

## THE ENDURING DIALECTIAL LYRIC OF AUGUSTO DE CAMPOS

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**Abstract** Fundamental appositions structure the variegated poetical repertory of Augusto de Campos, including affirmation / negation and presence / absence. Spanning decades of production (1964 to 2015), two pairs of synthetic poems illustrate, diachronically and synchronically, such binomial operation with regard to sound / silence and humanity / its counterpart. Technical management achieves existential levels.

**Keywords** Augusto de Campos, concrete poetry, dialectic

In his brief preface to *Outro* (2015), Augusto de Campos expresses a particular like for the ambiguity of the title.<sup>1</sup> The standard acceptations of "other/another" are assumed, and the alternate meaning is explained as a USAmerican jazz term for the exit segment of a performed composition the "opposite" of the introduction (intro), a sort of bonus. This new other-worldly collection, he further ponders, might be the last bonus of his poetic work. Subsequent years have proven that speculation to be rather premature, as he, the lone surviving member of the Noigandres poets who invented *poesia concreta* in the 1950s, has continued to create and publish incisive visual *contre-poems* in the reactionary context of the late second decade of the twenty-first century in Brazil.<sup>2</sup> As for career-spanning aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> The present contribution to this special issue honoring Augusto de Campos upon his ninetieth birthday has its origins in "OUTRO: Another Arc of the Inter-Art Poetics of Augusto de Campos." Global Studies Distinguished Lecture. Temple University, Philadelphia PA. March 18, 2016. I am grateful to Prof. Adam J. Shellhorse for the invitation and for his continued enthusiasm about research on this incomparable artist of the word.

<sup>2</sup> See the series of *contrapoemas* in *Circuladô* (63-68), as well as new and old items posted by digital assistants on the author's own social media pages (Instagram, Facebook) or on dedicated third-party sites such as Poesia Concreta (Facebook). It bears noting that an appendix to *Outro* lists the URLs of

preface, it also reflects, beginning with the very title, "Outronão," an oft-observed constant in the poet's oeuvre: negation and negativity.<sup>3</sup> Critics throughout the Americas have underlined as much. A double review of Augusto's *Música de Invenção* and *Não* (2003) refers to "negatividade constitutiva" and "negação inventiva."<sup>4</sup> A noted transamerican scholar writes that with his debut book, *O rei menos o reino* (1951), Augusto demarcates one of the principles of his poetic project — "la negatividad, la carencia, la sustracción" — as a way to tackle new discourses and social situations.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the opening line of Augusto's first book of verse reads "Onde a angústia roendo um não de pedra."<sup>6</sup> The title of the polychromatic *poetamenos* (1953) falls between the lines of subtraction, while the poster poems of *Ex-poemas* (1983) and the variegated *Despoesia* (1994) confirm the tendency with their own prefixes. A New York presentation of Augusto's accomplishments in lyric, in turn, calls it "a paradigm that encompasses [his] entire catalogue: negativity, understood as carefully constructed denial, abstention, subtraction, reduction, minimalism, and condensation."<sup>7</sup> All of these are observable in *Outro* and predecessors to varying degrees and intensities.

Counterparts to the operative negation-negativity in Augusto's ideography are the natural complement of affirmation, whether condensed emotive gestures or celebrations of aesthetic beauty, and dual-action expressive acts that embody a dialectic whereby the element of no is balanced with a yes. This can be thought of and poetically conceived as a mathematical binomial, a digital 0/1, a mechanical on/off, a chromatic black/white, a philosophical yin/yang, an acoustic sound/silence, or overall as presence/absence. These appositions can occur within a single poem or collection, or between works separated over time. The present essay comprises readings of two revealing counterpositionings: a diachronic sounding in the pregnant noise(s) from "anti-ruído" (1964) to "ruído" (1993) and a synchronic reading of the circuits of "humano" - "desumano" in *Outro*. In this pair of pairs, the former concerns the material and the sensorial to a greater degree, while the latter

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digital versions, some animated, of several of the poems in the book. On politics in Augusto's oeuvre and recent accomplishments, see Adam J. Shellhorse, "The Verbivocovisual Revolution: Anti-Literature, Affect, Politics, and World Literature in Augusto de Campos". *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 20: 1 (Spring 2020), 147-184.

<sup>3</sup> Mata, p. 36

<sup>4</sup> Siscar, "O percurso digital." The preface of the latter book is titled no less than "NÃO Ofácio". On reduction and negation, see Eduardo Sterzi, "Sinal de menos" in Sterzi, ed. Therein, see Siscar, "A crise do livro ou a poesia como antecipação," pp. 115-135.

<sup>5</sup> Aguilar, *Poesia concreta brasileira*, p. 191.

