The Anti-Dictionary

The Verbal Non-Object and Neocncrete Poetry, Books, and Installation Art

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the combination of sensorial elements of the word—sound, graphic script—will always be dependent on what results as “verbal” expression, and that, moreover, all of the established relationships envision a transcedent totality: the concrete poem must be produced with the aim to become a living reality and its fruition, a full act.

Ferreira Gullar, Oliveira Bastos, Reynaldo Jardim, 1957

The verbal non-object is the anti-dictionary: it is the place where the isolated word radiates (irradia) its entire charge. The visual element married to it there serves the function of rendering explicit, of intensifying and concretising [sic] the multivocality the word contains.

Ferreira Gullar, 1959

The cover page of the Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil on June 23, 1957, juxtaposed two manifestos by the competing schools of concrete poetry in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo below the words “CISÃO NO MOVIMENTO DA POESIA CONCRETA” (Split in the concrete poetry movement) (figure 1.1). “Poesia concreta: experiência intuitiva” (Concrete Poetry: An Intuitive Experience), written by the carioca poets Ferreira Gullar, Oliveira Bastos, and Reynaldo Jardim, responded to the paulista poets and the corresponding essay by Haroldo de Campos, “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição” (From the Phenomenology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition). This debate-in-print followed a panel discussion.
earlier in the year in which, according to the popular magazine, O Cruzeiro, the poets “almost came to blows” (figure 1.2).

The symposium coincided with the reinstallation of the I Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta (ENAC or First National Exhibition of Concrete Art) in Rio in January 1957, following its inauguration at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in December 1956. The exhibition demonstrated how the Brazilian Concrete project was always conceived as a literary and fine art movement with the integration of works on display by poets and visual artists. The coming together of the two groups, ironically, led to their subsequent rupture, as publicized in a series of articles by Waldemar Cordeiro, artist and leader of São Paulo’s Concrete art group, Grupo Ruptura, and Gullar and Mário Pedroza in Rio. Gullar battled simultaneously a two-front attack against São Paulo poets and artists. The desire to define his ideas in the two fields requires “the need to build an esthetic theory that would serve both for poetry as well as plastic arts,” in the words of Lorenzo Mammì.

The return to 1957 and the split in Brazilian Concretism points to the porous boundary between poetry and visual arts and the ways in which the debates in the movement influenced, in particular, Gullar’s “esthetic theory.” Though the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art featured poetry and art, the São Paulo poets and artists did not form a group. In contrast, Neoconcretism in its initial formation included three poets: Gullar, Jardim, and Theon Spanúdis, and throughout its (short) life, it centered the relationship and exchange between poets and artists. Neoconcretism—the movement and the idea—must be defined as the investigation into the affinity of poetry and art, or the potential for words, colors, and forms to find renewed expression. Removing these elements from the worlds of math, science, and popular culture, the Neoconcretists created objects for the individual reader to experience intimately.

With a focus on Neoconcrete poetry and art the chapter counterbalances the scholarly attention given to the debates between Cordeiro and Gullar, and therefore the understanding of Neoconcretism solely as a visual arts movement. As a result, new objects of analysis come into view, including Gullar’s theorization of the non-object as including poetry and the significant contributions of Jardim and Lygia Pape to the group. In particular, Pape pioneered modes of working between fields, often leading the group with her explorations into the affinity of poetry and art. Across the movement Neoconcrete artists continually shared ideas, pushed each other formally and conceptually, and strengthened their individual practices.

