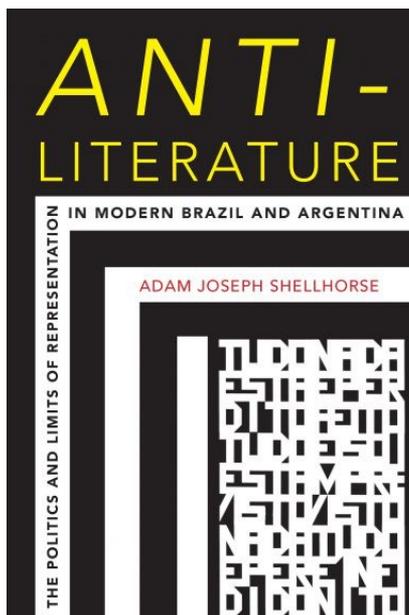


What is Anti-Literature?

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Adam Joseph Shellhorse. *Anti-Literature: The Politics and Limits of Representation in Modern Brazil and Argentina*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2017. 258 pp. ISBN 978-0-8229-6447-6

EVERY	NOTHING'S
THING'S	PER
SAID	FECT
EVERY	IT'S ONLY
THING'S	UNFORESEEN
SEEN	EVERY
NOTHING'S	THING'S
LOST	INFI
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Anti-Literature by Adam Shellhorse offers a “broad-based discussion” on literature of modern Argentina and Brazil, taking into consideration the historical, cultural, political and social processes in Latin

America and their influence on the creative processes of experimental texts (4). By examining how texts engage with the European colonial legacy and with their own conditions of production, expressing “original life-words of its autochthonous peoples” (5), the author proposes new approaches to what he describes as an anti-literature, i.e., the “multidisciplinary, minoritarian, and multimedial ‘body’ of writing that produces and affects (...) new modes of perception” (7). These new modes of perception, which create a new perspective for literary studies, evolve side-by-side with “urgent debates in Latin America studies and literary and filmic production: sub-alternity, feminine writing, post-hegemony, concretism, affect, experimental poetics, marranismo, and the politics of aesthetics” (8).

Anti-literature is defined as “a subversive, anti-literary understanding of form, understood as a combination of creative forces or interplay between distinct media”, initiating a journey through “multiple regimes of signs (...) that throw light over literature’s limits and excess” (11). These regimes use the verbal and visual poetic fields to engage readers with other philosophical, political, historical, artistic or literary sources (14), in which materiality and techno social contexts have a major influence either on creative or reading processes. The book structure approaches the concept of anti-literature by exploring the representations of minorities, subalternity and the refusal of the European colonial Parnassian through the work of Clarice Lispector, David Viñas, Osman Lins, De Campos brothers and Sebastião Salgado.

The first chapter looks at Clarice Lispector’s work as an intimate process in which the language of life allows transculturalization (21) as the reader, as did the writer, is faced with differences of cultural and social contexts which define a real or fictional character. Lispector’s work is a process that brings “to life the socially marginalized” (20), an act of spiritual decolonisation (21). The author adds that “for anti-literature, as experimentation, constitutes a procedure of the sensible that investigates and redistributes through its form, the social-political (...) articulating flows of desire, affect and perception as a revolutionary potentiality” (23) which lead to a modification of “the concept of things’ and the liberation of writing from ‘stratified’ overly abstract conceptions (29). In this sense, anti-literature can be, as Lispector thought, “a language-structure that is simultaneously content and form”, like an ideogram which is a direct reflection of the writer’s identity and his/her relation with the world.

David Viñas’ politics of aesthetics is the core of the second chapter, which introduces the reader to his fight against Peronism, the 1940s Argentinian dictatorship, seen as a parallel to 1960s radical changes in Brazilian society brought about by the military *coup d’état*. The debate moves forward the “dissolution of art into politics” towards the “avant-garde proposal of

increasingly posit literature's limits and exhaustion" (45). In this sense, and as Lispector wrote in *linguagem de vida*, "literature inscribes a new way of being" (46). It is a polyvocal experience of relating everyday life with politics which can only be fully experienced when the reader rejects "literary idealism" and looks at "literature as a concrete struggle over experience" (46), exploring and expanding its limits. Another interesting argument deals with the creation of the myth which occurs as the text loses its context.

The third chapter provides a perspective on the distinctive roots of Brazilian Concrete Poetry, highlighting Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia*, which allowed poetry to be "an anti-codifying mechanism, and a creative mode of relating to the Brazilian world" (70). It is one of the main concepts originating in the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna*, which first promoted modernist thinking in Brazil and still reverberates today. Its crucial impact resulted from critically thinking and assimilating the "European ideas in national coordinates", blurring the boundaries between popular culture and poetry, performing a "powerful syntactic and sensory sabotage of the discursive codes of official culture" (71). The link between *antropofagia* and Concrete poetry begins with the participatory leap which foregrounds the "inter-semiotic assemblage that brings into play a multitude of non-poetic regimes of signs" (72), mediating off-text and immanent potentialities provided by those signs and the materiality of literature. These potentialities function in a verbivocovisual dimension where the significance of the text is reached by its reader's interpretative action.

