

Trans-Memories of Heaven and Hell. Haroldo de Campos and “the angel on the left of history”

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Abstract: “Get thee behind me Satan, I want to resist”. . . To translate memory across cultures and disciplines is an act of defiance, a proud sign of disobedience, tacitly performed by one of the most celebrated and internationally renowned practitioners and seminal theoreticians of the tasks facing the translator, the Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos. In “On Mephistofaustic Transluciferation,” he writes: “If it has no Muse, it could be said to have an Angel; translation has an angelical function, that of bearer, of messenger. It is a messianic point or a semiotic place of convergence of intentionality.” Addressed here are the challenges posed in translating memory, memories, as the retrieval, reconstruction, inscription, and leaving of the traces and effects of a markedly memorializing act. The task of the trans(at)l(antic)ator involves not abandoning but suspending certain spontaneous choices of literal translation in favor of inter- and trans-action. The responses are: differ, defer, never with indifference, always without deference; address not only urgently political issues of *The Movimento dos Sem Terra*, primordial in Brazil, but also the transactions, with and in the Movement, of so many poets and songwriters and now, perhaps even more defiantly, with a Brazilian-inflected countertheory to the rescue.

Remembering (belated) versions

The invitation to “establish a dialogue with and among scholars working on the intersections between translation studies and memory studies as they are presently configured and might be envisioned in the future,” keynote of this special issue on translating memory across cultures and disciplines, proleptically, had been tacitly accepted *avant la lettre* and throughout his career

by one of the most celebrated and internationally renowned practitioners and seminal theoreticians of the tasks and challenges facing the translator, the Brazilian poet and transcreator, Haroldo de Campos.

In “Committing Translation or the Task of the Trans(at)l(antic)ator,” the introductory essay to my translations of the ineradicably political memories and cultural expressions of ideological indignation of the MST (Movement of the Landless Rural Workers in Brazil) in *Landless Voices in Song and Poetry. The Movimento dos Sem Terra of Brazil* (Vieira and McGuirk 2007, XXI–XXIV), I addressed and now return to the challenges posed in translating memory, memories, as the retrieval, reconstruction, inscription, and leaving of traces and their effects of a markedly “memorializing act” (Vieira and McGuirk 2007); in and for a Brazil confronting its own secular inequalities and injustices, alerted to that sovereign state’s and that nation’s continuing struggle to emerge from the cliché-ridden inscription on its national flag, the ever-ironic “Ordem e Progresso.” Under whose orders and for the progress of whom was national memory to be reinscribed, translated, indeed transferred from the hegemonies of a very recent twenty-year military regime and its transitional legacies in the period of rebuilding a democracy from 1984?

Further, on undertaking this commission, I recalled the advice of Umberto Eco as I reflected on the experience of having worked, together with the Brazilian critic and translation theorist, Else Vieira, in preparation of *Haroldo de Campos in Conversation* (McGuirk and Vieira 2009), the volume that arose, *in memoriam*, not least from the numerous meetings that, as editors, we held between 1999 and 2002 with Haroldo and his wife Carmen Arruda Campos in the hospitality of their Library of Babel home:¹

I frequently feel irritated when I read essays on the theory of translation that, even though brilliant and perceptive, do not provide enough examples. I think translation scholars should have had at least one of the following experiences

¹ This volume contains renderings in English of the following Haroldo de Campos essays touching variously on his theories of translation: “On Translation as Creation and Criticism,” “Constructivism in Brazil: Concretism and Neo-Concretism. A Personal Post Scriptum,” “On Mephistofaustic Transluciferation,” “On Homerotherapy: Translating *The Iliad*,” and “The Ex-centric Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation.”

during their life: translating, checking and editing translations, or being translated and working in close co-operation with their translators [. . .] Between the purely theoretical argument that, since languages are differently structured, translation is impossible, and the commonsensical acknowledgement that people, after all, do translate and understand each other, it seems to me that the idea of translation as a process of negotiation (between author and text, between author and readers, as well as between the structure of two languages and the encyclopaedias of two cultures) is the only one that matches experience. (Eco 2003, 36)

In such “a process of negotiation,” in that multiple “in-betweenness,” here evoked by Eco but previously the subject of an indispensable meditation on a specifically Latin American project, the “entre-lugar” of Silviano Santiago, “between sacrifice and play, between prison and transgression, between submission to the code and aggression, between obedience and rebellion” (Santiago 1978, 11), and as translator of the poems and songs of the *Movimento dos Sem Terra* (MST, or Movement of the landless rural workers), I soon confronted commitment, in various of its encyclopaedic forms.

