

THESES ON AFFECT AND ANTI-LITERATURE IN AUGUSTO DE CAMPOS: THE UNTIMELY POWER OF BRAZILIAN CONCRETISM

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Abstract This essay is organized around nine theses that explore Augusto de Campos's protean poetics through the underexamined questions of affect and anti-literature. I begin by situating Campos's reception against the grain of the modernist paradigm of the arts which informs conventional accounts of the Brazilian avant-garde and concretism. In contradistinction, through a consideration of "cubagramma" (1960/1962) and "Contrapoema para o verbo ir" (2020), I make the case that Campos's poems are not self-enclosed monads dealing in identity, linear signification, and evolutionary paradigms, but best framed dynamically from the vantage of their relational, constituent, and sensory-affective processes. Moreover, if, for Campos, each new poem is a prototype that places poetry in crisis, I turn to Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari's concepts of the distribution of the sensible, affect, politics, and the plane of immanence to reckon with the writer's conception of the poem as a verbivocovisual body that produces new varieties of affect and syntax in space-time. Meditating on the legacy and political potential of the concrete master's sui-generis production, I conclude with a reading of "poema bomba" (1987) and "palavras" (2000).

Keywords Augusto de Campos, Affect, Anti-Literature, Politics of Literature, Concrete Poetry, Modernism

As I have argued elsewhere, in our time the problems surrounding the literature debate have changed, and traditional concepts and vocabularies are not the most useful ones for describing literature's nature and intervening power. We need to think in a new way and invent new concepts.

We need to come up with concepts that correspond to our reality—and that "reality" encompasses the productivity and potency of texts that have placed "literature as cultural identity" and "literature as modernism" in crisis.¹

¹ For critiques of the literary representational paradigm in Latin American studies, see Beverley (1993), H. Campos (2005), Dove (2016), Graff-Zivin (2020; 2014), Hoyos (2015), Jenckes (2017), Johnson

The literary question today is overdetermined by representation, sociology, and transcendental values — what I have called, in the context of Latin American Studies, the literary representational regime. If literature persists in crisis today, the task today is to reconstitute its critical force. In effect, to the extent that we are immersed in a technomediated environment contextualized by the global electronic boom, the rise of retrograde ideologies, antidemocracy, and what William Marx has called the “indifference” to literature, Augusto de Campos’s conception of the poem as a self-reflexive, verbivocovisual word-thing (*palavra-coisa*) affords us a seminal opportunity to rethink literature’s intervening power and inexorable link with affect² (Marx 2).

This essay is organized around nine theses that explore Campos’s protean poetics through the underexamined questions of affect and anti-literature.³ I begin by situating Campos’s reception against the grain of the modernist paradigm of the arts which informs conventional accounts of the

(2019), Legrás (2008), Levinson (2001), Moreiras (1999; 2001), Sánchez Prado (2018), Shellhorse (2017; 2016), Siskind (2014), and Williams (2002).

² Yet, different from Marx’s understanding of anti-literature as “opposition” to literature, my immanent conception concerns grasping the multiplicity, dynamism, and affective force of experimental texts, like those of Campos, in terms of the following: 1) their confrontation with the literary field understood as a *habitus* and regime of visibility and interpretation; 2) their subversion of monological conceptions of literary writing; and 3) their status as intervening procedures of the sensible (Marx 1-6). Accordingly, to grasp anti-literary works, I argue for the necessity of creating a new typology of the text and methodology of reading that understand literary form as an open, verbal, vocal, and visual complex of perception and affection that dialogues with other media, other art forms, and marginalized social groups. In short, against transcendental conceptions of literature, involving a unified (hegemonic) subject and its formation and developments, anti-literary writing is modal, immanent, and minoritarian. See Shellhorse (2017), 4-7.

³ See Shellhorse (2020). For studies on Augusto de Campos, see *Revista Circuladô* (volume 7, 2017) and (volume 8, 2018) edited by Julio Mendonça. See also Aguilar (2019; 2014; 2004; 2003a; 1994), Becker (2009), Bessa (2017; 2009), Busato (2012), Raquel Campos (2019; 2018; 2014), Cisneros (2020), Clüver (1981), Daniel (2021), Donguy (2011), Funkhouser (2017), Gómez (2018), Jackson (2014; 2004), Jorge (2016; 2011), Lemos (2017), Lino (2018), Perrone (2007; 2004), Médiçi Nóbrega and Milton (2009), Santos (2020), Shellhorse (2021; 2019; 2015), and Sterzi (2006). Moreover, see the essays in *Sobre Augusto de Campos* (2004), edited by Flora Süssekind and Júlio Castañon Guimarães, as well as those in *Extra. Augusto de Campos: 90 anos* (2021), a special volume of *Bunker: Revista de Literatura e Artes Visuais*. The latter, edited by Mário Alex Rosa and Jardel Dias Cavalcanti and published on occasion of Campos’s 90th birthday (14 February 2021), contains essays, homages, and poetic texts by Luiz Costa Lima, Lygia Azeredo, Marjorie Perloff, Gerald Thomas, Tom Zé, Arnaldo Antunes, Trajano Vieira, André Vallias, and others. In similar fashion, see *Revista Errática’s* special issue, *Poéticas na Quarentena 6 / Augusto de Campos 90* (February 2021). Edited by Bené Fonteles and Walter Silveira and designed by André Vallias, the richly illustrated issue brings together 56 poets and artists to celebrate the life, work, and achievement of Campos. Finally, for superb interviews with the poet, see Greene (1992) and Perloff (2005).

Brazilian avant-garde and concretism.⁴ In contradistinction, through a consideration of “cubagramma” (1960/1962) and “Contrapoema para o verbo ir” (2020), I make the case that Campos’s poems are not self-enclosed monads dealing in identity, linear signification, and evolutionary paradigms, but best framed dynamically from the vantage of their relational, constituent, and sensory-affective processes. Moreover, if, for Campos, each new poem is a prototype that places poetry in crisis, I turn to Jacques Rancière, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari’s concepts of the distribution of the sensible, affect, politics, and the plane of immanence to reckon with the writer’s conception of the poem as a verbivocovisual body that produces new varieties of affect and syntax in space-time. Meditating on the legacy and political potential of the concrete master’s sui-generis production, I conclude with a reading of “poema bomba” (1987) and “palavras” (2000).

