



VISUAL

Poetry Movements

in

Rio de Janeiro

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Neoconcrete **1**
(Based on Lygia Pape deposition – English Version: Sabrina Gledhill)

The Process Poem **8**
(Based on Neide Sá deposition and on Clemente Padín essay on the subject – English Version: Regina Célia Pinto)

(Cover: Regina Célia Pinto)

Museum of the Essential and Beyond That

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The Neoconcrete

Around the late 1950s, the Rio group carried out an en-masse critical review of their previous position. They denounced the excessive dogmatism that led to Concretism, the production of art according to formulas that ended up submitting it to a system devoid of critical or artistic potential instead of integrating art into life.

As a result, the NeoConcretist Manifesto was published in the Sunday Supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper on March 23, 1959. The First NeoConcrete Art Exhibition showed works by Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Amílcar de Castro, Franz Weissmann, Reynaldo Jardim, Sergio Camargo, Theon Spanudis and Ferreira Gullar. Other exhibitions followed, in which other artists took part.

"We split from the concrete group from São Paulo because they wanted to create a ten-year plan for future work. The Rio group thought this was taking rationalism to the extreme. We wanted to work intuitively but freely.

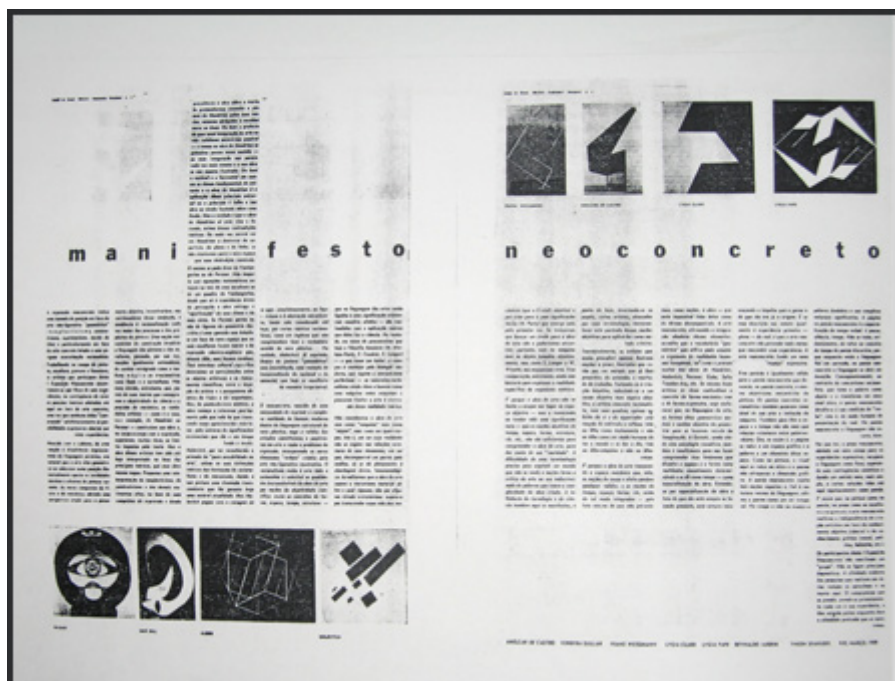
We exchanged a great deal of information, but there was also a certain impregnation, to the extent that one person conversed with another. The NeoConcrete (movement) did not arise by chance, nor was it something we developed and then started working on. We were led to it by our previous experiments. Later, Gullar, who was a poet and copy-editor at *Jornal do Brasil*, was a very good writer and had studied art theory, was charged with writing a paper that covered everyone's work - a paper that succeeded the work.

