

HAROLDO DE CAMPOS' GALACTIC OBSERVATORY IN SÃO PAULO

EL OBSERVATORIO GALÁCTICO DE HAROLDO DE CAMPOS EN SÃO PAULO

L'OBSERVATOIRE GALACTIQUE DE HAROLDO DE CAMPOS À SÃO PAULO

Kenneth David Jackson 

Yale University

k.jackson@yale.edu

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Abstract: This essay offers a comprehensive overview of the work and legacy of Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), one of Brazil's most influential and multifaceted literary figures. As a poet, essayist, translator, and intellectual, he played a central role in shaping Brazilian literature and literary thought during the second half of the twentieth century. He was pioneering force in experimental poetry, co-founding the Concrete Poetry movement in Brazil in the 1950's, which sought to reinvent with traditional poetic forms and explore the visual and material dimensions of language. His theoretical writings deeply influenced generations of writers, critics, and professors, both in Brazil and abroad. In addition to his creative output in poetry, Haroldo de Campos was a distinguished translator, known for his bold and innovative renderings of classical texts, which includes Homer, Dante, and James Joyce. His transcreations are celebrated not only for their linguistic brilliance but also for their interpretative depth. With a strong international circulation, his work helped

Brazilian literature within global conversations, making enduring contributions to aesthetics, semiotics and literary theory.

Keywords: Haroldo de Campos; Essay; Translation; Criticism; Poetry.

Resumen: Este artículo ofrece una visión general exhaustiva de la obra y el legado de Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), una de las figuras literarias más influyentes y polifacéticas de Brasil. Como poeta, ensayista, traductor e intelectual, desempeñó un papel central en la configuración de la literatura brasileña y del pensamiento literario durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX. Fue una fuerza pionera en la poesía experimental, cofundador del movimiento de la Poesía Concreta en Brasil en la década de 1950, que buscaba reinventar las formas poéticas tradicionales y explorar las dimensiones visuales y materiales del lenguaje. Sus escritos teóricos influyeron profundamente en generaciones de escritores, críticos y profesores, tanto en Brasil como en el extranjero. Además de su producción creativa en la poesía, Haroldo de Campos fue un traductor destacado, conocido por sus versiones audaces e innovadoras de textos clásicos, entre ellos Homero, Dante y James Joyce. Sus «transcreaciones» son celebradas no solo por su brillantez lingüística, sino también por su profundidad interpretativa. Con una circulación internacional significativa, su obra ayudó a insertar la literatura brasileña en las conversaciones globales, haciendo contribuciones duraderas a la estética, la semiótica y la teoría literaria.

Palabras clave: Haroldo de Campos; ensayo; traducción; crítica; poesía.

Résumé : Cet article propose un aperçu approfondi de l'œuvre et de l'héritage de Haroldo de Campos (1929-2003), l'une des figures littéraires les plus influentes et polyvalentes du Brésil. Poète, essayiste, traducteur et intellectuel, il a joué un rôle central dans la formation de la littérature et de la pensée littéraire brésiliennes durant la seconde moitié du XXe siècle. Il fut une figure pionnière de la poésie expérimentale, cofondateur du mouvement de la Poésie Concrète au Brésil dans les années 1950, qui visait à réinventer les formes poétiques traditionnelles et à explorer les dimensions visuelle et matérielle du langage. Ses écrits théoriques ont profondément influencé des générations d'écrivains, de critiques et de professeurs, tant au Brésil qu'à l'étranger. En plus de sa production poétique, Haroldo de Campos fut un traducteur éminent, réputé pour ses traductions audacieuses et novatrices de textes classiques, dont Homère, Dante et James Joyce. Ses « transcréations » sont célébrées non seulement pour leur brillance linguistique, mais aussi pour leur profondeur interprétative. Grâce à une diffusion inter-

nationale notable, son œuvre a permis à la littérature brésilienne de s'inscrire dans les débats mondiaux, apportant des contributions durables à l'esthétique, à la sémiotique et à la théorie littéraire.

Mots-clés: Haroldo de Campos ; essai ; traduction ; critique ; poésie.

We can imagine entering Haroldo's atelier, surrounded by thousands of books and papers in his house on R. Monte Alegre, 635, in the neighborhood of Perdizes, São Paulo, where the walls were lined with books, even going up the stairway, overflowing into his office upstairs. For some years I helped modestly to increase this collection by sending books that HC ordered from a bookstore in Austin, where he left an open account: for example, the German text of an essay by Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache*, translated to English as *On the Way to Language*, that he needed for an essay on the ideogram, to be dedicated to the philosopher Benedito Nunes, and that depended on "certain effects of language" only possible in the original German.

Haroldo called his house his "galactic Brazilian observatory planted in São Paulo" (cited in Sánchez Robayna and Díaz-Migoyo 15). A visit there was always a very special occasion, for the company and intense intellectual conversations, for the library, paintings by Orlando Marcucci and Tomie Ohtake, the constant enthusiasm of Haroldo himself, new projects for which he cited the pertinent books and studies at hand, and for the attentions of Carmen, who accompanied everything attentively, maintaining the correspondence and photographs in carefully organized albums. That house and library was the center of operations of the poet, critic, and translator. In an early essay fundamental for his future work, "On Translation as Creation and as Criticism" ("Da Tradução como Criação e como Crítica")¹, he named the areas in which would continue to act complementarily throughout decades of work: poetry, criticism, and translation.

