithmetic, for example, one had to replace the decimal system with duodecimal (here there are esoteric connotations, because of the twelve signs of the zodiac).¹¹ For that reason, a great number of his paintings, especially the depictions of writing and the architectures, are signed with two dates. For example, in the writing depiction *San Pablo* say, two dates appear: the decimally based 1961 and the duodecimally based 1775 (FPK 842).¹² In music, he developed a piano with three keyboards, to shorten the time required to learn to play; the keys, color coded, were quite possibly filled with symbolic meanings, of Pythagorean and Goethean origin. With respect to the cabala, Xul offers “[t]he attached duodecimal astrological diagram, a detail of the pan tree which is a new improvement on the cabalistic tree of life and which aims at containing everything in the cosmic order”.¹³ The complex system governing Panchess requires the didactic explanation of Jorge O. Garcia Romero's monograph (1972):

The board has thirteen spaces on each side, the first being a superposition of the last, as in an octave chord, which is to say, each side corresponds to the duodecimal system. The pieces are astrological and zodiacal, representing the constellations. The spaces correspond to the days, weeks, months and years, and besides the passage of time each space represents ten minutes of time, a musical note or two-and-a-half degrees of arc. Each player plays with thirty pieces, and there is one, chance, that is for both, with the ability to decide the match, not by luck, but by combinations or logical calculations of an adversary. In a game as rational a and mathematical as chess, the combinations multiply ad infinitum. (FPK 35)

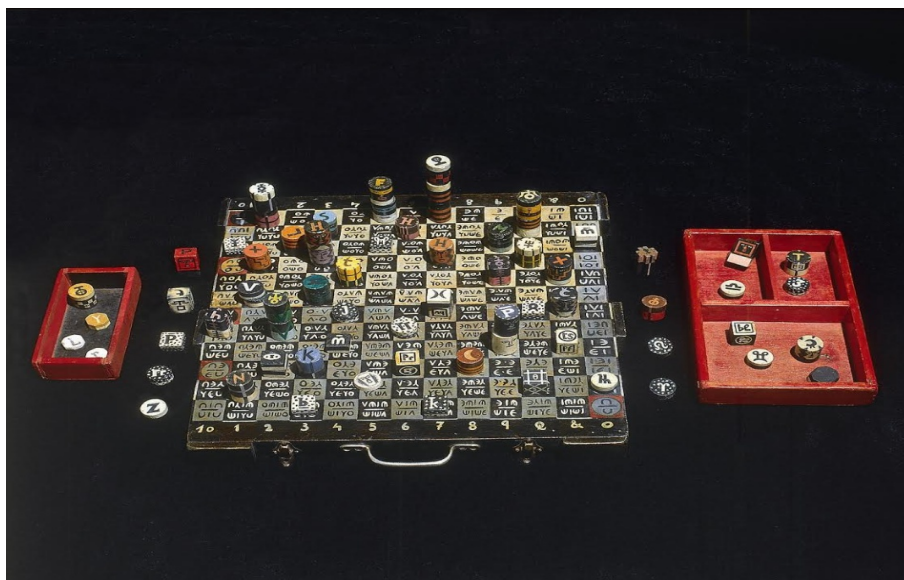
Xul was the victim of his own inventive compulsion, as in a continuous process of rotating signs (to employ the terminology of Octavio Paz) in a combinability in *motu perpetuo*. One of his contemporaries, Osvaldo Svanascini (1962), author of the first book on Xul and the man who organized his last exhibit, attributes this impulse toward continuous change to a desire for perfection:

Among the many things that one should remember regarding this admirable Argentine artist, one should single out his constant need for perfection. That has complicated the rules of his games, writing systems, languages and other inventions. Anyone who learned to view or play on a given day would be corrected the following day, since Xul had already introduced improvements into his own work. Even while explaining he would plan new modifications that would likewise increase his creative interest. (48)

Some twenty years later, in his lecture in 1981, Borges (1980) corroborates the fact that Xul's case is one of a kind of inventive machine, running at top speed toward the unforeseen, almost like Mallarmé's throw of the dice:



Pan árbol, 1954, acuarela y tinta sobre papel montado sobre cartón, 35,5 x 24 cm



Pan chess id 1890 inv1222. Caja-tablero transportable, ca. 1945, 62 piezas de panajedrez y 2 cajas contenedoras; madera, manija y trabas de metal; madera tallada y pintada al óleo, 43 x 41 x 2,7 cm

As I said, Xul lived his life continuously inventing. He had invented a game, a kind of chess, but more complicated, as he would say, more “pli”, and he tried to explain it to me many times. But as he explained it, I came to understand that his thought process had already outdistanced what he was explaining, that is to say that while explaining it, he continued to make it more complicated, and I believe that it was for that reason that I never came to understand it completely because he himself realized that what he had said was already out of date, so he added something else. As soon as he said it, it was already out of date, so he had to make it more complicated. (“Recuerdos”)

Besides describing the process of invention, modification and correcting a language, the most interesting thing is to try to understand certain motivations, little studied as of yet, that would reveal Neo-Creole to be the cosmic projection of a monolingual artificial language that, seen from the point of view of religion, might reveal mystic or occult secrets.

À la Recherche of an Identity

The universe, as a combinational series of signs, is inscribed in this sort of self-baptism that, after a series of variations, is crystalized in permanent form in the esoteric and formidable Xul, a reversible trilogy in which the amalgam of his paternal (Schulz) and maternal (Solari) surnames generates the anagrammatic game of XUL / LUX SOLAR.

In the correspondence Xul maintained from Europe with his parents and his aunt, we can follow the sequence of signatures: Oscar (Marseilles, 1913), Alejandro, Alex (Munich, 1922), Alec (in the majority of the letters to his family, and also the name that he affectionately received from Pettoruti in his correspondence from the 20s, A. Xul Sol, with which he signs the article on “Pettoruti y obras” [Pettoruti and His Works] (dated Munich, 1923), Shul, a stage on the path to phonetization, prior to Xul, which figures in watercolors dated 1918 in which titles in English and French *The Wounded Sun*, *Le Soleil blessé*, and *Worshipped Face* appear in his handwriting together with the signature Shul-Solary and Shul Solary (Gradowczyk 36-37). In 1926, the images reproduced in *Martin Fierro* (nos. 30-31, 8 July 1926, pp. 1-3) clearly register the signature A. Xul Solal. There are three illustrations with the same signature repeated, which eliminates all possibility of a typographical error. One last variant, Xul Solá, appears as the signature in the gauchoized version of “Apuntes de Neocriollo” [Notes on Neo-Creole] (1931), in which the phonetized anagram SCHULZ / XUL / LUX defines a permanent writing style: Xul Solar. These are the prior oscillations, beginning with the first correction of his own name.

