

HAROLDO DE CAMPOS IN CONVERSATION

IN MEMORIAM
1929 - 2003

edited by
Bernard McGuirk
and
Else R. P. Vieira

Zoilus Press
London
2008

Haroldo de Campos in Conversation:

Haroldo de Campos In Conversation
In Memoriam 1929-2003

Edited by Bernard McGuirk and Else R. P. Vieira

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Cover photograph by Juan Esteves

Cover design by Hannibal

Published in Great Britain by Zoilus Press, 2008.

ISBN 978 1 902878 98 1

Printed by Tipografia Guerra, Viseu, Portugal

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The editors wish to thank Miguel Ferreira da Silva and Macdonald Daly for their invaluable technical assistance, Hazel Spurr and Beverly Tribbick for their unstinting secretarial support, and Laiz Rubinger Chen and Ana Claudia Lessa for their editorial input, in the preparation of this volume.

They gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce the copyright materials included in this volume from the following:

- Fundação Memorial da América Latina, Revista Nossa América/Nuestra América, for the reproduction of the English version of the interview, by Maria Esther Maciel, under the title 'Sobre Octávio Paz: conversa com Haroldo de Campos', in *Nossa América/Nuestra América*, Memorial da América Latina, n. 12, 1995;
- Projecto Portinari and João Candido Portinari, for the reproduction of the pictures: *Retirantes*, 1944; *Criança Morta*, 1944; *Enterro na Rede*, 1944; *Retirantes*, 1952;
- Augusto de Campos, for the reproduction of 'Plano Piloto';
- *World Literature Today*, for the reproduction of the English version of 'Blanco: Space of Change', by Julio Ortega, translated by David Draper Clark, in *World Literature Today*, Autumn, 1982, 635-8;
- Latin American Literary Review Press, for the reproduction of the English version of 'The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe Under the Sign of Devoration', by Haroldo de Campos, trans. Maria Tai Wolff, in *Latin American Literary Review*, 27, 42-60.
- Carcanet Press, for the reproduction of the English version of 'Servidão de Passagem', by Haroldo de Campos, translated by Edwin Morgan, in *Edwin Morgan – Rites of Passage: Selected Translations*, 149-55.
- The Centre for Brazilian Studies of the University of Oxford for publication of edited versions of the following material presented at the conference *On Transcreation: Literary Invention, Translation and Culture: In Honour of Haroldo de Campos*, held at Wadham College, Oxford, 13-14 October 1999): Nicholas Zurbrugg's 'Programming Paradise: Haroldo de Campos, Concrete Poetry and the Multimedia Avant-Garde'; Piero Boitani's 'The Last Voyage: *Finis mundo*'; Bernard McGuirk's 'Laughin' Again He's Awake: Haroldo de Campos à l'oreille de l'autre celté'; Haroldo de Campos's 'The Ex-centric Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation'; 'Haroldo de Campos in Dialogue with Jacques Roubaud and Helder Macedo'; 'Haroldo de Campos in Conference with Nicholas Zurbrugg, João Almino, Else R. P. Vieira, Bernard McGuirk, and Luiz Costa Lima'; Haroldo de Campos's 'A Word in Response to the Debate on Cultural Dependency in Brazil'.

FOREWORD

João Almino

Haroldo de Campos was a great *causeur*: ‘this man is a great poet-thinker who knows everything, I told myself right away, what is *the secret that he holds?*’, muses Jacques Derrida, referring to the first time they met. Bernard McGuirk and Else R. P. Vieira have chosen wisely to include in this book not just dialogues and interviews, however fascinating, with this indefatigable Brazilian polymath. For *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation* delivers even more than its title promises. The editors transform the contributions of an impressive array of internationally reputed thinkers into an indispensable introduction to the critical theoretical stance, the literary criticism, the translation theory, the poetics, and the poetry of Haroldo de Campos. A highly accessible reference guide, it juxtaposes seminal texts of his own with original essays on his work by eminent critics. Here the reader will find, for example, the 1958 Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry, several of his theoretical reflections on translation as transcreation, as well as illuminating texts by Severo Sarduy, Ángel Rama, Octavio Paz, Jacques Derrida, and Umberto Eco, among other distinguished intellectuals.

