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Art and Language in Vilém Flusser's Brazil:

Concrete Art and Poetry

In his correspondence with friends and colleagues, Vilém Flusser often complained that he felt exiled to the periphery of culture and intellectual life after migrating from Europe to Brazil in 1940. Paradoxically, however, he was arriving at a center of innovation that would shape his thinking. Concrete art and poetry flourished in Brazil in the fifties, and Flusser, who had decided that his primary focus would be language, was introduced to these new vernaculars. In particular, the formal layout of Concrete art and poetry, with their rigorous approaches to space, color, and typography, would impact Flusser. “The *Gestalt*,” he wrote, and “the visual character of writing” in “Concretist experiments are rupturing discursive thought and endowing it with a second dimension of ‘ideas’ which discursive thought cannot supply.”¹ These methods served as proto-interfaces or screens, predicting the digital revolution, and offering what poet and theorist Haroldo de Campos called a “new dialogical relationship” with “imperial” languages, since Concrete art was an international language and Concrete poetry took very little vocabulary to interpret and understand.² This paper looks at Flusser’s personal engagement with these phenomena and how they informed his concept of “superficial” reading, non-linear “post-historical” thinking, and the idea that philosophy itself would eventually be practiced in images rather than written words.

Art in Brazil

Brazil was becoming a vital center for visual art in the forties. The Modern Art Week (*Semana de Arte Moderna*) in São Paulo in February 1922, with a flurry of exhibitions, lectures, poetry readings, and concerts is often seen as a seminal moment for the advent of modern art in Brazil, analogous to the Armory Show in 1913, which introduced European modernism to New York. (Also important is the emergence a few years later of the concept of *Antropófago*, or *Anthropophagy*, in which European and

¹ Vilém Flusser, *Groundless*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (São Paulo: Metaflux, 2017), 193.

² Haroldo de Campos and Maria Tai Wolff, “The Rule of Anthropophagy: Europe under the Sign of Devoration,” *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 14, no. 27 (1986): 56.

colonial artistic influences would be “cannibalized” and digested.)³ After World War II, however, Brazil witnessed a surge of activity: the opening of the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo in 1948 and the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1949; the establishment of a commercial art market; and the inauguration of the São Paulo Biennial in 1951, modeled after the Venice Biennale.⁴ The Brazilian government and wealthier classes saw the efficacy of using art as a platform, embracing abstraction in particular as a shorthand for the advanced modern state at a moment when Brazil was attempting to achieve warp-speed industrial development and gain visibility on the world stage.

Concrete art was an important component in this project. A geometric form of abstraction, devoid of figurative elements and symbolic meaning and detached from observed reality, Concrete art was developed by the Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg, the founder of De Stijl, and laid out in in a manifesto titled “The Basis of Concrete Art” published in the single of issue of *Art Concret* in April 1930.⁵ The movement argued for painting constructed from pure plastic elements – planes and colors – and avoiding nature, lyricism and sentiment. After van Doesburg’s death in 1931, Max Bill, a Swiss artist, designer, and architect who studied at the Bauhaus and later co-founded the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm (HfG Ulm, or Ulm School of Design) became a primary proponent.⁶ Bill extended Concrete art into ideas of “good form” generated by mathematical operations, and “good design” – “honest” and not merely popular or fashionable – and which would clearly influence Flusser’s later writings in which art and design were conflated.⁷

Although not a critical figure in Europe, Bill found his audience in South America. He first visited Brazil in 1941 and met with artists traveling in Europe, like Argentinians Tomás Maldonado and Juan Melé, and a retrospective of Bill’s work was mounted at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) in 1951, the same year he won the international prize for sculpture at the first São Paulo

³ See Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto Antropófago,” *Revista de Antropofagia* 1 (São Paulo, 1928): 3, 7.

⁴ The first Biennial opened in October 1951 and included 25 countries, 739 artists (228 Brazilian; 511 foreign). See Leonor Amarante, *As Bienais de São Paulo. 1951 a 1987* (São Paulo: Projeto, 1989); Rita Alves Oliveira, “Bienal de São Paulo: Impacto na cultura brasileira,” *São Paulo Perspectiva* 3 (2001): 18-28; “Verdadeira farra de tubarões a inauguração da Bienal de Rockefeller,” *Hoje* (São Paulo, October 21, 1951); Serafim, “O reporter na Bienal,” *Habitat* 5 (São Paulo, 1951): 2-21. *Habitat* was the official publication of MASP.

⁵ Theo van Doesburg, “Base de la peinture concrete,” *Art Concret* 1 (April-May 1930): 1. See also Gladys Fabre and Doris Wintgens Hötte, eds., *Van Doesburg and the International Avant-Garde: Constructing a New World* (London: Tate Publishing, 2010). The manifesto was also signed by Otto G. Carlsund, Jean Hélion, and Leon Tutundjian.

⁶ See Aracy Amaral, ed. *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte: 1950-1962*, Exhibition catalogue (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 1977); and *Arte construtiva no Brasil: Coleção Adolpho Leirner*, ed. Aracy Amaral (São Paulo: Companhia Melhoramentos; São Paulo: DBA Artes Gráficas, 1998).

⁷ See Max Bill, “The Mathematical Approach in Contemporary Art” (1949), reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, eds. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1996), 74-77.

Biennial. (He served as a jury member for the second edition of the Biennial in 1953.)⁸ Swiss-derived Concrete art conveyed rigor and rationality, contradicting the stereotype of Latin American art devoted to protesting workers or peasants and tropical flora and fauna.⁹ Ronaldo Brito wrote that, “to a certain degree, in the case of Brazilian artists, adhesion to constructive tendencies was a messianic project that involved a series of efforts to overcome underdevelopment.”¹⁰ Geometric abstraction was seen as a mode of cultural transformation in postwar Latin America, a unifying international style capable of giving rise to a new world order that would eradicate language differences (Brazilian Portuguese surrounded by nations speaking Spanish) and geopolitical borders. Its easily readable and reproducible vernacular ultimately extended into everything from painting and sculpture to posters, murals, dresses, and tablecloths.¹¹ And the Brazilian Concretists had ambitious aims. In 1956, Waldemar Cordeiro, the Italian-born Concrete painter and later cybernetic artist whom Flusser recommended for the 1973 São Paulo Biennial wrote: “Art differs from pure thought insofar as it is material and from ordinary things insofar as it is thought. Art is not an expression of intellectual, ideological, or religious thinking. Nor is it the expression of hedonism. Art is, in other words, not *expression* but *product*. The concept of productive art is a fatal blow to idealism; it releases art from the secondary status to which it had been reduced.”¹²

Flusser was aware of this development. A section *The History of the Devil* dedicated to painting reveals Flusser’s view of visual art as a paradigmatic form: “painters of concrete art are of a fundamental importance for an interpretation of current times ... They are, effectively the advanced posts of the natural sciences. Our scientists are still at the state of representational painting.”¹³ Although Flusser

⁸ Ivan Serpa won the top prize for National Painter at the same 1951 São Paulo Biennial with *Formas* (1951), a geometric abstract painting. Serpa would go on to teach many artists associated with the Neo-Concrete movement.