The abbreviation XUL appears in writing for the first time in a letter dated 14 March 1923 sent from Munich to his “old ladies” or “mamas”: “My address here is A. Xul Solar”. These variations are explained—to my way of thinking—in a rather limited way, by Jorge O. Garcia Romero, who moves up the date of the baptism with the name of Xul: “In 1916, dissatisfied with the excessive length of his names and surnames, with their inharmonious sound and the difficulty their pronunciation represented for others, he translated his paternal surname (Schulz) from German into its phonetic Spanish equivalent: Xul, and converted his Italian maternal surname (Solari) into Solar” (Romero 10). To all this one must add the mystic element. The visionary element of this way of writing his name arises after his encounter with the mystic and master Aleister Crowley (Paris 1924), and appears so described in one of his *San Signos*, in the transcription of the dialogue with the angel who marks on his body, in a fiery red, the letter X. A divine baptism sealed with a tattoo on his body from a red-hot iron:

HEXAGRAMA 45 (VISION 14.9 DE OCTUBRE, 1925)

luego serre los oqos, i noai mas luzes. dige: "sou lu mas negro keas visto, i sou too luz, i mi nombres lux, es dize, xul, al revéz." entón le digu: "¿sou tú, o eres yo? si mi nombr'es el tuyo." él dige: "eres too, sou too, cada uno es too." me arroibu en él, me le unu, mas luego me coibu, i pr'untu porké sou tan fiaco, tan tolo, tan meskino, porké olvidu nel mundo, i me'ponde: "te grafaré mi nombre nel pecho, ke te kemilembre." i su mano me glif en roqo fuego nel cuor'lao: xul, cun gran gor'letras, ke me gozi gusti ardan. luego me insulte: "vil, pigro, cobarde, ruin . . ." i más ke olvidu, i me corte o me arranke trozos mo crustas ke qondicaian asta el mar triste ke se abre i los trage, i mi cuerpo kede otro, no ya negro sinó hial 'azúl sobre oriaura, cun oripenacho.¹⁴

Patricia Artundo has informed me that Xul initially translated his visions from English into Spanish and then, at a later date, into Neo-Creole, creating many variants along the way through a continuous process of revision. In the Fundación Pan Klub, there are four handwritten notebooks of the *San Signos*, which were later revised on a typewriter, perhaps because he was thinking of a final version for publication, which was never accomplished. We cannot speak of definitive versions, not even among the published versions: for there is not a single page, handwritten, typewritten or printed, that has not gone through a constant and irrepressible corrective process on Xul's part. I take this opportunity to reproduce the English translation —done by Daniel E. Nelson— of the fragment cited above:

then he closes his eyes and there are no more lights. he says "I am the blackest thing that you have ever seen, and I am made entirely of light, and my name is lux, that is to say, xul written backwards". then I tell him: am I you or are you me? because my name is the same as yours". he says: you are everything, I am everything, each person is everything". I am in ecstasy with him, I unite with him, but then I feel inhibited, and ask him, why am I so lazy, so foolish, so petty, why do I forget myself when I am in the world? and he answers me: "I will write my name on your chest, so that you remember chemically". and his hand writes on me in a fiery red on the side where my heart is: xul, in big fat letters, that burn into me with pleasure and delight. then he insults me: "vile, careless, cowardly, despicable man . . ." and other things that I can't remember, and he cuts me and tears pieces off of me like scabs that fall down toward the sad sea that opens and swallows them, and my body becomes different not black any more but a frigid blue with a golden aura and a crest of gold.

This kind of pact written in blood ("I will write my name on your chest, so that you remember chemically" and his hand writes on me in a fiery red on the side where my heart is") resonates with Faustian connotations and recalls Sor Juana's signature, written in her own blood in the registry, when she enters, definitively, the Convento de los Jerónimos.¹⁵ No symbol could better incarnate the person of a being illuminated by a higher will than the name XUL. Solar radiation, primary source of energy, appears in the primary color of the suns and in the orange and red tones of the first decades of Xul's work. His name almost takes on an allegorical value. Besides being the bearer of the name as a divine mission,¹⁶ and although the written record of these *San Signos* is posterior by several years to the adoption of the name Xul, there is a kind of fascination with the X, which directly translates the Christian connotation of the cross. The equation of an abstract geometry with mystic connotations could not be better represented than by this name, this letter, and this image.

The X is converted into a veritable logotype in many of Xul's paintings.¹⁷ When he looses the X in the space of the painting, as in the case of *Místicos* [Mystics], what we find is a veritable framework construction, in which the Xs are superimposed and dialogue with crosses and multiply in the vertical spaces of the columns that are repeated in the geometry of the painting. In *Algo marcial* [Something Martial], great framed Xs sketch out a kind of aerial syntax, as if they were something like a Succession of kites in space. In *De Egipto* [From Egypt], one sees an Egyptian ritual procession, in which two of the figures clothe their bodies with emblematic Xs. Yet another variant, the most synthetic of all, is when he signs merely with the X (the calligraphic painting *Gran Rey Santo Jesús Kristo* [Great King Saint Jesus Christ]).¹⁸

The name XUL, does it have something to do with Neo-Creole? Strictly speaking, the Spanish pronunciation, at least in Buenos Aires, would have to be KSUL or SUL. But it has always been pronounced with the Portuguese or Brazilian fonetization: SHUL. This is the way that we hear Borges say it.¹⁹ It could be that, in this exercise in homophones, the name might also be an early indication of Neo-Creole, in which Spanish and Portuguese are fused. In the repertoire of esoteric signs, the X exercises a preponderantly symbolic, phonetic and religious authorial role, but it is not the only symbol to do so. In *Ronda* (1925) [Round], for example, several Stars of David and swastikas fly about in the space of the watercolor together with the Xs covering the bodies of seven beings walking about, this long before the swastika acquired Nazi overtones.



Ronda, 1925, acuarela y gouache sobre papel montado sobre cartón, 25 x 31 cm.

Explica?

The most obvious paradox of Neo-Creole is that, while Xul Solar spends almost his entire life trying to systematize an artificial language for collective use, a kind of Latin Americanist utopia in which predominantly Hispanic and Brazilian Portuguese roots are combined, at the same time this same language becomes hermetic. Not only because of the difficulties the average reader encounters in trying to comprehend Neo-Creole, but also because of the occult connotations it can contain. It is a question of a language that is simultaneously transparent and opaque, destined for the masses yet, nonetheless only comprehensible to initiates.

Xul Solar's insistence and determination in disseminating Neo-Creole among the reading public is surprising. The first publication in the language appears quite rightly in *Martin Fierro*, a review in which Xul had already presented an article on Emilio Pettoruti and reproduced several of his own watercolors.²⁰ The translation from German into Neo-Creole, under the title "Algunos piensos cortos de Cristian Morgenstern" [Some Short Thoughts of Christian Morgenstern] (from the original *Stufen* [Steps], 1918, in *Martin Fierro*, 28 May 1927) may have seemed to the readers of the legendary review a vanguard exoticism, *jitanjáforas* perhaps, not far distanced from the eccentricities of Gironde or Macedonio. The aphorisms translated reveal Xul's identification with the ideas of the German poet through language games, nonsense poetry, and links to the theosophy of Rudolph Steiner. Besides the agglutination in the title ("piensos" for "pensamientos" [thoughts]), Portuguese is also present: "ome" —a phonetized form of *homen* [man]- and "então" [then]. Creolized oral forms emerge ("tirao" [tirado = thrown], "espiritualidá" [espiritualidad = spirituality], "seriedá" [seriedad = seriousness]), the frequent use of contractions ("piensos" for "pensamientos", "s'estimen" [se estimen = esteem themselves], "q'esto" [que esto = that/than this], "d'ellas" [de ellas = of them (f.)]), etc. Some of the aphorisms of Morgenstern (1871-1914) could easily belong to Xul's linguistic idearium and may even have inspired him: "With dialect, the spoken language is only just begun", advocating a new dialectal language. The defense of a language differentiated from the general language, accessible to a few initiates, is clear if we understand by democracy of language its capacity for universal comprehension: "The worst consequence of democratic ideas is that words too are considered equal", Xul translates.

