

Mário Pedrosa

PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

Editors

Glória Ferreira and Paulo Herkenhoff

Translation

Stephen Berg

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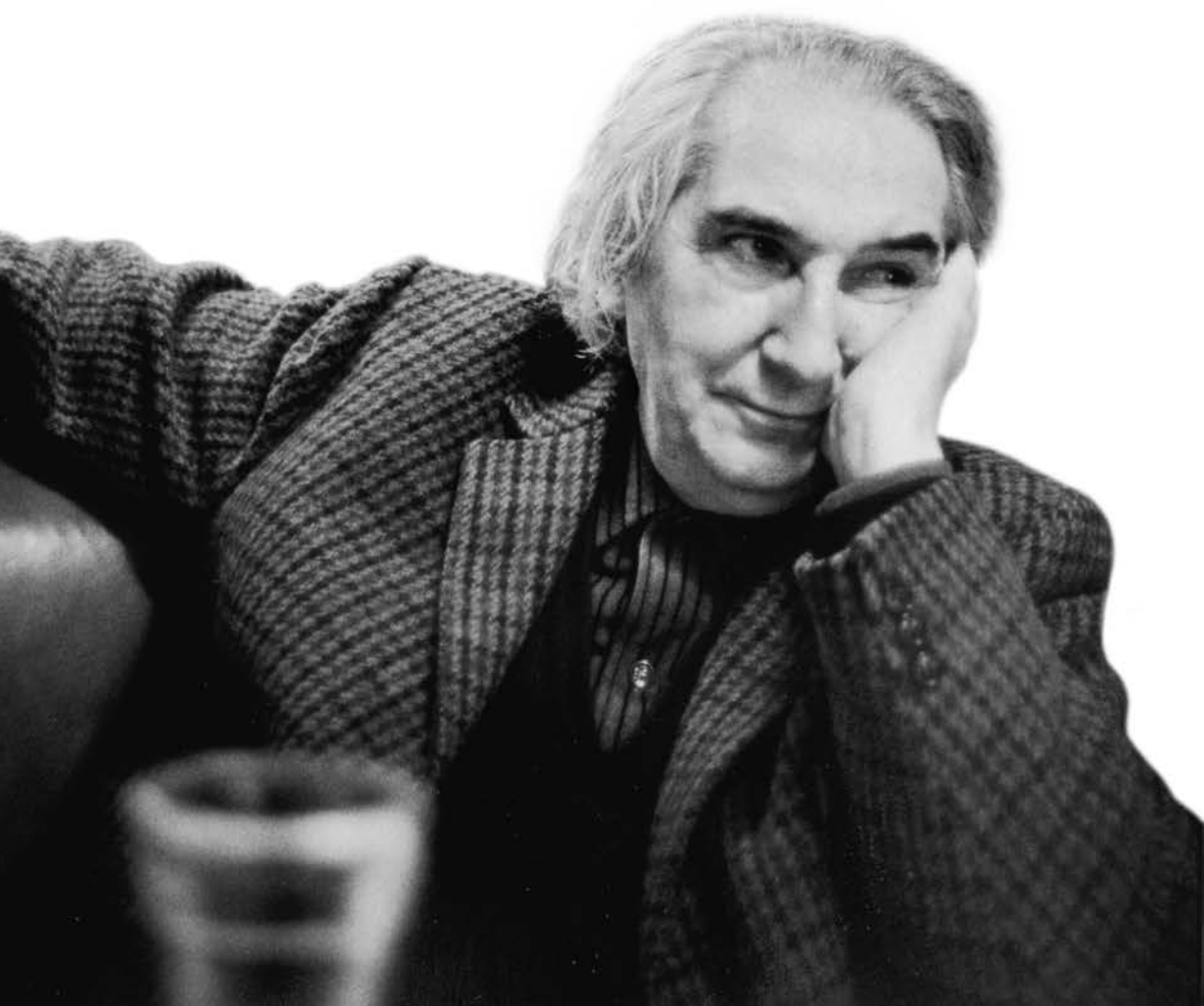
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**Mário
Pedrosa**
Primary
Documents

Edited by

Glória Ferreira

and Paulo Herkenhoff

Translation by

Stephen Berg

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

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c. 1958

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Mário Pedrosa with Lygia Clark, La
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Mário Pedrosa at Alberto Magnelli's
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Lula da Silva). 1980. Centro de Docu-
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Foreword

This is the seventh in an ambitious series of documentary anthologies that began in 2002 with *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art*. Published by The Museum of Modern Art's International Program and generously supported by its International Council and other donors, these books are intended for English-language readers with a serious interest in modern art and provide access, often for the first time, to important source materials in translation.

Paulo Herkenhoff, the acclaimed Brazilian curator and museum director who served as MoMA's Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art from 1999 to 2002, proposed the present volume as one of a trio of documentary anthologies focusing on key personalities and moments in the history of Latin American art. The first of these to be published, *Listen, Here, Now! Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-Garde* (2004), presented art and performance from a celebrated decade of production in Argentina. The second, *Alfredo Boulton and His Contemporaries: Critical Dialogues in Venezuelan Art, 1912–1974* (2008), traced the beginnings of art history and criticism in Venezuela through the writings and correspondence of its first major author. *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents* completes this series with a wide-ranging selection of texts by one of Brazil's most influential intellectuals of the postwar period, whose writings have never before been translated into English. Pedrosa was a courageous political activist who was twice exiled by repressive governments but later participated in the formation of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's Workers' Party. He was also an erudite theorist and outspoken critic, the most important voice of his time in the world of Brazilian modern and contemporary art, as well as a pioneering curator and museum director.

According to a famous observation attributed to the legendary musician Tom Jobim, "Brazil is not for beginners," and MoMA is fortunate indeed to have had a long and continuous engagement with the country, dating back to the 1940 show of the paintings of Candido Portinari and the influential architecture exhibition *Brazil Builds* in 1943. In recent years, the Museum has exhibited the work of two major women artists of the postwar years, Mira Schendel (2009) and Lygia Clark (2014), both of whom were championed by Pedrosa in writings that appear in this book. We returned this year to the subject of Brazilian architecture in our exhibition *Latin America in Construction: Architecture 1955–1980*. We also take great pleasure in the close personal contacts we have enjoyed with leading personalities in the Brazilian art world, many of them members of our International Council. In addition, we are particularly proud to be the first institution to present Pedrosa's writings to the English-speaking world since—as noted in the pages to come—his passionate engagement with the radical implications of modern art was in part inspired by a visit to the Museum's exhibition *Alexander Calder: Sculptures and Constructions* (September 29, 1943–January 16, 1944), seen during his exile in the United States.

For this publication we owe a very special debt of gratitude to Vera Pedrosa, Mário's daughter and a distinguished diplomat in her own right, and to her children Bel, Quito, and Livia. Their gracious support was indispensable to this project from its inception, and we are particularly grateful to Quito for compiling the chronology of his grandfather's career.

Paulo Herkenhoff had hoped to edit this book himself, but his responsibilities as founding curator of the Museu de Arte do Rio de Janeiro (MAR), which opened in 2013, intervened, and we were fortunate indeed that the prominent critic and historian Glória Ferreira was able to take over from him as editor of the publication. We are indebted to Ms. Ferreira—for her deep knowledge of the history of modern Brazilian art and her exceptional dedication to this publication—as well as to Margareth de Moraes, who ably assisted her as our on-site administrator in Rio. With advice from a small committee—including Lauro Cavalcanti and Catherine Bompuis in Rio; and Jay Levenson, the director of our International Program, and Luis Pérez-Oramas, the Estrellita Brodsky Curator of Latin American Art at MoMA—Ms. Ferreira worked tirelessly to assemble the texts included in this volume and to commission new contextual essays, ensuring that the book contains up-to-date materials on the continued relevance of Mário Pedrosa’s thought. Ms. Ferreira, Mr. Cavalcanti, and Ms. Bompuis also contributed new essays to the book, as did Kaira Cabañas, Marcio Doctors, and Adele Nelson. Sarah Lookofsky, Assistant Director of the International Program, energetically and insightfully shepherded the book to completion.

Each volume of the Primary Documents series has been fully underwritten so as to keep its cost within the reach of students, and we are indebted to the generous support of our key sponsors, led by the International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, for making the publication of this volume possible. We are particularly grateful to our other principal sponsors: the Fundação Roberto Marinho, under its President, José Roberto Marinho, and its Secretary General, Hugo Barreto; the Ministry of Culture of Brazil, and especially Minister Juca Ferreira; and the Brazilian Consulate in New York. Generous support has also been provided by The Fran and Ray Stark Foundation, Louis Antoine de Ségur de Charbonnières, Andrea and José Olympio Pereira, Frances Reynolds, and Jack Shear.

—Glenn D. Lowry

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First of all, we wish to give special thanks to Mário Pedrosa's family, led by his daughter Vera, who generously made her father's texts available and helped us at every stage of the project; and to Paulo Herkenhoff, who first introduced us to Mário's writings. Hugo Barreto of the Fundação Roberto Marinho was another essential partner in this enterprise. In addition to the scholars and curators who served on the book's advisory committee, other experts in the field generously shared their knowledge with us on an informal basis. We would especially like to thank our esteemed colleagues Edward Sullivan, Gabriel Pérez-Barreiro, Adele Nelson, Peter Kornbluh, and Kaira Cabañas.

A publication of this scale would not have been possible without the help of specialized research associates, and we are indebted to Rodrigo Krul and Izabela Pucu, assisted by Marisa Calage, who worked tirelessly with Glória Ferreira and Margareth de Moraes in Rio. Ingrid Vieira and Aurea Marisa Kuck also provided indispensable assistance to our editorial team in Brazil.

Many members of the The Museum of Modern Art staff helped with this publication. In the Department of Publications, we wish to thank the wonderful team that has helped us to produce the Primary Documents series: Christopher Hudson, Publisher; Chul R. Kim, Associate Publisher; Marc Sapir, Production Director; Matthew Pimm, Production Manager; Hannah Kim, Production Coordinator; and Genevieve Allison, Rights Coordinator. We are especially grateful to David Frankel, Editorial Director, for his authoritative and thoughtful advice on all aspects of the book and for the support he offered us from start to finish. In the International Program we thank Marta Dansie for coordinating the multifaceted parts of the project to successful completion, a task that was carefully handed over from her predecessor, Amy Benzyk. Todd Bishop, Lauren Stakias, Sylvia Renner, and Kayla Dryden provided essential assistance and advice in the all-important matter of fundraising. Patty Lipshutz and Nancy Adelson adroitly advised us on legal issues, and Luis Pérez-Oramas and Lilian Tone kindly made themselves available as our in-house Brazilian specialists on multiple occasions. For their warm support of this book since its inception, we are tremendously indebted to the Museum's Associate Director, Kathy Halbreich, and Director, Glenn D. Lowry.

The entire manuscript of this book was translated by Stephen Berg, who brought to the project not only his expert knowledge of art historical Portuguese, but also his keen editorial instincts and deep understanding of the history of modern art in Brazil. Vera Pedrosa told us at the start that she had been explicitly warned by her father that the texts of his newspaper essays sometimes contained typographical errors that crept in during the typesetting process. Steve kept his sharp eye out for issues of this sort and helped us correct them. He worked closely with our English-language editors—Libby Hruska, who was assisted by Evelyn Rosenthal—to ensure that the translations would be both accurate and readable. We are particularly grateful to Libby and Evelyn for their painstaking efforts to ensure our English-language readers would have all the contextual information they needed to understand the texts. Gillian Sneed ably researched and tracked down original citations for many of the quotations found throughout Pedrosa's writings. Thanks are also due to Cecilia André, who was our crucial liaison for obtaining the rights to reproduce texts and images of artworks. Gina Rossi, the designer of each book in our series, provided us with another original design that captures the personality of the subject and the spirit of the period in which he lived.

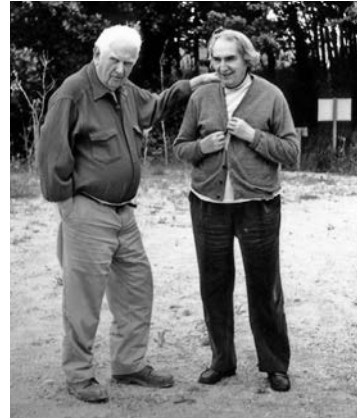
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Finally, we wish to thank all the artists, authors, institutions, and collectors who provided permission to include and reproduce texts and images in this book. Without their enthusiastic and generous cooperation and support, we could not have produced this remarkable volume.

—Jay A. Levenson and Sarah Lookofsky

Essays



The Permanent Revolution of the Critic Glória Ferreira

For his cosmopolitan perspective, acuity of thought, and erudition, Mário Pedrosa is regarded as one of Brazil's most important critics. He wrote visual arts columns for various newspapers and other publications, and was an active participant of the Brazilian and international art systems. In his writing, he summoned up diverse fields of knowledge, from philosophy to science, from psychology to a deep knowledge of art and its history. In addition to art criticism and analyzing salons, biennials, and other events, he also served as general secretary to the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in 1957; directed the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, in 1961; and was a member of the International Association of Art Critics, serving as the organization's vice president and president of its Brazilian section. Pedrosa established many friendships with artists and writers around the world during his sojourns in other countries, including periods of exile in the United States, Chile, and France, and had friendships with many artists and writers.

Pedrosa's political activity during the 1920s and '30s was intense. He joined the Communist Party in 1926. Always questioning the duties of a critic, he believed that responsible art criticism meant not dissociating an artistic project from the struggle for social transformation. Recognizing that art itself had come to question its traditional foundations, he noted in 1967 that the critic lives in a state of "permanent revolution."¹ Pedrosa established a relationship between revolution and avant-garde art that, as critic and curator Sônia Salzstein has written, made it possible "to see the work of art within its autonomous sphere and, at the same time, irrigated by a complexity of social agencies that bring [a] cultural dimension to the task of art."² This may be the signature of his activity over nearly five decades.

Pedrosa had previously written about music and literature, as well as politics, but in 1933 he delivered his famous lecture "As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz" ("The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz"), in which he established a relationship between an aesthetic present and social art no longer based on subjects, but on artistic procedures themselves.³ Its Marxist analysis emphasized the universally proletarian nature of Kollwitz's prints, as distinct from the search of that age, within the Brazilian context, to represent national identity. This conference is considered Pedrosa's debut in the field of the visual arts.

Pedrosa's interest in the arts came about during visits to The Museum of Modern Art during the 1940s, when he lived in exile in the United States. He was enthusiastic about the important Alexander Calder exhibition there, and became friends with the artist.⁴ He wrote several articles on art, including "Calder, escultor de cata-ventos" ("Calder, Sculptor of Windmills"); "Portinari: De Brodóski aos murais de Washington" ("Portinari: From Brodowsky to the Washington Murals"); and "A coleção Widener na Galeria Nacional de Arte dos Estados Unidos" ("The Widener Collection at the National Gallery of Art of the United States").⁵ It was upon his return from exile, in 1945, that Pedrosa became interested in art criticism. Until this time, it had been mostly poets who practiced—a generally impressionist—criticism in newspapers and magazines. They largely espoused a national affirmation of the modern, believing this embrace of the new would free Brazilian society from its colonial past. Pedrosa's critical awakening unfolded against the backdrop of a national project that embraced culture and art, begun in the late 1920s by Mário de Andrade, an influential modernist writer and critic who became a close friend of Pedrosa, and someone who sought to develop a sense of Brazilian identity through art. This movement gained momentum during the Cold War under the influence of the Communist Party, which used its authority, particularly

insofar as Latin America was concerned, to bolster national cultures and link them to social concerns, thus creating resistance to North American sway.

With the end of World War II and the beginnings of political changes in Brazil, Pedrosa returned to his home country in 1946, with an intensely militant attitude toward life and art criticism. Among other activities, he participated in the creation of the União Socialista Popular [Popular socialist union] and founded the weekly *Vanguarda Socialista*.⁶ According to writer and critic Antonio Candido, “In the 1940s, by means of his innovative art criticism, Pedrosa indirectly made a far-reaching, civilizing contribution to the Brazilian left.”⁷ In his column in the Rio daily *Correio da manhã*, which he wrote from 1945 to 1951, Pedrosa attempted to expand the very definition of art by proposing a Universalist view and by advocating for the art of children and the mentally ill and for primitive art. He both influenced and became a champion for a number of Brazilian artists, including Abraham Palatnik, Ivan Serpa, and Almir Mavignier, who were then working with Dr. Nise da Silveira at the Hospital Dom Pedro II, a psychiatric center in the Engenho de Dentro district of Rio de Janeiro. He also worked with initiatives such as small art schools for children, including those of Serpa. In 1947, on the occasion of the closing of an exhibition organized by the center, Pedrosa delivered a lecture titled “Arte, necessidade vital” (“The Vital Need for Art”), in which he furthered his inclusive view of art, declaring that “this activity extends to all human beings, and is no longer the exclusive occupation of a specialized brotherhood that requires a diploma for access.”⁸ He promoted visits to the center, like those made by Albert Camus, poet and critic Murilo Mendes, and influential critic Léon Degand. In 1949, he organized an exhibition about the art of the mentally ill, held at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s, Pedrosa actively took part in the polarities and passions engendered by the rise of abstract art, which involved both artists and critics. The opposition between figurative and abstract aesthetics dominated one of the most intense periods for the Brazilian art world since the Semana de Arte Moderna (Modern art week) of 1922—the landmark week of art, music, poetry, lectures, and heated debate regarding the emancipation of the country’s art that coincided with celebrations of the centenary of Brazil’s independence from Portugal. The debate intensified with the arrival of Degand, who had taken on the directorship of the recently founded Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and organized the exhibition *Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo* (From figuration to abstraction), which opened there in March 1949. The exhibition resonated powerfully with the cultural scene at the time. It moved on to Rio de Janeiro under the title of *Exposição de pintura e escultura* (Exhibition of painting and sculpture), where it elicited passionate debate, and Pedrosa defended abstract art as a universal, non-nationalist language. Beyond the works present in the original show organized by Degand, others were loaned from the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and from private collectors in Rio—which stirred up great controversy. For the exhibition catalogue, with texts by various authors, Pedrosa published “As duas alas do modernismo” (“The Two Wings of Modernism”), a historical and theoretical text about the development of modern art, pointing out the important transformations that had taken place in the perception of space, in art and in the world beyond.

Pedrosa, influenced by Gestalt theory—to which he had been exposed in Berlin during the late 1920s—developed during this time his thesis “Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte” (“On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art”) (1949),⁹ in which he sought out an aesthetics of form from a methodological perspective in

order to resolve the classic antithesis of subjectivity versus objectivity. Drawing on the work of different Gestalt theorists, such as Kurt Koffka, Wolfgang Köhler, and others, his thesis preceded the celebrated incorporation of Gestalt psychology into aesthetic theory by Rudolf Arnheim in *Art and Visual Perception*, published in 1954.¹⁰ Pedrosa considered art to be a mode of knowledge, albeit an intuitive one. For him, it was the universality of form that guaranteed the work's communicability. Certain topics in the thesis, such as the autonomy of art, reappear in other texts, above all under the influence of phenomenology, for which he turned to the work of Susanne Langer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ernest Cassirer, Anton Ehrenzweig, and others. In various later texts he presented nuances of his views; such is the case with "Forma e personalidade" ("Form and Personality") as well as "Das formas significantes a lógica da expressão" ("From Signifying Forms to Logic of Expression"), from 1960, in which he states: "Visual perception is not only a surface sensorial and mental process; it is also a process that comes from the unconscious to the surface in the conscious sensorial region, where it finally crystallizes, and succeeds in doing so only after a struggle between several layers of perception."¹¹ Pedrosa never ceased to privilege the simplest forms of art, resorting to Gestalt for the solution of aesthetic problems both theoretical and methodological. Much later, he would summarize this concern as an attempt to "overcome the same set of problems, in which art is treated, above all, from the dialectical perspective of form and content. We seek to deepen the concept of form in order to highlight it, in search of its internal logic."¹²

At the aesthetic-critical level, Pedrosa's understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of art's autonomy was found in the famous concepts of Swiss art historian Heinrich Wölfflin, who helped to develop a system of classification for the formal analysis of art in the early twentieth century. However, this proposed autonomy did not relegate each art to "its area of competence," in the sense that American critic Clement Greenberg would have understood it, and would later be questioned vis-à-vis the artist's freedom of invention.¹³ Above all, throughout his career, Pedrosa upheld the irreducibility of the artistic phenomenon, "regardless of any purely external or historical-evaluative explanation."¹⁴

If, in his critical texts, Pedrosa often turned to the history of art as a sort of didactic explanation based upon a theory of art, he nonetheless did not linger on theoretical discussions. Rather, he compiled a "critical history" in a number of different texts throughout his trajectory, in which, above all, it is the critical analysis of artists' works that is highlighted. In "Fundamentos de arte abstrata" ("Foundations of Abstract Art"), in which he discusses Wölfflin's positions, he declares that "art historians . . . never deigned—as, in fact, is the habit among these gentlemen—to occupy themselves with this trifle that is the art of their time."¹⁵

Pedrosa was a champion of the art of his time. He particularly advocated for geometric abstract art, with great influence above all in Rio de Janeiro and maintained a position of mistrust with regard to *Art Informel* and to Tachism. At the core of Concretism, in a country such as Brazil, which is romantic par excellence, was a need for discipline, for an order of sorts, "to educate the people." In "Aventuras da linha" ("Adventures of the Line"), he argues that those artistic developments constituted a departure from the promise of abstraction: "Cubism and Abstractionism gave the line considerable freedom for a while, but what with instinctive and *Informel* or Tachist tendencies in vogue, it once again tends to lose its independence."¹⁷

In "O paradoxo concretista" ("Concretist Paradox"), also from 1960, Pedrosa underscored the apparent incoherence of the Concretist presence in a country

given to romanticisms. As artist Lothar Charoux had observed in 1949, “It took a while, but the ‘battle’ arrived here, the ‘battle’ of those who call themselves figurativists and of the so-called abstractionists. . . . For now more than ever and there is no ignoring the very evidence of the facts and they show frankly how the number of abstractionists grows and of those who, in one way or another, participate in the movement.”¹⁸ Criticism played a crucial part in displacing the artistic debate from the realm of the ideological to that of the formal-aesthetic and the defense of a universal language of art.

The emergence of Concretism was facilitated by the opening of the first edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in 1951, and the prize awarded to Max Bill’s sculpture *Tripartite Unity*, shifting the dispute between figuration and abstraction to the divergences between the branches of abstract art. The Grupo Ruptura manifesto, launched in 1952 at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, shed light on these divergences by announcing the distinction between “those who create new forms from old principles and those who create new forms from new principles,” positioning itself against “hedonistic nonfiguration as a product of gratuitous taste, that seeks the mere excitation of pleasure or of displeasure.” The deviations, which have their origin “in the theoretical and practical interpretation that each one of them makes their insertion in the international questions of Concrete art,”¹⁹ take on greater importance on the occasion of the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art in São Paulo (1956) and in Rio de Janeiro (1957). Whereas the São Paulo artists professed the theoretical postulates of the Concretism espoused by the School of Ulm, and especially by Max Bill, those in Rio had reservations with regard to these theories. As Pedrosa insisted in the text “Paulistas e cariocas” (“Paulistas and Cariocas”): “The *paulista* painters, draftsmen, and sculptors not only believe in their theories—they follow them precisely. . . . Compared to them, Rio painters are almost Romantic.”²⁰

In 1957, at the invitation of journalist Odilo Costa Filho, Pedrosa wrote a visual arts column and published three texts about criticism for the *Jornal do Brasil*, in which he expounded his criteria for thinking and writing about art. In “O ponto de vista do crítico” (“The Critic’s Point of View”), Pedrosa proclaimed the Baudelairean vision of criticism: “partial, passionate, and political,” demanding, perhaps, more tolerance in the “chaotic, formless, and indiscriminate Brazil of our day.”²¹ In “Ainda sobre o crítico” (“More About the Critic”), he argued for appreciating the physical or even psychological state of the artist, separate from the work of art itself.²² In Pedrosa’s third text for the paper, “Em face da obra de arte” (“Before the Work of Art”), he reaffirmed the work (its “formal qualities”) as being what is of interest, arguing that the critic, to properly appreciate and judge, must replace the artist: “If, for [Charles] Baudelaire, the artist’s problem is nature’s substitution by man (at the source of creation), the critic’s task is to stand in for the artist, that is, for the unconscious or preconscious creator through an awareness of the creative process.”²³

Costa Filho, along with poet and journalist Reynaldo Jardim and artist Amílcar de Castro, was then engaged in a major graphic redesign of the paper. The highly acclaimed new look, which cut back considerably on advertisements and created a four-to-five column grid structure that foregrounded photography and white space, is considered a watershed moment for Brazilian graphic design. The paper’s *Suplemento Dominical* (Sunday supplement), circulated from June 1956 to December 1961, became an important platform for the artists of Rio de Janeiro and a privileged space within the Brazilian cultural circuit. It promoted the most important events in the arts, philosophy, and literature, both nationally and internationally. The publication became a center for the discussion of Concrete art.

At the same time, another dispute was establishing itself between the Concretist branches of Rio and of São Paulo: on one hand, opposing the rational postulates of Concrete art defended by the theoretical rigor of artists from São Paulo and, on the other, an understanding of the work as expression, in which, for the Rio artists, experimentation prevailed over theory. The controversy originated on the occasion of the Grupo Frente exhibition, bringing together the artists from Rio who, in their second exhibition, in 1955, included a text by Pedrosa. According to the critic, “The Grupo Frente artists pursue ethical discipline and creative discipline: they would otherwise not be able to experiment as freely as they do,” thus characterizing the group’s various languages, among them the way Lygia Clark integrated architecture into her modulated surfaces.²⁴

The split within the movement—between the geometric, mathematical Concretists of São Paulo and the more dynamic, experimental Neo-Concretists of Rio—that would give birth to Neo-Concretism stemmed from disagreement with regard to Concrete poetry, above all with the text “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição” (From the phenomenology of composition to the mathematics of composition), by São Paulo-based Haroldo de Campos. In it the author declared: “Concrete poetry is moving toward a rejection of organic structure in favor of a mathematical or quasi-mathematical structure.”²⁵ The answer came from poets Reynaldo Jardim, Ferreira Gullar, and Oliveira Bastos in Rio, published that same day and in the same newspaper, in the text “Poesia concreta: Uma experiência intuitiva” (Concrete poetry: An intuitive experiment), in which they state: “The Concrete poem should be an everyday—affective, intuitive—experience, so that it does not become mere *illustration*, in the field of language of catalogued scientific laws.”²⁶

Ferreira Gullar—who emphasized Pedrosa’s importance in the development of contemporary Brazilian art from the 1940s to the 1970s—insisted that, without Pedrosa, the split in the Concrete movement would have been something else. Not only did Pedrosa stimulate the emergence of Concretism in Brazil, but his texts could be seen as “the pollinator of the Neo-Concrete movement.”²⁷ In Nina Galanternick’s 2010 film *Forma de afeto: Um filme sobre Mário Pedrosa* (Form of affection: A film about Mário Pedrosa), Gullar good-humoredly declares that the split within the Concrete movement took place while Pedrosa was out of the country: “We struck the coup by chance, but it went down as having been a coup. . . . In ‘Big Daddy’s’ absence we changed, and by the time he arrived it had become something else.”²⁸

This coup, as Gullar referred to it, may have been alluded to by Pedrosa in “Considerações inatuais” (“Outdated Considerations”), an essay from late 1959.²⁹ Without referring to the practices of the Neo-Concrete artists, who propounded the relation between art and life, Pedrosa discussed the transformations of “perceptual patterns of our time”; he warned that, because they follow one another vertiginously, these patterns render judgment precarious, “removing . . . specific uniqueness from the notion of the work of art.”³⁰ In recognizing this potential loss of a work’s “specific uniqueness,” Pedrosa underwent an evolution in his understanding of the “permanent revolution” in which the critic lives. Indeed, he had already declared in 1957 that art criticism must become increasingly encyclopedic, demanding critical knowledge in the most diverse fields, and emphasized: “Formerly the art historian tended to absorb the critic: nowadays, on the contrary, the critic tends to absorb the historian.”³¹

Pedrosa’s absence referred to by Gullar above coincided with an extended sojourn in Japan between 1958 and 1959 that proved a lasting influence on his thinking. He wrote several texts published in the *Jornal do Brasil* on topics such as the tradition of art and its Westernization, the various clashes between different artistic currents, and

the influence of Japanese prints in Europe, particularly upon the Impressionists. He also devoted himself to considering the relationship between modern Sino-Japanese calligraphy and the abstract art of the West. His universalizing view of art is made explicit in “Japão e arte ocidental” (“Japan and Western Art”), in which he wrote: “The reality of the world is [only] one. The art of the world is also [only] one. Who proves it? Art itself, which, as it becomes universal, evinces that the world is [only] one. Japanese art’s role as a mediator of this process reveals itself to be of incalculable importance.”³²

In 1959 Pedrosa organized a meeting of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), with events taking place in Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro. The theme was “Cidade nova: Síntese das artes” (New City: Synthesis of the Arts). With the presence of sixty-five delegates, including Meyer Schapiro, Giulio Carlo Argan, Bruno Zevi, and Tomás Maldonado, the conference opened with Pedrosa’s lecture “Brasília, cidade nova” (Brasília, new city). The debates from the gathering are also dealt with in his text “Lições do Congresso Internacional de Críticos” (“Lessons from the International Congress of Critics”).³³ The great advantage of this event, for Pedrosa, was that Brasília would be placed “under the scrutiny of professional foreign critics.”³⁴ He felt the capital was more than a feat of urban planning; it was “a hypothesis for the reconstruction of an entire country,” with the nation’s very destiny at stake.³⁵ From early on, Pedrosa was interested in architecture. He believed, however, that it was important to approach it critically rather than through the more traditional lens of art history, whose appreciation was based on a historically celebrated value. For a new architecture to succeed, architects had to ensure recognition for “the new standard for architectural construction, that is, as a work of art” that possessed the abstract qualities of painting or sculpture, as “simple modalities of a single essence” to be recognized.³⁶

In “Crítica alienígena e arquitetura brasileira” (“Foreign Criticism and Brazilian Architecture”), Pedrosa underscored the inability of foreign critics to “appreciate or judge as the result of a cultural-historical aesthetic complex that corresponds to the realities of this country.”³⁷ He declared: “Here, it is *natural* for us to be *modern*, even without wanting to be. However, a self-satisfied, deeply rooted accumulation of exhausted knowledge persists in them. The levels at which they judge and create are other and do not coincide with our own.”³⁸ This fundamental difference also affected how Brazilian painting was viewed.

Upon being invited to serve as director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and to organize the sixth São Paulo Bienal, both in 1961, Pedrosa bid farewell to his activity as a politically militant critic, returning to the problem of criticism by discussing its origins and transformations. If the critic’s job is “to intervene in the artist’s very activity,” the museum director—especially one at a necessarily experimental museum of modern art—must see to it that “responsibility and commitments are above all in the field, rather, to his epoch.”³⁹ Upon assuming the role of museum director, he wrote in the text “Arte experimental e museus” (“Experimental Art and Museums”) that the function of a museum of modern art is to create the conditions of a “paralaboratory,” allowing for “an unlimited right to investigation and, above all, to experimentation, to invention.”⁴⁰ As the organizer of the MAM-SP’s ten-year celebration, in 1961, Pedrosa put on a wide-ranging show, transmitting a view of art history outside that of the Western canons.

Toward the end of the decade, Pedrosa turned his attention to a comparison of the art of the Caduveo, an indigenous Brazilian tribe, to both African art and contemporary

art. In 1968 he wrote: “The primitive artist creates an object ‘that participates.’ With something akin to despair within him, today’s artist calls upon others to bring participation unto his object.”⁴¹ In other articles of the period, Pedrosa emphasized the end of what was called “modern art,” as based on the Cubist experiment. Other criteria are necessary to the appreciation of this art, he believed—each cycle of which, starting with Pop art, is radically different from the preceding one. Pedrosa expressed ongoing reservations regarding Pop art. He considered certain North American artists in particular—including Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Indiana—as artists who worked for mass consumption, the defining activity of North American civilization: “Powerful urban civilization contains them all like a bell jar. When they reacted to Abstract Expressionism and took the first steps toward ‘postmodern art,’ their activity was not unlike that of the seller of knickknacks or the maker of bric a brac.”⁴² His attention to capitalism’s influence on contemporary art is also present in “O ‘bicho da seda’ na produção em massa” (“The ‘Silkworm’ in Mass Production”), in which he analyzes the contemporary artist’s dilemma—producing works in spite of the capitalist regime’s differentiation between productive and unproductive labor—which shall only be resolved when he returns to being an independent producer in a socialist society. Thus he characterizes the artistic behavior as one of freedom, “or the sense of a new freedom. A long time ago, in attempting to analyze the phenomenon, I defined the art of our days as the experimental exercise of freedom.”⁴³

It was within this context that Pedrosa responded, in his text “Do porco empalhado ou os critérios da crítica” (“On the Stuffed Pig; or, Criteria for Criticism”), to artist and provocateur Nelson Leirner’s famous happening that took place during the 1967 Salão de Arte Moderna, in Brasília.⁴⁴ For this performance, Leirner demanded an explanation from the salon’s jury as to why his work—which consisted of a stuffed pig inside a crate, tied to a ham—was accepted for exhibition. Pedrosa had already dedicated several texts to emphasizing the inevitability of new critical criteria in light of the changes of values that guided artistic output. This was how he arrived at adapting a term made famous by Leon Trotsky when he declared: “Thus, the critic exists in a state of permanent revolution”—already quoted at the beginning of this essay. On the jury’s authority to accept the stuffed pig, he announced one of the features that, according to him, methodize criticism: “However, given that, for them, the *Porco Empalhado* had to be the consequence of the whole of the artist’s aesthetic and moral behavior, the jury had full authority to accept it in the Salão. In postmodern art, it is the idea, the attitude behind the artist that is decisive.”⁴⁵

Pedrosa was troubled by the increasing interference of the government in art. In 1969, under the pseudonym of Luis Rodolpho, he signed the incisive manifesto-text of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics: “Os deveres do crítico de arte” (“The Art Critic’s Obligations to Society”).⁴⁶ In it, he condemns and demands explanations for the censorship that was then beginning to be systematically imposed upon the visual arts, especially with the closing of the exhibition representing Brazil at the sixth Paris Biennale in 1967 due to its choice of artists. In 1971, indicted under the National Security Law by a military court, Pedrosa was forced to seek exile in Chile. That same year he was tapped to establish a new institution in Santiago, the Museo de la Solidaridad (Museum of Solidarity), with the enthusiastic support of Chilean President Salvador Allende. Pedrosa called for contributions from his network of contacts with countless artists and critics, such as Calder, Joan Miró, Dore Ashton, Harald Szeemann, and others, and all of the roughly fifteen hundred works that currently make up the museum’s collection were donated by the artists themselves.

This work continued during his exile in Paris, where he moved following the Chilean coup of 1974.⁴⁷

In 1975, while exiled in France, Pedrosa wrote the essay “Discurso aos tupiniquins ou nambás” (“Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples”), published by *Versus* magazine in the United States, Mexico, Portugal, and France simultaneously.⁴⁸ In it he argued that the avant-gardes of countries considered to be on the periphery were erroneously “struggling to keep up with the very latest novelty” rather than rejecting the “developmentalist” mindset that was the basis of colonialism.⁴⁹ Instead, Pedrosa thought, these countries should first build on their own histories. He felt that, “below the line of the hemisphere, saturated with wealth, progress, and culture . . . a new art threatens to shoot forth”; according to him, the “whirlpool of the capitalist market” in postindustrial societies and the succession of isms as pure novelty for that market led art to lose “its existential and naturally spiritual autonomy.”⁵⁰

Upon his return to Brazil, in 1977, Pedrosa engaged himself in organizing the exhibition *Alegria de viver, Alegria de criar* (Joy of living, joy of creating), which was to feature art of Brazil’s Indians—“a world in which there are other values and there is pleasure in making and creating.”⁵¹ According to him, such an exhibition would possess an “aspect of historical, moral, political, and cultural reparation.”⁵² His ambition was to present works from European museums, such as the Tupinambá mantles—from the Musée de L’Homme, in Paris, or the Kunstmuseum Basel, from the earliest years of the colonization, during the sixteenth century—an exhibition of films, and a special room dedicated to indigenous music, as well as original recordings of Brazilian Indians, made during the 1920s and housed in Germany. According to Pedrosa, “Some Brazilian pieces went to Europe during the time of François I, others during the age of the Louis, some arrived through Rouen and were seen by [Michel de] Montaigne and by [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau, when he was portraying his noble savage.”⁵³ His vision was political and educational, insisting on the need for Brazil to contribute to the research into indigenous traditions being developed in countries such as Peru and Mexico, as well as introducing this work to young people. In the interview “A arte não é fundamental. A profissão do intelectual é ser revolucionário” (“Art Is Not Essential. The Intellectual’s Profession Is to Be a Revolutionary”), granted to the news weekly *O Pasquim* and published soon after his death, Pedrosa affirmed: “When I returned to Brazil, one of my concerns was to find out the conditions of works in certain museums that own collections of Brazilian indigenous peoples. I was very impressed by feather art, which is extremely delicate, and wherein the Indian shows the qualities of an artist without knowing that he is an artist, a man who lives in his community and, despite all external pressures, maintains his individuality, even though he is historically and socially doomed to vanish.”⁵⁴

Due to a disastrous fire in the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, however, the exhibition did not take place. The following year, Pedrosa turned to planning the museum’s reconstruction, but with some major changes. Instead of an all-encompassing institution, he envisioned a group of five large museums, one each devoted to the art of the Indian, “virgin” art (Pedrosa’s term for work by self-taught artists), modern art, folk art, and Afro-Brazilian art.⁵⁵ He felt that the museum must show the art of primitive and peripheral peoples, which had been so central to the modern movement and exists in abundance throughout the country, along with its collection of contemporary Brazilian and Latin American art. This proposal for a unity of five museums was characterized by much of the utopia that typified Pedrosa, exposing the turns of his critical thought, confronting the new conditions that presented themselves. However, toward the end of his life, Pedrosa was rather disillusioned

with modern art, and no longer considered himself a critic; his interest at this time was essentially political, and focused above all on the possibility of forming a socialist party in Brazil, though he never ceased pondering the ways of art. In his last interview, granted shortly before his death, Pedrosa was asked whether he was a stoic. He replied: “When global planning was first discussed, it was the transition from utopia to an attempt to control the situation scientifically. Because I followed a utopian line, I came to accept planning as a world solution but the world is actually very complicated.”⁵⁶

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Notes

1. Mário Pedrosa, “On the Stuffed Pig; or, Criteria for Criticism,” p. 219 in the present volume.
2. Sônia Salzstein, “Mário Pedrosa: Crítico de arte,” in Marques Neto and José Castilho, eds., *Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001).
3. Written on the occasion of the conference “Käthe Kollwitz e o seu modo vermelho de perceber a vida” (Käthe Kollwitz and her red way of seeing the world), Clube dos Artistas Modernos, São Paulo, June 16, 1933. See “The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz,” pp. 233–40 in the present volume.
4. The exhibition *Alexander Calder: Sculptures and Constructions* was on view from September 29, 1943–January 16, 1944.
5. See Mário Pedrosa, “Calder, escultor de cata-ventos,” in *Arte, necessidade vital* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria e Editora Casa do Estudante, 1949), pp. 85–142; “Portinari: From Brodowski to the Washington Murals,” pp. 240–53 in the present volume. Reprinted in Aracy Amaral, ed., *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981); and “A coleção Widener na Galeria Nacional de Arte dos Estados Unidos,” *Boletim da União Pan-americana*, May 1943. Reprinted in *Arte, necessidade vital* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria Casa dos Estudantes do Brasil, 1949).
6. The *Vanguarda Socialista* weekly (1945–48) was founded by Pedrosa in Rio de Janeiro; he also served as its first director. Among his collaborators, he gathered several militant Trotskyists, dissidents from the Communist Party, and socialist-leaning Brazilian intellectuals.
7. Antonio Candido, “Um socialista singular,” in José Castilho Marques Neto, ed., *Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001).
8. Mário Pedrosa, “Arte, necessidade vital,” closing conference of the exhibition organized by the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional (National psychiatric center), with support from the Associação dos Artistas Brasileiros (Association of Brazilian artists) at the Associação Brasileira de Imprensa (Brazilian press association), March 31, 1947. See “The Vital Need for Art,” p. 106 in the present volume.
9. With this thesis, Pedrosa participated in official examinations for the chair of art history and aesthetics of the Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura, having obtained second place. His thesis was published in Mário Pedrosa, *Arte, forma e personalidade* (São Paulo: Kairós, 1979).
10. Rudolf Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (1954; Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).
11. Mário Pedrosa, “Das formas significantes a lógica da expressão,” *Jornal do Brasil*, July 23, 1960.
12. Mário Pedrosa, “Prefácio,” in Aracy Amaral, ed., *Mundo em crise, homem em crise, arte em crise* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2007).
13. Clement Greenberg, “Modernist Painting” (1960), in John O’Brian, ed., *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).
14. Mário Pedrosa, “Exposição de alienados: Rio de Janeiro,” *Correio da manhã*, February 4, 1947.
15. Mário Pedrosa, “Foundations of Abstract Art,” p. 187 in the present volume.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Mário Pedrosa, “Aventuras da linha,” *Jornal do Brasil*, August 13, 1960.
18. Lóthar Charoux, “Abstracionismo,” *Revista de Novíssimos*, no. 1 (1949).
19. Fernando Cocchiarale and Anna Bella Geiger, *Abstracionismo, geométrico e informal: A vanguarda brasileira nos anos cinqüenta* (Rio de Janeiro: FUNARTE, Instituto Nacional de Artes Plásticas, 1987).
20. Mário Pedrosa, “Paulistas and Cariocas,” p. 274 in the present volume.
21. Mário Pedrosa, “The Critic’s Point of View,” p. 205 in the present volume. Reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Política das artes: Textos escolhidos*, vol. 1, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995).
22. See Mário Pedrosa, “More About the Critic,” pp. 207–09 in the present volume.
23. Mário Pedrosa, “Before the Work of Art,” p. 211 in the present volume.
24. Mário Pedrosa, “Grupo Frente,” p. 270 in the present volume.
25. Haroldo de Campos, “Da fenomenologia da composição à matemática da composição,” *Jornal do Brasil*, June 23, 1957.
26. Reynaldo Jardim, Ferreira Gullar, and Oliveira Bastos, “Poesia concreta: uma experiência intuitiva,” *Jornal do Brasil*, June 23, 1957.
27. Ferreira Gullar, “Entre Sócrates e Dionísio,” in Aracy Amaral, ed., *Mário Pedrosa: 100 anos* (São Paulo: Fundação Memorial da América Latina, 2000).

28. Nina Galanternick, *Forma de afeto: Um filme sobre Mário Pedrosa* (Gala Filmes, 2010). On the occasion of the first Neo-Concrete exhibition in Brazil, held at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1959, Pedrosa was in Japan, on a scholarship from UNESCO.
29. See Mário Pedrosa, "Outdated Considerations," pp. 213–14 in the present volume.
30. *Ibid.*
31. Mário Pedrosa, "The Order of the Day: The Terminology of Criticism," p. 212 in the present volume.
32. Mário Pedrosa, "Japão e arte ocidental," *Jornal do Brasil*, April 6, 1957.
33. Mário Pedrosa, "Lessons from the International Congress of Critics," pp. 356–374 in the present volume.
34. *Ibid.*
35. Mário Pedrosa, "Introduction to Brazilian Architecture II," in *Brazilian Architecture: From Baroque to Brasília* (Tokyo: National Museum of Modern Art, 1959).
36. *Ibid.*
37. Mário Pedrosa, "Crítica alienígena e arquitetura brasileira," *Correio do Povo*, July 24, 1960.
38. *Ibid.*
39. Mário Pedrosa, "The Critic and the Director," p. 218 in the present volume.
40. Mário Pedrosa, "Arte experimental e museus," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 16, 1960.
41. Mário Pedrosa, "Art of the Caduveo, African Art, Contemporary Artists," p. 153 in the present volume.
42. Pedrosa, "Gewgaws and Pop Art," p. 201.
43. Mário Pedrosa, "The 'Silkworm' in Mass Production," p. 148 in the present volume.
44. See Pedrosa, "On the Stuffed Pig" (see note 1).
45. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
46. Mário Pedrosa, "The Art Critic's Obligations to Society," pp. 222–26 in the present volume.
47. While in Paris, Pedrosa acquired roughly seven hundred works by many different artists, including Sérgio Camargo, Eduardo Chillida, Lygia Clark, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Sérvulo Esmeraldo, R. B. Kitaj, Franz Krajcberg, Wilfredo Lam, Julio Le Parc, Joan Miró, Claes Oldenburg, Jorge Oteiza, Antonio Saura, Jesus Rafael Soto, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Pierre Soulages, Antoni Tàpies, Joaquín Torres-García, Victor Vasarely, and Wolf Vostell, among others.
48. Mário Pedrosa, "Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples," pp. 169–72 in the present volume.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. Mário Pedrosa, "Indigenous Art: The Choice of the Critic Who Grew Weary of the Avant-Garde," p. 379 in the present volume.
52. Mário Pedrosa, "Art Is Not Essential. The Intellectual's Profession Is to Be a Revolutionary," p. 394 in the present volume.
53. Pedrosa, "Indigenous Art: The Choice of the Critic Who Grew Weary of the Avant-Garde," p. 379.
54. Pedrosa, "Art Is Not Essential," p. 394.
55. See Mário Pedrosa, "The New MAM Will Consist of Five Museums," pp. 173–74 in the present volume.
56. Pedrosa, "Art Is Not Essential," p. 396.

A Strategic Universalist Kaira M. Cabañas

A samba, for example, would produce, who knows, an emotion of love. But within behaviorist theory nothing exists in the properties of the stimulus that explains the specific emotional effects.

—Mário Pedrosa, 1949

Imagine the galleries in The Museum of Modern Art, New York, filled with hanging and standing abstract sculptures. Shaped planes of monochrome colors are carefully suspended, subject to motion by shifts in the air current. The exhibition is Alexander Calder's mid-career retrospective, including his *Gibraltar* (1936; see fig. on page 254) and other work created during his affiliation with Abstraction-Creation in Paris, to his signature mobiles and stabiles with their elegantly arched forms and steel planes. Two prominent art critics, one from the United States and the other a Brazilian national exiled in New York, visit the exhibition and critically comment upon it in the pages of publications central to the art criticism of their countries: *The Nation* and

Correio da manhã respectively. The critics are Clement Greenberg (age thirty-four) and Mário Pedrosa (age forty-three). The year is 1943.

Did the two by chance meet in front of a work and exchange a few comments? Would Pedrosa have agreed with Greenberg's assessment that Calder's work "lacks history" and that it is "not sufficiently determined by a driving purpose working itself out," a critique that foreshadows what the American later identifies as modernism's self-critical tendency?¹ Alternatively, would Greenberg have been sympathetic to Pedrosa's celebration of Calder's work and his observation that Calder's art is "at the service of the imagination"?² For Pedrosa, Calder's work avowed an approach to technology that transcended function, thereby escaping identification with the machine.

For readers unfamiliar with Pedrosa, as a shortcut we might compare Pedrosa's prominence in the world of art and art criticism to that of Greenberg or of Pierre Restany in France, or even Romero Brest in Argentina—the latter two were both critics with whom Pedrosa was in direct contact.³ Indeed, Pedrosa's influence on the Brazilian and international art scenes was as deep as his knowledge was broad. In addition to his role as an art critic, Pedrosa was key to bringing art from Europe and the United States to Brazil, including Calder's 1948 exhibition at the Ministério da Educação e Saúde (Ministry of education and health), site of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM-RJ) by 1952. He was central to the foundation of Brazil's institutions of modern art and collaborated closely with the MAM-RJ from its inception in the mid-1940s through to the '60s, as well as the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), for which he served as director from 1961 to 1963. He also participated in the organizing committees for the second and third São Paulo Bienals, and as its general director for its sixth iteration, in 1961, a subject Adele Nelson addresses in this volume. Pedrosa was an active member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and in 1959 organized an AICA conference titled "Cidade nova: Síntese das artes" (New City: Synthesis of the Arts) in Brasília, using the city as a case study, as Lauro Cavalcanti's essay in this volume details. It was in this context of accounting for the new capital's new architecture that Pedrosa first coined the phrase that Brazil was "condemned to be modern."⁴ Pedrosa was also deeply committed to leftist politics. In these pages, Catherine Bompuis charts the scope and breadth of Pedrosa's political identifications as well as his activities, which include the foundation of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' party) in 1980, while Dore Ashton turns to her memories of Pedrosa's person as well as his pioneering role in the creation of the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende during his exile in Chile.

The encounter between Greenberg and Pedrosa narrated at the outset of this essay is an imaginary one, but their accounts of Calder's work are true. Just as they diverged in their responses to the artist's whimsical and innovative work, so too did they differ in ways that are essential for developing nuanced understandings of modern art and criticism. Yet their orientations did overlap in some important aspects. Like Greenberg, Pedrosa's criticism of the 1930s was inflected by Marxism (more specifically Trotskyism). But whereas the Greenberg of that time is known primarily for his defense of high art against kitsch and against an increasingly pervasive commodity culture, Pedrosa engaged the work of Käthe Kollwitz to insist on art's active social and political role.⁵ In the postwar years, the two also shared an intense engagement with establishing modern art's autonomy and accounting for the formal properties of a work of art. But here, too, key differences remain—ones that go beyond their aesthetic allegiances to Abstract Expressionism, on the one hand, and Concrete art on the other. Greenberg insisted on a medium's



Installation view of *Alexander Calder: Sculptures and Constructions*, September 29, 1943–January 16, 1944. Photographic archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York

self-identity and also upheld the contemplative stance of the viewing subject. Pedrosa, on the other hand, turned to art’s formal properties in order to account for a subject’s affective aesthetic response.

In 1949 Pedrosa wrote his thesis “Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte” (On the affective nature of form in the work of art), which lays the foundation for his subsequent thinking in the late 1940s and 1950s. The study begins: “The problem of apprehension of the object by the senses is the number one problem of human knowledge.”⁶ For Pedrosa to approach this problem was to approach the work of art. How is a work of art perceived and what are its specific properties? How can one account for the work of art’s dynamic relay between form and expression, objectivity and subjectivity? In order to tackle these issues he turns to the psychology of form, to Gestalt psychology and its analysis of sensory organization. To be sure, “Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte” relies heavily on and faithfully rehearses various Gestalt principles—e.g., figure-ground articulation, the closure principle, the subordination of parts to whole, as well as good form—and its pages are peppered with the visual graphs so characteristic of these studies. It thus comes as little surprise that on account of the science to which he turns, Pedrosa’s thinking has been often assimilated into historiographic accounts of Concrete art’s “rational objectivity.”⁷

That rationalist aspect of geometric abstraction, of works exhibiting an almost mathematical logic, does exist in the Brazilian context. But it is mostly evinced by artists working in São Paulo, those who made known their commitment to a rationalist abstraction in the Grupo Ruptura’s 1952 manifesto, and less characteristic of the artists of Grupo Frente in Rio, for whom Pedrosa often served as theoretical guide. One might refer to his text “Paulistas and Cariocas” from 1957, included in this volume, in which the critic describes how “*paulistas*” faithfully follow their theories while the “*cariocas*” are more devoted to “spatial play” in their work (*paulistas* refers to artists based in São Paulo and *cariocas* to those based in Rio).⁸ There is no doubt that Pedrosa embraced Concrete art as fitting for the Brazilian context and its developing modernity, and thereby opposed the continued prominence of prior generations of figurative painters such as Candido Portinari. But his, I argue, was a concretism of a different kind. Within his Gestaltist orientation Pedrosa ultimately turned to an understanding of the physiognomic Gestalt—as opposed to the formal Gestalt—and

hence to physiognomic perception and expression, which he felt was lost to rationalist worldviews.⁹

What is physiognomic perception? Most simply, to perceive physiognomically is to perceive the face of things. Within Gestalt psychology, physiognomic perception describes those instances, for example, when one perceives a dark cloud as threatening or a mountain as majestic or forbidding. Such tertiary properties of object perception—that an object of perception be perceived in its dynamism as gay, melancholic, or pensive, rather than through primary and secondary properties such as form and color—are central to its analysis. Crucial here is that the physiognomically expressive characteristics of a work of art are phenomenologically objective (exist in its formal properties), while related to individual affective response. Pedrosa affirms: “[Art] is endowed precisely with this physiognomic power that we grasp so well . . . that the child understands in a face.”¹⁰ Physiognomic perception thus describes a type of perception that precedes an intellectual-rational grasp of the world. Accordingly, Pedrosa’s discussion incorporates not only the perception of children but also that of psychiatric patients and the so-called “primitive,” as well as artists. Such an approach, which was informed by the comparative psychology of Heinz Werner and work of European modernists such as Vasily Kandinsky, had far-reaching consequences for Pedrosa’s aesthetic thinking as well as his allegiances.

Pedrosa was a staunch supporter of aesthetic education and the work of painter and professor Ivan Serpa, who was at the helm of Grupo Frente in Rio. Together they worked on the catalogue that accompanied *Crescimento e criação* (Growth and creation, 1954), an exhibition of work by children enrolled in Serpa’s classes at MAM–RJ. In the volume Pedrosa describes the benefits of aesthetic education as producing just citizens, not necessarily great artists.¹¹ In order to grapple with the quality of the creative work produced by psychiatric patients, Pedrosa developed the concept of *arte virgem*, presenting a theorization contemporary with—but altogether different from—Jean Dubuffet’s conception of *art brut* in the late 1940s. Pedrosa also addressed the production of Brazil’s indigenous societies within the discursive contours and limits of his own intellectual and modern-cosmopolitan perspective. But with the rise of geometric abstraction in avant-garde circles in Brazil, his turn to the lessons of physiognomic perception and expression provided the conditions of possibility for extending his aesthetic observations to the then emerging Concrete art. He writes, “Not all physiognomic qualities reside in a face. They are also characteristic of the geometric figure, of a painting.”¹²

When Alfred H. Barr, Jr., MoMA’s first director, served as juror in the fourth São Paulo Bienal, in 1957, Concrete art was at its height. The previous year the city had celebrated the 1a Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta, which subsequently traveled to Rio. According to Pedrosa, at the Bienal Barr notoriously dismissed the work of the Brazilians—but also the Argentines—as so many “Bauhaus exercises”; Pedrosa responded to the charge: “like all prominent foreigners do when arriving on our shores [he was] in search of indigenous huts and flocks of parrots.”¹³ At the time, Pedrosa would also critique American Abstract Expressionism for being too tied to the artist’s subjectivity such that “the resulting work is no more than an affective projection of him.”¹⁴ For Pedrosa, expressive value derived from the structural properties of the work of art, not from the subject who produced it. Within these terms, one should not confuse image and psyche.

Pedrosa supported an aesthetic program at odds with Abstract Expressionism and its European equivalents in *Art informel* (or Tachism), but his position, when carefully assessed, also drives a wedge into the dominant art historiography that

describes rationality as the exclusive worldview informing the production of Concrete art in Brazil. It is on account of the latter that Swiss artist Max Bill holds such a privileged place in Brazilian art history. As is well known, his work *Tripartite Unity* (1948) won the first prize for international sculpture at the inaugural 1951 São Paulo Bienal, and consequently he is often credited with having introduced geometric abstraction to Brazil. Certainly, Pedrosa supported Concrete art and how it stood for a universal modern art, but he also lamented that modern-utilitarian society had banished the physiognomic character of objects. As a countermeasure, Pedrosa affirms, “the function of the artist consists precisely in fabricating these characters.”¹⁵ In short, Pedrosa’s thinking and ambitions for Brazilian Concretism remained conceptually and affectively distinct from the rational application of Gestalt theories in art.

Pedrosa’s engagement with Gestalt and physiognomic perception—a perception attuned to the expressivity of forms in the world—places him in an intellectual lineage shared by practitioners such as Béla Balázs in film as well as psychologist and theorist Rudolf Arnheim. Like Pedrosa, Arnheim extended the Gestalt conception of form to include expression in his work on film in the 1920s and later in his magnum opus, *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye* (1954; a volume that counts among those found in Pedrosa’s extensive library). Given these intellectual affinities, Pedrosa’s approach to the affective response provoked by a work of art must also be situated at a critical remove from Greenberg’s “aesthetic regulation of feeling.”¹⁶ What is more, his insistence on physiognomic *expression* in the work of art casts Pedrosa’s participation in the break between Concrete art and Neo-Concretism in a different light.

In 1959 artists such as Amílcar de Castro and Lygia Clark challenged Concrete art’s rationalism and the formalism of São Paulo Concretists. They formed—along with Reynaldo Jardim, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanúdis, and Franz Weissmann—the short-lived Neo-Concrete movement (1959–61). To signal this shift, Pedrosa’s disciple, the poet and critic Ferreira Gullar, penned the “Manifesto neo-concreto” (Neo-Concrete manifesto). Gullar explains, “*Neo-concretism* . . . denies the validity of scientific and positivist attitudes in the arts, and reconvoques the problem of *expression*.”¹⁷ Informed by his reading of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, which Pedrosa reportedly introduced him to, Gullar and his cohort disavowed the rationalist model of consciousness upheld by São Paulo painters and poets as well as the expressive subject evinced by *Art informel*, which dominated the São Paulo Bienal that same year. These artists reoriented the space of geometric abstraction, of Concrete art, toward a spatialized phenomenological experience, one in which the viewing subject was accorded a more active role, as in Clark’s *Bichos* (Critters) and Oiticica’s *Núcleos* (Nuclei) and *Penetráveis* (Penetrables).

For those unfamiliar with the history of art in Brazil, within North American art historiography Minimalism is often cited as a homologous break in artistic practice. For Hal Foster, Minimalism “breaks with the transcendental space of most modernist art . . . but it also refuses the siteless realm of most abstract sculpture. [Sculpture] is repositioned among objects,” thereby inaugurating a shift from work to site. Consequently, the viewer is “refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art.”¹⁸ Gullar seems to evoke a similar reorientation with the shift from Concrete art to Neo-Concretism in his March 1959 manifesto and especially in his subsequent “*Teoria do não-objeto*” (Theory of the non-object), with its references to painting moving beyond the frame and sculpture abandoning its base.¹⁹ Yet careful critics such as Michael Asbury and Sérgio B. Martins have isolated important differences between



Mário Pedrosa (right) with
Alexander Calder and Niomar
Moniz Sodré, Paris, 1975

the two cultural contexts.²⁰ For purposes of this essay, if Greenberg's theories served as representative of what Minimalism rallied against, Pedrosa's role in the development of Neo-Concretism is of a different order.

Admittedly, Pedrosa was in Japan at the time of Neo-Concretism's formulation, which has often led to speculation that the group was formed against him. Yet Gullar and the other Neo-Concrete artists did not abandon the elder critic's investment in the expressiveness of form. Here one might also recall Clark's 1959 article, "Lygia Clark e o espaço concreto expressional" (Lygia Clark and the concrete expressive space), in which the artist describes her desire to "express space itself, not compose within it."²¹ Indeed, Gullar's and Clark's invocations of expression extend Pedrosa's thinking, whereby expression is rerouted to take place in the relation between a work and the space it constructs. As I have argued elsewhere, such conjunction of concerns between the physiognomic and the phenomenological suggests less a rupture between Concrete art and the subsequent Neo-Concrete movement in Rio, than a critical elaboration and intensification of physiognomic qualities' intangible expressivity ultimately taken to the realm of the spectator's corporeal participation.²²

Over the course of the 1960s, these artists moved beyond Neo-Concretism to articulate various approaches to artistic practice. A new generation of artists—e.g., Artur Barrio, Cildo Meireles, and Rubens Gerchman—also emerged and joined them in their efforts, often incorporating popular elements of Brazilian culture into their aesthetic propositions. Where a critic like Greenberg argued against similar developments in the North American context (such as Happenings, Pop art), Pedrosa demonstrated a theoretical dexterity and acute testing of his own knowledge and subject position when accounting for new artistic developments. (In contrast, in these years Gullar would completely exit avant-garde art circles to endorse a return to realist aesthetics during his work with the Centros Populares de Cultura.) It was during this time that Pedrosa first articulated his now famous saying that art is "the experimental exercise of freedom"²³ and also elaborated the concept of a "postmodern" art. Decisive here is that Pedrosa's postmodern theorization must be understood in a cultural context defined by the rise of mass media, on the one hand, and the increased repression of Brazil's military regime, which came to power in April 1964, on the other.

In his 1966 essay "Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica" ("Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica") Pedrosa conceptualized the postmod-

ern as a shift to an art that is cultural, and not purely artistic, in ambition and effects. He cites Oiticica's *Penetráveis* but also Clark's *Bichos* as works in which "the spectator ceased to be a passive contemplator," and describes how plastic values "tend to be absorbed by the malleability of perceptive and situational structures."²⁴ Given their work's move away from purely artistic ends, he affirms, "this time around, Brazil participates not as a modest follower, but as a leader."²⁵ While the latter affirmation admittedly speaks to a concerted nationalism (after all, the move to participation in the visual arts was international in scope), it remains notable how Pedrosa's theorization of a postmodern art chronologically precedes its usage as a term in North America and Europe. Yet at issue is less the fact of historical precedence than how Pedrosa offers a different understanding of the postmodern, one that helped to define and shape artistic production and reception in Brazil.

Cast in this light, his use of postmodern limits the term's purchase and priority for a North American and European audience. We might briefly evoke how the term emerged in architectural debates in the 1970s as well as in Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* (1979), which described the loss of meta-narratives. In the 1980s and early '90s, American cultural theorist Fredric Jameson aligned the postmodern with the cultural logic of late capitalism, and thus as a cultural dominant that is "at one with the official or public culture of Western society."²⁶ What is more, he characterized the postmodern by depthlessness, simulacra, and a weakening of historicity. In art, Jameson cited Andy Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), an image of pure surface and commercial accumulation, as a harbinger of this postmodern condition.²⁷

In 1967 Pedrosa would also question Pop art as a postmodern art in similarly Marxist terms.²⁸ At the same time, however, his version of the postmodern grapples with artistic practices' move to a more environmental dimension, and how "there is no single artwork that can be appreciated in itself, like a picture" and the "sensorial perceptual whole dominates."²⁹ His ideas were especially important to Oiticica, who penned his seminal text "Esquema geral de Nova Objetividade" (General scheme of the New Objectivity; 1967) and therein explicitly referenced Pedrosa's discussion. Oiticica's text was an ambitious one, and in it he argues for a collective art that might find its inspiration in popular manifestations such as samba schools, of which, he explains, there is a "huge archive, of an unmatched expressive wealth" in Brazil.³⁰ Here we might recall that in 1949 Pedrosa—while developing his thesis on Gestalt in opposition to Behaviorist theories—used samba as an example to highlight how a work's formal structure is independent of, but related to, emotional response (see this essay's epigraph). In the case of Oiticica, his engagement with samba and the community of the Mangueira favela in Rio de Janeiro formed part of what he called his de-intellectualization, a move to undo his bourgeois conditioning without, however, abandoning his commitment to the "constructive will" of advanced art.³¹ He shared this anti-elitism with Pedrosa, who always included the work of children, psychiatric patients, and "primitive" populations as he argued for art's autonomy.

Later that year, in his review of the 1967 Bienal, Pedrosa describes how "The 'participation of the spectator' increasingly revealed itself as a revolutionary concept to oppose . . . the without a doubt decisive aesthetic concept of previous periods, or of 'psychic distance.'"³² But for Pedrosa, as discussed above, the subject doesn't exist in a transcendental relation or psychic distance to the work of art, but is literally emotionally *affected* by it. Instead Pedrosa's theorization of the postmodern and spectator participation speaks to the inability of an autonomous modern art to survive when faced with rampant commercialization as well as a repressive military state. Given

that the 1967 Bienal was also dominated by an international “Pop” style, Pedrosa’s approach to spectator participation formed part of his strategic rejection of that other postmodern art—North American Pop art—an art he repeatedly described as evincing “complacent conformity” with American technological culture.³³ Accordingly, his vision of a postmodern art attempts to delineate an ethical position aligned with artistic practices that provide an alternative experience to and critique of that culture.

The next iteration of the Bienal was decisive for bringing international attention to the increased repression and censorship evinced by Brazil’s military state. In this context, French critic Pierre Restany played an important role. Pedrosa likely met Restany in the late 1950s on account of AICA activities, or subsequently during Pedrosa’s travels to Europe to organize the national representations for the São Paulo Bienal in 1961, the year he served as director. Restany, perhaps best known as critic and founder of Nouveau Réalisme in France, maintained an affirmative stance in relation to consumer culture and supported experiments in art and technology. He was also no stranger to the Brazilian art scene. Restany traveled to Brazil various times in the course of the 1960s, and the Biennial Foundation officially invited him to organize an Art and Technology exhibition for its 1969 installment.³⁴ The previous year, in the wake of the events in Paris during May ’68, Restany had developed and consolidated many of his views on the role of museums in technological society in his manifesto “Le Livre blanc de l’art total: Pour une esthétique prospective” (The white book of total art: For a prospective aesthetic). The fact that Parisian museums were, according to Restany, behind the times had been largely due to the stagnation of official cultural policy under President Charles de Gaulle’s regime. In his essay, Restany thus argued for a “*musée vivant*” (living museum) that would inaugurate new museographic practices by facilitating exhibitions and events in which the spectator could develop “a new psycho-sensory reaction vis-à-vis the environment.”³⁵ Restany’s pro-technological stance could not be further removed from Pedrosa, who critiqued the technological optimism of Restany’s notion of a “total art” in a 1967 article.³⁶ This said, the two remained in close contact and Restany left his technological humanism aside, albeit briefly, to lead the 1969 Bienal’s international boycott.

Restany withdrew his participation as curator, as did Pontus Hultén, who led the Swedish delegation, and Edy de Wilde, who led the Dutch one. Restany also penned the manifesto “Non à la Biennale,” which was published in the *New York Times*, among other venues.³⁷ In Paris more than three hundred intellectuals signed a petition supporting the boycott, and this led to further attrition: communities in Belgium, Mexico, and Italy soon issued similar decrees.³⁸ In this contentious context, it is notable that the U.S. contribution took longer to pull out, even when U.S.-based artists such as Hans Haacke made their opposition clear, calling attention to the U.S. support of the regime. Restany also advocated on behalf of Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt (one of MAM-RJ’s founders) and Mário Pedrosa in the wake of their arrests. Nevertheless, Restany’s desire to renew artistic institutions ultimately trumped his anti-dictatorship stance: the year of the boycott he drafted a project for a thematic biennial at the request of Francisco Matarazzo, president of the Biennial Foundation.³⁹ In the years that followed, a second wave of protest occurred: Gordon Matta-Clark published an open letter linking the Bienal to the regime in 1971. Although the Bienal remained active between 1969 and 1981, its prominence and tactics necessarily shifted, as did its prestige both at home and abroad.⁴⁰ At this time, Pedrosa, now seventy, became an exile again: he went first to Chile (1970–73) and then to Paris (1973–77). In Paris he wrote what is often considered his last sig-

nificant piece of art criticism: “Discurso aos Tupiniquins ou Nambás” (“Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples”), which offers a trenchant critique of art’s assimilation to the commodity. Nevertheless, the critic expresses hope for an alternative future for art in Latin America.⁴¹

Upon his return from exile, Pedrosa imagined the role of the museum in ways that cast in relief the unique characteristics of Brazilian art history and responded to the precariousness of the country’s material conditions. In the wake of the 1978 fire that practically destroyed all of MAM–RJ’s collection, Pedrosa suggested that the museum be reorganized through his proposal for a Museu das Origens (Museum of origins). In addition to calling upon the necessity of state funding, his new concept for MAM actually included five museums: Museu do Índio (Museum of the Indian); Museu de Arte Virgem (Museum of virgin or unconscious art); Museu de Arte Moderna (Museum of modern art); Museu do Negro (Museum of black people); Museu de Artes Populares (Museum of folk art). At the time, only the first three existed. As to why such an association of museums, Pedrosa affirms that all modern art was inspired by “povos periféricos” (peripheral peoples) and thus why not have MAM present that which “we possess in abundance alongside a collection of contemporary Brazilian and Latin American art.”⁴² Accordingly, we encounter a museum conception that regards modern art as one type of aesthetic production among others, and in which Pedrosa returns to the origins of his aesthetic thinking, which affirmed the *affect* underpinning non-rationalist worldviews.

For Pedrosa, from the perspective of Brazil, his museum of origins posits a break with the Euro-American model of a space for modernist art premised on its autonomy as well as the techno-optimism of Restany’s *musée vivant*. In so doing he is more aligned (although, to the best of my knowledge, it is not explicitly stated) with the thinking of his contemporary Pietro Maria Bardi, and his similar attempts at the helm of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo to dehierarchize cultural production by working at the intersection of distinctions such as the modern and the popular in the name of a universal art production. But such a shared drive to universalism remains at historical and conceptual remove from, for example, Andre Malraux’s “Le Musée imaginaire” (“Museum without Walls”) (1947), which decontextualized the world’s art objects in order to determine their meaning through the juxtaposition of photographic details.⁴³ Instead Pedrosa’s universalism responds to the historical specificity of Brazil, its populations, and how the interchange between the popular and modern, sane and insane, and the legacy of colonization are constitutive of its modernity as well as a different understanding and practice of what is modern in the arts.

In the early 1980s, Otília Beatriz Fiori Arantes describes how upon his return from exile in 1977 Pedrosa complained about the standardization in avant-garde art, and how in Brazil “one does exactly the same as in any other place.”⁴⁴ At this time he turned his attention to politics, and when it came to art he dedicated his final activities to the creative work of psychiatric patients. In 1979 he organized an exhibition of the work of Fernando Diniz at the Galeria Sergio Milliet. The following year, he organized an exhibition of works by Raphael Dominguez, which was presented at MAM–RJ. He also organized the informative volume *Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente* (Museum of unconscious images), which offers a history of the museum and psychiatrist Nise da Silveira’s pioneering role in art therapy, as well as entries on specific patients’ work, including Diniz and Dominguez.⁴⁵ Given these facts, Arantes queries: “Had Mário . . . lost the sense of the new?”⁴⁶ I would suggest that rather than a loss, he renewed his commitment to those whose work had been so central to his early theorizations as an art critic. Let us recall how, in 1951, he affirmed: “In the same way that the child,



Mário Pedrosa with
Nise da Silveira. 1980.
Museu de Imagens do
Inconsciente, Rio de
Janeiro

the schizophrenic, the artist, cannot contemplate anything . . . without emotion: the majority of the rest of us, however, see everything without being moved.”⁴⁷

What is Pedrosa’s legacy today—what does it mean to read his work now? The after-life of Pedrosa’s conception of a renewed modern art museum that includes what he called “peripheral peoples” can be tracked in the programming of the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR), which was inaugurated in March 2013. Directed by Paulo Herkenhoff—who deserves credit for having initiated the present volume of translations—MAR functions primarily as a city art museum.⁴⁸ Recent exhibitions include *From Valongo to Favela: The Imaginary and the Periphery*, which explored the legacy of colonial exclusion through an examination of Rio de Janeiro’s port neighborhood, and *Pororoca: The Amazon at MAR*, which featured their Amazonian collection as part of MAR’s “continuous historiographical and geopolitical revision of art,” writes Herkenhoff.⁴⁹ MAR, through the Escola do Olhar (School of looking), also carries out an active educational program. Its mission statement declares: “The Escola do Olhar is a space of continued development which aims to stimulate and spread sensibility and knowledge.”⁵⁰ Indeed, with the reference to “sensibility” and “knowledge” we hear clear echoes of Pedrosa’s ideas on the educational force of art.⁵¹

Beyond this legacy, and as this volume evinces, Pedrosa penned critical and insightful essays that today—when global art history is all the rage—might serve as inspiration and key references for establishing not only alternative genealogies but also nuanced understandings of what is conventionally understood by modernism and modern art, as well as the role of the art critic. Pedrosa’s writing asserts his commitment to leftist politics, as well as his work at the intersection of a series of debates that reveal the complex relations between art criticism, psychology of perception, artistic pedagogy, and psychiatry. His work encourages today’s readers to consider not only the material differences in art’s processes and procedures, but also the social and historical context of art’s production. At the same time, as was characteristic of the intellectual milieu in which he was intellectually formed, Pedrosa was a universalist. When evaluated from the perspective of the present, however, we might understand his universalism as strategic, and doubly so: Pedrosa inscribed modernist abstraction in Brazil within a universal art history (working against foreign misconceptions) and at once incorporated the creative production of subjects considered “other”—that is, children, mental health patients, and what today are called first nations—*within* his universalist account of aesthetic response. In light of this unique double strat-

egy, turning to Pedrosa's thinking means necessarily *provincializing* American and European narratives of modern art and tracing the complexity of modern art and its context in Brazil. In this way, his writing presents a challenge to contemporary "global" art history, within which it seems the art of all nations continues to be evaluated through the tool kit of the "West."⁵² Brazil is not only huts and parrots, or body and soul.⁵³

I would like to thank Ana Gonçalves Magalhães and Sérgio B. Martins for their insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from non-English editions are my own.

Notes

- Epigraph: Mário Pedrosa, "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte," in *Arte, forma e personalidade: 3 estudos* (São Paulo: Kairós, 1979), p. 58.
1. Clement Greenberg, "Alexander Calder," *Nation*, October 23, 1943, p. 480.
 2. See Pedrosa's "Calder, escultor de cata-ventos" (December 1944), reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Modernidade cá e lá: Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995–1998), p. 62.
 3. It remains uncertain if Greenberg and Pedrosa actually ever met. Lorenzo Mammì, in his recent preface to the newest edition of collected writings, mentions that Pedrosa names the American critic in his essay "Arte entesourada," *Correio da manhã*, November 26, 1946. See Lorenzo Mammì, "Prefácio," in *Mário Pedrosa: Arte ensaios* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2015), p. 12n6.
 4. See the critical biography by Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico* (São Paulo: Editora Página Aberta, 1991), p. 88. The phrase appears in his lecture "Brasília, cidade nova" at the 1959 AICA conference and subsequently published in *Jornal do Brasil*, September 19, 1959. See Arantes, p. 160n8.
 5. See "The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz," p. 233–40 in the present volume. Published as "As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz" (1933), reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Política das artes: Textos escolhidos*, vol. 1, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995–1998), pp. 35–56.
 6. Pedrosa, "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte," p. 12 (see note to epigraph).
 7. For art historian and critic Ronaldo Brito, Concrete art presents "optical and sensorial possibilities . . . already prescribed by Gestalt theory" as well as serial and optical-sensory productions that attempt to approximate science and technology. Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: Vértice e ruptura do projeto construtivo brasileiro*, 2nd ed. (1985; São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 1999), p. 41.
 8. See Mário Pedrosa, "Paulistas and Cariocas," pp. 274–75 in the present volume.
 9. I take up the subject of Pedrosa's understanding of the physiognomic Gestalt in Kaira M. Cabañas, "Learning from Madness: Mário Pedrosa and the Physiognomic Gestalt," *October*, no. 153 (Summer 2015): 42–64.
 10. Pedrosa, "Forma e personalidade," in *Arte, forma e personalidade: 3 estudos*, p. 64. In this work, Pedrosa relies heavily on Kurt Koffka's "Problems in the Psychology of Art," in *Art: A Bryn Mawr Symposium* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Bryn Mawr College, 1940); as well as Heinz Werner's *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (1926; New York: International Universities Press, 1980). By 1954 Pedrosa would turn to Suzanne K. Langer's *Feeling and Form: A Theory of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953) when elaborating texts such as his "Problemática da arte contemporânea" (Problems of contemporary art) (1954).
 11. See Pedrosa's text in the exhibition catalogue *Crescimento e criação* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1954), which includes images of a selection of works by Ivan Serpa's students. Two years prior, Pedrosa also introduced the first exhibition of children's art at MAM-RJ.
 12. Pedrosa, "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte," p. 74.
 13. Mário Pedrosa, "Brazilian Painting and International Taste," p. 192 in the present volume. Reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Acadêmicos e modernos: Textos escolhidos*, vol. 3, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995–98), p. 280.
 14. Mário Pedrosa, "Da Abstração à Auto-expressão" (1959), reprinted in Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética: Textos escolhidos*, vol. 2, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995–98), p. 318.
 15. Pedrosa, "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte," p. 76.
 16. Caroline Jones, *Eyesight Alone: Clement Greenberg's Modernism and the Bureaucratization of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 55–56.
 17. Ferreira Gullar, "Neo-Concrete Manifesto" (1959), *October*, no. 69 (Summer 1994): 92. Originally published as Ferreira Gullar et al., "Manifesto neoconcreto," *Jornal do Brasil*, Sunday supplement, March 21–22, 1959. My emphasis.
 18. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 37–38.
 19. Ferreira Gullar, "Teoria do não-objeto," *Jornal do Brasil*, Sunday supplement, December 20, 1960.
 20. See Michael Asbury, "Neoconcretism and Minimalism: On Ferreira Gullar's Theory of the Non-Object," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 168–89; and Sérgio B. Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949–1979* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), esp. pp. 17–46.
 21. Lygia Clark, "Lygia Clark e o espaço concreto expressional," *Jornal do Brasil*, Sunday supplement, February 7, 1959, p. 2.

22. See Cabañas, "Learning from Madness," p. 60.
23. Mário Pedrosa, "The 'Silkworm' in Mass Production," p. 148 in the present volume.
24. Mário Pedrosa, "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica," pp. 315, 314 in the present volume. Reprinted in Pedrosa, *Acadêmicos e Modernos*, pp. 356, 355.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
26. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992), p. 4.
27. What is more, for Jameson, during postmodernism, modernist style had become so many codes to manipulate in one rampant global pastiche. On the other hand, also in the 1980s, for artists such as Barbara Kruger, Sherrie Levine, and Cindy Sherman—and others associated with the Pictures Generation—they responded with a critical postmodernism in art and through gestures of appropriation that questioned image culture in a critique of originality and authorship, as these often converge with questions of gender and power.
28. See Mário Pedrosa, "Gewgaws and Pop Art," pp. 199–202 in the present volume. Reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Mundo, homen, arte em crise*, ed. Aracy Amaral (1975; São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2007), pp. 175–79.
29. Pedrosa, "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica," p. 315.
30. Hélio Oiticica, "Esquema Geral de Nova Objetividade" (1967), reprinted in *Hélio Oiticica* (Rotterdam: Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art et al., 1992), p. 117. In relation to Pedrosa, Oiticica's text outlined the principal characteristics of this new objectivity with point number 5: "Tendency toward collective propositions and consequently the abolition, in the art of today, of 'isms,' so characteristic of the first half of the century (a tendency which can be encompassed by Mário Pedrosa's concept of 'postmodern art')," p. 110. Originally published in the exhibition catalogue *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1967).
31. For a rigorous discussion of Oiticica's commitment to a constructive will in art, see Sérgio Bruno Martins, Chapter 2, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949–1979* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 51–78; for an analysis of the relation between Oiticica's and Pedrosa's postmodern theorizations, see Mônica Amor, "'Of Adversity We Live!'" in *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, ed. Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), esp. pp. 55–56.
32. Mário Pedrosa, "Bienal e Participação . . . do Povo" (1967), reprinted in Pedrosa, *Mundo, homen, arte em crise*, p. 188.
33. See Pedrosa, "Gewgaws and Pop Art," p. 201.
34. In his review of the 1961 Bienal, Restany noted the rare "references to local folklore," thereby echoing Barr's earlier assessment. Perhaps tellingly, that same year Lygia Clark received the national prize in sculpture for her *Bichos*. Restany's response points in part to a sustained rift between foreigners' expectations and Pedrosa's ambition: where Pedrosa wanted to reveal Brazil's modernity, other critics expected to see tropical images. See Pierre Restany, "VIe Biennale de São Paulo," *Cimaise*, no. 56 (November–December 1961): 74. That year the French critic also visited Rio and met Hélio Oiticica (to whom he introduced the work of Yves Klein). On account of his visit, he penned a proposal to organize a New Realist festival in Rio, similar to the one he had organized in Nice earlier that year. See Isabel Plante, "Pierre Restany et l'Amérique latine: Un détournement de l'axe Paris–New York," in *Le demi-siècle de Pierre Restany* (Paris: Institut national d'histoire de l'art, INHA/Les Éditions des Cendres, 2009), pp. 287–309.
35. Pierre Restany, "Le Livre blanc de l'art total: Pour une esthétique prospective," *Domus*, no. 469 (1968): 42.
36. Mário Pedrosa, "O Manifesto pela Arte Total de Pierre Restany" (1967), reprinted in Pedrosa, *Mundo, homen, arte em crise*, pp. 237–40.
37. See Isabel Whitelegg, "The Bienal de São Paulo: Unseen/Undone (1969–1981)," *Afterall* 22 (Autumn/Winter 2009), accessed July 11, 2015, <http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.22/the.bienal.de.sao.paulo.unseenundone.19691981>.
38. See Claudia Calirman's detailed account of the boycott in her *Brazilian Art under Dictatorship: Antonio Manuel, Artur Barrio, and Cildo Meireles* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 24–36.
39. See Plante, "Pierre Restany et l'Amérique latine," esp. pp. 301–02.
40. For more on these years, see Whitelegg, "The Bienal de São Paulo."
41. For a translation, see pp. 169–72 in the present volume. This text is garnering renewed scholarly attention. See the excellent introduction by Ana Gonçalves Magalhães in *Discours aux Tupiniquins: Périphéries et nouveaux mondes de l'art*, ed. Gonçalves Magalhães and Thierry Dufrené (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, expected 2015).
42. Mário Pedrosa, "The New MAM Will Consist of Five Museums," p. 173 in the present volume.
43. André Malraux, "Museum without Walls," in *The Voices of Silence* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 21. In 1958, around the time Malraux's ideas were gaining currency, Pedrosa had proposed to Oscar Niemeyer a museum of copies for Brasília, which would thus not compete with less precarious institutions while at once be able to present all of art's histories. See Mário Pedrosa, "Projeto para o museu de Brasília" (1958), reprinted in Pedrosa, *Política das artes*, pp. 287–94.
44. Mário Pedrosa, cited in Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes, "Mário Pedrosa, um capítulo brasileiro da teoria da abstração," in *Discurso*, no. 13 (1980): 132; Arantes dates the article to 1982, which suggests that there may have been a delay in the journal's actual date of publication.
45. Mário Pedrosa et al., *Museu de imagens do inconsciente* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Nacional de Arte, 1980).
46. Arantes, "Mário Pedrosa, um capítulo brasileiro da Teoria da Abstração," p. 133.
47. Pedrosa, "Forma e personalidade," pp. 96–97 (see note 10).
48. This contrasts in important ways with Restany's legacy. In 2001, Restany's dream for a living museum became a reality: the Palais de Tokyo, a contemporary art space in Paris, was established in large measure due to Restany's campaign efforts throughout the years. It follows that he was named

the venue's honorary president, while Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans served as its first directors. Bourriaud in particular claims Restany as his *père symbolique* (symbolic father) and dedicated his curatorial programming to the artists associated with his model of *esthétique relationnel* (relational aesthetics; posited as inheritors of Nouveau Réalisme), an art in which artists take contemporary consumer culture—from TV programs to corporate design, from restaurants to Hollywood film—as their field of operation.

49. Paulo Herkenhoff, curatorial statement for the exhibition *Pororoca: The Amazon at MAR*, Museu de Arte do Rio, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.museudeartedorio.org.br/en/exhibitions/previous?exp=1358>.

50. Museu de Arte do Rio education statement, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.museudeartedorio.org.br/en/education>.

51. See his “A Força Educadora da Arte,” reprinted in Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética*, pp. 61–62.

52. My use of the term *provincializing* is inspired by Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

53. *Brazil: Body and Soul* was the title of an exhibition of Brazilian art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 2001.

Radical and Inclusive: Mário Pedrosa's Modernism Adele Nelson

With the rise of scholarly interest in postwar Brazilian abstract art in recent decades has come a renewed interest internationally in Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa. Pedrosa was a key partisan for and interpreter of Brazilian artists' abstract turn. He is, thus, an essential interlocutor in historians' attempts to understand the shift from the dominance of social realism before World War II to the ascendancy of Concrete art, a stringent form of geometric abstraction, thereafter.¹ A committed Marxist political activist—who underwent multiple periods of imprisonment and political exile during the Estado Novo dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1937–45) and the military dictatorship that followed the overthrow of President João Goulart (1964–85)—Pedrosa brought to his analysis of postwar abstraction the belief that art must engage society.

Pedrosa's writing related to abstract art, including his 1949 thesis on Gestalt theory—a touchstone for Brazilian abstract artists—has recently received insightful study, as has the criticism of poet and critic Ferreira Gullar, Pedrosa's younger colleague in arms in defense of abstraction.² However, Pedrosa's account of modern art history has not sustained the scholarly focus it warrants.³ First articulated in writings of the late 1940s and early 1950s, Pedrosa realized a history of modernism on a grand scale in his previously unrecognized role in assembling the displays of European modernism for the second São Paulo Bienal (1953–54).⁴ For this undertaking, Pedrosa tailored dominant narratives of modern art circulating in Brazil and abroad to craft a history of modernism in sync with his observations of and hopes for emerging abstract art.

This component of his criticism was a central concern among Brazilian abstract artists who formed avant-garde artistic groups in the 1950s, including Grupo Ruptura, Grupo Frente, and the Neo-Concrete movement, as they delineated a genealogy within the history of modern art that validated their artistic projects. The groups, the first based in São Paulo and the latter two in Rio de Janeiro, shared an interest in the “constructive” European avant-garde (from de Stijl and Russian Constructivism in the 1910s and '20s to the Bauhaus and Concrete art in the interwar years). The attention to Constructivism, writ large, was graphically rendered in the 1959 Neo-Concrete manifesto, authored by Gullar, in which works by Josef Albers, Max Bill, Kazimir Malevich, and Antoine Pevsner are juxtaposed with those by Amilcar de Castro, Lygia

Clark, Lygia Pape, and Franz Weissmann in order to trumpet Brazilian artists' claim to the historical avant-garde, as well as their aim to supersede it.⁵ Pedrosa provided essential intellectual groundwork for the Neo-Concretist gambit and for historians' notion of a Brazilian Constructivist project, but the crux of his approach to modernism lay elsewhere.⁶ He refused to cede the mantle of socially engaged art to realism and criticized historical and contemporary expressionist practices, arguing that figures like Alexander Calder and Paul Klee, rather than Pablo Picasso, provided models for the creation of socially transformative art. Pedrosa also articulated a broad, inclusive conception of modernism wherein expression and creativity are not the sole domain of artists, but part of a larger cultural and, to Pedrosa's mind, spiritual inheritance shared by all.

History on the Page

Pedrosa published his first two books of art criticism and art history in 1949 and 1952. Titled *Arte, necessidade vital* (*The Vital Need for Art*) and *Panorama da pintura moderna* (*Panorama of Modern Painting*), respectively, the two volumes establish the essential if seemingly contradictory poles of the critic's thinking about modern art: namely the assertion of the universality of creativity and an evolutionary, European-centered understanding of the development of avant-garde art.⁷ Simultaneously trans-historical and teleological, Eurocentric and transnational, formalist and Marxist, Pedrosa proposed a redefinition of modernism that intertwines the significance of non-objective abstraction with the recognition of the art of outsiders.

Arte, necessidade vital is a collection of essays from 1933–48 that draws its title from his lecture in 1947 at an exhibition of art by mentally ill patients under the care of Nise da Silveira at the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional Pedro II in Rio de Janeiro.⁸ Often referred to by the neighborhood in which it is located, Engenho de Dentro, this facility is where artist Almir Mavignier helped establish an art studio in which local abstract artists and Pedrosa actively participated (see opposite).⁹ In the lecture, he stated that the dual origins of modern art in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries are widely understood to be the rejection of Renaissance illusionism and the awareness of so-called primitive art, and he dedicated his remarks to analyzing primitive art's significance for modernism. For Pedrosa, encountering the art of ancient and contemporary peoples of the Americas, Africa, and Oceania not only sparked formal innovation, but also a historical, geographical, and epistemological reorientation. He saw modern artists' recognition of what he described as a "resemblance" between the art of primitive, child, and untrained artists and the reconceptualization of the human mind as possessing an unconscious—thanks to the fields of psychoanalysis and psychology—as the foundation for a new understanding of creativity as inherent in all humans.¹⁰ For Pedrosa, this reorientation was part and parcel of understanding the origin and meaning of postwar abstraction. It also allowed emerging abstract artists to view their work as part of a longer, more inclusive history.

Pedrosa's *Panorama da pintura moderna*, part of the *Cadernos de cultura* (Culture notebooks) series of books commissioned from prominent Brazilian thinkers and dedicated to the arts, is recognized as a significant text in his oeuvre and in the historiography of Brazilian art. Nonetheless, the book has been little studied. The seeming conventionality of Pedrosa's text, both in its adoption of art historian Heinrich Wölfflin's notion of enduring stylistic binaries and in its similarity in content and approach to the accounts of modernism put forward by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., and others in the 1920s and '30s, has perhaps deterred a finer-grain analysis. In the book, Pedrosa proposes a teleological account of modern art in which



Raphael Domingues. *Untitled (Vase of plants with bananas)*. 1949. Ink on paper, 18 ¹¹/₁₆ × 12 ³/₈" (47.5 × 31.3 cm). Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente, Rio de Janeiro

Impressionism and Cubism beget a succession of artistic movements that can be distilled into two opposing trajectories, which Pedrosa describes as expressionist and constructive. According to the critic, past and present artists participating in the former privileged emotive color, while artists in the latter employed structured space in their respective challenges to naturalism. Within this evolutionary scenario, however, he makes a significant detour. His interest lies not in the direct descendants of the expressionist and constructive lines—the Picasso–Jackson Pollock lineage proffered in U.S. postwar criticism, for example, or the strict adherence to the ideas of Piet Mondrian on the part of interwar and postwar artists—but in the outliers. Among the historical figures he considers, Pedrosa singles out Klee for particular praise. He sees Klee’s allusions to the world, or “reminiscences of the real,” as the key to the artist’s protean work, an approach he contrasts to what he views as Mondrian’s doctrinaire and hyper-formal practice.¹¹

He also asserts that the most engaging new artists reinvented the constructive legacy of Mondrian, or “open again the door closed by the Dutch master,” by investigating time and light, thereby integrating the real into art in a non-illusionistic and, to his mind, socially engaged manner.¹²

Over the course of these texts and others in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Pedrosa interprets the genesis of modernism as a formal revolution accompanied by an equally crucial conceptual reorientation wherein art and creativity are viewed as “universal acquisitions” rather than the exclusive domain of artists.¹³ For Pedrosa, the emergence and significance of abstraction, which he views as the leading edge of modernism, cannot be separated from this larger epistemological shift in which “the enchanted world of forms” is accessible to all of humanity.¹⁴ Both of these paradigms required an expanded notion of art denuded of Renaissance illusionism and without the artist’s elevation above society. The critic thereby recasts a linear, European story centered on artists and intellectuals as a global one that insists on a larger conception of creativity.

History in Model

The São Paulo Bienal, which began in 1951, was, from its early years, a hybrid institution. Its leadership sought to provide Brazilian artists and the public with an “active contact” with international art, but also to perform the functions more commonly associated with museums, namely tracing a history of art.¹⁵ Never was this more the case than at the second Bienal, the most ambitious and historically significant of the exhibition’s early iterations, where the displays of historical modernism rivaled and often surpassed those at the postwar iterations of the Venice Biennale. For two months, from December 1953 to February 1954, representations from nations of the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East were augmented by presentations of important artists and movements in the history of European and U.S. modern art,

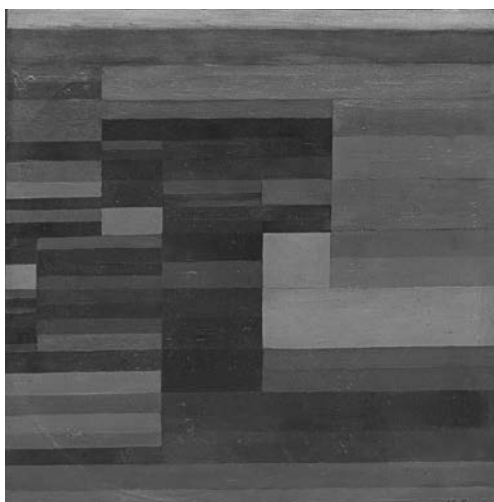


Installation view of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) in the Pavilion of Nations at the second São Paulo Bienal, 1953–54. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

as well as historical displays of Brazilian art. Seminal works of European modernism, including Picasso's *Still-Life with Chair Caning* (1912) and Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* (1913), as well as Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) and Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (1942–43), were displayed in exhibitions dedicated to Cubism, Futurism, and de Stijl, and retrospectives of Calder, Klee, Picasso, and Henry Moore. There was also a nucleus of monographic exhibitions dedicated to Symbolist artists and Expressionist precursors, including Edvard Munch and James Ensor.¹⁶

Pedrosa, who was based in Europe for nine months to coordinate the European contributions to the Bienal, was the figure largely responsible for this remarkable achievement.¹⁷ In his organizational efforts, he helped to assemble the exhibitions of avant-garde movements and artists with an eye to directing the emerging theory and practice of abstract art among Brazilian artists. For example, Pedrosa contributed to the organization of a large Picasso retrospective, which was independently commissioned and funded by the Bienal, but he also endeavored to counterbalance the foregrounding of Picasso.¹⁸ Specifically, he sought to elevate the assessment of Klee, and he envisioned the Bienal as an unprecedented opportunity for Brazilian and international audiences to view the artists' production in comparison to one another.

As Pedrosa articulated in an essay written in January 1953, shortly before he departed for Europe on behalf of the Bienal, he viewed Klee as a key figure in European modernism who defied categorization and whom he hoped to position for Brazilian artists as an essential point of departure.¹⁹ For Pedrosa, Klee's refusal to adhere to a single style and his use of references to reality even in seemingly abstract works were evidence of a "radical attitude" that "allowed all avenues to remain permanently open before him."²⁰ In other words, Pedrosa saw Klee as a bulwark against orthodoxy, evidence of which he saw locally and internationally in the Communist Party's adoption of social realism as its sanctioned aesthetic and in Max Bill and his followers' advocacy of Concrete art to the exclusion of other approaches. Implicit in Pedrosa's elevation of Klee was a challenge to the vision of modernism promoted locally by established artists Emiliano Di Cavalcanti and Candido Portinari, which valued expressionistic realism, derided non-objective abstraction, and viewed Picasso as



Paul Klee. *Fire in the Evening*, 1929. Oil on cardboard, 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (33.8 × 33.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Joachim Jean Aberbach Fund

he secured the participation of Klee's heirs and foundation by promising a "face-to-face" competition between Klee and Picasso, and to West Germany, where he persuaded government authorities by arguing, outlandishly, that their support of a Klee exhibition would be considered internationally as reparation for the Nazi closure of the Bauhaus and would be an opportunity for the "new Germany" to brandish its cultural and artistic openness.²³ The result was an exhibition composed of sixty-five paintings and works on paper spanning much of the artist's career, accompanied by a well-illustrated catalogue.²⁴

History on the Wall

While it is possible to reconstruct from the archival and documentary record Pedrosa's goal of foregrounding Klee as a model for young Brazilian artists at the second Bienal, the narratives of modern art ultimately constructed and proffered to visitors in São Paulo would also depend on the installation of the exhibitions by Pedrosa's colleague, critic Sérgio Milliet.²⁵ The biennial was held in two nearly identical buildings, the Pavilhão das Nações (Pavilion of Nations) and the Pavilhão dos Estados (Pavilion of States), in a new modernist complex of buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer for the yearlong celebration of the city of São Paulo's fourth centenary, in 1954.²⁶ The architect relegated the few permanent walls to the perimeter of each pavilion and thereby produced enormous, largely uniform halls supported by columns. The Bienal organizers used temporary walls and freestanding partitions to create distinct yet open spaces dedicated to each national representation or special exhibition. While the interior plan of Niemeyer's buildings enabled fluid transitions between works of different artists, historical moments, and nations, the Bienal organizers divided the exhibition between the two buildings in a manner that underscored national and regional identity. Works from European nations, along with the few from Middle Eastern and Asian nations, were displayed in the Pavilion of Nations, and those from countries of the Americas, including Brazil, as well as the architecture section, occupied the Pavilion of States.

The grand face-off between Picasso and Klee that Pedrosa had envisioned from Europe was not to be. Although the installation allowed for a viewing across

the paragon of socially conscious art. He also wanted to supplement the already burgeoning interest in Brazil in Mondrian—an artist to whom Pedrosa warmed considerably by the time of his departure for Europe—with an engagement with the more heterogeneous practice of Klee.²¹

Pedrosa's commitment to bringing a robust Klee exhibition to Brazil was such that he not only derailed the West German government's plans to send a special exhibition dedicated to Die Brücke, but also orchestrated the support for the Klee exhibition through a substantial amount of arm-twisting.²² He traveled to Switzerland, where



Installation view of the Paul Klee retrospective in the Pavilion of States at the second São Paulo Bienal, 1953–54. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

Installation view of the Alexander Calder retrospective in the Pavilion of Nations at the second São Paulo Bienal, 1953–54. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

time and place that was in keeping with aspects of Pedrosa’s thinking, and the didactic material surrounding the exhibition encouraged visitors to contemplate the distinctions between movements and artists, this differentiation was not focused on Picasso and Klee to the exclusion of consideration of Boccioni, Ensor, and many others. Furthermore, Picasso—and above all *Guernica*, despite Pedrosa’s efforts—was the unrivaled star attraction.²⁷ However, the contrast emphasized by the installation—that of the retrospective exhibitions of Picasso and Calder filling the sunken atriums of the two buildings—suited Pedrosa’s polemical aims just as well and he lobbied, unsuccessfully, for Calder to be awarded the event’s top prize.²⁸

In the weeks and months following the opening of the second Bienal, Pedrosa authored articles and gave interviews in which he downplayed his organizational role in the event, instead donning the hat of critic and agitator.²⁹ For example, he caused a controversy that resulted in his resignation as critic from a São Paulo newspaper when he spoke against the work of beloved Brazilian artists, including Portinari and Di Cavalcanti.³⁰ Furthermore, he reiterated and expanded on his division of modern art into the distinct trajectories of expressive and constructive. Pedrosa argued that artists who practiced the former, from Picasso to Abstract Expressionists, treated art as a catharsis, which he saw as egoistical and shortsighted, whereas constructive or geometric abstract artists sought to create works of “sufficient universality to give our times what they lack: spiritual cohesion.”³¹

In midst of throwing his lot in with geometric abstraction, Pedrosa retained the skepticism toward dogmatic art that defined his approach to modernism. It was, in fact, concerning Calder that Pedrosa first wrote in the 1940s in much the same terms as Klee, describing him as a model for young Brazilian artists due to his refusal to be defined by a single style and his creation of an abstraction that sustained a connection to the world.³² Pedrosa wrote that Calder's "abstraction with its more poetic than doctrinaire character, concrete in the experimental sense, is the fruit of an enduring enchantment with the world, of a perennial state of grace which is always awaiting the rehabilitation of all the sublime and radiant potentialities that are hiding in the universe."³³ One senses that it was in thinking about the work of artists like Calder and Klee and the patients of the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional that Pedrosa experienced what he theorized as the communal wellspring of creativity. For him, the act of making that universe palpable in a work of art was a far more noble, socially transformative, and modern undertaking than any social program espoused by a given artist.

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Notes

1. This question has been paramount in the art historical scholarship in and on Brazil since the 1970s. Foundational texts include Aracy A. Amaral, ed., *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950–1962)* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro; and São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo, 1977); Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: Vértice e ruptura do projeto construtivo brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1985); and Aracy A. Amaral, *Arte para quê? A preocupação social na arte brasileira, 1930–1970*, 3rd ed. (São Paulo: Studio Nobel, 2003), pp. 229–66.
2. See, for example, Irene V. Small, "Exit and Impasse: Ferreira Gullar and the 'New History' of the Last Avant-Garde," *Third Text* 26, no. 1 (January 2012): 91–101; and Sérgio B. Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil, 1949–1979* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 17–48.
3. Pedrosa scholar and philosopher Otilia Arantes is an exception, and her thoughtful analysis of Pedrosa's methodological approach and early writings has informed my thinking, as has historian Francisco Alambert's analysis of the role of Pedrosa's Marxism in his art criticism. See Otilia Arantes, "Apresentação," in Mário Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, *Modernidade cá e lá*, ed. Otilia Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 2000), pp. 11–23; Otilia Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), pp. 53–106; and Francisco Alambert, "1001 Words for Mário Pedrosa," *Art Journal* 64, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 85–86. For an interpretation of Pedrosa's approach to modernism focused on his writings of the late 1950s and 1960s, see Monica Amor, "Of Adversity We Live!" in Alexander Dumbadze and Suzanne Hudson, eds., *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 50–59.
4. Scholars have not previously studied Pedrosa's role at the second Bienal, though Francisco Alambert, Polyana Canhête, and Mari Carmen Ramírez describe Pedrosa as one of its organizers. His activities are documented in detail in archival holdings at the Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo (AHWS), as well as in the Acervo Mário Pedrosa, Divisão de Manuscritos, at the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, a collection of his personal papers that the Pedrosa family donated to the Biblioteca Nacional in 2001. See Francisco Alambert and Polyana Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo: Da era do museu à era dos curadores (1951–2001)* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2004), p. 58; and Mari Carmen Ramírez, "The Embodiment of Color—'From the Inside Out,'" in Ramírez, ed., *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color* (London: Tate, 2007), p. 71n51.
5. Ferreira Gullar et al., "Manifesto Neoconcreto," *Jornal do Brasil*, Sunday supplement, March 22, 1959, pp. 4–5.
6. The notion of a Brazilian Constructivist project was named and analyzed by Aracy A. Amaral and Ronaldo Brito in the 1970s. See Ronaldo Brito, "Neoconcretismo," *Malasartes* 3 (April–June 1976): 9–13; and Amaral, *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950–1962)*.
7. Mário Pedrosa, *Arte, necessidade vital* (Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1949); Mário Pedrosa, *Panorama da pintura moderna* (Rio de Janeiro: Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1952). The latter is reprinted in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, pp. 137–75 (see note 3); Mário Pedrosa, *Arte: Ensaios*, ed. Lorenzo Mammi (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2015), pp. 178–216.
8. See Mário Pedrosa, "The Vital Need for Art," pp. 103–12 in the present volume.
9. On the Engenho de Dentro art studio, see Gláucia Villas Bôas, "A estética da conversão: O ateliê do Engenho de Dentro e a arte concreta carioca (1946–1951)," *Tempo social: Revista de sociologia da USP* 20,

- no. 2 (November 2008): 197–219; Heloisa Espada and Rodrigo Naves, *Raphael e Emygdio: Dois modernos no Engenho de Dentro* (Rio de Janeiro: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2012).
10. Pedrosa, “The Vital Need for Art.”
 11. Pedrosa, *Panorama da pintura moderna*, pp. 46–47.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 47.
 13. Pedrosa, “The Vital Need for Art,” p. 105.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 111.
 15. The phrase “active contact,” which is alternatively translated as “living contact,” derives from a much-referenced statement by Lourival Gomes Machado, the artistic director of the first Bienal. Lourival Gomes Machado, “Introdução,” in *I Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1951), p. 14.
 16. See *II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo: Catálogo geral* (São Paulo: Edições Americanas de Arte e Arquitetura, 1953).
 17. Pedrosa departed Brazil on March 17, 1953 and was in Europe from about March 20 until sometime before December 14. Letter from [Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho] to Paulo Carneiro, March 10, 1953, Folder 3.5.2, Acervo Pedrosa, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; box 2/26, folder 4, Documentos históricos: II Bienal, AHWS; “Mário Pedrosa na Europa,” *Boletim do Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro*, no. 6 (March–April 1953): 6; “Instalado o juri da II Bienal,” *Folha da manhã*, December 15, 1953, Assuntos gerais section, p. 5.
 18. The Picasso exhibition, organized by French art critic Maurice Jardot, was composed of fifty-one paintings from European and U.S. private and public collections. It surveyed the major stages of Picasso’s work from 1907 through the early 1950s, and was accompanied by a Portuguese-language catalogue. Maurice Jardot, *Exposição Picasso: II Bienal do Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo* (Paris: André Tournon et Cie.; and São Paulo: Comissão do Quarto Centenário de São Paulo, [1953]).
 19. Mário Pedrosa, “Klee, o ponto de partida” (1953), in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, pp. 189–92 (see note 3).
 20. *Ibid.*, p. 192. Here and in his 1961 text “Klee e a atualidade,” Pedrosa relates Klee’s approach to Edmund Husserl and phenomenology. See “Klee and the Present,” pp. 310–11 in the present volume.
 21. Mário Pedrosa, “Mondrian e a natureza,” *Tribuna da imprensa*, March 14–15, 1953, p. 4. The essay is reprinted in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, pp. 193–96 (see note 3). The text was written from Europe and published in the Rio newspaper *Tribuna da imprensa* in May 1953. See also “Foundations of Abstract Art,” pp. 187–91 in the present volume.
 22. On West German plans for the second Bienal, see letter from Wolfgang Krauel to Ruy Bloem, October 3, 1952, box 2/01, folder 2, Documentos históricos: II Bienal de São Paulo, AHWS.
 23. Letter from Mário Pedrosa to Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, June 1, 1953, folder 3.5.1, Acervo Pedrosa, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; partial copy in box 2/06, folder 11, Documentos históricos: II Bienal de São Paulo, AHWS; letter from Mário Pedrosa to Arturo Profili, July 8, 1953, Folder 3.5.1, Acervo Pedrosa, Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro; box 2/25, folder 5, Documentos históricos: II Bienal de São Paulo, AHWS. Pedrosa repeated this explanation of his tactic with the West German government in an interview. J. C. Ribeiro Penna, “A batalha secreta do grande prêmio da II Bienal,” *Folha da noite*, December 17, 1953, p. 5.
 24. *Paul Klee, 1879–1940* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1953). It, along with the Picasso catalogue (see note 18), were the first Portuguese-language monographs on each artist.
 25. Milliet was likely assisted by Wolfgang Pfeiffer and Arturo Profili. To the best of my knowledge there is no documentation at the Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo (AHWS) detailing the installation process; however, a photograph in a local newspaper shows Milliet and Pfeiffer working on the installation, and the installation design fell logically within their titles of artistic and technical directors, respectively, of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo. One press report cast Pfeiffer as having been in charge of the installation, and Pedrosa retrospectively noted Pfeiffer’s important work under Milliet on the Bienal. Other press accounts saw Profili, the secretary general of the Bienal, as in charge of the installation. Antônio Bento, “As artes: Notas diversas,” *Diário carioca*, October 30, 1953, p. 6; “II Bienal de São Paulo: A maior exposição internacional do continente,” *Correio da manhã*, December 5, 1953, p. 12; “Amanhã, em S. Paulo: Calder, Picasso e Moore, na Bienal,” *Tribuna da imprensa*, December 11, 1953, p. 2; and Mário Pedrosa, “Depoimento sobre o MAM” (1963), in Mário Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 1, *Política das artes*, ed. Otília Arantes (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995), p. 300.
 26. The complex, in São Paulo’s Ibirapuera Park, still stands, and Pavilhão Ciccillo Matarazzo (Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion), originally called the Pavilhão das Indústrias (Pavilion of Industries), has housed the Bienal since 1957. On the Ibirapuera Park design, see Adele Nelson, “Monumental and Ephemeral: The Early São Paulo Bienals,” in Mary Kate O’Hare, ed., *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s–50s* (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 2010), pp. 127–28, 139n3–5.
 27. On *Guernica*’s reception in Brazil, see Francisco Alambert, “El Goya vengador en el Tercer Mundo: Picasso y el Guernica en Brasil,” in Andrea Giunta, ed., *El Guernica de Picasso: El Poder de la representación* (Buenos Aires: Biblos, 2009), pp. 57–77.
 28. Henri Laurens won the top prize; Picasso, Klee, and other subjects of special historical exhibitions were ineligible. On Pedrosa’s lobbying for Calder, see Penna, “A batalha secreta do grande prêmio da II Bienal”; Flávio de Aquino, “Na II Bienal de São Paulo: O grande juri premiou os favoritos,” *Manchete*, no. 90 (January 9, 1954): 31–32; Mário Pedrosa, “Calder e Brasília,” *Jornal do Brasil*, March 9, 1960, in Roberta Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil: The Tale of a Friendship*, trans. Juliet Attwater (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2006), p. 222; Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil*, p. 170.
 29. Alambert and Canhête have noted that Pedrosa occluded his role in retrospective accounts. Alambert and Canhête, *As Bienais de São Paulo*, p. 58 (see note 4).
 30. For an account and analysis of the controversy, see Mário Pedrosa, “Dentro e fora da Bienal”

- (1954), in Pedrosa, *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*, ed. Aracy A. Amaral (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), pp. 47–54; and Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico*, pp. 16–17.
31. Pedrosa, quoted in Jayme Maurício, “Picasso e Klee realizaram a catarse de sensibilidade moderna,” *Correio da manhã*, December 20, 1953, p. 15.
32. See, for example, Mário Pedrosa, “Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Alexander Calder,” pp. 253–62 in the present volume. See also “Calder, escultor de cata-ventos” (1944) and “A Máquina, Calder, Léger e outros” (1948) in Pedrosa, *Textos escolhidos*, vol. 4, pp. 51–66, 81–90. For translations, see Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil*, pp. 37–51, 136–43.
33. Pedrosa, “Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Alexander Calder,” trans. in Saraiva, *Calder in Brazil*, p. 134, with slight modifications.

Naturally Modern: Mário Pedrosa and Architectural Criticism

Lauro Cavalcanti

By the time Mário Pedrosa wrote his essays about architecture in the 1950s, modern architecture in Brazil had acquired a specific local accent as well as international recognition. Pedrosa felt that the most powerful manifestation of Brazilian modernity came from architects, and he examined their output in the columns he wrote for the *Jornal do Brasil*, the periodical with the largest circulation in the country. Believing that radical new approaches to building design demanded a critical gaze beyond the traditional focus of art historians, Pedrosa proposed a formal judgment that would consider aesthetic and technical aspects as well as the perception of space and the way one moved through a building. In a 1953 article titled “A arquitetura moderna no Brasil” (“Modern Architecture in Brazil”), he wrote: “The young architects were the revolutionaries; and the revolution that they undertook was their own, in the name of explicit social and aesthetic ideals.”¹

Brazil’s continental size, the vastness of its jungle, its seemingly endless coastline, and the Portuguese language all serve to make the country unique in comparison to its neighbors. For Pedrosa, Brazil was “condemned to be modern.”² The absence of a developed pre-Columbian civilization meant the country had to move forward on the course of its own making. Indeed, Pedrosa noted that both indigenous peoples as well as Afro-Brazilians, “in spite of the slavery to which [they were] subjected, worked in the same sense as the Portuguese, that is, to conquer the wild country, to tame virgin nature.”³ Brazil was a nation whose still virgin soil inspired a significant spatial renewal.

Becoming Modern

The generation of young architects from Rio—including Lúcio Costa, Affonso Reidy, MMM Roberto, Sergio Bernardes, and Jorge Moreira—whom Pedrosa referred to as “revolutionaries,” succeeded in reversing a disheartening situation: in turn-of-the-century Brazil, an eclectic style—which favored decorative elements in profusion and heavy paneling evocative of European styles past—prevailed in public works and in homes of the elite. During the 1920s, work by architects from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo continued to look to the past, only now, informed by nationalist passions, it was the Brazilian colonial period they imitated. The buildings were characterized by tile roofs, verandas, granite embellishments, whitewashed walls, and high ceilings. Calling themselves “neocolonialists,” these architects succeeded in moving the federal government to such a degree that, as of 1922, officials made the style mandatory for buildings that would represent Brazil at international events.

Costa had been one of the most promising neocolonial architects, but after reading Le Corbusier's modern architecture manifesto *Vers une architecture (Toward an Architecture)*,⁴ he changed his thinking. As Costa has said, he subscribed to Corbusier's ideas "with the faith of a believer, for only they gathered arguments with regard to three facts that he considered to be essential: the technical, the artistic and the social."⁵

By the mid-1930s, modern Brazilian architecture had established itself, on a large scale, by means of state directives. President Getúlio Vargas—who governed the country for two terms, one as a dictator (1930–45) and one as its democratically elected leader (1951–54)—wanted his administration to make its mark on the capital of Rio de Janeiro. He promoted the construction of ministerial headquarters, administrative buildings, and new avenues that changed the face of the city.

One of the apparent paradoxes between politics and aesthetics that took place during the beginning of the Estado Novo—a period that began in 1937 with a coup d'état, and was characterized by the centralization of power, nationalism, populism, anti-communism, and press censorship—was that, even as a highly restrictive dictatorship was being established, the architecture was plural, with "academic," "neocolonial," and "modern" currents vying for the state construction market.⁶

Individual ministers had a lot of influence over the design of their headquarters, based on their ideological inclinations and the image of the ministry that they wanted to project. For Gustavo Capanema, head of the Ministério da Educação e Saúde (Ministry of Education and Health), the aim was "to elevate the level of the masses by developing high culture within the country: its art, its music, its letters."⁷ Capanema was a liberal politician who maintained amicable relations with young academics, and whose chief of staff was Carlos Drummond de Andrade, one of Brazil's most beloved and important poets.⁸

A contest was held for the design of the ministry; it was judged by a jury composed mostly of graduates of the conservative Escola de Belas Artes (School of fine arts) in Rio de Janeiro. They chose a project that fused elements of classical architecture with native motifs, imagining a new, fictitious style that the Greeks might have created in the Amazon during antiquity. Drummond, horrified by a style that seemed to emanate from a fanciful and not very inspired Hollywood musical, convinced Capanema to pay the winner his prize and then declare the contest null and void.

Capanema, still acting under Drummond's counsel, invited Costa to design the project; Costa put together a group made up of Carlos Leão, Jorge Machado Moreira, Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, and Ernani Vasconcelos. Unhappy with the architectural quality of a building that should have been impeccable given that the new mode of construction would come under general scrutiny, Costa managed to get Le Corbusier invited by the federal government to come to Brazil in 1936, as a consultant. The Franco-Swiss architect spurred on the team to design a classic of world architecture, the first on a grand scale, with a curtain wall, *pilotis*, free-standing structure, free plans, and a garden-terrace. Beyond ratifying Costa's outstanding work, its construction also introduced Niemeyer, author of the final design, as well as the landscape work of Roberto Burle Marx. Here was proof that modern architecture could be accomplished on a monumental scale and also adapted for climates outside temperate European zones.