⁹ Key figures were Tarsila do Amaral, Candido Portinari, Lasar Segall, Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, and José Pancetti, artists searching for a national identity, or a term Flusser also used: *brasilidade* (Brazilianness). Moreover: “In Brazilian Concretist production we can easily perceive an anxiety about overcoming technological backwardness and the irrationalism caused by underdevelopment. This is why it reacted against regionalist realism, which was supported by the country’s official Left in particular. This art consisted of a hodgepodge of archaic and folkloric references, extraordinarily diverse from a formal point of view, which were put to ideological use (recall, for example, the mixture of rustic and Renaissance traditions that characterized Mexican Muralism). Until the 1960s, the Brazilian constructive avant-garde was the most important alternative to the dominance of this regionalist tendency, which managed to seduce even a middle class little attuned to leftist politics.” Ronaldo Brito, “Neo-concretism, Apex and Rupture of the Brazilian Constructive Project” [1975], *October* 161 (2017): 116.

¹⁰ Ronaldo Brito, “Neo-concretism, Apex and Rupture of the Brazilian Constructive Project,” 117.

¹¹ María Amalia García, *Abstract Crossings: Cultural Exchange between Argentina and Brazil* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), 4.

¹² Waldemar Cordeiro, “O Objeto,” *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* 20 (São Paulo, 1956), n.p.; quoted in García, *Abstract Crossings*, 225. Italics in original.

¹³ Vilém Flusser, *The History of the Devil*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2014), 165.

had decided that language would be his primary concern as a philosopher, visual art increasingly penetrated this investigation.

Concrete Poetry

The concerns of visual art often overlapped with Concrete poetry, which emerged in the early 1950s in Brazil, Sweden, Switzerland, and Austria – outside the European capitals afflicted by World War II.¹⁴ Concrete poetry was concerned with the physical aspects of language – spatial syntax, typography, color, design, sound, translation, and the poem as an object. Its roots were in many places: Stéphane Mallarmé’s Symbolist poetry; the syncopated concision of Emily Dickinson’s verse; Walt Whitman’s object-lists; the *Dinggedicht* (thing-poem) of Rainer Maria Rilke; and the experimental modernism of William Carlos Williams, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce.¹⁵ In art, Mondrian’s *Broadway Boogie Woogie* paintings – and the idea of a universal vision in the plastic arts – Bill’s Concrete art, and Josef Albers’ approach to color and composition were cited as important sources—as well as Optical Art, which was reacting against the subjective expressionism of much U.S. and European abstract art. The time-space experiments of composers like Webern, Boulez, and Stockhausen, and other concrete and electronic music served as further sources.¹⁶

Most important for Flusser was the Noigandres group, formed in São Paulo in 1952 by brothers Augusto de Campos and Haroldo, along with Décio Pignatari, and named after a line in Ezra

¹⁴ Three events occurring in 1953 are often cited as the genesis of Concrete poetry: Augusto de Campos’s completion of his *poetamemos*, a collection of poems using Anton Webern’s notion of “Klangfarbenmelodie”; Swiss-Bolivian Eugen Gomringer publishing his *Konstellationen* poems in Ulm; and Brazilian-born Swedish poet Öyvind Fahlström’s “Manifesto for Concrete Poetry” in Stockholm. Three manifestos are often cited: Öyvind Fahlström’s manifesto (although his was less circulated or influential); Eugen Gomringer’s “From Line to Constellation” (1954); and the São Paulo-based Noigandres group’s “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry” (1958). See Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, “plano-piloto para poesia concreta,” *Noigandres* 4 (1958), reprinted as “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 70-71; Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, and Haroldo de Campos, *Teoria da poesia concreta—Textos críticos e manifestos, 1950-1960*, 2nd Edition (São Paulo: Livraria Duas Cidades, 1975); and *Metalinguagem & outras metas*, 4th Edition (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1992). See also Solt, Mary Ellen, *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

¹⁵ Augusto de Campos in Roland Greene, “From Dante to the Post-Concrete: An Interview With Augusto de Campos,” *The Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Summer 1992), online at UbuWeb Papers, <http://www.ubu.com/papers/greene02.html>.

¹⁶ Rosmarie Waldrop, “A Basis of Concrete Poetry,” *Bucknell Review* (Fall 1976): 141-51. Cited in Marjorie Perloff, “‘Concrete Prose’ in the Nineties: Haroldo de Campos’s *Galáxias* and After,” *Contemporary Literature*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2001): 270.

