

## AUGUSTO DE CAMPOS' *NON SERVIAM*

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O Tempo é sim e não, o homem se multiplica,  
Mas o que é este Sim-e-Não ninguém explica.

Paul Fleming (1609-1640)

Tradução de Augusto de Campos

El poeta, en plena conciencia de su pasado y de su futuro,  
lanzaba al mundo la declaración de su independencia [...]

Una nueva era comienza.

Huidobro

Nunca mais servirei mortais

Não mais servirei mortais

Jamais servirei mortais

Não servirei mortais

Não servirei

Jorge de Sena, 'Sobre um verso de Sophia de Mello Breyner'

**Abstract** Augusto de Campos' *poesia da recusa*, in the tradition of Huidobro's 1914 manifesto *non serviam*, directs his poetic universe. It defines a position of esthetic independence, against commercialization, against traditional rhetoric and against discursive poetry. Augusto allies himself with independent and innovative poets of all time periods who respect the rigor of composition. His non-conformist mini-book "NÃO" reinforces a negative positive that supports difference, while reflecting broad currents of demolition practiced by the historical vanguards. A creative *verbivocovisual* tension runs throughout his works. Augusto's poetry of refusal covers an esthetic and social program that justifies the "anti," "antipoetry," and writing "on the margin of the margin" lying at the nerve center of poetic and social consciousness of vanguardist poetics.

**Key words** *non serviam*, refusal, innovation, rigor, anti-poetry

When the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro (1893-1948) read the manifesto *Non serviam* at the Ateneo de Santiago in 1914, he rejected the pathetic fallacy and Nature as a theme for poetry. His manifesto proclaimed individual artistic independence and creative autonomy for a new era ("una nueva era comienza"), a declaration common to manifestos by historical avant-garde movements of the new century. Joyce's Stephen Dedalus used

the phrase *non serviam* in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) to mean refusal to serve that in which he no longer believed. In both cases, the “no” of *non serviam* conveyed a positive meaning, created through an expression of negation and opposition, common across broad currents of demolition aimed at tradition practiced by the historical vanguards.

A century after Huidobro’s reading, Augusto de Campos traveled to Chile as the 2015 recipient of the Premio Iberoamericano de Poesía Pablo Neruda from the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura e las Artes (CNCA) and Biblioteca Nacional de Chile. In his verse introduction to “América Latina: Contra-Boom da Poesia” in *o anticrítico* (1986: 162, 167), Augusto recognized Huidobro’s exceptionality for working directly with language in the long inventive poem *Altazor* (1919). Augusto credited Huidobro with overcoming the “[...] insuportável retórica metaforizante” of Spanish American poetry [...] by focusing on “o núcleo das palavras / que desintegram e reconstroem / em novas vivências léxicas / e novas sondagens poéticas” (1986: 161-2).

From *Altazor*, the rambling, surrealistic poem in seven cantos, Augusto translated selections from Huidobro’s own French version of 1930, calling our attention to a fragment containing inventive variations on the French word for nightingale, *rossignol*. Its semantic variation of neologisms produced a *verbivocovisual* sequence similar to techniques of semantic variation of non-words used by Brazilian concrete poets in the 1950s and 60s:

mas o céu prefere o roudonol  
seu filho mimado o rourenol  
sua flor de alegria o rousminol  
sua pele de lágrima o roufanol  
sua garganta de noite o roussolnol  
o roulanol  
o roussinol.

In the same section of *o anticrítico*, Augusto translated a poem of more concentrated negation and creative experimentation with language by Argentine poet Oliverio Girondo (1891-1967), “El puro no:”

[...]  
o não  
o não inóvulo  
o não nonato  
o innão  
[...]  
o macro não não pó  
o não mais nada tudo

o puro não  
sem não.

Girondo published the poem in his last book, *En las masmédula* (1953), in the same year that Augusto published the color poems of *Poetamenos*. Camila Torres Povea points out Girondo's use of techniques derived from historical vanguards, particularly the neologisms that create a "language within language" (158) to intensify the meaning.

