

## BIZARRE POETS ON THE INTERNET: EXTRANSLATIONS AND COUNTERPOEMS BY @POETAMENOS

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**Abstract** Although Augusto's life-long translation practice may draw from specialized knowledge of literary traditions, his recent re-versioning of older translation projects on new digital platforms expands his commitment to radical language as universally accessible. In this article, I study several re-mediations, new translations, and ready-mades published through his Instagram account @poetamenos, namely the Italian "bizarre" poets, Lewis Carroll's "doublets," and new "contrapoemas." These gestures point backwards into the long trajectory of Augusto's translation practice and forward to show how online circulation makes more source texts available to more people and invites creative new-media expansion or "disappropriation" to circumvent traditional publishing to bring older poetic forms to bear on the present moment of political crisis and pandemic.

**Keywords** Augusto de Campos, concrete poetry, translation, digital poetry, Lewis Carroll

My title draws from Augusto de Campos's recent publication with Galileu Edições, *Poetas bizzarros na internet: Extraduções* (2020). On first glance, readers might imagine it will feature Augusto's signature creative translations of twenty-first century writing for the Internet. Or the label "bizarre" might evoke the aphoristic experiments with constraint by poets on Twitter, or found-text procedures with online writing, such as "flarf," where poets shaped deliberately bad or tasteless language culled from Google-search prompts. Yet this title is an anachronistic red-herring, another instance of Augusto's productive collapsing of past and present. The so-called "bizarre poets" are the Italian Mannerists Luigi Groto (1541-1581) and Ludovico Leporeo (1588-1635), and their texts are "on the internet" thanks to large-scale book scanning and open-source library projects. Even still, they remain obscured by the prejudices of a scholarly establishment that reads them as secondary, in poor taste, or "bizarre." To be "on the internet," then, represents a shortcut through consecration or literary tradition, available to all poets alive or dead, an aesthetically democratic space where his anti-

establishment poetics can thrive and intensify and where the full-color gloss of mass media circulation can be both deployed and critiqued.

On the occasion of Augusto's ninetieth birthday, I examine the implications of his social remediation of his work on his Instagram account @poetamenos. With the collaboration of his granddaughter Dr. Raquel Bernardes Campos and her husband Alvaro Duarte, Augusto opened this account in March 2018, and since that time he has shared nearly 500 unique posts to date. The concrete poet's *verbivocovisual* poetics mesh effectively with the particular attributes of Instagram's multimedia platform, where the square-shaped image of each individual post can be enhanced with sound or video, and where each post builds up into a mosaic or "grid" display that expands over time. Furthermore, the social function of an Instagram post, inviting comments, hashtags, reposts, and links to other accounts as both source-texts or destinations, renders Augusto's tendency to reformat his own work into a participatory game.

In this article, I read Augusto's Instagram account through Cristina Rivera Garza's concept of "disappropriation," defined as "contemporary writings that seek to participate in ending the dominion of what-is-one's-own, using strategies of disappropriation to evade or directly impede the text from circulating (often in book form) within the economic and cultural cycles of global capitalism" (48). On @poetamenos, Augusto reframes his own work, his translations of other poets, and his found-text ready-mades from non-literary language of the present moment. While a full analysis of the material shared through Instagram is beyond my scope, I focus on three gestures of translation as disappropriation: the open-source translations of sixteenth century "bizarre poets," the translation of Lewis Carroll's "doublets" that turn so-called "nonsense poetry" into meaningful protest poems, and his cannibal translations of political headlines, slogans, or mottos into new "contrapoemas."

\*\*\* @poetamenos on the Internet: From Ideogram to Instagram

The Brazilian Concrete Poetry movement drew from the Poundian ideogram as an "appeal to nonverbal communication" and worked with the material of the word as "sound, visual form, semantic charge" ("Pilot Plan," 218). The presentational strategies they explored to achieve the *verbivocovisual* anticipated possibilities now more easily achieved online, including unlimited color options, sound and movement embedded alongside semantic meaning, multilingual readership, and instantaneous apprehension. As his granddaughter Raquel Bernardes describes, Augusto saw the potential of Instagram's platform to achieve *verbivocovisual* effects and respond to Brazil's political

moment.<sup>1</sup> Augusto's relationship with poetic tradition—as poet and translator—reflects the edicts of Ezra Pound, to “make it new” and to “show where the treasure lies.” Yet the digital sphere of circulation also allows him to inhabit the aesthetics of the copy, which, as Jacob Edmond posits, represent the twenty-first-century update to literary innovation under digital and globalized communication systems, where artists in fact “make it the same.”<sup>2</sup> On Instagram, Augusto takes advantage of the specificity of the medium to reframe his own work, treating his own past projects as “ready-mades.” The platform of his account @poetamenos draws attention to the persistent contemporaneity—and dangerous, revolutionary potential—of *verbivocovisual* poetry.

With a long-standing practice of transforming his works over time, Augusto frequently remediates his poems, from literary journal to bound book to plastic art object to animated flash-video to song-writing collaboration with Caetano Veloso or his son Cid de Campos, and more. As Gonzalo Aguilar demonstrates, his poetics distinguish themselves from other Brazilian concrete poets through use of montage, metamorphosis, and minimalism—approaches that obtain in his original work as well as his translations.<sup>3</sup> In a compelling turn of phrase in any language, Aguilar also labels Augusto “un poeta de largo porvenir” or “a poet with a long future” (*Clarín*, n.p.). His relationship with poetry's underexamined past and his use of new forms of digital circulation reframes his legacy and prolong his future within a globally accessible public sphere. Adam Shellhorse defines Augusto's “post-concrete phase” as “characterized by ceaseless mutation and by confronting the crisis the new media place on the status of poetry” (“Augusto de Campos,” 77). Although as Odile Cisneros writes, his

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Raquel Bernardes for the insights she provided into this article. In response to my question about the Instagram account, she wrote: “my husband Alvaro Dutra had the idea, about two years ago, to make an account for Augusto, but first showing and explaining to him about the app and about its potential reach. At first, Augusto wasn't very convinced but slowly he not only understood Instagram's language, but he identified its *verbivocovisual* aspects and used them to create poetry especially for Instagram. [...] He could finally add movement and nuances to what he couldn't before with his poetry. [...] About the poems Augusto creates for Instagram, most of the time he doesn't consider them “poems” in the proper sense, but instead “ready-mades” (or “contrapoemas”) through which he is reacting and responding to the political tragedy that is taking place in Brazil, since 2016. It motivates him to write, because he never thought that, after such a long and harsh dictatorship, we would be facing this risk to democracy again. The captions for these recent and political poems are all written by Augusto. Others, usually revisiting old poems, are written by Alvaro.” Personal correspondence, August 26, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> In his excellent study of contemporary poetics *Make it the Same*, Edmond “seeks to show that literary change in our age of globalization and digital media is best understood through the master trope of the copy” (10).