Though Neoconcretism officially emerged in 1959, many of the group’s ideas and creative practices were already in formation in 1957. “Poesia concreta: experiência intuitiva”
FIGURE 1.2. “O ‘Rock’n Roll’ da Poesia,” O Cruzeiro, March 2, 1957. The article covers a symposium on poetry in coordination with the opening of the I Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta in Rio. Seen in the photos: On the left, Haroldo de Campos stands with his arm outstretched and Hélio Oiticica sits in the front row to the left; on the right, Ferreira Gullar can be seen standing. Collection D. A. Press.
"ARAIAL O VERSO" é o grito de revolta que sacudiu os jovens poetas e escritores brasileiros, presente em todas as letras uma nova linguagem poética: a poesia sem versos. "Essa é uma das de- bates merecida" — brilho a moderna Glicira Márquez, quando fala temporaneamente, em mesmo palco, no Ministério da Educação e no Ensaio Nacional de Arte Contemporânea. "Essa poesia é um bom exemplo a ser seguido." E o respeito dos jovens escritores que ficam em silêncio ao observar essa revolução na poesia.

Texto de Luís Engler de Andrade
Fotos de Gerardo Viola

O PAPA de concerto e o poeta (Diário Pigmenta), um advogado, com 20 anos e em mãos, que ensina aos leitores muitas assimergidas na chamada "poesia de 40", com a qual sepecula viciosamente.

— Os poetas brasileiros do segundo grupo-pensante (com exemplo de João Cabral de Melo e Henrique Távora), que, com a proclamação de 1945, desaparecem a pensar nas coisas que a poesia moderna que atravessa e o estado agudo com "Uma Grijl de D'or", de Malleow, de 50 anos atrás.

A Diário Pigmenta Jornal, com os irmãos Haddad e Augusto de Campos, e se dedicaram a tirar ao trabalho do soldado, na Literatura moderna, e nas coisas que a poesia moderna que atravessa e o estado agudo com "Uma Grijl de D'or", de Malleow, de 50 anos atrás.

O manuscrito Ferreira Gullar com a poesia moderna de grupo, e os co-episos e amigos, principalmente Malleow ("Uma Grijl de D'or", 1971), Pera Picca, Conrado e Jass Acey.

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Enquanto que tudo mundo atende os romances, Manuel Bandeira faz "pensamento", que o CRUZÉRIO politico em primeira mão. Ele explica assim: "Depois de ter um sonho de grupo concerto, acesta um pensamento que os sopreplantar os seus próprios papéis de poesia uma traves de concerto..." Apesar disso, a parte disso que não desista de pensar aconte- cem para os poetas em coro. A CRUZÉRIO politico em primeira mão.
The AnTi-DicTion Ary featured the incipient ideas that would take hold in the Neoconcrete manifestos two years later—a deep sense that poetry and art must be expressive, not imitative nor predeter-
mined, but “a full act.” The final paragraph of “Poesia concreta” reads as follows:

The concrete poem must be similar to an everyday experience—affective and intuitive—so as not to become, in the field of language, a mere illustration of catalogued scientific laws. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that the combination of sensorial elements of the word—sound, graphic script—will always be dependent on what results as “verbal” expression, and that, moreover, all of the established relationships envision a transcendent totality: the concrete poem must be produced with the aim to become a living reality (uma realidade viva) and its fruition, a full act (um ato pleno). Otherwise there would be no point in writing it.

Like the turn to abstract art as a repudiation of mimesis, language should no longer simply describe the world. It must be “a full act,” a way of being in the world, or what the poets termed, “um modo de realidade.” As with art, and central to the Neoconcretist credo, the poets resisted forms of poetry that copied and externalized preexisting ideas, and yet words do not bend in the same way as shapes and colors that can eliminate representation without falling into nonsensical meaning and a scramble of letters. The poet works with words that carry with them assigned meanings. The notion of the readymade, whether words, geometric shapes, or colors, challenged the Neoconcretists to imbue their forms with a renewed energy, and in turn, to invite the reader to experience the rebirth of a new world.

