INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSPOSITION AND THE TRANSLATION OF VISUAL POETRY

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ABSTRACT: Translation theorists such as Julio Plaza, Gisbert Kranz and Claus Clüver have explored the frontiers of intersemiotic translation. They have collectively redefined the perception of semantics as essentially – or at least potentially – multisensory. This essay investigates the complexity of translating textual visual poetry, and emphasises the instructive value of intersemiotic transposition not as an end in itself, but as a translation tool. A "literary" rendering requires not only the search for "verbal equations" between content and form (Jakobson) often employed in poetry translation, but also an artist's sensitivity to the poem's visual aesthetic. It is suggested that intersemiotic transposition may provide a key intermediary step for translators of visual poetry. Two poems by e. e. cummings are translated into Portuguese using the translation methodology described.

KEYWORDS: translation; visual poetry; e. e. cummings; semiotics; intersemiotic translation

RESUMO: Julio Plaza, Gisbert Kranz, Claus Clüver e outros teóricos da tradutologia têm explorado as fronteiras da tradução intersemiótica. Coletivamente, redefiniram a percepção da semântica como essencialmente – ou pelo menos potencialmente – multisensorial. Nesta monografia examina-se a complexidade da tradução de poesia visual textual, e enfatiza-se o valor instrutivo da transposição intersemiótica não necessariamente como um fim em si mesmo, mas como uma ferramenta de

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tradução. A versão "literária" exige não apenas a busca das "equações verbais" entre forma e conteúdo (Jakobson) freqüentemente empregada na tradução de poesia, como também a sensibilidade de um artista plástico diante da estética visual do poema. Sustenta-se que a transposição intersemiótica pode proporcionar um importante passo intermediário para o tradutor de poesia visual. Usando a metodologia descrita, traduzem-se dois poemas de e. e. cummings para o português.

UNITERMOS: tradução; poesia visual; e. e. cummings; semiótica; tradução intersemiótica..

In this paper I intend to briefly discuss the role of intersemiotic transposition and cultural dynamics in the interlingual translation of visual poetry. My primary object of focus will be transcreational literary translation rather than the product of intersemiotic transposition into media other than verbal (lexical) language. I intend to demonstrate that inter-semiotic transposition can be an effective aid to translators who wish to produce literary renderings of visual poetry into other languages. For the purposes of illustration and example, I have chosen to examine and translate two visual poems by American poet e. e. cummings (1894-1962) into Brazilian Portuguese.

Visual Poetry Defined

Due to the ambiguities circumscribing the term, any discussion of visual poetry must begin with a clear definition. It must first be specified that the use of the word "visual" in this arena has nothing to do with images evoked by verbal language. We are not concerned with the verbal description of images, nor with the visualisation of images by traditional means of decoding verbal text. "Visual" as employed in "visual poetry" refers to the actual, pictorial image created by the poetry itself as displayed on the page (or other physical surface).

I prefer to employ the term in its broadest sense, to include all poetic language whose principal means of enhance-

ment is visual rather than syntactic or semantic. The visual element in visual poetry does not necessarily preclude the importance of its syntactic, formal, or textual semantic elements, but the genre must have visible, pictorial art in addition to these other elements in order to be considered visual poetry. In this sense the term visual poetry includes much of what has come to be classified under the terms concrete poetry, material poetry, pattern poetry, altar poetry, picture poetry, *Bildgedicht*, lettrism, hypergraphy, ekphrastic poetry, and the like. Each one of these genres places primary importance on the visual elements of letters, words, lines, punctuation, white space, typography, and other graphic elements as well as on the intentional arrangement of these on the page into some sort of representational and/or abstract image.

ruaruaruasol
ruaruasolrua
ruasolruarua
solruaruarua
ruaruaruas

Untitled visual poem by Ronaldo Azeredo
(Philadelpho Menezes, Poética e Visualidade. Campinas, EDUNICAMP, 1991, p. 39).

One must take care, however, to not assume the visual elements are all there is to visual poetry. While the orientation is usually visual, there is usually a strong complementarity of text and image. That is to say, the poetry in visual poetry is actually textual and not merely metaphorical. The visual poet is both artist and poet.

Traditional poetry is a personal vision, a personal interpretation of a world-view, whereas I think that visual poetry is closer to a sort of an engineering of language and of image – or, to put it in more modest terms, a craftsmanlike approach (Arias-Misson, 1991).

In summary, then, for the purposes of this paper our definition of visual poetry is the most comprehensive and generic possible.

