

Augusto de Campos's *Outro*: The Limits of Authorship and the Limits of Legibility

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Abstract: This essay analyzes Augusto de Campos's 2015 poetry collection *Outro*, titled not only after the Portuguese adjective, but also referencing the English music recording industry term for the concluding portion of a piece of music, as opposed to the "intro." The collection explores many of his earlier devices and proposals—the materiality of language, particularly, visuality and typography, and the appropriation of past masters (both through translation and rewriting). I argue that, while these devices are not new, in this volume Augusto takes them to extremes that in turn probe the limits of legibility and authorship and constitute both an affirmation and a negation of concrete poetry's legacy.

Keywords: Concrete poetry, Brazil, paratexts, translation, the illegible

In 2015, after a hiatus of almost twelve years, Augusto de Campos launched his latest book of original poetry, *Outro*.¹ The publication was greeted with reviews that highlighted not only the longevity of the author (eighty-four at the time) but also his status as the last surviving member of the *Noigandres* group.² A

¹ Alluding not only to the Portuguese adjective, the title also references the English term for the concluding portion of a piece of music, as opposed to the "intro."

² Ubiratan Brasil wrote: "Augusto de Campos não publicava um livro de poesia desde 2003, quando saiu *Não*. Mas, ao longo desses 12 anos, o poeta de 84 anos não ficou parado - pelo contrário. Pesquisador incansável das novas mídias eletrônicas, ele manteve seu interesse pela dimensão 'verbivocovisual' [. . .] e criou novos poemas, reunidos agora em *Outro* (Perspectiva) [. . .] Augusto é [o] último dos escritores vivos do grupo Noigandres, fundado em 1952."

collection of new poems and translations, which Augusto terms “intraduções” and “outraduções (remixes visuais),” *Outro*, in many ways, explores (and exploits) his earlier devices and proposals, such as the appropriation of past masters and the materiality of language. While the devices and proposals may not be new, the extremes to which Augusto takes them in this new collection are arguably remarkable, exhibiting a deliberate play with the limits of authorship and legibility.

Regarding the question of authorship, the volume is enveloped by series of paratextual gestures that “package” the text and discreetly, yet relentlessly, establish Augusto’s authorship. This contrasts with some of concrete poetry’s early proposals. Concrete poetry’s curtailment of the poetic “I” or subjectivity could implicitly be construed as a critique of authorship. However, the use of paratexts in *Outro* helps establish authorship. On the other hand, the fact that the book combines, in an indistinguishable fashion, original poems with creative translations blurs the boundary between Augusto’s authorship and that of the writers he translates. In other words, in *Outro*, the adoption and manipulation of some of Augusto’s most revered models and references have the effect of problematizing the volume’s authorship in a way that starkly contrasts with how the paratexts seem to point, beyond the shadow of a doubt, to the author-qua-demiurge.

With regard to the issue of legibility, *Outro*, to a much greater extent than any other of Augusto’s volumes, deploys book design, typography, and other visual devices in a radical, almost limit way. Originally, concrete poetry had insisted in doing away with linear and temporal syntax, replacing it with visual elements that would speed up communication. It aimed at the perceived “instant” communication of non-alphabetic or ideogrammic languages and of modern advertising. *Outro*, on the other hand, uses visual elements to eschew or inhibit legibility: the use of certain elements of design, at times, turns the task of the reader into an act of decoding that requires time and no small amount of specialized knowledge. A tension thus emerges in *Outro* between concrete poetry’s original use of material devices as a way to achieve “instant communication” and *Outro*’s visual design which, while contributing to meaning-making, nonetheless hinders legibility.

In short, this essay tackles both the use of paratexts and translation, and the use of visual devices to explore the author’s ambivalence towards the status of

authorship and readability. In both cases, I argue that *Outro's* conjunction of paratexts and translation, and its bold design, probe the limits of authorship and legibility, respectively. I also claim that the limit-aspects of *Outro* constitute both an affirmation and a negation of concrete poetry's legacy. In these avowals and disavowals, *Outro* lays bare the devices of its construction while simultaneously hinting at the seeds of its own de(con)struction. These somewhat paradoxical goals coalesce in a work that, in the ninth decade of the author's life and seventh of his career, could be seen as both Augusto's crowning achievement and his *envoi*.

Reading from the Outside In: The Paratexts of Outro

A text, any text, argues Gérard Genette in *Paratexts*, is seldom presented "in an unadorned state, unreinforced and unaccompanied by a certain number of verbal or other productions" (1). Instead, it is surrounded by a number of apparently liminal elements, "productions," which stand between text and reader, influencing how the text is perceived. Genette urges us to pay attention to such "liminal devices—titles, signs of authorship, dedications, epigraphs, prefaces, notes, intertitles, epilogues and the like—that mediate the relations between text and reader" (Macksey xi). Many readers might be tempted to skip over those seemingly dispensable preliminaries in a hurry to get to *the* text. However, it is just those unassuming paratexts that often condition our reception. Is the paratext a fruitful notion when reading the creative work of concrete poets, particularly, Augusto de Campos? My contention is that it is,³ and that in a particularly dramatic way this applies to *Outro*. I thus begin at *Outro's* outer reaches, the paratexts, only to make my way inside—to the poems and translations—in the second and third parts of this paper. I argue that the paratexts are crucial to our understanding of the entire work as a unified

³ Consider here the examples of *Despoesia* (1994) and *Não poemas* (2003). While discreet, the use of paratexts in those volumes is anything but trivial. The visual design of the covers of both books is highly intentional on the part of the author. Both also contain "sumários" where the author strategically lays out the parts of each book. *Despoesia* does not include a dedication, and *Não poemas*, only a discreet one, yet the power of the paratext becomes apparent in the prefaces. Printed on the flaps, "desfácio" is the prefatory statement in *Despoesia*, and more conventionally placed within the book, "NÃOfácio" introduces the texts of *Não poemas*. Both provide explanations and reading clues, and situate the works for the reader.

“livro-objeto,” the result of very deliberate choices by the author. Based on some of Genette’s notions, I perform an analysis of *Outro* that tackles a number of paratexts: the outermost peritext (including cover); the book’s material construction; the credits page; the title; the epigraph; the dedication; the table of contents; and the preface. The discussion follows the order in which, by reading convention, paratexts occur in a book, including *Outro* and some of Augusto’s other poetry volumes.