Neoconcrete objects, including the poems, books, paintings, and sculptures analyzed in this chapter, shaped and exemplified Gullar’s conception of the “não-objeto verbal” (verbal non-object), or objects that no longer fit a singular category—neither poem nor book nor art. The term, não-objeto verbal, can be found in his text from 1960, “Diálogo sobre o não-objeto” (Dialogue on the Non-Object), a response to and clarification of “Teoria do não-objeto” (Theory of the Non-Object, 1959). The visual non-object thus far has obscured the verbal non-object and the ways Gullar always thought and wrote about art and poetry together, demonstrating once again the need to define Neoconcretism as an interdisciplinary practice and theory. The chapter traces this creative synthesis in Gullar’s writings to present how his ideas emerged from these cross-boundary practices.

Gullar, Jardim, and Pape in their production of não-objetos verbais explored the limits of the design of words on a page from single pages or painted forms to books and finally to a built environment. In constructing a more complex habitat for the word each artist sought to close the gap between language and the reading subject. Even as the term non-object was invented to describe these new objects that erased the border between poetry
and art no new name was applied to the person experiencing the work, despite the trou-
bling of their own categorization. Are they a reader, a viewer, a spectator, a user, or a partici-
pant? Most often they occupy these positions simultaneously when reading, look-
ing, and handling the non-object. I use reader in order to emphasize the integration of
poetry and art and, moreover, to communicate a sense of the person “reading” the work
for its meaning—an act distinguished by the Neoconcretists as subjective and durational.

Neoconcretism desired art to be a personal rediscovery of the world as an expressive
experience. The focus on the individual, the subject, and the intimate structured the ways
the artists made their work. Yet through the personal engagement with the Neoconcrete
object, the reader began to imagine themselves as part of a larger society. In a 1957 text that
was published in the newspaper and presented at the panel discussion to inaugurate the
opening of the national exhibition, Gullar described the inextricable relationship between
a subject and their culture, since meaning could only be given and received within that
exchange.10 The subject, whether the artist or the reader, can only operate from within
their particular world of shared knowledge and experiences. Thus, the individual is not
isolated, but rather always between or intersubjective—intervolved, to use Maurice
Merleau-Ponty’s term. The social function of art, its potential to construct national cul-
ture, accumulates from the subject. Gullar recognized that culture intersected with class,
in the sense of what preceded that “shared” point of view, but he did not elaborate further.

The Affinity of Neoconcretism interrogates more closely this blind spot in Gullar’s vision of
poetry, art, and culture, and the middle-class values that undergird the movement.

The Neoconcrete idea of art was in tension with that of the paulista poets who opened
their practice to the increasingly industrialized and commercialized world around them:
advertising, neon lights, and commercial products, while the cariocas explicitly rejected
popular culture. Rehearsed in the early sections of this chapter, the cacophonous voices of
the two cities lay bare the differences in the production of modern culture and the contradic-
tions of postwar Brazil. In many ways Gullar’s vision of Neoconcretism presented a complex
and often uncomfortable relationship with a particular version of modernism, a temporality
born on the exchange of the past for the future. Given his location in Rio de Janeiro, a capital
city with “an expiration date,” and not in São Paulo, Gullar argued against a modernity
defined only through rationalism, progress, and locally, the ingrained theories of Positivism.11

Neoconcrete poetry and art instead valued a modernity that contained the possibilities
for human expression, lived time, sensorial experiences, and the refusal of art as a com-
modity form.12 Neoconcrete modernism attempted to forestall the instrumentalization of
culture, and as a result, its art retained the romanticism and potential for transcendence of
past traditions, though grounded in the intertwining of mind and body. The subjective, in its many meanings—the personal and the perceptual as derived from the senses—refused to be displaced in favor of the objective.

