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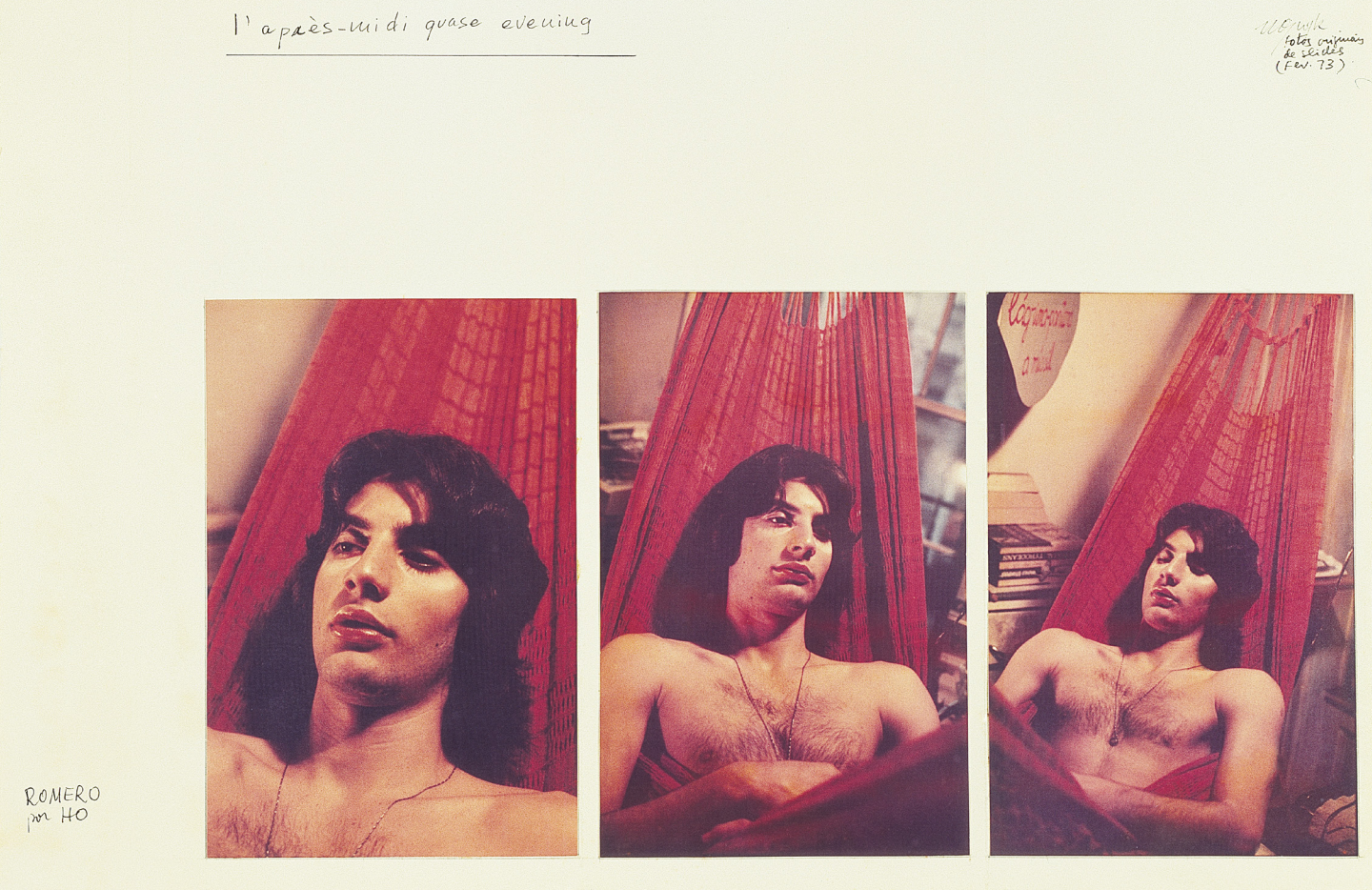
Museum Research Consortium
Research Dossier 5



MoMA

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Cover: Hélio Oiticica. *The afternoon almost evening*. 1973. Cibachrome prints pasted on paper. 11 9⁄16 × 17 11⁄16" (29.3 × 45 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund. 845.2016

Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto antropofago” (May 1928)

Mia Kang
Yale University

MANIFESTO ANTROPOFAGO

Só a antropofagia nos une. Socialmente. Economicamente. Philosophicamente.

Unica lei do mundo. Expressão mascarada de todos os individualismos, de todos os collectivismo. De todas as religiões. De todos os tratados de paz.

Tupy, or not tupy that is the question.

Contra toda as cathecheses. E contra a mãe dos Gracchos.

Só me interessa o que não é meu. Lei do homem. Lei do antropofago.

Estamos fatigados de todos os maridos catholicos suspeitosos postos em drama. Freud acabou com o enigma mulher e com outros sustos da psychologia impressa.

O que atropelava a verdade era a roupa, o impermeavel entre o mundo interior e o mundo exterior. A reacção contra o homem vestido. O cinema americano informará.

Filhos do sol, mãe dos viventes. Encontrados e amados ferozmente, com toda a hypocrisia da saudade, pelos immigrados, pelos traficados e pelos touristes. No paiz da cobra grande.

Foi porque nunca tivemos grammaticas, nem collecções de velhos vegetaes. E nunca soubemos o que era urbano, suburbano, fronteiriço e continental. Preguiçosos no mappa mundi do Brasil.

Uma consciencia participante, uma rythmica religiosa.

Contra todos os importadores de consciencia enlatada. A existencia palpavel da vida. E a mentalidade prelogica para o Sr. Levy Bruhl estudar.

Queremos a revolução Carahiba. Maior que a revolução Francesa. A unificação de todas as revoltas efficazes na direcção do homem. Sem nós a Europa não teria siquer a sua pobre declaração dos direitos do homem.

A edade de ouro annunciada pela America. A edade de ouro. E todas as girls.

Filiação. O contacto com o Brasil Carahiba. **Oú Villeganhon print terre.** Montaigne. O homem natural. Rousseau. Da Revolução Francesa ao Romantismo, á Revolução Bolchevista, á Revolução surrealista e ao barbaro technizado de Keyserling. Caminhamos.

Nunca fomos cathechisados. Vivemos atravez de um direito sonambulo. Fizemos Christo nascer na Bahia. Ou em Belem do Pará.

Mas nunca admittimos o nascimento da logica entre nós.

Desenho de Tarsila 1928 — De um quadro que figurará na sua proxima exposição de Junho na galeria Percier, em Paris.

Contra o Padre Vieira. Autor do nosso primeiro emprestimo, para ganhar commissão. O rei analphabeto dissera-lhe: ponha isso no papel mas sem muita labia. Fez-se o emprestimo. Gravou-se o assucar brasileiro. Vieira deixou o dinheiro em Portugal e nos trouxe a labia.

O espirito recusa-se a conceber o espirito sem corpo. O antropomorfismo. Necessidade da vaccina antropofagica. Para o equilibrio contra as religiões de meridiano. E as inquisições exteriores.

Só podemos attender ao mundo crecular.

Tinhamos a justiça codificação da vingança A sciencia codificação da Magia. Antropofagia. A transformação permanente do Tabú em totem.

Contra o mundo reversivel e as idéas objectivadas. Cadaverizadas. O stop do pensamento que é dynamico. O individuo victima do systema. Fonte das injustiças classicas. Das injustiças romanticas. E o esquecimento das conquistas interiores.

Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros. Roteiros.

O instincto Carahiba.

Morte e vida das hypotheses. Da equação **eu** parte do **Kosmos** ao axioma **Kosmos** parte do **eu.** Subsistencia. Conhecimento. Antropofagia.

Contra as elites vegetaes. Em communicação com o sólo.

Nunca fomos cathechisados. Fizemos foi Carnaval. O indio vestido de senador do Imperio. Fingindo de Pitt. Ou figurando nas operas de Alencar cheio de bons sentimentos portuguezes.

Já tinhamos o communismo. Já tinhamos a lingua surrealista. A edade de ouro.
Catiti Catiti
Imara Notiá
Notiá Imara
Ipejú

A magia e a vida. Tinhamos a relação e a distribuição dos bens physicos, dos bens moraes, dos bens dignarios. E sabiamos transpor o mysterio e a morte com o auxilio de algumas formas grammaticaes.

Perguntei a um homem o que era o Direito. Elle me respondeu que era a garantia do exercicio da possibilidade. Esse homem chamava-se Galli Mathias. Comi-o

Só não ha determinismo - onde ha misterio. Mas que temos nós com isso?

Continua na Pagina 7

Plate 1 Oswald de Andrade (Brazilian, 1890–1954). *Revista de antropofagia vol. 1, no. 1, May.* 1928. closed: 13" × 9 ⅜" × ⅛" (33.2 cm × 24 cm × 3 cm) open: 19 ¼" × 13" × ⅛" (49 cm × 24 cm × 3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art Library. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Paulo Herkenhoff. 300333681

Oswald de Andrade's 1926 manifesto (pl. 1) begins dramatically: "Cannibalism alone unites us. Socially. Economically. Philosophically."[1] Likely influenced by Francis Picabia's "Manifesto Cannibale," published in *Dada* magazine in 1920, Andrade's manifesto consists in aphorisms dense with references. Concerned with the creation of a uniquely Brazilian form of modernism, the manifesto is seen as the founding document of the Antropofagia movement. It proposed to cannibalize European influences into the native traditions of Brazil, thereby producing a revolutionary synthesis which would both resist European dominance and advance Brazil's progress.

The manifesto was published in the first issue of the *Revista Antropofagia*, produced under the leadership of Antonio de Alcantara Machado and Raul Bopp.[2] The issue included journalism, advertisements, poems, editorials, and more, making it a kind of "anti-magazine espousing a different idea of Brazilian culture."[3] Beginning on the third page of the journal, the manifesto is laid out in three columns of text, each brief section divided by a horizontal line. In the center of the page, extruding slightly into the text, Tarsila do Amaral's famous *Abaporu* is reproduced as a drawing, with the caption "Desenho de Tarcila 1928—De un quadre que figurará na sua proxima exposiçao de Junho na galeria Percier em Paris." The caption's mention of Paris is telling: Tarsila's painting would be shown there, indicating the exchange of artistic practices between Europe and Brazil even within the layout of the manifesto. The drawing seems to anchor the text, becoming an instant icon for Antropofagia.

In both content and form, the manifesto emerged from Andrade's belief that the "importers of canned consciousness" from Europe should be countered with a "Carib Revolution," a return to indigenous heritage via the figure of the cannibal who devours his enemy.[4] Read by some as an important early instance of postcolonial critique, the text might also be read as problematically primitivist. Andrade writes of "Children of the sun, mother of the living," making references to spirituality, magic, "natural man," and the natural environment.[5] Tarsila's *Abaporu* also draws connections with the natural environment, depicting a distorted figure seated alongside a cactus and a floating sun.

Yet Andrade's "Manifesto" does not only contend with questions of Brazilian identity. It is also interested in issues of cultural production, in the emergence of forms which will bring about a new social paradigm. "We are concretists," Andrade writes. "Ideas take charge, react, and burn people in public squares. Let's get rid of ideas and other paralyses. By means of routes."[6]

What are these routes of which Andrade speaks? One section of the manifesto simply reads: "Routes. Routes. Routes. Routes."[7] Other navigational and spatial terms figure large. Andrade refers to the "*mapamundi* of Brazil," "caravels," "the migrations," "urban scleroses," and "sextants," to name a few.[8] Cross-Atlantic circulation is clearly in play here. Andrade's evocation of "routes" suggests that the act of anthropophagy would devour these circulation networks in reverse, exporting Brazilian modernism through the very conduits established by colonization.

Indeed, while the manifesto can be mined for its allusions to European thinkers, including Goethe, Rousseau, Montaigne, and Freud, it is more striking for its temporal propositions. Thinking ontologically, cannibalism confuses the logic of origins. The manifesto form necessarily gestures toward the future, but Andrade is also nostalgic for a Brazil that "never had grammars… never knew what urban, suburban, frontier and continental were."[9] Aphorism performs a similar movement, operating metonymically within Andrade's philosophy. To be "concrete" for Andrade is to deny the future inscribed by colonialism. But his politics fail in his turn to the past. Cannibalism, in other words, ends up being merely an aesthetic. Andrade succeeds in producing a flurry of ambivalent relations, but his opposition to "the dressed and oppressive social reality registered by Freud" may cause him to miss reality in general.[10] Nevertheless, the text remains a fascinating gesture, one which would impact Brazilian artists for decades to come.

1. Oswald de Andrade, trans. Leslie Bary, "Cannibalist Manifesto," *Latin American Literary Review* 19 (38): 38.

2. Kenneth David Jackson, "Brazilian Literature: Eating the 'Revista de Antropofagia,'" *Latin American Literary Review* 7 (13): 2.

3. Ibid.

4. Andrade, trans. Bary, "Cannibalist Manifesto," 39.

5. Ibid, 38, 39.

6. Ibid, 43.

7. Ibid, 40.

7. Ibid, 39, 42, 43.

8. Ibid, 39.

9. Ibid, 44.

Joaquín Torres-García, *Construction in White and Black* (1938)

Mostafa Heddaya
Princeton University

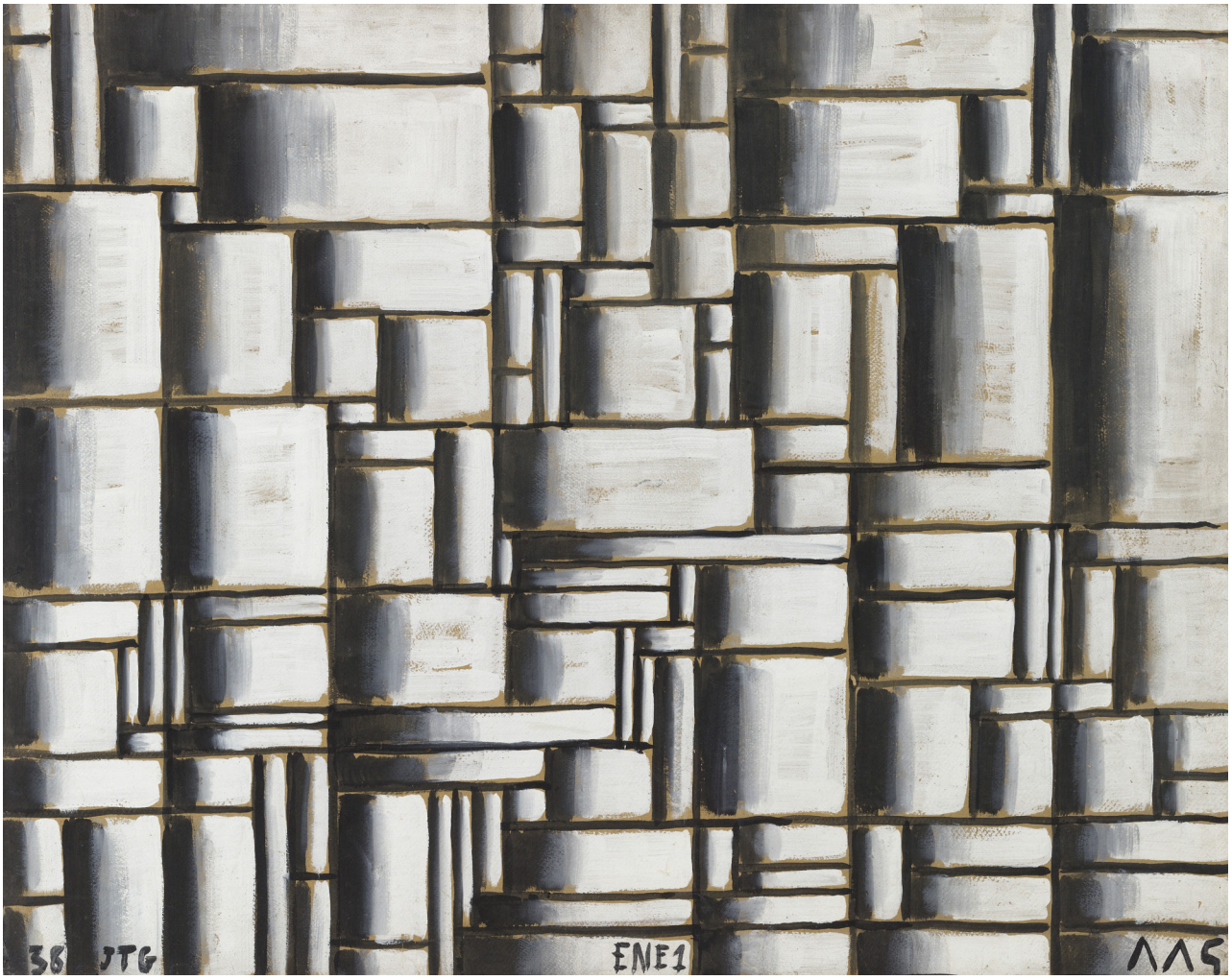

Plate 2 Joaquín Torres-García (Uruguayan, 1874–1949). *Construction in White and Black*. 1938. Oil on paper mounted on wood. 31 ¾ × 40 ⅛" (80.7 × 102 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of David Rockefeller. 331.2004

Begin with the bottom line: Three lower inscriptions ballast this painting by Joaquín Torres-García in time and space, and through them we will wend our way into its events. First, the artist's signature and annual date, on the left, here an initialed contraction of Torres-García's earlier longhand imprimatur: 38 JTG. Then ENE1, a truncation of the Spanish for January 1st. New year's day might herald the opening of the Gregorian calendar year, but a single day, expressed as dateline, signs its own diurnal worlding. In Torres-García's "January 1" of 1938 as in James Joyce's well-known "June 16, 1904," there is an effect of "an abridgment of all space in a brief segment of time," as Marshall McLuhan once wrote regarding the "newspaperwise" quality of *Ulysses*.[1] Such abridgment animates the content and method of this critical fragment too, reading Torres-García through the expanded moment of *Construcción en blanco y negro* (*Construction in White and Black)*, which is to say his activities circa 1938.

Given the overriding preoccupation with the timeless and the unitary in his classicicizing constructivist thought, "ENE1" is a challenging — not to mention unique — mark in the oeuvre of Torres-García. Its pairwise presence here with the remaining text on the lower right, AAC, or "Asociación de Arte Constructivo," might help further construe its meaning. Founded by the artist the year after his return to his natal Montevideo from Madrid, in 1935, the Asociación was to be a platform for the "intellectual diffusion," as one scholar put it, of his project of universal constructivism in the Uruguayan capital.[2] There the publication of *Estructura* in July 1935 was the artist's first programmatic theorization of his "arte constructivo." *Estructura* was dedicated to Piet Mondrian, despite Torres-García having rejected the rational geometricity of his erstwhile Cercle et Carré colleague's abstraction.[3] This was a lineage Torres-García (re)claimed on his own terms: The following year, the AAC began publishing *Circulo y Cuaderno*, a journal chiefly preoccupied with Uruguayan art.[4] That its title translates Cercle et Carré was almost incidental, even if it was in the Parisian group's journal that he had published his first formal expression of the *constructive* idiom, in 1930.[5]

The painting at hand is a paradigmatic expression of this long-gestating constructivist style, in which "all space" — both mythic and Euclidian — is rearticulated in a derationalized yet "unitary" architectonic grid partitioned by means of the golden ratio. Here the grid's content is "tubular," occupied only by a triadic gradient suggesting the third dimension in a progressive slapdash of black, grey, and white, all rendered in fast-drying glue tempera on cardboard.[6] (Slapdash because uneven, both in the grid's lineation and the casualism of its incomplete fill; it is conceivable that the entire painting was executed in under an hour.) The ostensible rectilinearity of this field also belies the slantedness of the right edge of the original cardboard support, which skews slightly inward as though to make un-ruly the parallelism of its rectangle, splitting the geometric difference between the synthetic and the natural. We might note, further, that the "natural" extends to the medium: Glue tempera is made from organic, i.e. animal-based, glue.[7]

Insofar as the work is architectonic in its dimensional deployment of the grid, it participates in a long-held if oblique interface with architecture that found its greatest expression in Torres-García's eclectic 1932 album *Structure*s, in which the artist collected images of buildings and monuments alongside examples of writing and art spanning world history. Often these pasted-in prints were accompanied by brief captions handwritten in French, but sometimes his hand was absent, as in a page where a schematic depiction of four ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic cartouches joins a photograph of a Canadian grain elevator and another of a gothic façade featuring a prominent rose window. By 1938, his interest in architecture would congeal in the public sculpture titled *Monumento Cósmico*, a gridded, wall-like structure nearly twenty feet long ornamented by "Indoamerican" symbols unveiled that year in Montevideo's Parque Rodo, a construction of his constructive idiom.[8]

"What is constructive art?" A lecture bearing that title delivered by the artist in the final month of 1938 returns us to the scene of this painting, clueing an adherence between language and form. "Our culture is bookish," Torres-García explains, "through the white and black [*blanco y negro*] of books."[9] In the constellation of his constructive paintings of the 1930s and 40s — characterized by a binary trio of features: the presence or absence of symbols, color or black and white, gridded or not — the repeat appearance of the titular phrase "blanco y negro" is thereby suggestively illuminated. Summarizing his position later in the same lecture, the artist's rhetoric comes to treble our double-one of January 1st. It might, we recognize, be thought with the unitary law ("la ley de unidad") of the constructivist project according to Torres-García: "Todo aquí es UNO."[10] *All here is ONE.*

1. Marshall McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," *Sewanee Review* 62 (1954), 50.

2. María Jesús García Puig, *Joaquín Torres García y el Universalismo Constructivo: La enseñanza del arte en Uruguay* (Madrid: Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica, 1990), 48.

3. Guido Castillo, *Primer Manifesto del Constructivismo por Joaquín Torres Garcia* (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispanica, 1976), 22–23. NB: Earlier in this text, Castillo, an associate of Torres-García's, notes that the first articulation

of his constructivism is in fact to be found in the artist's 1922 illuminated booklet-manifesto entitled *Dessins* ("que es, en realidad, el más antiguo manifiesto del constructivismo que existe") and which is reproduced in a facsimile edition accompanying Castillo's publication.

4. Alexander Alberro, "To Find, To Create, To Reveal" in *Joaquín Torres-García: The Arcadian Modern* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2015), 108n9.

5. Juan Torrès-Garcia, "Vouloir construire," *Cercle et Carré*, n.1 (1930), unpaginated.

6. Unlike its nearest formal match in the oeuvre of Torres-García, *Estructura abstracta tubular* (*Abstract tubular structure*) (1937), the term "tubular" is here occulted.

7. Author's interview with conservators Anny Aviram and Chris McGlinchey, 12 April 2018, Museum of Modern Art, New York. NB: The current object record incorrectly identifies the aforediscussed media as oil on paper.

8. The term "Indoamerican" is taken from Torres-García, as in the title of his 1939 publication *Metafísica de la Prehistoria Indoamericana*.

9. Joaquín Torres-García, "¿Qué es el arte constructivo?" (December 1938) in *Universalismo constructivo* vol. 2 (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1984), 618. *Trans. mine*. NB: *Blanco y Negro* was also the title of an important Madrid-based art and literary journal published from 1891 to 1988, with which he may be presumed to have been familiar.

10. Ibid., 620.

Armando Reverón, ***White Landscape*** **(1940)**

Horacio Ramos
The Graduate Center, CUNY

Plate 3 Armando Reverón (Venezuelan, 1889–1954). *White Landscape*. 1940. Oil on canvas. 25 ¾ × 34 ⅝" (65.5 × 88 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in memory of Dr. Enrique Pérez Olivares. 503.2015

Visual Perception and Bodily Gesture in Armando Reverón's *White Landscape* [1]

Because of its light palette and abstract appearance, Armando Reverón's *White Landscape* (pl. 3) has been called Latin America's "first *White on White*."[2] Indeed, a diagonal band of white pigment at the center of the composition (fig. 3.1) is the first element to capture the viewer's gaze. As that first impression fades away, one starts to notice the diversified network of dark dabs, gestural marks, and loose fabric that populate the canvas. After experiencing it from different angles and under changing light, it becomes clear that the white band serves to delineate the silhouette of a mountain richly textured by fabric and pigment. As stated by the work's title, far from being an abstract monochrome the piece offers us the image of a territory.

Reverón's investigation of landscape, undertaken throughout his career, was part of a larger trend in Venezuelan art. Between 1915 and 1919, he was associated with the Círculo de Bellas Artes, a group of writers and painters that, among other demands, called for the development of a national art through modernist aesthetics.[3] While in other Latin American countries painters at around the same time combined modernist idioms with nationalist discourses by depicting social themes and local communities, in Caracas artists developed images of the local territory.[4] In Macuto (the Caribbean village where he lived starting in 1919), Reverón developed between 1926 and 1934 a series of blinding landscapes that eluded the figurative clarity of other Latin American modernists and pushed the boundaries of representation (fig. 3.2).

Executed in 1940, *White Landscape* constituted a late iteration of Reverón's previous explorations with Macuto's light. Further, it made the experience of light its main theme. The clarity of the white pigment obscures the spectator's perception of the other compositional elements, thereby evoking the experience by which strong light blinds the viewer and demands a slow process of optical adjustment.[5] Only after close analysis does the important role that Reverón gave to dark marks and dabs become apparent. Paintings conservator Anny Aviram and conservation scientist Chris McGlinchey recently analyzed what looked like mere "stains" in different sections of the piece (fig. 3.3) and identified in them the same binder that is present in the white band. Thus, the painting's dark marks were as much a part of Reverón's compositional method as the lighter sections.[6]

The allure of white pigment also obscures the gestural marks made to add and subtract it. As in some of his previous works, Reverón removed pigment to re-expose the canvas's loose fabric (fig. 3.4).[7] Furthermore, ultraviolet illumination reveals that the artist used the same type of gesture (figs. 3.5–3.6) to add paint in the upper level and to subtract it in the lower section, probably with a spatula or with the back of a brush. Reverón, who visited Paris in 1914, most likely knew about Henri Matisse's incisions into thick *impasto* with the back of the brush, as well as of Eugène Carrière's severely modeled and monochromatic *camaïeu* landscape paintings.[8] As art historian Luis Pérez-Oramas has noted, this enabled a subtle game in which the artist added materiality to the "lighter" areas (the sky) and took it from the "denser" ones (the earth), working against the expectations of traditional landscape painting.[9] Thus, from the white band to the darker strokes below, the work operates as a system of gestural additions and subtractions.[10] The overall gestural character of *White Landscape* invites the viewer to focus on its materiality (its white pigment and its re-exposed fabric) rather than on its theme, which explains why this landscape painting is often read as a monochrome.

While its monochromatic semblance makes the work comparable in tone with his blinding landscapes of the 1920s (fig. 3.2), *White Landscape*'s gestural marks distinguish it from them and instead place it in conversation with his temperas and gouaches from the 1930s (fig. 3.7). Unlike those clearly figurative works, however, here Reverón links marks and background by using a similar palette. Reverón's later work continued to employ gestural strokes but did not repeat such reduced range of hues.[11] Thus, *White Landscape* constitutes a key to understand the continuities in an oeuvre that is often divided by rigorous periodization.[12]

Reverón's painting has been labeled as either a belated example of Post-Impressionism or an early exploration of the picture plane.[13] Living in Macuto and occasionally visiting Caracas, his work was not necessarily in synchrony with specific debates and trends from artistic "centers." Instead, he appropriated them to develop a continuous investigation of the effects of visual perception and bodily gesture. It is not coincidental, then, that *White Landscape* requires from both viewers and art historians to distance themselves from first impressions and preconceived historiographical frameworks. By design, the work's meaning shifts with different lights and angles, and each new zone nuances our recollection of the previous ones.

1. My present discussion of gesture in *White Landscape* is shaped by several conversations with Luis Pérez-Oramas, to whom I am deeply grateful and in debt. This paper also gained a lot from the comments received at the Museum Research Consortium session that took place on May 10, 2018, at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In that session, Anna Indych-López pointed out to me that our perception of the work in contemporary exhibition spaces is different than the one that Reverón had when painting it under the vibrant light of Macuto. In that same session, Irene Small suggested me to reflect on the temporality that is required to experience and make sense of *White Landscape*.

2. Ariel Jiménez and Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Works and Problems: A Conversation about the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Collection," in *Geometric Abstraction: Latin American Art from the Phelps de Cisneros Collection,* exh. cat. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Art Museums, 2001), 60. The term "White on White" is a reference to Kazimir Malevich's foundational and widely influential *Suprematist Composition: White on White* (1918).

3. On the relationship between the Círculo de Bellas Artes and Reverón, see Luis Alfredo López, *El Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Caracas: Instituto Nacional de Cultura y Bellas Artes, 1969), 27–29.

4. Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Armando Reverón in Latin America," in *Armando Reverón*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 91.

5. For a similar analysis of different works, see John Elderfied, "The Natural History of Armando Reverón," in *Armando Reverón*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 28.