Pound's Canto XX.¹⁷ The term "concrete," for the Noigandres, took inspiration from modern architectural developments in Brazil, which attacked the colonial-Baroque architecture: their manifesto was inspired by Lúcio Costa's architectural "Pilot Plan for Brasília" and the architectural rhetoric of architects like Le Corbusier, who first visited Brazil in 1929, and Richard Neutra.¹⁸ The Noigandres devoted themselves to developing a universal poem-object that would unite visual, verbal, and spoken elements of language.¹⁹ They also described the Concrete poem as a form of "metacommunication" that "deals with a communication of forms, of a structure-content, not with the usual message communication," and based in cybernetics: "the poem as a mechanism regulating itself: feed-back. Faster communication."²⁰

Flusser had been lucky in his friendships – and particularly his association with the esteemed literary author João Guimarães Rosa. However, in Guimarães Rosa's writing, Flusser – clearly absorbing the impact of Concrete poetry – could see the "crisis" in the literary novel, since it "presupposes a universe where the author is omniscient and manipulates events – a universe that is unacceptable today."²¹ Instead, Flusser cites the *visual* impact of Guimarães Rosa's work as its primary contribution: "In one's [*bis*] opinion, any phenomenology of language must start from a spoken rhythm and the visual *Gestalt* of written language. For Guimarães Rosa (who was never really a writer but a storyteller – *vates*), the visual *Gestalt* was secondary and the melody of the spoken language fascinated him. Curiously, however, as Guimarães Rosa's *oeuvre* progressed, he became a revolutionary of the Brazilian *Gestalt*, and the Concretists and other practitioners emerged from his groundwork."²²

The *Gestalt* of a poem or a Concrete painting was an idea championed by art critic Mario Pedrosa, who had met Gestalt psychologists in Berlin in the late twenties and written a dissertation based on Kurt Koffka's ideas and led to Concrete poetry being read in a non-linear fashion, its meaning lying

¹⁷ The Noigandres also cited Lewis Carroll, Ernest Fenollosa, Oswald de Andrade, e.e. cummings, Guillaume Apollinaire, João Cabral de Melo Neto, Sergei Eisenstein as progenitors. The lawyer, journalist, and film critic José Lino Grünewald also joined the Noigandres group in 1958. The three Paulista Noigandres poets were later joined by three *Cariocas*: Wladimir Dias Pino, Ronaldo Azeredo, and Ferreira Gullar, who would be central in the theorization around Neo-Concrete art.

¹⁸ Fahlstöm, on the other hand, was more concerned with the importance of words such as "capitalism," "alienation," and "exploitation" which signified actual conditions and could be concretized in language—and poetry. See A.S. Bessa, "Architecture Versus Sound in Concrete Poetry" (1997) on UbuWeb Papers, <http://www.ubu.com/papers/bessa.html>.

¹⁹ The "verbivocovisual" was a term coined by James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, which gave the aural, visual, and signified equal weight: "Up to this curkscrew bind an admirable verbivocovisual presentment of the worldrenowned Caerholme Event has been being given by The Irish Race and World. The huddled and aliven stablecrashers have shared fleetfooted enthusiasm with the paddocks dare and ditches tare while the mews was combing ground." James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), 341.

²⁰ "Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry," *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 70-71.

²¹ Flusser, *Groundless*, 171.

²² Flusser, *Groundless*, 178.

on the surface in the same way Flusser would argue technical images called for “superficial” reading.²³ Flusser’s argument that technical images signaled the end of linear writing (and thinking) is presaged in Concrete art and poetry’s interest in non-linear writing and composition.²⁴ In his essay “The Open Work of Art” (1955), which preceded Umberto Eco’s *The Open Work* (1962), Haroldo de Campos described poetry arranged in a “circular organization,” inspired in part by James Joyce, whose “universe evolved from a linear development of time toward space-time,” and *Finnegans Wake* “retains the properties of a circle, of the equidistance of all points on it from the center. The work is porous to the reader, accessible from any of the places one chooses to approach it.”²⁵ Likewise, Décio Pignatari in “The Contiguity Illusion” (1978) argued that traditional philosophy, spelled out in language with one letter placed next to another, elevated the “logical illusion” or “contiguity illusion”: Aristotelian logic and linear thinking, carried forward in thinkers like Hume or Peirce, which got smuggled into modern linguistics and semiotics.²⁶

Concrete poetry’s spatial syntax, resulted in a *perceptual* rather than *conceptual* approach, which is significant when one thinks of Flusser’s writing in what would be called his “phenomenological seventies.”²⁷ The Noigandres’s “Pilot Plan” called for using “graphic space as a structural agent” and following a “space-time structure instead of mere linear-temporistical development” and with a “direct-analogical, not logical-discursive juxtaposition of elements,” perceived rather than merely read, the way Flusser would later argue technical images are scanned.²⁸

²³ In 1949, Mário Pedrosa submitted his dissertation, *Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte* (On the affective nature of form in the work of art) to the Faculdade de Arquitetura da Universidade do Rio de Janeiro. See Otilia Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico* (São Paulo: Scritta, 1991); ed., *Mário Pedrosa: Forma e percepção estética* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1996); and ed., *Mário Pedrosa: Acadêmicos e modernos* (São Paulo: EDUSP, 1998). See also *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, eds. Glória Ferreira and Paulo Herkenhoff (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2015).

²⁴ In the opening statement of the *AD* exhibition edition in 1956, Décio Pignatari wrote, “Verse having been abolished, Concrete poetry confronts many problems of space and time (movement) that both the visual arts and architecture have in common, not to speak of the most advanced (electronic) music. Moreover, the ideogram, for example, can perfectly well function on a wall, internal or external.” *AD 20* (1956), np. Cited in Claus Clüver, “The Noigandres Poets and Concrete Art.”

²⁵ Haroldo de Campos, “A Obra de Arte Aberta,” *Diário de São Paulo* (July 3, 1955); published in English as “The Open Work of Art,” *Dispositio*, Vol. 6, No. 17/18 (1981): 5-7. Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989). Originally published as *Opera aperta* (Milan: Bompiani, 1962). Claus Clüver writes that, according to Haroldo de Campos, Pierre Boulez explained the concept of an “open work of art” in a conversation with Décio Pignatari; de Campos applied it to the work of e.e. cummings. See Clüver, “Klangfarbenmelodie in Polychromatic Poems,” 397, fn12.

²⁶ Décio Pignatari, “The Contiguity Illusion” in *Sight, Sound and Sense*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 87.

²⁷ See Willard Bohn, “Exploring the concrete labyrinth,” *Ciberletras*:

<http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/bohn.htm>; also included in Willard Bohn, *Reading Visual Poetry* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010).

²⁸ “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” *Concrete Poetry: A World View*, 70-71. See also Claus Clüver, “Reflections on Verbivocovisual Ideograms,” *Poetics Today*, Vol., No. 3 (1982): 137-148.