With these two "counter-translations," Augusto promoted creative experimentation in Latin American poetic language in place of rhetorical discourse, popularity and commercialization. His title, "Contra-Boom," took the side of the experimental poetry of Huidobro and Girondo against the popularization of discursive prose novels by a group of younger Spanish American authors that constituted a wave of Latin American works on political and historical subjects published and translated widely in Europe in the 1960s and 70s, known as "El boom."

#### *Non* as a principle

The first *non* in concrete poetry can be seen in its non-conventional composition, ruled by a *verbivocovisual* dimension where graphic arrangement, structure, design, sound and language all interact. Its rejection of discursive poetry marks a fundamental difference in the constitution, communication and reception of what is signified, for two main reasons: first, the creative method is allied to other arts – Augusto says "Às vezes penso que sou menospoeta que músico e menosmúsico que artista gráfico" (2003: "NÃOfácio") – and, secondly, it reflects the influence of a universal synchronic selection of texts and of innovative techniques, contrary to received tradition. Thus the reading of a concrete poem obliges the reader to re-think its esthetic information and to reconfigure its meaning through its *non*. Graphic appearance raises the question of what constitutes meaning in poetry. The non-verbal dimensions of concrete composition -- space, silence, absence, emptiness and refusal – figure among other resources of the *non*, provoking differences in meaning, resulting from its isomorphic structure. The practice of *non* generates what William Franke (in the essay "On the Poetic Epistemology of the Humanities," 2011) calls "registers of signification," which themselves structure the poem's meaning, defying common norms of writing and discourse by opposing them.

In the same way, well-known books of literary criticism have defied the norm, adopting an openly negative position, for example, *Against Interpretation* by Susan Sontag, or *Against Literature* by John Beverly. Adam Shellhorse enlarges the term "anti-literature"

to include a reevaluation of a basic concept, “[...] to rethink what literature can mean today” (2017: 3). For the Brazilian concrete poets, the consistent and programmatic use of poetic materials comes out of a primary *non*, a refusal that purges tradition, the ingredient of a critical method practiced by vanguards of all times. The presence of the *non* in Brazilian concrete poetry shows up as much in the sphere of literary history as in the conception and operation of the text. The field of *non* can be seen as a contribution to the creation of a positive meaning through the mechanism of controlled negation, comparable to the broad currents of demolition practiced by the historical vanguards: In his “ULTIMATUM” of 1917, for example, Álvaro de Campos shouted, “Fora com isso tudo! Fora!” And in his “ULTIMATUM,” Almada Negreiros confirmed the corollary, “Eu pertenço a uma geração construtiva” (*Portugal Futurista*).

The revolutionary impact of the vanguard manifesto

Augusto’s poetics are always guided by postulates of many of the century’s principal artistic and literary vanguard movements and major authors. Augusto came to know many of them intimately, whether as co-founder of concrete poetry; through correspondence with Ezra Pound and other theoreticians of modernity; by years of study exhibited in his many erudite essays; or as translator of Pound, Joyce, Stein and other main figures of modernist poetry. Augusto shares the qualities of independence and autonomy expressed in Huidobro’s manifesto; there is no doubt that his poetry of refusal is crossed with revolutionary intentions coming from these vanguards. In his anthology, *poesia da recusa*, Augusto confirms his intention to produce a revolutionary impact, when he proclaims: “A poesia requer de nós algum instinto revolucionário, sem o qual ela não tem sentido” (2006: 17). He points to the case of the French poet Tristan Corbière (1845-75) as an example of a “poeta antipoético [...] a modo de guerrilha” (1986:10). And in his essays, he frequently uses the language of manifestos: “Contra a crítica para críticos [...] ainda que isso nos custe mais antipatias e mais incompreensão” (1978: 8, 89). He clearly denounces the kind of poets and poetry that he rejects:

O que abomino [são] os que não iluminam nem se deixam iluminar. Os desconfiados e os ressentidos [...] (1986: 10); Os futurocratas  
passadófobos, que dividem a história em antes e depois de si próprios,  
não passam de medíocres narcisistas que já vão ser enterrados no  
próximo passado do futuro. (1978: 8)

On his black list is the “bloqueio massacrante / do dilúvio informativo,” alongside the “[...] inanidade dos poemas ‘abertos’, mas sem estrutura e sem know-how” (1987: 41).

