

Haroldo de Campos's "planetary music for mortal ears": A Latin American Postmodern Global Poetics

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Abstract: *Crisantempo* (1998), a late work by Haroldo de Campos, was published on the 40-year anniversary of the "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry." Spanning decades of his own work and vast poetic and intellectual traditions, it acts not only as a summa but also as a final, inconclusive postscript to the controversial revolution effected in the late 1950s by the Noigandres group. The roads taken (and not taken) in this paradoxical and multifarious later work can be productively examined under the lens of "postmodernism." *Crisantempo*, I argue, implicitly and explicitly articulates what I would term a Latin American "postmodern global" poetics. I follow Matei Calinescu's theorization of postmodernism as a dismissal of notions of progress, universal finality, and radical innovation to analyze Campos's logic of renovation and reconstructive dialogue with world literary traditions beyond concrete poetry's Poundian *paideuma*. *Crisantempo* also extends, negates, parodies, and deconstructs the avant-garde devices deployed in concrete poetry's early days. The global aspect of its poetics lies in its strategy of "planetary redevouring," an idiosyncratically Latin American practice, perhaps even post-utopian and decidedly non-centric.

Keywords: *Crisantempo*, Brazilian poetry, concrete poetry, postmodernism, translation, world literature

1998, the year Haroldo de Campos published *Crisantempo: No espaço curvo nasce um*, his penultimate book of poetry, also marked the 40-year anniversary of the “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” the revolutionary manifesto authored by Campos, his brother Augusto, and their friend Décio Pignatari to launch the concrete poetry movement, a literary initiative with roots in Brazil that gained international momentum.¹ It was no coincidence, I would like to think, that Campos chose to bring out a book spanning at least two decades of his own work, centuries of literary history, all five continents, and remarkably diverse poetic genres and intellectual traditions just as concrete poetry was turning forty. *Crisantempo*, a book (plus a CD) represents not only a *summa* of Campos’s literary career but also a final (“unconcluding”), inconclusive postscript to the controversial poetic revolution effected in the late 1950s by the Noigandres group.²

To approach the roads taken (and not taken) by Campos in this paradoxical and multifarious late work, I examine it under the lens of postmodernism. In some ways, *Crisantempo* could be seen as both a “high” and a “low” point in his literary production. “High” and “low” are meant here as relating to the level of engagement with the principles of the avant-garde and modernism (high modernism).³ While *Crisantempo* retained many of those lessons, it also

¹ One of Latin America’s most radical postwar avant-gardes, concrete poetry’s ambitions were, among other things, to declare the “historical cycle of verse (as formal-rhythmical unit) as organizing principle [...] closed” (Campos et al., “Pilot Plan” 271). Concrete poetry also sought to become an international movement, disseminating its production in a number of different contexts—Germany, Switzerland, Britain, and Japan, to name a few—perhaps achieving, for the first time, Oswald de Andrade’s ambition that Brazil would produce a “poetry for export.” The Swiss-Bolivian poet Eugen Gomringer, unbeknownst to the Brazilians, was almost simultaneously producing similar poetic experiments he called “constellations.” Gomringer met Pignatari in 1955, and, as Campos recalls, in a letter to Pignatari, Gomringer “accepted the name *concrete poetry*, suggested by the Brazilians, as a general label for the movement” (Campos, “Brazilian” 252).

² In 1846, the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard published a major work titled in English *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments*. In that work, Kierkegaard launched an attack of Hegel. Targeting perhaps the most influential philosopher of the nineteenth century and his notion of deterministic logic was a bold move. Kierkegaard’s title was ironic because the *Postscript* is almost five times longer than his earlier work *Philosophical Fragments*. Punning on Kierkegaard’s title, I wanted to highlight a parallel in Campos’s own previous embrace of concrete poetry’s belief in evolutionary logic as well as the irony implicit in *Crisantempo*’s expansiveness as opposed to concrete poetry’s strict textual economy. *Crisantempo* also includes specific poems, such as “Finismundo,” discussed below, that challenge the idea of finality.

³ Campos also used the terms “high” and “low” when discussing concrete poetry’s relation to information theory in an early essay entitled “A temperatura informacional do texto,” though the

recycled them in a “low resolution” mode that could be termed postmodern. *Crisantempo*, I will argue, implicitly and explicitly articulates what I would term a Latin American “postmodern global” poetics. The postmodern aspect, in Matei Calinescu’s formulation of the term, is evident in a number of features: its dismissal of the dogmas of progress and its notions of universal finality; its adoption of a logic of renovation rather than radical innovation; and its lively reconstructive dialogue with the past (265-76).⁴ Specifically, this means that, while revisiting and recapitulating the Poundian *paideuma* adopted by the concrete poets, *Crisantempo* also extends, negates, parodies, and deconstructs the avant-garde devices deployed in the early days of concrete poetry. The global aspect of its poetics lies in its strategy of “planetary redevouring,”⁵ a practice we could identify as uniquely and idiosyncratically Latin American, perhaps even post-utopian, and decidedly non-centric.⁶ In this article, I will reflect on these two main aspects of this late work by Campos—the questioning of the early tenets of the avant-garde (which he termed a “post-utopian” stance)⁷ as well as his creative ecumenical embrace of world literature, through reference, parody, and translation, or, as he termed it, “transcreation.” This engagement with diverse