There was total freedom. Nothing was dogmatic. Everyone was willing to be creative. We didn't stick to conventional categories. In sculpture, the idea was to destroy the base and create an object that could be called a sculpture, but could be positioned in any way. Paintings would no longer be surrounded by frames. They would move out in space. I invented a book called the 'Book of Creation,' which recounts the creation of the world without words. It is half plastic art, half poetry. This sense of invention, of creation, was what truly characterized the movement. In those days, people still believed that a painting had to be hung on the wall for mere contemplation. There was no sense of participation, of using different materials: so all of this led to a tremendous feeling of freedom. It wasn't easy back then. The whole world was against us." (Lygia Pape's deposition to Regina Célia Pinto)

Mário Pedrosa has observed with his habitual acuity that NeoConcrete art was the "prehistory of Brazilian art." This definition, which should not be taken literally, underscores the radical nature of the NeoConcrete movement: it was prehistoric to the extent that it questioned the essence of the existing artistic language and proposed a return to the "beginnings" of art.

The NeoConcrete Manifesto, which is based on the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, retrieved humanity and rehabilitated the palpable, disqualified since Plato, making it the basis of a real knowledge. The aim was to revitalize the relationship between the individual and his or her work.

ICONOGRAPHY



1- NeoConcrete Manifesto

Cf.: NeoConcretism Exhibition catalogue / 1959-1961, Banerj Art Gallery, September 1984.

Note the modern layout of the Sunday Supplement of the Jornal do Brasil, published on March 23, 1959.

We do not conceive of a work of art as a "machine" or "object" but as a "quasi-corpus"; that is, a being whose reality is not exhausted by the external relationships of its elements; a being that can be deconstructed into parts for analysis but can only be fully understood through a direct, phenomenological approach. We believe that a work of art surpasses the material mechanism on which it rests, but not because it has an extraterrestrial quality: it surpasses it by transcending such mechanical relationships (which is the aim of Gestalt) and create, in and of itself, a tacit meaning (Merleau-Ponty) that emerges for the first time.

A work of art was seen as being similar to a living organism. The absence of a frame or support would bring it into real space - take art down from its pedestal and include it in life - so people could become a natural part of the artwork. By establishing relationships and carrying out exchanges, the individual would continually create and recreate the work. Thus, the support would cease to be the frame or pedestal of a sculpture and become the body itself. This replacement of conventional support with natural support indicates the radical nature of NeoConcrete art. The aim was to be achieved somewhere between nature and culture, almost anteceding culture as the original formulation of the real.

From this standpoint, one can easily understand why Claude Lévi-Strauss dedicated his book *The Savage Mind* to the philosopher Merleau-Ponty. In this book, we learn that there are two different modes of scientific thought: one that is approximately

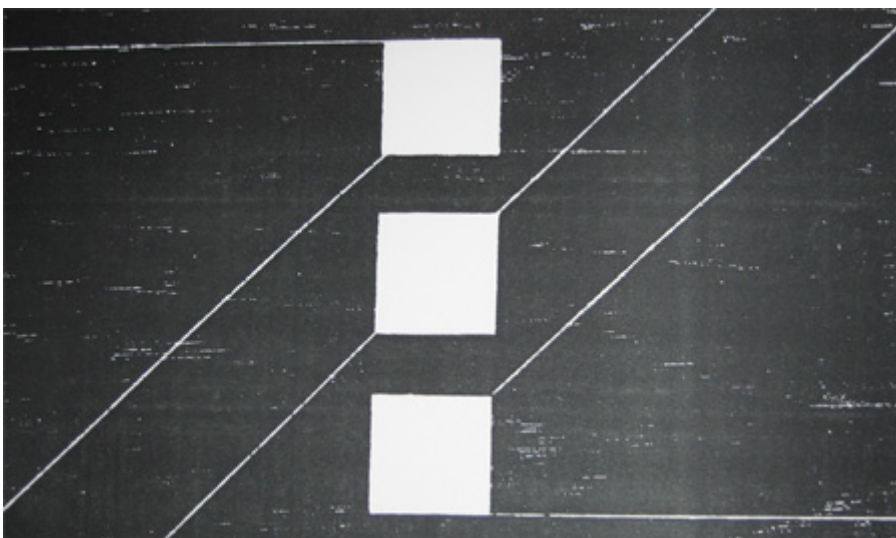
adapted to the realm of perception and the imagination, and another that is dislocated. It is as though all necessary relationships, the subject of every science, Neolithic or Modern, could be attained through two different paths - one that is very close to sensitive intuition and the other more removed from it.

