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The Aesthetics and/or Politics
of Neoconcretism:
The Case of Ferreira Gullar

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar pursued a project he named “neoconcretism” — a project apparently distinct from his preceding and subsequent poetry, and bookended by the explosive economic success of developmental populism, at its beginning, and Brazil's 1964 military coup, at its end. What is the relation of Gullar's neoconcrete period to Brazilian history? What is at stake, aesthetically, in Gullar's poetic project? What are its politics? By way of addressing these questions, this essay attempts to shed light on the question of the relation between artworks and their social determination: in Marxist terms, between superstructure and base.

Keywords: Ferreira Gullar, concrete poetry, neoconcretism, Marxism, phenomenology, Brazil

In 1930 José Ribamar Ferreira, one of eleven children, is born to an unsuccessful shopkeeper in São Luis, the coastal capital of the provincial Northeastern state of Maranhão — the second-poorest state in Brazil — in a house recalled in *Poema sujo* [*Dirty Poem*] as a *porta-e-janela*: a one-window, one-door house. Attending technical school, residing in a house without books but living in backyards and streets, he devotes himself at 13 to poetry, which is less astonishing than the fact that he will become one of the major poets of the twentieth century. At 19, annoyed that a worse poet has a similar name, he publishes his first book of poetry, in a Parnassian vein, under the name Ferreira Gullar.

In 1954, as the so-called “golden years” of rapid economic development in Brazil gain momentum, he publishes *A luta corporal* [*Bodily Struggle*] in Rio de Janeiro, having moved there for an editing job. The innovations of *Bodily Struggle* attract the attention of the concrete poets — Décio Pignatari and the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos — in São Paulo. In 1956 he breaks with the São Paulo concretists, forming the neoconcrete group with the artists Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Amílcar de Castro, and later Hélio Oiticica, among others — a break that becomes decisive in 1959 when he writes the “Neoconcrete Manifesto” in the name of the group, and, under his own name, “Theory of the Non-Object.” While all of the members of the group are theorists in their own right, Gullar’s writings establish the coordinates within which their several positions gain coherence. One year later, Ferreira Gullar rejects vanguard aesthetics — suggesting to Oiticica that the neo-concretists should mount a final, “terrorist” exhibition in which they blew up all their existing works — to join the directorship of the CPC, or Popular Centers for Culture, which championed a “popular revolutionary art” that would produce “spiritual weapons for the material and cultural liberation of our people.” In 1964, the year of the counterrevolutionary coup that would usher in twenty-one years of military dictatorship, he joins the Communist Party; in 1968 he is imprisoned; in 1971 he goes into exile in the Soviet Union and then, seemingly trailed by right-wing coups, in Chile and Argentina. In 1975, living in Buenos Aires under precarious conditions, he writes *Dirty Poem*, his long-form masterpiece. On his return to Brazil in 1977 he supports himself and his poetry by writing journalism and for television.

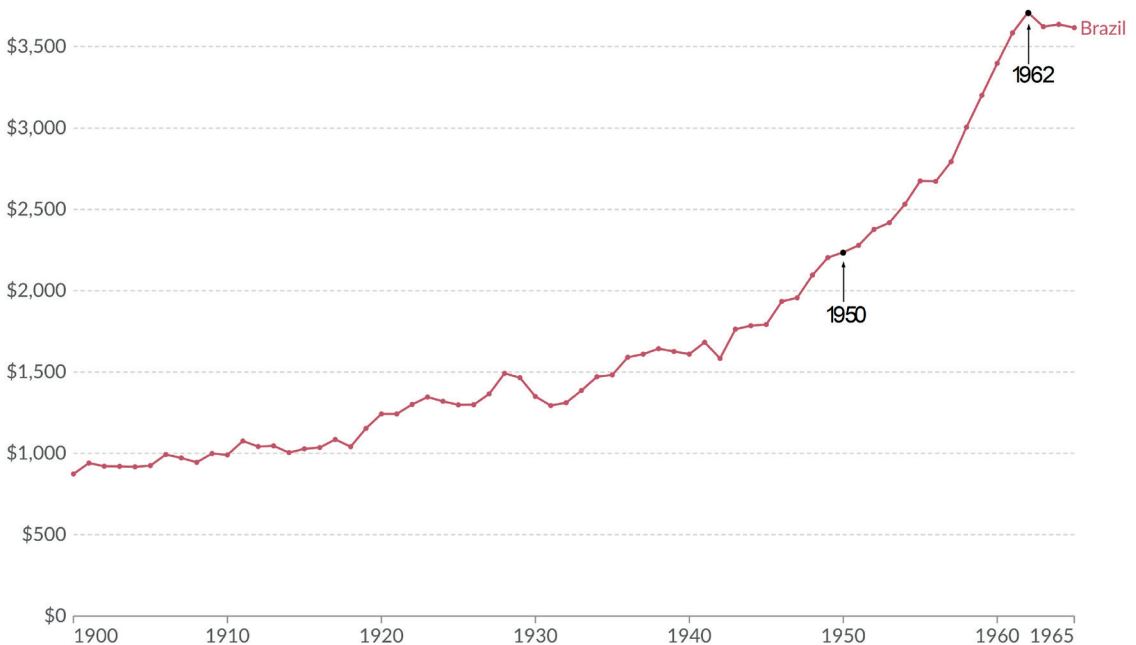
It is hard to imagine a poetic career more clearly inflected by the political and economic changes that characterize the Brazil of the middle of the twentieth century. In particular, the sequence that leads from

Bodily Struggle (poems written 1950-1953) through the neoconcrete period to Gullar's break with neoconcretism (Gullar begins his work with the CPC in 1962) fits neatly between the beginning of the period of explosive economic growth, import substitution, and rapid industrialization that characterized the 1950s, and the moment in the early 1960s when that growth cycle runs up against its own social and economic contradictions, ultimately leading to the coup that sent Gullar into exile.

GDP per capita, 1900 to 1965

Our World
in Data

This data is adjusted for inflation and for differences in the cost of living between countries.



Data source: Maddison Project Database 2020 (Bolt and van Zanden, 2020)

OurWorldInData.org/economic-growth | CC BY

Note: This data is expressed in international-\$¹ at 2011 prices.

1. International dollars: International dollars are a hypothetical currency that is used to make meaningful comparisons of monetary indicators of living standards. Figures expressed in international dollars are adjusted for inflation within countries over time, and for differences in the cost of living between countries. The goal of such adjustments is to provide a unit whose purchasing power is held fixed over time and across countries, such that one international dollar can buy the same quantity and quality of goods and services no matter where or when it is spent. Read more in our article: [What are Purchasing Power Parity adjustments and why do we need them?](#)

As we shall see, this is precisely how Ferreira Gullar himself understands his neo-concretist phase from the vantage point of 1963: as an anomalous development tied not organically to the art that comes before

it, after it, and around it, but as a byproduct of the ideology of rapid modernization that characterized the Brazilian 1950s.

Marxism's wager is that history is a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity: a single process unfolding in paroxysm and crisis. How this wager is to be played in the sphere of culture is less clear. Classically, class struggle is understood to be the determining instance. But if that is the case, it is hard to see why culture would hold more than illustrative interest. Engels's recourse to some kind of reciprocal action between culture and class struggle is incoherent, negating the principle it seeks to explain: if culture can intervene in history, then history is not the determining instance. The correct and seemingly harmless replacement of forms of the word "determine" with forms of the word "condition" similarly abandons the specificity of the Marxian hypothesis: is anyone today formalist enough to deny that history, even in the specific form of class struggle, in some way conditions culture? As with most theoretical propositions, the hypothesis that the relations of production are the determining instance is only interesting in its absolute form. The endless attempts, Althusserian in inspiration, to produce accounts of multiple vectors of causality, are then equally fruitless: if there are multiple vectors, then the primacy of any one vector is quantitative and contingent. The same must be said for "semi-autonomy" and its cognates: if a certain degree of autonomy is possible in the interstices of power, then it is possible anywhere, and we are dealing once more with a merely quantitative balance of forces. I could go on like this all day. The problem seems to call for solutions and stymie them with equal insistence.¹

I don't propose to resolve the matter with this essay. What I want to show instead is that while the matter cannot be resolved conceptually, it can be, and routinely is, resolved concretely. As with the antinomy of theory and practice, whose unity is not a third concept but rather the Party, the unity of determination and autonomy is not an idea, but an act — a poem, for example — that it is our task to understand.

It may help us in this instance that Ferreira Gullar's poetic trajectory lends itself to being described as a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, a single process unfolding in paroxysm and crisis.² Many of the Rio concretists understood their artistic development as the unfolding

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1 I want to thank Paweł Kaczmarski for pointing out the intransigence of the problem, and a path to a solution. Until I heard his talk "A Note on Base and Superstructure" in 2023, I had taken refuge in translating "bestimmen" as "to condition." An elaboration of that talk will be published in *nonsite*.

2 I am far from the first to make this claim. For a particularly insightful commentary on Gullar's work as a whole, see Durão and Frungillo 2014.

of a dialectic, but Gullar seems to have understood his work that way before his experience of concretism.³ Attempting to read Gullar's poetry systematically, one begins to understand not only that the unit of the book is as pertinent as the unit of the poem, but that even the unit of the book is subordinate to the trajectory of "Gullar's poetry," by which I mean Gullar's poetry as he has organized it. The canonical collection of his work, *Toda poesia*,⁴ is all poetry but manifestly not all of Gullar's poetry, as it omits his first published book of poetry and begins with the section "Seven Portuguese Poems," which itself begins with a poem numbered 3.

The first book in that collection, *Bodily Struggle*, begins, after some throat-clearing, in sonnets — more or less Sicilian rhyme, more or less well-behaved decasyllables — and ends in the apparent anarchy of a private language that only intermittently allows us to glimpse an obscure meaning — a meaning on which it nonetheless insists. What is Gullar after, and why does it produce not so much poems as a poetic process, of which the poems we read are the legible trace? To begin to answer this question, I will turn to a few of the poems that begin *Bodily Struggle*: three astonishing and deceptively difficult sonnets, numbered 5, 6, and 7, that appear to make a group. The reader will have to bear with me: in the interests of space I will be doing something less than a full close reading of these poems, and in a language alien to the sonnets themselves. (The poems, in Portuguese and in English renderings, appear in full in an appendix.) Our purpose will be to establish that the animating preoccupation of Gullar's neoconcrete sequence is present "from the beginning" — meaning, always, from the beginning as Gullar presents it.