**CONCRETE POETRY: AN INTUITIVE EXPERIENCE**

Poets in Brazil, along with Eugen Gomringer in Switzerland, pioneered concrete poetry, or the use of a minimal number of words and an emphasis on the materiality of language as a structuring principle of the poem.¹³ In 1952, three poets in São Paulo—Décio Pignatari and the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos—published a magazine, *Noigandres*, to feature their concrete inventions. The poets, referred to by the name of the magazine, continued the magazine until 1962. Around 1955 Gullar began interacting and exchanging ideas with the paulistas with the publication of his book, *A Luta Corporal*, the previous year. He was subsequently invited to participate in the *I Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta*. Gullar contributed pages from his fifty-page poem “O formigueiro” (*The Anthill*) to the exhibition as posters in which the letter “g” acted as an ant, while the São Paulo–based Concrete poets installed poster-poems.

In their 1957 manifesto, “Poesia concreta: experiência intuitiva,” the carioca poets named their fight first and foremost through its title, which underscored their belief in the significance of intuition to any artistic practice, especially against a mathematical approach suggested by the Noigandres text. Haroldo in the essay, “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição,” called for the construction of the poem beforehand and through a mathematical or quasi-mathematical process.¹⁴ He wrote, “Concrete poetry instead seeks a mathematical structure planned before the word . . . The definition of structure which fits the poem will be the exact moment of the creative option.”¹⁵ Poetry would emerge from “a constructive rationalism” (“da racionalidade construtiva”).¹⁶ For the Noigandres, the words of the poem would be organized and overdetermined by a rule of numbers. The poets sought to evacuate the expressive subjectivity of the author, and therefore release poetry from hermeneutics based in romanticism. Instead, the poem would exist for itself as a concrete object and meaning would be generated through the formal structure of the poem or in his words, “the content of the poem will always be its structure.”¹⁷ With a mathematical rigor, the Concrete poem intended to become a useful object—an object with purpose, the cultural equivalent of the industrial and economic construction of a modern Brazil.

The Neoconcrete artists, on the other hand, rejected the call by the Noigandres for rigorous objectivity. They wrote, “Only a scientific mistake could lead one to suppose that
the being of language is in its formalisation [sic]. The proposed submission of poetry to mathematical structures is proof of this error.” The carioca poets interpreted the shift to a poetry of mathematics as a formalization of language, and therefore an end to language as mutable, affective, and expressive. The poet, according to the cariocas, should “concretize expression,” not by prioritizing speedy communication, but instead by creating “the word’s new, vital habitat.” The essay most strongly assailed the Noigandres’ idea of poetic apriorism, instead privileging the intrinsic time of the poem—the creative process as its inception and the reader as its culmination. Gullar would also reject this same idea of apriorism in Theo van Doesburg’s definition of concrete art from 1930. The carioca poets emphasized the defining roles of the subject and object or the reader and the poem, whereas Haroldo and the Noigandres focused on the production of the poem. The ideas of the dynamic relationship between the reader and the poem and the time of the poem was then applied to visual art when Gullar wrote about Neoconcrete art.

Despite their differences, both groups remained invested in the production of objects—a manner of working that echoed more with art practices of the early twentieth century than the second half, with its emphasis on the performative and the ephemeral. Gullar, Bastos, and Jardim challenged the traditional structure of language as a representational system and proposed it as “um modo de realidade” (a mode of reality of that world). Language and more specifically the poem no longer “stand-in” for an object. The poem is the object—“a durable object,” indicating both the sense of its materiality and temporality. The Noigandres in their central manifesto, “pilot plan for concrete poetry,” from 1958 also articulated similar intentions, “A concrete poem is an object in and for itself, not an interpreter of external objects and/or sensations more or less subjective.”

One defining quality of Concrete poetry was an emphasis on the materiality and the concreteness of language or the transformation of the word into the object. And yet, the fundamental difference between these two groups of poets was how the object operated, what it communicated, and how it moved through the social space. In contrast to the efficiency extolled by the paulistas, a durable object would last, not flash like blinking lights on a night street. I underline this point because the categorization of the object leads to the way the plastic art object will be framed and, in particular, Gullar’s theorization of the non-object. The definition of the object is the critical distinction for the two groups of poets.