⁴ On Brazilian concretism and art, see Aguilar (2008; 2003b), Alvarez (2013; 2012), Bandeira (2006), Bandeira and Barros (2008), Becker (2014), Bessa et al. (2021), Bohn (2011), Clüver (2007; 2006), Delgado Moya (2017), Erber (2012), Infante (2013), Khouri (2006), Kosick (2020), Ledesma (2016), Menezes (1995), Nelson (2016), Perloff (2017), Perrone (1996), and Price (2014).

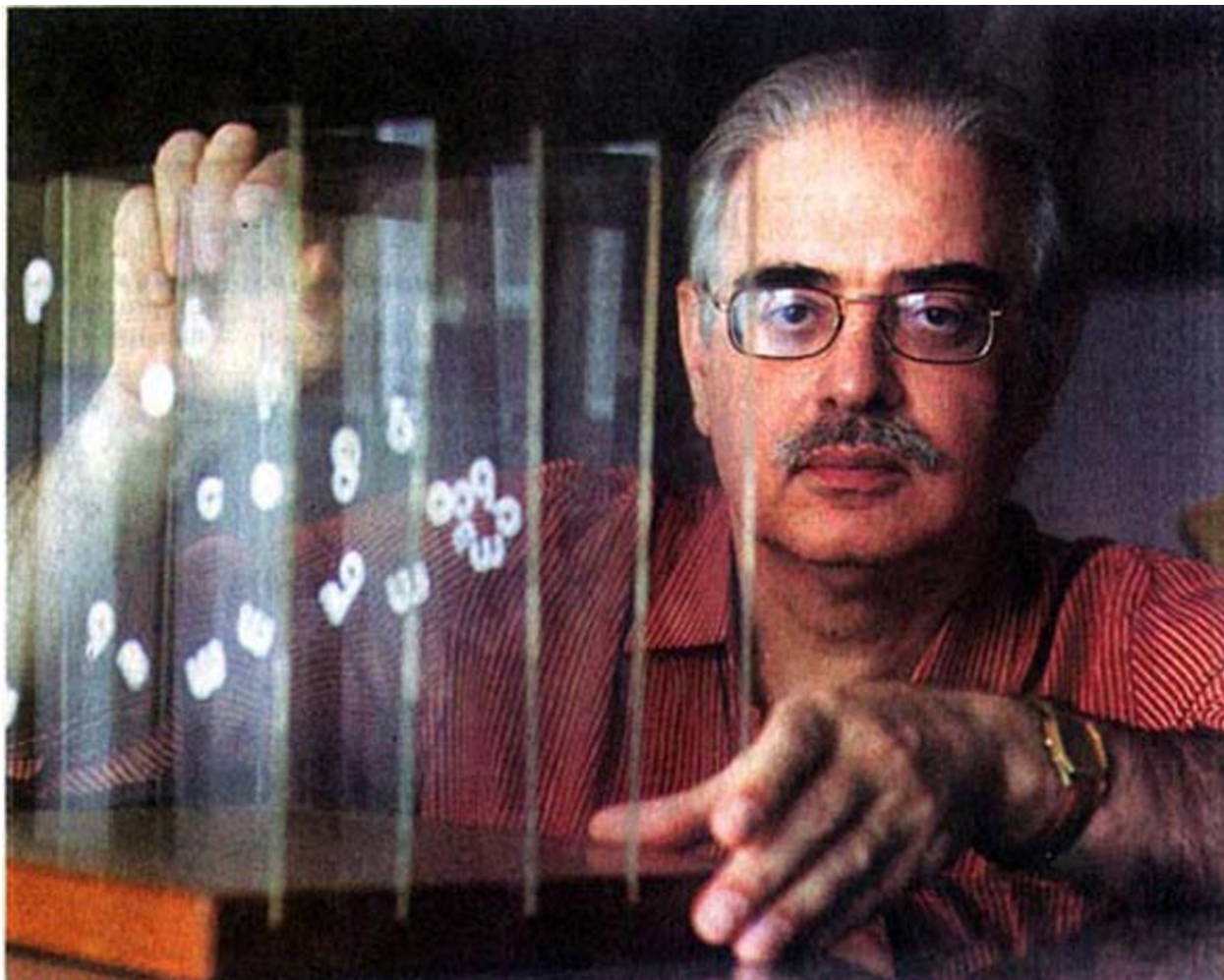


Fig. 1. Augusto de Campos in his studio in 1987 beside the prototype sculpture, “poema bomba.” Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

I. Theses on Affect and Anti-Literature in Augusto de Campos

1) *Immanence*

Responding to the impasse in the field, an immanent conceptualization of Campos’s verbivocovisual revolution and its relevance for our time could perforce be *anti-literary*. That is, an approach geared to read Campos’s production against the grain of traditional paradigms of modernism and cultural identity. What is at issue is precisely this: Campos’s work—which defies not only genre but normative conceptions of what is meant by literature—need not be reduced by the avant-garde, modernist paradigm of the arts. Like identity, the modernist paradigm functions as a master discourse in literary studies, and narrates the successive stages and conquest of a so-called autonomization of literature. In the context of Brazil, the modernist paradigm frames literary language as progressively intransitive,

developed, and less derivative—as an autonomous subject no longer dependent on Europe. Moreover, in positing literature in such rarified, self-enclosed, national, and transcendental terms, the modernist paradigm tends to efface the specificities, movement, and sensory stakes of Campos’s radicalized medium, which welcomes prosaic, non-literary forms of life, including multimedia and insurgent, subaltern, feminine, and minoritarian modes of discourse.⁵ For this reason, Campos will characterize his experiments as *antipoesia*⁶: namely, as an intensive “fenomenologia da composição,” as seeking “permanent dialogue between the verbal and nonverbal,” and as a “força relacional” (relational force), akin to paintings desiring to be video-clips (*quadros querendo ser clips*) (“Plano-piloto” 217; “REVER” 5; “OUTRONÃO” 11).

2) *Assemblage*

Against identity, genre, and the illusion of transcendental literary values, Campos’s texts are best conceived as polyphonic, open assemblages composed of multiple regimes of signs. Such an approach entails the following aspects:

- The move beyond static notions of literature;
- A concern with writing’s constituent perceptive, affective, and multimedial powers—where writing is understood as an open, experimental process, always redefining itself, always hooking up literature to its outside and to the outside of language (*não-linguagem*);
- The problem of unearthing pariah inventors and traditions, following Ezra Pound, that introduce new techniques of writing. At issue, as Haroldo de Campos relates, is the blending of experimentation with critique: a form of “poetry that places poetry in crisis” (“Carta” 2).