“[T]he outermost peritext (the cover, the title page, and their appendages)” and “the book’s material construction (selection of format, of paper, of typeface, and so forth)” is what Genette calls the “publisher’s peritext,” because it is “the direct and principal (but not exclusive) responsibility of the publisher (or perhaps, to be more abstract but also more exact, of the *publishing house*)” (16). In the case of *Outro*, we learn, from a brief examination of another paratext (the credits page), that “capa, projeto & execução gráfica” are the work of Augusto de Campos,⁴ also the director of Coleção Signos, the series to which the book belongs.⁵ Thus, though Augusto is not technically the publisher, he is responsible for the design of *Outro*, the physical book, including the cover and other graphic features, all of which communicate much to the reader. Among these features, the format is significant: a 23-cm (9-inch) square, *Outro* is smaller than a quarto, but, is still a medium-to-large book. Regarding size, Genette points out that, “in the classical period, ‘large formats’ (quarto) were reserved for serious works (that is, works that were religious or philosophical rather than literary) or for prestige editions that enshrined a literary work” (17). The formats of *Outro* and its predecessors, Augusto’s main poetry volumes—*Não poemas*, *Viva vaia*, *Despoesia*, and even the 1973 edition of *Poetamenos*—in many ways publicize such values of prestige to the reader. *Poetamenos*’s 20-year anniversary edition was printed as a collection of 25-cm square loose leaves enclosed in a 26.5-cm square sleeve. *Outro*, *Não poemas*, and

⁴ The same remark is present in *Despoesia* and *Não poemas*.

⁵ Genette notes that the modern heir to the notion of format is the series which is “itself only a more intense and sometimes more spectacular specification of the notion of a publisher’s emblem” and that it “indicates to the reader the type of work and genre” (22). This is exactly the case for Editora Perspectiva, a publishing house founded by Jacó Guinsburg, originally devoted to Judaica, but which expanded into a modern arts and humanities intellectual project. The layout of Perspectiva’s Coleção Signos, founded by Haroldo de Campos and directed by him until 2003 and by Augusto thereafter, is described in the publisher’s website thus: “o projeto gráfico e o textual definem uma produção poética de Vanguarda.”

Despoesia, all published under Perspectiva's Coleção Signos, are the same dimensions (23-cm squares), whereas *Viva vaia* (republished by Ateliê) is an 18 × 24.5 cm (7 × 9.6-inch) rectangle. It is interesting to note that these design features remain somewhat consistent throughout Augusto's poetry books, whereas other volumes of essays or translations were published in a variety of smaller formats and with no consistency regarding size or shape, which points to Augusto's deep investment in the appearance of these original volumes.

The soft binding of these volumes contrasts with the format. As paperbacks, these books are all portable, something that could initially mislead readers about their "seriousness."⁶ Yet, other material features like the choice of paper stock (heavy, high quality, glossy) make clear the volume's graphically ambitious nature. Moreover, the publisher's peritext likewise conveys significance through materiality. The front cover (Figure 1) displays the author's name centered at the top, the title (a logo in red letters and embossed printing) in the middle, and the emblem of the publisher in black at the bottom, all against a medium dark green background.⁷ A very slight black outline makes the red letters and logo stand out. The bold choice of colors (green and red) becomes clear when reading the epigraphs, discussed below in more detail. All of these material elements render the cover design⁸ a highly unified project, perhaps not unlike previous volumes, yet the embossed printing and "color coding" are unique to *Outro*.

Besides the material construction, content elements of the cover also support the idea of *Outro*'s attention to design. Augusto's minimalist cover contains only three elements—the author's name, the title, and the publisher's logo.⁹ This minimalist tendency is reinforced in the semantics of the title. *Outro*'s title, in contrast to other volumes (*Viva vaia: Poesia 1949-1979*, *Não*

⁶ Portability might lead readers to assume a more "casual" approach to them, yet unlike "small format" books, they are not meant for what Genette humorously calls "casual and more ambulatory reading" (18). In other words, though the soft binding makes these books easy to carry, their format demands that we pay careful attention to them, that we purposely sit down and read them, rather than distractedly leaf through them while riding transit, for instance.

⁷ While this layout resembles that of *Despoesia* and *Não poemas*, the design of the title as a logo is unique to *Outro*. The title's rich visual and semantic meanings are discussed in-depth below.

⁸ The back cover, also in green and red, reproduces one of the poems, also with embossed printing, and the book's barcode. The flaps, following a similar color scheme (the front in green with black letters, and the back in black with white letters), feature the poet's biography.

⁹ In contrast, Genette lists up to eighteen items that could be included in the front cover, many of which may not be expressly chosen by the author (24).

poemas, *Despoesia*, and *Poetamenos*), entirely omits the reference to poetry. This omission problematizes the subject matter by not referring to the genre, or it assumes an informed reader who will immediately recognize it as a book of avant-garde poetry.¹⁰



Figure 1

Outro's title is remarkably rich—it suggests an enigma. Its refusal to refer to poetry perhaps suggests that something *other* than poetry is what we should be paying attention to. Visually, the iconic design of the title on the cover, is reminiscent of Décio Pignatari's early works such as "LIFE" and "organismo." Like the poem "Código" and the logo of *Revista Código* that Augusto designed in the 1970s,¹¹ the title's receding typographic design creates an almost

¹⁰ Genette suggests that a work's title may have among its functions to: "(1) identify the work, (2) designate the work's subject matter, (3) play up the work" (76). It is interesting that *Outro* fails to identify the subject matter but creates an aura of mystery that ultimately does play up the work.