Visual poetry is not universally understood nor appreciated. Some critics believe this level of interplay between poetry and art produces awkward hybrids which are neither poetry nor

art. Others believe it to be futile, frivolous, and sophomoric. Wallace Stevens, for example, offhandedly dismisses visual poetry as inconsequential and far removed from his own poetics:

> "In [Mallarmé's Un Coup de Dés, for example]...the exploitation of form involves nothing more than the use of small letters for capitals, eccentric line-endings, too little or too much punctuation and similar aberrations. These have nothing to do with being alive. They have nothing to do with the conflict between the poet and that of which his poems are made. They are neither "bonne soupe" nor "beau langage." (Stevens, 1942)

Most would say a rather sophisticated understanding of the role of convention and tradition in language is necessary for a full appreciation of the true nature and value of the visual poetry. This genre contributes to a critical perception of language both as symbol and as object.

Visual Poetry in Translation

Robert Frost dismissed any attempt to translate poetry as futile. He argued that "poetry" – in its most ethereal, purely aesthetic sense – is precisely what is lost when a translation of a poem is attempted. Certainly it is next to impossible to produce a true equivalent of a poem in another language. The interplay between form and meaning, between semantic nuance and formal grace, between the poem and the reader within a given cultural context, are all quite impossible to replicate in another language. Translation, nevertheless, rarely proposes to be utterly faithful to the source text. Translations are always versions of varying distance to the original. Modern translation theories concede – even assume – that total correspondence is impossible. To affirm, then, that it is impossible to translate a poem is akin to denying the true translatability of any text.

What a translator generally aims for in attempting to translating poetry is to produce a somewhat parallel rendering of the original for a different audience. Sometimes the translation is

undertaken as a commentary on the original; in these cases, normally the reader is presented with both original and translation. In other instances, the translation is undertaken by a poet who strives to produce true poetry based on an original. Jakobson calls such translation "creative transposition", (Jakobson, 1960) while Haroldo de Campos affirms that the translator's task when rendering poetry is "creative and critical" (Campos, 1989).

As has been argued elsewhere[1], translating poetry necessarily involves walking the tightrope between procurement of semantic fidelity and similarity of aesthetic form. This tension is most apparent when the poem in question contains any rigid poetic system such as rhyme scheme, meter, alliteration, allusion, or onomatopoeia. At each turn the translator needs to make decisions between adherence to strict textual signification and formal similarity (if not equivalence). These decisions will be determined by "the function the translation is to serve, and by the context in which it will appear". (Clüver, 1989)

If the translation of traditional poetry is an imprecise, heavily negotiated activity involving personal interpretation, determination of function, and a balancing act between form and meaning, the translation of visual poetry is complicated even further by an additional preoccupation with its aesthetic, visually observable aspects. The literary translation of visual poetry requires attention to textual semantics, to structural form, and to viewable (physical) image.

Visual poetry is language-intensive; that is, it cannot exist without verbal language, the medium in which it is built. Sometimes the verbal language is implicit as a mere referential element. More often, it comprises the visual tools with which the poet sculpts or paints the work. Due to the fully symbiotic complementarity between text and image in visual poetry, when the language is removed the poem self-destructs. Hence, trans-

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1 Notably by Jakobson, who describes translation of poetry as an exercise in "verbal equations" negotiated between textual signification and poetic form (1969, p. 72). Wittgenstein also equates the translation of poetry to the solving of mathematical problems (quote 1 by George Steiner 1975, p. 275).

lation is possible only if one understands in the broadest sense the sorts of verbal equations one must negotiate in rendering poetry into other languages.

It can be perhaps affirmed that certain types of visual poetry are indeed exceptionally difficult to translate, particularly into languages made up of linguistic symbols and codes different from those extant in the source language. Nevertheless, certain attempts can be made even in these cases. Sometimes it is a matter of adapting the idea of the original to a completely different set of circumstances and linguistic tools. Walter Benjamin has set forth quite persuasively that the task of the translator is to find "that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original" (Benjamin, 1969).[2] Where visual poetry is concerned, that echo may be able to reverberate in a physical space that is quite similar to that of the original.

A full appreciation of most visual poetry includes a meaningful decoding (reading) of the textual language upon which it is built. Hence, visual poetry is not universally understood in the same manner in which a painting might be considered to be. For many readers, comprehension is dependent upon translation.