The striking thing in this first publication in Neo-Creole and its similarity to almost all the others is that they are almost always accompanied by an apparently didactic explanation. "Algunos piensos cortos..." (1927) includes as an epigraph a "Nota del traductor" [Translator's note];²¹ "Apuntes de neocriollo" [Notes on Neo-Creole] (1931) is followed by a "Glosa" [Gloss], as is "Visión sobrel trilineo" [Vision on the Trigram]. (1936). The title of the text "Explica" [Explanation] (1953) may give us the appearance of false didacticism. These last three texts are in reality *San Signos*, in other words, translations into Neo-Creole of his own visions. And "Conferencia sobre la lengua", from 1962, is his final effort (I understand by "final" his last effort, which does not mean that it was definitive) and the most didactic of all in its attempt at explaining the structure of Neo-Creole and the syllabic structure of an Panlanguage (Artundo, *Entrevistas*). Over a forty-year period, very few texts were published in Neo-Creole, but almost all of them are accompanied by this didactic urge to explicate.²²

Xul, Transcreator

Xul lived Neo-Creole intensely: on the everyday level of his conversations and his correspondence with Lita during the transcription of his visions, in the calligrams in his paintings, in his different publications in the language, in his public declarations of a

theoretical nature and, in addition, in his work as a transcreator.²³ In addition to these uses, which go from pragmatic to esoteric, Xul also tried to confer literary status on Neo-Creole. Proof of this comes in the form of some exercises in fiction, like the unpublished children's story *El mundo despierto. Una histori pa néritos i mamues. Con glosas margi en hebreo i latín, pa uso dus sabues i calues* [A Story for Small Children and Drunkards. With Marginal Glosses in Hebrew and Latin, for the Use of Wisemen and Scholars],²⁴ or poems like “Pampa rojiza” [Reddish Pampa] (Artundo 2002. 207). The area where, without doubt, Xul puts the most effort into this translation work is in his visions, which were first translated into Spanish and later into Neo-Creole. An example we can examine with interest is the transcreation into Neo-Creole of the sonnet by Baudelaire “La Mort des Amants” (“The Death of the Lovers”) from *Les fleurs du mal*, 1857.²⁵ Here, I cite an unpublished version, a difficult handwritten manuscript in the possession of the FPK, transcribed by Daniel E. Nelson:

La muerte dos Keri

Mui wil ten kâma plen de huêlie leve
 Yi divân tumbihondoè
 Yi droflor sur xêlfo
 deselosia pa mui sub keûlo maior
 siêl plu' bel
 gastiñ pórfin xus lasti hotie
 warmie
 naxi cuôr wil sé duo vasti gran tôrche
 ke wil reflecte xus bilûx
 nen naxi mête, kwes twin mirro
 hâlma
 psyûh
 soar
 Wan soire de rose yi myusti blu
 Mwil xanje' un uni' lampo
 blitzo
 'mo diu sobe
 long zasplore
 plen cargie de salûto gretie
 sauda grûsie
 Yi luegó un anjo fiel yi gay
 leal
 va vene', terabrir lo puérta
 pa limpie li mîrro turbio yi
 cleanse
 yi renime li flamo muerta
 pa o

A version that is much less elaborated in terms of its use of Neo-Creole —whether it is anterior or posterior to the handwritten version unknown— is the typewritten text, signed X. S., that I reproduce here:

La muerte d'os amantes

Tendremos camas frag'illenas
i divanes tumbihondos

i flores drolas en estantes
abrias pa noh, sob ceos mejores

Gastin porfue xus poscalores
nuestros cuoreh serán dos granteas
qereflejarán xus biluzes
en nuestras mentes, coespeyos.

Una tarde rósea i mistia
trocremos un lampo uni,
'mo largo sollozo
plencarg'io de adioses

I luego un ángel, fiel i jubli
vendrá entreabrin las puertas
pa limpie los espejos empáñidos
i reanime las flamas muertas.

Charles Baudelaire (trad. X.S.)

What first draws the reader's attention is the change of structure: from the classic form of fourteen lines divided into two quartets and two tercets, Xul shifts to four quartets of four lines each, in other words, sixteen lines, with no fixed meter and no rhyme. He deconstructs the formal structure of the sonnet, but not its contents. The thing that without doubt attracted the artist was the theme of the mystic death of the lovers, who, united as a single ray of light, would be received by an angel who would reanimate their dead and spectral images. A redeeming version, opposed to the classic Baroque theme of *carpe diem*, eternalized by Góngora in the line "en tierra, en humo, en polvo, en sobra, en nada" [into earth, into smoke, into dust, into shadow, into nothing] ("Mientras por competir con tu cabello" [When Compared to Your Hair]).

The presence of the angel, the warm tones of the flames, the torch and the ray of light, the mystic lights, the possibility of life after death: all this verbal iconography could be transformed into one of Xul's unmistakable watercolors. The process of contraction and synthesis of the vocabulary appears at various moments: "frag'illenas" (for "pleins d'odeurs légères [full of slight fragrances]); "tumbihondos" (for "profonds comme des tombeaux" [deep as graves]); "biluzes" (for "deux vastes flambeaux" [two great torches]); "coespejos" (for "miroirs jumeaux" [twin mirrors]). The use of the gauchesque also permits the contractions "pa" (for "para" [for]), "noh" (for "nosotros" [we]), "mistia" (for "mística" [mystic]), "mo" (for "como" [like / to]), and the phonetization of the conjunction "i" (for "y" [and]). Also the subtle insertion of Portuguese "ceos" [skies] (for "cielos", in reality it would be "céus") and the Gallicism "drolas" (from "drôle" [unusual / strange]).²⁶ Finally, another of the strange and constant aspects of Neo-Creole is the shifting of the acute accents, transforming the words into proparoxytones: "amantes" [lovers] and "empánidos" [tarnished]. We find the explanation

for this practice which is so frequent in Xul's Neo-Creole texts at the end of his "Conferencia sobre la lengua" from 1962 in topic X. Acento [X. Accent].

One defect of our languages (and other) is that the accents fall on the word endings, increasing ad infinitum the "poor" rhymes, which are bad in prose too, as can be seen in so many official documents, overflowing with -on, -ado, -dad, etc. To the contrary, accentuate the root, wherever possible. (*Entrevistas*)

More than anything else, Xul reinvents himself. He translates his visionary images into a written text, translates the same text into Neo-Creole, and rewrites it endlessly. And when he fixes his attention on other texts, like the one cited above by Baudelaire, we can discern, more than a rereading of Baudelaire, an extension of Xul's own interests and preoccupations.²⁷

Neo-Creole: A Crossroads

Neo-Creole evolves toward a Pan-American utopia, of brotherhood among nations, though a language tending toward agglutination mixing primarily Spanish and Portuguese. However, this does not exclude from Xul's practice the introduction of terms in English, French, German and Italian.

The nationalist basis of the project initially resides in the defense of an attempt to define a very oralized Argentine language which was defended by a great part of the Argentine vanguard generation. Although it may seem paradoxical, the gaucho, symbol par excellence of the nationalist literature in the nineteenth century, is reborn in the vanguard, enthroned in the title of the review *Martín Fierro*, and in gauchesque language as the definition of a modern national standard.²⁸ Mixed into this is a sociolinguistic plan for international brotherhood among nations. Umberto Eco, in the magnificent *La búsqueda de la lengua perfecta* [The Search for the Perfect Language] postulates an apparently simple principle: "In order to search for a perfect language, one must think that one's own is not".²⁹ Xul searched his entire life to find a perfect language by modifying his own. In his final "Conferencia sobre la lengua" (1962), Xul affirms:

All in all, and although it is rather far from the ideal of the *perfect language*, English, due to the simplicity of its grammar, accompanied, as I believe, by our other two languages, has the ability to become a world vehicle, although it would only be provisional for a long time, that would fulfill the need for the exchange of ideas and mutual understanding. (*Entrevistas*)

Whether for religious motives that seek a return to an original universal language to repair the Babelic curse that condemned men to linguistic diversity and, therefore, to incomprehension; or for ideological reasons of brotherhood among nations; or because of the remarkable progressivism of the nineteenth century, that, in order to increase the speed of oral and written communication, generates a variety of alternative languages as broad as that of existing languages.