Ronaldo Brito writes that NeoConcretism is centered on the positivity of the constructive tradition - art as an instrument for constructing society. If so, it would be contradictory, in view of the fact that it would contradict its own postulates due to the artists' practices, and work to partially break them. In the view of this critique, the NeoConcrete was both the vertex of Brazilian constructive awareness and the agent of its crisis. Lygia Pape disagrees with this view and writes that, for the NeoConcrete movement, the idea of "inventing" new things would be a revolutionary stance that did not involve politics or participation.

Establishing a connection between these two opinions, we can conclude that the NeoConcrete was seeking new paths. More palpable paths. The manifesto postulated what had been learned through experience. Thus, experience would be the act of doing merged with being - being that could be constructed through the palpable. And such learning would involve the entire body. It should be said that art could not be subjected merely to the desire for certainty and accuracy; to extreme constructivist rationalism. It is also subjected to the participation of viewers of the work, making them take part in its explanation; awakening in them the awareness their capacity for bringing about change.

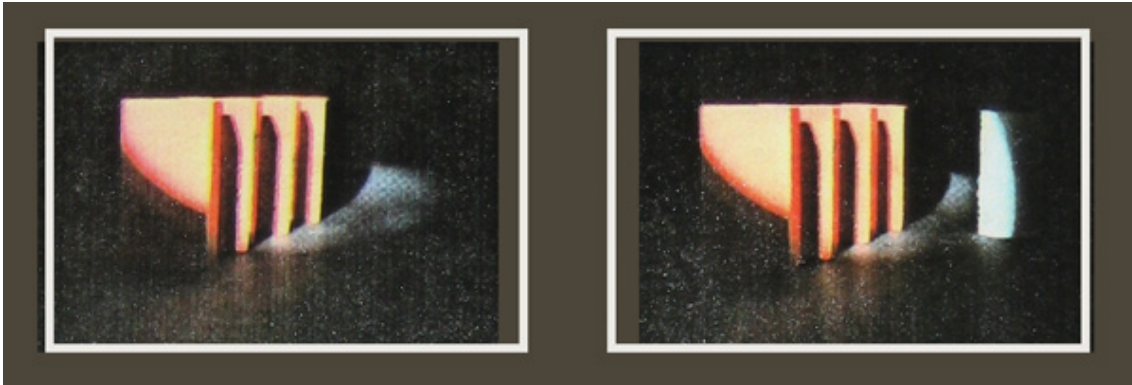
This transfer of artistic support to the body itself and the awareness that we can become agents of change is said to have its remotest philosophical origins in Nietzsche 6, who in the late nineteenth century stated his opinion of despisers of the body, advising them to "bid farewell to their own bodies, and thus be dumb": "Body am I entirely, and nothing more; and soul is only the name of something in the body."

ICONOGRAPHY



2- A woodcut from the Tecelares series
Cf.: PAPE, Lygia et al., op. cit., 1983, p.8.