<sup>6</sup> *Viva Vaia*, p. 9

<sup>7</sup> Perrone, "ABC," p. 243.. See also the second section of Sússekind and Castañón, "II - Formas do Não," 95-160, with four apt essays.

couple links linguistic signals to experiential and electronic planes. At bottom, they prove to be interrelated, like the ideal assertion of form and content, inseparable. The anti-normative technological lyric of Augusto de Campos thus reveals a paradoxically existential space that combines micro-poetics and macro-perceptions.

#### I. Information Theory and Significant Sound.<sup>8</sup>

The mellifluous and multivalent term that the Noigandres group of São Paulo discovered in the neoteric prose of James Joyce is quite suitable to help unpack the original synthesis they sought to achieve with *poesia concreta*. The Irish word-wizard's "verbi-voco-visual presentment" (in Book II, Episode 3 of *Finnegan's Wake*) was recognized by the poet-essayists of Perdizes, and they profitably employed the compressed significance of the modifiers, elaborating upon them in their own particular ways. In Augusto's early capsule definition of *poesia concreta* as "tensão de palavras-coisas no espaço tempo" (1956)<sup>9</sup> there is no clear emphasis on one expressive mode. The characteristic orthodox "definition" of the new form of lyric would be *verbivocovisual ideogram*. Therein, what is essential is the interrelation of three dimensions: the semantic, the sonorous, the optical. If an even tripartite distribution is the optimal objective, in many creative results one of the three planes plays a more prominent role, akin to a dominant function of language. Over the decades, readings have most often accentuated visuality.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Décio Pignatari wrote that *poesia concreta* commenced upon considering graphic space as structural agent.<sup>11</sup> Notwithstanding this bias, there are abundant instances of foregrounding and/or "thematization" of *sound* fields, and/or silence, the antithesis of aural presence. If one concedes a certain primal contribution of the third component in verbi-voco-visual, the second also has plenty to offer. For his part, Augusto has created a notable series of germane compositions: both art-objects that aspire to an autonomous status and visual poems that function in domains of counter-discourse, artistic and social alike. Sound in general (all auditory signs) and the significant

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<sup>8</sup> This section is based on "Des-Const-Ruído: Noise in Noigandres and Beyond." Paper delivered at BRASA XIII at Brown University, 04-01-2016, part of the multi-session panel "Contos e Cantos de Barulhos" organized by Luca Bacchini.

<sup>9</sup> Campos et al. *Teoria*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> A cosmopolitan Italian scholar has defended a thesis that "aims to return the body to concrete poetry, its physical presence and materiality, whose importance has too often been diminished by critics concerned exclusively with the graphic-visual aspect and interested in the mere attribution of 'right' meanings." Romani, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Campos et al. *Teoria*, p. 156.

strident subset of noise, and at times their negation, undergird Augusto's sensitive extra-verbal poetry, as a prime maker on the Noigandres team and as a solo artist.

The word *noise* — covering the two Portuguese equivalents *barulho* and *ruído*—relates usefully to a stream of works in Brazilian lyric from *modernismo* forward. Two sonically-relevant titles in the *frementes anos vinte* (epithet by *o saudoso* Nicolau Sevecenko) were *Toda a América* (1926) by Ronald de Carvalho and *Vamos caçar papagaios* (1926) by Cassiano Ricardo. Honoring Walt Whitman—the USAmerican poet with a nose for noise in his *Leaves of Grass*—Carvalho echoes “I hear America singing!” with “Eu ouço o canto enorme do Brasil!” While the young Brazilian’s lyrical neo-epic contains, in a celebratory Futurist mode, dozens of forms in the paradigm of sonority — *zumbindo, gritando, rangem, martelam, estridulam, roncam* — the words *ruído* and *barulho* do not actually occur in the vociferous sequence.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, the very first strophes of *Vamos caçar papagaios* treat of raucous protest by native birds: “por quê tanto barulho?” the narrator asks.<sup>13</sup> There are plenty of additional examples to substantiate a loud soundscape-oriented reading of Modernist verse. In the contemporary period, an immediately obvious example in this strain would be Ferreira Gullar’s poem “Barulho” in *Barulhos* (43).

Todo poema é feito de ar  
apenas:  
    a mão do poeta  
    não rasga a madeira  
não fere  
    o metal  
    a pedra  
não tinge de azul  
os dedos  
quando escreve manhã  
ou brisa  
ou blusa  
    de mulher.

O poema  
é sem matéria palpável  
tudo  
o que há nele  
é barulho  
    quando rumoreja  
    ao sopro da leitura.

