

Haroldo de Campos: Between concretism and neo-Baroque (in memoriam)

An homage by Clemente Padin (Montivideo, Uruguay)

Poet, translator and essayist, the Brazilian Haroldo de Campos, passed away on August 16th in Sao Paulo. He was one of the historic concrete poets participating in the first exhibition of Concrete Poetry of 1956 in Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro and one of the most important figures of the 20th century in his field. His efforts intended to give legitimacy to concrete poetry, linking it to the Western tradition, seeking examples in all literatures to which it would apply. At the same time, he tried to link concrete poetry with the Theory of the Gestalt in relation to the visual syntax that it established.

Born August 19, 1929, in Sao Paulo, Harold de Campos studied Law at the University of Sao Paulo. In 1952, he along with his brother Augusto da Campo and Decio Pignatari, founded the Noigandres Group of concrete poetry. He participated in the official launching of The National Exhibition of Concrete Art, in Museum of Modern Art of Sao Paulo (1956) and in the vestibule of the MEC of Rio de Janeiro (1957). They also published the influential magazine "Noigrandes", in 1958, participated in the edition of the Pilot Plan of Concrete Poetry, jointly with Augusto da Campo and Decio Pignatari, creating great influence in world-wide poetic circles, constituting itself in the manifesto for the "structural" tendency of poetry. In the following years he worked as a translator, critic and literary theoretician, besides being chair in postgraduate studies in Communication and the Semiotics of Literature in the Pontifical University of Sao 505050Paulo.

More than a translator, he was really a "transcreator" or transcreator of works like the Iliad of Homer, the Divine Comedy of Dante and Goethe's Faust, among others. His "recreation" of Provençal poetry or Japanese poetry and his constant search for poetic excellence in all times and places is well known. He translated Italian, German, Spanish, Latin, Russian, Greek, Hebrew, English, Japanese, Provençal and Chinese, some of which could be called "anthological" like some chapters of *Finnegan's Wake* of Joyce or texts by Mayakovsky, Li Po, Ungaretti, Vallejo and many others. His text "Of Translation as Criticism and as Creatio50n" (1963) is where he delineates clearly his conception of translation which is not just a mere transcription of the content of texts, but which served to preserve the para-semantic mechanisms of what the author valued in the original language. In his book "The Operation of Text" (1976), he spoke of "transculturation" talking about the historical projection of the concept of "transcreation", although the idea comes from

the field of Anthropology. In relation to poetry, we hear his words: "My poetry followed two lines: a) the one of specific poetry, that was characterized by the functional use of the white space (or black) of the page and the typesetting resources, tending to syntactic geometrism and Minimalism (*avant la lettre*) semantics; b) the one of NeoBaroque proliferation...(Taken from Haroldo by himself' translation by Alfredo Fressia). That is to say, it cultivated not only spatial poetry, strongly structural in classic concrete poems but also "verbal poetry"50 in which the verse or the "poem in prose" had a strong Baroque component predominating that finds its peak in the book *Galaxies* (1984), "an experiment between narrative and visionary-imaginetic" in his own words...The concrete aspect of his poetry continues the tradition of the visual poetry in Mallarmé (structural geometry), or of semiotic dismemberment of Cummings, or of visual syntax as in the "figurata carmina", or of the direct-analogical juxtaposition of poems of Apollinaire, or the ideogrammatic method of Pound, etc. As in the Pilot Plan: "Concrete poetry: tension of word-things in space-time, in other words, the description of verse by preserving the work in all its dimensions: the "verbi-voco-visual". He harmonized the apparent contradiction between his interest in concrete poetry and literary Baroque. (It is also known that de Campos had widespread influence on Brazilian popular music, with composers like Caetano Veloso basing songs on his poems).

He published more than 30 books since 1950. In all the fields in which his genius inserted itself, he left creative seeds and a universal character of his propositions. With his poetry he established a unity combining verbal, the visual and sound. A worthy life, with all its intentions.