### Seventy years of a poetics of refusal, 1951-2021

With 70 years of poetic production, in one of the longest careers in all Latin American literature, if not world literature – surpassing Carlos Drummond de Andrade --Augusto de Campos has followed a series of recurring structural principles, founded on a vanguardist premise of negation and resistance. Augusto's *non serviam* is his affirmation of fidelity solely to poetry, above all to the "pure" forms of concrete esthetics, exemplified by Gironde's "puro no" and by Huidobro's *rossignol*. Augusto declares his devotion to poetry and its esthetic components: "Minha meta é a poesia que, de Dante a Cage, é cor, é som [...]" (1986: 10) – and he singles out Emily Dickinson as an example worthy of admiration:

Preferiu o difícil anonimato  
a traír a poesia.

He also locates a rare example in Marcel Duchamp:

a ação na raiz das coisas / sem suportes apriorísticos: um livro ou um  
vidro / uma capa ou um corpo / um postal ou um disco / um dado ou  
um vaso / um xequê ou um cheque / ou o silêncio / mas tudo ou nada  
/ entre o visível e o invisível / o imprevisível / choque. (1986: 210)

Augusto's *non serviam* amounts to attention to poetry in all of its dimensions – esthetic, historical, social and cultural – the equivalent of a full theory of literature and esthetic program, anchoring the social and ethical principles that run through his entire career, under the aegis of concrete poetry. Although never proclaimed in a single manifesto, his positions become apparent in his introductions, prefaces and essays. He proclaims his refusal mainly as an esthetic and libertarian creed, part of the language of resistance found in vanguard positions. In his very original "NÃOfácio" Augusto confirms that "A recusa é boa marca de poesia" (2003: 11).

The esthetic and intellectual objective of Augusto's poetic project is to advance the critical consciousness of the poet and of poetry, as he declares in *LINGUAVIAGEM*: "Poesia como arte e como forma de conhecimento – *consciência da consciência*" (1987: 42). He locates refusal in the very critical consciousness of the poet, illustrated by the case of Valéry, "[...] que instaura uma realidade intelectual à margem da realidade, e até oposta a ela [...]," and in his compositional technique: "O rigor das recusas, a quantidade de soluções que são rejeitadas, as possibilidades que o escritor se proíbe, manifestam [...] o grau de consciência [...]" (1987: 14).

Still more important is the awareness of language through experimentation with form, a procedure seen in the constructed poetry of João Cabral de Melo Neto and in the experimentation of Murilo Mendes, who mixes prose with poetry (*Transistor*, 1980). Augusto shares the values of innovation, formal rigor and criticism with poets from multiple languages and literatures whom he identifies synchronically across time. He laments those who abandon verse, well exemplified in the subtleties of Mallarmé and Valéry: “Basta dizer que são poucos os poetas e professores de literatura que, entre nós, dominam com inteira competência as técnicas da metrificação e da versificação” (1987: 42). The first refusal is rejection of unruly poetry, in favor of a return to discipline, as Augusto explains:

[...] a poesia concreta [...] criou novas formas, rigorosas, funcionais – economia de precisão: ‘Cronomicrometragem do acaso.’ [...] Para além da tipologia das novas linguagens [...] foi essa postura ético-poética, levada ao limite do quase-silêncio [...] que ela ofereceu ao contexto dos anos 50 [...]” (1987: 41).