In Neo-Creole, then, various aspects cross. It is a question, without doubt, of an artificial language that starts with existing or natural languages. It is not a case of glosolalia, also known as "speaking in tongues", as known in spiritualist séances, Pentecostal rituals or

clinical cases, among which the most famous is that of Mlle. Hélène Smith, a patient of Dr. Flournoy,³⁰ in which the language, considered Martian, is practically indecipherable, since it does not belong to any social system. When Xul translates his visions into Spanish, and from Spanish into Neo-Creole, he deliberately transforms them into an esoteric language, befitting a seer and designed for initiates. This connects him to other traditions that help to explain his artistic and mystic trajectory. First to the spiritualist wave of the second half of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that circulated in expressionist circles, especially in Germany. It is possible that Xul may have read *Abstracción y Naturaleza* [Abstraction and Nature], by Wilhelm Worringer, which establishes the relationship between transcendence and the desire for abstraction in art. And if, in 1924, Xul brought home in his luggage a copy of *Der Blaue Reiter* (1912), edited by Wassily Kandinsky, it is quite probable that he had also read his classic *Of the Spiritual in Art* (1912).

Thanks to the information in “El Libro del Cielo”, by Patricia Artundo, we know that Xul returns from Germany with the books of the principal theosophists: Helen P. Blavatsky, who in 1875 founds, in New York, the Theosophical Society; Annie Besant and Rudolph Steiner, whose crowded lectures Xul had attended during his stay in Germany. This spiritualist trajectory would take a definitive course after his encounter with Aleister Crowley in Paris, in 1924, when he receives as his mission the transcription of his visions, accompanied with the 64 ideograms of the *I Ching* (*Entrevistas*). After having passed through a period of initiation and in accordance with the difference Maurice Tuchman establishes between mysticism and occultism, I believe one could inscribe Xul in the tradition of the occultists.³¹ In *Desarrollo del Yi Ching* [I Ching Development], a tempera from 1953, the saintly authors of the I Ching appear atop mountains. The last of these, on the extreme left, leaves no room for doubt: “NOW XUL”,³² who presents himself in a self-portrait as one of the great initiates, possibly after having rewritten the I Ching, in accordance with the mission entrusted to him by Crowley in 1924.

Preoccupied with the invention of a universal language, Leibniz was one of the first Europeans who had access to the *I Ching*. Just as Xul does, he treats the 64 symbols as a sacred divinatory system, but also as a logical and variable system. “The mystery of combinatorial analysis will obsess him throughout his life”, Umberto Eco tells us of the father of binary logic.³³ Borges, who followed the theoretical reflections of Gottfried W. Leibniz (1646-1716) with regard to the binary system of numeration and its connections to the I Ching, remarks: “I recall that Xul Solar used to reconstruct this text with matches or toothpicks”.³⁴

Xul’s archives reveal that, besides having a practical interest in Neo-Creole and Panlanguage, he was also informed regarding theories of perfect, universal and artificial languages. The contemporary character of Esperanto, an artificial language proposed by Dr. Lejzer Ludwik Zamenhof in 1884 (he signed his name Doktoro Esperanto, in other words, “Doctor Hopeful”), is surprising, considering it is still in full force more than a century after its creation.³⁵ In the important interview Xul granted to Gregory Sheerwood (1951), he conceptualized Neo-Creole and Panlanguage as, like Volapük, Esperanto and Interlingua, *international auxiliary languages*.³⁶

We are living in the age of the great blocs: Pan-America, Pan-Europe, Pan-Asia, —my interlocutor continues—. Creole or Neo-Creole would be the *auxiliary language* of Pan-America; Panlanguage would be the complementary language among the three blocs. Panlanguage is remarkably simple, and its writing is similar to stenography or shorthand.

Among a number of curiosities in his archives, we find a detailed description of a “Sistema de escritura condensada y abreviada” [System of Condensed and Abbreviated Writing] named Densografía [Densography], filed in Buenos Aires in the Registro Nacional de la Propiedad Intelectual [National Registry of Intellectual Property]. More than anything else, the publication *Larjentiome. Folletín Mensual Novel Idioma Argentino*, edited by T.J. Biosca (1 April 1946), is folkloric. The motto of the review –whose cover is illustrated by two photographs of equal size of D. F. Sarmiento and its editor T. J. Biosca (!)– is “El novel idioma Argentino no teraa ke als Arjentinós nos digan Argentinós perfeccion gramatical”. This linguistic system also justifies itself through brotherhood and social justice: “Larjentiomaestriases panamerigloble argentryankifrances sistem Biosca”.



Desarrollo del Yi Ching

Pan, Trans, San Signos

Xul’s writing project cannot be viewed separately from any of his other initiatives. Underlying his thought is a continuous search for the spiritual and the absolute, in which life and art are indistinguishable. Like his entire generation, Xul is influenced by the spiritualism of the German vanguard, which runs from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century.³⁷ For even an artist as rationally based as Torres-García passed through the experience of spiritualism.³⁸ In consonance with the Symbolist tradition of correspondences, Xul seeks to supply communicating vessels, imparting a sense of unity to his inventions. His piano, with several color-coded keyboards, much more than a piano, is a sophisticated system that attempts to integrate music with color and algebra.³⁹ Xul returns to the Pythagorean tradition, which introduced the notion of a sacred world ruled by numerical relationships and by the music of the spheres.⁴⁰ To that are added the Goethean principles of color interpretation, touching on the chromatic vibrations of the *Thought-Forms* (1901) of Annie Besant (1847-1933), in which the keys to the meanings of colors are represented and explained. Similar connections arise in *Panchess*, in which the sacred geometry of the board allows Xul to play

combinatorial games in which the numeric is combined with the astrological. His paintings, his writings, his writing systems and neoplasticisms, the architectures, the *I Ching*, the *Tarot*, the Pan-trees of Cabalistic origin, the hundreds of astral charts, the duodecimal number system and the twelve signs of the zodiac, all lead to a coherent, unifying cosmic plan, with a mystic and fundamentally Christian orientation, which is paradoxically opposed —no matter how modern Xul may seem— to two of the greatest myths introduced by modernity: the idea of the new and a fragmented view of the universe. “What is the reason for this tendency of his to universalize language, music, writing, a game as old as chess [?],” Sheerwood asks him, to which Xul replies “In the universalization of these and other things lies brotherhood; brotherhood is the essence of the Christian religion” (*op. cit.*).

Within this project, how can Neo-Creole and Panlanguage be defined? The agglutinating principle culminates over time in the plan for a monosyllabic language. At 66 years of age, in an interview with Carlos A. Foglia, Xul reveals that:⁴¹

—At present I am working on a monosyllabic language —the subject of our interview adds—, that has no grammar, that is written as it is pronounced, composed of basic, univocal, and invariable roots, which can be combined at will, with an easy, musical phonetic system in which all pronounceable sounds are registered. These should be, upon careful consideration, the basic characteristics of every a priori language. Each consonant represents an entire category of ideas qualified by vowels arranged in a positive and negative polarity. The new language is regular, has no exceptions and uses an obvious system of accentuation so the word will be recognizable.

— Could you give us some illustrative examples?

— The hardest letter, corresponding to Saturn and representing quantity, which is something like the law of this world, is T.

Ta means how much; Ti, little; Tu, much; Te, less, and To, more. Rr is the most restless; it corresponds to Sagitarius, indicating verbs of action: Rra, to act; Rri to do or to make; Rru, to undo; Rre, to interchange, and Rro, to move.

The dictionary of this language, which I will propose at the opportune moment, is the board of Panchess. The consonants are the game pieces, and the vowels with their various combinations are the spaces of the board, which equal one hundred sixty-nine.