Due to its highly experimental, unorthodox nature, most visual poetry invites similarly unusual methods of translation. These range from, on one hand, a full commitment to reproduce the same visual effects produced by the original and, on the other, complete deconstruction, wherein the original serves as a distant reference point for the "translator's" own work. As mentioned before, one approach might be to present to the reader the original visual poem, then comment on it by providing a literal, didactic translation to aid the reader in a broader understanding of the poem's implications and intentions. In addition to this prose translation, translator's notes may be added to assist the reader in sensing the poem's meaning and impact upon the origi-

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2 Benjamin does not discuss the translation of visual poetry. He says, "The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational" (p. 76-7). The visual element in visual poetry, however, provides a literal, observable axis around which both poet and translator commune.

nal intended audience. Another method of translation involves a conscious decision by the translator to concentrate on one of the three elements to the virtual exclusion of the others. The product of this sort of translation renders a product which is (1) textually faithful but formally and visually unattached, (2) formally similar but dissimilar in visual equivalence and textual signification, or (3) visually equivalent but textually and formally distant.

The translation of traditional poetry normally involves an exercise of decoding and encoding using a single semantic system as a primary basis, although parallel semiotic and cultural semantic systems need be taken into account as well. The translation of visual poetry forces the translator to access new semantic systems that are visually oriented. Without dealing with a pictorial semantic system, the full, "literary" rendering of a visual poem is deficient. As an example of this deficiency, I have chosen to reprint an English-language version of Décio Pignatari's visual poem "beba coca cola" (1957), translated by Maria José de Queiroz and Mary Ellen Solt.[3] Here is the original, followed by its translation:

	beba	coca	cola
	babe		cola
	beba	coca	
	babe	cola	caco
	caco		
	cola		
	c l o a c a		

and its translation:

	drink	*coca cola*
	drool	*glue*
	drink	*coca(ine)*
	drool	*glue shard*
	shard	
	glue	
	cesspool	

3 Presented by Roland Green as "[t]he standard translation" of Décio
   Pignatari's poem, in "From Dante to the Post-Concrete: An Inter-

Although the translators have evidently paid a moderate degree of attention to lexical meaning and (to a lesser degree) to formal similarity, the visual aspects of Décio Pignatari's original have been largely ignored. In the original, all the letters line up top to bottom, with the exception of those in the last word, "cloaca", where the kerning was altered to allow the word to begin aligned with the first letters of the second words above and end precisely where the lines above also end.

In the translation, no such similar care was taken. In the first place, a different typeface altogether was used. The letters do not line up; the spaces between the first and second words in lines 1, 3, and 4 are wider than those between the second and third words. The final word, translated as "cesspool", is not placed on the page with the same precision. In the original, the combined shape of the letters form a small letter "e", which may or may not have a broader, implicit significance, but which in any case should not be completely written off as meaningless or inconsequential.[4] Furthermore, all words in the original start with one of two letters – b or c, and all words except for the last contain four letters. In the translation there are five-letter words as well as four-letter ones, and the words start with d, s, g, or c. The translation is not poor – it is just more faithful to the lexical and formal semantic systems than to the visual one. This is, of course, an option open to any translator, but it seems to me that

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view with Augusto de Campos", *Harvard Library Bulletin*, (New Series, Summer 1992, v. 3, n. 2) p. 29. The translation originally appeared in *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, ed. Mary Ellen Solt (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 108.

4 It may be argued here, as in other visual poems, that some of the visual elements are coincidental, not intentional, and that it is absurd for a translator to attempt to reproduce exactly the same idiosyncrasies that characterize the original when they are incidental to the poet's intention. This line of logic, however, is risky, for it can be extrapolated to other semantic/semiotic systems present in the original – e.g., how much of a poem's double or triple entendres are coincidental?; to what extent can some alliteration be in fact unavoidable and unintentional?; etc. A translator's wish to take such elements seriously in a visual poem must be respected.

some homage must be paid to the original poet's task of painting or sculpting a visual piece of art. An alternative translation might be done this way:

beba	coca	cola		swig	coca	cola
babe		cola		spit		cola
beba	coca			swig	coca	
babe	cola	caco		spit	cola	coke
caco				coke		
cola				cola		
	cloaca				cloaca	

This alternative gives primary focus to the poem's visual element. It reproduces the basic shape of the original; although the letters change, the number of letters remains constant (not always possible to achieve, of course, but here it works). Queiroz/ Solt opt for fidelity to textual signification, and thus sacrifice visual aesthetic. Their translation of "beba/babe" is "drink/drool", perhaps more accurate than the alternative presented, but these words contain five letters each, thereby compromising the poem's symmetry. "Swig/spit" do convey a similar basic concept – taking in and letting out a liquid substance through the mouth. Queiroz/Solt translate "cola" as "glue", and thus opt for one of the word's meanings in Portuguese. I chose to retain the original, transcribing it identically into English and thereby opting for just one meaning, but intentionally so in considering the gains to visual reproduction.