Haroldo was an assiduous reader of theory throughout his career as poet, essayist, and translator, as documented in references and notes in his books that characterize him as a studious writer and thinker. From his galactic observatory, he sought key references in theory to substantiate a series of major concepts that he developed as much from heuristic research as from a rhythm of international contacts: *constellation*, *syncretism*, *plagiotropia*, *neobaroque*, *antropofagia*, *post-Utopia*. Theory underwrites the evolution of his literary and aesthetic thought, which we can trace from *Teoria da poesia*

1 "Da Tradução como Criação e como Crítica" was first published in *Tempo brasileiro*, no. 4-5, jun.-set. 1963.

concreta: textos críticos e manifestos (1965). There, in nine major essays, Haroldo introduced concepts that would continue to shape his works, drawn from semiotics, language, music and art, mathematics and physics, to Russian formalism, literature, and poetic theory. He devoted special attention to the ideogram (Pound, Fenollosa, Bense, Gomringer), to a “new sonorous syntax” (Boulez, Schönberg, Stockhausen), to committed literature (Sartre, Marx), and to philosophy of art (Mário Pedrosa, Susan Langer, A. A. Mendilow). In *A arte no horizonte do provável*, Haroldo added an interest in aleatory or “precarious” esthetics (Schwitters), haiku and visual poetry, fragmentation (Ungaretti), kitsch (Nabokov), and synchronic poetry (Genette). Subsequent essays widened his interests, sources, and perspectives, from structuralism to post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, to *antropofagia* and post-Utopian poetry. In his syncretic library (a collection amounting to 23,000 volumes) we can find titles by Pound, Bense, Jakobson, Peirce, Eco, Boulez, Bakhtin, Lacan, Adorno, Foucault, Barthes, Benjamin, Genette, Deleuze, Derrida and others in references spread throughout his notes². Additionally, Haroldo was one of the few Brazilians —accompanied by poet Manuel Bandeira and scholar Eduardo Coutinho— to dialogue with Spanish American authors and intellectuals, especially Octavio Paz, Julio Cortázar and Severo Sarduy, with whom he exchanged important correspondence, as well as with Julian Rios and Andrés Sánchez Robayna in Spain. Haroldo's galactic observatory became a global center of research in contemporary theory, translation, and poetry.

Haroldo's major prose work, the *Galáxias*, fifty fragment-sketches of prose in poetry, composed primarily in the early 1960s and first published in 1984, is now available in English, translated by Odile Cisneros, after a translation to French by Inês Oseki-Dépré with the help of the author in the 1990s and two editions in Spanish by Reynaldo Jiménez (2010). The anthology *Novas*, published by Northwestern directed by Sérgio Bessa, is the entryway book to his works in English, alongside interpretive essays by scholars including Claus Clüver and Marjorie Perloff. Jean Longland translated some of his concrete poetry in journals. Well known in Spanish America and Europe, HC came often to the U.S. and was visiting professor both at Yale, invited by Emir Rodríguez Monegal in 1978 and twice at UT Austin (1971; 1981), the second time as Edward L Tinker Visiting Professor, when he organized conferences on translation³. A number of his major essays have been translated to English, although many remain disperse. One major

2 For a more detailed account of theoretical sources, see Louro.

3 “Conference on Translation”, Yale University, March 31-April 1, 1978; “Workshop on Translation: Scribblevaganza on Theory and Practice of Translation”. University of Texas at Austin, April 2-3, 1981.

resource in English is the book that I organized⁴, *HC: A Dialogue with the Brazilian Concrete Poet*, from the Oxford-Yale conferences in 1999 commemorating Haroldo's 70th year⁵. In a more recent conference at Yale in December 2019 titled "Poetry Criticism Translation", the presence of young scholars from a half-dozen countries proved that HC is now attracting wide attention with an international focus, visible in two recent anthologies of essays published in Berlin in Portuguese (Bachmann, Carillo-Morel, André and Oliveira; Jackson and Oliveira). For young scholars, Haroldo remains a fascinating figure for his extensive writings across multiple literatures, where poetry, criticism, and translation intersect.

1. Concrete Poetry

Haroldo de Campos became widely known for his role in concrete poetry in São Paulo, along with Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari, centered in the exhibit in December 1956 of poems and paintings at the Museum of Contemporary Art⁶. Beginning with the journals *Noigandres* and *Invenção*, he and his companion poets practiced, on the one hand, a sharply focused poetry of graphic representation and visual information that is integrated, on the other, with Brazil's radical architectural project and with a public cultural debate in influential literary supplements on the nature and social role of literature, promoting the critical encounter of national art and culture with concrete poetics.

From the beginning, concrete poetry was highly focused around a stable, identifiable group and style, wryly remembered by Kenneth Goldsmith:

Sitting on my desk is a catalogue that was made to mark the half-century anniversary of the founding of the seminal concrete poets known as the *Noigandres* group [...] In the black-and-white photographs of the period, the *Noigandres* group come off as 'serious' 1950s intellectuals, never smiling, dressed in thin-lapelled dark suits, crisp white shirts and skinny black ties. They look like tropical versions of 1920s Paris modernists, reminiscent of, say, Stravinsky peering over his thick glasses in his trademark double-breasted tweed suits (Goldsmith 12).

The 1956 Exposition in São Paulo, like the Modern Art Week of '22, assembled artists and poets, however it was more thematic and defined, juxtaposing geometrical abstraction by artists allied with the 1952 *Ruptura* manifesto —printed on a poster designed by Leopoldo Haar (1910-1954)— with concrete poems⁷. Their language of "word-things in

4 Oxford Centre for Brazilian Studies, 2005.

5 "On Transcreation: Invention, Translation, and Poetics", Oxford-Yale, Spring 1999.