The minimalist profile and the fixity that Xul wishes to give to the language are not without disadvantages, already foreseen by Amado Alonso in the essay initially mentioned: “Remove from language the renovating blood of styles, leave it in its strictly defined condition of repertoire of designations and combinations, and you will have converted it into a dead language”.⁴² Neo-Creole is a linguistic project shielded from diachronicity, invulnerable to time, that by incorporating other languages —hypothetically, Portuguese— hybridizes itself, but eliminates all otherness, transforming itself into a kind of South American linguistic monad. The only flexibility is the continuous process self-correction, which paradoxically prevents Xul from arriving at a definitive version. To see this, we might add another type of criticism, like that of Annick Louis: “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius’ can be read as an homage to Xul Solar’s ideas on language, but it is also undeniable that it can be interpreted as a parody of these ideas, or even worse: as an ideological reading. In the narrative, the language created is

not just a game practiced by a small elite: it is also the instrument of a totalitarianism that leads to the disappearance of other languages”.⁴³

Another of the permanent contradictions in the constitution of Neo-Creole is that if on one hand it is a South American language whose utilization serves as a vehicle leading to the brotherhood of nations, on the other hand its occultist character leads toward what Macedonio Fernandez came to denominate, ironically, as a language of incommunication.⁴⁴ It could be that Xul did not want to, or could not, elaborate a definitive system of Neo-Creole. Perhaps he maintained Neo-Creole as a utopia in progress due to the empirical nature of his changes, his obsession with change, with correction or reinvention; or because he was aware of the paradox of proposing a system that did not change with time (the elaboration and definition of permanent rules) for a society whose culture, and therefore, language change in diachronicity.

Finally it is necessary to consider the status of “the poetic” in Neo-Creole, especially in the San Signos. Aleister Crowley gave Xul the mission of rewriting the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching*, a task which inserts him in my view into a wider plan of rewriting the world. There were to be 64 symbolic drawings of *short prose or poetical descriptions* (Artundo 2002. 210; my italics). I can only imagine the challenge that that would have implied for someone like Xul who, according to Borges, “embraced the destiny of proposing a system of universal reforms”.⁴⁵ Xul himself might have been convinced of the poetic function of the transcription of his visions, as is demonstrated by the title to “Poema”, the first of the San Signos to be revealed in the review *Imán*, in Paris, 1931, whose origin—which is part of the sacred sphere—was never publicly revealed by Xul.⁴⁶ Neo-Creole is a ciphered language. Although it may be a translatable system, as Daniel Nelson has ably shown, its “explanations” or “glosses”, apparently didactic, help little in regard to a greater understanding of the linguistic system.

In much the same way, Xul leads the reader astray by giving the name “Poema” to a text in prose that, in my view, does not satisfy the basic rules of the poetic function, but whose title doubtlessly contributes to the identification of the text as such.⁴⁷ The Spanish version (the Neo-Creole is a translation) reveals to the reader a visionary universe, which prevents, entirely, categorizing the text as poetic prose. The strangeness provoked by the effect of reading Neo-Creole and the difficulty in deciphering it can lead us to think, mistakenly, of regions on the border between prose and poetry.

For example, let us read the first paragraphs of “Poema”, according to the version published in Paris in the review *Imán*, in 1931, and later rewritten in various manuscripts. Patricia Artundo has informed us that Xul wrote his first visions in English, that at a later time they were translated into Spanish and then immediately into Neo-Creole, at which point they began a process of continual revision. There are in the *FPK* four handwritten notebooks of the San Signos, which were later typewritten, with the possible intention of preparing them for a publication that never came to pass. The process of modification and rarefaction of the language, of “Neocreolization”, that is apparent between the first and one of the last versions in Neo-Creole belonging to the various handwritten and typed corrected versions is remarkable. Likewise remarkable is the synthesis evinced when we compare the syntax of Neo-Creole with that of English:⁴⁸

Es un Hades fluido, casi vapor, sin suelo, rufo, color en ojos cerrados so el sol, agitado en endotempestá, vórtices, ondas y hervor. En sus grumos i espumas dismúltú omes

flotan pasivue, disdestellan, hai también solos, mayores, péjoides, i perluzen suavue.
Se transpenvén fantasmue las casa i gente i suelo de una ciudá sólida terri, sin ningun
rapor con este Hades, qes aora lô real.

[It is a fluid Hades, almost vapor, without sky, without ground, of a reddish color, like the color that you see with your eyes closed under the sun, stirred up by an internal storm, in vortices and waves at a boil. In its lumps and foam different crowds of men float passively and sparkle in different ways. there are also beings who are alone, larger, in the shape of fishes, and they continuously and softly emit light. Through all of this, one can barely make out fantasmagorically the houses and people and ground of a solid terrestrial city, with no connection to this Hades, which is now reality].

The following unpublished version, also transcribed and translated by Daniel E. Nelson, is accompanied, like all the *San Signos* manuscripts, by the design of one of the 64 hexagrams of the *I Ching* (the third) in the upper left margin, with the date and the time of the meditation: *San Signos* 36, 36 first, 8 May 1926, 13h. None of the published versions include hexagrams or meditation dates. The explicit inscription of hexagram 3 modifies the status of the text which, from what is seemingly a poem, passes into the sphere of the occult, or more precisely, one of Xul's visions. It is important to make clear that the numeration of the hexagrams does not necessarily coincide with that of the visions:⁴⁹

Es una bría fluida, casi vapor, sin ceo,⁵⁰ sin fondo, fuei rufa mo en oyoh cérridoh so el sol, agitada en endotempestá, vérticzes ondas i yervôr. En sas grumos i espumas i olicrestas dismuititú de omes d'rivan destellan discróni; hai tamién solos maiores péxoides ke luzan suavi. Xe penven fantasmi tran too eso las casas i gente ándindo i suelo de una sólida mundiurbe sin ningún rapór con esta bría kes aora lu real.

[It is a fluid spiritual world, almost vapor, without sky, without bottom, a fiery red, like the color that you see with your eyes closed under the sun, stirred up by an internal storm, vortices, waves, at a boil. In its lumps and foam and cresting waves different crowds of men drift and sparkle at different moments; there are also beings like great fishes that are alone and emit light softly. One can scarcely make out phantasmagorically through all of this the houses and people walking about and the ground of a solid city of the physical world with no connection to this spiritual world which is now reality].

At various times, Xul defined his pictorial work as a description of his visions. He acknowledged in his art a semantic painting, in which the referential function prevailed. Borges, too, interpreted it in that way: "Xul told me that he was a realist painter, he was a realist painter in the sense that what he painted was not an arbitrary combination of forms or lines, it was what he had seen in his visions".⁵¹ In her analysis of the *San Signos*, Patricia Artundo corroborates this reference in Xul's writings: ". . . his visions had been extracted from the notebooks in which they had been recorded immediately after *they had been generated, since in reality they were a record that was as exact as possible of what he had 'seen' and 'heard'*" (*Entrevistas*, my italics). Beyond the intention of the author, and independent of the oscillation between the referential and poetic function, his pictorial work goes beyond this issue and imposes itself as

great art, now with national and international recognition. And if the occult referent obtains in the image an extraordinary artistic result, this equivalence is not produced in the writing. Xul, one of the most original painters of the historical Latin American vanguards, gives the lie in his writing process to the Horatian motto *ut pictura poesis*.