In 1958 Gullar composed a concrete poem that repeated the word “verde” (“green”) in three columns with four rows and then placed the word “erva” (“grass”), just once, outside to the right of the last row.
In Gullar’s ideal composition, the reader experiences the color green, repeated and layered; they are immersed in the color until it becomes an object in the form of grass. But Gullar recognized the poem could be grasped with one glance, rather than a slow reading with the reader moving through each word with the sudden and pleasant surprise of a new word, “grass.” He found readers could immediately perceive the word “verde” and its repetition and thus skip ahead to “erva.” This realization emerged from a conversation with a friend; Gullar wrote about the incident, “I asked him: ‘Did you see how the repetition of the word green makes the word grass pop out of it?’ His answer: ‘No, I didn’t see anything like that, because I didn’t read it word by word. As soon as I realised [sic] it was a repetition of the word ‘green’ I stopped reading.’ This ‘reading’ of the poem ran totally against my intentions, according to which it was indispensable that each instance of the word verde be read one by one until culminating in the word erva.”

As a poetic experience, Gullar wanted the reader to be a full participant in the act of reading, involved in the duration of the unfolding of the object itself, and immersed in the time of the word. Durational time was organic time, associated with the body, the human, the lived world, or as he stated elsewhere “to eliminate ‘time’ in language would mean a descent into chaos.”

At the same time, Gullar’s “discovery” of the foreclosure of the reading experience of “erva” is surprising given that concrete poetry by definition “is concerned with making an object to be perceived rather than read.” Like Ezra Pound’s ideograms inspired by what he understood as the imagistic language of the Chinese, concrete poetry shows its meaning through the structure of the poem rather than communicating it through a linear-discursive drift. Imagined as a gestaltic whole, the poem as a visual sign engages the reader like a street sign or an advertisement—an active, graphic object. Augusto de Campos had originally envisioned the Poetamenes poems (1953) as “luminous letters which could automatically switch on and off as in street advertisements.” Meaning lies on the surface. A concrete poem asks the reader to look at it rather than through it.

Sergio Delgado Moya argues against this reduction of concrete poetry to simply a visual object, noting that seeing and reading can be simultaneous, and points to the ways the poets resisted language as a system of “usefulness.” Advertising and logotypes bridged poetry with popular culture, in this sense returning to Oswald de Andrade’s call for
poetry to connect with modern Brazilian society. And yet Gullar’s objection to the reading of “erva” hinged on his recognition and refusal of the persistence of the surface as the site of meaning production (and simultaneously distances Neoconcretism from Minimalist Art, or as Frank Stella famously said, “What you see is what you see”). In contrast to painting, which can be perceived in a glance, Gullar formed his understanding of poetry as something that happens in time, and not in space, therefore rejecting Delgado Moya’s argument for the coincidence of perception and interpretation.

The Neoconcretists conceived of the poem in deep time, against the shallow time of these other objects. For the cariocas, poetry must be contrasted to “the advertisement and advertising processes in general, in which language is employed solely to trigger a reaction in the reader, not to create an object for him.” For them, the poems in Noigandres became products of industry and consumerism, and therefore situated the poet as an industrial manufacturer or a scientist. In contrast, the carioca poets began “Poesia concreta: experiência intuitiva” by removing concrete poetry and communication from the realm of efficiency or speed as a critique of the object too closely associated with the factory, laboratory, or market shelf.

The São Paulo poets, on the other hand, did not shy away from what I have already called the object as surface or, in this quote from Haroldo, the object as industrial: “It [concrete poetry] responds to a notion of literature, not as craftsmanship but, so to speak, as an industrial process. Its product is a prototype, not the typical handiwork of individual artistry. It tends toward a minimal, simplified language, increasingly objectified, and for that reason, easily and quickly communicated.” A result of the industrial process. A prototype. Easily and quickly communicated. Add to this the aim of the Concrete poets to remove any authorial gesture (“A poem does not say this or that, but it says itself, is identical to itself and dissimilar to the author . . .”), and we begin to comprehend Gullar’s framing of Concrete art as a machine, as a product of an assembly line, as a surface without an inside, or what Jon Tolman calls “the thingness of things” and Rachel Price names “a thing-oriented aesthetics.”