The middle sonnet will concern us most, but its sense emerges in relation to the other two. All three poems take place in relation to an absence. In the first, the unobtained object has the pronoun "she," and her possession is endlessly deferred: "Whenever I approach she leaves / as though she feared or hated me." But this absence, which appears through most of the sonnet as a frustration, appears in the last tercet as redeemed, endowed with unexpected content: "Vocabulary and body — fragile gods — / I reap the absence that burns my hands." This absence,

3 As we shall see below, concretism and neoconcretism are markedly different in their aesthetic bases and aims. However, in this paper I do not make a distinction between concretism and neoconcretism in Gullar's work, because his concrete poems were neoconcrete before Gullar had invented the name.

4 See Gullar 2006. Unless otherwise noted, all selections from Gullar's poetry are from this edition.

first lamented and then, in the last line of the first sonnet, accepted, is taken up in the first line of the last sonnet as actively sought: a perpetual liminality that accompanies the two sides of the poet's being — “vocabulary” and “body,” in the terms of the first sonnet, “light” and “clay” in the words of the third — but is neither of them: “Between what [of me] is rose and what its necessary mire / flows a river without mouth and without origin.”⁵

In the middle sonnet, the absence or failure is in the past. While the aftermath of a romantic encounter remains a plausible occasion for the poem, especially if taken in isolation, the (possibly misleading) “she” of the previous poem is replaced by an unnamed “terrible magic,” a feminine noun-adjective pair that may have been the referent of “she” all along:

6

I trample under my sordid feet the myth
that the heavens sustains — and I subside upon a chaos.
I tread on a morning fallen to the cement
like a violated flower. Curséd angel,

(I wanted to divulge the birth
of a terrible magic) now I hesitate,
and burn — and everything is the collapse
of the mystery that I suffer and demand.

I hesitate, it is true, but I await the astonishment
with which I will see descending from remote heavens
the lightning that will cleave my shoulder.

When peace comes, afterglow of earthquakes,
I myself will gather the star, or stone,
that remain of me under my ruins.

In the first and third sonnets of this trio, the quatrains, tercets, or couplets cleanly organize the logic of the poems, which are integrated

5 My translations throughout are functional guides to their originals. No attempt has been made to transfer rhythm, meter, rhyme, or perspicuous lexical ambiguity into English. When these come up in the commentary, a reader unfamiliar with Portuguese can still, it is hoped, follow them in the original with the help of the translations. The poems and their rough translations are presented in an appendix.

as well by the rhyme (see, for example, where “nasce” [is born], in the second quatrain of the first sonnet [see appendix], draws together around the intervening, enjambed and prose-like image, with the “face” from the previous quatrain). The endings in this second sonnet of the sequence, however, contain one conspicuous feminine noun (ending in the letter and sound *a*), while every other line in the poem ends in a masculine noun, masculine adjective, or first-person verb (ending in the letter[s] and sound *o* or *os*). Further, precisely the same structure of rhyme overcoming enjambment obtains in the second and first sonnets at precisely the same place (over the break between the first and second quatrain), but where in the first sonnet the rhyme arrives at the end of a sentence as a satisfying and surprising closure, in the second one, under discussion, it struggles to overcome the abrupt parenthesis that introduces the second quatrain, does not complete the thought and, because of the unusual asymmetrical rhyme scheme of the two quatrains, does not land with similar force. If the form fits the thought, as it does in the sonnets numbered 5 and 7, who is to say that the thought wasn’t made to fit the form? In performing the struggle of the sonnet form to contain its thought, sonnet 6 performs the authenticity of its insight and anticipates the abandonment of the sonnet form.

But what is that thought? The romantic pretext is deliberately maintained (“violated flower” being a commonplace since Sappho and Catullus), but doesn’t account for much. The “terrible magic,” the “mystery I suffer and require,” the “astonishment / with which I will see descending from remote heavens / the lightning that will cleave my shoulder” would be humbug in a love poem. If we take the order of these three sonnets to be narrative, the gathering that ends the second sonnet “in the afterglow of earthquakes” — a recasting of the “reaping ... that burns my hands” that ends the first sonnet — would prepare us for what happens in the third sonnet: the conviction that there exists a liminal accompaniment to world and earth, an un-nameable current that accompanies what is nameable, that subtends what can be accessed by means of the “fragile gods” of “vocabulary” and “body” — language on one hand, the sensory-motor apparatus on the other. In other words, the unattained “mystery” and “magic” of the second sonnet are to be identified with the almost-present, liminal “absence” of the first and third sonnet, and its non-attainment in the poem is the failure to which the second sonnet points. Like Coleridge, Gullar had a talent for writing successful poems about poetic failure.

In terms that these three poems set out with remarkable coherence and efficiency, what Gullar wants poetry to accomplish is, in the terms

In the aftermath of poetic failure — the failure to name or sense what cannot be named or sensed — the poet awaits (or chases) the “astonishment” of an illuminating intuition that will set the process in motion again. This is the dialectic that Gullar will pursue from *Bodily Struggle* through the end of the neoconcrete cycle.

under which Gullar wants to accomplish it, unattainable. Consciousness — as Fichte had it, the “I” that accompanies all my representations — is not accessible the way my proper name, my sensorium — the “I” of the ego — is accessible. Rather, it is always encountered in the present perfect. Reflection finds the “I” *to have been there* all along. “Between what is rose and what its necessary mire / passes a river without end and without beginning.” Poetry, here, chases an experience that is neither language nor the senses. But without language and the senses, no experience, only “chaos”: rather than the birth of a magic, the collapse of the mystery. In returning to the fragile gods of vocabulary and body, poetry merely points to an emotion: “I am alone, I am sad, etc.” (Veloso 1989).⁶ But in the aftermath of poetic failure — the failure to name or sense what cannot be named or sensed — the poet awaits (or chases) the “astonishment” of an illuminating intuition that will set the process in motion again.

This is the dialectic that Gullar will pursue from *Bodily Struggle* through the end of the neoconcrete cycle. It will, I hope, become much clearer as it gains concreteness as Gullar’s poetry progresses.

It comes as a mild surprise that Gullar follows three three lofty, abstract meditations with an ode to a rooster. But in fact it is a logical turn, animals being halfway, as it were, between body and language. With regret, I will largely pass over “Galo Galo” (see appendix; “galo” is rooster), partly because we will encounter the animal later. Quickly, I would want to suggest that the poem aims at Gullar’s problematic, but misses — or, better, performs, in Coleridgean fashion, aiming at it and missing. The adjective “medieval” at the beginning of the poem announces that the transfer of alien (human) attributes to the animal will not be subtle; meanwhile the “not so raucous” cry at the end, which has become the poet’s, is deflated as the “mere complement of dawns.” In transferring attributes between the animal and the poet — between o galo and o Gullar — the poem (ironically) sentimentalizes the bird and (ambivalently) demystifies the poem, without touching on what, as we shall see later, the animal and the poet might have in common.

“Pears” considerably deepens this problematic.

Pears

The pears, on the plate,
rot.

⁶ The song concerns, among other things, the becoming-meaningless of forms.

Does the clock, above them,
measure
their death?

Let's stop the pendulum. Do-
ing so, would we halt the
death of the fruit?

Oh the pears are tired
of their shapes and of
their sweetness! The pears,
finished, spend themselves in the
glow of being ready
for nothing.

The clock
doesn't measure. It works
in the void: its voice slips by
outside bodies.

Every thing is the tiredness
of itself. The pears consume themselves
in their golden
calm. Flowers, in their everyday
garden bed, burn,
burn, in reds and blues. Everything
slides past, and is alone.

The common
day, everyone's day, is the
distance between things.
But the cat's day, the feline
and wordless
day of the cat who passes among the furniture
is its passing. Not among the furniture. Pas-
sing as I
pass: between nothing.

The day of the pears
is their rotting.

Is it tranquil,
the pears' day? They
don't crow, like the rooster.

Cry
 for what? if the song
 is only an ephemeral
 arc leaping from the
 heart?

The singing had
 never to stop —
 never. Not for the sake
 of the song (song that
 people hear) but
 because sing-
 ing the rooster
 is deathless.

The temporality of the pears' decay, however we measure it, will have nothing to do with the measure, which is arbitrarily imposed, slipping by, outside of bodies. Seconds and minutes, like words, are conventions: the common measure doesn't measure things, but only the distance between them: the blooming flowers and the rotting pears can be compared, but they have nothing to do with each other.

The non-adhesion of words to things is not a problem for the cat, whose day is its passing, or the pears, whose day is their rotting, or the rooster; but it a problem for beings that posit and then inhabit universals like seconds and minutes. That is, it is a problem for beings with language, like poets: it is the "voice" of the clock that slides past bodies; the feline day, like the day of the pears and of the rooster, is "wordless." It is a problem for poets because words, being universals, slide past their referents, which are particulars. Unlike with the rooster of the earlier poem, who was metaphorical tenor or vehicle, depending on the stanza, here the poet's concern is with the being of the cat's day, not with a metaphorical use of it. The cat's day is spent passing among furniture. But cats' days don't pass among furniture, because cats don't have words or concepts like "furniture." Language passes by the day of the cat the way seconds pass by the rotting of the pears. What then does the cat pass through? Nothing that can be conveyed by language — and therefore, conveyed by language, "nothing." The final turn of the screw is that this paradox applies to the poet — or anyone else — as much as it does the cat: the cat "passes... as I / pass: between nothing." We no more sit on "furniture" than we live in seconds. *Now*, as I write this, I sit not on "chair," but on *this* chair.

But what my words actually say, what language says, is that “this” chair is any “this chair,” and “now” is any now. Gullar seems to have presented himself with an impossibility: what is sought as a gift of language (the poem) cannot appear in language: in the words of a poem from later in the same volume: “Give us the flames of an / exact / vocabulary / vacuum.”

That poem immediately precedes “Roçzeiral,” which is untranslatable. If I make an attempt to translate parts of it, you will see why:

ROÇZEIRAL

Au sóflu i luz ta pom-
pa inova’

orbita

FUROR

tô bicho

‘scuro fo-

go

Rra

...

ENFERNO

LUÍZNEM

E ÔS SÓES

LÔ CORPE

INFENSOS

Ra

CI VERDES

NASCI DO

CÔFO

RAZEGARDEN

Whend light yr splen-
dor innovates

orbits

FUROR

’n nuts

dark camp-

fu

Rre

...