<sup>3</sup> See Aguilar, “Augusto de Campos: Hacia una poesía mínima” in *Poesía concreta brasileña*, 305-341.

most recent traditional print publication *Outro* (2015) hinted at “the possibility that this might be his last opus” (44), his prolific activity with Galileu Edições and on Instagram demonstrates a continued participatory and open-source unfolding of his poetic future.

The Instagram handle “@poetamenos” itself beautifully links Augusto’s earliest work with his contemporary online avatar. Referencing the title poem of *Poetamenos* (1953), the freedoms of the internet fulfill several dreams for this early publication, which were initially composed with multiple colored inks, but printing costs made that impossible for the first printed edition.<sup>4</sup> On @poetamenos, there is no limitation to color, font, or readership. The square-photo format also speaks to the seamless transition possible for Augusto’s work onto the photo-sharing app, which features square images above brief text, titles as captions, arranged as a mosaic or “grid.” In 1973, he republished a full-color printing of *Poetamenos* as a square collection of loose square sheets; later collections *Despoesía* (1994), *NÃO: Poemas* (2003), and *Outro* (2015) are all printed in square book formats.<sup>5</sup> His Instagram handle, adding the “at-sign” @ to his early collection of concrete poetry, re-instantiates his location, his point of enunciation as a perpetual pose of negation, taking a contrarian stance, subtracting himself from edifice of “poetry” or “literature”—this time, on the internet. Also, because every post gets date-stamped and ordered chronologically, with the most recent post pushing older contributions further down into the grid, every post reaffirms a position rooted in the present, the very instant, the “Insta” in “Instagram.” If these poems were Ideograms, reframing them as Instagrams places them within a different register of circulation, far removed from the realm of the specialized literary journal or the art-book, newly activated in relationship with the political present in Brazil.

Yet more than any of his other online experiments, Augusto’s Instagram @poetamenos practices a particularly *social* form of self-re-mediation that places his work in relation to the Brazilian collective political experience.<sup>6</sup> As Shellhorse argues, the new “contrapoemas” expand Augusto’s use of the poetic register to respond to the political moment, a participatory gesture that remains a

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<sup>4</sup> “Despite the obvious interest of such a procedure, production costs forced the poet to abandon his initial program. His current web site suggests he would have published all his poetry in color if he could have” (William Bohn, n.p.).

<sup>5</sup> For analysis of the square book design used for *Outro* and these earlier works, see Odile Cisneros, 40-42.

<sup>6</sup> In his article on Augusto’s typography, Tiago Santos concludes that the author’s Instagram is the most successful and widely followed of the author’s online presence including his personal website, Facebook, YouTube channel.

contested element of the Concrete Poetry movement.<sup>7</sup> Both drawing from and responding to the formal qualities of campaigning, mass media, and political propaganda, Shellhorse writes that Augusto's contrapoemas "cannibalize the sensible as ready-made [where] publicity, global and local political events, and the poets' previous experiments converge as tools for counterconstructing the present" ("Verbivocovisual Revolution,"). In my analysis of his experiments with being a "bizarre poet on the internet," I would take the framework a step further to emphasize Augusto's modes of circulation—copyleft pamphlets and Instagram poetry alike—as challenges to ideas of language as private property that engage with producing poetry within and on behalf of a collective, sharing poetry socially through repeatable techniques.

Augusto has long worked with the practice of Duchamp's "readymade" in which an object produced by the labor of others gets placed in a new context and treated as though it were a work of art, and he confirms that his contrapoemas have the ready-made among their antecedents.<sup>8</sup> According to John Roberts, this avant-garde gesture accomplishes three things: a destabilization of the privileged labor of the artist, an inclusion of manual labor into the art world, and a performative making-visible of the intellectual, immaterial labor of the artist (qtd. in Rivera Garza 59-60). Augusto's ready-mades sometimes draw from literary language, as with *Os sertões dos Campos* where he extracts poems from the prose text of *Os sertões* by Euclides da Cunha. Others use legal language, as with his cannibalizing of the Brazilian constitution in the contrapoema "CLÁUSULA PÉTREA" posted on April 2, 2018.<sup>9</sup> Going beyond these works, the self-publication mode of Instagram adds in a new relationship to readers, democratically invited to participate in an open-source, shared mode of reading. Augusto's contrapoemas are not just ready-mades: they are also disappropriations because they intervene against language as private property and can be easily re-shared and imitated within a community of online readers.

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<sup>7</sup> For Aguilar, Augusto retains poetic production as necessarily separate from a political sphere (Aguilar qtd. in Shellhorse, "Verbivocovisual," 158).

<sup>8</sup> In an interview discussing the "contrapoemas" Augusto clarifies that "the 'counterpoems' refer to texts that use language that is hardly 'poetic,' distant not only from poetry as from literature, something with antecedents in Duchamp's 'Fountain' [...] texts marked by a political perspective and not only by a negation of conventional positions in the art world." "Os 'contrapoemas' referem-se, como eu disse, mais propriamente aos textos que utilizam uma linguagem pouco 'poética', distante não só da poesia como da prosa literária, algo que poderia encontrar o seu antecedente no 'Fonte' de Duchamp [...] textos porém marcados pelo viés político e não apenas por uma negação de posturas convencionais do universo da arte" (Interview in *Tutameia*, n.p.).

<sup>9</sup> In the case of this ready-made, Augusto's online work also circulated in the form of large-scale prints in a gallery exhibit titled "Poemas e contrapoemas" at the Luciana Brito Gallery in São Paulo.