meanings in that essay are somewhat the opposite. Answering the charge that concrete poetry, in its extreme economy, ended up “impoverishing language,” Campos argued, to the contrary, that an excess of (linguistic) information, so to speak, was not necessarily a measure of a text’s artistic achievement. He writes, “a ‘high informational temperature’ means a high degree of chance, and of *entropy*” (“The Informational” 231). As we will see, from the vantage point of these notions of concrete poetry, *Crisantempo*’s somewhat “higher informational temperature” might in reality appear as a “low” point due to the presupposed entropy that it entails.

⁴ There are many theorizations of the postmodern, notably: Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of a the postmodern era is a time for analyzing and reflecting on the past and skepticism of metanarratives (*The Postmodern Condition*); Jürgen Habermas’s idea of modernity as an incomplete project (“Modernity--an Incomplete Project”); Fredric Jameson’s view that post postmodernism replicates the logic of consumer capitalism (“Postmodernism and Consumer Society”); and Jean Baudrillard’s signaling of the precession of simulacra in the postmodern world (“The Precession of Simulacra”). Calinescu’s more capacious discussion of postmodernism as a “new face of modernity” seems to me the most productive way to approach Campos, specifically *Crisantempo*. Calinescu’s focus on the literary as well as his view of modernity as integrating a variety of facets is particularly useful.

⁵ Campos refers to the (post)modern Latin American reception of European culture as “planetary redevouring” in “Da razão antropofágica: A Europa sob o signo da devoração” (“Anthropophagous Reason: Dialogue and Difference in Brazilian Culture”), an essay discussed in more detail below.

⁶ Thaysé Lima sees Campos as “self-proclaimed ‘ex-centric’ (out of center) [who] supported a critical stance regarding the differential weight assigned to original and translated work, author and translator, established and ascending tradition, while also defending the value of target literatures and championing their place in the international arena” (463-64).

⁷ Campos initiated the discussion in his essay “Poesia e modernidade: da morte da arte à constelação. O poema pós-utópico” (1997) from *O Arco-Iris Branco*.

literary traditions via creative practices (including translation) presents an original approach to world literature from the periphery that may complement or even challenge such theorizations in Anglo-American, Francophone, and Germanic contexts.⁸

From Concrete Poetry to Postmodernism and World Literature

It is not without irony to think that, while in Brazil in the 1950s the Noigandres group was launching its utopian, optimistic, and perhaps belated avant-garde program, the label postmodernism was already emerging in the Anglo-American world to characterize the work of postwar poets such as Robert Lowell. The mid-fifties also witnessed the appearance of essays such as Leslie Fiedler's "The Death of Avant-garde Literature," which already seriously questioned the possibility of a postwar avant-garde in favor of a more democratic popular culture. These contrasts show that, despite its international dissemination, the term postmodern is indeed a historical construct that cannot be seen as equally applying to all contexts at the same time. In this sense, while in North America trends labeled "postmodernism" were being bandied about as a corrective for the excesses of the avant-garde, modernist ideals of emancipation and democratization were flourishing in Brazil under Juscelino Kubitschek, and these modernist ideals were also still expressed and explored through the modernist aesthetics of concrete poetry and the constructivist utopia of Brasília.⁹

The strong linkage of concrete poetry to an era of progressive optimism reflects its unambiguous stance on modernity, unlike other forms of literary modernism. Calinescu reminds us that literary modernism appears as ambiguously modern and antimodern: modern in its embrace of innovation, its rejection of the authority of tradition, and its experimentalism; antimodern in its

⁸ A full-fledged discussion of Campos's notions of world literature would be beyond the scope of this article, whose narrower focus is the specific case of *Crisantempo*. Lima calls attention to how Campos could "bring a much-needed contribution to the debate about power differentials in world literary circulation and exchange" promoted by critics such as Emily Apter, Pascale Casanova, and David Damrosch, "debates that have, so far, lacked the perspective of intellectuals speaking from 'ex-centric' literary cultures"; Campos can also expand these debates on "world literature [specifically, regarding] how translation affects international literary circulation and reception" (464).

⁹ The concrete poets' manifesto, "Plano Piloto para Poesia Concreta" ("Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry," 1958), was titled after "Plano Piloto de Brasília" ("Pilot Plan for Brasília"), the urban planner Lúcio Costa's winning design for the new Brazilian capital devised in 1957.

dismissal of the belief in progress and emancipation, its critique of rationality, and in proclaiming the dissolution of the great integrative paradigms of the past (265). Concrete poetry does not exhibit this ambiguity. It situates itself squarely within a modernity that integrates innovation with a belief in rationality and progress, albeit with a recuperation of a tradition of innovation.