⁵ On the modernist paradigm of the arts, see Rancière (2013), xii–xiii. A classic example in the field of Brazilian literature is Antonio Candido’s *Formação da Literatura Brasileira: Momentos Decisivos* (1959/1993). See Haroldo de Campos’s critique of Candido in *O Sequestro do Barroco na Formação da Literatura Brasileira: O Caso Gregório Matos* (1989/2011). On the legacy of *Modernismo* in Brazilian literature, see Jackson (1978; 1987), Perrone (1996), Rosenberg (2006; 2008), Santos (2013), Schwartz (1998; 2013), and Shellhorse (2018).

⁶ See Shellhorse 2019, who explains: “for Campos, poetry—or rather, what he likes to call “expoetry,” “unpoetry,” “no-poetry,” and “anti-poetry”—will only be attained by means of taking a risk and venturing into the nonpoetic spaces of the digital, technological age” (77).



Fig. 2. Augusto de Campos and Cid Campos performing “TV GRAMA 4 erratum” (2009) at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2012. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

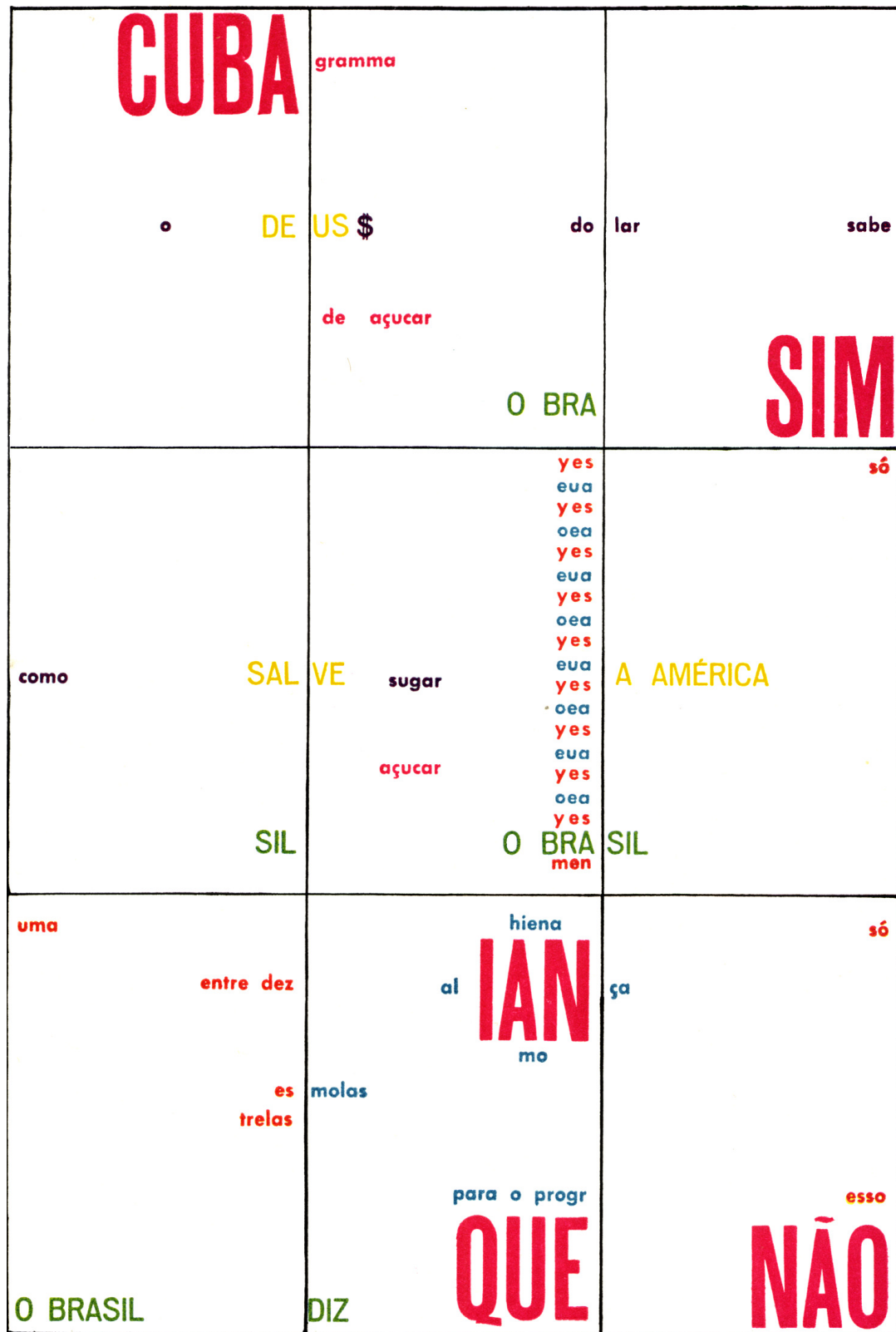


Fig. 3. 1. “cubagramma” (1960/62) by Augusto de Campos. From *Invenção: Revista de Arte de Vanguarda*, no. 2 (1962). Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

3) *Form*

An approximation to Campos's concretism entails an immanent understanding of experimental writing as processual, sensory-affective, and intensive, that is, from the framework of its constituent and destituent processes. Literary form will therefore be conceived of as a potency and capacity for establishing, intensifying, and proliferating relations. Moreover, the poem will be understood not so much by what it says and signifies at a linear, literal, or figurative level, but by what it gives, by what it intensifies, by what it produces, and by what it interacts with as a radicalized medium or assemblage. Yet it will also importantly be grasped by what it undoes, by what it deactivates, by what it renders inoperative, and by what it refuses (*recusa*). That is to say, Campos's anti-literary text is best fathomed as modal and dynamic, as taking place on what Gilles Deleuze has called a plane of immanence, because it does not receive its powers of transformation, becoming, subversion, and rupture from somewhere outside itself or from a transcendental subject, value, or paradigm. It is only by means of its combination with and exposure to other bodies, other media, other genres, and other discourses that Campos's writing becomes anti-literary—concretized—and increases its power to affect and be affected. Such an approach is strictly materialist and relational, because the process of composition, of subversive writing, “must be apprehended for itself, through that which it gives, in that which it gives” (*à travers ce qu'il donne, dans ce qu'il donne*), to quote Gilles Deleuze's reflections on Spinoza's plane of immanence (*Spinoza* 128; “Spinoza et” 169). It entails reading texts not as machines of unitary signification, codification, and metaphorization—word-centered—but rather as multimedial bodies and flows.