I do not believe that Xul Solar thought of his Neo-Creole *San Signos* as literature. Nor did Lita Cadenas believe that they belonged to the literary series.⁵² Without doubt, elements inherent to literature exist in his prose: symbols, metaphors, alliterations, paronomasias, many *portemanteau* words of agglutinative character and the effect of surprise (*ostraniene*), defined by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, in his *Theory of Prose* (1925), as essential to define the artistic object. But I would dare to affirm that the sum of all these conditions is not sufficient to convert the *San Signos* into poetic prose. Classic examples like the *Petits poèmes en prose*, by Baudelaire, *Une saison en enfer*, by Rimbaud, *Finnegans Wake*, by Joyce, *Espantapájaros* [Scarecrows], by Gironde, *Catatau*, by Leminsky, or *Galáxias*, by Haroldo de Campos, have an undeniable literary legitimacy, which is difficult to define in the work of Xul. In addition, when the concrete poet transcreates the Bible into Portuguese (Genesis and Revelations), although its purpose privileges the literary aspect of the text –which was never a priority in the canonical translations of the Bible– de Campos cannot modify the basic religious status of the text.⁵³ Nor do I believe that the dialogues of John Dee with the angels or the infinity of psychographic texts in mediumistic séances should be seen as literary texts. A similar phenomenon occurs with *A Vision* of the symbolist poet Yeats, even though visions have influenced his poetry, in the same way in which they influenced Xul's painting.⁵⁴

Xul tirelessly revised his manuscripts, which were destined for a future publication that was never achieved in his lifetime, and even today they remain largely unpublished. When Barthes affirms “It is we, our culture, our laws, who decide the referential status of a given writing”,⁵⁵ he allows us to define the *San Signos* in Neo-Creole as visions of liminal heavens, in a perpetual search for a written form that never completely defines itself and of a borderline genre that would, in the final analysis, oscillate between the referential of the “great beyond” and the poetic of the “here and now”. The commentary on the work of Xul Solar is infinite and also circular, infinite precisely because it is circular. Our commentary must accompany the spiral of situations that this work proposes: repeated situations, variants folded back on themselves. The commentary-text that accompanies this movement shines a light on it, without giving it a definitive meaning in the meanwhile. All we can do is to continue working with an expression of permanent amazement in the face of these (re)written materials. The *San Signos* permit analysis and commentary, but something in them will always escape interpretation, which can therefore never be definitive. To decipher these fascinating texts that resist interpretation means confronting the risk of being devoured by the Sphinx.

Notes

* Jorge Schwartz's “Let the stars compose syllables: Xul and Neo-creole” was first published in Spanish in *Xul Solar. Visiones y revelaciones*. Buenos Aires, Malba (24 set.- 30 dez. 2005, curator Patricia Artundo); then, in Portuguese and English for the exhibitions in São Paulo at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, in Houston at The Museum of Fine Arts and in México at Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, May-August 2006. All rights reserved to Fundación Pan Klub Museo Xul Solar (images on pages 198, 204, 207 and 213)

1. “Buenos Aires has ruined and denationalized the learned language of its own country, the honorable

language that can be clearly seen in the prose of Sarmiento, of Avellaneda, of Echeverría. What good is it if a few traditional families have inherited that way of speaking, partially improved today, if they are no more than a paltry few lost in the mare magnum —large and confused— of Buenos Aires? (...) What it has become independent of is not the Spanish of Spain, but the good Spanish here. It is not a nationalization but a denationalization of the language”. In “El problema argentino de la lengua”. *Sur* 2, Buenos Aires, 1932, n° 6, pp. 169-170.

2. Wells, “Xul Solar: un mago práctico”. In *Noticias* 2. Buenos Aires, September 1956, n° 3, p. 6. Collected in *Alejandro Xul Solar, Entrevistas, artículos y textos inéditos*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, in press, Patricia M. Artundo editor. (Hereafter, *Entrevistas*).
3. I do not wish to take up the discussion again here of the Andalusian origins of this gauchesque language, nor of the use that has been made of these same resources in Spanish Golden Age poetry.
4. Beatriz Sarlo and Carlos Altamirano, *Ensayos argentinos: de Sarmiento a la vanguardia*. Buenos Aires: Centro Editor de América Latina, 1983, and *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Nueva Visión, 1988. Cf. Jorge Schwartz, “Los lenguajes imaginarios”, in *Las Vanguardias Latinoamericanas*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002. 55-78.
5. Borges’s attitude, in his review of *Calcomanías* [Decals], toward the cosmopolitan Oliverio Girondo, is not surprising: “Undeniably, Girondo’s efficacy frightens me. I come to his work from the outlying neighborhoods of my poetry, from that long verse of mine in which there are sunsets and little sidewalks and a vague girl who is fair next to a light blue balustrade. I have seen him so able, so suited to leaping off of a streetcar at full speed and being reborn safe and sound between a threatening claxon and a stepping aside of passersby, that I have felt somewhat provincial compared to him. Before I began these lines, I had to lean out the window into the patio and make sure, in search of courage, that its rectangular sky and the moon were always with me”. In *Martin Fierro*, year II, n° 18, 26 June 1925, facsimile ed. The best example of the evolution of a gauchesque language (meaning Argentinizing) toward standardization we see in the comparison between the first edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*, of 1923, and the last, during the lifetime of the author, of 1977 (Emecé). Both have been preserved thanks to the special edition of *Fervor de Buenos Aires*. Buenos Aires: Alberto Casares, 1993: 2 vols. First and last facsimile edition of the first book of Jorge Luis Borges, three-hundred numbered copies.
6. Patricia Artundo, “El Libro del Cielo”. *Xul Solar* (exhibition catalogue). Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía [Queen Sofía National Museum Art Center], 2002. 206. (Hereafter, “El Libro del Cielo”). All of Xul’s correspondence mentioned in this essay, as well as other articles authored by him, are in the possession of the “Archivo Documental. Fundación Pan Klub - Museo Xul Solar”. (Hereafter, *FPK*).
7. “We are now embarking for Italy happy with Paris, and I am delighted with the Russian art of ballet... The company that performs it is going to Buenos Aires and I highly recommend that you see it, and hear it, for its music is unique among all others. Paris is perhaps the most complete city. The ladies have been through everything, and now know a great deal. Greetings from Oscar. Soon I will give you details of the trip”. The plural refers to his mother and his aunt Clorinda, who embarked for Europe a year after his departure and arrived in April of 1912. (Letter of 20 May 1913). Cf. the transcription of the important letter in Italian addressed to his father Emilio Schulz, in Artundo, “El Libro del Cielo”, *loc. cit.* 204.
8. The invention of a new language as maternal or paternal rejection, with psychological motives, could result in a case similar to that of Louis Wolfson, whose experience is narrated in his book *Le shizō et les langues* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970). As a North American, Wolfson rejects English and

composes his autobiographical text in French. Gilles Deleuze, in the introduction, affirms that “it is a question of a very clear form of destroying the mother tongue. Translation, which implies a phonetic decomposition of the word, which is not done in a particular language, but within a magma that gathers together all languages against the mother tongue, is a deliberate destruction”.