Augusto's self-publication -- his disappropriation of his own work and that of others on Instagram -- holds together in the same space ancient poets and new works, analog publications and digital circulation, critique of media and exploration of the social-media mosaic. To be sure, the printed translation collections with Galileu Edições do reflect Augusto's long-standing work with small-press art-book publishers, and they are hand numbered, limited edition treasures. Yet when he advertises them on @poetamenos and captions the Instagram posts with the editor's email address, he invites broader, informal circulation of these works. When Augusto called out the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* for their unauthorized use of his poem VIVA VAIA in an article about the ill-mannered hissing of VIPs at a soccer match, he does acknowledge the framework of copyright law. Yet he primarily objects to the undemocratic views of the newspaper; their use of his work more politically inappropriate than a legal infringement.<sup>10</sup> Through Instagram, Augusto makes his newest, as yet unpublished works widely available outside of the traditional apparatus of a printed book,<sup>11</sup> disappropriating from his own archive and from the every-day language of mass media and political engagement.

In one case, Augusto's new publication through @poetamenos attracted the attention of the political figure featured in the poem "HADDAD OU NADA" (see Figure 1).

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<sup>10</sup> To see Augusto's open letter where he refrains from suing Folha for copyright infringement, see José Carlos Ruy in *Vermelho*. For further discussion of this episode, see Shellhorse "Verbivocovisual Revolution," 170-171.

<sup>11</sup> It bears mention that @poetamenos also posts images of Augusto's published works, sharing his personal archive in multiple ways, including photos of covers of rare limited older editions, photos of selected pages, videos that flip through all the pages, other ephemera such as his selected work published in the London Times Literary Supplement in 1964, posted on @poetamenos, October 4, 2018, etc. The Instagram account does not replace these printed books or other physical materials but previews them for a broad public and frames them with contemporary relevance.

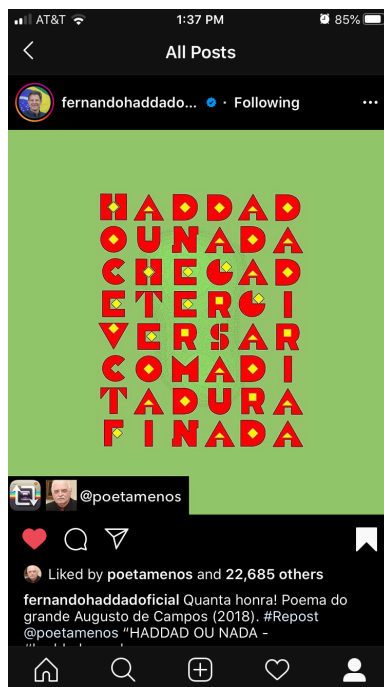


Figure 1. @fernandohaddadoficial reposts “HADDAD OU NADA”  
Posted on @poetamenos on October 5, 2018

Presidential candidate Fernando Haddad re-shared the post on his own official Instagram account later that day; the text reads “Haddad ou nada chega de tergiversar com a ditadura finada” or “Haddad or nothing enough of this dithering around with the finished dictatorship.” From the ephemera of a rally sign or political slogan proclaiming support for the candidate, in “HADDAD OU NADA,” Augusto extends the instant into an ongoing, continued becoming of a language held in common by poetry, politics, and protest alike. Using “tergiversar” to express the mood of waffling prevarication, Augusto pulls the verb “versar” out of the larger phrase, the fifth of the eight lines in the poem. In his counterpoems on @poetamenos, to make verses, to craft poetry is to stand with direct action, to call out uncertain, undemocratic, or dictatorial uses of language.

The frame of Instagram also makes the act of versification already held-in-common rather than under the authority of individually held copyright. Unlike his feud with the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* over their inappropriate appropriation of his *VIVA VAIA*, his @poetamenos account presents itself as imminently appropriation-ready, as when Haddad reposted his poem to be seen by ten times as many viewers.<sup>12</sup> In fact, he presents his work as ready, willing, and useful to

<sup>12</sup> I thank Raquel Bernardes for pointing out to me this reposting by Haddad.

themselves be cannibalized, emphasizing the openness, longevity, and iterability of his translation gestures. On @poetamenos, he does not simply reframe works to fit the tastes, platforms, or concerns of the present moment—his counterpoems point backwards to their sources and forward to their public, inviting comment, reposting, and imitation, exposing parallels and enduring prejudices that remain from prior moments in poetic and political history.

\*\*\*What's so "bizarre" about the Bizarre Poets?

*Bizarre Poets on the Internet* (2020) consists of an essay and series of translations that celebrate two Italian poets and their so-called "bizarre" aesthetic techniques of hyper-repetition, echolalia, and word-play. Viewed as exaggerated over-application of sixteenth-century Mannerist poetic devices, the concrete poet's introductory essay traces the poetic tradition's repeated rejection of these devices—until the internet provides a shortcut around scholarly consecration, leveling out the distance between his own experiments with poetry on the level of the letter and these early precursors. He disappropriates the literary language of the sixteenth century by recirculating it to viewers who may not otherwise study these poets, in particular because scholars have categorized them as lesser poets, in poor taste. His *Bizarre Poets on the Internet* challenges received wisdom about what makes poetry "good."

He also circumvents the traditional publishing industry to release work more quickly.<sup>13</sup> The prolific translator has collaborated with editor Jardel Dias Cavalcanti to publish an ever-expanding series of facing-page translation collections as small pamphlets, around forty pages, small-batch artisanal editions printed in runs of thirty to fifty copies.

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<sup>13</sup> Discussing these new publications, Augusto mentioned the rewarding experience of seeing work in publication more quickly compared to the slower timeline of other projects. Conversation with the author, June 13, 2019.



