



The *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*: Art, Poetry, and Media Design in Yellowed Newspapers and Digital Archives

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Abstract

This paper focuses on a Brazilian newspaper archive from the 1950s—the *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*—usually considered as the vehicle for the neoconcrete movement. It argues that the artists and poets working in this six-year publication increasingly engaged this media as a medium. It further raises methodology and historiography questions regarding the status of documents and digital archives. And, hopefully, it helps disrupt established narratives with fresh transnational histories crafted through comparisons between a couple of artworks published in this cultural supplement and related examples from the New York based *Art Forum* magazine in the 1960s and 70s.

Keywords

Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil, archive, documentation, neoconcretism, site-specificity, tactical media, Ferreira Gullar, Robert Smithson, *Art Forum*, graphic design.

Introduction

This short paper focuses upon an under-examined Brazilian newspaper archive—the *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil* [*SDJB*]¹—a cultural supplement published in Rio de Janeiro between 1956 and 1961. Central to the debates of the concrete and neoconcrete movements in Brazil of the 1950s, this publication articulated original relations between art, poetry and design, clearly expressed in the innovative layout of this newspaper. I have been exploring this archive for a few years now, first for its content, as the documents of an important developmental era; second, beyond documentation, examining methodology and historiography; and third, by creating a few experimental collaborations that explore the generative potential that will be opened up by the digitalization of this material. In the next paragraphs, however, I will discuss one specific

aspect of the *SDJB*: its use as a site-specific medium by the neoconcrete poets and artists who worked on this publication.

It is well known that the *SDJB* became a vehicle for the neoconcrete movement. But the *SDJB* was also a site-specific space, given that its newsroom was, at times, used as a gallery. And furthermore, we can argue that the graphic design revolution of this newspaper, which reflected ideas from concrete and neoconcrete movements and influenced news media design for years to come, in addition to the publication of a few artworks which were never built or no longer exist, suggest that the *SDJB* can be seen in terms of media intervention, and therefore constitute a pioneer example of tactical media.

Born in the cultural effervescent 1950s, as part of Brazil's developmental era that aimed at modernizing the country by leaping ahead "fifty years in five"—as the president's motto insisted—, like other concrete avant-gardes in São Paulo and elsewhere internationally, the Rio de Janeiro-based neoconcrete movement emphasized non-metaphorical and non-representational forms that sought to create their own concrete reality by eliminating fictional and symbolic references. Despite their goals and efforts, however, fiction and non-fiction remain inseparable in Modern or Contemporary Art.

The newspaper archive as document: local and transnational comparisons

On a local level, comparisons can easily be made between neoconcrete artworks and the participatory creations that followed it. Neoconcrete artworks that were destroyed or never built, such as Ferreira Gullar's architectural poem, *Poema Enterrado* [Buried Poem] and Reynaldo Jardim's *Teatro Integral* [Total Theater]¹ were important precursors

¹ Ferreira Gullar's *Poema Enterrado* [Buried Poem] was built in an underground brick and mortar room and later abandoned after

to, and the actual “prototypes” of the more famous participatory works of Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape of the 1960s and 70s.

Transnationally, comparisons between the *SDJB* and art publications elsewhere in the world open up interesting questions. For instance, the publication of images and blueprints of neoconcrete “non-objects” on the pages of the *SDJB* echo similar media interventions, such as the ones in the pages of the New York based *Art Forum* magazine in 1969 and 1974 respectively.

Beyond Documentation: Engaging the Media As Medium

The *SDJB* is certainly an archive of documents from six years of experimental thinking (beginning with poetry and the visual arts, and increasingly discussing all the arts as well as architecture), which articulated the various dimensions of art and poetry, including visual and verbal spaces, static and dynamic forms. While there are some similarities, for instance, between Gullar’s *Buried Poem*, 1961, and earthworks, such as Robert Smithson’s *Partially Buried Woodshed*, 1970, I want to suggest that the *SDJB* also has a site-specific dimension by comparing it with the publication of a Smithson essay in *Art Forum*. One of that magazine’s former editors, Phillip Leider, argued that the publication of a Smithson essay about his *Yucatan Mirror Displacements* in *Art Forum* in 1969, was a *new* thing, in that it became one of the versions of Smithson’s work:

The best examples, I’d say, are the “mirror displacements.” That essay is one of the forms that that work takes. The nine photos are another form. The actual work in Mexico was another form. But that essay is a form of that work of art. That was one of its manifestations. And that was a whole new thing.²

A similar argument can be made about Linda Benglis’s famous “center-fold” ad published in *Art Forum* in the November 1974 issue (in which she poses nude in pornographic fashion, wearing sun glasses and displaying a large dildo). It was not simply an exhibition ad, but arguably a tactical media intervention that subverted traditional hierarchies between art and advertising, artwork

and documentation, gallery and media exhibition sites. It certainly triggered a heated controversy among the magazine’s editors and contributors (a few of them left the publication to start *October*), not to mention within the feminist movement and throughout the art world. Benglis work asks us to consider the difference between the documentation of art and a site-specific media performance. And I believe that the publication of artworks such as Gullar’s *Buried Poem* and Reynaldo Jardim’s *Teatro Integral* [Total Theater] on the pages of the *SDJB* can be also approached as site-specific, and as examples of tactical media, as much as they are documentation of art projects, and they are the only version of those artworks that have survived.

Digitalization of Archives: Questions and Disruptions

There is great cultural value in old newspapers, but journals are also used “to wrap fish the next day.” Material loss, disaster, and failure haunt history and memory, and this loss of physicality is increasingly true, as newspapers become extinct by moving to digital platforms. An important aspect of digital archives is also their generative and recombinant potential, which in the case of the *SDJB* includes the material and methodological possibilities opened up by the digitalization of about 2750 newspaper pages. This generative potential poses further questions about how we engage history *as* a medium, and calls attention to how technology influences the dynamics between visual and verbal languages. How does the transformation of a collection of yellowed newspaper pages into a database constrain and expand research, as well as our understanding of historical events? Before approaching documents as evidence, what are the relationships between archive and method? And even though an archive of artifacts can also function as a database—for instance, when artworks never built during an artist’s lifetime are created by curators from drawings, or when multiple copies of interactive artworks are recreated for different exhibitions without an original—a digital archive’s generative potential grows exponentially by enabling new translations among objects, images, texts, and sounds.³

a pre-inauguration flood; Reynaldo Jardim’s *Teatro Integral* [Total Theater] is a multimedia installation room, which only exists as a full page drawing on the pages of the *SDJB*.

² Phillip Leider, in Amy Newman’s *Challenging Art: Art Forum 1962-1974* (New York, Soho Press), 250-251.

³ I have created a three-minute video analysis of the graphic design evolution of the *SDJB* in collaboration with Candice Ng: <http://vimeo.com/46111510> (password SDJB). See also the sound-based collaborative performance *Playing the Archive*: <http://playingthearchive.com/>

Among the questions and disturbances this research produces, are the histories that position “Latin American art” as derivative of Euro-American pioneer accomplishments.⁴ A transnational perspective builds networks and often disrupts traditional narratives, while producing more nuanced, critical, and relational media histories.

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⁴ Examples are my own book *Performing the Archive* (New York: Atropos, 2009); Michael Asbury, “Neoconcretism and Minimalism: On Ferreira Gullar’s Theory of the Non-Object,” *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, Kobena Mercer, ed. (MIT Press and inIVA, 2005), 168-189; and Pedro Erber, “Gutai and Brazilian Concrete Art,” *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, Exhibition Catalogue (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013), 270-274.

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Author Biography

Simone Osthoff is a professor of art and critical studies in the School of Visual Arts at the Pennsylvania State University. A Brazilian-born artist and scholar, her research on contemporary art, theory, and criticism focuses on experimental art practices and postcolonial histories. She is part of the editorial board of the *Flusser Studies* journal and a frequent presenter in national and international symposia. Osthoff’s numerous book chapters, essays, and reviews have been published internationally. She is the author of *Performing the Archive: The Transformation of the Archive in Contemporary Art from Repository of Documents to Art Medium*.