The utopia of progress, for instance, is patently inscribed in the very first sentence of the “Pilot Plan”: “concrete poetry: product of a critical evolution of forms” (Campos et al. 217). Concrete poetry’s attempt at liberating the word from the strictures of the line of verse and its opening of the page to graphic experimentation constitute yet another example of typical avant-garde tendencies, among them Russian Futurism, Expressionism, and Surrealism, based on utopian democratic ideals. Mayakovski’s dictum added to the “Pilot Plan” as a postscript in 1961, “There’s no revolutionary art without revolutionary form,” further emphasizes the direct connection of formal innovations to a program of social and artistic revolution embraced, at least in word, by the concrete poets. (It’s worth noting that the Russian futurists regarded their experiments in poetics as a struggle between outmoded forms of expression and new forms being created, forms that would correspond to the new revolutionary reality.¹⁰)

The notion of “progress” (a secularized version of Christian redemption) constitutes one of the many utopias associated with modernity. There is progress through knowledge, a process that also implies the notion of a “universal finality.” This implies the idea of arriving at a truth that is ultimate and universal. This, again, is understandable in the context of postwar Brazil, a country whose ultimate ambitions not only of domestic democratization but also of projection beyond its borders were mirrored by concrete poetry’s aspiration to revamp and re-appropriate Brazil’s literary heritage and gain new international audiences. In other words, Brazil aspired to a place in the “concert of nations,” which was paralleled by concrete poetry’s desire for Brazilian literature to be acknowledged abroad and enter the realm of “universal” or “world” literature. The concrete poets, as part of their critical practice, sought to put back into circulation disenfranchised national figures such as Sousândrade and Oswald de Andrade,

¹⁰ Peter Nicholls notes that for the Russian futurists overcoming the weight of tradition was perceived in strictly linguistic terms as a struggle between outmoded forms of expression and the new forms being created, and Kruchenykh characterized this as a need for “totally new words and a new way of combining them” (qtd. in Nicholls 127).

first, for their own fellow Brazilians, and ultimately (and ideally), for a world audience of readers.

In their creative endeavors, the concrete poets sought, with their emphasis on form, to quasi-industrially “manufacture” a poetry of direct communication and mass appeal, fit to be disseminated beyond the boundaries of Brazil and the Portuguese language, a dream first envisioned by Oswald de Andrade’s *Brazilwood* poetry for export. Concrete poetry, the Noigandres group could boast, not only put Brazil on the world literary map, but aspired to do so on an equal footing as the metropolis. The prominent place afforded to Brazilian concrete poetry in Mary Ellen Solt’s anthology *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (1968; 1970) is a testament to this ambition and its fulfillment, at least in the context of the world avant-garde.¹¹ Following the success of Concrete Poetry internationally (its so-called heroic phase of and its subsequent more relaxed association with Tropicalism), I am interested in exploring how Campos arrived at *Crisantempo*, which epitomizes the departures from modernist intellectual and aesthetic trends that characterize postmodernism. In other words, while forty years earlier, concrete poetry’s “Pilot Plan” inveighed against verse form and launched a global poetics from Brazil—in 1998, *Crisantempo* returns to lyric verse but in order to enact a Latin American global postmodern poetics that also remains in productive/destructive relationship to the past, that devours tradition rather than breaking with it. That journey is worth a brief detour.

If one of the primary tenets of concrete poetry was the abolition of writing in lines, a certain “metaphoric-discursive” tradition, and its substitution by the graphic space of the page as structuring agent, we can say that at least from the late 1970s, Haroldo de Campos (as opposed to his brother Augusto, who continued writing short lyric poems with ever-increasing visual experimentation) clearly abandoned this strategy. Campos began the experimental prose pieces of *Galáxias* around 1963, publishing them in book form in 1984. The insistence on the eradication of the line of poetry is all but gone,¹² and by 1985, Campos’s

¹¹ Solt’s widely known and discussed anthology placed Brazil among one of the most important centers of concrete poetry (along with Germany and Switzerland). Besides prominent inclusion in that landmark collection, Brazilian concrete poetry was also featured in Stephen Bann’s *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology* (1967), Eugene Wildman’s *The Chicago Review Anthology of Concretism* (1967), and Emmett Williams’s *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (1967) (Cisneros, “Concrete” 168).