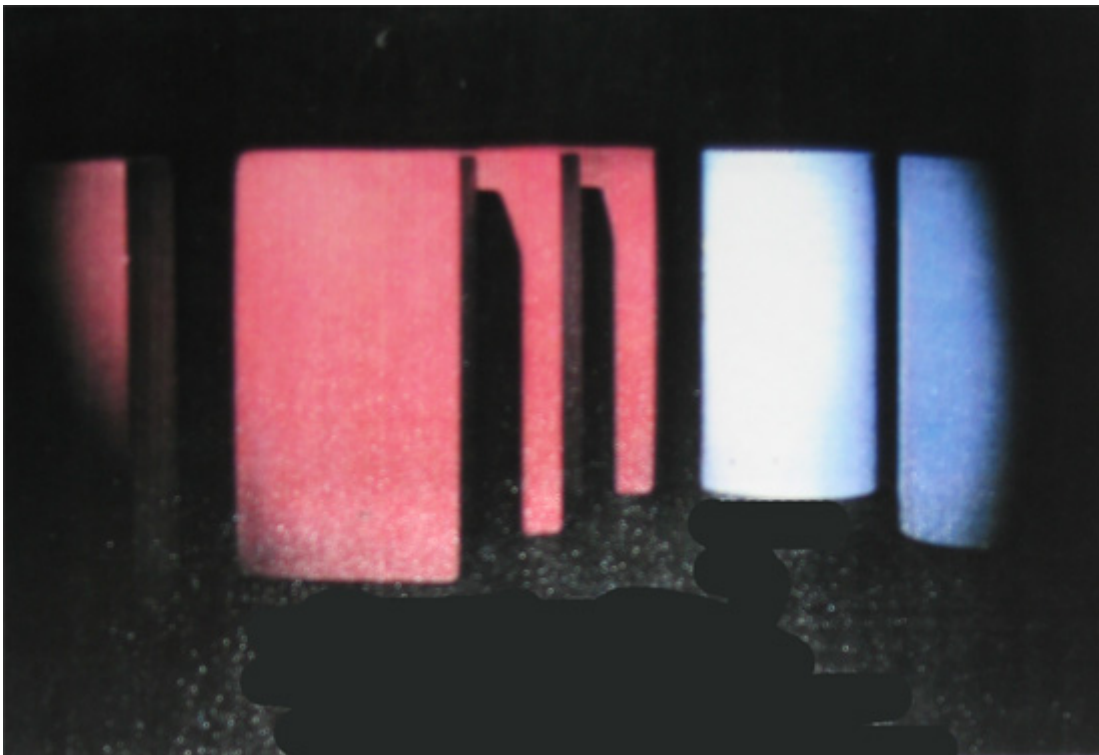
Shown at the First NeoConcrete Exhibition, this woodcut represents research done within a deliberately limited vocabulary to arrive at complex compositions in which exactitude becomes tension and drama. It is a phase of large black compound surfaces in which things cease to be what they are and disclose their other self. The artist plays with space - what is the figure, what is the ground? And what is the individual, what is society? What is in and what is out? What is sensibility, and what is sense?



3- NeoConcrete Ballet.

Cf.: Revista Galeria / 21, photo: Fernando Duarte

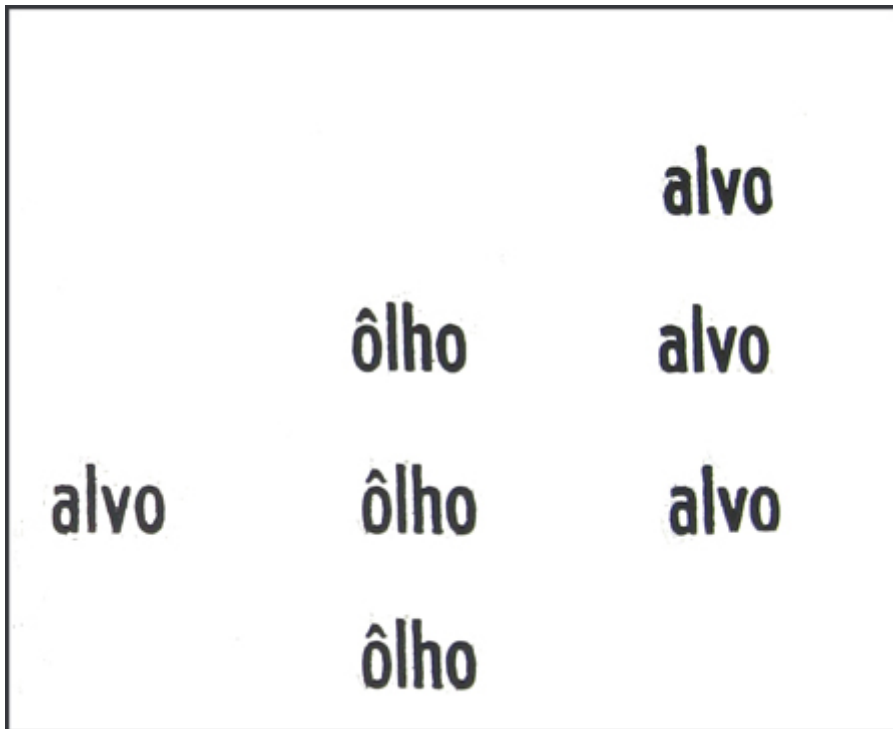
The support for the art of "NeoConcrete Ballets" was the body itself.