Accordingly, Campos conceives of writing as a sensory procedure and plurivocal force. Consider “cubagramma” (1960/1962) (Fig. 3). Here, in addition to abundant language play, we witness all the materials of the poem—from anti-imperialist slogans (*Cuba Sí, Yanqui No*) to U.S. neocolonial interests, the Cuban Communist Party newspaper (*Granma*), and writing proper (*gramma*)—pass into sensation: colors, shapes, formal intensification, and multimedial heterogenesis displace conventional, linear, and ideological modes of reading.



Fig. 4. *Augusto de Campos: Poemas e Contrapoemas* exhibit at Luciana Brito Galeria in São Paulo in 2019. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

4) *Politics and Prototype*

This latter point connects us to Jacques Rancière’s immanent conception of politics: the distribution of the sensible, as a condition and regime of sensibility into which we are thrown. For Rancière, there is a primary aesthetics of politics. Politics begins through our immersion in the political distribution of the sensible, understood as a “common habitat” or “the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common [*l’existence d’un commun*] and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it” (*Partage* 12; *Politics* 12). The sensible describes the system of implicit rules for sensing, speaking, and making that bind and divide a community. By parceling a community into groups, social positions, and functions, the distribution of the sensible establishes a society’s “perceptual coordinates” that determine who can participate and who cannot, as well as “a division between the visible and the invisible, the audible

and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable” (Rockhill 3). Rancière explains: “[p]olitics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent [*qualité*] to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (Rancière, *Politics* 13). The distribution of the sensible therefore names a *consensual* and *conditioning* “field of perception-in-common” that is “embedded in the material *sensorium* of everyday experience” (*Dissenting* 95; *Dissensus* 81).

According to Rancière, our global age of consensus is structured by market forces and a “logic of domination” (*Method* 151). To wit, it inscribes “a sensible configuration of the common world as a world of necessity, and as the world of a necessity that eludes the power of those living within that necessity” (*Method* 151). Defying consensus, art constitutes a “dissensual” cut (*coupure*) and suspension with respect to the normative modes of sensory experience (*Dissensus* 202; *Malaise* 173). As we see in “cubagramma,” but also in the poet’s politically inflected *Contrapoema* series on Instagram, Campos’s oeuvre does not impose order words and meanings on the reader, but rather seizes the experimental text as a procedure of the sensible that enacts its heterogeneous modes of expression as forms of resistance.⁷ That is, Campos’s texts are best grasped not only as visual poems with allegorical meanings on the border between propaganda and high modernist poetics, but processually and politically: as forms of engagement with the common sensory habitat, which is understood, like the poem itself, as a technomediated and embodied environment consisting of affective flows (“NAOfácio” 11). Following McLuhan, Campos will argue that “a função da arte não é desenvolver resíduos e incrustações de tipo fóssil, mas mover-se rapidamente, à maneira de guerrilhas, em novas esferas de ação e enfrentar conjuntamente novas espécies de contextos, criar novos tipos de cápsulas de tempo e espaço em que o homem possa sobreviver a despeito de suas próprias fantásticas invenções”⁸ (“Arte” 312). Indeed, Campos’s concrete poem unfurls as an inventive milieu or verbivocovisual multiplicity that works to deactivate the ordinary forms and rules of experience. This includes rendering inoperative capitalist, authoritarian, oppressive, racist, and phallogocentric relations of domination, and their imposed modes of universality, control, and general equivalence.

⁷ See Gandolfi (2018), Simon (2018), and Shellhorse (2020). A selection of the *Contrapoemas* was published in *Revista Circuladô* 8, edited by Julio Mendonça (Campos 2018), 63–71.

⁸ “The function of art does not concern developing fossil-type residues and incrustations, but moving quickly, in guerrilla fashion, in new spheres of action and confronting new species of contexts, in order to create new space-time capsules in which man can survive in spite of his fantastic inventions” (A. Campos, “Arte” 312).

The problem of Campos's literary politics concerns, then, rethinking poetic form from unity and expression (transcendental subject and values) to disparate multiplicities and force. In similar fashion to the work of Clarice Lispector, it concerns the creation of a new relation to syntax, language, and life—one that is non-dominating (*Outros* 105-106). From the moment there is anti-literature, there is something that escapes and breaks with any school and any period. At stake, is a breakthrough: the invention of a polyvocal, generative process that produces a rupture with what it means to write—a new image of writing. For this reason, Campos will consider all of his experiments prototypes and forms of *recusa* (refusal).

5) *Event*

Through the lens of anti-literature, one thus treats writing as a flow, not a primary code. Such an approach concerns an intensive way of reading the poem: as a flow meeting other flows.

We can here profitably return to Campos's objective in "cubagramma": that of converting signs into iconic language in space-time. *This nonhuman, nonverbal becoming of language signals a means of increasing the text's expressive and perceptive powers.* Here, Campos's anti-poem articulates its relation to the Cuban Revolution through variform words and colors, shapes, and diagrams that resist propaganda and the logic of domination. Form becomes pregnant, polytonal, and non-impositional—the concrete poem as a sensory synthetic event that emits new affects, and in turn, new ways of reading the political.

More recently, in his meme-like *Contrapoema* series, we witness Campos's writing inscribe an untimely relationship to executive policy, antidemocracy, and right-wing populism during the global pandemic. Consider "Contrapoema para o verbo ir" (2020) (see Fig. 5). Here, Campos's text configures an isomorphic dialogue with a conjugation chart for the verb "to go" (*ir*), the colors of the Brazilian flag, the president's name, and protest chants. That is, far from imposing a message on the reader through redundancy and disinformation, Campos *enlivens* language, via the metamorphosing conjugation sequence and a series of verbal, vocal, and visual puns that embody the poem as a constellation of ideas, sensations, and affects concerning the president—"Go Already / Gone Already / Going Already / Left Already / "JAIR/Go Already." In so doing, Campos invites the reader to experience the text as a dynamic composition of relations in movement, as a verbivocovisual multiplicity, freeing the reader from linear, controlling modes of discourse.



Fig. 5. “Contrapoema para o verbo ir” (2020) by Augusto de Campos. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

tension, semiotic blending, and heterogenesis. Moreover, for Campos, writing is not an affair of expressing personal impressions, proclivities, memories, and feelings, but rather hinges on creating polytonal assemblages, blocs of sensation and affects, in space-time.