Positive reaction from the international scene was immediate. On the occasion of the exhibition *Brazil Builds: Architecture Old and New, 1652–1942*, which opened at The Museum of Modern Art in January 1943, the ministry building merited special mention in the *New York Times* with a photo caption deeming it "the most advanced



View of the exhibition *Brazil Builds: Architecture Old and New, 1652–1942* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. 1943. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photography Archive

architectural structure in the world.”⁹ For Pedrosa, the Brazilian group’s cooperation with Le Corbusier led “the modern architecture of Brazil to be made on a monumental scale, and it emerged fully mature virtually from one day to the next.”¹⁰

Form Is a Function

Pedrosa did not fail to notice the Brazilian contribution to downplaying the prosaic style of an exacerbated rational-functionalism that, for him, was justified only initially as a way of combatting decorative excesses. As positive elements of this new emphasis, he pointed to the articulation between interior and exterior spaces and the formal freedom engendered by the curves of a project like the Pampulha complex, a group of buildings that surround the artificial Pampulha lake in Belo Horizonte, designed by Niemeyer.¹¹ Of the project, Pedrosa wrote, “Access to the work of art-architecture is relatively recent. And Brazilians—were we not men of the southern tropics bathed by the soft waters of the South Atlantic—were the first to send the functional diet to blazes. Since then, our terrible, our great Oscar Niemeyer cut loose. Thank God.”¹²

Max Bill, the influential Swiss architect and designer, was one of the few detractors when it came to the design of the Ministry of Education and Health. In 1953, on the occasion of his visit to the second São Paulo Bienal, he declared that he did not like the building. He explained in an interview with the weekly news magazine *Manchete* that Brazilian architecture, especially that of Oscar Niemeyer, was losing itself in an excess of creative individualism.¹³ The Brazilian architecture scene was caught unawares by Bill’s criticism. It should not have been so surprising, however, for Bill considered Walter Gropius to be the most important modern architect, “given that everything in architecture must have its logic, its immediate function”; those among Le Corbusier’s disciples who steeped themselves in formal freedoms also merited Bill’s rejection, for they “suffered slightly of this love for the useless.”

Bill conceded that his criticism of Brazilian architecture was made “because it supplies me material for such, which is to say that it is important.” In considering the Brazilian group’s joint project with Le Corbusier, he said: “As for the Ministry of Education building, it did not please me at all. It is lacking in sense and human



Oscar Niemeyer. Saint Francis of Assisi Church, Pampulha, Belo Horizonte. 1940–43. Photograph by Marcel Gautherot, c. 1945. Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

Affonso Eduardo Reidy. Pedregulho residential housing complex. 1947–52. View of the school with housing in the background, 1972



proportion; pedestrians feel crushed before that huge mass. Nor do I agree with the expedient adopted in the project, which chose to condemn the internal patio by constructing the building upon pilotis.” Amazingly, at another point in the interview, Bill admits that his assessments were based on his reading about the building, without having ever entered the ministry: “I know only the external decoration: Portinari’s azulejo tiles, the statue of youth and the gardens . . . although I know almost everything that has hitherto been published abroad about Brazilian architecture.”

Costa’s response saw a certain frivolousness in Bill’s hurried opinions: “Max Bill’s reactions—or, rather, his prejudices, for he already had them when he arrived—are typical of [his] guarded state of mind.”¹⁴ He is surprised by the opinion that a building which is elevated upon columns in order to make room for a public garden at ground level could be perceived as “crushing for pedestrians.”¹⁵

Bill did demonstrate enthusiasm for Affonso Reidy’s Pedregulho complex on the outskirts of Rio—a monumental residential complex with health services and sport and education facilities for the masses. For him, in contrast with the Pampulha buildings, the use of the curve form in the Pedregulho not only conformed to the topography but also served a social purpose. Pedrosa made the same comparison: “Pampulha could only be the fruit of the dictatorship, whereas the Pedregulho is the work of an already democratic age.”¹⁶

Costa agreed with the enthusiasm of both with regard to Reidy’s architectural complex but disagreed with doing so to the detriment of Niemeyer’s accomplishment in Belo Horizonte: “Without Pampulha, Brazilian architecture with its current features—the Pedregulho included—would not exist.”¹⁷ He also found it simplistic to



Roberto Burle Marx. Aerial view of Parque do Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, 1965. Núcleo de Pesquisa da Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro

judge architectural projects by their programs rather than by the way the architects approached a specific brief, regardless of whether it was destined for the bourgeoisie or workers.

Pedrosa's analysis was somewhere between Bill's harsher assessment and Costa's defense. Like the latter, Niemeyer's language stimulated him, although, like the Swiss artist, he saw in the "experimental gratuitousness of the Pampulha buildings" the danger that "his occasionally excessive brio stimulates a certain frivolity in the new buildings."¹⁸ In Pedrosa's opinion, the separation of political engagement from professional exercise gave way to a frivolous posture in Niemeyer's architecture.¹⁹ He needed the architect's Stalinist leanings, a forgery of Lenin's and Trotsky's true communism. For the critic, any separation of architecture from social causes would lead to work that was as empty as the decorative pastiche of earlier designs. It was, Pedrosa believed, essential to reintroduce ethics in aesthetics.

Pedrosa enthusiastically greeted the article that Oscar Niemeyer published in 1958, when the building of Brasília was in full swing.²⁰ In it the architect allows that much of his own work during the 1950s, especially that designed for real estate development within an urban context, was devoid of public or social purpose. He admits he accepted more commissions than he should have, and proposes to adopt more selective criteria in choosing his future projects. Pedrosa celebrated this embrace of balance between the social and the professional, foreseeing an abandoning of superfluous elements and a return to an absolute fusion between malleable and structural form.

Construction of a Modern Tropical Landscape

The embrace of modernist surroundings in Brazil extended to include outdoor space as well. The best-known practitioner of modern landscapes in the country was undoubtedly Roberto Burle Marx, who belonged to a generation that sought to build a contemporary culture that would embrace local sensibilities. Previously, specimens of imported plants had prevailed in the gardens of bourgeois homes among hedges sculpted in geometric shapes. The use of local plants had been unthinkable, even though those that came from temperate climates proved vulnerable to the heat and humidity of Brazil. Burle Marx broke away from French topiary designs and abolished exogenous species. Pedrosa noted that the designer's other artistic pursuits informed this work, writing in 1958 that "one cannot write the history of modern architecture in our country without reserving a place of prominence on the team of architecture's great names for this painter Roberto Burle Marx."²¹ The dominion of

space allowed him to establish a dialogue of forms, spaces, and volumes, shaping a formal, modern landscape aesthetic.

Nothing in Brazil's origins pointed to the fact that the country would embrace modern landscaping to such an extent. Pedrosa noted that neither the indigenous Brazilians nor the Portuguese left a good legacy with their lush tropical surroundings: "The Indian treated it with utter casualness and fire and, when he craved fruit, he simply felled the tree. Along with fire, the Portuguese used the axe and not infrequently preferred the naked, ungreened, walled ground around his house, to nip any exaggerated intimacy with the forest right in the bud."²²

To Italian architect and curator Bruno Zevi, the vegetation arranged by Burle Marx in irregular curves functioned as an organic "correction" to the hard orthogonality of Corbusier-inspired rationalist buildings.²³ The exaggeratedly sinuous course of rivers and estuaries had impressed Le Corbusier when he flew over the South American continent. In his book *Précisions sur un état présent de l'architecture et de l'urbanisme* (*Precisions on the Present State of Architecture and Urban Planning*), he tells about the need to overcome this slow natural order in favor of a rational, straight, fast, and pure one, of which he would be the emissary.²⁴ For the Ministry of Education headquarters, Le Corbusier had foreseen a row of palm trees on the ground floor, and narrow, rectilinear flowerbeds along the perimeter of the garden terrace. In the definitive version (and under the guidance of Costa), Burle Marx arranged native specimens in vast swaths of different shades of green, red, and yellow that recall an informal abstractionism.

In Burle Marx's drawings of gardens, the gaze may linger over the colored stains of vegetation or privilege the sinuous passages between them. If we focus on the paths, the impression we are afforded is that of a liquid that has run and, contained by obstacles, encountered a tortuous trajectory. According to Pedrosa, these spaces played the role of connecting building interiors with the open spaces of the South American terra: "In the lushness of their plants and the vigor of their colors, Burle Marx's gardens are also a piece of nature."²⁵

Brasília: From Gesture to Execution

Great controversy accompanied the decision to build a new capital in Brasília, more than six hundred miles (one thousand kilometers) from Rio de Janeiro. Though the desire had been expressed in the Brazilian Constitution since the nineteenth century, it did not seem a likely prospect until President Juscelino Kubitschek (1956–61) gave it his full support. Even more ambitious, Juscelino wanted it to be built in three years. Oscar Niemeyer was the lead architect on the project, designing all of the public buildings, with the urban planning to be decided by competition, which was won by Costa. From 1957 to 1960 Pedrosa followed the building of the new capital in weekly essays for the *Jornal do Brasil*. He pointed out the risk that distance and isolation from the rest of Brazil might transform the new seat of the government into a "bunker impermeable to external noises, to conflicting opinions, like a general staff that takes shelter in armored subterranean shelters."²⁶

The existence of two distinct Brasília's was very clear to the critic: there was the capital of Kubitschek, which Pedrosa considered to be the whim of a ruler; and the one outlined by Costa, a revolutionary gesture that transcended urban planning. Costa's vision launched a hypothesis for reconstructing the country and an opportunity to create "the finest standard of twentieth-century culture, civilization, and art"; he saw in Costa's proposal "a utopia, that is, a clear, perfect idea—here is an event that transforms everything."²⁷



View of the roof of the National Congress on the inauguration of Brasília. April 21, 1960. Photograph by Thomaz Farkas. Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

The plan of the new capital would take a cruciform shape, with one of the axes curved in order to adapt itself to the topography. The official buildings were to be located along the principal axis, while the other axis would house the residential sector. At the intersection of both was the heart of the city, with its commercial and entertainment facilities. The design of Brasília's palaces achieved a spectacular composition through the boldness and simplification of forms. Niemeyer created national monuments and symbols that were easy to assimilate: the columns of the Alvorada and Planalto palaces became signs of the state, of the country, and of the very desire of Brazilian modernity.

As the urban element that would substantiate the chaos of the present, streets with sidewalks were replaced by tracks, roads, promenades, axes, etc. Thus the figure of the pedestrian vanished from the city and automotive vehicles circulate, supreme, throughout the highway arteries.

The residential sector sought to create new habits of collective association. Residential buildings were to bring together people from various social strata. Blocks of apartments were surrounded by lawns, making up superblock squares containing businesses, services, and clubs. It was hoped that mixed-use spaces, such as plazas, gardens, playgrounds, schools, and convenience stores, might help to create community bonds that would supplant social differences.

Brasília was the great strategic priority of Kubitschek's administration. Pedrosa foresaw the risk that the new capital might become simply an instrument of personal affirmation: "We know that, in fact, for JK [Juscelino Kubitschek] it is a matter of making a new Pampulha, that is, a beautiful albeit proud and mayoral building in which several walls may be reserved to his own figure in various poses and attitudes."²⁸ He worried that, in the eagerness of fulfilling its goal of transferring the capital, the government would do so without the necessary care and rigor, giving birth to a monstrosity and "forever ruining the wonderful opportunity to build a new capital."²⁹

In September 1959, eight months before the inauguration of the new capital, Pedrosa organized the International Congress of Art Critics to debate the subject of cities as syntheses of the arts, using Brasília as a case study. Roughly fifty of the most renowned critics flew from their countries to the future capital to visit the construction sites and discuss their impressions.³⁰ President Kubitschek greeted them at the opening ceremony. Assessments of the new city were mostly positive—some enthusiastically so—though there were a few that were frankly unfavorable.³¹

Two of the most important modernist architects of the time, Austrian-American Richard Neutra and Finnish-American Eero Saarinen, felt the project could have a broad impact on architecture internationally. Neutra emphasized the fact that “Brasília shall become famous for attempting to find a way back to that which is biologically tolerable.”³² For Saarinen, the Brazilian capital inaugurated a new era “for all of Western civilization, which really hasn’t built any city in the twentieth century.” Frederick John Kiesler, an art and architecture critic who in 1957 was included in a list of the fifteen most influential people of the mid-twentieth century drawn up by The Museum of Modern Art, was less enthusiastic. He thought it wrong that Brazilians were applying European high technology to “a fantastic and beautiful desert land, when it is simplicity—the extreme simplicity of living and man’s truly basic needs—that should be the primary constructive factor of your city.”³³

The most radical criticism, however, came from Bruno Zevi, an uncompromising critic. Zevi did not appreciate Niemeyer’s architecture and, much less, Costa’s plan. For him, the forms of the palaces were arbitrary and gratuitous, the residential buildings insipid, and the overall monumentality excessive. He pointed out the lack of adaptation between the urban design and the lives of the residents.³⁴ With ironic elegance, in an essay titled “Crítica alienígena e arquitetura brasileira” (“Foreign Criticism and Brazilian Architecture”), Pedrosa points out Zevi’s ethnocentrism that demanded of Brasília the fusion between city and culture of the ancient Italian cities.³⁵ He argues that this would come only with the passage of time, and that Costa’s plan was coherent with the vastness of the Brazilian landscape and the tradition of starting over from scratch. With regard to the adoption of simplicity suggested by Kiesler, Pedrosa retorted: “Order is so rare in Brazil that even rigor and simplicity are made from learned lessons; hence their primary warmth, all grace and lightness.” He continued, now with Zevi as his target: “But this is not the simplicity that pleases foreign critics: they want it (if they want it at all) as a result of complexity itself. . . . However, a self-satisfied, deeply rooted, accumulation of exhausted knowledge persists in them. The levels at which they judge and create are other and do not coincide with our own.”³⁶

With Brasília fully functioning, the early community-minded principles soon disappeared as private property dwellings went on to obey market logic. Questioned about how much reality differed from his plan, Costa answered that what most surprised him was how similar it was to it. Niemeyer, on the other hand, spent the better part of three years on the construction site, and recorded his frustration: “Everything has changed now, and we feel that vanity and selfishness are present here and that we ourselves are slowly returning to the habits and prejudices of the bourgeoisie we so detest.”³⁷

These developments seemed to reinforce the difficulty of changing society through architecture and urban planning. We could invert the thesis of Anatole Kopp’s book *Quand le moderne n’était pas un style mais une cause* (When modernism wasn’t a style but a cause) by saying that, in Brazil, when modernism was a cause, it possessed an aesthetic radicalness that allowed for the establishment of such a significant style.³⁸

“The past is not irrevocable for we remake it every day,” Pedrosa recalled.³⁹ Once it was obvious that the future had not arrived by means of architecture, the critic set his sights and energies upon a vibrant new generation of visual artists from Rio who used free and dynamic movement, including the observer himself. In the Neo-Concretists—Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Amilcar de Castro, and Franz Weissmann, among others—he found that which he had sought in architecture: a transformative language, the opposite of space, and a total integration of the arts.

One may apply to Mário Pedrosa what he himself ascribed to Brazil: “It is *natural* for us to be *modern*, even without wanting to be.”⁴⁰

Notes

1. Mário Pedrosa, “Modern Architecture in Brazil,” p. 340 in the present volume.
2. Mário Pedrosa, “Reflections on the New Capital,” p. 347 in the present volume.
3. “Espaço e Arquitetura,” *Jornal do Brasil*, October 4, 1952. Reprinted in Aracy Amaral, ed., *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981).
4. Le Corbusier, *Vers une architecture* (Paris: Plon, 1923).
5. Lúcio Costa, interview with the author, Rio de Janeiro, 1989.
6. Pedrosa, himself a militant communist, was arrested in both 1932 and 1937. He went into exile in France from 1937 to 1938 and in the early 1940s lived in the United States, returning to Brazil in 1945.
7. Letter from Gustavo Capanema to Getúlio Vargas, June 14, 1937, Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação/Fundação Getúlio Vargas. Reprinted in my book *Moderno e Brasileiro: A história de uma nova linguagem na arquitetura (1930–60)* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2006), p. 33.
8. For a good introduction to Drummond’s work, see *Antologia poética* (1962; São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2012).
9. *New York Times*, January 13, 1943.
10. Mário Pedrosa, “Introdução à arquitetura brasileira I,” in *Mário Pedrosa: Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*, ed. Aracy Amaral (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), p. 327.
11. Inaugurated in 1943, the Pampulha architectural complex is made up of a group of buildings, notably the Igreja de São Francisco de Assis (Church of Saint Francis of Assisi), with paintings by Candido Portinari and landscaping by Roberto Burle Marx; the Museu de Arte da Pampulha; Casa do Baile (Ballroom); and the Iate Tênis Clube (Yacht Tennis Club).
12. Mário Pedrosa, “Architecture and Art Criticism I,” p. 355 in the present volume.
13. Flávio d’Aquino, “Max Bill critica a nossa moderna arquitetura,” *Manchete*, no. 60 (June 13, 1953): 38–39. All quotes in this and the following paragraph are from this interview.
14. Lúcio Costa, “Desencontro,” in *Registro de uma Vivência* (São Paulo: Empresa das Artes, 1995).
15. *Ibid.*
16. Pedrosa, “Modern Architecture in Brazil,” p. 341.
17. Costa, “Desencontro.”
18. Pedrosa, “Modern Architecture in Brazil,” p. 341.
19. See Pedrosa, “Architecture and Art Criticism I.”
20. Oscar Niemeyer, “Depoimento,” *Módulo*, no. 9 (February 1958).
21. Pedrosa, “Introdução à arquitetura brasileira I,” p. 281.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Bruno Zevi, “O arquiteto no jardim,” in *Burle Marx: Homenagem à natureza* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1979), p. 42.
24. Le Corbusier, *Précisions sur un état présent de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme* (Paris: G. Crès & Cie., 1930).
25. Mário Pedrosa, “Burle Marx, the Landscape Architect” p. 361 in the present volume.
26. Pedrosa, “Reflections on the New Capital,” p. 348.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*
30. To cite but a few, from France there was Charlotte Perriand, Jean Prouvé, André Bloc, André Chastel, André Wogensky, and Françoise Choay; from the United States, Richard Neutra, Eero Saarinen, and Stamo Papadaki; from Italy, Gillo Dorfles and Bruno Zevi; from Argentina, Amancio Williams and Tomás Maldonado, the latter representing Germany as director of the School of Ulm; from Britain, William Holford.
31. See Mário Pedrosa, “Lessons from the International Congress of Critics,” pp. 364–74 in the present volume.
32. Pedrosa, quoting Richard Neutra, in *ibid.*
33. Pedrosa, quoting Frederick John Kiesler, in *ibid.*
34. Bruno Zevi, “Architettura in nuce: Una Definizione di architettura,” trans. José Manuel Pedreirinho (1960; São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 1986).
35. Mário Pedrosa, “Crítica alienígena e arquitetura brasileira,” *Correio do Povo*, July 24, 1960.
36. *Ibid.*
37. Oscar Niemeyer, *Minha experiência em Brasília* (Rio de Janeiro: Editorial Vitória 1961), p. 64.
38. Anatole Kopp, *Quand le moderne n’était pas un style mais une cause* (Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1988).
39. Mário Pedrosa, “Brasília, a cidade nova,” *Jornal do Brasil*, September 19, 1959.
40. Pedrosa, “Crítica alienígena e arquitetura brasileira.”

A Revolution of Sensitivity Catherine Bompuis

The only revolution is the revolution of sensitivity. That is the great revolution, far-reaching and permanent, but neither the politicians, even the most radical of them, nor the state bureaucrats are going to bring it about.

—Mário Pedrosa, “Arte e Revolução” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 16, 1957

To dissociate Mário Pedrosa’s political activity from his engagement with art would be to misunderstand the intellectual principles that guided his life, as if the artistic innovations of the postwar period did not allow for a mixture of these two spheres. Pedrosa never abandoned his project of diminishing “the enormous distance between things resolved at a mental level and the moral level of action.”¹ The letters he sent in the 1920s to his friend Lívio Xavier, later published in José Castilho Marques Neto’s *Solidão revolucionária: Mário Pedrosa e as origens do Trotskismo no Brasil* (Revolutionary solitude: Mário Pedrosa and the origins of Trotskyism in Brazil), offer further insight into the guiding principles of much of Pedrosa’s thought.²

Pedrosa was a Communist, Trotskyist, and ultimately a socialist. His periods of exile in Paris, Berlin, New York, and Santiago gave him the opportunity to dissect world events and develop a valuable analysis of twentieth-century history. Luciano Martins, a teacher and a friend of Pedrosa, believed that Pedrosa was the figure who most accurately expressed Marxism in Brazil. Pedrosa was always opposed to any kind of revolutionary dogmatism, yet he never departed from the teachings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Martins believed that this intellectual commitment led both to personal crises and to violent conceptual revisions, as Pedrosa sought to “make utopia a way of life.”³

The purpose of this essay is not to retrace Pedrosa’s political career but to understand his intellectual commitment in both art and politics. His thoughts and actions in the service of the revolution and in the name of an ideal evolved throughout his life and became an integral part of his character. Sensitivity thus became the necessary condition for revolutionizing a vision of how the world should be.

Pedrosa’s criticism appeared in a number of newspapers and brought the subject of art to a large audience, reaching beyond the insular circle to which it had been historically restricted. From 1943 to 1951 he wrote for the Rio newspaper *Correio da manhã*, to which he introduced a visual arts column in 1946. He also started a visual arts column in 1957 for the *Jornal do Brasil*’s famous Caderno B section, which became the mouthpiece of various avant-garde movements. Critic and art historian Aracy Amaral was the first to collect Pedrosa’s writings on art from these daily newspapers in her volumes *Mário Pedrosa: Mundo, homem, arte em crise* (Mário Pedrosa: World, man, art in crisis) in 1975, and *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília: Coletânea de textos de Mário Pedrosa* (From Portinari’s murals to Brasília’s spaces: The collected writings of Mário Pedrosa) in 1981 (Editora Perspectiva, São Paulo). In 1995, critic Otilia Arantes published the first of four volumes containing a selection of Pedrosa’s writings: *Política das artes* (Politics of the arts) was followed by *Forma e percepção estética* (Aesthetic form and perception) in 1996, *Acadêmicos e modernos* (Academics and moderns) in 1998, and *Modernidade cá e lá* (Modernity here and there) in 2000 (all EdUSP, São Paulo). To this day, however, Pedrosa’s contribution remains unknown outside his own country. Although not all of the roughly eight hundred critical texts that originally appeared in the newspapers have seen the light of day, the publication of these collections gives us access to an essential thinker’s philosophy of art and politics.

The trope of revolution permeates Pedrosa's political texts as much as it does his texts on art. To understand this perspective, it is important to understand his trajectory—his break with Communism and, later, with Trotskyism—since it explains the character of his intellectual commitment. Pedrosa joined the Communist Party in 1926 and was politically active throughout his life, including an involvement alongside Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, future president of Brazil, in the development of the founding principles of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) in 1978, leading up to its creation in 1980. The Marxist concept of political revolution—one in which the political power of the bourgeoisie is taken over by the proletariat—was the principle that guided his evolving beliefs. Despite his commitment, however, Pedrosa also maintained a certain distance from politics: "But sometimes I forget I'm a Communist. To be sure, I shall never be a party man, a political militant. . . . Only if the moment were a decisive one: an impactful strike, a civic celebration—especially on a barricade, or a *civil war*."⁴

By 1926 Pedrosa was following intellectual debates in Europe from his home in Brazil. He subscribed to the daily *L'Humanité* and the journal *La Révolution surréaliste* and read Leon Trotsky's *Literature and revolution* (1924). The ideas of the Russian opposition, based on Trotsky's texts, arrived in Brazil thanks to Communist intellectual Rodolpho Coutinho, who had been in Russia in 1924, where he met Trotsky on several occasions. Pedrosa also read Pierre Naville's 1926 pamphlet *La Révolution et les intellectuels* ("The revolution and the intellectuals"), in which Naville accused Surrealism of wavering between anarchy and Marxism.⁵ In a famous response, André Breton wrote that "only necessity is revolutionary."⁶ It is in the context of these debates, then, that Pedrosa's contributions should be understood. Each of these figures seems to have had a different conception of revolution, but it seems that Pedrosa's interpretation is one that dialectically connects the world of the mind and the world of events.

In 1927 the Brazilian Communist Party was declared illegal. Pedrosa was supposed to go to Moscow as the Party's second candidate to study at the International Lenin School; he left on November 7, 1927, but never reached Russia. He fell ill and had to spend eight weeks in Berlin: while there, he read in *L'Humanité* that Trotsky and Grigory Zinoviev, along with the rest of the opposition, had been expelled from the Party. On December 24, 1927, in the first letter written to Xavier from Berlin, Pedrosa already sounded unsure as to how well-advised his journey was: "*Between us, now*, I've given up going there [Moscow] for good, I've just decided today, as I write to you. The 15th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) has expelled Trotsky and the Party opposition! Thus, the opposition is no more. . . . From my point of view—a disaster."⁷

Deciding to stay in Berlin, he became involved in the struggle against Nazism, studied German, and took courses at the university in Marxism, history, and sociology. In 1928 he began to visit Paris regularly. There he met Pierre Naville, with whom he developed a friendship, and supported the positions with respect to the International Left Opposition that Naville and Fourier published in the journal *Lutte des classes* (the organ of the opposition, which replaced *Clarté* in February 1928). He also met Breton, Benjamin Péret (who would become his brother-in-law), and Louis Aragon. These and other Surrealist figures joined the Communist Party for only a few months, and it was not until 1934 that an echo of Trotsky's activities appeared in the Surrealists' public writings. In *Parcours politique des surréalistes, 1919–1969* (The political path of the Surrealists), Carole Reynaud Paligot claims that for more than ten years the Surrealists' goal was to persuade the Communist Party to recognize Surrealism as revolutionary art.⁸

By 1929 Pedrosa was back in Brazil. Excluded from the Communist Party, he organized the Brazilian Trotskyist movement in order to combat Stalinism. At that time, thousands of Communists had rallied behind Luís Carlos Prestes, a political organizer and leader of the opposition to the regime of Getúlio Vargas, while the Trotskyist group was made up of only fifty or so individuals. In São Paulo in 1933—the year Hitler came to power—Pedrosa was actively involved in the creation of a united antifascist front to gather together the parties of the Left. On October 7, 1934, this united front braved the militia in São Paulo, and Pedrosa was struck by a bullet during the armed confrontation. Following a coup d'état, Vargas established a dictatorship that was to last until 1945. Repression increased, and Pedrosa once more left Brazil to seek asylum in France. At the Congress that established the Fourth International, held at Périgny in 1938, Pedrosa (under the pseudonym of Lebrun) was elected to represent Latin America on the Fourth International's Executive Committee; he was the sole representative of the ten Latin American sections. With the coming of World War II, the Secretariat of the Fourth International was moved to the United States, and Pedrosa left for New York, taking the organization's archives with him.

A controversy in the United States over the role of the Soviet Union in the war led to a split in the Socialist Workers' Party. One faction then founded the Workers Party, producing the first major crisis within Trotskyism. Pedrosa joined this new party along with James P. Cannon and Max Shachtman. Again as Lebrun, he questioned the defense of bureaucracy, asking why a decadent worker state should be unconditionally supported.⁹ On March 23, 1940, he wrote to Trotsky to express his concerns with regard to the future of the organization and to demand more freedom to undertake the revolutionary tasks that awaited them with the approaching war.

In a letter dated April 4, 1940, from Trotsky to Farrell Dobbs, who was active in the Socialist Workers' Party, one paragraph refers to Lebrun and provides Trotsky's indirect response to Pedrosa: "I received a letter from Lebrun about the I.E.C. [International Executive Committee]. A curious type! These people believe that nowadays, in the age of capitalism's death throes, in wartime conditions and in approaching clandestineness, Bolshevism must be abandoned in favor of unlimited democracy."¹⁰ Shortly thereafter Trotsky reorganized the Secretariat of the Fourth International from Mexico, and Pedrosa was excluded from it. They were never to meet.

When he returned to Brazil in 1945, Pedrosa distanced himself ideologically from the Trotskyist networks, broke with Bolshevism, and regrouped other militants around *Vanguarda Socialista*, which he founded and edited from 1945 to 1948. This weekly newspaper was handed over to the Brazilian Socialist Party when Pedrosa joined it in 1947; he remained a member until the party was dissolved by the military in 1965.

Of the Marxist thinkers he admired, Pedrosa's sympathies lay especially with Rosa Luxemburg, who saw capitalism as leading to the destruction of earlier forms of production and, ultimately, to imperialism. Luxemburg represented Marxist orthodoxy, and attacked the Bolsheviks for their cavalier dismissal of democratic principles. In Pedrosa's view, her intellect was the least Eurocentric or, more precisely, the least ethnocentric possible. He was to remain committed to Luxemburg's thinking, and in 1979 published a translation of selected texts by Luxemburg along with his own critical texts from the period after 1946.¹¹

Pedrosa's activity as an art critic cannot be dissociated from his political commitment. His first lecture on art was given in 1933: "As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz" ("The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz") proposed an analysis



Käthe Kollwitz. *Die Mütter* (The mothers). Woodcut from a portfolio of seven woodcuts and one woodcut cover printed in black, plate 6 from *Krieg* (War). 1921–22; published 1923. Sheet (irreg.): 18 ⁹/₁₆ × 26 ¹/₈" (47.2 × 66.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the Arnhold Family in memory of Sigrid Edwards

of Kollwitz's work from a sociological perspective.¹² At that time his political involvement was clearly focused on the struggle against Stalinism and its official embrace of social realism. The 1938 "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art," written by Breton and Trotsky (and signed by Diego Rivera), attacked Stalinism and social realism and was extremely influential among the intellectuals of the period: "We believe that the supreme task of art in our epoch is to take part actively and consciously in the preparation of the revolution."¹³ However, art here is still being instrumentalized for political purposes, though in the name of the freedom of the artist.

From 1943 to 1945 Pedrosa was the U.S. correspondent for *Correio da Manhã*, and was a key participant in the debates among artists about modern art. His interest in modern art first emerged in the early 1940s, while he was in exile in the United States. As Serge Guilbaut has shown, the art world in the United States was deeply divided politically between the supporters of social realism and the Trotskyist supporters of the Formalist avant-garde.¹⁴ Clement Greenberg had already remarked on the depoliticized character of modern art, which presented itself as anti-Stalinist: "Some day it will have to be told how 'anti-Stalinism,' which started out more or less as 'Trotskyism,' turned into art for art's sake, and thereby cleared the way, heroically, for what was to come."¹⁵ Harold Rosenberg noted the same phenomenon: "In the thirties, the avant-garde of art gave way, step by step, to the 'political avant-garde.'"¹⁶

Like Greenberg and Meyer Schapiro, Pedrosa actively championed modern art, and he had cordial relations with both of these figures. There are recognizable similarities between Pedrosa and Greenberg, who were both Trotskyist Marxists, although their paths diverged considerably. Whereas Greenberg confined abstract art within an aesthetics of the purely visual, making a distinction between "high art" and "low art," Pedrosa was moving intellectually in a completely different direction. For him, modern art was universal; it abolished the supremacy of mere appearances and reached down to the roots of the psychic structures shared by all human beings. For him, abstract art was the most powerful instrument for the idealization of reality.

Pedrosa also fervently believed that art is not the privileged property of the highly educated or of the West. His understanding of modernity presented itself as a healthy alternative to a homogenized history of art that preached one uniform story: "Modern art is modern precisely because, instead of seeking its artistic canons in Rome, Greece, or Paris, it first went to look for them in Oceania, Africa, Pre-Columbian America, Egypt, or Cambodia."¹⁷ Pedrosa had written earlier:

The pedagogical revolution that came to pass simultaneously with the psychology based on [Wilhelm] Dilthey, [William] James, [Wilhelm] Wundt, and the various modern schools from psychoanalysis to behaviorism, from genetics to the different theories of structure, also contributed powerfully to wrenching the phenomenon of art away from its humiliating condition as a secondary, luxury, and ornamental contrivance. Art is a real, vital need. The aesthetic revolution that began with Impressionism and continues to this day, ever more radical and profound, has contributed powerfully to the renewal of this mentality.¹⁸

Although he saw modern art as a phenomenon of enormous cultural importance, Pedrosa was always opposed to the idea of “art for art’s sake”; he refused to confine himself within any one artistic movement, and instead analyzed form at the site where artistic creation originates, that is, in human beings and their perceptual capacities, at the point where consciousness and the unconscious meet: “The intellectual prejudices that have been introduced into certain ‘cultured’ milieus, and the purely verbal forms of expression in which phenomena and things are characterized by everyone, no matter what their social class, all help to cut the artist off from society.”¹⁹

Pedrosa recognized two currents in modern art, the Expressionist and the Constructivist. He was chiefly interested in the latter. In 1954 he was one of the founding members of the Grupo Frente, alongside Lygia Pape, Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica, Abraham Palatnik, Augusto de Campos, Wladimir Dias Pino, and Ferreira Gullar. Although he was an originator of Concrete art in 1956 and Neo-Concrete art in 1959, his name no longer appeared on the list of members. The earliest experiments in Concrete art in Brazil date from 1951; Gullar observed that Pedrosa’s influence opened up “a path to the renovation of the Brazilian visual vocabulary.”²⁰ Here too, Pedrosa kept his distance: “People talk so much about ‘the modern’ and ‘modernism’ in connection with the art of our times that these terms and the other words derived from them seem to account for everything. . . . In art, the only way to go forward is through an uninterrupted, endless series of experiments. . . . But externalizing an authentic experience is always an adventure for those who are outside it.”²¹ The sensitizing of intelligence became one of his goals, along with his commitment to abstract art:

We have to get rid of the ghastly dichotomy of intelligence and sensitivity and reestablish them anew at the point where humans first became conscious of their destiny and their individual being. The fate of the world depends on the conjoining of these two capacities. . . . One of the great strengths of [Piet] Mondrian and of [Paul] Klee, and [Vasily] Kandinsky was that they sensitized intelligence. . . . All that sterile, scholastic discussion about sensitivity or its absence in modern art reflects something deeper, that is, the crisis of verbal civilization. . . . The verbal apparatus of contemporary civilization is out of order. This is a vast, complex subject.²²

It was within such a context that Pedrosa’s thoughts—his political and aesthetic reflections on art—signaled a profound break with a type of intellectual submissiveness that had resulted from the history of colonization. His writings are of a disconcerting simplicity even when they tackle the most complex phenomena of aesthetic perception. His wide-ranging cultural interests went hand in hand with an immense humanity and sensibility, within a context in which thinking about art—so-called theory—had been drained of all content: “For the artist, the object possesses emotional value, but what the work itself contains is universal and permanent. . . . Since the work is never a proposition—although it may be categorized as belonging to a par-

ticular school, current, or style—if it is authentic then our experience of it is always connected to the realm of the intuitive forms of thinking and feeling.”²³

In 1966 Pedrosa developed his own theory of postmodernism, namely that modern art has lost its cultural roots and become subordinate to other models, random and unstable ones, which dominate the consumer marketplace.²⁴ During this postmodern era, he continued to give artists unconditional support. In Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica he found an answer to the questions he asked himself.

Far from separating, compartmentalizing, or dividing sciences and subjects, Pedrosa’s thoughts and actions enable us to combine ethics and aesthetics. By rejecting the history of academic art, he broke with a longstanding tradition in Brazil. His friendships and intellectual exchanges with artists were to transform the Brazilian art world in a radical way. He was a consistent opponent of capitalism and, by extension, of imperialism. For him, thought and experience, action and execution came together. The beliefs that led him to enter the political fray were the same ones that made him leave it, as if revolutionary ideals were irreconcilable with party politics. His life and ideas tell a tale of dissidence that evolved with history—one that, in fact, constantly repositioned his criticism and his actions. The story of this political and aesthetic dissidence raises many questions for the history of the twentieth century, and constitutes a powerful attack on the hegemonic view of Western modernity.

Mário Pedrosa was a humanist and a visionary who pursued one single project: the revolution of the human being, in which politics and art were seen as equally indispensable means to reaching the condition and the consciousness of being human. A revolution of sensitivity.

Notes

1. Mário Pedrosa, letter to Lívio Xavier, February 12, 1926. Published in José Castilho Marques Neto, *Solidão revolucionária: Mário Pedrosa e as origens do Trotskismo no Brasil* (São Paulo: Edição Paz e Terra, 1993), p. 257.
2. See ibid.
3. Luciano Martins, *A utopia como modo de vida, fragmentos de lembrança de Mário Pedrosa. Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Perso Abramo, 2001), p. 30.
4. Mário Pedrosa, letter to Lívio Xavier, February/March 1927. In Neto, *Solidão revolucionária*, p. 272.
5. Pierre Naville, *La Révolution et les intellectuels* (published anonymously; repr. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1975).
6. André Breton, *Légitime défense* (Paris: Éditions surréalistes, September 1926).
7. Mário Pedrosa, letter to Lívio Xavier, December 24, 1927. In Neto, *Solidão revolucionária*, p. 272.
8. Claire Reynaud Paligot, *Parcours politique des surréalistes, 1919–1969* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010), p. 98.
9. Lebrun [Mário Pedrosa], “The Defense of the USSR in the Present War,” *International Bulletin* (Socialist Workers’ Party) 2, no. 10 (February 1940).
10. See addendum to letter “Lebrun [Mário Pedrosa] to Leon Trotsky,” p. 410 in the present volume.
11. Mário Pedrosa, *A crise mundial do imperialismo e Rosa Luxemburgo* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1979).
12. See “The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz,” pp. 233–40 in the present volume.
13. André Breton and Leon Trotsky, “Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art,” initially published in Mexico as a pamphlet on July 25, 1938.
14. Serge Guilbaut, *Comment New York vola l’idée d’art moderne* (Nîmes: Jacqueline Chambon, 1989).
15. Clement Greenberg, “The Late Thirties in New York,” reprinted in *Art and Culture: Critical Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).
16. Harold Rosenberg, “The Art World: The Thirties,” *New Yorker*, November 30, 1968.
17. Mário Pedrosa, “Artes Oficiais, Salões Oficiais,” *Jornal do Brasil*, April 16, 1957.
18. Mário Pedrosa, “Arte e Saúde,” *Tribuna da Imprensa*, January 10, 1953.
19. Mário Pedrosa, “As duas Alas do Modernismo,” in *O novo edifício da Sul América terrestres. Marítimos e acidentes* (Rio de Janeiro: Of. Gráf. da Ed. Sul Americana, 1949).
20. Ferreira Gullar, “Da arte concreta a neoconcreta,” *Modulo, Revista de Arquitetura e Arte* 3, no. 13 (April 1959).
21. Mário Pedrosa, “Experiências e aventura,” *Jornal do Brasil*, March 23, 1957.
22. Mário Pedrosa, “Problemática da sensibilidade II,” *Jornal do Brasil*, July 18, 1959.
23. Mário Pedrosa, “Problemática da sensibilidade I,” *Jornal do Brasil*, July 11–12, 1959.
24. See Mário Pedrosa, “Crisis of Artistic Conditioning,” pp. 118–21 in the present volume.

Mário Pedrosa's Somersault Marcio Doctors

I dedicate this text to Vera Pedrosa.

To paraphrase a well-known quote by Pedro Nava, dealing with a life and work that has ended is like driving an automobile whose headlight illuminates what is behind, rather than what lies ahead.¹ As I recall the intellectual figure of Mário Pedrosa, whose ideas continue to inform so much discourse today, I find myself returning to what may have been his greatest theoretical concern as a thinker about art: his questioning of the limits between the objective and subjective datum of a work of art.² His thinking unfolds from the consequences and implications of that question, articulating the affective and sensorial dimensions and the objective perceptions of form in the work of art.

Pedrosa's critical reflection first acquired a theoretical skeleton by aligning itself with modern artistic thought as a manifestation turned in upon itself, in which the author defends the dimension of finitude of the artistic discourse inaugurated by the Impressionist painters of the late nineteenth century. Able to grasp the paradoxes embedded in the intuitions of perception, his subtle intelligence led him to recognize the consequences of the Impressionists' attraction to light upon establishing the character of modern art and the deconstruction of naturalist representation in art.

In Pedrosa's words, "Capturing light now becomes the principal character of their [the Impressionists'] paintings; yet it is not an activity that might be called exclusively realistic. The naturalist view of light is uncertain, changing and occasionally fantastic. But light is an essentially natural phenomenon. Among objective and material objects, when we see only the play of light upon the surface, we are evidently on the extreme margins of realism, and even of naturalism. And it is precisely on this extreme point that Impressionism became aware of itself, becoming a world view, a school, a style." He continued, "Impressionism was the transition from nineteenth-century global realism to modern art. This transition consisted in the following: in its hunt for light, it replaces the appearance of objective reality with the appearance of momentary, purely phenomenological reality. So it was found that the old Aristotelian formula of imitation of nature should not be understood in its literal expression, that is, as a copy of the real object, of immediate external nature, but of nature as seen through the appearances induced by sensations."³

The Impressionists were executing a radical project of drawing the artist out of his studio to set him into direct contact with nature. Pedrosa understood that, rather than consummating the secular project of classical naturalist representation that was proclaimed by the Renaissance, Impressionism instead provoked the dismantlement of representation. A new perception of reality emerged, born from the sensation of uncertainty engendered by the light that, because it is movable, produced mutations in perception that prevented the fixation of an image to correspond to an ideal model. With Impressionism, sensation was introduced into art, questioning the limits of the representation of external form through verisimilitude. It provoked the displacement of boundaries that destabilized the traditional limits of the canvas, questioning the subjective and objective facts in the construction of the work of art.

The events that the Impressionist painter sought outside the canvas and the studio collided with the limit of his own sensation. This led him back to the limits of the painting, freeing painting from depicting reality in itself (Paul Cézanne) and generating a new depth upon the flat surface of the canvas that would later be defined by Paul Klee in one of the maxims of modern art: *Art does not reproduce the visible;*

rather, it makes visible.⁴ Beyond this utterance, absorbed and re-signified by other questions introduced by new generations of artists, what must be emphasized is that Pedrosa intuited what Gilles Deleuze would later interpret to be at the core of Michel Foucault's seminal epistemological polemic, *The Order of Things*: "The outside is not a fixed limit but a moving matter animated by peristaltic movements, folds and foldings that together make up an inside: they are not something other than the outside, but precisely the inside of the outside."⁵ Noting the scope of that perception is what will lead us to understand the greatness of Pedrosa's contribution to the consideration and practice of the visual arts of his own time, which reverberate to this day.

In 1949 Pedrosa wrote his thesis "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte" ("On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art"), in which he searched Gestalt theory for the support he needed to account for the objective facts of the autonomous work of art, seeking to break away from a reading of the artist's subjective references introduced by the psychology of art through psychoanalysis, while offering an account of the artwork's perceptive and sensory characteristics.⁶ Gestalt theory furthermore allowed for questioning the limits of and the correspondences between the objective and subjective facts of reality. We have not space in this essay to demonstrate the entire careful theoretical trajectory undertaken by Pedrosa in this study, in which he offers a precise and meticulous description of the concepts of Gestalt. But what is important (among the many aspects to which he refers in his thesis) is his making explicit the existence of a first perception that precedes the word—one that is not a diffuse tangle of sensations but a delimited field upon which a figure stands out, a luminous impression, in the very first moments of life, configuring an organized perception. Two years after publishing his thesis, in 1951, Pedrosa wrote "Forma e personalidade" ("Form and Personality"),⁷ and determined that it and his two earlier studies were complementary and should be read as parts of a whole. It is as if, in that text, he was attempting to step aside in order to establish a new layer for the work of art between the exterior and the interior.

What Pedrosa perceived, thanks to the Impressionists, was that form is light and that there is no fixed limit, but rather a wavering distortion of form. We must then reveal the objective facts that characterize this new object that is the modern work of art, given that its links to the traditional concept of exteriority had been broken. Previously, objectivity was ensured by verisimilitude as an ideal model of the "real," a correlation between the object presented and a representation based on a correspondence between the specific and the general. In the same way that in earlier centuries the image of God was traditionally the guarantee of the image of man, in the twentieth century knowledge came to relate to the forces of finitude and of interiority. Art, science, and philosophy turned inward upon themselves, articulating a system of folds, as described by Deleuze, in which the interior of the specific and the finite is constituted in the curvature of exteriority like pleats—let us recall the Moebius strip—that bring together the inside and the outside, rendering them continuous.

Building on Gestalt theory, there were two distinct scenarios for Pedrosa: preverbal founding perception and posterior intellectual perception that would create a distancing from that foundational moment. And I would highlight a correspondence between that concept and two essential moments in the history of Brazilian art during the second half of the twentieth century, of which Pedrosa was the protagonist, participating intensively as theorist and supporter. One is the already historically acclaimed movements of Concretism and Neo-Concretism, and their developments through the Lygias (Clark and Pape) and Hélio Oiticica and their influences upon the work of young artists of the 1970s and 1990s in Brazil. The other, still not yet

totally absorbed by the traditional historiography of art, was the support given by Pedrosa to the experiments of Dr. Nise da Silveira, creator of the Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente (Museum of unconscious images), and Pedrosa's conceptual proposition of the Museu das Origens (Museum of origins) for the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro, after its disastrous fire in 1978, which was the model copied by the Brasil do século XX Bienal of 2000.

Pedrosa stated that "perception is not born from a chaos upon which order is imposed, thanks to the help of previous experiences. Thus, it is not the result of intellectual activity. For this very reason it was compared to physical laws."⁸ How, then, to understand his defense of Concretism as part of the international Constructivist movement, which is understood to be a movement of aesthetic rationality and of the mathematizing of space? The answer is embedded in the aforementioned statement that, for him, perception is not the organization of chaos, but a natural fact. Therefore, geometric art is neither an abstraction—hence the term Concrete—nor the result of an intellectual production, but a manifestation that belongs to the order of affect. It is also not the introduction of subjective elements in the objective order of Constructivist geometry, nor a spiritual and cultural point of equilibrium for a predatory political and economic reality that generated social chaos, like the reading performed by some theorists about Brazilian art's constructive necessity. The originality and incisiveness of Pedrosa's observation lies in attributing to Concrete art and, in particular, to Neo-Concrete art, the product of an affect, of an "encounter" with an intensive sign of reality. In Brazilian art, geometry reinaugurates the sensation of sensitive experience, in light of the political and narrative dogmatism of social painting of late Brazilian modernism of the 1940s.

For this reason, when Pedrosa met the young artists of the 1950s and they became acquainted with his critical thought, the result was a renaissance of sorts in the sense of a felicitous encounter between ideas and talented people able to create an artistic movement, the consequences of which we still experience today. The principal contribution of this movement was a new reading of constructive art as a reduction of form that, by restricting itself to minimal, eminently malleable elements such as shape, color, and surface, could be detached from any narrative or descriptive concern. Such works do not close in on themselves but rather open up possibilities for escape through sensation to another artistic and social order, awakening the active dynamics of perception that, until then, had been approached as passive.

The fantastic "fold" performed by Pedrosa by adopting the laws of Gestalt perception and Constructive art effectively reinvented the Constructivist movement, reintroducing affective sensation as a constituent element in the perception of form. Therefore Neo-Concrete art was not the imprint of the artist's psychological subjectivity in the work—which preserves objective independence—but the liberation of the visual field as the locus of connection with the outside. Rather than through representation, this connection would be made through the sensation of perception that is shared by creators and appreciators of art alike. Yet another level is established that does not belong to the artist or the viewer; it is released by the perception of both as the place in which the freshness of the "founding perception," which is the result of sensitive apprehension, pulsates. This is the cunning solution proposed by Pedrosa, reorganizing and recovering for the modern work of art its link to external reality, without which it loses meaning and plunges into the nihilist void that he vehemently rejected.

This was the answer given by Pedrosa to the impasse created by the historical avant-gardes of modern art, of establishing an independent territory for the visual arts, which had its luminous apex with American Abstract Expressionism, the

consequence of which was an even more radical break with exterior reality, provoking resistance from the new generation of artists that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Brazil and in the world, who rejected that distancing. This fact also bothered Pedrosa given that we cannot forget his strong ties with Trotskyist thought nor the risk, against which he fought so hard, that abstraction's exacerbation would end in a dilution of form by subjectivity. We may establish a parallel with what took place at the end of Impressionism, when form was diluting itself so much by the dominance of light that Cézanne emerged to contain it, before it escaped totally. The closing of the visual arts in itself was a time bomb that led to an internal implosion, which broke its floodgates and provoked the overflow of art to external reality, establishing the various movements of approximation of art to life in the 1960s.

Pedrosa's critical reflection was the soil that nourished the developments of the Neo-Concrete movement, which took on the radicalness of transforming the artist into one who proposes—the one who in fact negotiates—the boundaries of the individual in relation to the world. His intuition revealed to us that those two entities are closer to one another than we had imagined, and that one is constituted by and in the other. The artist's process of subjectivation is formed in the outside world, just as the artistic field is shaped by the objective exteriorizations of artists, that is through artistic experimentation. There is a continuum in which the inside and the outside intertwine to constitute a whole. Within this understanding, art can put us into living contact with the world's forces, a site for “the experimental exercise of freedom.”⁹ There is no mystery concealed as transcendence, only the pulsating immanence of the images of artistic experiments and their materializations that unleash onto the surface of reality the metaphysical thickness of the present so that we may feel alive, free. Pedrosa called the perception of that moment the affective nature of form—the foundational model for which is global or syncretic perception, which configures itself in the sudden and instantaneous impression that we experience in our first encounter with the world and that art has the power to preserve.

For Pedrosa, our socioeconomic system produces a loss of syncretic perception with the maturation of the child. For him first impressions, which are the foundation of aesthetic impressions, begin to lose luster when they are mixed with analytic concerns of other orders, so that art ultimately ceases to be an end but a means. It is this thought that guided Pedrosa after his return from exile in the late 1970s. Questioning the direction of international art, he identified a strongly self-destructive tendency in the artistic manifestations of youth, stimulated by a nihilist vision of the historical moment in which they were living. As a response to this situation, he wrote the incisive text “Discurso aos Tupiniquins ou Nambás” (“Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples”) in which he proposed a connection to the artistic manifestations of Brazilian indigenous nations as societies that are able to privilege aesthetic relations in their social organization.¹⁰

Pedrosa's idea at the time the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio burned down was to organize a large exhibition about Brazilian indigenous peoples to be called *Alegria de viver, alegria de criar* (Joy of living, joy of creating). Instead, from the ashes of this tragedy emerged his proposal of a new museological identity for the museum, since it was no longer possible to remake its collection of modern art. He named this new concept the Museu das Origens (Museum of origins), and turned his attention to the aesthetics, outside of Greco-Roman and Renaissance traditions, that underlie indigenous and popular art, the images of the unconscious, Afro-Brazilian art, and contemporary art that, he argued, managed to preserve the vigor of first perception and of the primordial and irreducible need for expression. To illustrate this point, I should like

to conclude by quoting Mário Pedrosa on the implications for man's fate of new technological achievements of information in which he reveals his constant commitment to the present, his persistent refusal of the subject-object divide, as well as what he saw as a necessity to reinvent man beyond ontology:

Explicit knowledge undoubtedly enlightens the preontological comprehension of being, but the devil of it is that it may implicate the obfuscation of being itself transmuted into a "pre-ontological" object. An object of the object of himself, man may end his cycle without any longer knowing where to find himself, or where to find his essence or his substance. He will have performed a somersault upon himself, upon his own destiny in the cosmos. But will he know then, in those unimaginable times, that it is he himself? That is, as we ourselves, now and forever?¹¹

Notes

1. Pedro Nava (1903–1984) was an important Brazilian writer and memorialist.
2. More than thirty years after Mário Pedrosa's death, it is difficult for me to separate the man I knew in life from that of the public personality who built an oeuvre of the utmost importance to thinking about Brazilian and international art. My sentiments roam from great affection for welcoming me into his everyday circle, to gratitude for him helping me along my professional path. The title of this text references a word that Pedrosa liked and used in his texts and that I believe condenses his strategy of finding surprising solutions to artistic and political realities, of always being able to overcome complicated situations.
3. Mário Pedrosa, "Chegada dos impressionistas," in *Dimensões da arte* (Rio de Janeiro: MEC, 1964), p. 24.
4. Paul Klee, "Creative Credo" (1920). Translated by Norbert Guterman in *The Inward Vision: Watercolors, Drawings, and Writings by Paul Klee* (New York: Abrams, 1959), pp. 5–10.
5. Michel Foucault, paraphrased in Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 96–97.
6. Thesis presented as part of the selective process for the Chair in the History of Art and Aesthetics at the Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura, Rio de Janeiro, 1949. Reprinted in Mário Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética*, ed. Otilia Arantes (São Paulo: Ed. da Universidade de São Paulo, 1966).
7. Separate offprint, *Forma*, Rio de Janeiro, 1951 (n.p., n.d., n. pag.). Reprinted in Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética*.
8. Mário Pedrosa, "Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte," in Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética*, p. 147.
9. Pedrosa used this phrase on multiple occasions—including when he learned of artist Antonio Manuel's act of presenting his own naked body as a work of art at the Salão de Arte Moderna in 1970 at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro—and it became a powerful reflection of his thinking and of Brazilian art. See Mário Pedrosa, "Antonio Manuel. On Antonio Manuel's Presentation at the Opening of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, as a Work of Art," p. 326 in the present volume.
10. See Mário Pedrosa, "Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples," pp. 169–72 in the present volume.
11. Mário Pedrosa, "Lance final," reprinted in Pedrosa, *Forma e percepção estética*, p. 366.

The Critical Exercise of Freedom (2013) Dore Ashton

"After savage abuse," writes Peter Kornbluh in his indispensable book *The Pinochet File*, "numerous prisoners were executed, their bodies buried in secret graves, thrown into the Mapocho River, dropped in the ocean, or dumped at night on city streets. The acclaimed Chilean folk singer Víctor Jara met such a fate after being imprisoned at the Chile Stadium. His body, discovered in a dirty canal "with his hands and face extremely disfigured, had forty-four bullet holes."¹

Such was the news that filtered northward and reached those of us who had, with great fervor, welcomed [Chilean President] Salvador Allende's unique experiment in democratic socialism.

Not long after [Augusto] Pinochet's deadly coup, I received a letter from a Chilean general, who—if my memory serves me was General Heitman—declaring me "per-

Essay commissioned for the catalogue raisonné *Museo de la Solidaridad Chile: Fraternidad, Arte y Política, 1971–1973* (Santiago: MSSA, 2013).

sona non grata.” I had gained that distinction through my friendship with one of the most remarkable men of my lifetime, Mário Pedrosa.

Mário might have been called an idealist, although the word has acquired a slightly condescending overtone in recent years. But Pedrosa was an idealist who had extravagant ideals from his earliest youth and pursued them relentlessly. Certainly one of his most remarkable experiments in genuine socialist action was the establishment of the Museo de la Solidaridad [Museum of solidarity]. His association with Salvador Allende resulted in a unique institution never before or since equalled.

Looking over past documents from that exhilarating moment in 1972, when the Museo de la Solidaridad was conceived, I notice a pronounced accent on the word “dignity.” Enthusiasm can be combined with dignity, as I learned when I became a member of Pedrosa’s amazing International Committee, dedicated to acquiring distinctive contemporary art from the whole world for a museum that would reflect “*la Vía Chilena del socialismo*” (the Chilean road to socialism) as defined by Allende. If there is a politics in the action of the artists of the world who donated “the best fruits of their creative power,” as Pedrosa declared, “it is a politics in the highest sense of the word, that is to say, in an eminently ethical, humanistic and libertarian sense.”

There were very few art historians and museum officials who had any interest in the circumstances under which working people labored, or who cared to enlighten them about their fellow artists. The one amazing exception was Mário Pedrosa. I had the good fortune to encounter him when I was a young art critic traveling with a singular group of members of the International Art Critics Association. Among them were two men who, like me, were interested in “socialism” in a non-ideological sense: Mário Pedrosa and Giulio Carlo Argan. Our trip was to Poland—at that time a newly established communist country with an unusually open attitude to avant-garde painting. During the long bus rides from Warsaw to Zakopane, Mário and I stayed together and compared notes. From the very beginning we understood each other. Both of us (perhaps naively) believed that the very best of modern art could be brought to the working classes and displayed in a way that did not alienate them.

In fact, those fanciful conversations on the bus would, years later, eventuate in Mário’s tireless campaigns to bring contemporary art to socialist Chile. Mário wrote letters to everyone he knew in museums and at magazines in Europe and the United States, asking for donations. In each country he appointed a representative to collect donations, assuming (rightly so) that artists would be happy to offer a tribute to those who, under other circumstances, would never see a work by one of their fellows.

I myself had, in my youth, read [Spanish philosopher José] Ortega y Gasset. He taught me to recognize his own aphorism: “I am myself plus my circumstances.” Once Mário designated me as the North American representative, I quickly reviewed the possibilities. The word “socialism” was not kindly regarded, even by working painters in the United States. Mário tested my loyalty by forcing me to request donations from artists who were wary of that word. But they were my circumstances. I proceeded to annoy and bully my friends among New York’s artists, and did eventually have a shipment of outstanding works by artists I knew. Meanwhile, Mário had put together an extraordinary International Committee of outstanding museum directors and critics, all of whom he had met in his frequent peregrinations throughout the Western world. No one who ever knew Mário, with his immensely expressive eyes, could resist his appeals, least of all me. I stayed in touch with others on the International Committee, and felt I was committed to the progressive’s idea of a socialist undertaking. I admit that I still feel that way.

When Pedrosa appointed me the North American member of the International Committee dedicated to the establishment of a Museum of Solidarity with the

Chilean revolution, I was soon contacted by Allende's representative in Washington, Orlando Letelier, who proved to be another inspired enthusiast for our proposed Museum. Often, when I arrived at my office at 8:30 a.m. for a class, the phone would be ringing. It was Orlando, eager to know what kind of treasures I had been able to acquire for the Museo de la Solidaridad. The voice of Orlando keeping me attentive to the cause, I felt that I was participating in a glorious undertaking and worked zealously to bring it to fruition. Nevertheless, Orlando had been tracked by the CIA since 1960. . . . I had taken Orlando to visit another sympathizer with the Chilean experiment, the renowned photographer Richard Avedon. It was a rainy day, but Avedon wanted to make Orlando's portrait out of doors. Consequently, Orlando was portrayed wearing a long black overcoat and a somber expression, which I have never forgotten, and which now seems to me portentous. The assassination took place fourteen blocks from the White House.

Those of us who were engaged in finding support for the Allende socialist experiment were later, after the coup, kept informed largely by rumors emanating from clandestine sources in Chile. Gradually a horrifying picture emerged, particularly about the events in the infamous *Estadio Nacional*. Among other unverifiable rumors were those concerning United States citizens. (We did not know at the time about the CIA's collaboration with Pinochet's secret police.) I learned only many years after the coup about the murder of Charles Horman, who had been one of the U.S. citizens detained at the *Estadio*. His parents had been informed by Kissinger himself, who signed a telegram demanding nine hundred dollars for the return of his body, in a slatted wooden crate.

I mention these depressing facts only to remind contemporaries that the existence of the Museo de la Solidaridad today is something of a miracle, and one that must be vigilantly guarded. Strolling so recently in Santiago's streets, I found it difficult to imagine that they had once harbored Pinochet's murderers, and that once upon a time, something known as the Caravan of Death was proudly established to eliminate those who were always referred to as "extremists" or "Marxists." I would have been one of them, of course, as my beloved friend Mário Pedrosa certainly was.

There are still many people, especially artists in Latin America, who remember Mário's celebrated phrase "*o exercício experimental da liberdade*": the experimental exercise of freedom. In this oft-repeated phrase, Mário advocated a stance that few have been able to maintain, but there have always been some who do not forget. Although Mário considered himself a Marxist, he was never an ideologue. His critical exercise of freedom permitted him to see multiple horizons. He was never, never dogmatic, and I could always argue with him, sometimes successfully, about our common undertakings. It is for this reason that I remind you, yet again, how much his titanic efforts meant to the current Museo de la Solidaridad, and I take this occasion to express my amazement and gratification to acknowledge one of the few happy endings of my own somewhat political life—the existence today, under the remarkable direction of Claudia Zaldívar, of the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende.

Note

1. Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003).

Mário Pedrosa: A Man without a Price (2001) Aracy Amaral

With its slender modern structure applied to this immense continent teeming with natural and primitive forces, Brazil puts me in mind of a skyscraper whose facade is being eaten away by invisible termites. One day the great edifice will collapse and the whole of a teeming black, red, and yellow populace will spread across the surface of the continent, masked and armed with lances for the victory dance.

—Albert Camus, Rio de Janeiro, July 1949

The curious thing about Mário Pedrosa is that, if we consider his trajectory from a certain distance, we realize that he was always an intellectually divided man. He lived his passion for politics and for the fates of other men. Alternatively, his sensibility led him to play an absolutely crucial role in the panorama of Brazilian art criticism in the twentieth century (which, to my way of seeing, ended in 1989).

Simultaneously, I consider it a privilege—a feast for the eyes—that we are able to gather here today, during this week of celebrations, to think for a while about this personality. Friend, teacher, and interlocutor, he was always interested in sharing the creative adventures of those artists with whom he was acquainted. We are talking about a multifaceted, spirited man over a period of decades, a man who belongs to a lineage that is slowly becoming extinct, although specimens may still be found in personalities such as that of [literary critic and historian] Antonio Candido.

Pedrosa: a personality outside today's machinations, when movements must be immediate and reflection almost impossible because of the flood of information or out of reverence for the media. Unless we distance ourselves from an artistic milieu that seems to become stranger with each passing day, ethics are definitely in short supply on the cultural front. The absence of working conditions provoke a retreat by those who do not want to become involved with the rules of social projection enabled by the arts in this decade marked by urban violence, by fear, by despair, by the unlimited value of money and consumption. Not to mention the abandonment in which we live in a city like São Paulo, a condition unconceivable only fifteen years ago.

And although it is not exactly our subject, we could not but think, in reflecting upon Mário Pedrosa's trajectory, of the modalities of the visual arts that are practiced in these times of violence, of hypocritically undeclared war in the field and in the cities of Brazil.

Mário Pedrosa may have been the first Brazilian art critic who did not come from literature—prose or poetry, and I hope I am not doing any injustice out of ignorance—to approach the production of art, as he did in 1932, with his piece on Käthe Kollwitz. Or as he would do later with the work of Alexander Calder, in a famous essay he wrote about that artist in 1944.

An exceptional critic, educated in Europe, he moved comfortably throughout Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo—the country's two most important art centers—where he lived during the most crucial years of his professional life. His first love was politics; his final area of interest was politics, as well as the forsaken Brazilian indigenous peoples, their culture and their manifestations.

Art passionately occupied his years of maturity, a time of more intense rationality. And yet, in being born to a systematic activity such as “thinker of art,” that is,

Originally published as “Mário Pedrosa: Um homem sem preço,” in José Castilho Marques Neto, ed., *Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001). The author is a curator, art historian, and critic. In addition to other volumes, she edited an important collection of Mário Pedrosa's writing, *Mundo, homem, arte em crise* (1975; São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2007).

in reflecting upon the emergence of the artistic manifestation, through his regular presence in the pages of Rio de Janeiro newspapers *Jornal do Brasil* and *Correio da manhã*, he focused his attention on the creativity of the insane, fascinated by the work of the artists of the Engenho de Dentro [the psychiatric hospital Hospital Dom Pedro II], where he became acquainted with the works of [patients] Raphael, Emygdio, and Carlos, for instance, and where he was taken by Almir Mavignier, monitor of the occupational therapy section; and also on the free inventiveness of children, to which he dedicated various texts, including the little school of Augusto Rodrigues but, especially, the courses of Ivan Serpa at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

Mário Pedrosa navigated the journalistic and intellectual scenes with ease in Rio de Janeiro, where he lived, and in São Paulo, where he spent many years (during the 1920s, the early 1930s, and the 1960s). Present from the 1950s on at great art events, he easily identified the art scene personalities of both capitals. We may say that he served as an effective and respected connective element between the art scenes of the two cities. He became the spokesman for Rio's avant-garde (Concretists and Neo-Concretists) as well as director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo during the early 1960s. But Pedrosa knew well how to distinguish the diversity between Rio and São Paulo:¹ in Rio, "extroversion, nerve, heat, [and] elegance." Whereas in São Paulo, "where theoretical objections always carried greater weight," he perceived the greater technological prestige.

As curator of the 1961 São Paulo Bienal, long before the end of the Cold War, he desired, albeit unsuccessfully, a Soviet remittance centered upon Suprematism and on the Russian Constructivists.

Due to his interest in Constructivist trends, Mário Pedrosa also maintained a connection with Argentina's Romero Brest.

At the same time, he was the critic most interested in architecture, and he enthusiastically followed the building of Brasília. In September 1959, he was one of the pillars for the realization, in Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro, of the Extraordinary International Congress of the AICA [International Association of Art Critics] to debate the topic "Cidade nova: Síntese das artes" ["New City: Synthesis of the Arts"] seven months before the inauguration of the new capital. A congress that, in an original way, brought outstanding personalities to our country, men of the stature of Giulio Carlo Argan, Will Grohmann, Sartoris, Crespo de la Serna, Meyer Schapiro, André Bloc, Sir Roland Penrose, Tomás Maldonado, Stamos Papdaki, Romero Brest, Gillo Dorfles, André Chastel, W. Sandberg, and Julius Starzynski. The president of the congress was the distinguished art historian Giulio Carlo Argan. Brazilian participants included Theon Spanudis, Mário Pedrosa, Oscar Niemeyer, Israel Pinheiro, Flavio Motta, Mário Barata, Matarazzo Sobrinho, Niomar Moniz Sodré, and Fayga Ostrower, and Sergio Milliet was president of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics.

The stimulating sessions included discussions on art and the public; the city as a synthesis of the arts; art and architectural criticism; urban signage and communication, etc. The congress was held during a moment of effervescence in Brazil, under the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek, an era filled with optimism for our future, one that saw the building of Brasília and the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (the latter based on Affonso Eduardo Reidy's design). As a citizen of Warsaw, a city that was destroyed and rebuilt many times, Starzynski mentions that it is neither easy nor suave to live among "works constantly in progress. But this brings everyday stimulus to inner life: one has the incessant joy of seeing that beloved capital become more beautiful and more attractive with each passing day." More than forty years later, those words and that stimulating climate should encourage us to reclaim our

cities/ghettoes that have been besieged throughout the chaotic peripheries, to regain a little of the optimism that was lost over the last two decades.

About a year ago, the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art asked me to locate Mário's expression describing art as "the experimental exercise of freedom"²—for such was the name given to the Latin American exhibition put together by Rina Carvajal—and, at the time, there was no way to find the text in which the expression in question appeared. Unbelievably enough, this very week, as I was casually leafing through the two books he wrote and I edited for the Perspectiva publishing house in the 1970s and 1980s,³ I stumbled upon Mário's use of the expression to address artists who "do not make long-lasting works, preferring to propose acts, gestures, collective actions, movements at the level of activity-creativity," in a clear reference to Conceptual art.⁴

Another, almost unknown aspect of Mário Pedrosa that must be remembered in this celebration of his centennial comes from his "Parecer sobre o *core da cidade universitária*" ("Opinion Regarding the Core of the University Town"), referring to São Paulo, probably written in late 1962 and early 1963, that architect Hugo Segawa is now republishing (it made its first appearance in *GAM [Galeria de Arte Moderna]* magazine in 1967).⁵ This "opinion" reflects not only a concern with the fate of the São Paulo MAM collection, but already defines the cultural spaces that an institution of USP's [University of São Paulo] stature must contain. Pedrosa thinks "big" the spaces of a university committed to culture: a Sala Magna, solemn seat, a coordination central for cultural activities, an administrative services sector, with a central library, a third large architectural core complex devoted to the Museum, endowed with a "stupendous collection of artwork (paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings)" that had been donated to it by Cicillo Matarazzo, "of its kind, unrivalled in Latin America." He does not hesitate to declare that this collection would be "one of the most outstanding centers of artistic and social attraction in the Cidade Universitária." That text (which served as a foundation for Oswaldo Bratke's project for the USP)⁶ highlights the idea of creating an art institute with an entire "department dedicated to apprenticeship and to the professional education at the artistic level" for curators and art lovers. He argued that, without the collection, "the Art Institute, separated from the museographic context and from the ambience of the living work, tends to congeal in a teaching process like any other."

And speaking of museums, the vast Latin American cultural universe was penetrated by Mário Pedrosa during his 1970s exile in Chile, which led him to direct the Museo de la Solidaridad [Museum of solidarity], in Santiago. Setting his prestige at the service of a cause, Mário Pedrosa established the museum's collection with donations by artists from many countries, establishing a definitive dialogue between the Chilean and continental artistic scene and artists from Europe and the United States.

There are those who say he was a provocateur. Or a romantic, as his daughter Vera once described him to me. But that was his charm. When I was in conversation with him, in preparation for two anthologies, the impression I had was that he used whoever stood before him not as an interlocutor but as an audience to test, through oral expression, the manifestation of his intellectual anxieties. Emotion was always alive in him, a certain playful, almost childish bias that never abandoned him. He knew how to savor each instant of life.

Grave, albeit without taking himself too seriously, with no arrogance or affectation whatsoever, as is typical in a certain type of art criticism nowadays, albeit fully conscious of the density of his thinking, Mário Pedrosa was a man without a price (a lineage to which Harold Rosenberg, for example, also belonged). What I mean to say

by this is that for me, as well as for those who were close to him and knew his passionate way of experiencing and thinking about art, Mário Pedrosa's greatness lay in that—in him—the man towered over the intellectual.

Notes

1. See Mário Pedrosa, "Paulistas and Cariocas," p. 274 in the present volume.
2. See Mário Pedrosa, "Antonio Manuel. On Antonio Manuel's Presentation at the Opening of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, as a Work of Art," p. 325 in the present volume.
3. Aracy Amaral, ed., *Mundo, homem, arte em crise* (1975; São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2007) and *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília* (Perspectiva: São Paulo, 1981).
4. Mário Pedrosa, "Por dentro e por fora das Bienais," Cabo Frio, 1970).
5. Mário Pedrosa, "Parecer sobre o core da cidade universitária," São Paulo, November 14, 1962. Published under the title "A função do museu no core universitário" in an incomplete version in *Galeria de Arte Moderna* (February 1967). Reprinted in *Risco: Revista de pesquisa em arquitetura e urbanismo* (online), no. 1, 2003.
6. In late 1962, São Paulo architect Oswaldo Arthur Bratke (1907–1997) was invited to submit a proposal for the core campus of the Universidade de São Paulo (USP). Pedrosa's "Parecer sobre o Core da Cidade Universitária" was found in Bratke's personal archives by Hugo Segawa, author of the book *Oswaldo Arthur Bratke arquiteto* (São Paulo: ProEditores, 1997).

Mário Pedrosa Today (2000) Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes

During the centennial of a critic as essential as Mário Pedrosa, it is natural to ask about the relevance of his lifelong endeavor with regard to the enduring and enlightened renewal of Brazilian art. Twenty years after his death, where do we stand? With the benefit of hindsight, we realize today that we knew nothing about the end of the cycle experienced during that transition from the 1970s to the 1980s. Small wonder. By then, Brazilian oppositionist culture seemed to be approaching a new pinnacle. In order that there would be no doubt about it, there was the important historical novelty represented by the autonomous construction of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' party), in whose founding the art critic and militant socialist took part. Less than ten years later, building on that sense of accomplishment, a popular front led by the new party very nearly won a presidential election.¹ And yet, it had utterly failed to solve any of the problems of the historical agenda for building the nation (not even industrialization, which was completed in the 1970s, had produced the expected difference), half a century of national developmentalism (1930–80)—that is, half a century of conservative modernization—all of this was coming to a close. Nonetheless, the critical tradition to which Mário Pedrosa belonged had wagered on a positive outcome. Ultimately, throughout that long cycle of material growth and social polarization the country had undeniably remained in motion. It was precisely over those five decades that Pedrosa's critical activity took place. For that very reason, like all that had been considered rigorously "modern," it could have been dismissed, at best, as an object of historical curiosity. Evidently, I do not share this opinion—otherwise I would not be studying, publishing, and disseminating his work as I have been doing for all these years.

It is not easy to define Mário Pedrosa's relevance for today, especially when confronted with the intellectual legacy of two decades of mental stagnation and social regression.² To say that relevance lies first and foremost in his critical method and not in the historical material of his opinions—which were exact for his time and ranged from Käthe Kollwitz and the Mexican muralists to Brasília and Constructivism—would not be specific enough. I would then be suggesting only the essential, that is, the strength

Originally published as "Atualidade de Mário Pedrosa," *Folha de São Paulo*, Mais! section, April 19, 2000, pp. 4–7. Reprinted under the title "Mário Pedrosa e a tradição crítica," in *Mário Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Ed. Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001), pp. 43–50; and in *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário Crítico* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007), pp. 171–77.

of his approach to the problems of Brazilian artistic modernization stemmed from the manner in which he was able to reconnect with the subterranean lode of the finest Brazilian cultural tradition, or more precisely to the tradition of anti-illusionist reflection upon the *Brazilian difference*, and, for this very reason, always projected upon the background of the uneven and deceitfully convergent march of expanding capitalist civilization on the planet. That is why, above all else, the right question about Pedrosa's relevance speaks, above all else, to the future of that critical tradition, which crystallized something resembling the periphery's perspective of the nature of a global system that used one hand to withdraw what it offered with the other. I am referring, for example, to the collapse of development, but a development simultaneously dependent upon the metropolis, albeit associated with that very same dominant pole—a mandatory term of comparison for anyone considering the short-lived constructive interregnum of global capitalism as it played out on the periphery. Thus, it remains to be seen whether we shall have advanced culturally unarmed amid the ideological vacuum that has established itself. To sum up: are we or are we not beginning anew, *da capo*, as would seem to be the case with the dramatic experience of the various interrupted developmental stages of poorly formed societies. Or, on the other hand, has our modernity simply and finally been completed—as it has in the past, with each systemic cycle of global accumulation—only with an unexpected and inescapable outcome (barring one that might take place in a post-capitalist order), the logic of which is no longer one of integration but of a perpetual and erratic rotation toward dissolution?

Even so, I would like to underscore the originality of Pedrosa's critical method: the adjustment between international trends and local reality (something unthinkable or meaningless to a European critic, at least as long as he can reflect upon his material without testing it inside the petri dish of the periphery). Moreover, every time we abandon such two-way thinking—which includes confronting the metropolitan norm with its colonial "variation" and vice versa—we slide into complete irrelevance (as Roberto Schwarz usually reminds us).³ Of course, such was not the case with Pedrosa.

We can appreciate such a critical method, which is typical of the peripheral situation, as it operates within the dispute (as redefined by our author) between "figurativists," who are partial to an emphasis on local color (as rediscovered and reinvented by modernism during its "nationalist" period), and the internationalism of the "abstract" artists. In pleading the case for a possible Brazilian Constructivist tradition by demonstrating the national pertinence of abstraction and cosmopolitan relevance of the preceding period's modernism, Pedrosa was simply providing continuity, despite the disagreement in its assessment of the very logic of our binary cultural system—abstract or figurative art?—which demanded regulating the one according to the other, that is, local-particular and the Western-universal. It is true enough that, for the modernists, Cubist primitivism and Expressionist distortion of a clearly social proclivity appeared to suit the program for the country's formal transposition, to which "localist un-repression" (to use Antonio Candido's⁴ term) induced them, whereas with abstract art, they imagined we would be forced to renounce all that, that a tradition articulated with difficulty would be eradicated overnight to impose a new beginning. It so happens that the supporters of local tradition forgot that early modernism had also been foreign and that, similarly, in breaking away from an analogous system of quasi-official styles, abstract painting came to inaugurate a new cycle of up-to-dateness, to which our fate as a peripheral country condemned us. In the metropolis, comfortable with abstraction, the contemporary eye was somehow much more faithful to the principle of *mimesis* than to a merely rhetorical naturalist facade, so that—far from being an alienated art—

abstractionism was a veritable and rigorous poetics of contemporary alienation; and, over here, we were part of the problem.

Thus it is important to highlight that the two positions are not only present during each of the periods in question but succeed one another in turn: they are moments with aesthetically juxtaposed emphases, albeit not with regard to the national formation—from global (abstraction) to local (modernism)—I repeat, however, without interrupting the continuity of the formative purpose between the two, which provides the critical internal causality. An example of this would be Mário de Andrade’s illuminist-institutional period of the 1930s and the Constructivist-abstractionist purity of the effort to overcome underdevelopment that would set the tone for the subsequent stage; on the other hand, nothing could be more “local” than a new capital—a territorialist entity par excellence—in which that process culminated. Whereby one may see that the two Mários sought the same synthesis between nation building and the universalizing stage of that very construct.

Until now, the so-called *affirmative side* of this cultural logic has typified the critical reasoning of every Brazilian intellectual worth his salt, meaning one who was involved in the historical task of rendering the country feasible. Hence the naturalness of Pedrosa’s argument: everything unfolds as if we had always been prepared—at least according to the modernists’ constructivist bias—to assimilate the “abstract” consequence of modern art without arbitrariness. The *affirmative nature* of that (ultimately “harmonious”!) counterpoint resides between local experience and its true formulation in the most advanced artistic terms, because it assumes that such a synthesis between the local and the global is verifiable both in its expressive or symbolic dimension and in its material or social one—that is, that the competition between nations for capitalist wealth transfigures itself (there is no other term for this fantasy) in a shared prosperity thanks to a wise and rational division of labor, in the concert of nations—ultimately, everything that capitalism is doomed to promise without ever delivering. It is hard not to see how the internationalist (albeit acclimated) moment embodied by Mário Pedrosa made precisely the same assumption: that an economically modern and integrated society would correspond to cultural articulation along the lines of an emancipated aesthetic sensibility. Small wonder, then, that both projects—that of modern art taken to its limit (or Constructivist plenitude) and that of the national overcoming of underdevelopment—exhausted themselves at the same historical moment. “Condemned to be modern”—in Mário Pedrosa’s constantly reiterated formula—signifies how much this affirmative aspect of the Brazilian cultural system (in some sort of ongoing formative stage, so to speak) is ineluctable: to ignore it, or to subscribe to it wholly, would be a political-intellectual death sentence, as the experience of two centuries of independent (albeit secondhand) national life shows—which always winds up sterilizing any emancipatory impulse, and in which, in turn, such a past is discarded—now becomes truly “abstract,” like every transplant without a before or an after.

We are left with the other half of this peripheral perspective, *its specifically critical or negative underside*: the local moment of revelation of the global system’s disjointed course. I am referring to the counterpoint devoid of “synthesis” between an eternal influx—always predominant in the periphery, doomed as subaltern to “update” itself so as not to perish—and its local metamorphoses. We can see that other side acting in Pedrosa’s oscillations with regard to the transplants he baptized as “oasis civilizations” (inspired by Wilhelm Worringer): sometimes a colonial enclave, sometimes the creative matrix of a new social order befitting its time, embodied in the mythological building of a new capital—Brasília—the completion of the constructive process to which I referred, and of which Mário Pedrosa was, as is known, a tireless champion.

As a matter of fact, I know of no better example in this regard than the fate of Brazil's Modern Movement, if I may be allowed to cite an argument I have been developing, on my own and at my own risk, concerning to the "success" of Brazilian architecture. To sum up as concisely as possible: a successful transplant—when everything condemned it to inconsequential mimicry, in light of the notorious absence of the technical/social assumptions demanded by the new constructivist rationality—the necessarily "formalist" course of which nonetheless displayed the truth concealed in the metropolises of origin, that is, the false bottom of the ideology of the plane, whose utopian tabula rasa became the functional extension of the interminable and euphemistic "destructive creation" that sums up the regime of capitalist accumulation. In this case—the making of modern Brazilian architecture and its final erratic missteps since Brasília—a counterpoint without synthesis between the global and the local, that is, something akin to a reciprocal relativizing, a mutual contradiction, at the source (as I take it) of an original critical perspective of the joint gravitation of both instances: copy and model, main office and branch, mutually reiterating and discrediting themselves, as demonstrated by the successive and alternative misunderstandings between critics here and there in terms of who was truly faithful to the original project. To reiterate: side by side, those who embraced rigorous purity and formal boldness observed correctly about themselves what they criticized in others. Yet, all things considered, the acid test was taking place right here in the developmentalist periphery. Joining the two ends of the skein—insofar as the mutual implication of abstraction and the Brazilian Constructivist project (in all senses) is concerned—one need only check to see whether this was not, after all, the demonstration carried out throughout Mário Pedrosa's critical trajectory.

In spite of the fact that Mário Pedrosa's worth goes far beyond the effort to update Brazilian aesthetic culture, a large portion of the interest in evoking his trajectory lies in the opportunity it affords us to assess the relevance today of the critical tradition that inspired him, and whose evolutionary logic, as we have seen, can be found in the systematic and obligatory comparison—by virtue merely of the peripheral location of local culture subordinated to the coming and goings of the hegemonic tides—between the "deviance" or the national "difference" and the normative *corpus* of modernity defined by the "normality" of the central cultures. However: that which had hitherto characterized (and depressed) this peripheral perspective, always embarrassed by a "national matter," at first glance provincial if compared to the cosmopolitanism of hegemonic formations and that were, therefore, an exception, has nowadays become a general rule, although no one has stopped to consider the current course of the world from this angle that was until now merely our own. Of course I am referring to the period that followed the eclipse of national-developmentalism (in the periphery) and of Fordism or Keynesian compromise (within the organic nucleus of the system), and that answers to the catchall name of globalization. Nowadays, there is no study that does not explore dichotomies that are familiar to us—for example, the customary dissociations between the "global" and the "local." Wherein lies the novelty? In that this sort of reasoning reached the First World—not that the latter's national States are disturbed by transnationalization to the point of resemblance with the near-States of the Third World but in that—for the first time in those privileged and protected spaces—the peripheral experiment par excellence of lack of national solidarity is being carried out. Duality as we know it: the immobile "factors" rediscover themselves as "local," from man-power to indigenous culture. Moreover, for the first time the competition for new

locations highlighted the syndrome of perverse modernizations, heretofore the prerogative of born stragglers.

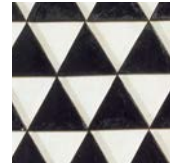
I would like to highlight but one aspect of this leveling of positions within the range of intellectual reactions, which brings us back to our subject. I am referring to that which is being called global culture based on the multiplication of “local” contributions that have been emerging in the periphery (or, in the central countries, by means of minorities and immigrants) as something akin to (no more or less than) the process of an “un-repression” of previously overlooked subaltern cultures that now gain not only visibility but have expanded into a supposedly de-hierarchized world canon. However, it is precisely there, in the fiction of this global cultural system, that we are able to recognize the *affirmative component* of the “harmonious” counterpoint of which we were speaking in the beginning, the point of synthetic convergence between the particular and the universal—in the “concert of nations” (or ex-nations, or even merely cultural nations). In those days, a reality-based vanishing point, but how to uphold it now, when capitalism has made its intentions clear? Here, precisely, lies the need to test the critical method that Pedrosa knew so well how to carry out and finally reactivate the *negative charge* of that very tradition. Given our unfortunate know-how of the subject, perhaps our contribution consists in hurrying the hour of the critical turnabout envisaged by Mário Pedrosa: one disavowed by the other, “globalists” and “localists”—the red thread that runs through his work and is as contrary to a nationalist immurement as it is to the timid cosmopolitanism of our time.

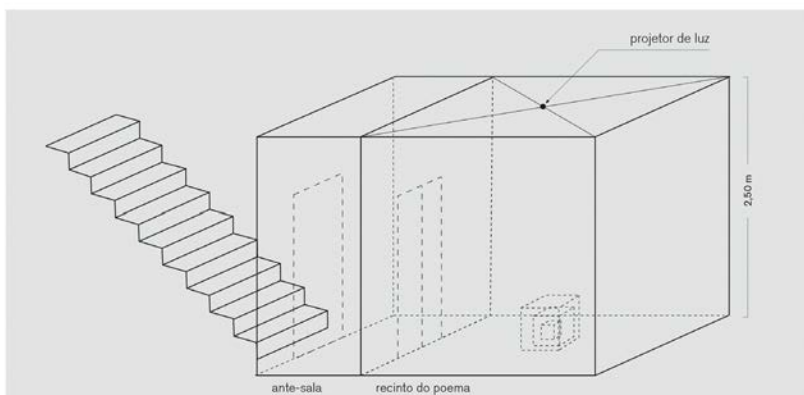
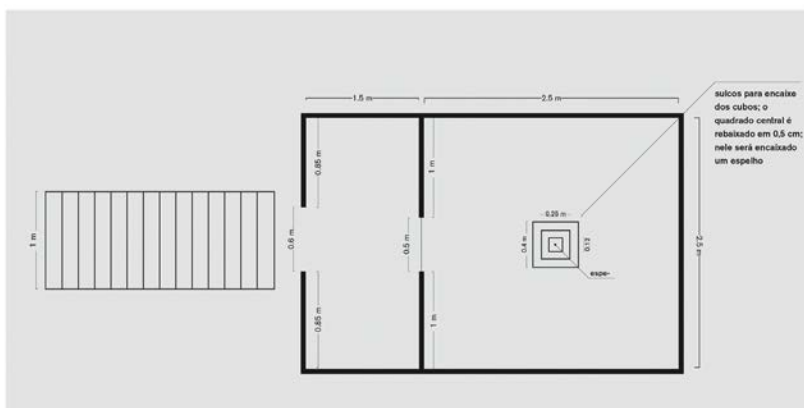
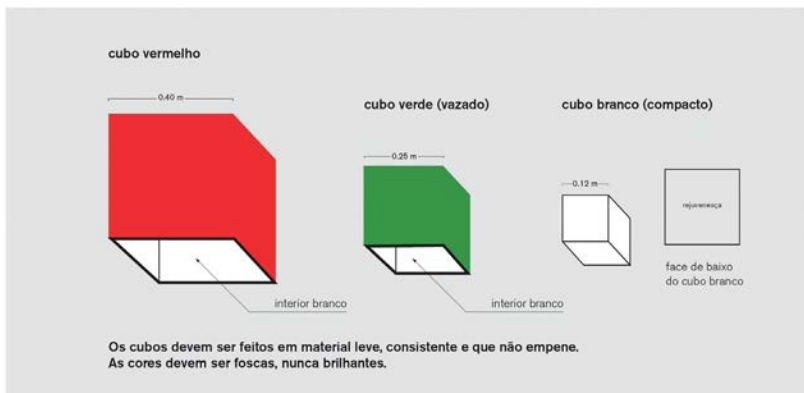
On second thought, it would be no exaggeration to note that Mário Pedrosa was never more presciently relevant as when, foreseeing the global regression that announced itself, he advised artists to resist discreetly in the rear guard and make way for the political struggle proper. So many years later such a premonition found itself ironically confirmed by the turnabout we are forced to witness while rubbing our eyes in disbelief: in the shadow of capital’s revenge, former dissidents feel increasingly at ease in replacing public confrontation with cultural action, all the more comforting when conducted under the pretext of an aesthetic refinement in the perception of the new world order.

Notes

1. In 2002, two years after I wrote this text, Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva) was elected president of Brazil. However, this does not modify the diagnosis presented here. In spite of the fact that the victory of the Partido dos Trabalhadores was undeniably a historical feat, it did not alter the path the country was to follow throughout the 1990s. It maintained an unequivocal neoliberal hegemony, and the so-called politics of inclusion was in fact one of inclusion via the market. In sum, no steps were taken in the direction of reforming the country in a meaningful way.
2. I refer here to the period of military dictatorship (1964–86). Pedrosa died three years before the end of that period.
3. Roberto Schwarz is one of Brazil’s most important literary critics. He is responsible for a decisive and historical turn in the interpretation of Machado de Assis, our greatest novelist and short story writer. Some of his books have been translated into English. See especially his *Misplaced Ideas* (Verso, 1992), which contains an emblematic formulation of the specificities of intellectual experience in a peripheral country.
4. Antonio Candido is the master of a whole generation of critics. He is at the source of what might be called a Brazilian critical tradition whose main line of development was the permanent confrontation of the cultivated European norm and its local transplant, which was sometimes inventive, sometimes simple mimicry.

Plates





Ferreira Gullar

Projeto para poema enterrado
(Project for buried poem).
1959. Architectural rendering.
Collection of the artist



Anita Malfatti

O homem amarelo (The yellow man), 1915–16. Oil on canvas, 24 × 21" (61 × 51 cm). Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros da Universidade de São Paulo



Tarsila do Amaral

A negra (The black woman).
1923. Oil on canvas, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 32"
(100 × 81.3 cm). Museu de
Arte Contemporânea da
Universidade de São Paulo





Candido Portinari
Café. 1935. Oil on canvas,
51 1/4 × 76 1/2" (130 × 195 cm).
Coleção Museu Nacional de
Belas Artes, Rio de Janeiro.
Projeto Portinari



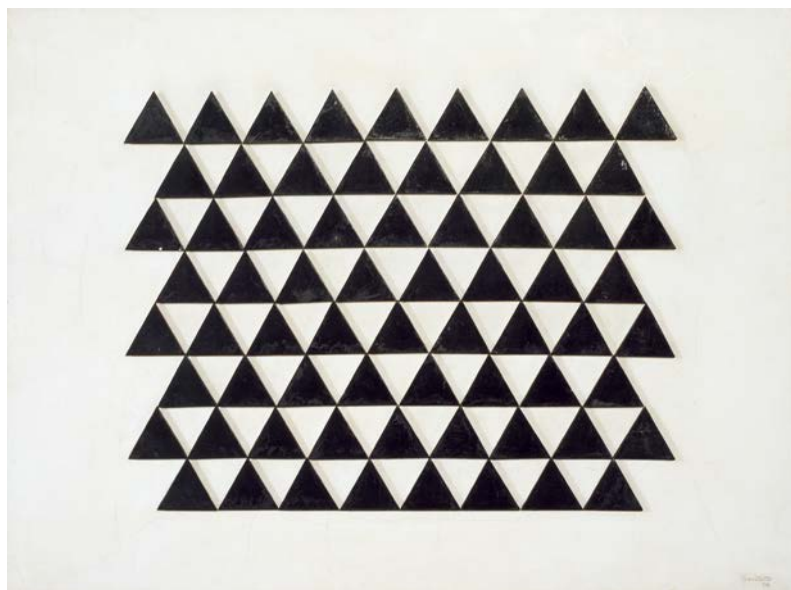
Lygia Pape

Laranja (Orange). 1955.

Oil and tempera on board, nine
panels, $15 \frac{5}{8} \times 15 \frac{5}{8} \times 1 \frac{1}{2}$ "

($40 \times 40 \times 3.8$ cm). The Museum
of Modern Art, New York.

Promised gift of Marie-Josée
and Henry R. Kravis



Luiz Sacilotto

Concreção 5629 (Concretion 5629). 1956. Enamel on aluminum, 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (60 \times 80 cm). Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

Waldemar Cordeiro

Idéia visível (Visible idea). 1956. Acrylic on plywood, 23 $\frac{9}{16}$ \times 23 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (59.9 \times 60 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros







opposite:

Alfredo Volpi

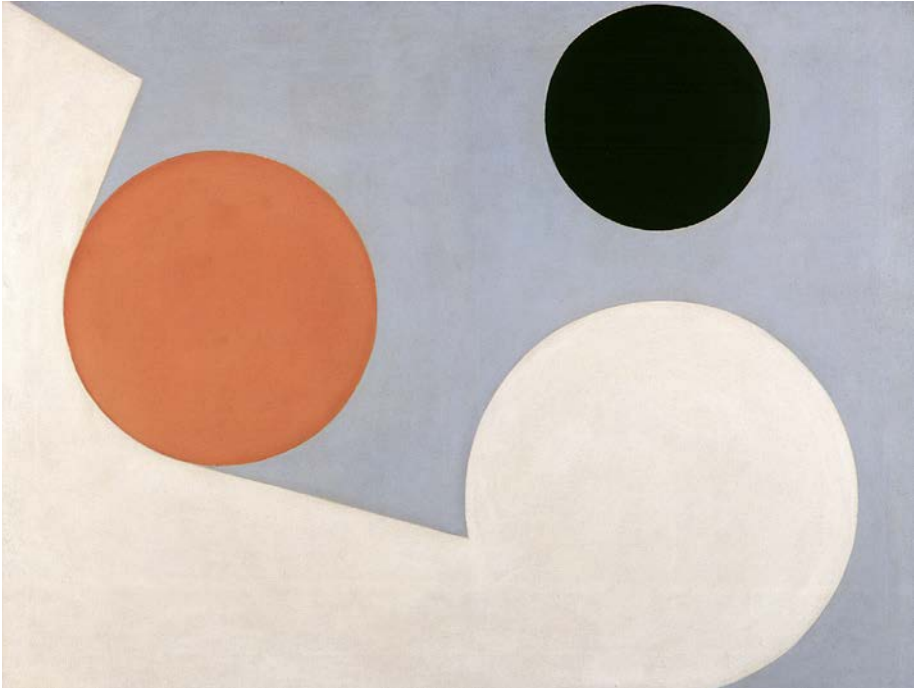
Barco com bandeirinhas e pássaros (Boat with flags and birds). 1955. Tempera on canvas, 21 $\frac{3}{8}$ × 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (54.2 × 73 cm). Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo. Gift of Theon Spanudis

Emiliano Di Cavalcanti

Pescadores (Fishermen). 1951. Oil on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 63 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (114.5 × 162 cm). Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo

Lasar Segall

Navio de emigrantes (Emigrants' ship). 1939–41. Oil and sand on canvas, 7' 6 $\frac{1}{2}$ " × 9' $\frac{1}{4}$ " (230 × 275 cm). Lasar Segall Museum Collection–IBRAM/MinC



Ivan Serpa

Formas (Forms). 1951. Oil on canvas, 38 ³/₁₆ × 51 ¹/₄" (97 × 130.2 cm). Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo



Abraham Palatnik

Kinechromatic Device S-14.
1957–58. Wood, metal,
synthetic fabric, light bulbs,
and motor, $31\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{5}{8} \times$
 $7\frac{7}{8}$ " (80 × 60 × 20 cm). The
Museum of Modern Art, New
York. Latin American and
Caribbean Fund through a gift
of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros
in honor of Marnie Pillsbury



Iberê Camargo

Untitled. c. 1959. Oil on paper,
15 1/8 × 22" (38.5 × 56 cm).
Fundação Iberê Camargo,
Porto Alegre. Coleção Maria
Coussirat Camargo

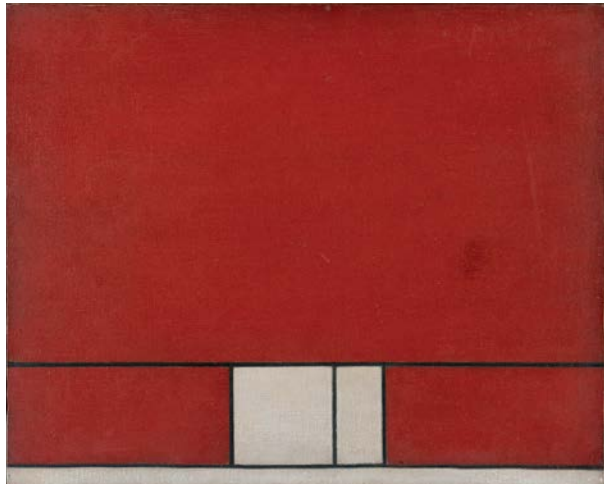


Milton Dacosta

Piscina (Swimming pool).

1942. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{5}{8}$ ×
45 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (93 × 116 cm). Fundação
Roberto Marinho

Em vermelho (In red). 1958. Oil
on canvas, 12 $\frac{13}{16}$ × 15 $\frac{15}{16}$ "
(32.5 × 40.5 cm). Colección
Patricia Phelps de Cisneros





Elisa Martins da Silveira
Circo (Circus). 1957. Oil
on canvas, 28 $\frac{3}{8}$ \times 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ "
(72 \times 92 cm). Instituto
Internacional de Arte Naif,
Rio de Janeiro



Djanira da Motta e Silva

Embarque de bananas (Banana shipment). 1957. Oil on canvas, 19 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (50 x 80 cm). Memorial Djanira, Avaré, state of São Paulo



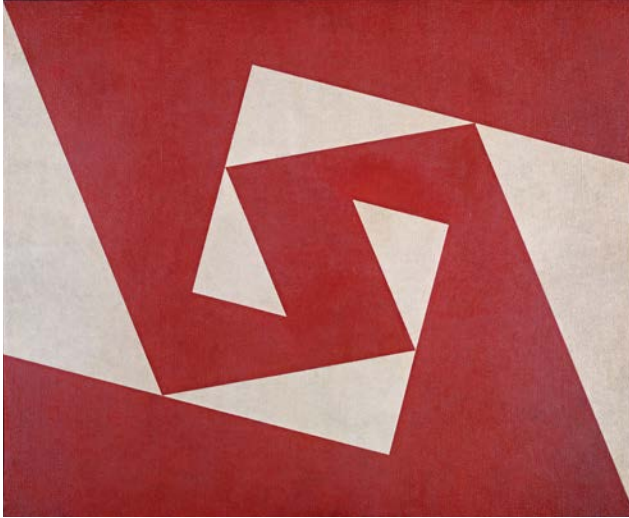
Emilio Vedova

Cosmic Vision. 1953.

Tempera on plywood,

32 $\frac{5}{8}$ \times 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (82.8 \times 55.5 cm).

The Museum of Modern
Art, New York. Blanchette
Hooker Rockefeller Fund

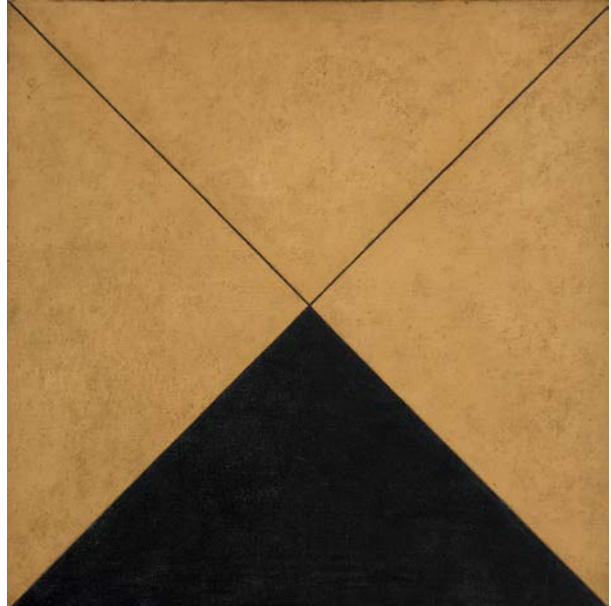


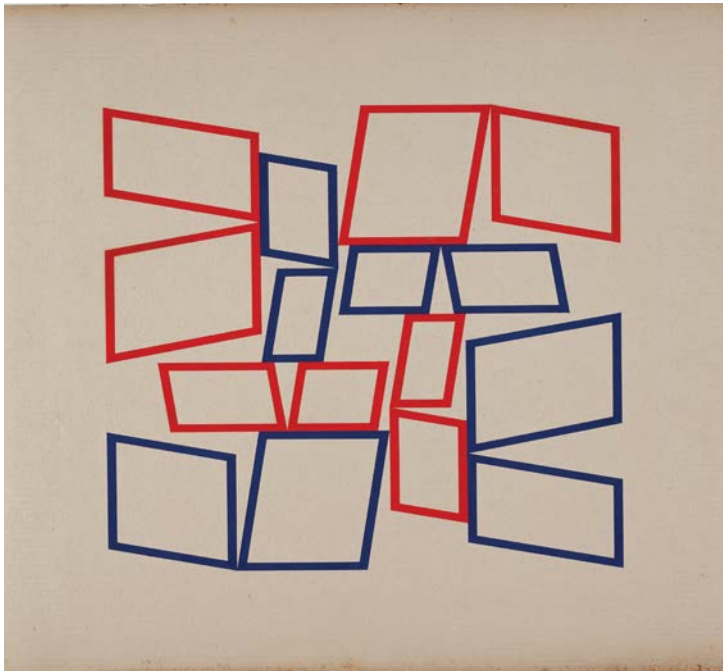
Aluísio Carvão

Clarovermelho (Light red).
1959. Oil on canvas,
29 1/8 × 35 1/2" (74 × 90 cm).
Museu de Arte Moderna
do Rio de Janeiro. Gilberto
Chateaubriand Collection

Mira Schendel

Untitled. 1962. Oil on canvas,
29 1/2 × 29 3/8" (74.9 × 74.7 cm);
frame 30 × 30 × 1 1/8" (76.2 ×
76.2 × 2.9 cm). The Museum
of Fine Arts, Houston. The
Adolpho Leirner Collection
of Brazilian Constructive Art.
Museum purchase funded
by the Caroline Wiess Law
Accessions Endowment Fund





Hélio Oiticica

Metaesquema no. 4066. 1958.

Gouache on incised board,

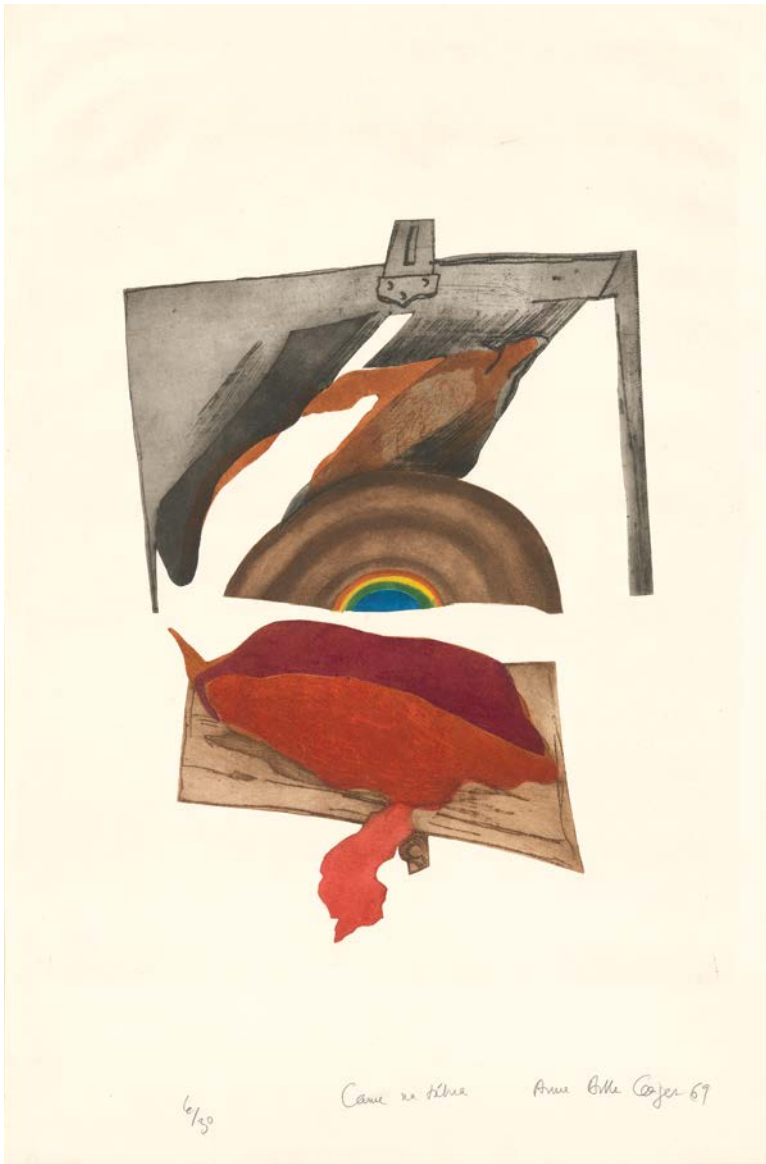
21 × 22 7/8" (53.3 × 58.1 cm).

The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Gift of the Oiticica
Family



Hélio Oiticica

Grande núcleo composto por NC3, NC4 e NC6 (Grand nucleus, comprising NC3, NC4 and NC6). 1960–66. Oil on wood, 21' 11 3/4" × 31' 11 7/8" (670 × 975 cm). Coleção César e Claudio Oiticica

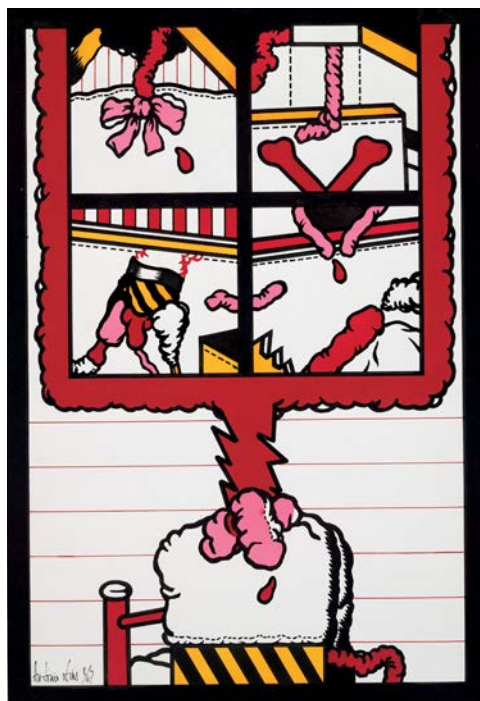


Anna Bella Geiger

Meat on the Table. 1969.

Etching and aquatint, sheet:
35 1/4 x 23 1/8" (89.6 x 58.7 cm).

The Museum of Modern Art,
New York. Inter-American
Fund



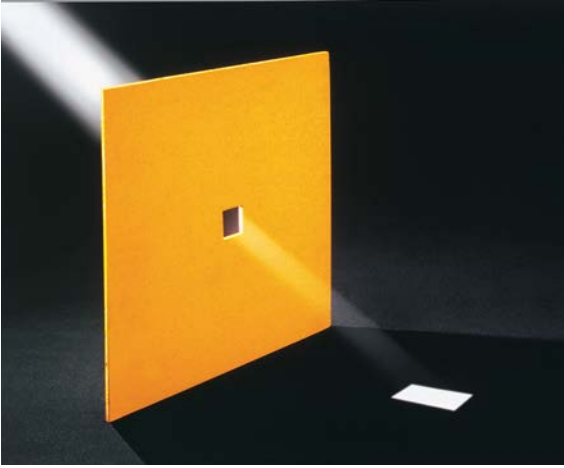
Antonio Dias

Untitled. 1967. Colored ink on paper, 18 1/2 x 12 5/8" (47 x 31.9 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund

Antonio Manuel

Estudante/Passeata (Student/protest march). 1968. Mixed media in plexiglass box frame, 18 1/2 x 14 5/8 x 1 3/4" (47 x 37.1 x 4.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Latin American and Caribbean Fund



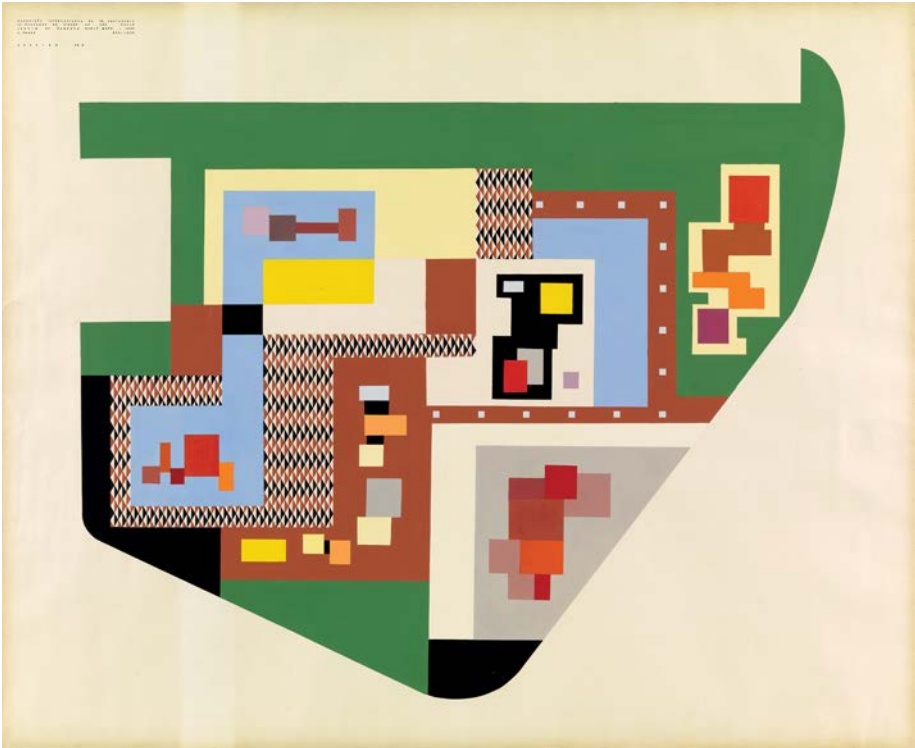


Lygia Pape

Book of Creation. 1959–60.
Gouache on cardboard,
12 × 12" (30.5 × 30.5 cm).
Projeto Lygia Pape

Roberto Burle Marx

*Ibirapuera Park,
Quadricentennial Gardens,
project. São Paulo, Brazil.*
1953. Gouache and graphite
on board, 43 × 52 1/8" (109.2 ×
132.4 cm). The Museum of
Modern Art, New York. Gift of
Roblee McCarthy, Jr. Fund and
Lily Auchincloss Fund



Primary Documents



Translator's Note

The selection of writing contained in this anthology draws from seven decades of feverish intellectual activity by Mário Pedrosa, and the present rendering of it in English represents three years of uninterrupted work translating and contextualizing people, places, and events across several continents for the Anglophone reader.

The bulk of Pedrosa's writing was done for periodicals, with all of the drawbacks and inconveniences that journalistic activity in pre-digital times entailed. He was afforded little or no opportunity to revise most of his texts as many times as he may have liked. Deadlines needed to be met. Thus the long, conversational sentences so typical of a brilliant mind proceeding from association to association, from deduction to conclusion, weaving back and forth across centuries of theory and images to make his points—the full impact of a quicksilver intellect that characterizes his prose—were not infrequently set in type with essential punctuation marks such as commas, periods, and quotes either misplaced or altogether omitted. Successive reprints and collections of his writing have largely overlooked such details, and much of this dynamic flavor has been lost. One of the things that this translation has attempted to convey is the passionate quality of his discourse.

Another pitfall for a translator tackling Pedrosa has to do with his abundant use of citations. The scope of his reading, his sweeping knowledge not only of art but also of many other subjects—including philosophy, architecture, poetry, music and science—may be verified in text after text. To the patient, discriminating scholar or translator, one accustomed to hunting down references—while stopping short of the complete critical edition that a thinker of his distinction has long merited—it soon becomes clear that the critic quoted from memory a great deal of the time and, no matter how prodigious his ability to recall, that faculty occasionally faltered, which easily explains how an “involuntary sacrifice” mentioned by Baudelaire becomes “voluntary” in one of Pedrosa's many essays on criticism, to give but one example.

In this edition, whenever it has been possible to verify a quotation, a citation has been provided in an endnote. Contextualizing information offering background on people or events important to understanding the material is also included as endnotes. Rare instances of notes by Pedrosa or from the time of any given text's original publication are included at the bottom of the page on which they appear.

Like the Greeks, Pedrosa was fond of neologisms. Most of these would require so much explanation that it was ultimately decided to translate rather than reproduce or explicate them in order to ensure the general fluidity of his writing.

Throughout, first names have been added in brackets with the exception of the rare cases in which we were unable to confirm identity.

The author's use of capitals has been retained.

Pedrosa often integrated foreign-language terms and phrases into his writing. These have largely been translated, except for instances in which we felt it added something to the understanding of the writing.

In the section “Correspondence,” all of Pedrosa’s letters were translated from the Portuguese except where noted. Vera Pedrosa has told me that her father generally avoided writing in English. Additionally, she reports that her mother, Mary Pedrosa, reviewed his texts whenever she was called upon to do so: “Whenever she was not at hand, his wording of that language would probably have been unusual. His French was far more precise.” Illegible words in the correspondence have been replaced [—].

Having accounted for the systematizing of *Mário Pedrosa: Primary Documents*, some acknowledgments are in order. The original invitation to be part of this project came from Glória Ferreira. For this opportunity, I am deeply grateful.

For more than three years, Jay Levenson, MoMA’s Director of International Programs, has provided me with unfailing support and encouragement. David Frankel, Editorial Director at the Museum, was my earliest interlocutor, and his answers to my queries were always as detailed as they were illuminating.

My indebtedness to editor Libby Hruska, and, at a much later stage, to Evelyn Rosenthal, is immense. Without their intelligence, patience, discernment, and sensitivity, my undertaking would undoubtedly have fallen far short of its principal aim: that of rendering Mário Pedrosa’s distinctive and highly original voice in English.

Thanks also to Gillian Sneed for her meticulous research in locating frequently obscure original quotes in a veritable Babel of languages.

Finally, I am beholden to Vera Pedrosa for the gentle openness with which she shared memories of her father and concurred with my understanding and interpretation of his voice.

Stephen Berg

1. Theoretical and Aesthetic Speculations

Introduction Glória Ferreira

From early on, Mário Pedrosa associated theoretical and critical reflection, as Otilia Arantes noted when she wrote that, in his writings, “we cannot separate strictly theoretical concerns from those that refer to direct critical experience.” This section brings together some of the texts in which the critic speculated on various abstract issues. His essay “The Vital Need for Art” (1947)—originally presented at the closing conference of an exhibition organized at the Hospital Dom Pedro II—is directly related to his association with Dr. Nise da Silveira and her close observation of the work of mental patients at this psychiatric hospital located in Rio de Janeiro. In this text, he argues against the prejudices that prevent an appreciation of these works, declaring, “Art begins with a child’s earliest doodles and is present wherever men make use of hand and eye . . . moved by the simple pleasure of making something, or even merely to express unconscious impulses.” In “Science and Art: Communicating Vessels” (1960), Pedrosa traces the kinship between artistic and scientific imagination. He insists on the social value of art in “Crisis of Artistic Conditioning” (1966) and, in “Crisis of Poetry: Art and Communication” (1967), upon the conditions of the transformations that the world and art are undergoing.

In the first of three theoretical texts collectively titled “Aesthetic Speculations,” from 1967, he analyzes the tension between “saying” and “expressing,” pointing out the conflict that exists “in man’s perceptual field itself, amid the new hypotheses of Information Theory and those of Gestalt and the structural psychologies, the foundations of which are found in phenomenology.” In the second text (on form and information), Pedrosa points out that the perennial function of form is “to express, as such, the realm of the intelligible in the organization of the perceptible, or of the primacy over the sensory.” In “Endgame” (the last of the speculations), while discussing the technological and scientific civilization of today, he declares that art “must be based less and less upon phenomenological perceptual experiences . . . from which formal phenomenological wholes always emanated and, inevitably, turned into something like the ‘thickness of the present’ (the threshold of sound perception).”

Finally, in “World in Crisis, Man in Crisis, Art in Crisis,” also written in 1967, Pedrosa analyzes the technical and social changes that transform humankind. Within this context, the artist “is stimulated by a thousand demands arising from the . . . exterior world.” According to Pedrosa it is, therefore, “within the environmental context that all correlated arts and activities may find the crucial moment of their integration, that is to say, of their true consummation within the social complex.”

—Glória Ferreira



The Vital Need for Art

The trouble with understanding the problem that brings us together here today is a conceptualization of art that centuries of bad tradition have implanted in our minds. The reality is that the world today does not know what art is. The public cannot discern what is fundamental about the artistic phenomenon.