INFIRNO

AMBERTNOT

ANDTHEBONELY

DE BODIE

HOSTILES

Re

ZO GREEN

BORNIN

CREEL

Translating the poem “Roçzeiral” presents a specific difficulty. It is not simply that one is forced to sacrifice meaning, which happens with all translation and especially poetic translation. Rather, it is that one cannot know the meaning of all of the words in the first place, even though one might be able to account for the existence of the whole. “Roçzeiral” is not a word: çz is, as far as I know, an impossible combination of letters in Portuguese. The concatenation of letters represents, perhaps, a perfect vocabulary vacuum. But it also combines *roçada* and *roseiral*, a cleared plot of land and a rose garden, and that gives us a kind

of clue as to how to proceed.⁷ But we are feeling in the dark among an indefinite number of possibilities. “Roçar” is a suggestive word in Portuguese, containing, besides the sense of clearing land: grazing, touching, nearly touching, rubbing, brushing, dragging, gliding.⁸ Is this relevant? By the time one arrives at the string of capitalized letter sequences, one has some guideposts (“ENFERNO” and “INFENSOS” are both actual words, or close, that seem to form the core of the letter cluster), but one finds oneself, I think necessarily, simply guessing at what words are being grafted together or ripped apart, and why.

Yet the poem insists on a meaning even as it withholds it. The intuition, meditation, or experience of which the desolated flowerbed (?) is the occasion, marker, or internal event, is the precise equivalent of the day of the cat. It refuses to be “slid past” by a pile of universals (“I could say [your life or mine] in two / or three words or even / in one,” Gullar writes in “Vida,” to which we will return). But it does so only by being, like the day of the cat, “without words.” Despite that, the poem insists on being the token of an experience. If we trust the poem, the intuition existed. But if the letters on the page are meant to embody or to stand for — in some sense to index, “as if language could be born together with the poem” as Gullar says in an interview — an experience that they cannot convey — then the poem is a failure, and of a kind we have seen before (*Ferreira Gullar in conversation with / en conversación con Ariel Jiménez* 2012, 58). If it cannot convey the experience then we can only know it embodies the experience because we are told it does: “I am lonely, I am sad, etc.” The difference is that now the experience no longer has a name. As with the distance traveled between “emotion” and “affect” in contemporary discourse, it is not obvious that the movement represents an advance. In any case, it is a repetition of “the collapse / of the mystery that I suffer and demand” foreshadowed in the sonnet numbered 6.

I will turn shortly to Gullar’s next book of poetry, which begins, as Gullar told us it would, by gathering together what remains, star or

7 In her extraordinarily perceptive comments on a version of this essay, Jennifer Ashton suggested that if Gullar’s problematic can be represented by the formula $z \Rightarrow \neg x \wedge \neg y$ (where x is immediate experience, embodied but unreflected, and y is its linguistic representation, which inevitably slides past it) then Gullar’s poetic aim is represented by the unvoiced letter z in “roçzeiral.” This reading, both attractive and speculative, rescues the poem in some degree from the impasse described below, which nonetheless continues to inhere in the poem. Unexpected echoes in Gullar of the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*, also pointed out by Ashton, deserve much fuller exploration than I can begin to give them here.

8 “Gosto de sentir a minha língua roçar a língua de Luís de Camões” — I like to feel my tongue brush Luís de Camões’s tongue (Veloso 1984).

stone, from the collapse that ended *A luta corporal*. (In the poem “Vida,” “destroyed flowerbeds” reappear in ordinary language: “canteiros destruchados”). But since it is poems like this “Roçzeiral” that first attracted the attention of the concrete poets in São Paulo, I want to take a moment to show how different Gullar’s project is from theirs: so much so that what needs explaining is not so much the difference between concretism and neo-concretism, which North American commentators seem generally to have difficulty grasping, but rather how such superficial similarity ever managed to be taken for a congruence in the first place.

Out of a large, fascinating, and internally various corpus, I will exhibit just part of one poem, “ALEA I: Variações Semânticas,” (“ALEA I: Semantic Variations”) by Haroldo de Campos. It was written in 1963, almost a decade after *Bodily Struggle* was published, but it is almost a pure embodiment of the line pursued by the 1958 “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry”: “the concrete poem is an object in and for itself, not an interpretation of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective sensations. its material: the word (sound, visual form, semantic charge). its problem: a problem of functions-relations of this material” (de Campos, de Campos, Pignatari 1958). I reproduce the poem’s second half:

N E R U M
D I V O L
I V R E M
L U N D O
U N D O L
M I V R E
V O L U M
N E R I D
M E R U N
V I L O D
D O M U N
V R E L I
L U D O N
R I M E V
M O D U L
V E R I N
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V R E N I
I D O L V
R U E N M
R E V I N

D O L U M
 M I N D O
 L U V R E
 M U N D O
 L I V R E

programa o leitor-operador é
 convidado a extrair outras
 variantes combinatórias
 dentro do parâmetro semântico
 dado
 as possibilidades de permutação
 entre dez letras diferentes
 duas palavras de cinco letras cada
 ascendem a 3 628 800

[*program* the reader-operator is
 invited to draw out other
 combinatory variants
 within the semantic parameter
 given
 the possible permutations
 using ten different letters
 two words of five letters each
 reach 3,628,800]

(de Campos 1966–1967, 33)

The word “aleia” is similar in meaning to the French *allée*; “álea” is a word for chance; “alea” is not a Portuguese word, but is the beginning of the word “aleatory.” As the author’s note (or perhaps the explanatory part of the poem) says, this part of the poem is a combinatoire, two non-words of five letters each, scrambled into thirteen anagrams out of three million possibilities, ending in “MUNDO LIVRE,” “Free World,” which appears as a punch line but must also be understood as a precondition. Like “Roçzeiral,” this poem is untranslatable. But unlike that poem, all its parts can be completely accounted for; in fact, it accounts for itself — completely — in the explanatory note. Interpretation (which is never complete) does not come into play. In order to render the poem in English one wouldn’t translate the words that de Campos has written, much less attempt to render the meaning the words convey: one would, instead, follow the procedure that de Campos follows. In English, “FREE

WORLD” has nine letters, not ten, and two of them are e, so the procedure wouldn’t work. “FUNKY WORLD” would work, but that wouldn’t have the same meaning at all. Would it matter? Only inasmuch as it has a different “semantic charge”: a different vibe one might say, a commercial-comical one rather than a portentous-political one. But semantic charge simply exists in its full, unproblematic plenitude (that is the point of saying “semantic charge” rather than “meaning”). There is no concern that language might slip past the world of concrete experience because language as such — “the common / day, everyone’s day” of words and clocks — is, for de Campos, taken as the absolute starting point: “the word (sound, visual form, semantic charge).”

Whether the São Paulo concretists maintain a consistent anti-humanist program — whether the choice of FREE WORLD is really only a “semantic charge” rather than a meaning after all is an important question. The pseudo-Latin appearance of the combinations chosen suggests the latter: “alea” is not a Portuguese word, but it is a Latin one: a game of chance, as in Julius Caesar’s “Alea iacta est,” the die is cast.⁹ The association of “FREE WORLD” with the Roman Empire certainly looks like an irony, and *eo ipso* a meaning — the “interpretation of [an] exterior object,” namely post-Truman Doctrine U.S. foreign policy — even if the poem’s claim that a game of chance lies at its origin insists that this cannot be the case. The point for now is that unlike de Campos, Gullar does not flirt with or claim non-meaning or objecthood as the essence of the artwork. Non-meaning — the São Paulo concretists’ “semantic charge,” Gullar’s own “common / day, everyone’s day” — is central to Gullar’s poetry, but always as the dialectical complement of an impossible-necessary meaning. What in Gullar is a dialectic is, in “ALEA I,” an unacknowledged antinomy.

From Gullar’s second book of poetry, *O vil metal (Base metal)*, I will discuss in depth only one poem, which seems to me to enact a sort of hinge between *A luta corporal* and the neoconcrete sequence.

Biografia

Naquela época a obscenidade de teu sexo recendia por toda a casa

9 Polish Concretist Stanisław Dróżdź’s *Alea iacta est* (2003-2005) is, in the thoroughness of its commitment to non-meaning, a purer expression of the Brazilians’ “pilot plan.” In the version recently exhibited in the National Museum in Wrocław, the work consists of six books, of 1,296 pages each, which together contain photographs of all of the 46,656 possible combinations of six throws of a die. See <https://mnwr.pl/stanislaw-drozdz-alea-iacta-est-2003-2005/>

A meu lado na varanda num jarro de louça uma natureza contrária à minha emergência

virente

Estávamos há quase dois séculos da Revolução Francesa

E aquela enorme flor amarela que nasceu no quintal junto ao banheiro

Pólen corpo incêndio

Biography

In those days the obscenity of your sex perfumed the whole house

Next to me on the balcony in a porcelain crock a nature contrary to my own was
emerging

virid

It was about two centuries after the French Revolution

And that enormous yellow flower that sprang up in the yard next to the loo
pollen body blaze

The poem consists of four very long lines and four unattached words. The long lines are capitalized but don't end in periods. The first three of these are sentences, or can be; the last one is a nominal clause, of similar weight and length to the sentences. The first unattached word, the adjective "virente," virid, modifying "nature" in the previous line, cleaves the poem almost precisely in two both visually — it divides the two sets of two long lines — and syllabically. It is hard to overemphasize the way the poem balances on, and emphasizes, "virente." The last three unattached words are nouns, most readily accounted for as appositives with the flower as antecedent.