6. Chris McGlinchey, e-mail message to author, April 19, 2018.

7. Elderfied, "The Natural History," 26–27.

8. In 1914, Reverón visited Paris. An autobiographical document states that he went to the Louvre and became acquainted with French Impressionism, even though his immediately subsequent work does not show such influence. See Elderfield, "The Natural History," 19. Anny Aviram and Luis Pérez-Oramas pointed out to me the parallels with Matisse and Carrière, respectively. On Matisse's methods for subtracting pigment, see Stephanie d'Alessandro and John Elderfield, "Matisse, 1913-1917, and the Methods of Modern Construction," in *Matisse: Radical Invention, 1913–1917*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010), 33–34. On Carrière's painting vis-à-vis sculptural processes, see Jane R. Becker, "'Only One Art:' The Interaction of Painting and Sculpture in the Work of Medardo Rosso, Auguste Rodin, and Eugène Carrière, 1884–1906," PhD diss. (Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1998).

9. Luis Pérez-Oramas in conversation with the author, April 16, 2018.

10. I took the idea of a "system of marks and traces" from Luis Pérez-Oramas, "Proposed Gift: Armando Reverón (Venezuelan, 1889–1954): Paisaje Blanco (White Landscape)," unpublished text, meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Fund Committee, April 7, 2015.

11. For an overview of Reverón's works from the 1940s, see *Armando Reverón*, exh. cat. (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2007), 150–191.

12. The periodization of Reverón's work in so-called "blue" (1919–24), "white" (1925–37), and "sepia" (1938-46) periods was first proposed in 1947 by painter Pascual Navarro, but it was consolidated by art critic Alfredo Boulton in 1955. See Alfredo Boulton, *Exposición retrospectiva de Armando Reverón* (Caracas: Museo de Bellas Artes, 1955), 7–14.

13. Eldelfied, "The Natural History," 27.

14. Explaining his move to Macuto, the artist described how there the light "dissolves colors" and "all colors, after all, become white." Carlos Morantes, "Visto por sí mismo: entrevista hecha la semana pasada en el Sanatorio San Jorque, del Dr. J. M. Báez Finol," El Nacional (Caracas, Venezuela), March 16, 1953.

Fig. 3.1

Fig. 3.2

Fig. 3.3

Fig. 3.4

Fig. 3.1 Center of the middle section

Fig. 3.2 Armando Reverón, (Venezuela, 1889–1954). *The Tree*. 1931. Oil on canvas. 25 ½ × 31 ¾" (64.8 × 80.6 cm). Collection Patricia Phelps de Cisneros, Caracas.

Fig. 3.3 Lower right section

Fig. 3.4 Lower right section

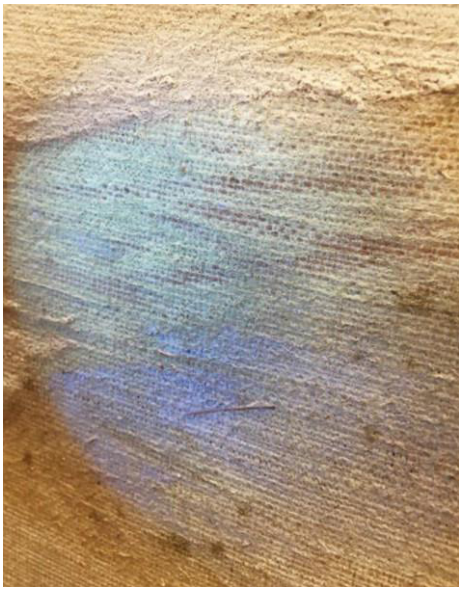

Fig. 3.5

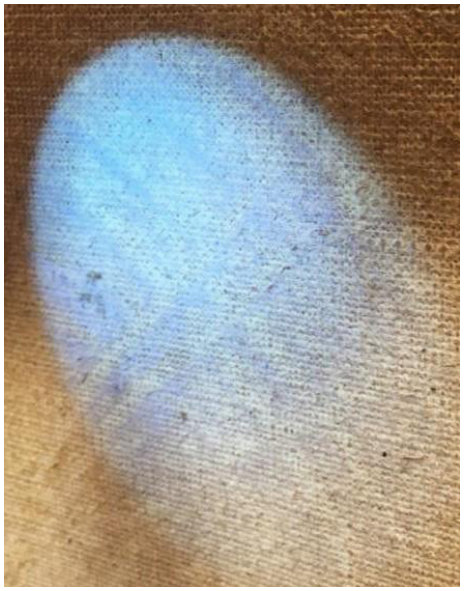

Fig. 3.6

Fig. 3.7

Fig. 3.5 Center of the middle section

Fig. 3.6 Lower right section

Fig. 3.7 Armando Reverón, (Venezuela, 1889–1954). *Maja*. c. 1933. Gouache on paper on board. 40 ½ × 35 ½" (102.9 × 90.2 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in memory of Dr. Enrique Pérez Olivares.

Juan Alberto Molenberg, *Composition* (1946)

Michaëla de Lacaze
Columbia University

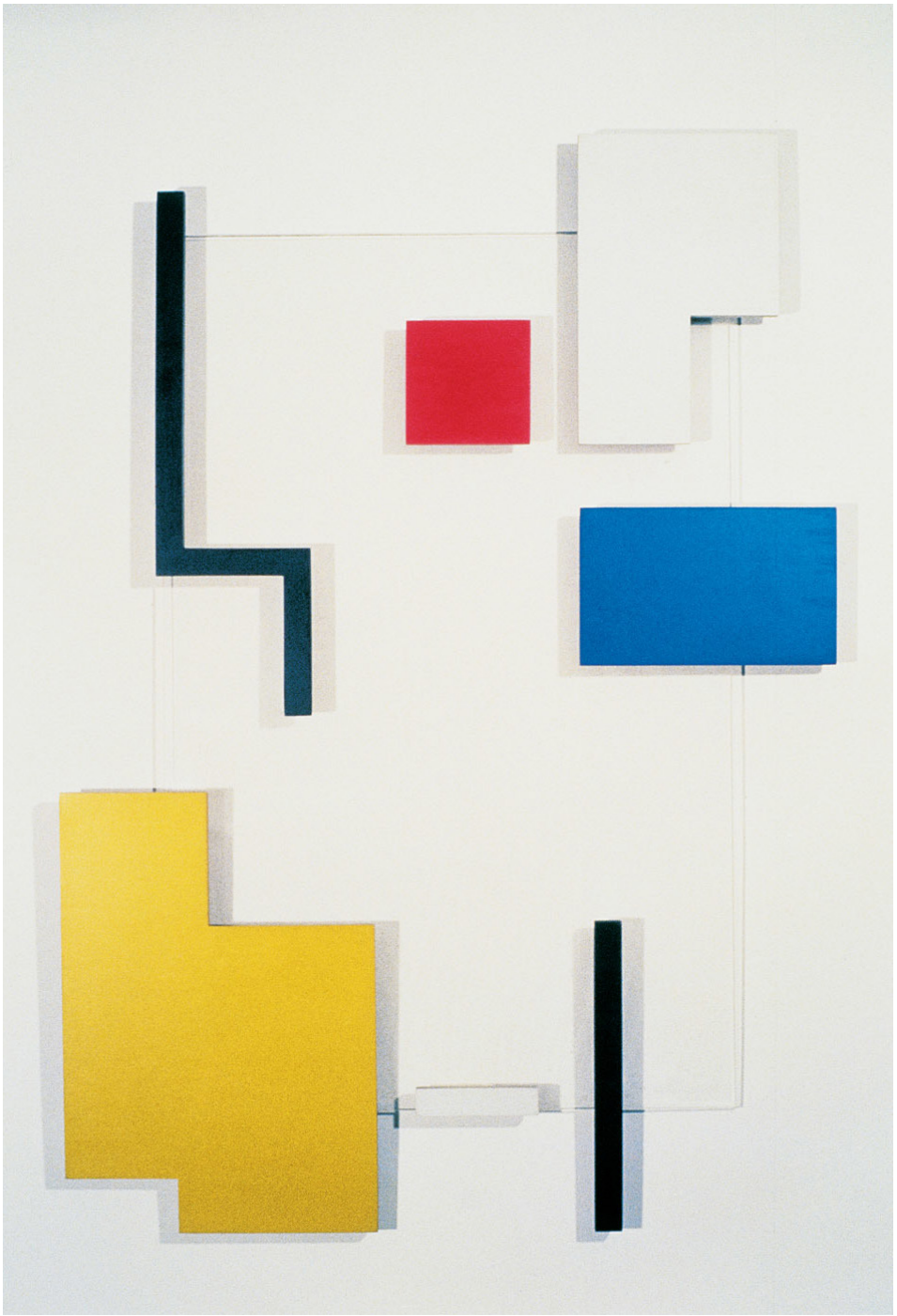

Plate 4 Juan Alberto Molenberg. *Composition*. 1946. Oil on wood over plexiglass. 39 3⁄16 × 27 9⁄16 × 1 3⁄16" (99.5 × 70 × 3 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Eva Luisa Griffin Cisneros. PG838.2016

In 1946, Juan Alberto Molenberg invents the coplanal — an open structure of separate but interrelated panels that, once placed directly on the wall, conscripts real space and shadows as formal constituents.[1] Immediately, the leading figures of Asociación Arte Concreto-Invención (AACI) position this breakthrough as the culmination of a multi-generational artistic endeavor bent on negating the illusionism of painting. Key texts, such as Tomás Maldonado's "Lo abstracto y lo concreto en el arte moderno" and Edgar Bayley's "Introducción al arte concreto," trace a genealogy of nonfigurative artists by now familiar. It begins with Cubism, continues with the art of Kasimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, and eventually abandons Europe for Argentina, where the cutout frame (*marco recortado*), theorized by Rhod Rothfuss, lays the groundwork for the epiphany of coplanarity. The compelling teleological impetus of such accounts, racing from the shaped to the shattered canvas, dissimulates a general lack of insight into the coplanal's development. Though scholars have recently elaborated on the link between the cutout frame and Molenberg's paradigmatic coplanal *White Function* (1946), none have addressed the artist's process towards this invention.[2] This is largely due to a stultifying paucity of works and texts by Molenberg.

Yet *Composition* (1946), which slightly predates *White Function*, offers an opportunity to ponder his exploration of coplanarity.[3] At first sight, this relief seems highly indebted to the cutout frame. Nearly all its painted polygons transgress and hence partially occlude the periphery of the orthogonal Plexiglas support to create an irregular border. Nonetheless, the rectangular support dogs the work. Some polygons, such as the white rectangle or black zigzag, coincide with the edges of the Plexiglas sheet and thus emphasize more than disrupt its rectangularity. Strikingly, the bottom edge of a red square — the only figure detached from the perimeter — completes the work's latent deductive structure: at the center of *Composition*, negative space replicates the shape and proportions of the translucent panel. Here, Molenberg inverts the logic of the cutout frame, whose contours, as Rothfuss stipulates, should be determined by the internal arrangement of forms.[4] Instead, *Composition's* inner emptiness offers only the material fact of pure transparency — an opening onto the world anathema to the autonomy affirmed by the cutout frame. In a daring reversal of the *marco recortado*'s raison d'être, this glass rectangle to be "looked through" literalizes or, rather, concretizes the metaphor of painting as window. That this transparency seems immediately checked by the opacity of an obdurate wall does not void *Composition*'s valence as an ideated window, for, as argued by Rosalind Krauss, "the window is experienced as simultaneously transparent and opaque" in art.[5]

As Molenberg rethinks the *marco recortado*, he simultaneously aligns himself with Mondrian, considered to be "the greatest painter of our time" by the AACI.[6] *Composition*'s triad of primaries, implicit grid, and orthogonal forms all distinctly evoke Neoplasticism. Molenberg's choice of title also nods to Mondrian's work, such as the locally well-known *Composition in White, Black, and Red (1936)*, featured in the pages of *Arturo* in 1944. In fact, *Composition*'s centrifugal arrangement hyperbolizes Mondrian's relegation of all colored rectangles to the edges of *Composition in White, Black, and Red*. Moreover, the spectral rectangle at the heart of *Composition* oscillates between being the actual ground of the work (the wall) and a central figure interceding in the foreground. As both an expansive receding plane and contained emerging shape, the core of *Composition* rearticulates Mondrian's principle of "dynamic equilibrium.[7]" Unafraid to break with Mondrian's orthodoxy, Molenberg fuses a deductive structure — a hierarchic and rational arrangement antithetical to Neoplasticism — with the Dutch painter's dialectical method of composition in order to neutralize figure-ground relations and break the illusion of the canvas as a receptacle of forms — a primary objective of the AACI.

By thus underscoring planarity as the common denominator of painting and architecture, *Composition* presages the coplanal.[8] Yet a third planar surface — the page — is relevant to this logic, for Molenberg experiences Mondrian's art only through reproductions. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro argues that the poor resolution of reproductions in glossy magazines caused many Latin American *concretistas* to misconstrue Mondrian and create paintings with lustrous surfaces as well as stark graphic qualities.[9] But what is the visual effect of embedding a Mondrian in print? Returning to *Arturo*, we can see how the reproduction of Mondrian's painting harmonizes by virtue of its grid, shrunken scale and near colorlessness with the magazine's horizontal lines and columns of grey text.[10] The closely cropped contours of the glued reproduction rhyme and even partially coincide with the edges of the page. Compared to its neighboring image of a *marco recortado*, whose jagged sides seemingly prod nearby words, the reproduced Mondrian has an osmotic and deductive relationship to its surrounds. Remarkably, Mondrian had himself recognized his art's compatibility with text by placing typed verses inside the Neoplasticist composition of his 1928 "tableau-poème," *Textual* [*Textuel*].[11] To be sure, Molenberg had no knowledge of Mondrian's vision of painting as a potential conduit to a future "environmental utopia." [12] Nevertheless, the suggestive recontextualization of Neoplasticism to the material domain of the page plausibly contributed to Molenberg's decision to push Mondrian's visual language into a state of radical contingency and concreteness — one surpassing the Dutch master's imagination.

Mondrian, however, was not the only point of reference for Molenberg and the ACCI. Malevich was his equally important antipode, as evinced by Maldonado, who writes, "We [the

AACI] reached the conclusion that we had to bring the ground at the same optical level as the figure not through a linear valorization (as with neoplasticism) but through a tension between figures. Practically speaking, it was about creating a synthesis of the most positive opposites of neoplasticism and suprematism."[13] *Composition* strives for such a synthesis in its recovery and dramatic amplification of the indefinite spatial dynamics of Suprematist paintings such as Malevich's *Painterly Realism of a Boy with a Knapsack* (1915).[14] Depending on the lighting conditions, Composition's raised polygons sprout shadows that form, sans perspectival lines, ambiguous volumes similar to El Lissitzky's axonometric Prouns (yet another rereading of Malevich's Suprematism).

Significantly, Lissitzky also understands space in terms of planarity, writing "Suprematist space may be formed not only forward from the plane but also backward in depth. If we indicate the flat surface of the picture as zero, we can describe the direction in depth by negative and the forward direction by positive."[15] *Composition* possesses a similar tripartite structure. In its near inexistence, the transparent Plexiglas sheet marks the place of the zero, while the shapes fixed above it operate in a positive domain. Everything behind the glass, including the wall, falls within the negative range. Crucially, *Composition*'s shadowy volumes bridge all three of these compositional strata, refusing to settle into the clear-cut duality of a figure-ground opposition.

Still this evasion of classic spatial relations is not *Composition*'s only feat. By constructing a spatial system that is contingent on light and the wall and yet independent of the Cartesian viewer, who is unmoored from the apex of the perspectival pyramid, Molenberg precludes the subject's illusory and cathartic identification with the work of art. In this demystifying assertion of the concrete objectivity of space and de-privileging of the viewer as an abstracted, centered, and omniscient eye, Molenberg breaks with the hierarchies of traditional bourgeois art and radically instantiates the AACI's Marxist ideology.

1. Alex Alberro and Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro have ascertained that Molenberg was the first to create the coplanal.

2. Both Monica Amor and Alex Alberro interpret the cutout frame as a formal paradox. It asserts the finitude of the composition and hence affirms the autonomy of the work of art but also activates painting's boundary to the point of interrelating it with actual space. See Amor's chapter "At Painting's Edge: Arte Concreto Invención, 1944–46" in *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944–1969* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016) as well as Alberro's chapter "Concrete Art and Invention" in *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

3. According to Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, *Composition* was created sometime between 1945 and 1946. Initially, the curator relates, *Composition* consisted solely of loose polygons to be placed directly on the wall. Molenberg, however, soon grew frustrated with the misplacement of these shapes and affixed them to a piece of glass (subsequently replaced by Plexiglas) in the current specific order.

4. Rhod Rothfuss, "El marco: un problema de plástica actual," *Arturo* no. 1, (Summer 1944).

5. For a concrete work of art to evoke the illusion of painting as window may seem like an untenable contradiction. Yet this paradox, Krauss assures us, is to be expected, since the grid pushes much modern art into this "fully, even cheerfully, schizophrenic state." Rosalind Krauss, "Grids" in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1986), 16, 18.

6. Tomás Maldonado, "Torres García contra el arte modern," *Boletín de la Asociación de Arte Concreto Invención*, no. 2 (December 1946).

7. The notion of dynamic equilibrium first appears in Mondrian's 1934 essay "Vraie valeur des oppositions," which was published in Dutch in 1939 and republished in French in *Cahiers d'Art* 22 (1947), p. 105–108. For more on the principle of integration at work in Mondrian's painting, see Yve-Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea" in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1990).

8. De Stijl artists also viewed the plane as a formal element shared by architecture and painting. See Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," 111–122.

9. Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, "Recortar a Mondrian, ¿una lectura errónea?: el caso del Río de la Plata 1944–1950," Seminario Fundación Cisneros 2011: "Piet Mondrian: Lecturas paralelas," Teatro Trasnocho Cultural, Caracas, Venezuela, 26 January 2011. http://www.coleccioncisneros.org/es/seminario/2011 (Cited April 24th, 2018). See also Pérez-Barreiro's "Invention and Reinvention: The Transatlantic Dialogue in Geometric Abstraction" in *Cold America: Geometric Abstraction in Latin America (1934–1973)* (Madrid: Fundacion Juan March, 2011). Other relevant readings include Pérez-Barreiro's "Concrete Invention" and Andrea Giunta's "Farewell to the Periphery: Avant-Gardes and Neo-Avant-Gardes in the Art of Latin America" in *Concrete Invention: Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Reflections on Geometric Abstraction from Latin American and Its Legacy* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centre de Arte Reina Sofía and Turner, 2013).

10. The reproduction of Mondrian's painting was entirely in black-and-white, but Lidy Prati applied the color red by hand to a small section of the image. For more on this, see María Amalia García "Lidy Prati y su instancia diferencial en la unidad del arte concreto" in *Yente-Prati* (Buenos Aires: MALBA Colección Costantini, 2009).

11. The poem was by Belgian painter Michel Seuphor.

12. Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," 103. Although Mondrian viewed his paintings as autonomous entities, he expressed in his 1927 essay "The Home–Street–City" that Neoplasticism could, in fact, gradually reshape the world according to its principles. The integration between painting and reality would begin with the interior of the studio and progressively encompass the street and the city until reaching the entirety of the world.

13. Tomás Maldonado, "El arte concreto y el problema de lo ilimitado. Notas para un estudio teórico. Zürich,1948," *Ramona* 30 (March 2003): 11–15. My translation. This statement was accompanied by Maldonado's sketches (drawn from memory) of Mondrian's paintings and *Boy with a Knapsack*.

14. In the case of *Boy with Knapsack*, an elusive, shallow depth is produced through the optical properties of contrasting colors and the oblique placement of differently scaled squares, which give the impression of movement. The singularity of the red square—a symbol of communist revolution to the Soviet avant-garde—could be Molenberg's subtle nod to Malevich, an allusion that becomes all the more potent when the red square becomes paired with a black square, its shadow. This duo of squares is, of course, present in *Boy with a Knapsack* but also seen in other Soviet works such as *Of Two Squares*, a politically allegorical children's book, illustrated by Lissitzky. For more on this, see Yve-Alain Bois, "El Lissitzky: Radical Reversibility," *Art in America*, April 1998, 160–181.

15. El Lissitzky, "Art in Pangeometry" (1924) in *El Lissitzky: Life, Letters, Texts*, ed. Sophie Lissiztky-Küppers, trans. Helene Aldwinckle and Mary Whittall (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1968), 350.

Alejandro Otero, ***Blue Coffee Maker*** **(1947)**

Colin Young
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Plate 5 Alejandro Otero. Blue Coffee Maker. 1947. Oil on canvas. 25 ⅝ × 21 ¼" (65.1 × 54 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Sharon Schultz. PG846.2016

No artist is more synonymous with abstraction in Venezuela than Alejandro Otero. After completing his studies at the School of Fine Arts of Caracas in 1945, Otero received a scholarship that allowed him to live in Paris for the next six years. The first series of paintings to emerge from Otero's time abroad — *Las cafeteras* (The Coffee Pots) — are widely credited with inaugurating abstract art in Venezuela when they were controversially exhibited at Caracas' Museum of Fine Arts in 1949.[1] Painted from 1946-48 under the direct inspiration of Picasso's wartime still lifes, the *Cafeteras* begin as legibly figurative works; as the series progresses, the eponymous coffee pots increasingly become reduced to their structuring elements of line, plane, and color. Small surprise, then, that from the perspective of Otero's oeuvre, the *Cafeteras* are conventionally framed as a necessary but intermediary step — canvases significant largely for the way they trace the artist's inexorable drive to abstraction. Lost in the aggressive futurity of modernism's teleology is the *Cafeteras*' most obvious but perhaps most important source of inspiration: the coffee maker itself.

In his classic essay "Thing Theory," literary scholar Bill Brown notes that "only by turning away from the object/thing dialectic, have historians… precipitate[d] a new materialism that takes objects for granted…in order to grant them their potency."[2] The potency or agency of objects in this material turn stems from an understanding that, as Jennifer Roberts explains, "the objects are the cultural patterns; the matter is the mind."[3] What is the matter with the *Cafeteras*? By reconsidering these works as meditations on the "thingliness" of coffee makers, rather than as nodes on the spectrum of figuration and abstraction, it is possible to provide a richer account of the advent of modern art in Venezuela.

Otero's *Blue Coffee Maker* (1947) (pl. 5) dates from the middle of the *Cafeteras* and provides an opportunity to assess how Otero was responding to Picasso and why he chose to focus on the coffee maker as his ideographic vessel. In its compositional and coloristic sobriety, Otero's painting is reminiscent of Picasso's *Pitcher, Candle and Casserole* (fig. 5.1) — one of two Picasso still lifes that, according to Venezuelan art historian Alfredo Boulton, served to catalyze the *Cafeteras*.[4] Yet despite their similarities, a number of important differences exist between the canvases. Otero has pared the the image down to an isolated coffee pot (the setting almost entirely eliminated) and thinly washed the cobalt blue of the Spanish masters enamelled saucepan or "casserole" with the even more planar facets of his lone coffee maker.

Modernist scholarship typically understands this painting as a formal treatment of the relationship between line and plane/figure and ground, one that presages Otero's later abstraction, especially his *Colorhythms*. The danger of such a formal approach is that it renders *Blue Coffee Maker* significant only insofar as it traces the artist's inevitable advance to non-figuration, while, ironically, also ignoring the "story of the canvas" upon which formalism is based. In other words, it neglects to grapple with the objectival presence of the coffee pot — the pivot upon which Otero's work turns. *Blue Coffee Maker* is less a general inquiry into the status of line and plane than a specific investigation of the ontology of the coffee pot as an object, its innards migrating across the canvas (note, for example, the fragment of blue material that floats above the lip of the coffee maker and echoes its shape, black lines of flight propelling it upward; consider the bisected triangle adjacent to the coffee maker, a form which is mirrored in the gray, central facet of the vessel itself). In this sense, *Blue Coffee Maker* is closer to the ethos of analytical cubism than geometric abstraction, remaining, as it does, fundamentally rooted in objective reality and the democratization of things.

Graham Harman's object-oriented philosophy, which "holds that the relation of humans to pollen, oxygen, eagles, or windmills is no different in kind from the interaction of these objects with each other," provides a theoretical explanation for why Otero's coffee maker (both the canvas and its model) is best understood as an object: it has a real world existence and interacts with other objects independently of the human mind.[5] For Harman, there is an essential translation of forces between objects, whether animate or inanimate; object-oriented ontology recognizes this agency of things and the way their "properties and affordances… powerfully shape human subjectivity and activity."[6] In a letter to Alfredo Boulton dated April 14, 1947, Otero describes his conception of the idea behind the *Cafeteras* in language strikingly aligned with object-oriented philosophy.

Otero notes the "monstrous tendencies" of the *Cafeteras*' painted reality, where the object, "through a will of the spirit," assumes a "human signification" that renders it alien to the eyes of those who only expect to see the human in man himself.[7] Significantly, it is in the less abstract canvases, such as *Blue Coffee Maker*, that this "deformation that adds character" is most visible. For Otero, the strange and new aspect of this series is the way that this "psychology" is communicated to man and object alike. The same transference of forces underpins Harman's object-oriented philosophy, where objects have a life and speak a language that renders them capable of "screaming," as Picasso is alleged to have said.[8] The question is why did the coffee maker in particular speak to Otero? While Otero produced other groups of paintings based on objects in Picasso's 1944–45 still lifes — including casseroles, skulls, and lamps (fig. 5.2) — the coffee pot is the object he depicted most frequently.

Edward Sullivan has highlighted the centrality of the debased or mundane object for Latin American artists, arguing that "modernist still life in the Americas can… be a potent indicator

of the artistic aspirations of those who wished to stress their identification with their place of origin."[9] Indeed despite Otero's assurance to Boulton that the *Cafeteras* "do not have any national character nor any contact with the things of America," his need to proclaim their essential distance from American things, in combination with their subject matter, suggest just the opposite.[10] The quotidian coffee maker may seem an unlikely vehicle for political commentary in general and the case of Venezuela in particular, but in 1912, less than a decade before Otero's birth, coffee accounted for fifty-two percent of Venezuela's national exports.[11] Furthermore, the artist came of age just as Latin America's "coffee century" abruptly ended in the late 1920s and early 30s with the onset of the Great Depression.[12] Instead of approaching the *Cafeteras* as stepping stones to abstraction, their progressive dissolution of form is perhaps better understood as visually enacting the dematerialization of Venezuela's coffee industry in the first half of the twentieth century. Rereading *Blue Coffee Maker* through the lens of object-oriented ontology allows for a restitution of the work as a "threshold" moment that defies easy stylistic categorization while also honoring the powerful objecthood of the coffee pot.

1. See note in Alexander Alberro, *Abstraction in Reverse: The Reconfigured Spectator in Mid-Twentieth-Century Latin American Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 252.

2. Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001), 6–7.

3. Jennifer L. Roberts, "Things: Material Turn, Transnational Turn," *American Art* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2017), 65.

4. Venezuelan art historian Alfredo Boulton writes that Otero began the *Cafeteras* in October of 1946 after seeing a pair of 1945 Picasso still lifes: *Pitcher, Candle, Casserole and Skull, Leeks, and Pitcher*. See Alejandro Otero and Alfredo Boulton, *He Vivido por los Ojos: Correspondencia de Alejandro Otero/Alfredo Boulton, 1946–1974* (Caracas: Museo Alejandro Otero and Alberto Vollmer Foundation, 2001), 36

5. Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 2005), 1.

6. Roberts, "Things," 65.

7. The passage is reproduced in He vivido, 44: "Se trata… de un arte concepción que parece dirigirse hacia la creación de una realidad… de una realidad voluntaria con tendencia a lo monstruoso (porque aquí el objeto, un objeto, tiene por voluntad del espíritu, una vida, una significación humana que lo hace extraño a los ojos de los que están habituados a no ver lo humano más que en el hombre, y solamente lo humano apacible). En esas telas, más visibles en la menos abstractas, hay una *voluntad dirigida* de deformación que da un carácter… Lo extraño y lo nuevo… radica en la extraordinaria realidad que uno puede comunicar a un objeto y a un hombre con esta psicología."

8. Gijs vans Hensbergen, *Guernica: The Biography of a Twentieth-Century Icon* (London: Bloomsbury, 2004), 145. Picasso is supposed to have said, "Even a casserole can scream."

9. Edward Sullivan, *The Language of Objects in the Art of the Americas* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007), 155, 193.

10. The quote is reproduced in *He vivido*, 57: "no tiene ningún carácter nacional ni contacto alguno con las cosas de América."

11. Steven C. Topik and Allen Wells, eds., *The Second Conquest of Latin America: Coffee, Henequen, and Oil during the Export Boom, 1850–1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 56.

12. William Roseberry, Lowell Gudmundson, and Mario Samper Kutschbach, eds., *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

Fig. 5.1

Fig. 5.2

Fig. 5.1 Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *Pitcher, Candle, Casserole*, 1945. Oil on canvas, 32 ¼ × 42 in. Museé National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou.