To the public, visual art is the imitation of nature—the representation of reality according to certain canons that have been codified since the Renaissance. All so-called works of art are immediately subjected to this criterion and the public wishes to see this confirmed in them—this identification with external reality.

Hence the public's incomprehension of so-called modern art. And its even greater incomprehension in light of an experiment such as the exhibition currently on view at the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional.¹

It is no longer just the public that finds these paintings and drawings “strange.” Perplexity has even taken hold of the avant-garde, of the unfortunately still narrow circle of enthusiasts and connoisseurs of the visual arts in our educated circles. Where does this perplexity come from? It comes from the dregs of an intellectual prejudice with which the problem of art is approached. We are no longer talking about those who are unable to distinguish a work of art—a legitimate painting—from a lifeless academic imitation. We are referring to artists, critics, and consciously refined connoisseurs with academic backgrounds who nonetheless somehow retain an anachronistic notion of the matter. They are interested only in the result—that is, the finished work—the purpose of which is to be perpetually admired or worshipped in a new fetishism. They see only the masterpiece. To them, art has not yet lost its capital “A.” It continues to be a separate, exceptional activity, and the artist remains a mysterious being enveloped by some mystical or magical halo.

This is a highly—if I may be allowed an awful word—*passé* attitude, and it, too, is the product of academic mustiness. It derives from a concept crystalized from the Renaissance on: art as social glorification, as the veneration of great men; whether they are begirded by the warrior's sword or wear the emperor's crown; whether prince or tyrant, cardinal or saint, etc. From its purposes of glorification—after the disappearance of the glorified; that is, the object of glorification—it was the work of art, in turn, that became celebrated as a new fetish that possessed the additional advantage of reflecting the vanity of its worshippers.

Beginning as tailors who stitched together the glorious mantles of the potentates and heroes of the Renaissance, artists eventually transformed themselves into a closed brotherhood at the service of the aristocracy. And, like every brotherhood, it created for itself specialized interests and fixed regulations that segregated its members from the rest of mortals, keeping others at a careful remove from its secrets. In the absence of their genius, the ways of Renaissance artists were zealously amassed and codified by imitators and mediocre successors: for two centuries or more, academicism propagated itself parasitically upon the accomplishments of that fecund age. Isolated in certain countries, the few artists of genius remained misunderstood and systematically ignored (think of El Greco) by trendsetters, dictators of aesthetic laws, and the proprietors of the academic brotherhood.

The world, however, did not remain limited to the Mediterranean; it eventually came to include America, Africa, and the confines of Asia. New civilizations and their cultures were revealed, penetrating ancient Greco-Roman culture.

Archeology, scientific explorations of every order, whether geographical, anthropological, or sociological, have conquered new territories for human culture, and their



Emygdio de Barros, Fernando Diniz, and Adelina Gomes in the occupational therapy studio led by Nise da Silveira, Hospital Dom Pedro II, Rio de Janeiro. 1960s. Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente, Rio de Janeiro

discoveries exert an influence on art today at least as profound as the excavations and discoveries of ancient classical statues in the age of the Renaissance. Donatello would not have been Donatello without the revelation of Greek statuary. There has been an exploration of cultural expressions not only of Egypt and the pre-Biblical peoples of Asia Minor, but of India and its cultural ramifications. The West has finally embraced Chinese civilization and its refinements. But it is not only these advanced cultural expressions that end-of-the-century Europeans absorbed.

The Barbarian peoples of pre-Columbian America, of Oceania, of Africa are also considered worthy of interest and, with astonishment, cultured Mediterranean man realizes that they, too, possess art (which thus ceases to be the privilege of Western Europe's superior races). Art is no longer solely the product of high intellectual and scientific cultures. Primitive peoples also make it. And since everything in art is judged by quality and since quality cannot be measured, these artistic products by primitive peoples are formally as legitimate and good as those of the super-refined civilizations of Greece or of France. Astonished by African, pre-Columbian, or Indonesian statuary, anthropologists and archeologists soon succeeded in convincing art historians and artists themselves as to the value of such revelations. It is, undoubtedly, a revelation of new formal organizations, pure, as pure as those who conceived the classic Western canons. Hence the profound revolutionary effect they have upon the sensibility of the best contemporary artists.

Simultaneously—and on its own—painting slowly arrived at a stalemate it was unable to overcome when, so as not to die by asphyxiation, it left the studio for the open air and came upon the open book of nature. Like a naughty child who runs away from home for the first time, Impressionism is dazzled by the miraculous properties of light. Hitherto apparently untouchable, the castle of academicism begins to crumble. Mandatory three-dimensionality is held in contempt. Young Impressionist painters feel happy because, now, they see before themselves an authentic new god to worship.

Psychology, in turn, as the youngest sister of the other sciences, is devoured by the ambition to expand the excessively timid horizons of classical or associationist routine. Like some new and unlimited continent, even richer and more mysterious than the American one, the Unconscious is discovered. Mechanical rationalism and its stunted fruit (abstract intellectualism) suffer a mortal blow. For the first time, then, the world of the arts is afforded the conditions to approach the preliminary, albeit fundamental, problem of its psychological origins, the subjective mechanicism of this activity *before* the finished work.

Even seemingly meaningless or unimportant acts that are practiced automatically—inconsequential movements, mistakes, scribbles, awkward drawings thoughtlessly made on paper—have become objects of interest and study. No gesture, word, or human act would ever again escape the field of psychological investigation. It was discovered that, beyond the express, apparently formal meaning of man's actions and words there might be another, truer hidden meaning. The congenital unity of the human race was confirmed anew.

Surprisingly, a resemblance was noted between works by the coarse, anonymous men of one people and the simple folk of other peoples. A native ingenuity common to all these anonymous creators illuminated their works, whether of an artisanal nature or more disinterested or mystical, such as the representation of the image of an Indian god. This natural ingenuity was like an emotional password allowing entry into everywhere, because one felt in it an obvious manifestation of the poetic order (which is universal). Kinship between the arts of various primitive peoples and similar manifestations in children the world over have long been noted.

The newly born modern art movement, like a river at high tide that, throughout its tumultuous course, takes possession of all the objects and all the achievements that humanity has accumulated within the domain of disinterested expression, has lost its residual remains of abstract intellectualism in these latest universal acquisitions.

This marks the emergence of teams of so-called “moderns,” which have been succeeding one another for generations. Yet, even as they presented themselves to the public, they were received with a fierce hostility, with derision and hearty laughter, contempt and hatred. They were immediately identified as savages or madmen or simply pointed at as mystifiers. But their works came to speak for themselves; little by little they stood out to the eyes of a still-traumatized public, like echoes of intentionally ignored pre-Renaissance art, thanks to the reversal of aesthetic values that triumphant academicism imposed upon the world. Thus, they once again took up the great, true, living artistic vein that runs through the centuries and was interrupted by mannerism and post-Renaissance decadence. The result of all this was the elaboration of a new concept of art, which was nothing more than the rediscovery of artistic sentiment in its purity, so transparent in the work of the primitive anonymous artists.

This evolution or revolution of values is well expressed by André Lhote, who, aside from being a painter, is one of the soundest theoreticians in contemporary art. Among others, he was able to mark the difference in attitude of the modern artist compared to Impressionist, Renaissance, and primitive artists. In creating, the latter obeyed the sacred scriptures and their perspective; their order of things was supernatural, religious. They placed objects within a transcendental hierarchy that was in no way realistic. The Renaissance artist invented linear, geometric perspective, and—because he created within the exterior world—he came to organize it according to its optical illusions. The Impressionist constructs his world (rather, his detail of the world) according to an immediate, purely perceptual perspective as a consequence of light and color. Finally, the modern artist—who understands the trick of Italian perspective but no longer possesses the mystical simplicity of the primitive artist nor shows himself to be passive before the Impressionist's play of natural light—refashions perspective. It is a new perspective, which Lhote calls *affective* in order to signify that it may no longer be reduced to any exterior formula, for the transformation that the creator artist imposes upon the natural relationship between objects obeys only—and must only obey—the rhythm of poetry, the rhythm of form.

To render even more sensitively and powerfully the contrast in attitude between an imitator of the Renaissance artist and that of the modern artist, it is useful to

compare a definition of painting given by seventeenth-century French academicians with those of a Parisian modernist artist-theorist. In the seventeenth century, a painting was a “flat surface covered in lighter or darker hues that imitate the relief of objects and create the illusion of depth.” In Maurice Denis’s appropriation of the old Gothic formula of the primitives, a painting is “a flat surface covered with colors assembled in a certain order.”²

In 1672 the French Royal Academy’s notion of painting was thus defined by one of its academicians: “An art that, by means of forms and colors, imitates, upon a flat surface, all the objects that appear to the sense of sight.” In the following session of the same Academy, in the same year, another member replied: “I do not know, gentlemen, whether it is possible to believe that the painter should strive for any purpose other than the imitation of beautiful and perfect nature. Should he pursue something chimeric and invisible? It is clear that the painter’s most beautiful quality is to be the imitator of perfect nature, for it is impossible for man to go beyond this.”

Yet more than two hundred years later, [Paul] Gauguin, for instance, did not think so, and wrote: “God took a little clay in his hands and made every known thing. An artist, in turn (if he really wants to produce a work of divine creation), must not copy nature but take the natural elements and create a new element.”³ These conflicting concepts prove the impossibility of understanding artistic activity itself, let alone its intrinsic purpose, without brutally severing ties with the prejudices and conventions of academicism.

“I should be in despair if my figures were good,” wrote [Vincent] van Gogh, for “I don’t *want* them to be academically correct.”⁴ He declared emphatically, “I long most of all to learn how to produce those very inaccuracies, those very aberrations, reworkings, transformations of reality, as may turn it into, well—a lie if you like—but truer than the literal truth.”⁵

Therefore, artistic activity is something that does not depend upon stratified laws, the fruit of experience of a single age in the history of art’s evolution. This activity extends to all human beings and is no longer the exclusive occupation of a specialized brotherhood that requires a diploma for access. Art’s will manifests itself in any man in our land, regardless of his meridian, be he Papuan or *cafuzo*,⁶ Brazilian or Russian, black or yellow, lettered or illiterate, balanced or unbalanced.

Artistic appeal is so irreducible that even [Charles] Baudelaire intuited that every child is an artist, or at least has the capacity to be a true poet or painter thanks to the freshness of his senses. “The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and color. . . . The man of genius has sound nerves, while those of the child are weak. With the one, Reason has taken up a considerable position; with the other, Sensibility is almost the whole being. But genius is nothing more nor less than *childhood recovered* at will.”⁷ To the great poet, the artist of genius was “a man-child,” that is, “a man who is never for a moment without the genius of childhood.”⁸

Indeed, for Baudelaire—he who understood his trade so well—genius is a state of childhood, and inspiration tends to intensify with spontaneous, vital, unconscious forces that accumulate—so to speak—in the tender, open pores of children. The discovery and exploration of the unconscious came as if to confirm the poet’s intuitions.

Thus man draws a little closer to the mysterious sources of artistic creation. Pictorial art is no longer a way to imitate nature, to represent external reality, or, as Monsieur Blanchard (the same French academician of 1672) would have it, to “bes-

tow roundness to the bodies that are represented upon a flat surface.” This art is no longer the science of *trompe l’oeil*! In any form, whether large or small, profound or decorative, mere elementary sketch or formless blot, to be considered art is initially a matter of emotion and sensation or, in [Georges] Braque’s laconic formula, “sensation and revelation.”⁹

It is not only artists and poets such as Baudelaire and Van Gogh who have intuition or—rather—the so-to-speak physical sentiment of the unconscious process of creation.

Defining it in terms of his own experience, Van Gogh spoke of his “terrible lucidity at moments,” in which, according to his confession, “I am not conscious of myself anymore, and the pictures come to me as in a dream.”¹⁰ The more objective modern psychologists—not the followers of [Sigmund] Freud or [Carl] Jung, but the fervent followers of behavioral psychology such as Henri Wallon—arrived at identical conclusions. As a general observation, they admit that, “Whereas conscience is mistress of the terrain, vain are the efforts of wise men and men of letters to accomplish the work that consumes them.” According to them, consciousness must “abdicate,” “give in to forgetting,” that is, to the subconscious.

In all mental domains, therefore, the problem of creation would consist of freeing the creators, who would forget previously established mental associations, already chained automatically to certain formulas. Yet this does not explain why a child is freer from these tyrannical associations than an adult, and the mentally abnormal man more so than the average one. “Only when the creators free themselves from an individuality that rejects any new combination,” the same illustrious professor admits, “shall they be able to contribute to a new intuition” and (we would say) with much stronger reason to any new image.

The normal observer or scientist must keep to examination and to reflection in order to avoid consciousness from dispersing. In light of this, the objective psychologists sound the alarm and point to “the unstable subjects whose illness consists precisely in allowing consciousness to abandon itself to any and all impression that solicits it.” Now, this examination and reflection act precisely in the sense of rendering consciousness insensitive to what these psychologists call “aberrant stimuli”; on the contrary, the observer is incapable of following the course of his perceptions and thoughts.

But for the artist—neither an observer nor a scientist—the advice is no good; it is not up to him, according to the logic of true art, to follow, as an external observer, the course of his own perceptions and thoughts in order to control them. He is not an observer. He is a creator, a being with emotions that demand formal expression. Wherever he may be, his task is to seek out that new intuition of which the scientist spoke, the new image. Consequently, for the artist there are no aberrant stimuli (rather, there is the hackneyed “Aeolian harp” of rhetoric or old Hugo’s “sonorous echo”).

Still, for the same psychologist, “A sufficient adaptation to the environment allows us to perceive *only the objective, conscious side* of the life of the mind. As long as it exactly represents our intimate aspirations vis-à-vis the exterior world, this will suffice to eclipse them totally.”

Now there can be no manifestation of artistic nature—and much less any creative appeal—with these eclipsed or absorbed intimate aspirations that come out of a “sufficient adaptation to the environment.” However, if the “objective and conscious face of psychic life” is insufficient to contain or express the “intimate aspirations,” as “anomalies,” the various “perversions” according to the “needs of existence” (also according to the psychologist’s terminology), the influx “of subjective influences”

necessarily reappears. These intimate aspirations are evidently impenetrable “to the objective and conscious face of psychological life”; rather, they constitute the other irreducible face of the same life, the one that never ceases to demand expression from us, just as, on another level, another face—the inscrutable side of the moon—never ceases to torment our eternal curiosity.

According to another teaching of this very psychology, “for every representation that flutters in our consciousness and pursues us, a tendency develops to externalize it, to place it before us, to find for it a subject outside of us.” Enfeebled consciousness tends to allow representations that obsessively inhabit the mind to escape. This is when that tendency to externalize emerges, setting these representations outside consciousness itself, as if they belonged to a foreign subject. In children, and above all in mentally disturbed personalities, this representation is profoundly internalized; for this very reason, the need to externalize may become unbearable. Even when it is simply therapeutic—as in the case of the artistic activity of the exhibitors who currently interest us—this activity may lead the obsessions to be sublimated, just as one might vanquish an enemy—by giving them formal expression. Of the process of elaboration, the document of externalization remains liable to being isolated and appreciated as intrinsic artistic expression.

Baudelaire spoke of “congestion” to express his concept of inspiration; momentarily in the grip of a “terrible lucidity,” Van Gogh enters it like a dream and is no longer able to feel himself. According to Wallon, Jean-Jacques Rousseau finds himself in a similar state after a fainting spell. Describing his sensations, Rousseau wrote: “In that instant I was born into life, and it seemed to me as if I was filling all the things I saw with my frail existence.”¹¹ Thus, the decline of conscious activity seems to lead parts of ourselves that we habitually forget are essentially ours to unmoor themselves from us. The body is therefore a sort of exterior field of sensations, which direct and organize themselves independently from us as if taking place at a regular distance from our very self. Consciousness is no longer able to oppose itself to these sensations, which are eventually mistaken with environmental reality itself. The same psychologist concluded that consciousness has lost the power of objectifying the representations that touch it.

This diffusion of states of consciousness in space comes about when there is a blurring of the lines, which the normal activity of consciousness never ceases to draw, between what distinguishes “I” from “not I,” between subject and object: it is more or less what occurs during a fainting spell.

The diffusion of consciousness in space . . .

Would such not be the case with these schizophrenics, these already entirely dissociated personalities such as that of D, in the exhibition catalogue, the author of these enigmatic watercolors to which he has given strange, invented names such as *Flausi-Flausi*, *Feérica* [Magical], etc.? They are adult beings enveloped by an insurmountable isolation, no longer possessing the power to coordinate the representations that touch consciousness itself or distinguish their sensations from the images and reflections of environmental reality.

He is no longer the creator of *Flausi-Flausi*; he is dispersed in air, in things, as it were; he is an object endowed with antennae, a strange living being that no longer inhabits this world of ours; a harp, a triangle of sound; these colored lines he weaves construct a sort of circuit between vegetable and animal, with the consistency of damp fibers like those of the trunk of a banana tree. The result is a mesh, a new framework for purposes as yet unclear; it might be the unfinished structure of a fantastical dirigible, the covering of which should have been swept away by the winds of space.

Whether formless or uncoordinated, all this nevertheless possesses an oddly musical quality, an abstract counterpoint in which the melodic lines of the dissociated personality still cross one another yet are no longer coordinated, no longer fixed in a group with a beginning and an end. Some of them point to the idea of a star machine, a celestial body, a passing meteorite. None of this precludes the fact that, within the chaotic mesh, admirable details may reveal themselves to the attentive gaze, the sweetest of profiles may appear like precise hallucinations or vaguely suggested dreams and symbolic signs to satisfy the curiosity of the most implacable analyst.

In passing, it must be said that what is lacking in these embryonic samples of art that we have here—the emotional raw material of formal creation—is productive will; that terrible, almost inhuman will that vanquished inner chaos itself in Van Gogh, imposing a formal organization and disciplining its explosive forces, subordinating everything to the final cosmic order necessary to creation.

Even in the most artistic—in the technical sense—of these personalities now exhibited before us, we may notice the absence of this formal resistance, the soul of the composition; however, it is what most differentiates the drawing or painting of a psychopathic personality or a child from those of a still conscious artist. In them a subjective confidence, an explosion of the affected self and the child's cosmic amazement before the eternally new spectacle, is predominant.

There is in these drawings and documents exhibited by the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional—which by so doing performs an inestimable service to Brazilian culture—a clear contrast between the joyous, spirited, playful minds evident in the images produced by the hands of minors, and the darker, more melancholy humor of those produced by the adults. Let us examine, for instance, *Passeata* [Protest march] or A's cold *Paisagem Abismal* [Abysmal landscape] and the minor D's *Cabritinho* [Little goat] or *Menino com o Bodoque* [Boy with slingshot]; compare the bitter, hallucinated expression of Autin's figures or the pungent, perverse, sickly romanticism of the author of the veritable drama in figures that is *Minha Vida* [My life] to the young O's doodles or farmyard chicks and nativity scenes.

In the end, what is art, from the emotional point of view, other than the language of unconscious forces that act within us? In turn, might not the visual arts be reductions of sentiments and aspirations that, even if they might become conscious, cannot be translated into words, according to Maria Petrie, that admirable pedagogue of the soul and of aesthetics? It is upon exactly this that modern educators of her kind base themselves. What they propose is to make use of art as a means by which to arrive at the harmony of the subconscious and to a better organization of human emotions. They request that “this grammar of a language able to express such important and subtle things” be taught to whoever wishes to learn it, in order that it may cease to be “the secret code of an elite.” Without this, it would once again become the instrument of a brotherhood more cloistered than the academic one, and more dangerous still because it is affective and possesses strange powers.

It is through this language that we learn the unconscious work of the mind that manifests itself in inspiration, that is, through the sudden projection of some thing or message in the field of consciousness, according to the vivid definition of the English educator. According to Petrie's definition, inspiration is knowledge, cognition by means of emotion rather than by means of intellect.

This is how we define the whole of one of the most significant branches of modern art, that of the family of subjective artists, the principal strain of which is represented by Surrealism. Let us not forget that one of the guiding principles of Surrealism is a condemnation of the external model (which is replaced by the incessant search for

an interior model). Revelations could be found in dreams and in the symbolism of the unconscious, and the principal means of capturing subconscious images would be psychological automatism, whether of verbal expression, in poetry, or visual expression, in painting and sculpture.

Painting speaks a new language: through it new possibilities for contact with other beings are established—a contact that will take place precisely within those regions in which the spoken word cannot penetrate or cannot be called to intervene.

Thus by felicitous coincidence, as currently considered by psychologists and artists and in light of these primary, elementary manifestations—the inconsequential bleatings of a creation that shall never come to be—the artistic phenomenon must be understood in a broader sense than it has been. This broader sense will allow it to reach its extremes, to catch up with simple, disinterested, lucid activity, in other words, that of the game with various materials that technology provides.

In this sense, even the scribbles of children and the mentally diminished fundamentally possess the same nature as the works of the world's great artists, conforming to an identical psychological process of creative elaboration. In all of these multiple and diverse manifestations, to greater or lesser degrees of intensity, what is essentially dealt with is nothing less than a bestowing of symbolic form (but form nonetheless) onto the feelings and images of the *deep self*.

Each individual is a separate psychological system, as well as a potentially malleable and formal organization. Psychological normality and abnormality are the conventional terms of quantitative science. In the domain of art, however, they cease to have any decisive meaning. Here, the boundaries between things are fainter, harder to precisely define than in any other domain of mental activity. The case of Van Gogh is conclusive: he was insane; yet some of his finest work was done while he was hospitalized. And do we not know other, equally illustrious cases in the field of literature such as those of [August] Strindberg and [Friedrich] Hölderlin? And, in England, at the beginning of the Victorian era, did we not have the pathetic case of the great medievalist William Blake? Doctors and psychiatrists tell us it is common to recognize accentuated manifestations and traits of schizophrenia and manic depression in so-called normal types.

From the perspective of the senses and the imagination, an intellectually disabled child or a mentally ill adolescent is, generally, quite normal; this is why they are able to produce authentic artistic manifestations and achievements. Their creative or imaginative appeal never disappears. On the contrary, they may oftentimes become more intense, urgent, and irrepressible, for that will be the only vehicle they trust to communicate with the exterior, for real communication, that is, from soul to soul.

In literary works, the creative process may be more rational because it does not dispense with but actually requires—to a certain degree—the contribution of intellectual concepts. Their dependency upon public participation is therefore greater. It is, however, less accessible to the child and the more mentally challenged.

For the mentally impaired and for children, for innocents of every sort, the art forms that require the least intellectual or conscious effort are the most accessible. This is not so much the case with music, in spite of the rhythmic element, which is instinctive, for children are not very sensitive to melody and harmony. In effect, these require a power of continuity and organization that escapes beings with a more hesitant control of consciousness.

Under these conditions, the visual arts are closest to the sensibility of children or the simple-minded. According to Petrie, they participate in the cosmic principles

inherent to space, such as two- and three-dimensional form, volume, mass, weight; in those same principles inherent to light: color, shadows, hues; and they deal with matter that can be acted upon, such as clay, stone, wood, paper, charcoal, etc.

Creative activity essentially repeats unconsciously the ongoing re-creation of the miracle of life among organisms, and that is what gives such exultant power to the work of pure creation. Hence artist and educator Maria Petrie's hypothesis that nature, in its attempt to lead our mental and psychological growth to develop harmoniously and in step with physical growth, has imposed its own laws upon actual artistic phenomena, so that men might finally recognize them and surrender to them. Thereby the same phenomena would take on the nature of a vital need, for it would be no more than a transposition onto the human plane of the laws of cosmic creation. This vitality, or form of vitality, is more urgent and irreducible when it identifies, defines, and expresses itself through those cosmic principles that rule things—"vitamins of the soul," to use Petrie's expression—that is, light, color, weight, rhythm, form, movement, and proportion. Art would be made according to the same principles that rule the incessant creation of the universe and its functional mechanism. It does not repeat or copy nature. Instead, it obeys the same rules; it transposes them to the plane of conscious (that is, human) creation. Thus, an artist is an individual who elevates himself to the category of universal architect, as the poor wretch Gauguin would have it.

At least in part, the discovery of the unconscious reveals to us the origins of artistic creation. The images and the life elaborated in it are the most genuine raw materials of the work of art. The latter manifests itself with or without the control of consciousness. It dispenses with the external contribution of the intellect. It belongs purely to the domain of the sensations that transmute themselves, by true miracle, into a harmony of formally structured emotions.

The visual arts may even dispense with those organs most indispensable to representation of the exterior world. Modeling may cease to be a visual art, given that through inner, haptic vision, the blind man, endowed with a sense of rhythm, is able to create plasticity.

To this end, it suffices that he combine the intuitions of touch with the divine sense of rhythm. Married to a sense of rhythm, this highly developed sense of touch allows a blind man to mold clay or mud and create inspired figures of profound formal visuality, of extraordinarily harmonic lines and planes. We already know of examples of these modelings through touch alone—the work of a blind man—which recall the formal organization of Lucas Cranach's figures.

Thus we have proof that these arts have no need of external visual representation. Indeed, the less they are subjected to realistic conventions and intellectual prejudices the more profound they are. A pure creation of the mind, the work leaves the unconscious or nothingness with the heat of things that are born to life, exuding joy, pain, sensitivity, in a system of emotions that—in turn—reinvigorates men with its spiritual vitamins, touching them with the grace of comprehending and the emanations of the world of forms.

Painting and sculpture—the arts in general—are techniques that must be learned as one learns to read and write, to sew, to cook, to weave. Their effects can make themselves felt even upon the mentally ill, whether by curing them or giving them hope, or by enticing them to once more come outside into our brutal, ugly world with messages, occasionally decipherable, that shine, devastating and fleeting, like flashes. There are no barriers—nor could there be, in fact—to the enchanted world of forms; there is no standing in line to enter its arena, which belongs to no one

and is common to all men without exception. Humanity is happy when all of them, initiated and without inhibitions, are able to penetrate this magical field! Entry is available to everyone.

The arts are surely not an unattainable exception. There is no education of the emotions, in the sense of an intellectual education, a social education, or education in other techniques for living. The earliest manifestations of the emotions appear at a very young age, and they do not respect limits, obstacles, prejudices, regulations, or even “states of consciousness.”

Art begins with a child’s earliest doodles and is present wherever men make use of hand and eye—of their senses and their hearts simultaneously—to bestow form unto anything that is not for immediate use, moved by the simple pleasure of making something, or even merely to express unconscious impulses. This is the case of the less adapted, such as these highly sensitive children and adults who now surround us with their invisible presence. The only means still left to them for communicating with us in depth (which is to say humanly), for signaling to us, is through these modest emotional expressions transferred onto paper and which, being of an obviously artistic nature, have been the object of our present discussion.

—“Arte, necessidade vital,” talk given at the closing conference of the exhibition organized by the Centro Psiquiátrico Nacional, with support from the Associação dos Artistas Brasileiros at the ABI, March 31, 1947. In *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), April 13 and 21, 1947.

Notes

1. As of 1946, the Hospital Dom Pedro II, located in the Engenho de Dentro district of Rio de Janeiro, contained an occupational therapy unit directed by Dr. Nise Silveira, who opposed controversial treatment methods such as electroshock therapy. Artists who collaborated with the unit included Almir Mavignier, Abraham Palatnik, and Ivan Serpa, as well as Pedrosa himself. In 1952 Dr. Silveira founded the Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente (Museum of images of the unconscious), a study and research center dedicated to the preservation of the works produced in the institution.
2. Maurice Denis (published under the pen name Pierre Louis), “Définition du Néo-traditionnisme,” *Art et critique* 65/66 (1890): 540–42. Quoted in Henri Dorra, ed., *Symbolist Art Theories: A Critical Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 235.
3. Paul Gauguin, *The Writings of a Savage*, ed. Daniel Guérin, trans. Eleanor Levieux (Da Capo: New York, 1996), p. 67.
4. Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, July 1885, in *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh*, ed. Ronald de Leeuw, trans. Arnold Pomerans (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 306.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–07.
6. *Cafuzo* is a term used for Brazilians who have Indian-African mixed racial background.
7. Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1964), p. 8. Italics in original.
8. *Ibid.*
9. “Unceasingly we run after our destiny. Sensation. Revelation.” Georges Braque, “Notebooks 1947–1955,” in *Georges Braque’s Illustrated Notebooks, 1917–1955*, trans. Stanley Appelbaum (New York: Dover Publications, [1948] 1971).
10. Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, September 1888, in *The Complete Letters of Vincent Van Gogh: With Reproductions of All the Drawings in the Correspondence*, vol. 3 (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1958), p. 58.
11. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, trans. Russell Goulbourne (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 14.

Science and Art: Communicating Vessels

Highly technical, mathematized Science becomes socially and philosophically isolationist. It seals off the senses to the universe and, therefore, to the imagination of laymen, that is to say, to naked men, unarmed before the mysteries of Nature. When Science rejects an intuitive—or truly sensitive—total image of the world, proclaiming the insufficiency and the impotence of the senses for grasping the ideomathematical world that it has constructed, humanity finds itself for the first time in its developmental curve without an intuitive cosmogonic or even cosmological concept of the universe. But can it live without a stable cosmogony? Man hesitates before this vertiginous and somber absence of an intuitively intelligible framework. In vain, his hands feel their way through the darkness, and his head does not conform to the formless vacuum. Especially now, as the inevitable hour of embarkation upon interplanetary travel draws near. Therefore, it is no extravagance if a group of artists rises up to construct this necessarily visionary image for which we feel such nostalgia. In fact, two types of visionaries may be differentiated within this general group—the blind and those whose eyes are opened childishly wide. The latter are first and foremost mathematicians, today more than ever identified with artists, for their domain is that of pure creation, entirely indifferent to ties with the uncultured world in which their feet are planted, having surrendered to the pure pleasure of speculation. Among artists proper, blind visionaries* create empirically through touch, through the contacts that they still (somehow and indirectly) maintain with the outer landscape. Armed with antennae that keep them headed toward good winds, they have faith in the good star. They are vehicles, instruments, mediumistic spirits. The others, those with their eyes open, give direct expression to the intuition of imagination. Expression in object-symbols, merely potential experiences and realities.

Only visionaries can create or configure cosmogonies. Whether or not Science can do so, willingly or not, this task is more than a socio-expressive mission; it is a necessity of the most elementary order of man's bio-psychological functions. The power of visualizing the exterior world as part of a whole, the elemental urge of man to organize his first contact with Nature, including among men, obliges him to construct a synthesis in his mind—a model, a general and primary image of the universe. Myths and cosmogonies are born from this sort of initial cognitive labor. From the outset, ingenuous phenomenological description is a mythic elaboration. The world cannot live without myth, nor can the brain interrupt its process of fabulation. Everything points to the fact that we are now in the beginnings of a new collective elaboration of this genre. Whether consciously or unconsciously, modern art re-creates myth, as did all the art of the past. Indeed, in all the great eras, formation of these vast imaginary concepts was one of the loftiest—if not the very loftiest—activities of artists: what culture or what art did not have its images, its myths about the end or the birth of the world: the final judgment, the Tower of Babel, the flood, resurrection after death, etc., etc.? Besides the Jews, of all peoples and cultures, followers of Islam may have been the only monotheists not to allow the representation of God—which they felt to be utterly beyond perceptibility—by a sensorial descriptive model or reduced to a particular figure. Geometry was the Greek science par excellence; Algebra, the Arab science par excellence. Algebra is not the stuff of which cosmogonies are made, but with Geometry they are formed almost spontaneously. However, in spite of an underdeveloped geometric

* After these lines had been written, [Emilio] Vedova, the Italian laureate painter, confessed to me in conversation that his desire was to create a "blind painting." (Author's note.)

awareness in comparison to its algebraic awareness, mythical thought in Islamic culture was not contained, although it may have been watered down by the growing influence of Hellenistic Greek thought, already quite distant from archaic Greek thought, or even from that of pre-Socratic philosophy.

Nowadays, as we have seen, even Geometry eludes its distant perceptual foundations. Indeed, there is nothing harder to visualize in the abstract than certain complexes of the topological repertory. Before this geometric reality that is inaccessible to the senses, contemporary man paradoxically finds himself in a position parallel to that of primitive man before Nature. Ever since the advent of Impressionism—but especially since Post-Impressionism and contact with archaic cultures and primitive non-European peoples—the nostalgia for thinking in terms of myth probably originated with this concept. Concerned with their cosmogonies above all else, the pre-Socratic philosophers left the responsibility of discriminating what was error from what was true intuition to later scientific and logical development. Democritus bequeathed to us the notion of the atom, the existence of which he never proved. Thus there was *news* of the existence of certain universal phenomena themselves *before* their discovery by Science, before the formulation of laws explaining their behavior. We might also point to what happens in the field of Mathematics nowadays. In it, the most fanciful investigations are generally hitherto unsuspected approximations of reality, even as they are reducible to hitherto unimaginable geometric spatial beings and in spite of the fact that they do not succeed in finding an equal purpose for deciphering unknown physical phenomena and laws.

Whereas since Newton, Geometry and Mechanics have been considered the accepted foundations of Physics and the other Natural Sciences, around the mid-nineteenth century this assumption began to be questioned with the advent of a new science: Thermodynamics. The second law of Thermodynamics, encompassing the transfer of energy—the passage of value to another energy or vice versa—as well as the idea of entropy, emphasized a crucial assumption of the modern critical mentality: the distinction between reversible and irreversible processes. The influence of this concept has increasingly come to dominate scientific thought. The struggle of the partisans of energetics continued throughout the rest of the century all the way to the beginnings of the present one. Generalizing, even then, the distinction between reversible process and irreversible process in order to endow it as a trait fundamental to the natural order, [Max] Planck, the creator of quantum theory, was able to write the following: “This distinction, with more right than any other, could be taken as a preeminent base for the classification of all physical phenomena and could still eventually play the leading role in any cosmology of a physics of the future” (1908 conference in Leyden, cited by E. [Ernst] Cassirer). Simultaneously, the understanding of electricity was enormously advanced by [Michael] Faraday—[James Clark] Maxwell’s introduction of the theory of the electromagnetic field.

With all these events taking place at the scientific level, new ideas were transplanted to the speculative domain of the Theory of Knowledge and other branches of Philosophy, for geometric concepts—ever since the abandonment of the old metaphysical notions derived from Aristotelian physics, the only ones left for translating the phenomena of the sensitive and physical world—were proving to be insufficient to explain the growing complexity of exterior reality. New qualities were then called in to assist in defining the strange objectified concepts of the current scientific view. Their properties possess an intrinsic dynamism that renders them even less accessible to immediate perception than the geometric ones: overcoming of dialogue, energy-mass, by that of mass dynamics, discontinuity of matter, etc. By coincidence,

whether deliberately or unconsciously, contemporary artists also begin to base their investigations on this new dynamism, this *vision in motion* of which [László] Moholy-Nagy was one of the great theorists and most lucid explorers.

Cubists and Futurists, Expressionists and Post-Impressionists, [Paul] Klee, [Piet] Mondrian, [Vasily] Kandinsky, [Kazimir] Malevich, Moholy-Nagy, [Theo van] Doesburg, [Jean] Arp, [Antoine] Pevsner, Suprematists, Vorticists, Rayonists, Neoplasticists, Constructivists, Abstract Expressionists—with greater or lesser propriety, all of them resort to these notions to explain the concepts that move them.

In addition to being a visionary artist, Klee was an eminent professor and an elegant theorist; he divided his book *Pedagogical Sketchbook*—a summary of his lessons at the Bauhaus—into four parts: Proportionate Line and Structure; Dimension and Balance; Gravitational Curve; and Kinetic and Chromatic Energy. The subtlety of his thinking and his visual imagination go far beyond the pure mechanics and simple metric (as well as projective) geometry: starting from a single dot's progression toward the line, he elevates the latter from the measure of all proportion to lines of eminent power and energy, vitally active abstractions that recall dynamic elements such as currents of water. In his treatment of dimension and balance, Klee replaced the old static notion of symmetry for that of the “equalization of unequal but equivalent parts.”¹ (The art of [Alexander] Calder!) In approaching the problem of man's position and of objects in space, in relation to the force of gravity or the natural dynamics of things as determined by the gravitational curve, the artist is especially sensitive to “regions with different laws and new symbols, signifying freer movement and dynamic position.”² In the last part, which is dedicated to the idea of energy and the understanding and defining of natural phenomena, he introduces an external albeit crucial element: the human *quantum*, that is, the idea, a symbolic form. For Klee, a “composition” only exists as “kinetic coordination” or “solution of kinetic infinity.”³ As in a thermodynamic system, energy resolves itself according to an “Intensification of color”⁴ that moves between extreme black and extreme white. In Kandinsky, objects are nothing other than fields of energy-tension, and compositions simple arrangements of lines (*Punkt und Linie zur Fläche* [*Point and Line to Plane*]). What he taught students at the Bauhaus was to observe not the object's external appearance, but its structural elements as well as what he termed logical strengths and tensions. For Mondrian, rhythm is everything, for it expresses dynamic movement through a continuous opposition of the elements of the composition. Through it, the work of art, a painting, is a sort of electromagnetic field in which contradictory albeit organized forces express what he designates as *action*, that is to say, life. Action is created by tension of form, by line, and by intensity of color. In his art, the Dutch master only distinguishes oppositions of position and dimension. On another occasion, he wrote: “Both Science and Art are discovering and making us aware of the fact that time is a *process of intensification*, an evolution from the individual to the universal, of the subjective toward the objective, toward the essence of things and of ourselves. . . . Through intensification one creates successively on more profound planes.”⁵

These concepts of force, of energetics, dynamics, intensification, etc., probably came from those sciences via modern psychology, above all the various holistic schools, such as Gestalt and Kurt Lewin's organismic-dynamic variant. On this subject, painter and theorist Allen Leepa (*The Challenge of Modern Art*) wrote: “The psychic energy of a period has a marked influence on the types of forms and images used. Fundamental to the activity of man is the release of tensions which are caused by personal and social problems.”⁶ Lewin, the eminent founder of Topological Psychology,

who sought to define psychodynamic and topological concepts (*A Dynamic Theory of Personality*), identifies the cause of this behavior as “inner tension systems of energy” that are a result of individual needs.⁷ His theory is essentially based on the concept of the field, transplanted from electromagnetic theory to Psychology. “All behavior (including action, thinking, wishing, striving, valuing, achieving, etc.) is conceived of as a change of some state of a field in a given unit of time.”⁸ At the individual psychological level, this notion is equivalent to what Lewin calls the subject’s “life space.”⁹ The concept of the field adjusts itself perfectly to that of contemporary sensibility, made up of direct oppositions of movement, of intensification, and of tension, in a well-delimited environment.

Traditional processes for creating space, such as perspective, effort, diagonal or inclined planes, and chiaroscuro, give us a passive image of space, leaving out what is essential to the modern mindset and sensibility: a sense of *spatial force*. The relationships among planes upon a surface create tension, create force, whereas space in itself does not create. For Leepa, “The space that planes create becomes active by association with the relations of emotion-tension and the system of psychic energy based on this opposition of tensions.”¹⁰ He continues: “Force is more closely tied up with the flatness of the canvas than it is with the realistic space portrayed. . . . The re-emphasis on the surface by contemporary ‘flat’ painting bears out its essential character in creative work. The emotion-tension appears to be closely tied up with the shifting and opposition of the forms on the surface of the canvas. The shifting of the forms actually controls the direction of the emotion-tension: it is the most forceful element with which the artist works. This does not mean that the space does not function in this emotion-tension, but rather that it is created as an adjunct more spontaneously felt than intellectually realized while painting.”¹¹

It is crucial to the understanding of modern painting and, therefore, of contemporary sensibility, to distinguish between the space whose existence depends upon our recognition of it on the canvas and felt space or, rather, this feeling of a surrounding space that is an indispensable factor of the component forces of formal tension.

Thus, artists and theorists increasingly speak of these dynamic qualities—tension, energy, force, vibration, attraction—and progressively less of the worn-out old terms of academic recipes. For this very reason, the idea of balance tends to be replaced by that of spatial relations; that of composition by force fields; that of drawing by the interrelationship of lines and planes, etc. The academic notion of composition was essentially static in nature, seeking above all to draw the viewer’s attention to the privileged placement of figures or forms in the painting’s central planes. So-called triangular, pyramidal, circular, etc., compositions were greatly admired and are described in detail in composition manuals to this day.

In one very interesting passage about the tension of balance and composition, for example, Leepa, with the double authority of practicing artist and writer, precisely describes the artist’s creative process, driven always and instantaneously (Kandinsky!) by the idea of force and balance within a defined field. Leepa says to us that the sense of strength and the sense of balance are always confused, even though they are different (albeit related). The latter, isolated, as in traditional painting, is like a “seesaw feeling”:¹² masses on one side of the canvas, masses on the other side; one corner of the canvas vis-à-vis another corner. However, a sense of force and of formal balance on a canvas always produces an intense emotional experience in the painter as he works—one in which the viewer later actively participates. It is a matter (he continues, describing his own experience) of an emotional reaction to the relationship between opposing parts—one that the artist feels as he advances in

the work. Yet the simple act of balancing forms upon the canvas *does not necessarily require great emotional intensity*. And, moving on, he gives us the reason for which the senses of force and balance are so frequently confused: it is that “the two processes function at the same time during creative activity. As the artist works, he develops his whole painting, opposing and balancing one form against another. In other words it is possible to experience balance without emotional intensity, but it is not possible to feel emotional intensity without balance; emotion-tension cannot be created without equilibrium—it incorporates *balance in a more profound, more intense experience*. A balanced painting is not necessarily a creative painting. The artist may feel balance in his canvas and still not experience an emotional intensity. The expressive vitality of a painting is not determined by the passive juxtaposition of forms on the canvas but on a strong felt relationship of these forms.”¹³ In seeking to define this mysterious dynamic of equilibrium-emotion-tension more precisely, Leepa resorts to the authority of Mondrian, that austere and formidable master of the dialectic of opposition, who described it thusly: “The equilibrium of any aspect of nature rests on the equivalence of its opposites.”¹⁴ This description shows how the unconscious and conscious elements, the intellectual element and the impulsive element are indissolubly fused in the creative process. However, one thing stands out clearly: the artist sees, feels, relates, and coordinates simultaneously; and all of these functions are simultaneously intuitive, sensitive, and logical. Relationships of space, of form, of opposition, of power, of intensification, of repulsion and attraction, of tension and distension, of differentiation and integration, along with the continuous, incessant vigilance needed to avoid seeing, feeling, or understanding anything unilaterally, are all specific to creative artistic activity and demonstrate the affinities that link the mental process of a sage such as [Hermann L. F. von] Helmholtz to that of an artist such as [Paul] Cézanne; of a mathematician such as [Christian F.] Klein to that of a painter such as Kandinsky. On this point, it may be appropriate to remember that an unquestionable authority such as W. M. [Wilbur Marshall] Urban (the great theorist of modern semantics) puts the unwary on guard against an excessive simplification of this “popular division of symbolism,” which sets Art and Poetry to one side and Religion and Science to the other.¹⁵ This, he says, “assumes . . . a distinction between art and science which, at least in this extreme form, does not actually exist. More and more science itself tends to deny the absoluteness of this distinction and to insist upon a kinship between the artistic and the scientific imagination.”¹⁶

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Notes

1. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy, introduction to *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, by Paul Klee (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, [1955] 1972), p. 10.
2. Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, trans. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, [1955] 1972), p. 24.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
4. This idea is discussed by Klee, though the direct quote does not appear. See *ibid.*, pp. 57–61.
5. Piet Mondrian, “Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art,” *Circle: An International Survey of Constructivism* (1937). Italics are Pedrosa’s.
6. Allen Leepa, *The Challenge of Modern Art* (1949; New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1957), p. 64.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Dorwin Cartwright, foreword to *Field Theory in Social Science: Selected Theoretical Papers*, by Kurt Lewin (London: Tavistock Publications, 1963), p. xi.
9. Kurt Lewin, *Principles of Topological Psychology*, trans. Fritz Heider and Grace Heider (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1936), pp. 11–13, 41–58.
10. Leepa discusses similar ideas in *The Challenge of Modern Art*, pp. 128–29: “The space defined by a plane . . . can create a space force when the plane defining the space creates an emotion-tension surface relationship.”
11. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

12. "Balance in painting is see-saw balance: the masses on one side of the canvas against the masses on the other side, one corner of the canvas against the opposite corner." *Ibid.*, p. 123.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 124. Pedrosa's italics.
14. Piet Mondrian, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 125.
15. Here Pedrosa makes a mistake in his recall of Urban's assertion. Rather than setting art and poetry to one side and religion and science to the other, as Pedrosa states, in fact, Urban wrote, "A popular division of symbolism is that which places the symbols of art, poetry, and religion on one side and those of science on the other." Wilbur Marshall Urban, *Language and Reality: The Philosophy of Language and the Principles of Symbolism* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, [1939] 1971), p. 456.
16. *Ibid.*

Crisis of Artistic Conditioning

The central problem in today's art is that of its integration into social life as a legitimate, natural, permanent activity that is not simply tolerated or accepted, or treated as a thing apart, for specific occasions, in certain circles. A natural activity, as legitimate as entertainment, sports, advertising, or religious practices. It will be one of the subjects at the next international congress of critics in Prague, after having been an object of debate at another congress of critics in Israel, in 1963,¹ from a slightly different angle than that of "artistic creation in modern technology."

It is common knowledge that the latter has not only been altering social conditioning with growing speed and depth but has also been essential in man's relationship with work. At present, among men who labor, who handle tools and materials, we may count the artist (or "supreme technician," as the eminent anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits called him). Indeed (and above all else) he is a maker of objects, a producer of things not expressly solicited by the market or, at least, not produced directly for it. We are talking about a category of worker who was predominant in precapitalist, or not essentially competitive economies—that of the independent individual producer. Nowadays, within the essentially capitalist (and even supercapitalist) socioeconomic context, he is an anachronistic figure, so to speak, socially and culturally much closer to the individual peasant who cultivates his plot of land, to the artisan who handles his own instrument, than to the worker or producer of large modern industry. Although totally capitalist in its social conditioning, the intrinsic nature of his work is still necessarily precapitalist (or artisanal). (Even when he handles machines, he does so individually, in an unusually gratuitous activity, for aesthetic pleasure.)

Along with other nineteenth-century social thinkers and economists, [Karl] Marx explained the implications of private property, since productive activity was "the foundation of petty industry."² But the latter was no more and no less than the "essential condition for the development of social production and of the free individuality of the labourer himself."³ Frequently mistaken for one another in past civilizations, it was in such an environment that the creative geniuses of industry and the arts emerged. The individual mode of production that permeated and established the productive foundation of all social regimes, from slavery to feudal servitude, from Asian despotism to medieval guilds, reached its whole and classical form when the productive worker became the free proprietor of the means of production that he himself put into action on his own. This may be described, in Marx's evocative expression, as "the virtuoso and his instrument."⁴ Freed from its means of production in small industry, the work of the individual owner/producer, throughout civilizations

and cultures, is and has always been the essential condition for creative and artistic labor as well.

Clearly, such ideal conditions for creative production have been dwindling inexorably since the bourgeoisie's rise as the dominant class, when it brought with it a capitalism and an industry organized around manufacturing centers in which individual workers lost possession of the instruments needed for their work. The artist's personality was split in two: that of the craftsman, which was always that of a producer of something new, that is, of "fine" arts. The "work of art" became a new product—for a new clientele: the upper social strata, the elites of the ascendant bourgeoisie. Great artists and personalities, those who keep company with princes, cardinals, good men, rich bourgeoisie—Michelangelo, [Leonardo] da Vinci, Raphael, Titian, El Greco, [Peter Paul] Rubens, and the like—all emerged from there. In the same sense, all later social, economic, or cultural development represented a complete separation of manual and intellectual labor, craftsmen on one side and industrial creators and entrepreneurs on the other, increasingly secular clienteles that belonged to the moneyed aristocracy and increasingly larger and more indiscriminate markets.

In the past, a style emerged in which all of society's artistic and industrial activities were generalized to define an era. In modern times, even though it did not last for even a generation, the last style to define an age was Art Nouveau, at the threshold of grand modern industry. Nowadays, industrial products are no longer projected and dictated by an ideal of technical perfection, of solidity, commodity, functioning, of strict obedience to the needs of their power of competition in the market, power submitted to the dictates of advertising and price. The current power of synthesis and agglomeration of all industrial and productive projects is given by the school of thought that dominates advertising—the only truly total one. It would not be possible for mass production to survive within a society that prefers—like societies of individual production in the past—to consume quality instead of consuming the new. The latest model is always the best: the "next-to-latest" ones are either quickly traded in or launched outside the circuit like old objects, residues, rubbish. (The automobile graveyards of the United States!) The pathetic beauty of these zombies, of these *sapucaias*,⁵ was immediately perceived by artists eternally nostalgic for the past and the future. Nostalgia for the object was one of Pop art's profound motivations. The civilization of waste, the essence of American civilization, provoked this aesthetic of the residue, the dejecta, the garbage that exists in many of the experiments of Pop, of neo-realism, of polymaterialism, and others today.

After Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, the movements that followed throughout the first half of the century—Fauvism, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism, Constructivism, Abstractionism, and Concretism—all unfolded by means of an evolutionary inner logic. This succession of development stopped them from decaying or becoming "outdated" before completing the evolutionary cycles themselves and exhausting their potentialities. Their evolution was still integrated to the field of Art and, within it, largely as a result of intrinsic solicitations. But even then, even as they appeared and succeeded one another, an external force was increasingly felt, in the sense that it accelerated their own evolutionary process and drained them of possibilities. This active external force—a veritable law of acceleration of contemporary artistic experiments—is the expression (in the hitherto reserved domain of the arts) of the determinant influence of mass consumption, of which one of the most important aspects is Marx's so-called *gebildet konsumieren* (conspicuous consumption).

As we have seen, it is no longer possible to speak of production without speaking of the system of labor, of forms of labor, and, ultimately, of creation. The essence of

creation, whatever it may be, lies in work. Under the social conditions that govern us and all of our activities—principally in the West—even the most disinterested activity is limited to the circle of the individual and tends to be absorbed by so-called productive work, or labor that produces only for the market.

Of course, it was in the United States that the phenomenon achieved its fullest expression. The industrial product, or industrial design—and this proves that the return to the “beautiful form,” like the essence of craftwork, was a futureless, romantic archaism—progressively lost its affective ties to the question that seemed, only a few years earlier, to be so basic: that of form itself—good form aprioristically conceived, that is to say, in short, conceived, along with Art, to be nothing other than a total program, much closer to the work of engineers than to that of artists. Paradoxically, however, one factor prevents this total program from being put into effect according to a lucid and full scientific rationality: this would be advertising, which intervenes in the program in order to divert it, forcing it to respond to the futile solicitations of mass sales. So the industrial product cannot be as perfect as possible: artistic creation is not left free, handed over to its distinguished potentialities.

Thus, the automobile is not an object in itself but a product of substitution, with its equivalent perfectly quantified in numbers and money signs, having none other than a relative existence, exterior to its own specific nature. The automobile represents the horse-driven carriages of our grandparents. The horses of yesteryear were magically transformed into the horses of the motor. What is common, what relationship may be found between the owner of the horse of yesteryear and the owner of the automobile of today? None. Formerly, the relationships between man and the objects of his use were personal, affective, lasted a lifetime or more. Those of today are impersonal, neutral, purely functional, there being no time in which to establish affection by those who use them. Of simple relative existence, nonindividual, like a fly in a multitude of flies, it is not quite an object created by the hand of the man-producer-artist, with the fundamental characteristics of a work indelibly impregnated with the mark of direct human labor. It is a thing.

Not for nothing is the fact that the notion of “style” being imbued with a certain nobility is being slowly replaced by a notion of *styling*, created and imposed by the determinations of mass consumption. The rule of *styling* is the incessant succession of models that replace one another, without stopping and as rapidly as possible, with the changing seasons. What is it we find when we leave the realm that we insist on calling “industrial art,” which in certain sectors is impregnated with an ancient romantic mustiness, in order to enter the purely aesthetic realm of the work of art? We find that it becomes increasingly attracted to and forced to enter the deadly race of models on the market. But can it replace that contingency without denying its own unmistakable nature—its nature of being within our social conditioning the only object that cannot exist other than as a product of itself? And never as a product of substitution, with its equivalent of use the result of the same laws that determine the *styling* of an automobile or a shirt or a bikini? In its essence, the work of art is not an object for consumption, nor is it a *commodité* in the French sense; however, it is merely “productive labor,” that is, essentially made for resale, when it enters the market as a *commodity* in the English sense of merchandise. (It is not a matter of refuting modern technology’s perfect means of reproduction; it is a matter of denying its intrinsic unity.)

In times past, craftsmanship—given that its principal feature was its perennial individuality—allowed for the propagation of its fundamental qualities and the subsequent birth of a style. Nowadays, conditions for creating a style no longer exist. For quite some time, the search for this modern style was the tormented ambition of

many artists, critics, and theorists. A utopia revealed itself. In order to create a formal and stylistic unity, what cannot be missing are the artisanal qualities of intrinsic perennality and similitude, and, above all, the solidity of profound cultural traditions that are able to furnish the fertile ground for a super-individual collective creation. Whereas, in times past, the artist was a “supreme technician,” nowadays he is seen as somewhat unusual and apart from others, someone the market tends to crush as a hurricane would a dry leaf. Formerly, it was precisely preexisting stylistic standards, a priori of the permanence of a culture, that prevented change and innovation according to the whims of chance. Today, the fatal, irreparable absence of those preexisting standards indicates that Art has lost its cultural roots and has been subordinated to other necessarily unstable and random patterns, such as those dominant in the consumer market.

The Western artist attempted to survive without those proper standards, dependent upon himself, upon the autonomy of his own being, drawing inspiration from strange cultural sources in name of the absoluteness of formal values, regardless of original cultural standards, deprived of symbolic meanings or native mythologies. For as long as this historical-aesthetic-cultural experience could be exploited by individual artists, in a fertile way, modern art filled our age with works of authentic value. (Ultimately, it was a new, cultural experiment based on the deliberate—so to speak—isolation of the artistic phenomenon’s intrinsic elements.) Everything now points to the fact that the experiment was consummated.

Conscious of this situation ever since [Paul] Klee lamented that the people did not support them, rootless artists began to react by simultaneously inserting themselves into the techniques of modern communication and proclaiming their contempt for the established canons of Art, in a radical operation to demystify the object, the work of art. Ultimately, once the powers of sublimation of pure formal values have been exhausted, they react to the conditioning of the market like birds sensing new winds blowing in other directions.

In a supremely objective desperation, to which they surrender, these artists negate Art and begin—whether consciously or unconsciously—to propose something else to us, above all a new attitude, the deepest meaning of which they are not yet perfectly conscious. It is an entirely new cultural (and even sociological) phenomenon. We are no longer within the parameters of what was called modern art. Let us call it postmodern art in order to signal the difference. In this moment of crisis and of choice, we should choose the artists.

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Notes

1. Pedrosa is referring to the International Association of Art Critics’ 18th General Assembly, held in Prague and Bratislava, in 1966; and its 15th General Assembly, held in Tel Aviv, in 1963.
2. Karl Marx, “Historical Tendency of Capitalistic Accumulation,” in *Capital: An Abridged Edition*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 378.
3. Ibid.
4. Though this exact phrase does not appear, Pedrosa seems to be referencing *ibid.*, which refers to the virtuoso and his “tool” rather than “instrument.”
5. *Sapucaia* is the name common to various species of resilient woody plant belonging to the genus *Lecythis*, of the family Lecythidaceae, native to Brazil; its fruit possess oleaginous, edible seeds and are used as gourds.

Crisis of Poetry: Art and Communication

The crisis of art or the crisis of poetry to which we are all bedazzled and apprehensive witnesses reflects a more general crisis: man's mutational crisis in the cosmos. Man is changing, man will change. Although we haven't yet confirmed it, we know this; we feel it even though we have not yet made the necessary effort of abstraction to understand or, rather, to situate ourselves consciously and immediately within the process. But let us look at politics. Whether because Science is or should be (at the very least) the most appropriate technology with which to situate man within this fearsome process, nothing could be more desolate and provincial, look where we may upon the global stage.

However, in the field of the Sciences, whether general or more specialized subjects, things are different. This is where one becomes aware of the phenomenon that is of capital importance to the history and survival of humanity. Biologists are sick and tired of warning us about the most palpable and dangerous effects that new technological and energetic conditions are creating for the species, while physicists and philosophers, scientists from the various branches of Astronautics, cyberneticists, and information and communication theorists (along with poets and visionaries), separate the details and developments of the irreversible process as laboriously as ants. Indeed, how can we think that Poetry and Art—the great branches of fantasy and fabulation—might remain strangers to the phenomenon alongside brazen legions of charlatans, prophets, mediums, parapsychologists, and messianic and eternal founders of religion?

But enough generalizing. Let us return to our little corner. We were talking about a crisis in Art, which may be considered from its aesthetic point of view, that is to say, from the prism of appreciation for the work of art, the prism of criticism. Above all, what one wants nowadays is to know what the work of art signifies to the spectator. The ontological aspect of the work of art—the precise aspect of the Philosophy of Art—is set aside. (The recent work of Étienne Gilson¹ about the philosophical penetration of the nature of the work of art should be regarded from this stupendously open angle.) The very predominance of appreciation that befalls the spectator with regard to an intrinsic knowledge of the work reveals the change of position undergone by art and by the artist as compared to what it was in the early part of the century; today, the nonvisual aspects of art may be rejected because of a need to isolate and analyze the phenomenon of a work and its formal values. The cultural conditioning that emerged, and came to be defined as “modern art,” was then created.

Now, as the work of art loses its unity, as the artist transcends his own work, the philosophers of art give way to aesthetic criticism and, above all, to the theories of signification, that is to say, of languages, of communication, of information. All of them are concerned with the messages from the receptors' side. This only serves to outline the scope of the cultural moment we are experiencing. It might be said that all ears and all eyes are open to all stimuli, to all provocations, to all communications, to all codes. Today man is an open animal and, therefore, a decaying animal—the old self-absorbed animal—and, furthermore, if nothing else, through strength of symmetry, a box, a progressively complex machine.

Abraham Moles, currently the most important theorist of Information Theory at the aesthetic level, wants to characterize what is modern by means of artificial channels of communication. Actually, what would characterize modern man would be the expansion of his bio-physiological powers of communication beyond the natural, the organic, would be his continuous expansion, as organic-cultural complex, beyond

the natural boundaries of the biological organism. While for Moles that which signals man's moment in the cosmos is an awareness of the materiality of information, this awareness should not be understood as if materiality were to abolish the ideal aspects of the messages that people exchange; it only means that such messages neither stifle nor conceal the operation's material side. Moles has explained that the ideas that were transmitted led to a forgetting of the means of transmission. Formerly, those who had a message to communicate—philosophers or prophets, for example—did not consider the materiality of writing (or other record) anything other than an annoying contingency, and from which it was imperative that the word should be freed. (The more ethereal and miraculous a conveyance appeared to be, the closer it was to truth.)

When languages were formed and the task of thinkers, philosophers, mandarins, priests, physicians, witch doctors, and magicians was that of fixing the necessarily fluctuating value of words, the process of isolating their various meanings was also (ultimately) linked to a parallel (albeit very slow) process of technological materialization of procedure. But when, as if in an inverse process, the word is freed from its conductive support, it is the metaphor that poetry or metaphysics isolates from it to extract new meanings. Throughout the endless domain of nominalism, the word becomes a being in itself, a thing, an object, and, like every object, must be identified in a necessary time-space extension.

It ceases to be an image in order to become a sign; it ceases to be a verb that makes with action an inextricably dialectic mass to become a disciplined signifier in a syntactic structure, a semantic sign in a logical framework and, ultimately, a signal in a coded message. The word frees itself from its awkward bio-physiological channels of permanent fog and psychological-perceptive "bewitchment" ([Ludwig] Wittgenstein) with which it is surrounded, somehow linked to the eminent initial effort, even today uncertainly or precariously apprehended by the correspondent—and likewise badly and empirically conditioned—recipients. The whole process continues to be yoked—as it were—to the reflexive creative semantic effort of the very formation of language or languages. There is always something clogging the conduits. Instinctiveness is a sap that runs from the blossoming of words and nourishes this tangle of parasitic creepers of human expression that coil themselves around the channels of emission and prevent or hinder clear semantic flux. Through his own organic, natural resources, man himself is incapable of achieving the clear fluidity of a purely semantic emission devoid of residues. However, to this point we have largely experienced this bewitching flowering (O! Joyce! O! Our own Guimarães Rosa!) which nonetheless gave us all the art and poetry we possess, the explosive energy of the metaphors of our (still Homeric) rhetoric, of our still Biblical storytelling.

Before it surrendered to a washing by the semanticists, to the discrimination of Semiotics, to its passage through symbolic logic, the liberation of the word had been the work of poets, in an effort to render its mythical uniqueness clear and polished. The alchemists crafted matter and water with eternal patience until they either arrived at heavy water and the point of its atomic transformations, or at the philosopher's stone. Poets had also been crafting the word with the same patience and the same elementariness of means that the alchemists used upon matter until arriving at its current anatomy, when enlightened artificial material conduits allow for its measurement. We do not wish to display erudition we do not possess, but—after [Arthur] Rimbaud—allow me to quickly invoke [Stéphane] Mallarmé, who crafted words with the patience and eternity of an alchemist (*Un Coup de dés*),² but only to remember the work of our young Concretist poets, without neglecting the experiments of Ferreira Gullar, the remarkable creator of *A luta corporal*.³

Independently of the poem's art, all deliberate word experiments are artisanally inscribed within the same lengthy, erudite protest. Gullar, for instance, made a few perfectly valid attempts at what he called the "non-object,"⁴ starting with the *Poema enterrado* [Buried poem] (see plate on p. 74), for which the fondly remembered José Oiticica (under tender pressure from Hélio, his son—who had not yet surrendered his soul to the devil in order to become the driven artist of today) built an underground shelter in the garden of his home. Alchemically, the poet seeks to find the place, the statutory site of the word, a uterus (artificial conduit) from which it might be reborn as it had been the first time around. The theorist of the "non-object" wanted to restore the purity of pregnancy and was, in this sense, the first (unintentional) creator of Brazil's "aesthetic," or "school," of boxes (about which so much has been indiscriminately and somewhat haphazardly said here up to this point). The *démarche* of the Concretist poets is something else altogether: they also attempt to isolate it, only not in real space-time, for they do not treat it as pregnant. They want to re-create it, supplying it with specific, flat planar structures in order to emphasize or create specific visual substances from it. The contribution of these poets, above all those from São Paulo, has been substantial, thanks in particular to the critical poetry or the creative criticism of the Camposes [the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campos] or even the occasionally lucid aggressiveness of Décio Pignatari.

All these young poets and critics eventually situated the problem in question—that of the word and its conduits—within their aesthetic plan. In Rio, with the Neo-Concretism of misleading existence, its artists and poets were able to discover the element of time so as to destroy with it the aesthetic of formal visual simultaneism, in search of the moment of the creative process, an idea that traced its developments to the fertile investigations and speculative inquiries of Lygia Clark and the still creative formal experiments of Hélio Oiticica. As for the Concretists of São Paulo, poets all, they set the word within an increasingly complex two-dimensional spatial structure, running in all directions, in scales of rhythmic spatial decomposition and recomposition, in a veritable staff of musical notations, until finding in it the artificial conduit that is able to lead an optimal informative message within a minimum of redundancy to the reception points. However, they should not forget that redundancy is the substance or virus of every message, of all rhetoric, whether persuasive or soothing.

—Originally published as "Crise de arte-poesia e comunicação," *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), February 26, 1967.

Notes

1. Étienne Gilson (1884–1978) was a French philosopher and historian specializing in medieval philosophy who taught at the Sorbonne, Harvard University, University of Toronto, and the Collège de France.
2. Stéphane Mallarmé, *Un Coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (1914).
3. Ferreira Gullar, *A luta corporal* (author's edition, 1954). Reprinted in Gullar, *Toda poesia* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 2002).
4. See Ferreira Gullar, "Teoria do Não-Objeto," *Jornal do Brasil*, December 20, 1960.

Aesthetic Speculations I: The Conflict Between “Saying” and “Expressing”

In this very century, physics has been torn apart by two conflicting hypotheses—the corpuscular theory of light and wave theory—which are in no way attuned to one another within the theoretical edifice of Science, though, within their respective fields, both perfectly meet proposed experimental conditions. Today, a possibly even more striking conflict may be found in man’s perceptual field, amid the new hypotheses of Information Theory and those of Gestalt and the structural psychologies, the foundations of which are found in phenomenology. This more recent conflict is of great interest to us because humans have the very root of the conflict in our sensory perceptual thresholds.

This conflict has been brought about by perceptual form itself—the way through which we perceive things and words, our first immaterial means of communication, phenomenological experiences first and foremost, essential by virtue of their profound and contradictory implications for the aforementioned theory. It is a matter of returning to the analysis of various forms of perception and their primary, intuitive means, to their organization into formal wholes, and to the analysis of words or of language, another primal, intuitive conduit for communication that may be examined with greater scientific—even quantifying—precision. It is also possible to see that, with this, the concept and very destiny of both Art and Poetry are directly involved.

Language has been undergoing significant examination by philosophers and scientists ever since the first phonetic revolution, I believe, in the last century, in Europe. More recently, developments in Semantics and the creation of Semiotics came from Charles Morris (*Signs, Language and Behavior*),¹ based on his studies of Charles Sanders Peirce, a nineteenth-century philosopher whose work was largely based on modern American empiricism and for whom pragmatism was a rule of logic rather than a metaphysical theory, and logic itself nothing more than a philosophy of communication or a theory of signs.

Let us set all of this aside in order to concentrate, for a moment, on Ludwig Wittgenstein—another, more modern thinker (who died prematurely), and whose ideas regarding language posited the problem of its transformation from an empirical, ingenuous instrument of communication into something rigorous and logical. He was one of the most original proponents of such linguistic asceticism, and was perhaps the first to define language as “a totality of atomic facts,”² and the atomic fact, in turn, as being made up of things or entities. By means of names, personal pronouns, and possessive adjectives, Wittgenstein declared these things to be nameable. He proceeded to demonstrate that there is a direct relationship between things or entities and words that provides a logical skeleton—an ideal language. (This operation was undertaken in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.)³

We are not interested here in explaining the philosopher’s work. However, it does interest us to underscore one of his most curious statements—one that leads us to the crux of our problem: “That which expresses *itself* in language, we cannot express by language,” which is the equivalent of stating: “What *can* be shown *cannot* be said.”⁴ But what is it that expresses itself in language? Our response would be this: spontaneity, issuing directly from the cradle of our storytelling, not quite characterized by a clear logical nexus, but as image, instinctive reaction, figuration. All this is not yet discourse but expression, and for this reason touches and instructs us as intelligible, that is, as a form or gestalt, without provoking our logical mechanism. Wittgenstein’s paradox signifies that what is expressed by itself cannot be said “by language.” “Saying”

is different from expressing; it is another discipline, one that is part of the conceptual world, as with utterances or a combination of utterances that may be verified or controlled. (B. [Bertrand] Russell classified them as “tautologies,” “contradictions,”⁵ or “indefinite descriptions.”⁶ It is within this classification that its (use) value would be found, fixed in what W. [Wittgenstein] called structure or “logical skeleton.”⁷

Showing, however, belongs to a different category of conceptualization. It is not fixed by a framework of logic; its structure is no longer intrinsically language. Indeed, if “showing” signifies “spontaneous self-expression,”⁸ it still belongs to the realm of the intrinsically psychological, that is, of expression. The latter effectively becomes apparent when (whether spontaneously or ingenuously) gestalts, “wholes” such as “faces” or “physiognomies”—all of them things, the properties of which impress us as qualitative or affective—emerge during the organization of the sensory parts of the perceptual whole as characteristics distinct from measurable physical data (weight, dimension, etc.). Which is to say, things that attract or repel, frighten or harmonize, enchant, etc. Here we have what the mind signals as “the rule/precedence/primacy of the expressive over the sensible,” in its turn a necessary result of the primacy of the whole over the parts. Thus, in the sense attributed to it by W. [Wittgenstein], “showing” belongs to the realm of expression, which is also, as may be inferred, the old realm of *Alice in Wonderland*. And this is why W. [Wittgenstein] and others insisted on extracting it from that realm by freeing it from its bewitchments, language, a conduit-instrument by means of which “one says,” or that with which it is informed at the semantic level.

But W. [Wittgenstein] was not satisfied with this initial operation, and moved on to the task of cleaning up language of “its superstitions”; to now “refuse” the “bewitchment” of our language by means of language.⁹ He warns us not to try to see language as having a hidden essence. What matters is discovering how it functions practically. One should inquire after its multiple uses rather than its meanings. There is no language, there are only languages; rather, there are language games, linguistic games. The philosopher moves on from his initial logical atomism to linguistic analysis, a *démarche* common in contemporary Western thinking that abandons the “habit” of working with categories of substance, of essence, of quality through manipulations and analyses of mediations, of intermediaries, of the very instruments with which they probe reality. In this sense, our philosopher’s final operation is now to unharness the word from “its” meaning. “Understanding a word in a language is not just understanding its meaning, but knowing how it functions, or how it is used within these games. The notion of meaning, far from clarifying language, surrounds it in fog.”¹⁰

Yet the word of poets and alchemists was not vanquished, nor were the indeterminate utterances of which Russell speaks thrown to the winds. “To make of language a means or a code for thought is to break it. When we do so we prohibit ourselves from understanding the depth to which words sound within us,” the significations that “[speech] tears out or tears apart . . . in the undivided whole of the nameable, as our gestures do in that of the perceptible.”¹¹ The speaker now is [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty, an eminent phenomenologist. The codification of language prohibits us from understanding that there is a desire, a passion, a need to speak as soon as one thinks, that words possess the power to engender thoughts, to implant inalienable dimensions of thought for the future, that they put answers on our lips of which we do not feel capable, which [Jean-Paul] Sartre says give us knowledge of our own thought. Merleau-Ponty agrees with a claim made by Wittgenstein on the opposite end of the spectrum: “Between men and within each man there is an incredible growth of spoken words, whose nerve is ‘thoughts.’”¹² However, his conclusion differs from that of the codi-

fiers: "It would seem that in order to have something signified before us (whether at emission or reception), we must stop picturing its code or even its message to ourselves, and make ourselves sheer operators of the spoken word." For Merleau[-Ponty], thought is but the seed of the word's vegetation. Ultimately, whether consciously or unconsciously, it is as if each man had his own cave of representations behind him. The emission would issue from the cave.

For Wittgenstein, above all else it is necessary to separate the word from its alleged meaning, for, contrary to enlightening, the notion of meaning is enshrouded in fog. For Merleau[-Ponty], words are like vegetation, generators of meaning, imposing dimensions of thoughts that become inalienable the moment they are spoken. Unlike Wittgenstein, for him language is broken when a code is made out of it. For one, meaning is the fecund and eternal freshness of language; for the other, it is a bewitching fog. One of them says that language cannot be transformed into code; the other maintains that there is no language, only languages; instruments, rules, and games themselves are many, and they include proposing and obeying them, describing an object according to its appearance or by giving its measurements, resolving a problem of practical mathematics, and so on.

Between the bewitching fog that must be dissipated and the vegetation that must be preserved, the options seem to be practical deliberations or behavior versus theoretical decisions. One submits the word to an analytic treatment of severe logical rigor; the other credits the word with latent creative virtues. However, the conflict opens itself up to a third approach, that is not satisfied with either the French philosopher's brilliant and profound speculation or the penetrating but purely logical analysis of the Austro-British thinker.

Indeed, Information Theory displaces the problem to another level, one of a practical-experimental nature that allows for other developments. Once language has been divested of its web of independent significations, dusted daily to clean it of its "superstitions" by Wittgenstein's followers, by the operators of symbolic logic, it nevertheless continues to produce its vegetation of words, to envelop us in its fog of mystery and its blunders. Its intrinsic ambiguities are not dissipated—at least not most of them—as long as discussion of language at the theoretical, logical level continues and it is not treated as an instrument, as a manipulated object, as "materiality." Information theorists have arrived at this other, more concrete approach, which is susceptible to mediation and control, and concentrate attention upon the message itself, the study of its transmission and reception. Starting from the level of psychophysiology, their attention is dedicated, above all, to the study of the sensorial requisites and of the data that derives from them, living ingredients of the messages, so that, extinguished by the expressive outgrowths that accumulate around them, they may arrive at a quantity of precise semantic information.

So what did these scientists do? They displaced the problem from the abstract level of the logicians, without dissolving the antagonism that remains between the phenomenological Gestaltian hypotheses, in which the proponents of great human ambiguity nestle, and the quantitative verifications established in the realm of perception by the Theory of Information itself. Thus, the problem was only restated in more scientific terms, if you will; the conflict, however, remains open within the limits of man himself.

—Originally published as "Especulações estéticas I: O conflito entre o 'dizer' e o 'expressar,'" *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), March 12, 1967.

Notes

1. Charles Morris, *Signs, Language and Behavior* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1946; reprinted, New York: George Braziller, 1955).
2. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, introduction by Bertrand Russell, trans. C. K. Ogden (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), p. 31. Pedrosa slightly misquotes Wittgenstein, who in fact wrote: "1. The world is the totality of facts, not of things. 2. What is the case, the fact, is the existence of atomic facts."
3. See *ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 78. Italics in original.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
6. Bertrand Russell, "Ch. XVI Descriptions," in *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), pp. 167–68.
7. Wittgenstein uses the term "logical scaffolding." See Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, pp. 61, 67; and Nicolay Milkov, "Tractarian Scaffoldings," *Prima Philosophia* 14 (2001): 399–401. It is Russell who employs the term "logical skeleton." See John Slater, *Bertrand Russell* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), pp. 47–48.
8. The term "spontaneous expression" appears in Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (1958; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 1296.
9. The terms "superstition" and "bewitchment" can be found in *ibid.*, p. 47e.
10. The following phrasing, slightly different from Pedrosa's, is found in *ibid.*, p. 4: "We may perhaps get an inkling how much this general notion of the meaning of a word surrounds the working of language with a haze which makes clear vision impossible. It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one commands a clear view of the aim and functioning of words."
11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Introduction," in *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 17.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

Aesthetic Speculations II: Form and Information

When today's art is not regarded first and foremost as something for appreciation—whether it is seen merely from the critical point of view or from that of its place within a social, economic, and political context; or from a more limited perspective, albeit one that is intrinsic to humanity itself, within which the primordial conditions for its emergence are produced—its future takes on a disturbing shape.

A. [Abraham] Moles, who lucidly approached the sometimes outright, sometimes latent antagonism between Gestalt's hypothesis of perception and the experiments at the level of Information Theory, was one of the first to understand that this tension involved an ever more serious cultural problem: the preservation of the sphere of artistic and intuitive phenomena in the face of threats from mathematical analysis and Information. The solution he found was to establish a distinction between semantic information and aesthetic information. Without knowing it, the art of today struggles with this very same conflict, taking the form of a sort of struggle between products of "information" and those of "expression."

Moles's starting point is the sensory-experiential or psycho-physiological field, which is at the threshold from which man, the human organism, comes into contact with the outer world. For this very reason, he begins before language. Rather than set in opposition the existential and the logical, his intent is to reconcile or integrate the purely phenomenological, the data that it provides us within quantitative or experimental computations of Information. What interests him is a concrete problem apparently more modest than those of the philosophers and logicians, albeit one of paradigmatic importance to the development of perceptual investigations. For this very reason, the task he imposed upon himself was that of defining with precision the phenomenon of sound in a message.

Information Theory has brought an entirely scientific approach to the study of sound, to the point of elevating it, according to Moles, to a Physics of the Message

and the emerging possibility of recording sound. His first objective, then, was to devise a method that would posit the existence of the phenomenon of sound *per se*, independent of traditional connections—in short, the existence of the sonic object. The approach to the problem of the message then underwent a radical change. This change occurred precisely because it began to elude the contingencies of immediate perception, with its ingenuous, fumbling, and, ultimately, impressionistic or qualitative recording device. The trouble with another, more objective approach resided until then in the very absence of something—no matter how small—within the message, something that might allow the detection of materiality within it. This finally came about with the emergence of the musical and circular sign in wires, in circuits to be “transmitted, stored, received, bought, and sold.”¹ Its undisputed materiality grew to reach the musical sign and concretized itself in an object—the manifestations of which are given to us by effects. Recordings provided the ethereality of music with materiality. From this point on, the musical piece ceases to be music in order to become a thing, with spatial dimensions, something observable and measurable as a “temporal product.”²

Beyond the revolution of technological invention, the decisive operation here was having sought out the phenomenon of sound within our perceptual threshold in order to isolate, record, measure, produce, and reproduce it—in short, to treat it as an object.

When the simple musical note was detached from its original instrument, it soon emerged within a temporal structure. But when marked by intervals upon being recorded and materialized in a structure, the phenomenon of physical time led to the emergence of a structure hitherto not perceived in analytical terms: flow. This flow, in turn, experimentally produced in order to gain concreteness, is submitted to another operation that will decompose it. At the experimental level, this decomposition results in other phenomena or objects. Thus, through analysis of the decomposition of flow—a metrified product articulated within physical time—theory succeeded in producing a differentiation of capital importance. Indeed, through the, so to speak, spontaneous opposition to the notion of flow, it will achieve another phenomenon—this time of an irreducibly psychological nature—called duration, the denotative feature of which is that it can only be perceived psychologically, or merely as a whole. Because of this, Moles designated it a “dimension of sensation.”³

When one proceeds to isolate duration—which is intrinsically psychological in nature—for analytic purposes, one realizes that isolation does not erase it. On the contrary, duration draws unto itself a very specific attention; for duration cannot be deconstructed into complex structural elements that are only of interest to the analysis of sonic objects. Thus it only touches us as un-decomposable Gestaltian perception. In this case, the phenomenon is the opposite of the musical note, which—withdrawn from its initial empirical origin as the property of a given instrument—is subsumed in a sequence in time, disappearing due to having been transformed into a de-particularized phenomenon of sound, already a participant of the category of sonic object, with the physical properties of measurement, extension, etc. As we have noted, once recorded, sound phenomena pass from the quantitative, numbered, measured plane in which they exist as objects, after having been isolated and gathered in the sensory thresholds of our organism. Throughout this process, the elements of the flow are eventually analyzed, measuring what is quantified, while, for example, according to an experimentally produced contrast, they are distinguished from the phenomenon of duration which, not being physically or analytically decomposable, does not lose its first designation as pure psychological perception, pure gestalt.

In light of these analytic deliberations, Moles does not conceal Information Theory's tendency to mistake "the human organs of perception with mechanical systems or materials of transmission and reception."⁴ The psycho-physiologist does not hesitate to consider the individual receptor as an exploratory device. (A certain disconsolateness of Moles's notwithstanding, there may well be nothing to do against this—Cybernetics is a fact.) Be that as it may, in its atomistic propensities, the theory initially rejects certain aspects of the perceptual world's reality that are, nevertheless, the very property or raw material of Psychology's holistic, globalizing theories. Thus two perceptual concepts, which Moles calls "exploratory" and "global," confront one another.⁵ Ultimately, they are merely the results of the early-twentieth-century controversy between the atomistic thesis and the Gestaltian thesis. The great innovation of the former came principally from the cyberneticist search for analogies between organism and machine. For this reason, it advances in increments that integrate one another in the manner of analogical encounters with the television camera eye and end with the emergence of experimental memory systems.

As a counterpoint to this concept, both the early Gestaltians ([Wolfgang] Köhler) and the later (possibly less ambitious) ones managed to find one of the principles of their perceptual concept in the verification—a consequence of the systematic study of the cerebral cortex as it relates to optics—of the fact that the diffuse visual field is very broad, whereas the central visual field is, on the contrary, quite restricted. This understanding somehow confirmed the Theory of Form's experiments within the field of pure psychology, according to which visual perception precedes the apprehension of wholes rather than perception coming through exploration, in a succession of details of sensations that come together and accumulate *a posteriori*, in another mental operation. Thus, as a result of a disparity between the great extension of the diffuse visual field and the restricted nature of the central field, the perceptual process means one does not learn a word letter by letter, nor word by word on a page; rather, one proceeds by leaps, from one visual group to another, or by perceptual wholes.

The theorists of exploration did not accept these limitations, and showed how, even in the cases most favorable to the gestalts (viewing a painting or a motion picture screen), the exploratory process may intervene in the sense of intensifying perception, in an exhaustive and memorizing manner. It must be understood that, at the level of information, global perception is positively deficient. Moles himself, the champion of "esthetic information" as well as "semantic information," recognizes that—although they are evident—the perceptual gestalts teach us very little about the intrinsic nature of the phenomena underlying perception.

However, there is one irreducible factor that protects the concept of Form from the most tenacious and productive exploratory assaults on their own perceptual level. This is the hitherto indisputable fact that the global perception of elements "[is] *not* . . . the result of random events."⁶ On the contrary, this combination is intrinsically inherent to the act of perception. And here it is: equilibrium—and even less so a synthesis of the two theories—is not easily obtained. A decisive factor encumbers this synthesis or equilibrium. It is the new concept of "quantity of information"⁷ that leads to a constant search for breaking the boundaries of the fields of validity of both theories. However, the tendency to break these limits means, in turn, the constant expansion of the parameters of an exhaustive perception. Although such a tendency is characteristic of exploratory perception, it has no part in the intrinsic nature of Gestaltian investigation (chiefly in terms of time) as a minimum time-frame for exhaustive perception.

Nevertheless, for each perceptual field there are limits—or one maximum limit—of perception that are decisive (at least for some time) to the individual. (Actually, this boundary that has moved beyond the strict field of the psycho-physiologists, projecting itself in the much vaster field of culture.) Indeed, we have already calculated the ultimate limit of perceptible information, and we also know how this ultimate boundary is generally inferior insofar as the sources that surround us, whether they be auditory, sonic, visual, or tactile. We only use an infinitesimal fraction of the information that comes to us from the world around us. From what we are able to assimilate, we infer that control over this exterior world will depend increasingly upon our ability to learn to select in the messages of the surrounding environment those elements which, captured and brought together, allow us at every instant to control that world. However, in this selective operation there is something qualitatively irreducible that elevates itself above exploratory analyses. What is it? The concept of form that was always the first generalization, the first abstract synthesis we managed to achieve within the concept of reality. In renewing the formulation of the old concept, Moles proposes: the first element of a structure.

Once again, its perennial function is clear and basic to us: to express, as such, the realm of the intelligible in the organization of the perceptible, or of primacy over the sensory. This is precisely where we have a surfeit of (or where we are left with) intuitive moves, with meanings that come from the eternal vegetation of the word, those residual aesthetic blocks to which man—in the sensory perceptual thresholds that equip and circumscribe him within the moment—has until now confined himself in order to make poetry, art, and philosophy.

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Notes

1. Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, trans. Joel E. Cohen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1968), p. 106.
2. Moles uses the phrase “temporal material.” See *ibid.*, p. 107.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
4. This exact phrase does not appear in the English version of *Information Theory*, however similar ideas are discussed in *ibid.*, pp. 7–8, 17.
5. The words “exploratory” and “global” may appear in English translation as “scanning” and “form (Gestalt).” See *ibid.*, pp. 8–9, 57.
6. The English translation reads: “More precisely, a form is a message which appears to the observer as *not* being the result of random events.” *Ibid.*, p. 57.
7. *Ibid.*

Aesthetic Speculations III: Endgame

In Socialist or Communist ideology, the moment in which man reaches full control over nature shall be the moment in which humanity finally passes from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom ([Friedrich] Engels). Until now, the moment we came closest to realizing this was when man succeeded in disintegrating the atom, in opening up the heart of matter. But what came next? The possibility of harnessing nuclear energy—and Hiroshima! Followed by extraplanetary exploration and a race to the Moon.

In both of these ideologies, nature would become a great deal closer to us as man’s power grows over the infinite mass of information that descends upon us from the

exterior world, like stardust. And due to this growing power, man would also find his faculties altered, including his sensory, psychological, and mental faculties. The task at hand is thus to determine the process of discrimination and selection of information. If “perceiving is selecting,” this is equivalent to saying that to know the world is to know the rules of perceptual selection. Do we not have the key to transform our “modern” culture into an integrated universal culture, in which man, who has created and is creating this culture, will be increasingly changed in his organism and in his powers?

When our highest thresholds of perception are dilated or intensified, and the voracious quest for more information does not cease, as if in search of an exhaustive knowledge that is ultimately unattainable, it is up to us to ask: which global, overarching structures can remain intact (or retouched) to express the simple mastery—if not primacy—of the intelligible over the sensitive? How much longer will aesthetic perception be based upon the ultimately archaic teachings of early experiments in which the inexorable explorations of the subject’s relationship to the world constantly undermine the foundation of such teachings? Nevertheless, there is evidence that the phenomenological approach continues to be a valid—or at least inevitable—one.

As an example of this approach, let us take the notion of periodicity that comes to us as a form, and if we compare it to the mathematical approach, we will see that the latter is unable to provide us with a perfect sense of the former. For such a notion of periodicity would imply—as in [Abraham] Moles’s experiment with musical notes—that the latter has no beginning or end. Mathematical rigidity is then corrected by psychological experience, which reveals how the musical note differs from a whistle (controlled in pitch by an oscilloscope) precisely because it possesses a beginning and an end. From this experiment came the conclusion that the musical scale creates the phenomenon. We did not arrive at an awareness of microscopic periodicity directly from auditory sensitivity; yet Moles reminds us that we were unable to perceive on our own that light is made up of waves. The phenomenon—the phenomenon?—or the fact, simply exists beyond our direct perception. It is therefore the perceptual scale that creates the phenomenon. Periodicity only becomes explicit to us through our own sense of time; for this very reason, it disappears on this side of what is called the “thickness of the present”¹ or, in the mediations of experience, when rhythms become faster than 16 to 20 per second (movie frames, musical sounds)—precisely when it is possible to “see” the appearance of periodicity by scientific means. Thus, the intensification of the scale engenders in us a phenomenological vanishing, removing the perception of periodicity. This phenomenological evanescence of periodicity may have been verified when Science came to perceive it—to our misfortune—and consequently created the possibility of reaching a new field of visual experiences. Where? In what terrain? In cinema, an art that is, for this very reason, intrinsically new; new not only in external terms as a technological innovation, but internally, as psycho-sensory experience. The essence of the image no longer comes from periodicity, resulting from a globalizing perception, but from a continuity beyond the direct threshold of perception.

If the notion of periodicity in music is delimited by a “thickness of the present,” or by insurmountable thresholds of perception, what happens when we measure the threshold against another perceptual phenomenon as important as duration. Thanks to experiments with the degradation of temporal forms to increasingly shorter or briefer intervals of dissolved or mixed musical modulations, such mediations verify that the perceptual threshold of sonic duration is revealed by the speed with which

form dissipates. Whereas the notion of periodicity is suggested to us only by phenomena within the limits of our phenomenological perception, or essentially the isochronic repetition produced by rhythm, the notion of duration transmutes itself into a phenomenon based on the value of a velocity in which form and its definitions (such as periodicity and rhythm) dissolve when the perceptual threshold of sound is reached.

Thus an art that must be based less and less upon phenomenological perceptual experiences stems from today's technological and scientific civilization itself, from which formal phenomenological wholes always emanated and, inevitably, turned into something like the "thickness of the present" (the threshold of sound perception). Art is constantly called upon to accompany, to draw attention to, the systematic amplification or intensification of the thresholds of perception that a structured exploration in search of new information attempts to exhaust. Film was the first fruit of this Faustian investigation to result in art—a great new art. Radio, television, and other transmission processes were also products of the same explorations, though less developed in terms of artistic achievement. In music, these thresholds are more easily crossed now—since the earliest, still emerging investigations of atonalism, from twelve-tone music to mechanical recordings, audiotapes, and the Concretist, electronic, clamorous manifestations of today's experimental "music."

The spatial arts, the arts of visuality—with the exception of the increasingly precise or important experiments in the field of optics, such as those involving light devices or chromatic games (Op art)—are necessarily and obviously limited, because they are more confined to traditional conditioning and, for this reason, less open to the exploratory intensifications of perceptual thresholds.

Interpret as you will the formidable exploratory and scientific developments of Information Theory—this terrible sensory accelerator—but, one asks, does it not explain this restless, almost neurotic obsession with investigation that dominates the boldest and most creative artists of the age? Since the advent of cave painting, the ability to absorb increasingly vaster fields of both sensory and substantive understanding has always been Art's great civilizing mission.

It should be observed that these investigations have always been leading toward an expansion or intensification, an interpenetration of the thresholds of perception, this "thickness of the present." The constancy of this push allows us to infer that a simply discursive albeit "new" idea can hardly preside over or stimulate investigation into a specific level of any art, whether visual, auditory, or otherwise. The threshold of perception tends to be constantly broken, and in all sensory directions. One might say we are on the verge of an expansion or deepening not only in the vertical direction of the thresholds of these fields, but in the horizontal direction as well, as if these changes might encompass, organize, reveal, fertilize, in a wide array, all the sources, no matter how minuscule, of sensory emissions accumulated in the human organism's trillions of cells.

The sensory fields are also becoming objects of aesthetic investigation beyond the visual, the auditory, the tactile, and—let us say—the olfactory. Any research that does not propose a breaking down of the boundaries of the "thicknesses of the present," in any field, cannot be considered innovative. It may be of interest (in the traditional sense), it may be gratuitous (in the formalist sense), or it may be redundant (in the social sense). However, it will not be on the course of true cultural innovation. It may be idealistic or discursive, even intelligent, but it cannot be considered a contribution to the contemporary practice of art as it accompanies the world's technological innovations or, even more decisively, the fundamental mutations that man, within the

scientifically created second- and third-degree nature in which he lives—this organic box that is being reconstructed—experiences in hallucinatory rhythms.

Throughout this vast process, Art appears to us as a precarious exploration that nonetheless anticipates the mutations that are in store for man. It fumbles along in search of the just human behavior for this momentous path that has opened up. Everything happens as if an old man were preparing himself to leave, like some delicate butterfly—his cocoon resembling a kind of folkloric-magical-idealistic-capitalist-Western culture—readying to thrash about, unsure yet courageous, entering another cultural habitat that he himself has been creating, or has been forming itself, now *by* itself, and that is also transforming him, from contradiction to contradiction. The least that can happen to him then is that he will be put on display, analyzed, measured, quantified, in his totality and in detail, as an object, a material product. Until fairly recently, everything that surrounded him, things that were right in front of his nose, came to him covered in a layer of magic and mystery. What greater miracle or mystery is there than that man found his voice without knowing how, at random? A “law” was forming, creating and leading him, without his knowing or discovering it. But here is this detached voice, isolated from its natural means, to be weighed and measured as a concrete object, as a material product. The voice is now transmitted by better artificial means, more perfect than the first natural conduit, the most primary throat, with its primitive vocal chords, in the same way that the wings of today’s airplanes are instruments more perfect and more propitious to flight than the immemorial wings of eagles. His own new habitat, his planet, appears to him—O man of Camonian dimensions,² such a tiny earthworm, little more than a maggot—examined from without, as if he were under the lens of bored entomologists entertaining themselves by examining the latest beetle they had found.

In his occasionally premonitory research, the artist of today unknowingly attempts to situate man within the context of the future. Modern man continues to transform himself into an increasingly complicated, increasingly perfected system of communications conduits. The whole of his evolution, all of his progress, which will (perhaps) assure the survival of his species, depends upon the increasing complexity and discriminatory power of these informative conduits. He is more and more something other than himself and—insofar as this progressive and dialectic objectification is concerned—becomes the exclusive subject of his own art. Just as his heart may be replaced by another, perfectible, artificial one, so may his soul be reconstituted outside the web of communications that he receives and transmits. The evolution he experiences (and which will not cease) shall not only be quantitative but qualitative. It will be a veritable mutation—a mutation the form of which we, his ancestors, cannot reach. Indeed, what will today’s human being be to his grandchildren, to his great-grandchildren, or to his great-great-grandchildren a million years from now? They will probably be more different from us—this perilous and brilliant yet somewhat futile late-twentieth-century humanity—than we are from Neanderthal man. Even anatomically there will be surprising differences between the almost winged, indifferent biped of today and the largely mutable and collapsible machine-organism or the distant descendants of the cyberneticists and *informativistas* of today who will live in those fabulous future times.

On a much lesser—albeit, for this reason more precise—scale, one of the great physicists of our time, [Werner] Heisenberg, who is also endowed with a good dose of skepticism, in a suggestive reflection about the subject’s relations with nature as a result of the state of contemporary Science, admonished us that, in the future, “many technical instruments will become as inescapable a part of ourselves as the snail’s

shell is to its occupant or as the web is to the spider.” But the sage carefully added: “*But even these instruments would be a part of our own organism rather than parts of external nature.*”³ A list could already be made today of these indispensable appendages of the human organism that are created thereabout every day—from the transistor (the future identity card of every citizen, wherever he may be) to the various spare organs that man already carries and shall continue to carry everywhere with him in a bag.

I believe it is in one of his meditations on [Friedrich] Nietzsche that [Martin] Heidegger declares that, in the beginning, the comprehension of being was pre-ontological, but eventually transmuted into an explicit knowledge. This explicit knowledge of being is comprehensible, but what is hard to explain is the absence of a limit for this act of making explicit, given that it may end with the alienation of being itself. Explicit knowledge undoubtedly enlightens the pre-ontological comprehension of being, but the devil of it is that it may implicate the obfuscation of being itself as transmuted into a “pre-ontological” object. An object of his own object, man may end his cycle no longer knowing where to find himself, or where to locate his essence or his substance. He will have performed a somersault upon himself, upon his own destiny in the cosmos. But will he then know, in those unimaginable times, that it is he himself? Or we ourselves, now and forever?

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Notes

1. Moles in fact wrote about the “length of the present”: “The threshold of perception could be described as the ‘length of the present.’” Abraham Moles, *Information Theory and Esthetic Perception*, trans. Joel E. Cohen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), p. 15.
2. Luís de Camões (c. 1524–1580), a Portuguese Renaissance poet, is best known for his epic poem *Os Lusíadas* (*The Lusiads*), in which he portrays the Greek gods watching over the voyage of Vasco da Gama. “Man of Camonian dimensions” seems to refer to one who is seen from the perspective of a larger, greater being.
3. Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist’s Conception of Nature*, trans. Arnold J. Pomerans (London: Hutchinson, 1958), p. 18.

World in Crisis, Man in Crisis, Art in Crisis

The extreme complexity of modern civilization allows no activity of a scientific, cultural, or aesthetic order to unfold in isolation. It imposes a globalizing activity in all senses. The technology that is the conductor of all operational activities and experiences is also the socializer par excellence of these activities. To a great degree it also determines behaviors and attitudes. Beyond its globalizing tendency, the age is typical of technical and social transformations that succeed one another from day to day, incessantly reconditioning humanity in every field. This increasingly vertiginous, change-ist¹ succession is of such an order and occurs at such a pace that “the rate of technological change is already considered to be the measure of modern man.”

Entirely new social and cultural conditions bring about a focus on the present in all creative energies, which tears artists, architects, and designers away from the individualist isolationism in which they insist on living, children that they are of an essentially artisanal tradition. To overcome the barrier between the technological transformations of the present and the isolationism of an artisanal essence, one must

consider the environmental aspects of everything, whether in the scientific, technological, or aesthetic dominions. The promotion or conception of a future that is “already here,” according to professor [Ivan] Chermayeff’s formula, cannot be made other than through an effort to create something like its environment. This capital task is the only one that can encompass, in its entirety, creative activities in our time, such as regional, urban, and architectural planning, industrial design, and the disinterested arts, principally sculpture and the various constructions and arrangements of objects in space.

The crucial problem is to define the environments: for whom, where, for what, and why? It is no longer permissible to speak of Sculpture or Painting or any other art in space and time in isolation. Not even, or above all, of Architecture. The work of an artist can no longer be examined by itself. Let us say it brutally: it is no longer the artist’s competency or ability in making or manipulating that is of exceeding interest to us. The artist may be an excellent craftsman—in the sense of the work’s making—and no more than this. His work presents itself as solitary as a thing abandoned or forgotten at a terminal gate. Anyone could happily take it home as a readymade. Not even gardens or public squares, open-air markets, and great urban spaces are valid in themselves. But it is within the environmental context that all correlated arts and activities may find the crucial moment of their integration, that is to say, of their true consummation within the social complex.

What is the essential feature of this social complex, of this cultural (and technological) environment that envelops the man of our cities and of our time? Let us first note a cultural fact of paramount importance and range in all of its vast implications: the progressive loss of the wholesale hegemony of verbal expression, of writing, of the word, over any other medium of expression in Western civilization (all the countries of Europe and the Americas included). The purely discursive conception of an abstract and decidedly visual image of the world has resulted in the loss of this hegemony.

The advent of Information Theory brought with it an awareness that we now live under a different set of conditions, one that gives us an experience of sensory reality with many more dimensions than the three within which mankind had pleasantly and complacently established itself. Visuality has become increasingly more separate from verbal discourse, instead allying itself inextricably with the auditory mode, and we are drawing near to the time in which the olfactory mode will be added to the same complex. The new audiovisual system of film and television imposes a restructuring of the receptive—and inevitably participant—subject through cinematic, rather than written, discourse. In this process of modernization, which emerges everywhere, including throughout the entire underdeveloped hemisphere, through radio stations, cinema, and television, [Pierre] Fougeyrollas observed that people are reached by filmic messages before they learn to read or write. Indeed, even visual information is currently processed above all through a sensory discourse in which the tactile mode, the haptic element, plays an indispensable part in the deciphering of the message. It is almost no longer possible to see without touching or feeling. Here is cinema that bears witness to this. Day and night, man is inundated by a veritable multidimensional cacophony that tends to be filtered through a multisensory flow that, little by little, substitutes the old logical, abstract discourse of the written word. Humanity is no longer divided in terms of (bourgeois) literate man, entirely attuned to the abstract, the intellectual, on the one side, and the rational and non-literate man attuned to the concrete, the imaginary, and the emotional, on the other. What is the most profound consequence of this very recent indistinctiveness? For Fougeyrollas, it is the extraordinary resurgence of the instinctive, the affective, the

emotional, and the imaginary in ultramodern society. A new fact also comes into play upon this foundation, a fact that had been verifiable since the emergence of abstract and, above all, informal art and Tachism: men from all quadrants now find themselves in a far better situation than that of their predecessors, circumscribed as they still were by the means of communication available at the time, founded upon the dominance of discursive writing and the hegemony of rationalist abstract culture embraced by the bourgeoisie of the West in order to understand and communicate with other cultures.

We must take into account in what way a technological discovery crucial to the unitary process—growth and development—has been affecting our social and moral life. I refer banally to the advent of electronics that currently—to use a felicitous expression of Chermayeff's—resembles “a houseguest.” Daily contact with this new guest of ours leads man to the need for a new environment, for new sensory openings that are still being vaguely translated as a new (albeit paradoxically archaic) longing for community. [Marshall] McLuhan defined it with his idea of the “global village.”² (Deep down, is it not this vague sense of nostalgia that moves the hippies in their wanderings around the world, armed with spontaneity, love, and flowers?) This new environment alone may encompass all the aspects of the modern artist's aspiration to break free from his isolation (something Paul Klee had already complained about at length in the 1920s), in leaving behind not only aesthetic but also—or even above all—moral and social alienation, in which he is condemned to live by the conditioning of the bourgeois civilization of mass production and consumption.

The most penetrating conceptualization of that idea was formulated by McLuhan when he wrote, “In the present, everything is constantly on a more complex and more widespread scale, albeit somehow still equivalent to former tribal media environments.”³ What, in turn, characterized the ancient media and environments of old? The fact that it was familiar to all members of the tribe, who, without having to refer to it, perhaps without even having a clear awareness of it, used all of their senses fully, from morning to night, as a *sine qua non* condition for intercommunication and survival. McLuhan's idea reveals itself to be of ever greater acuity in deciphering what is contemporary on all levels, from social coexistence to aesthetic coexistence, from Architecture to the Arts in general. Through this, it is possible to conceive of overcoming the dispersive crisis of artistic genres that has prevailed for generations and generations, and the dispersion of which is precisely the trait that most strongly signals the very stalemate of Art in general in the Western capitalist society of mass consumption.

Every day, the spatial arts see that their repertory continues to expand regardless of the will of their creators. It is the case of the typical ancient sculpture that manages—without the support of cathedral walls or bombastic pedestals in public squares or the angles of bureaucratic palaces as apologias of the power of the state, of gentlemen magnates or medal-studded generals to seize empty space—to incorporate unto itself the enormous quantity of new and ever-changing materials and communications media. (Hence the sudden vogue for objects or “boxes” in Brazil.) This phenomenon is more important in the field of optics, and of chromatic and auditory games, thanks to the increasingly constant and indispensable incorporation of electronics into daily life and in the experience of ever more varied and subtle sensory experiences. One might think that simple craftsmanship might dominate the latter, but no. Craftsmanship is an acquired instrumental routine, whereas the introduction of lived experiences is a matter of an organic exercise of multi-, supra- and infrasensory amplifications of the exterior world.

The stimuli that came with mass communication media, with multisensory filmic language, which does not withdraw from the concrete, have been a terrible accelerator of the subject's exteriorizing organic energies. One of the keys to explaining this disturbing and almost neurotic obsession with research that dominates the boldest and most creative artists of the age lies at the psychological-technological level. At this grave crossroads in which Art finds itself, the artist is stimulated by a thousand demands arising from the ever broader, more complex, and astonishing surroundings. The exterior world, the world environment, is a permanent surprise. Thus, the contemporary artist's position tends—by a strange turn—to equate itself to that of the cave artists of the Paleolithic period, tormented day and night, sensorially and magically, by the formidable excitations of his environment, of the world outside with its bison, reindeer, bovines, in short, permanently mysterious, active, animistic nature as Great Entity, but where the artist-hunter had to go seek the principal sources of his survival and his technology. In today's open world, it is also—and fundamentally so—a matter of embracing ever vaster fields of sensory as well as substantive understanding of the world or of the universe—which ultimately, ever since cave art, has always been Art's great civilizing mission.

When Abraham Moles defined our current perceptual thresholds as the “thickness of the present,”⁴ he outlined boundaries, yet also showed that these limits were not permanent. Like Olympic records, they are forever mutable. This may indicate that an idea, simply discursive albeit “in the air,” could hardly motivate research in the field of art. Whatever research is not so oriented, that is instead dedicated to the enlargement of these domains, in any field, from the infra- to the extrasensory, shall not resemble innovation. Of course it may still be interesting in the traditional sense, aesthetically unnecessary in the formal sense, or redundant in the social sense. In this latter sense, which is the one that most approaches the discursive one, the redundancy in information is the element of appreciation par excellence. Yet none of these investigations, no matter how qualitatively valid they may be, could be classified as a new cultural opening. Whenever idealistic or discursive, the new cultural opening may be intelligent. However, it cannot hope to contribute to the way Art is made today—to keep up with technological and environmental innovations. Or, more decisively still, to accompany the rather serious mutations man himself is experiencing. In effect, having lost contact with our old mother nature, contemporary man lives in an ever more artificial world, that is to say, in second- and third-degree “natures” in which subjects like ourselves are already preparing to live with transplanted hearts or, like the early navigators, have already experienced the absence of the earth's line or gravity underneath their feet. Man is reconditioned, he changes; to avoid coming to an end, his art will change too. Better yet, it shall transmute itself, unpredictably, for us, ever less bipeds.

—Originally published as “Mundo em crise, homem em crise, arte em crise,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), December 7, 1967.

Notes

1. Here Pedrosa coins a neologism, “*mudancista*,” which has been translated here as “change-ist.”
2. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), pp. 34, 93.
3. This line is perhaps related to Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Message* (London: Penguin Press, 1967), p. 63: “We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us.”
4. See note 1, p. 127.

2. Cultural Politics and the Art System

Introduction Izabela Pucu

Among Mário Pedrosa's principal concerns was the place occupied by art within society as well as art's cultural implications and its possibilities for political participation. Through a lifelong focus, such reflections—which involved analyzing the artist's condition, the role of cultural institutions, and the relationship between the art of peripheral countries and their international contexts—were accorded special attention by the author in the texts that make up this section.

In this series of articles, Pedrosa carefully guides the reader on a journey through the history of modern art in Brazil by establishing relationships between the country's economic and social development and certain cultural watersheds. He deploys the Argentinean critic Romero Brest's Brazilian conferences and Swiss artist Max Bill's exhibition at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 1950 to explain the penetration of the Constructivist tradition and of Concretism in Brazil. In "The Concretist Paradox" (1960) he describes this heritage as a model contribution to the modernization and internationalization of the Brazilian cultural milieu even though at first sight (and above all to the foreign gaze), this adherence to Constructivist principles by our artists and architects must have seemed paradoxical. Pedrosa further outlines the Brazilian cultural landscape of the period that encompasses the famous Modern Art Week of 1922 (which he wrote about in a 1952 text published in the "History of Criticism" section) and the founding of the São Paulo Bienal. Throughout his life, the latter merited the author's attention, and he directed the event's 1961 edition. In the text "The Bienal from Here to There" (1970), Pedrosa discusses the importance of the São Paulo Bienal to the internationalization of Brazilian art in terms of the artistic proximity between the country's various cultural centers; the cultural interchange with Latin American nations; and the exchange of ideas between the world's critics and artists. Yet he also points out the dialectic effect of suspect personal gambits with regard to prizes, etc., as well as the commercial speculation that surrounded Brazil's emergence on the international scene.

The capitalist market's pressure on art (which becomes most notable in Brazil as of 1970) is discussed by the author in the 1966 text in which he ironically refers to the thirty-third edition of the Venice Biennale as a "fair." Pedrosa underscored Argentinean artist Julio Le Parc's award at that event as a remarkable cultural occasion, one that signified to him a breaking away from a deep-seated cultural and artistic prejudice with regard to the art of an underdeveloped South America.

The text "Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples," written in 1975 during Pedrosa's exile in Paris, focuses on the possibility of overcoming underdevelopment by peripheral countries, and on the art that emerged in such places at that time. He considered this art to be an utterly new cultural and social phenomenon. Checkmating the neoliberal developmental model, he declares: "The creative task of humankind has initiated a latitudinal shift. It now advances toward the Third World's vastest and most far-flung places"—in other words, toward countries like Brazil that, not without contradictions, currently boast the designation of emerging country on the international scene. —*Izabela Pucu*



The Concretist Paradox

It was because of “Concretism” that my friend Rubem Braga¹ threatened me with hemlock, although he said he would sweeten it with Coca-Cola because he is my friend. Someday, when I am even older, I may resign myself to drinking it—but never with Coca-Cola! Such a sacrifice would be far too great, for I detest that sweet functional syrup.

As for grammar and syntax, they aren’t such bad educational ingredients. And many a great writer has written well and vividly with grammar, syntax and all. Yet within the whole of this growing group of young artists and poets who more or less align themselves under vague “concretist” denominations, the problem of self-discipline remains. What is the reason for this in a country of accommodations such as our own . . . of the lack of rigor in everything, of lazy romanticisms, of *nonchalance* (given that the corresponding Portuguese word eludes me at the moment), which always contradicts the clear distinctions of intelligence, the vagueness of half-solutions, the repetitions of instinct?

From the perspective of—shall we say?—immediate historical circumstance, I believe the first person to speak of “concretism” was our great, dear Argentinean colleague Romero Brest, who gave a few lectures here during his visits to São Paulo and Rio. Around the same time we also attended the large Max Bill retrospective, organized by [Pietro Maria] Bardi at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo. Finally, it should not be forgotten that the first Biennial awarded its grand prize for sculpture to one of Bill’s most typical works, the famous *Tripartite Unity* that eventually seduced Mary Vieira on to Switzerland.

But what was the reason for its acceptance in Europe itself, within its great artistic centers, or in the United States, if another kind of art was already being made, one that was precisely opposed to the rigors of Swiss “concretism”? On other occasions, I have already written that this “paradox” always seemed premonitory: might it not be the sign of a new spiritual and—let us really say so—ethical beginning in Brazil? And because it is a new beginning, one that is rigorous, orthodox, and almost sectarian?

The fact is that the Concretist “grammar” has already contributed to the improvement of the artisanal and even to the aesthetic quality of our arts, not only the so-called noble ones, but the industrial ones, too.

See the marked improvement of our graphic art. Books, magazines, and even newspapers now appear much more modern, with a level of taste incomparably higher than it was ten or even five years ago. The same effect may be observed in decoration and in the art of furniture-making. And one already begins to notice something less inferior or vile even in the window dressing of stores—something that in Brazil displays poor taste, a distressing provincialism.

And now we may digress. Could it be that, in the future, we will see manifestations of this same self-discipline, of this spirit that is less complacent with itself, in other fields, immediately more important and ponderable, such as those of public administration, of educational policy? The history of art has already given us examples of similar foreshadowings of artistic movements in relation to other, more pragmatic fields of activity.

However, looking more carefully at our environment, we are obliged to note that, circa 1930, a handful of young men emerged around here who were eager to renew a new and extremely important field of the country’s cultural and social activities: the field of architecture (which actually reassumes leadership in the domain of the arts on an increasingly global scale). Indeed, during those years, after the still

provincial scandals of São Paulo's Modern Art Week, a group of budding architects was being formed, bent upon submitting itself to a severe regime of grammar and syntax. Making Le Corbusier's books their "Bible," those youths pledged to submit themselves to the dry austerity of the convent of Functionality. With the rigor of neophytes, any inclination, no matter how small, toward the decorative, the Baroque, or even curved lines appeared to be the very image of sin.

Yet it was from this attitude that contemporary Brazilian architecture was born. Oscar Niemeyer was educated in this convent. The outcomes of that puritan practice are there with the works of Lúcio Costa and his pilot plan for Brasília, those of Afonso Reidy for the Pedregulho and the Glória landfill, with the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro], those of Niemeyer in Brasília, Sérgio Bernardes, and many others. A true school of Brazilian architecture sprang from the rigors of functional dogmatism, with a diplomatic passport accepted the world over, and the bearer of two things: the "international style" (currently inevitable in all artistic and cultural manifestations around the world) and Brazilian regional characteristics, profoundly meaningful and remarkable.

A phenomenon of such cultural repercussions could not fail to also cast a reflection in the adjacent domain of the visual arts in general. The stupendous work of [Alfredo] Volpi is related to this architecture; the growing work-in-progress of [Milton] Dacosta also exudes the same spirit. Idem, the works in development of other, younger artists, such as Djanira, for example, which, in spite of being "figurative" becomes increasingly simpler in the same architectural sense, or Lygia Clark and her new sense of the monumentality of modulated spaces. No, this Concretist grammar and syntax have always served for something. When the young have forgotten it—and that time will come—their works will be mature, full of life and sap, albeit bathed in the same spiritual Brazilian and international atmosphere that our architecture created.

—Originally published as "O paradoxo concretista," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), June 24, 1960.

Note

1. Rubem Braga (1913–1990) was a journalist and master of the Brazilian *crônica* (short story) genre.

Experimental Art and Museums

It is only as the director of a museum of so-called modern art that one is best able to understand the intrinsic nature of this very art and, at the same time, the museum's part in its assessment.

Unlike traditional museums, whose rooms contain the masterworks of the past, the museum of today is, above all, a house of experiments. It is a para-laboratory. Inside it one may understand what is called experimental art—inventive art.

The mixture of all traditional genres of art is already a commonplace *cliché* of contemporary criticism. Sculpture is transformed into painting, painting into sculpture, printmaking into painting, etc., so that the old divisions become increasingly outdated. This is also why we are seeing the decline of easel painting, of sculpture according to the masses and planes of that ancient art.

Another feature of contemporary artistic activity is an unlimited right to investigation and, above all, to experimentation, to invention. When the rectangle of the can-

was loses its regulation limitations and the laws discovered in the handling of its space are forgotten, it is clear that the consequence is the painter's transition to senselessly creating things in real space, whether through collage, frottage, accumulations of material, tracings, etc., or through constructions . . . where? Within the rectangle? No, within space itself. [Frans] Krajcberg, with his tracings and collages, Lygia Clark with her critters,¹ [Alberto] Burri, [Lucio] Fontana, Ohno with his intumescences, Kantor, and others *shape, make, set up, and mount* things, objects (or non-objects, as proposed by the poet Ferreira Gullar), and do not simply *paint* or *sculpt*.

It is in this making of things that great modernity is to be found. This is the most generalized phenomenon of contemporary art. The extraordinary re-updating of Dada comes from this, having found the field open after the loss of prestige of *representational* art and the advent of an increasingly more *presentational* art, from [Vasily] Kandinsky's abstract improvisations to the creations of Russian Constructivism and pre-Cubism, starting with Neoplasticism and continuing on through to Concretism and Pollock's action painting, which already had very, very little to do with painting and easel pictures or murals. (Here in Brazil, also, the experiments of the Neo-Concretists, so interestingly hung at the Ministry of Education show,² are accomplished in the climate of this general trend of the age, that is to say, their experimental making prevailing over painting (or re-painting), sculpture (or re-sculpture), printing, writing, etc.

This general, experimental *making* that prevails over the exercise of the pictorial, the sculptural, etc., may be distinguished from the latter by its tendency (symbolically speaking) to present—and, by merely adding the “re” to “present” *a posteriori* through use. In art, this experimental making is, thus, always open, fully available. For being thus it is possible to become—with time and with the maturation of experience—truly representative of the age, of this also terribly threatening and fascinating age. This is where the function of the modern museum comes into play: it is the privileged site where this experiment should be made and decanted.

—Originally published as “Arte experimental e museus,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), December 16, 1960.

Notes

1. Between 1960 and 1963 Lygia Clark produced a large series of folding sculptures made in metal, intended to be manipulated by the beholders. Each of these works, titled *Bichos* (Critters), was able to become a flat surface and could take various configurations. There was no principal configuration for them, as there was no front or back. The goal of the Critter was to become an action while being manipulated. Composed by several flat pieces of metal, either angular or curved, held by hinges (*dobradiças*), the Critters implied an object that can be both unique and multiple. The word *bicho*, in Portuguese as well as in Spanish, has several possible meanings: from the designation of an animal, usually an insect, to that of a nameless entity or to affective or moral connotations (a *bicho* could be a very foxy person or even an evil one).

2. 1^a *Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta*, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1960.

Venice: Art Fair and Art Politics

Something extraordinary happened at the art fair (sorry . . .) in Venice, at the thirty-third edition of that city's Biennale, which is currently open: the international grand prize for painting has gone to a South American: thirty-three-year-old Argentinean Julio Le Parc, one of the founders of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, who exhibited his work in Rio de Janeiro, at our MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro], two years ago, as Jayme Maurício recalled just the other day, from over



Julio Le Parc at the Venice Biennale. 1966. Archivio Arte Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena

in Venice. Le Parc represented his country by himself in an authentic last-minute presentation, given that Argentinean officialdom had not been able to organize a show in time, with a copious and distinguished delegation of a deputy and vice- and sub-deputies, as Brazil did. However, the result was not only the opposite of ours; it was also unexpected and revealing. Le Parc (who assembled his things in fifteen days and left for Venice, according to information from friends of his who passed this way) was pondering anything but prizes. *Time* magazine itself tells that when it

went to meet the artist, on the very day of the award ceremony, he was stretched out on some faraway beach in the Lido, carefree and already thinking about his return to Paris, where he lives when he is not in Buenos Aires. Mauricio says his show was made up of forty-one pieces that may be displaced by pressing buttons or through vibrations of light and kinetic forms, or “simply surprise games for a sort of optical Luna Park.” *Time* speaks of motorized works that jump, in a burble of ping-pong balls in front of dazzling plexiglass screens.