2) Following Deleuze and Guattari, affects cannot be grasped at a conventional, emotive level. They take us to the limits of language and of our perceptive powers. In the arts, affects arise from the creation of sensory synthetic ensembles—from the transformation of the work’s materials into blocs of sensations—such as harmonies of color or tone in painting and music. Great novelists invent “unknown or unrecognized affects and brin[g] them to light as the becoming of [their] characters” (*What is* 174). Such modes of becoming can be violent, bestial, and are “constantly revers[ing] the order in affections presupposed by opinion” (175). In short, affects draw us into the composition, they overwhelm us and stir us to become, to desire, to act, and to create. They connect us to the nonhuman expressive forces of the earth and cosmos. In this way, style in art and literature could be seen as the constant striving for the creation of nonhuman affects and blocs of sensations (*percepts*)—autonomized visions and auditions immanent to the work’s materials—which are outside of human language, but are made possible by the creation of new modalities of syntax. Such fresh techniques force the diverse languages of the arts to become a “*language of sensations*” (Emphasis added, 176). Deleuze and Guattari write:

what great writer has not been able to create these beings of sensation, which preserve in themselves the hour of a day, a moment’s degree of warmth (Faulkner’s hills, Tolstoy’s or Chekhov’s steppes)? (...) *Affects are precisely these nonhuman becomings of man*, just as percepts— including the town—are *nonhuman landscapes of nature*. Not a ‘minute of the world passes,’ says Cezanne, that we will preserve if we do not ‘become that minute of man’ (169).

In effect, affects proliferate via bodies of sensations, bodies of sounds, bodies of colors, bodies of signs—becomings. And in Campos’s concretism this means: the verbivocovisual becoming of the word-thing in space-time as a sensory, multimedial event.

In brief, if the problem of writing is inseparable from a problem of becoming, seeing, hearing, and resisting—of the invention of a language of sensations — it is because the writer endeavors to reveal, preserve, and liberate “the life in things” (Deleuze, *Critique* 15). Having perceived “Life in the living or the Living in the lived,” or “the power of an impersonal” that traverses both the lived and the liveable, the writer sets out to discover, unleash, and render durable new blocs of sensations (*What is* 172; *Critique* 13). The writer twists language to liberate it and forge novel modes of

becoming with the forces of life.⁹ Indeed, through syntactic creation, the writer resists the order words of communication, subverting the clichés underwriting the “triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions” (176). For writing, as a process, resists “everything that crushes and imprisons,” including all forms of oppression, domination, control, and symbolic violence (*Critique* 15). Such a becoming, or the reinvention and liberation of language, requires creating a new language within one’s own language, like Campos’s radicalized medium as a perpetual revolution between languages and media.

3) Let us recall the dual character of affect: Spinozan, as the power of a body to affect and be affected, and as nonhuman becomings that surpass the powers of the individual. A favorite example of Deleuze is music: what one undergoes upon listening to sonorous arrangements, pure becomings. The Brazilian concrete poets seek to convert words into living, embodied word-things (*palavras-coisas*), while Clarice Lispector conceives of the experimental word as an ideogram or sensory synthetic assemblage (*a palavra é na verdade um ideograma*), where form and content merge (“Plano-piloto” 216; Lispector, *Outros* 105). However divergent their techniques, the common aim is *syntactic creation* and the transformation of words into blocs of sensations, into what Lispector called a *linguagem de vida* (language of life) and what Campos dubbed “uma entidade todo-dinâmico, ‘verbivocovisual’” (a completely dynamic, verbivocovisual entity) (*Outros* 105-106; “Poesia” 55-56). In both, we witness new syntactic creations that free writing from representational closure and reductive understandings of language.

For Deleuze and Guattari, artworks consist of compounds of sensations—*beings* of sensation and affects (*What is* 164). Just as Campos’s poetry reduces the subjective to a minimum and foregrounds the verbivocovisual dimensions of language as a dynamic process, affects are not individualized feelings but becomings—new modalities of experience that are independent of any perceiving subject and which overwhelm whoever lives through them. In short, affects and sensations are immanent to the work’s materials and immanent to the artist’s method or technique, which must ensure that the composition stand on its own, independently from its author. Deleuze and Guattari never cease to affirm that art is what lasts, preserves, and resists death. It is what “fre[es] life wherever it is imprisoned” (*What is* 171). At stake is the matter of *getting things moving*, of making the compound capable of preserving the event, and that means: a transformation of the work’s materials so that blocs of sensations and affects, new modalities of becoming, seeing, and sensing, circulate. As

⁹ See Deleuze (1993), 7-17.

constructivists, like Campos, Deleuze and Guattari explain the difference between individual perceptions and feelings and the autonomy of affect: “[b]y means of the material, the aim of art is to wrest the percept from the perception of objects and the states of a perceiving subject, to wrest affects from affections as the transition from one state to another [*d’arracher l’affect aux affections comme passage d’un état à un autre*]: to extract a bloc of sensations, a pure being of sensations [*Extraire un bloc de sensations, un être pur de sensation*]” (*What is* 167; *Qu’est-ce* 167).

4) In accounting for affect, all the material becomes expressive. As Deleuze and Guattari state: “It is the affect that is metallic, crystalline, stony, and so on; and the sensation is not colored, as Cézanne said, but coloring [*elle est colorante*]” (*What is* 167; *Qu’est-ce* 166). What this means is that affect—understood as a becoming and as a body’s affective capacity—expresses its affordance—to borrow a term from perceptual psychologist, J.J. Gibson—that is, it expresses its capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies, i.e., what it supplies or provides to other bodies, as well as how it interacts and combines with them, such as brightness, hardness, porosity, and dissonance. This expressive interactivity of bodies is strictly nonhuman. For Deleuze and Guattari, each body in nature expresses its capacity to affect and to be affected. As inventors of new varieties of affects, blocs of sensations, and syntax, writers and artists tap into the nonhuman affective expressivity of nature. In effect, the great chorus of forces, sounds, and colors of nature has long served as a source of inspiration for artists. Through the construction and presentation of affects, within its compounds of sensations, art deactivates the constricting aspects of humanity—the order of opinion, affection, and perception—by making all its materials pass into sensation. That is, art works against the imposition of standard, binary, authoritarian, repressive, and majoritarian forms that close off alternative possibilities of becoming, living, sensing, imagining, and understanding. In anti-literature, as in concretism, the word resists reduction, the order of codification, and the logic of the same, by becoming-other, feminine, minor—always other.