Fig. 5.2 Alejandro Otero (Venezuelan, 1921–1990). *The Bottle and the Lamp I*, 1947. Oil on canvas, 45 ½ × 28 ⅜ in. The Museum of Modern Art, New York, promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Sharon Schultz.

Rubem Valentim, ***Untitled*****, (1956–1962)**

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Plate 6 Rubem Valentim, *Untitled*, 1956–1962, Oil on canvas. 27 ⅝ × 19 ¾" (70.2 × 50.2 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Lissette Stancioff. PG876.2016

In his determination to inscribe the value of Afro-Brazilian culture in universal aesthetic principles, RubemValentim (1922–1991) has become a staple in global art modernisms as a creator from the Black Atlantic or African Diaspora. At the outset of his career as an artist in the late 1950s, Valentim started painting a series of oils on canvas depicting multicolored small geometric figures, which he arranged in hieratic, structured grids. One untitled piece made between 1956 and 1962 stands out for its color palette combining brightly colored figures against gray, dark green, and lilac backgrounds (pl.6). Formally, the flatness and bi-dimensionality of this painting reflects Valentim's interest in exploring a constructivist style through geometric abstractions. Most importantly, this composition brings to the fore the artist's interest in joining an internationally recognized artistic language through the symbolisms of Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices, namely those of *Candomblé*. Groundbreaking and innovative in his time, this provocative interplay of style and content addressed the discursive limitations between popular and elite culture, as well as Brazil's marginalization of its black population.

In 1976, Valentim published his "*Manifesto ainda que tardio*," a declaration of his political and aesthetic views, which circulated free of charge. Here, Valentim laid out, in hindsight, the backbone of his life-long artistic interests with astounding coherence:

> Intuiting my path between the popular and the erudite, the source and the refined [...], I started seeing in our symbolic instruments, our tools (*ferramentas*) of Candomblé [...] a type of "speech," a visual Brazilian poetic capable of adequately configuring and synthetizing the core of my interests as an artist.[1]

In addition, the artist also explained the linkage between such exploration and his own personal story:

> What I wanted and still want is to establish a *design* (RISCADURA BRASILEIRA [sic]), an apt structure for revealing our reality — mine, at least — in terms of a sensitive order. This became clear around 1955–56, when I painted the first works of a sequence that up to this day, with all its new segments, continues to unfold.[2]

Under this light, Valentim's references to both language (speech) and syncretism (synthesis) constitute pivotal elements to understand his thematically consistent, or sequential, body of work. The confluence of constructivism's interest in the interplay of geometric figures and the rich imagery of *Candomblé*'s pantheon of gods, or *Orixás*, provided the artist with a virtually endless source of inspiration. As a result, his work resonated simultaneously with two seemingly disparate visual traditions. After his relocation to Rio de Janeiro from Salvador de Bahia in 1957, Valentim's direct or indirect conversations with fellow Carioca artists, such as Ivan Serpa or Lygia Pape, paved the way for an increased representability of Afro-Brazilian culture in the visual arts.[3] Moreover, his multifarious images and their compositions appeared as semiotic signs or signifiers of black identities in Brazil, a trait that ensured their reception beyond the constraints of textual literacy.[4]

Consequently, Valentim's works purposefully pose a challenge to the viewer. The multifarious iconography he depicts resonates with the infinite forms *Orixás* appear in *Candomblé*, thus creating infinite avenues for interpretation. It is precisely this resistance to labeling and categorization what Brazilian artist and critic Emanoel Araújo has posited as a survival strategy for the different cultures of the Black Atlantic Diaspora. For him, the "acceptance of syncretism as a form of permanence" in Afrodescendant cultures actively opposes values of positivist erudition through adaptability.[5] This view is shared by postcolonial cultural theorist Paul Gilroy in his analysis of Black Britain's syncretic cultural adaptations in the post-war era. Seen as a form of political resistance, Gilroy argues that syncretism is at the heart of modernity in the African diaspora, as it grounds "the need to recover and validate black culture and reincarnate the sense of being and belonging which had been erased from it by slavery."[6]

Following this perspective, Valentim kept on exploring his two-dimensional works, for which he consolidated a style by the late 1960s. Eventually, the artist exceeded painting as a medium, and, inspired by *Candomblé pejis* or altars, set out to explore sculptural forms, such as totems and reliefs.[7] By 1969, Valentim created his acclaimed series of 31 *Objetos Emblemáticos* and *Relevos-Emblemas*, which, despite their voluminous character, reasserted the artist's interests in semiotics and formalist reductions (figs. 6.1–6.2).[8] These artworks and following paintings from the 1970s and 1980s have been the usual focus of major survey shows of Afro-Brazilian art in Brazil and the United States in the last two of decades.[9]

As his painterly style developed, Valentim's *Untitled* (1956–1962), together with selected pages from his personal diaries from 1958 and 1960–1961, provide valuable insight on his artistic interest in creating a universal visual language (figs. 6.3–6.4). In a preparation sketch for this painting, Valentim shows a high correlation between creative process and finalized piece, particularly in regards to choices for the color palette and composition arrangement (fig. 6.5). Here, the *Bahiano* painter includes a color coding system for all surface areas in the canvas. Outstanding are the words "*Neutra*" at the top and bottom of the page, and the instruction "*Verde Monastral*" for the area surrounding the lilac central square.

The latter was a pigment introduced in commercial markets in 1938 and was characterized by providing a "deep vivid green color."[10] Thus, by showing his little discussed artistic rigorousness, this drawing belies the essentializing descriptions of his work as merely spontaneous, spiritual, or self-taught.

Moreover, in both sketch and painting, a number of figures appear as evocations of popular representations of *Orixás* in *Candomblé*. On the left side of the canvas, for instance, Valentim depicted Exú's trident in ochre and Ogum's iron tools in dark red and green. Other symbols in the composition are more abstracted and vaguely evoke *Candomblé*'s sacred *ferramentas*. This is the case of the emblem of Ossaim, which is inverted and merged with a small brown circle on the left, and the bow of Oxossí depicted on the right in blue, white, and yellow. These variations respond to a series of methodic figural studies Valentim made early on in his career, as a page of his diary from 1958 attests (fig. 6.6). Here, the artist laid out a series of iconographic categories that would serve as a base for the geometric structures he ceaselessly rearranged and combined for decades to come. Named "Built Signs," these typologies notably included simple figures like "Rectangles," "Squares," and "Ovoids," so as more intricate "Combinations," "Forms created by freehand," or "*Candomblé* forms."

Interestingly, a V-shaped form composed by three converging lines follows the latter category, possibly making a reference to the *ferramentas* of Oxossí or Ossaim. Drawn within a circle, this specific figure holds a momentous place in Valentim's *oeuvre*, for it is recurrently featured in his work as his personal monogram. By combining his last name's initial with a *Candomblé* symbol, the artist visually asserts his Afro-Brazilian identity at the crossroads of a quest for artistic recognition. The piece *Untitled* (1956–1962) is no exception to this practice. In effect, this V-shaped symbol appears in the back of the painting joined by other relevant data, which include a remarkable and insofar unexplored numeration system which assigns this work with the label "P30", or *Pintura* (painting) number 30 (fig. 6.7).

Valentim's monogram is inscribed within a broader exploration that combines several other characters from the Greco-Roman alphabet and *Candomblé*'s symbols. In his journal from 1960–1961, one page shows an additional series of figures which mix visual elements from both systems of communication—and perhaps other alphabets—to imagine a new semiotic code (fig. 6.8). By combining disparate human cosmogonies, these symbols syncretize Western logocentric linguistics with African spiritual visuality, thus rendering their meaning virtually unintelligible. This, however, might not matter as much as the potency embedded in the disruptive gesture of joining them together. If one considers that Valentim's symbols come in a time of a global backlash to processes of cultural hybridization between 1945 and the postcolonial turn of the 1980s, their historical relevance comes poignantly to the fore.[11] Furthermore, this attempt to create a new language also resonates with countercultural trends of political resistance grounded in spiritual practices. Although stemming from Afro-Brazilian beliefs, Valentim's work should not only be limited to *Candomblé*, as Roberto Conduru fittingly reminds us.[12] Instead, his paintings and sculptures seek to connect with the underpinnings of human spirituality outside of Euro-centric or Afro-centric cultural systems, in order to show us new possibilities of understanding the world around us.[13]

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1. Rubem Valentim, "Manifesto ainda que tardio (1976)," in *Rubem Valentim: Artista da Luz*, eds. Bené Fonteles and Wagner Barja (São Paulo: Edições Pinacoteca; Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 2001), 29 (translation by the author). Exhibition Catalogue.

2. Ibid.

3. Kimberly L. Cleveland, "Candomblé as Artistic Inspiration: Syncretic Approaches," in *Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis*, eds. Patrick A. Polk, Roberto Conduru, Sabrina Gledhill, and Randal Johnson (Los Angeles, CA: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2018), 219. Exhibition Catalogue.

4. Kimberly L. Cleveland, *Black Art in Brazil* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013), 43.

5. Emanoel Araújo, "Exhibiting Afro-Brazilian Art," In *Brazil: Body and Soul*, ed. Edward J. Sullivan (New York, NY: Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 2003), 323. Exhibition Catalogue.

6. Paul Gilroy. *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2006; 1987), 297.

7. Cleveland, "Candomblé as Artistic Inspiration," 215.

8. Ibid., 215-219.

9. These include "Axé Bahia: The Power of Art in an Afro-Brazilian Metropolis" at UCLA's Fowler Museum (2017), "*Territórios: artistas afrodescendentes no acervo da Pinacoteca*" at the *Pinacoteca de São Paulo* (2016), "Brazil: Body and Soul" at the Guggenheim Museum (2001), and "*Mostra do redescobrimento: negro de corpo e alma*" organized by the *Fundação Bienal de São Paulo* (2000).

10. "Phthalocyanine Green," *Museum of Fine Arts Boston*, last modified June 18, 2018, http://cameo.mfa.org/wiki/Phthalocyanine_green.

11. Kobena Mercer, "Cosmopolitan Contact Zones," in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, eds. Tany Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (Liverpool, United Kingdom: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 41.

12. Roberto Conduru, “Bridging the Atlantic and Others Gaps: Artistic Connections between Brazil and Africa—and Beyond,” in *Afro Modern: Journeys through the Black Atlantic*, eds. Tanya Barson and Peter Gorschlüter (Liverpool, United Kingdom: Tate Liverpool, 2010), 67.

13. I am immensely grateful to Chris McGlinchey, conservation scientist at MoMA; Laurent Sozzani, private conservator in Amsterdam, Holland; Edward J. Sullivan, professor in Art History at The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and Kobena Mercer, professor in Art History at Yale University for their generous support in writing this piece.

Fig. 6.1

Fig. 6.3

Fig. 6.2

Fig. 6.1 Rubem Valentim, *Emblema-Relevo I*, 1967–1968, acrylic on wood, 40.1 × 29.5" (102 × 75 cm). Collection of Lia Bicca, São Paulo, Brazil

Fig. 6.2 Rubem Valentim, *Objeto Emblemático 4*, 1969, 78.7 × 29.1 × 16.9" (200 × 74 × 43 cm). Collection of Lia Bicca, São Paulo, Brazil

Fig. 6.3 Rubem Valentim, cover of personal diary from 1958. Collection of Laurent Sozzani and Eneida Parreira, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

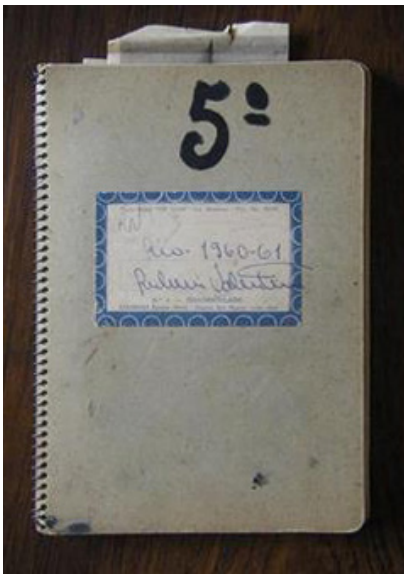

Fig. 6.4

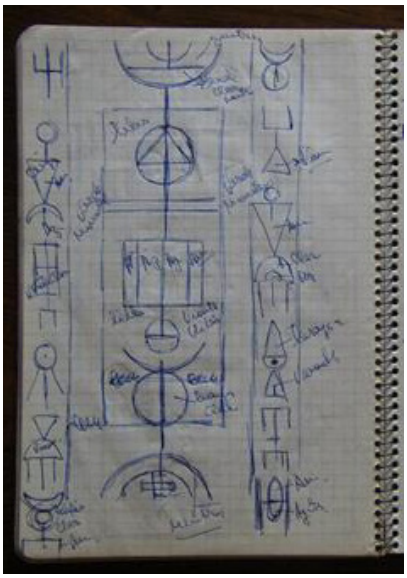

Fig. 6.5

Fig. 6.6

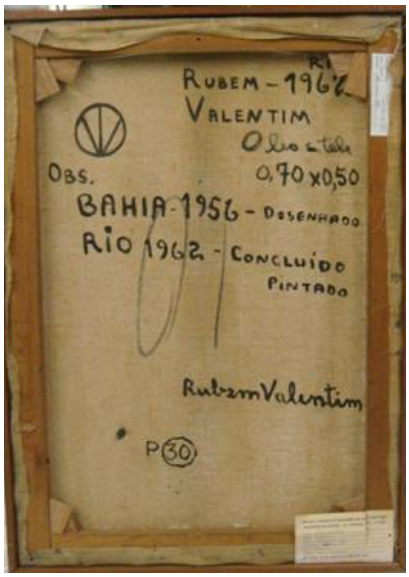

Fig. 6.7

Fig. 6.8

Fig. 6.4 Rubem Valentim, cover of personal diary from 1960–1961. Collection of Laurent Sozzani and Eneida Parreira, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Fig. 6.5 Rubem Valentim, sketch for *Untitled* (1956–1962) in personal diary from 1960–1961. Collection of Laurent Sozzani and Eneida Parreira, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Fig. 6.6 Rubem Valentim, list of "Built signs" in personal diary from 1958. Collection of Laurent Sozzani and Eneida Parreira, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Fig. 6.7 Rubem Valentim, *Untitled*, 1956–1962, oil on canvas, 27 ⅝ × 19 ¾" (70.2 × 50.2 cm) (verso). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Lissette Stancioff. PG876.2016

Fig. 6.8 Rubem Valentim, hybrid alphabet in personal diary from 1960–1961. Collection of Laurent Sozzani and Eneida Parreira, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abraham Palatnik, *Kinechromatic Device S-14* (1957–58)

Alexandra van Riel
Columbia University

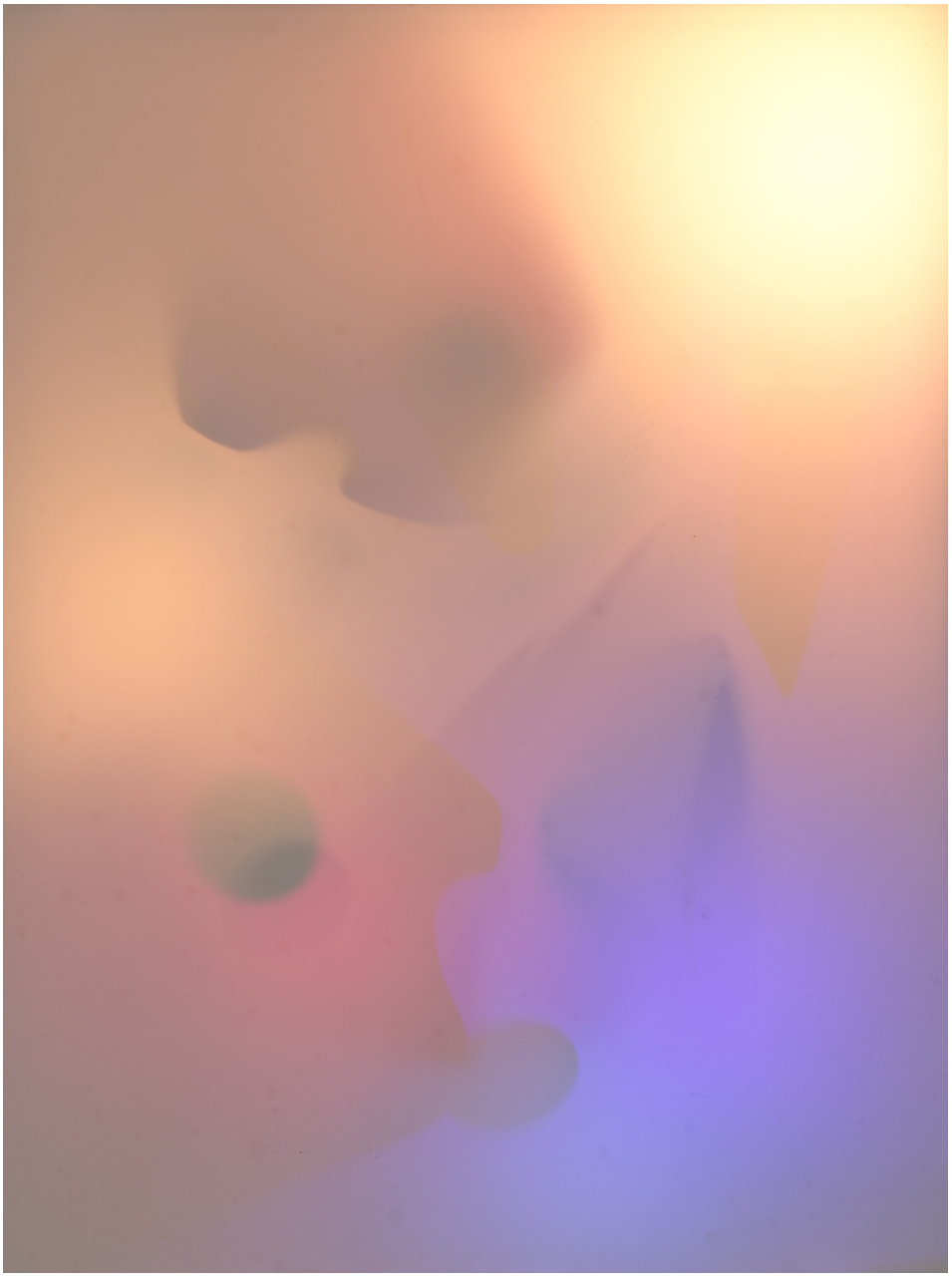

Plate 7 Abraham Palatnik (Brazilian, born 1928). *Kinechromatic Device S–14*. 195758. Wood, metal, synthetic fabric, lightbulbs, and motor. 31 ½ × 23 ⅝ × 7 ⅞" (80 × 60 × 20 cm). Latin American and Caribbean Fund through a gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of Marnie Pillsbury. 1150.2008

Abraham Palatnik, Painting with Lights

Kinechromatic Device S–14 (1957–1958) is one of Palatnik's first works in this series. It was exhibited at the 1964 Venice Biennial and, since then, much has been written about the artist's pioneerism in his studies in light and movement. Thanks to the visibility the Biennial provided, the next year a diagram pointed to him as the precursor of kineticism with light in an important international exhibition of kinetic art, entitled *Le Mouvement II*, at the Galerie Denise René in Paris.[1] It is remarkable, therefore, that in 1947, just two years before Palatnik began his research for this series, the artist was considered a "very academic" figurative painter.[2] A drastic shift in his career took place when he started visiting, with the artist Mavigner, the Pedro II Psychiatric Hospital in Rio de Janeiro, where Dr. Nise Silveira experimented on the treatment of her patients through creative drawing.[3] After seeing the expressiveness of the works produced by schizophrenics who had had no formal training, Palatnik realized everything he thought he knew about painting was wrong and that his own training inhibited creative expression. He nearly gave up art altogether until the critic Mario Pedrosa put him at ease by lending him books on Gestalt theory and Cybernetics and telling him there were other ways to express himself besides painting and sculpture.[4] These encounters initiated a short phase for the artist as an abstract painter, but Palatnik's background as a student of internal combustion engines at the Montefiori Technical School in Tel Aviv drew him to something entirely new: constructing machines that created paintings made of lights. These works, which Pedrosa later named "Kinechromatic Devices," consist of boxes that hide a complex mechanism of colored light bulbs, wires and an electrical motor that projects moving lights onto the back of a screen.

The use of light, movement, technology space, time, and magnetism as themes and mediums in these devices is what made Pedrosa refer to them as the culmination of modern painting.[5] However, not everyone was as receptive to the transmediality of these works as the critic. This quality is precisely what caused their rejection by the selection committee of the first São Paulo Biennial in 1951. However, after the Japanese delegation failed to submit their works in time the committee allowed Palatnik's first *Kinechromatic Device* to be exhibited in the empty space under the condition that, since it did not fit any of the conventional artistic categories, it would not compete for any prizes. The work did, however, receive a special mention by the international jury.[6]

Although Palatnik had had some contact with the theories of Abstractionism, Gestalt and Constructivism when he came up with these works, his personal background played an important role in his artistic progression. In addition to his technical training with engines he claims that the constant blackouts in his studio, forcing him to work with candles, were his main source of inspiration. In an interview with Brazilian art historian Felipe Scovino he said that he "began to see the shadows and the light overcoming obstacles."[7] Thanks to the limited role that theory had in his conception of this series and his other works, Palatnik's independence from artistic currents is remarkable. He is often cited as one of the founders of *Grupo Frente*, the first collective of concretist artists in Brazil who, strongly influenced by the ideas of Russian Constructivists and of the Bauhaus school, wanted to collapse art with life and the role of artist with that of the inventor. Although he wanted similar things, Palatnik only participated in the first few meetings because his main focus was movement, which did not interest the group. He explained his unwillingness to sign their manifesto by saying that "that sort of thing wasn't for me. Get myself attached to theories? No!"[8].

Nevertheless, Palatnik did not create in a vacuum and even though he claims he was not fully aware of the theories going around, the general atmosphere in the art world was to combine technology, movement and the arts[9] in a context where "painting with light [was a new] artistic utopia."[10] Since the Nineteen Tens, artists who were no longer constrained by static materials and had new technology at their disposal, begin to engage in new ways with the historic artistic problem of representing light and movement. A few works that exemplify this are Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) and *Rotary Demisphere* (1925), Thomas Wilfred's first *Clavilux* (1919), Naum Gabo's *Spiral Theme* (1941), Nicolas Schöffer's *Microtemps* series (started in 1949) and László Moholy-Nagy's *Light-Space Modulator* (1930).

The effects of this last work were the subject of the film *Lichtspiel Schwarz-Weiß-Grau* (Lightplay Black-White-Grey), directed that same year by Moholy-Nagy, which offers the possibility of a particularly interesting comparison with *Kinechromatic Device S–14*. Clearly Moholy-Nagy was also thinking about how light and shadow provided solutions to some artistic problems. Even though his *Light-Space Modulator* diverged from Palatnik's work by having fewer moving parts and has often been exhibited in contexts in which it reflects colored lights (and shadows) on a wall instead of a screen, the film itself framed these interplays within a screen. In that sense the film brought them closer to Palatnik's work. However, once the effects of light and shadow are captured by Moholy-Nagy's camera, they lose the quality of color. In this sense the film distances them from the light effects of the *Kinechromatic Device S–14*. *Lightplay Black-White-Grey* also differs from Palatnik's Kinechromatic Devices in the way in which it was heavily based on theoretical writings. In fact, Moholy-Nagy was working on the object featured in the film at the same time as he was writing his seminal text *Malerei, Fotografie, Film*. In it, he acknowledged that the invention of photography extended "the limits of the depiction of nature and the use of light as a creative agent"

and “[gave] us light painting side by side with painting in pigment, kinetic painting side by side with static.”[11] These ideas are illustrated in *Kinechromatic Device S–14*, but Palatnik has insisted over and over again on the small importance that theory played in his work. Its poetic and playful aspects[12] and its foot on geometric abstraction have no equivalent and cannot be fully encapsulated by the ideas circulating at the time. This is why his pioneerism and inventiveness are internationally recognized.

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1. Eduardo Kac, “Palatnik, Pioneiro da Arte Tecnológica no Brasil” In *Abraham Palatnik*, ed. Luiz Camillo Osório (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004): 195, previously published as “Entrevista de Abraham Palatnik a Eduardo Kac” In *Folha de São Paulo* (São Paulo: October 14, 1986).

2. According to the artist this is what his colleagues and teacher at the Municipal Institute of Art in Tel Aviv thought of his work (Fabiana Werneck Barcinski, “Perfil Bibliográfico,” *Abraham Palatnik*, ed. Luiz Camillo Osório [São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004]: 96).

3. Luiz Camillo Osório, “Abraham Palatnik: Perceber, Inventar, Jogar,” *Abraham Palatnik*, ed. Luiz Camillo Osório (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004): 52.

4. Sérgio B. Martins, “Abraham Palatnik,” *Artforum International* 55, Issue 9 (5/1/2017): 355.

5. Mário Pedrosa, "Panorama of modern painting," in *Mário Pedrosa : Arte Ensaios* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2015): 178–217.

6. Palatnik was invited to exhibit in the São Paulo Biennials of 1953, 1955, 1959, 1961, 1965, 1967 and 1969, always under the same condition (Aracy Amaral, *Perfil de Um Acervo: Museu de Arte Contemporânea Da Universidade de São Paulo/Organização Editorial e Ensaio de Aracy Amaral*. [São Paulo : Techint, 1988], 147).

7. Felipe Scovino, Pieter Tjabbes, John Norman, and Izabel Murat Burbridge, *Abraham Palatnik: The Reinvention of Painting* (Curitiba: Museu Oscar Niemeyer, 2014), 49.

8. Scovino, *Abraham Palatnik*, 52.

9. Osório, *Abraham Palatnik*, 61.

10. Mário Pedrosa, “Intróito à Bienal,” In *Abraham Palatnik*, ed. Luiz Camillo Osório (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004): 133, previously published in T*ribuna Da Imprensa* (Rio de Janeiro: October 1951).

11. László Moholy-Nagy, “Malerei, Fotografie, Film Volume,” *Bauhausbucher* 8 (Munich: 1925): 7, 9.

12. The Kinechromatic Devices' emphasis on “fantasy and fun” has led some critics to highlight a connection between Palatnik, Calder and Miró, who is said to have been an admirer of this series (Frederico Morais, “Abraham Palatnik: Um Pioneiro Da Arte Tecnológica.” In *Abraham Palatnik*, ed. Luiz Camillo Osório (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004): 192, previously published in Retrospectiva *Abraham Palatnik: A Trajetória de Um Artista Inventor* [São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 1999]).