¹¹ In a fascinating and novel discussion of "Código," Patrícia Lino argues that the poem "encarna, em simultâneo, signo e significante, o signo material e o alargamento visual do significante a partir do significado (a leitura de "Código" corresponde à decifração do código—ele mesmo).

hypnotic effect, drawing the reader in, as if into its “otherworldly” universe. The oversized *o* contains a smaller *u*, which, in turn, envelops the *t*, *r*, and *o* in a column. The placement of the *t*, *r*, and *o* inside the larger *u* unconsciously suggests, to an “errata eye,” to use an expression coined by Augusto himself (“Intradução de Cummings” 30), the word *útero*, uterus, matrix, inner sanctum, which in turn is enclosed in the larger circular *o*. Here, the generic yields to the generative. A further polyglot reading of this would give us the French *trou*, a (sink)hole¹² and perhaps a more vulgar term. As mentioned earlier, semantically, the word is ambiguous: *outro*, in Portuguese, alludes to both proliferation (*mais um*) and otherness (*diferente*).¹³ The Portuguese for “other, another,” can also be read as a clear nod to the French Symbolist poet Arthur Rimbaud, whom Augusto translated and republished in 1993 in *Rimbaud Livre* (another richly bilingual punning title, “Free Rimbaud,” or “Rimbaud Book,” in French): “EU é um outro” (“Intradução: Alguns Rimbauds” 13). Augusto also mentions Rimbaud in *Outro*’s preface. As noted earlier, the English word *outro* is the musical term opposite of intro, a musical coda, ending, or exit, or, in the recording industry, a “bonus” track, a different performance of a previous track. *Outro* may also resonate in English with “outerness” as well as “going out,” “fading out,” “ending.” The ambiguity—bonus or exit—is rendered particularly poignant by a comment Augusto makes in the preface, hinting at the possibility that this might be his last opus. He writes, *Outro* “pode ser também o último bônus do meu trabalho poético” (Campos, *Outro*), *último* here clearly understood not only as “latest” but also perhaps also as “ultimate” or “final.”

Following the title page, which reproduces the design of the cover except, now, in black and white (black letters against a white background), we encounter two more paratexts, the epigraph and the dedication, which share the same page. In comparison to *Despoesia* and *Não poemas*¹⁴ these paratexts are

Nele, negociação e manipulação minimalista, visual e sonora do signo poético, convergem todos os gestos e níveis da leitura” (11).

¹² I’m thankful to André Vallias for this perceptive suggestion at an oral presentation of this paper during the BRASA conference, held in July 2018 at PUC in Rio de Janeiro.

¹³ *Dicionário Priberam* records at least 6 definitions: ou-tro *determinante e pronome indefinido* 1. Não este. 2. Diferente. 3. Mais um. 4. Seguente. 5. Precedente. 6. Restante.

¹⁴ *Despoesia* contains no epigraph or dedication. *Não poemas* omits epigraphs and contains only a very short dedication to Augusto’s wife and, in memoriam, to Haroldo de Campos and Julio Plaza: “a lygia, companheira / 50 anos” and “a haroldo / e julio / in memoriam” (Campos, *Não poemas*).

deployed here to much greater effect. Both reveal not only a “condensation of the [author’s] whole doctrine” or a “token of esteem to a person, a real or ideal group” (Genette 117, 145), respectively, but also important details about some choices for the cover discussed above. In the epigraph, Augusto quotes from the Portuguese Romantic Cesário Verde (“pinto quadros por letras, por sinais”) and the American modernist Ezra Pound, followed by his own translation: “green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth, / crushed strawberries! come, let us feast our eyes. // verde-arsênico borra a tela ovo-alva, / morangos machucados! que festa para o olhar.” The first comes from Verde’s *Livro*, and alludes to the visual qualities often recognized in his poetry. Pound’s is from his two-line poem “L’Art, 1910,” included in *Lustra* (1916).

The epigraph’s focus on colors and visuality indirectly comments on *Outro* as a self-confessed book of “remixes visuais,” in the tradition that both Verde and Pound embodied. These authors, besides being revered masters, very much align with Augusto’s own emphasis on the visual, and these specific poems highlight imagistic qualities. In Pound’s “L’Art, 1910,” Earl Miner recognized the use of the “super-pository image technique” that Pound developed as a result of his interest in Japanese poetry (577). Pound’s poem alludes to green and red, the colors used in the design of the cover and spine. Verde’s last name translates as “green.” Thus, besides providing a clue to elements of the design, these quotes also announce to the reader *Outro*’s remarkable engagement with the visual, at times to the detriment of the verbal.

Despite their centrality, the identity of the poets only becomes apparent after some decoding. The quotes, for instance, are identified solely by their initials (CV and EP), another hint that, like the laconic cover, this is a text in which the author specifically addresses the initiated. This gesture is dramatically emphasized by the status Verde and Pound enjoy as “poets’ poets.” By quoting them, Augusto achieves what Genette calls the “epigraph-effect,” namely, he issues to his readers “a password of intellectuality” and, ultimately, “chooses his peers and consecrates his place in the pantheon” (164).

The epigraphs crucially position Augusto’s authorial persona within that “pantheon,” where he has already been preceded by Verde and Pound. Another paratext, the dedication, expands the pantheon to include the poets to whom Augusto dedicates the book, namely, Décio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos, José Lino Grünwald, and Ronaldo Azeredo, all of whom passed away between

2000 and 2012. Dedications, Genette contends, are ways of establishing lineages, and this one, *in memoriam* to his confrères of Brazilian concrete poetry by the last survivor of the original group, clearly creates such a legacy. Augusto emphasizes that notion later in the preface: “Sobrevivente, para o bem ou para o mal, não posso deixar de completar o que comecei, o quanto me for possível.”

The dedication is followed by a “sumário,” or table of contents, which shows the deliberate design of the book in its various sections: the preface; a section called “outro,” containing original poems; the sections “intro (*intraduções*),” “extro (*outraduções*),” and “clip-poemas 2.” This paratext, which serves to announce the intertitles (titles of the individual parts of the book), also displays a great degree of calculation. For instance, the arrangement of the parts of the book the titles designate points very purposefully to a concern not with themes, but with genre and originality. Commenting on the history of intertitles, Genette observes that there is a recurring tension between using mere numbers (for sections or intertitles) or using “thematic titling” (315). While not directly following a number, Augusto’s use of intertitles reveals an implicit order from original/individual/interior to translational/collective/exterior. Augusto plays with terms previously coined (*intraduções*), introduces new ones (*outraduções*, *extro*), and alludes to the design of the book, which is ordered from the innermost, “most” original (i.e., self-authored poems) to the outermost, “least” original (i.e., translations).¹⁵ The progression also goes from most verbal to most visual and intermedial, including the reference to online *clip-poemas*, where he incorporates a temporal dimension as well as a different medium, namely, electronic poetry. The translations likewise suggest an order that progresses from the legible to the illegible, as I will discuss below.