What are we to do with the seemingly anomalous line "It was about two centuries after the French Revolution?" What does the French Revolution have to do with the sex of the poet or the sex of the flower? It has just as little to do with one as with the other — and that, paradoxically, is its significance. The plant in its earthen pot is a "nature contrary to my own." How? History is relevant to one and not the other: only the poet is a post-revolutionary poet; a post-revolutionary flower is just a flower. But from the standpoint of sex — more precisely, from the standpoint of sex in its antediluvian, corporal aspect — the French Revolution or any other historical event is equally distant from the fertile plant and the horny poet. It is worth noting that, but for the change from the second person of "your sex" of the first line to the third

person of the “nature contrary to my own” in the second, the sex that “perfumes the whole house” could as well be vegetal as human, and with a mildly metaphorical meaning of “pollen,” the last words could refer to the poet as well as the plant. But if the difference between the plant and the poet is erased by the irrelevance of history to the body, it is reinscribed in a different way in that the poet, but not the plant, is confronted by the irrelevance: in this way the nature of the plant is “contrary” to the poet’s after all. The poet lives in a world of concepts, which are just as much nothing to the flower as they were to the pears. The poet is, as Robert Pippin characterizes consciousness in a commentary on Cézanne’s *Large Bathers* paintings, “amphibious”: at the same time antediluvian body, all the way down, and self-reverting activity, all the way down (Pippin 2014, 96–130).¹⁰

(With this in mind, the last three stanzas of “Pears” — where the rooster of “Galo galo” makes a second appearance — appear in a new light. Formally, the relation between the poet and the rooster is completely different than it had been in the earlier poem. What in the “Galo galo” had been a metaphorical comparison, is here a kind of extended pun. In the final two stanzas, the same words apply to each, but with different meanings. Is this the same rooster as the one in “Galo galo”? It doesn’t matter, and that’s the point. The rooster is “deathless” because at every dawn there will be a rooster crowing somewhere. Something similar can be said of poets — but that is precisely the opposite of what we mean when we say a poet is “deathless.” The rooster can only be deathless in the first sense; poets can be deathless in both, opposed ways.)

This internal cleavage within the truth does not render the distinction between poet and plant false: on the contrary, this cleavage is the truth that it cleaves. Its ground is not external reality or nature, but only self-reverting activity itself. There is no external token or evidence that one could invoke to establish the total identity and total difference of the world humans live in, which is entirely saturated by concepts, and a world that is itself innocent of concepts: any token or evidence that one would invoke would already be saturated by concepts. This identity and difference is, in other words, a self-grounding truth: a poetic version of Fichtean intellectual intuition.

In this compact game of identity and difference, the poet’s relationship to history can provisionally be made irrelevant, but his relationship to himself — consciousness — cannot. We are observing the same process

10 The theme of the “amphibious” is taken up much earlier and throughout.

that produced the earlier sonnets. In the opposition between the French Revolution and sex, we recognize the opposition between “light” and “clay” in the sonnet numbered 7, between “vocabulary” and “body” in the sonnet numbered 5; the river that between them runs “without end and without beginning” is the opposition that runs between the plant and the poet — and between the poet and himself — which cannot be made irrelevant even though it is not present to consciousness: indeed, it is when “I forget myself” that “the long solitary river awakens” (7).

But if we are on the same terrain, we are not at the same point in the process. What is new is a formal discovery, the emphasis on the individual word: in the poem “Vida” (“Life,”) “any word that hides / and shows the abraded body of time.” The dialectic of language both “sliding past” or hiding time (the day of the fruit or the cat) and being the only means by which to attempt to grasp it is simply acknowledged. I could say your life in the single word “body,” and that, like any universal, would both get something and miss something. It is in this sense that words are base metal. (In that poem, “esmerilado,” abraded, derives from “esmeril,” emery: that is, corundum, aluminum oxide, an oxidized and hence base metal). Something of this was already at work in *Bodily Struggle*, as individual words — fruit, time, rooster, body, torch — gained specificity throughout the book, without losing their universal character: that is, they became, in a precise sense, concrete.

In *Base metal*, this process of concretion reaches self-consciousness and becomes something like a method. “Biography” is a particularly successful instance. We have already seen that a tremendous rhythmic emphasis is borne by the word “virente,” virid. Both words mean “verdant” and “thriving” but also suggest “virile,” though neither word is etymologically related to it. Even as I use the word now, it contains, if I’m not mistaken, in the wake of Gullar’s poem, the impurities he combined with it: something of the obscenity of life in its indifference to what we make of it, what in the rooster’s cry inheres in the poem: a sense that is not in any dictionary and perhaps not anywhere but Gullar’s poem (and, after it, in us). Gullar’s entire neoconcrete sequence, as we will see, can be understood a pursuit of this effect, of producing the word as such as a dirty word, encrusted with impurities of phenomenal life. “Biography” is followed by a set of poems called “Definitions,” in which a word becomes the title, and the poem becomes a kind of definition. To an American reader, these are reminiscent of Gertrude Stein’s “Tender Buttons,” and are less successful than poems in which a word suddenly gains concreteness simply through its use: as for example in “Occurrence,” almost an anecdote or joke that reveals how “*todos*,” “all,”

can never literally mean what it says, and that therefore categorial distinctions are made in its use and understanding (as when Gullar titles his anthology *Toda Poesia*) that are not explicitly present to mind in the moment it is used.

“Biography” is, on my view and I hope on yours, a successful poem. In “Roçzeiral,” the intuition and the poem achieved a kind of identity. We can take that on faith, and perhaps we do; but precisely because they are identical one can’t grasp the other. In a sense which must remain obscure (and that is just its problem), the poem can only be the token of the intuition. However, in poems like “Biography,” Gullar accomplishes something more, precisely at the moment where “virente” comes not only to mean, but to embody something of the intuition of the obscenity of life as such, the disturbing dissonance of its simultaneous “contrariness” to consciousness and identity with it. If “Roçzeiral” and “Biography” — and specifically the word “virente” in that poem — both embody, then, their respective intuitions, only “Biography” can be said to grasp it.

But it still does not succeed in doing what Gullar wants a poem to do. “Biography” captures a truth: the distinction between and identity of what can be rendered irrelevant to experience and what is the precondition for any experience. As I have suggested, this is something like Gullar’s version of Fichte’s “intellectual intuition.” But this truth is outside the intuition itself: once it is extracted, the intuition, and the poem, are disposable, inessential with regard to the truth. But what Gullar has been after, from the beginning, literally chasing after in the sonnet numbered 5, is the intuition itself. Not *to have it*, because as has been understood between the sonnets and “Biography,” one cannot not have it: it has “neither beginning / nor outlet, and its course, which is constant, is various.” Nor to represent it, since representations return us to the “fragile gods” and slide past their object. The aim is rather to bring it to consciousness through the reader’s own experience. (Fichte also felt this need, and also had trouble accomplishing it. “Think of a wall,” he ordered his students on the first day of class. “Have you thought about the wall?”)

Only apparently paradoxically, what appears to be an aesthetic break — the beginning of the neoconcrete sequence — does not emerge from a poetic crisis but is rather a direct development out of *Base Metal* and its discovery of the impurity of the word as a poetic resource. Indeed, one of the last poems in *Base Metal* — the end of “Vida,” whose beginning we have already seen — could almost be describing experiments from the end of the neoconcrete sequence:

I could write my name
 on rock
 gullar
 but I'm not a date nor
 the bar of a sundial
 I write
 torch
 on lips of dust
 leprosy
 vertigo
 cunt
 any word that disguises
 and shows the abraded body of time
 cancer
 wind
 orangery

It should be clear that there is nothing in Gullar's poetry of the transcendent identity of poetry with the Word, with poets as the "unacknowledged legislators of the world," as Shelley had it. The word is the word in its use. The problem is how to present the word in its impurity, rather than as a pure universal that "slips past" its object: the word that "shows" rather than the word that "disguises." But these are, just as the poem says, the same word.

With this it should be clear that while there has been no poetic cataclysm, we have rounded a dialectical corner. To mean the concrete is easy: "This chair." But to say the concrete is not, since what I say is any "this chair." I can make up a new word, CHAtHISIR, that *means* only and precisely *this* chair in the phenomenal world to which it pertains at this moment; but the more seriously we take that solution the closer we are to Gulliver's visit to Balnibari. In "Biography," the poem itself produced and secured the concrete meaning of "virente." Yet even there, the problem of abstraction remains. The meaning of the experience is secured. But the experience itself, as we saw, has become inessential: we understand the meaning of the poet's experience, but are no closer than before to the experience itself, to a consciousness of the "river without end and without beginning" that is concrete experience. Something of "I am lonely, I am sad, etc." still inheres to the poem. The neoconcrete sequence is the attempt to overcome that abstraction by reproducing concrete experience in the reader. Gullar wants to produce an experience that would at the same time be a meaning: he wants us

The neoconcrete sequence is the attempt to overcome that abstraction by reproducing concrete experience in the reader. Gullar wants to produce an experience that would at the same time be a meaning: he wants us to experience a meaning — and this can only mean to experience the same intuition ourselves.

to experience a meaning — and this can only mean to experience the same intuition ourselves. Not to understand it, to credit its existence, or to appreciate it, but to experience it.

árvore

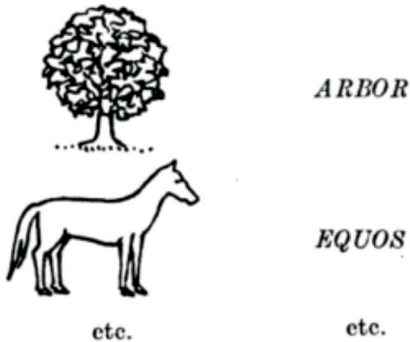
árvore

árvore

árvore

árvore

“Árvore,” “tree,” appears five times, at the left margin of the printed page. It doesn't seem right to call it a five-line poem, each line of which is “árvore.” Rather, the words are meant to be representational, but you also wouldn't say they look like a tree the way Apollinaire's calligram of the Eiffel Tower looks like the Eifel Tower. Composition takes place at the level of typography and the page, rather than drawing. The placement of the words corresponds roughly to the relative locations of the crown and the trunk of the tree. Near the bottom of the page, separated from the rest, is a final “árvore.” This is obviously a very simple poem and I do not wish to belabor it, but I believe it is best seen in light of the earlier poem, “Pears.” The word “tree” corresponds to a concept, and the concept corresponds to a mental image:



1084 2^e éd. signe, signifié, signifiant

And our mental image of the tree, if it is like Saussure's, slides past the existence of the tree, which is half underground. The poem seeks to return something of the subterranean life of the tree, which would bear a family resemblance to the imperceptibly oxidizing interior of the pear, to the word "árvore." The space between the trunk and the bottommost "árvore" is, on one hand, a poetic pause — a hypertrophied line break. But it is also, I believe, meant to be, but not to represent, a literal pause — a moment of hesitation or confusion where the dissonance between the half-subterranean life of the tree and our (literally) superficial common image of it is not signified, but produced, in the mental process of the reader: who now must be considered a reader-beholder.