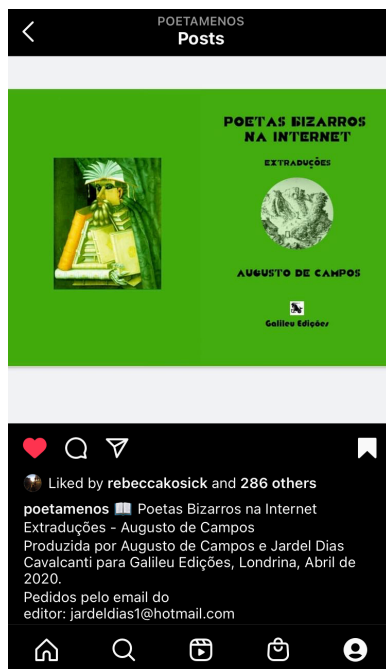


Figure 2. Cover of *Poetas bizzarros na internet*. Posted on @poetamenos on May 21, 2020

On @poetamenos, Augusto shares this new publication in two ways: a video-post showing a quick flip-through preview of its full contents and a still image of the vibrantly colored front and back covers (see Figure 2). The caption includes the editor's email; I was delighted to learn he would email me a PDF on request.

Given his anti-establishmentarian relationship to poetic language and scholarly values, as a translator, Augusto often seeks out underappreciated poets or devalued selections from a more celebrated poet's work to elevate and reconfigure through new translations.<sup>14</sup> In *Bizarre Poets on the Internet*, Augusto revisits the essay "Dos Poetas Bizarros a Hopkins" in *Verso reverso contraverso* (1978) and corrects and expands an essay "Poetas bizzarros na web," in *Erratica* (2010). Denominated the "poeti bizzarri" by German philologist Gustav René Hocke, poets Luigi Groto and Ludovico Leporeo figure as respectively precursor and postfacto to central phase of Italian Mannerism as exemplified by celebrated figure Giambattista Marino who lent his name to their movement known as "Marinismo." Not only forgotten but actively excised from the tradition for certain stylistic devices that offended good taste, Augusto celebrates his newly expanded access to their work through thanks to Open

<sup>14</sup> See for example the attention Augusto pays to profane and racialized elements in works by Brazilian baroque poet Gregorio de Matos, the "musa praguejadora" and "musa crioula" often left out of anthologies. For further analysis, see Chapter 5 of my *Cannibal Translation*.

Library, Project Gutenberg, and other large-scale open-source online book scanning projects. In 1978, he could only access a small portion of the works of these “bizarre poets,” and they were often cited only partially in notes or as asides to larger analyses or arguments about Marino, which only served to emphasize the extreme prejudice against these poets that “two hundred years later still prevented their full acceptance, despite recognition of their artistic skills” (6).<sup>15</sup> Augusto cites Hocke at length in his assertion that Grotto could have been a good poet, but sadly the “hyperfertility of his fervid fantasy” drove him to produce a vast corpus where most poems “are nothing more than whimsical, extravagant novelties” (7). What are Grotto’s stylistic crimes? “He put fifty-six rhymes into one sonnet; in another, all the words begin with the letter D. Calling himself a ‘Letrist,’ he claimed to be driven to such bizarreness by his ardor for a certain Didania, in whose praise he composed. For these reasons, he is often accused of perverting the lyric verse of his century” (7).<sup>16</sup> In other words, techniques of hyper-active rhyme or repetition, emphasizing a singular letter or using the alphabet as a poetic unit—techniques which anticipate later verbivocovisual experimentation within Augusto’s poetry and Concretism more generally—earn the “bizarre poet” the derogatory labels of “corrupt” and even “depraved.” Augusto again exposes long-standing bias against poetry that pushes the linguistic sign to the point of collapse. These elements—on display in the Italian originals by Leporeo, brought into Portuguese skillfully—could belong to an Augusto de Campos original:

Bolso ho il polso, agro, magro, e sto in barella,  
strutto e brutto, irto spirto che oimè strilla (*Poetas bizzarros* 18)  
Pulso expulso, agro e magro, vejo a estrela;  
luto no lodo, enquanto ela cintila (*Poetas bizzarros* 19)  
Pulse expelled, slim and thin, I see the star;  
I fight in the mud, while she twinkles

Augusto argues that after the neo-baroque poets such as Federico Garcia Lorca and his reanimation of techniques used by Luis de Góngora, the world may be ready to re-read the bizarre poets with different eyes. I would add that, after reading the works of Augusto, his own “Pulsar” for example, we are re-conditioned to appreciate these tightly packed rhymes, echoes, and semantic shifts on the

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<sup>15</sup> “preconceito que, duzentos anos depois, ainda impedia a plena aceitação dos seus poemas, mesmo reconhecida a sua habilidade artística” (6)

<sup>16</sup> “A demasiada fecundidade de sua férvida fantasia, que ele não soube moderar, e a corrupção do bom gosto que se iniciou naquele tempo, o prejudicaram muito [...] basta dizer que chegou a colocar em um soneta até cinquenta e seis rimas; num outro, dizendo-se ‘Letrista’, todas as palavras principiam com a letra D; à tal bizzarria foi levado pelo ardor que dedicou a uma certat Didania, em louvor da qual o compôs. Veio por isso mesmo a ser não poucas vezes acusado da depravação das belas letras daquele século” (Hocke qtd. in *Poetas bizzarros*, 7).

level of the letter. Whereas before these poets were nothing more than a “model of eccentricity or folly” (23), Augusto’s translation seeks out online a contemporary readership that can appreciate them through the lens of a counter-normative tradition. “Today, a prejudice-free perspective might discover their refined poetic sensibility, with “love&humor” intertwined, recalling the Oswaldian synthesis” (23).<sup>17</sup> Where the “bizarre” poets were suppressed by the establishment, Augusto’s translations celebrate and set their poems loose on the internet, free to roam and “corrupt the good taste” of poets centuries later writing in a totally different medium. In a Borgesian “Kafka and his precursors” move, Augusto sees these texts as responding to more modern works, where their devices including “ecolalia, paranomasia (puns), purposeful lapses (errors), exaggerated sound effects, multi-semantic word plays” respond to similar techniques used by Gerard Manley Hopkins, Arno Holz, or James Joyce.<sup>18</sup>

Augusto as translator has long held an anti-establishment approach to literary tradition;<sup>19</sup> his self-publication on Instagram takes that gesture beyond the literary into popular culture through social media. Not only does Augusto’s *Bizarre Poets on the Internet* celebrate their use of language in the wrong way, such as writing a poem where every word begins with the letter “D,” he also uses technology to disappropriate their work and circulate them outside the frame of traditional publishing. The performance of circulating *Bizarre Poets on the Internet* through @poetamenos demonstrates that online writers now access a much vaster portion of the past and can use the platform to excavate from unexplored territory. Always interested in the portions of literary traditions that are not taken seriously, that are relegated to the realm of the bizarre, nonsense, or children’s literature, or dismissed as merely popular culture, Augusto uses the popular format of Instagram to make the gesture of recovery relevant to the present day as a strategy to look for what the establishment has left out. The open-source nature of the texts he previews or publishes on Instagram invite interaction, imitation, and recirculation.