The “sumário” is followed by another paratext, “outronão,” a rich, one-page preface that Augusto also uses as an opportunity to expand on aspects of his authorial persona and choices in *Outro*.¹⁶ Augusto begins by insisting on the

¹⁵ Besides a play with the word “intro,” “extro,” in its pronunciation, also suggests, “estro,” i.e., poetic or artistic enthusiasm or inspiration.

¹⁶ Among the other functions listed by Genette Augusto’s preface that fulfills is that of providing a vital commentary on the title (noted earlier), which Genette notes is “all the more necessary when the title is enigmatic” (213), as is clearly the case of *Outro*. The preface also comments on

dearth of his poetic production: “Há quem diga que exagero quando afirmo que produzco pouca poesia. No entanto, minha última coleção de poemas inéditos—*NÃO*—é de 2003.” Augusto’s disavowal of himself as a prolific poet, and of poetry overall, continues with an indirect quote from Marianne Moore: “Eu também não gosto de poesia...Faço poesia porque não sei fazer outra coisa.” He confesses feeling both envy and admiration for Rimbaud, who gave up writing at age twenty, and for Emily Dickinson’s sense of detachment. He also suggests that, as atonement for his original production he translates the work of others. In other words, in an act of modesty, he tries to balance the somewhat self-centered production of “original” poems with “service” to other poets in the form of translation. With an overwhelming sense of belatedness, Augusto concludes with a *mea culpa* for whatever mistakes or “inefficiencies” his work might entail: “a única justificativa que posso dar é a de ter chegado muito tarde a um mundo muito novo.” More than self-justificatory, the tone of the preface is self-deprecating. Interestingly, this “text,” where we hear Augusto’s voice directly for the first time in *Outro*, patently insists on diminishing or negating the authorial persona that all the previous paratexts go to great lengths to construct.

Despite these efforts at minimizing authorship, the various paratexts discussed above unambiguously present *Outro* as the work of a single author, perhaps even, a singular *auteur*, Augusto de Campos, whose presence permeates every aspect of the design and execution of the book. *Outro*, thus, is not just any *other* book,¹⁷ but rather one meticulously thought out and executed by its author.¹⁸ The result is such that, even before the reader encounters the actual “texts,” Augusto’s position as the author has been clearly established from the outside in. The paratexts closely link symbolic and material devices to

the text’s origin (going back to Augusto’s *Poetamenos*), sources, and acknowledgements (citing Mallarmé and Timothy Leary, the author of the 1994 book *Chaos and Cyberculture*).

¹⁷ While *Despoesia* and *Não poemas* are also somewhat lavish in their materiality, especially considering the printing techniques available when they were published—paper stock, color printing (*Não* even includes metallic printing on the cover)—*Outro* outdoes them in quality and in the inclusion of embossed printing, which alters even the texture of the book).

¹⁸ As Donovan et al. point out, “in contemporary usage an ‘author’ is an individual who is *exclusively responsible* for the production of a unique, original work. It is this ‘literary’ concept of the author that has been the subject of intense critical scrutiny over the last forty years, much of which has been conducted in the shadow of the poststructuralist pronouncement of the ‘death of the author’” (1, emphasis added).

expressly enact (“make present” to use Genette’s terminology¹⁹) the verbivocovisual legacy of concrete poetry. Furthermore, *Outro*’s paratexts constitute an affirmation, indeed a revival, of the staying power of the “author” (in Foucault’s and Barthes’s sense) after so many decades of debate around this figure’s presumed death.²⁰

Reading from the Inside Out: Through the Looking Glass

As the above analysis shows, Augusto makes strategic use of paratexts to leave a visible mark of authorship throughout. Other aspects of the text, however, insist on minimizing that intentionality, stressing instead authorial hesitancy. The preface, discussed earlier, attests to Augusto’s authorial reluctance in the references to Rimbaud and Dickinson. Furthermore, regarding authorial responsibility, two of the three parts of the book are acknowledged as “intraduções” or “outraduções,” and 47.5% of total number of individual texts are versions.²¹ In this section, I look closely at a number of “intraduções” and “outraduções” to examine how they appropriate and transform their models and originals, particularly through visual and other concrete devices. These procedures have the effect of creating new poems whose originality blurs the limits of authorship.

¹⁹ Genette argues that while we don’t always know whether the paratexts should be regarded as belonging to the text, they nonetheless surround, extend, and present the text in the strongest possible sense: “[to] *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world, its ‘reception’ and consumption in the form (nowadays, at least) of a book” (1). As our analysis shows, in the case of *Outro*, there is quite a bit of certainty that the paratexts belong to the text and they unambiguously contribute to establishing the text as Augusto’s work.

²⁰ In an article examining theories of authorship, Dario Compagno reminds us that “texts are intentional products, the results of series of *choices*,” as he echoes Wayne Booth’s ideas that “‘all art presupposes the artist’s choice’” and construes “the *implied author* as ‘the sum of his own choices’” (45). Compagno argues that “[i]nterpretation is a matter of recognizing *what is intentional*: where the work begins and ends, and what is planned within it. Here is also the need to recognize *what is unintentional*, above and beyond the author’s intention – otherwise the author would become a god-like entity with a perfect control over language and with an unrealistically clear idea of the ends and consequences of his or her actions” (50).

²¹ Though there is a fourth part entitled “clip-poemas 2,” this is a list of references to the online poems. It is unclear whether those are to be included as “part” of the book. The idea of whether texts which are not physically part of the book might be somehow considered part of it is conceptually fascinating, and again, supports the idea that Augusto here is pushing the “limits” of this text.

Presented alongside original poems, these translations are elevated in status to original creations, and the degree of creative manipulation of the translations indeed supports that notion. This is no surprise. It is well known that both Augusto and Haroldo de Campos put forth, from an early moment, a translation practice that involved highly creative transformations and that they rejected the notion of translation as unoriginal.²² Here Augusto plays with the notion of authorship in that he is thoroughly reflected in the choices he makes as translator, while also acting as the “double” of the author he translates. For the most part, Augusto’s versions are not strict verbal renderings, and even when mostly verbal, other devices intervene. At the same time, Augusto employs techniques which, paradoxically, attempt to diminish and even compromise the legibility of the text.