What had they done to my song?

The preceding decades had witnessed the revitalizing of popular music as a vehicle for political activism in Brazil. One obvious source had been the *música sertaneja* of land-deprived migrant workers, driven to the cities and taking with them their country music, be it traditional or, more recently, influenced by the commercial brands of the southern cultures of the United States. No less influential had been the *pagode* movement’s samba-esque registering of the violent tensions of poverty in hardly couched critiques of repressive regimes, military or otherwise. The performances echoed, consciously or subliminally, the prosodies—high and low—of Brazilian Portuguese and the broadsheet and *cordel* strains of popular imaginaries from across and beyond the nation. For Brazil has never ceased to explore and express its sensitivity to the ideological power of the protest song; not least, and latterly, against the imagined and projected versions of what is to come peddled, for many of its displaced, unrepresented and unlikely-to-be-remembered victims, by the invasive myth-makers of a nation awarded the Trojan horses of a World Cup and an Olympic Games.

At the time of committing myself to undertake the translations of unabashedly radical texts, it was the centenary of the birth of the celebrated Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Inspiration of politically committed poetry and song for not a continent but a world, he had long ago been described by Federico García Lorca as being closer to blood than to ink. It was on such a note—often indissociable from tears or from wine—that the anguish and euphoria, the despair and hope that suffuse the texts I translated were approached and embraced. My locus of transcreation was, and is, unavoidably and unapologetically, Anglophone; it is also, though tempered, European. As a critic and translator of, primarily, literatures in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and Italian, I exploited the availability of translation alternatives from those traditions as well as from any Brazil-specific contexts that informed the choices made. *Pace* Umberto Eco, I often wrote as both *Mouse* and *Rat*, chewing or munching in a further in-betweenness or the negotiated hybridity that I had experienced in tussling with Haroldo de Campos himself.² For part of our “translating, checking and editing translations, or being translated and working in close co-operation” had been the daunting enterprise of revisiting “o anjo esquerdo da história”; beginning with the resonantly intertextual reference to Walter Benjamin’s “angel of history. His face [. . .] turned towards the past” (Benjamin 1999, 249), broached at once in the title of this long de Campos poem. Written to commemorate the victims of the notorious massacre in 1996 of nineteen protesting members of the MST at El Dorado dos Carajás in the State of Pará, and originally rendered into English by Haroldo as “the left-winged angel of history.”

Engagement with the calculatedly syntagmatic discontinuity and attendant staccato rhythms of the Brazilian Portuguese text also had to take into account a context of commitment and contributions, to and in the Movement, of such distinguished Brazilian artists as Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Milton Nascimento, Frei Betto, and many others, including Haroldo de Campos himself, and thus readdress previous tasks of the other—cultural inseparably from linguistic—translator(s).

² See the facsimile of Haroldo de Campos’s scribbled distinction between chewing and munching with reference to my translation of “quoheletic poem 2: in praise of the termite,” in McGuirk and Vieira 2009, 339.