6 For an analysis of the movement, see Gonzalo Aguilar.

7 See García.

space-time" was described using the Joycean word *verbivocovisual*, and its language was transparent to readers of other languages, who also quickly recognized texts saturated with social and political allusions and critiques.

In David Seaman's work on concrete in France, he states about the Brazilian poetry, "Clearly socially-oriented in function, these poems often pick up the tone of proclamations and slogans" (Seaman 12). While modernist representations of Brazil were evocative and descriptive, concrete poetry was analytical and critical, reacting to a more contemporary period of rapid modernization, mass culture, communications, and accelerated urbanization. And while in the 1920s patrons, diplomats, and politicians aided and financed the modernists and their contacts with the Parisian avant-gardes during extended periods of residence and study, in the 1950s the concrete poets themselves financed *Noigandres* and *Invenção*. They communicated with select personalities mainly through correspondence, while continuing to work professionally as lawyers in São Paulo.

The *Noigandres* group enjoyed an explosive, intense, and well-defined florescence during the period 1950-67: "Alongside the group's own poetry, the journal published classic modernist poems and manifestos, many of which were presented in Brazil for the first time. Any given issue would include poems by Stéphane Mallarmé, Ezra Pound and e.e. cummings, alongside radical works by the *Noigandres* group, Oswald de Andrade and João Cabral de Melo Neto" (Goldsmith 12). The "Pilot-plan" was immediately recognized internationally as a fundamental text:

Their manifesto is the 'Pilot-plan for concrete poetry', originally published in *Noigandres*, IV (1958), and in French in *Les Lettres* [in November 1963]. [...] The pilot-plan easily captures the essence of the dynamic or ludic trend in Concrete poetry, parallel to the spirit of architectural modernization in the pilot-plan for Brazil's new capital city, Brasília (Seaman 232-233).

Beyond their journals, the São Paulo concrete poets promulgated a well-defined, specific theory in the *Teoria da Poesia Concreta: textos críticos e manifestos*⁸, a collection of essays by Haroldo and Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari dating from 1950-60 in their first commercial edition (1965), followed by a "surge of explosions and international anthologies that took place in the late 1960s" after its publication (Campos, Pignatari and Campos 6). Works by the "*Noigandres* group" would appear internationally in major anthologies of concrete poetry in the late 1960s, such as Mary

8 See note 2.

Ellen Solt's *Concrete Poetry: A World View* and Emmett Williams' *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*.

From the onset of concrete poetry, Haroldo studiously sought out contacts with major figures of the historical avant-garde. Beginning in 1953 the group began correspondence with Ezra Pound. In a long and little-known letter in March of that year, written in English, part of the collection in the Yale Beinecke Library (*Ezra Pound Papers*), the “Noigandres group” presented their poetic program to the master:

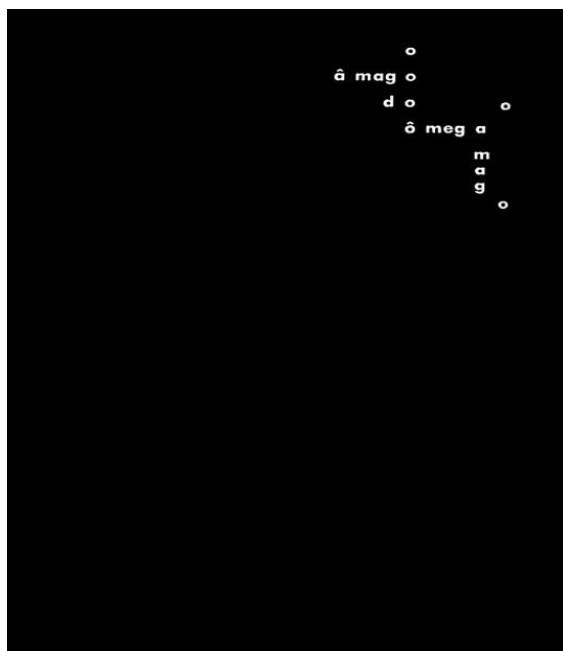
We believe, rather, that a new form creates a new content. Or better: that there is a dialectical, isomorphic relation between form and content. ... Ours is a progressively rational and characteristically technical one. Concrete poems operate in various levels—in the linguistic level, criticizing the ‘morose delectation’, the mannerism of verse; rescuing so-called semantical clichés from the hibernation of habit; bringing words to new ways of action and interaction;—in the psychological one, rejecting subjective catharsis ... and promoting objective, immediate communication, direct apprehension of structures ... this is our way of being engaged with language and with our era. Construction is the message and the task of the young (19/03/59).

Haroldo arranged to meet Pound in Rapallo at the end of a four-month visit to Europe in 1959, and soon after the group began translating the *Cantos*. Max Bense invited Haroldo to return to Stuttgart to lecture in 1964. Like the modernists before him, Haroldo traveled by ocean liner, staying for six months visiting Portugal, Spain, and France. He traveled extensively and met dozens of important figures, including Francis Ponge, Yves Klein, Gomringer, Maldonado and most importantly Bense and Elisabeth Walter. In 1964, Haroldo would meet poets Pierre Garnier, Henri Chopin, and Mario Diacono, secretary to Ungaretti and friend of the Brazilian painter Volpi. One may consider Haroldo's two early visits, and publication of the *Teoria da Poesia Concreta* and *Invenção 5* (1965) to mark the apotheosis of the movement, after which the concrete poets would develop their individual styles and projects in different, although complementary directions. In 1976, Haroldo's poetic works were collected in *Xadrez de Estrelas*, a title taken from a 17th century sermon by Antônio Vieira, S. J.