"In 'Balé I,' there were four white cylinders and four orange-red parallelograms; they were two meters high and set on small wheels. The people hidden inside these shapes moved them around, using the human body as an engine. The ballet was

based on a poem by Reynaldo Jardim. The choreography followed the poem, which consisted of two words, "alvo" (target) and "olho" (eye), repeated by moving them on the paper. Only the geometric shapes were visible on the stage. The sound, produced by Reynaldo Jardim, consisted of two notes, using the piano as a percussion instrument: pam, pam - pam/ pam - pam."

ICONOGRAPHY:



4- Poem by Reynaldo Jardim
Cf.: MAM documentation section.

"As for 'Balé II,' it consisted of nothing but two large 2 x 2-meter squares - a pink one and another with a blue stripe along the top. These shapes were also set on wheels, but they only moved at right angles. The choreography was more rigid. The backdrop was also black, and there was a very interesting moment when the pink square entered upstage and was transformed into the ground, while the black one seemed to be the figure. The inversion obtained was very beautiful."

According to Arnheim 7, a concrete poem should be a concatenation and not adopt the standards of logic, sparking a reaction in the reader's mind by fusing all the elements into an organized whole. This is what the ballets did. In fact, as the artist mentioned, the choreography of "Balé I" was based on one such poem.

NeoConcrete ballets could be called organic because they not only use the human body to support art works but they point out the inconclusive nature of reasoning. They express a multiplicity of relationships, ambiguities and contradictions that lead spectators to complete the work, removing them from their passive role.

"NeoConcrete ballet hides the body to reveal it. There are no dancers, only the dance."

These ballets only comprehend the parts when they form a whole. This whole could be the dance or culture / society. Similarly, the individual is only fully revealed in his or her cultural and social context. The ambiguity found in these ballets links the spectators' attention to enable them to perceive this absolute unity.

ICONOGRAPHY



5- Lygia Pape shows her "Book of Creation" at the Second NeoConcrete Art Exhibition

The Neoconcrete Poem:

If we compare a neoconcrete poem with a concrete poem, we will have to verify that the concrete poem is less structural, less material, less verbal, less rational and, in a certain less static. Instead of accentuating the mechanical relations among words, this kind of poem searches accentuate the emptiness among them, the silence. In a concrete poem, the verbal elements not only qualify each other, but also they create, the dynamic tensions of attraction and repulse to each other.

This dynamic and unstable set is, at the same time, in spite of the of its dynamism and instability, something of static as a set. The tensions are inside of it, but the set is something static. The neoconcrete poem, which abandons the structure is much more dynamic. It is less verbal, because the concrete poem, even if elaborated with few verbal elements, that can be only two, because of the repetitions, combinations and inversions, becomes more talkative verbally.

ICONOGRAPHY



6- A Neoconcrete poem by Theon Spanudis

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Essay extracted from:

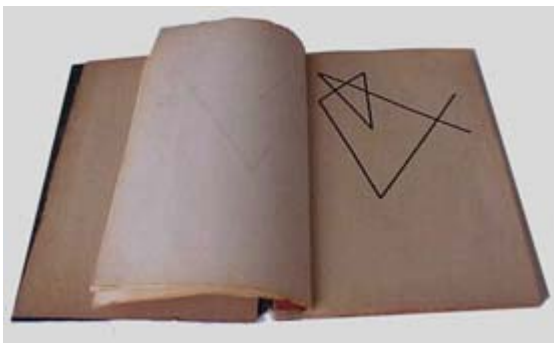
PINTO, Regina Célia. "Quatro olhares à procura de um leitor, mulheres importantes, arte e identidade" ("Four Views in Search of a Reader, Important Women, Art and Identity"). Rio de Janeiro, 1994. 415p. Tese (Pós Graduação em Artes visuais, Mestrado em História da Arte, área de Antropologia da Arte) - Escola de Belas Artes, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

The Process Poem

1. The Mathematical Language

This tendency of the Brazilian concrete poetry arises from the Wladimir Dias-Pino work and it is the basis of the Process Poem, which was Born in 1967 / Rio de Janeiro. Dias Pino exhibited in those historical exhibitions of 1956 his poems "A Ave" and "Solida".