From what may be inferred, what Le Parc took to Venice were works along the same lines as those that, with his whole group, he showed at the fourth edition of the Paris Youth Biennale last year, in “name of the de-mystification of the work of art and of the creative act and seeking a reconsideration of the appreciator in an effort to rouse him to action by means of solicitations or provocations.” In that lively room, “each [individual work] disappeared” to the advantage of elements that contribute to the organization of a *place of leisure and activation*, where these elements are no longer closed works. These definitions come from a small prospectus that presented this work by visual research artists to perplexed visitors who were hesitating between touching and contemplating, seeing and participating. Many did so timidly, like a child holding his parent’s hand on a Sunday outing to a fair or to some exhibition. It was fun, attractive, and, at times, puerile but it could also rejuvenate the serious bourgeoisie. There was the embryo, or the embryo of the embryo of something as yet undefined, something like the original experience of a new freedom.

There may have been other artists of the same tendency at the Biennale who were better represented. Those who saw the room by Venezuelan Jesus Soto tell us that the work of another South American, a master of kinetic visuality—able to navigate twenty years of incomprehension and ostracism before arriving at the well-deserved world recognition of today—was stupendous. However, such considerations are not germane to the case.

Le Parc is an artist of uncommon merit; he weds a rich, spontaneous inventiveness to a powerful, formal visuality. What matters here is that his work broke with a deep-rooted artistic cultural prejudice: there are no great painters or great sculptors outside of Western Europe.

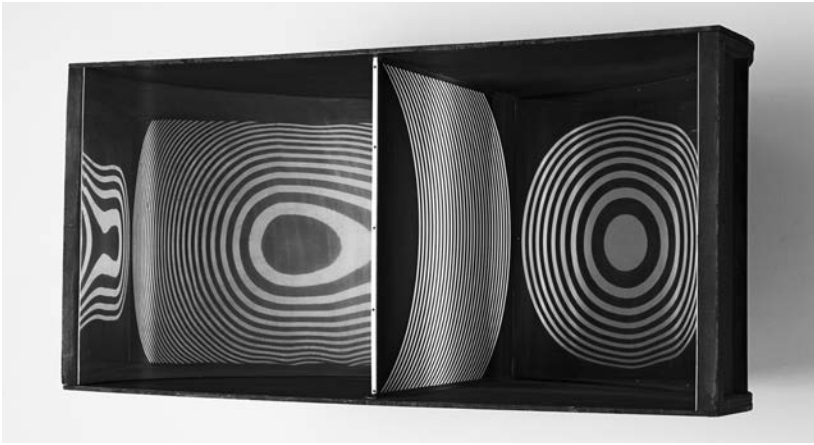
But even in the 1950s, due to the pressure to be a formidable art market as well as embody the incomparable vitality of modern American art, the prejudice was already unfounded. I believe it was [Mark] Tobey, the great master of the American Pacific coast, who first snatched the pictorial prize for his work in Venice. He suggested new horizons for the West, a decentralized type of painting made from a thousand strokes, fragments of signs of meaningful ambivalence coming from this thousand-year-old stratification of culture and knowledge that is found in Chinese ideograms. In 1954 or thereabouts, Calder took the prize for sculpture, with a dizzyingly new work that blazed unsuspected trails for the very concept of art: he is the first of the Western creators who played with art and made great art. Finally, in the preceding Biennale, there is more than impact, there is scandal: Robert Rauschenberg, the good humored captain of Pop art, beats all the competition, with some extraordinary work that owes much more to modern graphic art and advertising techniques than to the sacred canons of the great paintings of museums. His works are huge posters, a tribute to the assassinated president—a full-body photograph of [John F.] Kennedy; in another one a real, unpainted clock, outrageously inserted upon the canvas. But the battle also took place outside the Biennale's gardens, with a provocative inscription that is proclaimed everywhere to some degree: "The world capital of art has left Paris for New York."

The provocation was deliberately launched, in obedience to the laws of advertising that are no longer exclusively at the service of private market competition, albeit in name of the official prestige of the United States. United, dealers and bureaucrats, Rauschenberg's promoters fought the battle to win, and won. As is known, modern totalitarianism, especially starting with [Adolf] Hitler's movement, found in advertising—which had been elevated to the level of Art and Science in the United States by the demands of their market economy—a nonviolent means to impose its political indoctrination. The laws of advertising have become part of the art and science of governing ever since. Advertising carries within itself the first condition of totalitarianism: not to allow any area of human activity, even if it is private, outside its action.

In adopting the publicity machine as an instrument for political action, the so-called liberal American state consequently discovered the modern importance of Art and no longer abandons the sector to the *laissez-faire* attitude of yesteryear. Today it is an area that attracts resources and attention from the State Department: art at the service of American foreign policy. Until the 1950s (more or less), one did not see signs of official action from the U.S. government at international art shows. Now these shows are becoming battlefields and vicious competitions for Washington. American representations were formerly models of discretion and moderation. A federation of museums without state financing organized them; their delegates had nothing to do with the government, and one often saw American members of international juries voting on artists from another country, considering their works through a purely aesthetic prism.

Now, delegations financed and controlled by the State arrive willing and ready to roll up their sleeves. It must be well understood that none of this means that a personality such as Rauschenberg was not equal to the prize he won in Venice in 1964. Indeed, it is hardly news (since the state began to promote the arts abroad) that New York has become one of the great—or *the* great—artistic centers of the world.

Whether we like it or not, the United States is the only truly modern country of today. Its civil society was the first to be truly integrated with the idea of mass production. Mass production brought with it new conditioning to that society. It forced change upon its everyday habits, its way of life, its cooking, eating, way of dressing, leisure, rites of passage—being born, getting married, dying. This statement



Julio Le Parc. *Instability Through Movement of the Spectator.* 1962–64. Synthetic polymer paint on wood and polished aluminum in painted wood box, 28 $\frac{5}{8}$ × 57 $\frac{1}{8}$ × 36 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (73 × 145 × 91 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Inter-American Fund

implies no value judgment, merely substantiation. But it may explain the fact that modern art (which was not created there) had its greatest reception in that country. The world's first museum of modern art emerged in New York. The first great artistic movement to emerge after the isms of the first half of the century (Cubism, Surrealism, Abstractionism, etc.) was *action painting* in the United States; in the formidable figure of [Jackson] Pollock it had its protagonist and its martyr, as well as its theorist, another admirable radical intellectual figure, impartial and discerning—my friend Harold Rosenberg. The artistic gesture of our time undoubtedly comes from Japanese abstract calligraphy, albeit filtered through the United States, in its position as mediator between Western Europe and the East. (This is perhaps the privileged position of all the Americas, if ours, down below here, should manage to overcome the barrier of confinement with which the one from up above, the one from the North, insists on isolating us from the world, from the East, from the Far East, which is not just Japan and India, but also the enigmatic continental China in transformation.)

It is also not by chance that the current Pop art movement—the immense importance of which is, above all else, of a cultural order—emerged in the United States. With Pop, there is no longer any question of “transfiguring reality,” explains Rauschenberg to perplexed Italian critics, but of “distorting reality.” Ultimately it is not a distortion, but an awareness—after the profound, transcendent, and luminous experience of Abstractionism’s purely formal values—of an ugly, grotesque, distorting, inhuman and human, powerful and fascinating reality through which the artist intuits. Indeed, in its essence, Pop represents a new attitude by American artists toward the presence of Art itself, toward life itself. (In Europe, this artistic attitude is more intentional or conscious than in the United States.) We stand before a capitulation that is open to the immediate objectivity of the everyday world. The artists take objects from everyday life, from mass consumption, and isolate them, present them just as they are, or copy them slavishly so as not to leave any room for doubt that they do not wish to “transfigure” reality nor to transcend anything. Passively, they kneel before the object itself. Above all, to them it is not a matter of embellishing reality, of idealizing it, in the deification of a society of bureaucratic leaders, as Soviet artists were forced to do during the age of the *cult* of [Joseph] Stalin.

To the Pop artist, a clock really is a clock, a sausage a sausage, a plaster bus driver an extremely precise reproduction of the real one, a pig a pig, etc. The reality of the

immediate in which they live is a prison yard with extremely high walls. One does not escape from it. The great American artists of the avant-garde might as well be saying that reality must not be idealized; reality must not be interpreted; reality has no transcendence; reality is what it is, right in front of your nose. (Reality is Vietnam. . . .) With film and Pop, the latent or hidden brutality of American civilization became open and explicit. The paradox is that, at that same historical-cultural moment, the American state feels the need to mobilize the art of its artists to cover the terrifying face of its imperialistic politics.

Still, the Americans lost the Venice contest all the way down the line. Lichtenstein is an authentic and great artist of the Pop tendency. A jury of two Italian critics and five Europeans, of which only one is from the eastern strip (a Czech), ended up discovering the Argentinean artist. As a matter of fact, unable to contain himself, upon learning of the prizes, the American delegate—a deservedly famous critic—distributed a note, proclaiming jury and prizes meaningless. The *New York Times* critic harshly criticized, and even disparaged the Biennale as “one of the most squalid art reviews ever put together.” Our country took a secondary prize, a high level compensation for light and shadow seen and pondered by the jury, who preferred to stop at Le Parc. It was their right. Le Parc is one of ours, and his prize was a cultural landmark for all of underdeveloped South America.

An artist from the periphery is distinguishable from the well-protected masters of the Western metropolitan centers by his new offerings for visitors to prestigious institutions. They insulted him for this. Unappeasable indignation was expressed by important galleries and their followers as well as by important, super-developed critics. In Italy itself, one of their eminent critics drew himself up from “two thousand years of art” to the height of his arrogance to refer to the artist laureate as no more than “an Argentinean character who was not afraid to present a *Luna Park*.” Le Parc was truly fearless. He is a barbarian in Venice, Florence, or Rome, and, for this reason, he was unable to satisfy the critics’ aristocratic taste; he brought his project not so much for aesthetic contemplation as for a new way of living—optimistic, undoubtedly still utopian, but for the troubled men of our time.

—Originally published as “Veneza: feira e política das artes,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), July 10, 1966.

The “Silkworm” in Mass Production

Ever since the artist-artificer ceased to be an independent producer in a real economy—like any medieval craftsman or peasant who was master of his plot of land and of the old manual plow, that is to say, an independent producer, not like every artist essentially, but *functionally*, just as he was in economic regimes prior to modern capitalism (only now do we see it)—the evolution of art that was then taking place, and what is currently designated as “modern art,” had become inevitable. Culturally, it may be said that the seeds of modern abstractionism were already planted in the lofty considerations of the hero of the Sistine Chapel, as well as in the pure sensory variations of canvases by Titian or [Paolo] Veronese. The social conditions needed for the full autonomy of the Arts that would burst forth with the Cubism of [Pablo] Picasso—[Georges] Braque and come into full bloom with the Abstractionism of [Vasily] Kandinsky—[Piet] Mondrian were already in place. At the critical-aesthetic level, the

theoretical foundations were given to us above all in Heinrich Wölfflin's famous pairs of concepts for studying the evolution of art forms from the Renaissance onward.

But, for the time being, let us pause here. We are now interested in approaching that most complex and contradictory problem of the artist's condition in modern society. This is an indispensable starting point for understanding the position not only of the very newest art of today but of its creators, especially of *Pop* (with all of the variations and designations that fit within it) and of *Op* (also with all the variations and designations that fit within that so vast and abstract syllable). I do not believe it to be an exaggeration to declare that the decisive trait that characterizes the artistic behavior of now is freedom, or the sense of a new freedom. A long time ago, in attempting to analyze the phenomenon, I defined the art of our days as the experimental exercise of freedom. The later development recorded in artistic investigations since Abstractionism seems to me to have confirmed that conceptualization.

It is undoubtedly a cultural and social phenomenon that is absolutely new in the history of that civilization we conveniently call Western. Where does this freedom come from? Where does this factor that drove artists to the need for that exercise, for that experience, come from? That is currently the essential problem of Criticism. Without its elucidation, the task of Criticism today is—at best—an empirical fumbling; and, in most cases, uncertain and improvised. And the question does not confine itself to us, here in Brazil, but extends itself to criticism around the world. (We hope that, come September, the next international conference on criticism, to be held in beautiful, baroque, old Prague and entirely dedicated to the problem, shall clear up some part of the tangled sheaf of current perplexities. Unfortunately it seems that, this time, Brazil will be absent from it.)

If we observe the artist's position within his social context, from a historical perspective, we will note that he has continued to be—at least in theory—the “independent producer” of the precapitalist regimes. However, with the advent of capitalism he was classified within a new category, coined by none other than Adam Smith, the father of modern economics; I am referring to the category of “unproductive laborer.” In this category Smith includes all those who, from the King and the princes with their clients, to magistrates and commanding officers, to the Army and the Navy, had no function in the production apparatus, the work of a new class, full of energy and lacking time for distractions, personally engaged, day and night, in the continuous development of wealth. Whereas Smith felt the greatest enthusiasm for these new men—the recently empowered bourgeoisie—in compensation, he hated the others, the so-called public servants, the ones he included in the class of unproductive producers, that is, beyond kings and princes, “churchmen, lawyers . . . men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musicians, opera singers, opera dancers, etc.” Smith wanted to remunerate them with the minimum possible, mindful above all else of defending the interests of this revolutionary new bourgeois class driven by a formidable productive and creative energy.

Once dominant in society, the new class was quick to find leisure time for the refinements of “conspicuous consumption,” and attracted to its service all of society's ideological bodies and spiritual unproductive workers. The group of unproductive workers increased. Whereas the content of productive labor has nothing to do with the result of that work or its specific utility, its own use-value, outside the productive circuit the work's content does not come under consideration. It remains unaltered.

The ambiguity of the artist's position—he who had formerly been an authentically independent producer—became patent, explicit. For in light of the market's devas-

tating power, the same work can be simultaneously “productive” and “unproductive.” And Marx (again?!), in differentiating one type of work from another, also gives us an example of the artist’s ambiguous position within the new society: “Milton, for example, who wrote *Paradise Lost*, was an unproductive worker. In contrast to this, the writer who delivers hackwork for his publisher is a productive worker. Milton produced *Paradise Lost* in the way that a silkworm produces silk, as the expression of his own nature. Later on he sold the product for £5 and to that extent became a dealer in a commodity. But the Leipzig literary proletariat who produces books, e.g., compendia on political economy, at the instructions of his publisher, is roughly speaking a productive worker, insofar as his production is subsumed under capital and only takes place for the purpose of the latter’s valorization. A singer who sings like a bird is an unproductive worker. If she sells her singing for money, she is to that extent a wage laborer or a commodity dealer. But the same singer, when engaged by an entrepreneur who has her sign in order to make money, is a productive worker, for she directly produces capital.”¹

Such a dichotomy only came to be in the capitalist regime. In preceding regimes, work was done to satisfy immediate needs and personal or indirect solicitations rather than for the market. The end product belonged entirely to the producer, who could usually dispose of it as he wished (except in the cases of slave labor and feudal serfs). Money did not intercede as a necessary intermediary in the relations between one producer and another. *Paradise Lost* was not created to be merchandise, but to serve its creator’s natural gift. The work of art, the object of art, was not merchandise, the property of an owner who did not make it. As private property, the object ceases to exist in itself, to exist only as the product of a substitution, as an equivalent. Having lost its own identity, it expresses itself only in relation to something else. The object of private property thus became value and, in turn, exchange value. Its existence as value is different from its immediate existence—one might almost say its original existence—for it is exterior to its specific nature. Because the work has nothing but a relative existence, it is “an alienated determination of its very being.”

Nevertheless, no work of art can exist—more so than any other object—except as a product of itself, and never as substitution. As a rule, precapitalist economies did not encompass this metamorphosis of an object—the fruit of the producer’s work—into a privately owned object, the exchange value of which is determined by an equivalent that makes it indifferent to its specific nature. Therefore, it did not take place by means of this determination that was foreign to its nature and its intrinsic purposes, the process of the object’s alienation, wrested from its very being, from its true existence so as not to assume anything but the hypothesis of a relative existence, relative to other things.

So it is that a new situation was created in our contemporary world. We find ourselves in a regime of mass production, increasingly automatized and mechanical, at the base of the market, which progressively excludes the personal, human equation of production itself; and we stand before another, rival regime that prepares itself for mass production, also tending increasingly toward automation, although no longer at the base of the market. If we assume the latter regime is a postcapitalist, noncompetitive economy, not subject to the laws of the market, it should comprise a situation that once more approaches the one that existed for the artist in the modes of production that preceded capitalism. Indeed, in a postcapitalist regime of market domination, wage labor should disappear and, consequently, the old division of labor into productive and unproductive. The artist would once again be an independent producer and no longer alienated from his own production. The object, or his work,

would no longer be doomed to lose existential authenticity, reduced to a simple existence both relative and referential to something else, in the form of an equivalence that would specifically unite and identify all objects and all work with the most abstract and most absolute of all commodities—money. Thus, in a—shall we say—socialist society, the phenomenon of the work of art's transformation into exchange value should not occur, for it would be unacceptable that it might come to fall under the same sort of conditions that prevail in mass-production capitalism. One cannot conceive it divesting itself, ridding itself of its own particularity. In such a regime it would have to preserve its uniqueness, with no loss of intrinsic identity, even if it had been mechanically reproduced, for, in the event of change, there would not be a problem of quality, only one of technology. Its permanence, identical to its original nature, cannot be altered. Otherwise, the essential condition of its emergence would have expired: a creator that makes it, driven by a natural gift such as that of the silkworm that produces silk.

Not only are the artists of today conscious that—like their elders—they are silkworms; they have become aware of a new drive that compels them to the use of freedom. Where does this impulse come from? But where are the social and cultural conditions that allow these worms to continue to produce their silk incessantly and to use it in its original authenticity, to distribute it without altering its intrinsic existence, to offer it to a society that already has abundant synthetic silks and surrenders to mass mobilizations and to mass entertainment?

—Originally published as “O ‘bicho da seda’ na produção em massa,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), August 14, 1967.

Note

1. Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 2*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Classics, 1993), p. 484.

Art of the Caduveo,* African Art, Contemporary Artists

One of the most striking features of art made by peoples of primitive cultures was noted by F. [Franz] Boas, the eminent master of modern anthropology, when he painstakingly described the displacement of bodies and faces in the tribal art of the North American coastline. The organs and the very parts of the body—objects of the tribal artist's composition and design—are outlined in accordance to a law of sorts. Through these outlines and developments, the individual is reconstructed in a simultaneously arbitrary and symmetrical way.

[Claude] Lévi-Strauss used Boas's observation to lay the foundations for his own analysis of the development of representation by primitive peoples. Indeed, when—in a penetrating analysis—[Lévi-]Strauss studied the culture of some of our vanishing indigenous groups, he was afforded an opportunity to verify that the art of the Caduveo obeyed the same principles of representation. The Caduveo take the displacement of the figure both further and not as far as what was observed by Boas in his research. The main reason for the fact is simple: the Caduveo artist works

* The Caduveo are a Brazilian indigenous group that inhabits the Kadiwéu reservation located in the region of the Bodoquena mountain range, on the border of [the state of] Mato Grosso do Sul and Paraguay. Claude Lévi-Strauss lived with this group during his sojourn in Brazil and devotes special attention to the study of their facial paintings in a chapter of his book *Tristes tropiques* (1955).



Woman with a painted face,
Brazil Caduveo population.
c. 1935. Photograph by Claude
Lévi-Strauss. Musée du Quai
Branly, Paris

upon a body and a face in flesh and bone, which makes it impossible for them to be decomposed and recomposed unless this is done through a hardly conceivable form of surgery. However, whereas the integrity of the (tattooed) face is respected, it is no less displaced by the systematic asymmetry of the design, the principal function of which would be to violate the habitual harmony in order to replace it with another harmony—the artificial harmony of painting. [Lévi-]Strauss draws one main conclusion from this: instead of representing the image of a distorted face, that painting effectively distorts a real face. And this is why he can say that in the art of the Caduveo the principle of displacement goes further than in the art of the Northwestern coast of North America.

[Lévi-]Strauss's observations allow us to reflect upon both the differences and the similarities in the spirit of art in these primitive cultures, as well as that of the art that has been characterized in our century as "modern." In spite of all its effort at eschewing an art of representation, even [Pablo] Picasso's Cubism never ceased to be, in the distortion of the image or of the figure, an art of representation. However, in the art of the Caduveo, what is distorted is a given image, given material, or reality. The art of Picasso is a mere distortion of the representation of reality. The difference is crucial.

Two ingredients make up the art of the Caduveo in equal parts: a decorative element and an element of Sadism. The combination of these two elements allowed the Caduveo women to wield an erotic and extremely powerful force of attraction upon adventurers (according to information from [Lévi-]Strauss himself) along the banks of the Paraguay River. The taste for the ornamental and the decorative among primitive cultures (a taste that may also be noted in certain families of animals) displays the will to modify the natural order, to alter the environment in which one is actively and dynamically steeped. Male attracts female, or vice-versa, through ornament, whereas the artificer-artist-producer alters the image of the natural environment and gives shape to objects.

The art of these cultures is not an art of contemplation, but an active, participant, collective art, and its manifestation is not a replacement for anything else. It is not the representation of an image, even of reality, because it is reality itself, or one of the sources for recreating that reality. In the art of a people already as lost and decadent as the Caduveo in Brazil, its dynamic, erotic, and decorative functions—a modifier of social relationships and of the burden of reality—continues to be present, continues to exert itself.

Today, such a function may be the element that most fascinates the sensibility of contemporary artistic milieus. At the beginning of the century, when individual artists, such as [Henri] Matisse or Picasso, in Paris, or [Franz] Marc, in Dresden, Germany, experienced the revelation of African art, it was not in art museums or art galleries, where there was no room for it. It was in curiosity shops or in certain museums of natural history that were just then being opened for the first time. What affected them was the vitality, the formal beauty of those images, of those African fetishes exhibited there as exotic curiosities extracted from their natural, native cultural context, where they possessed a perennial social and collective function, touched by sacred meaning.

Cubism was born from the ribs of these fetishes (*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* by Picasso) and, like it, the obscure figures chiseled in wood or ivory by the Africans of the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast, from Dahomey and Benin, were suddenly elevated to the category of art, of great sculpture to rival the sculpture of the most important periods, such as Greek or Renaissance statuary.

Today, the arts of even the most modest primitive cultures, such as those of the extremely modest Caduveo, fascinate the modern sensibility because of what they signified, the action they exerted, the collective behavior they imposed upon the society from which they emerged. In this difference between the attitude of today's artist with that of [André] Derain or Matisse from the beginning of the century lies all the difference that extends from the art of that time, from the Cubist art of Picasso or the abstract art of [Piet] Mondrian, to the postmodern, Pop art, or environmental art of [Claes] Oldenburg or [George] Segal, the kinetic art of [Julio] Le Parc or [Nicolas] Schöffer, or the environmental, participant art of Lygia Clark or Hélio Oiticica.

African art continues to speak to us with all of its eminently aesthetic and formal qualities. But what today's artist seeks is an equivalency between his attitude, his work, and the attitude and the work of the African or of the Caduveo artist, within their respective social contexts.

In truth, what makes the artists of today (I am referring to the most demanding, to the most profound ones) nostalgic, in their cultural and spiritual isolation, is the absence of collective cultural resonances above the aesthetic appeal of the work. The latter cannot overcome isolation, achieve the collective and the mythical through the solitary field of individual taste whose opposite pole is the taste of fashion—which is capricious, of the moment, subordinated as it is to the disordering function of advertising or to its cultural dysfunction. When the Fauvists, Expressionists, and pre-Cubists embraced African art, even though they knew nothing of African culture, they did not do so (as some distracted or pedantic sociologists, anthropologists, and naturalists believed) because of its “exotic, barbarian, or scandalous” side, but for its intrinsic formal qualities, its hierarchical structure in the presence of an evanescent, amorphous, lifeless, naturalist, or naturalizing sculpture, the pure amalgam of masses or conventional theatricality that then dominated Europe's most eminent artistic centers.

It was the as yet unknown artists of the age, who were up against the academic prejudices on the parts of the most erudite art historians and the most celebrated art critics, who were right. In a dense book about the aesthetic sentiment of African blacks, as he attempts to differentiate the black stance from the European stance on an aesthetic level, Michel Leiris concludes that Western man judges beauty as an individualist, according to individual criteria, whereas the blacks of Africa, essentially social beings, do not judge. Instead of judgment, which no one asks of them, what they do is verify tradition, which is composed of artisanal rules, liturgical rules,

or historically fixed formal rules, by social collectivity, by the group. So it is that, in their cultural context, it is the object's participation that is of paramount interest.

Looking to find the essential element that—in the art of the Northwestern coast as well as in Guaycuru and Maori art and even in the art of ancient China—would explain the continuity and the rigidity with which the development of representation (which would be the function of a sociological theory of the development of personality) is applied, [Lévi-]Strauss finds it in a very particular relationship between graphic elements and formal elements. Far from being independent, these elements would be connected by an ambivalent relationship, that is to say, a relationship of opposition and of functionality. As for the latter, the object is always conceived according to a double (formal and graphic) aspect: the vase, the box, and the wall are not independent or preexisting objects to be decorated *a posteriori*. These objects only take on a definitive existence when the decorative (the artist's action upon the thing; it could be a real face, or a—so to speak—still implicit structure) and utilitarian functions are integrated. When the Caduveo artist paints a face, the decoration creates the face. For him, paper itself is not just any flat surface upon which to draw or paint—it is a figure. In indigenous thought, the decoration is the face or, better yet, it is the decoration that creates it. The development of figural representation must take place in any situation or, as we might say, with any support. The indigenous artist denies this. A box by an artist of the Northwestern coast is not only a recipient decorated with the image or sculpture of an animal, but the animal itself that actively protects the ceremonial ornaments that are entrusted to it. Thus, if structure modifies decoration, the latter is the final cause of the former, inevitably adapted to its needs. According to [Lévi-]Strauss, this is why we are always before a “utensil-ornament,” an object-animal or a “box-that-speaks.”¹

The primitive artist creates an object “that participates.” With something akin to despair within him, today's artist calls upon others to bring participation unto his object.

—Originally published as “Arte dos Caduceus, arte negra, artistas de hoje,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), January 14, 1968.

Note

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Schoepf (New York: Basic Books, 2008), p. 261.

The Bienal From Here to There

In taking the perspective necessary to fully grasp the march of art in Brazil up until the opening of the São Paulo Bienal, it behooves us to linger upon the circumstances that created it. In 1951 the first Bienal was an act that seemed at the time to its own creator, Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, like a gesture, a temporary initiative that did not necessarily need to continue. As one might plant a *sapote* seed in one's yard to see whether it grows. The gesture surely presupposes that the subject has tasted the fruit and liked it. The fact is that (in 1948, at least) he had already created his art museum, as Assis Chateaubriand had created *his*, less than a year earlier,¹ except that Ciccillo Matarazzo added to his museum the essential and indisputable designation of “modern.” Upon his return from one of his annual comings and goings to Italy, perhaps

with the idea of a “Biennale” in his head, as he had seen it on his way through Venice, Matarazzo questioned the (already) second director of his museum in less than a year as to how much a biennial would cost. This director, Lourival Gomes Machado, was an eminent professor and writer on Art whose premature death represents, for Brazilian art and culture, the famous cliché of irreparable loss. His friends mourned him openly, fearing that the staggering duties stemming from the initiative would kill the still-budding museum. (And for this very reason the museum never actually became a real museum and ended up being summarily dissolved, its collection offered in exchange for favors and titles from the University of São Paulo, and its museographic installations appropriated to serve as a background to the Fundação Bial de São Paulo, an autonomous private organization.) The founder of the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo] and of the Bial belonged to another spiritual family, came from another sphere, played another game. The museum’s director was just a young intellectual with an impressive cultural background, albeit accustomed to the discipline of the professor who must not only transmit what he knows to his students but immediately measure the impact of that transfer of knowledge. The discipline he learned as a teacher was necessary to prepare him to be the head of a cultural institution in constant contact with the public. Not so the other [Matarazzo Sobrinho]. A great businessman, he played like a veritable captain of industry of the age, one whose narrative was so well described by [Joseph] Schumpeter.² And, indeed, the first Bial was a purely improvisational gambit. Luck helped its founder, as is commonly the case with great industrialists (it is the same story with capitalism writ large). The realization touched the imagination of the *paulistas*, and Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho was thus called upon to preside over the celebrations of the fourth centennial anniversary of the founding of São Paulo, in 1953. The idea of a second Bial came about organically during these celebrations. The industrial entrepreneur’s star rose, driven by the singular (although ultimately not fortuitous) coincidence that Ademar de Barros (a famous “manager,” who, by temperament and affinity, was very close to the family of businessmen and bold captains of industry) was a member of the São Paulo state government, along with another figure no less famous for the audacity of *his* political game and whose arrowlike, meteoric rise in Brazilian politics was only beginning: Jânio Quadros. By a stroke of luck, beneath a veneer of adventurousness, the sudden gesture from the top responded to the new dynamism, coming from below, that drove São Paulo’s productive energies.

During the critical decade spanning 1940 to 1950, in which the boom of industrialization gathered speed through a mechanism for sourcing materials locally rather than through importation, the country’s urban population grew 45 percent; from a population growth of 10,000,000 people, 5,800,000 were absorbed by urban centers. All over the country, Brazilian cities grew. Those with 100,000 inhabitants grew in number, absorbing 47 percent of the urban growth, while the larger metropolises called unto themselves an even greater percentage of these Brazilians; millions left farming, trading the isolation of rural life in exchange for a more cosmopolitan, urban existence. Concomitantly with this brutal displacement of people to the cities, the Brazilian working class more than doubled. Capitalism as it was lived in São Paulo became the lifeblood of this surplus value that flowed torrentially through the gateways of the new factories opening in the city. New waves of immigrants were arriving at the ports and airports of Rio and São Paulo, and—unlike those of the first influx of immigrants at the beginning of the Republic or the beginning of the century—they did not go to the coffee plantations with job contracts, but came with belongings, capital, and *know-how* to establish their businesses, factories, and companies here. These

men who were fleeing the political and social catastrophes of the Old World brought with them certain experiences, personal tastes—in short, a certain (though modest—let us not nurture any illusions) appreciation. Let us further consider that, according to the census of 1950, in terms of professional activities, the population of São Paulo included 1,754,000 industrial workers laboring in tertiary-sector services of every type, representing 60 percent of its inhabitants. In light of this number, it is interesting to keep in mind that 50 percent of the new entrepreneurs of that period came from outside, from abroad. On the one hand, there were these capitalists hard hit by the storms of Europe, in search of a new homeland; on the other, there were millions of Brazilians chased from their land in the interior by endemic poverty, in search of safer ways to earn wages in the workforce-hungry metropolis, and this group already made up 60 percent of São Paulo's active wage-earners, the census in question having included anyone above the age of ten in that mass. These wage-earners constituted an uninterrupted flow of inexperienced and uneducated workers, soon exploitable to the maximum degree. The new capitalists in the country bore hopes and optimism, eager to contribute to those activities of their city's tertiary sector that afforded prestige, satisfaction, and were a source of pleasure and leisure. The basis for social enthusiasm over conspicuous consumption of the contents of the biennials was not, therefore, absent.

What effects, what repercussions were brought by the expansion of modern art in Brazil through the series of biennials that succeeded the first one? First and foremost, the São Paulo Bienal expanded the horizons of Brazilian art. Created along the mold of the Venice Biennale, its first result was that of breaking the closed circle in which the artistic activities of Brazil unfolded, removing them from a provincial isolationism. It provided an international gathering in our country, granting Brazilian artists and the public direct contact with the “newest” and boldest of what was being done in the world of art. In reality, like every living phenomenon, it had a good side and a bad side, a positive aspect and a negative or contradictory one. Indeed, the contact it provided was inevitable, for no country, and ours in particular, could develop in isolation, autarchically, closed to influences, to trade with the exterior world. From its early days, the international mercantilism that discovered Brazil dragged along (in those days based exclusively upon the law of piracy), exploited it incessantly and monopolistically as a colony until delivering it to the more intensive, more systematic, canier exploitation of contemporary imperialism. For even that incessant exploration, from its birth until now, possessed and continues to possess its positive aspects.

Long, long before all the talk about the “law of unequal development” that [Vladimir] Lenin attempted to formulate as the basis of empirical observation in international politics, the young [Karl] Marx of *The German Ideology*³ showed how, in developing societies, the different conditions that initially appeared as necessary to personal activity and, later, hindrances to that same activity, constituted in the course of historical development a continuous series of forms of trade transformed into a impediment. However, if another form corresponding to more developed productive forces and, consequently, to the most advanced mode of individual personal activity, in turn becomes a hindrance, is then replaced by another. In comparison, in countries such as those of North America, development happens very quickly. And this explains the phenomenon: such countries do not have *natural presuppositions outside the individuals who establish themselves in them* nor are they compelled to adhere to the forms of trade of the old countries, which did not respond to their needs. Thus, according to Marx, new countries begin with the most advanced individuals from the old countries, or with their most advanced corresponding form of

trade. To the example of the United States one might add Brazil, Argentina, Russia, and the new colonies in general. Marx extends the phenomenon of all the former colonies, Carthage, the Greek colonies, Iceland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. He specifies that, when they are imported, the same things come with conquest, already developed in the conquered country, the form of trade plied upon another soil. At the base of those fully wrought importations of more advanced activities and techniques in the late developing or dependent countries—a country, for example, that has not yet arrived at the railroad but already has an airline—[Leon] Trotsky attempted to complement the formula of unequal development with one he designated as “combined development.”

There are also techniques that, with the structure of trade, are imported “finished.” Probably without even knowing the formula, Lewis Mumford gave an example at the cultural level of this “arrangement” when he emphasized the importation to the South of the United States of complete neoclassical formulas of the architecture in vogue in the old European countries. This importation also extended to the Latin countries of the New World, during their phase of Independence and in other European countries in *their* process of modernization and revolution around the same time. Certain architectural contributions from the colonial period, above all the baroque of [the Brazilian state of] Minas Gerais, were immersed or forgotten in the torrent of modernizing importations.

The phenomenon repeated itself again with modern rational architecture, imported fully wrought during the time of the dictatorship, which constituted the second stage of the evolution of modern art in our country. And the third stage of the evolution began precisely with the biennials, when the most advanced forms of artistic activity entered the country en masse, led by those very art shows.

Upon its birth, Brazil entered the slave trade with a vengeance, when that institution was at its global apogee. Simultaneously, it adopted the Baroque—the very modern art of the Counter-Reformation—and it was precisely its most devoted soldiers, its most competent propagandists, the Jesuits, who came to Brazil to impose upon our indigenous population every manner of labor, trade, religion, education, and art defended by the Counter-Reformation. In the age of independence, it imported the most developed form of trade that came from England and, in Architecture and the Arts in general, the neoclassical forms of France, of Italy, etc.

With the Revolution of 1930, the established dictatorship imported the already finished forms of trade-related contingency and of salvation measures against the damage of the super production crises of large countries (United States) and the most advanced forms of modern architecture. Finally, after the war, at the end of the dictatorship, but with the intensification of the second boom of industrialization, entire technological structures were imported: more complex forms of trade, the intact formula of the Venice Biennale, and the boldest forms of the visual arts.

Let us now return to the Bienal and to its specific field. Thanks to it, our public learned about the century’s greatest artistic movements. The second Bienal simultaneously delivered Cubism, Futurism, and Neo-Plasticism, in addition to retrospectives of the greatest masters of our time: [Pablo] Picasso, [Piet] Mondrian, [Paul] Klee, [Edvard] Munch, James Ensor, [Henri] Laurens, [Henry] Moore, [Marino] Marini, [Alexander] Calder, and others, while the following biennials brought Expressionism and Surrealism as well as retrospectives of other great masters, [Fernand] Léger, [Giorgio] Morandi, [Marc] Chagall etc. In becoming a central attraction for all the artists of Brazil, the Bienal in turn was able to awaken an internal movement of artistic approximation between the country’s various cultural provinces, and nota-

bly between the two principal centers, Rio and São Paulo. The recalcitrant regional localisms of this or of that center begin to be overcome in Brazil's continental vastness. Nevertheless, the Bienal's diffusion was not limited to its country; it spread out beyond our boundaries early on and, attracting the attention of the artistic spheres of neighboring countries, allowed for the identification of the cultural interchange between Brazil and other Latin American nations. And upon these countries, the most remote and isolated, it exercised the same influence that it did upon Brazil's regional centers. During the period of the biennials, São Paulo indeed became a living center of interchange of impressions and ideas between the artists and critics of the world but, above all, of Latin America. Not all progress, however, is accomplished without countermovements, without regressions and without danger: the *paulista* Bienal did not escape this dialectic. In pulling Brazil away from its tender, sluggish isolationism, it launched the country into the arena of international fashion, into the arena of not only commercial speculations, but of shady personal and even national arrangements with regard to prizes, etc., prestige politics between national delegations, a barter policy between individuals. The art show becomes an art fair, and the dealer rules. The laws of the capitalist market are unforgiving: once art takes on exchange value, it becomes ordinary ham.

—“A Bienal de cá pra lá” (1970). Originally published in Ferreira Gullar, *Arte Brasileira, hoje* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1973).

Notes

1. Assis Chateaubriand (1892–1968) was Brazil's first media mogul and cofounder, along with Italian Pietro Maria Bardi, of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP), in 1947.
2. Schumpeter was an Austrian-American economist known for popularizing the phrase “creative destruction” as it relates to economics.
3. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (1865) (Moscow: Marx-Engels Institute, 1932).

Between the Week and the Biennials

As long as we're talking about it, this intermediary period¹ was inaugurated by the Revolution of 1930, and distinguishes itself by state intervention at the economic and political levels as well as at the cultural level. The intervention began at the artistic level with the revolutionary appointment of Lúcio Costa (who would later define the idea of Brasília) as director of the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes [National School of Fine Arts] that resulted in the dismantlement of the archaic institution of teaching of Architecture, which will finally assume the necessary autonomy in our Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura [National College of Architecture]. A few years later, through a purely bureaucratic act—similar to the enlightened despotism of earlier ages that resulted in the establishment of the academies—a national exhibition of modern art was created, like Eve from Adam's rib, from the old SNBA [Salão Nacional de Belas Artes], the distant origins of which date back to the Empire and its foremost task: to annually send some hick from the sticks who had been awarded a gold medal obtained in a conventional competition, to attend an academy in Paris or Rome. [Candido] Portinari was the first to leave that mill of crowned mediocrities as a living artist. Justice further dictates that note be taken of the fact that Milton Dacosta was the first to be saved by the Modern Division of the same salon, preceded,

however, by [José] Pancetti, who also had his trip abroad, which he had already done several times, having even lived abroad for many years.

It is the age that marks the beginning of modern Brazilian architecture's sensational eruption, above all in the monumental architecture of sumptuous official palaces and projects. This was the moment of the first generation of modern Brazilian architects. At the end of the World War II, a phalanx of first-rate young figures took Brazil and transformed it into a country of the architectural avant-garde. For a time, the country truly became an architect's paradise, for all that was considered in it were design and approach and enabling the luxury of experimentation with new materials—how they played with glass, aluminum, etc.—modernist innovations, whims—*brise-soleil* became toys, as it were—and ventilation flaps were placed even on the shadowed facades of unwarranted canopies, down to obsessions with detailing and finish. To the envy of, for example, Alvar Aalto, all this was paid for by clients. When Aalto awarded a prize to Sérgio Bernardes (a rising star of architecture) for his malleable use of new materials back in the second edition of the [São Paulo] Bienal, the Finn bemoaned having to make things at his own expense and in his own home in Helsinki. Thanks to this great master, even a poor country such as Finland now has an architecture that is well planted in its soil—homogenous and revolutionary in terms of its construction process, use of materials, such as wood, structural articulations, spatial solutions, and, last but not least, its lack of expense.

This first generation fulfilled its historical mission by launching the basic ideas for a Brazilian revolution in Architecture, with all of the implications it would engender for the general, social, and technical orders. Like so many other developments and institutions, it came from above and abroad. Without the dictatorial State, Brazil's new architecture would have been introduced through private channels and, therefore, more sporadically and gradually. The sudden, solid, large-scale manner of a sumptuous, bureaucratic, monumental nature with which it was introduced would never have taken place. Above all, young talents, such as [Oscar] Niemeyer and [Affonso Eduardo] Reidy, would not have had a chance at their vertiginous careers. Formerly, when the spirit of liberalism was still predominant, experienced intellectuals and men used to lament that everything was done by means of the State. Indeed, at least since King João II and Tomé de Sousa,² everything has been done by the State, whether represented by the Portuguese Crown, the imperial Crown, or even the First Republic, with its liberal constitution labor finally set free through competition and the influx of international (above all English) capital, promoting progress and giving rise to wealth.

The name of [Gregori] Warchavchik—a true precursor—must be added to this generation. Even before 1930, he timidly tried to make samples on a more modest scale of what later, under official patronage, would be executed on a large scale in Rio de Janeiro. Indeed, Warchavchik, who immigrated to Brazil [from Ukraine] at practically the same time as [Lasar] Segall, still in the early 1920s, built the first house in Brazil according to the “modern” formula: using geometric planes (most admired in constructions of that time) for everything, including the roof, thus marking the moment in which the Cubist aesthetic exerted hegemony over all the other branches of Art. Beyond the deliberate highlighting of planes, the other unquestionable rule was the suppression of the superfluous through the banishing of all ornamentation, along the ethical-aesthetic line of thought of [Henry] van de Velde and the Bauhaus, according to which anything rational would be functional and whatever was functional would eventually become beautiful or recognized as such (this line of thought is also reflected in Le Corbusier's concept that a house is a “machine for living,” that

is until the Calvinist that he was exploded in the Palace of Justice at Chandigarh and contritely bowed to the weight of his own depths in the romantic lands of Ronchamp). And further on in his precursory vein, our own Warchavchik (about whom Geraldo Ferraz wrote an excellent book, published by the Museu de Arte de São Paulo,³ and who exhibited in 1930 a house he himself called “modernist”), in an attempt to integrate the arts—of which architecture is the most encompassing—moved from painting and sculpture to murals, decorating, and landscaping. Above all else, the initiative had a demonstrative, didactic value.

This second period of modern art in Brazil would have been inconceivable without the leadership of this group of young architects from both Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. And what it brought with it, perhaps without much consciousness of this, or put into circulation as a central idea, and that Warchavchik had attempted to define with his “modernist house” in São Paulo, was precisely the idea of an integrationist architecture. And when the project for the Ministry of Education and Culture was launched, architecture presided over all matters and Portinari was called upon to collaborate on the tile decorations of an outer wall, interior murals, and, finally, the great frescos about sugar cane, tobacco, coffee, and cotton plantations, which may be his masterpiece. We believe these to have been the first large-scale frescos executed in Brazil, although preceded by the much more modest and private attempts of A. G. Gomide, a curious and pleasant personality who was born in Itapetininga [a city in the southern state of São Paulo] in 1895 and died in 1965. In his own individual manner, Gomide played a small role, albeit an important one for the 1920s. Although he did not personally take part in the Week (he was away from Brazil), he was perfectly attuned to its climate and concerns through a didactic calling and an interest in other aspects of decoration, such as stained glass, frescoes, etc. In the mid-1920s we were able to see the frescos he painted in his own house (*A Ceia* [The supper]); Gomide later painted privately commissioned frescos for the residence of Dona Olívia Penteadó, the patroness of modernists. Shortly thereafter, from 1933 to 1934, another Last Supper on an inner wall of the home of an art world intellectual active at the time of the Week and, later, until his death: the fondly remembered Carlos Pinto Alves.

While in São Paulo, which was experiencing a spurt of demographical and industrial growth, things were being done by individuals (on a more modest scale), in Rio, the capital of the Republic, the important initiatives came from the State, from the government. It was not only [Candido] Portinari who was invited to participate in creating the Ministry of Education and Culture; other painters, such as [Alberto da Veiga] Guignard, who has two excellent paintings from his Surrealist period there, and sculptors, including Bruno Giorgi, Celso Antônio, (a much younger) [Alfredo] Ceschiatti, as well as, for the first time in Brazil or in the contemporary West, an artist was officially called upon to collaborate exclusively in the design of gardens. Roberto Burle Marx, who thus began his career as a landscape artist when he was very young, still does so with the glory of having been the first specialist to participate in a regular and organic way in the fascinating adventure of modern architecture and urban planning. He was transformed by circumstance into a sort of Brazilian Le Nôtre.

In this case, it is possible to grasp concretely a striking difference from the first intermediary period. In that one, it was a matter of reaching the public through scandal or shock therapy specimens of the modernist revolution that was sweeping the world. A handful of visual artists, poets, men of letters, and musicians who proclaimed themselves to be “modern” gathered in the name of this modernism to introduce it to the provincial bourgeoisie. Each branch of art brought its representatives with their wares. All who were there presumed themselves to be brilliant individuals.

In this second phase, the dominant thinking already possessed a social and collective connotation of sorts and, not by chance, the true protagonist became the architect. In the third period, that of the biennials, the pendulum swung back to the individual arts, and hegemony was once again held by painting, as it had been in Europe. As was the case in São Paulo, some of the principal figures of the first generation of architects have passed on. The brilliant and distinguished poet Rino Levi wrote the architectural equivalent of First Epistle to the Corinthians: from Rome (where he was still studying), he put forth his manifesto (1928) to the people concerning the advent of modern architecture. There was also that admirable master architect—among the greatest of his generation—Affonso Eduardo Reidy, in Rio, prematurely robbed of two of the three Robertos,⁴ brothers in blood and in good professional lineage, likewise trailblazers (they designed the pioneering ABI [Brazilian Press Association] building). And we must remember with deep grief Attilio Correia Lima, who died while still in the flower of his youth. He was one of the generation's most promising stars, who showed in a single work the profound relationships that were established in Brazil during the last few years between spatial creativity in Architecture and the creativity of Brazilian abstract art. His Hydroplane Station (currently an aviation officials club)⁵ may, to this day, be considered a jewel of Brazilian modern architecture. Never has the intuition of space been more successfully captured in an architectural apparatus, whose proportions are more apposite in their living, tense articulations than in this unique building by Correia Lima. So many years later, it has lost none of its spatial vitality or organic quality, albeit brutalized by the mounting of the spiral staircase upon the floating stairs connecting the floor of the upper landing, a solid handrail that almost makes the pure spiral outlining of space into an unusual tube. (It is said that the "improvement" was introduced to prevent the curious from looking up women's dresses as they ascended.) At any rate, when we look at the prematurely deceased architect's small work now, after the aesthetic experience acquired throughout all these years of modern art and biennials in Brazil, it cannot be too much of an exaggeration to declare it one of the most beautiful or most perfect *abstract works* ever created in these parts.

During those years, the hegemony of architecture in the field of the arts was heavily state-funded. But formidable support also came from the private sector, starting with the famous construction "fever," or, more precisely, unlimited real estate speculation. It was then that São Paulo broke all records for new building, becoming the metropolis with the greatest number of new construction projects in the world, surpassing even Chicago or New York, by building one dwelling per hour (or even less). With the scandal of intractable land division, devoid of even the slightest glimmer of social consciousness, this marked the zenith of the anarchic growth of our major cities. The miracle (as it has been called) of private initiative played havoc with these urban centers. Architects had neither the time nor the inclination for close analysis of the nature of the miracle. And, whether they wanted to be or not, they were complicit in this urban brutality, including damage done to Copacabana, which transformed it into the most odious neighborhood in Rio, and then swept our dear city of São Sebastião do Rio—the intrinsic landscape of which requires only that it be left as it is, that it not be violated—by piling up hotels and sad, round blocks of skyscrapers upon beautiful hillsides. If we set aside the social aspects of the favelas, which is the negative side of every capitalist urban process, one thing is clear, and it must be said: for better or worse, the improvised and clandestine shanties that climb up the favela hillsides integrate themselves to the landscape; the licensed modern urban constructions brutally wound it. But the case of São Paulo may be worse still; in any event, it

is more serious, for private initiative there was more powerful than here [in Rio] and, in general, its cityscape is the work of men and men alone. And so the city center, where the charmingly provincial metropolis once sat upon the hills surrounding the Convento dos Padres, was transformed into a suffocating lair of hideous skyscrapers, as anarchic as some dense medieval burg and as anti-social as the urban centers of New York, Chicago, or Detroit. Its evils spread to the adjacent neighborhoods and continue on to the periphery so that the formidable urban center is now a sad, chaotic agglomeration of people that jostle back and forth from morning to night in order to make money. Art-architecture or cultural activity-architecture became a myth; one not yet denounced (although it needs to be) without becoming a rational and conscious social activity for this reason, within a constructive technique reformulated as a result of poverty conditions in the vast interior of the country or as a result of the ongoing global technological revolution in terms of materials, construction procedures, and the emerging freedom from the limitations of location. (In order to overcome the obstacle of underdevelopment, Brazil needs every sort of reformulation, including an architectural one.) But ultimately, capitalist progress carried along everything in its wake. Including the Arts—and, again—Architecture of the biennials, that are about to begin.

From the 1920s to the 1930s, important political events rocked Brazil from South to North. São Paulo became the crux of the revolution, although the central power continued to be in Rio, while the rebel forces came from [the state of] Rio Grande do Sul, and the auxiliaries from [the state of] Minas [Gerais] and from the Northwest. São Paulo was occupied militarily, with a temporary external military administrator, a real “*tenente*” [lieutenant]. In no State in the Federation was the process of political and social transformation more emphatic than in the land of Piratininga [in the state of São Paulo]. These were the greatest convulsions; they led to the revolt of the *pau-lista* bourgeoisie and petite bourgeoisie in the name of a new constitutional order and of State autonomy. Class division, already in a modern sense, was greater in São Paulo. Whereas the aristocratic quarter of Higienópolis was hostile to the new revolutionary power, the proletarian district of Brás was in favor, and manifested its ingenuous sympathy toward it. But by 1920 the political sympathy that Brás or Cambuci were able to muster had not yet grown big enough; for this reason, while Higienópolis produced the Modern Art Week in 1922, Cambuci and nearby municipalities produced the Família Artística Paulista in the 1930s.⁶ Whereas the venue for the Week was the majestic foyer of the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, the Família’s headquarters were located in an office in the Santa Helena building, in the Largo da Sé, where, since 1933, most of the new labor unions that were created along with the revolution were located. From 1920 to 1930, São Paulo’s social and demographic structure changed greatly. The following demographic data from the 1950 census gives us a sense of that change. From 1901 to 1920, Italians alone accounted for 900,000 immigrants. Even if the majority were destined for the coffee plantations of the interior, little by little, a considerable part of it (as well as its most active and enterprising elements), established themselves and their children in the proletarian neighborhoods of Cambuci, Brás, Mooca, and Lapa. This mass migration ceased shortly before the Week. But the first great wave of free workers from Portugal, Italy, Spain, and other countries arrived in the decade before, due to the abolition of slave labor. It was in this first wave of colonists we find these energetic and enterprising subjects who founded veritable dynasties of businessmen, industrialists, or plantation owners, such as the Matarazzo family and others who created São Paulo beyond coffee. Many of the others whose names are familiar to us never got around to making a fortune, but they left

descendants who would bring about their contribution to the Arts, to the country's literature, to its press, such as Menotti del Picchia, Alfredo Volpi, and Lívio Abramo (younger, for he was born in 1903), the son of one of the period's typical personalities, with the energy and intelligence to undertake a thousand things, but without being touched by the grace of fortune. By 1922, of the aforementioned names, only the painter Alfredo Volpi was able to become enough of an aristocrat to move beyond the Largo da Sé, to cross the Viaduto do Chá and participate with the people on the other side of it in the Week's demonstrations. (Born in Italy in the 1890s—more precisely, in 1896—he was brought here by his parents at the age of two, in the first wave; he was already a respected easel painter when the Week took place.) But the organizers of the Week had no knowledge of him—he who was a proletarian, a wall painter; just as he and the colleagues with whom he socialized and painted probably did not know about them. They did not go beyond the Largo da Sé; from that point, they moved back toward the Cambuci and the Brás quarters, which were dominated by craftsmanship and workshops. Already a good painter in an utterly nonacademic vein, but rather Impressionist or Post-Impressionist in the Italian style, Volpi was perfectly qualified to take part in the Week; however, he lacked the social status to have been acquainted with its promoters. And quite typically (at the professional level), he was still a decorative wall painter with cohorts who—like himself—painted, drew, and exchanged ideas about their progress with “beautiful painting,” all of them skilled workers on their way to becoming construction foremen. Much later, this was the environment in which the core of the Família Artística Paulista was born, very well intuited by Mário de Andrade when he named the group and wrote about it in 1937. Indeed, Mário did not actually meet Volpi until around this time, when, according to the latter, they got drunk together and established a friendly bond.

An intellectual climate hovered over the Week; a professional atmosphere hovered modestly over the Family. The altruistic nationalist aspirations that drove many poets and artists to take part in the Week eventually led to literary, social, and political movements; some of these, with greater originality (such as, for example, cannibalism of an aesthetic-philosophical nature) interpreted the historical making of Brazil; others (such as Verdeamarelismo [Green-yellowism]) were already frankly reactionary and rapidly degenerated into Integralism.

Revolutionary political ideas surfaced with the institutional crisis and the economic crisis of coffee, leading momentarily—and especially in São Paulo—to superficial symptoms of a power vacuum. Oswald de Andrade, in a profession of Communist faith, broke with his own class (the washed-up, decadent coffee aristocracy), and converted for a time to the ideology of the Communist Party and to the proletarian revolution. Alongside and in opposition to the Sociedade Pró-Arte Moderna [Society for modern art], founded by former promoters of the Week, now already accused of being socialites, aristocrats, and reactionaries, the Clube dos Artistas Modernos [Modern artists club]⁷ was launched. Flávio de Carvalho, its organizer and agitator—a high-spirited intellectual, arch, impertinent, and multifaceted artist who was also the product of an old *paulista* family—filled the city with echoes of his activities and his challenges. Perhaps without knowing it, he adopted as a motto the old Surrealist slogan launched by Louis Aragon—at the time one of Surrealism's most brilliant champions—to the effect of “scandal for scandal's sake.” Thus, in an exhibition of his own paintings, he himself denounced (via an “anonymous” letter to the newspapers and the police) the presence of obscene paintings on view there as a veritable assault upon propriety. The complaint having been made, a scandal was guaranteed and the public flocked to the exhibition before the police closed it down.

In a delightful book, *Experiência n° 2*, he provides a detailed, illustrated narrative of the lynching threat he suffered and the fear he felt for having challenged the piety of thousands of the faithful who followed in a religious procession by keeping his hat on his head. Another “scandal”—this one of real and profound ethics and aesthetics—were the fine drawings he made of the various moments of his mother’s death throes. In these, Flávio de Carvalho achieved his pinnacle as man and artist. Until it was closed down by police under the age-old pretext of being a place where subversion and orgies were practiced, his CAM [Clube dos Artistas Modernos] was something of a free platform for debate. The revolutionary work of the formidable German print-maker Käthe Kollwitz—the friend of Rosa Luxemburg—was shown there for the first time in this country. There was a conference about the artist followed by a debate about what had been done in Brazil from the Marxist perspective regarding “the social tendencies of art.”⁸ It was around this time that the first Brazilian artists with a conscious social message emerged. Alongside Osvaldo Goeldi emerged an important young artist named Lívio Abramo. As far as we know, he was the first to transpose the subject of class struggle onto wood engraving: the worker in the textile factory with his profile outlined against grills and chimneys, as erect as infantry before the enemy, and, around him, through the adjacent irregular topography, the workers’ houses in groups, climbing the elevations as if ambushed by robbers (guerrilla fighters?). Abramo’s wood engravings and linoleum block printing reflected a clean, strong line, a warm accent on class solidarity.

Around this time, Tarsila [do Amaral] was in her political period, when she gave us canvases such as *Operário* [Worker] and *Segunda classe* [Second class], in which all of her proletarian sympathies were expressed by a profound compassion for the poor. On a pictorial level, these magnificent canvases make use of a color scheme that differs greatly from the artist’s preceding period, into whose execution she put all her care. The great painter paid for her sympathies with prison, into which she was thrown by her own class, like another distinguished painter ([Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti) and several intellectuals during the days of the *paulista* uprising of 1932 [Constitutionalist Revolution of 1932].

High social tension and institutional crisis no longer allowed simply for the Week’s purely aesthetic or cultural explosions.

The controversy was no longer artistic, but openly political. In Germany, victorious Nazism emboldened the Brazilian fascists to don green shirts, practice extended arm salutes, find a national [Brazilian] führer, arm themselves and go out into the streets, beating up men of the left wherever they found them, and parade with militarized militia of thousands of men all the way to the oath to the flag ceremony at the Largo da Sé, in front of the Santa Helena building—the headquarters of the recently created Federação Brasileira dos Sindicatos dos Trabalhadores [Brazilian federation of union workers]. In keeping with the Nazi technique of conquering the street before taking power, the ceremony’s resolute military apparatus sought to intimidate workers by threatening the very existence of their unions. Although it was still inexperienced the Federation understood the danger and the meaning of the maneuver and of the threat. So, at its behest, a united Left front was formed with the express purpose of dispersing the march with violence in light of the government’s passive neutrality. Indeed, on October 7, 1934, the mass of people in the proletarian neighborhoods flocked to the Largo da Sé armed with anything (sticks, knives, scythes, rifles, pistols) and, by force, broke up (hundreds of wounded, one dozen dead on one side and, on the other, a great many prison sentences) the Galinhas Verdes [Green chickens]⁹ parade, which never marched through the streets of São Paulo again. However, they continued to do so in

Rio until the Estado Novo coup of November 1937, with which, with their complicity, the indeterminate liberal dictatorship of 1930 defined itself as fascist, and Mr. Filinto Muller, that legitimate democrat of today, was elevated to the category of [Heinrich] Himmler in order to establish the Nazi terror in our country for the first time. It was precisely during that year that the Família Artística Paulista was organized; that, avoiding every manner of controversy or aesthetics between “moderns” and “academics,” concentrates on matters of *métier*, of workmanship; thus, it ultimately reflected an artisanal mentality that really belonged to its members in general.

Professional concerns surfaced everywhere while ideological and political concerns took a back seat. The totalitarian Estado Novo¹⁰ did not allow more controversy or the free discussion of ideas, political fancies, or autonomous ideologies. The age of “modern” art clubs was dead; not by chance, the Sindicato de Artistas Plásticos [Union of visual artists] emerged in their place. From now on let each one take care of their own private business, their professional duties and let the (New) State take care of the rest. . . .

A tepid mood set in. The monotonous, suffocating days of the dictatorship were prolonged. Exhibitions of this and that by greater or lesser talents opened and closed, only to disappear without leaving behind so much as an echo. Solo exhibitions by this or that artist took place, sometimes in São Paulo, sometimes in Rio. A new generation of artists—of painters, above all—began to communicate its message. But striking personalities were rare. Art galleries were practically non-existent and the art market an eccentricity. The war began and the war ended, and a new, generalized unrest settled upon minds; the dictatorship was reduced to powder. Political turmoil grew. Aesthetic fermentation started up once again and became fashionable in museums; in São Paulo, that of Art in 1947, and that of Modern Art, in 1948; the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna] in Rio, in 1949. It was the eve before the Bienal.

—“Entre a semana e as bienais” (1973). Originally published in Ferreira Gullar, *Arte Brasileira, hoje* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1973).

Notes

1. The author is referring to the period between the Modern Art Week of 1922 and the first São Paulo Bienal, in 1951.
2. King João II (1455–1495) ruled Portugal from 1481–95. Tomé de Sousa (c. 1503–1579) was the first governor-general (1549–53) of the Portuguese colony of Brazil.
3. Geraldo Ferraz, *Warchavchik e a introdução da nova arquitetura no Brasil 1925 a 1940* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 1965).
4. “The three Robertos” refers to MMM Roberto—formed by *carioca* brothers Marcelo Roberto (1908–1964), Milton Roberto (1914–1953), and Maurício Roberto (1921–1996)—which was one of the most important modern Brazilian architectural firms of its day.
5. In 1986, it became the Instituto Cultural-Histórico da Aeronáutica.
6. Founded in São Paulo in 1937 and directed by Rossi Osir (1890–1959) and Waldemar da Costa (1904–1982), the Família Artística Paulista belongs within the context of artists’ associations that emerged during the 1930s, such as the Clube dos Artistas Modernos (São Paulo, 1932), the Grupo Santa Helena (São Paulo, 1934), and the Núcleo Bernardelli (Rio de Janeiro, 1934). The Família’s activity was situated between the experiments of the 1920s and academic art, which was still alive in São Paulo’s art scene at the time.
7. Established in 1932 and directed by artist Flávio de Carvalho, the Clube dos Artistas Modernos operated with some independence from the so-called official academic institutes, and from the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (National school of fine arts) in particular. Basing itself upon the aesthetic foundations of modernism, it nevertheless criticized the elitism of the Sociedade Pró-Arte Moderna, made up of artists who had taken part in the Modern Art Week of 1922 and financed by patrons and dealers.
8. For a revised version of this lecture, see “The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz,” pp. 233–40 in the present volume.
9. The Integralistas were pejoratively called the Galinhas Verdes [Green chickens] because of their green uniforms.
10. Estado Novo was a Brazilian political regime established by Getúlio Vargas with a military coup on November 10, 1937. It was typified by centralized power, nationalism, and anti-Communism. It lasted until October 29, 1945, when Vargas was deposed by the military.

On The Eve of the Biennial

Shortly before the opening of the first [São Paulo] Bienal [in 1951], with the recovery of world trade and the subsequent intensification of international communications, France sent us a traveling show of French art from the nineteenth century to the present. This was an attempt to improve its prestige—badly shaken by the war—by doing so before any other nation did. It was not a very complete retrospective, and it betrayed a certain conservativeness in the selection. Monsieur Germain Bazin, the Louvre's starchy chief-conservator, was far from being an up-to-date man. The eminent art historian René Huyghe also passed through here around the same time with a French modern show; despite the sheen of his lectures and the occasionally curious analogies that he established between one artist and another, he nevertheless did not go beyond the traditional school of Paris, the boundaries of which bordered a toned-down Surrealism à la Balthus, a French post-Cubism à la [Jean René] Bazaine, and a moderate Expressionism à la [Francis] Gruber, only recently deceased and Huyghe's hero. The French propaganda effort impressed the public at large but failed to convince the new generations anxious for bolder and more revolutionary expressions: would not the world after the victorious war against the forces of evil, against Nazi-Fascist obscurantism, be wholly other?

However, early on, two important artistic events came to reveal the new tendencies to those generations. These were two capital exhibitions that materialized, one in Rio de Janeiro in 1948, in the great hall at the Ministry of Education and Culture, on the initiative of Henrique Mindlin, and another in São Paulo, at the headquarters of the Museu de Arte, organized by its director, P. M. [Pietro Maria] Bardi. These two shows indicated to the youth above all that Paris was no longer the driving force behind the art world, as it had been for centuries. Indeed, here were two artists of the most advanced avant-garde tendencies who did not come from Paris, who were even disdained or unknown there: Alexander Calder and Max Bill. The latter was just introduced to Paris at the end of last year, in a large retrospective exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and anointed there by the critics. The other, although he was living in Paris part-time, or sometimes in the interior of France, was considered in artistic circles more as a curious personality than as a creative figure. In 1943, from New York, where he was living, Mário Pedrosa wrote a long article about Calder for the *Correio da manhã*, commenting upon his extraordinary exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art [New York].¹ The show displayed a great, sui generis artist who, through the jovial and original personal manner with which he presented himself in person and in his work, seemed to many of the wisest European and local minds not to fit in with their ideas about sculpture. This exhibition also possessed an obvious historical significance: it was the first time that a great North American visual artist presented his work in Brazil. He came with no official favor from his country. At the time, Washington, D.C., practiced a *laissez-faire* cultural policy. That is to say, it did not yet have a cultural policy of its own. It still practiced a provincial liberalism in this realm, as well as in others. Calder's liberated art was totally ignored by official circles. The establishment itself regarded it with reservations because he had not yet been bestowed the laurels of fame in international circles or won prizes at art fairs. A fierce competition, in every field of action, was launched with the Cold War; [U.S. President Harry] Truman—who was new to office—was however limited to the economic and political field. As we are only now realizing, Calder showed himself to be the precursor of some sort of demystified art of our days, with his stables and mobiles, his toy circus, his humor, his prosaic manner, his “plebeian” materials

subject to immediate wear—wire, sticks, shards of glass, etc.—consequently to be replaced with no loss to sacrosanct uniqueness.

As for the Max Bill show, admirably organized at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, in 1950, it was a revelation for the more restless young artists of Rio and of São Paulo and for militant criticism. Bill gave us a suite of his entire oeuvre, including the series of elementary geometric forms, which was still in progress; the process of the chromatic approximations of limit–non-limit; and the spatial constructions of topological forms, such as the Moebius strip, whence came the admirable *Tripartite Unity*, which took the grand prize for sculpture at the first edition of the Bienal de São Paulo, and happens to have been one of the rare genuinely revolutionary prizes ever bestowed in the long history of our biennial. It may be said that the important Brazilian and Argentinean Concretist movement had its first point of support in that exhibition of Bill's, then the most distinguished representative of Concrete art from Switzerland—the world, if we exclude the name of the great precursor forgotten in Paris, deceased some years ago, the Belgian [Georges] Vantongerloo, Bill's confessed master, his executor. What seduced young men in this art was manifest anti-romanticism, the haughty pretension of making a mathematically calculated art, developed upon a perfectly defined and expounded upon idea, and not in the vague or subjective moments of inspiration for which there could be no precious or non-random criteria for judgment. (This work dedicated to the specific field of the visual arts does not encompass the Concretist movement in Poetry that, due to its national and international importance, merits a study of its own.)

And what else? What was most peculiar or most important on the cultural-artistic map of Brazil before the Bienal? Two events are of great interest at the level of artistic activity and creation in general, and even at the educational and anthropological levels. These events came along to break the narrowness of conventional and academic concepts, old ruling prejudices about the nature of the artistic phenomenon, including the education and psychology of the artists themselves. Such prejudices were prevalent not only in official artistic circles, but even in the most advanced modernist environments.

The first of these events took place in the field of art education and child psychology, and was undoubtedly a veritable pedagogical revolution that began in Brazil when the country's first art school for children was created: the *Escolinha de Arte Augusto Rodrigues*. Rodrigues was not only a talented graphic artist and draftsman, but also a gifted educator. And as the foundational text of his little school, he had the good taste or the perspicacity to choose Herbert Read's essential work *Education Through Art*. Other small schools with the same approach emerged, such as the one begun by Ivan Serpa, who emerged as a result of the first exhibitions of children's art at the Museu de Arte Moderna (the latter already evincing proof of a rare sensitivity to the problem of artistic creation), who, in addition to his own excellent formal qualities, became a refined guide of children in the field of creativity.

Under his tutelage, the creative freedom of children became the focus, and from that came some of the most beautiful examples of children's art known to the country.

Even more important was Dr. Nise da Silveira's creation, at the Engenho de Dentro psychiatric center, of an occupational therapy section for her patients. From this initiative, from fruitful results in the field of psychiatry itself, two admirable and absolutely pioneering art exhibitions of enormous cultural, aesthetic, and psychological relevance emerged. The first, at the Ministry of Education, is where the brilliant artist Rafael was revealed; upon seeing his drawings, André Breton deemed

them superior to those of [Henri] Matisse. The other, right after it, in the lobby of the City Council, then under the presidency, *excusez du peu* [no less], of no other a personality than one of this country's greatest poets, Jorge de Lima. Another young painter of the time, Almir Mavignier, was an assistant to Dr. Nise da Silveira, and one could say the soul of those shows. He was the first in Rio to travel the path of abstractionism, influenced by the ideas of Gestalt as disseminated and applied to art by Mário Pedrosa in his thesis (1949)² for official entrance examinations to the College of Architecture. Beyond the essential psychiatric, spiritual, and ethical guidance of Nise da Silveira, it was to Almir, to *his* enthusiasm, devotion, and sensibility that we owe the revelation of the artists of "virgin art" within the Engenho de Dentro institution (whom Léon Degand, the first director of F. [Francisco] Matarazzo's Art museum, called Brazil's "School of Paris" upon visiting the center). Another painter of genius, Emygdio de Barros, whose work was featured in a solo exhibition at the IBEU [Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos], then with headquarters on rua Senador Vergueiro, became part of the Brazilian representation to the Venice Biennale in 1952. The large exhibition of virgin art that was held in the lobby of the City Council was also held at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, where another eminent psychiatrist (Dr. Osório Gomes) ran a section equivalent to that of the Rio de Janeiro Center in the Hospital do Juquery with remarkable success and [a] different scientific orientation.

At the scientific, psychological, and aesthetic levels, such events indicated the exuberance of ideas and concepts that were beginning to rouse the cultural and artistic communities of Rio and São Paulo, with greater or lesser significance throughout other states. Independently, the artists themselves, who were occasionally lacking a deep understanding of what was happening in the world of the Arts, slowly expanded all that had been restricted, prejudicial, and elitist in concepts then being propagated in the most "advanced" Brazilian circles.

Thus "modern art" would prove itself to be more than a mere trend or school, like any of the countless ones that have come and gone in contemporary history (including Art Nouveau, Rococo, and Neoclassical), a cultural movement of the greatest transcendence. First and foremost, it came to expose what had been forgotten in the course of development of bourgeois civilization, of its abstract rationalism, due to the supremacy of the capitalist economy with its market-based solutions, where things lose concrete reality and are transferred to the level of superstructures on a global scale: that at no time in human evolution was Art the monopoly or direct result of economic and intellectual progress. However, for the European bourgeoisie, it was in the name of this economic and political supremacy, and of the knowledge that they acquired and systematically reduced to rules of logic, emptied of its contradictory content, that they came to proclaim also having the supremacy and the monopoly of "great" art, of the "fine arts," from the advent of the so-called Greek miracle, in which they would find their origins or their model.

Yet in one of history's dialectical turnabouts, the very imperialist expansion that began near the end of the century opened Western art to the cultures of primitive peoples, albeit at tribal, community, or pre-capitalist stages. It is from that contact that what will become "modern art" is, if not born, then developed. The impact of such contact upon the social sciences—in sociology, anthropology, ethnography, and social psychology—was tremendous; hitherto these disciplines had remained relatively untouched, regardless of any investigations in their respective fields, through analogies and deductions made according to formal logic of an idealistic or mystifying nature, and a few isolated, brilliant inferences and intuitions by scholars.

The idea of white supremacy over peoples of the economic and cultural periphery was beginning to be challenged by the very development of the social sciences and cultures of the imperialist age. Modern art is largely the result of this cultural dialectic. Thus, even as imperialism conquers, exploits, and destroys the indigenous economies, lives, and cultures of these “barbarian” peoples, the art that is beginning to be made in the West will be enriched by the contribution of the hitherto unsuspected cultural forces of those same peoples. (The popular Japanese prints known as *ukiyo-e* were a revelation to Impressionists and Post-Impressionists alike; the influence of African fetishes upon the Cubists; the revolution of white culture from the impact of Pre-Columbian Mexican sculpture; the impact of the art of the entire Polynesian archipelago and Oceania, of the art of the empires of Khmer and Cambodia, of archaic art and art from the Greek Cyclades elevated above classical art under Pericles, etc., transformed the vision and sensibility of successive European generations since [Vincent] van Gogh and [Paul] Gauguin.)

But also around that same period, as a result of the contradictions of metropolitan society and culture itself, another conquest, this time one that bores down to discover a new world already suspected of existing but until then disdained or ignored by the intellectualist rationalist prejudices of that same bourgeois culture. It is about the world of the unconscious within man himself, finally scientifically isolated and emphasized by Sigmund Freud and from which originates most of the development of depth psychologies that were going to bring a new dimension to human knowledge. With this dimensional expansion we were finally ready to discern in man, beyond a budding rationality permanently hindered by the social structures of class, an incalculable need for storytelling, undoubtedly as compensation for an imperfect mastery over nature that incessantly externalizes itself in the mythical creations of primitive peoples throughout the lengthy and painful process of their passing from nature to culture in the unfettered imagination of childhood and, in fits and starts, in that unappeasable need for expression that exists in every living being, in every human being, whether psychotic or innocent.

—“Às vésperas da Bienal” (1973). First published in Ferreira Gullar, *Arte Brasileira, hoje* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1973).

Notes

1. Pedrosa is referring to the text “Calder, escultor de cata-ventos” (“Calder, Sculptor of Windmills”), published in two parts in the newspaper *Correio da manhã*, in Rio de Janeiro, on December 10 and 17, 1944.
2. The thesis, titled “Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte” (“On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art”), written in 1949 and defended in 1952 during the official entrance examinations for a professorship in Aesthetics and History of Art at the Faculdade Nacional de Arquitetura (National College of Architecture) in Rio de Janeiro. Published in Mário Pedrosa, *Arte, forma e personalidade* (São Paulo: Kairós, 1979).

Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá¹ Peoples

In countries such as ours—which do not arrive exhausted, albeit oppressed and underdeveloped, at the doorstep of contemporary history, floating either above the line of the greater meridian or faintly just beneath it—when it is said that its art is primitive or popular it is as good as saying that it is futuristic. This is not how it is in the old, frankly bourgeois civilized countries, in which art's path branches out into various paths that lead up the social scale only to lose themselves at the apex, with the elites who settle at the extreme delta of specializations or that flow downward like a trickle of water that disappears into the subsoil or stagnates in the bogs. Never have so many isms covered such small, unique, and extravagant areas for such refined or subtle consumers. In other countries, such ornamentation and results are the elitist subproducts of the margins of their capital cities, of their cosmopolitan airports, shopping malls, supermarkets, and international hotels. Beyond such areas there are handicraft workshops, where work that is not quite wage labor is performed, which reflects the anonymous effort of creativity, of true inventiveness, where collective accomplishment unfolds. In these secluded places, art is rooted in nature or in everything that belongs to it: earth, stones, trees, animals—ideas or near-ideas that hardly shield them from the things and the people with whom they coexist, mix, or perhaps complete themselves. What is nature here is already culture and what is culture is still nature, but they are not confused and less still are they melded, for it is not a matter of the trihedral process of dialectics that would end (albeit temporarily) in synthesis. Something else is happening here; it is the birth of a fourth kingdom beyond the traditional ones of nature: the animal, the vegetable, the mineral—that is to say, the realm of art. The statement is not as bold as it would seem to be. In order to prove it, one need simply raise the following question: who created art? Man. How? When? As it attempts to answer the question, the entire history of art becomes one of irreparable decadence. The point in question is now all the more convoluted when in the great metropolises an extremely brilliant, highly cultured Pleiad of voices rises up to proclaim that art is dead. Others, perhaps no less brilliant, say not, and defend the institutions dedicated to the promotion of art with tooth and claw. Of course art cannot die because no one can kill it, given that it is conditioned not only to the history of man but also to the history of nature itself. What happens is that some societies are inclined to develop artistic phenomena and others are not. As they grow, the great industrial or superindustrial societies of the West are increasingly driven by an internal mechanism that is inexorable in its continuous expansion—one that subordinates all classes to its frantic technological and mercantile rhythm, castrates the hives of all creativity, and removes any opportunity from men with still disinterested and speculative callings to resist the current that leads everything and everyone vertiginously to the whirlpool of the capitalist market. It is called art. It is something akin to a relatively new profession or craft that translates wholly original objects that please the eye or occupy enclosed spaces in a whimsical or even seductive manner, not as a directly utilitarian function, like a table, a closet, or a urinal. There is sufficient demand for the consumption of these things. As long as there are clients to buy it, this “art” exists. Of course many promotions are offered so that the distinguished trade may continue; this explains the superabundance of galleries, museums, biennials, triennials, etc. It is symptomatic that this activity is currently subordinated to the vast industry of advertising that protects and assures its progress and its persistence. Here, and definitively so, the old art lost its existential and naturally spiritual autonomy. And there is no need to

cry over this; to attempt to restore it is an anachronistic task, doomed from the outset as one of the many attempts at restoration of which recent art history knows so many failed episodes. Artists, critics, aesthetes, and even sociologists, leaders of the world of the arts and other things in big, important cities, know better than anyone else that “revivalism” is a false solution and, conscious of this false path, they launch themselves in the other direction, toward vanguardism.

In these postindustrial metropolises, where one finds vertiginous technological advances, artistic vanguards succeed one another day after day, driven by a pressing need to change the product to satisfy a clientele that generally prefers not to invest in what has already been seen, including artists, especially young ones, nor do they like to repeat what has already been done. What may be observed in the domain of the visual arts is not a change of style, as in the great epochs; rather, it is the process of modernization that is celebrated every year in the automobile fairs and exhibitions in the major capitals of Europe and America.

In countries of the periphery, in areas of underdevelopment, avant-gardes also emerge, although their purpose in these cases would be above all to assert themselves as being up-to-date. Nevertheless, their eyes are fixed upon the irresistible changes dictated by civilization’s law of consumption for consumption’s sake, that is to say, that of the great markets. This is why our “avant-garde” artists are always struggling to keep up with the very latest novelty. This race—the statistics increasingly reflect it—is a vain and sad illusion. Poor and underdeveloped countries can no longer keep up with the advances of the wealthy. This disparity can also be seen in the field of the arts. Here, too, quantity is transformed into quality. At this time, in order not to become altogether marginalized, not to skid upon the road to the contemporary, the Third World must build its own path to development—one that is decidedly different from the one taken by the world of the rich from the northern hemisphere. The cultural history of the Third World will no longer be a repetition *en raccourci* [in short] of the recent history of the United States, West Germany, France, etc. It must cast from its heart the “developmentalist” mentality that is the bar that supports the colonialist spirit. It implies the stylization of the automobile and its complements that go all the way to dressing, the home, living, decoration, and recreation. For its development, Tanzania preferred the teachings of China; Saigon, that of Washington. The symbol of the former’s progress was the railroad, the symbol of the latter, the warehouse. These are essential choices. Due to the very slowness of its development, the art of our countries will no longer be able to repeat the evolution of industrialized countries. Imperialist bourgeois civilization is in a blind alley. From this alley, we do not have to participate—indigenous peoples that we are from low latitudes and adjacencies.

The destitute populations of Latin America carry within themselves a past that they have never been able to surpass or even to express (theoretically, that is); because such an expression comes to us in mostly distorted or insincere books or in poor historiographies of metropolitan origin. The lives and experiences of these peoples are not the same as those of the peoples of the North. Even though their aspirations are contemporary, they are very different. In fact, quality of life, as it is called in the political jargon of Europe (France), differs from that of our peoples like pisco from wine. The poor of Latin America live and coexist with the debris and the uncomfortable odors of the past. The Ultra-modernisms and some of their advances, of a generally American mold, are umbilically connected to our favelas and shantytowns. The paradox is that these are the ones that do not change, just as they do not change wretchedness, hunger, poverty, huts, and ruins. But the future passes through this. Such is the Third World’s choice: an open future or eternal poverty. Necessarily, instinctively,

this future rejects the ultramodern products of the advanced zones of “transnational” civilization, the only futuristic element of which lies in its appearance. Indeed, what it proposes to us as the future are actually variants of the status quo that imperialism attempts to defend by all possible means, including war. The only art that is likely to be reborn—to find unpredictable or unsuspected cultural continuities—cannot result from abstract ideas, deduced from the permanent progress of multinational cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, it is this abstract derivation that nourishes the obligatory process of succession in the avant-gardes already analyzed here. The map of the schools, isms, and styles that succeed one another since, let us say, Anglo-American Pop art, indicates the derivative origin of these successions.

The creative task of humankind has initiated a latitudinal shift. It now advances toward the Third World’s vastest and most far-flung places. Wretchedness, hunger, and poverty may lead their populations to despair (so warns Mr. [Robert] McNamara, president of the World Bank, and so warn his people), but they are not contaminated enough by the powerful sadomasochistic complexes that rule the society of wealth, of prosperity, of cultural saturation to be driven to collective suicide. It is more logical to expect from them a more positive response to the status quo. Even in process, there is a bit in progress everywhere, a project to realize, a *sine qua non* by which to conceive the future, that is, to keep an unimpeded perspective of historical development open to all. What is this, if not a revolution? Yes, a revolution. The only one that is really likely to mobilize the peoples of the majority of humanity. The only one that is positively conceivable as the historical task of the twenty-first century.

Only within this universal context will it be possible to imagine engendering a new art. This will be one of the most vital facets of the revolutionary prism that is gestating within the violent womb of peoples whom [Frantz] Fanon has called the “wretched of the Earth.” Purely visionary? It’s all the same. It may well be a methodologically necessary starting point to encompass in its totality the vast, apocalyptic set of problems of the division of peoples on the planet into imperialism, its satellites and followers, tacitly conspired to defend, in the final instance, by all means possible, the status quo and the vast majority of the others, preferably of non-white races, doomed as if by some Biblical curse to hunger and backwardness. Those who forget this preliminary dilemma cannot speak. They are already mobilized—from above—by the other side. Even if they do not know it, they have already put themselves in the other perspective about which Samir Amin speaks to us.

From here, it is possible to understand the profound difference between what continues to be known as art in the hemisphere of the rich and imperial and what might or should emerge in our dispossessed worlds.

Inasmuch as it existed among the imperialist bourgeois, art is increasingly a clear caprice, deluxe, aestheticizing, self-consuming, and indifferent to all else. As he studied the panorama of art in his time, during the triumph of fascism, Walter Benjamin saw in [Filippo Tommaso] Marinetti’s Futurist manifesto on the war in Ethiopia “the perfect revelation of art for art’s sake,” the crowning of its supreme motto: *Fiat ars, pereat mundus*. Benjamin remarked upon this lofty concept of Fascist aesthetics with such acuity that his words of 1936 are astonishingly current:

Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order. This is the situation of politics which Fascism is rendering aesthetic.

A generation after the philosopher—when a second imperialist war, even more devastating than the first, had ended—art continued on its path in fits and starts rather than in a linear fashion, with vividly revolutionary spasms heralded by Dada and Surrealism and Marcel Duchamp, who, in his incorruptible, secular manner, emphasized moments of anti-prophecy and permanent dispute. The nonprophetic but ultimately systematic conscience of negativity, he presided over the aesthetic-non-aesthetic evolution of the century. Behind him come the artists of today, with their revolutionary proclamations. One of them begins by remaking his discovery of the readymade, only substituting the first historical example (“the urinal”) for the living and beautiful body of his own model: it is Piero Manzoni, who died in 1965 at the age of thirty; of what, we do not know. Of himself? Later on, from the same family, we have the protagonists of “body art.”

As if still sustaining themselves upon the incomparable and distant master, these artists attack their own bodies, evoking Duchamp’s star-shaped tonsure of his own head. It is impossible not to recall Benjamin’s words in the face of the revulsive experiments of these ultralogical nihilists of body art: “Self-alienated mankind can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order.” The figure of Rudolf Schwarzkogler comes to mind: one year younger than his Italian emulator when he died (1969), the young Austrian artist, impassioned by his self-destructive and narcissistic impulses, refusing to accept the atavistic determinisms of the will to be, began a series of acts of aggression to his own body and wound up cutting off his penis, sacrificed to the obscure ideas (or purges?) for which he killed himself. These acts of aggression to the body—an object of adoration, of repulsion and hatred—open the series of actions that the family of “body art” would like to consider edifying. It would be too simple—as well as unfair—to formally identify the “aesthetics” of these artists, whose explicit philosophy is to deny all aesthetics, with the clearly sadistic attitude of Marinetti and his followers. There is a substantial difference between the Marinetti of then and the “body artists” of today. Sadistic determinisms were predominant in the former, and Marinetti sang with delight at the spectacle of the destruction of the Abyssinian blacks under the aerial bombardments of the Italian fascists—pallid precursors of the supermodern American bombardments against the Vietnamese of today. Whether they are German, Austrian, Italian, American, or French, the activisms that weigh upon the artists of today are so complicated that they defy analysis. They do not offer themselves to others, such as Marinetti and his fascists: they give themselves to themselves, for their body is their object, the object of their search. The destruction is turned against themselves, against what they are not in their very being; it is pure self-destruction that takes place as spectacle—and as a spectacle that purports to be edifying. They want to edify through self-destruction. The aesthetic act that they always denied transforms itself into a moral act. How to qualify such actions? As witness to an isolated cultural conditioning, neither existential nor transcendental. The cycle of the putative revolution closes upon itself, and the result is a pathetic regression *in return*: decadence. They accept death as inevitable, in the name of cultural saturation and of life’s invincible irrationality. They arrive at the perfect cul-de-sac. Nevertheless, life germinates below the line of the hemisphere, saturated with wealth, progress, and culture. A new art threatens to shoot forth.

—“Discurso aos tupiniquins ou nambás” (Paris, 1975). Originally published in *Versus*, no. 4 (1976).

Note

1. Tupinambá was a great nation of Indians that, in the age of colonization, dominated most of the Brazilian coastline and possessed a common language, catalogued and identified as ancient Tupi by the Jesuits, in spite of not representing a single community. The Tupiniquim were among the various groups that were part of that nation, and their name is popularly employed as a metonym for “Brazil” or “Brazilian.”

The New MAM Will Consist of Five Museums

During a meeting of the Committee for the Reconstruction of the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro] held yesterday at the Escola de Artes Visuais, in Parque Lage, art critic Mário Pedrosa suggested reorganizing the museum according to a new structure composed of five independent albeit organic museums: the Museum of Black People and the Museum of Folk Arts [sic].

He said: All modern art has been inspired by the art of peripheral peoples, so that nothing could be more appropriate than for the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro to display this art we possess in abundance alongside a collection of contemporary Brazilian and Latin American art.

In his proposition, Mário Pedrosa gives a succinct explanation regarding the founding of the Museum of Origins:

As a result of the MAM's total destruction by fire,¹ it is imperative that some logical conclusion be drawn from the catastrophe: the MAM is gone. With Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt² leading the group that so generously applied itself to the work of creating it, it is no longer in any condition to start the task anew. The situation has changed; the times have changed; the philosophy, even the ideology that inspired those who made the museum more than twenty years ago has changed; hence the need to summon others and the State to create a congeneric establishment with other purposes. The time of purely private patronage has passed. Even in the United States, New York's Museum of Modern Art itself already resorts to substantial assistance from the state. Therefore we propose that the reconstruction be undertaken with the state's assistance and collaboration. We propose that a public or semipublic foundation be constructed, but that, along the lines of others that exist in this country, it should retain its full autonomy. Specialists in the subject guarantee its full viability.

What follows is the text read by Mário Pedrosa:

The founding of the Museum of Origins anticipates the establishment of five museums: the Museum of the Indian; the Museum of Virgin Art (Museum of the Unconscious); the Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Black People; and the Museum of Folk Arts.

These museums are all related although they are independent from one another. The Museum of the Indian already possesses its own structure, its own organization, certain resources, and an important collection, albeit no appropriate location.

The Museum of the Unconscious also has its own structure, organization, resources, and an excellent collection. Yet its installations are in precarious condition and even somewhat threatened. It is crucial that they be secured for the good of Brazilian and global culture. The Museum of Modern Art possesses magnificent headquarters and a location that can house the others, but only a small collection of works left over from the fire.

The foundation should be of a public or semi-public nature to ensure its permanence and solidity, particularly with regard to resources, although it should dispose of an autonomous organizational structure to guarantee a cultural and artistic orientation that is not only coherent and homogeneous but not subject to changes of

orientation and administration, a consequence of extemporaneous and bureaucratic political interventions that are not wholly advisable.

A committee of competent, active professionals and a board of directors made up of eminent and representative personalities whose respectability is well-recognized in society will be responsible for the cultural and artistic orientation of the foundation and an efficient, trustworthy, and authorized administration.

The Museum of Modern Art must rebuild a collection that is first and foremost representative of Brazilian art, from the early Impressionism of [Eliseu] Visconti to generations that followed, with artists such as [Victor] Brecheret, [Lasar] Segall, Tarsila [do Amaral], Anita Malfatti, [Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti, [Candido] Portinari, [Alfredo] Volpi, [Osvaldo] Goeldi, and Lívio Abramo, and on to the younger artists of today. It should also contain Latin American rooms, with work by the Uruguayan [Joaquín] Torres Garcia and artists from Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and Cuba, etc., as well as European rooms and North American rooms. There will be a room dedicated to Concrete art, one that corresponds to the MAM's modern origins in Europe, in Brazil, and in Argentina. A room dedicated to the Neo-Concrete art of Brazil, in addition to rooms for temporary exhibitions.

The Museum of Black People's collection will be based on pieces brought from Africa and others made here in Brazil, especially for religious use.

The Museum of Folk Arts collection shall be made up of pieces collected throughout Brazil's various regions, in the various types of artifacts such as pottery, wood, iron, tin, straw, etc.

A body of theoretical courses and practical apprenticeship at the MAM: visual arts, music, film, video tape, photography lab, graphic arts workshop, printmaking studio, joinery [cabinet-making], Moviola, etc., and a few general subjects such as art history, cultural anthropology, as well as specialized sections on urban culture, rural communities, tribal communities, urban festivals, and Carnival.

Financial sources: a) state-owned companies; b) federal, state, or municipal budgets; c) private donations.

The MAM will generate income through its graphic arts workshop, joinery, and printmaking studios, photography lab, editing room (Moviola), slides, silkscreen, etc.

Member contributions will be needed in order to maintain the foundation's democratic and popular organization, along with public and private donations of permanent, temporary, and specialized natures.

—Originally published as "O novo MAM terá cinco museus. É a proposta de Mário Pedrosa," *Jornal do Brasil*, September 15, 1978.

Notes

1. A fire in the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, in 1978, signaled a tragic moment in the museum's history and for Brazilian cultural overall. It happened during a retrospective exhibition of work by Uruguayan artist Joaquín Torres-García (1874–1949) and the exhibition *Geometria Sensível* (Sensitive geometry), organized by Roberto Pontual. It destroyed the majority of the works in the exhibition, as well as others from the museum's collections that were on display.
2. Niomar Moniz Sodré Bittencourt (1916–2003) was the executive director of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro throughout the 1950s.

3. History of Criticism

Introduction Rodrigo Krul

Mário Pedrosa's reflections combine his own lived experience with the vortex of historical events. His intense political activity, his literary criticism for the newspaper *Diário da Noite* from 1924 to 1926 (the period during which he met Mário de Andrade), and his flirtation with music criticism represent various moments of his São Paulo trajectory of the 1920s and 1930s, which emerge as a retrospective view of the period in his lecture on the Modern Art Week (1952). In "Modern Art Week" (1952), a text based on a lecture given on the thirtieth anniversary of Brazil's *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern art week), Pedrosa identifies a "global vision of the problem of contemporary art and creation" by means of an encounter between the visual arts and literature, which produced in the artist of that time a profound "awareness of the Brazilian cultural, social, and geographic environments," and pays tribute to de Andrade's universalist and primitive thinking.

Abstract art—a "work of its own" that reclaimed "conceptual, rather than perceptive" space—is the subject of "Foundations of Abstract Art" (1953). Between the lines of his consideration of the relationships between painting and light in space, Pedrosa highlights the pioneer spirit of Abraham Palatnik, a Brazilian artist who illustrates the function of abstract art as a mode of knowledge.

With regard to Brazilian art's belonging within Western art, Pedrosa's discourse is emancipatory in its presentation of Brazilian artists' autonomous investigations and search for freedom. For this reason, dialogue with and opposition to the perspective of international criticism on Brazilian art are frequent in his writings. Such is the case in "Brazilian Painting and International Taste" (1957), a text in which the critic points out the fragility of international critical criteria and of the jury convened for the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, for their isolationism in an art "within aesthetic canons and the prevailing contemporary taste in their own milieus," then represented by Informalism. To the critic, this tendency to understand Brazilian art as stylistic investigation represents an interference that promotes the historical dilution of the work of artists such as Alfredo Volpi, Milton Dacosta, and Lygia Clark.

In spite of this, there is an emerging "sense of independence" that may be traced among artists that is prophesied by Pedrosa and that would be confirmed two years later with the arrival of Neo-Concretism in 1959. Published the same year as the Neo-Concretist manifesto, the "Paradox of Modern Brazilian Art" (1959) was the phenomenon of the predominance of geometric abstractionism within a flow contrary to the aforementioned "international taste" for Informalism, a phenomenon that is a "profound will" to "modern and autochthonous" Brazilian art. The social dimension of this freedom is the formation and consolidation of Brazilian art as part of the global avant-garde.

"Calligraphic Abstraction" (1959) is the result of Pedrosa's experiences in Japan, as he reflects on the union of graphic traditions of both East and West, principally with regard to the "artist's creative impulse" in his search for signs and for the expressiveness of the line.

If modern art engaged itself in the "systematic process of destruction of . . . naturalism," the next stage was to be the destruction of objectivism, leading the artist's role in the 1960s to become a "refusal of self-expression," Pedrosa declares in "Crisis or Revolution of the Object: Tribute to André Breton" (1967). This essay may be directly linked to "Gewgaws and Pop Art" (also 1967) in its treatment of the "age of the culture of rubbish" and of the advent of an anti-criticism practiced by "anti-critics."
—Rodrigo Krul



Modern Art Week

The explosion of Modern Art Week reflected the arrival of a new, universal, revolutionary spirit in Brazil. Many years later, Mário de Andrade described feeling a sense of inevitability about the modernist movement—had it not been forged during the days of that week, it would have happened anyway, whether sooner or even much later. But it would have happened in any event. In 1940, in a genuine response to a sharp critic, the great poet of *Paulicéia desvairada* [Hallucinated city]¹ declared that modernism had needed very little in order to emerge and develop in Brazil, including the prestige of this or that celebrated figure, for it came “from a universal state of mind.” And it emerged “even with some delay,” Mário added, “for Cubism and Futurism—its noisiest manifestations—gave their first primitive European wails circa 1909.”

The genesis of modernism is outlined here. It was a movement that came from abroad—once again, from Paris.

In more than one passage of his writings on the Brazilian modernist event, Mário de Andrade acknowledges the foreign source of this movement. Furthermore, he recognizes its late arrival. In a lecture given in 1942, he declared: “Modernism was not an aesthetic—not in Europe and not here. It was an outraged, revolutionary state of mind that brought us up-to-date, guaranteeing the right to anti-academic aesthetic investigation as proof of national intelligence, and preparing the revolutionary state of the country’s other social manifestations, as in the rest of the world.”² With his unflinching clarity of vision, the great leader of the movement went so far as to say: “But the modernist spirit and its fashions were imported directly from Europe.”

Yet it behooves us to examine the notion of importation. Mário was exaggerating. There was no importation, for that would have meant receiving products, articles, ideas, ready and new, nicely packaged for immediate consumption. Revolution of modern art was neither industrialized nor crystallized enough to be exported as merchandise. It was still—as it is today—a movement on the march. It was not even an importation of trends that took place, let alone one of spirit. The spirit can never be transformed into something materialized, finished, like an object for exportation. But one of its most specific faculties is the terrible power of contamination that it possesses. And that was what happened. In Europe, the young poets and artists of 1922 were infected by the modern spirit that absorbed the sensibilities and intelligence of its most capable artists.

Mário himself describes this process of contamination. Before the Week, “the first cavemen modernists” gathered around the painter Anita Malfatti and the sculptor Victor Brecheret. The creator of *Macunaíma*³ explains that they served “as loud-speakers for a universal and national force much more complex than ourselves.” Six years before the explosive “party” at the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, “the preconsciousness” and then “the consciousness of a new art, of a new spirit . . . had been defining itself . . . in the sentiment of a small group of São Paulo intellectuals.” “A strictly sentimental phenomenon,” it is, again in the words of Mário de Andrade, “of a divinatory intuition, a . . . state of poetry.” This contagion was the result of the intellectuals’ direct contact with Anita Malfatti’s exhibition. In 1916, in the throes of war, the modernist veteran held a show in São Paulo of Expressionist and Cubist paintings.⁴ “Those pictures,” Mário confessed, “were a revelation.” Burning youth was so predisposed to it that contamination by the new spirit was instantaneous. “Marooned by the flood of scandal that had taken the city,” in front of Anita’s exhibition, which received injurious criticism from Monteiro Lobato,⁵ “three or four young men . . . became delirious and then ecstatic.” They had contracted an irreparable strain of the

modernist malady. And here is one of the most original and characteristic traits of the new movement and one that so distinguishes it from other movements and literary schools that emerged in Brazil. The movement began with a psychological experience, with a preliminary magical experience: contact with modern painting. The starting point is not literary. The holy fire did not come from readings, but from a direct experience between the naive young barbarian Brazilian and the magical powers of expression and aggression of hitherto ignored pictorial forms.

From the beginning, the modernist movement encompassed all artistic experiments. Soon afterward, Menotti del Picchia and Oswald de Andrade made another sensational discovery: in a roomful of debris in the Palácio das Indústrias, Brecheret lived with his things in utter isolation and anonymity. Unlike the painter [Malfatti], the sculptor had not arrived from Germany—the holy land of Romanticism and Expressionism. He had come from Rome, the holy land of Classicism, but had been educated in the school of a barbarian (by which I mean non-Roman, non-Latin) master named Ivan Meštrović. The psychological shock was no smaller before the great solid volumes, stripped of surface details, than before the Expressionist paintings of Anita Malfatti, *O homem amarelo* [The yellow man] (see plate on p. 76), *A mulher de cabelos verdes* [Woman with green hair], *A estudante russa* [The Russian student].

Under the impact produced in young men of letters by Brecheret's sculptures and Malfatti's darkly dramatic paintings, the canons of literary academicism with which they were still impregnated began to give way. Their modernist initiation began to take place not through literature and poetry but through the specifically nonverbal arts of painting and sculpture. The progress of this initiation may be seen by following the head of the movement—and its first and most eminent theorist—Mário de Andrade. He himself tells us, in a narrative filled with humility and humor, how, before paintings that were then ultramodern and revolutionary to him, such as *O Homem amarelo* [The yellow man] by Anita Malfatti, of such unprecedented forms, he was gripped by a holy enthusiasm, he dedicated “a Parnassian sonnet.” That was in 1916. But even in 1920, when he discovered Brecheret, he “had notebooks and more notebooks of Parnassian things and even a few timidly symbolist ones.” (Look how Mário himself evolved slowly in the realm of poetics that was his!) But he was already displeased by all of that, and his poetic vein ran dry until he came upon [Émile] Verhaeren of *Les Villes tentaculaires*,⁶ which dazzled him. He immediately attempted to produce a book of “modern” poems about his city in free verse. He tried and tried again, but, he confesses, nothing happened. It was a sad year, but one of fierce debates that resembled mutual insults. Insults, he says, “that often reached the breaking point that . . . what is it about art that has such power to infuriate!” Art was already something to fight about, which might well have predicted the challenge of the Week of 1922. One day, Brecheret gave him a *Cabeça de cristo* [Head of Christ], in plaster, which had enchanted him, and which he thought he might have bronzed. There was no money and the operation cost six hundred thousand réis. In the end, he obtained the money and, feeling “most sensually happy,” took home his bronze. All hell broke loose. The braided Christ was hideously ugly. The family became alarmed, gossiping relatives ran home to protest against the son’s “perdition.” Mário went up to his room “wanting to plant a bomb at the center of the world.” He went to his writing table, removed a notebook from it, and wrote, he says, “the title he had never thought of, *Paulicéia desvairada*.” The “boom” had arrived, after nearly a year of interrogative anxieties. Thus *Paulicéia desvairada* was also a result of the impact produced by Brecheret’s work. And it was the Week’s second preliminary scandal. Brecheret, confesses the poet, was the “trigger that set *Paulicéia desvairada* off.”

Thanks to this contact with modern visual art, from the outset the literati and poets of Brazilian modernism were privy to a global vision of the problem of contemporary art and creation. They educated themselves through modern painting and sculpture. Without this contact, without this initiation, the movement, limited to the field of literature, might not have been as universal as it was, nor had the depth of its awareness of the Brazilian cultural, social, and geographic environments. It might have ended like other preceding literary movements—including romanticism, with which it had many analogies. It might possibly have ended up as yet another literary school confined within a small, isolated group, like that of Rio's Symbolists and pre-Symbolists.

Painting and sculpture were responsible for an extraordinary broadening of the fields of vision and interest of the Week's promoters, and gave the best a less abstract and less purely verbal sense of the aesthetic problems at play as well as a more direct, more physical, and more concrete understanding of the surrounding environment, and of what in each of them were the most important and permanent components that called out for characterization and expression. Without the direct, primordial contribution of the visual arts, the modernist movement would not have been the landmark it was in Brazil's intellectual and artistic evolution. Discovered and revealed in Brazil, its own nationalist orientation would not have had the systematization, the depth, the search for roots with which it designated itself. It was likely this climate that spawned the idea for *Raízes do Brasil*, Sérgio Buarque de Holanda's penetrating book.⁷ The truth is that the individuals who had the least contact with the field of the visual arts, who, in the movement's inevitable ulterior bifurcation, borrowed the most superficial, narrowest, and currently the most idiotic (to wit, the political one) forms from nationalism.

As paradoxical as it may seem, it was through awareness of its "modernist internationalism," to use Mário's expression, that the movement arrived at—another one of Mário's expressions—its "angry nationalism."

Modern art was a reaction to the naturalist ideal in Western culture and a proclamation of autonomy for the artistic phenomenon, hitherto forced to serve and subordinate itself to impositions of strength, interests, and extrinsic ends. It refused to continue to be a servant of religion, of the state, of churches, of the King, of princes, of noblemen, and, finally, of the rich. Having conquered its independence from the exterior world, resolutely hostile to the naturalist representation of things, leaving the documentation and copying of apparent reality of the exterior world to photography, to concentrate on its effort of pure creative abstraction, it increasingly distances itself from the classical shores of the Mediterranean. And as it moves away from there, it approaches foreign peoples, alien to the Greco-Roman ideal. By hook or by crook, the time had come for the opening up of frontiers of the peoples of the entire world to European merchandise, capital, and European explorers and discoverers of the native riches of the African, American, Oceanian, and Asian peoples. It was the age of modern imperialism's great colonial expansion. Europeans were becoming less provincial, able to admit that there may be other cultures worthy of consideration outside of Europe. Ethnographic museums were founded in various capital cities. Archeological and cultural missions were multiplied. Upon his return from Africa at the beginning of the century, [Leo] Frobenius communicated to the astonished Europeans the existence there of great artistic centers. Also from Oceania, above all from Melanesia, artistic messages of the first order arrived in Europe. Thus, to the European hitherto proudly confined to his own backyard, knowledge of primitive cultures that were able to produce works of art of incomparable visual expression represented a veritable revelation.

In October 1897 [Paul] Gauguin wrote: "The big mistake is Greek art, no matter how beautiful it is. Always keep your eye on the Persians, the Cambodians, and to a small extent the Egyptians."⁸ In the next generation it was [Guillaume] Apollinaire's turn to dignify the Eiffel Tower (previously considered a mere by-product of the industrial age) through poetry by juxtaposing it to antiquity: "You've had enough of living in Greek and Roman antiquity."⁹ In 1906 H. [Henri] Matisse discovered African sculpture in a Paris antique store. But as early as 1904, before Black Art had conquered the Parisian artistic avant-garde with Matisse at its forefront, a young German painter by the name of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, one of the founders in 1905 of his country's first Expressionist group, Die Brücke, suffered a revelatory shock at the sculptural quality of the wood carvings by the indigenous peoples of the Palau Islands (Oceania) and those by Africans—all of which he saw at the Ethnographic Museum of the Zwinger, in Dresden. The pure lines and fully developed sculptural forms of the African masks and statuettes in wood won over the young artists—the Modiglianis, the Picassos, the Derains, the Légers, etc. Finally, these objects were exhibited in art galleries on equal footing with the painting and sculpture of the time, works by Fauves, Cubists, Expressionists, abstractionists, and so on.

This recognition of the artistic value of past or primitive archaic paintings of contemporary peoples was not dictated by any snobbery, nor restricted to the "sophisticated" circles of Paris. On the contrary, during this period appreciation was limited to the handful of artists who were vitally concerned with lofty aesthetic problems, or scientific specialists and investigators, such as Frobenius and others, as well as antiquarians and adept collectors.

Paul Guillaume (not the psychologist, but the well-known Parisian critic and connoisseur), in collaboration with the American aesthete Thomas Munro, in an admirable book (*Primitive Negro Sculpture*)¹⁰ did justice to the contribution of Black Art in artistic development at the beginning of this century. By 1910, the Cubist revolution had begun and continued its ascension. "[T]he honor of this renaissance," recognized the authors,¹¹ "belonged to negro art."¹² "It is no exaggeration to claim that the best of what has been developed in contemporary art during the last twenty years"—Guillaume and Munro's book having been published in 1928—"owes its origin to the inspiration of primitive Negro sculpture. Naturally, this is particularly evident in the visual arts, not only in the sculpture of Lipchitz and other leaders, but in the field of painting, where Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, and Soutine—considered to be the most influential among the young—adopted the Negro motif, with their own alterations of their creation."¹³

In the statuettes and masks of black sculpture, Western artists felt the concrete, real presence of "a form of feeling, an architecture of thought, a subtle expression of the most profound forces of life,"¹⁴ extracted from the civilization whence they came. To them, the formal and spiritual power immanent in those sculptured objects was like the revelation of a new message. Western culture had lost the formal meaning of the drawing, then yoked to a puerile or amusing surface play without greatness, purity, or synthesis. It was still far too enslaved to the graceful attitudes and projections of classical Greek and Hellenic statuary, and, above all, tied to the demands of naturalistic or literal representation of the subject (types, commemorative acts, etc.).

Thus, the reason for the profound interest of modern artists in the archaic or past sculptures of ancient Egypt, China, India, Polynesia, Africa, and America was not the exoticism of their subject matter. According to P. Guillaume and Munro, it "lies in the fact that these remote traditions emphasize more the design than the literal representation, showing effects of shapes, qualities of line and surface, combinations of mass, which are unknown to the Greek tradition."¹⁵

The conquest of archaic cultures by European modernism coincided with the universalist and primitive thinking of Mário de Andrade. Since the beginning, the great modernist poet encompassed the two levels of the movement in his powerful personality—the universal level, where it has its source, and the national level, where it will be realized. In “As enfiaduras do Ipiranga (Oratório Profano)” [The moral fiber of the Ipiranga],¹⁶ his profane oratorio of 1922, in a prodigiously rich enumeration of national colors and forms and themes and animals—which foreshadows *Macunaíma*’s admirable descent of the Araguaia River to the South of the country, accompanied by all the animals in the Amazon rainforest—the chorus of *juvenilidades auriverdes* [green-gold youths] proclaims: “the fringed pennants of the banana trees, the emerald greens of the macaws, the ruby red hummingbirds, the lyricism of the thrushes and the parakeets, the pineapples, the mangos, the cashews aspire to their own triumphant location in the excited celebration of the universal.”¹⁷

Thrushes, cashews, macaws, and banana trees are evoked by the green-gold youths to be integrated within the universal. One cannot fail to note the extraordinary visual and chromatic vigor of this evocation of Brazilian nature. His palette recalls the vivid hues of Fauvism and the violence of [Vincent] van Gogh’s pure color. The difference is that the poet’s vision is an optimistic one. Mário de Andrade’s Brazil penetrates the senses. Hence its malleable, concretizing force. Later, in 1924, he reaffirms this polysensorial notion of Brazilian reality in the poem “O poeta come amendoim” [The poet eats peanuts]. In it, denying even the power of blood and race, he writes:

Throughout the immense site of Brazil it is the sun
That has been marking Brazilians as dark-skinned

In another verse:

Heavy nights of piled-up smells and heat . . .¹⁸

he announces the painting of [Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti, one of the promoters of the Week who Mário, enthusing over his paintings in pastels, called, in a “weird dedication” of archaic symbolist flavor, the “minstrel of veiled tones.” In this poem he also lists the reasons for his Brazilianness:

Brazil beloved not because you are my country,
A country is the chance of migrations and of our bread wherever God gives it to us . . .
Brazil that I love because it is the rhythm of my adventurous arm.
The flavor of my repose . . .¹⁹

In keeping with his temperament, in keeping with the direct artistic education he received through his contact with Malfatti’s paintings and Brecheret’s sculpture, in keeping with the pure sources of inspiration, then hostile to conceptual intellectualism and stratified ideological precepts, his [de Andrade’s] Brazil is more of a provocation, or the small sensation that stirred a creative outburst in [Paul] Cézanne, than an ideological, conventional, civic, and cool abstraction.

This natural, anti-ideological, direct Brazil retains an initial purity that Tarsila [do Amaral] also attempted to reproduce, one that [Alberto da Veiga] Guignard captured in his landscapes and [José] Pancetti in his seascapes, and Heitor dos Prazeres in his enameled painting which is, as Lourival Gomes Machado so nicely put it, “the first attempt in the field of the visual arts of this enormous culture created by urban blacks.”

After roaring inside and outside the Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, with its eye on Paris, the modernist movement entered Brazil through the back door. Primitivism was the doorway through which the modernists penetrated Brazil, and it served as their Brazilian naturalization papers. The victory of the historical and proto-historical archaic arts and those of the new contemporary primitives facilitated the discovery of Brazil by the modernists. It was under their influence that, soon after the Week, the movements of Pau-Brasil [Brazilwood] and of Antropofagismo [Cannibalism] were born.²⁰

And so, unlike their super-civilized European role models, Brazilian modernists did not need to travel to the exotic latitudes of Africa or Oceania to renew their strength in the purer and more vitalized sources of certain primitive cultures. Turning inward, then, into the country, his back to the sea, the intellectual leader of modernism formed the notion of a *caboclo*²¹ Brazil unlike that of the capital, primary and irreducible in its physical reality, able to give him reason to conjugate the cultural and the instinctive. Yet this paradoxical fusion of contradictory elements was not the work of a single original personality, for, whereas it marked the action and work of Mário de Andrade, it also marked the movement's other great figure, Oswald de Andrade. The latter was truly the conscious theorist and creator of Brazilian primitivism. And naturally this primitivism, this slingshot and pierced-lip Brazilianness, revealed itself to Oswald in Paris. "On a trip to Paris, from on high in a studio on the Place de Clichy—the belly button of the world—a dazzled Oswald de Andrade discovered his own country" (Paulo Prado, *Poesia Pau-Brasil*).²² Like [the explorer Pedro Álvares] Cabral, Oswald discovered Brazil. With his dry, disjointed verbiage, in jerky, staccato phrases, Oswald defined Brazil from the colonial "society of lettered castaways" to the twentieth century, when "the men who knew it all became as deformed as rubber Babels." It is now "a leafy lyricism. The presentation of materials." "The first Brazilian construction coinciding with the movement of general reconstruction. Brazilwood poetry." What do these Parisian primitives want? Oswald replies: "The perspective of an order that is other than visual." "The correspondent of the physical miracle in art. And wise sunny sloth. Prayer. Silent energy. Hospitality. Barbarians, picturesque and credulous. Brazilwood. The forest and the school. Cooking, minerals, and dance. Vegetation. Brazilwood."²³

As may be seen, it is also a physical, concrete Brazil made of minerals, vegetation, superstition, and cooking. Here, the rigor and precision inherent to the visual mode of expression separate the poet from ideological shifts and from bad writing. For love of poetry, of the real and concrete sources of life, he also reduces Brazil to its most earthly and physical realities. Brazilwood. His is therefore a primordial nationalism, irreducible and anti-erudite like that of Mário de Andrade.

It was not until later—when temperament and individuality were separately established according to affinities—that primitive ingenuous nationalism, non-literary in the sense of verbal expression, but a formal, regional branch of modern universalism, degenerated into political, civic, patriotic nationalism with the usual variety of squabbles. And, actually, the modernist movement ended up bifurcating into two currents—one of pure psychological experience and high spiritual and artistic vitality, and the other of mere anecdotal and picturesque expressivity that degenerated into prejudiced fads and ended up in the style of oratory tropes. Nothing is left of art but the dead formula and it is indeed curious to note that from these (not quite artistic) literary derivations frustrated by the second wave of Brazilian modernism, such as Verdeamarelismo [Green-yellowism], and, later, the anachronistic indianism of Anta,²⁴ nothing aesthetically or even speculatively valid remained except for a few

loose images by Cassiano Ricardo. Nevertheless, Green-yellowist nationalism would soon leave the spiritual plane of actual artistic creation in order to cohere—this time around as a truly European import—with an exclusively totalitarian political movement, copied in gestures and apparel and in residues of the ideas of Italian Fascism and German Nazism.

The most revealing trait of this current's creative sterility lies in the absence, at its core, of visual artists and even musicians, that is, arts whose means of expression remained perfectly isolated from dangerous contact with the world of ideas and of concepts, indissolubly rooted in the word, the raw material of poetry, but also of the manifesto, of preachment, of discourse, and of reason. To them, Brazil became above all an arid abstraction, make-believe, a convention, an academy of stereotyped concepts and formulas, an ideology of importation.

However, the other current remained faithful to the postulates of intuitive thought that were dominant in all artistic and creative activity. Tarsila do Amaral also went to Paris to learn modern pictorial techniques. For the first time, Young Brazilian painters left Brazil on their own and went to Paris for direct contact with living painting rather than dead academicism. There is a symptomatic contrast between these youths—an Emiliano Di Cavalcanti, a Tarsila do Amaral, and the great names of official painting that traveled to Europe on travel award money. Almeida Júnior himself—not to even mention Pedro Américo and Vitor Meirelles—lived in Paris during the most heroic times of the Impressionist battle without so much as acknowledging its existence, indifferently elbowing a [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir or a [Édouard] Manet secluded in the musty atmosphere of [Alexandre] Cabanel's studio. The historical modernist Di Cavalcanti left for Paris after the Week. Swept up in the revelation of the Week at the academic hands of Pedro Alexandrino, Tarsila also sailed to Europe, where she moved directly on to initiation at the very sources of the modernist revolution. And in Paris she rushed to the studios of Lhote, Léger, and Gleizes, authorized participants of the transcendent mysteries of Cubism, which is the high point of the revolutionary crisis.

Di Cavalcanti, alone, isolated by his strong personality, absorbed his modernist experience by osmosis, so to speak. He drew from his surroundings what best suited his temperament without losing himself in learning the latest techniques simply because they were novel. Like a sensual feline, he promenaded like a Brazilian "solar sloth," to which Oswald lay claim in [*Poesia*] *Pau-Brasil*, through favorite haunts of Montparnasse, like the [Pablo] Picasso of the early days of Cubism, the cyclopic creator of the solid figures of the pink-and-black period, and of the blue graphic lyricism of the old [Raoul] Dufy that he draws close to. His visual vocabulary is defined early on, inscribed within a scheme of great soft curves supported by the strong, cannibalistic instinct of the colors. Although his favorite themes are popular, he flees from the decorative, from the beautiful, from the gaily festive. He is the first in Brazil to give us a visual characterization of Brazilian types such as the mulata of urban amusement parks, the then anonymous samba dancers of the hills, the as yet ignored heroes of the Carnival revelers of the Praça Onze, the heavy boatmen and fishermen of suburban ports such as Maria Angú. His canvases, densely packed with individuals, devoid of vast spaces or vast horizons—mostly closed interiors—sweat from the heat of physical contact between the robust bodies. A range of muted colors, of earthy reds and violent, shaded blues, express with difficulty, without eloquence, but in a commandingly sensorial and formal way. Unlike that of the others, Di Cavalcanti's Brazil of that period is neither gay nor ingenuous nor pretty. It is a suburban civilization that retains an instinctive vitality even as it has already been semi-domesticated by the crystallized collective life of urban culture. In this sense, he foreshadowed the still

purely rural, virgin concepts of the various literary Brazils that had succeeded one another since then.