Willys de Castro, ***Active Object*** **(1961)**

Theodossis Issaias
Yale University

Plate 8 Willys de Castro (Brazilian, 1926–1988). *Active Object*. 1961. Oil on canvas on wood. 59 1⁄16 × 1 9⁄16 × 1 9⁄16" (150 × 4 × 4 cm) on artist's base 2 × 39 3⁄8 × 39 3⁄8" (5.1 × 100 × 100 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Kathy Halbreich. PG78.2010

Down down down down deep down deep down deep deep deep deep, typed Willys de Castro for his *Poster-Poem* of 1958. These two words alternate and replay, forming a column that extends from the center to the far-bottom of the square paper. De Castro's columnar composition of "down" and "deep" evokes the literal meaning of these words when combined: descent. The alliteration and the slippages between the letters "d" and "p" create the illusion of a continuous movement, a flap display, which eventually leads the viewer's gaze to continue downwards, beyond the space of the paper. The poem exemplifies not only de Castro's graphic design sensibilities (he maintained a graphic design practice with his life-long partner Hercules Barsotti) but also his musical poetics. As a composer and performer of twelve-tone music he explored the phenomena of disruption and continuity, seriality and time. His concrete poem transcends modalities of poetry and underscores the spatiotemporal experience of viewing. In the words of the art critic Mario Pedrosa, "the Concrete poets have not only abolished verse, they have raised their aesthetic spears against poetic discourse. The Concrete poets relate to the visual arts and to music in order to arrive at the nakedness of perception."[1]

This search of temporal and spatial perception in language and design transfers to de Castro's interest in the art object, culminating in a series of *Active Objects* developed between 1959 and 1962. Intimate in scale, these objects are rectangular prisms enveloped in color that protrude from the gallery wall. This series of pictorial events defied the conventional categories of painting and sculpture by challenging the division between frontality and depth. In the artist's words, the active object "emerges and disrupts this world, triggering a torrent of perspective-phenomena and significations [...] hitherto unseen in this exact same space."[2] And he continues that the object "containing events within its own time—started, elapsed, finished, restarted, etc.—and there demonstrating clearly, fluently and indefinitely."[3]

The *Active Object* of 1961 pushes this experimentation to its limits. Counter to the other objects in the series, this work escapes the wall and stands at the gallery floor. The artist transformed the conventional media of painting—oil and canvas—into a three-dimensional object. With extreme precision, the artist glued canvas on a wooden post, avoiding any visible seams or overlaps at its edges.[4] It is this very meticulous execution, according to de Castro, that "guarantee[s] the artistic state of the work and prevents its return to the primitive brutality of matter."[5] With this process of dematerialization, de Castro underscores the physical presence of color as it wraps around the post. Rhythmic intervals of red and white both link and interrupt the surfaces of the slender volume. One of the four sides—a nearly chromatic red field—is interrupted by a vertical white stripe; likewise, on the lateral side, an identical red stripe disrupts the white field. This positive-negative motif of transferring fragments of color from one side to another destabilizes the continuity of the contiguous surfaces. This ambiguous object elicits the active engagement of the viewer. Tracing these chromatic displacements requires bodily movement, by which a white square plane safeguards a distance from the vertical volume, establishing multiple perceptual fields that extend into the gallery space.[6]

In 1960, de Castro presented a number of his Active Objects at II Exposição Neoconcreta, Rio de Janeiro, and became associated with the neo-concrete artists. This series offered an inventive solution to the fundamental propositions put forward by the group's ideologist, the Brazilian poet and critic, Ferreira Gullar. In his seminal 1959 essay "Theory of the Non-Object" Gullar argued that the modernist–constructivist desire to distill and subsequently end painting was finally reaching its inevitable conclusion.[7] For Gullar, this process, intensified by Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian, culminated in the neo-concrete non-object—a new notion of the art object inserted directly into space without a frame or pedestal. Subsequently, the non-object was not only liberated from the delimiting structures of the frame and pedestal, but also from the verbal designations imposed by language. Challenging to classify according to pre-existent categories within art history, it suspended any a *priori* knowledge favoring the "primal total-experience of the real."[8] De Castro, now among the neo-concrete group, had the most consistent interpretation of the legacy of Constructivism which sought to abandon easel painting and embrace modes of industrial production. And industrial design he did, from the textiles for Rhodia to logos and graphic identities for large industrial conglomerates. "Positive, optimistic, and constructive," the neo-concrete discourse posited a worldview that echoed the urban aspirations and possibilities of modernization in Brazil. Nevertheless, this experimentation came to an abrupt end with the establishment of the military dictatorship in 1964.[9] The active object, if it opened the possibilities of constructive art, in its ambivalent state, it also stands as a record of this precarious optimism.

1. Mário Pedrosa, "Concrete Poet and Painter," in *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, ed. Gloria Ferreira and Paulo Herkenhoff (New York, NY: Duke University Press Books, 2016), 272.

2. Willys de Castro, "Objeto Ativo" (Brazil: Galeria Aremar, 1960), International Center for the Arts of the Americas at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

Lygia Clark, ***Poetic Shelter*** **and** ***The Inside is the Outside*** **(1963)**

Gwen Unger
Columbia University

Plate 9 Lygia Clark (Brazilian, 1920–1988). *The Inside Is the Outside*. 1963. Stainless steel. 16 × 17 ½ × 14 ¾" (40.6 × 44.5 × 37.5 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Adriana Cisneros de Griffin. 1117.2011

You and the object — unique, total, existential reality. There is no separateness between subject and object. It is your own body, an existential body to be.[1]
— Lygia Clark

One of the best known modern Brazilian artists Lygia Clark's work spans from sculptural, pictorial, performative and interactive. While her work is continuously theorized as a move from visuality to bodily engagement of folding plane into physical space—Lygia Clark always conceived of her work as existing in real space through an integration of the arts, predicated in her architectural background. In 1963 she stated, "Truly, I was never a painter; what most interested me weren't sculpture or painting, but music and architecture."[2] Painting for Clark, "was simply the point of departure that was most readily available;"[3] the material through which she was able to cultivate an expression of spatial perception. In reality, Clark was trying to compose and manipulate space, to project the spectator "into the work, [in order] actually to feel in his own person all the spacial possibilities suggested by this. What I am trying to do... with deep intuition of future achievement,' is to compose a space."[4]

Rather than a linear development from two-dimensional painting to three-dimensional object, Clark's work is in fact circuitous, constantly self-reflexive, and always concerned with the engagement of the body in space, be it existing or created.

In 1960 Clark began creating a series of works called *Bichos*, or "beasts," sculptural objects made of various metal plates held together with hinges. These hinges functioned as the "spines" of the *Bichos* that would then enable the work to be manipulated and constantly change form, even flattening the many planes into one. Two works from this period, *Abrigo Poético* (Poetic Shelter) and *O dentro é o fora* (The Inside is the Outside), both from 1963, are anomalies within the *Bichos* series as they lack this distinguishable spine. But they also do not fit into Clark's next phase of creation, her *Trepantes (Trailings)* series, which are characterized by their winding, adaptable forms that wrap around their surroundings or environment.

About *O dentro é o fora* Clark specifically wrote: "When we manipulate it, this inner emptiness gives the structure completely new aspects. I consider The Inside is the Outside to be the result of my research on the Bicho... I am the before and the after, I am the future in the present. I am the inside and the outside, the face and the reverse."[5]

With this in mind, both *O dentro é o fora and Abrigo poético* can be seen as a culmination of those creations that came before them and expressions of ideas Clark would further explore in her later work. Neither exists quite fully as a *Bicho*, nor as a *Trepante* either; they inhabit an in-between in her oeuvre, delineating the unpredictability inherent in Clark's creations.

The real space that exists in *O dentro é o fora* is a space charged with affect, of connection between subject and object through an unconscious reaction, feeling, sentiment or emotion of life, of connection.[6] Clark felt that *O dentro é o fora* was "a living being open to all possible transformations. Its internal space is an affective space."[7] This affective space enables a "kind of embrace between two living entities"[8]: between the object and the spectator. The affective space also encapsulates a space of breath, of the living human subject. *O dentro é o fora* visually can appear as an unfolded Mobius strip, which Clark later would famously sublimate in her 1964 work *Caminhando*. As the building block of existence, the source of creation, the Mobius strip has a potent connotation, which Clark then charged with an "affective dimension" as remarks scholar Monica Amor. Rather than continue its hyper-rationality, Clark imbued the Mobius strip with sensorial experience and instability, revealing the instability and unpredictability of existence. The affective dimension nascent in both *O dentro é o fora* and *Abrigo Poético* exists in the interaction between subject and object, between spectator and art work, which then transforms the spectator into a participant. The affective dimension of Clark's objects lives in the encounter between subject and object. It is this encounter that Clark was constantly exploring, expressing, and developing through her practice.

The affective dimension of *Abrigo Poético* and *O dentro é o fora* exists almost as an architectural space created to protect its inhabitants, or rather those interacting with the objects (something made clear in her use of the title "Poetic Shelter"). Luis Perez-Oramas has stated that "if anything grows and densifies in Clark's paintings between 1948 and the 1960s... it takes the shape of a place, the place of a place, a coordinate in space, whether that space be imaginary, virtual, or potential. It becomes something that finally resembles less a critter than a building or a house—a place that someone might inhabit, and where he or she might interact with other bodies."[9] By building "homes" to be inhabited by the encounter of spectator and object, of the affective dimension that emerges between them, Clark revealed her architectural background and her constant pursuit of a synthesis of the arts, eschewing all rigid, concrete material designations of form.

These two objects exist in a space of in-between: interior and exterior, domestic and public, or the highly intimate and the detached outer world. The affective space that they create is a doorway between real space and the affective dimension, demonstrating what Susan Best calls a contact zone in between the two.[10]

This contact zone is what Lygia Clark calls the *cheio-vazio*, or the empty-full. The cheio-vazio was where the affective and phenomenological potential of Clark's objects came to fruition:

> "I discovered that in that space the body is the house, and that when people become conscious of that space, they rediscover the body as a totality—their vision of the world becomes broader…"[11] Through encounter the affective dimension of the work pervades, activating the life and potency of the object. It is only through interaction and encounter that Clark's works truly exist.

Even before explicitly stated, Clark's concern for therapeutic pathways through artistic practice is clear in her creation and conception of these two not-quite *Bichos*. In *Abrigo Poético* and *O dentro é o fora* she attempts a therapeutic merging of inner, personal experience with exterior depersonalization. Her work is a tension of introspection versus exteriority, of bringing human introspection into real space through the "doorway" of affect in both objects.

1. Lygia Clark "Going" printed in David Medalla, ed. "Lygia Clark at Signals London, 27th May to 3rd July." Signals: Newsbulletin of Signals London (London, England), vol. 1, no. 7 (April-May, 1965): 2.

2. Lygia Clark 1963 journal entry quoted in Felipe Scovino "Lygia Clark: Body Double" Flash Art. Vol. 44, no. 278 (May/ June 2011): 131.

3. Clark quoted in Luis Pérez-Oramas "Part 1: Lygia Clark: If You Hold a Stone" posted April 25, 2018: http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1043-part-1-lygia-clark-if-you-hold-a-stone

4. Clark quoted by Pedrosa, Mario "The Significance of Lygia Clark" in David Medalla, ed. "Lygia Clark at Signals London, 27th May to 3rd July." Signals: Newsbulletin of Signals London (London, England), vol. 1, no. 7 (April-May, 1965): 8

5. Lygia Clark quoted in "Offered Gift" sheet from MoMA Meeting of the Committee on Painting and Sculpture, December 12, 2011

6. Susan Best,"Introduction," in *Visualizing feeling: affect and the feminine avant-garde*. (IB Tauris, 2011), 5. [See also Luiza Nader, Affective Art History]

7. Lygia Clark quoted in Monica Amor "Introduction: Theories of the Nonobject" *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944 1969.* (Univ of California Press, 2016), 13.

8. Lygia Clark and Yve-Alain Bois. "Nostalgia of the Body." October 69 (1994): 97.

9. Perez Oramas "Part 2: If You Hold a Stone" posted May 16, 2018: http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1044-part-2-lygia-clark-if-you-hold-a-stone

10. Susan Best, "Participation, Affect and the Body: Lygia Clark" in *Visualizing feeling: affect and the feminine avant-garde*. (IB Tauris, 2011), 52.

11. Lygia Clark quoted in Luis Pérez-Oramas "Part 1: Lygia Clark: If You Hold a Stone" posted April 25, 2018: http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/1043-part-1-lygia-clark-if-you-hold-a-stone

Fig. 9.1

Fig. 9.1 Lygia Clark (Brazilian, 1920–1988). *Poetic Shelter.* 1960. Painted metal. 5 ½ × 24 × 20 ⅛" (14 × 63 × 51 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros in honor of Milan Hughston. 313.2004

León Ferrari, *Quisiera hacer una estatua* [I would like to make a statue] (1964)

Javier Rivero Ramos
Princeton University

Plate 10 León Ferrari (Argentine, 1920–2013). *Quisiera hacer una estatua (I would like to make a statue)*. (c. 1964). Ink on paper. 39 ¼ × 27 ⅞" (99.7 × 70.8 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Connie Butler. 268.2009

It would be impossible to overemphasize the call for subversion that propelled León Ferrari, a committed political dissident whose family was a victim of military repression.[1] Comparing President Lyndon B. Johnson with God sending his archangels into battle wielding flamethrowers, *Quisiera hacer una estatua* [*I Would Like to Make a Statue*] (pl. 10) hurls a piquant and double-edged critique against both the Vietnam war and Argentina's reactionary Catholicism. Yet however biting, the work should not be interpreted merely as a piece of agitprop. This "written drawing"—as Ferrari himself referred to it—stands not only at the threshold between legibility and illegibility, but also confounds the distinction between writing and drawing, text and image, monumentality and anti-monumentality.

Ferrari began experimenting with abstract drawing in 1962 after a Milanese gallerist asked him to produce a graphic rendition of his popular standing wire sculptures.[2] These thin, wiry and looping traces began aligning themselves along a continuous, horizontal trace that soon began to mimic handwriting. In 1963, he made Carta a un general, wherein certain provocative words alluding to the military could be deciphered in the mesh of twisting lines.[3]

Although legible, *Quisiera hacer una estatua* does not foster but thwarts readership. The handwriting renders each word with clarity, however, attempting to read through it is an almost impossibly vexing exercise because of both the semantic and graphic riddling of the text. Veering and jutting in different directions, the lines of words further tangle the already confounding meaning of the text, which lurches nonsensically from one idea to the next. Attempting to read the spiraling calligraphic traces still requires that the reader stands in relative proximity to the work. At a distance, the intricacies of the handwriting blur into an intricately textured drawing.

Unintelligibility and a need for proximity are not the only means by which this drawing pivots between text and drawing. A closer inspection conducted together with conservators from MoMA's Prints and Drawings Department confirms that Ferrari laid the sheet of paper flat while working on it, laboring on the horizontal plane of writing and drawing, before tilting it upwards, turning it into a vertical picture plane. This tilting upwards is particularly important if we take into account the work's valence. In her discussion of Jackson Pollock's apprenticeship under David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rosalind Krauss reminds us that before they can be thrusted upward, high into the air, for all the world to see, political banners created on the floor must be turned upright.[4] And yet in this work the tilt between the horizontal plane of readership to the vertical one of viewership remains equivocal. For a political banner's efficacy resides in its expediency and *Quisiera hacer una estatua* is decidedly inexpedient. As such, the work stands vacillating at the crux between what Walter Benjamin termed the longitudinal and cross-section cuts of the world's substance.[5] The former contains objects and the latter signs. *Quisiera hacer una estatua*'s is impossible to read from afar and still hard to read up close. Although vertical, it still retains its signs in proximity, almost hermetically, riddling the political distinction between the vertical plane of advocacy and the horizontal one of conspiracy.

Quisiera hacer una estatua further bewilders the difference between two emblems of power: statue and script. The first lines of the drawing read, "I would like to make a statute if I knew how in the ancient manner of Johnson for example mister president of the United States of America [...] signing his papers like when god sent his marine archangels to fight against the devils [...]".[6] At first glance, it seems that Ferrari's mockery is limited to religious and civic commemorative statues. However, in the last lines of the text Ferrari writes that he also wants to re-write the 1776 declaration of independence with spelling mistakes. Anti-monumentality is thus not circumscribed to statues but also to the foundational texts that underwrite political and religious institutions. ...The derision does not only lie on the semantic level, but is echoed by the irregular stacking of text that renders it analogous to a topographic landscape on which the elongated traces appear as so many erected statues. As Luis Pérez Oramas writes, Ferrari's written drawings, "the contradictions of text and image—as well as their fatal attractions, their mutual desire for each other—are always simultaneously present."[7]

1. Andrea Giunta and León Ferrari, eds., *León Ferrari: retrospectiva ; obras 1954–2006* (São Paulo: COSAC NAIFY [u.a.], 2006).

2. Giunta and Ferrari, 86.

3. Giunta and Ferrari, 107.

4. Yve-Alain Bois, "The Use Value of 'Formless,'" in *Formless: A User's Guide*, by Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss (New York: Cambridge, Mass: Zone Books ; Distributed by MIT Press, 1997), 93.

5. Walter Benjamin and Walter Benjamin, "Painting and the Graphic Arts," in *1913 - 1926*, Selected Writings, Walter Benjamin. Michael W. Jennings, general ed.; 1, n.d., 82.

6. León Ferrari, *Quisiera hacer una estatua*, 1964, Ink on paper, MoMA.

7. Luis Pérez Oramas et al., *León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets* (New York, N.Y.: São Paulo, Brazil: Museum of Modern Art; CosacNaify, 2009), 30.

Antonieta Sosa, ***Visual Chess*** **(1965)**

Sonja E. Gandert
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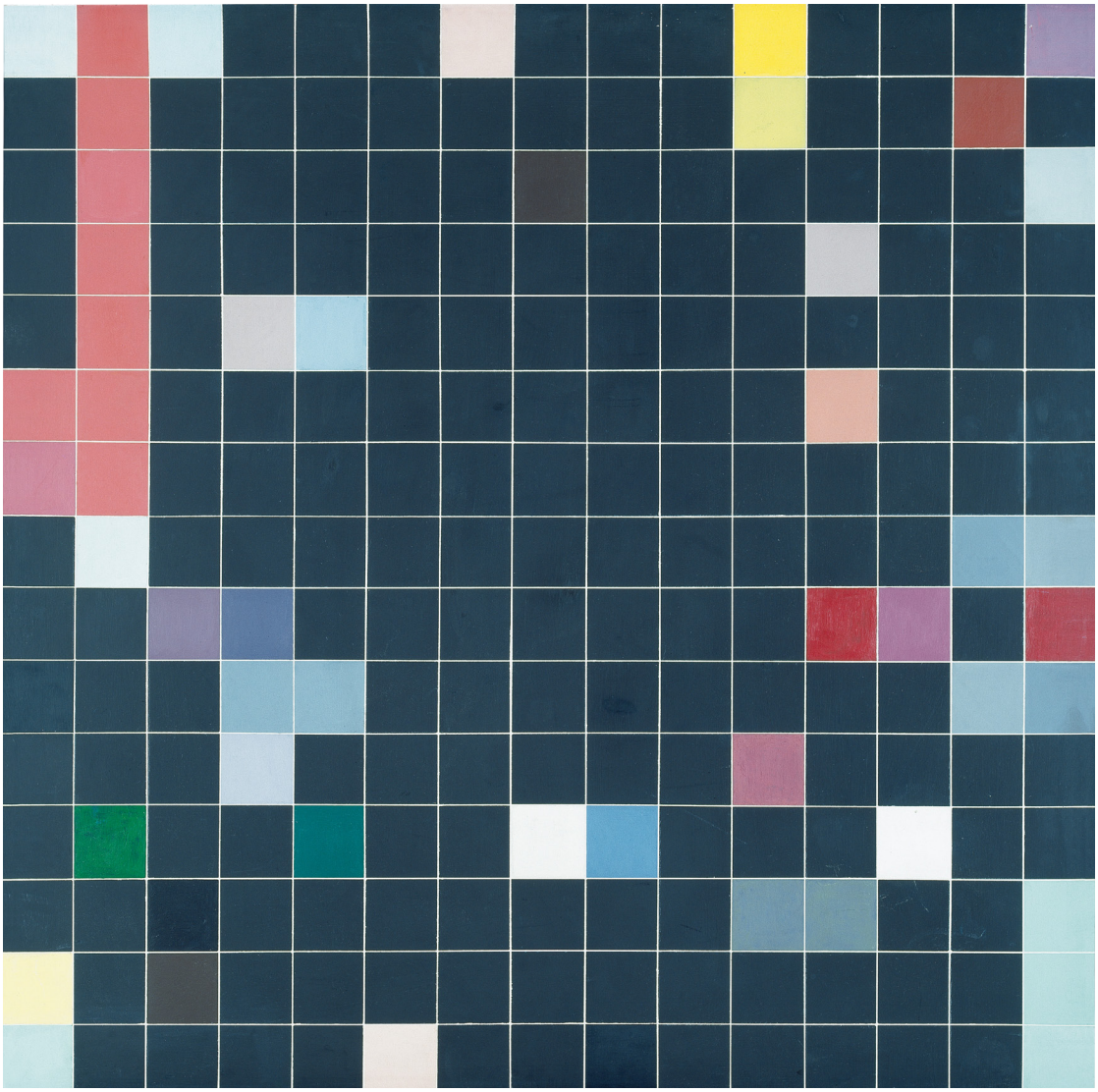

Plate 11 Antonieta Sosa. *Visual Chess*. 1965. Acrylic on wood. 37 ⅛ × 37 ⅛ × 1 ⅜" (94.3 × 94.2 × 3 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Ariel Jiménez. 869.2016

Choreographing Color: Antonieta Sosa's *Ajedrez visual* (1965)

In *Ajedrez visual (Visual Chess)*, precisely applied white paint overlays pin-straight scored lines that traverse the picture plane vertically and horizontally, demarcating a fifteen-by-fifteen square grid. Beneath the gridlines, the entirety of the rigid support is painted inky black, and black maintains its primacy as the eye moves toward the center of the painting. The largely monochromatic ground is punctuated by varying arrangements of colored squares, which form an asymmetrical yet still harmonious ensemble that flits nervously between the ordered and the aleatory. Most eye-catching is a reverse L-shaped formation in the top left corner of the painting, consisting of eight burnt orange units capped by two pale blue ones, as well as an incongruous pink-red square at its bottom left that seems oddly dissonant alongside its orange-red neighbors. The rest of the colored units are more sparsely interspersed, often in pairs that exhibit contrastingly lighter and darker values. Taken as a whole, they form a loosely delineated arc that guides the eye along a circular path. Though the full color spectrum is represented, there are virtually no pure hues and shades of blue and red figure most prominently.

Antonieta Sosa painted *Ajedrez visual* in 1965, a year before she finished her studies at the University of California, Los Angeles, and returned to Venezuela. While in Los Angeles she studied with artists Robert Heinecken and Irving Petlin, a student of Josef Albers whom she characterized as "a figurative painter, but one who achieves strong fibrillations of color [*fibraciones de color*]"[2]. As the artist explains, this painting was one in a series of five works made during her so-called "visual period", which she characterizes as a conceptual "spinal column or umbilical cord" linking abstract painting to her subsequent bid to "come down from the wall and insert myself into the world of objects in order to arrive at the chair and then the body"[3]. Deploying the grid to avoid "getting lost in space", she selected her colors "intuitively" and without any set theoretical guiding principles[4]. It was only later, she asserts, that she came to characterize another work from the same time period *(Pantalla para imágenes posteriores [Screen for Afterimages]*, 1965, Colección Fundación Museos Nacionales, Galería Nacional de Arte, Caracas) (fig. 11.2), which features off-kilter multicolored squares against a white background[5], as "nothing more than a screen so that the viewer could see the colors that were produced in her retina when observing red, and upon shifting her gaze to white, sees green."[6] Though *Ajedrez* visual in some ways operates as counterpoint to *Pantalla para imágenes posteriores*[7], ocular perception and the ways in which colors interact in juxtaposition remain ongoing areas of interest to Sosa and, I argue, inform our reading of both paintings.

Afterimages, a phenomenon wherein retinal activity continues even after stimuli—such as bright lights or certain complementary colors—are no longer present, constitute an embodied mode of engagement with the painted surface, and Sosa's invocation of them reinforces her interest in the intersections of art and the sciences of emotion and perception. According to Gabriela Rangel, during the 1960s Sosa conducted a series of experiments in visual perception in which student volunteers were asked to pick colors and describe the emotions that they provoked; Sosa then measured the electric currents that passed through a magnetic field using a device called a galvanometer[8]. To this day, she describes her painting in terms of the way in which, for instance, the viewer's perception of a green line is affected by the line's relationship to the other colors over which it passes[9]. Tracing a genealogy of artists' ongoing experimentation with color theory and perception both preceding and contemporary to Sosa is beyond the scope of this text, though it is worth noting that fellow Venezuelan Carlos Cruz-Diez's roughly contemporaneous *Physichromies* and *Chromatic Inductions* addressed similar concerns[10], and certainly U.S.-based artists were likewise exploring color and perception through abstraction. For her part, Sosa has specifically cited the work of Kazimir Malevich and Armando Reverón as influential to her practice[11].

Despite the work's title, its connection to the game of chess bears further exploration. Unlike a chessboard, which measures eight-by-eight and whose squares alternate white and black, *Ajedrez visual*'s monochromatic gridded field and capacious array of colorful arrangements suggest both a compositional totality and a sequential narrative. Scrutiny of the L-shaped formation at the upper left corner of the work could be viewed as various instantiations of the knight's move (two horizontal and three vertical or two vertical, three horizontal). Yet given Sosa's early formation as a dancer, as well as her contemporaneous engagement with the writings of experimental dance practitioner Anna Halprin[12], it may be instructive to think about *Ajedrez visual* as dictating a series of choreographed movements[13]—a practice not so different from the prescriptive nature of chess moves. To this end, we might in turn endeavor to physically disengage the painting from its two-dimensional wall-mounted orientation and place it in a three-dimensional context, a practice wholly congruent with the subsequent performative and installation work that Sosa would go on to create. Indeed, the impulse to move from the verticality of the wall to a horizontally oriented expansion into the world can be seen in the artist's summation of her career. As she recounted in an interview:

> Nowadays, after years of contemplating two paintings I have in my house, which I made in 1965 when I was studying at the university, I've come to think that the only thing that makes them paintings is that they're hanging on a wall… One day I found myself taking the square off the wall and putting it on the floor, increasing its dimensions to 6.5 by 6.5 feet, with a height of 90 inches.

> It was divided into nine squares that were supported from underneath, so viewers could walk on it and feel the instability of their bodies in space, their kinesthetic sensations, the loss of static balance[14].

Ajedrez visual, therefore, can be said to operate as a dynamic hinge that is both wholly in line with early experimentations in color and perception of the 1960s and presages the embodied, choreographic, and spatially charged work for which Sosa is best known today.

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1. I am grateful to the generosity of the faculty, museum, and student participants of the 2018 MoMA Museum Research Consortium (MRC) Study Sessions for their insightful comments about Sosa's work. Mónica Amor, Leah Dickerman, Edward Sullivan, Christine Poggi, Mari Carmen Ramírez, and Anna Indych-López were particularly helpful. This text likewise benefited from early discussions with Horacio Ramos Cerna, Francesca Ferrari, Isabela Muci Barradas, Julián Sánchez González, and Gillian Sneed. Conservators Anny Aviram and Diana Hartman helpfully spoke to me about Sosa's technique and process.

2. Antonieta Sosa. *Statement: "Ajedrez visual" (1965), de Antonieta Sosa, Caracas, 7 de agosto, 2006*. Object file, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

3. Ibid. For information about the importance of chairs in her practice, see Hernández, "Los múltiples tránsitos de Cas(A)nto." 16.

4. Antonieta Sosa. Statement: "*Ajedrez visual" (1965), de Antonieta Sosa, Caracas, 7 de agosto, 2006*. Object file, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

5. Illustrated and discussed in Rangel, "Politicized Dance." 76.

6. Antonieta Sosa. Statement: *"Ajedrez visual" (1965), de Antonieta Sosa, Caracas, 7 de agosto, 2006*. Object file, Museum of Modern Art, New York.

7. Relying on reproductions of *Pantalla para imágenes posteriores* cannot substitute for the sustained time I was able to spend with *Ajedrez visual*, but here I refer to the oppositions between black and white, irregularity and geometric regularity, etc.

8. Gabriela Rangel. "Politicized Dance." *Art in America* (October 2012). 76.

9. Sosa used these terms to describe a painting that hangs in her apartment in Caracas, though she could not recall its date. Telephone conversation with the author, June 27, 2018.

10. I thank Mari Carmen Ramírez for this suggestion. Cruz-Diez's theories on color and their interaction are expansive. In one instance from 1973, Cruz-Diez writes "In the course of my research into color interference and additive color, I came across the phenomenon of complementary color, or *inducciones cromáticas* [Chromatic Inducitions]. The visualization of this complementary color necessarily presupposes the phenomenon of "afterimage," or retinal persistence... By combining this phenomenon with that of interference, I was able to bring about this phenomenon—which normally takes places in two phases—simultaneously and without delay." Cruz-Diez, Carlos. "Chromatic Inductions." In *Color in Space and Time: Cruz-Díez.* Exh. cat., (Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and The Cruz-Diez Foundation, 2011). No page number.

11. Telephone conversation with the author, June 27, 2018.

12. Rangel. "Politicized dance." 76.

13. This point was first noted by Edward Sullivan.

14. Franklin Fernández. "Antonieta Sosa" *BOMB Magazine*, December 18, 2009. Accessed 4/28/2018 https://bombmagazine.org/articles/antonieta-sosa. Trans. Jen Hofer. The original can be found at http://laimagendobleentrevistas.blogspot.com/2008/09/antonieta-sosa-siento-que-con-la.html

Fig. 11.1

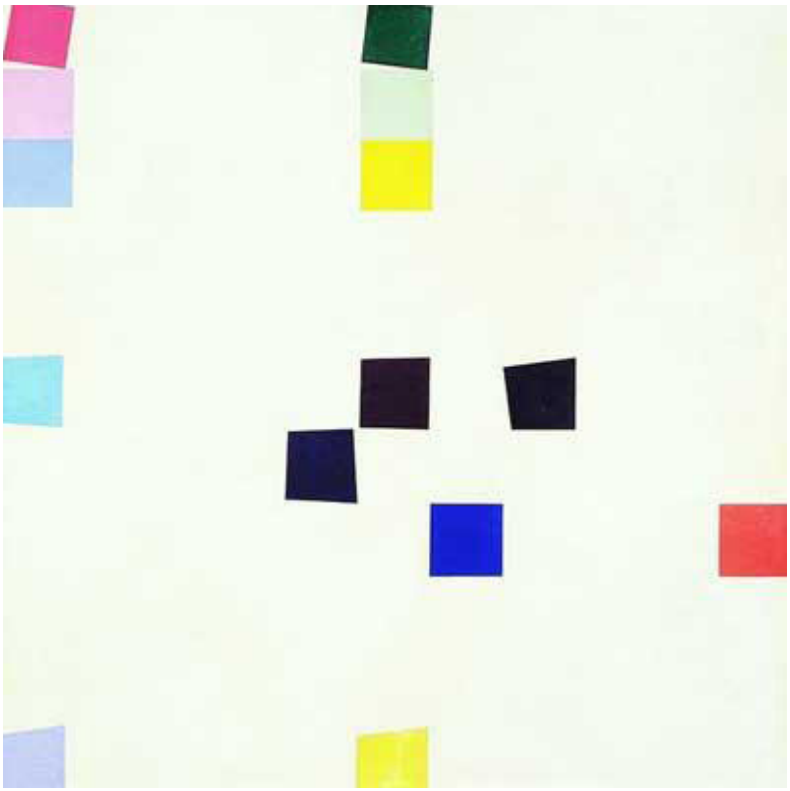

Fig. 11.2

Fig. 11.1 Antonieta Sosa, *Plataforma II*, 1969.