#### Esthetic independence of the poem

Ever since the series of color poems, *Poetamenos*, Augusto separated the poet from the work and uncoupled creativity from the lyrical voice. Poetic construction operated backstage, so that the materials could have an autonomous role and presence, not determined by a poet’s voice. In *Poetamenos*, for example, Augusto constructs his “language within language” by using multiple layers of fragments of words, with their colors spaced out in a “melody of timbres,” comparable to montage in a design seen in the poem *Lygia fingers*, meant to be harmonious with Anton Webern’s concept of *klangfarbenmelodie*:

lygia      finge  
rs      ser  
digital  
dedat illa(grypha)  
lynx lynx      assim  
mas fe lynx cam ly  
figlia me felix sim na nx  
seja: quando so lange so

While Huidobro engages the reader directly in the poet’s own voice, Augusto prefers the work to operate autonomously. Brazilian poetry had been separated definitively from

rhetorical constructions by modernist poetics of the 1920s and 30s that looked to popular speech, humor, satire and introspection. Drawing his lessons more directly from the constructive poetics of João Cabral de Melo Neto, as well as Pound and the international avant-gardes, Augusto's position on poetic language concentrates on the poem's esthetic materials. As Marjorie Perloff attests, "[...] the concrete poetry movement always emphasized the transformation of materiality" (2007). It is the work that is autonomous rather than the poet. By using the language of forms, the poet can express what cannot be said directly in words: "Entre falar e calar, seus poetas parecem dizer o indizível, por não tentar dizê-lo, mas realiza-lo através da linguagem" (2003). Augusto's poems impressed João Cabral as individual plastic miniatures: "Certa vez João Cabral, em conversa comigo, e para minha surpresa, me disse que a minha poesia lembrava a ele a arte miniaturizada de Paul Klee. Cada poema era único, diferente do outro" (2003: 11).

#### ЯЕВЕЯ: Word-Objects in Space-Time

The exhibit ЯЕВЕЯ in São Paulo in 2017 brought together works from 65 years of production, from books to collages and installations using letters, words, images and sounds. The reverse "R's" oblige the viewer to read differently and to be aware of the unorthodox, reversed use of language, which is nonetheless easily readable. Scholar John Piccione suggests making a comparison between baroque epistemology of paradox, dislocation and deception and a comparable negative tension in concrete poetry (2009: 61-70). Haroldo de Campos first spoke of the open work of art as "neo-baroque," or in the phrase of Pierre Boulez, "a modern baroque" (1973: 33). Just as Haroldo's phrase *nunhunzinho de nemnada nunca* in *Galáxias*, Augusto's *non serviam* expresses a negative, neobaroque tension that lies between a universal constructivist and cosmopolitan vision and a confrontation with society and tradition. A prime example is Augusto's poem "tensão."

ЯЕВЕЯ is conscious writing as re-writing, a modern baroque, described by Marjorie Perloff as an "arrière-garde." In an operation of re-seeing the poem object ("word-thing in space-time" is the formula in *Theory of Concrete Poetry*), for example, Augusto deconstructs and reconfigures the commonplace phrase "tudo está dito" (2005: 222), in a process described as implosion by Adam Shellhorse:

In [...] Augusto de Campos's video-poem, "tudo está dito" (everything's said) (1979; 1996), by accounting for literature's nonrelation to identity, we witness how anti-literature proposes a new conception of form where the conventional literary "all said" becomes



undone: “tudo / está / dito / tudo / está / visto / nada / é perdido / nada / é per / feito / é sói / mpre / visto / tudo / é / infi / nito” (every / thing’s / said / every / thing’s / seen / nothing’s / lost / nothing’s / per / fect / it’s only / unforeseen / everything’s / infi / nite). In effect, through the anti-poem’s zigzagging movement across the verbal and nonverbal, the poem and video, the straight line and labyrinth, we witness the idea of literary evolution and plenitude—everything’s / said / everything’s / seen—implode as a self-critical field of limitless verbal, vocal, and visual force. (2017: 166)

Augusto’s refusal applies generally to the tension of a baroque counterpoint with its contrary: a suspension of the rules, oscillation between concrete and abstract, rational and irrational, mechanical and fluid, aleatory and planned, sound and silence, space and print, unaware and premeditated, free and constrained, conscious and conformist. These opposites act in counterpoint: on one hand the abstract becomes concrete; on the other, concrete works its magic by becoming, as it were, immaterial, “disappearing in thin air” (2012: 183-92). Augusto recognizes the confluence of contraries, the isomorphic tension that is the positive negative of refusal: “Saber ver e ouvir estruturas será pois a chave para a compreensão de um poema concreto” (1975: 80). To read his poetry requires an understanding of negation -- of how, why and what is negated.

