

**Amilcar de Castro, Lygia Clark, Ferreira Gullar,
Reynaldo Jardim, Claudio Mello e Souza, Lygia Pape,
Theon Spanudis, Franz Weissmann
Neo-Concrete Manifesto//1958**

The expression 'Neo-Concrete' denotes a new stance in non-figurative 'geometric' art (Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism, Suprematism and the Ulm School) and, particularly, in Concrete art, taken to a dangerously rationalist extreme. Working in the fields of painting, sculpture, engraving and writing, the artists presently showing in this first Neo-Concrete Exhibition have been drawn together in the light of their own experience, with the contingency of reviewing the theoretical principles on which Concrete art was founded, since none of these principles satisfactorily 'understands' the expressive potential revealed through these experiences.

Born as part of Cubism, in a reaction to the Impressionist dissolution of pictorial language, it was only natural that so-called geometric art should place itself in diametrical opposition to the technical and allusive features of current painting. While offering a broader perspective for objective thought, the latest developments in physics and mechanics stimulate, in the followers of this artistic revolution, a tendency toward an ever-increasing rationalization of the processes and objectives of painting. A mechanistic concept of construction has taken over the language of painters and sculptors, generating, in turn, equally radical reactions of a retrograde character, as for example the magical, irrational realism of Dada and Surrealism. Undoubtedly, while borrowing from theories that consecrate the objectivity of science and the precision of mechanics, true artists – as for example, Mondrian and Pevsner – have constructed their oeuvre and, in their struggle with expression, overcome the limits imposed by theory. But the production of these artists has been interpreted from the viewpoint of theoretical principles that their work has denied. We now propose a reinterpretation of Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism and other similar movements, on the basis both of their expressive achievements and the prevalence of production over theory. If our aim is to understand Mondrian's painting by examining his theories, we have to choose between two options: either predictions of art's total integration into the daily life of individuals seems feasible and we glimpse, in the artist's work, his early steps in this direction, or this integration appears to be more and more remote, and his work fails in its objectives. Either the vertical or the horizontal planes do indeed provide the fundamental rhythms of the universe and Mondrian's work is the application of this universal principle, or the principle is flawed and

his work is founded on illusion. But the truth is, Mondrian's work exists, alive and fertile, notwithstanding these theoretical contradictions. Viewing Mondrian as the demolisher of the surface plane and the line will be of no avail to us unless we envisage the new space that this destruction has created.

The same could be said of Vantongerloo and Pevsner. It doesn't matter what mathematical equations are to be found at the roots of a sculpture or picture by Vantongerloo, for the work only reveals the 'significance' of its rhythms and colours to the viewer's direct perceptual experience. Whether or not Pevsner took figures of descriptive geometry as a starting point is not an issue in face of the new space that his sculptures bring into being and the cosmic-organic expression that his forms reveal in this new space. It would be of interest, from a cultural standpoint, to determine approximations between artistic objects and scientific instruments, between the artist's intuition and the objective mind of a physicist or engineer. From the aesthetic point of view, however, the work becomes interesting precisely through those elements that transcend these external approximations: the universe of existential significations that it simultaneously founds and reveals.

Thanks to having recognized 'the primacy of the pure sensibility in art', Malevich spared his theoretical definitions from rational and mechanical limitations, while imparting to his painting a transcendental dimension that today grants him remarkable actuality. But he paid dearly for his courage to oppose both the figurative and mechanistic abstraction at the same time. To date, certain rationalist theorists still regard him as an ingenuous artist who had not quite grasped the true meaning of the new style ... In fact, however, in his geometric painting, Malevich had already expressed dissatisfaction, a will to transcend the rational and the sensorial that nowadays irrepressibly manifests itself.

The Neo-Concrete trend evolved from a need to express the complex reality of present-day man through the constructive language of the new style. It denies the legitimacy of scientificist and positivist attitudes in art, and reintroduces the problem of expression while incorporating new 'verbal' dimensions created by non-figurative constructive art. Rationalism deprives art of its autonomy and replaces the non-transferable qualities of the artwork with notions of scientific objectivity. The concepts of form, space, time and structure, therefore – which in art language are connected to existential, emotional, and affective significance – are confounded with the theoretical applications of these terms in science. In the name of those prejudices currently being denounced in the field of philosophy (Merleau-Ponty, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne Langer) – and that are crumbling in all fields, beginning with modern biology, which surmounts Pavlovian mechanistic notions – the Concrete rationalists continue to view the individual as a machine among other machines, and are trying to curb their art to the expression of this theoretical reality.