Fig. 11.2 Antonieta Sosa, *Pantalla para imágenes posteriores*, 1965. Acrylic on masonite.

Hélio Oiticica, *P16 Parangolé cape 12 "From Adversity We Live"* (1965, reconstructed 1992)

Vivian A. Crockett,
Columbia University

Plate 12 Hélio Oiticica. *P16 Parangolé cape 12* "*From Adversity We Live*". 1965 (reconstructed 1992). Jute, fabric, wood shavings, and plastics. 44 ⅞ × 10 ⅝ × 8 ¹¹⁄₁₆" (114 × 27 × 22 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund. PG844.2016

Hélio Oiticica recounts that he conceived of the *Parangolé* upon encountering the word scrawled on a makeshift shelter.[1] From 1964 through the 1970s, he adopted the term for a series of works that took the form of *Parangolé* capes, banners, and tents. The *Parangolés* marked Oticica's ongoing exploration of color as three-dimensional, experiential art removed from the conventional modes of artistic contemplation, away from the canvas and the pedestal. Many, such as *P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "Da adversidade vivemos" ("From Adversity We Live")*, featured phrases printed on the exterior of the fabric or concealed in pockets and slits.

Oiticica's work has often explored the tension between transparency and opacity, playing with a textural layering of translucent and coarse materials that encourage negotiations of concealment, disclosure, folding, and unfolding. *P16*, for instance, contains a medley of materials. Its main form is built out of a burlap cape, while its side fabric fold contains a semi-concealed, large, clear plastic sack with various sub-compartments of sawdust, dyed polyurethane foam, small striped plastic balls, and jute. In a photograph from circa 1968, we see Nildo of the Mangueira samba school examining the contents of this large sack (fig. 12.1). His expression is one of false bewilderment. In another image, he is photographed with mouth agape, pretending to bite the bag. While highly staged and performative images, they nonetheless register a more insular engagement with the *Parangolé*, one not only defined by a relationship to dance, but also by an exploration of the materials contained within the *Parangolé* itself.

In 1965, a year after he first defined the fundamental terms of the *Parangolé*, Oiticica would reflect on how the *Parangolé* impacted his execution of future *Bólides*, *Penetrables* and *Nuclei*.[2] Like the *Bólides*, the *Parangolés* exemplify Oiticica's concept of '*OBJETato*,' a compound word which contains the word 'object' alongside the Portuguese words 'ato' (act) and 'tato'(touch). They are objects with which to act as well as objects meant for touch.[3] A convergence point in this regard is the use of language and poetry within both *Bólides* and *Parangolés*—and throughout Oiticica's body of work, from Ferreira Gular's "Poema enterrado" in *Projeto Cães de Caça* (1961) to Roberta Salgado's poetry throughout *Tropicália* (1967). One must manipulate the sack of blue pigment *B30 Box Bólide 17 – Poem Box* (1965-66) in order to reveal the phrase contained within (fig. 12.2). Similarly, we must extend the fabric in *P17 Parangolé Cape 13 "Estou Possuído ("I am Possessed")* (1965) in order to make its slogan legible. The reading of the text in a *Parangolé* for oneself mimics the contemplative operation of manipulating the *Bólide*. Elsewhere, one may also opt for exposing the text to an outside viewer. It is the realization of oneself as an ephemeral or documented image within the wearing—watching cycle, the consent to be 'possessed' as an image.

I have thus far written of these acts in a romanticized form, imagining their free manipulation as Oiticica originally intended them rather than from within the constraints of museological displays. In *Qual é o Parangolé?*, the poet-critic Waly Salomão proclaimed, "The museum is not in crisis; the museum is a crisis."[4] Extreme as this sentiment might seem, it signals the ways in which Oiticica's practice has consistently posed challenges to museological frameworks. Revealingly, the title of Salomão's text, could be translated literally to mean: *What is the Parangolé?* But also: *Which is the Parangolé?* The latter pinpoints the tension between the historical object, the 'original work'—in this case, a 1992 reconstruction of a 1965 object that is now deemed the 'official work'—and the exhibition copy that facilitates audience manipulation.

Before its public inauguration at the Museu de Arte Moderna—Rio de Janeiro in 1965, early versions of *Parangolé* capes 1 and 2 were photographed for a pamphlet to be exhibited at the event (fig. 12.3). This pairing, depicting Miro and Eduardo Ribeiro—note the full name in the latter—foreshadowed the polarity established between the *Parangolé*'s association with black, poor and working class inhabitants of the favela on the one side and a white subculture on the other. In spite of this binary, it is important to note that from early on, both were presented as examples of the various interactive possibilities of the *Parangolé*, the latter admittedly explored more deeply during Oiticica's time in New York.

And while we do well to remember how racism and classism barred the procession of Oiticica's *Parangolés* within the museum in August 1965—and the role these still play in limiting access to institutional spaces—we must also celebrate the small forms of resistance enacted that night.[5] Oiticica and a small contingent did ultimately make their way into the galleries, asserting the presence of raced and classed bodies discouraged from penetrating the museum's protective barriers, with Oiticica's *Penetrable Parangolé* leading the way (fig. 12.4).

1. J. Guinle Filho, "A Última Entrevista de Hélio Oiticica," *Interview* (April 1980): 82–84.

2. "A Dança na Minha Experiência," November 12, 1965 (AHO/PHO 0192.65).

3. Hélio Oiticica, "O objeto: Instâncias do problema do objeto," *GAM Galeria de Arte Moderna* no. 15 (1968): 27.

Hélio Oiticica recounts that he conceived of the *Parangolé* upon encountering the word scrawled on a makeshift shelter.[1] From 1964 through the 1970s, he adopted the term for a series of works that took the form of *Parangolé* capes, banners, and tents. The *Parangolés* marked Oticica's ongoing exploration of color as three-dimensional, experiential art removed from the conventional modes of artistic contemplation, away from the canvas and the pedestal. Many, such as *P16 Parangolé Cape 12 "Da adversidade vivemos" ("From Adversity We Live")*, featured phrases printed on the exterior of the fabric or concealed in pockets and slits.

Oiticica's work has often explored the tension between transparency and opacity, playing with a textural layering of translucent and coarse materials that encourage negotiations of concealment, disclosure, folding, and unfolding. *P16*, for instance, contains a medley of materials. Its main form is built out of a burlap cape, while its side fabric fold contains a semi-concealed, large, clear plastic sack with various sub-compartments of sawdust, dyed polyurethane foam, small striped plastic balls, and jute. In a photograph from circa 1968, we see Nildo of the Mangueira samba school examining the contents of this large sack (fig. 12.1). His expression is one of false bewilderment. In another image, he is photographed with mouth agape, pretending to bite the bag. While highly staged and performative images, they nonetheless register a more insular engagement with the *Parangolé*, one not only defined by a relationship to dance, but also by an exploration of the materials contained within the *Parangolé* itself.

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1. J. Guinle Filho, "A Última Entrevista de Hélio Oiticica," *Interview* (April 1980): 82 – 84.

2. "A Dança na Minha Experiência," November 12, 1965 (AHO/PHO 0192.65).

3. Hélio Oiticica, "O objeto: Instâncias do problema do objeto," *GAM Galeria de Arte Moderna* no. 15 (1968): 27.

4. "O museu não está em crise, o museu é uma crise." Waly Salomão, *Hélio*

Fig. 12.1 a

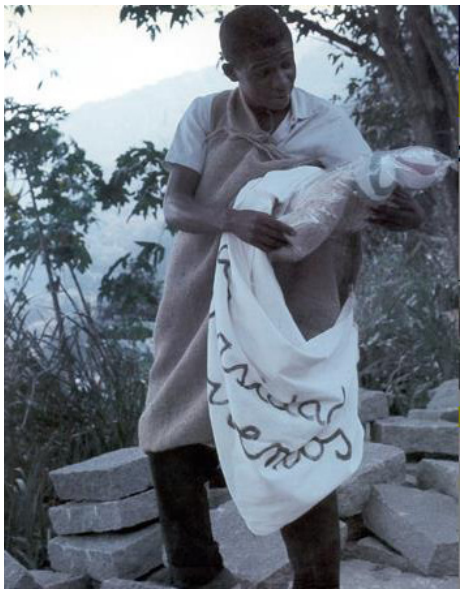

Fig. 12.1 b

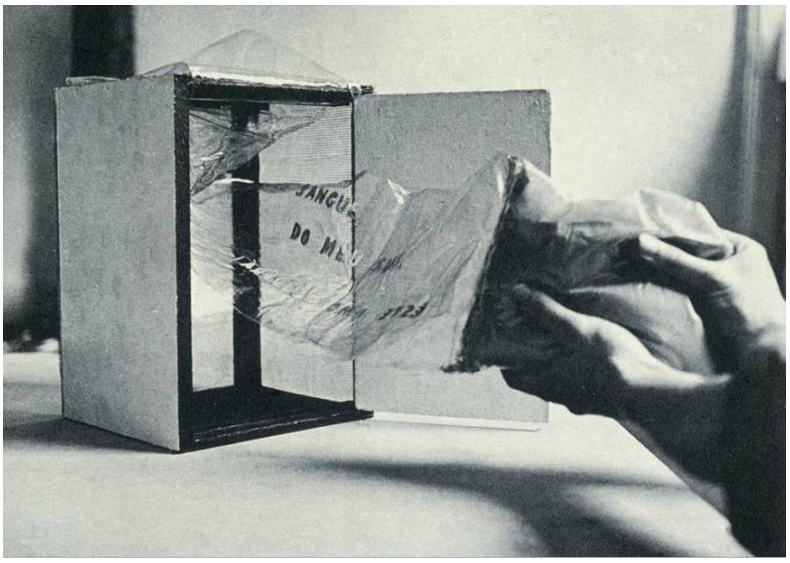

Fig. 12.2 a

Fig. 12.2 b

Fig. 12.1 a Hélio Oiticica, *P16 Parangolé cape 12 "From Adversity We Live,"* 1965 (reconstructed 1992). Jute, fabric, wood shavings, and plastics. 44 ⅞ × 10 ⅝ × 8 ¹¹⁄₁₆ in. (114 × 27 × 22 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund.

Fig. 12.1 b Claudio Oiticica, Nildo da Mangueira with P16 Parangolé cape 12 "*From Adversity We Live,*"ca. 1968.

Fig. 12.2 a–b Hélio Oiticica, *B30 Bólide Caixa 17, Poema Bólide 1*, 1965–66. Oil with polyvinyl acetate emulsion on wood, plyvinyl chloride plastic sheeting, pigment, paper, glass, steel wire mesh. 12 ⅝ in. × 9 × 8 ½ in. (32 × 23 × 21.5 cm). Collection of Guy Brett, London.

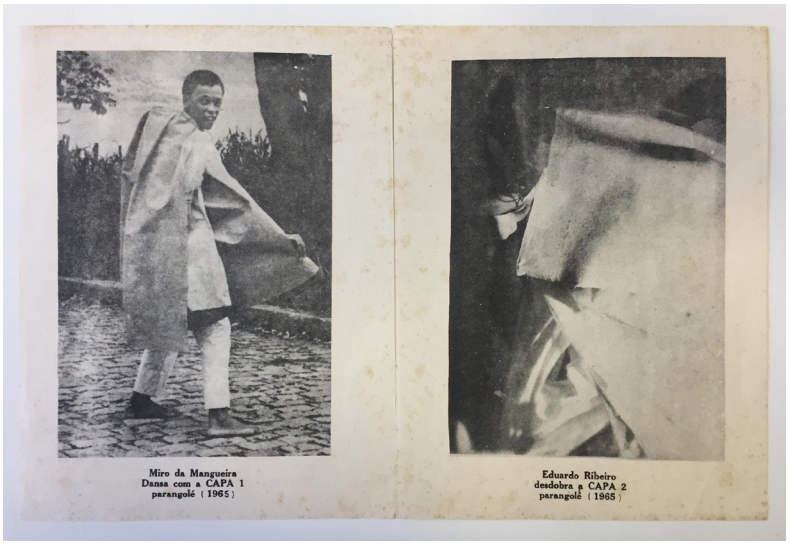

Fig. 12.3

Fig. 12.4

Fig. 12.3 Pamphlet for *Opinião 65* at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, ca. August 1965. Courtesy Archives of MAM-RJ.

Fig. 12.4 Hélio Oiticica, Mosquito and unidentified children with part of *P3 Parangolé tenda 1* (1964), inside the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro, 1965. Photo: Desdemone Bardin.

Mira Schendel, *Untitled* from the series Graphic Objects [*Objetos gráficos*] (1967)

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Plate 13 Mira Schendel (Brazilian, born Switzerland. 1919–1988). *Untitled* from the series Graphic Objects (Objetos gráficos). 1967. Graphite, transfer type, and oil on paper between transparent acrylic sheets with transfer type. 39 5⁄16 × 39 5⁄16 × 3⁄8" (99.8 x 99.8 x 1 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Luis PérezOramas. PG866.2016

Writing Space, Writing in Space: Typography and Topography in Mira Schendel's *Untitled* from the Series *Objetos gráficos*

Mira Schendel was a poet, philosopher, and artist whose life as a political refugee and immigrant was marked by linguistic and geographical fluidity.[1] Her series *Objetos gráficos (Graphic Objects)* (1967–1968) reflects the artist's history of multilingualism and displacement through interwoven written signs and layered spaces. In each of the series' works, Schendel blends drawing and writing on sheets of Japanese rice paper encased between transparent acrylic planes. The artist introduced the works in international settings such as the IX São Paulo and the XXXIV Venice biennials, where she exhibited them as a hanging collection, suspended from the ceiling just above eye level in a way that invited viewers to wander and contemplate the floating patterns of signs.[2]

As the title of the series suggests, in *Objetos gráficos* Schendel links written language with concrete objects situated in space, yet at the same time the artist playfully challenges the viewers' understanding of both graphics and objecthood.[3] This questioning of the connotations of the title "Graphic Objects" is particularly evident in the 1967 untitled piece gifted by the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros to the Museum of Modern Art, where Schendel dissolves writing into illegible swirls and undermines the concreteness of the object by constructing it as a combination of layers.

Untitled features small handwritten inscriptions, larger bold signs with a solid, architectural allure, and a number of dry transfer Letraset types.[4] Writing appears on both sides of the piece, seeping through the delicate surface of the rice paper. The relative transparency of the materials blurs the distinction between front and back, creating the impression that the written marks float and collide in the space between the acrylic sheets. Through overlap and blending, the chains of scribbled A's and X's and other isolated letters become increasingly unintelligible and distant from meaningful text. This effect would have been magnified when the works of *Objetos gráficos* hung together, interpenetrating one another as a photograph of Schendel's installation at the Venice Biennial in 1968 suggests (fig. 13.1).

Despite the impression that the written marks coexist along a uniform dimension, Schendel situates them on multiple material levels, frustrating the familiar experience of viewing written language on a single plane. She achieves this baffling effect through the stratification of acrylic and paper sheets, and through the varying thicknesses of the rice paper, which may result from the compression of multiple sheets into one. And while the scribblings and bold letters are inscribed directly on the paper, the Letraset transfer types are also placed on the interior and exterior of the acrylic sheets. The writing itself, then, appears and exists on multiple tiers within the work. Further, the manifold surfaces of the work either reflect or incorporate light, so that the work spills into the space around it and vice-versa. Depending on the intensity and direction of the light, *Untitled*'s transparency allows the surrounding space into the work, and at the same time allows the work to cast shadows around it. This interplay becomes increasingly palpable in Schendel's later works *Toquinhos (Little Things)* (1972–1973), which the artist hung close to walls to dramatize the potential of translucent surfaces (figs. 13.2–13.3).[5]

The centrality of multi-tiered strata in *Untitled* calls to mind both palimpsests and sedimentary rocks, bridging written language with geological formations. Indeed, the complex spatiality of this work pushes the viewers to "read" the writing as if it were not a text, but rather some kind of map. The configurations that cover the surface of this piece are reminiscent of aerial views of urban and rural landscapes and even extraterrestrial images of galaxies and constellations. Through this lens, the work can be understood as an intersection of typography and topography, the arrangement of written language and the arrangement of the physical features of a spatial area. Although here typography does not translate into topographical images as directly as in the linguistic maps of Schendel's compatriot Öyvind Fahlström (fig. 13.4),[6] Schendel's scribblings take on the semblance of intricate forests or metropolitan mazes, and the bold letters call to mind canyons or solid modernist architecture in ways that align the two artists' work.

Just as the cartographic appeal of Schendel's *Untitled* evokes physical space without depicting any particular geography, the materiality of the paper and the prevalence of written marks recall various kinds of documents—from the headlines of newspapers to intimate scrapbooks—yet they never converge to form a text. On the unreadable surfaces of the work, the recurrent presence of the sign X whimsically echoes this sense of elusiveness and impenetrability, perhaps anticipating the strategies by which artists and writers defended their works from the censorship that Brazil's military dictatorship officially imposed in 1968 via the infamous Institutional Act Number 5 (AI–5).[7] An effacing mark *par excellence*, the X is reminiscent of a mathematical variable as well as a secret spot on a map, embodying a layered presence that links typography and topography though allusions to hidden meanings.[8]

This latent politicized aspect of the piece underscores the deep ambiguity of Schendel's *Objetos Gráficos*,[9] which simultaneously exist as ethereal clusters of layers and as mementos to the intrinsic instability of the "maps"—whether linguistic or spatial—through which people relate to the world around them. To be sure, the visual intermingling of typography and topography parallels Schendel's own experience as someone constantly caught among and outside of linguistic and geographical borders. In turn, *Untitled*'s emphasis on the visual properties of language and its challenge to spatial containment hauntingly provokes viewers to reframe their understanding of both.

1. Born in Zurich, Schendel was raised in Milan, which she had to flee after Benito Mussolini's government passed laws persecuting Italians of Jewish heritage. After travelling to Eastern Europe, Schendel settled with a group of political refugees in Sarajevo, where she married a Catholic Croatian with whom she later moved to Brazil. Her fluency in languages as diverse as German, Italian, Croatian, and Portuguese emerges in her work, which features writing in various idioms.

2. See Fig. 13.1.

3. This aspect links Schendel's work to the concrete poems of Brazilian figures such as Haroldo de Campos, who was an intimate friend and intellectual interlocutor of the artist throughout the 1960s. Yet, many of Schendel's *Graphic Objects* produce an effect of dissolution of writing that distinguishes her approach from that of the Noigandres group. For a compelling study of this latter see Fernando Pérez, "The Eye and the Ear: Ezra Pound, Brazilian Concrete Poetry and their Paideuma," PhD diss., New York University, 2009.

4. Letraset was a commercial company based in the United Kingdom specialized in typeface sheets. Founded in 1959, in 1961 Letraset developed an innovative dry rub-down system that allowed typographic characters to be transferred to flat surfaces much like decals (the sheets carrying the characters contain adhesive substances that activate with the heat derived by rubbing). This product (also known as Letraset Instant Lettering) was widely adopted by graphic designers and architects until the 1980s, and may have inspired Schendel in light of her early activity as a graphic designer (starting in 1953 and for about a decade, Schendel worked as a graphic designer for various publishing houses in São Paulo, such as Editora Companhia Melhoramentos and Herder). Schendel's inclusion of this kind of type in *Graphic Objects* introduces a detached, almost mechanical connotation that starkly contrasts with the intimate character of handwriting, which in some cases takes on the semblance of obsessive scribblings. For more information about Letraset see Adrian Shaughnessy, *Letraset: The DIY Typography Revolution* (London: Unit Editions, 2016).

5. While the capacity of Untitled to cast shadows remains somewhat latent, it becomes an integrant part of *Toquinhos*, some of which were exhibited at Galeria Ralph Camargo in São Paulo in 1972 (Fig. 13.3). Schendel similarly exploits this visual effect with the 1972 series *Transformables (Tranformavéis)*, composed of subtle acrylic strings hanging from the ceiling which project filiform shadows around them.

6. Fahlstrhöm's work provides a direct example of the conflation of typography and topography that Schendel's *Untitled* evokes. Born in Brazil and belonging to Schendel's generation, his drawings and silkscreens from the *World Map* series depict maps composed of bits and pieces of comic-like graphic text. For an interesting study of these works, see the exhibition catalogue *Öyvind Fahlström: mapas*, ed. Antonio Sergio Bessa and Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro (Porto Alegre: Fundação Bienal de Artes Visuais do Mercosul, 2007).

7. For a thorough study of the strategies of self-censorship which artists and writers had to adopt under Brazil's military dictatorship, see Claudia Calirman. *Brazilian Art Under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012). I thank André Lepecki for pointing out, during the MRC Study Session on May 11th, 2018, that there may be a link between the unreadability of Schendel's *Objetos gráficos* and the necessities arising from systematic censorship in 1960s Brazil.

8. During the same session in May, Christine Poggi compellingly suggested that the proliferation of X signs in this work may constitute another form of layering consistent with my analysis.

9. The politicized side of Schendel's work has been discussed by Isobel Whitelegg in relation to the work *Ondas paradas de probabilidade*, which the artists decided to exhibit at the X São Paulo Biennial in 1969 despite the vast international boycott that protested the military government's persecution and censorship of intellectuals, art critics, and artists. See Isobel Whitelegg, "'The Other World Is This': Mira Schendel's Participation in the Boycotted X Bienal Internacional de São Paulo, 1969," in *Mira Schendel*, eds. Tanya Barson, Taisa Palhares (London: Tate Publishing, 2013).

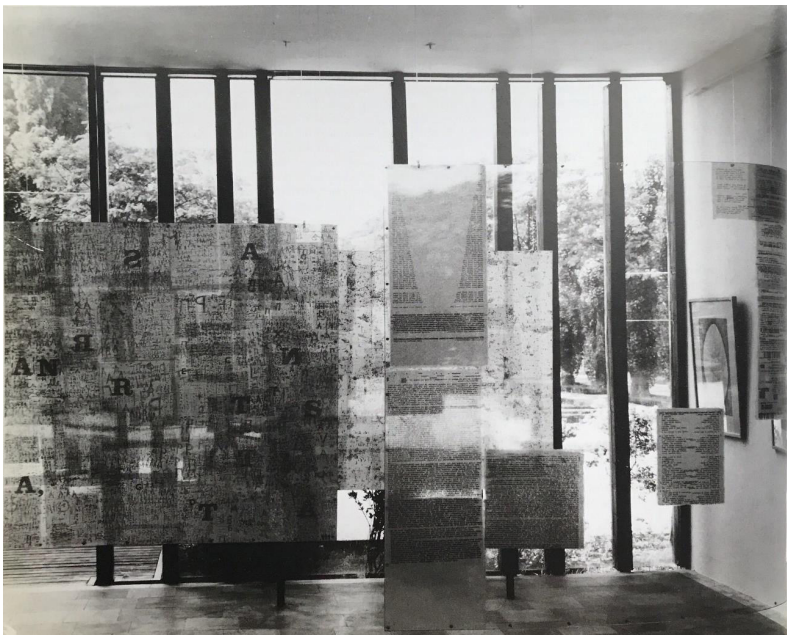

Fig. 13.1

Fig. 13.2

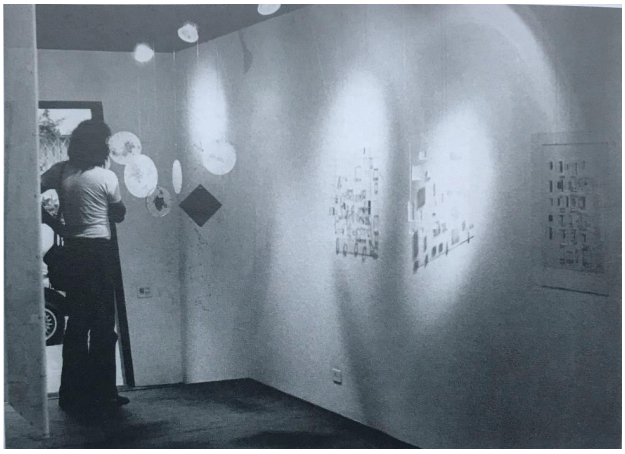

Fig. 13.3

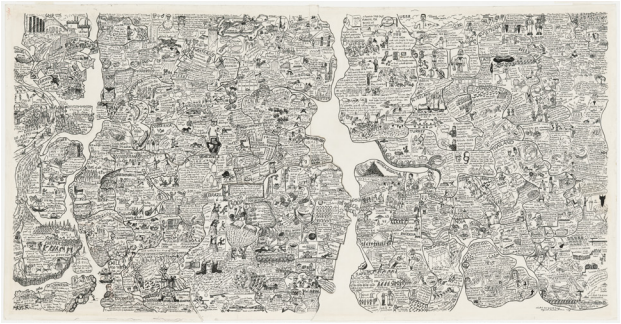

Fig. 13.4

Fig. 13.1 Installation view of Mira Schendel's *Objetos gráficos* at the XXXIV Venice Biennial, 1968. From *León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets*, ed. Luis Pérez-Oramas (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009) 12.

Fig. 13.2 *Untitled* from the series *Toquinhos (Little Things)*, 1970s. Transfer type on shaped acrylic on acrylic sheet, 46.5 × 20.5 × 35 cm. Collection Esther Faingold, São Paulo. From *León Ferrari and Mira Schendel: Tangled Alphabets*, ed. Luis Pérez-Oramas (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2009) 161.

Fig. 13.3 Installation view, including some works from the series *Toquinhos* on the right-hand side of the image, of the exhibition *Mira Schendel–Através: Acrílicos, Linhas, Transformáveis, Toquinhos, Bordados, Fórmica, Espirais, Discos, Outros Desenhos* at Galeria Ralph Camargo in São Paulo, 1972. From Ana Cândida da Avelar, "Mira Schendel: Chronology" in *Mira Schendel,* ed. Tanya Barson and Taisa Palhares (London: Tate Publishing, 2013) 234.

Fig. 13.4 Öyvind Fahlström, *Sketch for World Map*, 1972. Ink on paper, 48.3 × 94 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Feliza Bursztyn, *Untitled* [from the series The Hysterics] (c. 1967)

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Plate 14 Feliza Bursztyn (Colombian, 1933–1982). *Untitled (from the series The Hysterics)*. c. 1967. Stainless steel and motor. 17 11⁄16 × 15 3⁄4 × 19 11⁄16" (45 × 40 × 50 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Carolina Rodríguez Cisneros. 553.2017

Untitled (Hysteric) (pl. 14) is part of a series of kinetic sculptures that Colombian artist Feliza Bursztyn produced between 1967–1968. The *Hysterics* are a notable departure from the artist's earlier *chatarras* series, so-called junk sculptures made of industrial detritus (fig. 14.1). For the Hysterics, the artist opted for a more pristine materiality, turning to strips of stainless steel sourced from a factory that manufactured radiators. Bursztyn's proximity to the manufacturing realm and the ready availability of industrial materials were also linked to her biography—her family owned a textile factory in Bogotá, where she carved out a studio and living space.[1] Bursztyn shaped the pliable strips into varying sculptural compositions (figs. 14.2–14.3), and welded them to a base made of the same material.[2] With the assistance of an electrician, she installed and weighted a turntable motor, forcing it to rotate irregularly in an awkward manner.[3] When activated, the Hysteric produces a whirring, cacophonous sound that is simultaneously unsettling and humorous. *The Hysteric* holds varying associations in tension: in its dormant state, the sculpture's sinuous forms elicit a poetic quality that is undermined by its frenzied activation and haphazard construction. The loaded significance of the gendered title (*histérica*) also conjures associations to the 19th century vibrating devices used to "cure" the hysteric patient.