The Latin American protest song explosions of the late 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, of which Robert Pring-Mill reminded us in “*Gracias a la vida*” *The Power and Poetry of Song* (1990), had hardly left Brazil unaffected by the echoes, influences, hybridities, and intertexts of contemporary transculturations. He listed civil rights, the peace movement, and the anti-Vietnam war demonstrations in the US; Italian CantAcronache; the Greece of Theodorakis; the Catalan Nova Cançó; the Portuguese Nova Canção; Irish songs of “the troubles”; and Asian and African instances from the Philippines, East Timor, and Mongolia, to Mozambique and Angola. Not least of the intertexts of Brazilian protest song and poetry were the Cuban, Argentine, and Chilean expressions that sprinkled the MST artists with inspirations taken from the archives of the Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and *nueva canción* traditions. If any one element of Pring-Mill’s seminal analysis can be said to have informed the texts of the MST, it is this evocation: “Asked about his own songs (in 1973), the Uruguayan Daniel Vigliette said firmly that they were as much *de propuesta* as *de protesta*: designed not merely to protest but to propose—in other words not merely to ‘tear down fences’ (quite literally so in Viglietti’s own anti-*latifundista* ‘A desalambrar!’) but also ‘to build bridges’ and to be constructive” (Pring-Mill 1990, 10). Pring-Mill identified three functions of such texts: “response to an immediate environment”; “instrument of political and social change”; communicating a “horizon of expectations” and “presuppositions.” Yet he was quick to add a vital rider on cultural difference: “the whole rhetoric of such poems and songs is very different from ours, partly because Spanish [and here read Portuguese] handles issues more violently—more dramatically and emotionally—than English (sometimes in ways which we may find indecorous)” (Pring-Mill 1990, 10–14). He continued:

The messages of individual Latin American songs function within the framework of belief they foster and reinforce, in that extremely different social context. In countries where illiteracy is as high as it is in most of Latin America, where censorship and repression are so often at work, and where the official media are so rarely to be trusted, the message-bearing function of *poesía de compromiso*—sung or unsung—has an importance which it is not easy for a more literate academic audience to appreciate. Its messages perform a varied series of useful social functions [...] all of which are doubly

important in the context of predominantly oral cultures. Thus they serve both to report and to record events (interpreting them, naturally enough, from specific points of view, which will strike all those who disagree with them as prejudiced); they praise, or lament, heroes and denounce tyrants; they protest against abuses and propound solutions (whether these are viable or not); and they teach many kinds of practical lessons, which their listeners are encouraged to put into practice. (Pring-Mill 1990, 77)

Pring-Mill, a decade or so on, would hardly have been surprised not to have the last word. He might also have smiled at the risky certainty, in respect not only of rhetoric but also of politics, of Perry Anderson, as a heady mixture of denunciation and the recuperation of misappropriated national memories promised to turn to propounded solution in the form of a first left-wing figure, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, democratically elected in 2002, on the crest of the MST wave of popular protest: “the symbolism of a former shoe-shine boy and street vendor achieving supreme power in the most unequal major society on earth speaks for itself [. . .] A climate of popular expectation surrounds Lula that no President of the New Republic has ever enjoyed at the outset of his mandate. Hope of relief from the misery of the last years will not vanish overnight” (Anderson 2002, 21).

Get thee behind me Satan, I want to resist. . .

The risk of failing to render the textual wrath of a poem written in the indignation of 1996 protest amidst the 2002 days of heady triumphalist expectation—with popular memory of tyranny and criminality and a consciousness of the threat of impunity all too readily fading—seemed but one looming contention. The task of the trans(at)l(antic)ator therefore involved not abandoning but suspending certain spontaneous choices of literal translation in favor of inter- and trans-action. The challenges were: differ, defer, never with indifference, always without deference; address not only issues dear to the MST, primordial in Brazil, but also the transactions, with and in the Movement, of so many poets and songwriters and now, perhaps even more challengingly, but with a Brazilian inflected countertheory to the rescue, of Haroldo de Campos himself, from his essay on “On Mephistofaustic Transluciferation”:

Translation, like philosophy, has no Muse [...] says Walter Benjamin (“Die Aufgabe des Uebersetzers”). And yet, if it has no Muse, it could be said to have an Angel [...] translation has an angelical function, that of bearer, messenger [...] it is even, for the original [...] a messianic point or, in lay terms of modern theory of signs, a semiotic place of convergence of intentionality [...] Benjamin inverts the relation of servitude which, as a rule, affects ingenuous conceptions of translation as a tribute to fidelity. Fidelity (so-called translation literal to meaning, or, simply, inverted, servile, translation) [...] Therefore, in the Benjaminian perspective [...] the original is what in a certain way serves the translation, at the moment when it unburdens it from the task of transporting the unessential content of the message [...] and permits it to dedicate itself to an other enterprise of fidelity [...] the “fidelity to reproduction of form” [...] It is oriented by the rebellious slogan of *non serviam*, of non-submission to a presence which is exterior to it, to a content which remains intrinsically unessential to it [...] a satanic enterprise. The “cursed” counterpart of the angelical nature of translation is *Hubris*, the semiological sin of Satan, *il trapassar del segno* (*Paradiso* XXXVI, 117), the transgression of sign limits [...] A translator of poetry is a choreographer of the inner dance of languages [...]. (Haroldo de Campos 2009, 233–236)