We do not understand an artwork as a machine or 'object'; we see it as a quasi-corpus, i.e. a being whose reality is not limited to the external relations of its elements; a being decomposable for analysis that only fully reveals itself by means of a direct phenomenological approach. We believe that the work of art surpasses the material mechanism on which it is based, not because of some unearthly virtue, but because it transcends these mechanical relations (the focus of Gestalt) and creates for itself a tacit significance (Merleau-Ponty) that it brings up for the first time. Therefore, if we were to seek a simile for the work of art, we would be unable to find it in a machine or in an object, both viewed objectively; rather, according to Susanne Langer and Wladimir Weidlé, we would find it among living organisms. At any rate, this comparison alone would not adequately express the specific reality of the aesthetic organism.

The objective notions of time, space, form, structure, colour, etc., are not sufficient to comprehend a work of art and to explain its 'reality', because the work does not limit itself to occupying a place in the objective space. Instead, it transcends this space while creating in it a new significance. The difficulty of finding an accurate terminology to express a world that does not surrender to notions has forced art criticism to use words indiscriminately that betray the complexity of the artwork. Science and technology have had quite an influence here, to the point that, today, certain artists dazzled by this terminology try to make art by taking objective notions and applying them to their creative practice.

Inevitably, artists who proceed in this manner only illustrate *a priori* notions, for they are bound by a method that prescribes, beforehand, the result of the work. By refraining from intuitive creation and limiting himself to reducing his work to an objective body, made in an objective space, a simple reaction of stimulus and reflexive response is all that the rationalist Concrete artist asks of himself as well as of the viewer through his paintings. He speaks to the eye as an instrument rather than a human tool to apprehend the world and surrender to it. He speaks to the machine-eye, not to the body-eye.

It is because the work of art transcends mechanical space that, in the artwork, notions of cause and effect completely lose their effectiveness. Moreover, notions of time, space, form, colour – that did not pre-exist as notions for the work – are so intensely integrated that it would be impossible to speak of them as decomposable constituents. Neo-Concrete art asserts the absolute integration of these elements and believes that its 'geometric' vocabulary is capable of assuming the expression of complex human realities, as for example in a number of works by Mondrian, Malevich, Gabo, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and others. And if these artists themselves sometimes mistook expressive form for the notion of mechanical form, it must be made clear that, in art language, so-called geometric forms totally lose the objective character of geometry to transform themselves into

instruments of fancy. The Gestalt, as a school of psychology that interprets causal relations, is equally insufficient to elucidate this phenomenon that dissolves space and form as causally determined realities and renders them as time – as spatialization of the work. The expression 'spatialization of the artwork' means that this work makes itself always present; that it is constantly reviving the same dynamic impulse that created it and from which, in turn, the work has resulted. And if this description takes us back to the primordial and thorough experience of the real, it is because Neo-Concrete art aims at nothing less than to rekindle this experience. Neo-Concrete art creates a new expressive 'space' [...]

Amílcar de Castro, Lygia Clark, Ferreira Gullar, Reynaldo Jardim, Claudio Mello e Souza, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanudis and Franz Weissmann, 'Manifesto neoconcreto', *Jornal do Brasil* (23 March 1959); translated in *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía/Rio de Janeiro: Projeto Lygia Pape, 2011) 80–83.

Hélio Oiticica Colour, Time and Structure//1960

The sense of colour-time has made the transformation of the structure indispensable. Not even in virtualized form, in its *a priori* sense of a surface to be painted, was use of the plane – that former element of representation – any longer possible. The structure then turns into space, becoming temporal itself: a time-structure. Colour and structure are inseparable here, as are space and time; and the fusion of these four elements (which I consider to be dimensions of a single phenomenon) takes place within the work.

Dimensions: colour, structure, space, time

It is not a combination but rather a fusion of these elements that takes place here, one that exists from the very first creative movement – fusion, not juxtaposition. Fusion is organic, while juxtaposition implies a separation of elements that is profoundly analytic.

Colour

I seek to bestow a sense of light upon pigmentary colour, in itself material and opaque. A sense of light can be given to all primary colours and others that derive from them, as well as to white and grey, although for this experience one must