



Augusto de Campos, Lygia Azeredo, Elizabeth Jackson, Kenneth David Jackson

INTRODUCTION

AUGUSTO UNDER THE SIGN OF INVENTION

Kenneth David Jackson

Yale University

With this special number, SBPS celebrates the São Paulo poet, translator, essayist, and performer AUGUSTO DE CAMPOS (b. 1931) in his 90th year. The year 2021 also marks his 70 years of continuous literary activity since *O Rei menos o Reino* (1951), an achievement that distinguishes Augusto de Campos as one of the most productive literary figures in Latin American literature. He was awarded the Janus Pannonius Grand Prize by the

Hungarian Pen Club in 2017 and the Pablo Neruda Ibero-American Poetry Award in 2015 by the National Council of Culture and the Arts and the Pablo Neruda Foundation in Chile. That year Augusto received the Order of Cultural Merit in an homage in Brasília at the Palácio do Planalto from Dilma Rousseff, then president of Brazil. While his work has evolved over seven decades, it remains committed to visual, experimental, and concrete poetics, through a progressive series of *popcretos*, *poemóbiles*, *caixa preta*, *expoemas*, and *intraduções*. Among his works are much-commented iconic poems that synthesize Brazilian literature and culture in the latter twentieth-century, “Cidade City Cité,” *LUXO-LIXO*, *VIVA VALA*, *PÓS-TUDO*. The poem “Cidade City Cité” is featured in the musical-electronic performances by Augusto and Cid Campos, *Poesia é Risco*. Anthologies of Augusto’s works have appeared in French (*Antologie - Despoesia*, Jacque Donguy), German (*Poesie*, Simone Homem de Mello/Vanderley Mendonça), and Spanish (*Poemas*, Gonzalo Aguilar).

Augusto de Campos co-founded the concrete poetry movement in São Paulo with Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, launched in the journals *Noigandres* and *Invenção* in the 1950s and 60s and in an exhibit with artists in 1956 at the National Exhibition of Concrete Art at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo. Augusto’s poetry developed in contact with plastic arts, music, and semiotics of an international avant-garde. He defined his concrete poems as “tension of word things in space time.” The first inventive series of color poems, *Poetamenos* (1953), uses fragmentation with readings determined by placing of color-letters, following two key concepts, the *verbivocovisual*, found in Joyce, and Anton Webern’s *klangfarbenmelodie*, or melody of timbres. Some of these poems return decades later in musical versions by Caetano Veloso and the duo Augusto/Cid Campos. If technologically concrete poetry of midcentury predicted the computer age, then Augusto took the next logical step in the 1990s by working with computer poetics, leading to his

interactive clip poems. In 2016 the major exhibition *REVER/ЯЕВЕЯ* at SESC Pompéia in São Paulo paid homage to Augusto's visual poetics.

Augusto's concrete poems have consistently engaged with social issues, starting in the days of military rule with his "Psiu." "Greve," "SS," "Cuba Sim Ianque Não" and the poster poems LUXO-LIXO -- against conspicuous consumerism -- and VIVA VAIA, defending singer Caetano Veloso before a hostile audience. His incisive criticisms continued thirty years later with the audiovisual version of "poema-bomba," his "TVgramas," the 2018 "Clausula pétrea," and the shaped allusive poem "o mito" on Instagram.

Augusto is an active translator of world poetry, starting with early translations of Pound's *Cantos*, Maiakovsky, Joyce, e.e.cummings, and Provençal troubadours. His scholarly essays on theory and practice of poetic translation preface his translations, maintaining a connection between theory and the art of translation. He selects poets from world literature of all periods with an emphasis on avant-garde figures including Gertrude Stein and John Cage, as well as consecrated poets Blake, Keats, Valéry, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Hopkins and Rilke.

Augusto has perhaps not yet been fully appreciated as a scholar and essayist. His books recover and interpret both neglected and celebrated authors, Sousândrade, Guimarães Rosa, Kilkerry, and Duchamp. He wrote a history of bossa nova in *Balanço da Bossa e Outras Bossas*, including Tropicália, and his *Música de Invenção* focuses on Cage, Varèse and discusses many of the leading composers and works of international contemporary music. His *PAGU-VIDA-OBRA* (1982) is the first comprehensive anthology and interpretation of the radical modernist Patrícia Galvão. As indicated by his title *O Anticrítico*, Augusto carves out an individual critical position for himself as an avant-garde and often dissident voice in the Brazilian essay.