Bursztyn debuted her *Histérica n°1* in November 1967 at the XIX Salón de Artistas Nacional, where it tied for third prize. The Hysterics were not always exhibited as discrete sculptures, however, nor were they conceived of as precious objects—in fact their deliberate precariousness and innate destructiveness were integral to their design. Beginning in 1968, Bursztyn staged the *Hysterics* in elaborate arrangements in multimedia environments, one of the first artists to work in installation art in Colombia.[4] Exploiting the *Hysterics*' disruptive movements and sounds, she aimed to transform the white cube into a multi-sensorial experiential space. Bursztyn placed the sculptures in dense clusters on the floor, mounted them on the walls and ceilings, and painted the galleries black to mimic the "black box" environment of the theater (fig. 14.4). Spotlights dramatically illuminated the lustrous surfaces of the sculptures and created menacing shadows on the darkened walls. The dizzying cacophony of sound and intermittent flashing of lights were intended to assault viewers' senses, or what Marta Traba, the Argentine-born Colombian critic, curator, and major supporter of Bursztyn's work, claimed was a "mortification or… exasperation of the public."[5] Theater director Santiago García also likened the *Hysteric* sculptures to "…toys, like animals in a sardonic world, naïve, barbaric sculptures that are directed toward… violent rhythms of hallucinating stridencies."[6]

In one of the these exhibitions, *Espacios ambientales* (Environmental Spaces), organized by Traba at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Bogotá (MAMBO), the sexual connotations of the *Hysteric* sculptures became more explicit. Her individual contribution to this group show was titled *Siempre acostada* (Always in Bed) (fig. 14.5). The sculptures noisily and suggestively clanking away in darkened rooms flouted prevailing social and religious taboos among conservative sectors of Colombian society.[7] Similar installations with the Hysterics incorporated a short film by the Barranquilla-based filmmaker Luis Ernesto Arocha titled *Hoy Felisa* (Felisa Today) (1968), which interspersed close-up images of the sculptures with images of Hollywood sex symbols such as Marlon Brando and Bette Davis (fig. 14.6–14.7).[8] Bursztyn's engagement with eroticism and humor as forms of critique would become more pronounced in the subsequent series of kinetic sculptures known as *Las camas* (The Beds) (1974), which made present the absent, implied body in the *Hysterics* in its anthropomorphic scale (fig. 14.8).[9]

Like the ancient theory of the "wandering womb," the *Hysteric* sculpture resists being contained, and continues to pose contemporary conservation and display challenges, antagonizing the very structures and conventions of the art institution.[10] In a recent exhibition at MoMA, conservators debated various ways to anchor the *Hysteric* to a plinth, and noticed that the sculpture had eroded the padding built around the sculpture's base by the end of the exhibition's run.[11] Bursztyn's *Hysterics* are typically interpreted as a parody of societal constructs that contain (and pathologize) women. Yet the abstract sculpture's gleaming surfaces and material associations with industry and development also parody the logical, rational, and rigorous construction techniques deployed by South American artists working in constructivist and concrete traditions in the 1950s and 1960s. Bursztyn's embeddedness in the industrial world—from her factory studio to her own alignments with the working-class labor that populated the same neighborhood—linked her leftist political ideals with the functionless machines that she labored over with such wit and critical ingenuity.[12] The *Hysteric*'s non-productive energy expenditure, then, is not only a refusal of societal expectations of the reproductive body, but also of developmentalist imperatives in a rapidly transforming post-colonial context.

1. For a detailed chronology of Bursztyn's career, see Camilo Leyva, Manuela Ochoa, and Juan Carlos Osorio, "Cronología," in *Elogio de la chatarra* (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2009). Colombian architects Rogelio Salmona and Carlos Valencia remodeled the factory garage into a studio and living space (casa-taller) for the artist in 1960, p. 77.

2. According to MoMA Conservation, the strips appeared to be welded, but

require excerpt analysis for a definitive confirmation. Ellen Moody in conversation with the author, The Museum of Modern Art, April 19, 2018.

3. Bursztyn collaborated with an electrician named Albano Ariza to help her wire the Hysterics. See Gina McDaniel Tarver "The Art of Feliza Bursztyn: Confronting Cultural Hegemony," *Artelogie 5* (October 2013), http://cral.in2p3.fr/artelogie/IMG/article_PDF/article_a273.pdf, 18, footnote 42.

4. Tarver, *The New Iconoclasts: From Art of a New Reality to Conceptual Art in Colombia* (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, Facultad de Artes y Humanidades, Departamento de Arte, Ediciones Uniandes, 2016), 77.

5. Marta Traba, *Historia abierta del arte colombiano* (Cali: Ediciones Museo La Tertulia, 1974), 190, cited in Tarver, "The Art of Feliza Bursztyn," 7.

6. Leyva, Ochoa, Osorio, 82. "Estas esculturas son como juguetes, como animales de un mundo sardónico, ingenuo, bárbaro, esculturas que van dirigidas al nuevo sentido de violentos ritmos de estridencias alucinantes." All translations by the author.

7. Traba compares Bursztyn's *Hysterics* to an unspecified series of sculptures by Jean Tinguely, which she refers to as "copulantes," in *Historia abierta*, 190.

8. Tarver, "The Art of Feliza Bursztyn," 8. Luis Ernesto Arocha's films appeared in exhibitions with the *Hysterics* in June 1968 at the Art Festival in Cali and in April 1969 as part of the Cultural Salon, held in the Banco de la República de Barranquilla.

9. A soundtrack composed by experimental electronic musician Jacqueline Nova accompanied *The Beds*.

10. The term "hysteria" derives from the Greek word for uterus. The notion of the pathological "wandering womb" dates to ancient Greece but persisted in western Europe for centuries. Ochoa, "Movimiento," in *Elogio de la chatarra*, 17. According to Ochoa, Bursztyn "nunca intentó determinar cómo debían ser expuestas, si irían en el piso, en la pared, en el techo o sobre una base." (Bursztyn "never intended to determine how they should be exhibited, whether they would go on the floor, on the wall, on the ceiling or on a base.").

11. *Untitled (Hysteric)* was included in the 2017 exhibition, *Making Space: Women Artists and Postwar Abstraction* (April 15–August 13, 2017).

12. Tarver, "The Art of Feliza Bursztyn," 18, footnote 35. Bursztyn identified herself as a "worker and a welder" in a newspaper article, "Soy una obrera y soldadora," *Cromos* (Bogotá), no. 812 (November 6, 1974).

Fig. 14.1

Fig. 14.2

Fig. 14.3

Fig. 14.1 *Chatarra*, c. 1964–66. Iron. Source: Camilo Leyva, Manuela Ochoa, and Juan Carlos Osorio, *Elogio de la chatarra* (Bogotá: Museo Nacional de Colombia, 2009), 31

Fig. 14.2–14.3 *Las histéricas* (The Hysterics), c. 1968. Source: *Elogio de la chatarra*, 3: 54; **4**: 49

Fig. 14.4

Fig. 14.5

Fig. 14.4 Installation view of *Espacios ambientales,* 1968. Source: *Elogio de la chatarra,* 82

Fig. 14.5 Installation view of Feliza Bursztyn in *Siempre acostada*, Museo de Arte Moderno de Bogotá, 1968. Photograph by Nereo López. Source: *Elogio de la chatarra*, 16

Fig. 14.6

Fig. 14.7

Fig. 14.8

Fig. 14.6–14.7 Film still of Luis Ernesto Arocha, *Hoy Felisa*, 1968. Source: Instituto de Visión, http://institutodevision.com/visionarios/luis-ernesto-arocha

Fig. 14.8 Feliza Bursztyn, *Cama* (Bed), 1974. Source: Cecilia Fajardo–Hill and Andrea Giunta, et al., *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985* (Los Angeles: The Hammer Museum; Munich and New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2017), 73

Juan Downey, *Do Your Own Concert* (1968)

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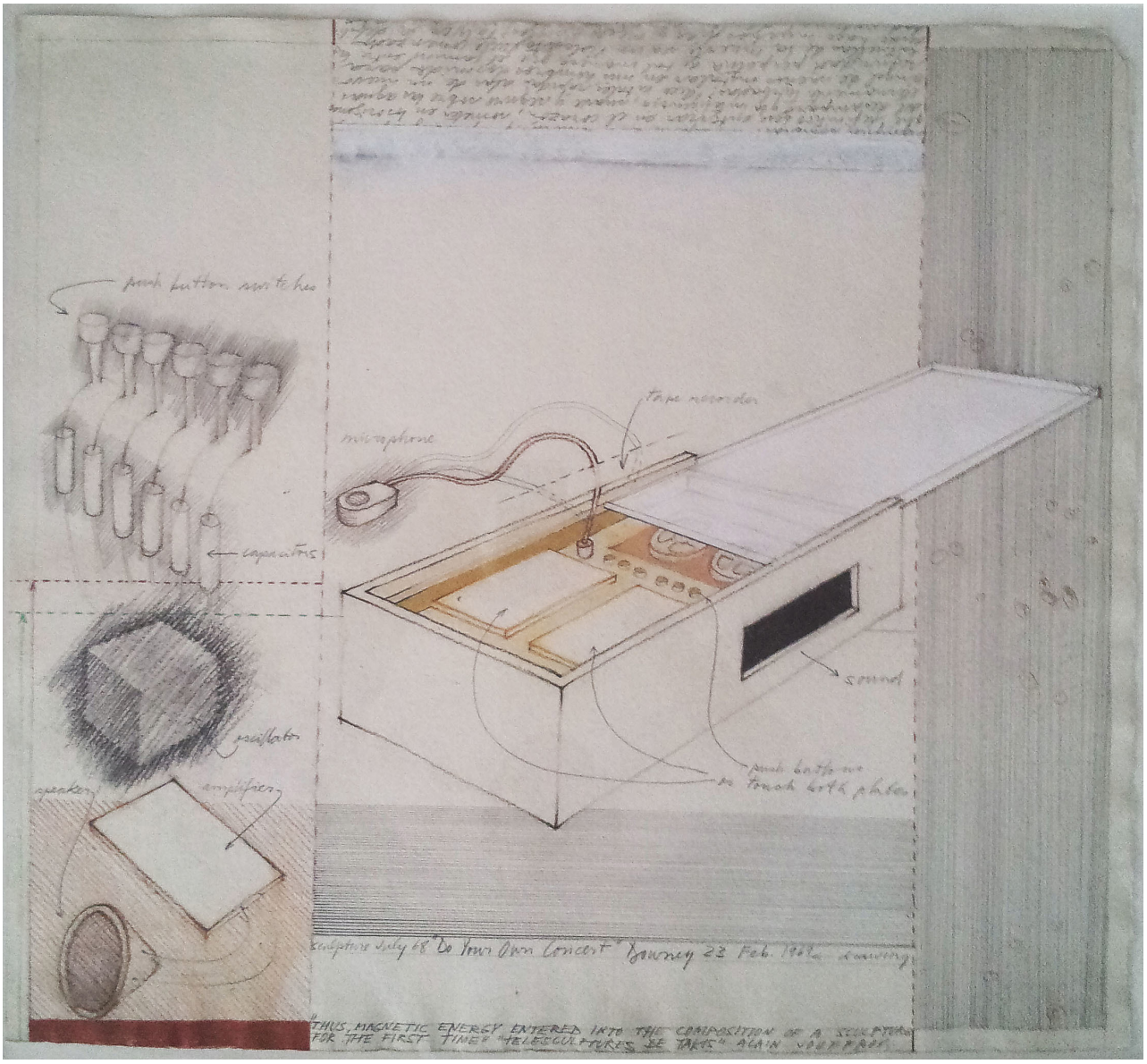


Plate 15 Juan Downey (Chilean, 1940–1993). *Do Your Own Concert*. 1968. Color pencil and collage on cardboard, audio player. 22 1⁄16 × 29 15⁄16" (56 × 76 cm). Unique. Latin American and Caribbean Fund through gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. 214.2013

Between January 3 and February 2, 1969, Juan Downey's *Do Your Own Concert* (1968) was installed at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.—its first and only exhibition. One of seven "electronically operated" sculptures on display, it consists of a partially-covered white box with rectangular cuts on each side allowing sound to emerge. On the surface, two metallic plates at one end serve as electrical sensors and conductors; a small aperture at the other exposes the reels and knobs of audio recording equipment housed below (figs. 15.1–15.2). As Downey explains in a 1968 essay, the piece is mainly activated by audience participation:

> By pressing the button-switches or by touching the two plates at the same time, a person can record electronic music that will be played back later. Music will also be created when a group of persons hold hands and the person on each end of the chain touches one of the two plates.[1]

An original recording from the work's debut documents one of the resulting "concerts" as a succession of individual tones, a change in pitch occurring each time a participant pushes a button or is added to a handholding chain.[2] The device thus serves a doubly interactive purpose, making viewers aware of both the electrifying energy of human touch—now palpable in musical form—and the lingering, audible presence of those recorded before. According to Downey's widow, Marilys, when the sculpture was not in use, a separate audiotape would play on loop, with the artist's voice inviting viewers to the machine and providing instructions on its use.[3] The installation thus represents one of the artist's first complete feedback loops, which he would begin incorporating in his "life cycles" and video work upon moving to New York in late 1969.

At the time of the Corcoran installation, Downey was based in Washington, organizing participatory "happenings" with his artist collective, The New Group, which similarly used technology to promote communal interaction.[4] Much like these singular events, the automated electronic sculptures were intended to be "ephemeral… part of a new development in the history of art to create works that are not supposed to last for a long time… Art is more concerned with thinking about what people experience than with producing objects."[5] Indeed, Downey took steps to frustrate the status of *Do Your Own Concert* as an art object, prioritizing the continuation of its phenomenological capabilities over the longevity of its contents. Beneath its cover, the nondescript box was meant to accommodate ever-modernizing technologies as the project aged, substituting new and functional audio equipment for obsolete components.[6] In his writings, Downey also disavowed sole authorship and creative power over the work, emphasizing the technical contributions of engineer Fred Pitts as an equal partner in its construction.[7]

Pitts's name is included on three illustrative drawings that Downey—a trained architect—drafted after the Corcoran show as instructional "blueprints" outlining the device's physical and cybernetic conditions and perhaps planning for future iterations [figs. 15.3–15.5].[8] While the drawings serve as an aesthetic and traditional foil to the sculpture's minimalistic form and experimental media, they contain similar themes of shared artistic energy. One drawing, now at The Museum of Modern Art, features a handwritten quote about the work of Takis, who befriended Downey in Paris in the early 1960s and helped to spark his interest in kinetic and electronic art.[9] Downey also meticulously transcribed onto each drawing lines from "Significa sombras," a poem by fellow Chilean Pablo Neruda, whom he had also met in Paris. The verses reflect on the human struggle between transience and immortality, futility and meaning, proposing that "Tal vez la debilidad natural de los seres recelosos y ansiosos/ =busca de súbito permanencia en el tiempo y límites en la tierra."[10]

Of course, the binaries in Neruda's verses parallel the tensions in Downey's sculpture, which relies upon temporary (that is, perpetually outdated) technology and yet promises lasting life through the survival of its recordings. Downey appears to acknowledge and toy with these inherent contradictions. The sculpture itself—posing a deliberate "problem for the collectors of art objects"—is fickle as the artist's faith in its utopian potential.[11] For Downey, it creates merely "the illusion that the public can participate in the work of art. Actually, we are still spectators mystified by the order that makes the world grow and move, although we pretend that we are determining what happens to us."[12] On one of his drawings, the most legible Neruda inscription—still handwritten in graphite, but less cramped and smudged than the others—reads: ""Que lo que yo soy siga existiendo y cesando de existir, y que mi obediencia se ordene con tales condiciones…"[13] Significantly, Downey omits the two final words, "de hierro" ("of iron"), which would fix his work in any sort of permanent conviction.

1. Downey, "Electronically Operated Audio-Kinetic Sculptures, 1968," *Leonardo*, Vol. 2, no. 4 (October 1969), 405.

2. The recording is preserved on The Museum of Modern Art's internal server as a digital audio file.

3. Author interview with Marilys Downey, April 24, 2018. Also stated in emails from Marilys Downey to Peter Oleksik (Associate Media Conservator, The Museum of Modern Art), dated June 17 and June 27, 2013.

4. Examples of "happenings" that Downey staged as part of The New Group

before and after his Corcoran show include *The Human Voice* (August 1968)—in which people were gathered and recorded on tape, their voices and conversations played back later—and *Invisible Energy Dictates A Dance Concert* (August 1969), in which five different kinds of sensory equipment were installed around Smithsonian buildings, their data transferred onto audio tape and played back as "music" to shape the movements of five different participating dancers.

5. Downey, "Electronically Operated Audio-Kinetic Sculptures, 1968," 403–404.

6. Email correspondence from Marilys Belt de Downey to Peter Oleksik (MoMA), dated June 27, 2013. The original reel-to-reel producer visible in older photographs of the sculpture did not accompany it upon its acquisition by MoMA in 2013; according to Marilys Belt de Downey, from whom the work was purchased, "throughout the years of hot and cold, plus the different moves, it cracked and broke in pieces." The original equipment was identified by MoMA's Media Conservation team using vintage *Lafayette Radio Electronics* catalogues. In the Spring 1968 issue, Downey's recorder appears on page 30 as the "best selling" Model RK-810. Interestingly, in Downey's ensuing sculpture (fig. 15.2), one can make out that the artist replaced the original white "Lafayette" brand label and logo on the audio recorder with his own tag, which—also on a white background—reads, "Do Your Own Concert."

7. Downey, "Electronically Operated Audio-Kinetic Sculptures, 1968," 404.

8. According to Downey's handwritten inscriptions, the three drawings were created on: February 23, 1969 (currently at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 214.2013), March 12, 1969 (currently in private collection), and March 28, 1969 (currently at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2015.19.2498).

9. In capital letters, it reads: "'Thus, magnetic energy entered into the composition of a sculpture for the first time' 'Telesculptures de Takis' Alain Jouffroy." From a review of Takis's work by French artist and critic Alain Jouffroy.

10. "Perhaps the inherent weakness of wary and anxious beings/suddenly seeks permanence in time and limits on earth" (translation my own). From Neruda, "Significa Sombras," *Residencia en la tierra* I (1933) (Santiago de Chile: Editorial Universitaria, 2004), 101.

11. Downey, "Electronically Operated Audio-Kinetic Sculptures, 1968," 403.

12. Ibid., 403.

13. "May that which I am keep existing and ceasing to exist, and may my obedience conform to these conditions" (translation my own). Transcribed onto the drawing currently in private collection. The verses are copied prominently at bottom center, immediately following Downey's handwritten instructions for the sculpture's use.

Fig. 15.1

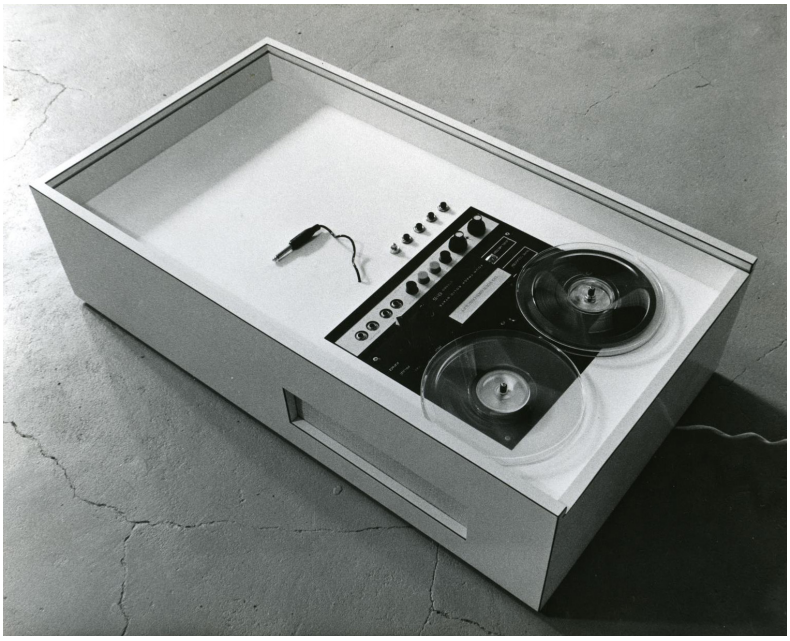


Fig. 15.2

Fig. 15.1 Exterior of *Do Your Own Concert* (1968); absent audio recording equipment Provided by Media Conservation, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 15.2 Assembled version of *Do Your Own Concert* (1968); absent two metallic plates Provided by Marilys Downey, The Estate of Juan Downey

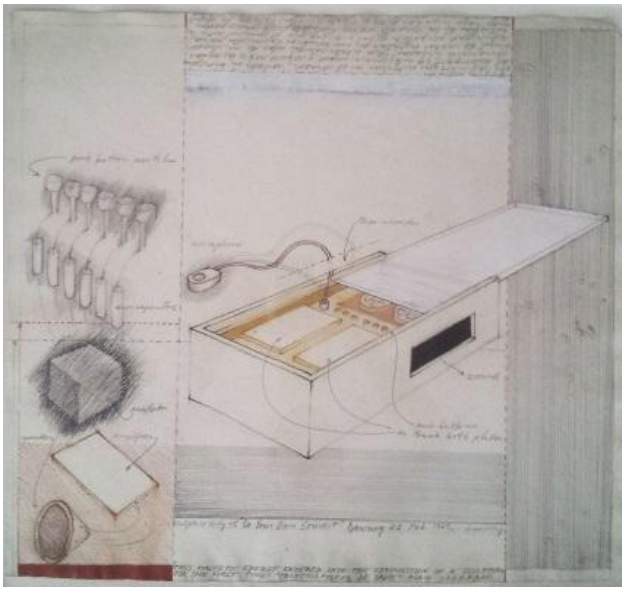


Fig. 15.3

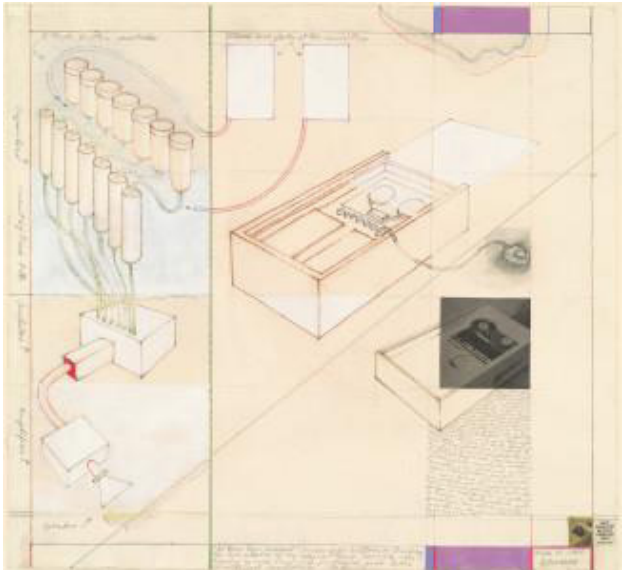


Fig. 15.4

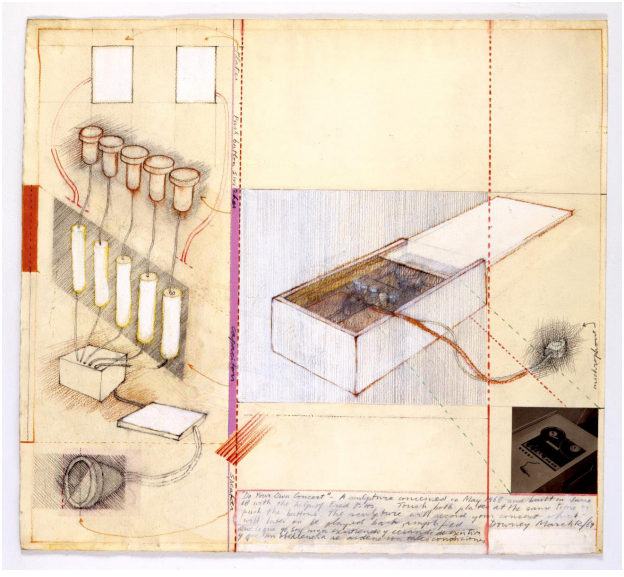


Fig. 15.5

Fig. 15.3 *Do Your Own Concert*, 1969. Colored pencil and collage on paper, 22 1⁄16 × 29 15⁄16 in. (56 × 76 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Fig. 15.4 *Do Your Own Concert*, 1969. Graphite, pastel, acrylic, collage on wove paper, 22 × 23 7⁄8 in. (55.9 × 60.6 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

Fig. 15.5 *Do Your Own Concert*, 1969. Colored pencil, graphite, and acrylic on paper, 22 7⁄16 × 29 1⁄8 in. (57 × 74 cm). Private collection

Cildo Meireles, *To Be Curved with the Eyes* (1970/1975)

Erica Cooke
Princeton University

Plate 16 Cildo Meireles (Brazilian, born 1948). *To Be Curved with the Eyes.* 1970/75. Wood box, iron bars, enamel plaque, glass and graph paper. 4 ½ × 19 ½ × 9 ⅞" (11.4 x 49.5 x 25.1 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Andrea and José Olympio Pereira. 567.2017

The wooden box of Cildo Meireles' *Para Ser Curvada com os Olhos (To Be Curved with the Eyes)* (1970/78) hinges open at 180 degrees to lay flat, exposing the interior of its equally-proportioned sides. On the bottom half, two chrome-plated steel bars—one curved, one straight—are pinned like specimens against millimeter-scale graph paper. On the upper half, a red enamel plaque with white lettering—akin in style to mass-produced street signs—reads: "Two iron bars equal and curved." Underneath this phrase are the copyright symbol and the date "1970" on the lower left, as well as the artist's initials—"CM"—and the date "1978" on the bottom right.

The multiple dates given for this work illustrate Meireles' atypical system of dating his works by their initial conception (as well as their material execution which is standard in the history of art). Here, "1970" marks the year that the artist had the idea for *To Be Curved with the Eyes*—and therefore remains a constant value across the work's edition of five—whereas "1978" signifies the physical production of this specific version of the box. Meireles' separation of the artwork's mental ideation from its literal manifestation prompts associations with Conceptual artists like Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt and Lawrence Weiner whose careers also achieved critical acclaim and international recognition during the 1970s;[1] however, Meireles' intense concern for the art object itself does not accord with the movement's placement of concept before object. Contrary to LeWitt's famous dictum—"what the work of art looks like isn't too important"[2]—, Meireles claims that "the art object must, despite everything else, be instantly seductive" and distanced from the "dry verbal discourse [of] so much conceptual work."[3]

Even the work's title—*To Be Curved with the Eyes*—is ambiguously seductive in its proposition that eyesight alone is potent enough to reconfigure the material world. Meireles' belief in this talismanic force is evident from his stated intentions to always include this work in solo exhibitions: "The idea of this work is that, no matter what exhibition I prepared, it would always be there, until one day, slowly, the second bar would also become curved by the sum total force of the gaze of the spectators."[4] The inevitable shortcoming of this utopian project—no quota of collective stares will ever bend metal—is less about viewers' confronting failure and more about each viewer negotiating the deeply intertwined and often contradictory relationship between vision and cognition. *To Be Curved with the Eyes* functions as a litmus test for this relationship: how do established conventions of seeing impact individual acquisition of knowledge? And vice-versa: how much do cognitive norms calibrate personal acts of looking? The work's interior lining of graph paper, for example, conveys bias for empirical reasoning—of learning only through observable phenomena—which ostensibly negates the artist's poetic supposition that accumulative vision exerts some kind of physical force on the work of art.

Such a provocative and ludic framework for addressing the mechanics of perception bears the imprint of Marcel Duchamp's influence. In particular, Meireles achieves the uncanny appearance of his materials as both familiar and inscrutable by experimenting with Duchamp's radical invention for modern sculpture: the readymade and assisted readymade. These Duchampian techniques of selecting manufactured objects and sometimes adding modifications—evidenced here in Meireles' castoff wooden box and customized street sign—are often misconstrued as liberating the hand from manual craftsmanship. *To Be Curved with the Eyes* is a corrective for the legacy of Duchamp and a mnemonic within the artist's oeuvre; it explicates what Meireles envisions as the genuine adversary for viewers and artists alike: not the hand, but "the habits and handiwork of the brain."[5]

1. Meireles was one of four Brazilian artists to participate in "Information" (1970)—the international exhibition of Conceptual Art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Curated by *Kynaston McShine, this influential show put the movement firmly on the map by introducing audiences to its manifestations throughout the world.*

2. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art (1967)," in *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 2000), 13.

3. Cildo Meireles, "Places for Digressions: Interview with Nuria Enguita (extracts) 1994," in Paolo Herkenhoff et al., *Cildo Meireles*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 137.

4. Cildo Meireles, "Para ser curvada com os olhos, 1970/5," in Moacir dos Anjos et al., *Cildo Meireles* (New York, NY: Tate/D.A.P., 2009), 104.

5. Cildo Meireles, "Insertions into Ideological Circuits 1970-75," in Paolo Herkenhoff et al., *Cildo Meireles*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1999), 113. This text was written contemporaneously with the development of the Insertions... projects in Rio de Janeiro, 1970. Published as 'Inserções em Circuitos Ideológicos' in *Malasartes*, No. 1, Rio de Janeiro, September/November 1975, p. 15. Revised 1999.