### Translating World Literatures

*Verso reverso controverso*, *LINGUAVIAGEM*, *O anticrítico*, *À margem da margem*, *Poesia da recusa*, are all anthologies in which Augusto introduces innovative world poetry in translation. He chooses poets who all have to pass in some manner through the sieve of poetic and esthetic refusal. Of the poets selected for the *poesia da recusa* anthology, he says:

The poets collected here, as different as they may be among themselves, have in common the flag of refusal. Not all of the poets presented in this book belong strictly to the category of ‘inventors,’ the discoverers of new artistic procedures, privileged in my translation adventures. But all of them are extraordinary artisans of the poetic craft, from whom there is much to learn [...] whether language or ethical-esthetic position (2006: 16).

His translations from an alliance with world literatures, in a spirit of resistance and innovation. Where else in this world could one find poetry of Crane, Thomas, Stevens and Stein alongside that of Blok, Mandelstam, Akhmátova, Iessiênin and Tzvietáieva?

Augusto’s *recusa* is formed by a paideuma of authors and innovative works, selected from diverse epochs of world literatures and languages. As he writes in *VERSO*



REVERSO CONTROVERSO, “O antigo que foi novo é tão novo como o mais novo novo. O que é preciso é saber discerni-lo” [...] (1978: 7). In *Poesia da recusa* Augusto recognizes a universal art of poetry based on innovation and formal rigor: “A poesia é uma família dispersa de naufragos bracejando no tempo e no espaço [...] os que lutaram sob uma bandeira e um lema radicais -- a invenção e o rigor” (1978: 8). Creative translation is furthermore a form of directed criticism, as Augusto explains in texts from the 1970s 1980s: “Outrossim, ou antes, outronão: tradução é crítica, como viu Pound melhor que ninguém” (1978: 7). By revealing the unexpected and innovative, creative translations also expose the routine: “[...] crítica de amor e de amador [...] crítica via tradução criativa – dirige a seta do seu ‘anti’” (1978: 7; 1986: 10).

Augusto’s *non serviam* is codified in the critical introduction to his anthologies and collections of poetic translations. Refusal is his main criterion in the selection of poets: “baluarte contra o fácil, o convencional e o impositivo” (2006: 15). This exigency means that each poem selected represent a threshold of the possibilities of creation: “Cada poema é como se fosse o último e ressoa, inevitavelmente, o fracassucesso desse conflito [...]” (1994: )

Poetry that survives the sieve of refusal becomes immune from “cultural cosmetics;” it joins a chorus of dissident voices, bringing together epochs, languages and their diverse radical forms of refusal. According to Augusto, they give new meaning to marginality, “[...] dos que buscam caminhos não balizados, abrindo sendas novas [...] Do avesso do avesso à margem da margem” (1989: 7). He describes the inverse path covered by poetry of refusal, whose objective is to animate the substance of poetry. Refusal brings before the reader new and unexpected poems in the Brazilian context, such as “Julia’s Wild,” by Louis Zukovsky, and the little-known optical poems by Bob Brown.

In his translations, Augusto always tried to locate creative writing from diverse historical periods and languages, thus in *o anticrítico* Huidobro and Gironde join a panorama of world creative poets, from Dante to Gertrude Stein. Augusto repeats the esthetic challenge voiced by Baudelaire: “Quand sera-t-on artiste, rien qu’artiste, mais bien artiste?” while at the same time opening his works to perceptive criticism:

Não sou—nem poderia ser—contra a crítica inteligente, a iluminadora [...] cujas reflexões sobre arte e sobre poesia constituem para mim fonte permanente de estímulo e inspiração” (1986: 10). “É um caminho dificultoso e desconfortável, [...] a sofrida experiência da recusa poética” (2006: 17) “porque poucos são aqueles que escolhem seguir a ética estreita da recusa” (1987: 41).