Concrete poetry's relationship with technology is also notable. The concrete poem's visual and spatial layout has been cited recently as a precursor to the computer screen, interfaces, and multimedia, and several concrete poets took their work into the digital realm, with video poems created by Lenora de Barros and Augusto de Campos.²⁹ In much the same way Borges's short story "The Garden of the Forking Paths" has been seen as a fictional diagramming of the internet, *avant la lettre*, the poet Kenneth Goldsmith has stated that: "everything [Décio Pignatari] was saying seemed to predict the mechanics of the internet ... delivery, content, interface, distribution, multi-media, just to name a few. Suddenly it made sense: like de Kooning's famous statement: 'History doesn't influence me. I influence it,' it's taken the web to make us see just how prescient concrete poetics was in predicting its own lively reception half a century later."³⁰

Similarly, in an interview from the nineties, Augusto de Campos reflected that Concrete poetry "signals the future": "Without intending, in any way, to fetishize the new powers of technology, I believe that a great part of the future of poetry will be affected by them. Some current experiences that are now just incipient, such as computer graphics, videotext, holography, and recording techniques, demonstrate that CP is at the base of a viable language for these media. ... Moreover, automation, which frightens humanists so much, might perhaps be humanized through poetry and, enriching itself conceptually, attain the dignity that the mere games of electronic entertainment cannot confer on it."³¹

These ideas overlap profoundly with Flusser's questioning in the eighties about the future of writing, technology, and automation. In *The History of the Devil*, however, Flusser cites concrete poetry and music as forms of language and considers mathematics as a "meta-language," predicting his later stance, that writing would disappear into binary code and images. Moreover, the "transcreation" of poetry between languages and the "transposition" between mediums like language and painting in Concrete poetry signals an early instance of what was later deemed a "post-medium condition" in which medium specificity, the tidy lines between processes, practices, materials, and contexts was either eroded or ceased to exist.³² In *The History of the Devil*, Flusser wrote that concrete poetry is "pictorial

²⁹ See Kenneth Goldsmith, "Curation 2.0: Context Is the New Content" in *Poesia con-creta: o projeto verbivocovisual*, 194-202, cited in Hilder, "Concrete Poetry and Conceptual Art: A Misunderstanding," 582.

³⁰ Kenneth Goldsmith, panel on Brazilian Concrete Poetry, March 6, 2001, Society of the Americas, New York, Décio Pignatari, K. David Jackson, A.S. Bessa, and Claus Clüver. Quoted in Marjorie Perloff, "Writing as Re-Writing: Concrete Poetry as Arrière-Garde," *CiberLetras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 17 (2007): np, <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberletras/v17/perloff.htm>.

³¹ Augusto de Campos in Roland Greene, "From Dante to the Post-Concrete: An Interview with Augusto de Campos."

³² See also Haroldo de Campos, "The Ex-centric's Viewpoint: Tradition, Transcreation, Transculturation" in *Haroldo de Campos: A Dialogue with the Brazilian Poet*, ed. K. David Jackson (Oxford: Centre for Brazilian Studies, Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-13; and "De la traduction comme creation et comme critique" (1967), trans. Ines Oseki, *Change* 14 (1974): 71-84. See also Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames &

language” which refuses to be “dragged” into discourse, arresting language at its roots and insisting “on the *aistheton*, on the immediate experience of the word.”³³ In the same way that he always looked for the high stakes in any practice or format, Flusser wrote: “Every web of language pulls the intellect down through the mountainside of poetry. Concrete poetry seeks to offer the intellect a support so that it can hold onto the summit. Concrete poetry is, therefore, a weapon of the Will against illusion, which seeks to prevent abstraction and to keep concreteness. This is a new weapon and its efficacy has not yet been put to the test. It is, however, a potentially dangerous weapon. The emergence of this attempt in Brazil is proof that this civilization is ready to overcome gluttony and envy through pride.”³⁴

Poetry and Painting

The affinities between Concrete art and poetry are profound, suggesting ideas that would become central for Flusser in later years around the non-linear and non-hierarchical; the optical over the discursive; universal language; and the merging of art, design, and mass communication. Claus Clüver and Gonzalo Aguilar argue that Concrete poetry looked well beyond the poetic both for inspiration and legitimization: Gestalt psychology, phenomenology, information theory, the Einsteinian space-time continuum, as well as Russian Formalism, Ezra Pound, and Mallarmé.³⁵ Augusto de Campos’s 1953 *poetamenos* were published in color and Haroldo de Campos created works either in response or homage to the abstract paintings of Piet Mondrian and Kazimir Malevich.³⁶ For instance, his Concrete poem “branco” (white) from *noigandres* no. 4 (1958), Clüver calls an “intermedial transposition of a painting into a poem,” in this case Malevich’s Suprematist monochrome *White on White* (1918).³⁷ Augusto de

Hudson, 2000). Claus Clüver points out that “One of the realizations of our discourse [around Concrete poetry] was that in the final analysis there does not exist a “pure” medium; another, that the last century created a number of new media that are mixed and fused by their very nature (e.g., installations and environments); most prominent among these are the digital media.” Márcia Arbex and Miriam Vieira, “Interview with Claus Clüver,” *Revista do Programa de Pós-graduação em Artes Visuais da UnB* (2020): 328.

³³ Flusser, *The History of the Devil*, 162.

³⁴ Flusser, *The History of the Devil*, 163.

³⁵ Clüver writes that the poets “found that in developing their art could learn just as much from painters and composers as they had from their literary models.” Claus Clüver, “Klangfarbenmelodie in Polychromatic Poems: A. von Webern and A. de Campos,” *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 3 (September 1981): 386. See also Gonzalo Aguilar, *Poesía concreta brasileña: Las vanguardias en la encrucijada modernista* (Rosario: Beatriz Viterbo, 2003).

³⁶ Augusto de Campos, *poetamenos* (São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1973); the *poetamenos* were composed between January and July 1953 and the first six texts were published in *noigandres* 2 (1955). See Clüver, “Klangfarbenmelodie in Polychromatic Poems,” 397 and “Augusto de Campos terremoto: Cosmogony as Ideogram,” *Contemporary Poetry*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1978): 38-55.