- 9 “Conferencia sobre la lengua ofrecida por Xul Solar en el Archivo General de la Nación”, 28 August 1962. Typewritten text, *FPK*, p. 1, reproduced in *Entrevistas*, op. cit. (My italics).
10. Lita Xul Solar, “Las graffas de Xul Solar” (*Correo de Arte* 5, Buenos Aires, May, 1978, p. 38).
11. On the esoteric value of the number twelve, Wayne Shumaker remarks, with respect to John Dee: “Twelve was the number of the tribes of Israel, of the disciples, of the gates to the City of God in Revelation 21 and much more”. In “John Dee's Conversation with Angles” (*Renaissance Curiosa*. New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982, p. 39).
12. In November of 1939, Borges publishes in *Sur* a review of the book by George S., Terry *Duodecimal Arithmetics*, Longman. Borges’s knowledge of the different systems of arithmetic is astonishing; he ends the review defending Xul Solar: “For more than twelve years Xul Solar has preached (in vain) the duodecimal system of numeration; for more than twelve years all the mathematicians of Buenos Aires have been telling him that they are already familiar with it, that they have never heard such utter madness, that it is a utopia, that it is a mere trick, that it is impractical, that nobody writes that way, etc. Perhaps this book (which is not the work of a mere Argentine) will cancel out or temper their denial”, in *Sur*, n° 62, November 1939: p. 77).
13. “Explica”, in *Pinties y Dibujos. A Xul Solar* (Buenos Aires: Sala V, Van Riel, Buenos Aires, in *Entrevistas*, op.. cit.)
14. These are the “Neocreolizing” processes of this fragment, through some examples drawn at random: phonetizing agglutination (pr'untu, for “le pregunto [I ask him], me'ponde for “me responde” [he answers me]), Creole or gauchesque (too, for “todo” [all]), Portuguese (sou [I am] and tolo [foolish]), Portunish (entón [then]), “normalization” of irregular verb forms, él dige (he says), Lunfardo (fiaco [fiaca = lazy]).
15. Cf. *Libro de profesiones y elecciones de prioras y vicarias del convento de San Gerónimo, 1586-1713*. Rare Book Collection Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas, Austin, Unpublished manuscript book.
16. The procedure recalls Christopher Columbus, who signed his name *Cristus ferens*, convinced that, as the bearer of Christ, he had the divine will of discovery installed in his very name.
17. In the history of painting, the most famous logotype belongs, without doubt, to the design of the signature of Albrecht Dürer.
18. The signatures of Xul also pass through a clearly evolutionary process that culminates in the X, in the final stage of the graffas plastiútiles [plastiuseful writings). In *Dos Anjos*, 1915 (Gradowczyk 27) the signature is clearly “Schulz Solari”, transforming the “S” into a capital-letter monogram that interlaces the two surnames, a kind of orientalist sinuosity, almost an arabesque, a version of the signature that we will not find again in the later works I have consulted. In his last years, in many of the graffas plastiútiles, Xul signs with an X with a period below. It could merely be an abbreviation. Xul was familiar with Hebrew, a consonantal language: this solution could then be read as the consonant X accompanied by the low vowel, represented by the period.
19. *Borges habla de Xul Solar*. Buenos Aires: Acqua Records, 1999. CD, 43'53"- Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, recorded in 1975.
20. *Milicia, Angel y Escenario*, in *Martin Fierro* Year III, n° 30-31, pp. 219 and 221 of the facsimile edition.
- 21, I transcribe, as an example, the epigraph in question: “Translator’s note. -The present indicative

- and the present subjunctive have been used with the endings of a single conjugation (the first conjugation) and the longer words have been shortened: -cion [-tion], and miento [-ment], and dad [-ty] because they are useless and ugly”.
22. “Algunos piensos cortos de Cristian Morgenstern” (translation from German into Neo-Creole) in *Martin Fierro* Year IV, n° 41, 28 May 1927, n/p. (p. 345 [347] of the facsimile edition), Buenos Aires, Fondo Nacional de las Artes, 1995; “Poema” in *Imán*, Paris, April 1931, p. 50; “Apuntes de neocriollo”, in *Azul, Revista de Ciencias y Letras* 11, August 1931, pp. 201-205; “Visión sobre el trilíneo”, in *Destiempo* 2, Buenos Aires, November 1936, p. 4; “Explica”, in *Pinties y dibujos*, Buenos Aires, Galería Van Riel, 22 September-7 October 1953.
 23. I use the concept of transcreation, initially elaborated as *recreación* by Haroldo de Campos in *Metalinguagem* (Rio de Janeiro: Vozes, 1967, p. 24). See the complete list of translations by Xul in the Bibliography compiled by Teresa Tedin de Tognetti, exhibition catalogue *Xul Solar*, Museo Reina Sofia Xul (Queen Sofia Museum), pp. 236-237.
 24. Typewritten text, unpublished, three parts, with handwritten corrections. FPK Archives.
 25. La Mort des Amants Nous aurons des lits pleins d'odeurs légères, / Des divans profonds comme des tombeaux, / Et d'étranges fleurs sur des étagères, / Encloses pour nous sous des cieus plus beaux. / Usant à l'envi leurs chaleurs dernières, / Nos deux coeurs seront deux vastes flambeaux, Qui réfléchiront leurs doubles lumières / Dans nos deux esprits, ces miroirs jumeaux. / Un soir fait de rose et de bleu mystique, / Nous échangerons un éclair unique, / Comme un long sanglot, tout chargé d'adieux; / Et plus tard un Ange, entr'ouvrant les portes, / Viendra ranimer, fidèle et joyeux, / Les miroirs ternis et les flammes mortes.
 26. One of the works exhibited in this show and reproduced in this catalogue bears that very title: *Una drola*.
 27. With regard to the relationship between Xul and poetry, Borges would correctly assert: “I suspect that [Xul] had less of a feeling for poetry than for language: and that for him the most essential things were painting and music”, in “Laprida 1214”, in *Atlas* (1984).
 28. Parallel mythologies occur with the anthropophagous Indian of Oswald de Andrade or with the Andean wise man of Mariategui. I do not know of an expressionist or cubist gaucho in the River-Plate iconography of the period, in contradistinction to what occurs with Diego Rivera’s modern view of the indigenous or Tarsila’s modern view of the Afro-Brazilian.
 29. *La búsqueda de la lengua perfecta en la lengua europea*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1999, (orig. 1993). Trans. Maria Pons. Chapters developed from this work are found in the book by the same author *Serendipities. Language and Lunacy* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999). Trans. William Weaver.
 30. Théodore Flournoy, [1899] *From India to the Planet Mars. A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages*. New Jersey: Ed Sonu Shamdasani, Princeton University Press, 1994.
 31. “... mysticism refers to the search of the state of oneness with ultimate reality. Occultism depends upon secret, concealed phenomena that are accessible only to those who have been appropriately initiated. The occult is mysterious and is not readily available to ordinary understanding or scientific reason”, “Hidden Meaning in Abstract Art”, in *The Spiritual in Art Abstract Painting 1890-1985* (Los Angeles County of Art, 1986. p. 19).
 32. I reproduce a note from the monograph by Jorge O. Carcía Romero: “Xul Solar depicted himself a single time in the water-color [sic] entitled *Desarrollo del Yi Ching*. Figuring the Chinese symbols Yin and Yang, the trigrams of the *Book of Changes, Fu and His*, the first historical figure of China, King Wan and his son Tan, Confucius and Xul Solar with an inscription over his head that reads Now Xul”, in *Alejandro Xul Solar* (Universidad de La Plata, August 1972, note 12, p. 127).
 33. According to information provided by the FPK, Xul had in his library two works by Leibnitz:

- Correspondencia con *Arnauld* (Buenos Aires: Losada 1946), and *Tratados fundamentales* (1st. series) (Buenos Aires: Losada 1936 and 1946). Borges, besides knowing the principles of binary logic, knew of the connections between Leibnitz and the hexagrams of the *I Ching* (cf. also the chapter "de Leibnitz a la *Enciclopedia*", which includes "El *I Ching* y la numeración binaria", in Umberto Eco, *La búsqueda de la lengua perfecta*, p. 230.
34. In J.L. Borges, "Sobre los clásicos", in *Otras Inquisiciones* (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1960, p. 260). For the connection between Leibnitz and the French missionary in China, Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730), who discovered the connections between the *I Ching* and the dyadic or binary arithmetical system of Leibnitz, cf. the excellent article by Frank K. Swetz, "Leibnitz, the Yijing, and the Religious Conversion of the Chinese", in *Mathematics Magazine* 76, n° 4 (October 2003): 276-291. Xul, like Leibnitz, who was also a sinologist, saw in numerology, and in the *ars combinatoria* of the *I Ching* a link with cosmology, metaphysics and theology.
 35. Although English is becoming more and more the great auxiliary language of international communication, there is the Universala Esperanto-Ligo (UEL), which is associated with the Argentina Esperanto-Ligo, with its headquarters located not far from the Fundación Pan Klub, at 2357 Paraguay. See www.uea.org and www.esperanto.org.ar.
 36. Gregory Sheerwood, "Gente de mi ciudad: Xul Solar, campeón mundial de panajedrez y el inquieto creador de la 'panlingua'", in *Mundo Argentino* (Buenos Aires, 1 August 1951, p. 14) in *Entrevistas*. Cf. Umberto Eco, chapter 16, dedicated to "Las lenguas internacionales auxiliares", in *op. cit.*, pp. 266-281. (My italics).
 37. Cf. the catalogue of the exhibit *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985*. Org. Maurice Tuchman (Los Angeles: County Museum of Art, Abbeville Press, 1986).
 38. In Paris, in 1926, "the masonic musician Luis Fernandez introduces Torres-García to occultism and spiritual transcendence, including medieval symbolism, the Cabala, Pythagorean numerical mysticism, which involved the notions that the spirit and the celestial bodies were ruled by numbers and that the numerical values appropriate to musical harmony derived from the music of the spheres. Esoteric knowledge seemed very attractive to Torres-García, who was possibly already predisposed to it during his previous experience with Neoplatonic philosophy and progressive education (whose spiritual leader was the theosophist Rudolf Steiner)", in Barbara Braun. *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World: Ancient American Sources of Modern Art* (New York: Abrams, 1993, p. 256).
 39. "The keyboard is a much smaller size than the ordinary one, the keys are uniform and rounded, which permits the fingers to move more easily. In addition, they are marked to permit their recognition by touch. This keyboard permits the intercalation of quarter tones on intermediate rows of keys, a feature that does not exist on present-day instruments. Also, one can learn to play the piano in a third of the time". Xul's explanation, in Artundo, "El Libro del Cielo", *op. cit.* p. 226.
 40. Cf. Neil de Grasse Tyson, "Wordless Music and Abstract Art", in *Exploring the Invisible* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 15).
 41. "Xul Solar, pintor de símbolos efectivos", in *El Hogar*, 18 September 1953, reproduced in *Entrevistas*, *op. cit.* (My italics).
 42. *art. cit.*, p. 138.
 43. In "Acontecimientos: Xul-Borges, a cor do encontro", in *Xul Solar / J.L. Borges. Lingua e imagem* (Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, exhibition catalogue, curator Alina Tortosa, 1998, p. 44).
 44. "Precisely because it lacks intelligibility, Neo-Creole excited Macedonio Fernandez, who publicly

- celebrated Xul Solar as the creator of a language of incommunication”, comments Naomi Lindstrom, one of the first critics to focus on the analysis of Neo-Creole. Cf. "El utopismo lingüístico en Poema de Xul Solar", *Texto Crítico* 24-25, (México: Universidad Veracruzana, January-December 1982, p. 244).
45. Prologue to the exhibit *Homenaje a Xul Solar* (Buenos Aires: Museo de Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1963).
 46. I transcribe Patricia Artundo’s observation with regard to this publication: “The first time that Xul revealed one of his visions under the title ‘Poema’ it was in the first and only number of *Imán* (April 1931) published in Paris by Elvira de Alvear. (...) The exceptional character of this review that brought together collaborations, among others, from Alejo Carpentier, Jaime Torres Bodet, Miguel Angel Asturias and Franz Kafka displayed Xul’s ‘Poema’ in a publication of marked reflexive tone, with no limits to its interests —‘we will be all-embracing’— affirmed its editor in its introductory text”. In “A Xul Solar: una imagen pública posible”, in *Entrevistas, op. cit.* “Poem was first analyzed by Naomi Lindstrom, after the reproduction of the text in Osvaldo Svanascini, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
 47. Roman Jakobson’s classic definition of the poetic function affirms that it arises at the crossing of the two axes in the articulation of language: the vertical, of signification, and the horizontal, of the succession or combination of words in “Linguistics and Poetics”, in *Selected Writings III. Poetry of Grammar and Grammar of Poetry* (La Haya: Mouton, 1981, pp. 18-51). (My translation).
 48. Concerning the text “Poem”, I transcribe the following note by Patricia Artundo: “... published for the first time in 1931, we know the first version —immediate registry of his vision as soon as it was finalized—, another handwritten version, a typescript copy, the version finally published in the review *Imán*, and the one published in *Signo* (1933), plus two variations on the printed version”, in *art. cit.*, note 3, in *Entrevistas*. I cite two versions in Neo-Creole, transcribed and translated into English by Daniel Nelson. The first of these is from the review *Imán* (Paris, April 1931, pp. 50-51). Cf. the complete Spanish translation in *Entrevistas, op. cit.*
 49. Thanks to the article by Frank J. Swetz, we know that the sequential order of the 64 hexagrams is read from right to left and from bottom to top, *art. cit.*, pp. 279-280.
 50. The only word in Portuguese in the selected fragment is “çeu” [sky], in standard Portuguese “céu”. Interestingly, the introduction of the cedilla (çeu) is in fact unnecessary, given that in medieval Spanish and in present-day Portuguese it is only used before the vowels “a”, “o”, “u”.
 51. Address to mark the occasion of the opening of the exhibit *Homenaje a Xul Solar*, Museo Provincial de Bellas Artes de la Plata (Provincial Museum of Fine Arts of La Plata), 17 July 1968. Reproduced in the catalogue *Xul Solar en el Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes* (Buenos Aires, September 1998, p. 12).
 52. Jorge O. García Romero affirms: “... According to what Mrs. Micaela Cadenas de Xul Solar declared to me, during the hour, the hour in which the artist was accustomed to meditate, the present text is one of his visions or revelations through transcendental meditation written in ‘Neo-Creole’, not a mere literary invention as it may seem at first glance”, in *Alejandro Xul Solar, op. cit.*, note 2, p. 129.
 53. Cf. Haroldo de Campos, *Éden* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2004).
 54. Upon referring to William Butler Yeats’s book *Per Amica Silentia Luna*, Richard Ellman affirms that “the reader is never certain if he is faced with a doctrine or a prose poem”. Cf. Yeats’s *The Man and the Masks* ([1948] New York: Norton, 1999, p. 223). Here, we could also make good use of the commentary of Wayne Shumaker, in his excellent book *Renaissance Curiosa*, in which he analyzes the text of John Dee only to arrive at the ironic conclusion that “the angels were

particularly poor pedagogues”, op. cit., p. 36.

55. Roland Barthes, «Variations sur l'écriture», in *Oeuvres Complètes IV* (Paris: Seuil, 2002, p. 284).

Works Cited

- Artundo, Patricia (ed.) *Alejandro Xul Solar, Entrevistas, artículos y textos inéditos*. Buenos Aires: Corregidor, in press.
- . “El Libro del Cielo”. *Xul Solar* (exhibition catalogue). Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía [Queen Sofía National Museum Art Center], 2002. 206.
- Besant, Annie and C. W. Leadbeater, *Thought-Forms*. London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1901.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. “Recuerdos de mi amigo Xul Solar”, Buenos Aires, Fundación San Telmo, 3 set 1980. Texto do Museu Xul Solar, reproduzido na íntegra em <www.temakel.com/confborgesxul.htm>
- Eco, Umberto. [1993] *La búsqueda de la lengua perfecta en la lengua europea*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1999.
- Gradowezyk, Mario H. *Alejandro Xul y Solar*. Buenos Aires: Alba / Fundación Bunge y Born, 1994. Images reproduced on pp. 36-37.
- Romero, Jorge O. García. *Alejandro Xul Solar*. Universidad Nacional de La Plata, August 1972. Unpublished monograph. Fundación Pan Klub.
- Sheerwood, Gregory. “Gente de mi ciudad: Xul Solar, campeón mundial de panajedrez y el inquieto creador de la ‘panlingua’”. In *Mundo Argentino*. Buenos Aires (1 August 1951): 14, reproduced in Artundo’s *Entrevistas*, op.cit.
- Svanascini, Osvaldo. *Xul Solar*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Culturales Argentinas, 1962.