¹² In *Galáxias*, Campos himself refers to the more than 2000 “versículos” of the work. “Versículos” is a Portuguese word used to refer specifically to verses in the Bible, but it of course retains an etymological relationship with “verso,” as in line of “verse.”

volume *A educação dos cinco sentidos* sees a frank return to writing in lines. This is indeed typical of postmodernism. As Calinescu notes, the furiously antitraditional avant-garde had eventually led to a kind of exhaustion and sterility (276-77). In order to counter this silence of the avant-garde, the extreme devastation of past practices had to be questioned (276). In *Crisantempo*, most of the poems are written in lines, while still retaining the concrete lessons of conciseness, spatialization, and some play with layout and typography. The book is also profusely illustrated with original artwork and photographs all printed in a muted sepia hue.

More generally, postmodernism's relaxation of the avant-garde anti-traditionalism (i.e. the destruction of the Library and the Museum) is also evident in *Crisantempo*. While concrete poetry had attempted a less radical renovation under Pound's "make it new" injunction, certain models were to be rescued, in fact, revived and re-circulated because—despite temporal discontinuities—they *always were* modern. Campos's later work is unabashed in its wide-reaching recuperation of radically disparate forms of writing. In *A máquina do mundo repensada* (2000), Campos's last book of poetry, he turns to a *terza rima* scheme to imaginatively fuse the influences of Dante, Camões, and Carlos Drummond de Andrade with the ideas of Brazilian scientists Mário Schenberg and Marcelo Gleiser, and postmodern scientific thinkers like Jacques Monod, Ilya Prigogine, and Isabelle Stengers, among others. There is a fascinating contrast (also a strange "fit") between Campos's choice of a "vintage" fixed form with an established pedigree (Dante's *Commedia*) and the contemporary cosmological theories broached in that work. Going further, in its catch-all "Museum of Everything" (to borrow the title of a book by João Cabral de Melo Neto), *Crisantempo* also assembles temporalities and contexts as dissimilar as Greek, Latin, and Nahuatl poetry; Homer and the Portuguese Baroque; Hegelian dialectics and Zen Buddhism; reminiscences of contemporary poets from Israel and the Canary Islands, to name but a few of the diverse forms of writing collected and colliding in this volume. Campos's creative embrace of remote traditions echoes Calinescu's view that postmodernism employs a logic of renovation, rather than radical innovation, establishing a restorative dialogue with the past (276).

Yet this dialogue, as Umberto Eco has noted, cannot be innocent: the past must be revisited but with irony, playfulness, parody, and self-parody (66-67). The paronomastic title of *Crisantempo: no espaço curvo nasce um* appropriately

captures the essence of this eclectic, lengthy volume where irony and parody remain within the realm of constructive interchange. A word that fuses florality and temporality, *Crisantempo* is a bouquet that gathers plants, native and non-native, living and desiccated. It also deploys strategies affiliated with postmodernism: deconstruction, parody, translation, collage, and re-inscription. Like a chrestomathy, *Crisantempo* assembles a generous selection of transcreations, as Campos terms them, alongside “original” poems.

I hope the above discussion helps elucidate the first term of my proposed reading of *Crisantempo* as “*postmodern* global” poetics. The second term, “global,” points to Campos’s relentless, idiosyncratic, and critical engagement with diverse world literary traditions. This engagement is of the sort that Mariano Siskind identifies as a particularly Latin American “strategic literary practice [...] denouncing both the hegemonic structures of Eurocentric forms of exclusion and nationalistic patterns of self-marginalization” (6). Part of such a strategy is Campos’s extensive work as translator of the most diverse periods and authors. For years, Campos endeavored to bring canonical authors and texts of world literature, such as the Bible, Homer, Dante, and Goethe as well as many others, into Portuguese, and to render them models for avant-garde literature.¹³ In *Crisantempo*, he offers a sampling of world literature (some former models and newer ones) in one volume, including creative reimagination and deliberate Poundian homages, blurring boundaries between original and translation. Campos sees this project as illustrating a general trend in the reception of world literature in Latin America, particularly by avant-garde writers he terms the “Alexandrian barbarians,” who, as I discuss below, enact a poetics of “planetary redevouring” (Campos “Anthropophagous” 173). By highlighting this global exchange, I propose reading *Crisantempo* as a model for a world literature constructed from Brazil. I now turn to a closer examination of the volume’s structure and the poems themselves to sketch a portrait of *Crisantempo*’s postmodernist aesthetics and deliberate embrace of world literature.

¹³ Campos coined many terms to discuss the various translation approaches he devised for each particular case: transcreation (generally), transparadization (Genesis), transillumination (Dante), transluciferation (Goethe’s *Faust*) (Campos, *Deus e o Diabo* 179-80).