Because of their founding role in concrete poetry at the onset of its international development, their founding presence in Europe, and in view of their well-defined platform of graphic space as structural agent, analogical methods, the ideogram, and isomorphism (“tension of word-things in space-time”), and the Joycean *verbocovisual*, Brazilian concrete poetry achieved wide international recognition as the “Noigandres group” during some ten to fifteen years of intensive activity. São Paulo became a center

with the re-arrival of Décio and Haroldo from their extensive travels and contacts. In the words of Goldsmith, "Concrete poetry's great gift was to demonstrate the multidimensionality of language, showing us that words are more than just words" (16).

Two concrete poems by Haroldo that illustrate the principles of isomorphism and *vervivocovisual* dynamics are "ô mago do ô mega" and "nascemorre". The first one is displayed in white against a black background, in three horizontal and three vertical lines. Readers may see two triangles, hinged on the letter "ô". While the "o"s play on the meaning of the Greek letter omega and the theme of finality, the "mago", or diviner, counterposes the mystery or magic of the word. The poem is nearly purely musical, with two sounds of the letter "o" and the final "a" of "ô meg" dominating any possible reading. The fragments, "mag" / "meg" / "mag" only gain meaning with the musicality of the independent vowels.



The second is one of the best known, "nascemorre", which gained an arrangement for chorus by Gilberto Mendes, of the "Música Nova" group. With "nascemorre" (1958), from the high phase of concrete poetry, Haroldo constructed an isomorphic and geometrical poem, with four triangles in two large units, separated as if floating in space. The triangles form a moveable structure, a Calder-like mobile, as if the triangles could rotate freely around a juncture created solely by the adverb "se" and the prefix "re". The elements at play operate on the linguistic level, through fusion of words, and with the addition of the prefixes "re" and "des", and on the visual and structural plane, whose

axles are formed by a retrograde sequence, “se” “re” / “re” “se”. Understanding the structural play is essential for reading the poem, whether to confirm the inevitability of death for everything that is born, or as a possibility of reincarnation, or other ways to “nascer” or “morrer” again, besides the conventional ones. The very unconventionality of the presentation of the theme is mirrored and intensified by the linguistic and structural play, passing from “se” to “re”, which in turn are letters and sounds found in the poem’s essential words “nasce” and “morre”. Humor, according to the theories of Arthur Koestler (*Act of Creation*), results from the tension created between suggestion, on one side, with morbid touches emphasized by repetition, of certain death and, on another,

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se
nasce
morre nasce
morre nasce morre
                                     renasce remorre renasce
                                     remorre renasce
                                     remorre
                                     re
re
desnasce
desmorre desnasce
desmorre desnasce desmorre
                                     nascemorrenasce
                                     morrenasce
                                     morre
                                     se

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of the questioning and even contradiction of that certainly by the syntagmes. The triangle that produces this effect most strongly is the third, with the preposition “des”, in the rhetorical figure of *adynaton*, or nature against itself, or that works in reverse. In this triangle, a logical structure challenges its meaning, while the whole poem passes through four stages of life and death. The poem creates a perpetual oscillation between the fatal and the improvised through its linguistic and structural play:

After that initial period, Haroldo no longer thought of himself as a concrete poet, but something more, part of a trend he considered to be world-wide: “From the end of the ‘sixties, the beginning of the ‘seventies, I was no longer a concrete poet in the strict sense. [...] But I have somehow migrated from the restricted idea of concrete to a larger one. I continue to work with the materiality of language, with the tangibility of the concrete stuff of language” (McGuirk and Vieira 254).

2. Translation

Although Haroldo is known in Brazil primarily as a concrete poet, he was deeply involved in literary translation in the early years of concrete poetry. After the 1959 stay in

Europe, he collaborated on anthologies of major works by Ezra Pound (Campos, Pignatari and Campos, *Cantares de Ezra Pound*), James Joyce (Campos and Campos, “Panorama em português”; *Panaroma de Finnegans Wake*), and Russian futurists (Campos, Schnaiderman and Campos), soon to be joined by Dante (Campos, *Dante: Seis Cantos do Paraíso*), whose impact extends from his translation of 6 cantos of *Paradiso* to a final major book of poetry, perhaps his greatest poetic achievement, the *Máquina do Mundo Repensada* (2000), a reworking in *terza rima* and decasyllables and within the examination of the theme of the mechanics of the world in Dante, Camões, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, in 152 stanzas and a one-line fragment. Note that he begins by transferring the setting to the Brazilian *sertão*, substituting panthers with *onças*. His last project was a bilingual, two-volume transcreation of Homer's *Iliad*.

Haroldo called his art of translation “transcreation”, by which he meant a re-imagining, and re-writing of the source text guided by verbal and linguistic versatility to describe the philosophy and practice of translation of inventive literary texts, chosen synchronically from world literature, from Christian Morgenstern to Oliverio Girondo and Octavio Paz, from Kavafy to Dante and Homer. In his poetic workshop, translation was always considered to be a creative activity worthy of a new and different designation. It has a double sense to it: as a scientific method or theory of translation, with relevant theoretical references and antecedents, attentive to the phono-semantic qualities of the text; and creative artisanship, leaving signs of his particular creativity in each work as if it were the signature of an artist on the canvas, or the recognizable movements of a choreographer of ballet. “Transcreation”, “Transluciferation”, “Transtextualization”, “Transfictionalization”, “Transcharacterization”, “Transparadization”: Haroldo's terms all sound like a baroque symphony for “re-imagining” poetic texts. All are linked to musicality by movement (the “trans”) and by creative appropriation; they affirm a neo-baroque vision open to the translation of everything, since Haroldo's workshop allowed no limitations by school, language or topic.