The 13 poets chosen for the anthology *poesia da recusa* – classified as “irmãos no tempo” – satisfy some essential requirements: they refuse and innovate at the same time; they show ethical and esthetic integrity; and they maintain a spirit of diversity. They are “Dispares. Diversos. Dispersos” (1978: 7). For their unusual qualities, the poems are difficult to translate. Augusto distinguished them for being “poemas que [...] efetivamente continuam poemas depois de traduzidos” (1989: 17), unified by their “bandeira da recusa,” whether for reasons of rebellious mysticism, vanguardist daring, atemporal imagination or blasphemous satire. On the question of brotherhood, refusal and innovation interact as a pair, “de modo a causar alterações na função da imagem de acordo com as questões culturais de cada época” (*Projéctica* 2012: 191). Beginning with the rebellious mysticism of the German baroque poet Quirinius Kuhlmann (1651-1698), the anthology presents poetic artisans with irregular and unforeseen qualities, from Mallarmé to Gertrude Stein, Yeats and Pound to Dylan Thomas, Wallace Stevens to Hart Crane, Maiakovsky to Mandelstam.

#### Against Commercialization, Commodification, Massification

A sense of ethics leads Augusto to a strong rejection of commercialism, conformity and massification of communication and social relations. Like the poems he translates from world literature, his poetry portrays and responds to our times within the concrete esthetic; it contributes to a point of view that opposes any status quo with “[...] formas de desacordo com a sociedade ou com a vida [...]” (2006: 15). His purpose is to defend an ethical position, his wish to define a problem outside the logic of form and language, to raise questions that go beyond the text to become part of the “cosmovisão do homem de hoje” as a value (1975: 80).

The titles of Augusto’s books frequently highlight his ethical position against the norms and practices of commercialization, conformity, mercantilism and massification present in contemporary society. He conceived many of these works in the 1960s, a period when São Paulo was beginning its trajectory from a city of a few million inhabitants to more than 20 million in 2021. He was facing the first years of a military dictatorship. There were social problems that accompanied the city’s rapid growth, bringing new problems that in Shellhorse’s reading “[...] explore explicit political ‘objects’ in their poems. These include, but are not limited to, the problem of subaltern hunger, agrarian reform, capitalist propaganda, the bombing of Hiroshima, and the Cuban Revolution” (Shellhorse, 2017: 87).

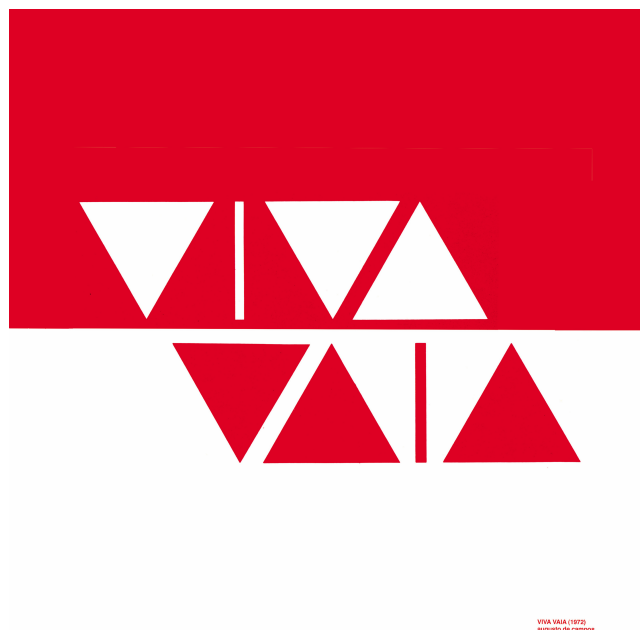
The artist Arnaldo Antunes offers a summary of Augusto's long trajectory of social, cultural and literary refusal by referring to a sequence of prefixes and conjugations, taken from his titles, that affirm by negating: "Do menos ao ex, do ex ao des, do des ao não, a poesia de Augusto renova a sua afirmação" (*Não*, 2003).