Tarsila do Amaral is the first Pau-Brasil transcription to painting. Her mission is to restore the naive iconography of the provincial interior, transplanting it to the canvas. And, for the first time, modernism finds in Brazil the perfect correspondence between newly learned techniques and the artist's inspirational subject matter. Tarsila flirts with naive, *caboclo* taste as well as the art of the native *santeiros* [makers or vendors of images of saints]. It is her distinction to have realized the most technically modern paintings produced in the country until then. In order to bring new life to the saints of domestic altars and the golden stars of its blue skies, the languid purple of the *manacá* [ornamental and medicinal shrub] and the white of the jasmine, the scarlet of peasant dresses, the tinplate chests with their laughing decorations, the outlines of the banana trees, the crisscrossing lines of little paper flags underneath the gentle roofs of useless tiles, and of the stocks of elements of the everyday life of the people, in poetry and in festivity, preserving the qualities of purity and lyricism, Tarsila found herself obliged to keep to the irreducible two-dimensionalism of the rectangle. And, casting aside the procedures and tricks of traditional painting, all destined for the fictitious representation of volumes in space, the artist draws the contours of the icons with clear, limpid lines, in a simple graphic procedure that attempts to evoke the whimsical arabesque of popular ornamentation, while the background of the canvas is divided into flat color zones in which pure blue encounters pink, and a dense, banana-tree green is contrasted against the dark chestnut brown of black skin. Referring to a 1926 Paris exhibition by Tarsila, a French art critic classified her painting as "scholastic optimism." No one would use this language to describe Di Cavalcanti's painting of the same period, even then made up of dark and violent accents like the grunt of the *cuíca* [percussion instrument that produces grunting and squeaking noises].

However, the psychological mindset of Pau-Brasil was short-lived. The reality of life and the times chased away the childish, fresh, optimistic lyricism that characterized it. Oswald de Andrade and others branched off from the initial modernist "trunk" and, with Tarsila as its principal interpreter, penetrated Brazil more profoundly, updating it while preserving its roots, its native simplicities, in short, its savagery. Such is cannibalism. Brazilians have had to assimilate the achievements of culture and civilization, for such are the contingencies of time, although, at least, this should be done brutally, ferociously. The savage, the Brazilian, may elevate himself to culture as long as he preserves the barbarian qualities of his Indian and African origins. He digests civilization in the same way that—according to legend—the Indians ate Bispo Sardinha on a deserted beach in Cabralian Brazil.²⁵ Tarsila then entered a new type of symbolic Expressionism that contrasts with the lyrical, decorative manner of her previous period. She no longer drew upon popular verse for her figures. Until this time, the distorted popular images, saints, and characters of her iconography obeyed a strict technical need for transposition onto the flat surface of the canvas. However, now the distortions stood for themselves as symbols of the cannibalist imagination. *Abaporu* [1928] nicely represents this desire to violate the natural proportions of living, real beings. Anthropophagy [cannibalism] was born from that figure. And with it, the continuum of artistic development stemming directly from the Modern Art Week comes to an end.

After these modernists came those artists whose inspiration and development did not have the Modern Art Week as their starting point. We may mention Lasar Segall, who, although he put in an appearance in the still romantic São Paulo of 1913 (with a small show of paintings from his Expressionist period), did not really emerge in Brazil

until much later, two years after the Week. At that point he was, indeed, immediately welcomed as one of modernism's great standard bearers. An Expressionist upon his arrival in Brazil, his painting is currently an increasingly refined essentialization of colors and lines, in a visual organization that respects the already stylized figurative scheme in order to surrender to more refined tonal subtleties. Then came [Candido] Portinari's triumphant entrance to the modernist camp; he brought with him versatility unknown within the Brazilian pictorial scene. He was the catapult that vaulted modern painting to the public at large, and early on, to the rejoicing of those who already supported him here, crossed borders and won an honorable mention at the Carnegie Foundation's international exhibition, in Pittsburgh, for his canvas *Café* (see plate on pp. 78–79). Portinari was not born of the Week but he did continue it, leading it forward. The honorable mention of 1934 did a great deal to validate modern art in Brazil, impressing the vast number of fools who only believed in the native values once they have been acclaimed abroad.

A new star, also not a participant of the Week, emerged in the north. This was Cícero Dias, a follower of the traditionalist school that Gilberto Freyre founded in Recife and from which emerged the national novel with José Lins do Rego. Cícero followed in the wake of that linear primitivism which became the first artistic interpretation of Brazil. His subjects and colors are drawn from the ideological repertory and the overall picture of northeastern life. But Cícero emigrated. And in Paris she evolved toward a simplified idiom in which the only thing that remains of Brazil are the permanent elements of nature—the tropical colors, the air, the transparent light of the northeastern atmosphere.

And there is of course Guignard, who returned to Brazil after a lengthy stay in Europe with modern pictorial skills, which he immediately placed at the service of Brazilian nature. Allowing himself to become impregnated by the primitive national climate created by the effervescence of the Week—and with a curly line of suggestive formal power hitherto unknown in Brazil, Guignard depicted the most picturesque characters of our rural life. But his great vocation is the landscape, and he gives us, through a color scale that descends from the most aerial atmospheric hues to the most varied earth tones, the chromatic modulations of the mountains of Minas Gerais. Underneath his backgrounds of large color stains, he threads the surface of the paintings with an arabesque that would appear to have been drawn in pen and ink rather than with brushes.

Still within the generation that established itself in the wave of 1930, we have the veteran of modern printmakers, Oswaldo Goeldi. He represents one of the great moments of modern Brazilian art. In black and white, he achieves a depth that painters do not always achieve, in spite of their color-laden palettes. This is his new image of Brazil, within a broader and more suggestive space, within which men are men and no longer mere types.

Among the forerunners of that period, a unique figure, insulated in a rarefied spiritual world, looms amid the noisy youth, somewhat frivolous in his enthusiasm. This is Ismael Nery. He never wanted to be a professional artist. Yet he kept within himself the fullest potentialities. Transcending the milieu and the predominant nationalist concerns, his already cerebral work reveals to us above all in drawing the gifts of formal speculation, the greatest, perhaps, of the generation. Ismael, however—a prince in spirit—disdained his wits and his glory in an attitude that was also very modern for the challenge it represented to the values of its day.

The list of names could continue. But it is useless: and besides, their filiation with the *paulista* pioneers would be quite remote. Pancetti and the others of his generation

have already begun to participate in other arenas, as well as to breathe an air that has begun to change. Let us stop here and proclaim the importance of the Modern Art Week not only to the artistic and literary development of Brazil, but also in cultural and spiritual terms. For the first time in this apathetic, inert Brazil that nevertheless begins to crumble with the disintegration of the old feudal, coffee-growing economy, a handful of youths rose up against the lethargy and shouted that it was not only in the interested realms of politics that men have reason to fight, to quarrel. Nowadays, art is an increasingly worthy activity that men—the best of them—should fight and sacrifice themselves over.

—“Semana de arte moderna” (1952). Lecture given at a conference on the thirtieth anniversary of Modern Art Week, Ministry of Education and Culture, Rio de Janeiro. In Mário Pedrosa, *Dimensões da arte* (Rio de Janeiro: MEC, 1964).

Notes

1. Mário de Andrade, *Paulicéia desvairada* (São Paulo: Casa Mayença, 1922).
2. Mário de Andrade, “O movimento modernista” (Rio de Janeiro: Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1942). Originally given as a lecture at the Ministry of Foreign Relations on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Modern Art Week. This, and all other translations in this text unless otherwise noted, are by Stephen Berg.
3. Mário de Andrade, *Macunaíma: O herói sem caráter* (São Paulo: Est. Gráf. Eugênio Cupolo, 1928). This novel is considered one of the seminal texts of Brazilian modernism.
4. In fact, the exhibition of Malfatti’s works ran from December 1917 to January 1918.
5. Monteiro Lobato, “A propósito da exposição Malfatti [Paranóia ou mistificação],” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, December 20, 1917.
6. Émile Verhaeren, *Les Villes tentaculaires* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1920).
7. Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, *Raízes do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1936). Among the many editions of this book, see the commemorative seventieth-anniversary edition of its publication, ed. Lília Moritz Schwarz and Ricardo Benzaquen de Araújo (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2006).
8. Paul Gauguin, letter to Daniel de Monfreid, from Tahiti, October 1897, in *The Writings of a Savage: Paul Gauguin*, ed. Daniel Guérin, trans. Eleanor Levieux (New York: Viking, 1978), p. 125.
9. Guillaume Apollinaire, “Zone,” in *Alcools: Poèmes, 1898–1913* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1913).
10. Paul Guillaume and Thomas Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926).
11. This and the following passage are not, in fact, from *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, as Pedrosa writes.
12. Paul Guillaume, “The Discovery and Appreciation of Primitive Negro Sculpture,” *Les Arts à Paris 12* (May 1926): 13. Translated in Jody Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir: Modernist Art and Popular Entertainment in Jazz-Age Paris, 1900–1930* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 1–2.
13. Albert C. Barnes, “Negro Art, Past and Present,” *Opportunity* (May 1926): 148. Originally given as a lecture to the Woman’s Faculty Club, Columbia University, New York, March 26, 1926. Quoted in Alain Locke, *Negro Art: Past and Present* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936), p. 38. Pedrosa alters the second part of this excerpt; Barnes actually wrote: “In the painting and sculpture of the leaders of our age—Picasso, Matisse, Modigliani, Lipchitz, Soutine and others—any trained observer can recognize the Negro motive.”
14. Guillaume, “The Discovery and Appreciation of Primitive Negro Sculpture,” p. 13. Translated in Blake, *Le Tumulte Noir*, pp. 1–2.
15. Though this exact passage does not appear, these ideas are discussed in Guillaume and Munro, *Primitive Negro Sculpture*, pp. 32–34, 43–46.
16. The last piece in *Paulicéia desvairada*, “As enfiaduras do Ipiranga (Oratório Profano),” is made up of five voices representing the social groups of 1930s São Paulo: “conventional orientalisms (writers and other praiseworthy artificers);” “palsied decrepitudes (millionaires and the bourgeoisie);” “indifferent pallbearers (workers, poor people);” “green-gold youths (us);” and “my madness.”
17. Mário de Andrade, “As enfiaduras do Ipiranga,” in *Poesias Completas* (Belo Horizonte: Itatiaia; São Paulo: EdUSP, 1987), p. 104.
18. Mário de Andrade, “O poeta come amendoim” (1924), in *Clan do jaboti* (São Paulo: Piratininga, 1927).
19. *Ibid.*
20. See the manifestos of these two groups in Jorge Schwartz, ed., *Vanguardas latino-americanas: Polêmicas, manifestos e textos críticos* (São Paulo: EdUSP, 1995). The “Manifesto antropófago” originally appeared in *Revista de antropofagia*, no. 1, São Paulo (May 1928).
21. There are two definitions of *caboclo*. One is racial; the other social. Whereas the former is used nationwide to refer to the admixture of whites and Indians, the latter is regional (north-northeast) and refers to the rural poor.
22. Paulo Prado, preface to *Poesia Pau-Brasil*, by Oswald de Andrade, illustrations by Tarsila do Amaral (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1925).
23. Oswald de Andrade, “Manifesto da poesia Pau-Brasil,” *Correio da manhã*, March 18, 1924.
24. The Escola da Anta (the symbol of which is an anta, or tapir, considered the largest South American mammal) was formed in 1926 by the writers Cassiano Ricardo, Guilherme de Almeida, Menotti del

Picchia, and Plínio Salgado. In 1929 they published the manifesto “Nhengaçu Verde-Amarelo: Manifesto do Verde-Amarelismo ou da Escola da Anta” (Nhengaçu green-yellow: Green-yellowism manifesto, or the School of Anta).

25. According to legend, Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, the first bishop of Brazil, was captured and devoured by the Caeté Indians in 1556, following a shipwreck on the coast of the northeastern state of Alagoas.

Foundations of Abstract Art

So-called abstract art did not emerge by chance or whim. It is the result of many factors, but, among these, the most important is its own internal development. Ever since Impressionism—and especially [Paul] Gauguin—the march of modern art has proceeded with increasing distance from nature, to evolve in an increasingly more abstract world; thus it follows a movement parallel to that of Science, which moves completely outside the perceptive world. Having obtained its autonomy over the course of a long history, living contemporary art is something like a work of its own, made from the development of its own constructive elements.

This affirmation is neither new nor daring. In its support, we may resort to authorities that may possibly surprise certain more conservative sectors. For example, instead of the authority of a critic or a philosopher, we may look to that of an art historian, such as Heinrich Wölfflin, who died in 1947. As far as we know, they never deigned—as, in fact, is the habit among these gentlemen—to occupy themselves with this trifle that is the art of their time. However, it is known that, unlike the majority of his eminent colleagues, in spite of being a historian, he [Wölfflin] prided himself in contemplating the works of the past to the exclusion of all others. Many of his concepts and ideas are now academic currency in the world of critics and scholars. Actually, he took upon himself—as his life’s work—the task of discovering the internal machinery of the works and the development of interior forms. On my train journey back to Paris from Germany last spring, I was reading a small book of his about the explanation of the work of art, published in 1921, and reprinted now with an afterword written in 1944.¹

In it, it would appear that he finally cast his gaze upon what was going on around him, because he was able to write things that refer to phenomena of his time, such as the general acceptance of the arts of primitive peoples and the last stage in the evolution of contemporary European art. To him, optical possibility largely determines the art of each historical cycle, creating new formal virtues much as what happened in the transition from the classical art of the Renaissance to Baroque art.

“If archaic, isolated, and stammering art still managed to achieve a coherent and comprehensive way of seeing, this is due to an inner process, without any direct relation to its expression, such is their importance for plastic imagination.” “Likewise,” he further notes, “if in painting a new trend appears for which color and light appears to not be based more directly on objects, but, beyond objects, receive a life of its own (in which color attracts color and light light, resulting in non-objective or abstract settings, and therefore greatly pictorial), this is also the result of a non-presupposed internal development.”

Wölfflin establishes a thesis of a specific development of the visual imagination. To him, inner formal fantasy has a spiritual mission that is intimately linked to man’s total development. The evolution of form in the history of art follows the course of

historical development. But, he adds, the development of formal imagination, in its specificity as an autonomous, expressly creative process, is a mere echo of the world's appeal to external representation. Thus, the meaning of the world of forms is also "for itself," even though it continues to be rooted in general spiritual culture. He adds that all of the new discoveries of the world of the visible are achieved by means of predictions of new forms and colors found in the artist's world. "To the extent that color has become a medium of expression for the psychic for the soul"—and who can deny this psychological assumption of our times?—"in this same medium there is also a previous history of color. The meaning of color has in itself its own history (differentiation, harmonization, total feeling)." And Wölfflin extends these possibilities of autonomous development to drawing and to the play of light and shadow: that is why, he explains, we can no longer think of sketches, perspective, and modeling, etc., [rather than] "at the outbreak of the feeling of the line in general and, later, in its stead by the plans" (*Das Erklären von Kunstwerken*).

Our age is the age in which everything becomes the object of analysis, and in the field of philosophy all of the activities and modalities of man's mental life are in themselves considered and, at the same time, studied within the context of our age. Like Science and religion, art was placed in conditions in which it may be separately examined. Everything is placed under the lens.

In the realm of painting, the picture became the artist's universe, his immediate physical reality. Color and line, for example, experienced a revival, unknown in Western art, at least since the Renaissance.

Let us look at color, this element of surprise and revelation. For the first time, it was considered in abstract terms, detached from its material support, that is, from the object of which it was merely the covering. The awareness of pure color is an invention of modern times. It brought about a veritable devastation in the souls of European artists, from [Vincent] van Gogh, who died of light, to the exasperation of the German Expressionists and the violence of the "Fauves" in France. In order not to lose one's head, one needed all the self-restraint of a [Henri] Matisse. Need we remember that, since then, the highly restrained [André] Derain compared color issuing from a tube to sticks of dynamite?

But color is irreducible to these exaltations of a purely personal order. Expressionism was the first to recognize the crisis of figuration, because it forgot that color is ruled by its own dynamic. It has already been compared to "a coherent social organism," within which beings cannot exist apart or in isolation. There is a necessary chromatic order within the frame. And this order does not tolerate just any reproduction of particular forms of objects. The object has its local color, but this privilege is unknown within the closed society of the frame, ruled by a chromatic order established by color that is pure or independent of the former figurative supports. A surface that is perfectly balanced in its chromatic relationships cannot be simultaneously the painting of an illustration. Either we approach the apparent reality of the object and necessarily alter the color relationships, or we abandon the apparent object's demands to obey the demands of color. Once unleashed, these no longer bow to the artist's mere whim or representative fancies.

It was the end of the anti-naturalist evolution, when the artists themselves made the intuitive discovery that colors lived in a world of their own, ruled by laws other than those of the old painting. If we are to properly understand Wölfflin's thinking, we must not forget that until the English and French colorists of the early nineteenth century, the painting of the Italian Renaissance was no more than an art of draftsmanship, of black and white, of *grisaille*. Color had no organic function in classical

pictorial concepts. The architecture of the painting was constructed according to the scale of grays. Color served only to cover forms, figures, and objects, to impart a natural appearance or some decorative purpose to the picture. It was therefore subjugated so that the demands of naturalist reproduction and the representation of volume could be satisfied. The laws of color have been denied since the beginning of painting, when the artist separated the model through chiaroscuro. The palpating phenomenological reality of color gives way to conventional reality.

[Paul] Cézanne was the first to almost consciously foresee the existence of an art of colors, just as—in moving beyond the stage of Expressionist catharses—[Vasily] Kandinsky was the first to give color all of its importance. But in order not to lose himself in the chaos of color that was unleashed, he sought in the musical scale a baseline of affinities and analogies for a new chromatic scale that would allow him to master this recently discovered kingdom. From the early improvisations he arrives at geometry, through the search for an architectural order, such as had been undertaken a few decades earlier by old Cézanne, who sought a means of endowing Impressionism with solidity through color modulation.

Space also underwent a resolution similar to that of color. The art of the ancient pre-Greek cultures and of the primitive contemporary cultures, such as the black culture, showed Europeans that their space was still the mechanical result of a perception that had already been stratified for several centuries. Then came Picasso and his *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, heralding the arrival of the Cubist revolution that [Piet] Mondrian deemed sublime. This marked the beginning of the dissolution of the object. With Cubism, space once again, after an interval of five centuries, became conceptual rather than perceptive, and the pictorial plane recovered its rights, forcing forms to a given behavior. Not yet entirely abandoned, the object remained only in what Picasso called its primary form. Not yet wanting to suppress the object, the Cubists rejected the living, vibrant range of Fauvism. They opposed the eternal form in favor of inconstant color. To them, form was still the Platonic idea, the universal model. Illuminated by new intuition, it was then that they realized another empirical truth: forms also have their own laws of development rendered explicit by the laws of visual perception, which was then just beginning to be studied by psychology. Through the decomposition of volumes, thanks to the interaction of occasionally transparent planes, forms placed alongside one another—sometimes juxtaposed and sometimes superimposed—tend to alter themselves to perception. They combine or interconnect within the spatial boundaries of the frame, disintegrating so that part of one together with part of another will make up something new. Within this dynamic play, they cancel one another out reciprocally or meld in new complexes or new structures that are often unexpected to the observer. The play of these formal transformations constitutes one of the secrets of a Cubist painting's captivating ambivalence. Planes and lines, color fields, profiles or pieces of figure or object arranged upon the canvas move toward or away from one another under perceptive optical factors of distance or proximity, of symmetry, of contrast, or of resemblance, of direction or of movement, in a permanent play of formal combinations, independent of any subordination to the object or the subject matter of the painting. The Cubist painters forged ahead on the new path without being fully conscious of what it was they were doing. This is why the group's leaders were not able to continue along the newly discovered path, considerably delaying the maturation of the real style of our age. In spite of some of its geniuses, the masters and founders of Cubism have not advanced since then. Picasso has dedicated himself to the task of torturing figure and object alike by every conceivable means and way imaginable, and in these distortions may

sometimes find the expression of a true tragic grandeur, and above all of an insatiable despair. But in spite of its flashes of light, his art has fallen back on the already transcended stage of an expression of catharsis.

Mondrian then emerged to reestablish the fundamental rhythms that are indistinguishable from the very rhythms of life, even as the artistic consciousness of the Young slowly understood that the organization of a painting must inevitably be subordinated to the calculated or intuited distribution of the various formal processes and rhythmic needs for the greater glory of the architectural whole. For only then did the younger generations realize the truth of Kandinsky, of [Paul] Klee, and of Mondrian, [Robert] Delaunay, [Auguste] Herbin, [Alberto] Magnelli, [Hans] Arp, [František] Kupka, Sophie Tauber Arp, and others, to wit, that—at the limits of the canvas—form also submits itself to the same remarkable interactions as color.

Everything indicates that abstract art is here to stay. If space, which has become conceptual, is marked only by the rhythms, modulations, and oppositions of colors, and the intersections of planes, two-dimensional inevitability leads the imagination to the idea of projections, vibrations, and succession. The new space is a dynamic mental suggestion. The notion of time increasingly interferes in the formal reasoning of the more avant-garde painters and sculptors. Italian Futurism, the orphism of Delaunay and his friends, and [Alexander] Calder's mobiles were all born of these dynamic concerns. And so the artist discovers that what the public had already anticipated—the power of expansion of the modern visual concept, founded upon movement, that is, in binocular vision from multiple angles. The merit of Futurism consisted in revealing the formidable importance of the dynamic in our mechanized civilization. However, traditional pictorial media evidently do not dispose of resources to give us the visual image of a succession of simultaneous sensations. And that is why [Umberto] Boccioni, one of Futurism's most eminent representatives, undoubtedly becoming aware of these limitations, was one of the first to conceive of a type of painting with light in space.

Indeed, in the presence of this internal evolution, eminent artists and theorists of the modernist movement began to believe that certain liberated formal mediums—such as light and color—had surpassed the very limits of painting. Along with Boccioni, one might further point to [Kazimir] Malevich, [László] Moholy-Nagy, [Frank Lloyd] Wright. After having been banned from the Bauhaus by [Adolf] Hitler, Moholy-Nagy (the founder of Chicago's Institute of Design) dreamed of integrating real space into the work of art with no loss to its formal qualities and without concessions to the imitative illustration of old painting. To his mind, after the invention of photography, painting evolved from color to light. Therefore, one should paint with light, thus transforming colored, two-dimensional surfaces into luminous structures. He imagined a device capable of projecting luminous visions into real space, or in vast rooms, onto canvases or unusual materials. He even foresaw other technical media for this art of light, including the open air. Experiments of this nature have been made in several countries and, recently, in Brazil. As for music, electronics is now used to capture new sounds.

These predictions are signs that should be taken into consideration. The arts, such as we know them, are in a transitional stage. Photography and film have opened up new visual possibilities to the formal imagination. As for modern painters, they experiment with the technique of film to capture the sense of pure forms in motion. Modern mechanics introduce us to new means of expression that have barely been touched upon.

The development of abstract art is still in its inception. All of modern sculpture only just began with old masters such as [Constantin] Brancusi and [Hans] Arp. Even

[Antoine] Pevsner, the most revolutionary, is ultimately no more than a forerunner. Even Max Bill, whose desire to base himself on mathematical thought, given the absence of the object, is as characteristic of our time, despite his accomplishments—is ultimately nothing other than a primitive, albeit, this time, a truly modern primitive, given that his “ingenuousness” consists of scientific thought or intention. The path of Bill or of [Georges] Vantongerloo is a productive one, albeit merely glimpsed.

It must be said that abstract art, which spills over beyond the level of simple expressive manifestation, begins with a spiritual operation or a mental experience. We can only find justification for it if we admit the possibility of a semantics, of another form of logic unlike positive logic. Its justification (let us compare Van Gogh’s ideas, his letters, to Herbin’s ideas) resides in the presupposition that form contains a symbolic meaning. And this is only possible if we establish the distinction between the symbol and the sign: “the first allows us to design your object”; the latter “limits us to dealing with what it means.”

In this sense, Herbin’s attitude is that of a true primitive, because his art is the expression of everything that is of its time, of everything that is modern, of everything truly ingenuous. And that is why Herbin is so authentic. He started with color and color alone to make paintings that rigorously obey chromatic law.

In these last few years, he has arrived at an entirely new and highly resonant expression.

He built an entire chromatic alphabet for himself with which he is able to give us a truly pictorial formal symbolization of all the words in the dictionary—that is, of all catalogued notions and concepts. With it, painting is always an operation of the mind and, through it, a link to the most complex and most erudite currents of so-called Concrete art, of the Swiss, for example. And he justifies—ingenuously but, for this very reason, legitimately—abstract art’s aspiration to being a mode of knowledge above all else.

We march toward a civilization of new or rejuvenated, still inadequately absorbed, signs—a civilization of symbol-images. As for cybernetics, it proposes a civilization of pure communication, no longer of strength, electricity, or steam. A civilization of communication without direct contact. Simultaneously, abstract art also appears to educate the people, to prepare it to understand itself, to communicate without using words. At this point, we must inquire after the existence and whereabouts of new signs fabricated by suggestions of the new worlds discovered by modern Science and technology (images of the infrastructure of matter and the infra-atomic world) or borrowed from primitive ages to the collective unconscious so that we may learn the meaning and use of lost symbols. Is this not partly the message of Klee’s work and that of the abstract artists concerned with the vision of the infinitely small or the structures that elude the apprehension of perception?

Someday, therefore, thanks to the accomplishments of abstract art, people and artists will reestablish their lost contact. In the decadence of verbal civilization, the descending curve of which begins to delineate itself before our eyes and which drags along with it the most solid and sacred of conceptualizations, new art attempts to rekindle the meaning of eternal things, giving life to new myths that, alone, shall bring man a new reason for being and waiting.

—“Fundamentos da arte abstrata” (1953). Essay developed from an interview granted to Edgar Pillet and published in *Art d’Aujourd’hui* (Paris) 4, no. 8 (December 1953).

Note

1. Heinrich Wölfflin, *Das Erklären von Kunstwerken* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1921).

Brazilian Painting and International Taste

If we isolate the [São Paulo] Bienal's Brazilian painters and give them proper technical conditions for presentation alongside international painters, the comparison is not at all unfavorable to us. Milton Dacosta may be compared to [Hans] Hartung, to [Pierre] Soulages, [Serge] Poliakoff, or [Guiseppe] Santomaso, and his intrinsic qualities would, likewise, appear to no disadvantage. Naturally, the same may be said of [Alfredo] Volpi, the whole of whose work is among the most important on the international scene. Alongside the good European or American artists of their generation, even the youngest (such as Lygia Clark or Ivan Serpa) will easily maintain their positions. Almir Mavignier is also on this level. Indeed, in spite of [Alberto] Burri's visible influence upon him, [Shiro] Tanaka¹ (who is represented by two canvases at the Bienal) may be counted among the finest Parisian "Tachists."

With regard to Tanaka, what may be said is that his language is cosmopolitan—that is to say, Parisian. As for Almir Mavignier's perfect technique, he allows his innately sensitive qualities to show through, although in discipline and thinking he is a true Concretist of the school of [Max] Bill. An escape from geometric figures and from spatial definitions by means of line and contour currently reigns in the vicinity of Ulm-Zurich. They would use color and, especially, its tonal values or sfumato to define by suggesting only the limits between forms and spatial variations. In a distinguished way, Almir applies the idea in *Três centros e duas figuras* [Three centers and two figures], while, in *Formas plásticas* [Plastic forms], the invention is more individualized.

The current Bienal is dedicated to Tachism, and the implicit or explicit thinking of the International Jury confirmed this. Its Tachist fervor was of such an order that it is possible to feel the deliberate disdain with which it moved through the room dedicated to our painting, without pausing before its most renowned names.

They pretended not to see Volpi, they pretended not to see Milton Dacosta. By some miracle or, rather, through the kind and spontaneous and very Brazilian incoherence of Maria Martins,² they ended up giving Lygia Clark an acquisition prize, even though they chose the weakest of the artist's three paintings.

By all accounts, the eminent Mr. A. [Alfred H.] Barr Jr. proclaimed all that effort to be a Bauhaus exercise. And also, from what we hear, he was intrigued to the point of irritation by the fact that young artists here and in Argentina have surrendered to so-called Concretist experiments. He was further irritated by the influence that Max Bill, for example, came to wield in these whereabouts: the studies and the importance given by the excellent Nueva Visión (New vision) group from Buenos Aires to [Piet] Mondrian, Wordemberg-Gilwart, [Josef] Albers, [Georges] Vantongerloo, Bill, and others possessed the ability to make him lose his patience. What would the illustrious former director of New York's Museum of Modern Art have preferred? That young Brazilian or Argentinean artists would yet again allow themselves to be influenced by [Pablo] Picasso, [Georges] Rouault, [Chaim] Soutine, or even by some of the glories discovered by that same museum, in the Peter Blume style?

But what the official critic did not perceive is that his irritation comes from not having found, in the Ibirapuera [where the Bienal pavilion is located], a painting to his taste, or to the eclectic taste that is dominant today in Paris or New York. And not finding anything to feed his habits, he wandered off like all prominent foreigners do when arriving on our shores in search of indigenous huts and flocks of parrots. In general, this is the attitude of the majority of the foreign critics who visit us: either they want a painting or a sculpture (of good quality, one can see), but one that

is within aesthetic canons and the prevailing contemporary taste in their own milieu, a priori considered more advanced or at least more sophisticated, or else something autochthonous. However, by autochthonous they understand everything that indicates primitivism, romanticism, or savagery—that is, ultimately, exoticism. They do not enjoy allowing our artists their own investigations—a modern language not to the taste of the moment in the great European centers.

An art of romantic or, better yet, anti-cultural tendency now predominates in these centers in the sense of preferring so-called instinctive or subjective values to purer formal values. As men who are tired of culture and of aesthetic experiments, of anything that recalls structure, order, discipline, tensions, optimism; to sum up—formal beauty. Why, our finest contemporary artists do not belong to this lineage; worse, still: they do not care whether what they are currently doing is not what is in style in Europe or in the United States, or is not appreciated there.

To us Brazilians, such a state of mind is highly regarded and must be preserved at any cost, for it will be in the measure of its preservation that something new and specifically ours may emerge. For the first time it reveals a kind of thinking, a sense of independence that is becoming generalized among our finest artists. From Volpi to Milton Dacosta, from Franz Weissmann to Lygia Clark, from Ivan Serpa to another young modern painter from here or from São Paulo, the same mindset prevails; a sort of embryo of a school, the fundamental characteristics of which it is too early to attempt to define and whose classification it is, therefore, difficult to establish.

One thing is certain, though: its stylistic and aesthetic foundations are emerging and slowly but surely being outlined. So this is a cultural and even spiritual phenomenon too important to be scorned and exchanged for eclectic or rigorous taste—whether excellent or not—of Mr. Barr Jr. and his most eminent international fraternity.

—Originally published as “Pintura brasileira e gosto internacional,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 19, 1957.

Notes

1. Shiro Tanaka (b. 1928), better known as Flávio Shiró, a Japanese-Brazilian artist.
2. The artist Maria Martins (1894–1973) was part of the jury of the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal.

Calligraphic Abstraction

If—in the art of today—the formal element tends to adopt Chinese calligraphy’s specific quality of being irreparable and irremediable once it has been set on paper or canvas, this signifies that something like a *sign* is to be sought behind the artist’s creative impulse. Indeed, in spite of Tachism’s lyrical, decadent intermezzo, the deepest—and still not fully explicit and conscious—contemporary current is graphic in terms of inspiration. Ever since [Paul] Klee, this new art of signs has appeared in Western painting and, since then, it has endured with highs and lows, albeit mostly muffled by the luster and success of the trend of so-called informal painting.

[Hans] Hartung was a great graphic artist who gave us some of the most magnificent, profoundly evocative and powerfully expressive signs. Nowadays, this very same artist seems to have reached a stalemate, debating the sign’s ancestral purity (on the one hand) and the—so to speak—cultural or social need to overcome it (on the other). [Pierre] Soulages is another renowned artist who, because in some sense

he came from Hartung, at least bases his painting on a ritual with something of the creative process of the sign. Extremely concerned, however, insofar as appearances are concerned, with problems of a rigorously elastic order and of pictorial technique—principally the functional appropriateness of the work instruments, paintbrushes of various dimensions and widths, qualities of bristle, scrapers, molds, and various materials such as spatulas, etc.—he [Soulages] does not surrender with abandon to the first movement of the arm or to a loose physical gesture. On the contrary, he corrects the initial impulse, the rhythm of his own arm. He no longer recognizes any creative work that results as a mere product of chance or as the physiological discharge of gesture.

Along the same lines, [Emilio] Vedova is another painter of renown, the last offspring of an ultramodern language: Italian Futurism. His painting is so signographic that it practically eliminates color: in him it is the physical-mental or spiritual dynamic that composes the painting. Hence the tendency to call this work “blind” painting. In it, movement possesses something episcopal, like a blessing. His is a gesture of the wrist, but the artist places himself as if at the center of the world, or of its drama, at any rate, at the point of confluences, so that nothing remains outside his reach. He is fond of saying that the artist must have radar on his forehead. What for? Surely in order to foresee—that is, to see before the perceptive experience and, thus, draw signs of pronounced power upon the canvas. There is a sort of preachment in his painting, one in which space is increasingly more Baroque, like a church ceiling by [Francesco] Borromini.

In [Jackson] Pollock, painting is, at first, a ray-sign that cleaves space: it is impossible to detain. At no time is this irreparable sign more visible and eloquent than in *The Deep* [1953], a Duco [enamel] and oil painting on canvas. We can compare this authentic sign with *Collapse*, by [Yukei] Teshima, yet another great Japanese calligrapher, seen at the last Bienal as well as in Tokyo.¹ Both are extremely representative of this signographic art that emerges from behind the tangle of many Tachist canvases to shine resplendently in the best nongeometric abstractionism as the most universal language of our age.

The trouble with the Chinese calligraphy is that, although its starting point is the ideogram, it does not go beyond that to dissolve itself into mere sensitive or formless abstraction. In Pollock, of course, this is not possible, for what lies before him is the void and, like a good son of the Far West, he never starts from an a priori understanding nor from any tradition, but from nothing to the unknown: as he paints, he advances across his long canvases, he advances and stops, and begins again, always bent over the surface he attacks or . . . decorates. Thus Pollock creates a weft with the initial sign: more than a weft—a rhythm; more than a rhythm—a ballet. With the trace of the sign he creates a ballet, a true symbol of the defenseless artist’s entanglement in the implacable web of an inhuman civilization.

In the West, the danger of this art lies in its hermetic individualism. But in the succession of signs, in Pollock’s two-dimensional linear rhythm, in the spatial rhythm of Vedova, it achieves universality. In the American artist, the universality of a symbol—the tragic destiny of the free creator in our time; in the Italian, the universality of a magical operation of decantation or of prophecy, valid in every meridian.

—Originally published as “Arte signográfica,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), August 5, 1959.

Note

1. Japanese calligrapher Yukei Teshima (1901–1987) participated in the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in 1957.

The Paradox of Modern Brazilian Art

Among the mob of extremely foreign and extremely important critics and “criticoids” who deigned to comment on the exhibition of Brazilian art that is currently traveling around Europe,¹ rare is the voice that has anything intelligent or penetrating to say. Most of them are conventional and vacuous enough to inspire pity. One who had something interesting and instructive to say was Mr. Jorge Lampe, of Vienna’s *Die Presse*.

After natural or obligatory references to veterans, such as [Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti and [Candido] Portinari, to so-called primitive painters, and also “natural and obligatory” to those who aligned themselves to the dominant international current, he noted what was undoubtedly the strangest phenomenon about the show: the predominance of so-called geometric abstraction. Why might this be so? What is the cause of this predominance, of this *archaism* in a new country of Brazil’s standing? That is, as the critic observed with great acuity, of a country or “a people who live in a subtropical environment in which, *at every step, nature threatens to absorb the intentionality of the inhabitant.*” To this day I had not witnessed such a burst of comprehension from any foreigner regarding our cultural case.

In general, whenever they abandon their charges to visit an exhibition of artwork from a country as far removed from the European periphery as Brazil, vaguely awash in the geographical concept of *South America*, our overseas brothers carry with them dogmatic opinions that they refuse to submit to scrutiny. They come and soon begin to look for parrots, that is, for loud colors, black men going about their tasks in a plantation, savage natives, ruins, forests, picturesque narratives, etc.—and when they find them, they express satisfied approval; if they do not find them, they are unable to hide their resentment. Later, they look for those who are doing things they are currently familiar with in their own countries, or better attuned to current international taste, and when they find these things they say—“that’s good,” but haughtily observe that they need to become “more individual” or “more assured” or “more” I don’t know what. Regardless, they sound their small note of consolation or encouragement and move on. Nevertheless, whenever they come across anything resembling the old tendency to geometric abstraction, they soon express their annoyance and declare with unrestrained, wisecracking irony that “Mondrian has been out for a long time now,” although I am certain that most of these fellows never really experienced Neo-Plasticism, etc.

Yet none of them ever paused to inquire as to the reason for this paradox of modern art in Brazil. And now Mr. Lampe has done so, most penetratingly: “Most impressive, even to spectators who, *like the author of these comments*, step away from the specific geometric constructions of modern painting, are the geometric abstractions whose authors dominate this exhibition.” In light of a fact with such a strange effect, the half-curious, half-anxious critic speculates, investigates, and inquires: “And, before this fact, the visitor *sees himself compelled to formulate to himself* the following question: how can such a tendency grow to the point of dominating the artistic production of a people who live in a subtropical environment, in which nature threatens,” etc.? If the question he raised was a pertinent and interesting one, his answer is equally penetrating and valuable.

Here it is: “Unless it has been precisely as a *reaction or defense against this threatening circumstance, and against the bubbling chaos.*” There is a truly luminous intuition, which the critic completes with this masterly proposition: “In any event, the works of [Ivan] Serpa, [Antônio] Dacosta, Décio Vieira, Lygia Clark *and, above all, [Alfredo] Volpi, are the result of a profound will, and not of a calculated formalism.*” See how penetrating the observation is: the works of a Dacosta, of a Volpi are

not the result “of a calculated formalism” but “of a profound will.” And he further makes out the same spirit, the same will in the Constructivist sculptures of a [Franz] Weissmann. And after seeing and reflecting upon it, he clearly declares that in this, in this paradoxical artistic expression “of a profound will” was “*the highest point of the show,*” and “the cohesion and the parallelism with internationally famous modern Brazilian architecture may be observed in it.”

Exceeding the limits of taste or of cosmopolitan fashion, or the non-aesthetic level of social and picturesque considerations, with regard to the artistic output of a country such as ours, Jorge Lampe, the critic from Vienna, hits the bull’s-eye with regard to what is most enigmatic and also most original, most specifically Brazilian, most vernacular, perhaps, in the country’s current artistic and cultural output. One would do well to ask whether the still precarious (albeit already existing) embryo of a modern and autochthonous—meaning authentically regional—Brazilian art of palatable and strong dialectal accents might be emerging from this paradox, from this “profound will,” into the great universal language of abstraction? As is already the case with our modern architecture?

—Originally published as “Paradoxo da arte moderna brasileira,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), December 3, 1959.

Note

1. From 1959 to 1960, collective shows by Brazilian artists were held in various European cities, including Hamburg, Lisbon, Madrid, Munich, Paris, Utrecht, and Vienna.

Crisis or Revolution of the Object: Tribute to André Breton

If today’s artist could be defined by a single trait within his sociocultural context, I would say that it would be a refusal of self-expression. That is to say, an attitude or behavior that sets itself at the opposite end of the pendulum from where it found itself a short while ago, during the reign of the solipsistic aesthetic of the informal and of Tachism. Almost suddenly, the pendulum swung down from the high point at right, where it was, then passed, without stopping at the center, and swung up to the left, where it hovers under the aesthetic of Pop or—better yet—of anti-art. The process of change is not one of a curve that continues to rise, but a pulsating, pendular rhythm, to one side and to the other. So it has been from the dawn of the so-called cycle of “modern art” until its most intimate developments, with the beginning of a cycle of features and even purposes so diverse that they lead me to speak of “postmodern art.”

Ever since its genesis, all “modern art” has distinguished itself as a systematic process of destruction of the naturalism that dominated nineteenth-century aesthetics following Neoclassicism. Another stage, that of objectivism, logically followed the stage of this first destruction. As early as Cubism, Fauvism, and, naturally, Expressionism, the object was dissected, de-structured, and dissolved. The “exterior model” was finally replaced by another model, which André Breton—the formidable poet and discoverer of Surrealism who died in October of last year—designated the “interior model,” according to which the object dissolves itself. We are now watching the pendulum swing back from the extreme of objectivism and move toward the extreme of subjectivism, on another scale. We exist in a period of Neo-Objectivism, of Neo-Constructivism, that is omnipresent, in a fervent, anxious search for real space—of an ideal center or site, independent of egocentric sequences of events—from

which to build, to adjust, to erect something in a constant, unambiguous direction—from oneself.

In 1936, in an essay whose significant title—“The Crisis of the Object”—said it all, Breton proposed the creation of “poetic ‘objects’” alongside “mathematical ‘objects,’”¹ concretizations of highly complex equations then on exhibition at the Musée de l’Homme, in Paris—one of the sources of inspiration for Concretists such as Max Bill. But the great poet had already proposed a fabrication and the putting into circulation of oneiric objects; Breton emphasized that access to the existence of these objects, despite the unusual aspect they might conceal, was more “as a means than as an end.”² However, from the multiplication of such objects he expected a depreciation of those that—through their conventionalized (albeit disputable) utility—cluttered up the so-called real world. In the poet’s thought, the function of this depreciation would be “a prerequisite for unleashing the powers of invention which, within the limits of our present understanding of the dream process, must surely be vitalized by contact with dream-engendered objects, representing pure desire in concrete form.”³ Ultimately, however, what Breton and his friends envisioned was “beyond the mere creation of such objects: it entailed nothing less than the objectification of the very act of dreaming, its transformation into reality.”⁴ It was around this time that Salvador Dalí, before he became the extravagant character of international artistic legend—Avida Dollars, according to Breton himself—created his “symbolically functioning objects.”⁵

With characteristic clairvoyance, Breton wrote, “The whole pathos of modern intellectual life resides in this unremitting quest for objectification, an urge which would betray its very nature if it stopped for one moment to celebrate its past triumphs.”⁶ This was also the time of the Surrealist exhibition of objects in Paris in the winter of 1936:⁷ “*Mathematical objects. Natural objects. Primitive objects. Found objects. Irrational objects. Readymade objects. Interpreted objects. Incorporated objects. Mobile objects*”;⁸ like the constructed ones, these objects are either Euclidean geometric givens (or non-Euclidean givens) that nonetheless entertain “a fascinating and equivocal relationship to each other in space,” for they are “of a kind calculated primarily to *raise the interdiction* resulting from the stultifying proliferation of those objects that impinge upon our senses every day and attempt to persuade us that anything that might *exist* independently of these mundane objects must be illusory.”⁹ What really mattered then to the founder of Surrealism and his colleagues was to strengthen the defenses that can “resist the invasion of the world of the senses by things which mankind makes use of more from habit than necessity.”¹⁰

Seen from a contemporary perspective, this stance would appear to emphasize the (highly precarious) barrier to invention that, in the name of dreams and poetry, Surrealism was attempting to erect against mass production. Thirty years later, what do we see? Pop art, which capitulates to it instead of raising a barrier against it. Here as elsewhere, Breton’s answer was to hunt down the “mad beast” of convention. Not for nothing did Surrealism always present itself as a form of ethical nonconformity rather than an artistic movement or school. There was in it a disinterested and uninhibited aristocratism in defense of the value of poetry, of dreams, of revolt against the passive acceptance, the vulgarization, the growing commercialization of the just emerging civilization of mass consumption. And yet the poet’s defeat was implacable or inevitable.

We are currently drowning in the mass production of increasingly varied and doubtful objects that invade the world of the senses, “more from habit than necessity,” according to the poet’s still optimistic warning. Nowadays need is invented by mass production. Based on [philosopher Gaston] Bachelard’s idea—according to which the concept of reality is expressed above all in the conviction that one will find more in

a concealed reality than in the immediate fact—Breton declares that the Surrealist *démarche* tends to provoke “a total revolution of the object,”¹¹ which consists of diverting it from its original purpose, giving it a new name, signing it, or bringing about its redesignation through choice (Duchamp’s readymade); displaying it in the state in which external agents, such as earthquakes, fire, or water (nowadays we might add the stresses of consumption and economic crises), put it by chance; keeping it because of the very doubt that might weigh upon its previous fate, from the resulting ambiguity of its total or partial irrational conditioning, which entails ennoblement through its very finding (found object), and allowing a considerable margin for the most active possible interpretation, if necessary (Max Ernst’s interpreted found objects); and, ultimately, reconstructing all of its pieces completely from scant elements drawn from its immediate surroundings, or the Surrealist object proper, like the model of a box then presented by Breton himself. “Perturbation and distortion are sought for their own sake, while recognizing that one should not expect more from these effects than a continuous and vigorous rectification of the law.”¹²

Surrealist poetry unsettles everyday life. The mission of poets and artists is to continually and enthusiastically rectify the law—that is to say, order. It proposes the unusual rather than routine. The paradox of Pop art is to maintain a sense of the unusual within the redundancy of mass communication. Its climate is the virile vulgarity of commercial enterprise and advertising. The Surrealists wanted to break the chains of intrinsically redundant and vulgar everyday life, introducing into it the dynamite of the unusual. The Pop artists of today toy with those chains, making unusual objects (that are nonetheless permeated with redundancy) out of vulgar materials; the makers of boxes here in our own whereabouts and in other places with low per capita incomes, the best and most authentic among us, such as Rubens Gerchman¹³ (beyond Hélio Oiticica, his predecessor, but in the name of an aesthetic other than the unusual-redundancy relationship) use redundancy as a starting point, use the materials that the civilization of vulgarity has to offer, albeit in the name of an idea that does not seek the creation of the unusual for the sake of the unusual but, rather, to participate within the collectivity. Gerchman’s *Boxes to Live In* are not something unusual in the redundancy of everyday life, something designed to make it right (Surrealist message) or to take pleasure in it (Pop art message), but a radical reduction of the real fact. They propose to us an urban reconstruction of the eugenic city of the future. It is a box for an underdeveloped country. Hence its merit. The objectivity of its *démarche* lies not in the construction of boxes themselves but in the extroverted direction of its practice. The unusual is not in everyday life as based on use and routine. Here, the unusual is infra-reality, or the reality that lies underneath the structures and does not call upon the poet to detect it, but rather an action, an event to identify the law of a reality that produces it. The relationship between redundancy and the unusual is thus inverted. In Gerchman and in others, it is redundancy that reveals the unusual, and what comes out of the boxes, for example, is no exercise in self-expression, but an attempt at building a new relationship with reality.

—Originally published as “Crise ou revolução do objeto: Homenagem a André Breton,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), May 21, 1967.

Notes

1. André Breton, “Crisis of the Object” (1936), in Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (1972; Boston: MFA Publications, 2002), p. 277.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*

6. Ibid.
7. According to Breton's text, the exhibition took place in May 1936.
8. Ibid., p. 279.
9. Ibid. Emphasis in original.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid., p. 280. Emphasis in original.
12. Ibid. Emphasis in original.
13. Rubens Gerchman (1942–2008) was a Brazilian artist.

Gewgaws and Pop Art

In writing about Pop Icons, the Greek (currently North Americanized) critic Nicolas Calas argues that, because “modern art” became the art of the establishment, its opponents have become anti-art.¹ In this regard, he evokes ages past, including the eighteenth century, when a dispute broke out between those who—in the name of perfection—defended the art of the ancients and those who—in the name of progress—fought for the moderns. In applying the analogy he declares that, nowadays, “modern art” is seen in terms of History of Art, and anti-art in terms of “life.” He does not appear to allow for the fact that the “anti-arts” of today are inspired, with time, by the well-framed chapters of this history. Whereas during the 1920s, Surrealism was the anti-art of Cubism, the Pop art of today is the anti-art of the Abstract Expressionism that preceded it.

Now, in this seventh decade of the century, in our country, Calas continues, doctors of philosophy also prefer to perform the same operation, considering Pop art as a perceptual scale or anti-art. This marks the emergence of studies of painting in terms of patterns or basic forms that abolish the difference between Roy Lichtenstein and Nicolas Krushenick, between Jasper Johns and Kenneth Noland; or that include Andy Warhol's bouquets and Joseph Albers's rectangles. And, outraged at the prospect of involving everything in a single, vast panorama, Calas—the once brilliant theorist of Surrealism and friend to Breton (with whom he sometimes discussed politics and art for hours at a stretch in Paris cafés)—once more proposes this analogy: if form is the basic criterion by which to judge Art, then why not also compare the basic pattern of two paintings with analogous patterns found in nature? And why not compare the dots in a Lichtenstein to the dirt produced by one of God's little beetles? Yes, undoubtedly, the integration of anti-art in art is a praiseworthy concern, as it would allow for the establishment of many divisions. And what are museums to do without walls? our Calas now asks sarcastically. And righteously threatens: “If the critic's role is to establish that anti-art is art, perhaps a Sibyl will prophesy the coming of anti-critics.”² (What Calas seems to ignore is that the prophecy of his Sibyl is already reality: the anti-critics have arrived.)

But there is nothing to be done. Pop art or the penultimate form of anti-art that has emerged in the United States and England is destined to integration in chapters of the History of Art, and even in promotional materials. Beginning in the earliest stages with assemblages and collages of distant European origins, from Dada to Surrealism, from Cubism to the Neo-Realists, issuing directly from Post-Abstract Expressionism—the age of the culture of rubbish—Pop art specializes itself, “purifies” itself, distinguishing itself from the “collage environment”³ with its lights, blinking neon signs, automobile graveyards, the detritus of ghetto and favela, etc.—and of the “new antiques,” who so bewitched poets and artists since the early days of Cubism.⁴

Jim Dine was among the first to reject activities in search of found objects because “there was too much of other people’s mystery in them.”⁵ In 1962, as a reaction, he gave us his shovel counter-shovel painted on a panel. Indeed, this year is considered to be the year of New York Pop art’s royal entrance, as made by [Tom] Wesselmann, [Claes] Oldenburg, [George] Segal, Marisol, and Warhol; or, according to the comment of one critic, the arrival of the “new vulgarians.”⁶ However, insofar as Calas’s objections are concerned, these “artists” reject social commentary and narrative. To the scandal of our critic friend, Oldenburg goes so far as to state “I have a very high idea of art” and “I’m still romantic about that.”⁷ And even his process “of humbling it is just to test it, to reduce everything to the same level and *then* see what you get.”⁸ According to one of its theorists (Lawrence Alloway),⁹ the New York Pop artists “do not see themselves as destroyers of Art, but as the donors of a much-needed transfusion to counteract the effects of a rarefied Abstract Expressionist atmosphere.”¹⁰ To Lichtenstein, art since [Paul] Cézanne has become extremely romantic and unrealistic, utopian, increasingly worldly and inward-looking. But “outside is the world.” “Pop art looks out into the world; it appears to accept its environment, which is not good or bad, but different, another state of mind.”¹¹

In terms of its inspiration, Pop art is therefore conformist or optimistic. Explaining R. [Robert] Indiana, one of its most important representatives (he will be present at our next biennial, R. Indiana, in one of his typical panels (*USA 666*, 1964), explains the word “eat” inscribed in it: “The word ‘eat’ is reassuring, it means not only food, but life. When a mother feeds her children, the process makes her indulgent, a giver of life, of love, of kindness.”¹² This is a precious confession. Here, inspiration comes directly from the function of advertising, which stimulates the motivation for consumption above all else. Warhol expresses himself similarly in his aphorism: “Pop art is liking things.”¹³ There is no parody in its manifestations and, if the observer so interprets them, that is his responsibility and not the artist’s. And when one notices an element of humor or satire in its works, it is rarely intentional (Alloway).¹⁴ The fun of the urban environment is commonly perceived, appreciated, and extolled by the Pop artists. Speaking of a possible element of parody in his manifestos, Lichtenstein confesses that “In parody, the implication is the perverse, and I feel that in my own work I don’t mean it to be that. Because I don’t dislike the work that I am parodying. . . . The things that I have apparently parodied I actually admire.”¹⁵

But what marks these artists is that they are not ingenuous inventors of their themes or subjects. Or of reality. Body and soul, they belong to the milieu [environment] whence they draw their subject matter and have full knowledge of what they do, for they were all trained in commercial art or advertising art. They are not artists because they are technicians of mass production. They are specialists who work (or worked) for American civilization’s ultimate activity: mass consumption. Warhol drew shoes for fashion magazines; Lichtenstein is a draftsman and a window dresser; Oldenburg is a magazine illustrator. It is worth emphasizing, however, that none of them transposes to his “art” the refinements obtained in industrial schools, veritable clichés of the iconography of Abstractionism, of the Bauhaus, of good taste, etc. They attempt to elude anything that is redolent of the “fine arts” so fashionable in academic, official, or generally accepted advertising. Above all, they fear the fine traditions of the old painting and, when he moved from animated cartoons to comic books of more serious content (such as *Army at War* and *Teen Romance*), Lichtenstein “confessed” that it was very difficult to keep from showing everything he knew about an entire tradition. It was hard not to be seduced by the nuances of “good painting.”¹⁶ Thus there is (or was) a deliberate reaction of these Pop artists to the seductions of “art”; according

to Claes Oldenburg's precise formula, "making impersonality the style characterizes Pop art in a pure sense."¹⁷

Like no other group of artists of their time (including the Japanese), Pop artists plunged into a heteroclitite repertory of resources and objects that constitute a veritable and typically American cultural subproduct. Powerful urban civilization contains them all like a bell jar. When they reacted to Abstract Expressionism and took the first steps toward "postmodern art," their activity was not unlike that of the seller of knickknacks or the maker of bric-a-brac. As we know, the latter produces only insofar as he is able to find things and objects in his path. He could be a maniac like the postman [Joseph-Ferdinand] Cheval,¹⁸ who built his castle of shells on a beach in Brittany, or a sub-lieutenant in Brasília who has just built a house to live in entirely made of oilcans. At the level of Art, [Kurt] Schwitters—the inventor of "Merz"—was the great handler of gewgaws during the age of Dada.

He was the most conscious of the artists who, in their rejection of painting upon surfaces, proclaimed *assemblage* and collage as the foundations for all future art. In the later generations of Neo-Dadaism, Neo-Realism, Neo-Surrealism, Polymaterialism, etc., the activity of the anti-Abstractionists consisted of directing itself to the world and gathering things. In the United States ([Robert] Rauschenberg, [H. C.] Westermann, and others) then applied themselves to the gathering of nonsensical things; not for lyrical effect or with the oneiric intentions of early Surrealism, but in order to produce new objects between image and concept in an effort more closely resembling information and message. This was the most intense period of the urban garbage scavengers. The exploitation of garbage contained its limitations within itself, defined by the group of occasions that appear to renew or enrich the stock of available residues. Here, [Claude] Lévi-Strauss's definition of *bricoleur* reveals all the existing parity between the *bricoleur*, with his "indefinable projects *a priori*, made with the remains of previous constructions or destructions"¹⁹ and the artist or anti-artist gatherer of heteroclitite things in space (what is curious is that an artists' collective united by the same taste for collecting trash was suddenly formed, with the same seductive sensibility and above all by the same ethical stance).

In the United States, they came across the limits of these investigations early on. As that activity ceased to be or to have an isolated nature, in equal measure it arrived at a stalemate of saturation, and they came to need or above all to refine their intentions and retreat in their use of mediums. If residuals and refuse constituted some sort of nature that emerged from the accumulation and abandonment of useless products, worn out by time and organic decay, dust, tatters, and rust, new mediums came into active use. Above all, they are operational instruments of graphic and communication techniques of every sort. The Pop artist is more of an engineer than a collector of gewgaws; and, like the former, makes an inventory of a predetermined knowledge set, no longer confined to collecting the residues of human works or, in the language of structuralism, "subsets of culture." Now his work involves the specificity of operating instruments in American culture and technology. Hence the source of Pop art's resulting optimism or complacent conformity—already shaken, however, by the newest generation of Beatles and hippies who prefer life itself and collective action rather than simple individual production over any aspect of Art.

However, at close quarters to the latter group, an obscure "cultural subset" emerges explosively from the urban environment of those artists who call into question the cultural whole from which—with fascinating invention—comes the North American Pop artist and exercises his activities. These are the black uprisings.

Notes

1. Nicolas Calas, “Pop Icons,” in *Pop Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (New York: Praeger, 1966), pp. 163–71.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
3. William C. Seitz, *The Art of Assemblage* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1961), pp. 72–73.
4. Lippard, “New York Pop,” in *Pop Art*, p. 72.
5. Jim Dine, “The Smiling Workman,” *Time*, February 2, 1962, p. 44.
6. Max Kozloff, “‘Pop’ Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians,” *Art International*, March 1962, pp. 35–36.
7. Claes Oldenburg, “Claes Oldenburg, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol: A Discussion,” moderated by Bruce Glaser and broadcast on WBAI, New York, June 1964. Edited and published in *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (1966): 22–23.
8. *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.
9. The following quote is not, in fact, by Lawrence Alloway. It was written by Lucy Lippard.
10. Lippard, “New York Pop,” in *Pop Art*, 85.
11. Roy Lichtenstein, interview with G. R. Swenson, “What Is Pop Art? Part I,” *Art News* 62, no. 7 (1963): 25–27, 60–64.
12. Robert Indiana, *Vogue*, March 1, 1965, p. 185. Quoted in Lippard, “New York Pop,” in *Pop Art*, p. 86.
13. Andy Warhol, interview by G. R. Swenson, “What Is Pop Art?” *Art News*, 62, no. 7 (1963): 26.
14. Again, Pedrosa misattributes this notion; it is Lippard’s, not Alloway’s. “Parody in Pop art largely seems to depend upon the viewer’s response, and is seldom the artist’s intention; or if the satirical humour is intentional, it may be secondary to the point of the painting.” Lippard, “New York Pop,” in *Pop Art*, p. 86.
15. Roy Lichtenstein, uncited quotation, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 87.
16. Roy Lichtenstein, interview with John Coplans, *Artforum* 2, no. 4 (1963): 31–32.
17. Claes Oldenburg, interview on WBAI Radio, 1965. Quoted in Lippard, “New York Pop,” in *Pop Art*, p. 86.
18. The French postman Joseph-Ferdinand Cheval (1836–1924) built the *Palais Idéal* in Hauterives, in the Rhône-Alpes region, attracting the admiration of Surrealist artists such as André Breton and Max Ernst (author of the 1932 collage *Facteur Cheval*, currently part of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice). Photographs of the monument were included in the exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada and Surrealism*, held at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, from December 1936 to January 1937; it was declared a cultural landmark by the French Minister of Culture André Malraux in 1969.
19. The phrase “made with the remains of previous constructions or destructions” appears in Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 17.

4. Criticism of Criticism

Introduction Izabela Pucu

The texts in this section provide access to Mário Pedrosa's reflections on the craft of art criticism, the duties and implications of this activity, and, in this sense, a defense of his ideas. Defining himself as a militant critic in the inaugural text of his regular column for the *Jornal do Brasil*, in 1957, Pedrosa returns to the teachings of critic and poet Charles Baudelaire in order to discuss the critic's point of view and further defines his position, or, more precisely, his criteria for appreciation and judgment, against the (then recurring) eclecticism of Brazilian artistic output, amid a rather formless cultural landscape. Criticism as an issue became ever more pressing because of the complexity that sheathed the artistic phenomenon. Not by chance was critical terminology also the theme of that year's Congress of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, whose debates were shared by Pedrosa with his colleagues—Lionello Venturi, Pierre Francastel, and Herbert Read among them.

Also in 1957, in "Before the Work of Art," Pedrosa considers the critic's aesthetic experience in terms of a re-creation, of a path that is opposite to that of the artist and must be traveled by means of perception: "In order to properly appreciate and judge, the critic replaces the artist. Judgment can only come after the experience has passed, which somehow repeats the creative experience that engendered the work." He was already posing questions about—and viewing with skepticism—the transformation of contemporary sensibility engendered by the ever-growing speed of information and communication.

Also included here is one of the many texts written by Pedrosa as a result of his 1958 trip to Japan, in which he establishes essential differences between criticism in the West and in the East. Pedrosa observes, for instance, the way that modern Western art established a break with tradition and how, in Japan, it persisted and continued to play a central role. In his 1959 text "Outdated Considerations," Pedrosa finds himself facing the total loss of standards or expectations that, previously, guaranteed the autonomy of aesthetic judgment in order that it might be distinguished from the judiciousness of taste. In this regard, he wrote: "The extreme instability of the perceptual patterns of our day do not have time to impose themselves, for, like fashion(s), they succeed one another vertiginously, rendering judgment highly precarious and removing any specific uniqueness from the notion of the work of art."

In "The Critic and the Director" (1960), Pedrosa bids farewell to the militant criticism he practiced in daily newspapers in order to take on the position of director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and its Bienal, which was held the following year, and points out differences and similarities between the two functions: "The critic battles or promotes, at the doors of studios; the director experiments, stimulates, or ignores until further notice."

The conceptual operations that characterized postmodern art and also questioned its systems of legitimation and appreciation (including criticism) are discussed by Pedrosa in the text in which he deals with an already famous episode in the history of Brazilian contemporary art: the *Critical Happening*, artist Nelson Leirner's intervention at the Salão de Brasília in 1960. As a representative jury member of the Salão, Pedrosa inserts Leirner's work within the context of cultural and aesthetic demystification, in the Dadaist heritage yet again taken up in the 1960s by Pop artists in particular. And, in closing, he says: "In postmodern art, it is the idea, the attitude behind the artist that is decisive." —*Izabela Pucu*



The Critic's Point of View

After several years of inactivity, just as the critic returns to a new audience such as this one—the dear readers of the *Jornal do Brasil*—it is imperative that he introduce himself, that he speak of himself.¹

Not in order to “defend himself,” but to explain himself. Let it be clear from the outset that a militant critic has no right to defense. (Except, clearly, in the event that what is at stake is his personal honor, his professional integrity—his intellectual honesty, in short.) Such points of honor notwithstanding, it is a “free-for-all,” and it is not his lot to complain or provide rebuttals and rejoinders in order to defend his criticism from the critics.

To plenty of people, this critic has a reputation for being sectarian, partisan, political, and accepting of a single kind of art which might vulgarly be designated as “non-figurative,” “abstract,” or “concrete,” etc. Yet it has never crossed his mind to make public statements or disclaimers. Fame, renown, conceptions, misunderstandings that spread or are woven around the critic are crystallizations which are formed, regardless of his will or acquiescence; they may be considered as tools of the trade. There is no point in rectifying or attempting to readjust them to the subjective reality of the critic himself. The personality under discussion continues along his way, indifferent to the real personality and it is, therefore, useless for the one to attempt to correct the other. More than useless, it is outright puerile—like a gesture made by an individual standing before the tiny mirror in the photographer’s studio as he prepares to face the lens and pose for his portrait, brushing his hair, smoothing his mustache, and straightening the knot in his tie in a desperate attempt at a final touch-up.

Now, however, afforded the honor of writing the *Jornal do Brasil* visual arts column—or, rather, its visual arts column—it is legitimate to attempt to explain in advance what I understand criticism to mean—or, more precisely, my criteria for appreciation and judgment.

Criticism cannot be separated from two things: the critic’s temperament and his cultural background. Let us unpretentiously draw support from [Charles] Baudelaire in order to clarify this: the great poet tells us that criticism cannot be “cold, mathematical . . . on the pretext of explaining everything, has neither love nor hate and voluntarily strips itself of every shred of temperament.” Completing the idea, he adds: “I hope that the philosophers will understand what I am going to say. To be just, that is to say, to justify its existence, criticism must be partial, passionate, and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view . . . that opens up the widest horizons.”²

The author of *Curiosités esthétiques* surely did not believe in man’s ability to do justice: the critic cannot “voluntarily strip [him]self of every shred of temperament,” and since he is, first and foremost, a conscious appreciator of the work of art, he cannot pose as judge and, from judgmental heights, pass sentences devoid of hatred or love. For this very reason, the poet, prizing “sincerity” above all else, like a good son of the Romantic age, finds it fairer and more prudent (and therefore more objective—o! paradox!) that criticism identify itself as “partial, passionate, and political.” Readers may well swallow the “partial” and “passionate” but we are certain they will stumble on the “political,” particularly in light of the word’s obnoxious and malign connotations. In the Baudelairean context, the “political” signifies something else—“non-eclectic” in particular. Criticism is sincere, discriminating, and affirmative, but it is not without criteria, nor indifferent to values and to the scale of values. (Indeed, one of its

functions is to attempt to establish such a scale. It distinguishes between values, discriminates between qualities, and does not unceremoniously or indiscriminately welcome everything and everyone in the name of momentary whims, impressions, or mere personal taste. On the contrary, it seeks to define, as precisely as possible, the at least impersonal if not objective means and resources according to which he may gauge the intrinsic qualities of a work. All of which imposes a need for the adoption of “a point of view.” Once adopted, it is just such a point of view that saves the critic, that redeems his partiality, passion, and politics. Baudelaire provides a masterly definition of it: “A point of view that opens up the widest horizons.”

The point of view that opens up the widest horizons is the highest one, that is, the one from where a greater number of horizons is unveiled; and from where one may take in a greater whole than the narrow horizons of the critic’s backyard, with its familiar routine, its subjective laziness, its immediacy. From this point of view, the critic’s temperament, his baggage of tastes, prejudices, lived experience, and culture lose their extreme subjectivity to be blended, shaped, and arranged in a hierarchy within the latter’s successive establishing shots so as to ultimately permit him to speak, to appreciate, or to judge beyond his own personal pettiness, his unilateral, prejudiced biases, his mere taste or fleeting impressions.

The critic’s point of view may be broader, as Baudelaire would have it, or narrower. So long as it is not eclectic. The poet gives us an admirable example of a narrow point of view: “To extol line to the detriment of colour, or colour at the expense of line, is doubtless a point of view, but it is neither very broad nor very just, and it indicts its holder of a great ignorance of individual destinies.”³ And why? Because “you cannot know in what measure Nature has mingled the taste for line and the taste for colour . . . nor by what mysterious processes she manipulates that fusion” of these two elements “whose result is a picture.”⁴

For Baudelaire personally, the broadest point of view was an “orderly individualism.” In the name of this “orderly individualism,” he required of the artist “*naïveté* and the sincere expression of his temperament, aided by every means which his technique provides.”⁵ As a worthy representative of the Romantic aesthetic, the critic-poet exclaimed: “An artist without temperament is not worthy of painting pictures,” and, he recommended, “he would do better to enter the service of a painter of temperament, as a humble workman,” for “we are wearied of imitators” (this in 1846!) “and, above all, of eclectics.”⁶

Indeed, eclecticism is the reef against which the ship of criticism will founder. “And doubt begat eclecticism; for the doubters had a genuine will for salvation.”⁷ And the poet continues to teach us that the impartiality of the eclectics is proof of their impotence. The arts are where eclecticism may be found at its most pernicious for, being something necessarily “profound,” “it must aim at constant idealization, which is not to be achieved except in virtue of sacrifice—an involuntary sacrifice.”⁸ And this is why the poet-critic declares: “No matter how clever he may be, an eclectic is but a feeble man; for he is a man without love. Therefore he has no ideal, no *parti pris*; neither star nor compass.”⁹ Blending together various different procedures, the eclectic artist always gives us “a negation”; “An eclectic is a ship which tries to sail before all four winds at once.”¹⁰

In this condemnation of eclecticism, the great poet outlines a veritable ethics of coherence and unity. Let us hail the work of art made from an exclusivist point of view for—no matter how great its faults—it shall never lose its charms, never fail to find resonance at least “for temperaments analogous to that of the artist.”¹¹ Baudelaire finishes by saying: “Thus an eclectic is no man.”¹²

In the chaotic, formless, and indiscriminate Brazil of our day, we subscribe to the poet's words, albeit somewhat more tolerantly. An eclectic may be a man, but he is not an artist. For today, this is our first conclusion.

—Originally published as “O ponto de vista do crítico,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 17, 1957.

Notes

1. When the *Jornal do Brasil* underwent a full, modernizing makeover in the mid-1950s, journalist, novelist, and poet Odilo Costa Filho invited Pedrosa to write an arts column for the newspaper.
2. Charles Baudelaire, *Art in Paris, 1845–1862: Salons and Other Exhibitions*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon, 1965), p. 44.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
8. *Ibid.* Pedrosa mistranslated Baudelaire's phrase in French, “*sacrifice involuntaire*,” as “*sacrificio voluntário*.” We have corrected it here in English as “involuntary sacrifice.”
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*

More About the Critic

The possible readers of this column will allow me to continue to linger on today about “criticism,” rather than about the work of art. Criticism is not practiced in a vacuum, but in a rigorous conditioning that includes, on one hand, the critic's temperament and cultural baggage, as we attempted to show yesterday, and, on the other hand, the environment in which he operates. Or more precisely: the communities, within society, that are in greater or lesser contact with the artistic phenomenon.

Indeed, in order to be able to “communicate,” the work of art demands a full common denominator between the communicator and his audience. There must be a single cultural bond between the artist (who communicates) and the audience (who receives). Both are rooted in a single psychological and sociological infrastructure. In a more simply organized society, such as those of primitive cultures (that of certain Oceanic peoples, for example), the common bond between creator and community is more visible and direct. In it the community encompasses everyone—artists and people, artisans and masters, the powerful and the humble. For this reason the art of these peoples possesses a spiritual unity, a sense of universality that is true for all, which, unfortunately, does not happen with our highly complex and internally divided society, in which specializations grow and, with each moment, isolated groups and subgroups are formed that are foreign (if not hostile) to one another.

Thus, for its comprehension, the work of art needs that which the theorists of psychoanalysis designate as the “public's identification with the artist.” For the majority, such identification is spontaneous—or should be; and, naturally, unconscious. However, it happens with the work, rather than with the artist or hero, as Freud naively imagined. When it takes place, the latter eludes the artistic or aesthetic level: they belong much more to the political level; for example, in collectives, groups, or the occasional manifestations of crowds, such as during a soccer match.

Today, Freud's disciples are no longer as ingenuous and, like Ernst Kris, former conservator of the Vienna Museum, they seek to emphasize the specific nature of

artistic activity. Produced under different cultural conditions, works of art engender (or should engender) in the public an active response, albeit in different degrees of sympathy or repulsion. The “unconscious” identification with the artist occurs precisely according to the different degrees of this response. However, identification does not take place with the artist’s physical or even psychological persona. (Such identification may be found in the relationship between the charismatic dictator and the public, the sports star and the crowd, the Hollywood star and the fans.) On our artistic level, it is not a matter of the artist’s “biographical persona” but, rather, what [Benedetto] Croce calls the aesthetic personality of the artist, that is, the artist as creator of the work of art. His marriages, divorces, eccentricities, and other advertising gimmicks are of no interest to the conscious appreciator, that is, to the critic.

The historical moment, the *zeitgeist*, also influences these different modes of identification. There are times in which art requires greater public participation (active response) and others in which it solicits less. The art of our age is among those that demand greater activism in response. Indeed, ever since Impressionism, art has been demanding an increasingly greater participation from the appreciator. For this very reason, the critic’s role is a great deal more significant than it was in the past. If, in primitive tribes, the whole community could consider itself competent in the presence of the accomplishments of its artists, it was because the men in that community never lost contact with nature and the simple functions of everyday life, because—being artist-artificers—all of them knew how to carve, model, sculpt, work with their hands. The master artist was merely the one who best carved or modeled. In environments such as these, in which a sort of collective skill predominates, artistic appreciation becomes functional, so to speak; it is spontaneous and natural. On the contrary, the aesthetic emotions awakened by the work are indistinguishable and blended with spiritual and religious solicitations and with magical invocations.

Work born in such a community is not isolated in its aesthetic meaning, for it serves purposes of ritual, religion, or magic (and even politics) indistinctly. It is only nowadays, in our highly modern civilization, that everything is necessarily discriminated, and each sheaf of emotions that may spring from a work of art is clinically or anatomically separated, as it were.

Among all others, our age is characterized by the fact that, for the first time, the artistic phenomenon has been isolated, studied, and appreciated in itself. For many theorists (Professor Kris among them), this fact is a consequence of our urban civilization in which art lovers form elite circles that possess their own, distinct social status, customs, and even language. It is in these circles that art finds its most rigorous or purist appreciators. In rural communities, an appreciator of this quality would be very rare. Therefore, art audiences are never homogeneous.

Kris further tells us that the critic is one for whom the identification or reaction to the work becomes conscious, or more conscious. Nowadays, most explanations and propositions regarding the public’s varied reactions to the work of art come from a group of *connoisseurs*, that is, from critics. Based on this verification, the eminent analyst deems it necessary to also place the critic under the lens of his observation: “The study of responses to art is incomplete if the psychology of the critic is not taken into account.” (It is not just with regard to the critic that the prophylaxis recommended by the author of “The Principles of Caricature”¹ is necessary. Individual, psychological, or sociological factors of how many have a profession or vocation that influences the public through words or action or any other means of expression must be taken into consideration so that whatever they say or do may be perfectly understood and complete, within a whole context.)

Thus, the critic may be considered as a member of the public, who passed from unconscious identification to a perfectly conscious identification. It is this process of awareness that the psychologist wishes to understand. But, as with the artist, it is not a matter of the biographical person but, rather, of the aesthetic persona. The question would seem to be: Does the critic also possess an aesthetic persona? We shall leave the answer for tomorrow.

—Originally published as “Ainda sobre o critico,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 18, 1957.

Note

1. Ernst Kris and E. H. Gombrich, “The Principles of Caricature,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 17 (1938): 319–42.

Before the Work of Art

Approaching a work of art is not something that happens all at once. It happens in stages. [Ernst] Kris recognizes that “in the instances of ‘great art,’ the superficial gratification which a first approach affords to the public may only be a bait”¹—and naturally so. The work attracts audience attention unto itself. Whether through shyness or indifference, laziness or impatience, spectators tend to stop at first encounters. (Nowadays, one of the greatest obstacles to the dissemination and general understanding of art is impatience, this terrible virus that corrodes [the] contemporary sensibility and feeds on growing speed, the hallucinatory instantaneousness of modern information, transmission, communication and transportation devices). He pauses at the threshold of initiation. Only little by little does he shed his hurry, his “natural” state. Then the work of painting, sculpture, building, or whatever else ceases to appear to him as a fleeting image, a piece of landscape that crosses his path. He suddenly senses an invitation to more prolonged contact with the work.

A force draws him from the periphery (at which he paused for a moment) to the center—the core of the thing—in search of an enigma that begins to fascinate him. “On a third reading”—says Kris—“the plot is but of little interest, and the fascination turns to active response. The formal qualities then become important and the question arises of how the artist has done it.”²

As we can see, the distinguished psychoanalyst approaches the problem of the appreciation of painting or sculpture with remarkable objectivity and at the level of criticism itself. In the end, what is of interest is the work, its structure, its rhythms, its “formal qualities,” rather than who made it—the artist with his vanities, whims, eccentricities or, on the contrary, his seriousness or austerity.³ Another remarkable observation to be emphasized is that he recognizes the method of “readings” or “sequence of reactions.”⁴ Everyone must learn to read. The first reading is elementary; it is a primer for kiddies. In art, too, people begin with spelling, barely guessing at a work’s title. Or, as Kris put it, referring specifically to the visual arts: “On a third reading, the plot is of little interest.” Like a fine house, a painting or a sculpture has no plot. The “plot” or “subject” is an external element, not an intrinsic part of the painting or the work of sculpture. And the proof is that the “plot” or “subject” can be the same for thousands of paintings and sculptures. But all painting or sculpture of true artistic value is unique, not to be mistaken for others with the same plot or subject matter, and may even differ from them like water from wine. However, it may possess affinity and present analogies with others of an opposite subject or plot, and from entirely distant times.

And what are the elements in a work of art that suggest these affinities and analogies? What in it is not common to other works? What in it belongs to it alone? What in it is specific and distinguishes it from the others? Its formal qualities. The task of criticism is to discern these qualities and highlight them, to discover their empirical, emotional, formal, and spiritual or symbolic meaning.

Another eminent authority on the psychology of art, professor S. [Stephen] Pepper (*The Basis of Criticism in the Arts*), who bases his system on Gestalt psychology, at the antipode, so to speak, of psychoanalysis, elaborated a theory that paralleled that of Kris and his “readings” in order to explain the same problem, i.e., that of the “perceptive series.”⁵ At the end of these series (which may extend from 1 to n-series), the painting—submitted to this x number of perceptions—no longer presents new revelations, and finally emerges in its plenitude as a work of art to be appreciated.

Initially, a painting is but a physical object—so many square centimeters of canvas or of surface with so many layers of paint applied to it. Later, the appraiser sees it once, twice, three times, and each time his overall impression changes. Let us imagine an airplane thousands of feet above the ground that is beginning its descent. At first, there is nothing below him other than a vague, formless, indistinct, colorless mist. The plane flies lower still and something resembling a field flickers here and there. Details jump out at us with every new drop. We are able to make out elevations, hills, knolls, a river. Suddenly, a rooftop rises to meet us, threatening to come up and collide against us as we look out from the window of the airplane. And so, with each new descent, the variations of terrain multiply themselves, plantations and vegetable gardens become recognizable, men and animals become individualized, distances and altitudes begin to be measurable by our vision and the harmonies and contrasts of hues and colors become apparent to our eyes. With each glance afforded by each dip of the plane, a new series of perceptions is absorbed and, following these, the indistinct, uncharacteristic image, apparent only through the “sign” of the first approach, is gradually replaced by other, more precise, more complete, more astonishing ones until the transformations no longer succeed one another but are stabilized in a final view that encompasses the sum or fusion of the previous partial views. At this point, we find ourselves before the new object, with its structures, its intrinsic and specific qualities, totally revealed to the observer. Here is the work of art. It is toward this vision that the critic marches, and it must coincide with the one that the artist wanted to transmit to us in making the picture.

In seeking a sense of unconscious identification with an artist, the analyst came upon another psychological process that approaches that of the artist in full creative swing. However, the difference between the two processes is an essential one. The perceptual process is the inverse of that undergone by the artist. In the former, we behold creative phenomena; in the other, a re-creation. In it, the process begins at the other side—the conscious side that demands permanent stimulation by perception of the work, from which (and from which alone) it departs to arrive at a process of pure elaboration undertaken by the artist’s imagination.

In starting from the perceptual experience that is the creator’s terminus, the critic (that is, the re-creator of the process) retraces the creator’s path, only in the opposite direction. Only thus will he finally arrive before the work’s ultimate nature, as conceived by the artist. It is the critic’s aesthetic persona that undertakes this march, basing itself upon the gradually perceived work through a series of perceptions that may be traced back to the sources that gave birth to it.

Therefore, in order to properly appreciate and judge, the critic replaces the artist. Judgment can only come after the experience has passed, which somehow repeats

the creative experience that engendered the work. If, for [Charles] Baudelaire, the artist's problem is nature's substitution by man (at the source of creation), the critic's task is to stand in for the artist, that is, for the unconscious or preconscious creator through an awareness of the creative process. And may the reader forgive me this further lucubration. It is the last one.

—Originally published as “Em face da obra de arte,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 19, 1957.

Notes

1. Ernst Kris, *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art* (1952; repr., New York: International Universities Press, 2000), p. 57.
2. *Ibid.*
3. “[The connoisseur or critic] will at times be concerned with the actual personality of the artist, will arouse interest in the artist's biography, which is then presented to the educated, first as a general model of greatness and then in order to deepen the understanding of the artist's work. . . . Even those who consciously identify themselves with the artist, and whom—we here comprehend with an extension of the traditional meaning—as connoisseurs, are as a rule concerned with the aesthetic person, with the artist as creator of art, not with the artist as common man.” *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
5. Stephen C. Pepper, *The Basis of Criticism in the Arts* (1945; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 149.

The Order of the Day: The Terminology of Criticism

This coming September marks the inauguration of the sixth edition of the International Association of Art Critics under the presidency of the AICA's Italian section. Beginning in Naples, the congress will come to a close in Palermo.

Its program, which has been in preparation since the general assembly meeting of the AICA last year in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, was finally, definitively elaborated by our Italian colleagues responsible for the realization of the congress.

Various subjects were submitted for discussion at the Dubrovnik meeting. The principal ones included: *O artista e as ideias de seu tempo* [The artist and the ideas of his time]; *A vida cotidiana e o valor das formas* [Everyday life and the value of forms] (suggested by Lionello Venturi); *É o cubismo o estilo do século XX?* [Is Cubism the style of the twentieth century?] (presented by [Pierre] Francastel); as well as the question already under discussion regarding the *Terminologia da crítica de arte* [Terminology of art criticism]. The study of the *Origem da arquitetura moderna* [Origin of modern architecture] was also suggested here, in these columns, which we have already commented upon.

Left to the discretion of the Italian delegation, final selection of the subjects and establishment of the order of the day for the congress were thus established: I) *Método e terminologia da crítica de arte* [Method and terminology of art criticism], moderator, Lionello Venturi; II-1) *Vida cotidiana e valor das formas* [Everyday life and the value of forms] (classical), moderator, Pierre Francastel; II-2) *Vida cotidiana e valor das formas* [Everyday life and the value of forms] (avant-garde), moderator Herbert Read.

The problem of terminology in art criticism is truly a problem of extreme importance, due to the enormous complexity taken on by the artistic phenomenon in our age. Until fairly recently, the arsenal of criticism was narrowly delimited by the aesthetic and technical problems of Renaissance art; its terminology reflected the aesthetic of the Renaissance and, therefore, once it had been codified by time, it was purely academic.

During the nineteenth century, with the Impressionist revolution and the more conscious contribution of Post-Impressionism, principally of divisionism in hues, the critical vocabulary was enriched in order to satisfy certain pictorial techniques, particularly as to color, put into circulation by the creative artists of the age and by the opticians' labs, revolutionized thanks to the contributions and discoveries of scholars such as [Hermann von] Helmholtz in Germany and [Michel Eugène] Chevreul in France.

In this century, Cubism and Expressionism, the discovery of the arts of the primitive peoples and of the psychological reality of the child, of the insane and of the primitive; the formidable revolution that took place in the field of psychology, with the almost simultaneous advent of Gestalt's decisive and fecund investigations into the field of perception and the sensational revelations of [Sigmund] Freud and of [Carl] Jung about the unconscious and the deep self; new construction techniques and new materials for modern industrial production, not to mention the growing experimental practical use of physics and the other natural sciences, the most recent mathematical results and speculations and of the various non-Euclidean geometries; all this suddenly launched into circulation an enormous mass of new concepts or new conceptualizations of a philosophical, aesthetic, and technical order that require urgent coordination, discipline, and precision.

A few years ago, at one of the group meetings of the AICA during the fifth edition of the Congress in Dublin, Jacques Lassaigue, the penetrating and engaging French critic and no less capable historian of Spanish painting (see *Spanish Painting*, published by Skira),¹ was saying to me: "Modern criticism is becoming increasingly encyclopedic; today the critic is required to have knowledge in all dominions—from philosophy to mathematics, from aesthetics to psychology, from sociology and anthropology to the physical sciences." Criticism is a total activity.

Formerly the art historian tended to absorb the critic: nowadays, on the contrary, the critic tends to absorb the historian.

Since the German "formalists," since [Konrad] Fiedler and above all since Aloïs Riegl and emphatically since [Heinrich] Wölfflin, [Wilhelm] Worringer, and [Henry] Schaefer-Simmern, art history has been passing from papers, from archives, from accessories to the work on to the work itself. Previously, the researcher started with libraries, with written sources, with the environment, with the period, with the "zeitgeist" that led to the artist's person and, from it, moved secondarily on to the work.

The latter was a sort of subsidiary element.

Now one starts from it, analyzed according to its physical, material constitution, all the way to the last vestiges of the artist's hand upon it, only then to move on to its formal meaning and, later, to the realm of the artist's subjectivity, from where one goes out into the street in order to attempt to plunge, feel, resuscitate the world, the age in which the artist lived and from where the work was extracted.

That process accompanied the lengthy historical process through which art became autonomous. And throughout this process, historians such as Wölfflin, Schaefer, Worringer, [Henri] Focillon, [Lionello] Venturi, and others distanced themselves from the external motives, from the subjects and themes, in order to concentrate increasingly upon the work's interior elements, upon the means that, together, give it plastic and static meaning or, rather, the synthesis of its various levels of meaning, from the formal and aesthetic to the historical and the cultural. Nowadays, when we study the line in itself, the plane in itself, light in itself, color in itself, the old concept of "composition," for example, comes under scrutiny and tends to be replaced by that of "structure," and the question of terminology in art criticism becomes an

“urgently urgent” one—as the saying goes at certain critical moments in our Chamber of Deputies.

—Originally published as “Em ordem do dia a terminologia da crítica,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), July 11, 1957.

Note

1. Jacques Lassaigue, *Spanish Painting*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (Geneva: Skira, 1952).

Outdated Considerations

Until our age, there were certain conditions—one might almost say obstacles—to be overcome before one could accept new artistic movements that made their comprehension a proud accomplishment for the appreciator of art. A previous education that allowed a more or less protracted period for getting over one school and moving on to the next was indispensable; the same went for the ability to assimilate one style after another.

For instance, one did not move from the *classical* (in the Wölfflinian sense) to the *baroque* or from the *linear* to the *pictorial* in the same way one travels from one floor to another in an elevator. In spite of the humiliation suffered by those poor stragglers who did not quickly abandon their admiration for [Jean-Auguste-Dominique] Ingres or [Gustave] Courbet in favor of an immediate admiration for [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir or [Paul] Cézanne, in fact those unfortunates merely offered shows of loyalty to the “perception patterns” within which their education in aesthetics had taken place. And the proof is that the first to acclaim [Claude] Monet or [Camille] Pissarro were the last to applaud [Vincent] van Gogh or [Paul] Gauguin. And so forth, until the advent of *Cubism*, which brought with it the seeds for new “perception patterns” that took an entire generation to become celebrated. By the time they became celebrated, however, a new school or sensibility called Abstractionism had emerged. Then, so that there would no longer be *stragglers* at any time, obstacles were raised against the acceptance of everything that might be labeled as new.

What happened? What [Helmut] Hungerland called “expectations” in the perception of the work of art have disappeared. Indeed, they grew with each historical period, as it were, within certain “perception patterns” having been formed, and were the ingredient that allowed critics, artists, art lovers and collectors—in short, enlightened opinion—to distinguish one work from another and penetrate its professed aesthetic intent. Thus, all eras of art history distinguished themselves according to such perception patterns that were able to function automatically and, therefore, to give art appreciators the possibility of judging independently of aesthetic preference. It is in this fact—empirically verified through many ages—that a theorist such as Hungerland bases himself in order to attempt a less whimsical or entirely subjective aesthetic classification.

Once established, these “perception patterns” that imposed themselves, independently of individual taste, meant that each art lover approached a work armed with or captivated by certain “expectation.” Why? Because he started from renowned perception patterns, that is, from a style. Through this expectation, appreciation or judgment was made of the work first and foremost as to its aesthetic object. And was, therefore, accessible to others.

Nowadays, this capital phenomenon of “expectation” has disappeared from the mode of perceptual appreciation. Perceptual appreciation has itself disappeared. Paintings are now approached without any expectations whatsoever. For this reason, judgment becomes mere individual preference, which not even so-called critics can explain. For it is no longer possible to speak of style. There are changes, models, and novelties, i.e., that which characterizes the modern industrial object when launched into the consumer market. Whether automobile, tray, furniture, knife, etc., it is the extreme variety of these products from one year to the next that defines *styling* within the consumer market. *Styling* also tends to characterize variety in painting, in all its manners and modes that proliferate everywhere.

The extreme instability of the perceptual patterns of our day do not have time to impose themselves, for, like fashion(s), they succeed one another vertiginously, rendering judgment highly precarious and removing any specific uniqueness from the notion of the work of art.

—Originally published as “Considerações inatuais,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 14, 1959.

Tradition and Criticism in Japan and in the West

Within the limitations of an article, nothing could be harder to convey, beyond the most superficial impressions, than something as complex as contemporary Japanese art. First, the field to be covered is so vast that it would be impossible to do so after a visit of a few months to Japan. Secondly, the conflicts between styles, manners, or the most contrary traditions may be even greater in Tokyo than they are in Paris, New York, or Berlin.

Indeed, whereas in Europe one sees, here and there, since Post-Impressionism and principally since Cubism and Expressionism, the feverish search for art’s most ancient expressions, here, in Japan, what initially intrigues us is the antithesis of “Japanese style” versus “Western” or European style. For whereas the West’s so-called academic tradition has either died or is frankly despised and cast aside, it persists in Japan and somehow plays a fairly respectable part. As a man schooled in Western art and, furthermore, directly linked to an art that will probably go down in history under the label of “modern art,” upon my arrival in Japan I, too, felt inclined to prejudge those who, in this country, inscribe themselves within that category. In fact, the Western critic leans far more toward that which, in his eyes, corresponds to or stems from the Eastern or Japanese tradition, merely because of what appears to him as a consequence or echo of the achievements of those European masters who came after Impressionism.

Among most Japanese critics, aesthetes, and art historians whom I had the good fortune to meet and who sometimes impressed me with their wisdom, with the extent of their knowledge and penetrating analyses, I find a contrary attitude, one that is symmetrically opposed to that of the Western critic. Still, reality is rarely symmetrical. Therefore, there is something wrong with this attitude of symmetrical opposition into which the critics of the West and Japan place themselves.

The Western critic is always more radical in his opinions and, often, in his reactions, than his Japanese colleague and, consequently, is farther removed from wisdom. If, in a Tokyo exhibition room or gallery, for example, such a critic finds himself before a painter from this country (whether young or old) still trammelled to Cubist or Fauvist solutions, one whose palette still derives from [Henri] Matisse’s range or from

[Chaim] Soutine's paste, or who takes for his figures the twisted framework of [Pablo] Picasso's constructions or the enigmatic linear allusions of [Paul] Klee and his color stains, passes by him without stopping and, occasionally, even without being able to conceal impatience. On the other hand, he is ready to examine with huge good will all the work that presents itself to his eyes as a direct or faraway attempt to continue, in a personal or original manner, the Japanese tradition of the autochthonous "style." This is where he locates the "new," the "modern." One might ask whether there may be in this a taste for the exotic unconsciously influencing that critic's judgment.

As for the Japanese critic, whereas he does not show himself to be as impatient as we are in regard to his country's own academic tradition, this may be because he is less passionate than we are; but it will be principally because the tradition against which he collides was surpassed not by an autochthonous revolutionary movement, but by the invasion of an art entirely foreign to Eastern culture. In Europe, academicism was defeated and expelled from the field of art under the sign of the oldest traditions of European art, Romantic art, the Gothic, the Byzantine, the Italian, Spanish, French primitives, etc. Here, on the contrary, the struggle against academic tradition was not done in the name of an older art, plunged into the depths of national history. This time, "modernity" was imported, no longer from one of the oldest, most nourishing sources of Japanese culture—that is, China—but from an entirely new source, and therefore "barbaric" in comparison to the country's civilization.

The adoption of oil paint implied a complete rejection of the ancient materials with which the national painters of the past had executed their masterpieces. In Europe, what took place was the revolt of a sensibility that had been suppressed by convention, of intuitive expression against the rational thinking that ended up by stanching all genuine visual inspiration from official nineteenth-century art. There, Modern art was nothing other than the rediscovery of art's lost origins. But that same art emerged like some new technology, almost like the steam engine, the electric battery, or the wireless telegraph. This new technical "acquisition" embodied an entirely new way of seeing and of feeling—one that apparently had nothing in common with the country's common artistic traditions or with the national sensibility. Conscious of this preliminary contradiction, many artists of the generations that came after the Meiji period sought a first compromise: to make oil paintings with a Japanese "feel."

Formulas of this kind are easier to put on paper than into practice. In fact, the Japanese critics were the first to realize this. This might be the source of their slightly ironic and skeptical smiles at the preconceived ideas of Western colleagues in search of a painting that would not be "European" but "Japanese," albeit simultaneously "modern" and not "traditional." Nevertheless, whereas lack of experience leads the latter almost always to see the "modern" in painters of the Japanese tradition, the former feel inclined to find this mysterious quality in their painters who employed oil and develop their creative efforts according to the already well-traveled terrain of Post-Impressionist European painting or of the "School of Paris." These colleagues are generally too indulgent with such artists and severe toward others—those of the Japanese style. As for us Westerners, our reaction is exactly the opposite of that one. However, I fear that both groups are deluded. And if one were to ask why, it might perhaps be answered that—whether "Western" or "Japanese"—all these critics are in search of a new *a priori*. The former want to rest, in contemplation of the paintings in the Nihonga style, of the European "deformities" and "violence"; the latter run quickly away from anything that might seem "weak" to them or from what they consider to be certain "feminine qualities" of Japanese art—delicateness, decorativeness, the way something is perfectly finished, the purity of its design and composition.

After some months of experiences, albeit still insufficient, in Japan, I arrived at a banal conclusion: one can as easily make living art with purity and reserve as with passion or “temperament” and whatever the material employed—fluid oil or crystalized powder. In any case, a “living” art is worth more than a so-called modern art if, by that, we understand a canvas painted in this or that technique or school, or simply in the manner of the last Western “isms.” Our Japanese colleagues surely do wrong in taking on (albeit nowadays) a “protectionist” stance toward oil painting.

It may be said that they did not notice that oil painters here have already achieved an equal and occasionally superior artisanal mastery over that of their Western colleagues. Oil painters in Japan no longer need to be stimulated or “protected” just because they work with Japanese materials. It is before this general mastery of the material that I allow myself to draw an equally general and perhaps very rudimentary conclusion, one that may be somewhat unpolished for the Japanese sensibility: as traditions, both that of Nihonga painting and of oil painting are dead.

What I ask is that—in an appreciation of contemporary Japanese art—the general be replaced by the particular. What I mean by this is, let us forget the great cultural categories in which each work in particular be inserted.

Let us set them in parentheses, so to speak, and see the paintings in themselves, without first asking of what they are made. Nor do we demand beforehand that there be such and such specifically appreciated quality, or that the matter be pasty in the Fauvist manner, or that they do not present an empty space or one organized according to the inverted Japanese tradition, or that their colors be fused and not juxtaposed, etc.; nor do we ask beforehand what their “tradition” is, only that they be judged simply by their formal and pictorial qualities. Alive, they will be, certainly, if the solutions that they present were found in the very process of their making and not extracted ready made—perfect formulas for national tradition or of the European masters.

The evil of tradition is one’s awareness of it. Here in Japan, both those who follow it and those who reject it are all too conscious of that tradition—some rest within it as quietly as ghosts who always return to their graves at daybreak; others exorcise it out of fear. Indeed, a few possess an anachronistic sense of that tradition they believe they are struggling against or imagine they are following. Thus they fall into the trap of academicism. Attempting to fit this tradition into certain historical-aesthetic molds, they mistake purity for poverty, plasticity with formalism, linear beauty with feminine beauty, spatial tension with the mechanical balancing act, etc.

And they forget that Asuka and Nara, Horiuji and Yakushiji, the sensitive beauty of Yamato-e and the severe beauty of Sumi, and Kanaoka and Josetsu, Seshu and Tohaku, Ryoangi and Saihoji, Taiga and Sotatsu, Karin and Tessai are all to be found in the historical lineage of this country’s art. At this point in the century, this is all part of the famous tradition.

Later, and more importantly: as soon as it is set aside, forgotten tradition reappears in the most unexpected ways. But it does so in a much more authentic and vital way because it no longer comes from the academy but from the depths of collective memory.

Some of the contemporary artists I have met here, principally among the young, seem to me already to be following this trail. They set aside all of the pseudo technical and aesthetic problems and devote themselves to work as simple, individually lost artists do in all corners of the world, their national origins forgotten, which schools are in vogue, which “groups” and “traditions.”

Some work in oil, others with Japanese materials. Ingenuously, they became simple, isolated painters. Alone in their homes, with their paintbrushes, their easels,

their tatami, and their canvases—they paint. And they painted some canvases that I, also naively, found “beautiful,” that is, universally beautiful. And then, suddenly, they also seem profoundly “Japanese” to me. Why?

At least for the time being, it would be difficult for me to analyze this impression of mine. Why do we not invert the question, and rather than ask “in what way” they are Japanese, ask “in what way” they are beautiful? And—who knows?—the explanation required by the former question might lie in the answer to the latter one.

—Originally published as “Tradição e crítica no Japão e no Ocidente,” *Tokyo Museum of Modern Art Bulletin*, January 1959.

The Critic and the Director

At least for now, I bid farewell to militant criticism. My possible dear readers shall now have me from another angle: that of director of a museum of modern art, and also accountable for a biennial [exhibition]. It’s a great deal of work and responsibility. Perhaps many of these possible readers of mine prefer me this way: from afar—in a less aggressive or more neutral position than that of the militant critic, glasses and pencil in hand.

There can be no doubt that there is a great difference between the two positions. It is the critic’s obligation to intervene in the artist’s very activity. No matter how obnoxious this might be—particularly to me, since I am and always will be on the other side; that is, siding with the street and irresistibly inclined to rebelliousness—there is in the critic something of the civil guard or policeman: that terrible obligation to intervene in order to check that everything is in order, albeit according to the canons of a libertarian aesthetics, and to sanction, that is, to judge, to grade, likens him to keepers of law and order; because he is always invested with authority, even when he would prefer not to be invested in it. This is part of the nature of his functions.

As for a museum director—even the director of a modern art museum—his position is different, as his functions are different. When one says: modern art museum, one speaks of something that is still controversial. The art of our times is always debated and debatable: a museum of this sort of art is also, for this very reason, a controversial, active, and, in short, essentially experimental instrument. In this sense, there is something analogous to the critical stance. In the presence of the museum of so-called modern art, that is, of the living, debated, hot-out-of-the-oven from which it came sort, the other museum—the traditional one—looks after those masterpieces that have passed the test of time and are no longer discussed with zeal and science.

Yet the director of a museum such as the one we have in Ibirapuera park or its important correspondent in Rio de Janeiro actively participates in the present, in the artistic battle for art that rages outside, like the critic. But whereas the latter is committed and involved from the start in some artistic adventure of the avant-garde, whether by fighting it or by supporting it, *ab initio*, the more functionally circumspect director observes or even stimulates, after all—experiments. Thus, his attitude is that of an attentive observer, of an experimenter, like the chemist in his laboratory. Naturally, he must possess the critic’s antennae in order to at least be able to judge the vitality or the possibilities for development or coherence or inner correspondence with the period or the seriousness of any new movement that announces itself or appears, whether from an isolated personality or from an emerging group of young



Opening of the 1961 São Paulo Bienal, Ciccillo Matarazzo Pavilion. Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo, Fundação Bienal de São Paulo

artists. Based on his own knowledge, his aesthetic stance, his experience, he welcomes this movement, these new experiments—or not. In so doing, it does not mean that he a priori approves or supports them. Or is apologetic toward them. His responsibility and commitments are above all in the field, rather, to his epoch, whereas those of the critic are above all to the artist. The critic battles or promotes, at the doors of studios; the director experiments, stimulates, or ignores until further notice.

Under my direction, the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and its Bienal—created by the generous, far-reaching vision of our president Ciccillo Matarazzo—will

be a laboratory for living experiments and a house of study and education, destined to assimilate whatever may be authentic and vital in these experiments.

—Originally published as “O crítico e o diretor,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 22, 1960.

On the Stuffed Pig; or, Criteria for Criticism

As a result of successive new schools, styles, and movements, the contemporary age has been particularly fertile in changes of critical criteria, in changes of values. Behold: many of our masters and most distinguished fellows—such as, for instance, a Lionello Venturi or a Paul Fierens (the first president of our AICA [International Association of Art Critics]), both of whom are deceased, and others, still, in the principal European countries—were initiated in the “science,” the “art,” or the “technique” of criticism during the Post-Impressionist period and, without stopping for breath, found themselves facing the “scandal” of Expressionism or the “challenge” of Fauvism. Yet they were soon made to come to grips with Cubism, Futurism, and Constructivism. The general public—general? nonsense!—the *distinguished* public had only just begun to digest the very earliest Impressionism (that of Manet: no longer Impressionist even to today’s sensibilities) and, after it, that of [Pierre-Auguste] Renoir with his beautiful ladies and beautiful children wearing beautiful dresses in beautiful parks, and that of [Edgar] Degas and his ballerinas. [Paul] Cézanne was still a hermit debated, feared, or ridiculed, while [Édouard] Manet wasn’t really brought out of the shadows until the mid-century. Tachism discovered in him the first of the abstractionists.

In order to properly assess the artistic kaleidoscope that was sweeping across Europe—indeed, throughout Paris, then the center of the art world—it would suffice to consider the fact that [Georges] Seurat and [Paul] Gauguin (or Cézanne) were not yet accepted, and art lovers and critics alike kept bumping into the group that was soon to be baptized as the beasts (*Les Fauves*) at the Salon d’Automne in 1905, where Manet was still afforded the honors of an important retrospective. In the room of “beasts,” there were [Henri] Matisse, [André] Derain (who used to get a new tube of paint and empty it onto his canvas like a cartridge), and [Maurice

de] Vlaminck, the kindly lummoX whose landscapes reflected *his* use of copious amounts of paint.

Before cinema, one new wave after another flooded the beaches of the Fine Arts, from the beginning of the century to the present day; such waves have tended to crash tumultuously upon us. (It was this aesthetic-historical-sociological verification that led me to speak of a “law of acceleration of isms,” as we advanced toward the last quarter century). Indeed, no sooner had Fauvism become—I shall not say tamed or digested—but merely known and awkwardly defined, the highest wave broke over Paris. With the revelation of African art, it was the arrival of the Cubists—the Revolution’s Jacobins. [Pablo] Picasso rocked the art world with a truly revolutionary explosion, *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. Through the debris produced by the explosion, one realized—people were stupefied—how many of the taboo values had fallen to earth: aerial perspective, atmospheric light, optical plays of light, chromatic fusion upon the retina, mortar-paste, figural depth, rich coloring. Impressionism was finally buried. For the proponents of the new waves, it appeared as a petit bourgeois art, in search of not too expensive and innocent sensorial pleasures.

Alarmed by Cubism, Paul Valéry wanted to know how he will be able to distinguish one artist from another from here on in—a [Georges] Braque from a Picasso, when everyone is geometricizing their landscape, canceling their perspectives, flattening volumes, “analyzing” portraits, painting everything in earth tones. After the Cubist revolution, the rush of waves did not cease. To the South and the East, the clarions of Futurism and Constructivism had already sounded or were sounding. Then came the war, and even before it was over the artillery units of Dadaism were exploding against all values hitherto proclaimed. The total, poetic, anti-formal, moral, and political revolt of Surrealism emerged next, negating Cubism; whereas, at the opposite end of the spectrum, Mondrian’s Neo-plasticism leads Cubism to its ultimate formal conclusions, proposing to surpass it within its own terrain.

The critic situates himself within this tumult of movements, as the artist’s inevitable other side; the artist’s involuntary or unrepressed conscience. His increasingly uncomfortable function leads him either to deliberately take on the partisan, active role of an ism or increasingly to become a lacerated soul that, out of a sense of universal duty, an undaunted, living witness of his time, must relate opposites, discover the common structure within which they establish themselves and testify with regard to presence, all of which contain or should contain his criteria for judgment. Each artist makes his revolution once, but the critic is a tireless witness of each revolution. Within a single age, one revolutionary episode after another amounts to a process. The critic’s role is to define this process—or the process of a single albeit permanent revolution—in its totality. Through the study and recognition of this process, the critic is the only one who knows that everything is just a revolution. Indeed, permanent revolution is the only concept that encompasses our age more generally and profoundly. Thus, the critic exists in a state of permanent revolution. Victor Hugo once defined the poet (or himself) as the one whom God had placed “as a deep echo in the universe’s heart.”¹ Were it not for Hugo’s emphasis, which would render the comparison excessively grandiloquent when measured against the modest standard of our functions, I might have used it to define the position of criticism. But then, instead of being the “sonorous echo” at the center of everything, I should say that it was some sort of annoying cricket that never ceases, in a corner of the large hall of society, to signal its presence, witnessing nightfall and the permanence of summer.

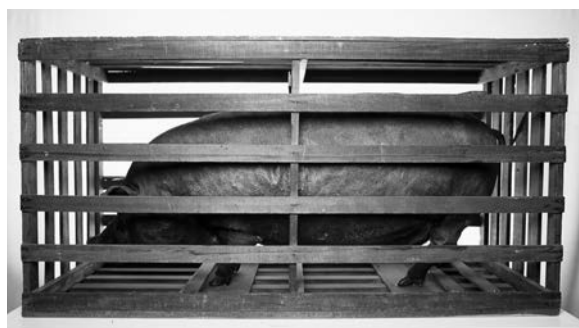
The revolution moves on, from Russia and Germany respectively; [Vasily] Kandinsky’s anti-object abstractionism and the Blaue Reiter emerge and, with them,

[Kazimir] Malevich, who proclaims—in a total simplification that already foreshadows later infra-sensorial ponderings—“the sensibility of the absence of the object”² and Suprematism (along with [Vladimir] Tatlin and [Antoine] Pevsner). [Naum] Gabo soon proposed kinetic art and [László] Moholy-Nagy projected light—the Constructivist synthesis. Within this process that involved the whole of Europe, from the Atlantic to the Urals, in an incessant flow of isms, the critic must therefore keep his head above water. At every turn, he must accompany the artist’s investigations, his creative inquietude; additionally, at every moment, he must make an effort not only to know how to capture [these probings] but also how to situate them. Even this fight for an idea, for a movement, for what is unilateral in the artist—that which is inherent and natural to the artist’s personality—cannot be his alone; for in order to explain, defend, situate, and hierarchize, he must be able to see from other perspectives. Woe to the critic who does not recognize the authentic formal values wherever they are found, in any movement; or who is unfamiliar with other values (such as poetic ones, for instance); it shall be said that his range of comprehension lies within a reduced scale; the same will be said of one who passes untouched through documents of more elementary aesthetic values—such as may be found in the simple, unconscious, naive artist of obvious primitiveness—in complete cultural isolation.

An eminent French critic was telling me that nowadays an art critic must be encyclopedic and know not only those subjects directly related to his *métier*, but be well versed or at least have read any of the human sciences and mathematics, not to mention, of course, philosophy. With the multiple ramifications of abstractionism, ever since the coming of age of Concretism, new subjects have been called onto the stage—from semantics to semiotics, from information theory to cybernetics. An avid search for meaning has surpassed the hitherto exclusive search for expressive values. Above all, there was a desire to solve [the question of] what abstractionism was; to decipher its messages. Yet there was one “but” that gathered all the preceding isms within a single structure (if not within the same process). It was the unique, privileged work of the artist, of the subject. The supreme value that had to be judged was the work of art in itself. During the course of the century, an extremely exact language had been formed to define, isolate, and extol the supreme formal, expressive, and aesthetic values contained within each work, within each movement.

Criticism’s greatest instrument, however, this vocabulary, had been in crisis ever since Concretism, having dissolved itself with the advent of Pop art and Kineticism. The supreme formal values have now been relativized. The work of art in itself loses its uniqueness and pretense to eternity. Nor do the materials with which it comes to be made any longer possess the former nobility of marble or bronze or oil, that propose to become permanent. The traditional genres of sculpture and painting are negated. The most precarious materials are used by artists; they do not endure, yet they are renewable. Pretense to originality is lost; aristocratic aversion to the copy is no more. (Increasingly perfected reproductive techniques are avidly sought after by artists; ultimately, so that their work may be within greater reach.)

Above all else, artists want to leave their earlier social and moral isolation. The art of participation seems to want to wrench the spectator from his contemplative passivity or, rather, from his multisensory and bodily indifference, from his moral and cultural neutrality. What lies beneath the whole of this anti-art movement is the artists’ sacred nostalgia for a society in which they would be as integrated—as indispensable to collective life—as in authentically social communities in the societies of primitive cultures; indispensable to their survival, to the preservation of their sacred rites and myths, precursors of today’s marginalized artists, their coopers and hunters,



Nelson Leirner. *O porco* (The pig).
1967. Wooden crate and stuffed
pig, 32 5/8 × 62 5/8 × 24 3/8"
(83 × 159 × 62 cm). Pinacoteca
do Estado de São Paulo

coastal dwellers and weavers, potters and tattoo artists, dancers and builders, makers of everyday things, of sacred things. However, nowhere is it said that the game has been won by the family of current artists. For the time being, they still find themselves at a stage of cultural and aesthetic demystification, half-unconsciously, marginally begun by the handful of Dadaists at the beginning of the century. Simultaneously, it is no coincidence that today's avant-garde artists, an actively conscious part of the world's youth, hits the road in groups of beatniks, hippies, and who knows what else, in a collective—and ultimately parallel—act of moral demystification.

It was within this context that a talented young *paulista* artist who, as a matter of fact, comes from a family of artists, came to question the jury of the Salão de Brasília, in a letter published in a newspaper, about the criteria that led it to accept his “work” *Porco empalhado* [Stuffed pig], which was submitted in a crate with the generic—and somewhat scholarly?—designation of “matter and form.” Was [its creator] Nelson Leirner expecting the jury to refuse it? Because it had no formal value? Because it wasn't “a work of art”? Because it wasn't “created”? Or possessed no originality? But it is a “stuffed pig.” Someone stuffed it. Stuffing animals is a known and appreciated art called taxidermy. Is Nelson also expert at it? But if he merely purchased the crated, stuffed pig and sent it off to Brasília, the work would fall into the category of readymades à la Duchamp. Could it be that the young artist wanted the jury to deny validity (albeit recognizing its precedents) to this proposition, one of the richest in consequences to have been invented since Dada, within the same context of cultural and aesthetic demystification? However, if the latent objection speaks to the work's originality, would Leirner not understand what he is doing? So allow me to report something very curious that took place at a solo show by Andy Warhol, in a gallery in Toronto, Canada, in March of 1965. At that stage, Warhol (who is one of the protagonists of Pop) was appropriating series of objects for commercial use, and arranging them for exhibition. When the cardboard boxes and cans with extremely well-known labels of commercial products arrived there, Dr. [Charles] Comfort, director of the National Gallery of Canada, was consulted regarding the authenticity or value of those “works.” The supreme authority of the arts in the world of Canadian officialdom thus determined that—since those “products” were not original sculptures—Warhol should pay the twenty percent importation tax (they had been brought over from New York, the artist's place of residence) so that they might be exhibited. The gallery owner accepted the decision. I am unaware whether, according to the laws of our revenue office, that product, the *Porco empalhado* (with sale value inscribed, by the way) should be subject to tax. Also under consideration was the fact that none of us (members of the jury) had any official authority to make any decision regarding the fiscal nature of the object, or even what nature Leirner had mentally bestowed upon the work sent to Brasília. However, given that, for them, the *Porco empalhado* had to be the consequence of the whole of the artist's aesthetic and

moral behavior, the jury had full authority to accept it in the Salão. In postmodern art, it is the idea, the attitude behind the artist that is decisive.

—Originally published as “Do porco empalhado ou os critérios da crítica,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), February 11, 1968.

Notes

1. Victor Hugo, *Selected Poems of Victor Hugo*, trans. E. H. and A. M. Blackmore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2001), p. 37.
2. This phrase is perhaps taken from Geneviève Bonnefoi, “Franz Kupka: Précurseur et solitaire,” *Les Lettres nouvelles*, no. 14 (April 1954): 592–97.

The Art Critic's Obligations to Society

Everyone already knows about the closing of the exhibition organized by the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio [MAM-Rio], at which, according to a program previously established and divulged by the museum's board of directors, the artists who would be representing Brazil at the sixth edition of the Paris Biennale come September should have been chosen. The public's perplexity in light of this closing increased when the Minister of Foreign Affairs himself issued a statement in the news outlining the reasons and the origin of the act that determined the show's closing.

The gravity of these assertions has forced the Brazilian Association of Art Critics [Associação Brasileira dos Críticos de Arte, or ABCA] to publicly manifest its position in defense of the freedom to practice art criticism in Brazil. Here are the statements:

From the Foreign Minister

Yesterday, Mr. Magalhães Pinto (the Minister of Foreign Affairs) guaranteed that Brazil shall not be absent from the sixth edition of the Paris Biennale. It will merely not participate in all of the exhibition's artistic categories.

In reference to the works selected by a committee at the Museu de Arte Moderna, and later canceled, chancellor Magalhães Pinto declared “an abuse of trust [has taken place] for, in accepting the commission of selecting the Works of art, the MAM was instructed to reject ideological and political aspects of works in competition.”

Censorship Promised

The Minister of Foreign Affairs added that the Museu de Arte Moderna had committed to consulting with the Itamaraty [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] before divulging the works, which never happened. The Itamaraty was admonished by the censors regarding the nature of the selected works and found itself forced to adopt the measure known to all.

From the President of the ABCA

The resolution adopted by the ABCA is self-explanatory: in spite of the malevolent insinuation made by some, even the typically sneaky accusations that our resolution was made “for political reasons,” any jurist would be perfectly situated within the boundaries permitted by those currently in charge of the country. Indeed, it is not a matter of “challenging the regime,” but of opposing repeated acts by authorities from here and there against the Salons and Bienals in Brazil. Such acts were recently reinforced by the refusal to send artists to the Paris Youth Biennale, which was publicly



Mário Pedrosa with Pierre Restany, Paris, 1973

made official. Thus, our association had to make itself heard. All that our resolution asks of the government is a clear and explicit cultural policy so that art critics may benefit from the conditions necessary to the free exercise of criticism. It even shows its optimism in that it does not exclude the possibility of coexistence (with no loss of autonomy and in its entirety) with the regime.

The international matrix of the ABCA, the Brazilian section of the International Association

of Art Critics, founded in Paris in 1949 under the auspices of UNESCO, has a lofty mission. Its actions are based on its awareness of this mission.

Throughout the course of its twenty years of existence, with national sections in more than forty countries, the ABCA has seen growing recognition of the importance of its functions. Ever since it was founded, it adopted the defense of freedom of creation, expression, and criticism everywhere as a basis of its activities. In this sense, the ABCA is none other than the executor of these principles at a national level. It has been advocating for art criticism to be recognized as a professional activity so that the critic may be seen as a qualified technician.