In “intraduções,” Augusto reworks texts by Catullus, Góngora, Longfellow, Laforgue, Valéry, Apollinaire, Marianne Moore, and Mallarmé. In what follows, I will focus on three versions of poems by Catullus and Laforgue. These are mostly verbal renderings, but the visual design stands out. I parse the transformations that Augusto carries out, which problematize the question of authorship and also present visual challenges to our reading habits.

“odi et amo” (Figure 2, 60-61) is mostly a visual reworking of Catullus 85, a brief poem by the Latin author to his beloved, a woman known in the poems as Lesbia.²³ Catullus’s elegiac couplet, which broaches the contradictory feelings of the poet, has often been praised for its brevity and directness. Augusto’s version, taking its title from the Latin first line, “odi et amo,” is an even more succinct visual manipulation of the two verbs in Portuguese, “odéio” and “amo.” The eight letters of the words are laid out on a 3 x 3 grid, with the last row missing a letter in the middle. Against a black background, Augusto prints the words in the iconic green and red, whose symbolism has been alluded to earlier. The word “odéio” is interrupted by the “a” of “amo.” This constitutes

²² The translation practice and reflections of Haroldo and Augusto de Campos have been widely discussed. Thelma Médici Nóbrega and John Milton provide an excellent overview of their work in this regard. My own discussion of the evolution of Haroldo’s translation concepts was published in *TTR* (see Cisneros in “Works Cited”).

²³ Catullus’s Latin reads: “Odi et amo. Quare id faciam fortasse requiris/Nescio Sed fieri sentio et excrucior.” Ezra Pound rendered this into English with a distinct modernist flavor: I hate and I love. Why? You may ask but / It beats me. I feel it done to me, and ache (Pound, *Confucius to Cummings* 33).

a clever rendering of the idea that both feelings intersect in the poet's consciousness. Likewise, the symmetrical placement of the letters (the "a" of "amo" is at the center) also suggests ambivalence—the fact that the feelings are felt simultaneously and with equal intensity.

Augusto does not verbally translate the rest of the poem, which alludes to uncertainty and pain, but his rendering "translates" that ambiguity through typography, visual arrangements, and color schemes. Manuel Portela has argued that in many of Augusto's works, "[r]ather than being the effaced transmitter of verbal meaning, typography [becomes] both functional and expressive in its materiality, coming between author and reader as a perceptual reminder of the elusive nature of meaning" (307). The typography of "odi et amo" is a case in point: all the letters of the font are designed to fit within a circle, and the first and last letters of the grid (from top to bottom and left to right) are an o, a perfect circle. The ambiguity of the feelings is underscored by the fact that all these letters aren't just neatly organized into a grid, but that they could all stack up or collapse into one, perhaps symbolizing the merging of the love-hate feelings. As a whole, then, "odi et amo" is a highly original visual and verbal rendering presented, nonetheless, as a "translation."

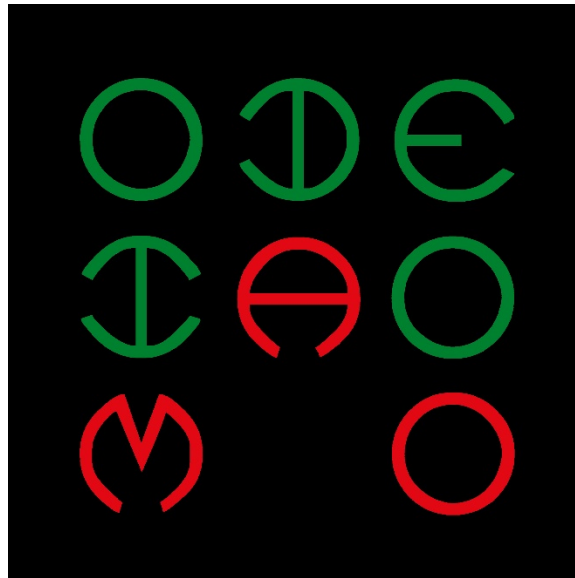


Figure 2

“odiamante” (62-62) is a further elaboration of the previous poem, which puns on the phrase “o diamante” and “odi amante.” This time, Augusto deploys a diamond-shaped grid in black and white (smaller-point white letters against a black background in the same font as the previous poem), as he continues to explore the indeterminacy of the love-hate emotional state. Read as a phrase, the words would spell “amo / meio / odeio / odiamo / amodeio / meiodeio / demiodeio / ideodeio / meioamo / ideamo / odeio / demo / amo.” On a verbal level, Augusto makes use of “amo” and “odeio” as basic building blocks for a variety of words that contain only the letters in those words (*a, d, e, i, m,* and *o*). Taking advantage of existing words that already signify that intermediateness (*meio, demi*) as words or prefixes, he creates further resonances of Latinate words (*id, id[e]m, idea*), and capitalizes on the coincidences of the initial and final *o* in the building block words by eliding them (*amodeio, meiodeio*). Along the right-hand side margin, Augusto produces a perfect, diamond-edge symmetry, as all lines end in an *o*. This second “version,” however, creates a decidedly different reading of Catullus, as the ambiguity of contrary feelings is resolved in the reiteration of “amo” in the first and final lines of the diamond. What is not resolved, however, is the question of who the author is: is it Catullus, who provides the initial impulse and poetic DNA, or is it Augusto, who, in this mirror maze, renders Catullus a thoroughly concrete poet?

Catullus’s brief and straightforward poem contrasts with “cauteriza e coagula”:

cauteriza
e coagula
e virgula
as lagunas
com
seus
lises
dessas
ofélias
felinas

folionas
orfeinas

de
tua
gula
nutrizes
cicatrizes
as tarântulas
ovula
dexas
ofélias
felinas
orfeinas
em folia

surdo aos
deslizes
açula
para a nula
lua
lunática
as crises
dexas
felinas
ofélias
das folias
orfeinas (70-73)

This poem is a rendering of French Symbolist Jules Laforgue's "Stérilités," a three-stanza poem from his collection *L'Imitation de Notre-Dame la Lune* (The imitation of our lady the moon, 1885) In the original French, it reads:

Cautérise et coagule
En virgules

Ses lagunes des cerises
Des félines Ophélie
Orphelines en folie.