Many of the titles of Augusto's books include diverse forms of *non*: *poesia da recusa*, *anti-poesia* and writing *à margem da margem*. Already during the first phase of concrete poetry in São Paulo, Jorge de Sena, having arrived in Brazil in 1959, referred to the experience of the concrete poets as an "escola de anti-retórica" (1963: 127), pointing out that the marginal forms of literary creation that they preferred could not be considered marginal at all when placed in the wide panorama of a literature (1989: 15). Marcel Duchamp attracted Augusto's attention, in this sense, by his particular form of marginality: "Ninguém como ele se desligou tanto da ideia de 'obra'" (1986: 202). As an "anti" act, Augusto placed a *não* in the nucleus of poetic and social consciousness of concrete poetry in the first phase of its evolution:

From the other side of the other side to the margin of the margin [...] come singular voices disturbing the monotonous croaking chorus [...] If such is inevitable and gives the general tone to an era, there can suddenly come from some dissonant minority voices an unexpected luminosity and de-banalizes sound, sweeps away the marasmus and shakes up the daily boredom [...]. (1989: 9)

The mysterious title of the first literary magazine of concrete poetry in São Paulo in the 1950s, *Noigandres*, from a troubadour poem by Arnaut Daninel, is thought to mean "against tedium." Thus, Augusto points to his refusal to accept tedium, mediocrity or empty rhetoric.

In the 1960s, for example, Augusto responded directly to socio-political questions with original poems. These he called *Popcretos*, exhibited in the Atrium Gallery in December 1964 (alongside art work by Waldemar Cordeiro) included *GOLDwEATER*, *Olho por Olho*, *Psiiu! e SS* (Ssemântica das Ssiglas). His "contra" position is alive in the poem-posters *LUXO-LIXO* (1965), against commercialization, inspired by the Atrium exhibit, and *VIVA VALA* (1972), which references a speech by Caetano Veloso to a hostile crowd at a performance in São Paulo. The two poems -- tied to youth culture, to resistance to the regime and to the confrontation of a conservative and massified society -- are today icons in the history of modernization of the city of São Paulo.



## NÃO

Augusto's "non-book," or "anti-book" par excellence is his *NÃO*, from 1990. He advances a creative poetics directed at conventional books, even if the book as a form is inescapable: "Mas o livro [...] é embalagem inelutável, ainda mais para os guetos e guerrilhas da poesia e suas surdas investidas catacumbicas" (2003: 11). Measuring 5X5 cm, 14 thin pages stapled twice on the left side, the anti-book *NÃO* consists of 10 vertical columns of letters, five horizontal lines, in a typed sequence of non-words that can only be "read" by whoever understands the strategy for unblocking the pattern of reading. As if ridiculing published books, each "volume" of this "edition" is numbered and signed by the author. The very composition of *NÃO* is a refusal to collaborate with the editorial industry, an artisanal preference that runs throughout Augusto's poetics from his first publication, *O Rei menos o Reino* (1951), to the journals *Noigandres*, *Invenção* and the color poems of *Poetamenos*, all truly artisanal projects produced in the printers' shops. These titles early on opened a path of "publication" parallel to what would follow at the Editora Perspectiva and other great publishers that would publish his works from the 1960s onward. His artisanal "anti-books," however, distinguish his poetic career, above all the translations produced by hand at Cleber Teixeira's Noa Noa, in Florianópolis, and the recent small volumes of poetic translations printed by Edições Galileu in Londrina, PR, or by the Selo Demônio Negro of Vanderley Mendonça, in S. Paulo.