In the third line, Queiroz/Solt intrude upon the artist's space by actually helping the reader or observer to "discover" an implicit meaning which is perhaps not so implicit after all; here they attest to their bias toward the lexical semantic system. In the fourth line Queiroz/Solt translate "caco" and "shard", certainly one of the possible meanings of the Portuguese term but quite possibly (almost certainly?) not the meaning Pignatari intended. "Caco" can also be translated as "coke"; these terms can both be used to describe the residue left behind by the burning of certain organic substances. Furthermore, Coke is the popular name for Coca-Cola, of course, and can also be used to

mean "cocaine" as well (as can "coca" in the original). Finally Queiroz/Solt translated "cloaca" as "cesspool", which specifies just one of "cloaca's" meanings. I chose to retain "cloaca", a term in English which, although more archaic and obscure that the word in Portuguese-language use, conveys similar significations and is, of course, visually identical to the original. The shape of the lower-case "e" is maintained as well.

Whether the alternative translation is superior to Queiroz/Solt's is not the question here. What the translations *do* reveal, however, are different biases at work orienting the translation process. Queiroz/Solt treat the poem's visual content as secondary to what the poet tried to say; I treat it as central to the picture the poet tried to paint. The translation of visual poetry can be achieved through one of several methodologies, but I submit that the visual elements are of central importance to the genre. Since language, and not only letters or words as visual objects, comprises the building blocks – the raw material, or medium – upon which the poet sculpts, the lexical .semantic charge cannot be ignored, and neither can other formal, perhaps more traditional literary elements, such as rhyme scheme, meter, metaphor, and alliteration. Without explicitly visual, observable elements, however, visual poetry could not exist.

There are certainly multiple ways of translating visual poetry. For the purposes of this paper I shall favour a rather conservative, "literary" approach, wherein the translator takes seriously the attempt to render into a second language the three basic elements involved in visual poetry. The degree of complexity and creativity involved may lead the translator to parallel activities for orientation. One of the most important is intersemiotic transposition.

Intersemiotic Transposition

In his groundbreaking article "On Intersemiotic Transposition" Claus Clüver expands the concept coined by Gisbert Kranz (1981) and suggests that if we accept the idea of interlingual

translation, the same presuppositions which lead us to this con-clusion also establish the viability of intersemiotic transposi-tion. As used by both Kranz and Clüver, this term refers to the "translation" of a work of art composed within one semiotic sys-tem into another, quite different semiotic system. The most com-mon example is a painting subsequently rendered as a poem (or vice versa).

The idea of such intersemiotic transposition is not as ab-surd as it might initially appear. We have seen that the interlin-gual translation of poetry is no simple matter. In fact, according to New Criticism apologists the meaning of a lyric poem resides in the "interplay of its sounds and rhythms, its images and tropes, its syntactical and prosodic structures, and the denotative and connotative dimensions of its lexical items, among other things". (Clüver, 1989, p. 59). Given such an extensive degree of semiotic and formal complexity, we must quickly arrive at the conclusion that the interlingual translation of such poetry is impossible to achieve with precision, due to the cultural and linguistic vari-ances inherent to every language and culture. As seen above, however, interlingual translation *is* possible, even the transla-tion of highly complex poetry, if we undertake the process fully aware of the natural limitations that exist and if we become more generous and flexible in our search for general similarities in-stead of precise equivalents.

Clüver argues that the same flexibility which accepts in-terlingual translation of poetry allows for meaningful intersemi-otic transposition:

> *The meaning of a poem is no more self-evident and unambigu-ous than that of a pictorial text. The translator's decision as to the preservation of formal features will be determined by his interpretation and judgement as to the importance and efficacy of these features in the audience's interpretive habits.* (Clüver, 1989, p. 61)

Clüver asserts that if we accept the idea that a poem can be translated from one language into another, we should also accept that a painting can be translated into a poem. The theory

does not lack opponents[5] but the very concept of meaningful intersemiotic transposition sheds light on what is achievable in interlingual translation.

It must be made clear that what Clüver and Kranz are discussing is not a mere description of a painting or a sculpture in poetic form, nor a painting or a sculpture loosely and abstractly based on a poem. Intersemiotic transposition has to do with full utilisation of a semantic system to produce a new reading of a work of art originally produced using the signs, codes, and media of a different system.