In Brazil, there is no unanimous view on the work of Haroldo de Campos, not least because he was a restless polemicist. The important debates provoked by his writings are put into a comparative international perspective here by Bernard McGuirk. Even his erstwhile opponents cannot deny that his important cultural contribution went far beyond national borders. Together with Antonio Candido, to whose interpretations of the history of Brazilian literature he offered an alternative view, he is possibly the most influential literary thinker of the second half of the twentieth century in Brazil. Else R. P. Vieira captures his basic insights into literature as she meditates on his reevaluation of the Baroque, the avant-garde of the 1920s, and the concept and practice of literary anthropophagy. She probes his counterpoint to an ontological nationalism, a modal, differential questioning of logocentric issues of origin. Haroldo de Campos was not proposing to efface Candido’s reading, but rather to re-read the same space, as in a musical score, replacing formation by transformation. For him, Brazilian literature had no infancy; it was born adult and baroque. Thus, new light is shed on the works, among others, of the seventeenth century poet Gregório de Matos, the nineteenth century poet Sousândrade and the modernist, avant-garde twentieth century writer Oswald de Andrade.

For Haroldo de Campos, the critical devouring of a universal cultural legacy, carried out not by the submissive ‘good savage’, but by

the challenging, aggressive, ‘bad savage’, involves a transculturation or a transvaluation that makes for a new synthesis of universal codes. For Engels, it was philosophy, for de Campos, it is literature that is the arena where economically backward countries can play the first violin. The vanguard Noigandres group, which Haroldo, his brother Augusto de Campos and Décio Pignatari formed between 1952 and 1954, certainly projected concretism beyond national borders, making a decisive contribution to the international phenomenon of concrete poetry. At the same time, it established connections with ‘concrete’ movements in music and the visual arts, in which other Brazilians, such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, also came to play a strong role.

Haroldo de Campos’ production, as a poet and as a critic, ranges wide. A restless innovator who plays with a legacy of Mallarmé, Pound, the Brazilian modernists, João Cabral de Melo Neto and, especially, the concept of the materiality of words, he later abandoned concretism in its strict sense of a visual poetry. In the 1980s, he recognized the end of both utopia and the avant-gardes, broaching a post-utopian poetry. As the contributors to this memorial collection definitively show, he will be acknowledged not only as an inspired poet and as a daring critic but also as a *sans pareil* translator himself who, as the formulator of a new translation theory, has left many extraordinary ‘transcreations’. Umberto Eco best captures the stature of Haroldo de Campos as ‘one of the great poets of our time’, recognizing that he was also ‘a fine connoisseur of many literatures and – while he kept one eye on Joyce – was a formidable translator of great poets, from Cavalcanti to Goethe, with an attention on Chinese poetry... and, I have no fear in asserting, the greatest modern translator of Dante’.

**HAROLDO DE CAMPOS
IN CONVERSATION**

IN MEMORIAM
1929 - 2003



HAROLDO DE CAMPOS

DÉCIO PIGNATARI

AUGUSTO DE CAMPOS

WOVEN MEMORY

Bernard McGuirk and Else R. P. Vieira

The important thing to the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of this memory.
Walter Benjamin

The challenging engagement with literature, philosophy and politics of Haroldo de Campos – as he was so wont to do in person – prompts conversation without end. No less, it bequeaths to the many who would remember him and his legacy a densely woven fabric at once indelibly Brazilian and imperishably coloured by the subtle hues of his multilingual erudition and informed internationalism. In such an enterprise, however, the task of the critic, no less than that of the translator, is rendered the more coherent by Walter Benjamin – always a key figure for de Campos. Referring to Marcel Proust, Benjamin characterized the text as a weave wherein memory is but skeined into the most complex of designs. Yet what of remembering the author himself? The present volume enters into conversation *in memoriam* but not *à la recherche de l'homme perdu*. Researchers of Haroldo de Campos's unravelable textuality here pursue and trace patterns which nonetheless shift and respond to even the most ingenious of analytical stratagems; ever in resistance, insistence, and persistence. Haroldo, in texture, still present.