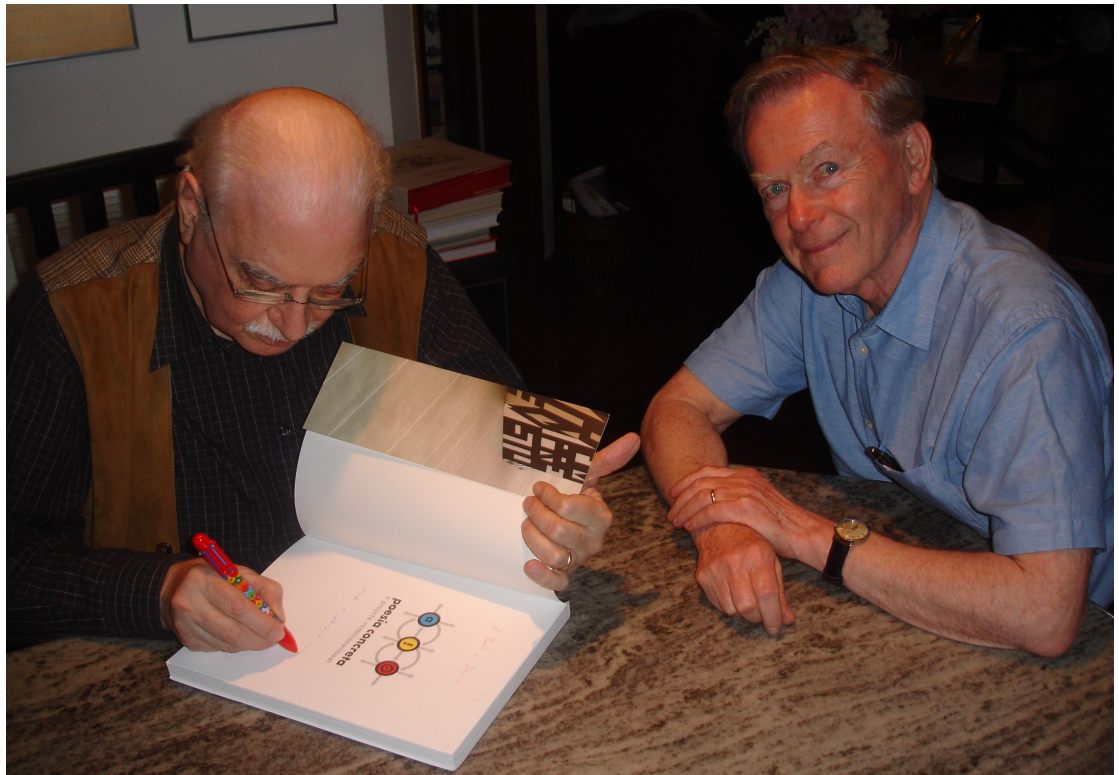
Augusto continues to produce an innovative and significant body of work well into the 21st century. He always showed an affinity for artisanal editions – his *Poetamenos* poems were prepared by hand and underwent separate printings for each color. Early translations of e.e. cummings were hand set at Noa Noa press in Florianópolis. Recently, Augusto has been publishing poetic translations in a series of small editions by the Selo Demônio Negro press in São Paulo.

This volume on Augusto de Campos includes works by scholars who have known and worked with him for more than fifty years, some who encountered him when he was already a recognized figure, and others whose interest in and contact with Augusto is more recent. They have written interpretations of individual poems -- *O Rei menos o Reino*, “cidade city cité,” “memos,” and the “popcretos” and evaluated Augusto’s position “at the margin of the margin” under rubrics of anti-literature , social satire, minimalism, disorder, exile, and refusal to serve. His major iconic poems are presented as works of untimely power, open to performance, while his translations open a “fourth dimension” in well-known poems by recognized masters. Finally, Augusto’s dedication to the computer and internet reinforces his relationship with the new, in the words of Marjorie Perloff, of a door always open for invention.

The enduring power and legacy of his works is well illustrated by the continuing dedication of his earliest readers, the attention of international scholars who came to admire his works, and the enthusiasm of scholars for whom Augusto is an illuminating and surprising discovery in the new context of Brazilian, Latin American and world literatures.

SBPS dedicates this issue to Augusto de Campos with VIVAS for his innovative literary production. Special thanks to poet André Vallias for his original graphic designs in homage to Augusto and to the vital community of scholars who collaborated with their

essays dedicated to Augusto de Campos on his 90th birthday. This homage was made possible by the invitation of editor Élide Valarini Oliver, Professor of Comparative Literature and Director of the Jorge de Sena Center for Portuguese Studies of UCSB, and *Santa Barbara Portuguese Studies*. I reserve a final thank-you for Augusto de Campos for making it all possible.



Autograph session in São Paulo