How many angels?

On the head of opinion... ionated Manicheans be it, however, whether scholastic or materialist, to limit the inspirers of Brazilian or any other translators to but two angels: the good, the bad. And the ugly configuration of Haroldo’s predecessor poet Drummond de Andrade’s *anjo torto* (“crooked angel”), in “Poema de sete faces” (Poem of seven faces), as long ago as 1930, should have alerted subsequent and would-be theorists to both the revelations and the dangers of going transcendental in “the retrieval, reconstruction, and inscription” of remembering, as surely as the Shakespearean “seven” it echoes had led to “mere oblivion/Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.”³ The figure of the postmodern angel, always and already fallen, was also one too easily overlooked, left behind (Drummond’s “*gauche* na vida”/“*gauche* in life”?), in the long march of historical materialism. . .

³ The caution of such philosophers as Richard Rorty in respect of the temptation to go transcendental in the memorializing of historical events had long ago been poeticized by Drummond de Andrade and, inherited, by Haroldo de Campos, not least in echo of William Shakespeare’s Jaques in *As You Like It*, Act II scene VII: “Last scene of all, that ends this strange eventful history.”

often the most dogmatic of “the imagined and projected versions of what is to come” on the part of de Campos’s Marxisant Brazilian detractors, as will be revealed in and after a reading of the poem; and of its guest.⁴ For into the space of neglect—of suppressed memory—Haroldo de Campos had injected “o anjo esquerdo da história,” for him “the left-winged angel of history”; “the angel on the left of history” in my *transjection*, my inherently “transformative” but necessarily subsequent swerve, my own anxious *clinamen*).

o anjo esquerdo da história	the angel on the left of history
os sem-terra afinal	the landless at last
estão assentados na	are settled in
pleniposse da terra:	full possession of the land:
de sem-terra passaram a	from landless to
com-terra: ei-los	landed: here they’re
enterrados	interred
desterrados de seu sopro	their life’s breath
de vida	unearthly
aterrados	earthed
terrorizados	terrified
terra que à terra	earth which onto earth
torna	returns
plenipossesiros terra-	land-holders pleni-
tenentes de uma	potentiary of a (single
vala (bala) comum:	bullet) common grave:
pelo avesso afinal	outside in at last
entranhados no	holed deep into
lato ventre do	the broad-bellied
latifúndio	acres of the <i>latifundio</i> -
que de im-	land once barren
produtivo re-	so sudden-
velou-se assim u-	ly shown to be most f-
bérrimo: gerando pingue	ecund: udder-spawning profit
messe de	crop of
sangue vermelho	reddening blood

⁴ In “Constructivism in Brazil: Concretism and Neo-Concretism. A Personal Post Scriptum,” Haroldo de Campos offers his riposte to Roberto Schwarz, as emblematic propagator of the attacks levied against the concretists and de Campos’s notion of a postutopical poetry. My “Laughin’ again he’s awake: de Campos *a l’oreille de l’autre celte*” addresses the polemic extensively in McGuirk and Vieira 2009, 126–152.