Haroldo de Campos in Conversation arose from numerous meetings that the editors held between 1999 and 2002 with Haroldo and his wife Carmen in the hospitality of their Library of Babel home. There the generous love of literature and a vibrant exchange of ideas and opinions habitually moved the project away from its original conception. What began as a plan to honour him and his work on the occasion of his seventieth birthday – celebrated at colloquia in Oxford and Yale in October 1999 – was later developed to fit the Nottingham/Zoilus series on writers 'in conversation'. It is trusted that this collection of critical analyses, seminal evocations of Haroldo *par lui-même*, dialogues and interviews, poems and remembrances will take its place alongside the many tributes that have appeared, throughout but also well beyond Brazil and Latin America, in the period since the death of the author it seeks to honour.¹

¹ See, for example, the indispensable contributions of Lisa Block de Behar (coordinator), *Haroldo de Campos, Don de poesía. Ensayos críticos sobre su obra y una entrevista*, (Lima: Fondo Editorial, UCSS/Embajada de Brasil en Lima, 2004), and K.

Haroldo de Campos in Conversation

Haroldo de Campos: born 1929, São Paulo; died 2003, São Paulo; a rallying point – and a presence – for those who strove to renew poetic language; a cornucopia of literary but, no less, of ideological experimentalism. For, whether translating or re-transmitting Mayakovsky, he echoed the latter's assertion that there cannot be a revolutionary art without a revolutionary form. While, on his death, he was hailed in newspapers throughout the world as the Pope or doyen of Concretism, and his global vanguardism had been remarked upon, in the early 1960s, by the Cuban writer Severo Sarduy, his highly respected internationalism, poignantly evoked here by Umberto Eco, was certainly not always understood and, indeed, was often a source of tension in Brazil. In retrospect, it might be said that the polemics in which he, his brother Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari and others were unremitting protagonists started at a time of political polarization in a traumatized country increasingly on the alert for even a hint of neo-imperialism. In sometimes difficult co-habitations with international culture, literary exchanges could often be perceived not as ex-centric interaction with so-called central cultures but as cultural dependence or imitativeness; as a lack of autonomous thinking or national-specific creativity; as, at worst, a spurning of engagement with the history of the nation. With such – still raw – issues this volume will unapologetically engage; not least through Haroldo's feisty *apologia pro vi(t)a sua*, that vital polemicist's trajectory which he pursued for five decades or more, starting with a bang.

Concretism, in Brazil and beyond, was undoubtedly one of the most innovative literary excursions of the second half of the twentieth century, but to acknowledge just his leading role in this movement does scant justice to the range and brilliance of de Campos's creative writing, let alone his intellectual acumen and literary distinction. His unswerving conviction that Brazilian Concretism – not least through the efforts of the *Noigandres* Group and interacting with developments in music, architecture and the plastic arts – developed together with and contributed to the formation of an international school is reflected not only in the seminal texts on Concretism reproduced in this volume, 'Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry', 'Constructivism in Brazil: Concretism and Neo-Concretism' and the poems from 'Transient Servitude', but also in key critical assessments by Sarduy himself and by Ángel Rama, Charles Perrone and Nicholas Zurbrugg.

The early 'sixties also saw Haroldo de Campos emerge as an original critical theoretician, as the essays of Rama, Julio Ortega and Else R. P. Vieira here suggest. His early dialogue with Octavio Paz on the

David Jackson (ed.), *Haroldo de Campos: A Dialogue with the Brazilian Concrete Poet* (Oxford: Centre for Brazilian Studies, 2005).