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<sup>12</sup> See my analysis of the voicing of transamericanity in this work in *Brazil, Lyric, and the Americas*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010. 117-27.

<sup>13</sup> The word *barulho* occurs five times in the book; *ruído* only two times.

The concept here is doubly conventional: the poem suggests oral recitation or reading aloud, and there is no sense of noise as deviant sound or interference. Further, there are no inorganic, mechanical or technological elements as one would find in material, concrete, visual, electronic, and/or digital poetry, where reside more relevant phenomena vis-à-vis *cantos de barulhos*. In any case, Gullar's lyric should incite one to check on the meanings of *barulho* elsewhere. Such action would immediately lead to adding to the mix the vocabular sibling *ruído*, modifier more often associated with cybernetics and electronic lyric.

As anti-normative sound and subsidiary concept, noise was dear to those aesthetic practitioners whose poetic repertoires in this vein are the richest of all: Augusto de Campos and cadre. To verify group pertinence, one need only to see that the letters of *noise* are literally contained within the enigmatic word NOIgandrES, emblem of the collective that created *poesia concreta*. In presentational writings, both Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari appeal to Norbert Wiener, the father of information theory, whom they read in English.<sup>14</sup> In *Cybernetics: the Human Use of Human Beings*, Wiener sets out five controls of communication—sender, channel, message, noise, and receiver—that can affect messaging.<sup>15</sup> In Brazil and the world at large, the Noigandres poet-theorists were way ahead of the curve in terms of radicalizing lyric via the effects of machine language, in accessing cybernetics with poetic ends. When noise is conceived of as interference with operations, the iconoclastic project of *poesia concreta* itself meant throwing a wrench into the machine of the system of poetry in Brazil, still running on late Modernist energy and neo-Parnassian ether.

As for actual *poeisis*, the *paulistana* poetics of the mid-1950s certainly innovated with the integration of the sense of sight—with all attendant ideational implications—into a totality of multi-sensorial signification. Further possibilities emerge when the retinal angles of concrete poetry are extrapolated onto aural planes, in voicings of poems, arrangements for human voices, experimental

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<sup>14</sup> Romani (p. 58) notes the importance of Haroldo citing Wiener in "A nova estética de Max Bense" (1959) in his collection *Metalinguagem & Outras Metas*. São Paulo, Perspectiva, 2006. Décio Pignatari initially cites Norbert Wiener's landmark work in "Arte Concreta: Objeto e Objetivo" (1956) in Campos et al *Teoria da poesia concreta*. p. 39. Of the Noigandres poets, Décio dealt most deeply and consistently with all aspects of information theory. He specifically relates entropy, redundancy and noise to concrete poetry in *Informação Linguagem Comunicação* (São Paulo: Cultrix, 1981), p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Lancashire, "What is Cybertextuality?" Chapter 23 of *Cybertextuality and Philology. A Companion to Digital Literary Studies*, ed. Susan Schreibman and Ray Siemens. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008. <http://www.digitalhumanities.org/companionDLS/>.

instrumental compositions, concretist songs, and related performances. The reverberations of *barulho*, *ruído*, noise, shrill or not, obtain over the decades. The first "concrete" poetry in Brazil was Augusto's *poetamenos* (1953-55), an idiosyncratic portfolio marked by fragmentation, spatial dispositions, polychromatic design, and, most fundamentally, multi-voice modeling on Anton Webern's *klangfarbenmelodie* [tone-color-timbre-melody]. In the orthodox phase of the movement one of the quintessential texts was Augusto's "tensão" (1956)<sup>16</sup>:

<b>com som</b>	<b>can tem</b>	
<b>con tem</b>	<b>ten são</b>	<b>tam bem</b>
	<b>tom bem</b>	<b>sem som</b>

This tightly woven fabric is wholly dialectical in its confrontation of presence and absence. A perceptive reader rightly affirms that "tensão" aims at "equilíbrio entre barulho e silêncio."<sup>17</sup> An earlier study maps all the inter-connected phonemes in the acoustic web.<sup>18</sup> As for translation, "sound on/sound off" is one of the seven ways (one for each pair of syllables) the poem has been rendered

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<sup>16</sup> The poem appeared as a poster at the national exhibition of concrete art in 1956, in print in *Teoria da poesia concreta*, p. 69 and in *Viva Vaia*, p. 95. This and 14 other musically set items are included on a CD insert in the third edition of *Viva Vaia*.

<sup>17</sup> Dick, n/p.

<sup>18</sup> See my reading in Chapter 2 of *Seven Faces: Brazilian Poetry Since Modernism*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 33-36.

in English.<sup>19</sup> On this high plane of *poesia concreta*, avant-garde composers such as Gilberto Mendes turned some texts into music, including "com som sem som," a setting of this classic of Augusto's.<sup>20</sup> The multi-member tension established here persists to this day as a frame of reference for the range of possibilities in concrete poetry.