This becomes clearer in my next exhibit:

girafa	farol
	gira
	sol
	faro
girassol	

indicação de leitura

5	4
	1
	2
	3
6	

"Girafa" is giraffe; "farol" is lighthouse; "gira" is turn; "sol" is sun; "faro" is the (directional, carnivorous) sense of smell; "girassol" is sunflower. As will be obvious, the etymology of "girassol" combines "gira" and "sol." "Faro" and "farol," "gira" and "girafa," are not, as far as I can ascertain, etymologically related pairs. Nonetheless Portuguese "has" their imbrication; it is part of the materiality of language that it offers such purely aleatory connections. The directions below the poem (its stalk?) tell us in what order we are to read the words, an order that pulls the words in their very vaguely flower-like shape (the poem has a stigma and petals, perhaps) into a rhythm and gives them rhyme. But it also

requires us to move our eyes in a circular motion, twice, in an expanding spiral. The directionality of the body, of senses that leave, like a lighthouse, most of the world in the dark — of animals like giraffes, dogs, and people, whose sensorium is largely placed (like the sunflower) at the end of a stalk — is enacted literally and unavoidably by the eyes of the reader-beholder.

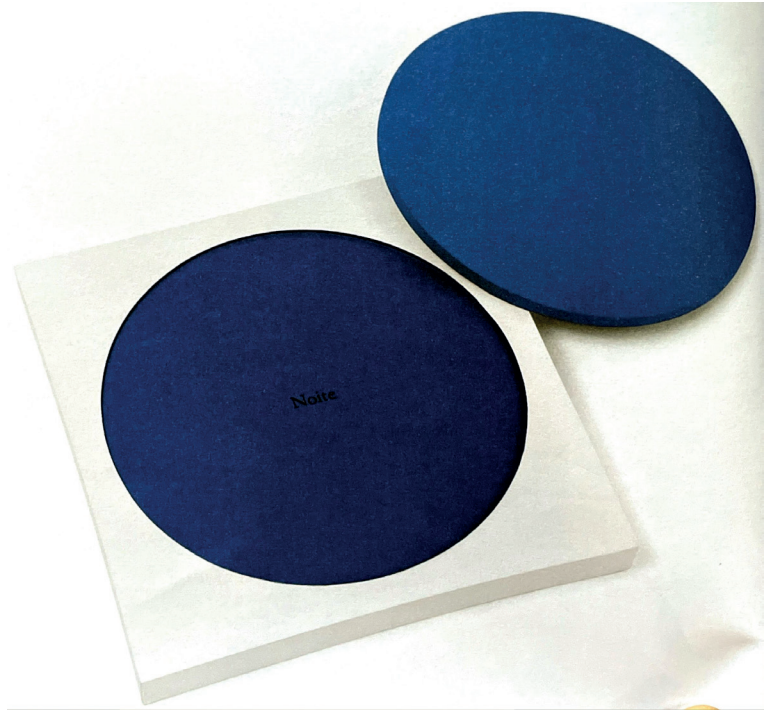
The sudden awareness of the bodily substrate of consciousness, a substrate that cannot exactly be sensed, is not merely thematized, but necessarily enacted by the reader-beholder. If you understand the poem, you also understand something about yourself, and you understand it as you are reading the poem; the truth is not something indicated by the poem, but something enacted by the reader-beholder. We don't just understand Gullar's intuition, we experience it.

The *gira-sol* poem marks an advance in Gullar's dialectic. By that I do not mean that it is better than Gullar's earlier poetry. For reasons that will become clear in conclusion, on my view the payoff of a poem like this one is that it prepares the way for some of the stunning effects of visceral immediacy attained in *Dirty Poem*, which are often produced by just such a sense of the directionality of the body:

that I leaning on the porch railing
 saw the black earth of the backyard
 and the chicken scratching and pecking
 at a cockroach among some plants
 and in that case a two-day
 one within and one outside
 the livingroom
 one at my back the other
 before my eyes
 each emptying into the other
 through my body

Gullar's 1959 "Noite" — produced near the end of the neoconcrete sequence and not exhibited until much later — is a "spatial poem" that further literalizes the participation of the beholder. It consists of a shallow white square box with a dark blue circle at its center. The circle reveals itself to be a kind of lid, which when removed reveals another dark blue circle, this one a depression, at the center of which appears the word "Noite," Night, in fairly small, black serif type. As with the previous poem, "Noite" is, in a casual way, representational: the black type on a blue background recalls, say, branches against a night sky. But

more importantly, the word “Noite” is difficult to discern: one has difficulty bringing it into focus, and may even have the sensation of one’s pupils dilating as one struggles to make it out.

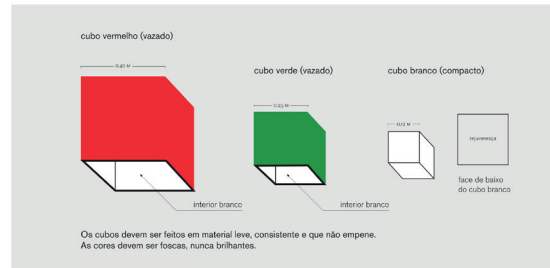
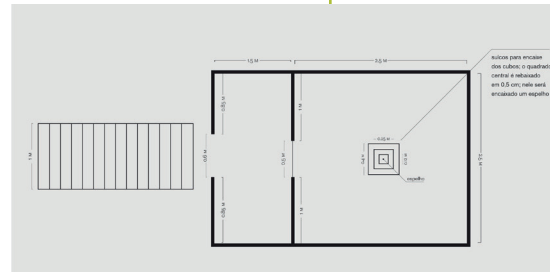
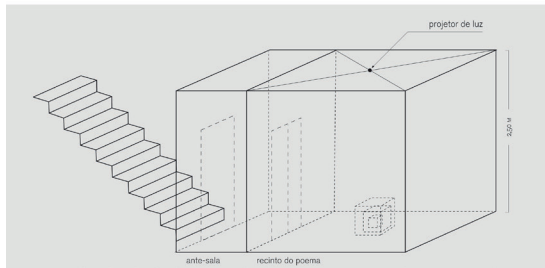


Under this aspect, “Noite” is less like a drawing or a poem and more like an ingeniously low-tech anticipation of James Turrell’s experiential sculptures (see, for example, *Twilight Arch* or *Night Passage*). Unlike Turrell’s work, however, which is meant to expose the raw edges of the sensorium, Gullar’s is meant to return something of the experience of night to the word “night” — to nudge the “word that conceals / and reveals” toward what it reveals. Again, here this happens not through indicating the difficulty of seeing at night, but by producing that difficulty in the reader-beholder.

The neoconcrete sequence organizes itself (or is organized retrospectively by Gullar, it makes no difference) into a progression. That sequence ends with *Poema enterrado*, *Buried* (or interred) *Poem* (*Experiência neoconcreta* 62–63).

poema enterrado

[esquema do projeto]



The project for *Buried Poem* was conceived and published in 1959. The reader-beholder is to descend a flight of stairs into an underground anteroom, and from there enter a chamber containing three nesting cubes. On the bottom of the smallest, solid cube, is printed the word “rejuvenesça” (rejuvenate, in the subjunctive/imperative). The poem was realized in 1960 in the backyard of a house Hélio Oiticás father was building, in an area meant to house a cistern. One Sunday, according to Gullar, as the entire “general staff” of the neoconcrete movement gathered to inaugurate the installation, it was discovered that it had flooded the night before, achieving its destiny of becoming a cistern (*Experiência neoconcreta* 60).

On one hand, *Poema enterrado* looks forward to therapeutic uses of art that Lygia Clark will turn to after the end of her neoconcrete sequence. (A retrospective account suggested that the “reader” in the inner chamber was to perceive “the scent of jasmine that permeates the atmosphere”) (*Experiência neoconcreta* 104).¹¹ On the other, it is recognizably continuous with the development we have been pursuing. “Rejuvenesça” is in the imperative, but: rejuvenate what? On its own, the word “rejuvenesça” is neither transitive nor reflexive; lacking a complement, it is both at the same time. A rejuvenation of the object — the ensemble of cubes, an analogue of the earlier pears, but with their hidden structure and meaning now completely exposed and linked by the activity of the “reader” to the perception of the whole — would be a fresh

11 This account is dated 2003.

intuition of the object, and therefore a fresh intuition, and therefore a rejuvenation of the subject and, at the same time, a kind of authentic experience of the word itself, “as if language could be born together with the poem.”

But it is unlikely that *Buried poem* could have been successful on its own terms: specifically, it seems far less likely to secure the desired meaning of “rejuvenesça” — if I am right about that — than “Biography” secures the desired meaning of “virente.” Other possible interpretations suggest themselves (an analogy with Christ’s entombment and resurrection seems like an obvious starting place) but the poem can provide no ballast for them (indeed, an analogy with Christ seems very far from the spirit of the agnostic Gullar’s poetry — so... maybe, but probably not?).¹²

From the standpoint of the present, *Buried poem* appears both as a precursor of contemporary experiential artworks (like Terrell’s), and primitive in comparison to them. As with the *Buried poem* itself, the only way out of the impasse it represents is back the way you came: securing the impurity of the word through its poetic use. Be that as it may, it marks the end, for Gullar, of the neoconcrete sequence. Soon after, he proposes his “terrorist” exhibition — a proposal that was made seriously enough that Oiticica very definitely refused to participate — moves to Brasília to assume a senior position in the cultural bureaucracy, and in 1962 joins the CPC. He writes for the Teatro de Arena, whose cultural politics in the period just following the coup of 1964 have been explored incisively by Roberto Schwarz (1978, 61–92). During this time his poetic output includes several *romances de cordel* (verse narratives in a folk style), which seem to reveal nothing of his earlier poetic commitments.