Evidently broad similarities must be evidenced and accepted between poetry and painting/sculpture if intersemiotic transposition is to be recognised as possible between these two considerably different semantic systems and, indeed, whether it is to be viewed as valuable by the translator of visual poetry. Wallace Stevens argued that the central element of composition is a "common denominator of poetry and painting ... poetry and painting alike create through composition." (Stevens, 1942). Stevens also observes that

> *No poet can have failed to recognize how often a detail, a propos*
> *or remark, in respect to painting, applies also to poetry. The*

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5   One of the most outspoken critics is Nelson Goodman, who has made a case for "considering the system of visual marks that constitutes a painting 'syntactically and semantically dense,' whereas a linguistic system is 'discontinuous' or 'articulate,' that is, 'semantically and syntactically differentiated.' Every change in hue, saturation, and value, every variation in thickness, direction, and ductus of a brushstroke, every dislocation of a shape or modulation in texture may affect the meaning of a visual text, however slightly. Even if were possible to establish a semantic equivalence between colors and phonemes, for example, the articulate system of verbal language could not match the infinite possibilities of the dense color system" (Clüver, "On Intersemiotic Transposition", p. 59, 60). Interestingly, this line of reasoning sounds very much like the arguments used by those who deny even the interlingual translatability of poetry. A broader view of translatability must be adopted if translation of any nature is to be regarded as possible.

truth is that there seems to exist a corpus of remarks in re-
spect to painting, most often the remarks of painters them-
selves, which are significant to poets as to painters. (Stevens,
1942, p. 160).

The similarities extend not only to painting but to sculp-
ture as well. Michael North observes that "[s]ince Hugh Kenner
first applied the phrase 'poet-as-sculptor' to Ezra Pound, it has
been clear that carving in stone is one of the best analogies for
the basic activity of his poetry". (North, 1985) He elucidates his
theory by observing Pound's extensive use of carving as a meta-
phor for composing poetry. Other poet-sculptors, such as Tom
Ockerse, explore the frontiers of poetry and sculpture by creat-
ing "three-dimensional poems" which are subsequently docu-
mented as two-dimensional photographs. (Ockerse, 1991)

An example of a successful intersemiotic transposition is
the poem "Starry Night", by Anne Sexton (1962), a rendering of
Van Gogh's "La nuit étoilée" (1889) (see Figure 1). The poem is
not a mere narrative description of the painting. Indeed, it spe-
cifically evokes images not present in the original (at least not
from Van Gogh's vantage point). The poet uses metaphors which
elicit the same sorts of feelings from observers who view the
painting. The colours and shapes juxtapose serenity and fore-
boding; the poet does the same ("The town is silent. The night
boils with eleven stars.")

We shall not explore the minutiae of the two works, but
Clüver has demonstrated that a full, analytical comparison of
the original and its rendering leads us to the conclusion that
the dynamic tensions, the artists' voices, and the evocations of
image are indeed quite similar. The painting leads us to the
poem, and the poem back to the painting. They are not neces-
sarily solely complementary; they can virtually be superimposed
as impressions of the same reality. Curiously, the sense of over-
hanging death in the painting became concrete with Van Gogh's
suicide; Sexton also ended her own life by her own hand.

The translation of visual poetry involves a sense of the
visually aesthetic. Perhaps one needn't be a poet to translate
traditional poetry, but one must have artistic sensitivity and

sensibility or – at least a craftsman's eye – in order to appreciate the elements which must be salvaged in translation of visual poetry.

Intersemiotic Transposition and the Translation of Visual Poetry

In the brand of intersemiotic transposition Clüver and Kranz set forth, a translation occurs between two distinct semantic systems. A poem becomes a painting, a sculpture becomes a lyric poem, linguistic dimensions are substituted for artistic representation and technique.

Earlier in this paper we summarised the nature and character of visual poetry. The essential difference between traditional poetry and visual poetry is the presence of more than one semantic system resident in visual poetry. Traditional poetry relies on verbal language (meaning and form) alone. Visual poetry straddles semantic systems; although its principal medium is verbal language, it incorporates (to varying degrees) literal, observable image as well.

(Figure 1)   Starry Night
                    That does not keep me from having a terrible
                    need of – shall I say the word – religion. Then I
                    go out at night to paint the stars.
                            Vincent Van Gogh in a letter to his brother

The town does not exist
except where one black-haired tree slips
up like a drowned woman into the hot sky.
The town is silent. The night boils with eleven stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die.
It moves. They are all alive.
Even the moon bulges in its orange irons
to push children, like a god, from its eye.

The old unseen serpent swallows up the stars.
Oh starry starry night! This is how
I want to die:
into that rushing beast of the night,
sucked up by that great dragon, to split
from my life with no flag,
no belly,
no cry.

Anne Sexton, 1962

Intersemiotic transposition is essentially an exercise in interpretation. Ambiguities resident in the original work of art run the risk of being ignored, literalised, or altered beyond recognition during the process of intersemiotic transposition. Clüver argues that such interpretation happens in any case – all comprehension involves interpretation, and inter-semiotic transposition is simply the act of interpretation made explicit.