Both at the international and national levels, the association has also been concerned with the growing function of the critic's activity with regard to the relationships between art and society and between art and the state, even as the importance of all senses of the artistic phenomenon grows in plain sight.

Criticism in Brazil

The process of recognizing the art critic as a technician qualified by the country's most prestigious institutions (biennials, museums) and, indirectly and still sporadically, by governmental organs, has just suffered a blow that may well halt this process for a long time to come. Naturally, the blow in question is the set of statements (not yet denied) attributed to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Thus the association has acknowledged the existence of official—albeit unconfirmed—censorship of a sector hitherto exempt from it, the sector of the visual arts. Critics were surely aware of previous examples of such acts. However, such acts had never been officially and openly sanctioned, as has been the case at various state salons (including the Bahia Bienal). All of this could have been seen as not originating with competent authorities but rather due solely to the occasional ineptitude of this or that ill-humored local authority. The ministerial statements have now allowed us to elucidate the origin of the order to suspend the show planned by Rio's Museu de Arte Moderna and, by extension, the Paris Youth Biennale. Of the two hundred works exhibited, twelve were singled out in the categories of painting, printmaking, photography, and sculpture—three per artist.

The Enigma

At one time intermittent and veiled, the enigma of censorship has finally been deciphered. Indeed, the order came from the censor's warning to the Itamaraty, which

created a new and extremely embarrassing situation for the men of the *métier*: in fact, it canceled out the conditions necessary to the normal exercise of Brazilian art criticism with regard to important public exhibitions. In those statements, the minister went so far as to accuse the upper echelons of the Museu de Arte Moderna of abuse of trust for not having “consulted the Itamaraty with regard to the results” at which the jury had arrived and, also, for “not having rejected ideological and political aspects of works in competition.” In the name of its associates, the ABCA’s directors began to voice serious objections to the ministerial remarks. A jury convened for the task of selecting artists for the Paris Biennale should not be the object of such impositions. Indeed, it is professionally and technically impossible for the art critic to distinguish, and much less “reject,” from a work “any ideological and political aspects.”

In the explanatory text of the resolution made by the ABCA in its meeting last June 21, held in Rio, this impossibility becomes clear: whenever such aspects are likely to be isolated and rejected in a work of art (in a painting, for example), it is a sure sign that the painting in question is lacking in the intrinsic qualities of form, composition, color, and line—in short, the malleable qualities that will allow its classification as a work of art. Condemnation of the works of so-called social realism—the official school of the USSR—or rejection of the products of [Adolf] Hitler’s “regenerate” or “Aryan” art was certainly generalized among critics. However, such condemnation was never meted out because of subject matter. The justifications for denying those products any artistic value—the latter being emphatically the fabrication of a state ideology imposed upon everyone—were to be found in the fact that other formal aspects of the work (whenever it was a work of art) were so insignificant as to vanish within an ideological aura, reduced to mere illustration, rather than because of any sort of subject matter. What condemned a work was the absence of essential formal and aesthetic qualities.

Daumier and Goya

The following is a transcription of the first and tenth items of the preamble to the resolution:

At the beginning of the last century, with the emergence of lithography, or the first process of mechanical reproduction to be used as an instrument of artistic creation, the traditional prints considered until then as the medium par excellence through which to illustrate scenes and events of the day lost this priority. In the history of nineteenth-century art, [Honoré] Daumier was the incomparable master of this new and revolutionary medium, for he used it with implacable severity to denounce the social and political infamies of the regime of his time, that of the smiling and moneyed July Monarchy, in France. As it was for [Charles] Baudelaire in his time, the challenge today is for anyone to manage to separate, within their work (as, indeed, in his other prints and paintings), even the most discriminatory social accusations; any of their ideological, moral, or political “aspects” from the formal “aspects.” However, it is the latter that become permanent and transform those that are essentially integrated into a whole and, for this very reason, are already detached from connotations of the present. The very junction that denotes representation is elevated to the level of creative fusion (which is substantively universal). And it is precisely because of this process of fusion and transformative synthesis that representation ceases to be the illustration of a scene or factual event in order to become an all-encompassing concept of the world according to an artist’s vision. The same may be said of the making of a painting as emotional and directly descended from a political event of its time as

[Francisco de] Goya's *The Third of May, 1808* (the painting refers to the massacre of Spanish patriots that took place on that date).

Goya's vehement witness uses the painting's dynamic composition, its contrasts of shadow and light, of masses and groups that converge and masses and groups that open themselves up, the dramatization of gestures, etc., in mere chromatic notations and above the anecdotal connotations of historical fact to create a monument to man's eternal struggle for freedom. However, let someone attempt to distinguish what is purely pictorial from that which is purely "political" or ideological within that canvas rectangle. There is also the example of another masterpiece of the genre, [Pablo] Picasso's *Guernica*, and during those rare moments in which it is allowed to leave its wall in New York's Museum of Modern Art,¹ it stirs the world and the people among whom it circulates. Comparable to Goya's masterpiece of "[socially] engaged art" for all seasons, it is similarly motivated—in this instance by the episode of the Spanish Civil War. No, art critics are not capable of such identical operations with regard to any work of art—whether painting, sculpture, or printmaking—because it is (first and foremost) the mutability of its origin or motivation, the expression of a personality whose antennae capture, or may capture, all of the signs and all of the echoes of their age. Thus, it is imperative for the good of all those who are interested in the sector—from government authorities to private institutions, artists, critics, museum directors to the mass of art lovers, and consumers of art—that an episode such as that of the closing of the MAM exhibition shall not be repeated.

The Visual Arts Sector Does Not Practice Clandestine Activities

Under the weight of exceptional circumstances that define the current Brazilian moment, the ABCA does not feel authorized to collaborate with government authorities given the organization's stated function: to assure the best level of the highest artistic values in the salons, exhibitions, and visual arts biennials while simultaneously respecting the principle of creative freedom. In our country, film and theater already exist under the regime of censorship. Justifiable or not, they are precedents that we would not like to see applied to the sector of the visual arts whose salons (exhibitions) and biennials cannot be equated to [theatrical or film entertainments], the only manifestation for which the current constitution foresees censorship. Yet the episode of the exhibition for the Paris Youth Biennale, organized by the MAM-Rio, indicates the practice of censorship already taking place in the exceptionally delicate sector of the visual arts. If the current government wishes to establish a cultural and artistic policy—or, indeed, already seems to have one—it should be clearly and systematically defined. In so doing, it will ultimately create a situation that is more comprehensible to everyone—to the state and institutions, to protagonists and critics, to producers and consumers—in that it will allow each one to choose his preferred course of action. It is no longer possible to continue within the current, indefinite state. For example, what governmental perspectives determine the activities of this so-called anonymous censorship about which all that is known are its a posteriori effects with regard to visual arts exhibitions? The Itamaraty has officially revealed its existence but neglected to say from what branch of the state it came and which specific authority issued it.

Therefore, it is imperative that a stop be put to this practice of an official albeit anonymous censorship. The visual arts sector exercises no clandestine activity that might require control, vigilance, or combat through the state's secret organs of defense and repression.

Resolutions

These are the ABCA's resolutions:

- I. To refuse henceforth to appoint, so long as the obstacles to the free exercise of art criticism exist such as they were defined in the preamble to this resolution, any of its members to participate in juries or in other correlative professional endeavors such as salons, art exhibitions of an official or officious nature, public or private initiatives including insofar as the selection of visual artists to represent Brazil abroad.
- II. Furthermore, the ABCA recommends that its members (and even those associates possibly foreign to its ranks) exempt themselves from taking part in the customary selection and prize-granting juries promoted by official and officious national institutions, whether within the country or abroad.
- III. According to the present resolution, only those associates who are perchance already engaged in work of a nature described in items I and II of our Resolution are exempted from the moral commitments created by their approval, given that these responsibilities were assumed prior to the facts that determined approval of this document. Thus, the ABCA leaves it up to these associates to take any attitude they like with regard to the aforementioned resolution.
- IV. The obstacles referred to in item I of the Resolution shall cease to exist when express government decision redefines the situation created for the practice of art criticism in the sense of abolishing the current form of censorship—disorganized and unregulated, as is the case with film and theater, as well as covertly practiced—so that, in consonance with the present constitution (which makes no mention of any form of censorship toward the visual arts sector) critics and artists may be assured the rights afforded them by said constitution.

Meeting of the Association of Art Critics

The São Paulo chapter of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, affiliated to the International Association of Art Critics, convened the majority of its members on July 2 (the occasion of the second edition of the Bahia Bienal, of the Salão do Museu de Arte da Prefeitura de Belo Horizonte and, this year, of the Salão de Ouro Preto) to consider measures adopted by authorities in 1968. Members debated the withdrawal of works by various artists, a fact aggravated by the cancelation of Brazil's delegation to the sixth edition of the Paris Biennale, and apprehensive with regard to the consequences of these acts, the ABCA has decided to take part (along with the ABCA's Rio chapter) in the fight against censorship, supporting instead the freedom of artistic creation and in defense of the free exercise of art criticism.

—“Os deveres do crítico de arte,” presentation of the manifesto of the Association of Brazilian Art Critics, *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), July 10, 1969. Signed under the pseudonym Luis Rodolpho.

Note

1. Picasso's *Guernica* was returned from The Museum of Modern Art to Spain in 1981, and currently resides at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid.

5. Art Criticism

Introduction Rodrigo Krul

This section presents the trajectory of Mário Pedrosa's art criticism in Brazil, encompassing his transition from political and literary criticism to art criticism proper. It begins with an early—and rare—foray into music criticism, "Villa-Lobos and His People: The Brazilian Perspective" (1929), and also includes a later work combining literary and art criticism, "Miró among Poets" (1976), both originally published in Paris. Pedrosa's visionary introduction of the concept of postmodernism is described for the first time in 1966 in his essential text "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica."

Considered the first manifestation of Marxist art criticism in Brazil, "The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz" (1933) introduced the German artist to Brazil, even as it welcomed to the country the universality of social art. "Portinari: From Brodowski to the Washington Murals" (1942) caused discomfiture by countering prevailing views about the artistic development of a national artist-hero, as well as by corroborating the necessary expansion of the Brazilian art circuit beyond the official domain of the state. In the text's discussion of the development of the "great synthetic art" of the mural in both North and South America, Pedrosa also reveals his view of the equator not as something that separates the two hemispheres but that, instead, brings them together.

Pedrosa recognized and celebrated avant-garde art. He referred to Alexander Calder's experiments with motion as "the ideal suspension bridge that connects the spatial arts to those of succession in time." The encounter between artist and critic developed into a lifelong friendship, and Pedrosa dedicated "Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Calder" (1944) to his artistically revolutionary friend.

Pedrosa discusses the foundational artists of Brazilian modernism in texts such as "Lasar Segall" and "Di Cavalcanti" (both 1957). He also examines their European precursors in "Giorgio Morandi" (1947), which illuminates "the mystical artist, [who was] severe and wise enough to love lifeless things," and in "Modulations Between Sensation and Idea" (1950), about Paul Cézanne, which precedes the decade that defined Brazilian art's autonomy and its ideological and sentient transformations, achieved through the experiments undertaken by Art Informel and geometric Abstractionism, Concretism, and Neo-Concretism. He also turns his critical attention to artists who are "primitive" at heart but nonetheless engender transformations in "Advantage of the Primitives" (1959).

Ivan Serpa's meeting with the artists who orbited around the Grupo Frente was recorded in "Ivan Serpa's Experiment" (1951) and in "Grupo Frente" (1955). "Ethical discipline and creative discipline" were common sense among these artists' unique temperaments and poetics during the period in which they were magnetically drawn to Serpa, an artist who also happened to be the teacher of Aluísio Carvão, Hélio Oiticica, and Lygia Pape (all of whom are accorded individual texts selected for this section). Those three were joined by Lygia Clark, and by Franz Weissmann—who is present in this section in the text on his special room at the eighth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in 1965.

"Concrete Poet and Painter" (1957) introduces the word and image experiments undertaken by poets Décio Pignatari and the brothers Haroldo and Augusto de Campos. Pignatari, along with the painters such as Waldemar Cordeiro and Luis Sacilotto, is also discussed in "Paulistas and Cariocas" (1957), in which Pedrosa reflects upon the cultural and regional aspects of Brazilian art by means of the differences between the two principal Brazilian economic centers, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Pedrosa's struggle for the ideological emancipation of abstract art in Brazil produced texts on the trajectory of two artists who contributed a great deal to the

critic's thinking: Alfredo Volpi and Milton Dacosta. About the former—the artist who acted as a bridge between Brazilian modernism and Concretism—he published “Volpi, 1942–1957” (1957), and, about the latter, “Milton Dacosta: Twenty Years of Painting” (1959). He discusses the abstract Art Informel school in his assessment of the São Paulo Bienal's fourth edition, in 1957—the so-called Tachist Bienal—in “After Tachism” (1958), as well as in “Iberê Camargo” (1958) and “The Two Positions; or, Pollock and Vedova” (1959).

Both “Lygia Clark; or, The Fascination with Space” (1957) and “The Significance of Lygia Clark” (1960) are included here, the former being the equally essential albeit less well-known of the two. Written two years before the Neo-Concrete manifesto, the earlier essay provides a critical introduction to the transitive power of Clark's investigations known as *Bichos* (Critters) and her discovery of the organic line, crucial to the revelation of space as “composed of vectors that allow us to have a phenomenologically affective rather than a purely sensorial awareness of it.”

The presence of the historical avant-gardes in Brazil in the 1960s was brought about in part by the rise of Pop art, and Pedrosa deals with that movement's reverberations throughout the country, as mediated by society's relationship to its icons, myths, and detritus, in “Klee and the Present” (1961), “From American Pop to Dias, the *Sertanejo*” (1967), and “From the Dissolution of the Object to the Brazilian Avant-Garde” (1967). In the late 1960s and the 1970s he also published reflections on some of the country's most important artists in texts such as “Mira Schendel” (1963), “Anna Bella Geiger” (1968), and “Camargo's Sculpture” (1975).

In “Hélio Oiticica's Projects” (1961), Pedrosa discusses not only that artist's innovative maquettes but also the need to update the function of museums around the world. To the critic, museums were like “houses, laboratories for cultural experiments.” This transformative view was put into practice throughout his activities as director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo at the start of the 1960s and, scrupulously, as the creator and organizer of the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende, in Santiago, in the 1970s.

Pedrosa's critical trajectory is marked by the belief that art and politics are the inseparable protagonists of a single action: the “experimental exercise of freedom”—his most famous utterance, reiterated here in his conversation with the artist Antonio Manuel in 1970. —*Rodrigo Krul*



Villa-Lobos and His People: The Brazilian Perspective

A very distinguished French poet whose art criticism is somewhat excessively aesthetic has said of [Heitor] Villa-Lobos's music that he could not accept it because he did not love brutality. But . . . can one demand, for example, of the *Sacre* [*du Printemps*; Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*] that it be pretty? Is it reasonable to want everyone to sing with the subtlety of [Claude] Debussy? A musician is not a music box that depends only upon the hand that turns the crank. He does not sing in the abstract. He is *possessed*. He is inspired. And the inspiration is as noble in its expression of softness and subtlety as it is in expressing violence or savagery. Taste is not found at the source of poetry, it does not flow with inspiration. It comes *afterward*. One finds it only later, in aesthetics. Meaning that if one does not take Brazil into account, one cannot understand Villa-Lobos. It is as if one were to expect a wild rose to bloom from a cactus instead of its own wild red flower. Because an artist's art that is unconsciously marked by his people's way of feeling—as deeply and inevitably saturated by the nature of his country as Villa's is—cannot be exquisite or fine, but must be like him: fiery and wild, sensual and sentimental, complex and solid. He has the naive and total sincerity of a mountain torrent. Nowadays Brazil continues to find itself at a primitive stage. But its primitivism is not a matter of fashion; nor is it due to this conscious, healthy search for renewal, for rejuvenation of sources for which European intelligence, too tired and too charged with culture, has felt such a deep need. Our primitivism is simpler and less refined; it is quite simply a historical period in our process of growth and development. Intelligence is not yet our affair, but sentiment, or even sentimentality. The *pathos* of the Germans. Until now, it is the people who have been our only great ingenuous and unconscious creator, of which rudimentary and interested art is no more than the direct expression of their rough joys and sadness. As everywhere, it is the magnificent tree from which the power of fertility is always awakening. Villa-Lobos has had the predestined luck to be the first conscious thrust of this tree. His work is an extremely personal creation, yet one in which the materials were taken from there. He has built his hut with wood from the forest that surrounds him.

Perhaps Brazilians are able to evoke at random whatever part of Brazil has entered the artist's imagination as nature, as a living thing, acting upon it and allowing it to help shape their sensibility: the popular dances and rondos beneath the palm trees and stars of the Northeastern beaches, the beat of the *catêretê*¹ at the forest's edge, the *macumbas*² and witchcraft of the blacks on the outskirts of cities, the *serestas* [serenades] and *choros*³ in the cities, the traditions and felicitous improvisations of Carnival in the capitals, etc. . . . Or even something more vague within the Brazilian vastness. . . . Things from deep in the woods: the mysterious Brazilian forest, filled with familiar legends and demons, where the wildcat lives with the Great Snake and the legendary descendants of tribal hero Macunaima,⁴ and the great rivers, majestic and deep, these great, fantastic beings that have always inspired childhood fear, attraction, and worship in Brazilians, from the depths of which rise enchanted palaces, dwellings of "Iara"⁵—the mother of the waters, with her green hair, our godmother, etc. . . . Throughout Villa's body of work—above all in his symphonies—one feels the reflection of these things. I believe it is only that which he ultimately calls the ambiance of the "Choros." And it is upon this vague and undefined ambiance that the rhythms come crashing down, literally, as if moved by the evident and imperious will to give it a precise form, of shaping almost everything in their image. Thus, one can easily understand the predominance of rhythm in this work, and it is from this

that it draws its form. For here it is the typical element, the concrete expression of race. This rhythmic is specific to the national popular music. One need not seek out external cultural or social causes in order to explain it, as has been done so often. The “Choros,” for example, have never needed Stravinsky, jazz, or other foreign influences in order to exist. Everything that was necessary to their creation existed in Brazil. V. Lobos did nothing but obey the imposition of his environment and his race. Its form is born from the fusion of primordial rhythmic elements that are embryonic or already extant in our popular music—for example, from Brazil’s unique syncopation that is spontaneously born from the soft, gentle national prosody,* the *maxixe*,⁶ rogue of coastal cities, from the *choro* oblivious of its Spanish nobility, bastard of civilization in the wild land where the guitar was replaced by the *cavaquinho*⁷ (viol), etc. . . . A profound interpreter of his people, his rhythmic is nothing but the brilliant, albeit unintentional, development of popular expression.

In certain parts of Brazil, we remain so close to nature that we can see (so to speak) the act of birth, the concrete source of many of our collective popular creations. One can almost see the moving work of anonymous creation in action. Such is the case with some of our legends, poetry, and music. One is able to feel how, for us, music and poetry are still enmeshed. One must think of Greece or of early Christianity. “This intimate connection with the spoken language that characterizes Greek music,” according to [German music critic] Paul Bekker,⁸ may also be found among us. Like the Greeks, our (mostly illiterate) popular singers “do not know measured rhythm in today’s sense, and they stress their singing generally in accord with the laws of their language.” Medieval music was also decisively marked by the historical process of the people’s growing individualization that was seen in Europe and that gave birth to several national cultures that had come to replace the unique culture of the period—the international culture of the Church. From the universal, sacred form of music that it had been, as sung in church, it became profane and national, “dependent now only on the physiological conformation of peoples and the language that they speak.” With us, things happened conversely. No growing individualization of the peoples; more of a growing mixture of peoples. Several totally different races from opposite meridians met at a given moment upon the virgin soil of Brazil: the free Indian, the Portuguese conqueror, and later, the African slave. These diverse peoples have nothing in common, nothing approximate, nothing similar: races, customs, language, foreign—almost inimical—civilizations. Nothing but the earth beneath them as a common denominator. Each with its totally opposite linguistic and musical ways.† In the end, because of the superiority of their culture and their civilization,

* See “Ensaio sobre a musica brasileira” [Essay on Brazilian music], by Mário de Andrade. According to this author, whose authority among us becomes greater with each passing day, there was a conflict between the directly musical eurhythmics of the Portuguese and the prosody of Indo-American songs found also among the transplanted Africans. The characteristic Brazilian rhythm emerges from this conflict, the Brazilian having an entirely fantasist way of giving rhythm and producing a somewhat freer and more varied rhythm. To him, rhythm is, above all else, an element of racial expression.

† To the Indian, music is never profane in Bekker’s sense. It is never lyrical in nature, never of a purely individual psychological order. It is always sacred, religious, in the sociological sense; commemorative and ritual music. It does not know exclusively musical rhythm. While the black man, forcibly torn from his environment and his tribe, was transplanted to Brazil, there to live oppressed by a social institution—slavery—his music is not religious or sacred, it evinces no commemorative nature, etc. But perhaps, because of the miserable and painful conditions of its existence, it has already taken root in motifs of a psychological order. Except that its cultural and social state is too primitive and its individuality still too rudimentary for this to bring about the blossoming of any such manifestation of lyricism—of a purely personal music. On the other hand, this very state of primitivism, its sharply defined ethnic type and the terrible identity of its living conditions, gave this music if not an organically collective character, then at least a formidable unanimous force, expressed by rhythm. However, for the Indian, the character of his music—if not expressly collective but above all impersonal and a-psychological, sacred and ritual—is given, one could say, by the strangely

the Portuguese got the upper hand and imposed their language. But in the clash of the two other opposing prosodies (the Indian and the African), Portuguese laws of prosody were transformed, giving birth to our current Brazilian prosody—completely different from that of Portugal. We can still feel the evident signs of this prosodic struggle in our very free popular way of singing,‡ in which only tempo counts, but not the measure framed in the European style—a way that, transposed to accompanying instruments, has become over time a specific element of Brazilian music. Also, among us, the evolution of our music always moved in tandem with the evolution of language; it did not *follow* it, as was the case in Europe. It was, rather, the mirror that reflected, in a large image, in slow motion, the whole of the formative process of our national prosody so that once this process was fixed, it saw itself fixed as well. But from this moment on, their destinies parted: Music now goes its own way, alone, fully independent of language. And soon, it moves from being sung to being played, frees itself completely from poetry, etc.; and this process continues until the emergence of artistic music and personal creation, of which Villa[-Lobos] represents the summit. Meanwhile, language has quite another destiny. The process of its individualization, of its nationalization, has not overtaken the framework of its prosodic evolution, of its physiological transformation. But all of its theoretical structure, all of what makes its spirit and its cultural tradition, was preserved, and its aesthetic obstinately resists all change. This is understandable, for it is a well-known phenomenon that every culture must, by definition, preserve itself, persist in conservation. And what does this mean? In the long run, it resulted in an ever-growing separation between our *spoken* language and the Portuguese we write. The literati wrote one language and the people spoke another. The two did not understand one another; they did not have a common means of communication. They did not know one another, and—with a few rare exceptions—intellectuals and men of letters felt like strangers in their own country, exiles in their own culture. Under these conditions, one can easily see that music—in its essence farther removed from any form of intellectuality, more independent from cultural necessity—should have taken precedence over language. For in a country made up of different races, each with its particular linguistic traditions, it was only natural that music should then have more easily become a more indeterminate means of communication, to be certain, albeit one that is also a good deal more universal and suggestive than the word. It came about without anyone's realizing it, the great collective voice of the people, the expression of its joy and its sadness, of the entire subjective life of the race. Thus, that which, in other countries, generally falls at first to language, to poetry, was here the mission of music. If the refined literature of the cities did not understand the uncultured and ungrammatical poetry of the people, and if they, in turn, could neither love nor understand or even recognize their literature, then at least music—with all of its formidable faculty of suggestion and its less intellectual and more instinctual character—could have a chance to move city folk, including intellectuals and artists. This is what happened. Nowadays, of all the intellectuals of the last generations, there is not one who is unaware of the crucial role of music in the making of our national culture and in the spiritual awakening of

melancholy, mysteriously vague melody, without the slightest formal frame. . . . What is certain is that for the black man, rhythm did not come as directly from the prosody, as with the Indian. It is already more musically individualized and translated into another social state. The personal lyrical note, psychological individuality—only with the European, Portuguese, or Spanish does one find an already more complex sensibility, marked by an entire cultural tradition, expressed by language and by music, already totally separated from the former.

‡ But all of these romantic subtleties of song are not always prosodic. Occasionally, they even contradict the laws of prosody. Yet they are always purely physiological—even choreographic—in essence. They are free movements determined by fatigue and developed from fatigue. Etc. (See Mario de Andrade: *Ensaio*, etc.)

the collective soul. Can one now imagine the importance that an oeuvre like that of [Villa-]Lobos might have in such a country? This importance spills out beyond the framework of the art of music. A higher echelon of culture has been achieved. The path has now been cleared for personal creation—a dangerous path among all others, leading from the collective to the individual. In the drama of our culture, it is the individual spirit's turn to play the starring role. Instead of a poet or a thinker, it was a musician that succeeded in expressing himself before the others. He was the first individual manifestation of Brazilian consciousness to express itself globally. This is a recognized fact that already implies a certain definition of our spirit and of the direction that our culture will take. In its future investigations, our critical and speculative thinking must forcibly take this fact into account. For it seems that fate has committed us to music—that is to say, we will never do anything other than see life but we will also listen to it, and the world will always be less of an image than a chord—a melody before a drawing; a process more than a definition. So, what is there to say? Will our culture be *musical* or will it not? . . . In any event, the work of Villa-Lobos is an already resounding confirmation of the soundness of the orientation and thought of the modern Brazilian generations.

—Originally published as “Villa-Lobos et son peuple: Le Point de vue brésilien,” *La Revue musicale* (Paris), November 1929.

Notes

1. A Brazilian dance of Amerindian origin also known as *Catira* in which two guitar players sing and direct the progress of hand-clapping and foot-stomping dancers.
2. Generic designation given to various Afro-Brazilian syncretic cults, generally strongly influenced by religions such as Candomblé, Umbanda, and Espiritismo (or Spiritualism), among others.
3. A genre of Brazilian popular and instrumental music. Choro compositions are virtuosic and feature improvisation. The emblematic instruments of the genre include seven-string guitar, piano, flute, *cavaquinho* (a four-stringed guitar), and mandolin. The “Choros” cycle is considered an important group of compositions in the work of Heitor Villa-Lobos.
4. The central character of the eponymous book by Mário de Andrade, published in 1928, Macunaíma was an antihero who embodied the various traits and stereotypes of Brazilian folklore and culture.
5. Also known as Iemanjá or Janaína, Iará is the queen of the oceans, according to the mythology of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religions.
6. A musical genre and type of ballroom dance of accelerated rhythm, brought over by slaves from Mozambique during the 1870s. It was influenced by the tango of Argentina and Uruguay.
7. A small, four-stringed guitar. The instrument originated in the Minho region of northern Portugal and was widely introduced in Brazilian culture, especially in samba and choro.
8. Paul Bekker, *La musique: Les transformations des formes musicales depuis l'antiquité jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris: Payot, 1929), originally published as *Musikgeschichte als Geschichte der musikalischen Formwandlungen* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1926). Pedrosa's quotations from Bekker may be paraphrases from the French edition or his French translations from the German edition.

The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz¹

In the present social state, with society divided into two irreducibly antagonistic classes, with the means of production needing once again to be socialized and the technical-industrial apparatus enabling man to impose his rational will upon nature, the decadence of past mythologies finds itself in various stages of ruin, according to the social group in question. With the bourgeoisie's advent as the dominant class, the scientific concept of nature was finally constructed. A new general concept of the world is now needed, one in which both society and nature are scientifically and harmoniously integrated. This concept can only be the work of the proletariat.

Once the general concept of nature has finally been elaborated, modern artists take possession of it and attempt to extract from it a synthetic image that is the expression of its sensibility. As for the concept of society, in order to impose itself conclusively, the general theory still in the making requires winning the battle against the forces of reaction, and its destiny is thus confined to the final outcome of the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Hence the individualization of the modern imagination, which signals the artistic expression of our times. Just as Greek art unconsciously drew the forms of its creative imagination from the arsenal of its mythology, modern artists do nothing more than unconsciously extract the aesthetic forms and accomplishments of their creations, not from a mythology, but from a scientific and rational concept of nature.

The total scientific synthesis between the two concepts, which until now have not adapted themselves to the mind of modern man, shall represent a decisive stage in the historical and cultural development of humanity.

After the revolutionary storm of 1848, [composer Richard] Wagner wrote: "In its flowering time, Grecian Art was *conservative*, because it was a worthy and adequate expression of the public conscience: with us, true Art is *revolutionary*, because its very existence is opposed to the ruling spirit of the community."² Nowadays, art can only be restored to its former dignity and represent a social function, though perhaps with a loss of its aesthetic purity, if it opposes itself to the accepted values. In a society shot through with the most terrible class antagonisms, it can only achieve public consciousness or, at least, some form of public class consciousness, by being revolutionary. Only one of the two embattled classes has the right to represent this form of general consciousness. Not only because of its growing numbers, but because of the formidable historical role it is destined to play, this class is the modern proletariat.

Originating as they do in the bourgeoisie, the great majority of current artists have not yet conquered within themselves the profound socio-philosophical antinomy that dominates our time. And this is the impasse from which they cannot extricate themselves. Their efforts are great, but unilateral. They reacted legitimately and in a timely manner against Impressionism, that extremely individualist delinquency at which art had arrived. They made an effort to cease contemplating the spectacle of the world, united only by one or two of man's most primary and miserable perceptions. They intuited more than they understood that our senses cannot today be used narrowly and empirically, divested of their entire technological and philosophical system. Faced with the vast material accumulated by the great modern industry, they paused, hesitant and intimidated. The vastness of that field completely removed from them all social perspectives. They occupied the same position as that of an ordinary laborer who spends his time turning a screw without any understanding of the overall process of production.

Formidable steel curtains have been drawn to reveal to the artist's imagination the prodigious dimensions of an arsenal infinitely more wonderful than the workshops of Vulcan and Mephistopheles, which are modern industry and technology. Finding it impossible to comprehend it in its totality, the individual imagination was rendered partial, and a new process of division of labor and specialization further developed in the field of aesthetics, while the branches of art—already so separate—were yet again subdivided, with the emergence of new modes of expression of infinite possibilities, such as cinema. In this case, the burning thirst for synthesis contained in every artistic manifestation came up against insurmountable social and technical obstacles. The productive, legal, and educational conditions of the ruling order do not allow them to be vanquished.

Everywhere, in all of its episodic or partial differences, the simultaneity and generalization of the movement called modern art reveals its true social character. It was neither anyone's individual caprice nor a superficially fashionable movement. It was a moment in the historical evolution of aesthetics and an imposition of the productive and cultural forces of the age, demanding expression in a nobler social form. But that movement remains unfinished and shall be no more than an evolutionary process, likewise marked by bourgeois duality; its purely natural or technological concept still excludes society—which explains its chaotic nature and the impression it produces of a workshop in which (separately, and amid complete disorder) the various parts of a work were being mounted which it is still impossible to perceive in its entirety.

This social and philosophical eclecticism is visible in all artists, even the most objective and systematic ones, and in those whose work is most disciplined, such as Picasso. All of them are marked by a latent subjectivism which manifests itself every time that—leaving aside the immediate technical problem at hand—they generalize, seeking to explain their own aesthetic concept. And they take personality itself as a universal step, thus divesting itself of the materialist austerity with which they believe in the existence of exterior objects. Impressionistic in their interpretation of the world, these artists are dehumanized, separate from society—that is, from its vital problems; they become corrupt and idiotic, restricting their social plan and their aesthetic concerns to a puerile game of forms and still lifes. To them, society itself and even men are a type of still life.

However, social dynamics do not allow the human spirit to remain paralyzed or imbecilic in this ideological and aesthetic infantilism.

Whereas the magic sparks of blast furnaces and the bold forms of prodigious machines fill the minds and imaginations of some of today's artists, others—as a requirement for integration of the human spirit, as a necessary expression of the modern sensibility—rise up and move away from the field of still life and purely technical experiments to observe society in its living, dramatic fermentation. These will seek the elements of a poetic expression equally modern in contemporary social relations.

This is why the artistic field is aesthetically and socially divided. On one side is the art of those creators who became absorbed by this second nature superimposed upon the primitive one which is technology (our modern and mechanical nature), completely disconnected from society, partially through narrow-mindedness, partially so as not to take a stand with regard to the implacable battle of the two enemy classes. The air in this stuffy environment becomes stale, and they grow pale within a suffocating, egocentric individualism at the service of a parasitic caste or in hermetic dilettantism for a half-dozen initiates. They return nostalgically to the ivory tower, amid the fabulous steel mirages that surround them. On the other side we have the social artists, those who move toward the proletariat and, in an intuitive anticipation of sensibility, are able to discern the future synthesis of nature and society, finally divested of the idealisms of educators and of the mystical convulsions of worm-eaten mythologies. This is what explains the realism of the proletariat and of the artists that express it.

Such is the case of Käthe Kollwitz.

The foregoing general classification of artists³ is also determined by the immediate or indirect aesthetic purpose with which they imbue their work. Individual art is a relatively recent invention. Through a deadly subordination to technology, the purest modern artists have resolved the problem of modern mechanical nature by

abolishing man—social man—from his universe. And the problem of modern art was thus averted, its solution being purely transitory and empirical. The social demands which grow vertiginously do not, however, forgive these artists such prestidigitations, and will ever more impertinently slam shut the doors of sensibility. All that is vital and embryonic within current society no longer subjects itself to this humiliating subordination to the machine. The time of this subordination is long gone. Today, new men once again claim restoration of their primacy over the superhuman and gigantic mechanical entity which they themselves created. It has been a long time since the time of instinctive revolts against it. It has been a long time since men rose up against the machine with sticks and clubs, in the name of the old distaff and the domestic spindle with which they wove their coarse garments, as in the episode of the Silesian weavers who inspired Käthe Kollwitz's earliest etchings.

As the opposite of nature, social motifs become increasingly richer and clamor for integration into the modern work of art. The social drama we experience possesses the strength and breadth that inspired the great subjects of Greek tragedy. Although tendentious due to a fatality of our age, the motifs that inspire our social art tomorrow will lend a character of more profound inner balance, for they will be integrated into the impersonal or asocial technological motifs manifested in modern art. It will be the superior art form of a new age, through nature's integration in man. But this is still the music of the future.

If, in the course of economic evolution, the process of the social organization of labor unleashed a formidable concentration of productive forces, it also brought together the living field of the workers in a single organic unit—shaped from the same social mass and forced into externally imposed discipline—with an implacable and impersonal precision. If blind and passive submission to nature created the discipline of Catholicism, man's brutal and economic subordination to machinery forged cohesion and collective will, the class consciousness of the proletariat. Another society formed inside bourgeois society, in underground mines, in tenements and in suburban clusters, under the roofs of great factories, in the caverns of foundries and boilers, in the core of machines, in contact with motors. And it holds the key to the world in its rough, coal-blackened hands. This is the only social group born with the machine and dispossessed by it, but the only one able to understand its secret and which will place its large, violent hand on the vertiginous and wild steering wheel of the machinery and lead it like a meek lamb.

This new world forces all men who still remain outside it to take a given social stand. The destiny of Käthe Kollwitz's art, then, does not lie in art itself. It lies socially in the proletariat. It is a partisan and tendentious art—but what astonishing universality! For, in representing the social expression of the new class—the future mistress of society's destinies—what she aspires to through the miserable oppression of the present hour is a superior new humanism, an authentic new classicism that emerged dramatically and spontaneously from life itself.

Here lies the first profound general aspiration that emerges from the German artist's work—an aspiration, which must not be mistaken for accomplishment. It is the secret of her universality. The social sentiments she expresses possess a Beethoven-like grandeur and latitude.

For all the outmoded aesthetic refinements that characterized him, [the English critic John] Ruskin put forth the risky argument that the value of artistic production is determined by the elevation of sentiment expressed in it, exemplifying this by stating that a miser cannot write poetry about lost money because such a poem would move no one. We do not want to discuss the case, but what is important about it to

us is the miser's social position. From the societal point of view, it is obvious that his socializing function would not appear here. For nowadays, under given moral and economic conditions, said socializing function depends primarily on the social position that is occupied. It depends on class. War is a subject that inspired Kollwitz's most remarkable prints and drawings, and yet the tremendously moving power of these pictures depends principally on the social position from which they were made. This is war as seen by the people, war on the other side of the social barricade, as felt by the proletariat, without ideological or tendentious distortions, without the ignoble patriotic masturbation with which it is exalted, without the enticement of unknown soldiers or comic opera heroes, without glory, without fat or star-studded generals, without guardian angels or charitable ladies who send bonbons and cigarettes off to the trenches. Kollwitz's war contains nothing but anonymous and monstrous sacrifices, nothing but widows who have lost everything, in poverty and in pain, nothing but large hands forever idle, gathered like a pair of useless objects upon the formless body, nothing but mothers—an organization of mothers united, their arms entwined like barbed wire, in defense of what children they still have (see fig. on page 55). It is the unarmed and humble people, on one hand; on the other, war—an elemental, inexorable, terrifying, and ubiquitous force, like some cataclysm of nature. The people in the prints seem to be unaware that war is made by men, that it is a social product, so great is the impersonality and the enormity of the catastrophe that crushes them. The artist essentializes the problems, and her achievements possess the virile force of simplification. Those small lithographs contain such socializing power that they assume the proportions of a medieval fresco.

Meanwhile, there is no art, there is no aesthetic prowess, there is no technical mastery capable of expressing the same emotional intensity, the same universality, setting itself between the creator on this side of the barricade and the social position of the bourgeoisie. Let a war scene be drawn and viewed by the ruling classes, and from the artistic perspective it is only possible to achieve art by expressing the grotesque: otherwise, the work shall not convey more than the most vulgar and conventional academicism. When [German artist] Georg Grosz depicted war from an individual perspective, it was through his avenging satire that he achieved great art. But to express war by particularizing it in the tragic or sympathetic image of a general, king, or profiteer is an aesthetic problem that challenges all the talents and technical resources of even the most brilliant modern artist.

Her attitude to war defines Kollwitz's dominant social tendency—*loyalty to her class*. That is the special trait of her art. The daughter of a stonemason, she remains throughout her entire long life a stonemason's daughter, a member of the proletarian family. Neither the triumphs of her career, nor the snobbery of fashion, nor the successive technical groups and schools she found along the way separated her for even one instant from this loyalty. Born to art under the sign of naturalism, thereby was her artistic apprenticeship made. [Novelist Émile] Zola's *Germinal* and [playwright Gerhart] Hauptmann's *The Weavers* marked the beginning of her work, just as they had been landmarks for an entire literary age in France and in Germany. Her etchings of this early period were inspired by those two creations. Naturalism issued her artistic passport. And it was natural that it should have been thus—that sincere and popular nature would necessarily absorb the will, the desire to grasp social poverty to the depth of its drama and of its secret, as contained in naturalism. But what the latter did not manage, due to its own flaws and literary affectation, the passivity of its distorted and microscopic lens, she was to achieve and surpass. She expressed the best and most profound elements of naturalism—which was overall a great literary

abortion, in any event. Compared to her, [German artist Max] Liebermann was a retrograde academic.

Kollwitz's second period, in which she achieved the inner assurance and plenitude of her art, coincided historically with the transition of the German proletariat to a higher stage of collective organization, having emerged victorious from its long struggle against the Bismarckian order. She then found in Marxism the complete expression of her theoretical conscience. The doctrine of scientific socialism appeared for the first time as the proletariat's specific and already practically proven weapon in the struggle for its emancipation. Thus the first revolutionary class organization, its political party (which was then social democracy), and its first great artist in the person of Käthe Kollwitz simultaneously emerged.

Up until then, other artists, among them those of the naturalist school, had already created literary and artistic subjects from the lives of the proletarian masses. But the artist who had made it the purpose of her life or work to express the collective and sentimental life of the proletariat as a class was unknown in the history of art. For her, this is more than an unexplored and interesting subject; it is the very condition of her art, the primary cause of her sensibility.

Her attitude toward the popular masses is more than an aesthetic stance. It is a social imperative she cannot escape, a system of life. It is already a political attitude. All of this is contained within this permanent trait of class fidelity. All the schools faded away; the aesthetic revolutions followed one after the other. Naturalism fulfilled its function and disappeared. The romantic wave of Expressionism flooded the country, inaugurating the literature of appeals and manifestos, socializing itself through war, and afterward, the storm quietly retreated and the individuals returned to their places. All of the modern aesthetic isms come and go contemporarily and successively, from Futurism and Cubism to Dada and the most recent, Neorealism, yet Käthe Kollwitz continues her unaltered and unalterable course. Only the artist is enriched with all those currents and deepens her art, perfecting her technique and specifying her intentions. The work thus has the dramatic and internal continuity of a running river, furrowing its bed ever deeper and accelerating—in a progressive and harmonious arrangement—the flow of its waters to the sea.

Her subject matter at the beginning of her career may be episodic or historical, still subordinated to anecdote, as in the *Weberzug* (March of the weavers) etchings. But little by little they become universalized, losing that anecdotal aspect while gaining depth and generality, and becoming (so to speak) a single subject or theme. It is war, death, hunger, the people—the anonymous life of the workers: a pregnant mother, a breast-feeding mother, a father killed in the war, the unemployed, a widow, prisoners, a proletarian demonstration, etc.

And yet the artist has her preference within the proletariat itself, for in addition to her class, she belongs to her sex. She is the artist of proletarian women. Their profound, instinctive popular strength, their immense capacity for affection and suffering, that joviality and sympathy despite everything they face in life—all this she carved into the moving simplicity of wood, with a severity that is almost hostile, but accentuated by the contrast of the violence and depth of sentiment expressed. The dramatic intensity revealed by the violated wood is such that in it, the work of art achieves the ideal unity and integration of the artist's truth and sentiment and the inner capacity for expression of the material itself.

This depth of sentimental understanding that she displays is one of the most typically feminine traits of her sensibility. And it might explain the absence in her prints of the enemy class, which appears in them only indirectly, in the guise of a *social*

fatality. That dark environment that envelops her figures represents the social fatality of the enemy class; the painful and tragic life of her people betrays the feminine reaction of her sensibility, which is purely instinctive and sentimental. The proletarian woman has not yet moved beyond that primitive phase of class consciousness. However, the almost complete absence of any trace of nature already demonstrates that all the evils come from society, from men.

The historical process of the making of class consciousness begins with a sense of solidarity during calamity, and so its first expression necessarily takes on a defensive form. But because of this awareness that the ills and miseries suffered by the people are of a social nature, a rustic proletarian mother has a deeper and truer understanding of life in the profound simplicity of her ignorance and her class instinct than a millionaire's daughter or any Princess Bibesco.⁴

The medieval plagues that regularly destroyed whole populations provoked, under the apocalyptic fear of these calamities, formidable convulsive explosions of hysteria and mysticism. The calamities that currently crush the popular masses are far from being less tragic or less apocalyptic. But, as is demonstrated by Kollwitz, the hysterical collective neuroses no longer appear. Under the terror of hunger and the horrors of war that shine with sinister light in the eyes of her children and her women, no gaze any longer lifts itself to heaven, nor are hands clasped in prayer. But here and there, flashes of conscious hatred already shine in bright pupils and a few fists are clenched.

The enemy no longer appears in those lithographs, but Kollwitz's people have already understood that their tragedy is a social one. Nevertheless, under the immensity of the calamities, they have not yet had sufficient time or energy to reflect upon them. Mired in suffering to the roots of their souls, all of their moral energy is concentrated in a heroic resistance to it. Kollwitz is the painter of the proletariat's cosmic sensibility, and this sensibility, like that of every young society, has no inaccessible ruffles nor interior affectations, has no purity of sentiment or intellectual refinements. It is simple and banal, but it is immense.

Not in vain is the proletariat the last class to have emerged in history. Instinctively, in itself, it already feels the making of a new culture, and that culture swells inside it. Its direction and its orientation have already been scientifically formulated, albeit only a part of it—its sensibility—has already found certain forms of artistic expression. Other forms of this expression came to join Kollwitz's historic attempt—the first to appear chronologically. Among these is the cerebral and conscious violence of Grosz's satire, in which hatred of the exploiting class is already the source of inspiration for his drawings and watercolors. While Kollwitz expresses the suffering of the exploited masses, Grosz uses his scalpel to dissect the very souls of the exploiters, tearing out eyes from all the tumors in those swinelike heads and those sclerotic women's faces.

The proletariat is a transitory class. Its existence is conditioned to a constant and terrible struggle for survival. It has no time to spare for stacking weapons and surrendering to the pleasures of gratuitous contemplation and imagination. Its art must likewise be transitory and utilitarian. The noblest expression of it to date lies in Käthe Kollwitz.

Concerned and biased as it is—and partisan by system—there is nonetheless no more profoundly human art. However, the concept of humanity is currently subordinated to a more pressing reality: the concept of class. That which is human to some is not so to others. It is precisely those who most deny this concept that are most instinctively and socially impregnated by it. They do not understand the great artist's

art. They would deny the very sincerity of her work, precisely under the pretext that it is tendentious. Many of them do so because of what they believe to be disinterested conviction, whereas they merely inherited it or absorbed it little by little, day after day, in their homes or schools, in their living environment. Such conviction is the instinct of their class. Observe some of them looking at these prints: the respectable banker or industrialist, the venerable titular clergyman, the noble lady of high society who supports nursery schools and other pious institutions—indifferently or not, they will allow their faded and distracted gaze to travel over the works, to arrive at the end overcome by an accusatory impatience. However, the prints will have other effects on the anonymous mass of uneducated men with calloused hands and ignorant women who do not wear hats. They come away from these pictures with fiery eyes and clenched fists. Today's social art is not, in fact, a delicious pastime: it is a weapon. Kollwitz's work proceeds, thus, to further divide men. The dialectic of the social dynamic which the laws of logic and of individual psychology do not decipher nonetheless leads a work of this kind—so profoundly inspired by love and by human brotherhood—to nourish the hatred of the more implacable class. And with this, its generous social mission is accomplished.

—Excerpted from the work originally published as “As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz,” *O homem livre*, nos. 6–9 (July 2, 8, 17, and 14, 1933).

Notes

1. The excerpt published here was part of Pedrosa's lecture “Käthe Kollwitz e o seu modo vermelho de perceber a vida” (Käthe Kollwitz and her red way of seeing the world), delivered at the Clube dos Artistas Modernos, São Paulo, on June 16, 1933. The version from which this excerpt was taken was revised and altered for publication in four chapters in the newspaper *O homem livre* (The free man) from July 2 to 14, 1933. The graphic work of Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) aroused the interest of Brazilian artists—among them Lívio Abramo—who were introduced to it at the *Exposição alemã de livros e artes gráficas* (German exhibition of books and graphic arts) (Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, 1930). She was also represented in the *Exposição de arte condenada pelo III Reich* (Exhibition of art banned by the Third Reich) (Casa do Estudante do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 1945), which included works from the “Degenerate Art” exhibition sponsored by the Third Reich (Munich, 1937). She participated in *A arte alemã contemporânea* (German contemporary art) (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1956). In 1985 her work was exhibited at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes in *Gráfica crítica na época de Weimar* (Critical graphic arts in the age of Weimar). The Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo owns *Auto-retrato* (Self-portrait; 1919) and *As mães* (The mothers; 1922–23).
2. Richard Wagner, *Prose Works*, vol. 1, trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York: Broude, 1966), 51–52.
3. In his lecture, before discussing the present, Pedrosa introduces a historical overview of the relation between art and work from a Marxist perspective, as well as a discussion of the social character of art in the past.
4. Pedrosa refers here to writer and socialite Elizabeth, Princess Bibesco, daughter of a British prime minister and wife of a Romanian aristocrat. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Bibesco.

Portinari: From Brodowski to the Washington Murals

A son of Italy, Candido Portinari's father came to Brazil at the age of thirteen; likewise Italian, the artist's mother arrived at the age of five or six. They were raised, and then raised their own family, as settlers on the farms near Ribeirão Preto.¹ Born in 1903 at the Fazenda Santa Rosa, the painter was the second of the couple's twelve children. A small town with a population of two or three thousand, Brodowski² was founded around that time, and was born amid farms. As for education, Candido did not go beyond primary school. But he shot down many a bird with his slingshot, flew kites, and often ventured off into the forest rather than go to school. Like everyone



Candido Portinari. *Hill*. 1933. Oil on canvas, 44 $\frac{7}{8}$ \times 57 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (114 \times 145.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund

else, he played soccer with a ball made out of socks, whenever he wasn't playing in a real field with a real leather ball. It was then he dislocated his right thigh, and limped forever after.

A son of the people, his education took place outdoors, in direct contact with the settlers' hard work amid the purple earth of the coffee plantations. His childhood was poor but enveloped in the warm tenderness of a rough family of Italian peasants. From that period, in addition to the images of childhood, he retained his fondness for familiar surroundings and an affection for his family, a sympathy for the common man, for the manual laborer and rough manners, and a certain amount of shrewdness and plebeian wisdom of the *paulista* yokel. One day a painter arrived in Brodowski to decorate the local church. It was a fateful day for the mischievous boy. Off he went to observe. And as the poet Manuel Bandeira said, from being a "spectator he soon moved on to being an assistant and first began to handle paintbrushes."³

This, then, was a double revelation, of painting and vocation. Once he had discovered the latter, he found himself—at the age of fifteen—in the painful circumstance of leaving his family, his beloved Brodowski, birds, bird traps, and paper kites. He moved to Rio de Janeiro, penniless, unprotected, alone, and shy. There were hard years of apprenticeship and the inevitable failures of the early days. He began to understand that art is serious and hard; it is no game. He identified completely with his life; he knew that his destiny was linked to the vicissitudes of his calling. And that is why Portinari was never in his life a dilettante. Just as others learned to become plasterers or marble cutters, he learned the painter's trade. Today, one of the deepest traits of his artistic personality is precisely this artisanal character, which he never let go of.

In order to survive in Rio, the budding artist was forced into various professions, including that of waiter. He enrolled in the contest to enter the living model class at the Escola de Belas Artes,⁴ but was rejected. In 1921, at eighteen, he managed to enroll in a drawing class at the same school, and applied for enrollment in a painting class. In 1922 he made his debut with a portrait that was ignored by the Salão.⁵ The following year he obtained his first triumph: a bronze medal for a portrait. From then on success was more frequent, although still on a modest scale. His rise over the years was constant,

neither sensational nor rapid. In 1924 he experienced the disappointment of seeing his first composition (an oil painting titled *Baile na roça* [Country dance]) rejected by the Salão jury. A small silver medal came in 1925, a grand medal in 1927, and finally, in 1928, the coveted European travel prize for his portrait of poet Olegário Mariano. After that he was off to Paris, Italy, Spain, England. In Europe he saw people, saw the masters, took part in debates, made plans. He scandalized his friends and teachers at the Escola de Belas Artes when he returned without a single canvas, but he brought back more than a picture: in addition to a few ideas, he brought his wife, Maria.

He now began his career as an artist proper. In Europe, Portinari principally studied past European masters. It was only in Brazil, upon his return from Europe, that he discovered so-called modernism. This is understandable: over there, his overriding concern was observing the manner, the technique, the art of the great masters of the past; he visited museums to learn humbly. He had no time to lose himself in abstract aesthetic or philosophical concerns. Only when he was back in his country could he begin to sort out in his mind what it was he saw there; like myself now, instead of museums and their countless treasures of the past and of tradition, he had only to see and consult art magazines or the albums and collections of contemporary artists—in addition to participating in abstruse discussions with intellectuals and men of letters—for the aesthetic problem that emerged to take on primary importance as a consequence of the time and the milieu. Thus, what interested him was not the conservative, necessarily timid, and somewhat provincial academic circles, perfectly satisfied with their not un noble mission of upholding time-honored artistic traditions against exalted iconoclastic youths. Hence his contact with the literary avant-garde of the day.

But let it not be thought that Portinari enlisted himself impetuously in the new troops like some unthinking convert, for he never allowed himself to be swept away by transitory enthusiasms or the influences of fashion. His transition to so-called modernism, or his break with academicism, was a slow, safe, step-by-step process. The proof is that, even while he presented new compositions of a frankly Constructivist or Cubist influence, he continued to cultivate classical art, painting portraits of ladies and gentlemen with artistic authority, pictorial realism, and a nobility of hues worthy of the great tradition of the Renaissance masters.

The works he exhibited in 1934 in Rio and, principally, São Paulo were a result of those early experiments and contacts with new antinaturalist concepts. It might be said that it was there the artist gained his earliest recognition—a recognition confirmed one year later, in 1935, when he received the second honorable mention for his painting *Café* (see plate on pp. 78–79) in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute contest.

The sentimental theme was the first to appear in his palette. The brown or Brodowskian series dates from this period. His canvases from then are characterized by a vast, predominantly brown surface, sprinkled with accidents of light, representation of its thematic figures, with the uniform play and direction of chiaroscuro, the contented pastiness of the paint, and the transparency of the hues. The outstanding poetic sentiment is conveyed not only by the chiaroscuro contrast but also by the atmospheric or cosmic elements, which recall the great Dutch landscape artists, especially Breughel. In this series, certain colors (particularly brown—the purple earth of Brodowski) contain an element of symbolism, as do the dark skies of the period. It is a sort of liberation from the past, a transcription to the canvas of his reminiscences of his boyhood in Brodowski. Actually, this coincided with the so-called primitivism of Brazilian modern poetry of the period, characterized by a return to the provincial sentimentality of the whiny Romantic poets of the previous

century or an insistence on naive popular subject matter, through anti-intellectual and antiformal reaction.

Childhood memories of an almost a priori subjective inspiration, mere suggestions of light, not quite realistic, not quite actuality—there is nothing in what he did then to suggest the muralist he would become. The most representative examples of this period are *O circo* [The circus]; *O futebol* [Soccer] in its first version, before Portinari modified the ambience, lightening the backgrounds to the detriment of the mystery and suggestiveness of the colors; *Casamento em Brodowski* [Wedding in Brodowski], a watercolor that might benefit from a comparison to the 1940 oil *Casamento rural* [Rural wedding]; and *Morro* [Hill], currently in New York's Museum of Modern Art, which closes the brown cycle, and whose composition is already more complex and the individualization of the figures more marked. This period extended more or less from 1933 to 1934.

Once he had satisfied his demands of a sentimental order, as if in a painful process of affective separation from the past that was necessary to his artistic coming of age, Portinari now surrendered to new aesthetic and technical problems. And he began a series of investigations into materials analysis. He dealt with things separately; the problems of space and perspective—that is, of construction—tormented him. He then abandoned that satisfied pastiness of the paint in the brown series and surrendered to an enormous analytic tension, seeking to translate visual reality into a geometric abstraction of planes and dimensions. In this period, formal play was exclusively subordinated to the need for an abstract definition of form. In order to create mystery and construct the world, he resorted to the lesson of Giorgio de Chirico, with his handling of shadows produced and inverted and the metaphysical spaces of perspective. It is the transcendent problem of composition, the central problem of the period 1934–35. The most expressive works of this period are *Estivador* [Stevedore] (1934) and the admirable *Sorveteiro* [Ice cream vendor] (1934).

The demands of art began to absorb him increasingly. It was the apprehension of pictorial material, that attracted him; fleeing from academicism, he solved the problem through a powerful antinaturalist modeling, which he sought out primarily in Picasso. In his search for the density of bodies and objects, the painter began to treat paint and color no longer as he had done in the Brodowskian period, as a means to exterior sensorial effect, in search of representations of spiritual states, whether conventional or not. The modeling now takes on a brutal concretization, and his figures gain the monumental strength of statuary. What he seeks above all is the integration of composition and mass, something he had not achieved until then in his anti-academic evolution. *Preto da enxada* [Black man with hoe], *Mestiço* (Mestizo), *Índia* [Indian woman], and *Mulata* [Mulatto woman] (1934) all belong to this period.

It was around this time that he introduced a new element to his palette in the modeling of his figures—sensuality, an element that is not exactly abundant in his work. The figures he painted at that time eat up the whole of the foreground, forcing the limits of the oil painting aesthetic to break.

It was the problem of man—of man's reality—that interested him now. His evolution is measured by the evolution of his space and his land, which changes from vast, monotonous, nostalgic, primitive, and plunged in shadow to cultivated earth that is well demarcated by lines and perspectives, geometrically divided by the rows of coffee plantations as a progressive gradation of planes and colors in the depth of its clear, well-lit horizons. Portinari was no longer content with the luminous representation of figures from his early brown period, nor was he satisfied with the formal yet abstract icons that were to follow (*Sorveteiro*), not even the enormous outlines

of isolated, modeled figures. What he wanted now was concrete man, in groups or in his social milieu, at work. In the two imposing figures of *Índia* and *Mulata*, the artist pursues a solid corporality. In *Mestiço* and *Preto da enxada*, the entire canvas is taken up by isolated figures, leaving only the background in perspective, a landscape crisscrossed by lines and signs of man's social activity. Here, he boldly violates the painting's technique and structure. As his figures are projected outside the canvas, the space of the fused background planes is filled with amplitude in an inverted movement. In that sense, there is a profound interior disharmony; the structural unity he had previously found is lost once again (*Café*, the first canvas with this name, and *Sorveteiro*). A profound dualism cuts through all of the painter's work of this period; his destiny depended on overcoming it. The solution he then found was a series of experiments he did while waiting for the wall on which he would spread his work in tempera. The most remarkable of these is *Colona* [Female settler] (1935).

Portinari then abandoned the abstract idealism he had achieved—a pure, transcendent plasticism of sorts—in order to surrender to a struggle against the material in an effort to dominate it. To this end, he sought a tougher, less malleable material, less mundane than oil. Hence his research and experiments with various techniques including tempera, fresco, etc.

Portinari did not arrive at fresco painting through a simple incident abroad, as one might think. It was not knowledge of the murals of [Diego] Rivera or his Mexican imitators that stimulated in the Brazilian painter the idea or the desire to do mural painting. Many who are unfamiliar with his work may think that Portinari's muralism was merely a late echo of the formidable Mexican movement. It was not. The interior evolution of his art allows us to see that Portinari arrived at the problem of the mural organically (so to speak), as the problems of technique and aesthetics matured in him. He first approached it as a problem of interior aesthetics. After the isolated monumental figures and the second *Café*, his experience with fresco work imposed itself naturally as the next step. The powerful figure in tempera, *Colona*—painted in 1935 along with *Café*, of which it is a detail—shows that Portinari was striving for malleable monumental form. At that time, the artist still had no real knowledge of what had been done or was being done in Mexico. It was precisely around this time that he sought to acquire a less haphazard knowledge of what was being done in that country.

It is true that during the period of intense political activity Brazil was then experiencing, there was a great vogue for movements and schools that tended to emphasize the social character or social criticism of art and literature. Naturally, the vogue for the Mexican school of painters was then very great in the country's intellectual circles, but few people actually had any accurate knowledge of it. Even the best-informed did not know much beyond the names of Rivera and [José Clemente] Orozco. Having already mastered modeling, the Brazilian painter set out to study the famous Mexican muralists, especially Diego Rivera—the most well-known of them all. With the proverbial curiosity of a modest and conscientious professional, he even experimented with the famous spray gun for spreading paint, proclaimed as the last word in technique for new modern, so-called open-air mural painting. He studied and tried everything for himself, like a craftsman who is proud of knowing the recipes and secrets of the trade.

However, it may be that the origins of Mexican muralism and of the Brazilian painter's experiments in the same genre were not only rejected at the time but were also purely aesthetic in nature. This explains perfectly why it is not enough to establish relationships of chronological dependency in order to deduce that it was

through direct influence of the Mexican muralist movement that Portinari decided to pursue the same path. Actually, both cases were a matter of the same phenomenon of aesthetic order that was already verifiable earlier in the history of European pictorial evolution. It was a reaction to the limitations of oil painting, which, since the Impressionist movement, had been threatened from many directions by contemporary monumental intentions, not founded upon a new architecture (but upon already crystallized values or ideology and devoid of a collective inspirational power) and by actual dissolution in the face of new needs of expression and of the specific aesthetic of easel painting (the rule of three unities, etc.).

The European artists settled the impasse, deciding to make their own aesthetic revolution within oil painting. Thus it was resolved in depth, because it was impossible to spill over into another domain or genre, and from one analysis to another it led to Abstractionism and Surrealism. Drawing on the enriched material and light achieved by the Impressionists, and the experiments in distortion used in caricature, especially by the formidable [Honoré] Daumier, they deliberately destroyed the surface unity of the picture in a return to the way the primitives treated it. In order to integrate formal needs with distortion in his search for the monumental, Picasso, among others, turned to classical antiquity in his search for solid corporality—heavy, but molded by an antinaturalist process he found in primitive black art.

Generally speaking, it may be said that, whereas the Mexican school principally used the elements of caricatural distortion—drawn not only from the experience in that sense of modern European painting, but from a great national tradition of its own (caricature was always one of the great manifestations of popular art in Mexico)—Portinari mainly used a solid formal distortion of Picassean modeling. The preference in processes of deformity—for monumentality or solid corporality in one (the Brazilian artist) and for social expressiveness in the other (the Mexican muralist movement)—defines the inner force that compelled them to mural painting and the various purposes they were aiming for.

Mexican artists were undoubtedly the first to make use of new experiments that grew out of a need to expand the pictorial field to be broader, less limited to the simple field of technical or aesthetic investigations, whether hermetic or gratuitous. It is their undisputed glory. Having realized the limitations of easel painting, they simply moved on to brushes with long handles: they set oil painting aside and surrendered to fresco work.

It may not be inapposite to observe here, at least in passing, that only in America was the Mexican attempt generalized throughout the whole continent, having become an actual feature of American pictorial evolution (in contrast with European evolution). In fact, if modern painting on this continent did not achieve the depth or purely aesthetic transcendency of modern European painting (centered in Paris), it has nonetheless been here in the American countries (Mexico, the United States, Brazil, etc.) that the boldest attempt was made to create a great synthetic art that could restore the artistic dignity of the subject, lost in purely analytic high modern art, in order to reintegrate human man, social man, into painting, from which he had been excluded.

Other differences in media, objectives, traditions, and conditions also determine differences in the manner of resolving the problem of the mural in both countries. In Mexico this type of painting constituted a profound and generalized social trend, creating a veritable school and a national style. In Brazil, however, it did not have this generalized character, limited as it was to one painter's stage of evolution. It did not quite become a movement here. To the Brazilian artist, this genre presented itself

above all as a means of developing on a broader scale the qualities of structure and all the possibilities of monumental visual art he had arrived at in his oil painting. Moved by intrinsically monumental intentions, he wanted simply to be able to surrender to the desire to experiment with the distortion of form. And he understood that in order to do so, he also needed, if not an architectural group, then at least a wall, without which he would be unable to express or satisfactorily resolve these intentions. However, above all else the Mexican muralist movement aimed to express—whether on the aesthetic or spiritual fronts—the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. There was the social and political revolution itself (which had begun in 1910) and the political activism of nearly all its artists, starting with Dr. [Gerardo Murillo] Atl and [José Clemente] Orozco, who awakened in them the need to seek out public places or to abandon their studios in search of walls to paint. Thus, in Mexico, which was more faithful to the great historical tradition of fresco painting—that is, to the profound social or spiritual meaning to which the genre was always linked, particularly in the age of faith and mysticism of primitive peoples—muralists surrendered body and soul to the militant expression of their passions . . . not quite religious, it is true, but social and political. The Mexicans frequently sacrificed the intrinsic structural qualities of execution to the partisan needs of extrapictorial intention, of propaganda, of proselytizing zeal; the Brazilian painter never sacrificed formal requirements to the element which—in his work—was always external to the subject.

As a survey of “Brazilian industries,” the Ministério da Educação [Ministry of Education]⁶ frescoes possess what Mário de Andrade called a “national functionality.” Yet they are never literally bound to the subject matter of each panel, nor do they seek to demonstrate anything whatsoever. Ultimately, Portinari never saw in these frescoes a mere reality to be expressed; rather, he may have seen them as something to interpret—as far as may be deduced, for example, in the antinaturalistic lighting in many of these murals, in the purely structural criterion of the distribution of light in certain details of the *Algodão* [Cotton] group, in which the foregrounded figures are lit by a symmetrically opposed and arbitrary schism.

In any event, in some of the fresco panels for the Ministry of Education and in tempera paintings of 1936, it cannot be denied that here and there, Portinari allowed himself to be influenced by the fundamental expressiveness of some of Rivera’s murals, especially by a certain way of approaching his subject matter and a certain distribution of groups and composition. Works such as *Carregadores de café* [Coffee bearers], *Menina segurando menino* [Girl holding boy] (tempera, 1936), and *Cana de açúcar* [Sugar cane] (Ministry of Education fresco) are more indicative of this. These recollections have already led more than one critic and painter—in the United States especially—to err with regard to the chronological order of many of the painter’s paintings, attributing works from an earlier (pre-mural) period or series, such as *Morro* or *Estivador*, for example, to more recent periods, after 1936 or to the period of the Ministry fresco works. This actually shows how Portinari’s evolution proceeded in an entirely different and independent manner from the evolution of the Mexican School’s most distinguished representatives. And if his Rio murals may seem colder to many, or less original than the Mexican ones in their exaltation of violence or in their contagious expressive power, in other aspects—their authentic structural quality, for example—they often surpass much Mexican fresco work.

Alongside or above reality, formal intention was always present in Portinari’s fresco work. He is forever fleeing—even when he makes the greatest concessions to the element of reality or the didactic, which he calls illustration. And yet the surrealism is profound and organic, perhaps an echo of his rustic origins. This innate plebe-

ian, rural element is what stays his hand, what weighs upon his paintbrush, delaying or preventing it from freeing itself—or once and for all straying from it—in order to surrender to the abstraction of pure formal expression, regardless of what he may be depicting. For this very reason, his attraction to murals possesses a deeper, more organic quality, no longer a mere consequence of opportunity or other external circumstance. Portinari tends to seek—and will forever, constantly seek—a fleeting synthesis, dramatic in its precariousness between form and abstraction, between pure pictorialism and life. This dualism imbued his early work with drama. It does the same for his current work, and will continue to do so for his future work.

Through a natural law of compensation, while Portinari filled the walls of the Ministry of Education with monumental figures, he took advantage of the experience he was acquiring to—in a return to the easel—surrender to a freer cadence in the oil paintings he never abandoned. One of the most characteristic features of the new trend was undoubtedly the emphasis on antinaturalist reaction. The artist seemed anxious to free himself of the demands of surface unity and of the rigors of an almost static composition, as required by the material he now worked with and the subject he was constructing. It might be said that he felt oppressed by the contingencies of the Cyclopic work he did at the insistence of purely—or necessarily—national subject matter, by the legitimate fear of falling back onto the facilities of conventional description and, above all, by the lack of resonance or . . . by the excessive resonance of racial and social (which is to say national) myths, which he created throughout the course of his work.

The works of this period are characterized by a sort of “escape,” of flight and liberation from the demands of a genre too closely bound to the subject of external social reality. Because of this, now, by contrast, in his new canvases and in his panels for the New York World’s Fair,⁷ for example, the concerns with composition tend to give way to invention, the unity of surface to discontinuity, and realism to surrealism. Formal objectives and research fall back into the shadows, and elements of imagination are foregrounded. In this sense, it is interesting to observe the revival of certain themes and objects of childhood. And there is a noticeable return to the balloons and mast poles of São João, to the scarecrows—enriched, it is true, by a new arsenal, this time drawn from the life of the Brazilian worker and having become an almost symbolic constant in the apparatus of accessories of his new paintings and latest panels: those of the New York World’s Fair and, now, of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress [1941], in Washington. This return to the so-called poetic subjects of childhood is a matter of mere psychological annotations, already dissociated. It is more of a bath in a field of inspiration that may be extrapictorial, but is purely individual and aesthetically rethought. In search of lost time, or for some other reason, in an attempt out of time, the artist draws the subject matter of his new works from almost subconscious images. In his eagerness to give artistic life to these more intuitive processes, he delimits the field of the canvas, divided into isolated or hierarchized planes within the rules of perspective. One of the most representative works from this period is *Espantalho* [Scarecrow], currently in The Museum of Modern Art collection in New York. In this way he re-creates the experiment of European modernism. But it is worth repeating that he submits it to a constant verification in the murals. Thus, their function is to “provide support” to the artist when he returns from his aesthetic digressions. Portinari’s pictorial soul is currently made from a mixture of plebeian realism and a romanticism nostalgic for beautiful colors, for beautiful blue skies. For this very reason, his plunge into concrete irrationality is not a deep one. His current use of certain Surrealist procedures (*Espantalho sob as estrelas* [Scarecrow under

the stars], 1940) did not lead to pure automatic or irrational association. His objects still do not function symbolically; that is, they are not quite what the Surrealists call a “poetic event.” The course or functionality of his objects, even the most gratuitous ones—his blue trunk, his somewhat pythonlike rope, his gourd, the scarecrows, even the ox skulls on the roads—is not diverted in other directions or to other, unpredictable ends. No universal or ill-timed displacement of objects is to be found in him. The scarecrow may still appear amid ox skulls and in front of endangered plantations. These objects are symbols, but of another kind. They do not come from automatism or from merely irrational associations or even from suggestive associations provoked by any sort of external mechanics (the Surrealist artist has the right to make use of the latter). They are permanent symbols, still bound to certain already established or sentimental psychological constants, and therefore realistic in a certain higher (a priori) sense, susceptible to experimental generalization within a preestablished harmony. These are romantic qualities; they are not the qualities of an investigator of irrationality.

From Surrealist painting Portinari draws only the atmospheric tone. Yet, like the Surrealists, he never did—and perhaps will never do—pure abstract painting. For instance, in 1940, alongside his freest and most abstract experiments, he returns not only to anecdotal painting (as in *O filho pródigo* [The prodigal son]), but, especially, to treating it in an almost traditional manner, in its presentation and meaning. Like those of the Surrealists, the elements that constitute his paintings are, ultimately, united by an ever-present reasoning which, although devoid of specific realistic suggestion, implies the existence of a “subject.”

The walls of the Hispanic Foundation in the Library of Congress afforded Portinari the opportunity for even bolder achievements in mural painting. They are panels done in dry tempera, nothing but lime wash and sand. Outside his country, outside his familiar birthplace and environment, the artist felt less rooted, freer to surrender without obstacles of any kind to the demon of his virtuosity, to his most hidden impulses, to his inspiration. Never again (and this may be immediately gathered at first sight), at any other moment in his mural work did he feel freer, more unobstructed, or more inclined to perform such dangerous technical gymnastics or violent distortions. These compositions were executed in the grip of a profound sense of inner freedom.

Dedicated to America, these panels were supposed to contain Spanish and Portuguese deeds in the New World. The new land explodes tropically in furry animals, in gigantic trees. Heroic winds blow indiscriminately from land and sea, from one to the other, bringing a powerful and organic smell of sea air from the high sea, or the hot breath that emanates from the animals, from the people, from the woods, from the wild earth, and finally disperses in the ocean. In strong, evocative language, the panels of *Descoberta da terra* [Discovery of the Land] and *Desbravamento da mata* [Entry into the Forest] speak of all this. The other two, *Catequese* [(Catechesis) Teaching of the Indians] and *Descoberta do ouro* [Discovery of Gold], tell of other aspects of Hispanic-American colonization.⁸ They are moved by other internal machinery and their rhythm is provided by other evocations and other mysteries.

In Portinari, fresco work and murals are always a moment of synthesis within the curve of his creative evolution. Before each wall he must cover, it seems that he will come to a conclusion, making use of all his accumulated experience, yet it is only a temporary stop . . . until he resumes his forward march. In these current panels, the artist's deep intention is no longer to define abstract forms, but to reduce forms to creative abstraction. His purposes are no longer purely constructivist, in any sense

of assembly or structure, but free creation. This is his period of creative freedom, the conversion of form into abstraction within the pictorial matter.

Through processes far removed from any prescription, he tends to what might be called a demythologizing of his icons, his images, and his landscapes, in a flight from the external contingencies of environment and of time, whether national or otherwise, and eats the fingers of his black men, deconcretizes the forms of his beings, intensifies the violent operation of contrasts, multiplies geometric signs in a yearning for abstraction, seamlessly joins irreconcilable colors, destroys perspectives and fuses planes, even to the detriment of the compositional balance or immediate representation—all in exchange for a nod of universality. He degeographizes his world and its symbols, never hesitating to upset the primary harmony in order to achieve—through a succession of dissonant chords—a more transcendent and silent harmony. From the panels for the New York World's Fair, which already represented quite a departure from the murals of Rio de Janeiro, to those of the Library of Congress, the distance traveled is considerable.

Of all the panels in the Hispanic Foundation, the closest to the previous ones—above all to the murals of Rio de Janeiro—is undoubtedly *Desbravamento da mata*, the one about the *bandeirantes*.⁹ Its figures are separated by immense tree trunks that lose themselves vertically in the heights among shadows that sink into the woods and warm hues of red earth carpeted in vermilion flowers and furry animals. The vertical élan of the trunks is interrupted by the horizontal depth of the earth. Cutting almost diagonally across the foreground, which glows with the heat of burning earth and living flowers such as cactus, the cold hues of a modeled blue stain prepare a brusque transition from ember to sky blue—an environment for the large figure lying prone on the ground, which gives the painting its sense of depth. A projection of magnificent decorative trunks that succeed one another down to the bottom further elongates the figure into the canvas, while a realistic and treacherous anteater emerges from behind a tree, on the heels of the thirsty *bandeirante* drinking from the river. In the foreground to the right, in a zone that is fully incandescent, a bearded, belligerent-looking *bandeirante* wearing a loud shirt with a red lozenge print, holds a blunderbuss in one hand and, with the other, holds a strange animal—half-owl, half-woodpecker—to his chest like some shiny badge. In the other corner, to the left, another figure in hues of gray, in half profile, balances out the reckless hero of the opposite angle. Farther away, its back to him, is another figure also in hues of gray. The details of the arresting design—the hands, the butt of the blunderbuss, etc.—are powerful fixations. The warm foreground hues are tempered by the somber, fleeting, cool greens of the forest, although the dense environment they create and the contrasting backgrounds emphasize the majestic stasis of the entire composition. Even the vivid, corrosive, hirsute animals—the armadillos, anteaters, or capybaras and their coats of fur, which antagonize the spectator—are motionless despite their frightened, sparkling eyes, the only self-propelled creatures in this scene of great decorative power.

After we leave the still atmosphere of *Desbravamento da mata*, we are bathed in the extraordinary joy of this other panel animated by the breath of the great ocean winds that blow from the high seas, the *Descoberta do ouro*. White, gray, blue, green, brown, red—within this chromatic scale the artist has constructed the New World. From one transition, from one stain to another, light, a great deal of light, air, open air, gyrating and blowing from all quadrants. A shaky vertical across the middle of the picture runs from a heavy, dangling cable that hangs from on high; descending from left to right in a diagonal the large white sail awkwardly bisects the vertical line. A powerful figure in gray, white, and blue, grips an oily tackle. Further right, the back

of another figure, in a position that is the symmetrical opposite of the first, tugs at another rope. Emphasizing the shrouds, with the same dangling cadence, a rope ladder descends parallel to them, sectioned by the intervals of its rungs. The precarious vertical in the center does not succeed in imposing itself as dominant because the rhythm of the diagonals, the movement of the foregrounded figures, the very texture of the oily shrouds prevent it from doing so. The movement is decidedly downward, in the direction of gravity, signifying that here nothing is heraldic or meant as solemn representation. The background stains, their arms raised, support the vertical, as does the atmospheric transparency of the seascape in the upper left corner. But the central figures, vibrant in their exuberant materiality, are more powerful.

Here, the heterogeneity of the painting's surface does not balance the aesthetic of the figures, for they are ruled by a powerful, wide motion of their own; on the contrary, it is the geometric forms of the planes—the triangular sails—that attenuate, with their static vibrant quality, the heavy cadence of the volumes of the foregrounded planes. The entire panel is divided into three parts; the great white sail is a triangle that eats up the upper third of the surface. Its hypotenuse cuts the picture diagonally and meets the line of the ship's side off to the right, separating the foregrounds in an opposite direction. Making up the large central plane within the aforementioned angle, busy sailors are crowded together on the caravel's bridge, as in a great luminous focus directed landward. Everything takes place within this central triangle. The rest of the surface is taken up by the foreground that encloses in green the vessel's gray-striped keel.

The subject of this painting is in itself full of dangerous seductions for a less cautious painter. The natural beauty of the seascapes, of the caravels already much conventionalized by romantic prints, is an obstacle and a dangerous invitation to condescension. Portinari set aside all concession to historical convention, and there are no grand captains or beautiful caravels in his painting. Of the sea with its beauties, of the easy subject matter so pregnant with literary intentions, such as this one of the discovery of the New World, the artist allowed only a small cranny on a triangular plane in the left corner of the panel. And he did it in a masterful way. In the background, between the extremity of the large sail and the side of the ship, is a gash of brilliant blue, green, and white space that allows us to see a tiny piece of the new land as if a curtain had been raised (O, Castro Alves!),¹⁰ an authentic seascape with its ocean of stormy waves, with foam, with poetic sails, under a beautiful blue sky, etc. This small open space on the panel's surface provides an extraordinary sense of spectacle, and is really meant to be seen and appreciated from inside the caravel. It is quite spectacular, for a spectacle it is, and a dazzling one—the sight of a new and unknown land. So this bold use of the conventional, of literary inspiration, produces a thrilling contrast with the serious, objective, and stirring materiality of the men in the foreground and the disinterested structure of the entire composition.

The painting is permeated with ravishing lushness and freshness. The formal distortions of the figures are marked by the lazy cadence of the hanging ropes. In the cadence of the volumes and the lines we seem to hear the rhythm of a work song rising from the unanimous, collective effort of the sailors. Everything contributes to centralize all attention upon these figures and testify that the credit for the discovery belongs to them.

In *Catesque* the plastic monumentality takes on a special prominence. Here, the figures tend not to be dissociated; instead, they are integrated into a solid, still group in the middle of the panel—the six-figure composition that the artist had already employed in an oil painting of 1936. In a great integrative movement, everything contributes to cen-

tralize and unify the central figures. The warm brown earth possesses nearly the same burning, hostile structure present in that of the *bandeirantes*.

First of all, it is a land filled with thorns, as evidenced by the catechists' huge, naked, deformed feet. Extending along the sides in a large brown stain that spreads like oil across the vast surface of the panel, it fades away into the background over a fence that gives way to the blue stains of the blended sky and sea. Behind the figures lies an inner field flooded with light in which a gray-green ox gazes in stupefaction at the scene before him, suggesting the silence of the incomprehensible; in the same field, another apostle—a gray stain—leads an Indian child in blue by the hand. A blue mortar produced by shadow is the solitary utensil in this third vast, empty space, not to mention the reverberations of warm hues that mottle the luminosity of the zone. Here, the play of shadow and light has a grave intensity. The luminous field arrests the figures in the central group and isolates them, endowing them with a strange solemnity, while the burning stains of earth enhance the rich material of which the figures are made. From here, ectoplasmic shadows run upward from the extremity of the catechist's habit, reaching his splayed hand, upon the shoulder of the figure standing behind him and extending all the way to his crown, only to continue along the raised arm of the other Indian woman bearing a basket upon her head. These dark stains envelop the large figure of the seated Indian woman who is listening to the preaching of a Jesuit with a powerful protective halo. Everything converges upon her or moves toward enveloping her. The unfinished face of the catechist is illuminated, as is the space, the zone of passage from one body to another. At right, another imposing Jesuit figure holding a child recalls an icon of Catholic hagiography. This figure offers his right side, also plunged in shadow, to the central group, in an unreal yet impressive contrast to the play of light that illuminates the group from the opposite side, casting everything in an anti- or supernatural clarity.

The entire panel is animated by a circular enveloping movement from right to left. The same direction is also marked not only by the circular line of the interior field, but by the pirogues anchored in the blue background, as if forced by the curve of the arch that delimits the panel to circulate within this gyrational movement itself. This extraordinary rotational movement in the air—which is cosmic and does not lie in things—is broken only by the enormous upright figures of a priest and a child to the left, in their strange and dramatic verticality. Without this group the composition might possibly have lost its equilibrium, resolving itself in a uniform and monotonous movement in which the solemn stasis, the mysterious power of catechesis, would vanish.

Descoberta do ouro is undoubtedly the freest and boldest painting. It is the most advanced point in Portinari's pictorial evolution. Here, the antinaturalist contrast between light and color takes every liberty. The secret of the composition lies in appearing not to exist. Yet the figures are arranged in a cross—or an x—which gives them all an almost cosmic structural unity and, at the same time, an extraordinary power to disintegrate, for it permits a rotary movement that prevents the figures from projecting themselves in every direction. In the same way, powerful dissonant chords dominate the cacophony that threatens to erupt from the contrast between black and white, between blue and red.

The subject is more distant than ever; except for structural and abstract considerations, one cannot penetrate its inner balance. Blue, blue, blue is the dominant color, with unpredictable accompaniments in gray, white, red, green, black, and brown. From the deep blue of the foreground, reaching in distance from the bottom up, all shades of blue reverberate in an infinite scale of values. The extraordinary vibrancy of

the paint in the play of tiny translucent fish, whether living or linear, imparts an even more emotional palpitation. High in the upper section the sky blends with the same range of blue, reinforced by white undertones. Previously, in order to make his plastic figures stand out in relief, he ordinarily brutalized the picture, ignoring the accessories or the secondary planes. Now, he leaves the figures in the center of the panel, and loses himself in the Benedictine figure of those blue stains of its water.

The dominant hue is counterbalanced by the green hues of the boat's hull, by the red of a prospector's shirt, by the gray, by the black and white of the figures. But it is the dominant hue that bathes the violence of the disparate figures in loud or somber shades, or in neutral ones of a soothing sweetness.

The triangular noses, the checkered outfit or the one in black, white, and red lozenges serve to placate the concretizing, anecdotal power of the figures of the highly formalized black men and their formidable hands, transforming them into colors, into stains, into volumes, disembodiment them.

One figure in the composition attracts our attention: the one in red lozenges holding a prospecting pan that appears in the right foreground. Above it, another black-and-white checkered figure is a *pendant* to that one; between the two, the gray stain of the figure leaning over the side of the boat is, in its neutral gradation, the center of gravity of the entire system of radiation that detaches itself from that stellar composition. The red lozenges in the foreground are practically the only warm hues in the entire panel. They undoubtedly provide a shock to the overall harmony, the transparency and the soft repercussions of the cold tones in a minor key. Without those loud reds, the ambience would be different; it would be placid and homogeneous. Many would have preferred it so. They clearly create a difficult dissonance; the contrast is painful. But they belong to the internal logic rather than to the intuitive method of composition. In a violation of the laws of perfect accord, the artist restores formal truth to the drama that is represented—diabolical excitation of possessed figures prospecting for gold. The possessed are wearing checkered shirts, immersed in the great sweetness of the very different atmosphere, so strange to the vibration and excitement of those mechanized dolls, doubly slaves, to gold and to society.

Without that red and its derivatives, the scandalous violence of the exaggerated gestures and hands, severed fingers, and dismembered arms flailing in air, brandishing a horrible brown mass, would not succeed in clashing, submerged in the irresistible melody of blues and grays and in the imponderable scheme of its hues. The composition would be “gold on blue,” yet it would engender no visual drama. In this manner, with this dissonance, the ultimately external (though specific) purpose of mural painting—the expression of a reality, whether concrete or transcendent—is restored without leading the artist to succumb to the banality of conventional description, keeping him within the domain of pure creation.

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Notes

1. Brazilian municipal district in the interior of the state of São Paulo, almost 200 miles (313 kilometers) from the state capital, São Paulo.
2. Brodósqui, or Brodowski, is a Brazilian township in the interior of the state of São Paulo, located 18 miles (29 kilometers) from Ribeirão Preto.
3. Manuel Bandeira, “Biografia de Cândido Portinari por Manuel Bandeira—Junho 1943,” in *Portinari* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1943), p. 5.
4. Escola Nacional de Belas Artes (National School of Fine Arts), now Escola de Belas Artes, is part of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.
5. The annual show of the former Escola Nacional de Belas Artes.

6. A watershed of modern architecture in Brazil, the building of the Ministry of Education and Health (Palácio Gustavo Capanema), in Rio de Janeiro, was designed by architects Lúcio Costa, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, and Oscar Niemeyer, with the consultancy of Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier. Completed in 1947, the building's construction introduced functionalist architecture in Brazil (as well as elements such as the *brise-soleil*), which the Brazilian state adopted for its developmentalist project, including the construction of the capital, Brasília (1958).
7. In 1939 Portinari executed three panels for the Brazilian pavilion of the New York World's Fair.
8. These are the titles as given by Portinari (Portuguese), according to the Portinari collection Web site <http://www.portinari.org.br>; and the Library of Congress (English) on its Web site: <http://www.loc.gov/rr/hispanic/portinari.html>. Pedrosa gave the titles as *Descoberta* (discovery), *Bandeiras* (flags or banners, but see n. 9, below), *Cataquese* (catachesis), and *Garimpo* (gold fields).
9. Literally “followers of the banner,” *bandeirantes* were members of sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century slave-hunting expeditions (called *bandeiras* [flags]), made up of Indians (both slaves and allies), *caboclos*, and whites (the captains of the *bandeiras*). Originally formed to capture and force Amerindians into slavery, the *bandeiras* later focused on finding gold, silver, and diamond mines, venturing into unmapped regions in search of profit and adventure. From roughly 1580 to 1670 they hunted slaves; from about 1670 to 1750 they pursued mineral wealth. These expeditions also expanded Portuguese America from the smaller boundaries of the Tordesillas Line to roughly the same territory as current Brazil, and the mineral wealth the *bandeirantes* obtained made Portugal's fortune during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.
10. Antônio Frederico de Castro Alves (1847–1871) was a Brazilian poet. His best-known poems are lyrical and heroic, marked by the abolitionist cause.

Tension and Cohesion in the Work of Calder¹

Clearly weary of the narcissism of the Greeks and the Renaissance Italians, modern sculptors since Brancusi have at last refused to continue to deify the human body. Consequently dehumanized, the gods have died, deserting the Earth.

Apollinaire's verses still ring out to modern ears: “*A la fin tu es las de ce monde ancien*” [You are weary at last of this ancient world] / “*Bergère ô Tour Eiffel . . .*” [Shepherdess O Eiffel Tower].² Later, during the early days of Cubism, [Robert] Delaunay introduced the new iron Shepherdess on the banks of the Seine to painting. Her beauty was finally proclaimed without restraint by all and sundry—engineers and poets, painters and Anglo-American tourists. The promotion of the Eiffel Tower as a work of art constitutes a watershed moment in the artistic history of humanity.

Sculpture ceased to perform the function of giving human shape to gods and mythological abstractions, or deifying men of flesh and bone. Public squares became practically depopulated. The census must have revealed a notable drop in the birth of statues. Were it not for the extraordinary and unexpected market created by the administrators of the time, they might have halted production of those works. For that, at least, they served a purpose. . . . Those who produced that sculpture of apotheosis should have been grateful to all the Caesars who were eager for glorification. . . .

In opposition to the visual realism that had persisted without interruption since the Renaissance, the new sculptors discovered a different species of realism, one that has already been called “mental”³—that of the primitive peoples, or the type revealed in Romanesque art, for example. Like the savages, they came to see with the spirit rather than with their eyes.

In search of other subjects—other forms—for inspiration, those sculptors rejected not only the eternal problems of solid volume but also the traditional working materials used since Donatello and Michelangelo. Or when they concerned themselves with or made use of these, they did so to other ends. Many then turned to a new, essentially modern myth—the machine; others turned inward to themselves; still others turned to neither of these, but to nature, the universe.



Alexander Calder. *Gibraltar*. 1936. Lignum vitae, walnut, steel rods, and painted wood, 51 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ × 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (131.7 × 61.3 × 28.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of the artist

Chinese Taoist artists had already considered the principle of symmetry (so pronounced in the stylized art of Byzantium) to be derived from contemplation of the human form. However, beginning with the Renaissance—the age of the apogee of drawing based on this form—the mobility and formal fixity that triumphed in the West through Byzantine art slowly disintegrated. From then up to the present day, the historical curve moved toward a growing freedom of drawing, which gained in free rhythms and flexibility what it lost in formalistic fixity. And those are the elements that make increasingly definitive contributions to modern formal expression.

Throughout this process, as we approach the modern age, drawing tends to reveal increasingly marked affinities not only with the arts of

primitive peoples but with the refined and formal art of the Chinese—so opposed to Byzantine hieraticism and so free! In order to avoid symmetry (which is deadly to the soul of drawing), they really turned their backs to the human form. And then they discovered the tree, combining the asymmetry of branches with the equilibrium of the whole. Thus, they came upon the principle of “asymmetrical equilibrium.”

Abandoning the slightest hint of the human body and arriving at the Chinese principle of asymmetrical balance, [Alexander] Calder⁴ also sees in the tree, in the vegetal, one of the richest sources of inspiration for the invention of his objects; there he finds suggestions for new forms that are much more fecund and varied than that of the human figure. Yet without Taoist symbolism and idealism, which sees in the tree a unique and sacred source of rhythmic asymmetry, he is able to draw inspiration from everything that translates itself into a system of planes and lines, and not malleable or solid volumes—the foundation of classical statuary.

He prefers to look for masses within the industrial field—pistons, cylinders, prisms—in short, in geometric solids. Because of its balanced asymmetry, the tree provides him with linear suggestions, an apparent automatism of movements, an indispensable mobility; the same is true for animal or human carcasses, whose structures resemble those of the tree (spines, vertebrae, skeletons), because of the arrangement of their planes and their precise outlines.

Indeed, whereas the mineral interests us especially for the rich material of its infrastructure and its surfaces, its power of attraction over men is limited. However, the vegetal exerts an inexplicable fascination, the secret of which may lie in its contained emotion, the tremulous and sober murmur of branches or trembling petals. In its fragility—constantly exposed but continually palpitating and present and brave and affirmative—lies the great lesson of the vegetal to man, to the human soul.

In Calder's work one feels the penetration of nature by inanimate means. It is filled with the nonhuman world—animals of the early geological eras or the limits of biology: insects, plants, algae, protozoa, mushrooms. And alongside these man has his modest place in the universe (for it is not the central place) as one and as part of nature. Thus, Calder turned to the geometric and the organic, to mathematical figures and natural forms, to machinism and the vegetal, to celestial bodies and the earth's animals, to nature and science—that is, to the universe and man as extended by technology and armed with all of his activities. In the latter quality, the machine also entered his world with the other things of the universe, plants, animals, crystals, stars, microbes, snails. In this way, he put an end to the hackneyed, discredited, and empty sculpture of futile apotheosis and dead allegories.

Calder's sculpture overflows from the field of sculptural traditionalism's specific activities. Setting aside the chronic preoccupations of volume, modeling, and surface, the only thing he retained from ancient academic art—and in this he displays a characteristic feature of modernism—is an interest in the possibilities of his material. His research into this is remarkable. As an example, no one equaled him in the depth with which he is able to follow the insinuations of wood all the way to nuance. And what he can do with wire is unsurpassed. For this very reason, Paris dubbed him "*le roi du fil de fer*" [the king of wire]. Nowhere is his marvelous intuition of the material revealed with greater splendor than in the admirable *Apple Monster*, which he was able to draw from wood as if moved by some divine sense or mysterious faculty for intimate communication with things, his hands deprived of any tool, like those of a magician or a happy midwife. His path unimpeded by all academic hindrances, he set off on a new trail that, little by little, led him farther away from the ultradecadent statuary of [Auguste] Rodin or even the work that issued, physically regenerated, from the powerful hands of [Aristide] Maillol.

Inspired by the abstraction and disinterested art of painters such as [Piet] Mondrian, [Fernand] Léger, and [Joan] Miró, he abandoned his old articulated toys and wire sculptures. In Paris, around 1931, he began a new art, pure and severe, that he defined with cold scientific rigor as "vectorial schemas," later sonorously baptized by another painter ([Jules] Pascin) as "stables."⁵ Although it then consisted of pure geometry in space, dominated by rigid lines of wire, the formal organization of those new things is of a density greater than everything he had made until then, with the exception of his earlier admirable figures in wood. In the making of these vectors he now combined other materials with wire and achieved a flexibility that wire alone was never able to give him. Thanks to this fluidity, his objects gained in formal latitude, creating relationships more weighted with universality and freed from any contingent or unilateral limitations.

His stables—compositions and objects not endowed with the ability to move—are fixed pieces made with wire or steel, assembled as a total form and made of partial patterns representing nothing objective. At times, their power of suggestion is greater than that of the mobiles, and many evoke animal forms.

In the stables Calder sought to arrive at the object's ideal relationship within the universe—as an abstract thing resembling nothing else that naturally exists, created by him, and for which he had to find in space a unique place of its own and fix it there for all eternity. Thus, what attracted him in this static category of objects is what he himself called "a sense of cosmic relationship."⁶

[Naum] Gabo, before him, had gone down this new path when, for the first time in sculpture, he introduced real rather than mentally represented movement. Yet Calder, not content with a single movement, soon rendered the contribution of this

new factor more complex. In fact, by introducing real movement into the structure of the object, he enriches it extraordinarily, despite the strictly sculptural qualities of the material with which he is working—wire, glass, steel, etc.

To him, the new objects (which Marcel Duchamp had called “mobiles”) are no more than “plastic forms in motion.”⁷ But this is not a simple motion of transference or rotation but of different types, speeds, and amplitude which, when reunited, combined, or composed, produce a resulting whole. And he explains: in the same way that one can compose colors or forms, one can also compose mobiles . . .

Although they exist in a state of rest, in themselves these mobiles are truly perfect compositions. When activated, they evolve in space, filling it with suggestions that give the object a strange power of fascination.

We can propel a mobile by breathing on it, and its arms or petals or balls will agitate themselves and draw in the air a succession of unexpected forms that transform themselves one after another in some kaleidoscopic vertigo, from bird to flower, from fish to comet, from tree to animal, and so forth.

Calder thus went off in search of the pure, naked rhythmic gesture that lies behind the linear representation of the drawing and is, so to speak, the initial impulse, the spring of the entire effort of graphic expression. With this he achieved the core of the formal experience in this sort of hunt for the kinetic gesture that finally manages to reveal to us, as if it were the Aristotelian impulse of the prime mover, the point from which every object in the world begins and takes on life. The subjective impulse that leads the artist to express himself in formal terms remains active and dynamic, through movement, in the created object itself. For Calder, this incorporation has a “contrapuntal value”⁸ which comes to adorn the formal concept with a quality of pure abstract choreography. Although it is only a mental state, gesture precedes and does not detach itself from the realized creation. Its object acquires the resonance of an instrument that dances or vibrates upon being touched.

Some of the various movements of the mobiles develop in a succession of scales; others are delicately balanced; others are animated by the action of gravity; others tend, on the contrary, to elevate themselves like captive balloons; others flail about aimlessly in currents of air, like weather cocks; and still others evolve by means of an electric current. In these mobiles, Calder combined active space with equally active time.

Calder’s mobiles are usually suspended from a fixed point and the motion develops within the closed system that is thus created. Whereas the amplitude and the different speeds of motion within the system seem to withdraw the overall plane from the object, destabilizing it through a chaotic multiplicity of conditions, the disorder fundamentally obeys a succession in time. By supporting the entire system upon a fixed point, when its parts describe their orbits or their various movements (pendular, circular, or elliptical) they may well be delayed along the way, yet they tend to close the cycle, returning to their point of departure—the object at rest. Thus, motion is not arbitrary and has succeeded itself in a predetermined formal design.

Having captured motion in his constructions, Calder launched the ideal suspension bridge that connects the spatial arts to those of succession in time. Without moving, the statue presents itself to the observer as if it turned around itself in a circle. Music, however, which flows in time, does not turn in a circle but is rather like a river that runs. In Calder’s experiments with motion, there is an effort at surpassing both arts.

This brings unpredictable consequences to his constructions. The new structural factor he introduces might be called—without insult, perhaps—a fourth dimension:

the time factor, closely and truly linked to a special function, the generation of a new, total but open form of an object in space: space-time as a result of formal creation. Hence the rhythmic vitality that is the secret, the soul of Calder's objects.

Energies set in a rhythmic relationship—that is the formula of his modes.

Early on, his experience distinguished two forms of movement in the mobiles: the one produced by crank or motor, connected to the object, and the one freely produced by any fortuitous impulse; the objects thus move and swing naturally, suspended, hanging from wire and even from string.

His first mechanical motion mobile was driven by a crank fastened to the outside of a small wire box, which made a wire fish move. Hence the idea of substituting the crank for an electric current or motor was born naturally. It was the natural transition of a simple machine to a composed or complex one. Instead of an outside crank handle to create a simple back and forth movement, he places a motor to activate an entire complex organism fitted into a panel of primary colors within which geometric figures gyrate or evolve according to a rhythm set by the machinery.

With their petals and leaves, wires or rods, wheels or spheres in a state of rest ideally silhouetted in the air, the free-moving mobiles surrender completely to chance. It is to chance that the geometric or living, natural figures generated in space appeal. When they leave their state of rest, they dance in the air or outline or expel firework roses, embryos of unknown beings, suggestions of animals, of birds, of things that lived only in spatial virtualities.

Nevertheless, it is not the mere visual perception of an object at rest or in motion that inspires him; it is the malleability of imagination. In these wind-driven mobiles, it is precisely the idea of total form in full bloom that he allows the imagination—or chance—to complete. He neither copies nor transfers movements, or details of real objects or figures, or their parts, as in the succession of frames in a movie. The total formal concept may remain in a latent state (when the objects are at rest); but in the process of making it unravel within the confines of the large external contour, he goes beyond the simple representation of movement in painting or sculpture, which remains in the realm of the purely mental. Thus, chance is allowed to drive the imagination . . .

And yet, whereas there is no place for a more lofty role for imagination in his motorized panels, there is, however, a circle that constantly closes and recloses itself. In an unwinding movement, the figures generate themselves in space, and space seems to deplete them, to empty them, returning them by means of some cyclical fatality to nothing—that is, to the initial position of rest—and the cycle recommences.

Through repetition and detailed, part by part translation of the volumes and masses in action, it is the idea of circularity itself that leads mechanical motion to present us with a total formal concept, rather than a sort of photograph or faithful reproduction of things in natural motion. Let us here compare this to the mechanics of the sea which, though monotonous in their repetition, always strike the imagination as something eternally new.

In its precision, the motorized movement of the panels possesses the cyclic rhythm of the laws that govern the movement of the spheres. It is the route of the stars through infinite space. In fact, his mobiles have their origin in cosmic associations. Calder even named the first one *Relação terrestre* [Terrestrial relation]: two wire circles projecting a diagonally sectioned sphere.⁹ The same idea is repeated, only with greater complexity and accomplishment, in his *A Universe*.

The monotonous tone engendered by the repetition of movements in these panels has the fascinating inevitability of the attraction of celestial bodies and the

underlying joy of the periodic returns predicted in the sage's calculations or the philosopher's speculation. The throes of their spiral-like movements possess something that leads us to hope for the disclosure of the secret of things. The ascending effort of these forms reminds us of a Gothic boldness in its keen, romantic reaching for the heights, those geometric figures elevating themselves in waves over seas, love, or music, only to crash—suddenly exhausted—from the supreme apex. The sphere falls from the top of its coiled spring and balances itself dramatically and silently in space, to the invisible beckoning of gravity. Prisms and cones acquire drama by themselves. Geometry is rendered volatile in ballets.

Calder discovered the relationship between the perennial and the fortuitous, and disclosed what it is that imagination may owe to mechanics when he compensated the standardized rhythm of the crank- or motor-driven objects through the use of free rhythms, thus overcoming the limitations of Constructivism and entering the world of organic forms. The resulting rhythmic freedom is intensified, and the unfinished quality of his juvenilia (such as the circus dolls) now takes on unsuspected depths of suggestion. The shadow play of his suspended mobiles is projected with enigmatic charm.

In surrendering to the free rhythms, his compositions gain in suggestions of volumes, inflating themselves in their swaying mobiles or outlining swollen gestures of plasticity in the air. The virtual images suggested to us by these gesticulating mobiles achieve a very much more voluptuous and malleable transparency, deeper and less anecdotal than the empty volume of the early heads and figures in wire. The suspended mobiles attain an almost absolute virtuality, open to all possible combinations within their spatial relationships. Suddenly, it is a spider that dissolves into a monster or a reverberation of stars, in metamorphoses that succeed one another without interruption under the magic wand of chance.

In turn, the old static sculptures that were previously executed on a simple plane are now complicated in the last large stables as objects of densely structural organization that take on an enormous power of fascination.

Recently, possibly pressured by wartime difficulties in finding material for his large, static steel monsters, Calder created a new category of stables which he called "Constellations." They are usually radial or star-shaped pieces of unfinished, unpainted wood fastened to one another by thick, rigid iron wires in such a way that they may be propped up against a wall, on the floor, without special bases or pedestals. When fastened to a wall, they seem to adhere to it in a strange parasitic succession, like a snail or an oyster. Some have the prickliness of a cactus. Others, more structurally ambitious, with larger dimensions, are supported by the ground, whence they bloom with an impetus of rays that freeze in space. They point brusquely in opposite directions, in a dizzying array of disconcerting gestures that are nonetheless charged with mute apprehensions.

It is not a passing impression, a "fleeting moment" (his own expression), that Calder captures with his objects; with them, he seeks to realize, or find—and thus he defines his own artistic concept—"a physical bond between the varying events in life," calling them "abstractions that are like nothing in life except in their manner of reacting."¹⁰

In them, motion does not seek to capture an instant; on the contrary, it seeks to achieve the most eternal, perennial, immutable qualities of the concept of the dynamics—that is, its perpetual and unlimited virtuality—which paradoxically manifests above all when at rest. Rest potentially contains all ideal forms, released from all convention or representation. If form is the irreducible source of all kinetic ideas,

motion is the latent principle of form; it is the generating source of all form. Calder's objects are constructed to allow all possible variations of form.

Visual and spatial unity reveals itself in the scheme and contour of the external lines or planes and the convincing, functional force of the materials used. What keeps the artistic group cohesive and united is the power of affirmation of this total unity, in powerful contrast with the surrounding space.

The flailing arm movements of his mobiles do not signify desperate cries for help or incoherent, isolated gestures; instead, they are organized evolutions, in spite of their appearance within a special whole. The complete image of a form finally revealed springs from the full unfolding of the movement of all the arms (thorns, branches, stems, stalks, wires, etc.) in all of their possible variants. It is only when the movements of the parts have been fully produced that the perfectly finished outlines of the object in its whole and ultimate form is achieved. It is a fleeting, luminous instant of integration with cosmic reality. Thus, the object's spatial unity becomes concrete, and the formal legitimacy of the work manifests itself in all its silent and astonishing clarity.

The dialectic opposition that tempers his objects—mobiles and stables alike—is produced above all by the antithetical play of tension and cohesion, of balance and asymmetry, of the static and the dynamic. In certain mobiles the tension is conveyed by a state of pathetic equilibrium, when the object is at rest and its parts are of an almost sectarian individuality; and, alternately, a totalitarian cohesion, when the object is in motion.

What provides cohesion to the free-rhythm mobiles is motion itself. However, in the large stables one feels the presence of two hostile forces confronting one another—tension and surrounding space. The same thing happens in the Constellations.

In the nonmotorized mobiles there is a weakening of cohesion to the advantage of a greater flexibility, a variation of patterns, spontaneity of the end result; in the stables, there is greater cohesion and less variation, but the greater care enables a structural precision. The free-rhythm mobiles lack the formal authority and weight of the materials used in the large stables. However, being more flexible, they possess the seduction of the unfinished. Such is the authority of heavy metal, of steel, as opposed to the freedom of cheap string and shards of glass. In the absence of internal cohesion, these free-moving mobiles gain in improvisation, in suggestibility—elements necessary for capturing the fullness of form in absolute space.

In the stables, the full force of internal cohesion that radiates from the vital center is tremendous; otherwise it would not overcome the extraordinary tension of the parts, of the outline details, or the seductive invitation to dispersion. Here, dispersion and tension are reconciled at last, after a battle with whose heat the air still seems to be impregnated.

However, cohesion in Calder does not have an organic or functional quality. It does not come from the convergence of all the parts in order to achieve a common purpose, external to the object's intrinsic, disinterested nature. The cohesion of his panels is not functional because nothing is intended as a direct function of parts that do not propose to represent anything. Here, among other elements, cohesion is given by the very rectangle of the panel or by the background before which the parts move.

The necessary opposition between opposite tendencies such as gravity and the expansionist impulse—that cosmic fascination with distant and disparate relationships between objects that move freely in space, and the pervasive need for content, for formal malleable substance, that overflows from each thing, from each one of Calder's creative thoughts—also comes from the tension of forces, lines, and planes,

and not of ponderable mass. Even in the large stables with heavier structures, opposition emerges—whether from the tension of the angles, of the lines (of force, therefore), and from the vital center or from the centrifugal force of the object's solar mass, or from the tension-gravitation antithesis; never from mass against mass.

In the stable he titled *Gibraltar*, for example, along with local contrasts between the various material treatments (polished matter—unpolished matter, etc.), there is a clear opposition to gravity between the sphere and the inclined plane of mass; between the sphere and the mass—as in other objects, the resistance to gravity that comes from other geometric forms (cylinders, cones, spheres) and the ascending mechanical impulse that drives the volumes in an upward spiral-like movement are also visible.

Like a good engineer, Calder never forgets to submit his mobile objects to precise equations of weight and balance. In many abstract painters—poets driven by the whip of inspiration, by the gusty winds of the unconscious, like Paul Klee—those forces they unleash, like evil spirits, end up escaping the artist's control. Not in this open-eyed dreamer who—Arielesque appearances to the contrary—knows how to coordinate ethereal images with precise mathematical calculations. One of his secrets is, precisely, the use he makes of the materials of modern industry in which the functional, utilitarian element is decisive, but giving it an unexpected right to fantasy, a right to stormy marriage with the imagination.

However, Calder did not become a slave to functionality through the use of these industrial materials; by shaping them with the drive of fantasy itself, he altered their course, distorted their forms, and, with them, their utilitarian and conventional fate. He knows how to assault the very functionality of the material in order to highlight its formal dramatic quality. Thus he made of mechanics a system at the service of nothing, working for nothing, for dreams and speculation—to move nothing at all, not to make money.

The idea of dynamic forms emerged in Calder as an engineer's idea. He was looking not for any sort of symbolic representation of action, but for the pure, abstract concept of form. Before reintroducing the organic forms rediscovered in Miró, he had approached the problem of formal kineticism, intent on discovering the relationships between two or more objects in space. For this very reason, he initially avoided any natural or organic form, precisely in order to gain intensity in creative abstraction and not transform the incorporation of movement into an anecdotal resource, a mere unfolding of pantomimes with marionettes or representational images of real organic beings.

But when he was able to reintroduce organic forms into his work without fear of distracting the spectator's attention from the disinterested formal purpose he was aiming for, a new character arrived to inhabit his objects: humor—the humor that reappears on its return trip from the nostalgic period of the circus and the wire faces.

Fleeing from immediate reality—of the Abstractionist sort that never lost its smile—Calder began to draw from the rhythm of chance or from mechanical rhythm forms that occasionally suggest concrete figures or motifs from the world of living beings. For his Abstractionism—which is poetic, concrete (in the experimental sense), rather than doctrinaire—is the child of a permanent enchantment with the world, of a perennial state of grace that constantly expects the rehabilitation of all the sublime and radiant virtualities that may be hidden in the universe.

Also not to be found in his work are gestures, lines, or planes signifying conventional functions or symbols (such as, for example, an extended arm), with the inten-

tion of mentally conveying to us the idea of action. They are there, yes, but they are spatial and malleable forms, with clearly defined outlines and silhouettes, and pure, real movements, in a state of rest or not. Calder's art knows only one functionality—that of the very material in which he works, the one that is vital, inherent to matter, and no other one that is external or foreign to its intrinsic property. Even when he creates things—objects, so to speak—with practical, external purposes, the work's utilitarian purpose is fused in the perfection and elegance with which he integrates and submerges it within the power of suggestion unique to the material of which the object is made. Thus, its suggestive power—that image of cosmic equilibrium with which he charms or intrigues us—comes from the pure gratuitousness of its movements and from the abstraction of its forms.

But this impassioned follower of Abstractionist Constructivism, who disrespected genres and modes in sculpture as well as in painting, who unites the most unmistakable purism with the almost subjective poetry of Surrealism, who ultimately disdained the conventional materials of both arts—who is he? A painter? A sculptor? He is an artist-mechanic, a disinterested constructor-creator, an engineer of art; a mathematician and planner of the nonimmediate and of fantasy; the exploration of that species of dynamic automatism that is his wind mobiles owes itself partly to the “automatist” art experiment of Miró and [Hans] Arp. The introduction of chance, of the fortuitous, may come from a distant echo of Dada. In Calder, there is always an element of mockery, of disrespect for the ancient canons, for academicism . . . whether old-fashioned or modernist, a disrespect that recalls Dada. A joyous, optimistic Dada: this is a paradox that only an American might assuage.

But is there not also a Surrealist influence here? In fact, this fortuitous element is one of the essential factors of Surrealist inspiration. Free movement beckons to chance, at the mercy of an unseasonable wind, of an unexpected gust of air, like reversals of fortune—there is some quality of automatism that probably comes to him from Miró, who was trained in the invocation of that demon's spells and powers.

One can already see that the automatism of the wind mobiles is not subjective; it is not psychological; instead, it comes from a total abandon to the external adventure of nature, or the observer's initial impulse. Something akin to a musical phenomenon is also taking place here, something that depends on various objective and subjective external factors, so that their magnificent unexplored sonorities may develop in time. Not only in the introduction of the time factor, but in the need to count on the chance factor (subjective disposition or external natural accident, winds or calm, static equilibrium or tension of dramatic vitality), this art achieves the pure state of music that purists and transcendentalists of the nonobjective and of creative abstraction so crave.

If—as it has been said—architecture is “frozen music,” the Calderian mobiles are forever unplayable “visual music.” They are for “reading” only. Evoking the rotation of celestial bodies, the transference of their forms in space grips and fascinates us like the silent music of the spheres. Uniting life and abstraction, conjoining humor and mechanics, they navigate between the two great wings of modern art: Surrealism, with its incurable romanticism that occasionally degenerates into anecdotal charade, and Abstractionism, whose obsession with formal purity often resolves itself between a sort of Baroque mysticism and pure puerility. The novel world of Calderian creation is one of total disacclimation.

—The original text, “Tensão e coesão na obra de Calder,” was written in New York, September 1944 (see n. 1, below).

Notes

1. This study, along with parts of another text, “Calder, escultor de cata-ventos” (“Calder, Sculptor of Windmills”), was published in Mario Pedrosa, *Arte, necessidade vital* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria e Editora Casa do Estudante, 1949). It was also used in the proceedings of the conference titled “Calder e a música dos ritmos visuais” (Calder and the music of visual rhythms), delivered in the auditorium of the Ministry of Education in Rio de Janeiro and at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 1948 to mark the occasion of Calder’s exhibitions in those cities.
2. From Apollinaire’s poem “Zone” of 1913.
3. Translator’s note: *Cosa mentale*—a thing of the mind, or a matter of intelligence—was Leonardo da Vinci’s aphoristic epithet for painting, and may well be applied to all works of art.
4. A friend of Mario Pedrosa’s, Alexander Calder (1898–1976) wrote of his close ties to Brazil in his autobiography *Calder, An Autobiography with Pictures* (1966). The Museu de Arte de São Paulo collection includes the following works, all originally designated “Untitled” by Calder: *MóBILE* (c. 1948); *Composição com fundo amarelo e vermelho* (Composition with yellow and red background) (1945); *Composição com meia lua* (Composition with half-moon) (1945); and two works from the Composition series (1946). In 1959 he held an exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, which was introduced by Pedrosa and Fernand Léger. Regarding the artist’s sojourns in Brazil, see *Calder no Brasil: Crônica de uma amizade*, ed. Roberta Saraiva (São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo/Cosac Naify, 2006), published in English as *Calder in Brazil, the Tale of a Friendship* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2009).
5. According to the Calder Foundation, it was Jean (also called Hans) Arp, not Pascin, who coined “stable”: “In response to Duchamp’s term ‘mobile,’ Arp asks sarcastically, *Well, what were those things you did last year [for Percier’s]—stables?* Calder adopts ‘stable’ to refer to his static works.” <http://calder.org/life/chronology>, “After 12 February, 1932.”
6. Alexander Calder, quoted in *17 Mobiles by Alexander Calder* (Andover, Mass.: Addison Gallery of American Art, 1943), p. 6.
7. Alexander Calder, quoted in *Modern Painting and Sculpture*, exh. cat. (Pittsfield, Mass.: Berkshire Museum, 1933), pp. 2–3.
8. *17 Mobiles by Alexander Calder*, p. 6.
9. The work Pedrosa refers to here is Calder’s *Croisière* (1931), one of his first abstract works (though not, in fact, a mobile).
10. Alexander Calder, “Comment réaliser l’art?,” *Abstraction-création, art non figuratif*, no. 1 (1932): n.p. (a statement accompanying a reproduction of *Croisière*); English translation by the Calder Foundation, available at <http://calder.org/life/selected-texts>.

Giorgio Morandi

In modern Italian painting, so full of tenors and baritones, Giorgio Morandi¹ is a chamber musician who avoids fermatas, high Cs, and theatrical tirades.

In fact, he is the least “Italian” of the country’s painters, although, perhaps for this very reason, he may be the most universal of them. Morandi is one of those rare personalities who pass fleetingly through schools and fashions, but without leaving pieces of himself in these forays, because for him it was never a question of presenting himself as an “-ist” of any sort, whether Futurist or metaphysician, Cubist or Fauvist. His trajectory through those schools or fashions is like the projection, in ever-greater circles, of the shadow of a young tree that grows.

In the midst of the modern vortex, Morandi retains the humility of the medieval craftsman and the artistic purity of a Bach. Like the air balloon navigator who throws ballast overboard in order to climb to ever more inaccessible heights, the painter from Bologna divests himself, first, of everything of the seductive world of anecdote, in a country that loves opera and theater, and then of figurative mythology, among a people who worship gesture, statuary, and monumentality.

From reduction to reduction, he also bids farewell to himself in order to dedicate himself exclusively to nature, but through the contact of his sensibility with the world of inanimate things, of ordinary household objects. Morandi did not participate in this Cyclopic and irrational task to which so many modern artists have dedicated themselves—that of contributing to the making of a new mythology, transforming gods into mannequins and heroes into ghosts, hovering above the tops of skyscrapers in today’s metropolises. Rather, he resembles Pascal’s thinking reed, bending before

the mystery of humble, lowly things. His attitude is that of the ant that stops before each pile of dust, each leaf particle it finds in its way.

To Morandi a treetop contains the universe, and a door or wall garlanded with leaves might well make up the world. His landscapes are “the landscape,” and in this man does not participate. What for? And he reduces them to the essence of natural things: in these landscapes the colors are substantialized in light, the forms are final, and what there is of man in the painting is reduced to the inevitable outlines, to his work. Man is not there in person because he is man—the mystical artist, severe and wise enough to love lifeless things, and the tree and light, while erasing himself before the work itself. The creator does not need to appear within reach of the object, for he knows how respectable the effort is and how contemptibly temporary the results.