lavradores sem	un-labored
lavra ei-	labor: here they're
los: afinal con-	larvaed at
vertidos em larvas	last
em mortuá-	on mortal
rios despojos:	remains
ataúdes lavrados	coffins labored
na escassa madeira	from the scanty timber
(matéria)	(timbre)
de si mesmos: a bala assassina	of themselves: the assassin bullet
atocaiou-os	stalks them
mortiassentados	thirst-squatting
sitibundos	death-settlers
decúbito-abatidos pre-	decumbents cut down pre-
destinatários de uma	destined for a
agra (magra)	meagre (earth) acre a-
re(dis)(forme) forma	grarian
—fome—a-	—famine—
grária: ei-	re (de)(formed) form
los gregária	here they are: gregarious
comunidade de meeiros	commune share-cropping
do nada:	nothingness:
enver-	shame-
gonhada a-	faced in
goniada	agony
avexada	vexed
—envergoncorroída de	—shamecorroded by
imo-abrasivo re-	inmost abrasive re-
morso -	morse-
a pátria	landless
(como ufanar-se da?)	(‘how shall we extol thee?’)
apátrida	homeland
pranteia os seus des-	laments its dis-
possuídos párias –	possessed pariahs –
pátria parricida:	parricide <i>patria</i>
que talvez só afinal a	for maybe only at last the
espada flamejante	fiery sword
do anjo torto da his-	of the crooked angel of his-
tória cha-	tory flam-
mejando a contravento e	ing against the wind and

afogueando os	burning the
agrossicários sócios desse	agrokilltural cronies of that
fúnebre sodalício onde a	somber sodality where
morte-marechala comanda uma	field-marshal death commands a
torva milícia de janízaros-ja-	grim militia of janissary-gun-
gunços:	men:
somente o anjo esquerdo	only the angel on the left
da história escovada a	of a history groomed against
contrapelo com sua	the grain shall manage with its
multigirante espada po-	multiswirling sword
derá (quem dera!) um dia	(if only!) one day to
convocar do ror	convoke from the nebulous
nebuloso dos dias vin-	mass of days to
douros o dia	come the at last
afinal sobreveniente do	overriding day of the
justo	just
ajuste de	adjustment of
contas	accounts

(Haroldo de Campos, 1996 © Translation Bernard McGuirk 2002)

The task of transacting—trans/dancing—with Haroldo de Campos’s poetry was made the more challenging by his Mephistofaustic promptings. In the essay, he had willingly reengaged with both Marx and Nietzsche in a reminder that translation in particular and writing in general always perform the act of transcreation, a refutation of original (etiology) and target (teleology), not only linguistically but also culturally and, let it be stressed, ideologically. Self-consciously, he had echoed Marx’s precursor complaint against the censoring of his style. Self-mockingly, he had appropriated Nietzsche’s plea for the necessarily sublime “maldade”—the “evil”—of mischievous content *and* form.

Radical content radical form radical translation

Countless Brazilian artists had reacted, in creative political interventions, to the obscenity of the murderous repressions perpetrated against the MST—as did de Campos, here, to the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás. Cyclical repetitions of organized violence, the option *against* the poor—in cynical

inversion of the “*for the poor*” slogan of Liberation Theology—had triggered the indignation *and* the artistry of such as Frei Betto’s “Receita para matar um sem-terra”/“Recipe for Killing the Landless”, Sebastião Salgado’s (1997) photography, in *Terra*, and Chico Buarque’s “Levantados do chão” (Raised from the ground). These contemporary artists, however, no less than their predecessors Graciliano Ramos, João Cabral de Melo Neto, or Glauber Rocha, will not be remembered for their indignation alone. Each—and differently—had had to make another option, broadly definable as the style of mischief-making that is the prerogative of any radical art. Style also functions as a sharecropping, a participating in the intertextuality available to the individual artist; or, in de Campos’s formulation, Karl Marx’s “property of form,” inseparable from his “individual spirituality.” Such an option, being *for the poor*, should never *be* poor. Even to think as much would be either to neglect the need for creativity or to misread it. To confuse, say, Graciliano Ramos’s calculatedly daring minimalism, in *Vidas secas* (Barren lives) of 1938, with some unmediated response to the prescriptive exclusions of the Soviet Writers’ Congress of 1934. To ignore João Cabral de Melo Neto’s career-long engagement with the materiality of words or with what Francis Ponge called *Le parti pris des choses*. To undersell, perversely, the difficulty of his own challenge: “É difícil defender/só com palavras a vida” (It’s hard to defend/only with words life) (*Morte e vida severina* [Death and Life of Severino]), of 1956. To imagine a *tabula rasa* (inter-cine-text-less) Glauber Rocha, deprived, in the 1960s, of a dialogical relationship with Italian neorealism. To conceive that, in postmodernity, the compassions of Sebastião Salgado did not reflect, and reflect on, Don Macullin’s 1970s photography of the oppressed. To fail to hear in Chico Buarque’s song the 1990s echo of José Saramago’s “Do chão pode levantar-se um livro, como uma espiga de trigo ou uma flor brava. Ou uma ave. Ou uma bandeira” (From the ground a book can rise, like an ear of wheat or a wild flower. Or a bird. Or a banner). But there is neither need nor time for doubt. The urgent indivisibility of radical content from radical form is better demonstrated by critical artistry than by artless criticism.