How are we to understand this abrupt aesthetic break? Gullar, in 1963-65, had a coherent account:

It is an obvious fact that the vast majority of the [Brazilian] people do not identify with a highly refined poetic, pictorial, or novelistic language — one

12 Consider, as a counterexample, the meaning of the word “rejuvenate” and similar words in Dostoevsky, where excoriating self-examination tends to lead to a desperate desire for spiritual rebirth. I am confident that I — a twenty-first century American atheist with sympathy neither for any of the religio-ideological positions available in Dostoevsky nor for their contemporary shades — have a sense of this desire and even of the specific weight it has in a society that can still be understood to have an authentic national religion. My confidence could be misplaced; there are no guarantees. All I have is my body and its experiences, and a quarter million of Dostoevsky’s translated words: “fragile gods.”

that expresses problems of a class that can afford to explore its subjectivity. Therefore one should not expect artists who use such a language to reach the public. (Gullar 2002, 45)

Confronting this picture... the artist may follow one of three roads: to submit to an activity with no valid cultural function in order to secure an economic advantage, selling himself to the dealers; to resist the pressure of the market, opposing it, closing oneself in a solipsism that will lead to madness or suicide; or, finally, to break with the current conception of art in order to rediscover its social and effectively revolutionary function. (Gullar 2002, 84–85)

If I think so it is because I believe we live in a moment when our own reality has become recognizable. It is at that moment that the phenomenon of political poetry imposes itself. (Gullar 2002, 102)

Though he would quickly retreat from it, this is the account Gullar gives of the break with neoconcretism at the moment of the break. The force of political developments — the recognition of “our own” Brazilian reality — relegates “highly refined” language of “subjective” poetry to a solipsistic game, leading to engagement with a “public” that is also the “people.” The political and social developments of the pre-revolutionary period — the emerging power of the organized elements of the working class and peasantry, allied with the Left intelligentsia, a conjuncture itself produced by the cycle of rapid industrialization — make inescapable the truth of the social order and the duty of the artist.

This narrative flatters common sense in its reflexive search for causal accounts. But it also corresponds, as noted at the beginning of this essay, to a Marxist account of class struggle as the ultimately determining instance of historical development. Leaving aside Gullar’s value judgments, it is, to put it plainly, not only true but ungainsayable that Gullar’s aesthetic break was occasioned by the newly urgent political landscape of the early 1960s. That landscape affected every one of the neo-concretist circle, in different ways, but all of them profoundly. Gullar also claims, of the beginning of the concretist impulse, that “a new European abstract art that invades the country around 1951” led to “an experience that had nothing to do with the immediate artistic past of the country, being tied to the critical problematic of European art. Thus emerges concretism” (Gullar 2002, 81–82). This is also ungainsayable. 1951 is the year of the first São Paulo Bienale; Max Bill, winner of the architecture prize that year, is universally cited as a touchstone in concretist and neoconcretist writings; geometric fonts are, if you’ll forgive the expression, the lingua Helvetica of the movement. Through the

Bienale, concretism is tied, appropriately, to the ideology of rapid modernization that touched every aspect of the Brazilian 1950s, from popular music to the construction of a new capital city. Its underlying economic logic, import substitution, is legible in Gullar's language, above, concerning the invasive waves of foreign products.

So Gullar's neoconcrete period is determined, at its ending and its beginning, by the inauguration and crisis of the cycle of rapid development that characterized the 1950s. But if this is true, what have we been doing for the last twenty pages? In particular, what are we to make of the fact that Ferreira Gullar's poetry appears to follow its own logic? That from the standpoint of Gullar's poetry, the inauguration of the neoconcrete sequence appears as a perfectly logical, even necessary development out of a set of problems that manifests itself first in a trio of sonnets? That from the standpoint of Gullar's poetry, the emphasis on the latencies of the word in its relationship to bodily experience reaches a crisis of its own accord, indifferent to land reform, trade unionism, economic stagnation, and the radicalization of university students?

If one follows the development of Ferreira Gullar's poetry, there is no need to bring in external factors to explain its development. If one follows the relation of Brazilian culture to Brazilian history, there is no need to look closely at Gullar's poetry. What started off as an investigation of a Brazilian poet seems to have landed us smack in the middle of Spinoza's "anomalous monism" (the term is Donald Davidson's): one sequence of events, susceptible to two incompatible explanatory logics. If Davidson had been a Hegelian, he would have said that the sequence of actions is itself the identity of the two standpoints. The two formulations are not equivalent (Davidson 2005, 295–313).¹³

As we have seen, Gullar's poetry thematizes the priority of a subterranean, bodily world that subtends consciousness but is not separate from it. From the first poems he considers part of his mature development, Gullar displays a kinship with Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*: "The body is the means by which we have a world." (Merleau-Ponty 1945, 171). Indeed, *Phenomenology of Perception* will be a touch-

13 This aporetic structure and its resolution are common in Hegel, particularly when he confronts Kantian antinomies. For example: on Hegel's account, Kantian morality understands human action as oriented toward two horizons — the world as it is, and the world as it ought to be — that are separated by an unbridgeable gulf. For Hegel, the unity of "is" and "ought" is neither impossible nor to be sought in a third concept, but is simply an action — any action. "The act is nothing other than the harmony between moral ends and reality." (Hegel 1986, 454).

stone for Gullar in his neoconcretist phase and beyond. From a sufficiently abstract standpoint (one that would miss most of the richness of the poem) *Dirty Poem* is about what it means to use and understand the preposition “in” (*em* and its variants). “But what meaning could [a preposition] have for a subject not situated by his body facing the world?” writes Merleau-Ponty (1945, 117). The neoconcrete sequence understands representation as a problem (as, indeed, has Gullar all along, since the body, being the foundation of all representation, cannot, in its world-grounding aspect, itself be represented). In the neoconcrete sequence, this preoccupation is thematized, non-representationally, through the strategy of mobilizing the literal body of the reader-beholder: the ciliar muscles and pupils in “Noite,” the extraocular muscles in the *gira-sol* poem, the entire body, sensory apparatus, and proprioceptive capacity in *Poema enterrado*. (This becomes a general strategy in neoconcretism: Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Hélio Oiticica all produce works that solicit the movement of the beholder’s body in various ways).

Wishing to maintain the discussion at a level immanent to Gullar’s poems, I have held in reserve until now his crucial, and extraordinarily rich, theoretical writings from the neoconcretist period.

The beholder is asked to use the [neo-concrete poem, artwork, or other] non-object. Mere contemplation is not sufficient to reveal the meaning of the work — and the beholder passes from contemplation to action. But what his action produces is the work itself, because this use, already foreseen in the structure of the work, is absorbed by the work, reveals the structure of the work, and incorporates itself into the work’s signification. The non-object is conceived in time: it is an *immobility open* to a mobility open to an *open immobility*. Contemplation leads to action leads to a new contemplation. Before the beholder, the non-object presents itself as incomplete and offers the means for its completion. The beholder acts, but the time of the action does not pass, does not transcend the work, doesn’t exist and then lose itself beyond the work: it is incorporated into the work, where it persists. Action does not consume the work, but enriches it: after the action, the work is *more* than it was before — and this secondary contemplation already contains, beyond the form seen for the first time, a past in which the beholder and the work became fused: the spectator spent time in the work. The non-object invokes the beholder (are we still talking about a beholder?) not as a passive testimony to its existence, but as the very condition of its presence. Without the beholder, the work exists only in potential, waiting for the human gesture to bring it into existence. (“Diálogo sobre o não-objeto,” 1959).¹⁴

14 *Experiência neoconcreta* 99-100.

One can see the attraction of neoconcretism for contemporary enthusiasts of participatory art, but also a crucial difference from participatory art that its partisans (and most contemporary commentators) overlook. “What [the beholder’s] action produces is the work itself.” This conforms to our contemporary comfort with the “open” artwork. “But what his action produces is the work itself, because this use, already foreseen in the structure of the work, is absorbed by the work, reveals the structure of the work.” So the work, it turns out, is not as open as it seemed: the action is foreseen, and the work’s structure is revealed, not altered, by it. After the interaction, the work of art is “more than it was before” — but this, and the rest of the paragraph that follows it, concerns the standpoint of the beholder — the only standpoint from which it makes sense to say the work contains “a past in which the beholder and the work became fused.” From the standpoint of the work, the action of the beholder is unproblematically “absorbed” into its structure.

If we take “Noite” and *Poema enterrado* as paradigmatic examples, we can see both the promise and the limitations of Gullar’s neoconcretist strategy. “Noite” successfully attaches to a word not the representation of a bodily experience (as Gullar did in “Biography”), but a literal bodily experience, and therefore produces, rather than merely describes, a visceral sense of the relationship between the body and language. This project may be unique in the history of poetry; certainly Gullar’s sense of his work as exploring uncharted territory is justified. On the other hand, the more ambitious the program becomes, the less it yields. Its essential insight is the profound, but abstract, sense of the relationship between language and the world-grounding body. That the word “night” is bound up with a certain constriction of the ciliar muscles in the eye is not in itself a particularly significant insight: the successful poems repeat the single, abstract insight (though in, paradoxically, concrete form) that language originates in bodily experience. Gullar’s neoconcrete poetry seems to be opening up a whole new arena of experience, but in fact, it only opens up the experience of “a whole new arena.” (This too he has in common with Merleau-Ponty). What I mean by this becomes obvious the moment a more concrete insight is sought, as it is in *Buried Poem*. The image of the virid flower in “Biography,” or the memory of standing on the porch of a humble house in *Dirty Poem*, are wonderfully concrete. But the experience built into *Buried Poem* is hopelessly abstract. What if the smell of jasmine makes me sick? What if I am taphophobic, cleithrophobic, or claustrophobic? Was that “foreseen by the work”? Can it be “absorbed by the work?” In fact, any genuinely concrete experience — any actual interaction of a human reader-beholder with

the buried poem — will fail to coincide with the desired meaning of the poem. This opens up the meaning of the poem in a way that would please fans of participatory art, but that is, from the standpoint of Gullar's aims, disastrous.

Without realizing it, we have already caught a glimpse of other side of the dialectic, of the socio-political determination of the history of neoconcretism. For what a purely immanent criticism has just shown is that Gullar's neoconcretism puts its faith in a spontaneous unanimity: a faith it shares with the Brazilian Left of its time.

The fact is indiscernible as long as the meaning remains at the most abstract level: everyone has a body. But what if your eyes don't struggle to focus when you look at "Night?" What if you read the *gira-sol* poem from left to right? (Aren't the "directions for reading" already an admission of defeat, that the "action of the beholder" is not solicited but only hoped for... or commanded?) In *Buried Poem*, the problem has become obvious. It might succeed as therapy, or it might not. In neither case does it have any determinate relationship to the presumed poetic meaning of the work: the mutual implication of subject and object in the word "rejuvenesça." Only faith in a spontaneous agreement could underwrite any confidence in its communication.