In the third phase of *concretismo* in the 1960s, that of open-ended *Invenção*, sonic motions emerge forcefully in (inter-) signic compositions in which *ruído* is explicit or plainly implicit. During the initial years of military rule, Augusto created five *popcretos* that concern visual pollution and silence, very much tied to historical reality and anti-regime sentiment. Even with noise-related semantemes, *popcretos* were still in the realm of print culture, cut & paste, collage. Yet they merit scrutiny. In the series, "todos tratam do silêncio, através de um barulho visual dadaísta."<sup>21</sup> The best known one is the Biblical "Olho por Olho" in which lips of locution are overwhelmed by seeing eyes.<sup>22</sup> The double-barreled "SS" can be read as informational noise and somehow anti-imperialist. "PSIU" hinges on the colloquial hushing sound beneath the phrase "Saber Viver, Saber Ser Preso, Saber Ser Solto," seen as "um recado objetivo aos coronéis." In the present writing, the most relevant item, clearly, is "o anti-ruído," an open-ended discursive provocation of vocabular parts cut from newspapers and magazines:

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<sup>19</sup> Charles A. Perrone. Seven versions and two graphic representations of "tensão" in *Telephone 3* (2011), 61-77; journal issue serving as exhibition catalogue of *Telefone sem fio: Word-Things of Augusto de Campos Revisited*. Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts. New York, NY. November 2011.

<sup>20</sup> See images of the cover of the published score and numerous other examples of music of concrete poetry in my "Versatile Vanguard Vectors: from Visible Voices to Virtual Vortices in the Vamps, Versions, and Voyages of Brazilian Concrete Poetry." *Graphos* [UFPB] 10.2-11.1 (2008/2009), 69-88. <https://periodicos.ufpb.br/ojs/index.php/graphos/article/view/4218/3205>. For an earlier documentation of such practices in popular music see my, "From Noigandres to 'Milagre da Alegria': The Concrete Poets and Contemporary Brazilian Popular Music." *Latin American Music Review* 6. 1 (1985), 58-79.

<sup>21</sup> Dick, n/p. Source of next quote as well.

<sup>22</sup> These *popcretos* are widely available on line for viewing. On optical poetics, see Kenneth David Jackson, "Augusto de Campos e o tromp-L'œil da poesia concreta." in Sússekind and Castañón, 11-35.



the keys of the piano?) are truncated, most missing just the final vowel, but several can be freely filled in, per the prompt of the gloss, in multiple ways. The inner ball, the center, has sixteen items, only four of which are not clearly English and only five of which are actually cut off. The circular periphery is almost all Portuguese words, but some can be multi-lingual, e.g. SEX (-), MASC-, VANG-, which could be the root of *vanguard*, *vanguarda* or *vanguardia*. *Mot* could be a French word or Spanish/Portuguese *mote*, both appropriate in this context. It has been observed that "o anti-ruído" is somewhat of "a cross between Marinetti's *parole in libertà* and Cage's rule-governed mesotic compositions."<sup>24</sup> The futurist angle surely obtains, while the latter attribution would have to involve rather lax regulations, more than the noun-minus-final-vowel rule. However read, visualized, heard, consumed, this *mise-en-page-en frame* remains antagonistic.

With respect to instances prompted by performance, Augusto's most abiding piece has been the folding placard "VIVA VAIA" (1972). This near anagram was inspired by an incident at a song festival when new superstar Caetano Veloso was booed for daring to play a rowdy electrified tune. Its representative value is clear in the fact that Augusto made his red & white pro-victim opus the cover art and title of his collected poetry. Given the original English gloss ("hurrah for hissing"), this powerful exclamation has always been read in the sense of "long live the hoot/jeer/boo," but in reverse, justified by the bipedal physical object itself, "vaia viva" can be understood as noun + adjective, "lively hoot/jeer/boo." Both meanings suggest elevated volume and rejection. At the other end of the decade, one of the entries in the portfolio of serigraphs *Ex-poemas* (1983) was the boisterous poster poem "Todos os sons" (1979), homage to the master John Cage (surname cited therein), who said in various ways, that "all noise is music." The word *ruídos* is, appropriately, one in the list of forty words (four columns of ten), a configuration that allows for bi- (or tri-) directional readings and auditions.