"A Ave" (1956) is a poem book, because it only exists because of the book, the pages are parts of the poem, it would be impossible to transport this poem to other languages or supports, in this case its signification will be totally lost. The poem is constituted and read while the book is manipulated: the paper texture, its size, its transparency and color are primordial elements. Dias-Pino foreshadowed the algorithms: what was important was the visualization of the process and not its structural crystallization.





The Movement

The movement called Process Poem was an action founded in 1967, which happened simultaneously in Brazil's several regions: here in Rio de Janeiro, in Natal, in Recife and in Minas Gerais. The action of the Process Poem developed from 1967 to 1972 and ended up having about 250 artists taking part on it. It was opened to new participants and for that reason, the post office was intensively used – the art via snail mail. Many people that work with mail art today took part in the Process Poem.

This poetical form had Dias-Pino work as basis and it arose, publically, with several manifestations, the start of the magazine "Ponto" and the manifest "Proposição" (Dias-Pino, 1971). At the beginning of 1968 the most important actions of the movement appeared, including books of discursive poets being torn on the steps of Municipal Theater, Rio de Janeiro. Also, during the Poem Process 2nd exhibition at "Escola de Belas Artes" (RJ) was distributed a pamphlet showing the following problems: 1)- a public protest against the secret literary politics of favors exchange; 2)- the necessity of showing that there was a qualitative rupture in the Brazilian Poetry development; 3)- Against the eternity character which tends towards the stable, preventing from the appearance of the new; 4)- Affirmation to the new poets that the kind of poetry existing on the torn books can not be an example because it was overcome and consumed; 5)- the poem is like a pile, when it exhausts, exhaust; 6)- It was necessary frighten being radical (...) (Vozes, ano 64, nº 1, 1977).

The Process Poem was based on the concept of process, which would be the starting point of the creation, in this way the space of Process Poem is the opposite of the neoconcrete's space which was metaphysical and existential. Through the Process Poem, an element would be affected by the previous which came first and

it would affect the posterior that would come after. The Process Poem is the one that in each new experience, inaugurates informational processes, being that the information can be esthetic or not, the important is that it can be functional, it is not to invent new information but to discover the new and to establish a concept in any available Language.

"...The Process Poem does not intend to finish with the word, what the Process Poem reaffirms is that a poem is done with a process and not with words... (Dias-Pino, 1971)

During the Process Poem's movement a "net" of poets and artists was created in several regions of the country and we can say that the idea of "net" was already glimpsed. The interaction and participation are ideas that were intrinsic in the concept of the Process Poem. That action had a very large growth, it was an intense change of information in the field of the visual poetry among poets and artists that participated of the action.

The Process Poem is that one which inaugurates processes to each new experience. It has as starting point the generating Matrix of series.

The first publications had been edited in envelopes with untied pages. It was already what is used today in mail art. Many times the letter invitation with the proposal for the publication was sent and who had interest in participating sent the work printed in the format and quantity previously determined. The material that arrived was organized in folders that had the name of the edition printed, as for example in the magazine "Point". The distribution was done by snail mail, therefore the Process Poem was not sold at the bookstores.

Nowadays one can imagine that if the movement of "Process Poem" had happened at the current moment, with all the easiness technological, it really would have been a fantastic because the intention was to create inaugural processes. It is almost sure that at that time the poets who participate of the movement foresaw our times and what would happen with the use of computer science. It had versions that were made for posterior interpretation by the computer. The approach in the Process creates dynamism. The Poem modernizes through the ways of each time, creating new versions.