Haroldo chose to translate literary works possessing a high degree of creativity and originality, a synchronic selection, a personal *paideuma* centered on literary modernity of all epochs. For Haroldo, the transcreator is a choreographer of semantics, continually putting verses into multidimensional movement, like an orchestral conductor of mobile semantics, changing instrumentation, timbre and register, as in Webern's transcription of Bach. First, the conductor-transcreator evaluates the lexical, sonorous, visual and rhythmic qualities in order to reinvent and rewrite them in Portuguese:

[...] the translation of creative texts will always be re-creation, or parallel creation, although reciprocal. The more full of difficulties the text, the more re-createable, more seduc-

tive and open to recreation. In a translation of this nature, one doesn't translate just the meaning, rather the whole sign, that is, its physicality, its materiality (sonorous properties, visual imagery, everything that makes up...the iconicity of the esthetic sign)... The meaning is a semantic parameter that will act only as a counterweight marking the location of the recreative enterprise. Here we are, then, on the reverse side of so-called literal translation (Campos, "Da Tradução" 35).

For Haroldo, creative translation was a form of esthetic hybridity, where transgressive appropriation is carried to its limits, where any text may be expropriated and its meaning altered. He recommended a non-reverential attitude toward any text, under the flag of cultural devouring related to Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia*. At the Oxford conference in 1999, Haroldo presented transcreation as something between Brazilian baroque hybridity and the non-reverential assimilation of a universal cultural heritage.

An early example is the fragment of *Finnegans Wake* in the 1971 *Panaroma*, where transcreation is at work in the first sentence: "It darkles, (tinct, tint) all this our funnaminal world" / "Escurece, tingetinto, nosso funamburlesco mundanimal" (Campos and Campos 66-67). We could say that his translation even intensifies the "funnaminal world" with his composite "funamburlesco" and its allusion to "funambulist" and "burlesque", while maintaining the visual "fun" of the original.

3. Essay

Haroldo's work as an essayist demonstrates the dimensions of his interests in aesthetics and critical theory. One of his first coins the phrase "open work of art" (Campos, *A Obra de Arte Aberta*), anticipating Eco on the topic, as is mentioned in the dossier presentation of *Theory Now*. An essay in the same year on poetry and paradise predicts his future translations of Dante, as well as the poem "Visão do Paradiso" (1978), written in an airplane⁹. His essays in two major books address theory and esthetics of concrete poetry in an international context (Campos, *A operação do texto; A arte no horizonte do provável*), treating the personal collection of contemporary writers and artists who contributed to theory and esthetics, Max Bense, Kurt Schwitters, Francis Ponge, Ungaretti, Gomringer, Van Doesburg, Lissitzki, Butor, Morgenstern, Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and Kitasono Katue. The volume of essays *Metalinguagem*, augmented as *Metalinguagem e outras metas: ensaios de teoria e de crítica literária*, demonstrates his versatility in theory and literary criticism, with important considerations of renowned figures in Brazilian literature, Murilo Mendes, Carlos Drummond

9 "[...] ha editado Pablo Beltrán de Heredia veinte ejemplares no venales, firmados por el autor e el traductor...." (Campos, *Visão do Paradiso*).

de Andrade, Manuel Bandeira, João Cabral de Melo Neto, and João Guimarães Rosa. Another essay in that volume on the stylistics of Oswald de Andrade's novel, *Memórias Sentimentais de João Miramar* (1924), was part of his role in rescuing the author of the *Manifesto Antropófago* and, later, developing the concept of *antropofagia* ("Miramar na Mira"; "Miramar revém (Polêmica)"; "Estilística miramarina").

His seminal 1981 essay, "Da razão antropofágica: Europa sob o signo da devoração" proposed the revitalization of a literature of the Americas by "new barbarians", veritable cannibals of letters in counterpoint to Europe. Two major contributions to theory in his essays are his work on "sequester of the Baroque in Brazilian literature" (Campos, *O sequestro do barroco*), arguing for its origin in Portuguese maritime baroque through the satirical verse of Bahian poet Gregório de Matos, who had studied law in Portugal; and his proposal of the term "post-Utopian" (Campos, "Da morte do verso à constelação"), rather than post-modern, to characterize contemporary esthetics.

I was fortunate to meet him and his brother Augusto de Campos during their first conference trip to the U.S. in 1968, when they appeared in Jorge de Sena's graduate seminar at U Wisconsin-Madison. Soon after, when I began a thesis on Oswald de Andrade, I traveled to the University of Texas at Austin to meet Haroldo, who was a visiting professor in the Spring of 1971, and to prepare the work I would soon do under his intellectual direction in São Paulo. When I subsequently returned to Austin as a professor, and later at Yale, I had the opportunity to organize conferences centered on his work, over a period of 18 years: from the "Scribblevaganza", (1981) to the "Experimental Visual Concrete" (1995)¹⁰, "On Transcreation" (1999), "POEM ART" (2007) and "Poetry Criticism Translation" (2019). In those conferences, and looking back over the 50+ personal letters that I received from H over the years, I recall some of his most well-known characteristics: an enormous energy (Max Bense called him the "locomotive of S. Paulo"), an attention to detail (H once commented, while correcting details in a student essay, "Don't forget that I'm a lawyer"), attention to new scholarship and critical theory, a dedication to the world of arts and ideas with a fine aesthetic sense, and a passion for languages—he added Japanese and Hebrew to Latin, Greek, Italian, French, German, Spanish and English, and he translated Russian futurism, classic Chinese poetry, and Japanese Noh theater.