Tarentules de feintises
La remise
Sans rancune des ovules
Aux félines Ophélie
Orphelines en folie.

Sourd aux brises des scrupules,
Vers la bulle
De la lune, adieu, nolise
Ces félines Ophélie
Orphelines en folie!... (206)

This poem stands out for its sound qualities and semantic obscurity.²⁴ As opposed to Catullus 85, “Stérilités” is an excessive, perhaps “limit-text,” where sound patterns are complex and meaning remains elusive. Jean-Pierre Bertrand, a noted Laforgue scholar, reads the poem’s excesses as “the paroxysmal culmination of practices scattered in other texts” (70-71). In particular, Bertrand sees the figure of the break as characterizing all of Laforgue’s work on a number of different levels: “In the end, this text offers itself to be read both as ‘sound bone and very void’ and ‘virgin verse to designate only the break.’ Let anyone read whatever he or she hears in this sound amalgam. Poetry has nothing more to say but can mean everything: it is only noise, stake, and inevitable consequence of the symbolism of the cut, between lack and excess” (71).

Bertrand’s observation that the poem’s sound which “is only noise” but can “mean everything” provides a clue to some aspects of the translation. Augusto’s version clearly zeroes in on the excesses, repetition of sounds in the original, “iz” and “ul,” creating corresponding echoes in Portuguese, “iza” and “ula,”

²⁴ Hiddleston observes the elaborate rhyme scheme, “full of word play and internal rhyme. The poet wants the virginal Ophelias to be sterilized and shipped off to the moon” (Laforgue 268).

and close sonic variants. Meter-wise, Augusto “cuts” Laforgue’s stanzas of five lines to create a column-like structure with lines that oscillate in length. The 5-line stanzas with regular 7- or 3-syllable lines become 12-line columns of irregular meter. Where Laforgue religiously repeats the quasi-incantatory “Orphelines en folie” at the end of each stanza, Augusto refuses a simple calque, inventing the variants “folionas / orfelinas,” “orfelinas / en folia,” and “das folias orfelinas.” A curious form of tracing, however, appears on the next page, where Augusto creates a further visual transposition of his “translation” (Figure 3). A seemingly arbitrary image of white dots against a black background reveals itself to the patient reader as a filling-in of the closed spaces in the letters of the previous poem. A veritable graphic cauterization that closes off the holes of letters, congealing them, so to speak, Augusto’s visual transposition pushes Laforgue’s already limit-text to an almost unrecognizable, illegible extreme.

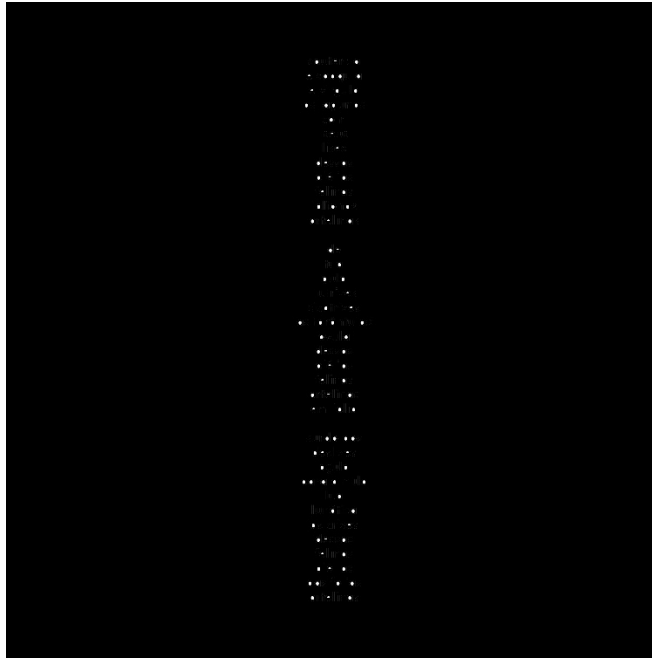


Figure 3

While “intraduções,” focuses on the verbal, the section titled “extro: outraduções” centers more on the visual. The authors in this section include Antonio Vieira, Bernardo Soares/Fernando Pessoa, Augusto dos Anjos, Euclides da Cunha, Raúl Pompéia, Erykah Badu, Scelsi, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and René Magritte. Several poems in this section push the notion of authorship to dizzying new limits. Who, for instance, can be considered the author of poem created when Augusto appropriates a text by a fictional author? Case in point is the poem titled “Pessoares” (92-93). Here Augusto borrows a fragment of the Portuguese modernist poet Fernando Pessoa’s *O livro do desassossego* (“De suave e aérea a hora era uma ara onde orar”). Pessoa was known for creating a multitude of poetic personae or heteronyms, including one with his own name and Bernardo Soares, the ostensive author of *O livro do desassossego*. Augusto devises a cross-shaped calligram with the fragment and the last names of Pessoa and his fictional heteronym, Soares. The portmanteau word “Pessoares” brilliantly fuses the name of the author Pessoa and his imagined character (as well as the two heteronyms, Pessoa and Soares) into what becomes an identity *mis-en-abîme*. This operation displaces authorship to the second (or maybe even third) degree: Augusto is the author (by appropriation) of this text by Soares who, in turn, is Pessoa’s creation. This merging of personalities is also doubled in the echoes of the sounds. In the phrase that makes up the calligram, the words *aérea, hora, era, ara, orar* share the middle consonant “r” and the vowel sounds “a,” “e,” “o” arranged in a vocalic rhyme pattern: e-a-a / a-e-a / a-o-a // e-a / u-a-a/ o-e / o-a .

In “Pessoanjos” (Figure 4, 94-95), a collage of photographs of Fernando Pessoa and the Brazilian poet Augusto dos Anjos, Augusto takes Pessoa’s play with heteronyms a step further. Pictured in Lisbon, on an imaginary stroll, Pessoa and Anjos, who were roughly contemporaries yet never met, exhibit an uncanny resemblance. Both men sport similar moustaches, attire, and posture. This ghostly image of a man and his doppelgänger is further enhanced by the lines of text above and below the image “Passos em Lisboa / Anjos em Pessoa.” The mysterious lines allude further to a fusion of identity of these two authors: in the act of taking a stroll (literally, steps, “passos”), dos Anjos (who incidentally shares Augusto de Campos first name) *becomes* Pessoa, and vice versa. A further reading of the phrase “anjos em pessoa” capitalizes on the

literal meaning of “anjos” (angels, apparitions) and “pessoa” (as person), positing these poets as “supernatural beings in person.”