The *som* motif operates literally in *Despoesia* (1994), first in another homage, "pessoa" (1981), "um som que não soa..." (pp. 16/17), and then in a four-page spread (pp. 62-65) with "o som (mandelstam)" (1992), dedicated to the Russian poet of tragic end, "o som seco... silêncio..." and, negatively in "transcorvo de poe" (1992), "sem um som." In the last section, "Despoemas," two titles are of particular interest: "poema bomba" (1987) (pp. 96-97) and "omesmosom" (1989/1992). If preceding examples are straightforward in their noise quotients, the multi-iterated "poema bomba" exemplifies implied auditory supra-event. Inspired in two bombastic (cited) quotes from Mallarmé,

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<sup>24</sup> Perloff, p. 110.

one of the main sources for the Noigandres poets' theory of new lyric in the 1950s, "poema bomba" began as a print simulation of an explosion and morphed into other forms: holograph, art-object, computer screen animation (1992), and short musical setting. In turn, the orange and blue visual poem "omesmosom omaggio a scelsci" (1989-92) pays tribute to the intriguing Italian composer who often worked with single notes in experimental compositions. The circular set of letters reads, counterclockwise, "o som sem o som", and clockwise "o mesmo som".<sup>25</sup>

The Noigandres poets have also inspired fittingly noisy compositions in next-generation visual poets. The best example is webmaster Elson Froes. His "Bomba Zen" (1993) seemingly merges Pedro Xisto's concrete poem ZEN and Augusto's explosive device, "poema bomba."<sup>26</sup> Again, a bomb involves the height of noise: explosion. Elson's visual poem has been interpreted art-historically:

... em 'Bomba Zen', os princípios do pensamento zen são apropriados integralmente pela simbologia visual dos opostos complementares yin e yang, pela nomeação do poema e do que vê implodir, a poesia concreta e os seus princípios de racionalidade, funcionalidade e equilíbrio, na composição poética visual baseada no ideograma, na simetria geométrica especular, no traço da arquitetura funcionalista e na sua perspectiva salvacionista e utópica de um processo autoritário e ideológico.<sup>27</sup>

That assessment very intentionally echoes the Noigandres platform of the late 1950s. In advance of another evolutionary historical evaluation, further examples by Elson Froes demonstrate a sonorous imperative in visual frames. "Zyklus" (1991) simply evokes snoring (zzzzz), sleep noise; it is less electric. For its part, "Ssockets" (1997) is intertextual, as it echoes Augusto's popcrete "SS," as well as being pointedly electronic in nature, cybernetic.

The contrast of items from the 1960s and 1990s invites a useful opinion of a salient poet-professor in North America.

in the case of cyberpoetry, bad naturalization occurs when radical artifice such as software is used to traditional ends such as lyric poetry. Cyberpoetry should seek noise rather than silence, interference and discontinuity rather than a smooth, unimpeded progress. The terms of engagement are changed when power shifts hands to the machine, and one's identity as digital pilgrim, as a 'data cowboy,' becomes banalized if the promise of the link does not produce a significant sense of self-creativity...<sup>28</sup>