This can be said of Campos’s cannibalization of the other arts, including computers and mixed media, enabling his syntax to unfurl as a continuous conversation between the verbal and nonverbal.

5) Therefore, in accounting for affect, the embodiment of expression, and writing as a sensory synthetic force in space-time, we transcend the order of standards—the normative orders of perception, affection, and opinion— and all majoritarian understandings of “literature.” That is,

following Rancière, literature here is understood as the art of writing and regime of visibility and interpretation that shapes our perceptions and feelings of what it means to write. We thereby move in the direction of Campos's event of writing and what I have called the untimely power of its anti-literary modes.

III. Conclusion: The Untimely Powers of the Concrete Word

Let us turn to two seminal experiments: "palavras" (2000) from the poet's latest volume, *Outro* (2015), and "poema bomba" (1987; 1992).

Writing at the limit of poetry, the graphic arts, the digital, and philosophy, both texts confront the crisis of literature in a deverbalized, increasingly technomediated age. Indeed, "palavras" (see Fig. 7) immediately recalls "poema bomba" (see Figs. 8, 9, and 10), which paid homage to Mallarmé and Sartre's reflections on literary commitment by way of two epigraphs: "je ne connais pas d'autre bombe qu'un livre" (Mallarmé) and "le poème est la seule bombe" (Mallarmé quoted by Sartre) [I know no other bomb than a book]; [the poem is the only bomb] (*Despoesia* 96-97). Directed, then, towards an experimentation in contact with the real, these are works that foster connections between disparate fields: between poetry, painting, video, militancy, and the experience of explosions.

Via its animated syntax that literally bombards the reader, "poema bomba" approximates guerrilla warfare, transforming the words "poem" and "bomb" into a sensory-affective event. Yet the poem does not immerse the reader in ideology, nor does it revert back to a speaking subject that would impose his ideas on the reader. Rather, at stake is a plurivocal construction bent on intensifying the two words' expressive dimensions. Emanating from the text's center in successive, spatialized fashion, a small "poema" is followed by an ever-larger "bomba" three times. In effect, "poema" and "bomba" converge on a three-dimensional plane of immanence. Accordingly, speeding up the poem's performance through sonorizations, the video clip, intertextual political reflection, and the iconic color reference to the Soviet flag, Campos transforms the text's words into intensities, verbivocovisual flows, making the entire piece proliferate. In Campos's poem-bomb, there is no sentence, no order words, no official literary politics, but rather a continuous circulation of sensory-affective configurations, causing thought and desire to stir. Understood as a self-critique of both poetry and social realist literature, the text expresses new forces capable of giving poetry another vital sense.¹⁰

¹⁰ In an email to the author, dated February 2, 2021, Campos explains the verbivocovisual trajectory and avatars of "poema bomba": "Reuni o material principal em torno do poema bomba,

“palavras” explores such verbivocovisual vitality, and is likewise acentered and performative. The text also articulates a guerrilla, warlike point of view regarding the crisis of literature in technomediated times. Far from falling into nihilism via the readymade syntagma that we read at the text’s center—“words, and nothing more”—words in “palavras” are not subjected to a central point of command or to hierarchical structures such as the lyrical voice, the poetic I, or the poem. At issue is not the reduction of words to the traditional space of verse, nor making the text signify according to models. The issue is to *produce* “palavras,” and with them, new desires, new configurations concerning the anti-poem’s powers of perception, affection, connection, invention, and proliferation.

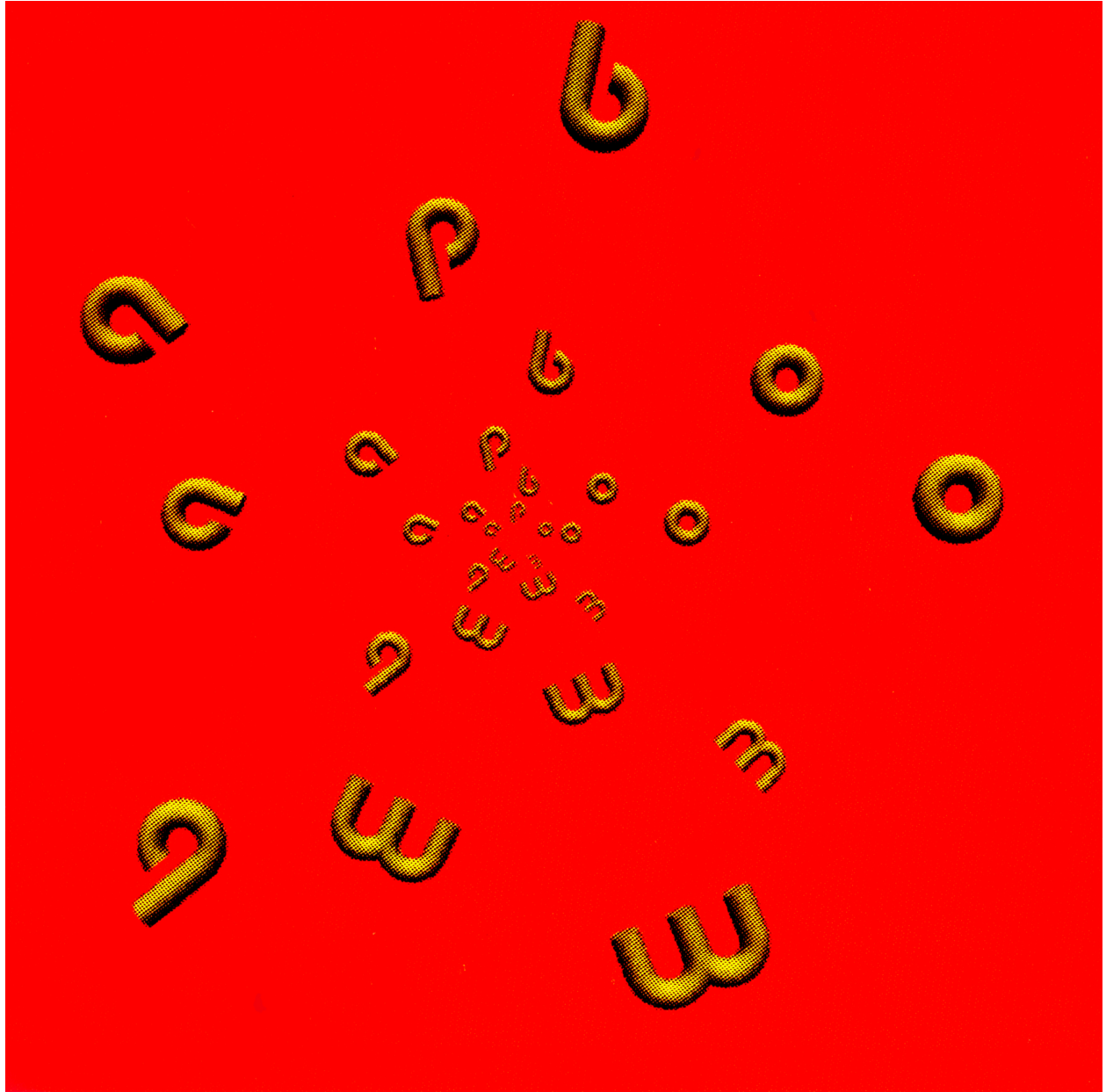
“Words, and nothing more.” So reality is fabricated. Yet in Campos’s concretism, words are not simply formalist, linguistic, and visual, but are animated by a plurality of senses and a heterogeneous working of matters. Indeed, sabotaging the real as *readymade*, Campos’s texts powerfully convert signs into iconic language. Taking on the form of a vortex of signs, the word “palavras” repeats 37 times in outward spiraling fashion. The poem’s design also recalls an eye chart, a vowel chart, as well as a big bang chiasmus of words exploding outwards in three dimensions, evoking previous experiments such as “OLHO POR OLHO” (1964) and the more recent, “contemporâneos (mallarmé)” (2009). Via visual paronomasia, the shape of the text’s letters morphs into larvae that work (*lavram*) their way outbound, emerging as wings on the text’s rim: “as / as / as / as” (wings / wings). As a pun in English, “as / as” also points to the system of analogical relationships the poem establishes: always in variation, always en route, to recall Oswald de Andrade’s anthropophagic dictum: *Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros*. Like Andrade’s modernist cannibal in *Pau Brasil* (1925), Campos’s anti-poem seeks inventive encounters between diverse regimes of signs. Witnessing the rebirth of language, these concretized *palavras* configure a sensory synthetic event. I hasten to add that the text inscribes a play