What role might intersemiotic transposition play in the translation of visual poetry? It is difficult to consider this question if we adhere only to the general term "visual poetry". But if we examine different individual poems, a number of possibilities arise. In some cases it might be possible for a transmutation to occur whereby an image merely suggested by the shape and form of the original poem might literally take shape. For example, a pattern poem presented in the shape of a cross might be transposed as a reproduction of an actual medieval cross, the kind that might be found sculpted into an altar in a 16th-century European cathedral. A concrete poem such as Ronaldo Azeredo's "ruaruaruasol" (see page 73) might be transposed as a painting (perhaps similar to Marcel DuChamp's quasi-animated "Nude Descending a Staircase") depicting the sun's daily journey over a city's streets. An ekphrastic poem might switch places with the illustration it complements.

Intersemiotic transposition cannot replace full interlingual translation, but as a discipline it can be useful to the translator of visual poetry. The visual aspect of visual poetry must be fully recognised and established if it is to play a major part in the literary, aesthetic process of translation. Intersemiotic transposition of a visual poem's rudimentary, suggestive visual elements into a fully-fashioned (or imagined) painting or sculpture will certainly help the translator to consolidate the image as fundamentally significant in the rendering. Infusing a visual poem's visual aspects with added colour, texture, volume and shape-definition will crystallise the pictorial/sensory elements in the translator's mind. The subsequent task of rendering the lexical meaning and poetic form can then be aligned with the poem's visual constraints. Some may argue that this sort of intersemiotic transposition is actually closer to literalization within a PAES,

single semantic system than to a true crossover exercise. Certainly the "pure" intersemiotic transposition amply described and dissected by Clüver and Kranz is muddled somewhat here by the second semantic system already present in the visual poem, however abstract or vague that presence might be. Nevertheless, not all readings of visual poetry recognise the semantic charge of the pictorial element, and it may be precisely the initial exercise of intersemiotic transposition which impels the translator to seek out the true visual/aesthetic nature of the visual poem he or she intends to render.

Intersemiotic transposition can be effective as an aid to the translator if it is seen not as an end it itself, but as an intermediary step leading to the full translation. Evidently a full transposition is possible and, perhaps in some cases, desirable. In these cases the translator might actually seek to sketch or model a drawing or sculpture to which a verbal translation can be anchored. The product of intersemiotic transposition can subsequently be discarded once the translation has been successfully achieved, or it can be employed as an integral part of the translation.

More frequently, no doubt, intersemiotic transposition as an intermediary step will not be literally carried out, but will happen as an essentially mental, reflective exercise. The translator will deliberately and carefully visualise a transposition of the original poem (or of portions of it), then will utilise this mental picture as an axle or a hinge which becomes pivotal to the remaining task.

A full reading of Clüver's article leaves the reader with the distinct impression that intersemiotic transposition between poetry and painting (or between poetry and sculpture) works best when dealing with (1) representational art and (2) narrative/descriptive poetry. Indeed, most of his examples involve one or the other. I believe, however, that meaningful intersemiotic transposition may also occur between abstract forms of art. An abstract painting by Pollock or Klee, for example, may be transposed as an impressionistic, non-narrative poem. Inversely, an abstruse, opaque poem may be transposed as a painting or sculpture which actualises the poem's dynamic. This leads me to af-

firm, carefully but with conviction, that intersemiotic transposition can be employed usefully as an intermediary step even when the visual aspects of the source poem are abstract, based more upon texture and shape than upon literal, realistic representation. What intersemiotic transposition affords the translator of visual poetry is a specific image which subsequently orients (or constrains) the remaining task of the translator.

I mentioned earlier that I favoured a conservative, "literary" approach to translating visual poetry, one which recognises all forces at play within the visual poem and seeks to creatively resolve each aspect for a new audience. I don't mean to imply that I undervalue the translator's freedom to improvise, create, adapt or contextualise. Cultural dynamics make such flexibility inevitable. Images and pictorial symbols often mean different things to different people. A generic image of snow, for example, would have to be modified for an Eskimo audience, for example, who possess more than 10 separate words for "snow" and who view specific types of snow as threatening, useful, premonitory, and so on. An image reflecting a regional advertising campaign and its immediate effect upon the society for which it was created would have to be creatively adapted using the target audience's universe of phenomena and cultural milieu. In essence, then, the same sort of translational flexibility which is necessary in rendering semantic lexical content and poetic form is also necessary in considering the visual poem's visual elements.