One of his long-range projects always present was a "synchronic library" under construction, consisting of innovative works from any time, period or language. He marshalled a seemingly never-ending sequence of creative projects into which he poured

¹⁰ See Jackson, Vos and Drucker.

his enthusiasm, cultivated a wide international network of contacts with vanguard artists and writers, and shared an endless personal and intellectual generosity with colleagues and friends (our libraries are filled with books he gave us). Haroldo was fully dedicated to poetics, to family, to the city of São Paulo and to Brazil. The broadest theme I see—and the most omnipresent quality running throughout his works—is a grand synthesis of principal components of twentieth-century avant-garde poetics, to which he gave a Brazilian focus.

4. *Galáxias*

Published in 1984, *Galáxias* are inventive texts representative of their time (composed from 1963 – 1976) in a project begun at the high point of international concrete experimentalism and neo-vanguards of the 1960s—from op and pop, happenings, minimalism and performance art—a phase that led to the “*Noigandres* group” being included in museums and anthologies and to the wide-ranging dialogue between Haroldo and Hélio Oiticica at the Chelsea Hotel in New York in May 1971. Marjorie Perloff’s essays on the “concrete prose” of *Galáxias* captures the elaborate word play; the eco effect; rhythm, assonance, and rhyme; etymological play, and a deep, *verbivocovisual* structure supported by the ideogram (see Perloff). The *Galáxias*, Haroldo’s most prominent work, became a key piece for the new twentieth century vanguard movements, as much for concrete poetry and for inventive prose. Guimarães Rosa read and commented the first pages with the phrase “perpetuum mobile, in kaleidoscope”.

In the 50 fragments of *Galáxias*, Haroldo’s novel-invention in prose in poetry arrived at the apogee of orality, with its nonstop linguistic play, bringing to mind Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* (written from 1922 a 1939). He used all the techniques in his phonetic repertoire, above all portmanteau words (mixture of two or more words in one), paranomasia, rhyme, alliteration, chaotic numeration, referentiality and velocity, in a nonstop stream of prose from beginning to end. Types of play prominent in *Galáxias* include one with a semantic-phonetic nucleus, developed in a series of forms related by sound and sense, as in the sequence:

tudo depende de embora e nada e néris e reles e nemnada
de nada e nures de néris de reles de ralo de raro e nacos de necas
e nanjas de nullus e nures de nenhures e nesgas de nulla res e
nenhumzinho de nemnada
[Campos, *Galáxias*, “E começo aqui” (opening fragment)]

all depends on the now transitory and the never though no-go
and nowhere and noplac and nihhil and nixit and zero zilch story¹¹

11 Translated by Odile Cisneros with Susanne Jill Levine.

Verbal play works on the basis of contrast between the introductory phrase “tudo depende de” (“everything depends on”, which reminds us of the celebrated poem “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams, which he translated), followed by a sequence of words in the negative, which dim the prospects of success for the initial statement. What stands out is the verbal play being enacted, more than the theme, and the pleasure of invention, intensified for the Brazilian reader through the use of an uncommon diminutive, in the style of Guimarães Rosa, “nenhumzinho”.

A second target of play takes us to the level of metapoiesis through referentiality, presenting *Galáxias* as a written oral tale, a risky proposition comparable to the dangerous precedent of the *Thousand and One Nights*, where Scheherazade as narrator and inventor must invent a new tale each night to save her life. What is in play in the *Galáxias*, in comparison, is the actual life story of the poet-teller of tales, who recreates himself as story and perpetuates his voice in the act of telling. In this sense, the poetic word is put at play to save the life of the enunciator, against the black or negative arts, verbal forms being the only defense and the sole enchantment capable of defending and projecting life and memory, as in the sequence:

sobreescrevo sobreescravo em milumanoites miluma-
páginas ou uma página em uma noite que é o mesmo noites e páginas

...

e descanto
a fábula e desconto as fadas e conto as favas pois começa a fala
[Campos, *Galáxias*, “E começo aqui” (opening fragment)]

the tracing to overwrite the slaving a thousandone nights in a
thousandone pages or a page in one night the same nights the same pages
[...]

and descanting the story not telling the tale I count my beans a quick win and the speaking begins¹².

Let us consider Haroldo's transcreative choreography in the opening and closing fragments of *Galáxias*. In the opening fragment, we observe a kind of dance of the veils based on the verb “começar”. His method may be compared to his poetic “Semantic Variations” in poetry, whereby differences are produced by sequential variation of letters, to the phonic play of open and closed vowels in the title of his early poem “O â mago do ô mega” (1955), and the creative use of prefixes “re” and “des” in the poem “nascemorre”. In the first fragment of *Galáxias*, the first-person verb “começo”, from the infinitive “começar”, is subjected to variation, fragmentation, and near rhyme. There follow the forms “comêço”, the noun with

12 Translated by Odile Cisneros with Susanne Jill Levine.

the vowel closed, then adding a series of prefixes (“recomeço”, “recomeça”, “descomeço”, “descomêço”), carrying us next to phonetic relatives “meço” and “remeço”, then on to parallel rhymed relatives (“conheço”, “reconheço”, “desconheço”), to near rhymes (“teço”, “retece”, and “avesso”), and to the portmanteau antithesis “accabarcomeçar”.

In the final fragment, starting with the first-person “encerro” (from the absent infinitive “encerrar”), Haroldo chooses words and phrases ending in “ero” that have parallel meanings, including “me zero”, “reverbero” and “desaltero”. From there he again adds the prefix “des” to create a series of terms relating to closing that “reverberate” with the initial “encerro” (“desprimavera”, “destempero”, “desaltero”, “descomeço”, “despuma”, “desatina”, “descadernei”). Of these, “descomeço” returns the final fragment to the opening one, by morphologically undoing the beginning of his long verbal adventure, just as the “des” in nascemorre returns the reader to the initial “se”.