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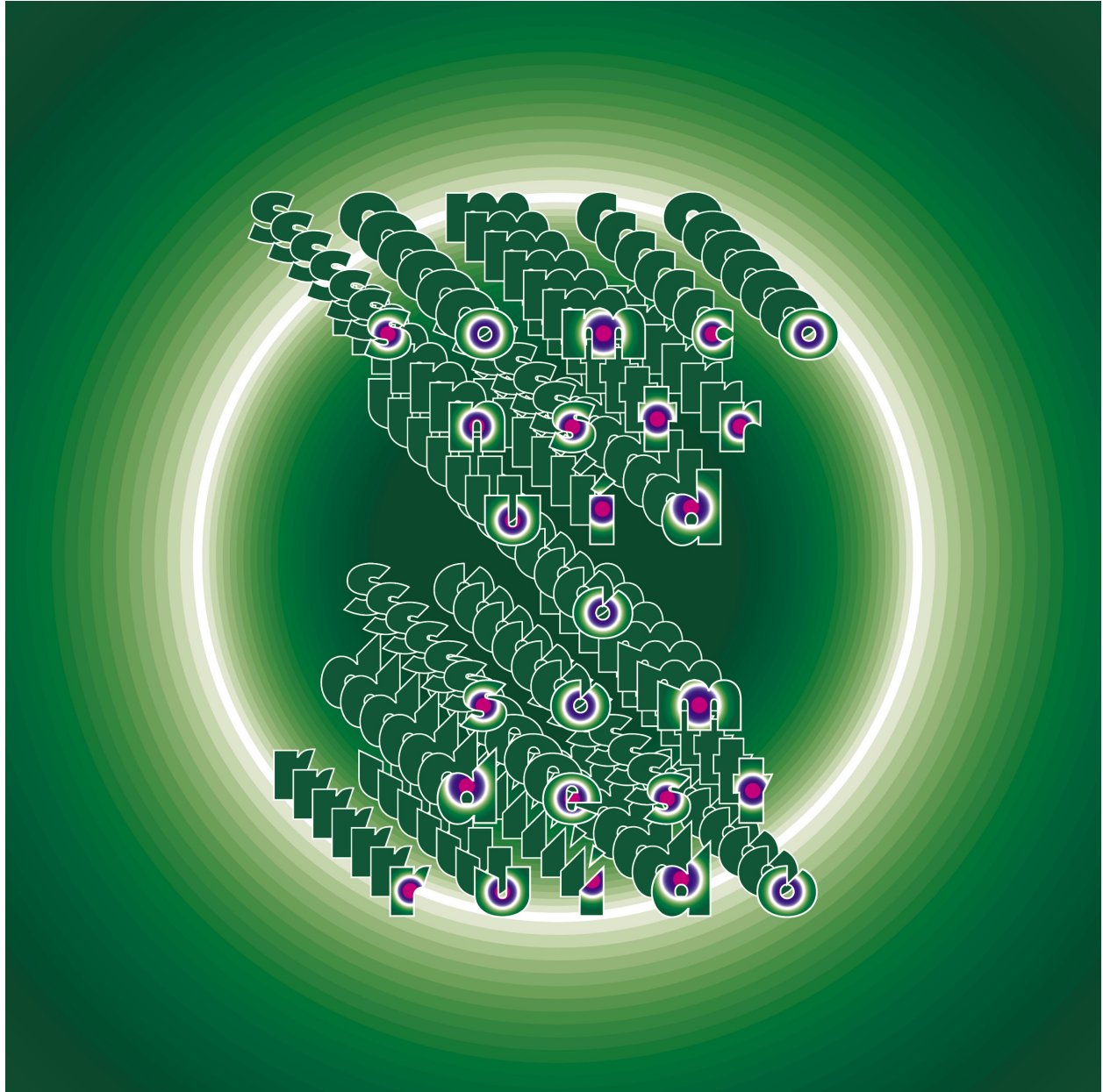
<sup>25</sup> See the discussion and color reproduction of this text, and others, in the Portuguese edition of Aguilar, p. 302. The Spanish edition is all black and white. Jackson and Mata also comment on this piece. There is a second homage to Scelsi in *Outro*.

<sup>26</sup> See all examples at <<http://www.elsonfroes.com.br/visual.htm>>.

<sup>27</sup> Aguilar, p. 98.

<sup>28</sup> Stefans (UCLA) p. 132. See more in 2nd ed. Paul Hoover, ed. *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology*. New York: Norton, 2013, p. 815.

Augusto's dialectic of silence and sound can be all the more effective when the latter functions as noise in two senses, acoustic wave per se and interference in a signal broadcast. Indeed, some concrete poetry qualifies as visual noise. The several strands of the present argument come together, and to final fruition, in Augusto's concrete-visual-digital-electronic poem, titled exactly "ruído."<sup>29</sup>



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<sup>29</sup> *Não*, 2003, pp. 56-57.

The wording is simple once one deciphers the contrived script, spacing and line breaks: *som construído*, *som destruído*, with the last five letters on the final line spelling out *ruído*. The busy multi-chromatic setting and alphabetical effects contribute to the destruction of cleanly constructed sound in this bright world. An X-ed set of letters overlays an “O” of light (an eclipsed sun?), and the whole background is green, suggestive of vegetation and nature overall. However these elements may come across, there is an unmistakable echoing of the dialectical tension-*tensão* of the black & white *com-som-sem-som* bookends of the classic verbivocovisual 1956 ideogram seen at the outset. In addition, there is, of course, an inexorable intra-repository allusion to the pre-digital *popcreto* “o anti-ruído.” Overhead stretches a paradigmatic arc across four decades of unfolding lyric adventure.

In a bigger picture, there is also a reverberation akin to that of the famous 1983 *ex-poema* “Pós-tudo,” an ironic take on the fad of postmodernism and a never-say-die affirmation of aesthetic change. In the verdant “ruído” one may sense the lingering specter of the exact synonym of *destruído*, to wit, *qual seja, desconstruído* from the modern verb *desconstruir*. To arrive at the synonym, one need only duplicate the letters *s* and *c-o-n* from the top of the circle of light and insert in the penultimate row. From the adjective we may infer the nouns, *desconstrução* and/or *desconstrutivismo* to arrive at an allusion to Derrida and deconstruction, his brand of skeptical interpretation, which has also circulated sufficiently in Brazil to be eligible for a bit of poking fun. To ponder possible interplay— between Augusto’s dualistic appositions in print poetry, including silence v. sound, and deconstruction’s fundamental distrust of binaries in Western reason and discourse—is entirely justified.