³⁷ Márcia Arbex and Miriam Vieira, “Interview with Claus Clüver,” 327. See also Claus Clüver, “The Noigandres Poets and Concrete Art,” *CiberLetras: Revista de crítica literaria y de cultura* 17 (2007): np. <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/ciberlet-ras/v17/cluver.htm>; “Brazilian Concrete: Painting, Poetry, Time, and Space,” *Proceedings of the IXth Congress of the International*

Campos was committed to using color in his work: words and syllables in his polychromatic *poetamenos* were color-coded to designate multiple speakers, but also respond to Anton von Webern's whose *Klangfarbenmelodie*, which designated "color tones" of specific musical instruments, and recall Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square* series, which explored the interaction of color.³⁸ This foreshadows Flusser's involvement in the eighties with the *Casa da Cor* (House of Color), a project inspired by Goethe's color theories in which color was coded and served as a universal language akin to Esperanto.

The São Paulo-based Ruptura artists and the Noigandres poets were closely associated – at least, at first. Their images and texts appeared together in the single 1949 issue of *Revista de Novíssimos*, and the 1952 *Ruptura* manifesto, whose layout looks like a Concrete poem.³⁹ In their writings, published in newspapers in the fifties, the Noigandres poets referred to earlier art – Malevich, Mondrian's *Boogie-Woogie* series, Max Bill, and Josef Albers – and Décio Pignatari and Cordeiro traveled to Chile together in 1953 to participate in the Continental Culture Congress financed by the Brazilian Communist Party. The painter and designer Geraldo de Barros encouraged Augusto de Campos' to produce his multi-colored *poetamenos* using typewritten copies with colored carbon paper.⁴⁰

An important moment came in 1955, when Pignatari traveled to visit Brazilian artists studying at the HfG Ulm and met Eugen Gomringer, then serving as secretary for Max Bill and they discovered that both of them were creating non-linear poems.⁴¹ The next year, *I exposição nacional de arte concreta*

Comparative Literature Association, Vol. 3: *Literature and the Other Arts*, eds. Zoran Konstantinović, Ulrich Weisstein, and Steven Paul Scher (Innsbruck: Innsbrucker Gesellschaft zur Pflege der Geisteswissenschaften (1981): 207-213; and "Painting Into Poetry," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* 27 (1978): 19-34. Both Clüver and Flusser were also acquainted with and wrote about Eduardo Kac, an artist engaged with transmedial practices, including digital poetry and bio-art. See Claus Clüver, "'Transgenic Art': The Biopoetry of Eduardo Kac," *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*, ed. Lars Elleström (Houndmills, Hampshire, UK, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 175-186.

³⁸ See Clüver, "Reflections on Verbivocovisual Ideograms," 140.

³⁹ Texts by Waldemar Cordeiro, Augusto de Campos, and Haroldo de Campos all appeared in *Revista de Novíssimos* 1 (São Paulo, 1949). The "Manifesto Ruptura" (1952) was signed by Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros, Luiz Sacilotto, Lothar Charroux, Anatol Wladyslaw, Kazmer Fejér, and Leopoldo Haar, signaling the beginning of the Concrete art movement in Brazil, "rupturing" the link with naturalist painting and promoting geometric abstraction. The group later included Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Judith Lauand and Maurício Nogueira Lima. Cordeiro would go on to become an electronic art pioneer and write a manifesto titled "*Arteônica: Electronic Art*" (1971). See Waldemar Cordeiro, *Arteônica. O uso criativo de meios eletrônicos nas artes. Idealização e realização* (São Paulo: University of São Paulo, 1972). Reprinted in English as "*Arteônica: Electronic Art*" (1971) in *Leonardo*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (1997): 33-34. For a broader, and yet more technical discussion of the overlap of poetry and painting, including their phonemic, morphemic, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic relations, see Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric: Problems in the Relation between Modern Literature and Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

⁴⁰ This is not to say that the poets were happily merging poetry with visual art. In a later interview Augusto de Campos argued that the "the radicalization of poetic elements proposed by *concretismo* ... may be realized almost exclusively in the domain of poetry. Its extension into other areas is inhibited." Augusto de Campos in Roland Greene, "From Dante to the Post-Concrete: An Interview with Augusto de Campos."

⁴¹ Brazilian artists affiliated with HfG include sculptor Mary Vieira and painter Almir Mavignier, were on the faculty, and Geraldo de Barros and Alexandre Wollner, who either spent time there or enrolled. A branch of the school in Rio de Janeiro existed in the late fifties, preceding the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (School of Industrial Design, or

(1956) opened in São Paulo, traveling to Rio de Janeiro the next year, and showcasing both visual artists and Concrete poets.⁴² An issue of *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* functioned as the catalogue for that exhibition, and included statements, poems, and reproductions of art works and a cover based on a painting by Hermelindo Fiaminghi, *Triângulos com movimento em diagonal* (Triangles with Diagonal Movement) (1956) later owned by the poet Ronaldo Azeredo.⁴³

One can see in both poems and paintings the same interest in structural procedures and interplay – the interdependence of visual elements on the canvas, disrupted grids, interlocking geometries, and conceptual, nonlinear arrangements which force the eye to move in different trajectories. In both paintings and poems, straight lines, squares and triangles, either of text or flat, solid color, traverse the surface, which needn't always be read from left to right. Concrete poets and artists both approached the grid—a traditional modernist structure and metaphor for progress and order – from a new angle, attempting to warp and bend its composition and meaning, as one can see in Augusto de Campos's "terremoto" (1956).⁴⁴

Some of the Concrete paintings and poems show remarkable structural similarities - for instance, in the interlocking designs of Augusto de Campos's "uma vez, uma vala" and "ovo novo" and Waldemar Cordeiro's *Movimento* (Movement) from 1951; Haroldo de Campos' "nascemorre" in *Noigandres 4*, 1958 and Luis Sacilotto's *Concreção 6048* (1960); or Augusto de Campos's "terremoto"

ESDI), which was created in 1962. Gomringer had seen the international exhibition of Concrete Art in Basel, Switzerland organized by Max Bill and collaborated with the artists Dieter Rot and Marcel Wyss on the journal *Spirale*, citing the Bauhaus, Hans Arp, Mondrian, and *de Stijl* as sources. See Eugen Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation" in Mary Ellen Solt, ed., *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968), 67-71; Emmett Williams, ed., *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry* (New York: Something Else, 1967); Stephen Bann, ed., *Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1967); Willard Bohn, *Modern Visual Poetry* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001); and Rosemarie Waldrop, "A Basis of Concrete Poetry" (1977) in *Dissonance (if you are interested)* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 47-57.