que é o que rendeu mais versões. A primeira versão foi composta em letra-set (1987). Para fazer o holograma era preciso desdobrar as fases das letras em placas de vidro, solidamente coladas na base. Assim, tentou-se o primeiro holograma, que não deu certo, porque as letras ficaram muito pequenas distribuídas em 8 placas. Mas ficou muito bonito o objeto feito em serigrafia sobre placas de vidro. Assim, mais adiante fizemos cópias desse primeiro objeto. (v. n. 3). Fiz uma segunda composição em letra-set com fontes futura-bold maiores (n. 4), que ocuparam só 5 placas e que foi a versão adotada no novo objeto em placas de vidro definitivo e no holograma final. Desse projeto fizemos algumas cópias em acrílico. Depois do holograma veio a animação digital feita na Usp, o vídeo dela extraído e a impressão em off-set (1992), que foi para o *DESPOESIA*. A seguir, a animação digital que eu fiz, em QuickTime (2003) e, por fim, a versão 3-D exibida na exposição *REVER* de 2016. Apresentamos ainda ao longo do ano 2000, depois da gravação do CD *Poesia é Risco* (1995), as versões verbivocovisuais do poema em nossas performances sob esse título.”

of contraries: more and nothing (*nada e mais*), the spiral and the explosion, as well as the name Adam, connoting the radical renaming of the word and world in verbivocovisual coordinates.



Fig. 7. “palavras” (2000) by Augusto de Campos. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.



Figs. 8. Computerized version of “poema bomba” (1992) by Augusto de Campos. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