## II. The Un-Humanity of Language, Letters, Chips and Tokens <sup>30</sup>

Both sound-silence and structuralist opposition manifest in a humanistic way in one of the key items in Augusto’s *Outro*, which further promotes a significant digital zero-one disposition. The table of contents reveals intention-laden rubrics.<sup>31</sup> On the theme of languages—common, artistic; national, multi-national; individual, collective; machine, human—a pivotal item in *OUTRO* is the first item under the rubric *poemas*: “desumano” (p. 14-15) which sets up a techno-affective and textual dialectic in the collection. Make what you will of the arrow shape of the words; they are pointing upwards toward something.

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<sup>30</sup> This section has its origins in the conference paper “From ‘tension’ to de(con)struction: the (in)human electric lyric of Augusto de Campos.” APSA X. Stanford University. 10-14-2016.

<sup>31</sup> The unpacking of the preface and sections — Outronão prefácio, OUTRO poemas, INTRO intradução, EXTRO outradução, notas, deserrata, CLIP-POEMAS 2— merits a study unto itself.

des  
aprender  
de uma vez  
todas as línguas  
em -al em -ol em -ão  
em -ego em -im em -ano  
em -ês  
poesia  
não tem  
porquês  
  
esquecer  
esquecer  
esquecer  
e m u d e  
cer des  
umano  
  
para vol  
ver a ser  
no nano  
uni vers  
o  
da minh  
a mudez  
  
humano

The hypothetical and hyper-textual paradox proposed in this pointed poetry is to negate, to unlearn and forget, in-humanly, in a wide omni-lingual dimension, in order to return to a tiny and quiet personal space to be, precisely, human. Man is an animal that/who speaks. What is a human who dis-engages to assert humanity? An arranger of sounds & silences, memories & projections whom we'd call: poet. One who isolates an "o" to provoke wonder.<sup>32</sup> As for interest in intertextuality, there are

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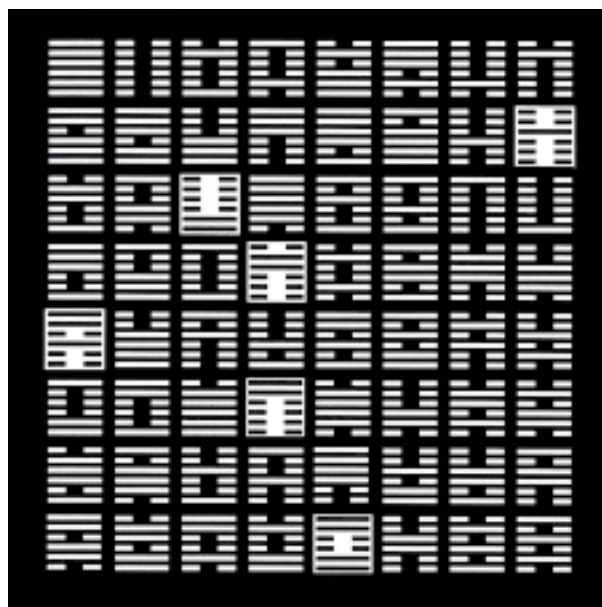
<sup>32</sup> See translations of "desumano" and "humano" in "Seven Material Poems by Augusto de Campos." Co-trans. with author. *Delos: A Journal of Translation and World Literature* (New Series) 32 (2017). 177-133. Available open access on line: <http://journals.upress.ufl.edu/delos>.

self-allusions in the word “desumano.” One may hear echoes of “o quasar quase humano” (1975), from one of the acclaimed *stelegramas* series. More pointedly, one recalls that in the satirical “Soneterapia,” (in *Navilouca*) Augusto responded to critiques of concrete poetry as “frio e desumano.” The second quatrain reads:

o concretismo é frio e desumano  
dizem todos (tirando uma fatia)  
e enquanto nós entramos pelo cano  
os humanos entregam a poesia

Forty years later, the discussion is rather more nuanced, necessarily including “desumano” as well as its sister piece in *Outro*.

Just as “o anti-ruído” pairs with “ruído” across decades, “desumano” naturally pairs with its opposite “humano”(p. 52-53) the penultimate and ultimate in the roll of poems in *Outro*.