⁴² The exhibition ran from December 4-18, 1956 at the Museu de Arte Moderna of São Paulo and moved to Rio de Janeiro in February 1957, where it was installed in Ministry of Education and Culture. See art critic Mário Pedrosa's description of the show: "Paulistas e Cariocas" (February 1957), reprinted in *Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro na Arte (1950-1962)*, ed. Aracy Amaral, Exhibition catalogue (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 1977), 136-138; and the historical exhibition *concreta '56: a raiz da forma* at the Museu de Arte Moderna of São Paulo, September 26 - December 10, 2006.

⁴³ *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração 20* (December 1956). Regarding the dialogue between poets and painters, Clüver writes, "When I began my research in Brazil in 1974, one of the first things I was told by Augusto [de Campos] was to seek out the painters, and I consequently visited and interviewed Fiaminghi, Sacilotto, and Volpi and later Judith Lauand and Geraldo de Barros. But I also encountered the painters in the poets' living-rooms." Décio Pignatari and Ronaldo Azeredo owned works by Mauricio Nogueira Lima, Hermelindo Fiaminghi, Alfredo Volpi, and Luiz Sacilotto, and a collection of Noigandres poems *antologia noigandres 5: do verso à poesia concreta* (1962) had a cover based on a 1960 painting by Alfredo Volpi owned by Pignatari. Claus Clüver, "The Noigandres Poets and Concrete Art."

⁴⁴ Augusto de Campos, *poetamenos* (São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1973); the *poetamenos* were composed between January and July 1953 and the first six texts were published in *noigandres 2* (1955). See Clüver, "Klangfarbenmelodie in Polychromatic Poems," 397 and "Augusto de Campos terremoto: Cosmogony as Ideogram," *Contemporary Poetry*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (1978): 38-55.

(1956) – that is, the version published in Mary Ellen Solt’s compendium of Concrete poetry – and the *Gestalt* inspired canvases of Judith Lauand, the only woman in Grupo Ruptura.

Mathematics was a theoretical touchstone for both poets and painters, from Max Bill’s “Mathematical Approach in Contemporary Art” to Haroldo de Campos’ “From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of composition” (1957), which treated the poem as a kind of equation.⁴⁵ Concrete poetry’s embrace of mathematics, particularly in terms of permutations and the relationship between elements – exhausting all the semantic possibilities of a word or phrase – and meaning related to the poem as a “system” and its overlap with Information Aesthetics, should also be factored into thinking about Concrete poetry and its impact on Flusser, who touched on mathematics frequently throughout this writings, in its relationship to abstraction, music, and the universe of technical images.⁴⁶

Both the paintings and poems, then, were theoretical objects. However, they opened into a much larger field. As Décio Pignatari wrote in that 1956 issue of *AD*: “Thanks to concretism’s critical stance, it can absorb the concerns of other artistic trends in an attempt to overcome them through the coherent, objective formulation of certain problems. It is interested in all forms of visual expression, from an unwitting discovery on the façade of a commonplace laundry mat or street sign to the remarkable pictorial knowledge of a Volpi, Mallarmé’s greatest poem, or the door handles designed by Max Bill at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Ulm.”⁴⁷

This is striking, in the way it foresees Flusser’s phenomenology but also his cross-disciplinary approach in which, ultimately, functional objects would undergo a utopian transformation and art and design would merge. Flusser’s succinct summary of Concrete poetry’s importance is worth noting, then, since the effects of Concrete poetry’s project extended into Flusser’s writing and thought to the end of his life. He wrote: “Among the most important results, the “Concretist” experiments raised awareness in relation to the *Gestalt* of writing, or the visual character of writing, or the visual character of letters; the possibility of combining letters and non-letters; problems of pagination; and inserting pages into new contexts. This new awareness infiltrated not only the general press and book design

⁴⁵ Haroldo de Campos, “Da Fenomenologia da Composição à Matemática da Composição,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), Suplemento Dominical (July 23, 1957); reprinted in *Teoria da Poesia Concreta: Textos Críticos e Manifestos 1950-1960* [1965], 3rd Edition (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1987), 96-98.

⁴⁶ See Rainer Guldin, “‘To make music with visionary power’: On the Relationship of Music and Mathematics In Vilém Flusser’s Work,” *Flusser Studies* 17 (2014): 1-17, <https://www.flusserstudies.net/sites/www.flusserstudies.net/files/media/attachments/rainer-guldin-to-make-music-with-visionary-power.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Décio Pignatari, “Arte concreta: Objeto e objetivo,” *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* 20 (December 1956); quoted in García, *Abstract Crossings*, 223-224.

field but also, perhaps more significantly, poster design and subsequently urban space. This meant a reformulation of clogged up channels (from Gutenberg's galaxies) in order to transmit new types of messages. Concretist experiments are rupturing discursive thought and endowing it with a second dimension of "ideas" which discursive thought cannot supply."⁴⁸

Translation and the Neo-Concrete

Concrete art and poetry caught the attention of Max Bense, a physicist, mathematician, and philosopher at the Technical University in Stuttgart best known as a founder of Information Aesthetics.⁴⁹ Through Pignatari and Gomringer, Bense met with Haroldo de Campos in 1959, forging a connection between Brazil and Germany that, while not fraught, was fruitful.⁵⁰ Bense eventually visited Brazil several times in the early sixties, culminating in the book *Brasilianische Intelligenz: Eine cartesianische Reflexion* (Brazilian Thought: A Cartesian Reflection) published in 1965, which included images of sculpture by Lygia Clark and Bruno Giorgi, the architecture of Brasília, and a section devoted to concrete poetry, and particularly the Noigandres group. Bense did not distinguish between art and science: he organized over ninety exhibitions at in the Study Gallery at the Technical University in Stuttgart, including Concrete poetry, early computer-generated drawings – made by computer scientists – and the work of Flusser's friend Mira Schendel.