Hélio Oiticica, *The afternoon almost evening* (1973)

Gillian Sneed
The Graduate Center, CUNY

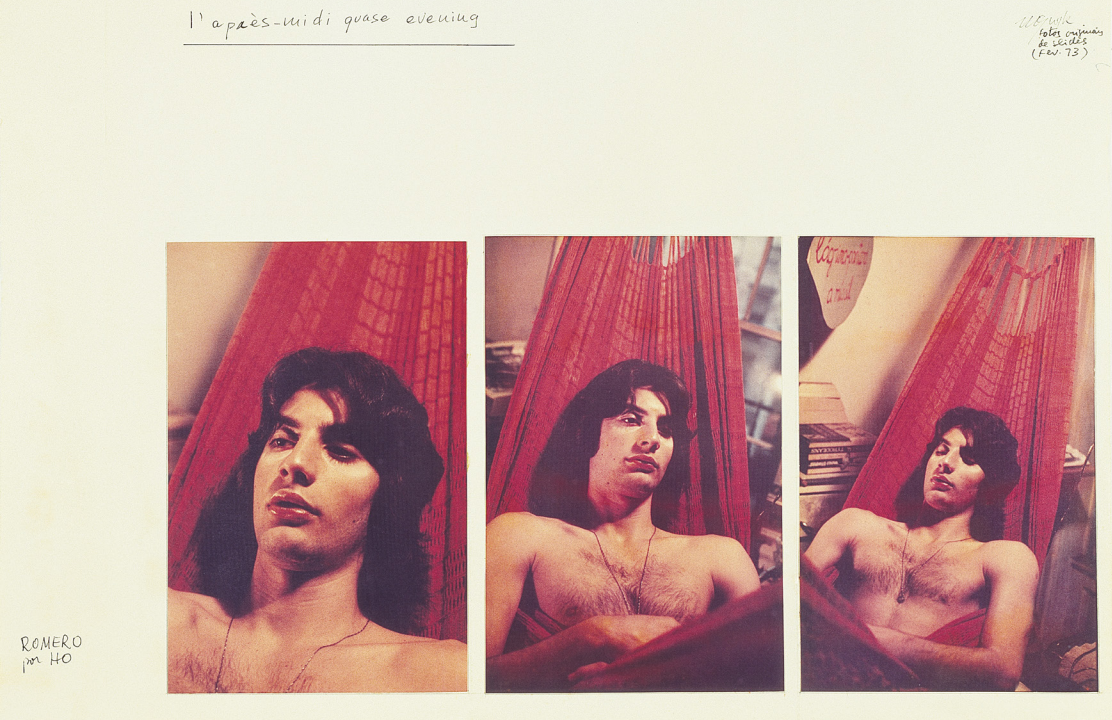


Plate 17 Hélio Oiticica. *The afternoon almost evening*. 1973. Cibachrome prints pasted on paper. 11 9⁄16 × 17 1⁄16" (29.3 × 45 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund. 845.2016

L'après-midi quase evening (pl. 17) is a work by Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980) comprising three color photographs pasted on paper. Oiticica printed the photos from slides he took of his then-lover and muse, Romero Calvacanti (b. 1952). The images are from different distances and angles, depicting the young man reclining in a red hammock. Handwritten in Portuguese at the bottom left appear the words "Romero by HO," and at the top right: "ho nyk original photos from slides (Feb. 73)." The title—"L'après-midi quase evening," (a combination of French, Portuguese, and English)—also appears at top.

The work was created in 1973, during the early years of Oiticica's New York period (1970–1978).[1] Oiticica arrived in New York in the summer of 1970 to participate in *Information*, curated by Kynaston McShine at MoMA (July–September 1970). Oiticica returned briefly to Rio de Janeiro, but after winning a Guggenheim Fellowship, he returned to New York in December 1970, settling in the East Village in a loft located at 81 Second Avenue, which he referred to simply as "Loft 4."[2] This is where Oiticica moved the *ninhos* (nests) he had shown in Information, renaming them the *Babylonests* (fig. 17.1) upon their relocation there. Composed of six compartments on two levels that contained bedding, curtains of various materials, televisions, radios, slide projectors, books, magazines, and newspapers, the *Babylonests* served as cocoon-like environments for himself, as well as his roommates and the many itinerant guests visiting the space.

Oiticica's time in New York was marked by a free-wheeling lifestyle that involved communal living, participation in the underground queer scene, an escalating cocaine addiction that also included dealing drugs, and later, an undocumented residency status.[3] It was also characterized by his shift towards ephemeral art forms, including slideshows, films, sound projects, and experimental writing, much of which remained unrealized or unfinished.[4] It was during this time that he met Romero Cavalcanti, the subject of *L'après-midi*. Today, Cavalcanti is a prominent Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu coach based in Atlanta. But when he arrived in New York sometime before October 1972, he was only 19 years old, and the then 35-year-old Oiticica described him in a letter as "a new acquisition from the beaches of Copacabana."[5] Cavalcanti became Oiticica's lover and model, and moved in with him shortly after his arrival.[6] As early as November 1972, Oiticica had begun taking photographs of Cavalcanti wearing *Parangolés* on the roof of his loft and in other locations (figs. 17.2–17.3).[7] In January 1973, Oiticica developed the proposition "MONÓLOGO DE ROMERO" (Romero's Monologue), an audio piece to be recorded on cassette tape and used in various performances, in which Romero discusses his experiences wearing the *Parangolés*.[8] That same month, Oiticica took Cavalcanti and other friends and his *Parangolés* down into the New York City subway system, where they invited riders to engage with them (figs. 17.4–17.5).[9] It was shortly after this, that in February of 1973 Oiticica took the photographs of Cavalcanti reclining in the red hammock that we see in *L'après-midi*.

In April 1973, Oiticica began a new slideshow work he called *Neyrótika* (a word play combining the words "New York" and "erotica"), which he intended to show in *Expo-Projeção*, an exhibition of experimental audio-visual and film-based works in São Paulo in June.[10] *Neyrótika* (fig. 17.6) comprised approximately 80 slides Oiticica had taken of the "goldenboys of the Babylonests"[11]—mainly black or Puerto Rican youth who he had picked up in the neighborhood—posed erotically in the *Babylonests*, accompanied by a soundtrack of radio recordings and his own voice reciting the poetry of Rimbaud.[12] Two of the photographs of Cavalcanti that appear in *L'après-midi* were printed from slides that Oiticica used in *Neyrótika*. These include the photograph on L'après-midi's far left, depicting a close-up of Cavalcanti's face, and a cropped version of the photograph on the far right, depicting Cavalcanti, eyes downcast, suspended in the hammock (fig. 17.7).[13] Oiticica also used other photographs of Calvacanti from the same photo shoot, as well as from other shoots in *Neyrótika*. Other photographs depict close-up shots of Cavalcanti's body—his underpants, his legs, his chest, and his face—as he posed on the roof of Oiticica's loft.

The photographs of Calvacanti had a second life as the images accompanying a stream-of-consciousness text titled "Letter to Waly that is material to be published" that Oiticica published in the first and only issue of *Polem*, an underground journal of experimental writing released in September/October 1974 (fig. 17.8).[14] The *L'après-midi* photographs appear on the bottom of page 88, below the text (fig. 17.9). Above them, appear the words: "L'après-midi quase evening" (at left), and "foto: ROMERO por HO" (at right).[15] An original mock-up of this text appears in Oiticica's archive as a typewritten document. [16] The page that provides the model for page 88 contains three blank rectangles crossed with X's at the bottom, indicating the location to place the photographs (fig. 17.10). This evidence indicates that *L'après-midi* was most likely a maquette, the final version of an image layout before it is sent to a printer in analogue graphic design.

Several details in the photographs are worth highlighting. According to Anna Katherine Brodbeck, the red hammock on which Cavalcanti is lounging was probably the same one used by spectators in the first screening of *CC5 Hendrix–War*, presented in Oiticica's loft in August 1973.[17] Brodbeck has also identified the strange object hanging from the wall in the photograph on the far right as the "tear-shaped" title-card Oiticica created for an experimental film by Júlio

Bressane titled, *Lágrima pantera a míssil* (Tear Panther-Missile), which was shot partially inside of Oiticica's loft in August 1971 (fig. 17.11).[18]

Records indicate that Cavalcanti returned to Rio sometime around May 1974, and for months he and Oiticica maintained a correspondence that included love letters and instructions for artistic projects Oiticica wanted to undertake with him remotely from New York.[19] However, these projects, as most of Oiticica's other ideas during this period, remained unrealized. After the "open-door policy at Second Avenue had gotten out of hand," Oiticica relocated in October 1974 to a smaller and more private apartment at 18 Christopher Street in the West Village.[20] Despite his efforts to get healthy upon his return to Rio in 1978, the New York years had taken their toll on him physically. He suffered a massive stroke on March 22, 1980, dying at the age of 42.

1. Anna Katherine Brodbeck and Martha Scott Burton, "Chronology of the Life of Hélio Oiticica (1937–1980)," in *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, edited by Lynn Zelevansky, et. al (New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2016), 290–295.

2. Brazil was then entering into the harshest phase of its military dictatorship, which lasted from 1964 to 1985, and he was eager to leave the country. Pauline Bachmann, Susanne Neubauer, and Andreas Valentin, *Hélio Oiticica in New York* (Berlin: Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2017), 13–25.

3. Oiticica's undocumented status occurred after his Guggenheim fellowship ended in October 1971. Brodbeck and Burton, "Chronology," 291. For a frank and detailed discussion of Oiticica's cocaine use and drug dealing, and their relationship to his creative output during his New York period see See Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, "Hélio's Cousin: Cocaine and the Relations of Production in the Life and Work of Hélio Oiticica," in *To Organize Delirium*, 223–228. Hinderer Cruz's scholarship has also been among the first to directly confront Oiticica's homosexuality. See Hinderer-Cruz, "TROPICAMP: Pre- and Post- Tropicália at Once Some Contextual Notes on Hélio Oiticica's 1971 Text," in To Organize Delirium, 171. See also Christopher Dunn, *Contracultura: Alternative Arts and Social Transformation in Authoritarian Brazil* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2017), 95–96.

4. His main projects during this period included a massive, unfinished writing project he referred to as the *Newyorkaises* or the *Conglomerados* (1971–1978); the film *Agrippina é Roma-Manhattan* (Agrippina is Rome-Manhattan, 1972); and the *Block-Experiments in Cosmacoca* (1973), multi-sensorial slideshow environments set to soundtracks, co-authored with Neville D'Almeida. See Frederico Coelho, "Subterranean Tropicália Projects-Newyorkaises-Conglomerados: The Infinite Book of Hélio Oiticica," in To Organize Delirium 198–210; Anna Katherine Brodbeck, "Hélio Oiticica and the Development of New Media," in *To Organize Delirium*, 148–162, and Bachmann, et. al, *Hélio Oiticica*, 20.

5. "Romero é a nova aquisição das praias de COPACABANA." Hélio Oiticica, letter to Antonio Dias, Nov. 9, 1972, p. 2. AHO/PHO1300.72.

6. It is unclear how long the relationship lasted, but it continued after Cavalcanti returned to Rio in 1974. According to Brodbeck, Cavalcanti no longer identifies as gay, and does not wish to discuss Oiticica with researchers. Anna Katherine Brodbeck, phone conversation with the author, April 27, 2018.

7. In a letter to Antonio Manuel Oiticica writes that "we are going to take some photos (me of ROMERO, super-sexy; he is one of the most beautiful people I've ever seen and I have to explore this inappropriate beauty.)" ["vamos bater umas fotos (eu de ROMERO super-sexy; ele é das pessoas mais bonitas q já vi e tenho q explorar essa beleza inaproyeitada.)"] Oiticica, to Antonio Manuel, Dec. 3, 1972, p. 5. AHO/APO 1324.72.

8. Brodbeck and Burton, "Chronology," 292.

9. Also accompanying them was Brazilian actress, and roommate, Cristiny Nazareth. Andreas Valentin shot a super-8 film documenting the action.

10. *Expo-Projeção* (Expo-Projection) was curated by Aracy Amaral and took place at the Espaço Grife in São Paulo in June 1973. In Portuguese slideshows are referred to as "audio-visuals," but Oiticica rejected this term in favor of what he called "non-narrations." See Oiticica, "Neyrótika," in *Expo-Projecão* (São Paulo: Centro de Artes Novo Mundo, 1973), n.p.

11. "garotos de ouro de Babylonests" Hélio Oiticica, "para EXPO-PROJEÇÃO-73 NEYRÓTIKA," 1973, n.p. AHO/APO 0480.73.

12. Brodbeck, "Hélio Oiticica and the Development of New Media," 153. Brodbeck points out, however, that *Neyrótika* was never finalized, so there is no master list of which slides were to be used or how many. Brodbeck, phone conversation with the author, April 27, 2018. As a reference, I have used the images included in the re-make of the work for the 2016 exhibition *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*.

13. Though Oiticica displayed *Neyrótika* in New York in April/May 1973 (most likely to friends in his loft), he was unable to fully complete it in time for *Expo-Projeção*. Even though *Neyrótika* appears in the catalogue, he showed instead his then recent film, *Agrippina é Roma-Manhattan* (1972). See footnote 28, in Brodbeck, "Hélio Oiticica and the Development of New Media," 161.

14. Oiticica, "Carta a Waly q é material pra publicar," *Polem*, no. 1 (1974): 78–91. AHO/APO 0896.74. The text appears to come from actual letters he had written to his friend Waly Salomão. Polem was published by Editora Lidador and edited by poet, Duda Machado. Aimed at a relatively small audience of poets, the illustrated, 96-page publication shared an affinity with *Navilouca*, another avant-garde magazine to which Oiticica contributed. Only one issue was published. Omar Khouri, *Revista na era pós-verso*, 14–15.

15. Above these, a caption reads: "chosen Feb. 24, 1974, on the fifth anniversary of the inauguration of my WHITECHAPEL EXPERIMENT in LONDON." ("escolhidas a 24 fev. 74 quando fazem 5 anos de inauguração da minha WHITECHAPEL EXPERIMENT em LONDRES" Oiticica, "Carta a Waly q ématerial pra publicar," 88.

16. Oiticica, "Carta a Waly q é material pra publicar," typewritten text, p. 11. AHO/APO 0151.74.

17. Brodbeck, phone conversation with the author, April 27, 2018.

18. Miguel Rio Branco was the camera operator, with Oiticica, Cildo Meireles, and several others acting in the unfinished film. Unedited fragments are available for viewing on YouTube. See "Lagrima Pantera a míssil Julio Bressane," published Aug. 7, 2014; Accessed April 28, 2018. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iJ6MyXVWn4.

19. By this time, Oiticica's residency status was no longer legal, so he could

not travel freely outside of the U.S. Some of these unrealized projects included *Call me Helium* (April 1974), in which Cavalcanti would stand on the beach in silver swim trunks and a white T-shirt reading "I am" (on the front), and "Hélio Oiticica" (on the back) (April 1974); *COLORECORD*, a double-sided card displaying a photograph of Cavalcanti to be produced in an unlimited edition (May 1974); a visual-text titled "CACIQUE repétorio pele Vergara" (Cacique Repertory for Vergara), a text for the *Newyorkaises*, which would also include images of Cavalcanti wearing a Cacique (indigenous leader) costume (Aug. 1974); and The Cocaine Helicopter, dedicated to Cavalcanti, in which a "proposer" snorts cocaine, amplifying the sound with a microphone, and the audience shouts and dances to loud music (March 1975). See Brodbeck and Burton, "Chronology," 293–294.

20. Hinderer Cruz, "TROMPICAMP," 227.

Fig. 17.1

Fig. 17.2

Fig. 17.3

Fig. 17.4

Fig. 17.1 Babylonests at 81 Second Ave. Source: AHO/PHO 2015.71

Fig. 17.2 Hélio Oiticica, Untitled (Romero with Parangolé Cape 25, New York City, 1972) 1972/73, Black and white photograph. Source: Zwirner and Wirth, http://www.zwirnerandwirth.com/exhibitions/2007/0507CP/22.html

Fig. 17.3 Hélio Oiticica, Romero Cavalcanti wearing Hélio Oiticica's P33 Parangolé Cape 26 at the World Trade Center, New York, 1972. © César & Claudio Oiticica. Source: Research Gate, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Romero-Cavalcanti-veste-P33-Parangole-Capa-26-no-WTC-Building-Nova-Ioque-1972-foto_fig3_320713504

Fig. 17.4 Oiticica with Cavalcanti, Parangolé Cape 30 in the New York City Subway (1972). Courtesy of César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. Source: AHO/APO 2010.73

Fig. 17.5

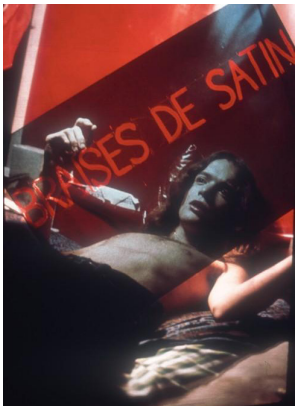


Fig. 17.6

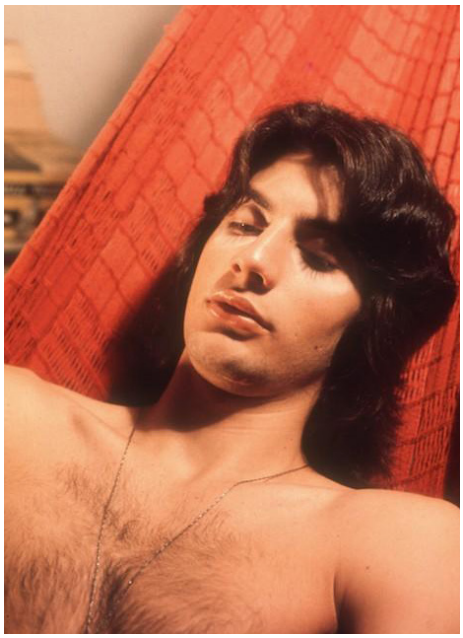


Fig. 17.7

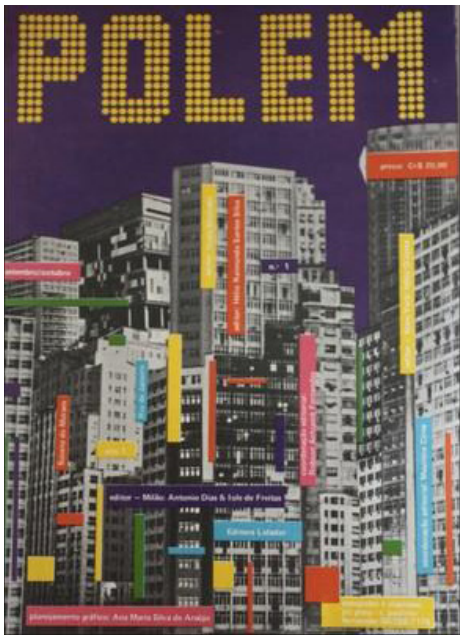


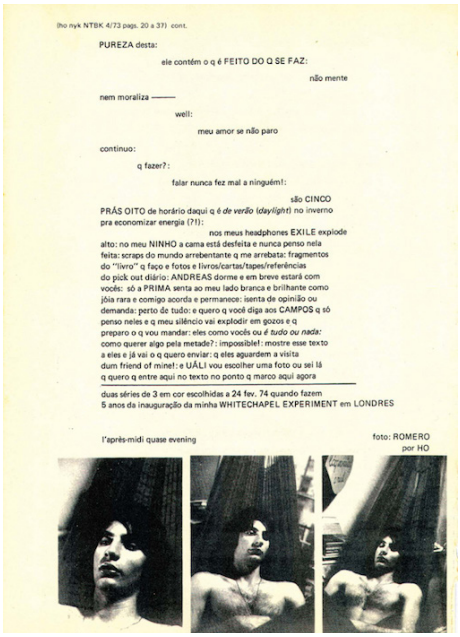
Fig. 17.8

Fig. 17.5 Oiticica, Parangolé Cape 30 in the New York City Subway (1972). Courtesy of César and Claudio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. (Source: AHO/APO 2010.73)

Fig. 17.6 Hélio Oiticica, *Neyrótika*, 1973. (Source: catalogue for *Hélio Oiticica: To Organize Delirium*, p.196)

Fig. 17.7 Hélio Oiticica, *Neyrótika*, 1973

Fig. 17.8 Cover of *Polem*, no. 1 (1974). http://blissnaotembis.blogspot.com/2013/05/seus-olhos-se-escondem-ou-sou-eu- que-te.html



(ho nyk NTBK 4/73 pags. 20 a 37) cont.

PUREZA desta:

ele contém o q é FEITO DO Q SE FAZ:

não mente

nem moraliza ——

well:

meu amor se não paro

continuo:

q fazer?:

falar nunca fez mal a ninguém!:

são CINCO

PRÁS OITO de horário daqui q é *de verão (daylight)* no inverno
pra economizar energia (?!):

nos meus headphones EXILE explode

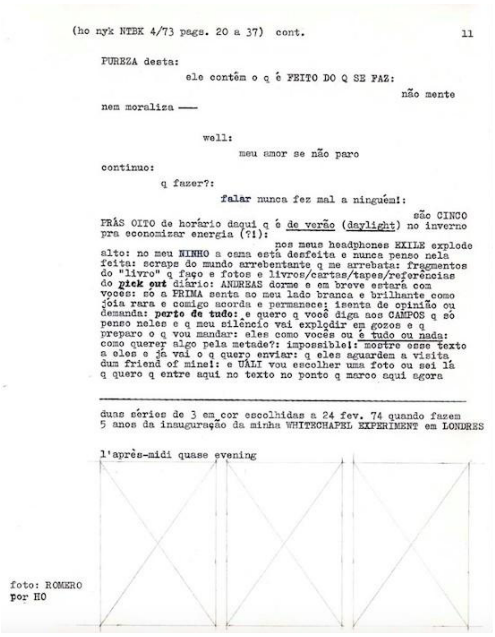
alto: no meu NINHO a cama está desfeita e nunca penso nela
feita: scraps do mundo arrebentante q me arrebata: fragmentos
do "livro" q faço e fotos e livros/cartas/tapes/referências
do pick out diário: ANDREAS dorme e em breve estará com
vocês: só a PRIMA senta ao meu lado branca e brilhante como
jóia rara e comigo acorda e permanece: isenta de opinião ou
demanda: perto de tudo: e quero q você diga aos CAMPOS q só
penso neles e q meu silêncio vai explodir em gozos e q
preparo o q vou mandar: eles como vocês ou *é tudo ou nada:*
como querer algo pela metade?: impossible!: mostre esse texto
a eles e já vai o q quero enviar: q eles aguardem a visita
dum friend of mine!: e UÁLI vou escolher uma foto ou sei lá
q quero q entre aqui no texto no ponto q marco aqui agora

duas séries de 3 em cor escolhidas a 24 fev. 74 quando fazem
5 anos da inauguração da minha WHITECHAPEL EXPERIMENT em LONDRES

l'après-midi quase evening

foto: ROMERO
por HO

Fig. 17.9



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PUREZA desta:

ele contêm o q é FEITO DO Q SE FAZ:

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vocês: só a PRIMA senta ao meu lado branca e brilhante como
jóia rara e comigo acorda e permanece: isenta de opinião ou
demanda: **perto de tudo:** e quero q você diga aos CAMPOS q só
penso neles e q meu silêncio vai explodir em gozos e q
preparo o q vou mandar: eles como vocês ou é tudo ou nada:
como querer algo pela metade?: impossible!: mostre esse texto
a eles e já vai o q quero enviar: q eles aguardem a visita
dum friend of mine!: e UÁLI vou escolher uma foto ou sei lá
q quero q entre aqui no texto no ponto q marco aqui agora

duas séries de 3 em cor escolhidas a 24 fev. 74 quando fazem
5 anos da inauguração da minha WHITECHAPEL EXPERIMENT em LONDRES

l'après-midi quase evening

foto: ROMERO
por HO

Fig. 17.10

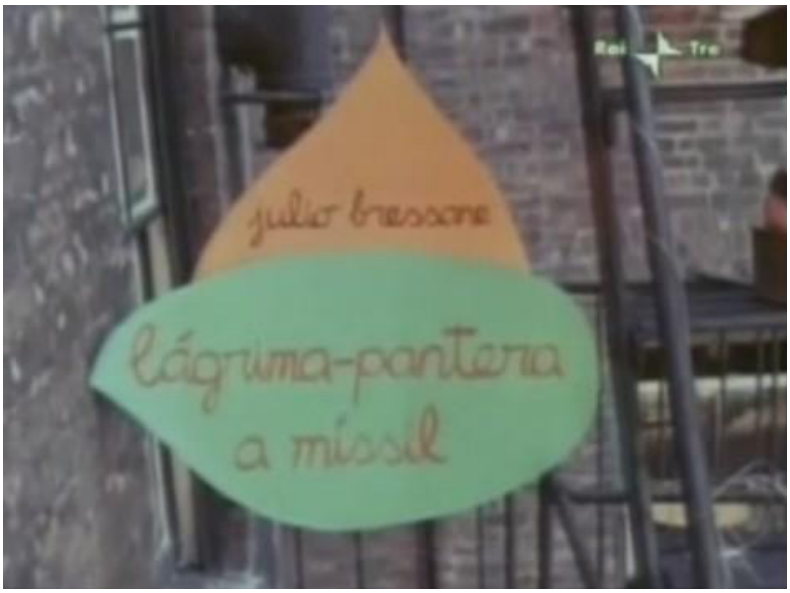

Fig. 17.11

Fig. 17.9 Hélio Oiticica, "Carta a Waly q é material pra publicar," *Polem*, no. 1 (1974): 88. Source: AHO/PHO: 0896.74

Fig. 17.10 Mock-up for Polem text. Source: AHO/PHO 0151.74

Fig. 17.11 Title card for *Lagrima-pontera a míssil* (1971) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_iJ6MyXVWn4)

Gego, *Weaving 90/36* (1990) and *Weaving 89/21* (1989)

Madeline Murphy Turner
Institute of Fine Arts, NYU

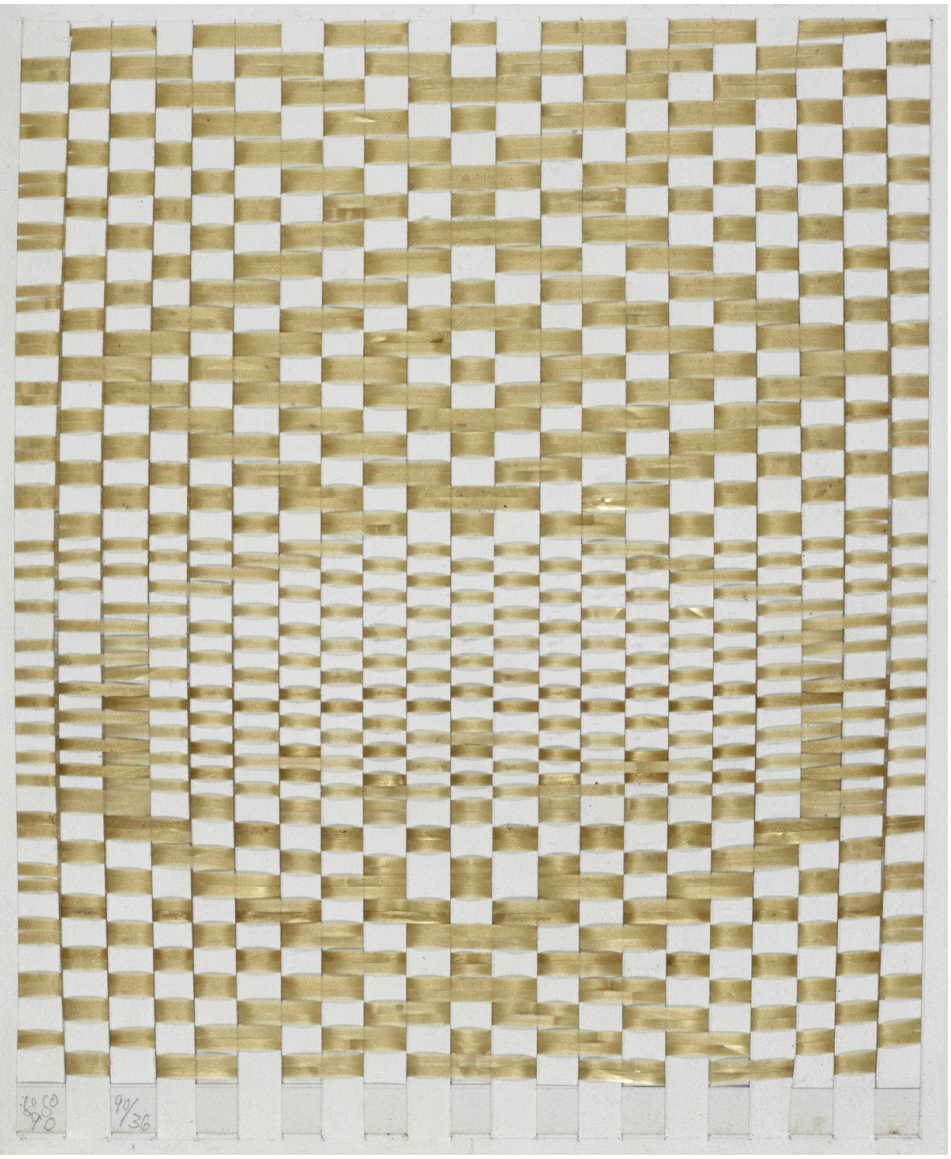

Plate 18 Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Weaving 90/36*. 1990. Cut and woven paper. 6 ¼ × 5" (15.9 × 12.7 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Patty Lipshutz. PG821.2016

In 1988, Gego began what would be her last body of work, the *Weavings* (Tejeduras). This extensive series—which includes *Weaving 89/21* (pl. 18a) and *Weaving 90/36* (pl. 18b)—represents an unexpected shift away from her earlier, more recognized hanging wire sculptures, such as the *Reticuláreas, Chorros* (Streams), and *Troncos* (Trunks). Gego's decision to work on a small scale was partially a response to her progressing arthritis. However, she continued to explore themes familiar from her previous work, such as the juxtaposition of the geometric grid with organic forms.[1] Working with paper from catalogue pages, her own drawings, and wrappers from the cigarettes she smoked, Gego intertwined thin strips to create complex patterns that defy the rigidity of geometric abstraction.[2] Though it is unclear if she used a pattern to create her designs, the precision required to execute such detailed works suggests that she mapped out her process ahead of time. Indeed, many of Gego's drawings from the years preceding the Weavings, such as *Sin título* (1987) (fig. 18.1), resemble a weaving pattern.[3]

As in many of her previous series, *Weaving 89/21* and *Weaving 90/36* subvert the conventions of geometric abstraction by overlaying irregular forms on a gridded field. In both of MoMA's works, the structure of warp and weft create a defined grid which Gego disrupts by weaving an organic form out of found materials across the surface. As an educated German émigré living in Caracas for fifty years, Gego had many sources to draw on: Venezuela's indigenous curagua weaving tradition, the Venezuelan textile industry—once robust, in decline at the end of the 1980s—and the theories propagated by the Bauhaus weaving workshop.[4] However, Gego's interest in the weaving of paper likely stems from a familiarity with the educational practices of kindergarten.