Travels in Space and Time

Crisantempo's deliberate interaction with world literature was not lost on poet Carlito Azevedo in his review for *Folha de São Paulo*. He wrote, "Essas viagens pelo espaço curvo da literatura mundial realizam o desejo de Goethe, um dos autores mais citados no livro, de ver a poesia erguer o olhar para 'além do círculo estreito' da ideia de literatura nacional" (np). Azevedo is right to suggest the metaphor of travel for Campos's deliberate recuperation of the literatures of the world. The geographies that *Crisantempo* charts and traverses are vast. Divided into twenty different sections (some collections of shorter poems, others comprised of a single poem), *Crisantempo*'s "roteiro de viagem" takes the reader to, among other "locais": classical Greece and Rome ("novas transiluminuras,")¹⁴; ancient Mesoamerica ("náhuatl: nota só,")¹⁵; ancient and contemporary Japan ("díptico para gôzô yoshimasu" and "yûgen: caderno japonês")¹⁶; the United States ("american impromptu")¹⁷; biblical and modern-day Israel ("harpa davídica")¹⁸; and the Canary Islands ("estância em canárias," original poems prompted by a trip to Tenerife).

The entire design of *Crisantempo* thematizes the trope of the voyage, of an author's *perpetuum mobile* across periods and geographies—a motion made explicit by the subtitle of the collection— "no espaço curvo nasce um." The phrase alludes to both biology and cosmology, Einstein's special relativity, syntactic indeterminacy, and the circularity of language—it uses scientific language to describe movement across a potentially infinite poetic space. The great epic of the voyage (literal and verbal) was one of the so-called grand narratives the high modernists held dear, with Joyce's *Ulysses* as the exemplary

¹⁴ Here Campos gathers a number of texts by Sappho, Horace, Catullus, Persius, and Ovid reimagined, rather than recreated, from the ancient Greek. The selection follows Pound's observation to Iris Barry: "Catullus, Propertius, Horace, and Ovid are the people who matter. Catullus most" (qtd. by Arkins 31). Notably, "persicos odi, puer, apparatus" ios—an Horatian ode transcreated appropriating a line from a samba lyric by Noel Rosa. See Bessa for an astute study of these allusions.

¹⁵ This section includes reimaginings of Nahuatl poems influenced by concrete poetry and *bossa nova* lyrics.

¹⁶ Poems inspired by Japanese motifs and a diptych for a Japanese poet friend Gôzô Yoshimasu. For more on this transcreation, see Inês Oseki-Dépré's article.

¹⁷ These are original poems inspired by travel, which include reminiscences of New York, a Renga, ekphrastic poems on art from the Frick Collection, a portrait of Octavio Paz at eighty, and an incidental poem about a Mexican meal.

¹⁸ "harpa davídica" features poems inspired by a trip to Israel as well as translations of contemporary Israeli poets.

fable. Campos too embraces the trope of voyage but in a way that betrays a deconstructive approach. In the postmodern world, grand narratives slowly disintegrate. Their universal authority is lost or displaced, and they give way to a series of “local,” heterogeneous *petites histoires* of paradoxical and paralogical nature (Calinescu 275). A heterogeneity of references (everything but accidental) marks *Crisantempo*. The epic journey as grand narrative is abandoned or, rather, substituted in Campos by a travelogue made up of fragments that do not imply finality or progress. This can be clearly seen in works prior to *Crisantempo*. For instance, despite an apparent beginning and end (“e começo aqui,” “fecho encerro”), no deliberate goal or progression are implied in the ceaseless proliferation of the linguistic fragments of *Galáxias* (np). On the contrary, the metaphor deployed is one of a circular or spiraling motion, as the text itself is self-generating and has limits that, like those of the titular galaxies, appear imprecise and ever expanding.

In *Crisantempo* itself, other voyage motifs depict forays into uncharted territories, where finality and transgression loom as foreboding as the end of the world. “Finismundo: A última viagem” is one such example in *Crisantempo*. The poem portrays Ulysses’s last trip, seen through the eyes of Dante: “Último / Odisseu multi- / ardiloso –no extremo / Avernotenso limite –re / propoe a viagem” (*Crisantempo* 55). A hubristic, “desmemoriado de Ítaca” senescent sailor attempts one last trip only to be, contrary to the outcome in Homer’s epic, frustrated in his attempt to return (56). The poem, however, does not end with a reversal of the hero’s fortune, which would render the epic tragic. It concludes instead with the poetic-I assuming the persona of an “Urbano Ulisses” who survives the myth, hubris gone, in a “penúltima [...] Tule,” content to possess only “[u]m postal do Éden” (59). The self-parody and pathos could not be greater, and here Campos appropriates not only Homer and Dante but also, implicitly, Joyce. According to Campos’s own notes about the poem, further analogies with punishing transgression (the myths of Prometheus and Lucifer) and with the motif of shipwreck (perhaps Mallarmé’s shipwreck of language) may also be present. In self-deprecating fashion, Campos characterizes this poem as “a busca (derrisória mas sempre renovada) da poesia num mundo trivializado” (353).

