

general scheme of the new objectivity

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A typical state of current Brazilian avant-garde art could be formulated as “New Objectivity.” Its principal characteristics are: 1) general constructive will; 2) a move towards the object, as easel painting is negated and superceded; 3) the participation of the spectator (bodily, tactile, visual, semantic, etc.); 4) an engagement and a position on political, social and ethical problems; 5) a tendency towards collective propositions and consequently the abolition, in the art of today, of “isms,” so characteristic of the first half of the century (a tendency which can be encompassed by Mário Pedrosa’s concept of “Post-Modern Art”); 6) a revival of, and new formulations in, the concept of anti-art.

“New Objectivity” therefore, as a typical state of current Brazilian art, likewise distinguishes itself on the international plane from the two main currents of today: Pop and Op, and also from those connected to them: Nouveau Réalisme and Primary Structures (Hard Edge).

“New Objectivity” being a state, and not a dogmatic, aestheticist movement (as Cubism was, for instance, or any of the other “isms” constituted as a “unity of thought,” but unified nevertheless by a general verification of these multiple tendencies grouped into general tendencies). One may find, if one wishes, a simile in Dada, keeping in mind the distances and differences. (. . .)

The problem of spectator participation is more complex, since this participation, which from the beginning was opposed to pure transcendental contemplation, manifests itself in many ways. There are, however, two well-defined modes of participation: one is that which involves “manipulation” or “sensorial-corporal participation”; the other, that which involves a “semantic” participation. These two modes of participation seek, as it were, a fundamental, total, significant, nonfractioned participation, involving the two processes; that is, they are not reducible to the purely mechanical participation, but concentrate on new meanings, differing from pure transcendental contemplation. From the “playful” propositions to those of the “act,” from the “pure word” semantic propositions to those of the “word in the object,” in “narrative” works and works of political or social protest, what is being sought is an objective mode of participation. This would be the internal search, inside the object, desired by the proposition of active spectator participation in the process: the individual to whom the work is addressed is invited to complete the meanings proposed by it—it is thus an open work. (. . .) It is useless to outline here a history of the phases and appearances of spectator participation, but it can be found in all the new manifestations of our avant-garde, from the individual works to the collective (e.g. “happenings”). Experiences of both an individualized and a collective nature tend towards increasingly more open propositions in the sense of this participation, including those which tend to give the individual the opportunity to “create” his work. Likewise, the preoccupation with serial production of works (which would be the playful sense elevated to the highest degree) is an important take-off point for this problem.

There is currently in Brazil the need to take positions in regard to political, social, and ethical problems, a need which increases daily and requires urgent formulation, since it is the crucial issue in the creative field: the so-called plastic arts, literature, etc. (. . .)

There are two ways to propose a collective art: the first would be to throw individual productions into contact with the public in the streets (naturally, productions created for this, not conventional productions adapted); the other is to propose creative activities to this public, in the actual creation of the work. In Brazil, the tendency towards a collective art is what really concerns our avant-garde artists. (. . .)

. . . In Brazil, the roles take on the following pattern: how to, in an underdeveloped country, explain and justify the appearance of an avant-garde, not as a symptom of alienation, but as a decisive factor in its collective progress? How to situate the artist’s activity there? The problem could be tackled by another question: who does the artist make his work for? It can be seen, thus, that this artist feels a greater need, not only simply to “create,” but to “communicate” something which for him is fundamental, but this communication would have to be

large-scale, not for an elite reduced to “experts,” but even “against” this elite, with the proposition of unfinished, “open” works. This is the fundamental key to the new concept of anti-art: not only to hammer away at the art of the past, or against the old concepts (as before, still an attitude based upon transcendentalism), but to create new experimental conditions where the artist takes on the role of “proposer,” or “entrepreneur,” or even “educator.” The old problem of “making a new art,” or of knocking down cultures, is no longer formulated in this way—the correct formulation would be to ask: what propositions, promotions and measures must one draw upon to create a wide-ranging condition of popular participation in these new open propositions, in the creative sphere to which these artists elected themselves. Upon this depends their very survival, and that of the people in this sense. (. . .)

. . . In conclusion, I want to evoke a sentence which, I believe, could very well represent the spirit of “New Objectivity,” a fundamental sentence which, in a way, represents a synthesis of all these points and the current situation (condition) of the Brazilian avant-garde; it could serve as a motto, the rallying cry of “New Objectivity”—here it is: OF ADVERSITY WE LIVE!

This text first appeared in the catalogue for the exhibition “Nova Objetividade Brasileira” (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1967), and was republished in Guy Brett et al., *Hélio Oiticica* (Rotterdam: Witte de With; Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1992), pp. 110–120, from where the present extracts are taken.

conceptual art: a critical anthology
edited by alexander alberro and blake stimson

the MIT press • cambridge, massachusetts • london, england

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This book was set in Adobe Garamond and Trade Gothic by Graphic Composition, Inc. and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Conceptual art : a critical anthology / edited by Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-262-01173-5 (hc : alk. paper)

1. Conceptual art. I. Alberro, Alexander. II. Stimson, Blake.

N6494.C63C597 1999

700—dc21

98-52388

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