In lieu of mythology, he concentrates on the soulless object in search of matter. His still life is truly still, given that he fears subjective expansionism even in organic matter. It is mineral nature that absorbs him, in the forms shaped by the artisanal hand of the potter, the glazier, or the spinner. The ceramic vase fascinates him, as does the glass bottle or the age-old amphora.

When art strips itself even of such extremely humble depths, it means that for the creator, the universe can no longer be measured by geographical extension or the illusions of spatial perspective. It condenses itself in the palpitation of inanimate matter, in the vascular porousness through which even stones breathe. Imperceptibly, through the power of patience, tolerance, and prescience, the artist approaches the mystery of life.

Morandi allows colors to desert his canvas of their own accord, like a breeder who opens the cage one day and sets his birds free into the blue sky. From this flight of colors some blue remains, or a few rays of green or purple that end up languishing in the gray—the color of things, the color of world. An object in itself is gray, as “gray” as a day of isolation and loneliness that never clears to reveal the sky.

With this world of intuitive gray, he stirs and mixes his bottles and his vases, giving each a hue of its own. Yet, from the place it once was, this hue inexplicably winds up being the flickering material quality of all objects.

At the age of fifty-seven, however, Giorgio Morandi of Bologna, Italy, is turning his back on museums and, exchanging [Jean-Siméon] Chardin’s snuff box or [Paul] Cézanne’s apple for the bottle, is formally reconstructing the world of domestic objects revealed by his eighteenth-century forerunner, adding to it the museum dignity that his French grandfather, the master from Aix-en-Provence, so assiduously sought in his own still lifes and landscapes.

Cézanne’s “primitive” experiments were somehow “realized” in Giorgio Morandi’s bottles and amphorae. Probably a shy man, this Morandi is, nonetheless, a rebel who lived through fascism, whatever his external attitude may have been—heroically solitary, of a ferociously anarchist individualism. Even though his art may appear submissive, is he not an uncompromising revolutionary? None of his contemporaries broke away with greater bravery from his country’s whole pictorial tradition. Nevertheless, he remains the purest of modern artists and, at the same time, the most archaic of them, because his artisanal soul, entirely devoted to the daily re-creation of flasks and bottles, requires the gifts, wisdom, and patience of the explorers.

Only now is Morandi’s success becoming somewhat generalized. That is what is currently happening in Switzerland, in England, and in France itself. Within his own country, his name is already spoken with profound reverence. An art as naked and severe as his is the kind that takes a while to reveal itself in all its fascination. But once revealed, it endures. Its triumph is assured, and the artist’s name will probably be remembered by those who succeed us as one of the few authentic masters of our age.

Note

1. Giorgio Morandi (1890–1964) was close to Mario Pedrosa who—in addition to the text published in this volume—also wrote “Um dia de Morandi” (A day with Morandi) (*Jornal do Brasil* [Rio de Janeiro], October 27, 1957), about a visit in the artist’s company to the Basilica of Santa Maria dei Servi in Bologna, to view a work by the Florentine painter Cimabue (c. 1240–1302). He participated in the second and fourth editions of the São Paulo Bienal (1953 and 1957), where he received prizes. On Morandi and Brazil, see Maria Cristina Bandera, “Morandi y la sala especial,” *IV Bienal del Museo de Arte Moderno: 1957, São Paulo, Brasil* (Navarra, Spain: Fundación Museo Jorge Oteiza, 2007).

Modulations Between Sensation and Idea

[Paul] Cézanne¹ was probably the first Western painter to have been aware of the not only active and autonomous but constructive function of color in painting. His innovations sprang from this awareness. Alongside a concern for rendering natural forms as geometric by reducing them to their essential structures, he sought a new method of his own to produce the effects not of volume but of solidity or corporality. It was in discussing the problem with the painter [Louis] Le Bail that he redefined the old concept of modeling: “One ought not say to model,” he explains, “but to modulate.”²

What does it mean to modulate? To alter color even as the object withdraws from the light, moving from hot to cold. The phrase has been interpreted to mean simply the suppression of linear drawing, as is usually done through the creation of volume-space relations, exclusively through the system of color contrasts. But, as [art historian Erle] Loran demonstrated in his rigorous treatise on composition in Cézanne,³ it is actually not a matter of any mysterious process of drawing with color and avoiding the line. Ultimately, the formula expresses the idea that space advances and retreats only because of the impact of these chromatic alterations that move from hot to cold and vice-versa.

In his diagrams, Loran demonstrated that the basic spatial relations remain (and quite clearly so), even when all modeling is eliminated, for analysis, and when the fundamental planes are marked only by contours. Modulations are, therefore, the specific means of highlighting the effects of three-dimensionality, as a counterpoint to planes that cross one another, retreat, or advance. The color superstructures are synchronized with contours that, although neither firm nor continuous, are at least sensitive and, at any rate, present.

The extreme complexity of modulations upon the surface of Cézanne’s paintings does not abolish the line (he is too classical and architectural to dispense with it); what he does is to give it a caprice, an arbitrariness it did not have in the static splendor of the Apollonian Renaissance, thus revealing its Baroque affinity with the lurching nervousness of El Greco’s drawing. No artist made as much use as he did of this invention so rich in surprises and mysteries for drawing, of this toy for concealing planes or edges that alternately lose and find themselves.

At once Impressionist and classical, it is no surprise that his works reveal a structural complexity hitherto unknown. In the great compositions (the landscapes of Mont Sainte-Victoire and the Bibemus quarry, in figures such as, for example, that of the *Man with Crossed Arms*, and even some of the watercolors, such as the *Bathers*), Cézanne achieves a synthesis of all the formal elements. His thought was divided between his zeal at grasping the sensations—or his “small sensation,”⁴ as he

used to say—and his profound intuition of architectural form. Hence the self-taught man's difficulty in "realizing," according to his craftsman's terminology, because to him, "to realize" meant to impart to the art of constructing a painting the materiality with which a mason builds his wall, setting brick upon brick. He would remain eternally divided between the abstract architectural sense and the insurmountable fascination for the charms of sensitive, fugitive, and mysterious matter, a sin that the Impressionists—those sybarites—introduced for all time to the world of painting.

Within his temporary and precarious artistic synthesis, Cézanne arrived at a solitary position, as solitary as his own life had been. Two contemporary currents converged toward it: the Impressionist current, which led to playing upon the surface of things, to remaining within the appearance of Nature's most transitory phenomena, obeying, therefore, an exclusively optical, sensorial, scientific perspective; and the extension throughout the centuries of the classical ideal of formal construction, albeit dulled by the realism and imitative conventionalism still dominant in his day.

This solitary position becomes quite clear and sharp when one learns of his reaction not only to his Impressionist colleagues but to painters of younger generations who already admired him, and, finally, to the great, established names of the early Renaissance in Italy. [The painter] Émile Bernard, after telling him one day that Gauguin (who had barely begun to make a name for himself) was one of his great admirers, heard him reply rather unpleasantly that he would never accept the absence of modeling and gradations in painting; that Gauguin was no painter, for he had produced nothing but "Chinese images."⁵ Turning to the past, he was no kinder to the great Cimabue or to Fra Angelico. He believed there was no flesh in Angelico's creations, whereas he himself was a sensualist.

In fact, his form stands out increasingly from Impressionist form. Renoir also painted Cézanne's cosmic passion, the Mont Sainte-Victoire. It is instructive to compare the same subject as painted by the two masters. [Art historian Lionello] Venturi was the first to show us the differences, basing his observations precisely on this parallel. These do not lie only in Cézanne's firmest contours, especially in relation to the mountain. In Renoir's picture, it distances itself, disappearing on the horizon, in the mists typical of aerial perspective. However, in Cézanne the monumental mass rises up in all its height and advances across successive planes. Thanks to the more constructive formal resources, its location within deep space is absolute and clear. Fully outlined and developed, erupting from underground like an immense tumor, it tends toward the foregrounds and thus returns—through a complicated play of advances and retreats—to integrate itself in the painting's two-dimensional plane. Despite his being a great artist, Renoir's view of the Mont Sainte-Victoire is a feminine one—sweet, poeticized, perfectly coherent with the realistic viewpoint, but very far from the formal, dramatic organization of Cézanne's vision.

Cézanne's constructive side was so pronounced that, also starting from the concept that the line is an abstraction, he nevertheless did not deny it, as the Impressionists had done. He introduced it into his color system, superimposing it upon color modulation, which was his contribution to Impressionism's theory of divided color. Yet even so, he shared the dominant prejudice according to which the line is a purely decorative formal element, it being impossible to create space and depth through delimited planes and contours alone. However, [Vincent] van Gogh and, later on, the great modern masters already showed how it is possible to suggest a sense of space simply through the use of lines and large colored planes. In fact, the Byzantines and the Chinese had demonstrated this long ago.

At any rate, in his most balanced paintings Cézanne revealed this possibility to the men of his day, who were still bound to the canons of academicism. Enchanted by the discovery of modulation through color, he always tended to use only the new process for the work's merely constructive aspects. Be that as it may, the process of dividing the colors systematically into a series of small planes that tend to accompany forms in their corporality proved to have a more pronounced structuring power than the Impressionist juxtaposition of multicolored dabs, in the search for effects of atmosphere and light. The warm, vibrant quality of the surfaces and their coloring comes from this place. The lines are then let loose, zigzagging, meteoric, fusing so perfectly within the total scheme of intense color that the entire structure seems to be built with no armature. It is his miracle. This is what gives his greatest paintings the same sense of grandeur that exists in Bach's sonorous system.

It was in reference to this achievement that he said, "Drawing and color are not distinct from one another; gradually as one paints, one draws. The more harmonious the colors are, the more precise the drawing will be. Form is at its fullest when color is at its richest."⁶ The contours are defined simultaneously with the burgeoning of the colored areas. When the colors become more intense—or richer or more translucent—the contours are altered once again, from layer to layer, so as not to be absorbed. It is a new system of using line and color, for both are now conveyed to the forefront simultaneously.

Loran saw in this process the deepest synthesis of rudimentary formal elements since Titian and the other Venetian colorists. However, in his *Treatise on Painting*, the Cubist and Futurist painter and theorist Gino Severini challenged this explanation, attempting to demonstrate its practical irreconcilability. Severini remarks that Cézanne himself was always chasing after the contour but, overpowered by the richness of his own temperament, he found himself constantly constrained by color, which thus transformed itself from means to end.

Severini is an idealist, formed by the school of linearism of the classical masters. The son of Greco-Latin culture—which, moreover, led him to the adventures of Futurism and Cubism—is revealed within this idealism. For him, the perfect balance of form and color must be clearly achieved in the mind before undertaking to execute a work of art. To him, it seemed materially impossible to find this balance outside, in motive—that is to say, in the subject or external stimulus, as Cézanne would have it—for the Frenchman sought it in the point of contact between his self and nature: in sensation.

In his effort to fuse the two elements, sensation became a purpose, when it was the ideal of the museums that Cézanne was looking for. Severini further observes that, in spite of his tendency to the classical, Cézanne's art is almost Impressionist and, therefore, more instinctive than thought.

Severini does not comprehend Cézanne's effort to reconcile the stain of color and the contours, or the elements of the pure sensation of thought without the discipline of a priori intelligence. For the Italian Futurist, a classical art requires a real preliminary method of idealization, circumscribed by a comparative canon. This idealist method does not take into account the irreducible antinomies of the physical world and the artist, the dialectical opposition between the sensorial and the intellectual, between material resources and technique, conscious will and the demands of the unconscious, all of which are present in every creative activity.

We stand before a formal idealism that is foreign to Cézanne's carnivorous temperament.

Despairing at and tortured by the insoluble contradiction between formal intelligence and unattractive, objectionable sensibility, the master of Aix hung on with tooth

and claw to what he called his “small sensation.” Like one possessed, or, put another way, like a galley slave with a heavy iron ball chained to his ankle to prevent him from fleeing, Cézanne was also chained to the muddy earth of sensations. However, with the stubbornness of Sisyphus, he never ceased to forge ahead with his intent to fuse the two irreconcilable elements of the ideal and the reality of physics. Steering clear of the sensorial deliquescences to which Impressionism was being reduced, however, he refused to enter the museum as one might enter a convent—that is, by checking his goods or worldly illusions at the door—for before he knocked at that door he wanted to obtain the reconciliation of contour and the stain of color. Thus, he hoped to put an end to the eternal dialogue, achieving the longed-for synthesis of his sensitive reactions as a man exposed to nature and to culture, abstract thought, the ideal.

His work may be defined as an endless modulation between sensation and idea.

—Originally published as “Modulações entre a sensação e a ideia,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), April 2, 1950.

Notes

1. The work of Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) was introduced to Brazilians in three group exhibitions of French art. In Rio de Janeiro, *150 anos de pintura francesa* (150 years of French painting) (Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, 1940); *A nova pintura francesa e seus mestres: De Manet a nossos dias* (New French painting and its masters: From Manet to the present day) (Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1949), when art historian Germain Bazin gave a lecture on his work; and in São Paulo, *Quatro séculos de gravura francesa* (Four centuries of French printmaking), presented in a special room at the fifth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1959), where the lithograph *Self-Portrait at the Easel with a Beret* (1898) was exhibited. The Museu de Arte de São Paulo collection includes *Scipio, the Negro* (1866–68); *Paul Alexis Reading a Manuscript to Zola* (1869–70); *Rocks at l’Estaque* (1882–85); *Madame Cézanne in a Red Dress* (1890–94), and *The Great Pine* (c. 1896).
2. Louis Le Bail quoting Cézanne, in Émile Bernard, “Paul Cézanne,” *L’Occident*, no. 32 (July 1904): 23–24.
3. Erle Loran, *Cézanne’s Composition: Analysis of His Form, with Diagrams and Photographs of His Motifs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1943).
4. Geffroy Marbeau quoting Paul Cézanne, cited in Richard Schiff, “Sensation, Movement. Cézanne,” in *Classic Cézanne*, ed. Terence Maloon (Sydney: Art Gallery of NSW, 1998), p. 26.
5. Paul Cézanne, letter to Émile Bernard, quoted in William Rubin, “Modernist Primitivism: An Introduction,” in *Primitivism in 20th Century Art: The Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, ed. William Rubin (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1984), p. 12.
6. Paul Cézanne quoted in Émile Bernard, “Paul Cézanne,” *L’Occident* (July 1904): 17–30, in P. Michael Doran, ed., *Conversations with Cézanne* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 39.

Ivan Serpa’s Experiment

In this amorphous, invertebrate country of today, the formal experiment that Ivan Serpa proposes to us in his show at the Instituto Brasil-Estados Unidos is worthy of our fullest attention. Here is a young painter who, in his first solo exhibition, presents a small body of work that is direct, frank, bold, and, above all, set upon a firm and modern course (see plate on p. 84 for a similar work).

Despite all the virtualities with which he is undeniably endowed, Serpa divests himself of exhibitionisms, of the usual academic tricks from the pictorial kitchen in which he was a virtuoso, in order to enter through the tallest narrow door of formal abstraction. However, it is not easy to remain aloof to the seductive power of that sensitive geometry of pure lines and forms evolving within the space of the rectangle.

The harmony that exudes from the surface of his canvases even seems easy. Laymen, lightweights, or empirical and reactionary curmudgeons will say (*do say*) that it is no more than a “cold,” “ornamental” exercise of neatly drawn geometric lines and figures. There was even one critic who, in an attack on Ivan, took me to task

because, in my brief catalogue introduction to the painter's show, as a way of supporting the artist's sincere effort, in passing I had used the expression "privileged forms" to designate the geometric figures of the circle and the square. I was labeled "literate" (as if the word were an insult), and was even taught a lesson according to which the circle, the square, and other strong, regular figures are not "privileged forms" but, rather, "natural, living forms." I am not sure why, but Cézanne also joined in the dance—perhaps because he professed "spheres, cones and prisms" as foundations for the structure of his compositions. However, in reality I have nothing to do with the critic's refutation, because the expression I employed is just scientific terminology created by modern psychology in order to point out the greatest power of impression and persistence in perception, experimentally verified, of the most regular and symmetrical geometric forms. The expression reflected nothing qualitative in any aesthetic sense or even in terms of simple individual taste.

But let us leave these taunts aside and return to our much more interesting exhibition. The impression of assurance, balance, clear beauty of hue and form, apparently the fruit of easy virtuosity, actually shows a self-control of mediums that is rare among artists his age. Indeed, Ivan has already achieved a degree of simplification that is not for those who aspire to it but for those who are able to achieve it. In discovering the world of visual abstraction, Kandinsky moved from impression to improvisation and, from there, climbed all the way to construction! As one of his Brazilian grandchildren, Serpa starts out from the master's final period, though in a still elementary manner, compared to the complexity of the formidable Russian discoverer's formal organization.

The struggle for simplification was the artist's great dilemma in this early stage of evolution. During the years of apprenticeship, ever since he began to look to Braque in search of something new in the domain of painting, Serpa was unable to find just what he wanted. And it was not until quite recently that he found a path to order, to inner discipline, to architectural space—his own path. Traces of such groping, of such hesitation may still be found in the present show, particularly in the drawings. Indeed, in some of these, the scheme of the lines does not always follow the direction of the planes, thus muddying the rhythmic limpidity. Until then, painting was a manual ability exposed to the winds of momentary influence. Only a love of order, of neatness, of nicely finished work stood out from among his intrinsic qualities, yet all of it was drowned out by an exuberance of superficial and external details, and a rash propensity to assimilate foreign formulas and apply them immediately at the first possible opportunity. In light of this excessive and passive faculty for learning, assimilating, and digesting foreign things, many doubted his inner strength, his artistic authenticity. In reality, he was working through the process of his artistic training. It was his way of preparing himself, of completing a painter's apprenticeship.

In this struggle with himself and with foreign influences, he eventually found himself. He then rediscovered the integrative (and, in itself, beautiful) power of the line. An entire series of abstract drawings served to free him from the purely figurative or purely sensorial residues of which he had had enough. Thus, the fundamental problem of space emerged from his mind, from this play of lines and planes in the small space of the drawing, in all its importance. He approached the canvas with linear freedom—above all with a free hand (ultimately, a free mind) that was able to guide him in the creation of formal rhythm. He had found himself.

Yet the earliest attempts are reduced to a sort of scaffolding, an analytic structure rigidly tied to the two-dimensionality of the canvas. Powerful generating lines mark circumferences, etc., upon the canvas. The arabesque is beautiful, but nothing

moves—everything is static. Early on, however, these lines disappear and what was schematic becomes living and dynamic. The large forms come unmoored from the surface, releasing themselves into space. The forms are still extremely simple, “privileged,” closed. But they are animated by a dynamic force that interweaves them in a cosmic movement rich with relationships and harmony. They are never isolated, and they come from this inter-relationship in which they coexist with the power of fascination and persuasion that they hold over us.

Colors vibrate one moment and reconcile themselves the next, although their overall function remains subordinated to forms—the principal protagonists. But, to judge by what he presents to us, the artist’s intention is to give color an increasingly important role in its relationships to forms. The same may be said of a better, more pictorial treatment here and there, of the material, of the texture of his paintings. These problems are secondary to the aims of Serpa’s art, and they will mature naturally under his brush, even as his spatial world expands and becomes richer.

There is currently much talk in Brazil about functional painting, at the service of architecture. However, what has been done in this field so far is empirical and improvised and, above all, disconnected from the formalist, purified spirit of modern architecture itself. Ivan Serpa’s exhibition shows that a new solution to the problem—to the fusion of the two arts, under the primacy of the first—is already beginning to emerge, and is worthy of examination by the nation’s architects.

—Originally published as “A experiência da Ivan Serpa,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), August 18, 1951.

Grupo Frente

Nowadays, the idea of a “group” is suspect—especially in a country like ours, of amorphous if not imbecilic individualists always ready to let themselves be mobilized by the first street vendor to come along. Particularly when the street vendor dresses loudly or hawks the wondrous virtues of political propaganda. For it was within this skeptical and superficial environment of ours—whose superstitions are even more superficial—that the Grupo Frente appeared, and has kept going to this day.¹

Its members are all young, and the allegiances that have marked its growth have invariably been those of still young personalities. This means that the group is open . . . to the future, to generations in the making. Even more promising is the fact that the group is not a restricted clique, nor much less an academy in which little rules and recipes for making Abstractionism, Concretism, Expressionism, Futurism, Cubism, Realism, Neorealism, and other isms are taught and learned. Does this statement astonish you? Well then look, just look: here is Elisa [Martins da Silveira] alongside [Ivan] Serpa; [Carlos] Val next to Lygia Clark; here are Franz Weissmann and Lygia Pape; romantic Vincent [Ibberson] leaning against Concretist João José [da Silva Costa]; and Décio Vieira and Aluísio Carvão, brothers, yet so different! Not to mention that terrible Abraham Palatnik, inventor, builder, maker of mobiles and artist of intelligence, who spares neither half measures nor concessions to those between here and there. However, the skeptics and the amorphous should not laugh.

These artists did not come together as a group out of worldliness, pure camaraderie, or by chance. Their greatest virtue continues to be the one it always was: a horror of eclecticism. They are all men and women of faith, convinced of the revolutionary,

regenerating mission of art. One thing unites them, and this they do not compromise, ready to defend it against everything and everyone, placing it above everything and everyone—freedom for creation. In defense of this moral postulate they give or beg no quarter.

Such a stance does not mean they endorse the ridiculous Parnassian principle of so-called art for art's sake. To them, art is not an activity of parasites, nor is it at the service of the lazy rich or political causes or the paternalistic state. An autonomous and vital activity, it aspires to an exalted social mission, namely to give the age style and to transform men, teaching them to fully exercise their senses and to shape their own emotions.

The Grupo Frente artists pursue ethical discipline and creative discipline: they would otherwise not be able to experiment as freely as they do. The path to ethical discipline is opened to them by this fanatical search for quality that characterizes the effort of an Ivan Serpa, or by the lofty, noble ambition for architectural integration that characterizes the effort of Lygia Clark. With the discovery of modulated surfaces upon which the line is actually incised or merely suggested by color contrast, Lygia takes a bold step toward integration because she abolishes the intrinsic difference between the painting in itself, the boxed panel, a facade, a wall, a door, a piece of furniture: everything in a building that is a living organism thus becomes part of the same creative thought, the same spirit of synthesis that aspires, simultaneously and inseparably, to functionality and to beauty. For some time now, Serpa has surrendered to the invention of his high-temperature collages and, recently, to experiments with the as-yet-unexplored world of textures in which a sensitive but controlled material submerges in its transparencies or in its opacity, in the contingencies of precarious sensorial reality, the lofty pure forms of geometry.

Actually, one of the present show's points of interest are the albums with various textural experiments in every sort of material, from tulle to alphabetical signs from typewriters to cheap wrapping paper. Everyone collaborates in this dissection of matter, including the group's most recent recruits. These activities thus draw its members into productive practical activities which, tomorrow, may bring about a considerable improvement in the quality of industrial products. Modern industry needs the essential and pressing collaboration of artists, under penalty of never elevating itself to the height of the cultural demands of the society it serves. Without this collaboration, it will never exceed the scope of the petty and merely utilitarian empiricism in which it works, never succeeding in ennobling our civilization with the formal quality (perfect synthesis of function and form) of its articles, as did the artisanal activities of the great creative ages of the past, such as medieval craftsmanship.

Unlike most of the others in the group, for Franz Weissmann the experiment almost never appears freely, as in a game. Rather, it only appears in depth in the work, as the fruit of mature reflection. His experiments succeed one another like hours in a day; however, their making takes up but one among the many, many hours of the days and nights consumed by experimentation, consumed by experiences. This does not mean that, amid his efforts to grasp space by articulating it with the line or the plane in trihedrons, tetrahedrons, or polyhedrons, a momentary experiment does not crystallize itself like some sort of baroque intermezzo for a flute player, for instance. Weissmann worships wire and steel thread, entertains himself most pleasurably with strips or sheets of aluminum, with yellow metal and other materials he finds in practical use in automobile repair shops.

Aluísio Carvão grew tired of experimenting with easel painting and now vacillates between flat surfaces and three-dimensional objects that he eventually suspends in



Mário Pedrosa (center) and Grupo Frente. 1955. Collection Ferreira Gullar

space, to avoid the fixity of a still, flat view in exchange for the multiplicity of colored and formally living surfaces. With Décio Vieira we have painting of predominantly sensitive qualities, which does not, however, escape from the rigor of an intelligence that, because it conceals a certain measure of irony and perhaps even of skepticism, nevertheless ceases to act to correct—whether through measure or through proportion—the excesses of the sensitive or . . . even of good taste. With growing boldness, Lygia Pape engraves in black and white and in color, in rich, delicate material, forms that become increasingly pure and universal, even as the formal idea is enhanced. The artist also gives us another measure of her worth in the jewelry collection she presents. And what to say of João José, the group's most rigorous Concretist? That working with progression and alternate rhythms, with deliberately elementary forms, he offers us living, expanding surfaces. It is an artistic vocation in progress.

There are others to mention, including the strong coloristic temperament of Vincent, the Englishman. Yet we are not cataloguing names. However, let us reserve a few lines to say something about the apparently unusual presence here of rebel individualists such as Elisa Martins or the lad Carlos Val. The former makes paintings that are notorious for being completely instinctual, yet in which the “figure” is so detailed that its particulars are eventually transformed into lines, into planes, into pure tone. Hence the presence upon the canvas of sewing stitches or colored, shiny embroidery of great pictorial richness. The seemingly rarefied atmosphere of experimental Concretists and Abstractionists (in which Elisa was actually trained) appears to be what best stimulates the reactions of her direct, simple temperament, which is opposed to theories. Carlos Val is the cherub of the group. He is one of those painters who springs from the cradle with an irremediable vocation. Though he is still an adolescent, his line has recently taken on an extraordinarily vigorous formal drama that is quite rare in these parts. It is the medium that Val uses to fuse to the tempestuous backgrounds of his drawings and paintings the silhouettes, shadows, and increasingly archetypal figures of his imagination—like his beloved horses, which he has painted since childhood in the purest, most beautiful and disconcerting hues.

This concludes the Grupo Frente's introduction. Thanks to the Museu de Arte Moderna's fine initiative, the group will reach the public at large through the show now being inaugurated. The honor paid to them by the museum is well deserved, and with it the Museu de Arte Moderna accomplishes its mission of stimulating new values and stimulating the public through the contact it establishes between them. The experience of such contact can only be fruitful, even though public reaction may not be immediately favorable—or even if it is hostile. Lasting friendships are not always forged at first sight. Yet something tells us that this exhibition will be successful:

that it will be a landmark in the process of winning over scholarly opinion for contemporary art, for the truly living art of our time. If, however, these hopes should be dashed, it will not mean the battle is lost. It does not mean that we need deny the high quality of what most of these young artists have already achieved; above all, it does not mean we should deny that they are right in their efforts and on the right path. Nor, still, should it stop us from writing that they have already achieved considerable creative ability. It was neither pride nor controversial diligence that led us to make these statements; on the contrary, we have been guided by humble, resigned, and well-seasoned patience.

To uphold one's own convictions is the supreme courtesy we owe to those who disagree with us. It is proof of our respect for them. And it follows that, with public support—or without it—we should allow ourselves to become irrevocably committed to expressing here our conviction that the present collective display of this fistful of impassioned artists can be compared with the most vibrant art of its kind that is currently on exhibition in the artistically valid capitals of the contemporary world.

—Originally published as “Grupo Frente,” in *Catálogo 2ª Mostra do Grupo Frente* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, July 1955).

Note

1. Formed in 1954 by artists Ivan Serpa, Aluísio Carvão, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Décio Vieira, Carlos Val, João José da Silva Costa, and Vincent Ibberson; they were joined in 1955 by Abraham Palatnik, Franz Weissmann, Hélio Oiticica, César Oiticica, Elisa Martins da Silveira, Eric Baruch, and Rubem Mauro Ludolf.

Concrete Poet and Painter

The Concrete poets have not only abolished verse; they have raised their aesthetic spears against poetic discourse. Nevertheless, in its specifically affirmative-apologetic-supportive mode, poetic discourse concedes a preferential place to what is signified. This is why [Walt] Whitman was able to write, “Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles.”¹ Elevating the senses to a preferential place, the poet positions himself as a sort of symbolic antenna, picking up the primary experience.

From the outset, his attitude to things is one of direct experience. “Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles . . .” Setting aside the American bard’s naturalist, romantic pantheism, one finds in him the purely descriptive (that is, phenomenological) approach that the poet, sated with today’s science and theory, so fervently seeks. The Concrete poets relate to the visual arts and to music in order to arrive at the nakedness of perception, the virginity and purity of the initial, global, perceptive blow of the *gestalts*. This is why they readily abandon verse, with its wanderings, its caesura, its invincibly cultivated, erudite, conceptual nature, in order to contact and become attached to the raw object, to an experience that is still this side of concepts, this side of the inevitable logical-associative, speculative-psychological chain. They want to start from “the direct and immediate datum of experience in relation to a concrete world of meaningful objects.”²

This is why the graphic-spatial image initially represents such a prime element in the poetic *démarche* of a Décio Pignatari or a [Ferreira] Gullar. They want to *previously see* the poem, and this can only be done through perception—that is, *seeing* a form or a formal nucleus: in short, an object. So it is logical that the result of a

formal-sensorial experiment should be called an object-poem. Haroldo de Campos, perhaps the most romantic of the Concretists, sees his poem take shape even as he hears the sound of its words—like a continuous thread—partly, perhaps, directing his spatial arrangement of them.

Even in precise engineer constructors of poems such as Augusto de Campos or Décio Pignatari, concrete poetic activity is always passionately phenomenological. They start with a word, but they disconnect it from everything that came before or after it, disassociating it like a loose link from the immemorial wholes from which it came and from the usual structures through which it circulates. To what purpose? To isolate it, to render it an indifferent thing, an object as yet undefined and nameless: in short, as a composite of sounds and letters, phonemes and diphthongs, divested of its immemorial logical-connotative functions, of its intrinsic conceptual nature. What remains of it? A mere phenomenological object, immediate, primary data for direct experience. (In abstruse philosophical language it would be—at best—a Husserlian “pre-perceptive essence.”) Of course, if this is their starting point, they must return once again to the world of concepts, the world of the word.

But let us now examine the Concrete painter according to theoretical orthodoxy, especially to that of the *paulistas*—of a Waldemar Cordeiro, for example (see plate on p. 81). The painter proposes to follow a *démarche* that is precisely opposite to that of the poets. His ideal is to divest himself as much as possible from all direct phenomenological experience in search of pure intellect. He would like to execute a pure, perfect mental operation—like the calculations of an engineer—that is foreign or indifferent to any modality of personal experience. Pictorially speaking, he is completely uninterested in the qualitatively good or bad execution of the painting. What interests him above all else is the precise externalization of visuality itself or, better yet, of the visual idea that . . . he designed, conceived, planned. Why, then, is he a painter? Because the idea conceived and transferred to the canvas is supposed to be seen and read upon the plane by perceptive eyes.

The usually serial form (triangles, squares, curves, etc.) is exhibited with the greatest possible precision, all else being accessory, including the colors that one should ideally be able to phone in to the optician’s lab, in accordance with the specific number of its chromatic wave or vibration. Thus, even color—the essential, primordial domain of every phenomenological approach—is relegated to outside the artist’s primary experience and transformed into resulting objective experiments that are already perfectly catalogued (that is, conceptualized). The Concrete painter aspires to the moment in which his own hand will become unnecessary to the making of a painting.

Thus, the poet leaves the specific field of verbal rhetoric, of logical-significant discourse—the natural environment in which words are born, live, grow, move, transform themselves, and die—to begin his investigations anew, with the virginity of primary experiences, at the level of practical-phenomenological intersensorial activities in which the painter or the musician acts. The Concrete painter, on the contrary, wishes to achieve the clarity of symbolic logic, breaking any commitment to past phenomenological experiences. He would like to be a machine for elaborating and making ideas visible. The phenomenon of this disparity of attitudes deserves to go on record.

—Originally published as “Poeta e pintor concretista,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 16, 1957.

Notes

1. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2004), p. 44.
2. R. B. MacLeod, “The Place of Phenomenological Analysis in Social Psychological Theory,” in *Social Psychology at the Crossroads*, ed. J. H. Rohrer and M. Sherif (New York: Harper, 1951), pp. 215–41.

Paulistas and Cariocas

We have long reflected upon the preliminary need for theory that characterizes certain peoples or, rather, certain cultural groups, when confronted with others for whom “theory” is not necessary or always comes a posteriori. For example, why is it that the Italians are always more theoretical than the French, the Germans than the English, the Russians than the Americans, the Spaniards than the Brazilians, and the *paulistas* than the *cariocas*?

Argentinean and Uruguayan artists, critics, and essayists always seem to be bigger know-it-alls—more intelligent, really—than we Brazilians of all colors, from all corners. There they are, beyond the Plata, artists and critics alike, their theories always on the tip of their tongue. As for us over here, we are always lazier, more negligent, perhaps concealing a smidgeon of skepticism or humor behind this laziness or this negligence.

What is curious is that inside our country, between the two most important intellectual metropolises—São Paulo and Rio—we may also notice something of this difference in attitude. Ever since the Modern Art Week [Semana de Arte Moderna],¹ São Paulo has presented itself to Rio as the driving center of aesthetic ideas and theory. Not only was modernism born in *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*],² but its doctrine and theory were defined and codified there. Shortly after he published *A escrava que não é Isaura* [The slave who is not Isaura; 1925], Mário de Andrade used to say, half ironically, half seriously, “First a book of poetry, then a book of wisdom.” As we know, the book condenses the aesthetic of the new modernist poetry.

The young Concretists of São Paulo hold the same concern for “wisdom,” alongside that of “poetry.” Between a [Décio] Pignatari and a [Ferreira] Gullar, the former is clearly more of a theorist than the latter. At the level of painting and the visual arts, the contrast is even more striking. The *paulista* painters, draftsmen, and sculptors not only believe in their theories but also follow them to the letter. (Of course, we are not referring to [Alfredo] Volpi, the old, still glorious master, above all isms and schools, who lends the young Concretists the generous and protective gesture of his solidarity.)

In comparison, the painters of Rio are almost romantics. In one group as in the other, the color treatment is very different. Here and there, in spite of one escapade or another in which one can see sensual or expressive lapses in color (in a [Hermelindo] Fiaminghi, or even in a [Waldemar] Cordeiro), the *paulistas* introduce a deliberately elementary chromatic vocabulary.

The chromatic variations are only of a dynamic visual order, as to brightness, vibration, and saturation—hard surface colors bound to the “procrustean bed” of formal patterns. These are usually of pure figural predominance—that is, powerful forms, in the gestalt sense. Severe and rigorous within their visual discipline, whenever *paulista* painters avoid symmetry they do so in order to reveal its presence, *quand même*. In I don’t know which one of his *Concreções* [Concretions] (the magnificent one with the black triangles, in horizontal parallel series in relief on a white background, aluminum sheet), [Luiz] Sacilotto gives us an excellent execution of his idea, based on the perceptual ambivalence in which the black triangles—extremely powerful closed forms—suddenly allow the white background to take the foreground in a series of visual triangles that act as if they were virtual shadows of the black series (see plate on p. 81). With this, the white gains an unexpected virtuality, and the captivating play of visuality continues to alternate itself indefinitely. In this work, the figures elude the quantitative limitations of metric geometry; that is, the triangles depend neither

upon the size nor even upon the rigidity of their form: their fundamental properties become dependent, above all, on the general position of the lines and points at which they intersect; from there, they grow and move as the gaze travels across their series. Even in his *Concreção* [Concretion]³ numbered before this one, Sacilotto begins with a spiral whose axes make up an irregular angle, the sides folding up on themselves. In this work, the artist still shows the scaffolding of his idea and, by virtue of a certain contempt for the spatial power of color, the drawing becomes rigid and ends with two figures—two hourglasses, one fixed vertically, the other horizontally—with what is ultimately a sort of perfectly three-dimensional central vanishing point, in the old manner.

Although he is approaching it, Maurício [Nogueira Lima] has not yet arrived at the freedom with which Sacilotto is already beginning to move. Cordeiro nourishes his idea and transposes it to the canvas, as a draftsman draws his object on a board. There is a sort of return to the center of the painting as a hierarchical place destined to the figure—I mean, to the form.

Carioca artists are far from having the severe Concretist awareness of their *paulista* colleagues. They are more empirical, or perhaps the sun and sea induce in them a certain doctrinaire negligence. Whereas they love above all else the canvas, which remains as the last physical-sensorial contact with matter and, through it, somehow, with nature, *paulistas* love the idea above all else. In this sense, Décio Vieira is a sensual cat that exudes aristocratic indolence, agility, and intelligence. What concerns him is the space of the canvas he articulates with subtle precision, although it is disguised by a loving brushstroke in highly personal, effusive, and nondelimiting colors. He is an Abstractionist rather than a Concretist. The other *carioca* painters also commit sins of heresy.

Their greatest concern is spatial play, so that no piece of the canvas is lost or neglected. Whereas *paulistas* devote greater attention to the conceived form to the detriment of everything else, even if they have to isolate it upon the canvas, *cariocas* still want to integrate it in a well or equally distributed spatial relationship. This is why they are so caught up with negative and positive spaces, giving their colors an equally active function—so as not to allow forms to be distinguishable upon the background.

For the *paulista*, color is a color-surface, pure luminosity, color for a form that functions here as an object. For the *carioca*, color is also space; it is illumination—the vision, so to speak, of empty spaces; it is negative form, as is, in fact, the white background of the triangular series in Sacilotto's prizewinning painting.

Among *cariocas*, João José [da Silva Costa] is the one closest to the *paulistas* or the most rigorous Concretists. But he, too, commits a sin of the flesh, for his dialogue with color still contains secrets of a subjective or expressional order. Be that as it may, in various degrees, the *paulistas* and *cariocas* of the Concretist field represent a good part of Brazil's hopes for the future of its visual arts.

—Originally published as "Paulistas e cariocas," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 19, 1957.

Notes

1. See Pedrosa's "Modern Art Week," pp. 177–87 in the present volume.
2. Volume of poems by Mário de Andrade, published in 1922.
3. We believe the author is referring to *Concreção 5628* [Concretion 5628] (1956). See illustration p. 79.

Maria the Sculptor

Among our few sculptors, Maria Martins is a unique figure.

The artist in Maria has the gift of repelling those who come into contact with her work. In order to approach her, one must overcome certain prejudices. And I am not talking about the banal, superficial—though sympathetic—preconceptions that were raised in certain artistic circles upon her arrival. Indeed, Maria came to art late in her career—and what a career! That of an ambassador's wife. She entered this art world of bona fide bohemians or austere and professional craftsmen as surprisingly as a parachutist. Reaction from the bona fides was natural in view of this strange figure from the world of well-to-do snobs and the rich bourgeoisie. However, Maria has not been beaten down by the hostility of the milieu. And she endures, keeps on going, and wins. Today she is an esteemed figure in these artistic circles. And rightly so.

Nevertheless, as an artist she suffers from a capital defect: an excess of personality. It is precisely from this fault that the most negative feature of her sculptural work emerges: its absence of monumentality. She lacks the high sense of form. In her solid works, statues and backs, this lack of monumentality stands out. Instinctively, she attempts to compensate for it through an overflow of highly personal bad taste, in which details join other details in order to represent subjects drawn from the modern literary arsenal about the unconscious. What dominates her figures is a profusion of ambiguous images generated by the same process of free association at the literary-poetic (and, especially, surrealist) level. Maria barrels ahead, her eyes shut, never watching for traffic lights—a dangerous driver. She tends to overexplain her ideas or her extravagances.

The core of her creative drive is not plastic but discursive. In these works, she reveals her sculptor's personality with sublime shamelessness and excessive satisfaction. It is true that, in all this, there is a certain unconscious core of exhibitionism, the fruit of an unmatched psychological infantilism or of total naiveté, which is disarming because it is unguarded, unsparing, and uninhibited. And within this defect or quality—as you prefer—lies the secret of Maria's artistic explanation.

Her idea of sculpture is a literary (and for this reason, romantic) one. Her art world initiation came to pass under [André] Breton's motto, "Beauty will be CONVULSIVE or will not be at all."¹ That, then, was the period when she surrendered to the punishing winds of the unconscious, previously exploited in writing. The devil of it is that she never achieved automatism precisely because she never ceased to place herself at the forefront of the creative process. Blending exhibitionism and sincerity, her art remains within the zone of the primary sensorial reactions, never achieving the innermost, highest zone in which sensibility and intelligibility become confused. That is why her personality is always excessive; why it is, shall we say, para-artistic. The artist—and the artist alone—already belongs to another, more distant, more solitary region, one that is more inimical to life itself; one in which sensibility is thought and intelligence sensibility. So the monumental work lives for itself, with that terrible capacity for self-isolation, for turning its back on its own creator, that is the hallmark of true masterpieces. Maria's best-executed pieces never detach themselves from her.

The volumes of her bronze, polished metal, or wood sculptures have no consistency, articulation, or hierarchy of planes. They tend to equal one another, treated as if they were only smooth or porous surfaces upon which the artist concentrates her affectations, her fixations, her whims and ideas. In later periods, the solid volumes are emptied, breaches are opened in them, and the surrounding space tends to penetrate them. That is when the sculptor achieves her finest work. She then gives us a

scheme made of branches, vines, and trunks in which the sensuality of the chosen material—porous, unripe, with the consistency of rotted wood—expresses her tortured mind more formally and with fewer sentimental effusions, simultaneously satisfied by a thousand perverse visions. This woman's imagination lacks order. If it had any, her sculptural art would be a consummate one. And Baudelaire's verses, "There, all is order and beauty, / Richness, quiet, and pleasure," might serve as a gateway to the work.² From this, however, we have to remove order and calm. And what beauty remains is that of a valved flower of cruel and vulgar evocations somewhere between the passionflower and basil.

The most authentic thing about Maria's sculpture is its biological two-dimensionality. Even when it extends its reeds or its limbs in space to form a sort of perforated net, in an irregular succession of spans that are often lacking in rhythm, it is the plane that lives, and what stands out is the adherence of the forms. They resemble creepers that, in turn, require something solid—a trunk or a wall—upon which to lean, upon which to branch out. They are parasitical forms that, without a consistency of their own, are only able to articulate themselves, to grow, or to bloom upon foreign bodies. These foreign bodies are always contingent; that is, they signify external nature: they represent the others, or their own body in a final narcissistic effort to endure. Maria's art acts like a leech, a claw of worn-out nerves, though dominated by a brutal will, but which is no more than a desperate caprice, a painful spasm.

But such as she is, in her irrepressible personalist assertiveness, Maria the sculptor exists, and matters.

—Originally published as "Maria, a escultora," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), April 27, 1957.

Notes

1. "La beauté sera convulsive, ou ne sera pas." André Breton, *Nadja*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Grove Press, 1960), p. 160.
2. "Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté. Luxe, calme et volupté." Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil and Other Works*, ed. and trans. Wallace Fowlie (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 59.

Lasar Segall

Lasar Segall was the first member of his great generation to introduce modern painting in Brazil, starting with his São Paulo show of 1913.¹ He left us work that was sincere, dense, sad, and somber, even when his subject matter was neither somber nor sad. It might also be said that in the family of Brazilian visual artists he was the first—and may well still be the only one—to have given his art a decidedly melancholy and pessimistic tone.

In general, Brazilian artists are not pessimists and do not linger for long in the clef of human suffering. Among the youngest there is perhaps only one painter whose art, though intensely lyrical, nevertheless prefers to express itself in a minor key: Milton Dacosta. Among established masters, of course, there is the work of Portinari, which is dedicated to the human condition. And yet, even in the series about migrant workers [fleeing the drought in] the Brazilian Northeast—in which the artist attained his greatest dramatic power—it cannot be said that Portinari is a sad and somber painter. Throughout that series one feels a boundless optimism. His skeletal figures in rags and the muted gray tones that cover them symbolize a representation of poverty and

despair rather than any deep, unassailable, internalized sadness. On the contrary, even in Segall's most lyrical and contemplative moments—such as the landscapes of Campos de Jordão² with the little cows—his painting never ceases to let sadness and pain show through. He saw melancholy and disengagement in everything: in animals, in sticks, in stones, in things. This is why, if he always treated the human figure with the artisanal care with which the Cézannes, Van Goghs, and [Giorgio] Morandis treated the still life, it was because the inanimate thing, the mineral and the vegetable, possessed mysterious subterranean communications with the human soul—with man, irrevocably subject to misfortune, incurably torn between nostalgia for his beginnings and the propitiatory attraction of the end.

In referring to Segall's sadness or melancholy, many have spoken of his race. This is a facile psychological explanation. There are other Jewish artists—like Chagall, who also came from Segall's birthplace of Vilna—whose figures are not perpetually stooping or laying their heads down upon stones, upon the ground or a bed (who knows whether to sleep, to rest, or to die). Rather, Chagall's figures fly like birds or angels, moved by a utopian aspiration to heaven or happiness. If there is pessimism in him, it is overcome by escapism, whereas in Segall, pessimism is nourished by a tropism.

On the occasion of his exhibition in 1938,³ European critics and artists, among whom I recall Pierre Gueguen, spoke of certain landscapes and new motifs in Segall's repertory as of "Brazilian painting." Cícero Dias and Di Cavalcanti, whether because of understandable artistic rivalry or for serious reasons, disagreed with this qualification. So did I, as a matter of fact. Of course the landscape was really that of Campos do Jordão: the little cows so elegantly transposed onto the canvas were, indeed, part of that stunning scenery.

But why were they not "Brazilian paintings" to us? Were not the well-rendered burnt hues of the mountain vegetation of Campos de Jordão right there, along with its dense and occasionally translucent air? They were. The painter's sure eye made no mistake, nor did the unsurpassed craftsmanship of his hand betray him. To this day, if we stroll through the paths and cliff sides of the Mantiqueira or the Serra do Mar mountain chains and gaze at the tall hills of burning land or tolerate the peaceful oxen and cows grazing in their pastures, the Segallian vision comes to mind. Down the road, in the middle ground, the gentle animals show us only their skinny, dark flanks, like walls or facades. From below and from outside, oxen and cows lose volume and three-dimensionality. In the repertory of our painting, it was Segall who first saw them in this way.

But does the fidelity of the penetrating Segallian vision give us the right to qualify his painting as Brazilian? We do not think so. Any artist endowed with Segall's powerful visuality could have given us an image similar to that bucolic part of our nature, regardless of the highly sensitive quality of Segall's paintbrush—even if he had arrived in that privileged place on that very day.

However, in many regards, Segall brought us more than a so-called Brazilian painting. He bequeathed to us a profound testimony of an entire period of dramatic contemporary events. But even beyond that, his work was an original and moving solo, with the hoarse, warm sonority of a countrified imposter within the universal cacophony. He had a predilection for minor keys and, for this reason, even when he took on the great epic subjects—*Navio de emigrantes* [Emigrants' ship] [1939–41] (see plate on p. 83), *Pogrom* [1937]—he soon transformed them into lamentations.

Generally so extroverted, Brazilian painting will forever be enriched by his art of complete introversion, contained harmonies, and the profound tenderness of the immortal portraits of Lucy.⁴

Notes

1. This solo exhibition took place in a rented space sponsored by Senator José de Freitas Valle.
2. Brazilian municipality located in the Mantiqueira mountain range, in the interior of the state of São Paulo, 173 km from the state capital and 1,628 meters above sea level.
3. During this year he had a show in the second edition of the Salão de Maio [May Salon], held at São Paulo's Esplanada Hotel.
4. The painter Lucy Citti Ferreira was Segall's student and model for more than ten years. See <http://www.museusegall.org.br/mlsObra.asp?sSume=15&sObra=46>.

Di Cavalcanti

Today is Emiliano di Cavalcanti day. They say it was sixty years ago that he disembarked in improvised diapers from a coaster that had sailed from Paraíba (the state from which his father—a military man—hailed) onto the shores of this old and well-beloved capital.¹ He is therefore a *carioca*. And no one is more of a *carioca* than Di.

He was the first to depict the people of the hills and suburbs where samba was born. Being the most Brazilian of artists, he was the first to feel that there was an intermediate zone between the interior, the farmland, the vast hinterlands, and the avenue, the “civilized center”: the suburb (see plate on p. 82). This is where the true native of the big city lives. He is no longer a country hick, but neither is he yet cosmopolitan. What happens there is authentic, both in origin and in sensibility.

There, Di sought inspiration, when he ceased being the “minstrel of muted tones,” as Mário de Andrade (the author of *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*; 1922]) called him in the handwritten dedication with which he offered him the book. (Or was it the Mário of *Há uma gota de sangue em cada poema* [There is a drop of blood in every poem]?)² Thus, no Brazilian visual artist ever became Brazilian more suddenly than he. Not even the admirable Tarsila [do Amaral] of the pink and blue and gold period of chests, Saint John's feast poles, and country dances, for when she discovered the farm she did so via Paris, [Fernand] Léger, and Mexico.

[Heitor] Villa-Lobos has always and from the start been the brilliant serenader we all admired, even now that he has turned seventy. Di Cavalcanti's roots also lie in the samba and in the serenade. It was not only the mulatto woman that Di discovered; it was also—and this is of crucial importance—the Port of Maria Angu.³ Until then, only the Pharoux and Mauá quays⁴ were known—that is, as real ports that welcomed and shipped people off to foreign parts, a place of gringos and swells.

Maria Angu is different: it is a port, but a suburban one. The journeys made (or planned) to and from there are not faraway journeys, nor do they involve long crossings: they are always tied to the land. The suburbanite adventure occurs not on the treacherous and abstract seas, or between sky and water, but always around the house or the yard, among neighborhood folk. The suburbanite is indifferent to the landscape which he has, in fact, barely left in order to live urbanely; this is why he is suburban. Because he comes from the countryside, nature does not interest him, and he lodges himself at the edge of the city to enjoy certain comforts and effluvia of urban civilization, without losing the comfort, the relaxation, the habit of enjoying, of slowly savoring—that is, with wise sloth and sensuality—life's pleasures as naturally as possible or modulated especially by the instincts.

In Maria Angu, a port with no sea or horizons, the women, fishermen, boats, and nets gather as in a marketplace. The landscape vanishes to make way for the suburb. Everything in it is picturesque, sweating with life and human sympathy, yet without space, without horizons. It truly resembles a canvas by Di Cavalcanti. Di lives intensely—that is, lazily in the present. He is an extraordinarily lively machine for feeling and perceiving, never for contemplating.

That is the secret of his novelty. Once in Paris, in exile during the untroubled days before the Second European war, when we saw one another every day, I observed that there was never space, never a sense of vastness or atmosphere in his painting. He was then experiencing one of the most successful periods of his art, rich in color, in the formal, optimistic, lyrical plenitude of its subject matter and in the decorative arabesque. Di took note of my observation, and the next day he showed me a new canvas: a beach with a vast contour, a low horizon, and a dense atmosphere of beautiful blue, green, and gray hues. We discussed the picture and Di left, carrying it off under his arm to his *marchand*, who had a gallery in the Rue de Fleurus, in the heart of Montparnasse.

He was disappointed when he returned, though; the dealer found the novelty strange, preferring the warm interiors and exquisite curtains, the sensual and nostalgic women, the flowers and more flowers that the painter had been turning out at that time. The painter did not insist on the experiment, though at the cost of some disappointment to himself and to us. The dealer did not want to take risks, for he knew from experience that Di's old manner always found a buyer.

These days I am inclined to believe that the dealer was right: Di is too commonplace, too sensorial, too materialistic (an appropriate word) for imaginary constructs or environments devoid of direct human presence. Not in vain did he discover spaceless, sealess, horizonless Maria Angu, with its people, barefoot fishermen with thick hands, sweaty women, boats and sails and nets—all full of life, human gravity, obscure heroism, and sin.

—Originally published as “Di Cavalcanti,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), September 6, 1957.

Notes

1. Rio de Janeiro was the capital of Brazil from 1763 to 1960.
2. Mário de Andrade's first book, published in 1917.
3. Maria Angu beach had a harbor through which agricultural products from the interior passed on their way to the city center from the districts of Irajá, Inhaúma, and Campo Grande—all rural areas with problematic access in those days. The beach became a vast landfill, although one of the remaining stretches is the beach currently known as Praia de Ramos.
4. Built during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Mauá and Pharoux harbors were created to transport passengers to other regions of Brazil and abroad. The deteriorated area, which currently houses the Cais do Porto and Praça XV de Novembro, is undergoing a process of architectural and urbanistic reform.

Volpi, 1924–1957

This Brazilian painter, Alfredo Volpi, is more than a *paulista*—he hails from the Cambuci.¹ He was not born in that neighborhood, but in Lucca, Italy, in 1896. When he was eighteen months old, however, his family—an Italian couple with three children—established itself in the Cambuci which, of Paulicéia's old neighborhoods, is among the rare ones to have resisted progress. For this very reason, it largely preserves its former appearance.

His father tried his hand at several small businesses but, in São Paulo as in Lucca, he was never a success. At sixteen the young Alfredo started off in construction work as an apprentice muralist. However, after elementary school, he worked first as a woodcarver, then as a bookbinder. The third profession was ultimately the one that defined him. At the time he was initiated into the profession, the pure Art Nouveau “floral” style prevailed among its masters. The year was 1912.

From the first day that he began to carry pots and buckets of water and whitewash as well as brushes and ladders for his elders, Alfredo Volpi was a conscientious apprentice. He learned how to mix paint and listened attentively to the masters' teachings when they told him to thicken the paint or to make it more fluid, so that the oil might be more smoothly applied. He began early on to deal with walls, to prepare, plaster, and to whitewash them. And his academy was truly the primitive, good school of the wall painter; in no time, the young Volpi was promoted to “decorator;” a title he bore with genuine pride for a long time and which allowed him to take on contract jobs on his own.

In these authentic, simple surroundings in which tradition reigns and the mastery of a good trade is still respected, aesthetic problems are resolved by themselves: every age has its decorative tenets. As we have said, his was the age of Art Nouveau. The subjects never varied, and everything depended on who had put in the work order: if the client were Italian, decoration had to be in the Renaissance style, but if French or Brazilian, it had to be Louis XV, while the Turks could not do without the “Moorish” style. A good contractor, Volpi satisfied his clients to the letter.

Almost nothing remains of these decorations commissioned according to the taste of the period and the customer: the explosive progress of São Paulo razed to the ground most of the homes he had painted. They were old-fashioned villas and small palaces in which the owner, on his way to prosperity, insisted on having wall decorations in keeping with the dwelling's character. Today, arid skyscrapers devoid of fantasy in which space is parsimoniously used stand where those old, almost never beautiful but almost always comfortable and invariably spacious houses once existed. Still, in his old Cambuci we discovered one old house in the Florentine style, where he had decorated the dining room with classical Greco-Roman motifs and a ceiling over a staircase in the Baroque manner, with angels parading across the heavens or leaning over parapets.

Years later, when Volpi, now aware of the existence of the other type of painting, began to distinguish himself as an easel painter, a spiteful Frenchman called him “the decorator from Cambuci.” Volpi paid him no mind. But in its popularly authentic flavor, the title is truly noble. Indeed, before his name became known outside his neighborhood—that is, throughout the cosmopolitan city center, throughout Rio and throughout Brazil, and even abroad—Volpi was already a celebrity in his Cambuci.

He was sixteen when he began to paint at home, for himself. His first notion of “fine arts painting” was to paint for his own amusement on small, cheap canvases, rather than painting for hire on walls that belonged to others. It was then that he suffered

his earliest “influences”: the boy would stroll along nearby streets or neighborhoods, stopping at certain doors or gates to appreciate the landscapes of entrances to homes, terraces, and porches. He found them amusing. Thus, the anonymous painters of those “entrances” were his first masters.

As a matter of fact, this never changed for him: even in his last Geometric-Concretist period the artist refused to separate what belongs to a school from what does not, what is erudite from what is not erudite, what one learns “through teaching” from what is learned without knowing how—from life, let us say.

Even of the geometric forms and subjects of his most recent paintings, he tells us: “You never know where the elements come from.” They come from everywhere, and he makes triangles from weather vanes, circles from cupolas, and rectangles from little paper flags. To this healthy, jovial, happy man with many adopted children, a fine wife, and a cheerful daughter, with dogs and cats that freely cross his threshold through the little gate from his quiet street, life is truly the supreme teacher.

One may search his work for the influence of noted modern or old masters. He surely never opened a foreign art magazine to study photographic reproductions of Picasso, Matisse, Renoir, Van Gogh, or Gauguin. The fact is, he never needed to seek in others the solutions he found, not in himself (he is not pretentious), but around him, in the simple beings that surround him, in children (who, he says, always surprise us), in everyday things and tasks.

For a while, his companion and friend was a popular painter from Itanhaém² called Souza, from whose landscapes Volpi may have learned to separate the essential from the accessory, one hue from another. Often, Souza and Volpi painted together on the beaches of Itanhaém. Souza was a simple man. He died as he started out: a popular painter; today we say a “primitive.” Volpi also continued to be what he had always been—a conscientious, simple craftsman, even now, when his figure looms large and he is on the way to becoming the first Brazilian contemporary painter and is, at any rate, the one who catapulted the medium into the future, where it is achieving a transcendence never before attained in Brazilian art. And he arrives at the extremes of abstract rationalization, so-called Concretist painting, with no loss of wit; under his brush, the most rigorous geometric subjects are sensitized by a use of color that functions with precision, purity, and a luminous vibration tempered by a touch of unmistakably personal lyricism.

When, around 1912, he began to paint “for himself,” Cubism was all the rage in Paris. By 1922, on the occasion of the Modern Art Week³ at São Paulo’s Teatro Municipal, Volpi already had ten years of pictorial experience. However, in the capital’s suburban circles he already shined. No matter how scandalous the manifestations through which modernism made its entrance in the quiet São Paulo of those days—the very same city that Mário de Andrade called *Paulicéia desvairada* [*Hallucinated City*],⁴ in the throes of a literary ecstasy—this may explain why the event went unnoticed by him. Volpi the decorator knew nothing of the existence of those great cosmopolitan names of intellectuals and artists, and they did not know of the existence of the Cambuci’s plebeian glory. Mário de Andrade and Volpi did not meet or appreciate one another until later, when they drank together until they were “plastered.”

To the young Volpi, there were more than two types of painting and no division between modernists and those who live in the past; there was only painting. And when, in the first show in which he appeared with others, his canvases were classified as “Impressionist,” he was surprised. Surely as surprised as M. Jourdain when he was told that he was producing prose.⁵ This took place in 1924, in the old Palácio das Indústrias. Professional colleagues—all of them from “civil construction”—also showed their



Alfredo Volpi. *Composição com uma bandeira* (Composition with one flag). c. 1955–59. Gouache on paper, 15 1/8 × 5 7/8" (38.4 × 15 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

work alongside his. Of the three works shown, one—*Moça costurando* [Young woman sewing]—was acquired by its current owner at a cost of 400,000 réis.⁶ At last, master decorator Volpi was also recognized as a painter. He was then twenty-eight. From that day on, his life began to divide itself into two parts: on one hand, the professional master-muralist; on the other, the individual artist, the easel painter.

The master artificer became aware that he was also an “artist.” But he realized, perhaps with melancholy, that artificer and artist could no longer cohabit within him as they had until now, because the different types of public each of them served were incompatible. The muralist worked for simple men. However rich or comfortably off, many were former artisans or small businessmen themselves, most of them immigrants; whereas the “new” easel painter had to please a completely different, peevish clientele—some of modest means, others who were rich snobs, intellectuals or demanding amateurs with refined, individualistic tastes. In these, “isms” prevailed; in the others, tradition.

The artist that Volpi is today was forged and developed within the world of São Paulo artisans of the beginning of the century. When, for this very reason, he was hailed as a master, he had truly mastered all the techniques of wall and easel painting without having attended a single school, much less any “fine arts” academy. He trained as an artist in the civil construction industry, and then he evolved from the pure manual craftsmanship

of stonemasons and foremen to the level of modern architecture in which those who deal with painter-artists are architects (that is to say, artists as well).

Volpi’s art bears all the marks of this evolution. Throughout the long years of honest, efficient work in the profession, he passed quite naturally (without knowing it) through all the phases of modern painting, from Impressionism to Expressionism, from Fauvism to Cubism, all the way to Abstractionism. If, in his current period—which retains a love of the old materials and, perhaps, a final preference for tempera (not to mention a fondness for the wall itself)—he no longer adapts his art to the artisanal styles of the civil construction of his youth, it nonetheless proves that a painter’s true school need not be the fine arts academy or the specialized school (distant as they are from the world of work and production), but the appropriate industrial apprenticeship of the day. In his development as a painter, Volpi re-created the evolution of the artist, who, upon leaving the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the age of guilds, moved on to the modern age of free trade in which guilds were dissolved and the separation between “fine” and “industrial” arts became definitive.

Nevertheless, having started from the trade of mural decoration, he succeeded in arriving at the apex of modern evolution. Hence, perhaps, his gift for the purity, the

artistic ingenuity, the dramatically precarious and rich manual crafting of his material, even in the most abstract or “concrete” compositions of his latest period.

His working tools and materials, however, are the same as in artisanal production. With them, he was able to see his experiment through to the end. The young men who follow him today must begin at another, far more complicated level: that of modern industry with its mechanical instruments, its new synthetic or plastic materials, so that, with these, they may attain a visuality beyond that of the pure Volpian surfaces with their burning checkerboards or the fascinating diagonals of his *sui generis* “Concretism.”

The current show seeks to impart a sense of the complete works in order to highlight his various periods. It begins with a sort of naive Impressionism and is followed by a Post-Impressionist modality in which the representation of things begins to be subordinated to a need to structure the composition; yet another experience is defined by a certain preference for social themes. The figures are then heavily laid on à la Cézanne, and the almost predominant chiaroscuro disappears little by little to make way for a play of chromatic shades that begin to construct the composition. Impressionist—or atmospheric—landscapes and thematic figures lose their modeling to make way for a painting of colored planes. Finally rid of modeling, color becomes the protagonist of his canvases. Yet here and there somber, mysterious hues and the charged atmosphere of certain old landscapes recall the [Oswaldo] Goeldi of haunted houses and ravens. It is curious, this atmospheric affinity Volpi displays at times with our printmaking grandson of [Edvard] Munch.

Little by little, after the quick experiment with painting still based on volume, the artist banishes every hint of three-dimensionality after realizing that “volume destroys color.” In his artisan’s overalls, the colorist emerges ever more demanding. His planes free themselves from illusionistic convention and become truly concrete on surface planes. The series begins and leads him to the total abandonment of any figurative suggestion. In his seascapes, sea and sky disappear in colored strips, the roofs of houses become triangles, slopes and streets are transformed into rectangles and windows into squares. Lines that previously served as contours of an apparently sloppy and simple though feigned elegance, areas of color or now-autonomous figures, all tend toward linearity, and a delectable graphism appears—ingenuously primitive in flavor yet, at the same time, extremely refined—as if in a calligraphy of “badly drawn lines.”

Volpi disguises his extreme artisanal refinement—and no master of Brazilian painting surpasses him in technical mastery; he is able to paint in all genres and styles, and the old resources of academic painting are familiar to him. He is as capable of giving us a perfectly academic nude as he is of surprising us with an admirably made and technically precise Madonna in the pure flavor of the Italian pre-Renaissance. This outlier from Cambuci is also a creator of the mythical Brazilian mulatto woman, which [Emiliano] Di Cavalcanti inaugurated in our painting. In an evocative suggestion, the children of the owner of *Figura entre cortinas* [Figure among the curtains] baptized it “Nêga Fulô.”⁷

Many still refer to him as a “primitive.” If by this they mean that his affinities lean toward the Italian “primitives,” I agree. But the same is true of the whole of contemporary sensibility, which prefers Giotto to Raphael and the mosaics of Ravenna to the Sistine Chapel.

Neither a “naive” nor a “primitive” painter, what characterizes him is the artisanal humility—the fruit of a profound pictorial knowledge. Nonetheless, he is as pure and simple as a true man of the people. Thus, even as he constructs a fantastic city

with the evocative power of metaphysical painting, he charms us with the childlike flavor of weather vanes, dolls, and puppets. Let it not be said, however, that his painting contains only gay and jovial, ingenuous or popular tones; in certain canvases, such as *Barco* [Boat] (see plate on p. 82) and *Cadeirinha* [Little chair], that magical ability of isolating the object renders an atmosphere as dense as any in a canvas by Van Gogh. There is no point in highlighting this or that quality or surprise in the painter's work, for it is as varied and intense as a river.

In 1950 Volpi, in the company of two painter friends, went to Italy, practically for the first time. He was fifty-four: a fully formed artist who knew what he wanted. There he found confirmation for what he was attempting to do in his own country. He spent thirty-five days in Venice. Yet while his companions remained there doing outdoor paintings of famous landmarks such as the Rialto bridge, Volpi went on fifteen or sixteen private excursions to Padua to contemplate the Giotto in the Scrovegno Chapel. In Arezzo, he discovered Piero della Francesca. But to this day, he confesses with astonishment that, in an exhibition of religious art he attended there, four or five canvases by Magaritoni led him to forget Piero himself! Thus, the "primitive" or popular Volpi is less partial to Piero—the patriarch of the Renaissance—than to an artist of much less renown, and a Byzantine one, at that; one who is even less condescending with regard to the pleasures of sensory matter and pays less attention to detail and realism in his exteriors than the formidable creator of the frescoes in Arezzo's Basilica of San Francesco.

Before going to Italy, his painting was already changing to a rigorous bidimensionality—that is, a painting without pure tonal modeling. On his return, his muralist inclinations were reinforced. Yet, with the exception of the brief but convincing experiment of the little chapel of "the Worker Christ" on the Estrada do Vergueiro [Vergueiro Road] in São Paulo—the result of an initiative by a Dominican friar—our modern architects have not taken advantage of them to this day. However, this is not the painter's loss: posterity can hold them accountable for this scandalous omission.

My *carrioca* brothers, here is Volpi. Thanks to the Museu de Arte Moderna for presenting him. Posterity shall remember his name. He is the master of his age.

—Originally published as "Volpi, 1924–1957," in *Volpi, 1924–1957*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, June 1957).

Notes

1. In the early nineteenth century, São Paulo's Cambuci neighborhood was home to immigrants—especially Italians—who labored in the region's factories, where the ideals of anarchism were disseminated.
2. City located on the coast of the state of São Paulo, 90 kilometers from the capital.
3. See Pedrosa's "Modern Art Week," in this volume.
4. Volume of poems by Mário de Andrade published in 1922.
5. A reference to the character Monsieur Jourdain in Molière's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* discovering he had been speaking in "prose" all his life.
6. *Réis* was the name of the Brazilian currency of the period, etymologically similar to the modern-day *real* (pl. *reais*).
7. "Nêga Fuló" refers to a character in the eponymous poem by Jorge de Lima, a slave who seduces her master.

Lygia Clark, or the Fascination of Space

Today, let us speak of other Brazilian painters at the [São Paulo] Bienal. Let us begin with Lygia Clark.¹ First of all, let us emphasize her courage, her audacity, or her “suicidal tendency,” as she calls her wish to signify fidelity to the idea and the artist’s indifference to immediate success.

Some years ago, Lygia discovered a thing she called the “organic line.”² Weary of art as a function of taste or temperament, she became obsessed with the so-called problems of “integrating” the arts. So she became interested in architecture and enchanted by the revelation that, in it, everything has—or should have—its reason for being. There is no architecture in which an idea of entirety—an idea of form finally realized—does not leap out from itself to move us. However, as a painter, she could not accept the role of assistant or complement assigned to her by the architect, when he decides to call a painter or a sculptor to decorate a wall or fill an empty corner space. To her, the painter or sculptor should be called upon to collaborate with the architect on an equal footing, from the floor plan onward. The mural is an unjustifiable survival, and should be replaced by planimetric modulation. This modulation should be achieved through a combination of line and color, and the wall taken not in isolation but as a function of space, of spans, of ceiling, of floor, of the material from which it is made.

Since no concept springs from her brain that is not at least partly a product of the hand and has, above all else, a passion for coherence, Lygia did not rest until she herself learned how to build models to show by example the function of her famous line and of what she understood by integration of the arts. She then came to detest easel painting and, especially, the symbol of its anachronistic privilege—the frame. She took to working with moldable materials and plywood. She sent brushes and oils to blazes, exchanging them for industrial paint, gun, and gas mask. The quadrilateral surface upon which she works must be only one part of the wall, integrated into it by the “organic” line, which delimits the planes, projecting across the divisions of doors and windows, moldings and bars, etc. The “painting” (if it can be called that) is now an organized whole, with parts glued to one another according to a previous drawing and wood that has been sawed, sanded, spackled and pistol-glued onto a base. The grooved line separates large, identically colored planes, or simply separates areas of contrasting colors or values graphically.

At that point in her idea, Lygia had a revelation about [Josef] Albers’s “constellations.”³ She was then making a kind of “painting” that somewhat resembled the relief surfaces of [Hans] Arp, Sofia Teuber-Arp, [Ben] Nicholson, and others. However, her line is no longer content to progress in the center of the modulated surface; instead, cutting it to the edge, it appears to want to project itself outside the limits of the frame and go around it. Her aim was to make even the external space a spatial element of the constructed work. Albers led her back to the concept of the painting—the flat object of an organization that is malleable in itself, and disinterested. Its purpose once more became the picture itself, understood in another way—no longer the famous “integration” of the arts.

The Bienal submission was the ultimate realization of her idea. Some even joked—whether innocently or maliciously—that it was Albers.

Not true; it is pure Lygia Clark, who encountered Albers in the midst of her arduous research. And he, by shortening her path, restored her painter’s consciousness, helping her to better concretize her thankless, difficult, heroic search (despite the skepticism of the majority) of many, many years, during the course of which she had no great success and won no prizes.

When she denied painting and did everything she could to destroy it—or, at least, to confuse it with what is beyond its conventional limits and contours—what Lygia was actually looking for was this new, terribly modern fascination that is space.

Albers's drawings gave her the final revelation of this new (and how old!) formal protagonist. However, despite being fascinated, like all of us, by the beauty of those drawings, the painter immediately distinguished the difference between her idea and that of the old Bauhaus master. For him, everything still takes place within the painting: the dynamic planes, spatial tensions, and strong lines act and balance themselves within a privileged central area, in the traditional manner. For Lygia, this means that the frame around it is preserved in its isolating function. Now, the painting is no longer the so-called neutral setting or circus ring within which the artistic event takes place. This is why even its external borders participate in the event, and thus are sometimes hollowed out and at other times full, so that nothing in it is isolated and everything lives as a single whole. The line both marks the outer margins—in which it digs grooves—and crosses the flat surface from side to side in the subtlest spatial modulations.

The limpid flat edges increase or decrease, advance or retreat, curve slowly or violently like great dynamic shapes. Although they are always orthogonal or angular, these plane-shapes often appear to become curvilinear in a rotary motion.

That is to say, they turn in space. Albers is something else: his movement is always internal—into the painting—and does not give the impression of distorting or disintegrating it. Endowed with strong formal qualities, Lygia's work is personal, although it belongs to Albers's spiritual family, and breathes a monumentality that is rare in these parts. Like a toy to a child or a mirror to a savage, space has the ability to entertain her and arouse her rich, spirited imagination, attuned to modern sensibility. Her submission to the Bienal was the first successful expression of her prolonged creative effort. It is a pity that two of her paintings were cut from the show.

In 1914, the late eminent architecture critic G. [Geoffrey] Scott⁴ complained about the then-generalized lack of sensitivity to new spatial values. "One only notices," he verified with extreme penetration, "what causes sensory reaction."⁵

"Space," he said, is "nothing"—the pure negation of what is solid—and that is why we do not perceive it. But although we cannot perceive or observe it, "space affects us and can control our spirit."⁶ At this stage of the century, with remote-controlled rockets and Sputniks, and after the tremendous visual experiments of aviation during the last war, what dominates our age is vision in motion, and that is why space itself penetrates our senses. In contrast with pure sensory optics, Lygia's current painting reveals space to us as composed of vectors that allow us to have a phenomenologically affective rather than a purely sensorial awareness of it. Hence the interest of her current effort and her contribution to the formulation in our milieu of a new sensibility.

—Originally published as "Lygia Clark, ou o fascínio do espaço," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 26, 1957.

Notes

1. At the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1957), Lygia Clark participated with three works from her 1956 series *Planos em superfície modulada* (Planes on modulated surface), described in a 1958 text by the artist available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br.
2. Clark describes the intention of the organic line as "to deny the painting's relationship within the frame, integrating it within the frame through color." Lygia Clark, "Descoberta da linha orgânica" (Discovery of the organic line), 1954. Available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br. This text was published in *Livro Obra* (1983), an artist's book with an edition of twenty-four copies.

3. Lygia Clark, "Influência de Albers," 1957. Available at: www.lygiac Clark.org.br.
4. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (London: Constable and Company, 1914).
5. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1965), p. 168. Pedrosa's "quote" is actually a loose paraphrase.
6. *Ibid.*

After Tachism

Not long ago we visited the fourth edition of the [São Paulo] Bienal. Steeped in a sea of *tachisme*, we were able to confirm our impression while in Europe that, in the romantic manner of the "stains" that developed in chance clusters of the most diverse—or even repugnant—materials, something appeared to be blossoming amid the chaos. And that something was *a will to meaning*.

As we know, Tachism is, essentially, the assumption that within an impulse of the artist's self expression—the more instinctive and uncontrolled the better—a meaning lies hidden. Let us set aside the core of this purely romantic idea and attempt to see how this concealed "meaning" might open itself to our understanding.

The conceit that painting is no longer anything to "see" is somehow predominant in painters of this movement. Details of beautiful matter are right there on the canvas, though not to capture our attention with regard to the whole, the purely subjective experience, or the "message" expressed therein. But if not to "see" the beautiful pieces of painting that may be found in a so-called Tachist canvas, then what purpose does it serve? It is meant to be understood through means other than sight (which many of them hold to be a very "hedonistic" sense!), by abstracting itself (still for the same reason) from the senses of touch and smell, through understanding. So the purpose of painting was to be *read*.

They would have us read the painting they make as one might read a Rorschach test. It has been a long time now since so-called abstract art—the art of [Vasily] Kandinsky, of [Paul] Klee, or of [František] Kupka—revealed a world of as yet unfamiliar images and signs when it presented itself to European eyes for the first time. In its finest moments, Klee's art is an art of signs. Such signs took years—dozens of years—to be deciphered in the West. And once the deciphering began in a given place of our cultural world, it continued successively, in country after country, in one city after another, until it ended up in Paris, the last metropolis to read the signs, understand them, and acclaim them.

But an art of signs is not an art of stains or blots, mere temperamental explosions (in the best of cases), or automatic agglomerations of things, running paint, loose fibers, wire, and what have you mixed upon a canvas. The art of signs is a sort of calligraphy. The successor of Tachism may well be a form of graphism that has become somewhat ubiquitous. Among the finest artists that may be included in this latest movement or trend, it seems that what tends to stand out in those stains—in that tangle of lines or masses—is an order of signs, not yet clearly explained or defined.

However, it was in the Japanese pavilion at the latest Bienal in Ibirapuera that one most clearly sensed where the Tachist wave will break when its last foams of impotence crash upon the beach of experimental saturation. It was there that we came upon a painting of signs that is of the utmost interest to us here in the West. And in no one, in no other artist, is this expression as brilliant and without subterfuge as in the painting of Téchima (Yukei). In him the traditions of Asian—and especially Chinese—

graphism are brought to a refined modern transformation. His *Hókai* (Collapse) is a magnificent sign—its rhythmic/formal impact, linear structure, and cadenced spatial intervals have only been paralleled in the West by [Jackson] Pollock's *The Deep* [1953], an impressive sign that powerfully affects us.¹ Here the formidable American artist, who would be seen as the father of Tachism, elevates himself to a truly significant art for, even without any rhythmic or formal impact, it may be convincingly, though convulsively, read.

—Originally published as “Depois do tachismo,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 17, 1958.

Note

1. See Mário Pedrosa, “Calligraphic Abstraction,” pp. 193–94 in the present volume.

Iberê Camargo

An exhibition of Iberê Camargo at the Gea gallery is an event in our artistic circles. Iberê is now showing surprising work in which the explosion of temperament prevails over abundant and eclectically employed pictorial media and resources. The personal experience evinced there is of profound human and artistic interest.

Iberê's personality is one, and whole. His life and character compel respect from those who like his painting, as well as those who do not. Two things stand out in these new canvases: a temperament that asserts itself and a type of painting that disaggregates itself.

To say that his painting disaggregates itself is not to condemn it a priori. One first verifies the phenomenon and immediately one understands that there may well be a beginning in disaggregation. The Salon prize-winning painter Iberê Camargo is an experienced artist, master of an already considerable pictorial oeuvre, profoundly knowledgeable about his métier, and also, with the Gea show, a painter who is just getting started (if nothing else, in an adventure that breaks with everything he has done in the past). In this sense, he is a young painter.

What he shows us with so much eloquence is an initial stage of destruction. Indeed, he is there to quixotically destroy the “old painting,” in the words of [the French painter Auguste] Herbin. And this may be seen in the artist's deliberate will, in his vibrant, intensified desire to make use of the traditional media of painting, or even of academic painting, in the most arbitrary and individualistic manner. Prey to deeply self-destructive and anarchic impulses, Iberê's powerful individuality struggles against established prejudices, against the order of things, and, above all, against the timeless tyranny of objective reality. He no longer believes the natural or compositional order of objects to be necessary, inexorable, or untouchable.

That is why wholeness of personality is not transferred to the pictorial work. On the contrary: it autocratically interferes with it. How to classify his current painting? As a sort of final stage of so-called figurative painting. That is why he insists on choosing the most ordinary, insignificant objects as subject matter—bottles, pitchers, spools (see plate on p. 86). By the quantity and immense size of the bottles, he puts them in a new perspective. However, as this is not given through properly pictorial means—that is, neither geometric nor aerial, but simply quantitatively dimensional—we may then say that it is a matter of a hierarchical scale representing moral, or at least psychological, values. In his canvases, Iberê asserts that nowadays, in his artistic

world, any stroke is as worthy of consideration as—or even more worthy than—the image of a king, the solemnity of a historical act, or any other thing of equal importance.

Nor does the order of presenting things matter to him because, in any case, it suffices that objects be placed in front of him so that he may paint them. Note here the anticompositional desire for rebellion. He also strives to give colors a personal treatment of their own, freeing them from continued naturalist enslavement to local color. And he assigns purples, blues, greens, reds, or yellows to objects or things that are never naturally seen in these hues. He escapes from local color; but how? By changing it from one “local” to another. And so, sometimes, the tone lies not on an atmospheric plane but on a real plane; at other times it is farther in front or farther behind, not according to the greater or lesser distance of certain pictorial spaces, but according to the greater or lesser frequency of the chromatic wave as it reaches the visual organ. Color displaces itself regardless of the painter’s whims, to show him that it, too, will not mold itself to his subjective will.

While a group of his principal characters remain in shadow (like the bottles), others—like the vases, glasses, or oranges—present themselves in light. There is a hierarchy here, based on chiaroscuro contrasts and pure illuminism, that nonetheless conforms to the rules of academic painting. Occasionally a surprising regularity of light sources that comes from traditional apprenticeship can be discerned. What is the reason for such an anachronism in these paintings that aspire to pure expressivity?

Formal values are subordinated here to moral values, and although the artist disproportionately enlarges objects in order to place them before other, smaller ones, and zones of modeling oppose zones of almost flat color, nevertheless their contrasts of shadow and light remain within, let us say, classical or scholastic precepts. What remains of reality, or of reality apprehended—that is, of its aesthetic-pictorial culture—is a radical antithesis between light-dark, shadow-light, life-death. Formerly seductive blends of color spring from there, but only very rarely does the line flow in free arabesques, and the strokes are heavy—sometimes dark, sometimes bright, sometimes simple touches of light—in the academic manner, as contours or planes that are still representational in a somewhat Cubist mode.

Therefore, the artist’s choice is even more of a choice than purity of expression; and for this reason, it is still largely defined by the tricks or resources of traditional painting, in spite of the truculent informality with which he disrespects them or employs them outside of their customary functions. In this dramatic violation of the natural, no integrative vision emerges yet from the chaos, although here and there the pieces of an as yet unborn formal world appear, still undecided as to the internal law according to which it will be ruled, whether it be that of pure form or of rhythm. Indeed, what is lacking amid the tumult is that vital law of rhythm according to which the expressionist or visionary artist, in breaking with the structures of the objective, re-creates the world he destroyed.

Where is Iberê Camargo headed? Toward a type of painting that is entirely deobjectified, as in the case of Tachism? Be that as it may, we must keep a close eye—half hopeful and half apprehensive—on the artist’s development, in which a noble personality clashes with the order of things as well as with the limitations of technique and aesthetics in his own painting.

—Originally published as “Iberê Camargo,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), June 7, 1958.

Milton Dacosta: Twenty Years of Painting

In these twenty years of painting by Milton Dacosta now on view at the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro]¹ one may find the entire evolution of modern painting in Brazil. However, it does not contain all of this artist's painting: I refer not to his own past, but to his future.

Dacosta still has a great deal to say to us—much more than he has already said to us, and in such an exquisite way. He advances slowly, not by leaps. On the contrary, he sometimes appears to be backtracking.

However, the logic of his art's internal evolution does not coincide with the logic of external attitudes. And so it is that we may see a “period” of pure abstraction—which we saw on his return to Brazil after his second European sojourn and which earned him the painting prize at the third edition of the São Paulo Bienal²—followed by an entire series of paintings with “figures”: *Cabeça com chapéu* [Head with hat]. Incoherence? Eclecticism? No such thing.

Let us leaf through his albums or portfolios of sketches and drawings. They are freehand exercises almost exclusively devoted to a single theme, resembling those by traditional Chinese and Japanese painters who train their wrists, hands, and brushes indefinitely upon a single subject: birds, clouds, mountains, waves, etc. Dacosta's exercises focus on the figure, specifically the torso or the head. One discovers in them an unimaginable will to discover and exhaust all the most imaginative and absurd variants of contours of what are called “heads” or “faces.” And it is curious to note that even the lines of volutes and arabesques eventually move toward the line that closes the contours, while the line that simultaneously guides and marks the fundamental axes strays from them to finish outlining a profile. Only the pure line, when it very infrequently appears here and there, interrupts the master line, temporarily breaking the contour. However, from it comes the thin shading that appears there.

The virtuoso presents his concert to the great audiences without showing the difficulties, stumbling blocks, and hesitations he has had to overcome; because of this he receives their rapturous and astonished applause, for they have neither seen nor imagined the prodigious manual exercises to which he committed himself until he could appear before the public. It is in these exercises that the virtuoso triumphs over his own nerves and shyness. There is something of the virtuoso in Dacosta. The painter does not appear in this state of preparation; only the draftsman does—the virtuoso of the line.

In his current figurative sketches, the artist, like a classical painter, starts from the model of the human body's articulation with geometry, with the geometric symbol. However, in his early work the process was exactly the opposite. Before the perceptive visual image, his mind was populated by a disciplined geometry. This is why it may be said that the painter's initial attempts are ultimately like a tuning of strings before a recital. Despite the fine pictorial qualities in many of his works of that period, his personality was still barely budding.

Those albums are highly revealing of Milton Dacosta's creative process. In them, we note the constancy with which the artist includes or inscribes his faces or heads, even the ones with unusual and whimsical forms and regularly orthogonal structures or parabolic curves. Yet one cannot help but admire the arabesques that the line makes in these improvisations, or its free progress, independent of the artist's will. However, it is not interrupted because the arm is tired or because it has exhausted itself by the end of the unraveling, when the figure is concluded. It is broken several

times before this, especially in the functional connections of corporeal articulation, thus denoting that their movements are, ultimately, controlled by the draftsman.

A question arises when one has finished leafing through the albums: when is it the turn of color—that is, painting? Probably when the draftsman has been sated. Linear exuberance is then contained and color has permission to appear. Indeed, it appears only when the artist's exhausted hand has paused or his satiated spirit has made it stop. One might say that there is a preliminary spiritual settling down, like calm returning to a nervous man, and conditions of serenity then favor the artist's putting aside the pencil used in meticulous linear notes and picking up the paintbrush. The process of pictorial elaboration is made up of slow, sure, patient drawing—labor not unlike that of a mason who lays brick upon brick until he has finished building a wall.

To Dacosta, drawing is one thing; painting is another. With drawing, he asserts himself; with painting, he hides. He speaks through the line with extraordinary stylistic precision, virtuosity, and boldness, and at times he achieves a mundane elegance; through color, he retracts and grows silent. Let us examine the painter's work of the period following that of the *cafés* and the early groups (*Ciclistas* [Cyclists], *Piscina* [Swimming pool]) (see plate on p. 87). We are referring to the period of self-portraits for which, as a matter of fact, he was awarded the foreign travel prize by the modern art Salon.

It is the earliest and already most forthright—albeit still naïve—manifestation of the artist's personality, with painstaking, flat draftsmanship, although he is still using modeling and substantial materials. The painter presents himself with petulant, almost exhibitionistic, elegance.

The now acclaimed Milton Dacosta was the first artist in Brazil to have started with Cubism or, rather, with the Cubist revolution's repercussions on our provincial shores. He was also the first to be innocently—that is, inevitably—educated in the atmosphere of the fashionable “school of Paris,” despite his having only left this country much later. In fact, some of our modernist elders had left Brazil, already aware that they needed “modernizing” in Paris, in the ateliers—as well as the *cafés*—of Montparnasse and Montmartre.

As a much younger man, Dacosta “went” to the “school of Paris” . . . by frequenting the environs of the Escola de Belas Artes [School of fine arts] and the few remaining *cafés* on the Avenida Rio Branco.³

From this period of 1939 to 1940, he bequeathed to us some canvases that are still interesting to this day for their essentializing of formal values, their contempt for anecdotal detail so that only what defines the environment is retained, and, above all, for the way they indicate the atmosphere—their principal subject matter. There is a remarkable workmanship that already knows how to mark the composition's important points, neglecting other parts with only a few small touches on a grisaille background. The schematization of form—especially the absence of physiognomic detail in the ovoid heads—is reminiscent of [Amedeo] Modigliani. Truly, these canvases exude a “school of Paris” air.

One of the painter's most typical features is that he was never fond of naturalistic outpourings. Even his initial subjects were never related to ecology, to compelling sentimental environments, or to the nostalgia for childhood that is so visible, for example, in [Candido] Portinari, who clearly influenced him for a while (from 1942 to 1943): details of clouds and hills in the background, landforms, tricks of linear perspective, as in *Roda* [Wheel] or in *Composição* [Composition]. The latter signals a new moment in the artist's evolution. Here Milton discovers the poetry of metaphysical painting, although he really did not know where to find it yet and, for this reason, looked for it only externally in the perspectival spaces of [Giorgio] de Chirico, with

their strangely isolated objects, upon a sort of platform that seems even bigger and more filled with suggestions because of the artificially projected shadows; with their living mannequins, etc. At any rate, Dacosta was eventually infused with the spirit of metaphysical poetry, which may be listed among the contributions that have weighed most heavily in his visual imagination.

Folklore is never to be found in him (past or future). As far as we know, he never painted popular scenes of either the country or the city, with, for example, soccer matches (which he nevertheless greatly appreciates). Even his cyclists or, especially, the swimming pool denizens that are the subject of one his most ambitious canvases of the period, are reduced to isolated coloristic planes in which what is perceived above all else is the artist's effort to draw formally daring positions for his figures. There are no "naturalisms" or "realisms," even when the painting depicts an anecdotal subject of sorts. The only naturalist touches that are openly found in his work translate as certain elements of a sentimental order: in his preoccupation with the sad black eyes of some of the small figures in his post-café period, or much later on, in the famous *Alexandre*, during the period of the paired heads, the polyhedric heads, the rugby-ball heads.

And, indeed, although he was born in Niterói—where, at the age of fourteen, he studied drawing with a German who was teaching how to draw grid-method portraits of the movie stars of the day (he won his earliest forums as an "artist" by successfully making portraits of Gloria Swanson and Buster Keaton using that ingenious process)—he brought nothing with him from there. He was never suburban⁴ or regional, like [Alfredo] Volpi, Portinari, or Tarsila [do Amaral]. Early on—very early on—he crossed the bay and came to the capital.⁵ And on the fringes of the Escola de Belas Artes, where he had just enrolled as a student, he served his apprenticeship in the many courses and subcourses that flourished in those parts. The subjects he finds arresting are modern, "academic" (because of his irrepressible classical vocation), or Impressionist, a thousand leagues from social or regional sentimentalisms, from the emerging forms of anecdotal Brazilianness, or the suburban picturesque. Thus his education was that of a true city boy—sensitive, smart, clever, a voracious assimilator of the "civilization" of streets and cafés, that veritable natural incubator of every artist, "school of Paris," the effluvia of which he absorbed there.

It might be said that Milton began to favor the assimilation of Cubism to a greater or lesser degree. If Cubism can actually be defined (and it can be, in certain aspects) as the employment of a simulacrum of objects that lack three-dimensionality and yet are connected to surrounding space within an integral unity, the young Milton's paintings of group figures are merely a sort of para-Cubism. For the isolated figures, the meager space, and the neutral ground (*Ciclista* [Cyclist]), a clumsy representation of the earthy plane—they contain no integral unity of compositional parts. In fact, though, this entire period ultimately did not come directly from Cubism but, instead, from an indirect source—much more literary than visual—to which we have already referred: that is, from the metaphysical painting of De Chirico, who enjoyed such a great vogue in Brazil among such modernist intellectuals and painters as Portinari, [Alberto da Veiga] Guignard, Tarsila, and others who were linked to them.

Among the younger painters, Milton was the one upon whom metaphysical suggestion exercised the greatest seduction. Only much later would he be able to unite—to connect—object and space to one another, fusing them in a single visual event.

In the preceding period, figures were ambiguously situated within strong, sharp contours and accents of light, with a timid chiaroscuro process unfolding in the internal areas. In his canvases, object and space openly antagonize one another.

This antagonism is clear in the compositions of the period. They lack the contiguity needed for the entire unique, formal arrangement. But he would find for himself the truly assimilated Cubist solution. This can be seen in the so-called “sweethearts” period or the *Alexandre* period that is so important to his work, for within it nearly all the important elements in his painting would develop or germinate. He conquers the space-object antagonism, projecting the limits of the latter into the surrounding space. Indeed, in this period, the wet outlines of his figures—usually so sharp and continuous—either exude shadows or occasionally break open like ripe pomegranates (*Alexandre*, 1949; *Mulher de verde* [Woman in green], 1951; *Natureza morta* [Still life], 1949) so as to make way for a few timid stains (or, with time, evenly colored planes).

During the period of his admiration for Modigliani, one already felt that, to Milton, perceptual awareness is dependent or secondary. That is to say, a geometric formalization inserted itself between it and external reality. This geometric model appears to have been indispensable in his early group compositions or scenes. It gave his compositions structure, chiefly by fixing the figures in their initial isolation, balancing them, marking local space for them, and creating backgrounds that would be covered in color, usually flat tints, sometimes singing out, sometimes receding between bright yellows and sentimental blues. In time, the painter slowly abandons the geometric a priori, and as mastery of the line is refined, he surrenders to his own inventions of schemes for articulating the human body. At this moment, the lesson of Cubism and of Picasso's distortion is very precious to him. Starting from these arbitrary corporeal schemes, without resorting to the a priori modules of classical geometry, he concludes his figurative compositions in geometric syntheses or suggestions with a powerful generalizing potential. Looking back, we can now see the figurative aspect of his work—if one may say so, it was always a prefiguration; that is, a judgment of reflexive life. Armed with his freely diagrammed bodies, he gave us a whole rich series of human figures, isolated or in pairs—above all, young women and the mysterious (and prophetic) boy Alexandre (whose picture he found in the street one day, and which remained fixed in his mind like an obsession). By virtue of its assured planar composition, its aristocratic beauty of line, and the extreme lyricism and refinement of the color scheme, this was the period that definitively established his fame as a painter.

In setting aside the initial preperceptive geometric scheme (his “academic” apprenticeship) in order to adopt the human corporeal articulation that is the fruit of the line's virtuoso findings, what he was seeking in aesthetic terms was to endow his figurative storytelling with abstract—that is, universal—value. But although it is free and, so to speak, spontaneous, the second schematization is soon saturated as well. Then comes the period of pure abstraction, which is no longer conditioned to previous strategies, but perhaps to the artist's soliloquy with himself or, rather, a dialogue between him and his double, the other (who may be an imaginary spectator), in a state of nonsensorial plenitude. As a variation on the human body scheme, the artist—while intensifying the experience of Cubism—deconstructs the objects into purely formal parts, arranging them upon the pictorial plane so that they may achieve a rhythmic succession. He then goes on to construct the purest still lifes in Brazilian painting. His bottles, vases, pots, and cups are flattened upon the surface of the canvas, and what remains of them are wonderfully outlined and intertwined planes; more than that, dimensional relationships of fascinating proportions, purely formal speculations that achieve their zenith in the brown and cream-colored *Natureza morta sobre trilhos* [Still life on tracks; 1954]—a masterwork of our painting.

In a—so to speak—inevitable succession, he moves from these still lifes to another successful series that won him the grand prize for Brazilian painting at the third [São

Paulo] Bional. This is the period of castles and cities, in which the planes of the still lifes are reduced, brought closer to one another, transformed into squares and rectangles piled up in the center of the canvas, within a vivid chromatic variation. In these paintings a new element emerges in Dacosta's work: an optical game, produced here by the small rectangular planes that advance and recede before the spectator even as the uniquely colored background remains serenely enchanted. In some of these canvases these contradictory elements rend the unity of the surface or threaten to collapse it. As an interesting contradiction to the painter's procedure, the "crescent" gouaches should be characterized as a decorative intermezzo in the painter's march toward his later severe purifications. However, their existence is worth recording, for they show a Dacostian painting made with something akin to the freedom of his drawings.

Ultimately, the painter's point of departure was always abstraction. In this sense, he is really a son of Cubism. His eye does not fall upon a perception that drives him toward the easel. When he paints, it is as if he were positioning himself in front of some distant panorama bathed in real clarity.

His motionless gaze upon an equally motionless object. If the gaze then functions, it does so in the sense not of perceiving but, perhaps, of evoking; evoking (who knows?) something akin to a timid—or, rather, tacit—invitation of extreme subtlety, to a phenomenon on this or that side of vision, a tactile phenomenon. There are no objects in front of the artist. Thus there is no visual perception as such. But did not [Kazimir] Malevich discover "sensibility" in the "absence" of the object? However, where could this sensibility be other than in space? Thus, it is space that, in the last analysis, brushes up against the artist's existential consciousness—if not his sensitive soul—with an imperceptible hand. It is in this instant that he becomes aware of a need to mark that ideal space with an equally ideal line: the basic, vaguely present abstract horizon line, upon which the artist supports himself in order not to stumble. At this level, a horizontal ideal takes on the existence of a phenomenon.

However, one such planimetric event takes place inside the empty space (or the homogeneous panorama) where perception becomes increasingly rarefied, like the atmosphere in interplanetary travel—for which Dacosta is, in fact, imagining the beings that will inhabit his latest pictures. (Although among these, figural ambivalence also interferes, transforming some of the parabolic heads into chalices, crosses, or religious ritual objects.) Once the basic horizontal line has been found again, it is almost inevitable that the faraway spirit of Mondrian would emerge in the sky to contradict it, fixing it vertically. Dacosta then cuts it, creating irregularities in it—small, subtly modulated vertical bars: time has descended upon space.

It is the period of the great monochromatic rectangles upon which the spirit of Renaissance proportion blows with innocent purity (see plate on p. 87). However, the sensorial stimuli did not disappear from these vast spaces: painting, not geometry, keeps watch over them. Are they planes of color? No, they are planes of *matter*. But—and here, I believe, lies another one of the painter's most characteristic features, the one that makes him modern rather than "modernist"—he never made the Cubist transition from the material to the textural. For in this regard, instead of clinging to the lesson of Cubism, he fixes upon the example set by Morandi, and the material that he puts into his great planes with the patience of a monk and the passion of a loner is nothing but shadows, footsteps, and moisture. This is why color is a substance as well as an adjunct to form, which imbues it with meaningful silence and an invitation to contemplation. Above all, what Dacosta wants is that the "other" for whom he makes the painting will gaze at it with the contemplative persistence with which one gazes at the distant reaches of the incommunicable horizon.

—Originally published as “Milton Dacosta—Vinte anos de pintura,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), June 27, 1959.

Notes

1. Milton Dacosta, *Pintura e desenho: 1939–1959*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, July 1959).
2. Pedrosa was part of the jury of the third edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1955).
3. Construction of the Avenida Rio Branco (formerly the Avenida Central) was the principal accomplishment of the urban reform carried out by Francisco Pereira Passos during his term as mayor of Rio de Janeiro (1902–06). The Biblioteca Nacional (National Library), the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes (National Museum of Fine Arts), and the Teatro Municipal (Municipal Theater) buildings are all located on this avenue.
4. Pedrosa’s use of the adjective *suburban* in Brazilian Portuguese should not be read as synonymous in any way with the American sense of the suburb as a place of wealth, privileged housing, well-manicured lawns, etc. Instead, it describes the suburb as the countryside of the poor and has connotations of idyllic simplicity.
5. Guanabara Bay separates the cities of Niterói and Rio de Janeiro.

Advantage of the Primitives

The other day we noticed how there was a growing predominance of subjects that are not organic or human; that is, they involve scenes and actions—with their inevitable literary or theatrical associations—that are unnatural, fabricated, artificial, or constructed. Such scenes still abound and, once again, demonstrate how an academic mentality permeates or clouds the environment in which a more contemporary art of general sensibility develops. However, let us compare the respective scenes of set designers and scenarists such as Mr. Malagoli¹ or the Messrs. José Morais,² Fernando R., and Rescala,³ with their washerwomen, to Djanira [da Motta e Silva] and even Elisa Martins [da Silveira] (see plates on pp. 88 and 89), and we shall see the distance that intercedes between an authentic visual sensibility and pastiche, blot, or mere technique.

In its purity and its freshness, the art that is now called “primitive” retains the primal sensibility as a driving force. Two factors are inherent to this authentic, untainted sensibility: the freshness of the sensorial reactions, which translates into joy or astonishment before images of the world of perception, and the ingenuous desire for an ideal order that rules the world, which translates as a generalized love of symmetry and the need for a utopian concept of the universe. The naive artist would have the world be pure, colorful, beautiful, or tragic, albeit according to his orders or his image. However, in Djanira the sense of order already transcends the ingenuousness of primal perception in order to become increasingly more malleable. Djanira is not a primitive painter, because even now, her work is the result of a meeting point between her naive view of things and a visual awareness that is even austere.

In Elisa, visual organization is less pronounced than in Djanira, for her pictorial structures are constructed through beautiful color contrasts (the visual element) and meaningful details filled with humor. In *Irene no céu* [Irene in heaven], she begins to change her process, and color here tends to aerate itself, to fill spaces, to model, to the detriment of clearly outlined areas, of contrasting color planes and linear and parageometric construction.

Milton Ribeiro⁴ bases himself on a detail of Elisa and on the contrast of small color planes, but without her sense of fantasy, whose origin might lie in the genial [Alfredo] Volpi-like creation of facades and houses.

Marques de Sá⁵ may be more primary than primitive, and his painting is bad, but his bad taste is splendid. Here is yet another soul seduced by the order of symmetry and by clear surfaces that flaunt themselves in the sun, casting no shadows. Everything about him is decorative, really printlike, including his graphic sense and use of color. And yet he is someone—a popular artist.

Whereas painters who attend schools—erudite ones (as they were called in the old days) as opposed to popular ones—lose a sense of form and a sense of color in exchange for procedures of pictorial technique, brushwork, modeling, chiaroscuro, material, tonality, etc., the so-called primitives preserve both a sense of form, which may be poor but is always present, and a sense of color, which may even be in bad taste but is rich and pure. This is why painting is a vital experience to them, and a scholastic thing or exercise to most others.

—Originally published as “Vantagem dos primitivos,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), July 27, 1959.

Notes

1. Ado Malagoli was part of the Núcleo Bernardelli.
2. José Machado de Moraes was an assistant to artist Candido Portinari.
3. João José Rescala was part of the Núcleo Bernardelli.
4. Milton Ribeiro was a member of the Guignard Group and taught at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro's Escola de Belas Artes (School of Fine Arts).
5. Marques de Sá was awarded the Travel Prize at the fifteenth edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna (1966).

The Two Positions; or, Pollock and Vedova

Throughout the world, international exhibitions continue to be held and prizes awarded, especially to young artists and painters. At this very moment, news comes to us of Italy's Lissone prize. Brazil once took part in this show, and it was only by a hair that Milton Dacosta missed taking the grand prize, for the entirely foreign (and, of course, predominantly Italian) jury hesitated between him and [Renato] Birilli.

Now Emilio Vedova, currently the subject of a large exhibition at the São Paulo Bienal,¹ has won the grand prize (see plate on p. 90). He is the new Italian artist who does not interrupt the continuum that extends from Futurism to the current abstract, though tempestuous, idiom. For a long time now I have considered him to be one of the most representative names in contemporary Italian painting. On February 11, 1958, in an article titled “O signo no ocidente” [The sign in the west],² following another one in January of the same year that we reprinted last week under the title “After Tachism,”³ we wrote: “These days, in spite of the decadent intermezzo of *tachisme*, the inspiration behind the most significant current in contemporary painting is predominantly graphic.” And we quoted [German-French painter Hans] Hartung, “who gave us signs that were magnificent by virtue of their depth of evocation and their expressive strength,” but today, we added, “appear to have reached a stalemate, floundering between the ancestral purity of the sign and the so-called cultural or social need to overcome it.” We also quoted [French artist Pierre] Soulages, because “he came from Hartung” and because “at least he bases his painting on a ritual that contains elements of the creative process of the sign.” However, by virtue “of his deep concern with problems of a visual order and of pictorial technique proper,” etc., we recognized that he was not a true graphic artist and much less a *tachiste*, for “he does

not surrender with abandon to the arm's first movement or to loose physical gesture. He corrects his initial impulse, the rhythm of his own arm . . . since he no longer recognizes any creative work that results from the mere product of chance . . ."

And, finally, we quoted Vedova, whose painting, I said at the time, "is so signographic that it nearly eliminates color." The validity of such painting lies in its signification, in its power to foreshadow, especially when we locate it within the curve that begins at the still figurative and anecdotal dynamism of Italian Futurism—in all of its naive progressive optimism—and moves through the Russian Rayonnism of [Mikhail] Larionov and [Natalia] Goncharova (of whose work F.G. [Ferreira Gullar] published excellent reproductions in this paper's Saturday supplement)⁴ and, one step ahead of Futurism, abandons the puerile anecdote to achieve an abstract dynamic essentialism, arriving at today's dynamic spatial sign impregnated by a tragic world view.

It is a large step from the provincial, "modernist" optimism of the Italian Futurists to the revolutionary, nonrepresentative spatial dynamism of the Russians. But one generation later, what appears to be most analogical to those movements is [Jackson] Pollock's⁵ no longer social—albeit dissociated from individualist despair—gesture, or the celebratory gesture of Vedova. Pollock becomes hopelessly entangled in gesture itself like a soldier of war in the barbed wire of trenches, while Vedova—still constrained to a certain typically Italian sense of monumentality—manages, for this very reason, to detach himself from the situation in order to transfigure it into a picture of universal destruction. Devoid of perspective, the American artist does not succeed in creating a distance between his ego and reality, between the world and his vision and his work: hence his entanglement in it, *unwillingly transformed into an actor*. Consequently—and logically—he ends up destroyed within his own story, within his own machinery. However, the Italian painter manages to preserve the distance between his art and the world, and is never an actor, in order to be only a witness—a sharp, conscious, pathetic witness.

Western artists who consciously surrender to the experimental extremes of our time are situated between these two positions. That is because they all express this "unhappy consciousness" of which Hegel speaks, and which so clearly characterizes the minds of our age. Aside from these, any other attitude is inauthentic, promotional, hedonistic, and, if it's a game, it's truly a game—or a pure adventure with no strings attached.

—Originally published as "As duas posições, ou Pollock e Vedova," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November, 1959.

Notes

1. Emilio Vedova participated in the first, second, and fifth editions of the São Paulo Bienal (1951, 1953, and 1959).
2. *Jornal do Brasil*, February 11, 1958.
3. See "After Tachisme," pp. 288–89 in the present volume.
4. Ferreira Gullar, "Etapas da arte contemporânea XX," *Jornal do Brasil, Suplemento Dominical* (Rio de Janeiro), November 7, 1959. The images published in the article and mentioned by Pedrosa are Larionov's *Portrait of Tatlin* and *Rayonnism* (both 1911) and Goncharova's *Electricity* (1910–11).
5. At the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal (1957), the special Jackson Pollock room presented some twenty-nine drawings and thirty-four paintings, including *The Flame* (1934–38); *The She-Wolf* (1943); *Guardians of the Secret* (1943); *Pasiphaë* (1943); *Gothic* (1944); *Shimmering Substance* (1946); *Cathedral* (1947); *The Deep* (1953); *Easter and the Totem* (1953); and *Search* (1955), among others.

The Significance of Lygia Clark

The remarks one hears most clearly nowadays while strolling through exhibitions and shows in the most diverse European countries—starting with the principal show, the Venice Biennale—concern the decadence of sculpture. Given that the arts are currently suffering from a generalized exhaustion, the phenomenon appears all the more emphatic in sculpture, and I believe that the most important reason for this phenomenon is its total loss of autonomy. If Cubist sculpture proved unable to hoist itself in creative power to the height of painting, it was because it generally sought to follow closely upon the discoveries—and above all, the inventions—of painting. The proof is that since [Constantin] Brancusi, the greatest sculptors of the first half of the twentieth century did not originate with Cubism. Look at [Naum] Gabo or, especially, [Antoine] Pevsner and [Hans] Arp, who from the beginning were the initiators of Constructivism or of Dadaism, respectively. They had little or nothing to do with Cubism.

Today they are unanimously considered by European critics to be the master sculptors of the century. And already we see that sculpture has begun to decline ever since it veered off course (or off the course set by those trailblazers) and returned to following the tracks of painting—a painting reduced, moreover, to self-expression, extreme subjectivism, and capitulation or total submission to the material. Sculpture once again has come to imitate painting in this anxious search for material and for expressive subjectivity. Today, the result is imprinted upon the Venice Biennale where, with the exception of [Pietro] Consagra in Italy, or of others here and there, what presents itself as sculpture is deplorable. (The Biennale jury itself confirmed this by refusing to award the grand prize for sculpture, only making things worse by transferring the prize in question to a painter such as Mr. [Jean] Fautrier.)

Everything that may be deemed new or worthy of consideration in the sculpture currently being made in Europe is inscribed either as a return to Constructivism, along the lines of a Pevsner, or as an effort of invention, along the lines of motion inaugurated by the Calderian revolution. Among those who work with pure expressivity there is tremendous weariness because, as they slowly return to figuration, they limit themselves to highlighting details of conventional expression, of purely representational allusion. Not to mention the English post-[Henry] Moore group that seemed so promising some years ago and currently appears to have exhausted itself in the work of [Eduardo] Paolozzi—the youngest among them, who has a large show at the Biennale. In France there is the case of César, who, despite his physical strength, surrendered the power to shape his work to the machine: he currently resorts to a hydraulic crushing machine in order to gather or join together old auto bodies, bits and pieces, scrap iron, tubes, cans, wires—all of it in a powerful polychromatic amalgamation of apparent structures that he calls *balles* or sacks of compressed cotton. These blocks of compressed scrap metal are a complete novelty in French sculpture: this is impressive stuff. But to what degree is the artist the creator of the work in these cases?

Lygia Clark's discovery is a profound one, and, because it is a discovery, it is the result of a lengthy period of research by the artist herself. We will not trace her evolution here, from when she broke the picture frame, went on to integrate it into the rectangle, and later, with the *Superfícies moduladas* [Modulated surfaces], broke with the very notion of the painting and began to construct juxtaposed or overlaid planes, until she arrived at the *Constelações* [Constellations] suspended on the wall; the *Contra relevos* [Counter-reliefs]; and the current *Casulos* [Cocoons], in which a basically

planar surface allows planimetric developments to be erected upon it along with spatial variations that, in turn, seem to evolve within an ideal spatial interior delimited by the same basic surface. She usually says that her current Bichos [Critters] fell—as do real cocoons—from the wall onto the floor. By 1957, Lygia was rebelling against the serial form of Concretism in her notebooks, calling it “the false way of dominating space,” because it prevented the painter from “doing so in a single stroke.” And she wrote, with astonishing clarity and foresight: “The work (of art) must demand immediate spectator participation and he, the spectator, must be thrown into it.” She is a visionary of space, like all true modern artists (in their Constructivist Manifesto, during the century’s second decade, Gabo-Pevsner had already declared “the unshakable conviction that only spatial constructions would touch the heart of the future human masses”);¹ refuting a purely optical vision, she longed for the spectator to be “thrown into the work” that he might feel all the spatial possibilities suggested by the work acting upon him. “I am seeking,” she said, in a profound intuition of future work, “to compose a space.”

Thus even then, she posited a sculptural problem. Like the concept of reality, the concept of space has undergone a profound change in our time. These are no longer static or passive concepts, in either the literal or even the kinetic sense, or in the subjective sense. It is not a matter of a contemplative space, but of surrounding space. As far back as 1922, in the footsteps of Gabo and Pevsner, [László] Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény² launched a manifesto about the system of dynamic-constructive forces that involve “the activation of space” so that man, “hitherto merely receptive in his observation of works of art, experiences a heightening of his own faculties, and becomes himself an active partner with the forces unfolding themselves.” And, with the integrity and modesty of his inventive genius, Moholy recognized that the first projects were only “experimental demonstration devices for testing the connections between man, material forces and space.” Next, or further on, he added, “comes the use of experimental results for the creation of freely moving” (free from mechanical and technical movement) works of art.³

We now see that Clark’s current works insert themselves perfectly within that potential perspective outlined nearly forty years ago by one of the century’s great masters of experimental art. And everything indicates that these works by the Brazilian artist, like those by artists from the United States, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Japan, etc., who follow in a parallel direction, are opening up a new path that will most likely be the one the development of art follows to the end of this century.

Lygia’s spatio-temporal constructions—like, for example, the works of a José Rivera (although on another level)—are an art not only of expression, but also of rigor. Actually, César’s *balles* belong more to the hydraulic crushing machine than to the artist, whose behavior is akin to that of a stoker fueling a boiler. He selects whatever materials and throws them into the machine for compression and amalgamation.

Powerful as the result may be, it was molded by a machine. Only the idea remains the artist’s. With Lygia, the idea was not born suddenly, but over many years of patience and tenacity that occasionally seemed to be suicidal. And when the idea came to light, crystallized, it seemed so natural it was like a discovery. Her point of departure is always a preexisting structure, and the first of her Bichos emerged directly from the lozenge-shaped *Contra relevo*. But that first work does not lie flat on the floor, on the plane, like the very image of all virtualities, and still has a privileged initial form. For this reason it possesses certain classical features of sculpture, in spite of a hinge (a revolutionary invention) that joins two planes, and two folding, clinched parts that do not move. A central axis presides over the movement of the



Mário Pedrosa looking at one of Lygia Clark's *Bichos* in the 1961 São Paulo Bienal. Photograph by Thomaz Farkas. Instituto Moreira Salles Collection

planes. Soon afterward, Lygia approached the circle as a natural evolutionary step—a central axis and a circular plane that revolves around the vertical axis. This work has the mythical dignity of a sundial—a marker of time.

From there, evolution occurs in the sense of an increasing structural complexity in which squares are linked to triangles, squares to squares, squares to circles, etc. Within this complexity the works become progressively individualized as movements and counter-movements, tending to expand here toward their extremities or there inward, in search of a central cell resembling that of the convergent or back/front symmetry of living organisms. This is not the place for an analysis or detailed examination of these movements and the predicted spaces they create, the shadows they cast, the reflections they create, the luminous irisations that appear as opened invaginations, the anticipated spatial visualizations, the time-space virtualities they suggest. Whereas the earliest works still contained a certain predominance of sculptural space, others already possess spatial, architectural value combined with sculptural space.

It is worth recalling that the now famous Gabo-Pevsner Constructivist Manifesto, in its consideration of kinetic motion in its relations with the spectator, recognized that time, a factor of emotion, transformed itself into the very substance of the constructions as a figurative element of the sculptural material. And, as a result of the forms' evolutions in space, "it only took the spectator's simple movement around the work for apparently elliptical forms to become circles, for squares to become cubes, etc." Now, in Lygia, it is the work that moves—no longer exclusively the spectator moving around it. And this is where a considerably significant spatial difference imposes itself, for when it is the spectator who moves, space is undoubtedly more architectural; but when the work moves, space is intensified with the notion of time, creating a new relationship that goes beyond mere sculptural space. (As in [Georges] Vantongerloo, who sought to capture motion within the sphere; or [Alexander] Archipenko in some of his movable paintings and sculptures; or Brancusi, creating rotating bases for his *Leda* and his *Fish*; Joost Schmidt, with his lines⁴ in search of the space-time potential of torsions; and even in [Alberto] Giacometti, not to mention [Alexander] Calder.) But what is specifically architectural about Lygia's *Bichos* that move, or—more precisely—stir when provoked by the spectator? The planes? The spaces that open themselves up or are projected, the polyhedric angles that are articulated? No; above all, it is the spaces that are created and imagined, although they are beyond the reach of our direct vision. Thus, these works participate in all spaces—from the sculptural to the architectural, from the architectural to the strictly kinetic.

To many, however, these Bichos (what a vulgar name!)⁵ are not sculptures; they may not even be works of art (this doubt had already been raised following the appearance of Calder's mobiles). In our time, such an objection has become increasingly academic or anachronistic, because in light of the ever more pronounced crisis of the traditional arts of painting and sculpture, genres no longer present the old delimitations (painting tending toward sculpture, sculpture imitating painting) and things are born at each new moment; hybrid objects are invented which appear to indicate that art, as we have known it until now, is in a transitional state, like a chrysalis. Be that as it may, the objection is a superficial one. There are also insinuations to the effect that it is a game in which the creator-artist has only the smallest participation, since it is up to the spectator to intervene in order for the work to undergo new transformations, so to speak, by chance. In fact, this insinuation is false. Lygia's Bichos live precisely because they join together an occasionally organic expressive power and a mathematical spatial dynamism. The severe structures that serve as their starting points predetermine the spatial variations, distortions, and transformations that take place as a result of the spectator's gesture. It is not only the metamorphoses that are predetermined, but also the characteristics of each group. This art is actually ruled by certain mathematical laws perfectly inserted within group theory.

Let this frighten no one. As we know, mathematics has never been separate from the arts. And many of today's so-called informal [Art Informel] artists are not ashamed to claim mathematical contributions for their art, especially when they appeal to its authority in order to paint what they call discontinuous structures.