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<sup>17</sup> “Hoje, um olhar despreconcebido poderá descobrir neles um senso poético refinado, no qual se entrelaçam “amor&humor”—para lembrar a síntese oswaldiana” (23).

<sup>18</sup> “Em termos modernos, respondem [...] a propostas radicais, como a “ecolália” poética de um Hopkins, a “elefantíase” sonora do *Phantasus* de Arno Holz, ou à linguagem de propositaados lapsos e atos falhos paronomásticos e pluri-semânticos do *Finnegans Wake*, virtuosismo dos virtuosismos, bizzarria das bizzarrias” (23).

<sup>19</sup> Ana Cristina Cesar identifies his revolutionary poetics in his translation practice: “El traductor Augusto de Campos se refiere constantemente a las posiciones tradicionales del *establishment* literario. Considera que su función es oponerse al *establishment* a través de la traducción y la publicación de poetas que producen poesía ‘revolucionaria’, o por lo menos poesía orientada hacia la revolución del lenguaje” (183).

\*\*\* The Common Sense in Nonsense Poetry

Augusto's Instagram also features repeated revival of the "nonsense poetry" of Lewis Carroll, in particular the form of the "doublet," a word game where shifts of one letter at a time transform "PROSA" into "POEMA" or "OURO" into "LIXO," or, in the example below, "PRESO" into "LIVRE" (see Figure 3). These interventions show that word games are not just for children, that the playful connection between opposites through arbitrary manipulation of linguistic signs can express, explore, and intervene into the "lawfare" strategies of the Brazilian right-wing. In this self-translation or remediation of Carroll, he recirculates works published decades earlier, giving them new political relevance and challenging received notions of what is "nonsense" and what is "serious" in poetry or in language.

In the poem essay introducing Lewis Carroll titled "Homage to Nonsense" in *O anticrítico*, much like his recovery of the bizarre, Augusto inveighs against critical prejudice that underestimates the power of these works written by "supposedly inoffensive authors 'for children.'" He writes that "more than a hundred years of bad-sense separates us / from nonsense poetry / a creation of Victorian English humor" (*O anticrítico* 123).<sup>20</sup> In this play on words, Augusto rejects the common sense or good sense (maybe good taste?) that relegated this so-called "nonsense" poetry to the realm of children's literature and obscuring its true insight and radical modernity. Drawing from *Understanding Media* by Marshall McLuhan, he posits that the part of Victorian literature most rejected by critics actually anticipated Einstein's idea of space-time.<sup>21</sup> Citing Carroll's novel *Sylvie and Bruno*, he frames the aesthetic of brevity as an anticipation of living life digitally, that "when we travel by electricity," "we might have leaflets instead of booklets / and the crime and the marriage / would arrive on the same page" (126).<sup>22</sup>

This uncanny folding together of opposites rehearses the insight of the structure of a "doublet," reducing narrative to its most basic elements, or eliminating it entirely in favor of a concrete

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<sup>20</sup> mais de cem anos de mau-senso nos separam  
da poesia *nonsense*  
criação do humor inglês vitoriano—  
de autores pretensamente inofensivos  
"para crianças" (*O anticrítico* 123).

<sup>21</sup> "em *alice no país das maravilhas* ele deu aos confiantes vitorianos um jocoso antegosto do espaço-tempo einsteiniano" (McLuhan qtd. in *O anticrítico*, 126).

<sup>22</sup> "teremos folhetos em lugar de livretos / e o crime e o casamento / virão na mesma página" (Lewis Carroll, *sylvie and bruno*, qtd. in *O anticrítico*, 126).

poetic transformation on the level of letter, visual repetition with a difference as a motor of creativity and insight. The concept that a word has an “opposite” begs the question of how that opposite determined, through semantic meaning, culture, habit, or arbitrary linguistic signs. These doublets from Lewis Carroll ask: what structures and assumptions make “BLACK” the opposite of “WHITE”—the example Augusto cites in English doublets in his essay poem “Homage to Nonsense” (*O anticrítico*, 124).

On Instagram, Augusto remixes one of his older Lewis Carroll “doublets” moving from “PRESO” to “LIVRE” in the new key of #lulalivre” (see Figure 3). In *O anticrítico*—just reissued in 2020—this doublet figures as one of fourteen, a full-page spread of these word-games in Portuguese, including many key words appearing in other concrete poems by Augusto, such as “LIXO / OURO,” “SIM / NÃO,” and “PROSA / POEMA.” In the new framing of his “PRESO / LIVRE” doublet on @poetamenos, Augusto amplifies the visual qualities of the poem with a rich blue background, evoking a national flag, or perhaps the view through vertical bars of a prison.

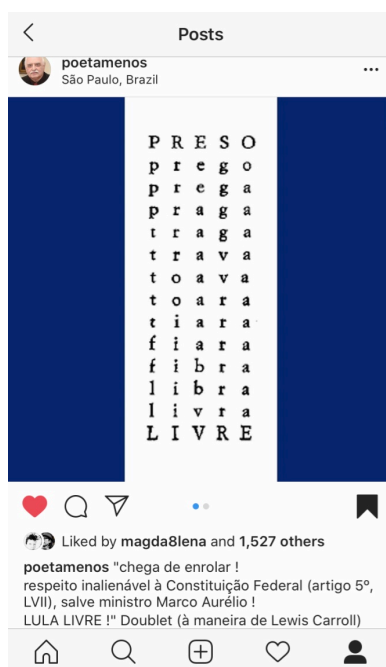


Figure 3. “chega de enrolar!” “LULA LIVRE! Doublet (à maneira de Lewis Carroll)” Posted by @poetamenos on December 23, 2018<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> The post includes a second picture, the cover of *O Anticrítico* (1986) to clarify this doublet comes from his previously published work, now repurposed for the current moment.