5. *Homo Ludens*

The thesis of the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* (1938), which confirms the primacy of play in the concept and operation of culture, would find in Haroldo de Campos one of the most complete examples in poetry in the last half of the 20th century. Invention in Haroldo’s poetry conforms to Huizinga’s idea of play: it taps a source of vital energy, creates esthetic meanings, communicates a constructive joy that experiments with limits of time, space and even common logic, rhetoric and language. The idea of play as an essential element of culture takes root in Haroldo’s poetry and reflects many of the types of play defined by the Dutch theoretician: play with language, play with knowledge, play with art or esthetics, mythopoetic play, and play as an expression of culture and civilization.

For Haroldo, Huizinga’s play meant invention, marked by a confluence of a mythopoetic consciousness, cultivated through musical and lyrical arts and placed at the service of world literatures, especially the classical and biblical literary backgrounds. In an interview, he described his relationship with tradition as musical: “I like to read tradition as a transtemporal musical score, which constantly makes synchronic and diachronic harmonization, so as to translate the cultural past, in a way of speaking, into a present moment of creation” (Campos, “A Minha Relação com a Tradição é Musical”). Guided by the concept of open work or art —leading to an interesting exchange with Umberto Eco— Haroldo remained open to a universal repertoire of arts of the word, in the widest sense used by Huizinga. Here are some further examples of play in Haroldo’s poetry that I am dividing into three parts: The Game of Knowledge, The Play of Geography, and the Play of Metapoiesis.

5.1. *The Game of Knowledge*

In April 1978, after taking part in a conference at Yale, I invited the poet to an event at the University of Texas at Austin, where I was a professor at the time. He arrived with a poem, “Visão do Paradiso”, written on the plane and annotated “Braniff – New York – Austin 14-IV-78”, which I translated. A colleague from Spain, Pablo Beltrán de Heredia, took the poem and translation to Santander, where he had a private edition published in large format, 20 numbered copies, eventually signed by the poet and translator¹³. This rare work is an early expression of the paradise theme, parallel to Haroldo’s translations of Dante.

VISÃO DO PARAÍSO

profundoazul	
listas de ágata	
azul mais claro	
raia de rubi	radiante
coxinhas esverdeiam	
no cinza opaco	chumbos/sombras
outro friso:	laca acesa
(da cabina – amarelo	
peito-do-pássaro	
uma janela ogiva o	
pór-de-céu	
	rubis
	lumes de laca
	lanças vermelhas
disso – íris no íris	
- se faria o	
paradiso	
	(na cabina
	fogos fúteis – cubos
	de gelo no
	uísque – trívica

13 See Campos, *Visão do Paradiso*. Bi-lingual printing with English translation by K. D. Jackson.

& paraselene)

o olho fosfóreo de dante) (se enubla em licorosa luz neon
BRANIFF – New York Austin – 14-IV-78

VISION OF PARADISE

profundblue
agate lines
a lighter blue
ruby ray radiant

highlands greening
in opaque ash leads/shadows

another frieze: lacquer aflame

(within the cabin — yellow
bird's breast —
a window ogives the
setting sky

rubies
lusters of lacquer
red lances

this – íris on íris
- would become
paradiso

(in the cabin
futile flames – cubes
of ice in
whiskey – trivia
and aura)

the phosphorus eye of dante) (clouded in liquorous neon light
BRANIFF – New York Austin – 14-IV-78.

In this poem, the “Paradise” theme foregrounds another major juxtaposition in Haroldo’s poetic and transcreative work, between the knowledge of the classical world, reflected here in “Dante’s phosphoric eye”, and a prosaic window in the plane that “ogives a

sunset", in the same way that deep blue stripes of agate contrast with the "futile flames" in the cabin, ice cubes in whiskey versus "ruby rays". The desacralization of the world into "trívia & paraselene" is put into play with the contrast between the poet's paradisiacal vision on a futile yet transcendent flight. Implicit in the game is the presence of Purgatory, in its mechanical and modern body, in which the poet with his "íris on íris" eye constructs a visionary paradise on the basis of Dante.

5. 2. *The Play of Geography*

From January to May 1981, Haroldo was at UT Austin, where he wrote the poems of "Austinéia Desvairada", translated "Blanco" by Octavio Paz, and collaborated with the English poet Christopher Middleton translating Goethe. I played a part in two poems from "Austineia" series, by chance, the first when I invited Haroldo to go with me to a lumber yard to choose a new front door for my house. It was a hot day with brilliant sun when we met the old Texan in charge of the yard. After choosing a door, he gave us advice about how to prepare it to withstand the rigors of the Texas summer. Evidently Haroldo was listening intently to the old man's speech, because he reproduced it word for word in his poem, "The Front Door", a quoted poem, a true "objet trouvé". We could even call it ethnographic research in the field, in view of the age and accent of the old Texan, a folkloric informant. The poet is at the same time a play on geography, of a Brazilian poet in Texas, who also knows about the relentless summer sun, and a translation into Portuguese that respects the colloquial qualities of the original. And there is a second game in the meeting of languages, the old man's prosaic advice, captured by a poet always attentive to the poetic qualities of speech, wherever they are to be found.

THE FRONT DOOR

para beth e david

se você não lhe der
mais de dez mãos de verniz
sob o sol do texas
a pintura rebentará
como um flor
ou escamas de peixe

THE FRONT DOOR

for beth and david

if you don't give it
 more than ten coats of varnish
 under the Texas sun
 the painting will crack
 like a flower
 or the scales of fish¹⁴.