The relationship was even closer, however: Flusser and Haroldo de Campos published essays in the same issue of *Cavalo Azul* (1965) and Flusser wrote "Concreto – abstrato," a 1964 article published in *O Estado de São Paulo* in which he considered the "radical" aspects of Concrete poetry and named Haroldo de Campos as one of its primary practitioners.⁵¹ Moreover, the same year, Flusser was included in a Spanish journal devoted to important thinkers in Brazil that included Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, as well as João Guimarães Rosa.⁵² Flusser also translated a fragment of Haroldo de

⁴⁸ Vilém Flusser, *Groundless*, 193.

⁴⁹ See Max Bense, *Aesthetica. Metaphysische Beobachtungen am Schönen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1954); *Aesthetica II. Aesthetische Information* (Baden-Baden and Krefeld: Agis, 1956); *Aesthetica III. Ästhetik und Zivilisation* (Baden-Baden: Agis, 1958); *Aesthetica IV. Programmierung des Schönen* (Baden-Baden: Agis, 1960); *Aesthetica. Einführung in die neue Aesthetik* (Baden-Baden: Agis, 1965).

⁵⁰ In addition to Augusto and Haroldo de Campos and Décio Pignatari, Bense lists Ronaldo Azeredo, José Lino Grünwald, Pedro Xisto, Mário da Silva Brito, L.C. Vinholes, Wladimir Dias Pino, Edgard Braga, Cassiano Ricardo, and Alfonso Avila as "more or less" to the Noigandres and publish in the interdisciplinary journal *invenção*. See Max Bense, *Brasilianische Intelligenz: Eine cartesianische Reflexion* (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1965), 61.

⁵¹ Vilém Flusser, "Concreto – abstrato," *O Estado de São Paulo*, Suplemento Literário 383 (June 6, 1964): 1.

⁵² See *Revista de Cultura Brasileira* 11 (December 1964).

Campos's epic *Galáxias* (1963-76) for Bense and Elisabeth Walther's experimental journal *rot 25* (1966).⁵³ Flusser credits his friend Milton Vargas for bringing Max Bense (as well as Concrete poetry) to his attention, and Bense would serve as an important model for Flusser: a thinker who merged information theory with aesthetic concerns and considered contemporary visual art and poetry as advanced realms for thinking.⁵⁴ Written in 50 fragments, *Galáxias* follows a Ulysses-like narrator voyaging in Brazil.⁵⁵ "Circuladô de fulô" (Circulation of Soot) the fifteenth text in *Galáxias* was inspired by a song that Campos heard in a state fair, possibly in the outskirts of Recife. The canto-like fragment – later turned into a song by the *Tropicalista* singer Caetano Veloso, was written between February 21 and 24, 1965. The section that Flusser translated (another one in the small booklet is translated by Anatol Rosenfeld) comes from a manuscript by Haroldo de Campos, still in the Flusser Archive. Flusser and de Campos clashed on the translation and Flusser used the section dedicated to de Campos in his autobiography, *Groundless*, to jab back at Campos's stance as an *engagé* poet; he later wrote, "I felt admiration, but also a deep divergence, for engineers in poetry such as Haroldo de Campos. I had lost myself."⁵⁶

Flusser ultimately ended up closer to other Concrete poets like Theon Spanudis, an art collector and champion of Mira Schendel's work, who also contributed to Dora Ferreira da Silva's *Cavalo Azul*.⁵⁷ (He also wrote about poets like Mario Chamie, who created the "praxis-poem" which deviated from Concrete poetry by putting the emphasis on, among other things, sound.)⁵⁸ At the same time, Concrete art and poetry experienced serious push-back in Brazil in the late fifties, which would also

⁵³ See Haroldo de Campos, *Versuchsbuch Galexien*, eds. Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther, *rot 25* (Stuttgart, 1966). See also Haroldo de Campos, "Poesia de Vanguardia Brasileira e Alemã," *Cavalo Azul* 2 (1966): 70-96; "A Palavra Vermelha," *Cavalo Azul* 6 (1970): 36-50; and *Galáxias* (São Paulo: Ex Libris, 1984).

⁵⁴ Flusser, "In Search of Meaning," *Writings*, 204.

⁵⁵ Marjorie Perloff has compared *Galáxias*, in terms of its experimental techniques, to the permutations in Gertrude Stein's *How to Write* (1931) and the diaries of John Cage—but, among his other writings and activities, de Campos also translated Homer's *Iliad* into Portuguese. See John Cage, *A Year from Monday: new lectures and writings* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1968); Gertrude Stein, *How to Write* (Paris: Plain Edition, 1931); and Homer, *Iliada*, 2 vols., trans. Haroldo de Campos (São Paulo: Mandarim, 2002; Arx, 2002-03).

⁵⁶ Flusser, *Writings*, 205.

⁵⁷ See Theon Spanudis, "Três Poemas," *Cavalo Azul* 1 (1965): 83; "Nota sobre o Panorama Geral das Artes Plásticas," *Cavalo Azul* 2 (1965): 63-65. Flusser mentioned Spanudis in "Dáctilo e liberdade," *Estado*, Suplemento Literário (June 28, 1969): 4. He also wrote a blurb for the back of Spanudis's collected poems. See Theon Spanudis *poesia íntegra* (São Paulo: Livraria Kosmos, 1970) and *poética* (São Paulo: Livraria Kosmos, 1975). Flusser's copy of *poesia íntegra* includes the inscription from Spanudis, "do Vilém Flusser, com profunda estima e admiração, Theon Spanudis" ("to Vilém Flusser, with deep esteem and admiration, Theon Spanudis"), Vilém Flusser Archive, Berlin.