Established in the mid-19th century by the German pedagogue Friedrich Froebel, kindergarten was a revolutionary approach to education that encouraged creativity and curiosity in young children.[5] By the time Gego began attending school in 1918, kindergarten had become prevalent throughout Germany, and she almost certainly learned from Froebel's pedagogical methods.[6] To channel a child's energy, Froebel developed twenty distinct gifts—play objects such as pencils, blocks, and paper that were integrated into acts such as such as drawing, cutting, and folding. Significantly, the fourteenth gift is weaving paper—the process and outcome of which is strikingly similar to *Weaving 90/36* and *Weaving 89/21*.

Froebel envisioned the kindergarten movement as female-led, and the use of weaving, embroidery, and textiles in art has a long history of being codified as a feminine practice in the domestic sphere. While weaving and textiles have undeniably been central to women's history, art historian Julia Bryan-Wilson argues that the act of weaving operates across conditions of gender, craft, art, and labor.[7] This is true of MoMA's works, in which Gego weaves together objects of consumption—magazines and cigarettes—breaking down distinctions between craft and commodity production.

Weaving is a theme that appears throughout Gego's oeuvre, but she did not implement it in such a literal way until the end of her life. Many scholars describe her wire sculptures as a form of weaving, or frame her artistic approach as a metaphorical weaving together of various influences.[8] As art historian Mónica Amor explains, Gego even referred to the process of producing the Reticulárea as weaving.[9] Furthermore, in a 1973 book about fabric, Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen—who were not only textile experts but also MoMA curators—designate the Caracas *Reticulárea* as a new concept of textile art.[10] Gego's reference to textiles is made more literal in the *Weaving* series, where she not only metaphorically weaves together diverse sources and practices, but literally creates the work through the act of weaving itself.

The translation of the original Spanish title, "Tejedura," to the English "Weaving" unearths interesting questions about the conception of this series and the role of the human body within it. Tejedura is defined in English as the act of weaving. It can be used metaphorically to reference, for example, the weaving together of ideas. This contrasts with the more common *tejido*, which signifies an object that is made by weaving.[11] In choosing to refer to these works as *Tejeduras*, then, it seems that Gego envisioned them as intimately linked to embodied human action. Many of Gego's earlier series—especially the *Reticuláreas, Chorros*, and *Troncos*—are environmental projects that welcome viewers to move around them. The *Weavings*, although neither environmental nor sculptural, nonetheless invoke bodily intervention through the title, conceived as a verb and metaphor. By naming the works *Tejeduras,* Gego turned the object into an ongoing action, implicating her own body and its physical labor into the life of the artwork.

1. Ruth Auerbach, email interview with the author, April 16, 2018; see also Ruth Auerbach, *Gego: Dibujos, Grabados, Tejeduras* (Caracas: Galería Sotavento, 1990).

2. See Lisa Le Feuvre, "Growing Lines into Sculpture," in *Gego: Line as Object* (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2013), 39.

3. Gego, *Sín titulo* (Untitled), 1987, ink on screen printed paper, Fundación Gego Collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

4. The Bauhaus would have been of particularly great interest to Gego, as it argued for an integration of weaving into functional, architectural space; See

T'ai Smith, "Toward a Modernist Theory of Weaving: The Use of Textiles in Architectural Space," in *Bauhaus Weaving Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); See also Mónica Amor, *Theories of the Nonobject: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, 1944–1969* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 180–81.

5. Norman Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1997), 32. Many thanks to Gabriel Pérez Barreiro for recommending this source.

6. When Gego was about five years old, she attended an all-girls public school in Hamburg that soon after became the Helene Lang School, which still exists today. According to Gego, the school was known for encouraging creativity and employing female teachers, two central components of kindergarten theory; See Gego, "Reflexiones sobre mi origen y encuentros…", in *Sabiduras y otros textos de Gego* (Houston: The Museum of Fine Arts; Caracas: Fundación Gego, 2005), 328–332.

7. Julia Bryan-Wilson writes, "textile production has not been uniformly considered feminized labor in all cultural contexts; some of its procedures have gendered associations that differ throughout history and across regions…." She also acknowledges that "Some queer male Latin American artists in the 1960s and 1970s, including Peruvian artist Jorge Eielson and Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, used cloth and fiber…" See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Fray: Art and Textile Politics* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 12.

8. Rina Carvajal, "Gego: Outside in, Inside out," in *The Experimental Exercise of Freedom* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1999), 120, 130; Eliseo Sierra, "Organismo vivo: el mundo gráfico de Gego," in *Gego: dibujos, grabados, tejeduras* (Caracas, Venezuela: Fundación Centro Cultural Consolidado, 1996), 6; Eliseo refers to Gego's body of work as a "weaving of inseparable relations" (translation by the author).

9. Mónica Amor, "Another Geometry: Gego's Reticulárea, 1969–1982," *October* 113 (Summer, 2005): 101–103.

10. Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen. "Gego," in *Beyond Craft: The Art of Fabric* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1973), 73. In 1969, Mildred Constantine and Jack Lenor Larsen organized the exhibition *Wall Hangings* at MoMA. Although Gego was not included in this show, there are clear visual similarities between the *Tejeduras* and the textile works on view in the 1969 exhibition.

11. My thanks to Isabela Muci Barradas, Horacios Ramos Cerna, and Julián Sánchez González for consulting with me on this translation. For an example of an artwork that uses the word "tejido" see Ester Hernández, *Tejido de los desaparecidos* (Weaving of the Disappeared), 1984, El Museo del Barrio, Museum Purchase with funds from the Mexican-American Cultural Foundation.

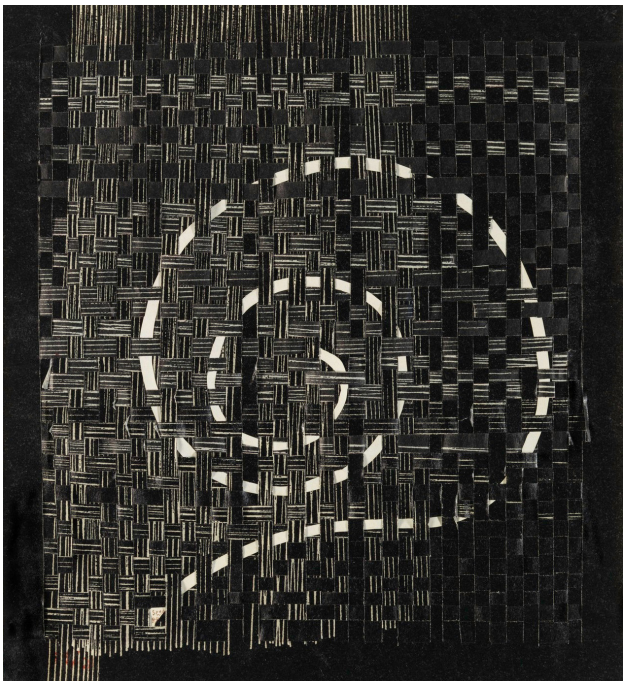

Fig. 18.1

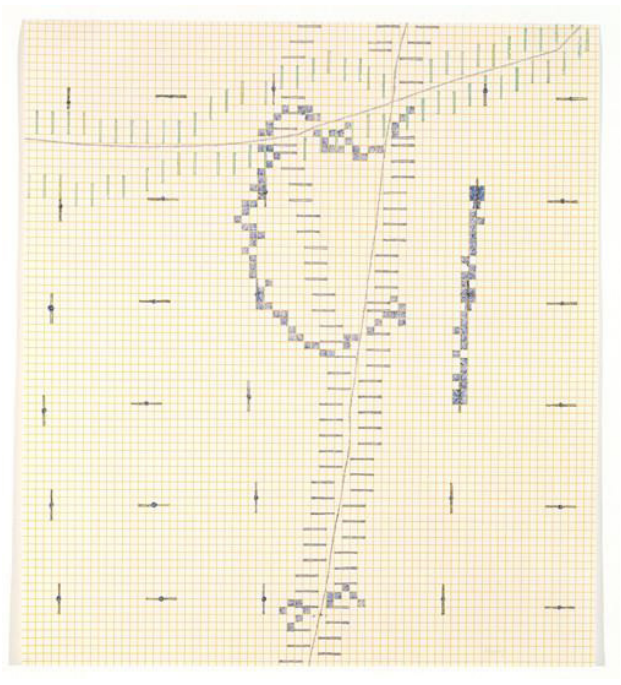

Fig. 18.2

Fig. 18.1 Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Weaving* 89/21. 1989. Cut and woven paper. 9 × 8" (22.9 × 20.3 cm). Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Jeanne Collins. PG820.2016

Fig. 18.2 Gego (Gertrud Goldschmidt). *Sin título*. 1987. Ink on screen printed paper. 20 5⁄8 × 18 3⁄8 (52.4 × 46.7 cm). Museum purchase funded by the Caroline Wiess Law Accessions Endowment Fund. Museum of Fine Arts Houston. 2010.1720

Rosângela Rennó, ***Untitled*** **(1996)**

Isabela Muci Barradas
Princeton University

Plate 19 Rosângela Rennó (Brazilian, born 1962). *Untitled*. 1996. Chromogenic color print. 48 1⁄16 x 32 15⁄16 x 3⁄16" (122.1 x 83.7 x 0.5 cm). Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund. 233.2014

Rosângela Rennó's *Untitled* (1996) contests the notion that a photograph enhances memory.[1] Through a prolonged process of engagement with the work, what at first glance appears to be a red monochrome transfigures into a phantasmagoric image of a child in a rural setting (pl.19/fig. 19.1). Are we witnessing a process of remembrance or forgetting?

The work's phenomenological traits stem from Rennó's strategic manipulations. While enlarging the image, Rennó used a red filter to drastically reduce contrast and generate an ethereal effect that stimulates the perceptual qualities of the photograph's surface. According to the artist, "the idea was to force the public to *look into the image* (perhaps into their own memory so that they could project it onto the surface of the photo) instead of looking at the photograph."[2] The photographic referent recedes in importance in favor of an active process of looking that rejects the supposed transparency of the medium and emphasizes the limits of visibility and memory.[3]

Untitled (1996) marks the beginning of Rennó's *Série Vermelha* (Red Series, 1996–2003), a sequence of red portraits sourced from her collection of albums and found negatives. Rennó often re-contextualizes discarded vernacular photographs found in archives, newspapers, family albums, or flea markets to reflect on the history of photography. By examining the circulation and lifecycle of images, her larger body of work focuses on the nuances of social amnesia.[4] According to Paulo Herkenhoff, Rennó's work constitutes a critical portrait of photography, and this unnamed ghostly boy further foregrounds Herkenhoff's proposition.[5]

The first significant appearance of the color red in Rennó's practice emerges in 1990–1992 with the piece *Paz Armada* (Armed Peace, fig. 19.2).[6] It consists of two photographs that purposely lack photographic fixer, leaving their light-sensitive support vulnerable outside the red light of the darkroom. In order to prevent the images from vanishing, Rennó places a piece of red acrylic over each unfixed print. In *Paz Armada*, the color red addresses both the looming violence implied in the work's title and the importance of red light in the photographic process of appearance and disappearance of images. Taking into account that the second part of the *Série Vermelha* centers on images of young boys and men dressed in military uniforms (fig. 19.3), this dual function of red is at the heart of the series' chromo-poetics.[7]

Rennó started working on the *Série Vermelha* soon after moving to Rio de Janeiro. In the 1990s the city had a major upsurge of violence. Constant murders and blatant massacres led Rennó to address her social context critically in works such as *Atentado ao Poder* (Attack on Power, 1992, fig. 19.4), where she appropriated images of dead bodies from newspapers to reflect on the violent conditions of the urban environment in a period of alleged democratic transformation. This state of uncertainty is also present in *Untitled* (1996), as it becomes increasingly difficult to determine if the depicted boy poses as a victim of violence or as a future perpetrator.

Considering that Rennó grew up during the Brazilian military dictatorship (1964–1985), *Untitled* (1996) can be understood as a reflection on the violence of the time when the work was made in relation to the fading memory of the brutal years of the military regime. If the overall *Série Vermelha* aims to undermine any possibility of glorifying the *portrait bourgeois* by streaming the images of uniformed men through a blood-stained filter, the specter in *Untitled* (1996) represents the vestiges of light that picture a haunting trauma.[8] Rennó's untitled photograph takes us to the mind's darkroom to witness a blurred memory of the present.

1. Rennó's photograph resonates with Geoffrey Batchen's idea that "contrary to popular opinion, photography does not enhance memory [...] but replaces it with images." In Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance*, (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2004), 94.

2. Rennó in correspondence with Inés Katzenstein referring to a group of ghostly images from the series *In Oblivionem* (1994-1995) that produce the same visual effect as *Untitled* (1996) but are printed in black instead or red. Incidentally, one of the images from *In Oblivionem*, known as *Untitled (Boy)* from 1994, depicts the same ghostly boy from Untitled (1996) but in a black setting. Published in Katzenstein's text, "Rosângela Rennó, Theories of History," *Archivo Pons Artxiboa*, (San Sebastián: Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, 2002), 271.

3. According to Rennó, "I always try to de-re-contextualize ordinary photos: creating new connections, depriving them of their original referents and playing with them as anonymous characters where you can introduce your own stories." Published in Melissa Chiu and Rosângela Rennó, *"Rosângela Rennó Interview," Rosângela Rennó, Vulgo [Alias]*, (Kingswood: University of Western Sydney, 1999), 42.

4. As Rennó suggests, "Photographs have a life cycle: they're born (or are made), they fulfil a function for a specific amount of time, reproduce meaning and die when they lose their symbolic value, whence they end up in the garbage or in a dead archive." Interview with Veronica Cordeiro, "Shuffling the Labels," *BES Photo 2012*, Rosângela Rennó, (Lisbon: Banco Espírito Santo, 2012), 18.

5. As Herkenhoff notes, "Underlying the formal organization of Rennó's works and installations there is a subtext — perhaps the main thread of her work — which is the critical portrait of photography." See Paulo Herkenhoff's "Rennó ou a beleza e o dulçor do presente," in *Rosângela Rennó*, (Edusp: São Paulo, 1997), 116.

6. For the purposes of providing contextual information to better grasp the meaning of the title *Paz Armada*, the violent connotations of the term can be read as parallel to the ominous associations of the Latin adage Si vis *pacem, para bellum* (If you want peace, prepare for war), especially in the context of Brazil's wave of violence during the 1990s and the constant militarization of *favelas* in large urban centers

7. The term "chromo-poetics" was used by Cildo Meireles in 2008 to

describe his work *Desvio* para o *vermelho* (Red Shift, 1967–1984). According to Meireles, "the piece was much more linked with chromo-poetics, if I may call it that, more to do with poetry than with politics, more to do with perception, sensitization, than with a symbolic meaning." See Meireles in an interview with Guy Brett included in "Corners and Crossroads," *Frieze*, no. 117 (September 2008). Available at https://frieze.com/article/corners-and-crossroads. For a thorough account on Meireles's refusal of a narrowly political reading of his work pertinent to Rennó's use of the color red see Camila Maroja, "Cildo Meireles and the Definition of the Political-Conceptual," *ARTMargins*, vol. 5, issue 1 (February 2016): 30-58.

8. As Rennó has characterized the photographs comprising the *Série Vermelha* in the past, "They are found single portraits in which I adulterated colour and contrast. I chose them because they relate to bloody memories, a comment on the 'portrait bourgeois.'" In Melissa Chiu and Rosângela Rennó, "Rosângela Rennó Interview," *Rosângela Rennó, Vulgo [Alias]*, (Kingswood: University of Western Sydney, 1999), 42.

Fig. 19.1

Fig. 19.2

Fig. 19.3

Fig. 19.4

Fig. 19.1 Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled,* 1996 from *Série Vermelha* (Red Series), scan of original transparency.

Fig. 19.2 Rosângela Rennó, *Paz Armada* (Armed Peace), 1990-1992, unfixed black and white photographs, acrylic, and zinc boxes, 7 1⁄16 × 11 13⁄16 × 1 9⁄16", taken from: http://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/obra43514/paz-armada

Fig. 19.3 Rosângela Rennó, *Untitled (Mad Boy)* from *Série Vermelha (Militares)* (Red Series, (Military Men)), 2000, Lightjet print, 70 7⁄8 × 39 3⁄8", taken from: http://www.rosangelarenno.com.br/obras/exibir/14/2

Fig. 19.4 Rosângela Rennó, *Atentado ao Poder* (Attack on Power), 1992, 15 gelatin-silver prints (appropriated newspaper photos), plexiglass, bolts, and 2 green fluorescent lamps and vinyl lettering on the wall, 126 × 9 13⁄16 × 9 13/16", taken from: http://www.rosangelarenno.com.br/obras/exibir/20/1

Juan Manuel Echavarría, *Mouths of Ash* (2003-2004)

Pooja Sen
Yale University

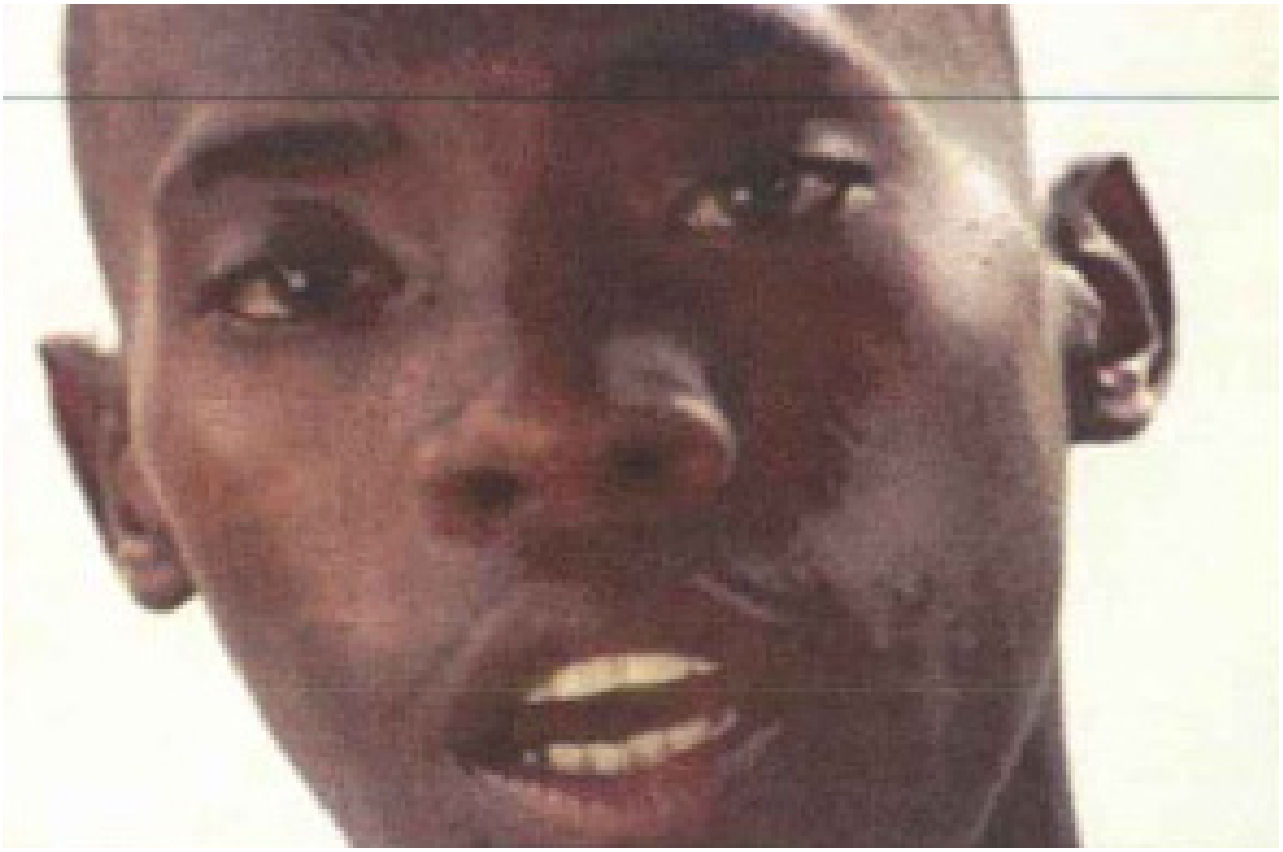

Plate 20 Juan Manuel Echavarría (Colombian, born 1947). *Mouths of Ash*. 20032004. Video (color, sound). 18:05 min. Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Ambassador William H. and Wendy Luers. PG669.2017

On the morning of May 2, 2002, one hundred and nineteen people were killed in a small Catholic community church of Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó along Colombia's Caribbean coast by paramilitary groups known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. This was a historically marginalized community and the massacre set off a new cycle of the forced displacement of indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations in the region.[1] Juan Manuel Echavarría's *Bocas de Ceniza* (*Mouths of Ash*) is a video work founded on this massacre event. The eighteen-minute video documents the songs written by a group of survivors. The artist met and interviewed these singers at Afro-Colombian symposiums and in Afro-Colombian festivals in the Chocó region in the months following the attack.[2]

The resulting video is bare and the songs are sung without accompaniment. The songs are variously addressed to the president, to God, and to lost friends and family. As Noél Gutiérrez explains in his narrative, "The people ran, the children cried/As they saw how their town was destroyed/I can't believe, nor can I imagine/That that could have happened, there in Bojayá." Rafael Mosquera, meanwhile, pleads with viewers of the video and the president of Colombia repeatedly to listen and "hear suffering and pain" of those slaughtered. Viewers are confronted by close-ups of the faces of each singer, posed against a nondescript background, over the course of two or three minutes. Through the suppression of further visual clues, the video demands sustained viewing, listening, and affective engagement by focusing our attention to the skin, hair, eyes, and voices of each singer.

It is important to note that the video in the Museum of Modern Art's collection (pl. 20) is preceded by an earlier gelatin silver print of the same name (fig. 20.1). The photograph bears seeds contained within a gashed hollow of what resembles a gaping and blackened head and neck. The tightly focused photograph of this gnarled organic structure, which demands anthropomorphization, is a clear precursor to Echavarría's cropped framing of the heads, necks, and shoulders of his singers in the second iteration of *Mouths of Ash*. In both versions literal and figurative seeds, which signal renewal and growth, emerge from bodies left scarred and deformed by violence.

Trained as a historian and writer, since 1995 Echavarría has documented the normalization of violence and death in Colombia in photographs and videos. The dismemberment and reconstruction of bodies through visual and textual narratives are recurring features in his work.[3] In interviews, the artist has explained that, "The main concept [of *Mouths of Ash*] was the eyes as the mirror of the soul."[4] Yet, the reproduction of bilingual transcripts of each individual's songs emphasizes *Mouths of Ash* as a simultaneously textual, aural, and visual work. Indeed, the video exceeds the visual in many ways. The singing voices in *Mouths of Ash*, for example, cannot be contained by the moving image alone. Two prior installations of the work at the Weatherspoon Art Museum (Greensboro, North Carolina) in a black box room and in a hallway to the entrance of the Tufts University Art Gallery (Boston, Massachusetts) are instructive here.[5] In these installation environments, the sound of *Mouths of Ash* is not limited by walls and instead, creates overlapping acoustic layers in the public space of the museum. The voices of these survivors spread out and create unintended soundscapes, blending into and politicizing the aural environment of the museum.

Nevertheless, art critics, curators, and scholars writing on *Mouths of Ash* have continued to reiterate Echavarría's primarily visual and documentary interpretations, suggesting that the emphasis on the mouths and eyes of each individual as well as on their songs allow the survivors to "bear witness" and to "sing as a form of catharsis that would allow them to move beyond the loss and pain of these events."[6] Moreover, the video's narrative techniques are understood to be an act of noninterventionist documentation. As Laurel Reuter contends, "[Echavarría] is present but only as the sympathetic listener behind the camera lens."[7] Yet, as an artwork exhibited in the museum, *Mouths of Ash* complicates the notions of bearing witness, of "giving a voice to the voiceless," and the engineering of affect in the documentary spectacle of suffering as somehow on par with the intensely political and physical acts of relief, rescue, and self-preservation the singers demand from the president and from God. Rather, by severing faces from bodies, limiting what we are able to see, and extending the voices beyond the image, *Mouths of Ash* frustrates the ethical paradigms of the documentary as well as the paradigms of the museum. Although the video draws on documentary tropes of nonintervention, objectivity, and immediacy, the underlying narrative of corporeal mutilation is rendered explicitly invisible. *Mouths of Ash* significantly shifts our sense of the unmediated documentary image as a primary weapon for social change.

1. Aurora Vergara-Figueroa, *Afrodescendant Resistance to Deracination in Colombia: Massacre at Bellavista-Bojayá-Chocó* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), xxi.

2. "A Conversation: Juan Manuel Echavarría and Laurel Reuter," in *Juan Manuel Echavarría: Mouths of Ash/Bocas de Ceniza*, ed. Laurel Reuter (Milan, Italy: Charta, 2005), 27.

3. Calvin Reid, “Juan Manuel Echavarría,” *BOMB Magazine*, January 1, 2000, https://bombmagazine.org/articles/juan-manuel-echavarr%C3%ADa.

4. “A Conversation: Juan Manuel Echavarría and Laurel Reuter,” 27.

5. See for example: “Juan Manuel Echavarría, Mouths of Ash, June 25, 2006–September 10, 2006,” Weatherspoon Art Museum, accessed April 21, 2018, http://weatherspoon.uncg.edu/exhibitions/show/?title=juan-manuel-echavarria-mouths-of-ash; Jeanne Koles, “Juan Manuel Echavarría: *Bocas del Cenzia [sic] (Mouths of Ash)* January 17–April 2, 2006: New Media Wall,” Press release for the Tufts University Art Gallery, accessed April 21, 2018, http://artgallery.tufts.edu/documents/PR2006Echavarria.pdf.

6. María Victoria Uribe, “Facing the Vacuity of Violence: The Photographic and Visual Work of Colombian artist Juan Manuel Echavarría,” in *Juan Manuel Echavarría: Mouths of Ash/Bocas de Ceniza*, ed. Laurel Reuter (Milan, Italy: Charta, 2005), 46.

7. Laurel Reuter, “Requiem for a Country,” in *Juan Manuel Echavarría: Mouths of Ash/Bocas de Ceniza*, ed. Laurel Reuter (Milan, Italy: Charta, 2005), 14.

Fig. 20.1

Fig. 20.1 Juan Manuel Echavarría. *Bocas de Ceniza* (*Mouths of Ash*), 1999. Gelatin silver print, 52.4 × 41.9 × 2.9 cm (framed). Walker Art Center, Minneapolis