Through grouping the constellation of words Gullar used to attack that which is not Neoconcretism—extreme rationalism, mathematical structures, advertising, efficiency, scientific objectivity, positivist attitudes, machines—I define more clearly his determination to critique the plans for modernity occurring in Brazil. Gullar and Neoconcrete theory and practice contested the government-sponsored vision of modernity, and its cultural extension in the São Paulo school, characterized by creative production as market production. In the late 1950s and especially with the presidential election of Juscelino
Kubitschek in 1956, Brazil had moved forward with a plan for advanced modernization through industrialization and the international privatization of the economy. The construction of Brasília usually serves as the emblem of Kubitschek’s forward thinking and, by turn, a megalomaniacal, style of governing. Yet Brasília formed only one piece of a larger plan for national development that focused on energy, transportation, industry, food, and education. João Manuel Cardoso de Mello and Fernando A. Novais described how “Between 1945 and 1964, we lived through the decisive moments of the industrialization process, with the installation of the most advanced technological sectors, which required large-scale investments.” They go on to list for thirteen pages in their essay everything new in these years including industrial production, manufacturing plants, electronics, mass-produced food, supermarkets, shopping centers, restaurants, fast-food, toiletries, domestic cleaning products, mass-produced clothing, synthetic materials and the pharmaceutical industry. Brazil had entered into a highly competitive and global capitalist market, both as producer and consumer.

Neoconcretism was a reaction to this advanced modernization and developmentalism, and positioned itself against the Noigandres group as its cultural representation. Scholars continue to debate whether the São Paulo concrete poetry project uncritically reproduced the national policies or operated as a “decoder” of market capitalism and consumer culture. Regardless, Gullar enacted a criticism of this vision, of progress and rationalism, or in other words of the nation-state and its ideology. Amid these “golden years,” Gullar turned against that which Brazil had been waiting for—the delivery of “Fifty Years of Progress in Five.” In many ways Kubitschek served as the fulfillment of republican Brazil’s destiny (and therefore an erasure of the intervening Vargas years), both with the construction of a new federal capital mandated by the constitution in 1891 and the implementation of plans set forth by the Brazilian sect of Positivists who decorated their new republican flag with a shortened adaptation of Auguste Comte’s most famous aphorism of “Love as the Principle, Order as the Base, and Progress as the End” to “Order and Progress” in 1889.

Positivism strongly influenced the formation of Brazil as an independent nation and continued to sway contemporary thinkers who exerted power over the ideology of developmentalism in the late 1950s. Founded by Comte in France in the wake of the French Revolution, Positivism traveled to a Brazil-in-transition in the 1850s, was studied widely by the 1870s, and became central to the foundation of the Republic in 1889. Positivism described a philosophy based on “provable knowledge” and espoused the study of science, mathematics, and engineering as the route to the natural order of society. Comte was
the father of “sociology” or as Robert Nachman described, “Comte established a hierarchy of the sciences which served as a basis for an ultimate discipline aimed at integrating and tapping the whole of science in order to discover therein the immutable laws of society.”