The caption that reframes this older work appears in quotation marks, as though it is the title of a poem, or a direct citation: “chega de enrolar ! respeito inalienável à Constituição Federal (artigo 5º, LVII), salve ministro Marco Aurélio ! LULA LIVRE !” Doublet (à maneira de Lewis Carroll) [“Enough deception! Inalienable respect for the Federal Constitution (Article 5, LVII), protect Minister Marco Aurélio ! LULA LIVRE !” Doublet in the style of Lewis Carroll.”<sup>24</sup> Augusto originally composed this doublet in 1971, long before the 1988 Constitution or the soaring political career of Lula da Silva, the PT President from 2003-2011. In the twenty-first-century iteration, this older poem is tagged with two political slogans of the moment: “Lula Livre” and the constitutional Article 5 which states that “no one shall be considered guilty until their case is fully adjudicated” and gives defendants the right to remain free as long as appeals are pending.”<sup>25</sup> When former president Lula was jailed before all appeals were exhausted, this clause became a rallying cry demanding his release, rejecting the contemporary echo of the military dictatorship’s use of imprisonment to intimidate opponents, which the clause itself aimed to prevent.

Copied directly from his original page of doublets, the list of words that transition letter by letter from “preso” to “livre” speak to figure of Lula as a political prisoner: “preso / prego / prega / praga / traga / trava / toava / toara / tiara / fiara / fibra / libra / livra / livre.” In the following rough, direct translation—one of many possible readings of this series of words—I emphasize the interpretation of the doublet not just as a word-game but also as a sequence that narrates the story of an individual living through a Christ-like set of challenges and set-backs to speak truth and gain freedom: “the prisoner / the nail / he preaches / the plague / he swallows / he gets stuck / he thundered / he had thundered / the tiara / he had guaranteed / the fiber / he weighed / he freed / free.” The doublet’s title referring to the Article 5 places the opposition between “prisoner” and “freedom” within the powers of the state as constituted by its governing documents; the series of words between the opposed terms narrate a story while they also delegitimize that story by framing it around non-semantic shifts of one letter at a time, as arbitrary yet potentially manipulable as the legal wrangling over Lula’s case.

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<sup>24</sup> The caption refers to Marco Aurélio Mello, a Federal Supreme Court Justice of Brazil.

<sup>25</sup> Augusto also created a series of *contra-poemas* using the text of this “Clausula Petrea” or “Set-in-Stone Clause” published first on @poetamenos and exhibited at large scale in the Luciana Brito Gallery. <http://www.lucianabritogaleria.com.br/exhibitions/136> The translated clause comes from Ernesto Londoño and Leticia Casado, “Ex-President ‘Lula’ Is Freed From Prison in Brazil After Supreme Court Ruling,” *The New York Times*, November 8, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/08/world/americas/lula-brazil-supreme-court.html>

In addition to reframing this older doublet for recirculation, Augusto crafts a new “DOUBLET PARA LULA” (see Figure 4) in a perfect Instagram-ready square.

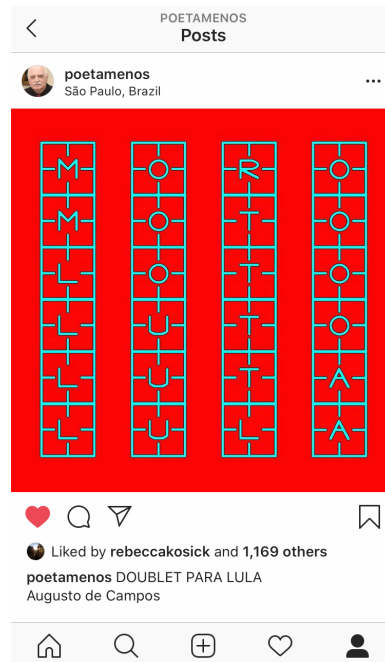


Figure 4. “DOUBLET PARA LULA”

Posted by @poetamenos on September 11, 2018

The font evokes a sniper scope fixated on a targeted man and calls out “lawfare” tactics the right-wing in Brazil has engaged in by using corruption lawsuits as to gain political power. The words read: “MORO / MOTO / LOTO / LUTO / LUTA / LULA” [“MORO / MOTTO / LOTTO / MOURNING / STRUGGLE / LULA” moving from “Sérgio Moro,” the Minister of Justice under president Jair Bolsonaro, who led “Operation Car Wash,” an anti-corruption lawsuit against Lula and his administration. As the poem cycles through the mottos, the chance games, the mourning, the fights and struggle, and end with Lula, this doublet plays a word-game while also raising questions about the role of mottos, slogans, inflammatory speech, and in fact digital activism itself in the rise of polarization and political violence in Brazil’s public sphere. Augusto draws on the nonsense poetry of Carroll’s doublets and the casual, mass-media platform of Instagram to engage in self-conscious critique of media, of his own medium of circulation on the internet, where his contrapoemas coexist and rub shoulders with the political present of the source texts they draw from.

Although the “DOUBLET PARA LULA” appears to be the only new doublet, many of the contrapoemas poems take on the shape and style of Carroll’s word-games, confronting viewers

with block of letters that demand deciphering at the level of individual signs. In another post from the same day as his reframed PRESO/LIVRE doublet (see Figure 3), Augusto crafts a new contrapoema (see Figure 5) that links his Instagram presence with another form of mass media: the Folha de São Paulo. The immediacy of the platform allows for this poetic ready-made to come ripped from the headlines—and also to link directly to its source.