From the standpoint of meaning, the activity of the beholder is completely unproblematic if it is understood as compelled by the artwork. That Corot's portraits solicit, as Michael Fried has pointed out, a physically close inspection of the area of the face and a more distant view of the composition as a whole, and therefore the physical movement of the beholder, is simply part of the meaning of Corot's portraits. The activity of the beholder is equally unproblematic, but free, from the standpoint of non-meaning, as we have already seen in the example of the "program" that accompanies *ALEA I*, which, in theory, would produce as many poems as there are readers. But the insistence on the participatory "completion" of the work by the beholder, without the expected consequence of producing as many (non-) meanings as there are beholders — as can be seen in the "instructions" that accompany the *gira-sol* poem — puts tremendous pressure on this basic artistic structure. Gullar's position is equally problematic from the standpoint of its politics. As the instructions on the *gira-sol* poem suggest, the expectation of unanimity is a hair's breadth from a call to order.

Note that a poem like "Biography" faces no such difficulty. It is indifferent to difference. Readers will disagree about what it means — but this is not a problem for the poem, but (a generally pleasant) one

for those participate in the disagreement. In the case of interpretive disagreement, there is no contradiction between a transcendent meaning and an inevitable and irreducible multiplicity of effects and affects. There is only a conversation to be had. Empirically, such disagreements are not accessible to everyone. Some people don't read Portuguese; some people don't read poetry; some people don't read; some people can't read; some people can't see; and so on. But everyone, in principle, can be led to understand what is at stake. (It has been my aim, here, to lead readers to what I think is at stake in Gullar's poetry). As Gullar was well aware in 1963, the empirical non-universality of poetic discourse is one of the problems we face when we face the problems of class society. But class society, not poetry, is to blame for that.

With *Buried Poem*, on the other hand, you cannot be led to what it means, because what it means is a specific bodily experience that you might not have. You may be calmed by the smell of jasmine, it might make you sick: but nobody disagrees about whether jasmine makes them feel calm or sick. It just does. The experience has no determinate relationship to the object that provokes it, which then can't be said to have a meaning. At most, you can be told what it was supposed to have meant, and we're back, at best, to "Roçzeiral."

Buried Poem embodies an irresolvable contradiction. That contradiction disappears only from the standpoint of a faith that every reader-beholder would take the same action, that "rejuvenesça" could, through the poem, come to mean the same thing for everyone. It is a lot like a faith in the unanimity of a "people."¹⁵

Ambitious art in (or oriented in relation to) the European tradition from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth almost universally understood there to exist a contradiction between the universal address of the artwork and its empirical reach in a society organized by the particularity of class (or of race, of gender, of sexuality, of...): that is, a contradiction, sometimes raised to the level of antagonism, between the artwork and its audience.¹⁶ This antagonism is not essentially an intra-class one, between, as Pierre Bourdieu had it, the "dominated fraction of the dominant class" and its dominant fraction.

15 Contemporary left reliance on spontaneous forms of collectivity like the multitude, the commons, identitarian "communities," affinity groups and virtual gangs of all kinds, including the "Party" as an abstract, book-club-like social form, are distant cousins, or should I say present familiar symptoms.

16 For a further discussion of the origins of modernism in 1848 and the consequent coming-to-self-consciousness of the bourgeoisie as representing particular interests, see Brown 2021.

It is rather a contradiction within the dominant class as a whole, the contradiction between citizen and bourgeois, universal aspiration (art) and private interest (audience). For ambitious art from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth, the beholder, reader, or audience poses a problem for art, whether or not the artists for whom it poses a problem themselves understand it to be the problem of a historical class.

The neo-concrete sequence takes place at a moment when a national, progressive, anti-imperialist bourgeoisie can and does see itself as standing unproblematically for the universal interest. As with the early years of the bourgeois revolution in Europe, this involves a certain measure of truth and a certain dose of self-deception. (It is the self-deception that comes under pressure in 1848 in France, inaugurating modernism, and in 1964-68 in Brazil, ending neoconcretism). But whatever the relative proportions of truth and self-deception, the unproblematic perception of (a fraction of) the bourgeoisie as representing the universal interest renders the central problematic of modernism — the reason why modernist works appear first as refractory — effectively irrelevant. As we shall see shortly, at the period of the neoconcretist sequence even the Brazilian Communist Party understands the development of a progressive urban bourgeoisie to be essential to the “interests of the proletariat and to the people as a whole.” Precisely through an historically original relationship between artwork and audience, neo-concretism is able to break new ground — but cannot find a way out of it. This is not a symptom of, but is rather identical with, the promise and failure of the Brazilian revolution.

The Brazilian Communist Party, when Ferreira Gullar joined it, was not the party of class struggle. It is hard to exaggerate how thoroughly the party’s platform, formalized in the 1958 “Declaration of March,” sidelines class conflict and avoids class analysis. Even as class struggle is acknowledged as primary in “the international situation,” the national conjuncture is described as a polarization between “democratic and anti-imperialistic forces, on one hand, and comprador forces on the other.” There is a class character to this division, but the comprador forces — elsewhere “the enemies of the Brazilian people” — are described as internally “meager.” The real conflict lies between, on one hand, “independent and progressive development” — a “common objective” that brings together “proletariat and bourgeoisie” in a “unified front” — and, on the other, a “north-american imperialism” that stands in the way of the “peaceful course of the Brazilian revolution.” A passage that describes the “two fundamental contradictions” confronting Brazilian

society — neither of which is social class — merits quoting at length. Of particular note is the undialectical escamotage that refers the “productive forces in development” to the expansion of industrial capital, and the “semifeudal relations of production” to agricultural capital. This separation turns a question of class into a question of historical stages, thereby avoiding the established starting point of Marxist inquiry, namely an analysis of the actual relations of production that pertain to either sector:

The first [contradiction] is [that] between the nation and north-american imperialism and its internal agents. The second is the contradiction between the productive forces in development and the semifeudal relations of production that prevail in agriculture. The economic and social development of Brazil demands the solution of these two fundamental contradictions.

Brazilian society also encompasses a contradiction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, which is expressed in the various forms of the class struggle between workers and capitalists. But at the current stage, this contradiction does not call for a radical solution. In the conditions presented by our country, capitalist development answers to the interests of the proletariat and to the people as a whole.¹⁷

Elsewhere, the text cautions against “elevat[ing] contradictions internal to the unified front [i.e., class antagonisms] to the same level as the principal contradiction, which opposes the nation to north-american imperialism and its agents.” In retrospect, it is obvious that neither the “unified front” nor “the people as a whole” — the spontaneous alliance of agricultural and industrial workers with the urban and therefore “progressive” bourgeoisie — existed.

From this standpoint, we find between *Buried Poem* and the period in which Gullar participated in the theatrical production *Opinião* and wrote his *romances de cordel* not a break but a continuity. Roberto Schwarz writes of *Opinião* and its sequel:

Despite the tone of something like civic belonging, of communal protest and mutual encouragement that characterized these two shows, a certain aesthetic and political unease was inescapable, considering the total unanimity produced between the stage and the audience. The real scene was not on stage. Not a single element of the critique of populism had been absorbed. (Schwarz 1978, 80)

17 “Declaração sobre a política do PCB,” Comitê central do Partido Comunista do Brasil, Março de 1958. <https://www.marxists.org/portugues/tematica/1958/03/pcb.htm>

A version of Schwarz's commentary would apply to Gullar's *romances de cordel*. One thinks, for example, of the subordination of relations of production (where coffee farmers are the exploiters) to those of imperial domination (where coffee farmers are the exploited, and therefore part of the unanimous "people") that characterizes the *Cutting-Contest Between José Pain-in-the-Ass and Uncle Sam*. Consider also the disconnection, more relevant to the current discussion, between the sentimentality of the narrative and the spontaneous conversion from individual despair to collective action that arrives as a *deus ex machina* in the final lines of *João Boa-Morte* (1962). The titular "John Good-Death" is driven in his desperate poverty to the point of killing his five children, his wife, and himself. Chico, a drover and member of the Peasant Leagues, arrives to save the day and to recruit João to the cause. But he accomplishes this neither through his actions nor through his exhortation — which is declamatory rather than persuasive — but rather by his mere presence:

When Chico spoke,
a new light arose
on João's emaciated face.
Just then dawn was breaking
Rising from the earth of Sapé.

And so ends one part
of João's story.
The other part of the story
continues
not on this stage, on the street
but on the stage of the backlands.
The characters are many
and great is their distress.
They understand already
as João came to understand,
that the peasant will overcome
by the strength of union.
That he's joining the Peasant Leagues
that he'll beat the boss
that the road to victory
is through revolution.

Revolutionary subjectivity comes about in *João Boa-Morte* the same way rejuvenated subjectivity comes about in *Poema enterrado*: spontaneously, on exposure to a sanctified object.

It is not that politics puts an end to neoconcretism, but that Gullar's politics in 1962 represent the desperate attempt to continue the aesthetics of his neoconcretism in another form. In both, structural antagonisms are construed as non-antagonisms: a position that touches reality (we all have bodies; the national bourgeoisie contains a revolutionary fraction) but does not encompass it. But the point is not merely that these are similar operations, but that they are the same operation, an expression of the non-antagonistic class ideology native to the progressive bourgeoisie during the period of developmental populism. In each case, a central, non-antagonistic relationship is made over, on the terrain of the whole, into a postulated, abstract synthesis that, precisely because it does not encompass real relations, takes the substitute form of a particular object. But precisely because it is an *ex machina* solution, the particular (the *rejuvenesça* cube, Chico the drover) cannot accommodate the postulated abstract content, which is spontaneous universality. (As opposed to the concrete, everyday universality of the dialectic: poetic meaning on one hand, political discourse on the other). Thus, the non-dialectical resolution appears in both cases as a particular thing endowed with the quality of universal plenitude: a sublime object. And the sublime, as Hegel taught us, is always an attractive mistake. The real break — with both an abstract politics and an abstract aesthetics — comes about in Gullar's gloriously concrete masterpiece, *Dirty Poem*. But that's a story for another time.

Appendix: Early Poems

5

Prometi-me possuí-la muito embora
ela me redimisse ou me cegasse.
Busquei-a na catástrofe da aurora,
e na fonte e no muro onde sua face,

entre a alucinação e a paz sonora
da água e do musgo, solitária nasce.
Mas sempre que me acerco vai-se embora
como se me temesse ou me odiasse.