An unapologetic option for the inseparably transcendental *and* material underpins the very title of “o anjo esquerdo da

história.” Whether God is dead or not (and whether such a dominant metaphysics of absence might be Marxian or Nietzschean in inspiration), the conspiracies of history are still played out amidst the configurations of narrative. Which is not to see history *as* narrative (that is, only as troped)—for that would be to deradicalize both history’s powers and any reading of it. In *Le monolinguisme de l’autre* (1996), Derrida elaborated on the “call for an outside.” In “o anjo. . .,” de Campos called upon a figure, that of the avenging angel, which inhabits, simultaneously, both the inside and the outside of “a história.” He even staked out for it a particular location, the place of enunciation for a nuncio to a nation, for a committed messenger. Yet the call is not voiced until after that necessary delay that enables the poem to revisit, to reinhabit, to relive the arduous struggle for a hearing, paradoxically, on behalf of a voice—that of poetry—no less excluded, traditionally, than the referents of its echoing anger. Thus, by way of (not) analyzing the poem, I prefer to comment on aspects of my own transjection of it.

Cheek to cheek. . . and the ear of the other

Cast at me as a throw of the dice, the poem impelled me to reject paraphrase. Haphazardly, I projected it, rather, only as recastable. For the game was too serious to stop at a single appropriation. The ear of this other, too, had its particularity, its “properties of form,” its “individual spirituality.” An Irish specific of a past inherited, part-interred (*ex-patria*), in an England pre-, pro-, and post-Thatcher, suffused and infused my option for an irony that filtered distorted echoes of another, unofficial, “national” anthem: “Land of Hope and Glory.” “How shall we extol Thee?” who were born not of, but only *on*, Thee. Here I played with another geopolitics, one of parallel clichés, *terra firma*, “broad acres,” “field-marshal” of a homeland *unheimlich* and—sublime “maldade”—of the *Mal-vinas*, with their no less somber soldiery.⁵

That the translation must speak for, and of, itself is but part of the point. In language, for Bakhtin, the word was always half someone else’s. . . whether spoken or written. Had de Campos not taken but half of Mallarmé’s angelism, appropriating

⁵ “Land of Hope and Glory” operates as a much appropriated English national hymn. It has been adopted as the official anthem and is sung at the annual conferences of the Conservative Party.

poetry's power of memory but adding to it a specifically Brazilian infernal vision ("quem dera!"), that of Canudos, and of Antônio Conselheiro? A post-Blake m(isc)arriage wherein the legacy of revolutionary mysticism assailed, as forcefully as does dialectical materialism, the hell-on-earth of landless utopians yet to glimpse a Brazilian heaven of agrarian reform? Such a politico-poetics could not presume to deprive those *sem terra* of the configurations, including the martyrs, saints, and avenging angels, of their local narratives, small or grand. . . *sem céu*? Heaven-less? Who knows? Who would impose? If their collective history had certainly been groomed against the grain (where every day was—is?—a last day), at least the poem leaves its protagonists "lying still" with their theology and with its (dis-)placements.⁶