⁵⁸ See Vilém Flusser, "Variações sobre um tema de Mário Chamie," *O Estado de São Paulo*, Suplemento Literário, No. 663 (February 3, 1968): 3. Flusser's article considers Chamie's book of poetry *Indústria* (São Paulo: Mirantes das Artes, 1967) and the "industrial praxis" of using new words like "supermarket," which both mirrors Pop Art's use of popular images and motifs and Brazil's ideas of "development." Chamie, Flusser argues, "writes for a mass society, but writes to de-massify it."

have implications for Flusser's work. In 1957, *Jornal do Brasil* published essays by two competing factions: São Paulo-based Haroldo de Campos "Da Fenomenologia da Composição à Matemática da Composição" ("From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition"), which argued an objective poetry based in formal methods of construction and "Poesia Concreta: Experiência Intuitiva" ("Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience"), signed by *carioca* (Rio de Janeiro-based) poets which shifted the emphasis from the poem and poet to the experience of the reader.⁵⁹ A 1959 Neo-Concrete manifesto written by the art critic Ferreira Gullar and signed by Amilcar de Castro, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Reynaldo Jardim, and Flusser's friend Theon Spanudis was published in the Sunday supplement of *Jornal do Brasil*.⁶⁰ Inspired by cybernetics, Gestalt psychology and optical experiments by artists like Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely, the Neo-concretists decried the "dangerously acute rationalism" of Concrete art and poetry: "We do not conceive of a work of art as a "machine" or "object" but as a "quasi-corpus," that is, a being whose reality is not exhausted by the external relationships of its elements; a being that can be deconstructed into parts for analysis but can be fully understood only through a direct, phenomenological approach."⁶¹

The Neo-Concrete break signaled a shift amplified in the sixties and moving toward direct experience with art, championing the affective, sensorial, and subjective encounter with art over objectivity – but also circling back to the utopian constructivism of Mondrian, Pevsner, and Malevich.⁶² It was also a critique of the earlier Concrete embrace of *Gestalt*, which many felt was too reductive and simplistic: Gullar and Hélio Oiticica, who joined the Neo-concretists after the manifesto was published, were heavily steeped in the Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology – which critiqued earlier Gestalt theory – and argued that Concrete art saw "man" as a social and economic being rather than a

⁵⁹ Oliveira Bastos, Ferreira Gullar, and Reynaldo Jardim, "Poesia concreta: uma experiência intuitiva" (Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experiment/Experience), in Gullar, *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 137. Originally published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*, June 23, 1957. See also Ferreira Gullar, *Cultura posta em questão* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1965); *Vanguarda e subdesenvolvimento: ensaios sobre arte* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1969); *A luta corporal* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1975); *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007); Mariola V. Alvarez, "The Anti-Dictionary: Ferreira Gullar's Non-Object Poems," *Nonsite* 9 (2013), <http://nonsite.org/feature/the-anti-dictionary-ferreira-gullars-non-object-poems>; and Monica Amor, *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944-1969* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

⁶⁰ Ferreira Gullar, "Manifesto Neoconcreto," *Jornal do Brasil: Suplemento Dominical*, Vol. 67, no. 66 (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, March 21, 1959). Signed by Amilcar de Castro, Lygia Clark, Reynaldo Jardim, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanudis, and Franz Weissmann, with a layout designed by Reynaldo Jardim.

⁶¹ Gullar, "Manifesto Neoconcreto."

⁶² See Ronaldo Brito, "Neo-concretism, Apex and Rupture of the Brazilian Constructive Project" [1975], *October* 161 (2017): 89–142.

more holistic *being-in-the-world*.⁶³ This foreshadows Flusser, who made heavy use of the word *Gestalt* in his writings – but increasingly embraced the phenomenological idea of *being-in-the world*, thread through the philosophies of Heidegger and Husserl. The call to eradicate the gap between art and life would also be felt in Gullar’s urging to move art from individual “contemplation” to “action” and *participation* and, a key element of Flusser’s proposal for the 1973 edition of the São Paulo Biennial, based on a communications model, and which argued for the exhibition as “laboratory” rather than the display of discrete aesthetic objects.⁶⁴

Ultimately, Flusser’s closest affiliations were with artists such as Samson Flexor (1907-1971), who was included in *Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo* (1949), the inaugural exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna in São Paulo, and who founded the first abstract painting workshop in Brazil,⁶⁵ and Mira Schendel (1919-1988), who created an idiosyncratic body of work that rigorously engaged both abstraction and language. (Schendel was friendly with Haroldo de Campos, who wrote a poem for one of her exhibitions and recommended her to Max Bense, who exhibited her work several times in Stuttgart and dedicated an issue of *rot* to her graphic works.)⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Concrete art and poetry impacted Flusser in inestimable ways, laying the groundwork for ideas that would appear in later writings. Beyond spoken and written language, these experimental forms of visual art and poetry informed what would become, in Flusser’s universe, the “superficial” reading of technical images, the eclipse of text by images, images-as-philosophy, and, finally, the era of non-linear post-history.

⁶³ Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical perspective proposed “a new frame of reference involving intentionality and structures of behavior in problem solving as well as learning, objections to naive realism in Gestalt Psychology, and some new categories for a descriptive, reflective, and sometimes analytic point of view. For that point of view, gestaltist descriptions are not about the contents of minds conditioned by real but unobservable objects but instead are about the real things which we perceive about us, ourselves and others included.” Lester Embree, “Merleau-Ponty’s Examination of Gestalt Psychology,” *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 10 (1980): 117. Gullar had read Merleau-Ponty’s *The Structure of Behavior* (1942), *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), and “Cézanne’s Doubt” (1945) by the time he wrote the Neo-Concrete manifesto. See Ariel Jiménez, *Ferreira Gullar in Conversation with Ariel Jiménez* (New York and Caracas: Fundación Cisneros/Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, 2012), 69-70.

⁶⁴ Gullar’s seminal essay “Theory of the Non-Object” (1959) was written after an encounter with a Lygia Clark sculpture. These also foreshadow Flusser’s essays “The Non-Thing I” and “The Non-Thing II” in the eighties. See Ferreira Gullar, “Teoria do não-objeto” (“Theory of the Non-Object,” *Jornal do Brasil*, Sunday Supplement (December 19-20, 1959) and “A Dialogue on the Non-Object” (1960), *Experiência neoconcreta: momento-limite da arte* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), 149-150.

⁶⁵ A monograph devoted to Flexor’s work would also use this title. See Alice Brill, ed., *Samson Flexor do figurativismo ao abstracionismo* (Exhibition catalogue, Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 1990).

⁶⁶ See Haroldo de Campos, *Mira Schendel*, brochure for a 1966 exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro; Haroldo de Campos, “uma arte de vazios,” in *no vazio do mundo*, ed. Sônia Salzstein (São Paulo, Editora Marca D’Água, 1996), 260-261; and “Interview with Haroldo de Campos,” *no vazio do mundo*, 227-241. See also Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther, eds. *rot 29, mira schendel: grafische reduktionen* (Stuttgart: edition rot, 1967).

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