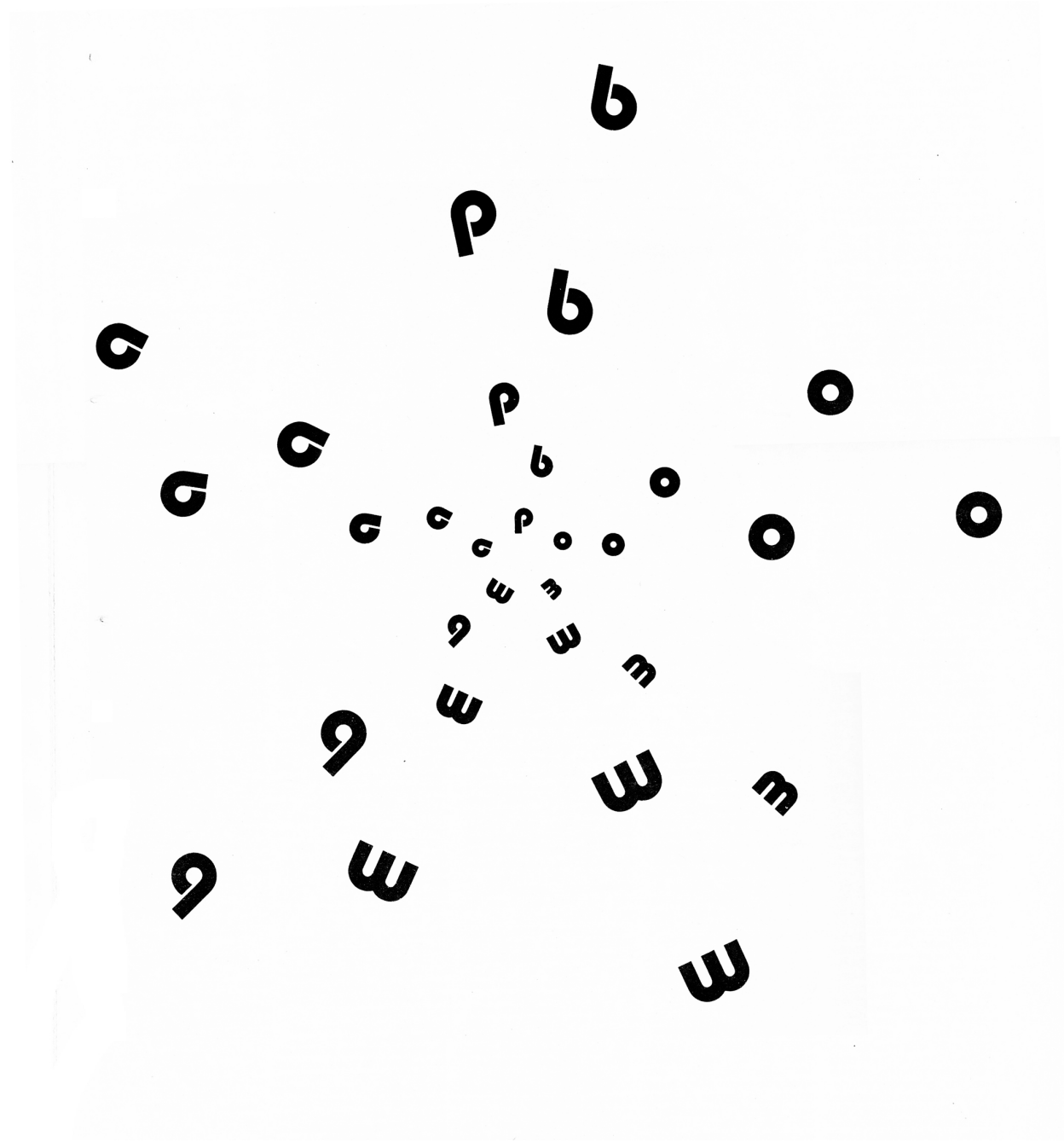


Fig. 9. Original version of “poema bomba” in Letraset (1987) by Augusto de Campos. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

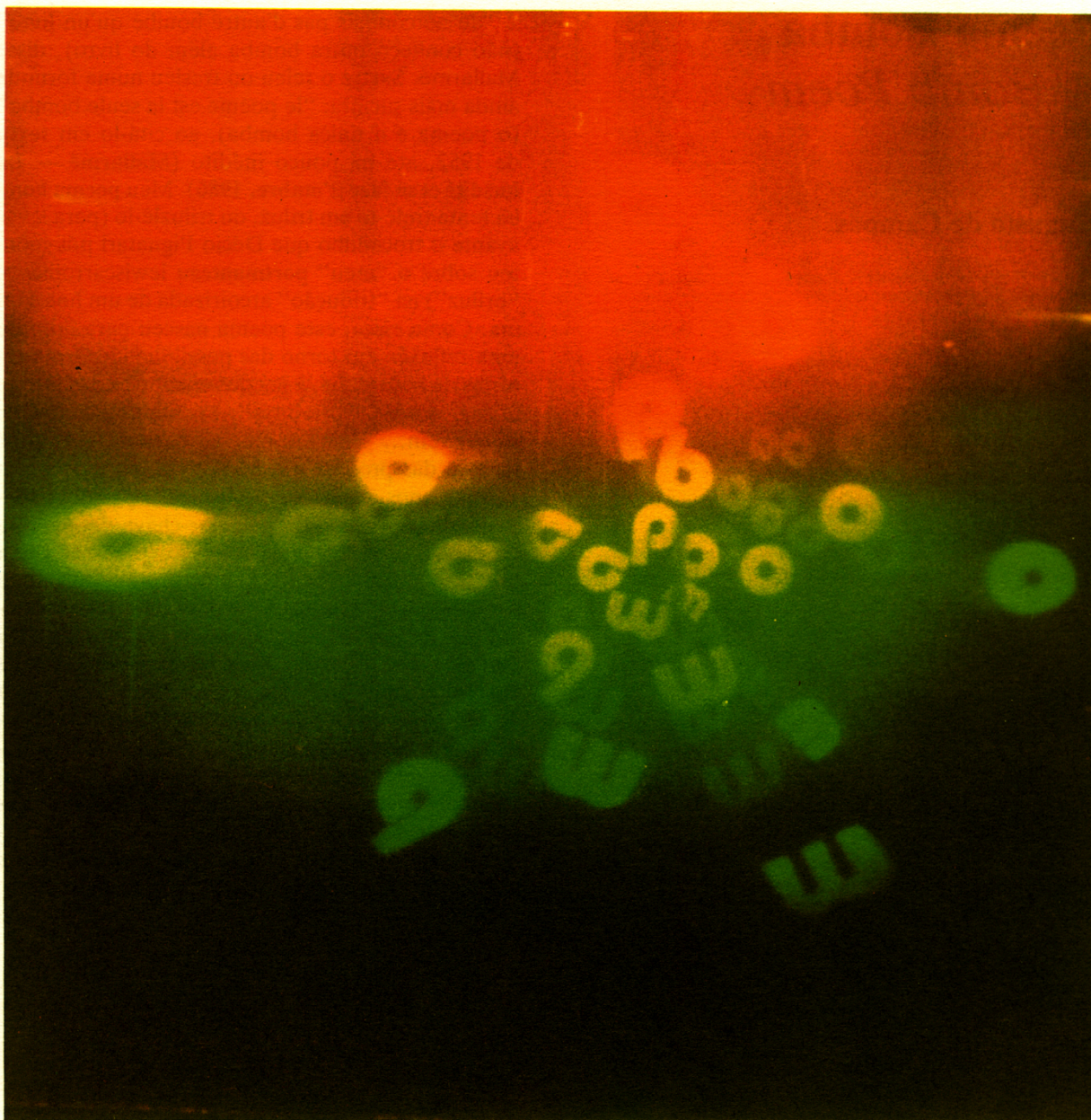


Fig. 10. Hologram version of “poema bomba” (1987) by Augusto de Campos. Courtesy of Augusto de Campos.

In “palavras” as in “poema bomba,” the poem must wear the mask of formalism, lyricism, and all the clichés surrounding the literary institution—a ridiculous image of writing, *words*, and *nothing more*. Yet Campos’s text conquers the vanity and mask of literature by giving it a new sense, a new event of writing: maelstrom of semiotic codes swarming in heterogenesis. In dialogue with our present, with the technomediated reification of the sensible, he endows the poem with an affective task which expresses its untimely, anti-literary force. Such an affect—concretized via Campos’s conception of the

poem as a verbivocovisual embodied ensemble—stirs us all the more, into a future space of literature beyond the state and customary accounts of modernism. Even as Campos writes against the linear and paradigmatic, his poems twist, detonate, and intensify language, creating new varieties of affect and syntax. In effect, blowing up language’s prison house and orthodox accounts of concretism through the experience of such works, we move in the direction of the poet’s verbivocovisual revolution and its powers of affection — legacy and achievement of a master at 90.

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