This philosophical system spread throughout the Americas in the latter half of the nineteenth century, where within Brazil it gained popularity with the middle classes especially through educational institutions. The Republic’s Positivists, most often engineers, professors, and military officers, along with government officials, called for state intervention in the development of the economy and industry, as prescribed by Comte’s mandates (an effect of his disillusionment with the disintegration of the French state after the revolution). These theories gained ground again in the 1950s with the work of sociologists and economists, most notably Florestan Fernandes, Celso Furtado, and Nelson Werneck Sodré. Though perhaps not self-professed Positivists, these men’s ideas played a critical role in the reformation of Brazil, both in the national and international sphere and in political and intellectual circles. For example, Celso Furtado’s groundbreaking study *Formação econômica do Brasil*, a history of Brazil and its economy, led to the development of “dependency theory,” or a critique of the international economic system in which developed countries extract and profit from the resources of underdeveloped countries without benefit to the latter. Developmentalism emerged to combat this global inequality by investing in national production and consumption of those goods, ending the reliance on more expensive imports. Interestingly, Furtado’s book was published the same year as the “Manifesto neoconcreto.”

Developmentalism and Brazilian culture came together when the Noigandres group literally envisioned themselves as working from the economic-cultural capital, São Paulo, and adapted Lucio Costa’s Plano Piloto de Brasília of 1956 for their manifesto “plano-piloto para poesia concreta” (1958), which ends with the statement, “the poem-product: useful object” (“o poema-produto: objeto útil”). Weaving together the history of poetry, film, literature, music, and art, the manifesto traces in clipped sentences and phrases the development of concrete poetry and its result as a product. As already discussed, the poets aligned their creative process with the industrial, and by proxy then with politicians and economists who argued for the making of the nation through labor, production, and consumption.

The concrete poets have often been compared to designers. Importantly the Instituto de Arte Contemporânea (Institute of Contemporary Art), based on the Bauhaus and the Chicago Institute of Design, opened in São Paulo in 1951. Scholars including Jon M. Tolman, Gonzalo Aguilar, and Antonio Sergio Bessa have categorized the poets in...
different positions within the field of design. Tolman emphasized Concretism’s desire for functionalism as a way to engage the public with “creativity as a process akin to industrial design.”\(^5\) Aguilar agreed, but rather than taking cues from “an object like a piece of bread or a newspaper,”\(^5\) he pointed to the influence of architecture and its integration of “planning, design and construction,” all common to Concrete poetry.\(^5\) He went on to say that the concept of design allowed for a theorization of their poems as products and prototypes in which “the mechanical dislocates the expressive,” and for the engagement of the social and cultural sphere through functionality and the utilitarian. Bessa identifies the group as engineers, architects, and designers in their promotion of precision and in their “highbrow, overly theoretical approach.”\(^5\)

Critically, both the Concretists and the Neoconcretists were interested in forming relationships with their “public,” but the Concrete poets, via utility, efficiency, and productivity, attempted to transform their poetry into popular culture or applied arts, whereas the Neoconcretists continued to defend the autonomy of the arts, not in the sense of medium-specificity, but rather that art must not become a tool of the state and should remain an individual experience. Though both groups theorized participation, the Concrete poets established a relationship between the artist and viewer as if handing over raw materials to a receiver who could participate in the construction of a new modern Brazil.\(^5\) Their poems—prototypes and industrial products without authorial intermediation—can be considered the means to empower the people into agents of cultural change. Neoconcrete participation, on the other hand, operated more on the individual, rather than the collective, through mythology and self-discovery. The Neoconcrete model of living centered the subject and the potential for inter-relational knowledge and experience as a way to assemble a modern Brazil and cast off a history of colonization and old-fashioned ideas, but without realizing this was impossible unless it included a more rigorous examination of class ideology.

THE NON-OBJECT: THE ANTI-DICTIONARY

In “Teoria do não-objeto,” published in the Sunday supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* on December 19–20, 1959, Gullar wove together his version of the history of European avant-garde art, with references to Cubism and Russian constructivism, and his views on contemporary art, like Tachisme and Neoconcretism (figure 1.3).\(^5\) The Rio de Janeiro-based newspaper and its supplements served as the main vehicles for publishing and publicizing Neoconcrete works and texts. In the simplest terms, according to Gullar, the

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\(^5\) The Anti-Dictionary