Woven Memory

cultural reductivism implied by the supposition that artistic experiences are indissociable from economic progress, and his re-engagement with Oswald de Andrade's anthropophagy as a rich metaphorical disturbance of the straight-line transfer of hierarchies from, say, original to copy, or source to target, situate him as both early poststructuralist and radical theorist of translation. Consequently, transcreations, transluminations, transparadisations, transluciferations – terms that abound in his ever self-consciously Baroque and auto-replicating style – signal a refusal of unmediated and, worst of all, causal(ist) logophonies. Unsurprisingly, de Campos's engagement with Kabbalistic hermeneutics is attested, as evoked here by Maria Clara Castellões de Oliveira, in his exploitation of all writing – not just translation – as laying bare and re-dressing, as glimpsing and re-covering, as but intermittently perceiving the ineffable before re-performing it, and its effects, as transfictionality. National and international traditions, for instance, are trans-fused as de Campos recaptures the poeticity of the Bible by transposing its arcane Hebrew orality into the style of a João Guimarães Rosa. At a stroke, he conjures up the no less vocal interior of Minas Gerais and exploits that voice which distinguishes Brazilian Portuguese from its Iberian progenitor.

Ex-centricity is a typically Haroldian coining of that self-(in)-other relation that approximates his whole *oeuvre* to that of innumerable writers from myriad traditions and cultures who have performed the seductions of what Malcolm Bowie, in respect of Stéphane Mallarmé, has termed *The Art of Being Difficult*. While so many political and critical hegemonists have shied away – oft-times with a whimper – from the subversive legacies of a Dante or a Pound, a Rimbaud or a Joyce, a Mayakovsky or a Lezama Lima, de Campos serious-playfully gets his teeth into the respective challenges of Mallarmé's 'Un Coup de dés' and Oswald's 'Un Coup de dents', never countenancing the abolition of hazard in the ('Macunaimic') project of (con)fusing cultures, languages, iconicities, iconoclasm. Not accidentally is he determinedly neo-Baroque, vaunting the 'voice of hell' Brazilian precursor Gregório de Matos as that 'irresponsible hybrid spirit' deferring 'in-betweenness' three centuries before Derridan Jew-Greek – Greek-Jew questionings of logo-and/or Euro-centrism; and, albeit neglectedly, he foreshadows the (ex-)importations into Brazil of Silviano Santiago's later deconstruction and its 'double stiletto of the text and of the reading, of the author and of the reader'.² It is with markedly different aspects of the internationally resonant literariness and repute of Haroldo de Campos that Piero Boitani, Bernard McGuirk and, again, Else R. P. Vieira engage in their respective

² See Wander Melo Miranda, 'Silviano Santiago: Double Stiletto' in Macdonald Daly and Else R. P. Vieira (eds.), *Silviano Santiago in Conversation* (London: Zoilus Press 1999), 45-62.

Haroldo de Campos in Conversation

analyses here, finding their own therapeutics in dialogue with Haroldo's 'Homerotherapy' and the light-hearted radicalism of its challenge to turn difficulty and strangeness to vitalizing effect.

The *Dialogues* arose from the Oxford birthday colloquium, much amended and supplemented by the contributions of Jacques Donguy, Maria Esther Maciel, Octavio Paz and Umberto Eco to the voices of those present in 1999: Jacques Roubaud, Helder Macedo, João Almino, Luiz Costa Lima, the late Nicholas Zurbrugg, and the editors. Not least in his 'A Word In Response to the Debate on Cultural Dependency in Brazil', de Campos himself dialogues on. The volume closes – but does not end – on a personal note that evokes, again, the many gifts of conversation and literary exchanges that Bernard McGuirk and Else R. P. Vieira, amongst countless others, received – and will continue to cherish – from Haroldo de Campos and Carmen Arruda Campos.

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