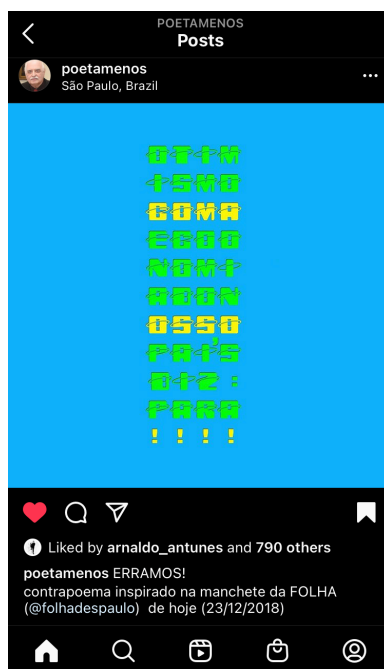


Figure 5. “ERRAMOS!” Posted by @poetamenos on December 23, 2018

The full caption reads: “ERRAMOS! contrapoema inspirado na manchete da FOLHA (@folhadespaulo) de hoje (23/12/2018)” or “WE ARE MAKING A MISTAKE! counterpoem inspired by today’s lead story in FOLHA (@folhadespaulo).” Not only does he reference the headline, he also links directly to the newspaper’s official Instagram account, which describes itself as “Um jornal a serviço da democracia.” Split into lines of four letters each, the poem echoes the style of the doublet, spelling out the phrase: “otimismo com a economia do nosso país diz: para!!!!” or “optimism with the economy of our country says: stop!!!!” Yet the prior post, the “PRESO/LIVRE” doublet conditions readers to consider lines as individual words, in particular the two words plucked from the main phrase in yellow to read “COMA” as in a catatonic state and “OSSO” or “BONE” as in ossification, paralysis. The four exclamation points at the end punctuate each of the four columns of letters, standing stiff underneath the rest of the poem like a row of bones in the graveyard of Brazilian



history, or like four rifle shots fired from the past military dictatorship into the present newly elected government.

The *Folha de São Paulo* headline (see Figure 6) reads: “Otimismo do brasileiro com a economia do país dispara” or “Brazilian optimism with the country’s economy takes off [more literally, shoots up].” The sub-headline contextualizes the assertion of an explosion of confidence around the lead-up to Bolsonaro, who won in the second-round election on October 28, 2018 with 55% of the vote and would soon take office as president on January 1, 2019: “As Bolsonaro’s inauguration approaches, Datafolha marks a record 65% [of Brazilians] who say the situation will improve.” A graph accompanies the headlines, showing a by a graph that depicts the dramatic increase in positive expectations about Brazil’s economic situation from July 2016 to December 2018, a period representing the shift in power from Lula’s Worker’s Party precipitated by the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff on August 31, 2016.



Figure 6. Front-page Headline in Folha de São Paulo on December 23, 2018

A commenter on Instagram notes “I don’t understand the repeated oo,” one of several small shifts Augusto made to his found text to shape the contrapoema. The double “oo” invites an echo of the word “eco” into the word “economia,” introduces the aesthetic of deliberate error, mis-reading, multiple semantic possibilities, all of which slow down the eye of the reader in a way the newspaper

headlines never would. With the caption or poem title “ERRAMOS!” or “WE ARE MAKING A MISTAKE!” the Instagram poem draws attention to this error but makes it collective: the poet errs in his spelling because the people themselves are in error in their optimism. The poet also chose to place the optimism in the possessive, not held by the generalized “Brazilian” is optimistic but instead “our country.” The doubled “o” also allows for the four-letter placement of the word “osso” or “bone” within the “nosso” or “our” country; the error of the double oo increases the sense of collectivity within the counterpoem in two ways.

The figurative language using the verb “disparar” to indicate the rapidly increasing favorable public opinion, the graph itself showing a positive outlook shooting up off the charts, does not escape the violence within that verb. What is this optimism shooting at? Who are the victims of this rising economy? One of the underlying claims beneath Augusto’s contrapoema—and in fact beneath many of his seemingly simple, or even nonsense for children or for mass media on Instagram poems—is that newspapers also operate in the realm of a language of precision, concision, and even concrete attributes—consider the necessity of headlines to fit within the page layout. They also participate in creating the language held in common, the common sense operating on public opinion through polling, the sense of a common positionality experienced by the massive, simultaneous readership of a major daily newspaper. Although Augusto always takes a position of humility when it comes to the political impact of poetry, an understanding of its limits, I think one of the expansions possible through the Instagram format is a direct connection to other spheres of cultural production where the poetic impulse obtains.

### **\*\*\* Lulagramas, Bolsogramas, and Coronagramas**

In addition to his long-standing experiments with color printing and a square *mise-en-page*, Augusto also anticipated the appeal of the suffix “gram.” Now a widespread, affectionate shorthand for the platform Instagram, this new media platform references the outdated technology of telegrams which also produced appealing constraints. Augusto created a series of “Profilogramas,” starting with “poundmaiakóvski” (1966), a visual layering and homage to two predecessors in one.<sup>26</sup> The longer series in *Despoesia* (1996) expands to ten additional “Profilogramas,” including one to his brother Haroldo de Campos (1989).

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<sup>26</sup> Gonzálo Aguilar interprets this neologism as meaning: profile or prophet + grama in which “a partir del montaje, realiza asociaciones polémicas y significantes: Pound y Maiakóvski, Cage y Webern, Webern y João Gilberto, Sousândrade y la Bolsa de Wall Street” (*Poesia concreta* 422).

On his Instagram, Augusto has initiated a series of Lulagramas and Bolsogramas, expressing his support for the “Lula Livre” rallying cry and expressing dismay at the actions and inactions of current president Jair Bolsonaro. In one Lulagrama (see Figure 7), Augusto draws from the online language of text as image, in which the icon of an audio clip here figures also as the protestor’s megaphone, acknowledging and wryly critiquing the movement of much protest activity to digital media, while also evoking the calls to take the streets.<sup>27</sup>



Figure 7. “LULAGRAMA.” Posted by @poetamenos on June 11, 2019

For “MENSAGEM NUMA GARRAFA (Bolsograma 2)” (see Figure 8), the Instagram posts provide viewers with a two-image stack; a still image and a video post that zooms on the font and the words displayed, activating semantic and somatic sensory reactions to this “Message in a Bottle” printed on a delicate mint-green ceramic corked bottle, an artisan object or magical talisman that recalls Lewis Carroll’s Alice approaching the bottle labeled “DRINK ME.” Augusto here calls out Bolsonaro’s refusal to respond to the coronavirus crisis, calling it a “gripezinha” and a “resfriadinho”—this object-poem speaks to all our senses, as we interpret information and translate the visual and semantic information into meaning.

<sup>27</sup> For an incisive reading of another #lulalivre Lulagrama, see Shellhorse “Verbivocovisual Revolution,” 172-5.