5. 3. *The Play of Metapoiesis*

Haroldo reaches the height of metapoetic play in the poem FINISMUNDO, when he allows Odysseus to shipwreck on arriving at the Brazilian coast. Since he notes that each voyage of Odysseus is further west, H proposes in this “last voyage” an attempt by the hero of Greek mythology to reach Brazil. Playing with this metaphoric voyage, H's idea is to bring together myths of the classical world with the historical and poetic formation of Brazil, substituting Cabral and his sailors with Odysseus and his Greeks. Metapoetic play overrides the phonetic and structural, as Haroldo once again returns to the disarticulation of the prefix “re,” from *nascemorre*, to “re-propose” a last voyage of Odysseus, based on daring and hubris. The ocean becomes the pure sound “O” in the verse “O Redondo / Oceano ressona taciturno”, to the point of replacing referential meaning with the oceanic waves that beat an incessant “O”. The image of an “anxious island”, whether Ithaca or Brazil, suggests a further reference from Camões, the celebrated “enamored island” from Canto IX of *The Lusiads*. As we observed in VISÃO DO PARAÍSO, however, the classic “paradiso” came to an end with the shipwreck and was itself substituted —at the *finis/mundi*— by a postcard from a global tourist: “Um postal do Éden / Com isto te contentas”.

FINISMUNDO: A Última Viagem
...per voler veder trapassò il segno

Último
 Odisseu multi-
 artiloso - re
 propõe a viagem.

Re
 incidir na partida. Ousar –
 húbris-propulso - o mar
 atrás do mar.

14 My translation.

O redondo
Oceano ressona taciturno.

Perdeu os companheiros
À beira-vista
Da insula ansiada

...
FINISMUNDO: The Last Voyage
...per voler veder trapassò il segno.

Ultimate
Odysseus multi-
artful—— in the extreme
Avernal limit —— re-
proposes the voyage.
[...]
To Re-
peat once again the departure. To dare——
hubris-propelled—— the sea
behind the sea.
[...]
The round
ocean resounds taciturn.
[...]
Lost his companions
Just in sight
of the island anxiously sought¹⁵.

6. International Presence

The São Paulo concrete poets advanced the historical rhythm of transatlantic exchanges in arts and letters in Brazil, building an international presence through correspondence and travel. Recognizing that historical modernist poetic language was not exportable because poets who incorporated popular speech and expressions in their poems made them difficult to translate in a meaningful way into other cultural equivalents, particularly on questions of race, gender, moment, class, cuisine, and nature, Haroldo attempted to overcome this difficulty in a poem about the Japanese poet Gôzô Yoshimasu, who on a visit to Brazil was fascinated by the word “jacaranda”:

gôzô então
experimenta pronunciar

15 Translation by Andrea Koukklanakis. Center for Hellenic Studies, Harvard University.

a palavra *ja-ca-ran-dá*
 e começa a descobrir o Brasil
 por essas vogais em tupi-guarani
 que soam em japonês tin-ti-na-bu-lan-tes –
 como os sinos suspensos
 à porta do estúdio
 de um letrado que
 neste preciso instante
 caligrafa em kioto
 este poema.
 (in Silvestre 105)¹⁶.

gôzô then
 tries to pronounce
 the word *ja-ca-ran-dá*
 and begins to discover Brazil
 with those vowels in tupi-guarani
 that in Japanese sound tin-tinn-abu-lous –
 like the bells suspended
 at the studio door
 of a lettered artist who
 at this precise instant
 calligraphs in kioto
 this poem¹⁷.

Haroldo served as spokesman for Brazilian literature worldwide, describing himself in a late essay as an “ex-centric” poet, who defended Brazilian creativity in the universities where he taught as visiting professor and writer. Writing from the world’s major languages, he left an ample and significant panorama/panaroma of authors translated/transcreated into Portuguese language. He collected his poetry in *Crisantempo* (1998), followed by the posthumous *Entremilênios* (2009). In my meetings with Haroldo over more than 30 years, I could always see him formulating and advancing his projects and inventions, almost always overcome by a transcreative joy and creative happiness, assuring that poetry would remain a major topic of interest and contention on the national level. Led on by his exuberant imagination and linguistic talent, he brought new aesthetic information from his world contacts; he gave Brazil a synchronic view of creative literature that had not existed before. He made poetry present in the press in public debate over poetic themes circulating in national intellectual and critical circles.

16 See “o poeta japonês descobre a palavra jacarandá,” *Crisantempo*.

17 My translation.

Beginning in the 1950s, these debates continued for almost 30 years, assuring that poetry remained a compelling topic in national discourse. In view of the scant attention given to poetry or its translation today, one can appreciate even more the times when there was a contentious public debate on esthetics and poetry, encouraged by literary supplements in newspapers. Transcreation promoted a more elevated awareness of literary art and of the work of writers and translators among the Brazilian public; Haroldo promoted a more interactive and open presence of literature in society. He popularized a synchronic view of vanguard literature, or "literature of invention", among young readers, together with popular music, forming at that time a poetics of resistance to the regime. Haroldo formed a corps de ballet among the many languages and literatures in which he worked, and others that he studied. At the same time, he practiced an exemplary essayistic transcreation in *Metalinguagem e Outras Metas*, describing a tradition of creativity in the work of major figures in modernist poetry.

During a half century Haroldo's work as poet, critic, and translator gave Brazilian readers access to a wide range of innovative world poets, rooted in semiotics and structural linguistics. In the theory and practice of translation, his works occupy a position that is attracting young scholars. May his galactic voyage and his vision of a transcreative Brazilian literature, open to a world of letters and of languages, remain alive among us.

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