Haroldo de Campos was no angel, least of all in his own poetic practice. He was unstintingly confident, certainly enough to lampoon critical and ideological rigidities and excesses. Acutely alert to the fact that Brazilian neo-Hegelians, no less than their counterparts elsewhere, in their determination to confront the brutality of much of Latin American society, have fallen precisely into the lure of a discourse too mimetic of brute reality, too mirroring ever to achieve a cutting edge, Haroldo de Campos convoked the figure of poetry itself. He knew that poetry is a master teaser, a baiter of stiff contemporary realists or the limp lamp bearers of reflection theories past and present. The inter- and intracultural transluciferations of his textual performances had allowed for the inter-action of Brazilians speaking and listening to Brazilians being listened and spoken to; in turn, they inspired that other, the present trans(at)l(antic)ator whose sign/ature shuttles to and fro, ever seeking to perform intra-, but never faithful, ever faith-less, illusorily face-less, scorn-fully masking source, mourn-fully eschewing target, settling (lawlessly), for an ever extra-trans-mission of occupations, pre-occupations, needs, urgencies.

⁶ The reference is to the 1902 foundational memorializing of the Canudos war of 1896–1897 in the seminal text of Euclides da Cunha, *Os Sertões*, in which the rebellion and massacre of the *sertanejo* inhabitants of the Brazilian interior, in the State of Bahia, prefigure the plight, a century on, of the *sem terra* of El Dorado dos Carajás.

Stormy (whether you like it or not. . .)

Whence, for Haroldo de Campos, the “anjo esquerdo da história”? In his unapologetic rejection of “unacceptable cognitive models,” the challenge of de Campos is consistent, not least when addressing the angel as an appropriated icon of the left, inherited from Walter Benjamin’s seminal formulation:

This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe that keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin 1999, 249)

His reconfiguration, in poetry, of the readily packaged but not so smoothly imported “anjo,” regarded by Else Vieira as a de Campos “mutation” in the poet’s resistance to allowing Benjamin’s “Angelus Novus” cum “angel of history” to be unproblematically appropriated as emblematic of a Brazilian historical materialism, must also be seen as an instrument of Haroldo’s staunch debunking of those theorists who would unquestioningly identify their ideological stance with “the storm of progress.”⁷ Most notoriously, Roberto Schwarz, “sociologizing critic, of vocational incompatibility with the new in poetry” (de Campos, in McGuirk and Vieira 2009, 197):

The basic scheme is as follows: a tiny élite devotes itself to copying Old World culture [. . .] As a result, literature and politics occupy an exotic position, and we become incapable of *creating things of our own that spring from the depths of our life and history* [...] But why not reverse the argument? Why should the imitative character of our life not stem from forms of inequality so brutal that they lack the minimal reciprocity [. . .] without which modern society can only appear artificial and “imported”? (Schwarz 1992, 85–89).

⁷ See the sections “Protean Angels: Shifting Spectres of Walter Benjamin” and “Crooked Angels, Satanic Angels: From Determinism to the Recovery of Revolutionary Possibility” in “Weaving Histories and Cultural Memories. The (Inter)National Materialisms of o anjo esquerdo da história,” in McGuirk and Vieira 2009, 170–175.

Far from resembling “devoted copying,” such Haroldo de Campos performances as I have dealt with here, whether in his criticism or in his poetry, are, to use his own formulation, “textos de ruptura”(rupture texts). In *Panorama do Finnegan’s Wake* (1962), the de Campos brothers, Augusto and Haroldo, had already embarked—for a hybrid genre of transl-*iter*-ation—on the journey of strenuous excursions demanded, by the modern artist *par excellence*, Stéphane Mallarmé.⁸ As has been seen in respect of “o anjo esquerdo da história”, any “angelism” inherited from Mallarmé is supplemented by the daemonic; is traced (as even Roberto Schwarz might admit) by the diabolic. The recuperative moves of the poem play with “fallen” transcendentalism and that corrective shift which—for Haroldo de Campos, no less than for any Marxist—tugs “a história” (history *and* the story of history) always to the Left. *Not* “going transcendental,” but refusing to forget that particular *-ism* (without being “-ista”). *Not* appropriating an already unbalanced Brazilian history (which ever was and still is on the Right). Rather, engaging with it and in it through concrete performances. Destabilizing the dubious claim that we judge our own time by its politicians, the past by its artists. Searching for poetry’s readmission to a *Res Pública Brasileira* in which the artist (in academic freedom, *pace* Roberto *et al*) might also stage the still-to-be-negotiated identities of the nation. Writ(h)ing, in agon, so that sub-alterity (*sic*) might no longer be a leper’s bell to be hung, by the dark forces of any “sociologizing” thought-police, about the neck of Brazil’s excluded artists.