In between these journeys abroad, Campos, however, always “returns home.” Sections of the book are clearly inspired by Brazil—its literary heritage and the full range of its social and cultural realities. “ars poética: uma arte” meditates on “o futebol-poesia do brasil” (64). “o anjo esquerdo da história”

draws on Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" to protest the massacre of landless peasants from the MST (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra) at Eldorado dos Carajás. "o elogio da xilo," written for an exhibition catalog, praises the long and rich tradition of woodcuts, which illustrate the Northeastern popular genre of *cordel*. The tone of the poems goes from elevated approaching the sublime, with a rarefied at times precious vocabulary, to a colloquial quotidian, to minimalist lyricism at times reminiscent of João Cabral de Melo Neto. In a review for *Folha Ilustrada*, while critical of some of the postmodern parodic techniques that I discuss below, Régis Bonvicino characterized Campos as the densest poet of his generation, with a voice at times severe ("contudente") that comes through in certain poems.¹⁹

Perhaps the most ambitious of these "local" poems, might be "nékuia: fogoazul em cubatão." Here Campos deploys a veritable eco-poetics to invert the Symbolist ideal of *azure* and morph it into the dystopian, infernal landscape of a pollution-ravaged region.²⁰ Inspired by the photographer and visual artist Marco Giannotti's images of Cubatão, a once highly polluted city in the Baixada Santista, Campos imagines that place as:

ferruginoso inferno

lixo atônito

[...]

fumaça –
sob um céu
varicoso

[...]

¹⁹ Bonvicino writes: "Mas em 'Crisantempo' há a voz do Haroldo mais contundente, que é o poeta mais denso de sua geração. Leia-se 'Oportet', poemas qoheléticos, 'A revolta dos objetos', 'Renga em Nova York', 'Yugen' e os poemas de Israel. Concluo com trecho de 'Língua morta', que nos dá notícia da situação da poesia: '...o tempo – copy desk – tornou-me a escrita fosca / desconstelou-me as letras – amarela / conjuração de alamaço decadente / impossível de ler na lauda pardacenta / um poema – este poema – em língua morta.'"

²⁰ I wrote in greater detail about this poem in "Ciudades letradas posconcretas: Conciencia tóxica en tres poetas concretos brasileños."

azul
ruinoso
ex-céu
(*Crisantempo* 143-44)

The depiction of this ecological nightmare, which combines references to Camões's giant Adamastor in *Os Lusíadas*, the *Odyssey*, and *nekuia*, an ancient Greek ritual of querying the dead about the future, still merits from the poet a dream of redemption worthy of the contemporary trend of ecocriticism: “o bicho-homem/dorme: / no seu sonho / uma florada verdecloro / (primavera!) primaverdece” (145).²¹

“nékuia” exemplifies as well how the near and the far, the past and the present, can merge into a poem, not just *of* the now, but also *for* the now. References to the Greek Hades and to Camões's epic are repurposed here with a very current ecological bent. The desire to read the past in the present, or *into* the present, is not a new idea for Campos. In an essay included in his 1977 book *A arte no horizonte do provável*, he had already stressed this “synchronic” reading of the past that could be reclaimed for the now: “Todo presente de criação propõe uma leitura sincrônica do passado e da cultura. A apreensão do novo representa a continuidade e a extensão da nossa experiência do que já foi feito, e nesse sentido ‘quanto mais nós compreendemos o passado, melhor nós entendemos o presente’” (Campos, “Comunicação” 154).

One such reading of the past, and one that directly portrays such a dialectic with the present, is found in the section “hegel poeta,” an assemblage of snippets from Hegel's *The Phenomenology of Mind*. In “dialética do agora—1,” Campos sketches out the basic tenets of Hegel's *Aufhebung*, whereby a concept clashes with its opposite, and what results is both cancellation and preservation, or sublation of the concept—in a word, the essence of dialectic: “o agora / que é noite / é pré- / (sus- / penso) / -servado / ou seja / é tratado / como aquilo / pelo

²¹ It is fascinating to think that Haroldo is using the word “ecopoema” in 1998 when the first critical writings on ecocriticism, the critical field that explores the relation between literature and the environment were emerging in North America. The first of these, *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* co-edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, came out in 1996, just two years before *Crisantempo*, and J. Scott Bryson's anthology *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, was published two years after *Crisantempo*. This shows how Campos was ahead of his time in identifying and deploying contemporary poetic trends.

que / ele se nos / dá : como um ex- / -sistente / mas ele se nos / mostra antes muito / mais como um / não-ex- / -sistente” (*Crisantempo* 218). While this, to an extent, is a “found” poem, a “cut & paste” of Hegel’s work, Campos’s clever use of prefixes “pré” and “ex” reinforces their temporal meaning to deliberately stress a “before” and an “after.” At the same time, the focus is on the thesis and antithesis (existente, não-existente) as colliding and simultaneously being “preserved” and “suspended” in the “agora.” It is telling that Campos would turn to Hegel, whose dialectic undergirds some of the progressive ideologies of the twentieth century, including Marxism, to figuratively, ironically, and literally (i.e., *chopping up* words) deconstruct that grand narrative of the evolution of forms alluded to in the “Pilot Plan.”