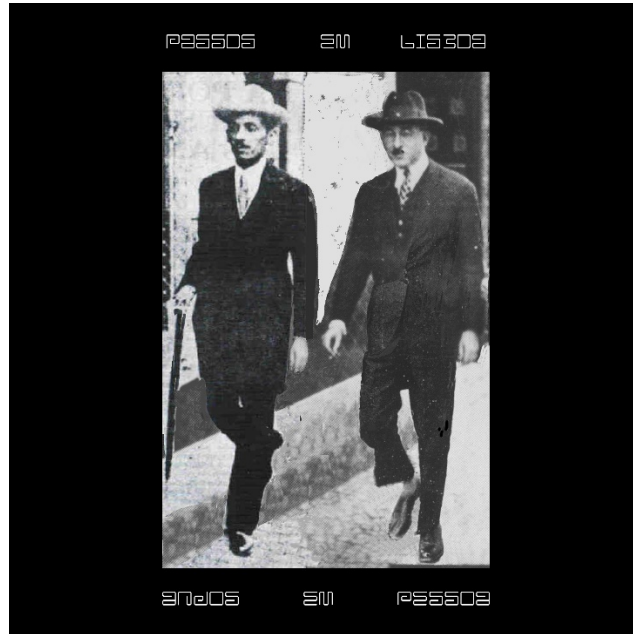


Figure 4

All these examples illustrate how Augusto deploys the tools of concrete poetry in his translations, or rather transformations, of classical and modern poems, taking them to extremes that render them unrecognizable. Moreover, these translations lead to a questioning of the concept of authorship by the very transformative operations Augusto carries out. On a material level as well, Augusto makes use of all kinds of layout, typographic, and other visual maneuvers not only to enhance the meaning but also to complicate it. As we will see in the next section, the operations of translation also lead to compromised legibility.

Reading (and) the Illegible

Above I suggested the tension between the role that paratexts play in *Outro* establishing authorship, a notion that in turn is questioned, initially, by the sheer proportion of translations that constitute the volume. Furthermore, these radical translations also blur the lines of authorship between Augusto and the poet translated. This generates tension around subjectivity and authorship, concepts initially questioned by concrete poetry. Another tension emerges here which harkens back to one of the early tenets of Brazil's concrete poets: their desire to eliminate the dependence of poetry on discursivity by adopting an ideogrammic method of writing in which form and meaning were inextricably fused. Furthermore, concrete poetry's recourse to visual elements was a strategy aimed not only at universal but also instant communication. Interestingly, some of the poems in *Outro* take visuality to an extreme that, on the contrary, obscures verbal signification. Rather than promoting immediate communication, as was the ideal of some concrete poetry,²⁵ they substantially slow it down or outright impede it. In other words, in *Outro* visual devices at times make the poems more difficult to read, as already noted by Rodolfo Mata. In a review of *Outro*, Mata observed that the poems, "apresentam virtudes, dificuldades, complexidade e inclusive qualidades refratárias," going on to suggest as designation the term "criptopoemas" (28-29).

My own interest lies more specifically in the question of legibility and how it relates to the material aspects of the text. While my discussion will focus on the legibility of individual poems, it is worthwhile to point out that when Augusto produces limit-texts that are close to the illegible, this gesture runs counter to the deliberate work of the paratexts to make *Outro* a clearly recognizable (readable) book. To this effect, following Lorraine Piroux, Elvira Blanco Santini points out that:

²⁵ Although "plano piloto para poesia concreta" does not mention the issue of "reading" (legibility), it does insist on the fact that *poesia concreta* is there to *communicate*: the main advantage of the "verbivocovisual" sign is that "participa das vantagens da *comunicação* não-verbal, sem abdicar das virtualidades da palavra. com o poema concreto ocorre o fenômeno da *metacomunicação*; coincidência e simultaneidade da *comunicação* verbal e não-verbal, com a nota de que se trata de uma *comunicação* de formas, de uma estrutura-conteúdo, não da usual *comunicação* de mensagens" (157-58).

[T]he ‘regime of legibility’ was consolidated in Europe with the French Enlightenment, along with the physical changes that the book as medium and object underwent at the time [...] Books were being [...] printed with clearer structures thanks to typographical technologies; certain mechanisms of text organization ‘made the semantic architecture of the text immediately available [yet, i]n response to the imperative of transparency [...] some writers began to embrace the materiality of the written sign (61-62).

This is the case with Augusto’s *Outro*. Just as the paratexts do the work of presentation and legibility, the texts themselves embrace the materiality of the written sign, and, in so doing, compromise legibility. A clear example of this complexity that precludes reading is “humano,” printed on the back cover of *Outro* and also appearing in the section of original poems (52-53). This poem plays on the format and script of the *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese book of divination. Editions of the *I Ching* contain an 8 x 8 reading guide/matrix of symbols, hexagrams made up of long and short bars, divided into an upper trigram and a lower trigram. The system generates sixty-four possible hexagram combinations, which are used in a complex divinatory method. Augusto “reads” the shapes of Roman alphabet letters in these hexagrams, using a highlighted version to spell out the word *humano*. A rich meditation on the combinatorial poetics of the *I Ching* and their relation to being human, the poem may well contain many other meanings (numerological or other). Far from being “immediate communication,” reading here is deciphering, and even this simple initial insight requires effort.