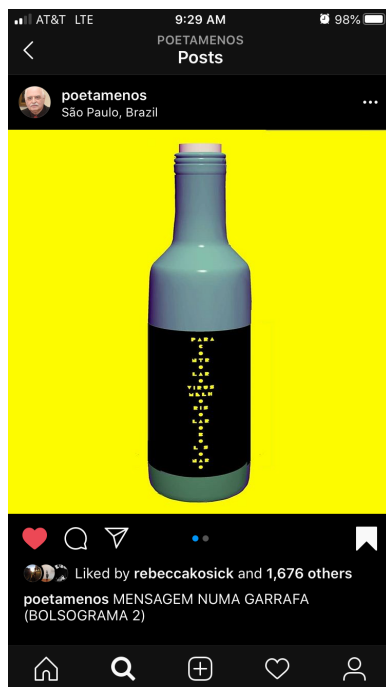


Figure 8. “MENSAGEM NUMA GARRAFA (BOLSOGRAMA 2)”

Posted by @poetamenos on April 6, 2020

The video version insists that this is a real bottle you could hold, a serum you could take, ingest, taste, hope to soothe you; yet in fact it is only an image on the screen, an image the author found online and edited using Photoshop.<sup>28</sup> The text reads: “Para controlar o virus melhor isolar o Bolsonaro” / “To control the virus better isolate Bolsonaro”—with all the letter “o”s in the phrase themselves isolated, dropped out of the equation, like so many anonymous heads lined up outside a hospital, or like the holes left in families and communities as the dead pile up. The “o’s” are carbonation bubbles, they make sounds popping, or firing rubber bullets into a peaceful protest. The letters “O” are reduced to images, organized by their shapes—asking: how is meaning being constructed in this crisis? Who defines what “illness” or “cure” look like? Is it based on medical evidence or the shape of a curve, a graph of the economy “shooting” upward?

To conclude, I share my own transcreation of Augusto’s “Bolsograma 2,” my own response to the open invitation of his social-media poetic practice (see Figure 9). A meme—much like a sonnet—functions on repetition with a difference, in which elements of a trope are stable but each instance reorganizes and redeploys them in a new way. My repetition of his “Bolsograma 2” could be

<sup>28</sup> Personal correspondence with Augusto de Campos, July 25, 2020.

a part of a series of contrapoemas critiquing world leaders in the face of the coronavirus, “Coronagrams” circulating online, linking back to Augusto’s Bolsogramas.

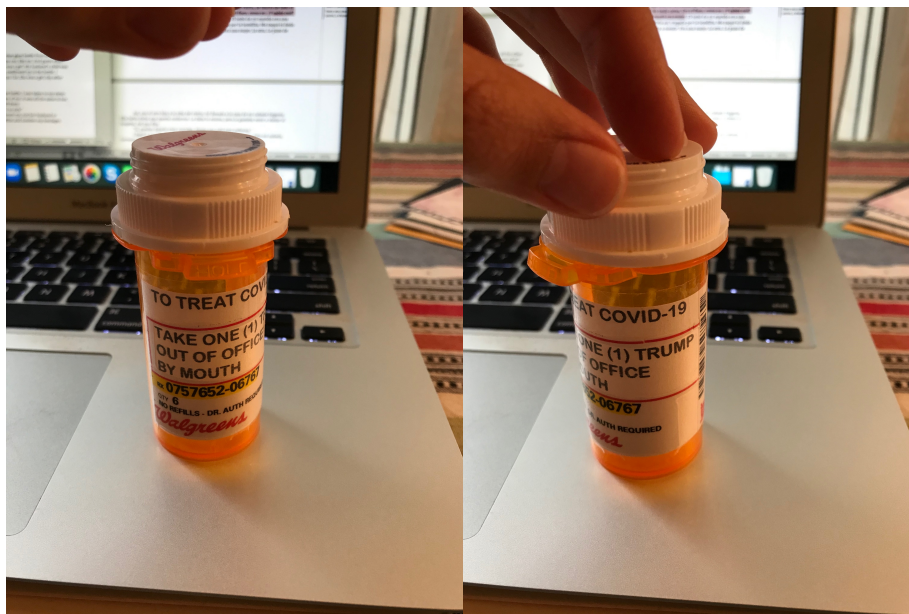


Figure 9. “HUGE Pharma.”

My title riffs on the superlative favorite phrase of President Trump—not just “big pharma” but “HUGE Pharma” operates in this administration’s network of meaning. The prescription bottle label reads: “TO TREAT COVID-19 / TAKE ONE (1) TRUMP / OUT OF OFFICE / BY MOUTH.” Using materials available to me at home, my transcreation reads immediately as embedded within the for-profit pharmaceutical industry—less a “message in a bottle” of Augusto’s elegant, timeless, ceramic flask, my orange-plastic rendition speaks to the rigidity and branding of a profit-driven health industry. Augusto’s “Bolsograma 2” fantasizes about “isolating” the Brazilian president, putting him, genie-like, back into the bottle—or to take the verb within the semantic field of politics, to isolate him from collaborators, to cut off his support. In my riff on his work, I play on the word “to take”—which can mean both incorporating, swallowing, suffering through, but also removing, leaving, taking off. While we might hope to take a pill to cure the disease, nothing produced by the neoliberal pharmaceutical industry will be a panacea: even the long-awaited vaccine will inevitably increase private wealth of drug-makers and investors alongside the social benefits of restored freedom of movement. The false hopes of a quick fix, a miracle cure, a new president to return us to neoliberal “normal” without transforming the racist capitalism on which it is built—my transcreation speaks to

these diseases. Disappropriating Augusto's source work allows me to look more closely at both the source text and at the parallel situation in the USA and in my own language culture.

In conclusion, Augusto de Campos as a "Bizarre Poet on the Internet," sets into motion a stance towards language, never using language or translation as merely transparent or invisible transmission. Far from the received knowledge of the scholarly tradition, or the passive, private consumption of a privileged art-book, he instead recovers the bizarre, the nonsense, the childlike play with language as a democratically produced, shared experience. Revisiting older works, he makes their interventions relevant to the current moment and remixes texts for new audiences, platforms, and situations—and his work invites us all to use our creativity to do the same, to disappropriate language and to activate a poetry held in common.

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