Yet, as noted above, the past in the now, has to be revisited with irony, playfulness, parody, and self-parody. The section titled “xenias: finezas e grossuras” harks back to a so-called lesser genre of Goethe’s and Schiller’s *Xenien*—from the Greek, “hospitality”—short satirical poems and witty epigrammatic texts accompanying presents offered to a foreigner. In “ruibarbosiada ou a idéia fixa,” Campos lists, in alphabetical order, all the names by which Rui Barbosa, the celebrated nineteenth-century jurist and patriot refers to “loose women” in a written condemnation of a *maxixe* dance held next to the Supreme Court where Barbosa was busy presiding over a *habeas corpus* case. In “refrão à maneira de brecht,” Campos castigates in a Brechtian tone and a single breath the Cuban embargo, the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein, the Middle East conflict, and the IMF. “satirália: roque à maneira dos titãs” is a poem in the style of lyrics of that famed rock band from São Paulo complemented with computer icons and a playful font. In an embrace of a postmodern kitsch aesthetic, “bufonaria boteriana” employs a thick, bold font and insistent, overblown puns and alliterations to mirror similar visual strategies in the paintings by the famous Colombian painter Fernando Botero. Even at the level of the letter, Campos crowds his poem with rotund images and sounds: “obesos budas / de botero / goyas gordos / com ós e ôs / ovos ovas / ovais” (161). Self-aware yet unabashed, Campos deliberately adopts bad taste as a strategy (“pomposos policiais policiosos”) to mirror Botero’s kitsch depiction of Colombia’s corrupt, brutal drug and military conflicts.

A final tour de force is “jubilário trintenário: historieta (parcial) da p’oh!esia br’ah!sileida”—a Joycean text, ludic and self-deprecating, that celebrates and mocks the thirtieth anniversary of concrete poetry. Campos begins by

humorously recalling the momentous meeting of the Campos brothers and Décio Pignatari that led to the founding of concrete poetry: “Naquele entonces quando os dois turgimanos siamesmos se uniram ao oleiro calábrico, a literordura burrallheira teve um baque: teve um troço, teve um karataque...” (165), Referencing precursors (Sousândrade and Oswald de Andrade), Campos goes on to chronicle the ups and downs of the movement, their radical proposals, and their contentious engagement with Brazil’s literary establishment, to end, once more, on a comical, polemical note where they, the concrete triumvirate, have the last laugh: “[...] E como um sósatana pode mais que cem sant’annas, os tresdemoinhados estão aí, tresrindo, trintamente” (166). While not a concrete poem per se, this playful text deploys “verbivocovisual” strategies bringing them to a point of exhaustion. It also recalls the form of *galáxias* in its narrative lineated prose, though it does not dispense with punctuation. Punctuation, in fact, becomes a visual gesture that Campos combines in the title to an intriguing effect.

Translation as Time Travel and Planetary Redevouring

A full analysis of Campos’s translations in *Crisantempo* might be the subject of another paper, but, from this overview, suffice it to say transcreation (the term most widely used by Haroldo his prodigious and wide-ranging translation practice) is at the center of his recuperation of the past and of his engagement with World Literature and the literatures of the world.²² Translation is not just a way of “presenting” new poetic models to a Brazilian audience. It is also a way of “making present” those traditions in the now and incorporating them into his own practice. To make a pun on Pound’s celebrated dictum, so dear to the concrete poets, “Make it new and... make it now!” Campos reflected on this “trans-temporal” aspect of poetry that translation makes possible in an essay that came out just one year before *Crisantempo*:

Tenho dito, em mais de uma oportunidade, que a “poesia concreta” dos anos 50 e 60, como “experiência de limites”, não clausurou nem me enclausurou. Ao contrário, me ensinou a ver o concreto na poesia;

²² The literature on Campos as translator and theoretician of translator is vast. I refer the reader to two recent volumes: *Haroldo de Campos: Tradutor e traduzido*, edited by A. Guerini, W.C. Costa, and S. Homem de Melo, and *Haroldo de Campos-Transcrição*, edited by Marcelo Tápia and Thelma Médici Nóbrega.

a transcender o “ismo” particularizante, para encarar a poesia, transtemporalmente, como um processo global e aberto de concreção sígnica, atualizado de modo sempre diferente nas várias épocas da história literária e nas várias ocasiões materializáveis da linguagem (das linguagens)... Por isso, a poesia “pós-utópica” do presente ... tem, como poesia da agoridade, um dispositivo crítico indispensável na operação tradutória. ... A tradução—vista como prática de leitura reflexiva da tradição—permite recombinar a pluralidade de passados possíveis e presentificá-la, como diferença, na unicidade *hic et nunc* do poema pós-utópico. (“Poesia da modernidade” 269)