In my analysis of some of the translations I have already alluded to the way that expressly devised fonts contribute in significant ways to meaning-making in each poem. In the case of some of the original poems, typography is likewise put to use but with quite misleading consequences. Take the poem “ter remoto” (40-41). At first sight, the curious font employed here makes the letters look like the symbols of the Zodiac, though none of them are. The patient reader eventually will discover these are letters doubled in their mirror images, spelling out the phrase “borboleta que ter remoto acaso faz o leve tremer de tua

frágil asa?” The verbal meaning could be construed as an enigmatic double meditation on the so-called butterfly effect: here Augusto wonders not only whether a butterfly flapping its wings can cause a catastrophe elsewhere in the world, but also the opposite notion—whether a remote earthquake (*ter remoto*) would be the cause of a fragile butterfly’s light batting of wings. The syntactical ambiguity here allows a double reading of the words(s) “*ter remoto*,” deliberately spelled with a space in between to bring out the idea of a remote cause—as both subject and object. The enigma posed by the question is further intensified by the script, which takes some effort to decipher, and again, puts the issue of il/legibility at the forefront of Augusto’s poetics in *Outro*.

In the section “*extro: outraduções*,” there are more examples of what Craig Dworkin describes as “poetic works that appropriate and then physically manipulate a source text, employing erasures, overprinting, excisions, cancellations, and rearrangements, and so on, as to render part of the source texts literally unreadable” (xviii). In “*o polvo*,” (Figure 5, 84-91), Augusto visually distorts beyond recognition the lines of a fragment of the “*Sermão de Santo Antônio aos peixes*,” by the seventeenth-century Jesuit Antônio Vieira. The first of a series of four images shows several purple and white horizontal squiggly lines against a black background, somewhat reminiscent of the scrambled signal of a retro TV image. The shape of the lines and dark colors are suggestive of both tentacles and of the viewer’s blurry vision (as if under water). And like a TV finally tuning in, the subsequent images gradually become less squiggly and more legible to reveal Vieira’s text (appropriated passages here noted in italics):

O polvo com aquele seu capelo na cabeça, parece um monge; com aqueles seus raios estendidos, parece uma estrela; com aquele não ter osso nem espinha, parece a mesma brandura, a mesma mansidão. E debaixo desta aparência tão modesta, ou desta hipocrisia tão santa, testemunham constantemente os dois grandes doutores da Igreja latina e grega, que o dito polvo é o maior traidor do mar. Consiste esta traição do polvo primeiramente em se vestir ou pintar das mesmas cores de todas aquelas cores a que está pegado. As cores, que no camaleão são gala, no polvo são malícia; as figuras, que em Proteu são

fábula, no polvo são verdade e artifício. Se está nos limos, faz-se verde; se está na areia, faz-se branco; se está no lodo, faz-se pardo: e se está em alguma pedra, como mais ordinariamente costuma estar, faz-se da cor da mesma pedra.

The illegibility that the text produces is richly analogous to the deceptive nature of the octopus as described by Vieira. Vieira calls him “o maior traidor do mar,” since he is an animal that appears “manso” and “brando,” but with its color-and shape-shifting features, he traps his prey, the unsuspecting fish that swim by, and muddles the water with its ink. Augusto’s appropriation of Vieira’s sermon, which refers to different qualities of human nature in a complex allegory involving fish and marine creatures, is rife with metaphorical meaning that could be explored at great lengths. For the purposes of our focus on readability, suffice it to say that just as the octopus renders his environment “illegible” by releasing ink. Augusto, in reverse fashion, renders Vieira’s text initially illegible through distortion, only to reveal it, tantalizingly, several pages later.

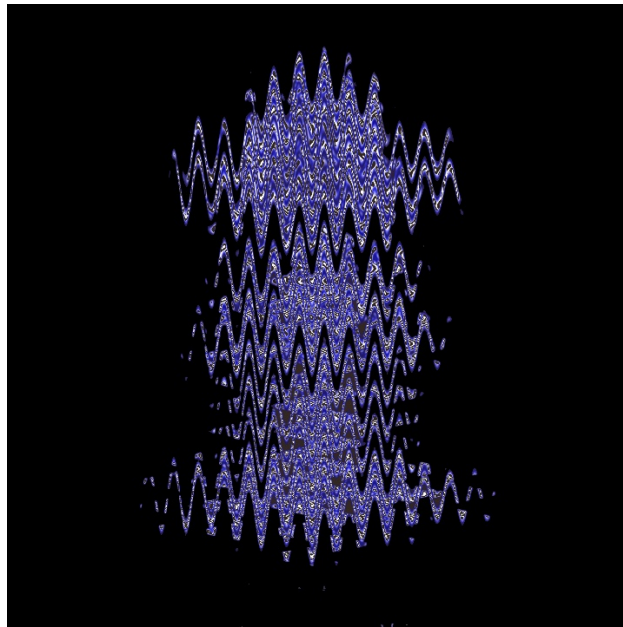


Figure 5

As I suggested at the beginning of this essay, *Outro* is a work that plays with the limits of authorship and with the limits of readability, both as an affirmation and a negation of concrete poetry's legacy. On the one hand, the paratexts of *Outro* work to present, indeed, affirm Augusto's authorship throughout. On the other, we are led to question, ultimately, to expand, our perception of such authorship when confronted with translations, appropriations, and alterations of work by other poets, where the degree of manipulation renders them quasi originals and authorship is substantially shared. Legibility, likewise, is put to the test, perhaps more than in any other volume, in poems that employ visual devices to deliberately complicate meaning-making and reading practices. In the short article "Um exame da vista para o século 21," Raquel Campos suggests that another poem in *Outro*, "Os contemporâneos não sabem ler," which appropriates a phrase from the notoriously difficult French Symbolist Stéphane Mallarmé, becomes precisely an "eye exam" for the twenty-first century. Removing the spaces between the words, Augusto prints it centered and in gradually smaller font, mimicking an optometrist's eye chart. The result is a text that forces us to stop and look carefully to make out a self-reflexive phrase offering commentary on our contemporary inability to read. By problematizing the issue of legibility, Augusto, in this last work, invites us to reconsider and even question our current reading practices. Furthermore, these partially illegible poems shun the concrete ideal, maybe fantasy, of transparency and immediate communication compelling us instead to slow down, take difficulty seriously, and, once more, learn to read. And though Augusto remains at the center, his authorship clearly anchored in the paratexts, a sense of doubt remains in the collaborative texts and his own self-confessed "recusas." In the oscillation between authorial certainty and uncertainty as well as in the play between legibility/illegibility, Augusto seems to not only question such limits, but also come full circle from his early concrete days—poetically affirming and outstripping his own six-decade career.

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