Assim persigo-a, lúcido e demente.
Se por detrás da tarde transparente
seus pés vislumbro, logo nos desvãos

das nuvens fogem, luminosos e ágeis!
Vocabulário e corpo — deuses frágeis —
eu colho a ausência que me queima as mãos.

5

I promised myself to possess her, whether
she would redeem me or blind me.
I sought her in the catastrophe of dawn,
and in the fountain and in the wall where her face,

between hallucination and the sonorous peace
of water and moss, is solitary born.
But whenever I approach she departs
as though she feared or hated me.

So I pursue her, lucid and demented.
If behind the transparent afternoon
I see her feet, soon in the attic

of the clouds they flee, luminous and agile!
Vocabulary and body — fragile gods —
I reap the absence that burns my hands.

6

Calco sob os pés sórdidos o mito
 que os céus segura — e sobre um caos me assento.
 Piso a manhã caída no cimento
 como flor violentada. Anjo maldito,

(pretendi devassar o nascimento
 da terrível magia) agora hesito,
 e queimo — e tudo é o desmoronamento
 do mistério que sofro e necessito.

Hesito, é certo, mas aguardo o assombro
 com que verei descer de céus remotos
 o raio que me fenderá no ombro.

Vinda a paz, rosa-após dos terremotos,
 eu mesmo juntarei a estrela ou a pedra
 que de mim reste sob os meus escombros.

6

I trample under my sordid feet the myth
 that the heavens sustains — and I subside upon a chaos.
 I tread on a morning fallen to the cement
 like a violated flower. Curséd angel,

(I wanted to divulge the birth
 of a terrible magic) now I hesitate,
 and burn — and everything is the collapse
 of the mystery that I suffer and demand.

I hesitate, it is true, but I await the astonishment
 with which I will see descending from remote heavens
 the lightning that will cleave my shoulder.

When peace comes, afterglow of earthquakes,
 I myself will gather the star, or stone,
 that remain of me under my ruins.

7

Neste leito de ausência em que me esqueço
 desperta o longo rio solitário:
 se ele cresce de mim, se dele cresço,
 mal sabe o coração desnecessário.

O rio corre e vai sem ter começo
 nem foz, e o curso, que é constante, é vário.
 Vai nas águas levando, involuntário,
 luas onde me acordo e me adormeço.

Sobre o leito de sal, sou luz e gesso:
 duplo espelho — o precário no precário.
 Flore um lado de mim? No outro, ao contrário,
 de silêncio em silêncio me apodreço.

Entre o que é rosa e lodo necessário,
 passa um rio sem foz e sem começo.

7

In this bed of absence in which I forget myself
 awakes the long solitary river:
 if it grows from me, if I grow from it,
 little knows the unnecessary heart.

The river runs and goes without beginning
 nor outlet, and its course, which is constant, is various.
 It goes in waters carrying, involuntary,
 moons where I awake and sleep.

On this bed of salt, I am light and clay:
 double mirror — the precarious in the precarious.
 Does a side of me bloom? On the other, to the contrary,
 from silence to silence I rot.

Between what is rose and necessary silt,
 passes a river without end and without beginning.

Galo galo

O galo
no saguão quieto.

Galo galo
de alarmante crista, guerreiro,
medieval.

De córneo bico e
esporões, armado
contra a morte,
passeia.

Mede os passos. Para.
Inclina a cabeça coroada
dentro do silêncio
— que faço entre coisas?
— de que me defendo?

Anda

no saguão
O cimento esquece
o seu último passo

Galo: as penas que
florescem da carne silenciosa
e o duro bico e as unhas e o olho
sem amor. Grave
solidez.
Em que se apoia
tal arquitetura?

Saberá que, no centro
de seu corpo, um grito
se elabora?

Como, porém, conter,
uma vez concluído,
o canto obrigatório?
Eis que bate as asas, vai

morrer, encurva o vertiginoso pescoço
donde o canto rubro escoa.

Mas a pedra, a tarde,
o próprio feroz galo
subsistem ao grito.

Vê-se: o canto é inútil.

O galo permanece — apesar
de todo o seu porte marcial —
só, desamparado,
num saguão do mundo.
Pobre ave guerreira!

Outro grito cresce
agora no sigilo
de seu corpo; grito
que, sem essas penas
e esporões e crista
e sobretudo sem esse olhar
de ódio,
 não seria tão rouco
e sangrento

 Grito, fruto obscuro
e extremo dessa árvore: galo.
Mas que, fora dele,
é mero complemento de auroras.

Rooster rooster

The rooster
in the quiet courtyard.

Rooster rooster
of alarming crest, warrior,
medieval.

Of horny beak and
spurs, armed
against death
strolls.

Measures its steps. Stops.
Tilts its crowned head
in the silence
— what am I doing among things?
— what am I defending against?
Walks

in the courtyard.
The cement forgets
his last step.

Rooster: feathers that
bloom from silent flesh
and the hard beak and the claws and the eye
without love. Grave
solidity.
What does such architecture
rest on?

Does it know that, in the center
of its body, a cry
prepares itself?

How, however, could one contain
once completed,
the obligatory song?

See how he flaps his wings, is going
to die, curves his vertiginous throat
from where the scarlet song flows.

But the rock, the afternoon,
The ferocious cock himself
Survive the scream.

It's obvious: this crowing is useless.

The rooster remains —
despite his martial comportment —
alone, forlorn,
in one of the world's courtyards.
Poor warrior bird!

Another scream grows
now in the secrecy
of its body; scream
that, without these feathers
and spurs and crest
and above all without this look
of hatred,
 would not be so hoarse
and bloody

 Cry, obscure extreme
fruit of this tree: rooster.
But that, outside of him,
Merely accompanies dawn.

As pêras

As peras, no prato,
apodrecem.
O relógio, sobre elas,
mede
a sua morte?

Paremos a pêndula. De-
teríamos, assim, a
morte das frutas?

Oh as peras cansaram-se
de suas formas e de
sua doçura! As peras,
concluídas, gastam-se no
fulgor de estarem prontas
para nada.
O relógio
não mede. Trabalha
no vazio: sua voz desliza
fora dos corpos.

Tudo é o cansaço
de si. As peras se consomem
no seu doirado
sossego. As flores, no canteiro
diário, ardem,
ardem, em vermelhos e azuis. Tudo
desliza e está só.

O dia
comum, dia de todos, é a
distância entre as coisas.
Mas o dia do gato, o felino
e sem palavras
dia do gato que passa entre os móveis
é passar. Não entre os móveis. Pas-
sar como eu
passo: entre nada.

O dia das peras
é o seu apodrecimento.

É tranquilo o dia
das peras? Elas
não gritam, como
o galo.

Gritar
para quê? se o canto
é apenas um arco
efêmero fora do
coração?

Era preciso que
o canto não cessasse
nunca. Não pelo
canto (canto que os
homens ouvem) mas
porque can-
tando o galo
é sem morte.

Pears

The pears, on the plate,
rot.
Does the clock, above them,
measure
their death?

Let's stop the pendulum. Do-
ing so, would we halt the
death of the fruit?

Oh the pears are tired
of their shapes and of
their sweetness! The pears,
finished, spend themselves in the
glow of being ready
for nothing.

The clock
doesn't measure. It works
in the void: its voice slips by
outside bodies.

Every thing is the tiredness
of itself. The pears consume themselves
in their golden
calm. Flowers, in their everyday
garden bed, burn,
burn, in reds and blues. Everything
slides past, and is alone.

The common
day, everyone's day, is the
distance between things.
But the cat's day, the feline
and wordless
day of the cat who passes among the furniture
is its passing. Not among the furniture. Pas-
sing as I
pass: between nothing.

The day of the pears
is their rotting.

Is it tranquil,
the pears' day? They
don't crow, like the rooster.

Cry
for what? if the song
is only an ephemeral
arc leaping from the
heart?

The singing had
never to stop —
never. Not for the sake
of the song (song that
people hear) but
because sing-
ing the rooster
is deathless.

Vida,

a minha, a tua,
eu poderia dizê-la em duas
ou três palavras ou mesmo
numa

corpo

sem falar das amplas
horas iluminadas,
das exceções, das depressões
das missões,
dos canteiros destroçados feito a boca
que disse a esperança

fogo

sem adjetivar a pele
que rodeia a carne
os últimos verões que vivemos
a camisa de hidrogênio
com que a morte copula
(ou a ti, março, rasgado
no esqueleto dos santos)

Poderia escrever na pedra
meu nome

gullar

mas eu não sou uma data nem
uma trave no quadrante solar
Eu escrevo

facho

nos lábios da poeira
lepra
vertigem
cona
qualquer palavra que disfarça
e mostra o corpo esmerilado do tempo

*câncer**vento**laranjal*

Life,

mine, yours,
I could say it in two
or three words or even
in one

body

not to mention the ample
illuminated hours
the exceptions, depressions
the missions,
the ruined flowerbeds become the mouth
that spoke hope

fire

not to qualify the skin
that surrounds the flesh
the last summers we lived
the hydrogen shirt
that copulates with death
(or to you, March, torn
in the skeleton of the saints).

I could write my name
on rock

gullar

but I'm not a date nor
the bar of a sundial
I write

torch

on lips of dust

*leprosy**vertigo**cunt*

any word that disguises
and shows the polished body of time

*cancer**wind**orangery*

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Tytuł: Estetyka i/lub polityka neokonkretyzmu. Przypadek Ferreira Gullara

Abstrakt: Pod koniec lat pięćdziesiątych i na początku sześćdziesiątych brazylijski poeta Ferreira Gullar realizował odrębny projekt, który nazwał „neokonkretyzmem” – projekt wyraźnie odmienny od jego wcześniejszej i późniejszej poezji. Jego źródła wiążą się z gwałtownym sukcesem ekonomicznym populizmu na rzecz rozwoju, a koniec z przewrotem wojskowym w Brazylii w 1964 roku. Jaki jest związek neokonkretnego okresu w twórczości Gullara z historią Brazylii? Jaka jest estetyczna stawka poetyckiego projektu Gullara? Jaka jest jego polityka? Odpowiadając na te pytania, niniejszy esej próbuje rzucić światło na kwestię relacji między dziełami sztuki a ich społeczną determinacją, a ujmując problem w kategoriach marksistowskich: między nadbudową a bazą.

Słowa kluczowe: Ferreira Gullar, poezja konkretna, neokonkretyzm, marksizm, fenomenologia, Brazylia