Some examples of Process Poem:

“POEMÃOS” by Neide Sá

[“Poemãos” = Poema+Mãos = Poem+ Hands, but also Poemãos means a big poem, the suffix ão increases the size of the nouns in Portuguese.]

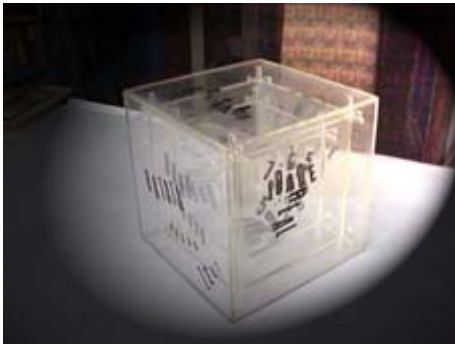


POEMÃOS is a creative process which started to be registered in 1970, with the image which integrated “A Caixa” (The Box) and the hands that held it and that metaphorically built it.

It developed and became an autonomous process starting in 1976, time in which the artist worked for the first time the form of a hand as base sign to a poem series.

"POEMÃOS" is an unfinished process because it is always in permanent update. It lets as trace its previous versions as, testimony of a process that only will extinguish with the human being.

Transparence, other poem by the artist/poet:

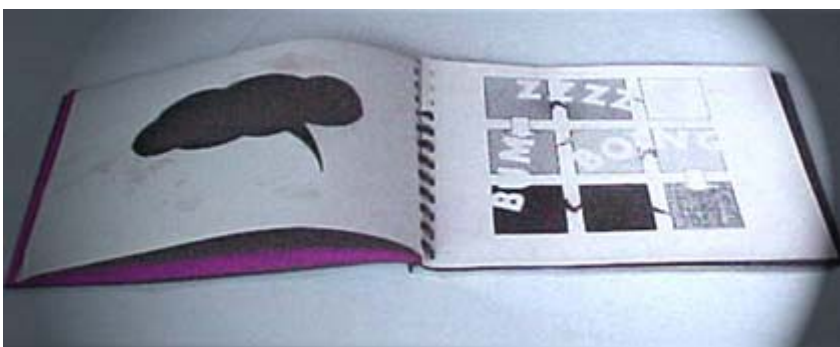


Transparência

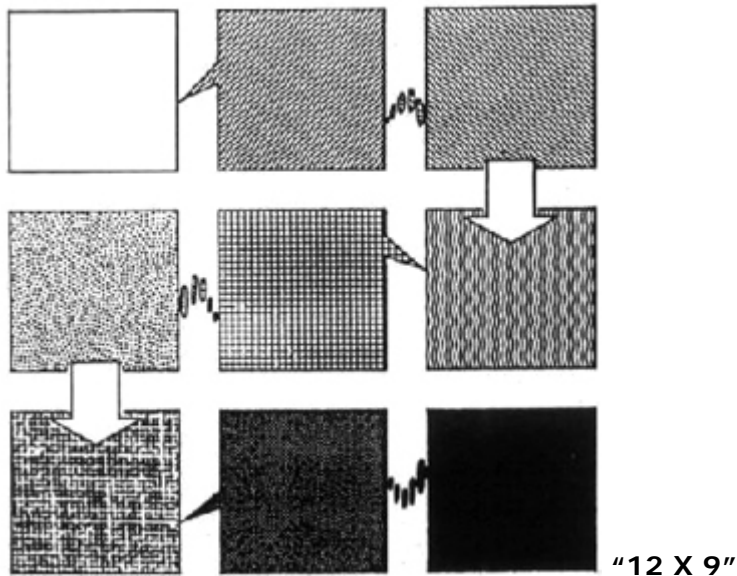
Poems by Álvaro de Sá:



Alfaberto



HQ S1P



A poetic object by Wladimir Dias-Pino, Neide Dias de Sá or Álvaro de Sá, basically is composed of a series of elements whose final disposition, without any previous outline must be composed by the people that interacts with the elements. Usually the elements come inside a bag, placed in it without any constructive composition – sense of freedom – no order is respected, be it chronological or any other order.

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<http://artonline.arq.br/museu/ensaios/dialogos.htm>