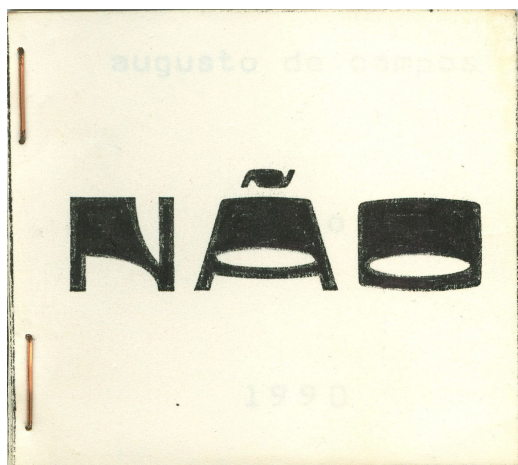
*NÃO* is the supreme “non-book” of poetry, thin, made of simple pieces of paper cut by hand into squares. At the same time, it is a lesson in a negative mode of “verses” that still have not achieved the true state of poetry; it is an ironic and debunking criticism of everything that is published in the category of “poetry”. Following the cover and title page are 12 more pages, 9 with poetry in the form of rectangles of five horizontal typed lines, 10 characters per line. The lines form a chaotic and apparently illegible sequence of letters. Each successive page has one less character in the last vertical position of the lines, until in the last page there is only one vertical column of characters remaining, “read” from top to bottom. Throughout the pages, the letters are arranged, and divided in line separations, so that there is hardly any complete or recognizable word. And although each page’s block of letters has a chaotic and apparently meaningless sequence, there is nevertheless a sinuous reasoning disguising the reading, a lesson in the hermetic nature of poetry, a neobarroque touch. Whoever discovers the key to the zigzag reading uncovers the following text:

1. meu amor dor não é poesia amar viver morrer ainda não é poesia
2. escrever pouco ou muito calar falar ainda não é poesia
3. humano autêntico o sincero mas ainda não é poesia
4. transpira todo o dia mas ainda não é poesia
5. ali onde há poesia ainda não é poesia
6. desafia mas ainda não é poesia
7. é quase poesia mas
8. ainda não é p
9. oesia

Poetry exists in the hidden code, between the lines, among the lines, giving the impression of an incomplete and alienated meaning in its illegibility, its pure external form, disguising the meaning as if it were the occult kernel of a more perfect state, a hidden illumination awaiting the reader. And when read, the text talks only about all that is not poetry, giving one more meaning to the title, *NÃO*. The reader must learn to see and to read differently, with insight, prepared for the unexpected, which is the condition of true poetry that hides itself behind *NÃO*: “oesia” in place of “poesia.”

For having defied the major publishers, and because of its unusual construction, *NÃO* is today a collectors’ item and bibliographical rarity, as has occurred with so many ephemeral works produced by the historical vanguards. In 2013, after the

sensation created by the non-book in the 1990s, *NÃO* was republished in a commercial book, with essays and photo fac-simile of the original, now fetishized. But not the *NÃO*, no *NÃO*, no.



### The Refusal that Teaches

Augusto de Campos' poetry is a contemporary way of knowledge as a function of refusal, a positive-negative dimension of concrete poetry that repositions the platforms of the historical vanguards into a more universal and synchronic context related to world literature. *Poesia da recusa* and the affirmation implicit in its negative premise communicates its knowledge primarily through its forms of *não*: "Dessa condição limítrofe surgem as marcas de negação que vêm caracterizando sua poesia há muitos anos [...] Tais sinais de menos adquirem positividade na medida em que os poemas se efetivam, minérios extraídos de recusas a todas os excessos e facilidades" (2003: 90).

Through the affirmation implicit in its refusal, Augusto's poetry transforms practices of the historical vanguards and sustains the condition of a counter way of knowledge, which knows and teaches, surprisingly, through its *não*. And through the affirmation of his refusal, Augusto continues to tread the impassable and difficult path that allows poets to survive and to write poetry in the contemporary world: "Desviagens da poesia que [...] é uma viagem ao desconhecido via linguagem" (1987: 7). The poet Augusto de Campos, on the eve of his 90th birthday, which I have the honor of commemorating here, continues to teach us the "contra" way, which leads to knowledge, which knows and teaches, surprisingly, by its *não*.

New Haven, February 13, 2021, Happy 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday tomorrow Augusto.

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