Two Examples

In order to illustrate the utility of intersemiotic transposition to the translator of visual poetry, I would like to present and translate two visual poems by e. e. cummings into Brazilian Portuguese.

cummings is still seen by today's literary critics as something of an anomaly during the period in which he lived. He was fully antiestablishment, and this isolationist conviction destroyed his military career and various marriages and other relation-

ships, and relegated him to a virtual poorhouse during most of his life. He was perhaps most unorthodox when it came to his art, which was perennially nonconformist. He was a successful poet who wandered way off the paths of traditional orthography, syntax, semantics, spelling, and the rules of punctuation and capitalisation. His unconventional orthographic treatment was meant not only to direct the manner in which he intended his poems to be read aloud[6], but to guide the reader to a visual appreciation of his poetry.

cummings was also a painter; as such, he was never as successful as he was with his poetry, but he remained a painter for all of his life. Indeed, he saw himself primarily as a visual artist.[7] cummings was not an Imagist, contrary to the presuppositions held by certain critics today. Whereas the Imagism of poets such as Pound, Lowell, and Hulme based itself on the belief that a specific, clear image was essential to verse, the "image" they stressed was always created in the imagination through narrative description. cummings's images, on the other hand, often included the literal pictures of visual poetry. He brought text and images closer together than did the Imagists themselves.

One of cummings's most well-known visual poems is "l(a." This poem is not only visual in orientation; it is practically an animated film script providing the key to its textual content:

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6 Theodore Spenser indicates that cummings's unorthodox orthography reveal that the poet "wanted to control the reading of the poem as much as he can, so that to the reader, as to the poet, there will be the smallest possible gap between the experience and its expression." In "Technique as Joy," *The Harvard Wake,* n. 5 [Spring, 1946], p. 25-29, quoted in *Esti: eec: e. e. cummings and the Critics,* ed. S. V. Baum (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1962) p. 50.
7 In December 1923, in a letter to his father, he said he was "still convinced that [I] am primarily a painter." Milton A. Cohen, *e. e. cummings: The Hidden Career* (exhibition catalogue) (Dallas, University of Dallas, c1982), p. 1.

l(a	
le	
af	
fa	
ll	
s)	
one	
l	
iness	

This masterpiece of visual poetry creates the image of a falling leaf which isolates itself from the tree. The poet utilises the image as a metaphor for loneliness. cummings' use of the letter "l" shows a leaf which falls free from the branch, spins in the air, then floats to the ground, where it lands horizontally. He separates the letters of the words in order to reinforce the idea of oneness, solitude, and loneliness. In line 1, the first letter we see is "l" which, in this font, is identical to the *number* 1. In lines 2-4, there is in each line one letter with a stem rising above the em-space. Each such letter is accompanied by a vowel. The letters with the high stems switch places, suggesting the leaf which spirals as it falls. Line 5 is made up of two "l"s or, conversely, two number 1s, thereby emphasising the drama of solitude. Line 7 is simply the word "one". Line 8 repeats the number 1. The last line reads "iness", or, perhaps, "the state of being I." cummings often expressed the first-person objective pronoun as a lower-case "i".

Faced with the complexity of translating this visual poem into Portuguese, a translator may first wish to create – literally or mentally – an intersemiotic transposition of the poem, as described above. I suggest something similar to the following:

l(a		
le af fa		
ll		
s) one l		
iness		

The drawing which results from this transposition fully illustrates one aspect of cummings's original, and provides a strong backdrop against which semantic (textual) and formal translation might be undertaken. The images effectively dramatise for the translator the centrality of the visual element. The visual element is not subservient nor merely "depictive"; it is central to an integral comprehension of the poem. The product of the intersemiotic transposition orients and stabilises the translation process, outlining in broad strokes the limits within which the translator must function. The image of a leaf falling is a universal metaphor for change, transition, metamorphosis.

Based upon cummings's original and the intermediary transposition (which, bear in mind, needn't always be literal), I crafted the following translation:

l(a			s(e	
le af fa			af ol ha	
ll			ca	
s) one l			i) óso l	
iness			itude	

Applying the product of the intersemiotic transposition as an anchor, I adapted the textual semantic and formal elements, given the natural constraints of Portuguese and adding (unobtrusively) a reading not resident in the original. In line 1 it was exceedingly difficult to create the same effect with the same letter "l". I opted, then, to keep at least two letters separated by an opening parenthesis. With the parentheses, the message reads, "só solitude (e a folha cai)"; English retranslation: "only loneliness (and the leaf falls)". If the parentheses are ignored (and in *cummings*, such graphic devices as parentheses are often used for nothing but visual effect), another reading is possible: "se a folha cai, ó solitude"; English retranslation: "if the leaf falls, o solitude". In lines 2-4, I maintained the basic configuration of two letters per line – a vowel and a letter with a high stem – though I found it necessary to modify the position of the letters. In this manner, the leaf spirals in a more irregular manner.