Are Haroldo de Campos’s “o anjo esquerdo da história” and my transjection of it—as not abandoned or to be forgotten, mutilatedly only “left winged” and but formerly “of history,” but rather ever active, whole, uncut, as “the angel on the left of history”—merely a further negotiated staging? Or just a plea for the performative poet–critic to be heard as also improvising *politically* against, in counterpoint to, “unacceptable cognitive

⁸ “The double effort required to allow Mallarmé’s gaps their full disjunctive and destructive power, yet at the same time remain attentive to the multitude of invisible currents which pass back and forth between the separated segments, will strike many readers as inexcusably arduous and unrewarding,” and “such moments are of the essence in Mallarmé [. . .] the type of modern artist [. . .] intent on breaking up ready-made *Gestalten* and smooth surface textures in order to compel his audience to look elsewhere for artistic coherence, to venture beneath the surface into the difficult, undifferentiated world of unconscious process, to interrupt the easy flow of horizontal perception with strenuous excursions into multi-level, all-at-once ‘verticality’” (Bowie 1978, 6 and 16, respectively).

models” of a Brazil in construction. . . though sorely lacking in deconstruction?

Trans memoriam

To Jacques Derrida’s “there is always something sexual at stake in the resistance to deconstruction” (1987, 196), this particular re-reader—and re-hearer—of Haroldo de Campos would add: “*and* cultural, *and* ideological.” But isn’t that where the guest translator came, invited, between 1999 and 2002, by and with Haroldo and Carmen, and with Else, into the hospitality of the Babelic home of Brazil and Brazilian letters?

Unheimlich? Years on, I am still questioning the possibility of speaking or hearing “do exterior,” “from abroad”; but, now, it is because I have listened, learned, read, and may even write, that intra- has a history which includes extra-; that *il n’y a pas d’hors contexte*.

At, and beyond, the limits of the languages and the antics of nations—not least in transatlantications—the sting and the contamination of the *tse-tse* flies in the face of hygienic, much less immune, bodies such as text, context, literary, semiotic, cultural, or translation studies. In aporetic threshold performances, where differences between some “outside” and some “in” are never abolished but ever undermined, not merely inverted but politically subverted, “transtextuality” is a new wor(l)d. . . but it is readable, habitable, pleasurable; like *tsexuality*.

This place of aporia is before a door, a threshold,

a border, a line, or simply the edge

or the approach of the other as such

Jacques Derrida (1993, 12)

Coda: translator’s note

The discourse of the author of the above is considered by the journal reviewer to perform that approach to translation theory to which it attempts to give (further) voice. Subsequent to the medium chosen by Haroldo de Campos to deliver a poetic rebuke to the perpetrators of the 1996 massacre at El Dorado dos Carajás,

will there have been, will there be, a creative intervention that, similarly or comparably, addresses and challenges the contemporary social upheavals and political manifestations of the opposition to a contemporary Brazil that projects as heaven-sent the staging of a World Cup and an Olympic Games in the best of all possible wor(l)ds? A diabolic *fait accompli*; or do post-Haroldo undoings—the transluciferations of successor artists—loom. . . ?

The task of the present trans(at)l(antic)ator is to await texts from writers who, also, will have undertaken such “imagined and projected versions of what is to come.” Then, in a necessarily matching performative meditation, will it be conceivable to “update.” *Pace academe passim. . . Ite, missa est.* The sacrifice (of the masses) in the interim will have found but formulaic, liturgical, expressions of their material—street, stadium, factory, favela, commune, congress—protests, however real, however righteous; whether or not arising from the left of history. Chronicles of a dearth foretold; testimony to a lack of devilishly challenging artistic engagement? The avenging angel of *poiesis* awaits; translations will follow.

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