The design of language is carried out by the Concrete poets through a cannibalisation of intermedia in the post-verbal and post-literary era (93), but the utility of the text – design being understood as a service that fulfils needs – can only be experienced by its readers. The argument made by the author is that the perseverance of Concrete poets to "secure poetry's relevance in a public sphere in crisis", in which mass media dominated the public's imaginary – much as in the 1920s Andrade wanted to "renovate poetry in a [*sic*] increasingly industrialised society" –, by looking at European avant-gardes from a playful position of inhabiting popular speech and media and bringing them into the universe of literature (74). Literature became freer as it came out of the "entrenched Parnassian lettered class" position, being disseminated as a "product of export" (83), which incorporated new alphabets, syntax and contents devouring "the icons of popular culture with a critical function that is far from representational" (77). The reader becomes an active element in the creative process, participating in a committed literature which interpellated him/her as a creator-critic who "from the cannibalised 'bones' of popular culture and mass media" (91) has the task of

relating ready-made images with techno social context (90) within the constantly expanding limits of words as anti-representational elements of composition (92). By sabotaging the sensible as a ready-made (93), for its non-linearity exploring the absence and limits of literature or for the counter fabrication of the present (95), Concrete Poetry is a risk. A risk that is not understandable for everyone.

From the fourth chapter onwards, the author centres his attention on Haroldo de Campos' work. He looks at the politics of representation in his Concrete texts and how "[w]ords freely relate to others through the absence of grammar and punctuation" (98). With *Galáxias* Haroldo de Campos anticipated the 'book-object' as a 'kinetic sculpture' of loose leaves, proposing a renovation of poetry with respect to other avant-garde arts and a "continual passage to newness and the unforeseen" (99) within an evolutionary textuality that is open to history. The *antropofagia* inheritance in Concrete Poetry cannibalised new media using "new systems of signs that issue from the modern city" in a quest to "de-automate language and summon a critical reader to read against the grain of a society ruled by the spectacle" (107). To demonstrate his argument, the author analyses Concrete poems from the participatory leap stage which have in common the representation of either new ways of living in urban spaces or the disregarded or subaltern in modern societies. The disruption in Brazilian literature was "'born' under the sign of the Baroque", which was appropriated for reframing issues of its own time (115). *Galáxias*, and Concrete poetry in general, "forsake rules, grammar and punctuation, yet inscribing syntax as proliferating sequence of sensory ensembles that affirm play, the aleatory, and endless permutation. The reader must undergo the order of the affect, always undecidable" which forces to stutter language and "speak in a foreign tongue, [...] not as a foundational principle or object of domination but as the singularity and infra-material principle for another language to come" (118).

The fifth chapter looks into the antinomies of anti-literature from the *Galáxias* perspective. The mutations present within *Galáxias* and Concrete poetry frees literature from the normative state-form, incorporating Brazilian transcultural contexts. It results in a "product of avant-garde forms from across the arts, including poetry, painting, cinema, architecture, and atonal music", unfolding as a "sequence of discrete, highly revolutionary syntactic processes [...] that resist a representational reified present, and as genealogical agent of authority" (125).

The sixth and last chapter approaches experimental writing as the writing of the subaltern and as a form of redemption and insurgency. At this point the author presents his clearest definitions of *anti-literature*: "Literature becomes anti-literature when it subverts itself" (166), by mobilising the

non-verbal and non-literary traditional contexts, expanding our understanding of the dimensions of literature, “creating new modes of perception and feeling that challenge the habitual ways of seeing and sensing the community” (167).

The analysis of Haroldo de Campos’ “O Anjo Esquerdo da História” as a restaging of the police massacre of nineteen landless workers in Eldorado dos Carajás (170), with a close reading of Sebastião Salgado’s photos of the tragic event, contextualises the Insurgency in Latin America. The Landless Workers’ Movement (MST) is commonly seen by Campos and Salgado as a revolutionary promise. Both photographs and poem respond to “the need to craft a poem-response that was adequate to the event of subaltern tragedy and resistance” (175). Salgado’s images “configure an arrest in time, a stark mediative space of contrast through which the viewer may ponder the cooperative, living pulsation of a people” (174). The poem takes “the shape of a vigil, a form of mourning” in a

alliterative, atonal circuit, a block of sensation that makes movement itself part and parcel of the work. Punctuation and irregular spacing produce a pictorial language. In effect, the proliferation of colons and hyphens - the dramatised dashes - summon an iconization of the event of the massacre. [...] [P]unctuation represents, in other words, the passage of bullets, as well as the inexhaustible passage to an-other sense. (181)

The materiality of the poem uses spatiality to express an “enigmatic notion of justice”. The spaced words, for Giorgio Agamben, are hyper-read, i.e. they are read twice, like a palimpsest of a citation (195), configuring iconic images which provide a close-up to the “problem of justice and restitution of subaltern memory” (196). It is a “convergence between affect and chance, poetry and subaltern history, politics and multitude, which produces multitudinous forms of resistance” (191). “O Anjo Esquerdo da História” and Salgado’s MST photos meet the Benjaminian concept of image, *Bild*. Together they interweave past and present, with presence, “where the present is able to recognise the meaning of the past and the past therein finds its meaning and fulfilment” (196). The poem’s composition is like a “performative sequencing” guided by each word and punctuation mark which in a certain way is allowing the reader to take time and penetrate an image that doesn’t exist, yet where the differential relationships of meaning are configured.

Anti-literature is created by “the interface between literature, revolutionary praxis, and subaltern tragedy” (196). Its untimely secret is the recapture of the “form as an assemblage of expression, an interplay between

media, that effectuates subversions of the sensible” (194), with the “condition that each sign, each stanza, each medium has reached a state of excess, beyond closure” (197).

In a review of Latin American anti-literature it is impossible to forget the “antipoesia” proclaimed by Augusto de Campos, in 1978, derived from João Cabral de Melo Neto’s and Oswald de Andrade’s work. “Antipoesia”, in Campos’ perspective, adopts a critical position which opposes both popular and literary normative definitions of poetry, proposing an antinomic stance which challenges the canon of poetry. The work of Adam Shellhorse attempts to expand this definition by looking into the symbiosis between literature and the codes of other media as acts of resistance that give voice to minorities and the subaltern.

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