In line 5 there are the same numbers of letters as contained in the original, but with no resident double meaning. In line 6 the letter "i" is followed by the closing parenthesis. The letter "i" is reminiscent of a smaller letter "l", yet more obscure, more solitary, as it were. It is further reminiscent of the personal pronoun "I" in English (and, indeed, in lower case, as often treated by *cummings*), the poet's mother tongue. Line 7 contains three letters, "óso", a solitary "s" between two identical letters. Line 8 recuperates the double image of letter/number "1". In line 9, there is the horizontal end of the narrative.

The result is a full translation of the original visual poem. The translation maintains a similar visual image as set forth in the original, even utilising the exact same number of letters used by cummings. The poem in translation is visually similar, textually comparable, and formally commensurate.

The second poem I would like to consider is "insu nli gh t", which first appeared in *73 Poems*.[8] This visual poem is similar to "l(a" in that its visual, pictorial aspects animate the poem's textual content. Below is the original as well as one of several

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possible inter-semiotic transpositions of the poem, and its trans-
lation into Portuguese:

insu nli gh t		nalu zdo so l
o		t
verand		ornare
o		t
vering		ornand
A		O
onc		eer
eup		aum
ona		ave
tim		zoj
e ne wsp aper		o rn ald odia

This is an impressionist poem about time. In more ways
than one cummings paints a picture for his reader. The poem
would have pleased the Imagist Ezra Pound, for it is based on a
clear central image. It is a visual poem as well, for it literally
and pictorially depicts what it also describes. The poem con-
tains cummings's characteristic orthographic antics; words are
split at odd junctions and the poet creates a neologism: "overing".
Lines 2-5 and 7-10 are aligned far to the right of the left margin,
and the letter "A" in line 6 almost certainly represents the sun,
to which the wind-swept newspaper (i.e., time) is subject. Both
beginning and ending lines contain 10 letters each, but the let-
ters are grouped differently (4-3-2-1, then 1-2-3-4), perhaps to
pictorially comment on the illusive slowing down and speeding
up of time.

The intersemiotic transposition of this poem, undertaken
pragmatically as an aid to the translation, fixes the image of the
temporal day's news (or, perhaps more accurately, yesterday's
news) in comparison to the timeless sun. The translation is based
not only upon a recognition of this visual image but upon the

objective of adapting it, if possible, taking full advantage of the new elements presented by Portuguese. The most evident "improvement" is the substitution of the letter "A" – the sun in the transposition – for the letter "O", a letter whose physical, pictorial characteristics match those of the sun itself. The translation seeks to emulate the visual image while maintaining similar textual and formal elements as well. An English retranslation of the textual/formal signification might read "in sunlight, turns and turning [or alternately, "turns returning"] and, once upon a time, the day's paper". Lines 2-6 can be read as either "torna retornando" ("turns returning") or "tornar e tornando" ("turns and turning"). Whereas line 6 in the original contains a separate word, the indefinite article "A," in the translation it is simply the last letter of "tornando" or of "retornando".

A commitment to visual similarity often results in solutions which may or may not be of great consequence, but which nevertheless attests to translational care. Two examples: (1) Lines 2-5 begin with either "o" or "v" (two vowels, two consonants). The translation reproduces this effect – a pair of identical vowels and a pair of identical consonants; (2) lines 7-10 begin with three vowels and one consonant; likewise in the translation. Furthermore, both original and translation contain the same number of letters (in each line and, subsequently, in total).

Based upon the two examples presented, it may be argued that the necessity for intersemiotic transposition as an intermediary step in translation of visual poetry is unnecessary if it is possible to reconstruct the poem using an identical number of letters and lines. Certainly a closer resemblance to the original will be achieved in the manner, but I submit that intersemiotic transposition affords to the translator the possibility of enriching the transcreational process and product. Intersemiotic transposition often makes evident new possibilities to the translator; these are based on characteristics of the target language which give rise to new, complementary applications (e.g., the letter "O" to represent the sun in the second example above).

Conclusion

I am convinced that the reason so few translations of visual poetry have been undertaken can be partially explained by the apparent procedural and methodological complexities involved. The third restrictive element constraining transcreation (visual proximity, in addition to lexical signification and form considerations) of visual poetry tends to dissuade all but the most resolute translators. Intersemiotic transposition as an intermediary step facilitates the process due to the simple fact that it moors the rendering to a pictorial base. Translation of lexical meaning and poetic form follow the lead, and the translator can freely experiment with the new options opened up by the characteristics of the target language. Translation of visual poetry enables experimentation with the outer limits of interlingual symbiosis and the creative interplay of orthographic, semantic, and cultural characteristics.

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