Poetry appears then as a “processo global e aberto de concreção sígnica,” and translation allows the poet to bring that plurality of possible pasts into the present as difference. This last term is crucial since the past is not repeated innocently and also not replicated unchanged. Difference is anchored, indeed, determined by the poet’s individual situatedness, and this is stated right from the start of the volume. *Crisantempo* opens with a poem titled “this planetary music for mortal ears,” a line borrowed from Percy Bysshe Shelley’s “A Defence of Poetry” (1821). In that passage, Shelley explains how, the “excellence of poetry” is at times unacknowledged by a poet’s generation; rather it is “reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendor” of poetry’s wisdom and delight (“A Defence”). Campos’s own invocation in that opening poem, stresses not a dislocated universalizing appeal, but rather one that speaks of the condition of the poet, a poet not just from, but also located in, a specific condition in time and space: “falas da condição latinoamarga / do tempo e dos sucessos / dos floreios / duma voz auroral” (*Crisantempo* 15). Postmodern and global, the poetics of *Crisantempo*, this new dawn of poetic flowering, also betrays a bitter Latin American condition, an idiosyncratic and post-utopian posture that attempts to contest the metropolis from its non-centric position.

In his brilliant essay “Da razão antropofágica,” (“Anthropophagous Reason”), Campos termed this sort of strategy “planetary redevouring,” following Oswald de Andrade’s celebrated “Manifesto antropófago.” He identified, among the practitioners of this “global cultural consumption,” figures such as Octavio Paz, José Juan Tablada, Jorge Luis Borges, and José Lezama Lima. These writers, whom Campos terms the “Alexandrian barbarians,” “have

long been resynthesizing” European and other sources, “chemically through an impulsive and uncontrollable metabolism of difference” (“Anthropophagous Reason” 173). Campos stresses the global reach of their sources, as these writers “have not only devoured Europeans: Eastern, Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese ingredients have entered into the ‘sympoetic’ cauldron of these neo alchemists” (173).

Campos himself joins the Alexandrian barbarians in his late work, particularly *Crisantempo*, to produce a volume of extreme global and temporal breadth. This anthology simultaneously celebrates the accomplishments of the controversial movement that pronounced the historical cycle of verse closed and lays its previous universalist claims to rest. At the same time, it charts a new path towards an ecumenical embrace of world literature, a world *of* literature not passively acquired, but rather critically devoured and redevoured, through a creative translation practice. Campos’s radical proposal counters models of world literature, such as Pascale Casanova’s *World Republic of Letters*, where peripheral nations are traditionally at a disadvantage.²³ To quote again from “Anthropophagous Reason”: “Thus, any mechanistic reduction, any self-punishing fatalism—according to which, to an economically underdeveloped country must correspond an underdeveloped literature, as if by conditioned reflex—always seemed to me the fallacy of a naïve sociologism” (158-59).

What Campos says of Manhattan’s buildings in one of his poems could easily apply to the transtemporal, peculiar, and motley architecture of *Crisantempo*:

pré- moderna (pós-
moderna ?) floresta
de pináculo :
do verde ao platina
ao marrom-violáceo
ao ouro e cinza :
esfumadas cúspides quase
góticas

²³ With regard to Latin America, Casanova quotes Antonio Candido’s position on the “underdevelopment” and “dependency” of Latin American literature (Casanova 31, 285). Campos’s fundamental disagreement with Candido regarding not only the origins but also the originality of Brazilian literature is what prompted Campos’s essay *O sequestro do Barroco na formação da literatura brasileira: O caso Gregório de Mattos*.

cumieiras heteró-
clitas arvorando-se
polifosfóreas
sobre o traçado
ortogonal da cidade de mondrian
(300-301)

Like a pre-/post-modern forest (of symbols), a florilegium gathering high and low, new and old, *Crisantempo*'s assemblage of figures, landscapes, and eras pays homage to the past while (self-) mockingly affirming the present.

In *Last Books, Last Looks*, Helen Vendler writes, "There is a custom in Ireland called 'taking the last look.' When you find yourself bedridden, with death approaching, you rouse yourself with effort and, for the last time, make the rounds of your territory, North, East, South, West, as you contemplate the places and things that have constituted your life" (1) Vendler goes on to suggest that in books that have an ultimate, close-to death, elegiac as well as summative role in their poetic trajectory, poets develop a "strange binocular style ... to render the reality contemplated in that last look [...] the looming presence of death and the unabated vitality of spirit" (1). *Crisantempo* was not Campos's last book (he would live another 5 years), but it has a summative character and does appear to take stock of Campos's trajectory and his cultural territory. Rather than the "binocular style" that narrows the view, however, *Crisantempo*, as an example of Campos's late work, is expansive and proliferating, while still gravitating critically to past sources, including concrete poetry and world literature. In the process, Campos's Latin American postmodern global poetics, forges a new critical and creative perspective on world literature as a decentered and unsettling "planetary redevouring."

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