The letters of the word “humano” are made visible by backlighting six of the spots in this 8x8 square of graphemes, which comprise the 64 hexagrams of the *I-Ching, the Book of Changes*. The construction has been explained:

Augusto subraya aquellos hexagramas cuyo perfil se asemeja a las letras con que se escribe la palabra HUMANO. Las conexiones entre las ideas de ‘humano’, ‘cambios’ y las que se generarían consultando los textos oraculares del antiguo libro de

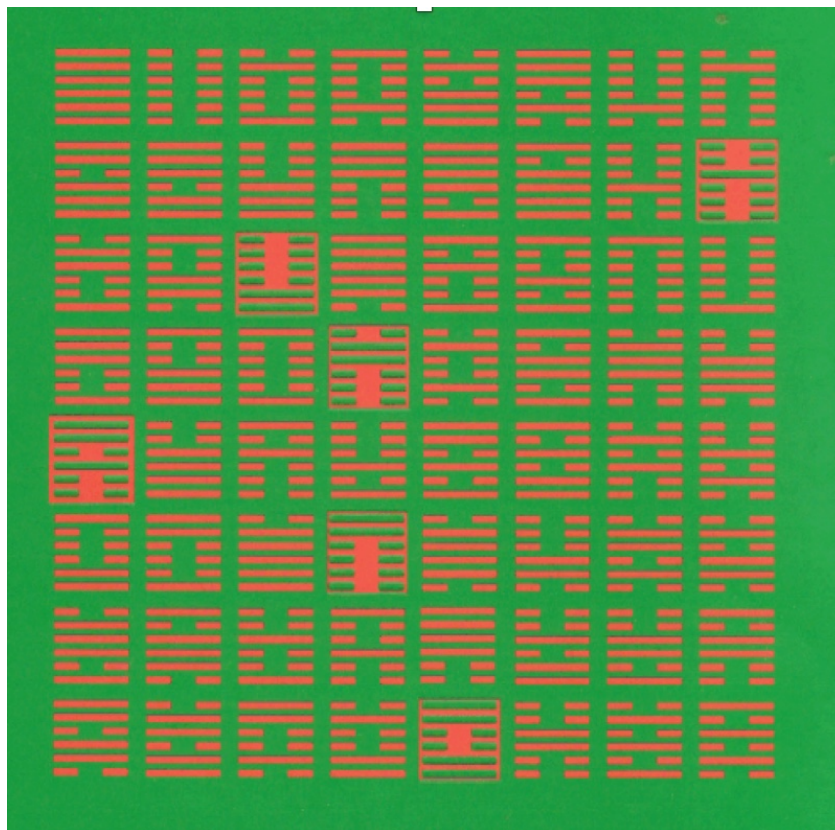
adivinanza chino, elegidos por la coincidencia de hallarles a los hexagramas formas de letras, resultan en una especie de azar objetivo surrealista, casi mágico.<sup>33</sup>

In terms of physical shape, there are "other" ways to assess this visual field, because some hexagrams not altered (backlit) actually look more like the letters H-U-M-A-N-O. Still, it is instructive to follow this lead and consult the meanings of the six hexagrams Augusto painted. In descending order we have: 1-excess/providing for enthusiasm; 2-nearing, approaching forest; 3-abundance/preponderance of the great; 4-retiring/yielding; 5-coupling/meeting of two; and 6- center-returning /inner truth. The last two of these options obtain most forcefully: coming together and finding resolution. There is even more: to some unsuspecting viewers the arrangement of graphemes may appear to be asemic signage, which only communicates when the added backgrounds are grasped and turn six distributed splinters into letters. Still further, one can view the page as a sort of technological plane, like an integrated circuit board with multiple connections and six special capacitors. In all cases, the point of arrival is *humano*. What could be mere material coincidences or chances, or a sterile technological frame, instead prompts affirmation of a living, speaking being. A tactile, visual enactment generates signification and vitality. The *I Ching* is invoked and/or machine code is humanized. The matter is lyricized. Another other breeds otherness, perchance with a hint of utopian difference.

There's one more level to this assertion of being. The back cover of the book comprises a second version of "humano".

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<sup>33</sup> Mata, p. 32



This placement parallels that of the multi-color plate of "sem saida" on the back cover of *NÃO*. And as with "ruído," the color field here allows for association with the biosphere beyond the virtual and the technical. The mise-en-verdant-page nicely complements the white-on-black item in the main section of poems. A seemingly eco-organic rendering enriches the dialectical whole.

In conclusion, these dyads, pairs, binaries, bookends, complements... go on-off, yes-no, plus-minus, one-null, yin yang, to affirm sensory existence and, despite any negations, expressivity. The lyric is electric, both in the literal sense of AC-DC, digital poetry, and in the connotative sense of exciting. Both sets of Augusto's poems are paradigmatic, poles of a plural arc that extends from the developmentalist utopia of the 1950s to the multiform space of the ultra-contemporary, an other version of humanity.

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