It has not been too long since, at a symposium in honor of [art historian Heinrich] Wölfflin's eightieth birthday, Andreas Speiser—one of the eminent collaborators at the tribute ([and a scholar] who dedicates special attention to group theory in the artwork of the past)—offered considerations of great interest regarding the problem. What is particularly remarkable when one studies groups is that, among other possibilities, theory is able to deduce the symmetry of planes and space a priori. "The artist," says Speiser, "is not the creator of the work; like mathematicians, he discovers it in an ideal inner world."⁶ In the same study he analyzed the ornamental art of the Arabs from the perspective of group theory. He tells us that, whereas in other arts the effects of symmetry appear unconsciously (or remain unperceived), this is not so in Arabic art. There one must follow a line that extends itself, contracts, conceals itself within multiple tangles, plays, unravels, and displaces itself according to the prescriptions of a group—hence the origin of figures of many kinds that change in accordance with the observer's stance. Everything comes alive: threads and lines connect and interlace in remarkable constellations and separate themselves again, only to come together once more and separate afresh, in the course of which other figures and constellations emerge. Nor does it contain any object in front of a background, for foreground and background are equivalent; they may be confused and the ornament is transmuted into a fine new picture. The eminent master tells us that this is how the Egyptian spirals were born, as were the Cretan leaves, through which foreground, background, and complement form new figurations. The same principle, applied to music, explains the origin of the canon: a melody interfering with itself. At times (four, at most) the accents are always on multiple numbers, and the voices are also repeated and exchanged. The formidable discoveries of a Bach, of a Mozart or Beethoven in this domain would appear to indicate that therein lies "the true invention or artistic discovery of music." Thus, art is a permanent discovery; for Speiser, the artist discovers rather than creates. "Pure fantasy only keeps us in constantly circular thought if comprehension does not fix discoveries in calculation, which thus allows the new

path to extend farther.” Speiser’s thought is rich in suggestions and warnings. Above all, it proves the fecundity of studying ancient and modern works in light of group theory. His comparison of an apparently dry and purely ornamental art—such as that of the Arabs—with canons in contrapuntal music is full of convincing intuitions.

One could certainly use his considerations as a starting point from which to develop an analogy with Lygia Clark’s discovery. The preliminary structures of her *Bichos* possess a spatial development of their own. At the technical-artistic level, the big difference is that here it is no longer the line but, rather, the plane that develops in space. Her *Bichos* are beings subordinated to or guided by given structural laws, but from whose evolutions no continuation is predictable to the eye. The secret of these structures is that they are ruled by symmetries, of which only the effects are seen—and unexpectedly so. But, as in Arabic art, they possess an internal continuity: the planes displace themselves, raise or lower themselves, distance themselves or approach one another, drive the dislocation of one axis or another, and then a sort of chain reaction of displacements unfolds, compelling the whole into new positions. New formal groups or new constellations are always emerging in space, in accordance with the observer’s point of view and also according to the dynamic and interior deductions of the basic structural symmetry. All these movements, displacements, contractions and expansions, games, generators of planes in space around one or more axes, become like the evolution of the line in the schemes of Arabic art, according to the prescriptions of a group.

The most astonishing visual and sculptural formations appear as a consequence of the observer’s gesture, eventually depleting the spectator’s curiosity—even before the virtualities of the basic structures are exhausted, all of them based on the principle of symmetry. These structures are like a magical tree that bears sculptures just as a jackfruit tree bears jackfruit or a cashew tree bears cashews.

Another point of contact between the canon and the art of the arabesque is that in these groups, there are no foregrounds or backgrounds. In general, there is not even an opposite or reverse side in any of these spatial beings. Here foreground and background are also equivalent and may be mistaken for one another. No whole here is definitive, for it transmutes itself easily into another beautiful form.

However, Clark’s sculptural series contains not only a canonic or fleeting succession from music to continuous melodic voices that intersect and separate, but also a simultaneous, vertical occurrence of harmonic music. It has a musical series of dramatic orchestrations through chords in the play of shadow and light of its emptinesses and fullnesses, of its open spaces and its closed spaces, of the luminous reflections on the surfaces of its parts, of the focal points of light that occasionally set fire to the contours of certain triangles, squares, or circles, or that cut them in halves, thirds, fourths, into tiny particles or corners. It is a constant weaving of new interior figurations; only this time they are fantastic visual impressions, sonorous echoes, rare interferences populating the architectural block in the space with myriad tiny touches, a full flowering of unexpected life. This is an inherently pictorial element that plays upon the surfaces like pulsating light across cathedral facades à la Monet. One might speak here of a reflexive quality of bilateral symmetry.

The structures possess features of their own that sometimes give them a strange organic sense brought about by the interrelationship of their occasionally vaginal or uterine internal organs (as in a sculpture by Pevsner) or by their formal concreteness à la Arp. Without anyone realizing it, the name “*Bichos*” was probably born from such impressions and analogies. By virtue of their complexity and superimposed structure, many of them contain a sort of internal machinery that leads the generation

of a plane in space—or its mere displacement—to have an immediate repercussion for the whole, leading all the parts to begin to move—seemingly of their own accord—in search of a new position. At times the work moves like an insect or suggests the idea of a strange space-constructing machine. These fabulous architectural units are designed in air.

From one angle of vision or another, the extremely rich spatial articulation allows us to make out spatial projections that are impenetrable to the unobstructed view from the other side of the polyhedral planes. Many of Lygia's latest Bichos are characterized by this Constructivist quality that highlights formal, architectural, or sculptural values rather than the organicist values of other works.

Undoubtedly, we stand before a revolutionary artistic experiment, although—for this very reason—one that is profoundly representative of the modern sensibility. The Lygian Bichos revolutionize the ancient concept of sculpture; they add a new, highly transcendent element to the previous accomplishments in the realm of the kinetic movements' constructions and creations. Now Lygia invites the spectator to participate—if not in the creation, then in the blossoming and experiencing of the work of art. The spectator is no longer a passive and purely contemplative subject before an object, nor even an egocentric subject who, in order to impose himself, negates the work—the object—as in the currently fashionable romantic and low naturalistic painting and sculpture that flees from exterior reality, cowering before the hardships and complexities of the contemporary world in an entirely solipsistic position. Clark's new art invites the subject-spectator to enter into a new relationship with the work, or object, so that the subject participates in the creation of the object that, transcending itself, connects him to the plenitude of being.

Modern art once again begins to break with Romantic obscurantism and, reclaiming an optimistic stance, proposes to solve the enigma of the world with man and for man, and to recondition his fate. Lygia Clark's current works perform this role.

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Notes

1. The Constructivist Manifesto is also known as the "Realistic Manifesto." Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, "The Realistic Manifesto" (1920) in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 396–400. The text quoted by Pedrosa does not appear in the published manifesto, and is most likely from Lygia Clark's notebook.
2. László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény, "Dinamisch-konstruktives Kraftsystem," *Der Sturm* 13 (December 1922).
3. László Moholy-Nagy and Alfréd Kemény, "Dynamic-Constructive System of Forces" (1922), in László Moholy-Nagy, *Moholy-Nagy*, ed. Krisztina Passuth (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1985), p. 290.
4. Pedrosa's word *fios* could also mean "threads" or "wires." We have not located any images by Schmidt, a Bauhaus graphic designer, to indicate which is correct.
5. According to Clark, "this is the name I gave to my works of that period because its features are fundamentally organic. Besides, the hinge that joins the planes reminded me of a spinal cord." Lygia Clark, "Bichos," 1960. Available at: www.lygiaclark.org.br.
6. Andreas Speiser, *Die Theorie der Gruppen von endlicher Ordnung* (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1923). Pedrosa quotes (in Portuguese) from Speiser's German text, of which we could locate no English edition.

Aluísio Carvão

In 1947 [Swiss artist] Max Bill was attempting to elucidate an old misunderstanding—the absolute identification of Concrete Art and Constructivism. In his essay (*Worte rund um Malerei und Plastik*),¹ he sought to demonstrate that Constructivism—or any other constructive or mathematical artistic manifestation—is but one of the possible different expressions of Concrete Art, which can also express itself perfectly in fully a-geometric or amorphous forms (note that at that time, language possessed greater rigor than it does nowadays).

This elucidation might well serve Aluísio Carvão in explaining his current phase, if an artist needed any other explanation beyond the work itself. However, in view of so many misunderstandings flying about, it may not be excessive to resort to authoritative explanations such as the one we have just given. At any rate, the superficial, the ill-tempered, and the hasty are warned not to brand the painter as inconsequential or incoherent just because his current painting does not emphasize any external rigor of patterns or purely geometric Constructivist concerns.

However, it is important to note that the Carvão of today is exactly the same as the Carvão of yesterday, just as, most probably, he will be the one of tomorrow, given that coherence has always stood out among his qualities as an artist. At no point in his career did he cease to be faithful to himself; he is a painter who never frivolously adopted a new set of problems, only to drop them off at the first street corner or discard them without first having explored them in all of their possibilities. Such problems are always, so to speak, unlimited, to those who know how to sound them out; they transmute themselves dialectically, so that the more an artist analyzes, experiments, explores, or penetrates them, the more they necessarily open themselves up to new modalities, new combinations, or perennial metamorphosis. And in this process, they eventually begin anew from other starting points, negating themselves at their sources, just as the numerically limited simple bodies of ancient chemistry ended up multiplying themselves in an unlimited chain of new bodies that are added, from day to day, going from one kind of matter to another (which allows the wise chemist of today to return to the magical dream of medieval alchemists searching for the philosopher's stone).

For this very reason, no aesthetic doctrine, no matter how rigorous, can limit investigations, or prevent the artist from being led to the contradictory infinity of the philosopher's stone, in which everything is transformed into everything. For this very reason, Picasso the magician, barely having completed his Cubist investigations, said, with profound intuition: "I do not seek, I find."²

In his current show, Carvão does not change course, orientation, or school—his *démarche* is perfectly Neo-Concrete, but denotes an arch-prepared transition from one period to another, successively interior one, analogous to that of the craftsman at his craft, who, with the passing years, moves from student to follower and, occasionally, from follower to master.

And let it not be said that Carvão is a versatile artist who changes at every moment, or is pretentious. From his early Amazonian Impressionism all impregnated with a flaming Van Goghism—seen almost by hearsay in precarious reproductions—to his abstract attempts that resulted, with total naturalness, in an increasingly rigorous Concretism, Carvão is the same painter, slow at what he does, who at every moment inquires, simplifies, analyzes, intensifies with Oriental patience but hidden ardor.

In fact, the present show includes the coronation of an ultimately rather slow evolution that began with certain works of 1958, when the painter achieved an

almost perfect rigor with regard to the clarity of the set of problems and the optical/Concretist result intended with his *Núcleo-tensivo* [Tensive nucleus]. He arrives, with *Ritmo centrípeto-centrifugal* [Centripetal-centrifugal rhythm], at a conclusion that is no longer one of scholastic rigor but, rather, an already creative or gifted state beyond technical formal perfection, of indubitable expressive power, with its play of forms that are posed and counterposed simply in black and in lilac-gray.

From this point, in which the mastery of form is adroit and lucid, his sensitive geometry progressively transforms itself, abandoning the subject matter of figures in different positions for another that is increasingly less quantifiable because it is essentially of a qualitative order, of energetic intensification—that is to say, of luminosity and color.

In capturing light that is not necessarily white—the nirvana of colors—but refers particularly to the scale of saturation, he has given us a series of canvases (note that everything is amalgamated into a single word: *Clarovermelho* [Light red] (see plate on p. 91), *Vermelho-cinza* [Red-gray], etc.), from which light bursts forth in a vectorial direction or thrust toward clean color, pure luminosity. It is the hour of the *Cromáticas* [Chromatics]. Inspired in 1959, they expand themselves in the works shown at the Salão of 1960.³

His constructions now contain a *program*—of color. This program is already visible in the titles of his paintings: *Vermelho-vermelho* [Red-red], *Amarelo-amarelo* [Yellow-yellow], *Rosa-amarelo-amarelo* [Pink-yellow-yellow]. The remnants of geometry of position that are still present are merely a conventional limit that comes from the earlier period, because in fact, it is now color and color alone that, in its intensity and saturation, weighs upon the surface, imposing even form itself upon it. As I write these lines, I am reminded of a short essay I wrote in 1951 in which I quoted a penetrating yet simple observation by A. [Adolf] Behne (*Von Kunst zur Gestaltung*, 1925) on the problem of color in contemporary painting—one that might define Carvão's current position: "Only those who control its laws can control color," but "only those who control themselves can work with those laws."⁴ Behne also famously compared colors, in their infinite relationships, to "a coherent social organism, in which separate or isolated beings do not exist." That is the point reached by Aluísio Carvão in his evolution as a painter.

Color requires of painting an internal order that must be found and, when found, obeyed. This knowledge was transmitted to us by the great creative generation of the beginning of the century, which, having abandoned figurative painting's earlier, traditional procedures of grisaille and chiaroscuro, moved on to Kandinskyan improvisations, to [Henri] Matisse's scandalously perverted flat areas, and to the geometric abstraction of [Robert] Delaunay, [Vassily] Kandinsky, [Piet] Mondrian, and others. When its reign arrived, pure color left in its wake the last barriers of Figurativism. Nowadays, Carvão stands before a world so detached from any objective material allusion that his painting is reduced to pure chromatic relationships. On one hand, this may be an ascetic act; on the other hand, however, it may be an orgy. He is forever moving back and forth between these two extremes.

His aesthetic is Neo-Concrete because it exists within the eternal ambiguity of its original cells—Neoplasticism, Neoromanticism, Neonaturalism, and Neoconstructivism—given that he already calculates positions according to planes, through increasingly more intense and subtle, more measured, and more passionate approximations. Such is his construction according to quality rather than quantity.

A small ocher-pink painting might be singled out as a delicate moment in the transition from the geometry of position—of areas defined by clear linear boundar-

ies—to that of qualitative approximations and vicinities. Here, a rather dark hue of ocher advances in a triangular point upon the contiguous pink area, where the ocher becomes the shadow of the pink or the pink the negative of the ocher. From then on, the areas are no longer delimited according to geometric rigor but through the meeting of chromatic strips whose extremities dwindle away as if drained of energy. In the important *Cromática 17* [Chromatic 17], in orange, earth-colored, and ocher strips whose hesitantly contiguous edges are taken by strange green hues, imprecise boundary zones are established—nonlimits that are emphasized but do not, in fact, interrupt, not reaching the notations of a scale because they remain as a flickering modulation in green.

The formality of contrasts has ceased, for inner law is now stronger than the law of complementarity or simultaneity, etc. It is now a matter of an insistent, monotonous assertion that would universalize itself, moving outside itself only to return to itself; one that does not demonstrate, but only exposes itself as an argument in circular logic. The qualitative subjectivity of color wants to exist existentially, rather than in the abstract, in the laboratory, in number and frequency, or in external nature as a simple prop for defining objects, or as mere subjectivity in the abstract symbolism of a [Paul] Gauguin or [Vincent] van Gogh, or concretely upon the plane, in ethical-decorative effects.

It needs to be born, generated at the bottom of crucibles, to decant slowly until the moment of birth. It is not just childbirth; above all, it is ceremonial, whence comes its magical element and, therefore, the artist's familiarity. With whom or with what? With the idea? With manual work or craft? Not with . . . nature.

Carvão does, indeed, create color: his color? Yes, if one thinks of the relationship between father and son, but the created being derives from and drifts toward other mysteries. Thus when, in the course of his craft, the painter abandons the limitation by external means (color), he does not do so through conscious deliberation, merely to *change*, to move away from the *formal* to the *informal*, or other vulgarities of the so-called militant criticism of our time. The thing goes deeper, like the transition from one climate to another, or the passage of the meridian—not in the geographical sense of one hue, from the height of the chromatic circle, to another on the antipodes, but rather, more modestly (?) from one hue . . . to the same hue, from a green to a green (*Madrugada* [Dawn]), from a red to a red, from a yellow to a chrome yellow, from a pink that, for example, visitors to the recent Neo-Concrete Exhibition dubbed the Sun, just because one of them had crystallized in a circular form, very easily analogous to that of the star.

There is no horrified rejection on Carvão's part of such designative commentary made with regard to his paintings because—both skeptical and serious—he is always alert to the game of a posteriori designations and analogies that, ultimately, betrays the vague but generalized collective desire that afflicts all of us these days—that of discovering the secret of contemporary abstract art's meaning. By the way, the Sun, after having recovered its larger dimensions, eventually lost its circular analogy to the square, by virtue of the direction of the brushstrokes alone. (Coincidentally, in the Chinese ideogram, the sun eventually took the form of a square.)

Hidden within this obsessive insistence on the single hue is the belief that multiplicity lies within unity itself. Within these *Verde-verde* [Green-green], *Azul-azul* [Blue-blue], will there be no magical atavistic belief in the power of the word, or . . . in the preverbal perceptive observation that is the unconscious cell of reality itself? At any rate, the need for repetition that absorbs the painter's mind recalls the designative process through repetition of doubled sounds in popular music or popular

mythology in taxonomy, such as the *Quero-quero* [Lapwing], the *Tico-tico* [Sparrow] etc.⁵ The enigma remains. What, after all, does this color signify if it is not a specific place (despite the a posteriori invocations of locatable atmospheres, such as the *Verde-verde* I called *Madrugada*, for Carvão indeed painted that picture at daybreak after a sleepless night), and if it is not symbolic or denotatively abstract, or even fluidic or deep or illuminated, but pigmentary color in itself—like clay or earth which, the more one digs or scrapes, the more it is earth or clay, and surely possesses a concrete, physical reality.

But of what does this sure—though *sui generis*—materiality of his consist? It is made of light and chemistry in the painter's alchemical crucibles.

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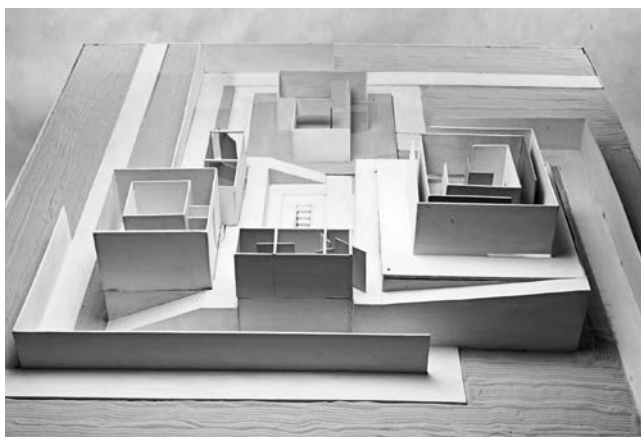
Notes

1. Max Bill, *Worte rund um Malerei und Plastik* (Zurich: Allianz, Vereinigung moderner Schweizer Künstler, Katalog Kunsthau Zürich, 1947).
2. Pablo Picasso, quoted in Graham Sutherland, "A Trend in English Draughtsmanship," *Signature*, no. 3 (July 1936): 7–13.
3. At the ninth edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, for which Pedrosa was part of the jury, Aluísio Carvão received the foreign travel award. In November of that same year, Carvão also took part in the second National Exhibition of Concrete Art, at the Ministry of Education and Culture, Rio de Janeiro, alongside Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, and Ferreira Gullar, among other artists.
4. *Von Kunst zur Gestaltung. Einführung in die moderne Malerei* (Berlin: Arbeiterjugend-Verlag, 1925).
5. Birds of great significance in Brazilian popular culture, often mentioned in folklore and in music.

Hélio Oiticica's Projects

The Rio de Janeiro MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna] is to be warmly congratulated for housing an experiment such as this one by the talented young artist Hélio Oiticica.¹ "Museums" of contemporary art—or those dedicated to the myth of so-called modern art—cannot be confined to the traditional activities of storing and exhibiting masterpieces. Their functions are much more complex. Intrinsically, they are houses, laboratories for cultural experiments—instantly unbiased laboratories of an aesthetic order, for the purpose of allowing experiments and experiences to be made and realized under the circumstances most conducive to creative stimulus. Thus conceived, the museum is the elastic glove into which the free creator may fit his hand. Hélio Oiticica, a young and austere artist (as befits the grandson of an illustrious anarchist), brings to the museum one of his latest ideas, the personal fruit of the collective break of the Rio "Concretists" with the official branch of Concretism when they organized the Neo-Concrete group under the leadership of Ferreira Gullar and Lygia Clark.

Ever since [his participation in] the Grupo Frente, Hélio (who was a student of Ivan Serpa's) has forged his own path within the aesthetic concepts of Neo-Concretism. In his search for real space, he broke away from the picture frame, freed himself from the traditional rectangle, attempted to suppress the last vestiges of any type of support for the work of art, and created suspended plates of color in an attempt to arrive at the absolute ideal described by Ferreira Gullar as a "nonobject." The model currently on view at the Rio MAM adds a new idea to the preceding experiments: that of time experienced, in the form of spectator participation in the creator's experiment. This idea is a natural consequence of the poetic discovery of the notion of time made by "Neo-Concretist" artists and poets, when they distanced themselves from the seri-



Hélio Oiticica. Model for *Projeto cães de caça* (Hunting dogs project). 1961.
21' 11 3/4" × 31' 11 7/8" (670 × 975 cm). Courtesy Projeto Hélio Oiticica

al-spatial orthodoxy of Concretism. From this discovery arose Reynaldo Jardim's *Livro-poema* [Book-poem],² [Ferreira] Gullar's *Poema-ação* [Action-poem], Lygia Clark's *Bicho* [Critter], Lygia Pape's *Book of Creation* (see plate on p. 96), and finally, the privileged place into which Hélio invites passersby to leave behind everyday life. In order to emphasize the unusual nature of the site, the artist names it after constellations and nebulas, and calls the project on exhibition *Cães de caça* (Hunting Dogs), like one of those Kandinskyan beings of the Milky Way.³ It is, shall we say, an abstract garden reminiscent of the sand and stone Ryōan-ji in Kyoto, Japan. Here the painter has brought together Ferreira Gullar's *Poema enterrado* [Buried poem] and Reynaldo Jardim's *Teatro integral* [Whole theater], interspersed with his own *Penetráveis* (Penetrables), "works" to be entered by pushing against walls or making them revolve, climbing stairs, or by circling plates and panels, walking as if in a labyrinth until . . . one comes face to face with colors, feels the reflection of colors, steps on colors, lives colors. Some of these *Penetráveis* are labyrinths, others are corners and recesses of movable colored walls (see, for example, plate on p. 93). And yet, enveloping all of these individual sanctuaries for soliloquies is a larger labyrinth that can shelter more than one person within its perimeter—a space for group initiation in the experiential soliloquy of the works within. A curious, attractive, and very modern feature of Oiticica's concept is a certain collectivist character contained in his creation even as it ceases to be something purely individualistic and egocentric. Indeed, it requires the collaboration of individual works by other artists: these projects engender a spatial and spiritual atmosphere that favors the realization of other bold projects by other creators such as (in this case) Gullar's *Poema enterrado* or Jardim's *Teatro integral*. In these instances, spectator participation in the work is more complex: it is no longer a matter of simple participation in the created work by completing or being integrated into it, but of an observer engaging with a poetic or magical world that is given to him, with its creator absent from the enclosure. Freed from everyday life, the participant becomes integrated into himself; that is, he becomes part of the original lived experience of the first experiment. Some element of those *invitations au voyage* of the Romantic period is present here; the difference is that the Romantic nostalgia for escape is impregnated—by the consciousness of the times—with a pathetic ethical resonance. As for an artistic appreciation of the experiment, each spectator must judge for himself.

—Originally published as "Os projetos de Hélio Oiticica," in *Catálogo exposição Projetos cães de caça* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, August 1961).

Notes

1. On Oiticica, see also Mário Pedrosa, "Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica," in this volume.
2. Along with Ferreira Gullar and Amílcar de Castro, journalist and poet Reynaldo Jardim was responsible for the layout of the revolutionary graphic design project of the *Suplemento Dominical* (Sunday supplement) of the *Jornal do Brasil*. One of the signatories of the Neo-Concrete Manifesto, he created the *Neo-Concrete Ballet* with artist Lygia Pape (1958–59).
3. Oiticica explains his title: "The denomination of 'Hunting Dogs,' for the project comes from the criterion I established for the nomenclature of these projects, that is, names borrowed from constellations and nebulas, as is the practice with atomic projects; "Hunting Dogs" is the name of a spiral-shaped nebula." From "Projeto de cães de caça e a pintura nuclear," typescript of an interview with Oiticica about the MAM-RJ exhibition (November 1961) *Projetos cães de caça*, <http://www.itaucultural.org.br/programaho/>.

Klee and the Present

In these times of artistic confusion—with the cheaply informal aesthetic of *art autre*¹—it is comforting to receive a book such as this latest one, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen*, by Will Grohmann, the grand veteran of German criticism.² Once again, he puts us in touch with the perennial deep waters of creation.

Klee is one of the great estuaries of so-called modern art. Many currents flowed from him and many others converged toward him. In a dense chapter on the artist in his slender volume on contemporary painting, Romero Brest³ observed that "everyone lays claim to him": Dadaists and Surrealists, Abstractionists related to German Expressionism and Cubists, Futurists and the family of Kandinskyans. And now even the *tachistes*. Expanding his field of assimilation and radiation, we still need to acknowledge him as one of the links between East and West. Persian miniatures and even Chinese calligraphy have worked their fascination on the art of the wise, quiet master from Bern. All that scholars of calligraphy in Japan talked about was Klee and Miró, as Western artists with calligraphic qualities.⁴

Be that as it may, Klee increasingly appears to be the first modern creator who, being of pure Germanic ancestry, was essentially a spiritual emigrant from the East—or, better yet, from the Middle East: a Levantine or, even more precisely, a Mediterranean from those shores. His signs do not look for roots in the characters of Chinese phonetic-semantic, synthetic writing, but in the analytic characters of Persian miniatures and the Arabic alphabet. Klee's signs function as a team, dancing about like elements of a ballet; they advance in one direction, but may be detached from that procession to make up another group, given that they are more precisely letters or silhouettes that evoke or suggest, without the expressive, nondiscontinuous, subjective weight of Sino-Japanese calligraphy.

In underscoring the fact that nearly five thousand of the nine thousand works the master bequeathed to us were drawings, Grohmann informs us that for a long time Klee believed himself to be no more than a draftsman, resigned to earning "his bread" as an "illustrator."⁵ Indeed, until 1914, when the defining journey to Kairouan took place,⁶ all his work (with very few exceptions) was in black and white. That year, for the first time, the watercolors outnumber the black-and-white drawings. It was then that he wrote in his diary, "Color possesses me. I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it. That is the meaning of this happy hour: color and I are one. I am a painter."⁷

He was thirty-five. It was a new beginning in his artistic life, now as a painter. Besides, he was forever starting over. At the beginning of the war, at age twenty-three,

he wrote the famous words that would become so characteristic of the general frame of mind of artists of his generation: “I want to be as though new-born, knowing nothing, absolutely nothing about Europe.” Hence his sense that it was necessary “to start with the smallest.”⁸ To “know nothing . . . to be completely without sophistication, virtually at the origin.”⁹ This stance defines not only his art, but also the position of every true artist of our time. What he evinced was the artist’s absolute need never to leave the plane of the “first experience.” His starting point is equivalent to the “radical starting point” of [Edmund] Husserl, the master of modern phenomenology. It must not be mistaken for a Cartesian, rationalist “starting point,” which proclaims that before an authentic analytic, scientific *démarche* one ought to doubt what one already knows about matter. With Husserl, it is not a matter of “doubting” what one already knows, but of divesting oneself of all the weapons of knowledge in order to start from the beginning. Like Paul Klee; yet so unlike the inventive artists who are the makers of today’s real, pictorial cocktails.

—Originally published as “Klee e a atualidade,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), March 5, 1961.

Notes

1. Mid-twentieth-century abstract art movement also known as Art Informel.
2. Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen* (Berlin: Müller & I. Kiepenheuer, 1934), 2 vols.
3. Jorge Romero Brest, *La pintura europea contemporánea (1900–1950)* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952).
4. See Mário Pedrosa, “Calligraphic Abstraction,” pp. 193–94 in the present volume.
5. Grohmann, *Paul Klee: Handzeichnungen*.
6. It was during Klee’s 1914 visit to Tunisia that, inspired by the quality of the light, he decided to become a painter. That year he painted the famous *In the Style of Kairouan*, his first pure abstract painting.
7. Paul Klee, diary entry no. 926 0, in *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), p. 297.
8. Paul Klee, diary entry dated June 1902, quoted in Leopold Zahn, *Paul Klee: Leben—Werk—Geist* (Potsdam: G. Kiepenheuer, 1920), p. 26. English translation is from: Paul Klee, diary entry dated June 22, 1902, quoted in Robert Goldwater and Marco Treves, eds., *Artists on Art: From the 14th to the 20th Century* (London: J. Murray, 1976), p. 442.
9. See: Graham Birtwistle, “Child’s Play,” *Artway*, accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.artway.eu/content.php?id=1117&action=show&lang=en>.

Mira Schendel

Mira Schendel is a painter who resists fashion. However, we should not look to her for any special attachment to this or that school, style, or manner. But let us not think that she has no interest in research or even in experimentation. As for her pictorial means of expression, she is a curious painter, concerned with problems of her *métier*. I am unacquainted with her early work, although I am familiar enough with the period preceding the one in this exhibition to know two things: her painting remains the same, even as it is not the same. It is the same because abstract geometric subjects are present in one and in the other. There is a compositional constant, a division of the canvas that is somehow repeated. But it is no longer the same in the sense that, above all, the artist’s vision is more particular, more self-assured.

Previously, the line that divided her rectangles into many regular or successive forms, in repetition, also divided them into figure and background. Here and there her rectangular forms stood out, apart, so that the rest of the painting could be an accompaniment. The form ceased to be a form—a living, malleable form—in order to become a compositional form. Now, in turn, color (which was still isolated then) can

no longer be distinguished, and material even less than tone (see, for example, plate on p. 91). Material now exercises its action of presence not only through extension—its most evident and quantifiable property—but through the particularly sensitive quality of intensity. Concretism becomes denser and takes on another dimension, that of a subjective expressiveness with real emotional impact.

Richer pictorial mediums now really help the artist to reveal herself, to express herself, to compose her own personality, rather than provide her with the possibility of exhibiting virtuoso compositions. The paper upon which she presents some of her works in oil and tempera served her as a sort of intermediate material so that she might end her transition from color-tone to material, which externalizes itself from the inside out—alternating between light and shadows—through successive layers of tempera and oil applied with brush and spatula. In her current canvases, the process of fusion of color and tone in the material ends, and the surfaces of her paintings take on a density rich in suggestions of nature and of things, cemented by a prolonged and dramatic human experience. Her register is always low, for earth colors predominate. No high notes; the song or melody is always grave.

The result of all this is a characteristic I deem to be an achievement in all these paintings: the *return*—even in geometric abstraction—of the theme to the motif. Here, abstraction is an inner need; it is the language of a dialogue between the artist and the world that can only be subjective. An interminable dialogue.

—Originally published as “Mira Schendel,” in *Mira Schendel: Pinturas*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Galeria São Luiz, 1963).

Franz Weissmann (Special Room)

Franz Weissmann is presenting himself to the eighth edition of the São Paulo Bienal after having been absent from competition since 1957, when he won the prize for best national sculptor. He is back in the country after a long absence abroad.

When he left Brazil he was a “Concretist” or rather, a “Constructivist.” One might have said he had become an “Informalist.” (How faded that designation already sounds!) Why? Because now he brings us flattened, crumpled, bruised metal plates in relief. And portfolios and more portfolios of drawings in which the line literally leads him over the smooth or rough surface of the paper, in whirls, in arabesques, in uninterrupted circumvolutions, in infinite crisscrossing. It is a journey through space, a long journey of which traces of light remain, revealing unsuspected structures. Between these emerge living yet uninhabited, dynamic but untraveled spaces—intervals that lie not between things, phenomena, or events, but between intervals of intervals, indefinitely.

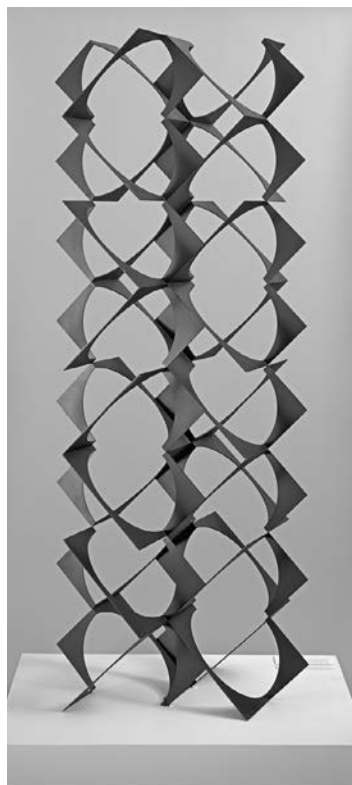
In these drawings there is a duel between line and light, fought until the bodily free-for-all when, despite everything, the light reemerges from the infinite interweaving of desperate, frenzied lines. These frequently admirable drawings are a dialogue between Franz Weissmann and himself.

In his transition to real space, Weissmann once more settles his accounts with his material. As a sculptor, this is his task, his toll. In his previous spatial constructions his problem was exactly the same, only then he wanted to construct in space, regardless of his material. Essentially, he denied its existence; he availed himself of

it only inasmuch as might be minimally necessary to his pierced planes that articulated themselves in a calculated rhythm. Within this rhythm something remained undecided, unfinished, retaining an undefined power of attraction. This poetic indecision outlined in space fascinated two great Brazilian poets—Murilo Mendes and João Cabral de Melo Neto; the latter speaks nostalgically “of the aerial columns of yesteryear”; the former, with regard to the sculptor’s work, “of a time that accelerates the conflict between two cultures.” In the existential and more pessimistic European

environment, Weissmann was defeated by *material*. He stopped constructing in space in order to operate with it, although not in order to surrender to the material; rather, he engaged with it in a duel that still persists.

Whereas for him the drawings are a dialogue between line and light, the plates in relief are a dialogue between the line and the blow—the light. Indeed, he has armed himself for this struggle with a hammer, boxing gloves, and mallet, and gone after the pieces of zinc, to wrest from them a colloquy. He hammered at them until they opened up and blossomed like sensitive beings. With a certain light flickering among clouds, it is a landscaped sky that would evoke the atmospheric space of the late-eighteenth-century Venetians—of, say, a Tiepolo. It is a curious approximation that I cannot explain. Beneath his blows zinc becomes sky and, once again, one realizes that the creases hammered into the material allow light to pass through it, and in its pursuit, an architecture of planes and lines succeed one another and are armed with the whim of passing clouds. Franz Weissmann made a discovery; that is, he did not deliberately seek it out. For he repeatedly attempted some magical operation in his long, solitary, daily artisanal dealings with his material.



Franz Weissmann. *Coluna neoconcreta* (Neo-Concrete column). 1957. Painted iron, 77 $\frac{7}{8}$ × 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (197.6 × 77.4 × 47 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

With the move to aluminum, the tools for the artist’s attack—the mallet and the powerfully protected hands—knead more and incise less. The aluminum blades bring an untouchable, translucent, virginal clarity. A desire to defile that pure clarity seizes the sculptor. And what he does is a rape. He crumples it like a piece of paper with his calloused boxer’s hands. He advances his attack, the mallet, and gathers it all; the metal shrinks and folds and its creases make it look old, but it is ultimately transmuted into a squandering of chiseled silver, of shiny flashes. Aluminum has truly been made into something else. It possesses grooves, sparks, pleats, wrinkles, cuts, and layers, but ascends to a higher category, becoming an almost noble, precious metal. It is a Weissmann with different insignia, with a different work, but it is the same uncertain and profound, violent and lyrical artist who proceeds as if to avenge himself for his human, earthly condition—while he awaits transubstantiation. And the latter is his daily bread.

—Originally published as “Franz Weissmann (Sala Especial),” in *Catálogo da VIII Bienal Internacional de São Paulo* (São Paulo, September/November, 1965).

Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica

Now that we have arrived at the end of what has been called “modern art,” inaugurated by [Pablo Picasso’s] *Les Femmes d’Alger*, and inspired by the (then) recent discovery of African art, criteria for appreciation are no longer the same as the ones established since then, based as they were on the Cubist experiment. By now, we have entered another cycle, one that is no longer purely artistic, but cultural, radically different from the preceding one and begun (shall we say?) by Pop art. I would call this new cycle of antiart “postmodern art.”

(In passing, let us say that, this time around, Brazil participates not as a modest follower, but as a leader. In many regards, the young exponents of the old Concretism and especially of Neo-Concretism (as led by Lygia Clark) have foreshadowed the Op and even Pop art movements. Hélio Oiticica was the youngest of the group.)

In the apprenticeship phase and in the exercise of “modern art,” the natural virtuality, the extreme plasticity of perception of the new being explored by the artists was subordinated, disciplined, and contained by the exaltation and the hegemony of intrinsically formal values. Nowadays, in this phase of art in the situation of antiart, of “postmodern art,” the reverse takes place: formal values per se tend to be absorbed by the malleability of perceptive and situational structures. As a psychological phenomenon, it is perfectly clear that the malleability of perception increases under the influence of emotion and affective states. Like the classical modernists, today’s avant-garde artists do not avoid this influence and certainly do not seek it out deliberately, as did the romantic subjectivists of “abstract” or “lyrical” Expressionism. Expressiveness in itself is of no interest to the contemporary avant-garde. On the contrary, it fears hermetic individual subjectivism most of all—hence the inherent objectivity of Pop and Op art (in the United States). Even the “new figuration” (in which the remains of subjectivism have aligned themselves) aspires above all else to narrate or to spread a collective message about myth and, when the message is an individual one, to use humor.

As early as 1959, when throughout the world the romantic vogue for Art Informel and Tachism predominated, the young Oiticica, indifferent to fashion, had given up painting in order to forge his first unusual, violently and frankly monochromatic object—or relief—in space. Having naturally broken away from the gratuitousness of formal values that are rare among today’s avant-garde artists, he remains faithful to those values in the structural rigor of his objects, the discipline of his forms, the sumptuousness of his color and material combinations—in short, for the purity of his creations. He wants everything to be beautiful, impeccably pure, and intractably precious, like a Matisse in the splendor of his art of “richness, quiet and pleasure.” The Baudelaire of *Flowers of Evil* may be the distant godfather of this aristocratic adolescent who is a *passista*¹ for the Mangueira² [samba school]—albeit without the *poète maudit*’s Christian sense of sin. His Concretist apprenticeship almost prevented him from reaching the vernal, ingenuous stage of the first experiment. His expression takes on an extremely individualist character and, at the same time, goes all the way to pure sensorial exaltation without, however, achieving the psychological threshold itself, where the transition to the image, to the sign, to emotion and to consciousness takes place. He cut this transition short. But his behavior suddenly changed: one day, he left his ivory tower—his studio—to become part of the Estação Primeira, where his painful and serious popular initiation took place at the foot of Mangueira Hill, a *carioca* myth. Even as he surrendered to a veritable rite of initiation, he nonetheless carried his

unrepentant aesthetic nonconformity with him to the samba in the eternally hard-core spaces of Mangueira and environs.

He left at home the spatial reliefs and Núcleos [Nuclei], the continuation of an experiment with color he called Penetráveis [Penetrables]—constructions in wood with sliding doors in which the subject might seclude himself inside color.

Color invaded him. He made physical contact with color; he pondered, touched, walked on, breathed color. As in Clark's Bichos [Critters] experience, the spectator ceased to be a passive contemplator in order to become attracted to an action that lay within the artist's cogitations rather than within the scope of his own conventional, everyday considerations, and participated in them, communicating through gesture and action. This is what the avant-garde artists of the world want nowadays and it is really the secret driving force behind "happenings." The Núcleos are pierced structures, suspended panels of colored wood that trace a path beneath a quadrilateral, canopy-like ceiling. Color is no longer locked away; the surrounding space is aflame with violent yellow or orange color-substances that have been unloosed, seizing the environment and responding to one another in space, as flesh, too, is colored, and dresses and cloth are inflamed, and their reverberations touch things. The incandescent environment burns, the atmosphere is one of decorative over-refinement that is simultaneously aristocratic, slightly plebeian, and perverse. The violent color and light occasionally evoke [Vincent] van Gogh's nocturnal billiards room, in which those colors that symbolized the "terrible passions of humanity"³ reverberated for him.

Oiticica called his art environmental. Indeed, that is what it is. Nothing about it is isolated. There is no single artwork that can be appreciated in itself, like a picture.

The sensorial perceptual whole dominates. Within it, the artist has created a "hierarchy of orders"—Relevos [Reliefs], Núcleos, Bóides⁴ (boxes), and capes, banners, tents (Parangolés)⁵—"all directed toward the creation of an environmental world." It was during his initiation in samba that the artist moved from the purity of visual experience to an experiment in touch, in movement, in the sensual fruition of materials in which the entire body—previously reduced in the distant aristocracy of visibility—makes its entrance as a total source of sensoriality. In the wooden boxes that open like pigeon-holes from which an inner light hints at other impressions, opening up perspectives through movable panels, drawers that open to reveal earth or colored powder, etc., the transition from predominantly visual impressions to the domain of haptic or tactile ones becomes evident. The simultaneous contrast of colors moves on to successive contrasts of contact, of friction between solids and liquids, hot and cold, smooth and creased, rough and soft, porous and dense. Wrinkled



Hélio Oiticica with his B33 *Bóide caixa 18* "Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo" (B33 box bolide 18 "Homage to Horse Face"). 1955–66. Courtesy Projeto Hélio Oiticica

colored mesh springs from within the boxes like entrails, drawers are filled with powders and then glass containers, the earliest of which contain reductions of color to pure pigment. A variety of materials succeed one another: crushed brick, red lead oxide, earth, pigments, plastic, mesh, coal, water, aniline, crushed seashells. Mirrors serve as bases for Nucléos or create further spatial dimensions within the boxes. Like artificial flowers, absurdly precious and lush yellow and green porous meshes emerge from the neck of a whimsically shaped bottle (of the type that belongs to a liqueur service) filled with transparent green liquid. It is an unconscious challenge to the refined taste of aesthetes. He has called this unusual decorative vase *Homenagem a Mondrian* [Tribute to Mondrian] (one of his idols). A flask sits upon a table amid boxes, glass containers, nuclei, and capes—a Louis XV-like pretense of luxury within a suburban interior. One of the most beautiful and astonishing boxes, its interior filled with variegated circumvolutions (meshes), is illuminated by neon light. There is enormous variety in these box and glass Bólides. No longer part of the macrocosm, everything now takes place inside these objects; it is as if they had been touched by some strange experience.

One might say that the artist transmits the message of rigor, luxury, and exaltation that vision once gave us into the occasionally gloved hands that grope and plunge into powder, into coal, into shells. Thus he has come full circle around the entire sensorial–tactile–motile spectrum. The ambiance is one of virtual, sensory saturation.

For the first time, the artist finds himself face to face with another reality—the world of awareness, of states of mind, the world of values. All things must now accommodate meaningful behavior. Indeed, the pure, raw sensorial totality so deliberately sought after and so decisively important to Oiticica’s art is finally exuded through transcendence into another environment. In it the artist—sensorial machine absolute—stumbles, vanquished by man, convulsively confined by the soiled passions of ego and the tragic dialectic of social encounter. The symbiosis of this extreme, radical aesthetic refinement therefore takes place with an extreme psychological radicalism that involves the entire personality. The Luciferian sin of aesthetic nonconformity and the individual sin of psychological nonconformity are fused. The mediator of this symbiosis of two Manichaeian nonconformisms was the Mangueira samba school.

The expression of this absolute nonconformity is his *“Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo”* [“Tribute to “Horse Face”], a veritable monument of authentically pathetic beauty in which formal values are finally not supreme. An open box without a lid, modestly covered by mesh that must be lifted to reveal the bottom, its inner walls are lined with reproductions of a photograph that appeared in the newspapers of the day; in them, [the outlaw] “Cara de Cavalo”⁶ appears lying on the ground, his face riddled with bullets, his arms open, as if crucified. What absorbs the artist here is emotional content, now unequivocally worded. In an earlier Bólide, thought and emotion had overflowed its (always-magnificent) decorative and sensorial carapace to become an explicit love poem hidden inside it upon a blue cushion. Beauty, sin, outrage, and love give this young man’s art an emphasis that is new to Brazilian art. There is no point in moral reprimands. If you are looking for a precedent, perhaps it is this: Hélio is the grandson of an anarchist.⁷

—Originally published as “Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), June 26, 1966.

Notes

1. A samba school dancer; from the Portuguese word for “passos,” meaning “steps.”
2. Grêmio Recreativo Escola de Samba Estação Primeira de Mangueira, founded in 1928 on Mangueira Hill in Rio de Janeiro.
3. Vincent van Gogh, letter to Theo van Gogh, September 3, 1888, in *Van Gogh: A Self-Portrait, Letters Revealing His Life as a Painter*, ed. W. H. Auden (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963), p. 319.

4. According to Oiticica, “BÓLIDES were not actually an inaugurated art form: they are the seed or, better yet, the egg of all future environmental projects.” Hélio Oiticica, *O objeto na arte brasileira nos anos 60*. Written in New York, December 5, 1977, for the catalogue *O objeto na arte brasil nos anos 60* (São Paulo: Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, 1978).
5. According to Hélio Oiticica, “The discovery of what I call ‘parangolé’ signals a crucial point and defines a specific position within the theoretical progression of all my experiments with color-structure in space, especially insofar as it refers to a new definition of what the ‘plastic object’ (or, in other words, the work) may be within this same experience. . . . The word here serves the same purpose it did for Schwitters, for example, who invented ‘Merz’ and its derivatives (‘Merzbau’, etc.) to define a specifically experimental position [that is] basic to any theoretical or experiential comprehension of his entire work.” Hélio Oiticica, “Bases fundamentais para uma definição do ‘Parangolé,’” *Opinião 65* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1965).
6. “I knew Cara de Cavalo personally and I can say he was my friend although—to society—he was public enemy number one, wanted for bold crimes and robberies—what perplexed me then was the contrast between what I knew of him as a friend, someone to whom I talked within the context of everyday life, as one might to anyone else, and the image created by society, or the way he behaved in society and any other place. This tribute is an anarchic attitude toward all kinds of armed forces: police, army, etc. I make protest poems (in capes and boxes) that have more of a social meaning, but this one (for Cara de Cavalo) reflects an important ethical moment that was decisive for me, because it reflects an individual outrage against every type of social conditioning. In other words: violence is justified as a means for revolt but never as a means of oppression.” In: Hélio Oiticica, “Material para catálogo” [Whitechapel Gallery, London, 1969], typescript, partially published in the exhibition catalogue for the artist’s show at London’s Whitechapel Gallery from February 25 to April 6, 1969. See also, by the author, *O herói anti-herói e o anti-herói anônimo*, March 25, 1968.
7. Hélio Oiticica’s grandfather, José Rodrigues Leite Oiticica was a philologist, poet, translator, and editor of the anarchist newspaper *Ação direta*. He lectured on Portuguese philology at the University of Hamburg in 1929. Hélio’s father, José Oiticica Filho, an engineer, professor, and photographer, received a Guggenheim Foundation grant in 1947, and worked at the United States National Museum–Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., in 1948.

From the Dissolution of the Object to the Brazilian Avant-Garde

After the process of the dissolution of naturalism had reached a greater degree of depth, and representation became excluded from artistic meditations, and after Cubism had been digested by Mondrian and Objectivism swallowed up by Surrealism, a type of art emerged that was based upon the “interior model” whence Tachism or Art Informel had sprung, and the notion of space became a residue of that downfall; the most abstract (or at least most representative) possible residue—like an unsupported plane, or one supported by itself.

Lygia Clark was the first in Brazil to draw implications from this by attempting to unframe the painting, so that as it floated in real space, it would identify with that space—the ultimate reduction of all representational concepts in the visual world. From this step she moved on to others that led her to make the transition from flat pictorial surface to real space, where, by articulating hinged planes, she arrived at motion with her *Bichos* [Critters]. By doing away with the pictorial space of the plane, one created a thing, an “object” or “neo-object,” or an “artificial object” (in the domain of structural theorizations) or a “nonobject,” if we stick to the homegrown theories then expounded with great intelligence by Ferreira Gullar, or the fundamental Neo-Concretist intuition of the discovery of time, in Concretism’s formidable effort to define space or the simultaneous spatial concept of our age.¹

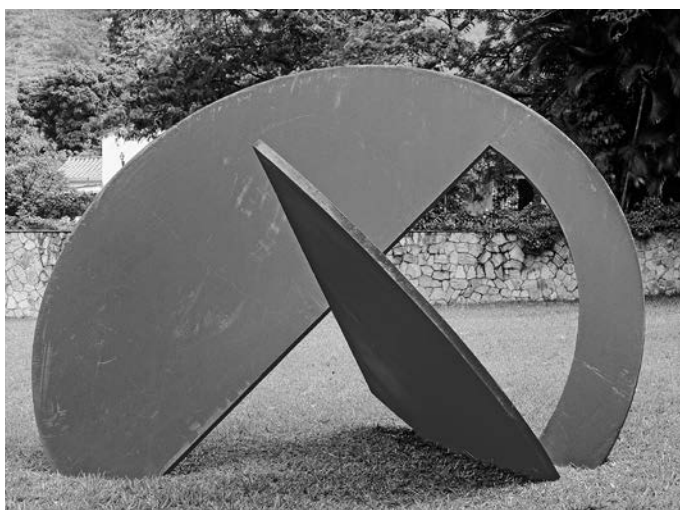
The great importance today of Neo-Concretism consists in aggregating time to highlight a foreign element in Concretism’s verbal, vocal, and visual *démarche*—an element charged with a certain dose of subjectivity. The most “concrete” expression of this movement was the Neo-Concrete ballet performed in Rio by Lygia Pape and others. Another one of its transcendental derivations was introduced by Clark and

her Bichos when she pointed out the need to reestablish a relationship with the other that had been lost ever since the work of art—within the domain of pure plasticism or neoplasticism—presented itself as unique in its solemn isolation. Herein lies the origin of the famous participation of the spectator in the work of art. If I single out Clark and the rest of her Neo-Concretist colleagues as the initiators of this participation, it is not to claim absolute priority in this movement for her and her comrades, but to note the absolute inner coherence of her investigations and thinking by the time she had arrived at the notion or need of a new relationship between artist and subject. In today's modern global culture or civilization the priorities for this or that are puerile pretensions. Everything that is born here or in Belo Horizonte or in São Paulo can be born in Japan or in France or in the United States. In fact, here as elsewhere there emerged within the intuitive domain of the arts a new primitive, primary conceptualization of reality that was defined by the brand new science of cybernetics, when it replaced the former relationship between subject and object with the object-organism complex. The object is re-created as a result of the relationship between organism-machine-organism. Cybernetics discovered (Columbus's egg)² that, like the machine, all organisms are closed. The construction of the art-object is the expression of the artist's intuitive or unconscious need to complete or close the cycle within which his creativity moves.

But let us return for a while to the plane unsecured in virtual space when, in its evolution, the phenomenon of so-called modern art eliminated the last traces of naturalism and also dissolved the old representational object of all former arts. Other contemporary artists, such as the North American sculptor Louise Nevelson, destroyed not only the plane but the planes of sculpture in order to create a new spatial relationship in their stead—one that defines itself in accordance with the innate relationship between interior and exterior. Like closets, their sculptures are windows that open onto spaces, residual spaces that are not landscapes because they are the framings—or remains—of the thing-making man outside (which is also in here), where magical forms may be glimpsed like continents of human knowledge or evil preserved by the centuries.

Also in painting, an artist such as [Lucio] Fontana committed a magical act upon the pictorial plane when he not only perforated the canvas but also slashed it with spatial meaning, "integrat[ing] [...] the illusory space contained in the painting with the real space that surrounds and runs through it."³ For him, it was not a matter of making "spatial" paintings or "spatial" sculptures, but of approaching the "spatial concept" of art in itself. In this concept, inevitably, painting and sculpture became fused or lost their respective conventional specificities. He expressly said during a symposium in 1955 that, "as a painter [...] I don't want to make a picture. I want to open up space, to create a new dimension for art, to connect it up with the cosmos as it lies infinitely outstretched, beyond the flat surface or the image." Regarding his repeated cuts on the canvas he said, "I did not want to 'decorate' a surface—on the contrary, I tried to smash the dimensions that limit it. A long way beyond the perforations, a newly won freedom awaits us: but, just as obviously, the end of art awaits us too."⁴ Art dissolves all of its boundaries, although it risks its own annihilation in this rupture.

One of the greatest though least well-known Brazilian sculptors, now quite justly rewarded with a foreign travel grant⁵ by a clear-sighted jury in the latest Salão, Amílcar de Castro is a protagonist of this struggle with or against the plane, the only remaining survivor in the shipwreck of Naturalism and the dissolution of the object. Castro came from Belo Horizonte, where he attended Guignard's small school in the Parque⁶ and



Amílcar de Castro. Untitled. n.d. Steel, 8' 6 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 12' 1 $\frac{11}{16}$ " \times 11' 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (260 \times 370 \times 342 cm). Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

graduated alongside Mary Vieira, who emigrated to Zurich in the 1950s. There, as a solitary young Brazilian artist, she grew in wisdom and knowledge under the wing of Max Bill, whose *Tripartite Unity* had carried off the grand prize for sculpture at the first edition of the São Paulo Bienal. Vieira is currently an independent artist working in the vein of Concretist plasticism, to which—to her credit—she has remained faithful, presenting a series of pieces in which Constructivist technical perfection denotes the high quality of Swiss industrial finish and execution. Based on abstract formal schemes such as rectangles or circles, these pieces allow for the most astonishing formal variations, at the discretion of the hand that caresses or shapes it. She also invites the spectator to handle her idea (which remains faithful to its matrix form). Its movement is not—nor should it be—discontinuous, so that the surfaces upon which it unfolds are not broken or disarrayed. Whereas Franz Weissmann—who also had a studio in Guignard's little school, as a master—later decided to hammer the aluminum and corrugated iron surfaces of his breathtaking, luminous planes, Mary Vieira—who was initiated into sculpture with him—does not allow the metal to be violated; on the contrary, she wants it to be fondled and caressed. She starts off with separate stems that are strictly identical in thickness as well as equidistant, so that, in touching the stems, one arrives at surfaces united by sinuous or continuous outlines of extreme fineness. Vieira intends to industrialize her creations so as to divest them of the work of art's aristocratic unity, thus making them fit the average pocketbook as salable objects—a fine proposition.

Amílcar de Castro also comes from a Concretist background, but in Rio de Janeiro. In his dialogue or monologue with the plane, he broke the situational limits of sculpture and, in his timid, quiet way, transformed his works into self-directed objects free of pedestals or even bases—the fateful limitation of every representational sculpture. Whereas Clark freed her paintings from the frame, Castro (and Weissmann, during his Concretist period) freed their sculptures from any need for a base. Their pieces are valid from all sides, in all positions. They require no privileged angles or sites in order to appear.

He began with the material plane—with iron—for an apparently modest spatial adventure that was actually filled with metaphysical implications. Vieira gives us a

series of pieces that require bases upon which their forms may evolve. The relationships established between them and the subject are ludic—they enchant us like privileged toys. From this perspective, Vieira’s art bears a very close relationship to Op art. In turn, Amílcar’s works are invitations to meditation rather than to playfulness. What is specific to his operational *démarche* is that it is not based on anything a priori but on a vague drawing on paper that he only later opens up and develops into the flat square, circle, or rectangle; he does not construct violently; he does not construct in reality. He obeys a mysterious whole that does not reside in any a priori. Once the plane has been wounded or cut or opened up, it is the space created by this that leads him forward, as if heeding the call of a biological or organic destiny in search of three-dimensionality. In his rigorous art, this is not the result of a previously given constructive or geometric scheme; rather, it comes from a process of prospection and discovery. From an initial square or circle its march unfolds in an endless ideal spiral. Everything is right in there, including the keenest aspirations of the artist’s imagination or gut. As is the case with other like-minded artists who make up his contemporary family, Castro’s plane is thus a seed for the discovery of the new dimensions of man’s existence in this age of perennial boundlessness.

Originally published as “Da dissolução do objeto ao vanguardismo brasileiro,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), June 18, 1967.

Notes

1. Ferreira Gullar, “Teoria do não-objeto,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), November 21/December 20, 1960. Reprinted many times, see Glória Ferreira, ed., *Brasílian Contemporary Art: Documents and Critical Texts /Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: documentos y críticas* (Rio de Janeiro/Santiago de Compostela: MinC/Dardo, 2009).
2. “Columbus’s egg” refers to a significant achievement or idea (like Columbus’s voyages to the Americas) that seems easy after the fact. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_of_Columbus.
3. Lucio Fontana quoted in Damián Carlos Bayón, *Adventures in Modern Hispano-American Art: Painting, Kinetic and Action Arts*, vol. 1, trans. Galen Greaser (Austin: unknown publisher, 1973), p. 108.
4. Lucio Fontana quoted in Gilbert Brownstone and Enrico Crispolti, *Lucio Fontana* (Paris: Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1970), p. 8.
5. XVI Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna (1967).
6. Founded in the 1940s, the Escola de Belas Artes (School of fine arts) de Belo Horizonte, now known as the Escola Guignard in homage to its first director, the artist Alberto da Veiga Guignard. Amílcar de Castro directed the school from 1974 to 1977.

From American Pop to Dias, the *Sertanejo*¹

Today’s art, whether made here or elsewhere, in Paris, New York, or in Campina Grande (where we went to the opening of an “Art Museum”² that is yet another incentive courtesy of Assis Chateaubriand),³ is extroverted, impertinent, and unaesthetic. That is to say, it is apprehensive about accusations of being hermetic, aristocratic, noncommunicative, or alienated. Terrifically competitive with the mass communications media—among them film and its variant, television, which hold first place—poor painting and sculpture also wanted to reach the great public. And here they are, borrowing the techniques of mechanical reproduction wherever they can find them, so as not to be expelled from the circuit. For this very reason, the visual arts of today sacrifice the old abstract and formal values intrinsic to the mere desire to inform, to communicate.

The American artists at the very forefront of the avant garde, in the name of the vigorous savagery of an ultramodern mass civilization, were the first to abandon the

ancient, noble artisanal traditions of painting and sculpture in order to reach the level of comic strips, of the poster, and of other mass communication processes.

A [Tom] Wesselman and a [Roy] Lichtenstein, a [Claes] Oldenburg, an [Andy] Warhol and a [George] Segal, a [James] Rosenquist and a [Robert] Indiana are not frightened by banality, and accept the powerful competition of vulgarity and kitsch. For them, it is a matter of calmly and undramatically verifying what is available in order to produce for “normal” consumers rather than for aesthetes. When Wesselman, a powerful artist with an extremely natural sensibility, affixes a ready-made (not painted by him), half-open, pink, thick-lipped mouth-device onto the appropriate place in one of his “great American nudes,” showing off her gleaming white teeth, the nude is a joyous body on display at the market, and the whiteness of her teeth like advertisements for some brand new brand of toothpaste. The other presents a store window of sparkingly appetizing cakes, as mouth-watering as the ads for attractive salads and tidbits in *Life* or in the *Saturday Evening Post*. All these artists produce accessories for the positive hero; in the optimism that lulls them, above all else they highlight the positive virtues of the products, as does, incessantly and at every moment, the great advertising machine in a frantic and insatiable eagerness to intensify mass consumption.

But in countries like ours, Pop cannot have the same purpose, unless it is to artists who are attracted only to the novelty of the grand media to be deployed in a competition that has been won beforehand by the metropolitan protagonists. They learn to use such mediums just as well as the North American followers, within the limits of a lesser scale of available technical and mechanical resources. They become virtuosos, precious and perfectly up-to-date with fashionable procedures, but what they invent is detail, what they add is caprice. They wind up as lesser artists, ultimately producing art for art's sake, or antiart for antiart's sake. They are either mundane or, at best, archaizing Dadaists. However, not all of them are like this, for when the language or vehicles of Pop seize them, they possess a native ingenuity, an essential set of themes, an incoercible way of being that does not grant them the gratuitousness necessary to embrace any advertising cause with snap, sparkle, and naturalness. It is only that, for example, young artists like [Rubens] Gerchman—with his permanent indictment of the poverty of his home town [of Rio de Janeiro] and his extroverted love for neon-lit bars frequented by common people—or Antônio Dias do not do things with the advertising satisfaction of consumerism for the sake of consumerism in mind. The difference is that the “Popists” of underdevelopment choose for whom to produce their work; hence, for example, the passionate nature of the work of Antônio Dias (see, for example, plate on p. 95). For this very reason, he already occupies a place of his own in young Brazilian art and has his battle station set up along the international frontlines. His drawing narrates but, above all, it exposes. It has the concreteness of facts. Dias was never a member of any Abstractionist school; he came directly from the popular images that surrounded his childhood world. Yet it is also the case that his perception of the world is not as formal as it is particularly genetic and organic.

Within a concise comic strip structure—of a, shall we say, temporary nature—he proceeds as in a game, I know not whether liminal or unrestrained (unless it is unconsciously so), at any rate contradictory or dialogic, between the allusive (a piece of a headboard) and the frank (sex), between the partial and the whole. In his work, figuration is at once illustrative and plastic: not in vain are narrative, discourse, and word as indispensable to his painting as are its rigor and frontal formality.

He feels a disalienating need for the sentiments that drive him—the drama of life; ultimately the drama of contemporary man, whether brother or enemy—to

be surrounded and defined by symbols, yes, but translucent and deciphered ones, devoid of opalescent outer coverings, that is—of already conventionalized signs. (In this sense, there is something elementary about his writing, about the directness of Pop's mechanical, antistylistic writing.) This is why he makes abundant use of the clichés of popular rhetoric that compose the imagery of colored lithographs from Casa Sucena,⁴ of almanacs; for instance, the sign of the red heart, so prominent in religious iconography (saints, hearts of Jesus) or the ludic iconography of playing cards (the suit of hearts).

In scenes from his living theater there is always a sense of the suburban⁵ living room crammed full of furniture, of armchairs upholstered in red velvet and studded with yellow metal buttons, and an enthroned "Heart of Jesus" facing a television niche. Such environments are inevitably allusive to the radio or television soap operas whose atmosphere of banality the artist respects, although the narrative takes on a solemn rhythm within the quasi-hieratic structure that characterizes his drawing. (There is some unsuspected spiritual demand in this young *sertanejo* with the thin, sparse beard.)

Dias takes the signs where he finds them, whether in the color lithographs and prints available at all the Casas Sucenas out there, or in comic books but, especially, in the sensationalistic newspaper reporting of the mainstream press. His ideal is to achieve clarity without the subterfuge of information from photographs that run in the daily news. In order to explain his message he dismisses no medium; hence his recourse to words or sentences among the images in his drawings and the liturgical colors of his paintings. His painting might be a sort of antiphon, with vignettes (although of inverted proportions with regard to letters and images) that admit no mistakes; first and foremost, the message must be literally explained. To him, shadows were not meant to conceal or render contours indistinct, but to highlight things.

This young man knows only one form of purism—that of naked violence without subterfuge. To him, heraldry itself is reducible to the explicit information of a road sign that indicates the nearby topographical west (the "emblem for the assassin squad").

Instead of the myths of positive comic book heroes, Dias prefers the vulgarity of radio soap operas. Ultimately, the comic strip's linear narrative is vegetarian nourishment. For his thirst and his hunger, only the vulgarity of the lowest level of reality, or the substance of flesh, of blood, of this insurmountable visceral trinity—in man and in woman, the genital organ in one, the genital organ in the other, and the heart in between. He abhors (or despises—I never asked him) the Supermen and the Batmen—all the mythology of impotence sublimated in omnipotence that populates comic strips. In terrestrial, underdeveloped, peasant style, he sticks to the permanently living facts of the day in the crime pages.

Within his closed environment—a room in a cheap boardinghouse—the bed is always too big, with blood-stained, diagonally positioned pillows (rather than the immaculately clean new ones in Claes Oldenburg's made-for-advertising bedroom), disheveled bedcovers, violated women, revolvers on cushions in the half-open drawers of little bedside tables, and a profusion of icons—hearts, thick vaginal labia, mountainous buttocks with unexpected fissures, the virile muscle seemingly protected by cushioned sheaths, bloody daggers, and all the paraphernalia of crime and passion at the suburban cultural level of radio. This is truly no painter of fashions. With him, it is not a matter of the erotic *delicatessen* of the very latest model of [filmmaker Michelangelo] Antonioni's bored and refined society. With him, love, crime, passion, violence, rape, and sensuality are all taken from the front pages of the tabloids.

The slim, trim [Brazilian] northeastern that is Antônio Dias fears any decline of elevated meaning in worldly concessions. His artistic (and moral) thought eludes essence so as not to escape the substantial. The artist has modesties. He is not interested in scandal; however, he is interested in truth—the truth of substances. His art consists of trying to apprehend it unvarnished. He makes this art through Gestalt-like exertions (as open forms hungry for self-completion) and through thorough descriptions. He does not give us a journalistic commentary, as in American Pop but, rather, a raw slice of life.

In Dias's world, life requires its own space. He endows it with architecture of extreme rigor founded on symmetry, like the formalist, liturgical art of the Byzantine masters. In the abstract definition of an ideal space, he inserts another structure and, within it, other smaller structures—cubes, spheres, boxes, and sacks—in which the cauldron of substances bubbles. Therein burns the vital chemistry, with its odors and fats, its fermentations and greases, its gases and secretions. It might be said that all those structures, coverings, boxes, lids, are there to contain an infernal machine that is going to explode—life. And explode it shall, the more contained it is within the small anarchist's can in which the painter has crammed it.

In his painting, the volume, the three-dimensionality is not fictitious, given by pictorial tricks and perspectives; it is real, in relief from whose borders flow every organic expedient and secretion—blood, excrement, sperm, orgasms, pus, and hormones, with their smells and their colors. In drawing solid frameworks of beams in red, black, and yellow bars and planes, something unusually immaterial bursts forth in whites and in spaces, crowded in by an excess of things—the sovereign idea. Between the sovereign idea and the irrepressible material, Dias's art or antiart is an intrinsically lacerated one, and the face it offers us is pathetic and frank, cynical and religious, permanently condemned to never finding peace. Dias and his images propose no solution other than to constantly revive in him, in us, and in others the perplexity of the world and the unruliness of life.

Originally published as "Do pop americano ao sertanejo Dias," *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), October 29, 1967.

Notes

1. A *sertanejo* is a small farmer or inhabitant of small towns that extend from the north of the state of Minas Gerais to the south of the state of Pará and encompassing the countryside of all the states in Northeastern Brazil and practically the whole of the state of Piauí.
2. Museu Assis Chateaubriand (MAC), Universidade Estadual da Paraíba (UEPB).
3. Francisco de Assis Chateaubriand Bandeira de Melo was the owner of the *Diários Associados* newspaper, radio, and television media conglomerate. In 1947 he founded the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP) with the Italian journalist and art critic Pietro Maria Bardi, and was responsible for the emergence of television in Brazil with the inauguration of the TV Tupi television station in 1951.
4. A store specializing in religious articles.
5. Pedrosa's use of the adjective "suburban" in Brazilian Portuguese differs considerably from the American understanding of the word. See n. 4 on p. 296.

Anna Bella Geiger

Here is a printmaker who is almost dissatisfied—an unprecedented fact—with her most honorable *métier*. Initiated in metal and in etching like so many young Brazilians, Anna Bella found her artistic calling in printmaking (see, for example, plate on p. 94). Anna Bella truly discovered this vocation, for she did not make of printmaking, like so many people in Brazil, merely a fashionable activity. She started out as a printmaker in a time when the various modes of Abstractionism predominated—above all, what was called “lyrical abstraction.” Tachism seduced her and she surrendered—legitimately, in fact—to the search for stain effects, for textures that the metal plate, acids, powders, and chance so generously produce, instigate, or insinuate.

Such exercises—if one persists in them—grow dull. But when they are integrated into the artist-printmaker’s practice and experiments, they enrich them. After her experiment with abstraction she slowly and ingenuously realized that she, too, was “showing off in the kitchen” without knowing it, like Mr. Jourdain.¹ Today when she uses etching, she does so to attack in the metal some idea or sentiment afflicting her heart.

Anna Bella made a discovery on her own account: that the greater reality is that of the body (not in vain does she have a strong maternal sense). In spite of her evidently introspective nature, idealistic if not mystical, the flesh offers her a whole mystery to unravel; the living body is like the workings of a clock: made up of viscera that move inside it. Even now, they are her engrossing characters. In moving from abstraction to viscera, the artist moved from *tachiste* gratuitousness to the functionality of in-depth research into organic reality. From *tachiste* redundancies to the so to speak histological function of her research, many of Anna Bella’s current prints give us impressive images, whether, for example, of the insides of genital organs, or of the mystery of how embryos are formed. At this point, she is not interested in the formal unity of printmaking, or even its unified composition or the decorative aspects of color. To her, color is now an accessory between red, which is blood, and the grays and the browns, which are like the tissues of which embryos are made. The white field of the paper invades the field of the engraving itself, and the latter’s parts tend to separate themselves as if in an operation of reproduction by fission, to gain autonomy in real space and act within it like other living beings. In attempting to define the materiality of the human body’s viscera, Anna Bella essentially seeks to re-create them, to give them their own, autonomous experience, and to show that multifaceted life perpetuates itself in the dissociation from the body itself.

But does this not insinuate—with possibly Baudelairean inspiration—that creative vitality proceeds inexorably in organic decomposition as the only authentic or faithful image of perpetual motion?

—Originally published as “Anna Bella Geiger,” *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), February 6, 1968.

Notes

1. Pedrosa refers here to M. Jourdain, the foolish, social-climbing protagonist of Molière’s *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (1670).

Antonio Manuel. On Antonio Manuel's Presentation at the Opening of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, as a Work of Art¹

Mário Pedrosa— In doing what you did, your gesture of presenting yourself as a work of art, you dismantled—you showed that the exhibition regulations don't have the slightest importance. And as for the fact that you weren't accepted, that you didn't fit in with the rules—what exists is life. So life is greater than the rules.

Antonio Manuel— You also say that art concerns nature—that it preexists in nature. There's a sense of that, too.

Mário Pedrosa— Exactly. Of course, the artist is always the one who's never out of touch with nature. The engineer—that is, the others—they lose touch. But the artist is the one who doesn't lose touch, not even at another level, within machines. He sees things as a direct relationship—between himself and the world, himself and reality, himself and nature.

Antonio Manuel— And Mário, this was also a personal attitude; I felt as if I'd killed off a thousand prejudices, a thousand academic things.

Mário Pedrosa— No doubt, sure. With this, you furthered the entire process of the art of stripping away that is done—antiacademic art, absolutely simple art—you brought the exhibition to a masterly conclusion that is typical of art itself: you dissolved the mystique, the myth of making art this way, without an artwork. Afterwards, you returned to the origins. When you put sperm in a woman's egg, it's not just the source of life. You returned to the origins, to the source of the ego's relationship to the world, to the source of wisdom, of consciousness, of creation. Yesterday they were saying you had put hay in the *salão da Bússola*.² Today that imparts consequence to everything you've done—including Arte Povera, art that dissolves itself in the moment. You set an example. Throughout this process, you've been extraordinarily exemplary. You made it to the end of this entire process, of a model for a type of art that dissolves in itself—in action: creative, and dissolving itself. The others always stay within a sort of representation—the representation of an idea. You were the very fulfillment of an idea—the conclusion of an idea. That's beautiful; it's enormously meaningful. It's brilliant. You presented a work—an act—that is at the same time irresistible and irrepressible. And no one can impose exclusion. No rule can prevent a work from being made, or an act from being performed. You tore down all the exhibition's rules, the whole bureaucracy of art.

"It's no use." "I won't allow it." "You can't present that." Well . . . you may not be allowed to show the work of art, but it's made! It's here! Regardless of whether it's hung in the exhibition. I feel this to be incredibly important, more important than anything else.

And it is this whole chapter of activity-creativity that is the fundamental thing in the world of today—a world of protest, of rejecting the society of mass consumption, massification, mass culture. By the way, for the last [São Paulo] Bienal I was going to propose modern art, then postmodern art, then environmental art. Two types of environmental art: existential—the type that is made in Brazil, because we do not have technology—and abstract environmental art, the art of technology. After that, in addition, comes activity-creativity. Take charge of the world. Create the world of the future. Create a new situation of men for men.



Antonio Manuel. *O corpo é a obra* (The body is the work). 1970. Performance at Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro

Beyond that, it is absolutely negative; all negativity is creative. It breaks all taboos, leads to the end of all taboos; it breaks with everything at the level of ethics, at the sexual and moral levels—at the creative level.

Hugo Denizart— Antonio, your attitude is so creative that it's as if the very discussion of the thing opens up perspectives . . . an opening . . .

Mário Pedrosa— That's right. It transcends the level of a purely aesthetic debate—based on a work. It is life itself. We are no longer discussing a work that is “made,” but a creative act. This is eminently avant-garde art. It's an aspect of the cultural revolution—one in which taboos are broken.

The fact that you did this today upsets all of art's perspectives: the aesthetic debate, the ethical debate, the

debate on art. It disputes everything, and with enormous authenticity. What Antonio is doing is the experimental exercise of freedom. He's not trying to dominate others. He's saying, “This is how it is.” Total authenticity, which is creative authenticity.

Antonio Manuel— And I felt a euphoria . . . a freedom.

Mário Pedrosa— That's true, euphoria when you create something. Freedom and creativity are two concepts that go hand in hand. Antonio creates and shows all the consequences of an artistic attitude, of an avant-garde attitude, of creative art, authentic art—what art is expected to be. He accomplished this in a very simple—yet at the same time, radical—way. There's no point in making garbage art, Arte Povera, conceptual art—all those art forms. It's fine to make them, but he went to the heart of these problems, showing how there's a fundamental incompatibility between man and ego, between human beings and the society of mass consumption—the oppressive society—that prevents art from being a legitimate activity. So this whole thing of Antonio's is just fabulous—the rest is kid stuff. Hence the importance of the fact. Creativity is the most revolutionary thing that exists. Creative activity tears man away from his everyday routine; it always posits a new dimension for man.

Alex Varela— I believe that everyone who was there at the exhibition felt as if they were doing it themselves. Everyone who applauded was taking off their own clothes.

Mário Pedrosa— Precisely, precisely, a power of communication above mass communication, above information theory. That is the only new thing opposing this consumer society. So the modern age is, precisely, an age in search of the final authenticity of things, of attitudes and such, in order to break away from the mystification of mass consumer society—and even from mass culture—because the cultural revolution is

the only thing that stands against mass culture today. The existence of mass culture is based on urban folklore. It's an average—the average for the average public of that time. No one exists individually. There is an average—an average of everything—that has a formidable power of communication. But it's not authentic. It's an intermediary, a mediation. It's only authentic as a function of an acceptance of the immediate, of everyday life. So art is the only way to break with this taboo, to present problems in their final authenticity.

So an act such as yours, Antonio, is an act in itself. Communication doesn't take place through media. Media doesn't communicate with others—the fact itself does—the irreducible, fundamental unit of man who communicates with the other. The relationship—the fundamental communication underlying all this—is part of the total cultural revolution against the status quo—against the establishment. Hence the enormous, transcendent importance of the fact. Art is the only thing that stands against the entropy of the world, fallen in the homogeneous state of death; that has always been art's way, but it needs to return to its roots, and to total divestment. You put everything else on an aesthetic level. The whole problem of Arte Povera, etc.—that, too, remains at the aesthetic level because it fails to bring together the ethical level and the creative level. You have posited the ethical problem quite splendidly. All of today's art—every activity, all creativity. The ethical problem emerges in the most astonishing way—because it only has meaning when you start out by tackling the ethical problem. All the art that doesn't really propose doing anything—that's just an attitude, an act; but what does the act mean? It is anti-everyday life. So what keeps it at the aesthetic level is exclusion. Whereas in your stance, Antonio, all of the elements are present, and the ethical aspect becomes crucial.

—Originally published as “Antonio Manuel. Sobre a apresentação de Antônio Manuel na abertura do Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna, como obra de arte. Conversa entre Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Manuel, Alex Varela e Hugo Denizart, 1970,” in *Exposição de Antonio Manuel. De 0 a 24h nas bancas de jornal. O jornal, Tema* supplement (Rio de Janeiro), July 15, 1973.

Notes

1. This conversation between Mário Pedrosa, Antonio Manuel, Alex Varela, and Hugo Denizart took place at the home of Mário Pedrosa two hours after Manuel presented his piece *O corpo é a obra* (The body is the work), in which he appeared in the nude, at Rio de Janeiro's Museu de Arte Moderna, at the opening of the 1970 edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna. Transcribed and edited by the artist Lygia Pape, the conversation was published on July 15, 1973, in the *Tema* supplement of *O jornal*, as an integral part of the article *Exposição de Antonio Manuel. De 0 a 24h nas bancas de jornal* (Exhibition by Antonio Manuel. From 0 to 24 h at newspaper stands), which took up all of the supplement's pages with various texts and images of the works that would have been presented in his MAM/RJ exhibition, canceled by the museum's board of directors for fear of reprisals by the military regime then in power in Brazil.
2. Antonio Manuel participated in the Salão da Bússola (Bússola exhibition) (MAM-RJ, 1969) with an installation titled *Soy loco por ti* (I am crazy for you), made up of *Dieffenbachia seguine* plants (considered to be amulets of protection in Brazilian folk culture), country-style music, a bed of straw, and a procedure in which the spectator used a rope to activate a black panel that revealed another panel upon which was a red map of Latin America.

Camargo's Sculpture

The art of Sérgio Camargo, the young Brazilian artist who has already made an international name for himself, is hard to classify regarding its genre. He is undoubtedly a sculptor, but where is the volume, the three-dimensionality of his sculpture? Of what are its dimensions made? Where is the modeling of his material to be found?

Why or where is space defined—his enveloping or surrounding space? In general, its destination is the wall, as a relief. With what function? It is more of an interval, like a measure of time, than a component spatial measurement. As we know, it captures light—and therefore, shadow—like a cathedral facade, à la Monet.

Might it then be somewhat akin to a painting? But in order to be that (we are moving increasingly farther away from sculpture) it would have to present something like a wall, a facade. It is not a proud structure in itself: the difficulty with Camargo's work is that it is never abstract. It is always concrete, though far from the strict canons of "Concrete art."

It is always structure, although the force or forces that define it are deliberately connotative rather than significant. There is a relationship between relief and surface (or field) that ties Camargo's work to a structure that does not tolerate surrounding spaces or external ambiances. This intolerance is what makes it enchanting and invites us to discover the spring or mystery of such enchantment. It is like a toy whose internal mechanism the child hopes to discover. Woe to him if he does.

The Camarguan structures are not a sum of forms, nor are they a theory of figures and images that move or, rather, pullulate arrhythmically. Signification and contours are denied them by limits that are (strictly speaking) indefinite. The discontinuous surfaces tend to dematerialize so that real matter itself—what they are made of—may expand and fill these structures with something immaterial like gas or air—that is, light. It is the white in which the reliefs are painted that captures, captivates, and

apprehends matter. The latter is given a sort of patina but, paradoxically, does not allow itself to be defined by extension or outline, and the totality becomes mere memory—an aesthetic connotation. The shadows come with the light, reliefs that are nothing exchange the visual for the tactile, and the work regains its permanently ambivalent status as game and structure, touchable and untouchable, limit and unlimit, light and shadow. These visual structures by Camargo are a negation of form. Their parts do not actually make up the whole. Contrary to what one might think, matter is more present than contour, although the element that produces it—that fills it with substance—is light, rather than the solids conjoined by parameters that determine the field. It is idea—not form—that conducts the formal structures of Camargo's art. Hence its permanent openness and its enigmatic power of communication.



Sérgio Camargo. *Edge*. 1962. Painted wood on carved wood, 16 3/4 × 10 5/8 × 4" (42.5 × 27 × 10.2 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase

—Originally published as "A escultura de Camargo," in *Catálogo exposição relevos e esculturas (1963–1975)* (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna, 1975).

Miró Among Poets

If, among poets, Miró was always one of them, it was not because he dedicated himself to poetry or even to literature. He must have been the least lettered of painters, with no love for ideas, and even less for theory. Indeed, it may be said that in his work as well as intellectually, Miró nourished himself on chance encounters—on life's crumbs, like the birds—and that he always kept his feet firmly planted on the ground, treading with the heavy, tranquil steps of the Catalan peasant.

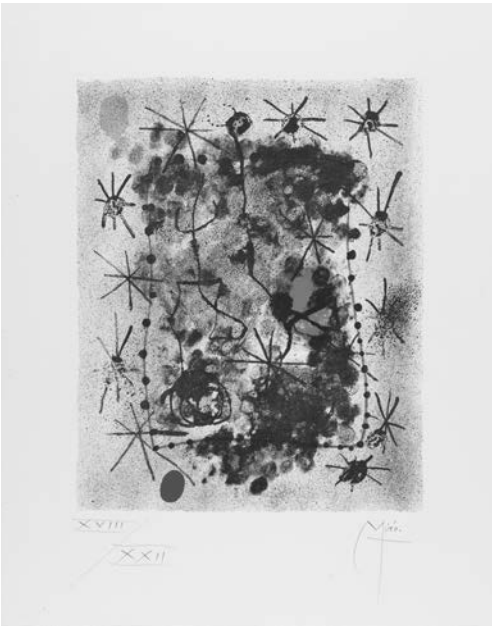
And yet, from the moment he arrived in Paris, he joined the poets of the Cubist generation and sat down with other, younger ones at the table of Surrealism. He signed manifestos, frequented cafés, listened to discussions, and went to bed at night on an empty stomach. Hunger tormented him, but so did creative work. “The automatic writing” in his canvases of the period—with “an innocence and a freedom which have not been surpassed”¹—is at least partly the effect of “hallucinations from hunger,”² as well as of the superb theorizing of the Surrealist Manifesto.

In any event, historical coincidence eventually launched Miró as a new and instinctive force that collided with Cubism and Neoplasticism and inoculated them with poetry. On the other side of the Atlantic, André Breton received Miró's *Constellations* series in installments, between January 21, 1940, and September 12, 1941. “It would seem that an absolutely pure and impervious tensile reflex impelled Miró, at this hour of extreme anguish which encompassed the whole period of production of his ‘Constellations,’ to unfurl the full range of his voice. So his voice rang out in every direction, not only outside this world but outside time as well, in any direction where it might echo most resoundingly and most enduringly, thus joining the loud chorus of the most inspired voices of all time.”³

Can it be that it was only at this point that everyone became aware of what history had made of the Catalan painter? Indeed, at the moment “of extreme anguish,” André Breton (who would be saluted in death by [French writer and critic] Jean Paulhan “as a hero of the Western world”),⁴ elevates his tone to designate Miró, with his “innocence and a freedom which have not been surpassed,” as “the most ‘surrealist’ of us all.”⁵ But the poet did not feel this was enough, for what he discerned from afar was, first and foremost, that “his voice rang out . . . joining the loud chorus of the most inspired voices of all time.” The problems of that time have been largely overcome, yet in speaking of Joan Miró, Breton is perfectly attuned to history.

Miró recognizes the importance of his Surrealist education, as well as the need to “go beyond the visual object and achieve poetry.”⁶ Yet there was never a question of cozying up to ideologies, even when the Surrealist poets, or others, pressured him to do so. Miró followed his own path and never strayed from it. Poetry is not an accomplishment—it inhabits him. And nature is openly there to teach him something every day. He wholly surrenders to this apprenticeship, his body sensitive to all provocations. In his youth he surely learned something in villages and in schools from teachers and friends, but apart from this, what does he know? Almost nothing, or very little. In fact, it is to the physical and sensory shelter of his entire being that one must connect the knowledge he acquires—especially what he learned through life itself, rather than in books. At first, he persisted in the tricks of his painter's trade; and not only as a painter for, since his early days, he has aspired to do everything, to know everything about the visual arts. And he works not only with his brush but with his arms, his hands, his fingers, his whole body stretched out on the ground.

Reserved for “great art,” oil painting is usually separated from other, “lesser” artistic activities. In Miró's case, this is impossible, for he practices all the arts—ceramics



Joan Miró. Untitled from Constellation of André Breton. 1958. Lithograph, comp.: 11 13/16 × 9 7/16" (30 × 24 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Pierre Matisse

and sculpture, which, as was previously the custom, he combines with several modalities of the graphic arts: engraving, "biting in" with delicate or nearly bloody teeth; woodcuts; deep black lithographs with pallid transparencies. These cannot be treated as a minor mode of his work—it may well constitute the revolution Miró made in the static conventions of old academicism. There are no genre differences for him; he is painter and printmaker at once: "I am always working on a hundred different things at the same time. And this holds good even for different branches of art: painting, engraving, lithography, sculpture, ceramics."⁷

Everything depends upon the act in which he finds himself engaged, whether it be the gesture of the paintbrush sliding across the

canvas or that of a point, a chisel, a burin that lacerates and grooves the resistant surface. In this sense, his case is surely not unique; look at Picasso, who ran the gamut of all the experiments of his century in time and space.

Miró represents another viewpoint. If none of the arts he practices dominates the others—and not only because their qualities are of equal value—it is also, and above all, because Miró ascribes the same importance to them. From this perspective, the subjects of his painting and prints do not count. In other artists, subjects change or disappear incessantly, at the discretion of taste, period, fashion, or new materials, but for Miró, what matters is situating himself at another, deeper level—that of the fundamental need to communicate. From his earliest canvases—*Potager à l'âne* [Vegetable garden with donkey] (1918), for example—Miró is interested in all types of two-dimensional representation. "As I work on a canvas I fall in love with it, love that is born of slow understanding." Why this "slow understanding"? Because, Miró tells us, "of the nuances—concentrated—which the sun gives." And so it is that the need for a "slow understanding" appears to us, in the countless collected details, in this "concentrated," great wealth of nuances. There is "joy at learning to understand a tiny blade of grass in a landscape." Having convinced himself that this tiny blade of grass is as beautiful as a tree or a mountain, he also recognizes that "apart from the primitives and the Japanese, almost everyone overlooks this which is so divine."⁸ Thus, for twenty-five years now, affinities that cannot be just a matter of chance have been signaled.

This brings to mind primitive peoples and the Japanese, within a culture that is totally other, inside a vastly different sensibility. By virtue of his great visionary power—his imagination—in the course of a lengthy process, the young Catalan artist reduces everything in nature and the cosmos to *signs*. His art eventually transforms itself into a preverbal caricature, for it is situated within that indefinable zone in which signifiers are unable to keep up with meanings. In statements collected by

[writer] Pierre Volboudt, Miró says: “The reality of a universe of signs and symbols in which figures pass from one realm to another . . . is like a secret language made up of magic phrases, a language that comes *before words themselves*, from a time when the things men imagined and intuited were more real and true than what they saw, when this was the only reality.”⁹ One might thus believe that, to Miró, these signs, far from being the pure products of his imagination, belong instead to a sort of “secret language,” to “magic phrases that come before words”—a concept that equally presupposes the religious and aesthetic traditions of Chinese and Japanese calligraphers. Few European artists reveal such an affinity with the East in the relations between line and sign, space and motion, or the physical and spiritual appropriateness of creative work.

Many poets became friends with Miró and grew knowledgeable about his work and his technical procedures. Let us not forget their shared initiation into Surrealism, into the mysteries of the unconscious and automatic writing. As early as 1924, the painters in the group adopted the habit of presenting their “ramblings” to their poet, writer, and intellectual friends. They set about discovering—or better yet, deciphering—in canvases and drawings the acts and demons of the unconscious, just like the characters who appear or disappear in the painted scene, according to the obscure laws of Freudian cosmology. From Breton to the youngest of the poets, all the Surrealists participated in these labors of decodification.

Raymond Queneau, during a period in which he had broken with Breton, wrote a book about Miró in 1949 that still reflects the atmosphere of the early days [*Joan Miró; ou, le poète préhistorique*]. Here the relationship is inverted: Queneau is the critic and Miró the poet. This allowed the author to raise the very important question of a reading of the set of Mironian signs. For the first time, he speaks of a “miro-glyphics” and “mihieroglyphics” dictionary, beyond a repertory of signs, defining all of Miró’s art as writing—that of the “Prehistoric Poet.”¹⁰

Starting with the Mironian signs of the early periods, Queneau dedicates himself to a detailed refutation of Surrealism in Miró’s painting. Queneau notes that one does not find in it “clocks made of flesh” or “sewing machines bicycling down the Avenue de l’Opéra,” but instead pictures that “represent” (the author’s quotation marks) “a dog that barks at the moon, a hand catching a bird, a seated woman,” etc.¹¹ Therefore, Miró merely used “certain Surrealist methods.” Even if all this is debatable, though amusing (as when Queneau argues with Breton about whether a tiny object in the *Paysage Catalan* [Catalan landscape] represents “mud” or “color spilled from the tube”), the author is undertaking a serious labor of discovering the real enough relationships between Chinese ideograms and Miró’s painting, another kind of “writing one must know how to decipher.” In this regard, he seeks to allay his readers’ fears by specifying that “Miró’s graphic originality is in no way diminished by this comparison (regarding how he treats script) with the evolution of Chinese ideograms.”¹² Why, then, speak of “diminishment” in these comparisons between the treatment of script and ideograms? As a painter, Miró establishes a very specific and very profound relationship with nature, or, if we prefer, with the nature of reality. The secret of Sino-Japanese calligraphy results from the sign’s predominance over nature. There has always been ideographic writing, before the eyes of the calligraphers, and even (I dare say) before noncalligraphic artists. To them, nature is not an infinite and unfinished book of new images but, rather, an inexhaustible album of signs. Chinese and Japanese children *know* before they see; they learn their “life science” from the time they receive the little wooden sticks with which they will eat or write; probably also before they really see through direct perception. Even before they have the

perceptive experience, let us say, of the mountain, the rice paddy, or the rickshaw, they are already familiar with the ideograms for water, star, or house. One may safely say that from time immemorial, the Japanese calligraphic artist (and even today's abstract calligrapher) encounters an ideogram. I don't know if the same thing occurs with European artists; although they also live in very old countries, their stocks of sensory images and knowledge cannot help but be archaeological, in a way. We are far—very far—from true reality. In our Western world, even the most modern painting becomes necessarily conceptual and, if it wishes to achieve maximum freedom, it must free itself from the data of perception and the influence of nature. To the author of *Prehistoric Poet*, the true meaning of painting is freedom from “a subjective world communicable by a ‘sort’ of colored writing laid out on a flat and generally rectangular surface.”¹³ But is it still justifiable today to keep Miró's multiform work within these boundaries?

Miró himself does not readily admit these limitations. Around 1961, he confessed to his friend Rosamond Bernier that he felt “a very great inner tension to reach the emptiness I wanted.” He was then at work on his three great blue canvases. His language and his attitude bore considerable resemblance to those of the calligrapher at the moment of the irrecoverable gesture. “It was like preparing the celebration of a religious rite or entering a monastery.” This “entering a monastery” may surprise Westerners, who will be even more surprised to know that this is no matter of mystical practices, and that Miró is referring to Japanese archers “getting themselves into the right state” to prepare for competitions: exhaling, inhaling, exhaling: “It was the same thing for me. I knew that I had everything to lose. One weakness, one mistake, and everything would collapse.”¹⁴ Here we recognize the calligrapher's intense physical and psychological concentration at the very moment of executing his work. Tension and symbiosis of body and soul—that is the secret of those who dedicate themselves to the “great art” of calligraphy or the “small art” of the bow and arrow. In this case, bodily discipline is an essential condition: we ask ourselves whether Miró also practices it.

Let us recall the indispensable testimony of J. [Jacques] Dupin regarding one of the crucial moments in the making of the triptych *L'espoir du condamné à mort* [The hope of a condemned man; 1974]. The critic—or, more precisely, the poet—tells us: “The work was born in his studio's garret—severe, dark, and suffocating, like a cell. The blinds closed, only the rays from a projector lit the three canvases hanging on three walls. In each painting, everything rests on the adventure of a single line. . . . They are three silent stages in the inscription of agony, anxious expectation, and imaginary evasion. The essential thing about the painting is the slow elaboration of the line. . . . Miró pursued this line with a sense of physical malaise bordering on asphyxia. He was only able to breathe freely when he finished the painting.”

One cannot speak of Miró's illustrations without taking into account the following statement: “I see no difference between painting and poetry. I sometimes illustrate my canvases with poetic sentences, and vice versa. Did not the Chinese, those masters of the intellect, proceed in precisely the same way?”¹⁵ He has handfuls of such phrases, of beautiful words that intervene in the pictorial or graphic work. Each time, a verse defines the pictorial subject, and one cannot gaze at the painting without taking the title into account—like this one, among twenty others: *Femmes aux cheveux défaits saluant le croissant de la lune* [Women with disheveled hair welcoming the crescent moon]. Among Miró's masterpieces there are a few small compositions in which he shows himself to be painter and poet at the same time. Such is the case with *L'Hirondelle joue de la harpe à l'ombre des pissenlits* [The swallow plays the harp

in the shadows of dandelions] (1955). The phrase continues across the work's four pages. The letters begin with thin crisscrossing lines that suddenly form the word *hirondelle*. Other, thicker lines move on to the next page to write *joue de la harpe*. The letters are lines of varying thickness that are transformed into signs so that the entire plot may be read from one page to the next, with a brief epilogue that sums up the scene: a figure holding a harp plays by the light of a streetlamp, or what stands for it in the artist's repertory. Here, the synchronization of letters and figures is perfect. One no longer knows whether one is "reading" or "seeing."

Upon his return to Japan, Miró worked in a genre that was new to him—the haiku. An entire book is dedicated to these minipoems translated by [the Swiss poet] Philippe Jaccottet, and Miró illustrated it with seven lithographs. Thus he completed the other dimension of the poem, somehow producing its shadow or its complement (which the Japanese call *haiga*). In haiku, the relationship between poem and painting is not the same as in poems illustrated by correlation. Here, the contents of the two interpenetrate as in a fugue, giving the poem a certain vague, impersonal tone. In Japanese poetry, the cosmos remains impregnated by the ego; the "self" participates in the cosmos without being massacred by it. Hence the infinite or incomplete states that are so frequent in haiku.

Many of Miró's fellow travelers bypassed Surrealism. Others—like Benjamin Peret, whose *Et les seins mouraient* [And the breasts were dying] (published by Cahiers du Sud in 1928) was one of the most fluidly automatic texts illustrated by Miró—remained in it for life. Ten years later, another text by Peret (*Au paradis des fantômes*) [In the paradise of ghosts] infused Miró with its heat, and the poet made inscriptions in it with a fiery drypoint needle.

There is also René Char, who discovered in himself common roots with Miró's imaginary population. His short *Homo poeticus* is the fruit of their poetic collaboration—a model dialogue between words and signs. As for *A la santé du serpent* [Here's to the snake] (1954), it is the exceptional conversation between two minds. The book opens with a masterly page of calligraphy in which the poet "sing[s] of heat with the face of a newborn, desperate heat."¹⁶ Following this, inscriptions, signs, and thoughts of great beauty alternate and complete one another. The Mironian signs stand out from the texts like engraved stele, commenting on the poem's sentences and intensifying its gravity: "The one who relies on the sunflower won't meditate in the house. All the thoughts of love will be his thoughts."¹⁷

At a given moment, as if it were a matter of rhythmically marking the distances along the lines, the poet tells us: "There remains a calculable depth where sand subjugates fate. . . . Poetry is of all the clear waters the one which lingers least in the reflection of its bridges."¹⁸ Here, Miró's signs are, again, veritable ideograms.

Having arrived from Zurich after the First World War, [Tristan] Tzara brought Dada with him in his baggage, and soon had to accommodate it (almost by force, under pressure from Breton, [Paul] Éluard, and [Louis] Aragon) within the boundaries of the Surrealist movement. Tzara was a kind of meteor. None could resist his charm. Miró inseminated his *Parler seul* [Speaking alone] (1950), a song that evokes the acrobat's absence of boundaries in a series of mischievous lithographs. Tzara writes: "A stranger in the sunshine of the bells, I saw her fleetingly on the arm of dead leaves." Or also: "Green shadow met you by the water's broken arm." Or then: "And death bites our buttocks / What do you know about that, barking at black laughter / Delivered from return / There you are on the right path." Here, Miró's hand points to "the right path." With the "laughter of water" [*rire de l'eau*], in a chain of metaphors, Tzara refers us "to all the directions of white hair" [*aux quatre coins des cheveux blancs*] and Miró flings a

brilliant series of lithographs upon these inspired pages. “Still steeped in parentheses / Waxed twisted whitened / Open in the water, rare laughter / Fallen lower than a begging hand.” And farther on: “What to say of the empty closet / In a great shout of milky laughter.” Next comes *Paroles des vieux et des jeunes* [Words of the old and the young] and *Mots de paille* [Words of straw]. With this type of final ballad: “The knife in the wound / Whistle blow ended departure / Another train tells us what it tells us / It says poor folk from here and there / And freedom spreads / Like blood-colored milk.”¹⁹

In Paul Éluard, Miró finds a pure, serene, calm, and violent voice he does not find in his Surrealist colleagues. *A toute épreuve* [Foolproof] (1958) is, above all, a poem of meditation, of love, of solitude—a poem in which psychic automatism moves in a dialectical game of concepts that oppose one another but are also occasionally conciliatory. For this book Miró executed prints on colored wood. The image of solitude is black and, within this context, the relationships between solitude and the universe are of proximity and lack of communication. The treatment of the wood does not overburden the poetry and, in a way, protects it.

It would be a long walk to follow Miró all the way to his most recent work, page by page, through the poems of his friends. But how to leave out, for example, Alice Paalen’s *Sablier couché* [Recumbent hourglass] (1938), or [the magazine] *La Carotide* and *Le Visage s’invente* [The face invents itself] by P. A. [Pierre-André] Benoit, one of Miró’s frequent interlocutors? Or Lise Deharme in the small poems of her *Le tablier blanc* [The white apron] (1958), *Lorsque l’oiseau perdit ses plumes . . .* [When the bird lost its feathers]. Or even René Crevel, the spell of whose *Bague d’aurore* [Ring of dawn] (1957) evokes [Comte de] Lautréamont? Miró paid tribute to him in etchings whose language allows us to detect signs of love and friendship. There is also *Fissures* by Michel Leiris, whose wise authority kept watch over poetry and art with wisdom, love, and disenchantment. With his etchings, Miró responds to the disillusioned words of the strophes *Rouge ou noir, Lumière est ombre* [Red or black, Light is shadow]. “Must one suddenly risk all / If nothing exists that doesn’t hang by a thread?”²⁰

Jacques Prévert, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes²¹—how can one fail to mention them? Or the great Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto who, in Barcelona, in 1950, discussed Miró’s art from the perspective of his own personal experience?²² Or Jacques Dupin, whose dialogue with Miró we never tire of listening to in *Les brisants* [The breakers] (1958) and *Saccades* [Fits and starts]?

The list goes on and on, because in leaving the circle of his friends, Miró reached out to masters from other periods and other climates, such as W. B. [William Butler] Yeats, with André Pieyre de Mandiargues’s French translation of *The Wind among the Reeds* [*Le Vent parmi les roseaux*], and in a completely different vein, [Alfred] Jarry’s *Ubu Roi*.

Finally, let us recall an event that took place in 1974—the publication of R. [Robert] Desnos’s poems *Les Pénalités de l’enfer ou les Nouvelles Hébrides* [The Penalties of Hell or the New Hebrides]. The work is the fruit of a pact of friendship pledged in 1925, interrupted by the war in Spain and then by the World War, an exile from which Desnos never returned. Thirty years later, the pact unites the voice of purest youth with illustrations by a master in all the richness of his advanced age. And it is marvelous to confront the poet’s verve (as inspired by the ego’s revolt against the superego) with the vigor of Miró, who unveils a vast panorama in which greens whirling above foamy whites buttress the apparition in red of a sort of horseshoe launched into the cosmos like some premonitory sign.

—Originally published as “Miró parmi les poètes” (translation by Iná Camargo Costa of “Miró entre poetas”), *Opus international* (Paris), no. 58 (1976).

Notes

1. André Breton, quoted in Jacques Dupin, *Joan Miró: Life and Work* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962), p. 153.
2. Joan Miró quoted in Lluís Permanyer, "Revelations by Joan Miró about His Work," *Gaceta ilustrada* (April 1978), in *Joan Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. Margit Rowell (New York: Da Capo, 1992), p. 290.
3. André Breton, "Joan Miró 'Constellations,'" in *Surrealism and Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), p. 263.
4. Jean Paulhan, "Un héros du monde occidental," *La nouvelle revue française: André Breton et le mouvement surréaliste* 15, no. 172 (1967): 589–91. Pedrosa misquotes the title as "an intellectual hero of the Western world."
5. Breton, *Surrealism and Painting*, p. 36.
6. Joan Miró, quoted in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 114.
7. Joan Miró, quoted in Juan Perucho, *Joan Miró and Catalonia* (New York: Tudor, 1968), p. 222.
8. Joan Miró to J. F. Ràfols, August 11, 1918, in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 57.
9. Joan Miró, "Statement," in *XXE Siècle* (June 1957), in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, p. 240. Italics are Pedrosa's.
10. Raymond Queneau, "Miró, or the Prehistoric Poet" (1949), in *Letters, Numbers, Forms: Essays 1928–70*, trans. Jordan Stump (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), pp. 166, 162.
11. These quotations may be paraphrases relating to text found in *ibid.*, p. 167.
12. Pedrosa's word *lama* (mud) is given as "an animal's dropping" in *ibid.*, p. 166.
13. *Ibid.*; italics are Pedrosa's.
14. Joan Miró interview with Rosamond Bernier, *L'Œil* (1961), in Rowell, *Miró, Selected Writings and Interviews*, pp. 258–59.
15. Joan Miró quoted in Queneau, "Miró, or the Prehistoric Poet," p. 167.
16. "Chante la chaleur à visage de nouveau-né, la chaleur désespérée." René Char, "Here's to the Snake!" trans. Mary Ann Caws, *The Brooklyn Rail* (December 2007–January 2008). Accessed April 25, 2014, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/12/poetry/heres-to-the-snake>.
17. *Ibid.* Pedrosa gives the Portuguese translation of the French original, "Celui qui se fie au tournesol ne méditera pas dans la maison. Toutes les pensées de l'amour deviendront ses pensées."
18. *Ibid.* "Il reste une profondeur mesurable là où le sable subjuge la destinée. . . . La poésie est de toutes les eaux claires celle qui s'attarde le moins au reflet de ses ponts."
19. Translations by Steve Berg of the following: "Etrangère dans le soleil des cloches, je l'ai vue fugitive au bras des feuilles mortes"; "Verte l'ombre t'a rejoint sur le bras cassé de l'eau"; "Et la mort nous mord les fesses / Qu'en savez-vous aboyant au rire noir / Délivrée du retour / Vous voilà sur la bonne route"; "Encore imbu de parenthèses / Parafiné tordu blanchi / Ouvert dans l'eau, des rires rares / Tombé plus bas que main d'aumône"; "Que dire de l'armoire vide / Dans un grand éclat de rire de lait"; "Le couteau dans la plaie / Coup de sifflet fini départ / Un autre train nous dit que dit-il / Il dit pauvres gens deci de-là / Et la liberté se répand / Comme du lait couleur de sang."
20. "Faudra-t-il tout à coup, jouer le tout pour le tout / Si rien n'existe qui ne tienne à un fil?"
21. Jacques Prévert, Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, *Joan Miró* (Paris: Maeght, 1956).
22. Miró commissioned his friend, the Brazilian poet João Cabral de Melo Neto (who lived in Catalonia), to write an essay for his book of prints. See João Cabral de Melo Neto, *Miró* (Barcelona: Ed. de L'Œc, 1950).

Lygia Pape

Among the artists in circulation around here, none is richer in ideas than Lygia Pape. Ideas are not concepts or prejudices but, rather, fragments of sensations that lead Pape from one space to another event, and from there to a state in which flickering colors and spaces devour one another between the inside and the outside. Cubes and eggs delimit their areas and create states of perspective that intersect to join this plane and that one, empty and full, while the spaces or instants of space appear on the street corner through the street vendor who has the gift of calling with his whistle to the otherwise-beings who suddenly gather around him. Walls are erected from the wind eggs that eventually evoke a trench of Sandinista guerillas in action, bestowing a touch of contemporaneity to the structure-state in which everything returns to being what it never was, and post- and pre-images recommence the cycle of creativity, from the *Livro da criação* [*Book of Creation*] to the *Balé neoconcreto* [Neo-Concrete ballet], from the small bags of the *Objetos de sedução* [Objects of seduction]



Lygia Pape. *Book of Creation* (installation). 1959–60. Gouache on cardboard, each 12 × 12" (30.5 × 30.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros

to *Eat me*, from the *Roda dos prazeres* [Wheel of pleasures] to the *Espaços imantados* [Magnetized spaces] that warm themselves in improvisations of chance and poetry. Deep within the entire scheme that represents the driving artist lies the tiny particle, the breath of life that unites everything, art and nonart, form and part, color and space, in a circuit that begins here and does not end there, but always keeps open the breach through which the idea once more shoots forth, and makes everything begin again, from lushness to sensations, heat to form and vitality to where life adorns itself, and the continuation of things indicates that art and idea never stop, shot through by the sinewy inspiration of Lygia Pape.

—Originally published as “Lygia Pape” (1979). Published in *Lygia Pape*, exh. cat., with commentary by Luiz Otávio Pimentel, Lygia Pape, and Mário Pedrosa (Rio de Janeiro: Coleção ABC/Funarte, 1983).

6. Architectural Criticism

Introduction Lauro Cavalcanti

Mário Pedrosa wrote about the golden age of Brazilian architecture, from the early 1940s to the inauguration of Brasília in 1960—which he viewed as the most successful expression of the modern project in the country. He examines this era in “Modern Architecture in Brazil” (1953), written for a special issue of the French review *Architecture d’aujourd’hui*.

In “Architecture as Work of Art” (1957), Pedrosa claimed the status of art for works of architecture, retrieving them from the exclusive examination by historians. The texts “Architecture and Art Criticism I” and “Architecture and Art Criticism II” (both 1957) see Pedrosa take an ironic stance toward those who assumed the consideration of built form to be a static examination of facades, when he saw the exact opposite: an analysis in motion of the spaces, structures, and volumes that arise from them.

Pedrosa felt that painting, sculpture, and architecture belonged to a single essence of the work of art. “Burle Marx, the Landscape Architect” (1958) emphasizes the fact that the creation of new aesthetic parameters had been possible thanks to someone who, endowed with a knowledge of botany, had transplanted the modern aesthetic to gardens, using vegetal specimens in lieu of pigments.

A Trotskyist, Pedrosa considered it impossible for a contemporary artist to be alienated from the world around them. Architect Oscar Niemeyer, by contrast, drew a clear boundary between his duties as a citizen and his activity as an architect. He felt that practitioners should fight for advances in their specific fields, whereas citizens should engage themselves in activities that might lead to social revolution. However, in the very process of building the new capital of Brasília—with his architecture and an urban design by Lúcio Costa—Niemeyer, a member of the Brazilian Communist Party, published a self-criticism of that position, pledging to steer clear of eminently commercial projects in favor of those that expressed collective aspirations. In “Oscar Niemeyer’s Statement I” (1958) Pedrosa celebrates the architect’s transformation and praises his courage to make restrictions on himself that were even more rigorous than those of his most staunch critics.

Pedrosa enthused about Costa’s plan for Brasília because he felt that it privileged the thinker over the architect or urban planner. In “Reflections on the New Capital” (1957) he celebrates the originality of a radical plan that attempted to impose social change through a government project. He feared, however, that the plan’s execution could be misinterpreted, and warned of the existence of two Brasília’s: President Juscelino Kubitschek’s, which was at the service of a conservative project celebrating his own image, and the revolutionary Brasília of Costa.

“Lessons from the International Congress of Critics” (1959) describes the meeting, in Brasília, of intellectuals such as Alberto Moravia and Jean-Paul Sartre with the theoretical elite of world architecture to debate the subject of the city as a synthesis of the arts, based on the example of the new Brazilian capital. In it, Pedrosa firmly and elegantly refutes the (ethnocentric, to his mind) restrictions of European critics such as Bruno Zevi and Frederick Kiesler. —*Lauro Cavalcanti*



Modern Architecture in Brazil

Origin

In spite of its sudden emergence, modern architecture in Brazil is no spontaneous eclosion. As is the case with many manifestations of a cultural order, one must go abroad to discover its origins. Around 1930, young purist architects got together under the leadership of Lúcio Costa to study the great European masters of a new architecture that was being born. They became acquainted with the work of [Walter] Gropius, then still at the Bauhaus, whence Hitler would soon expel him. They also became acquainted with the work of Mies van der Rohe and, above all, with the theories of Le Corbusier.

Yet well before then, the “modernist” literary revolution born in Paris had emerged in Brazil.¹ In Europe the fashion at the time was the art of primitive peoples, especially African art.

The vibrant forces of the instinctive were overwhelmingly victorious in intellectual circles. In Paris, our young writers and artists found themselves in the presence of a new cult of all things naive, savage, anti-intellectual, anticivilized, anti-Western. They understood the contribution that instinctive, primitive values could make and that could be made to grow in their own soil, without having to look for them in Africa, in Asia, or on the lost islands of the Oceanian archipelago. From Montparnasse and from Montmartre they discovered their own country. Their gospel was thus based on the fusion of two opposite terms: culture and instinct.

Starting in 1927, in the field of architecture Flávio de Carvalho and [Gregori] Warchavchik² were the pioneers who represented the two terms of the antithesis. But architectural “modernism” was very different from literary “modernism.” The question was not discovering or rediscovering the country. It had always been there, with its ecology, its climate, its soil, its materials, its nature, and all its inevitabilities. Without primitivism, as among the literati and musicians, and without ideological nationalism, as among political writers, to an architect geographical and physical reality is something absolute and primordial. For the others it is, in a way, a matter of choice or interpretation.

Of “modernism” L. [Lúcio] Costa wrote: “They become modern without realizing it, exclusively concerned with once more establishing the conciliation of art and technology and rendering accessible to most men the benefits of industrialization that are now possible.”

The doctrinaire inspiration of the purist group of Lúcio Costa,³ [Oscar] Niemeyer, Carlos Leão,⁴ [Jorge] Moreira,⁵ and [Affonso] Reidy, based on the ideas of Le Corbusier, thus created between them a revolutionary mind-set. They needed their theoretical dogmatism of this period in order to carry out their role as militants. However, this dogmatism rested upon a very modern sentiment: faith (that which you lack here) in the democratic potentialities of mass production. This theoretical discipline allowed them to put their ideas into practice at the right moment.

To these young Jacobins, Le Corbusier’s theories were architectural purism—according to Lúcio Costa’s expression, the “sacred holy book of modern Brazilian architecture.”

Why this wholesale acceptance of Le Corbusier’s ideas and their almost immediate implementation? Their revolutionary nature was contagious in Brazil’s state of mind at that moment, for in 1930 the country was still living in a climate of revolution. The economic crisis that had just exploded in New York in 1929 had spread rapidly through Brazil. In this country, it was due to the decline in the price of coffee

on the global market; it had as a consequence the unbalancing of our whole national economy based on that export, and as another (direct or indirect) consequence, the political revolution.

Thanks to the contradictions of this transitory period, one fine day Lúcio Costa was called to the dean's office at the Escola de Belas Artes [School of Fine Arts]⁶—a truly revolutionary act. In the same instant, thousands of tons of coffee were being burned, day and night, to raise their price. In the United States, too, kilometers of cotton plantations were burned, which seems to be the epitome of antifunctionality and is, indeed, perfectly irrational.

In this contradictory climate the dictatorship established itself among us. But if in the public domain it was the reaction that dominated, in certain isolated sectors like architecture it was the revolution that dominated; then we saw the production of what is sometimes called the “miracle” of the Ministry of Education,⁷ where for the first time Le Corbusier's theories were put into practice, though from independent points of view and with concern for an adaptation to the truly admirable local conditions. From one day to the next, modern architecture was launched and seemed to have come of age.

Moreover, this work is a collective achievement by Lúcio Costa, Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Reidy, Carlos Leão, Jorge Moreira, and Ernani Vasconcellos.⁸ At that same moment the Pampulha complex was being built—a veritable oasis, the fruit of the period's exceptional political conditions, when a group of plenipotentiary rulers, for love of their prestige, decided, like absolutist princes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to build this magnificent whim.⁹

To better capture the particular character of our revolution of architecture on a social and artistic level, it would be useful to establish a quick parallel between the Brazilian Revolution and the Mexican Revolution. The latter took place before our own; in certain aspects it had a racial character. In this sense, it was a protest of the oppressed indigenous races. Above all, the Mexican revolution had a quality of restoration, of the Indian peon's revenge against the white occupier, against the Spanish conquistador, destroyer of ancient cultures, of ancient civilizations represented nowadays by the country's old popular roots. Among us there was none of that; no ancient cultures, only a dispersed population of nomadic Indians. Even the black man was brought from abroad; in spite of the slavery to which he was submitted, he worked in the same sense as the Portuguese—that is, to conquer the wild land, to tame virgin nature.

It was the nature of the claims and reparations made by and to the oppressed races that offered Mexican artists their subject matter at the social and political levels. This is why, in art, it is painting that provides the finest achievements, albeit social painting as represented by al fresco murals. The wall was conquered by painting, not painting by the wall—that is, by architecture. The latter did not undergo a total renovation as in Brazil; it remained what it was before the revolution. On the contrary, in our case architecture preceded the mural. The young architects were the true revolutionaries; and the revolution they attempted was their own, in the name of very well-stated social and aesthetic ideals, much deeper than those of the politicians and of their revolution (a superficial one, in any event). In Brazil primacy at the artistic level fell to architecture; the important thing was to create something new, there where the soil was still virgin.

Later, political and social events succeeded one another, the economy slowly re-established itself, and the democratic climate returned. At the same time, architecture—mature, already more rooted in our environment and in popular accep-

tance—found itself facing increasingly more difficult and complex tasks, in particular that most decisive task of all: the rational organization of our cities, those that already existed and the ones that are created each day in the country's still intact regions.

Social and Political Conditioning

The speed with which the new architecture developed during the feverish years that preceded the last war did not allow time for a more natural growth. A dictatorship reflects the total freedom of the State and the almost total oppression of the citizens. Brazil's is no exception to the rule, having conceived casuistic laws, concerned above all else with its propaganda, and seeking to attract to its totalitarianism young architects whose ideas and concepts were—nevertheless—utterly opposite in their inspiration. Indeed, the latter worked for the dictatorship, but without renouncing their ideas.

The new builders made use of the dictators' power of action to put their ideas into practice. They were able to transmit everything they believed and dreamed of accomplishing. The dictatorship offered them that possibility, but the result was an as yet not totally overcome contradiction between the democratic and social ideals implicit in the new architecture—between its rational and functionalist principles—and the concerns of self-propaganda, of shows of force, a taste for sumptuousness and wealth to impress those responsible for the dictatorship, possibly symbolized at that point by the occasionally excessive “brio” and the gratuitous forms that became fashionable.

The “miracle” of the Ministry of Education could not have occurred were it not for its “grandiosity” and its imposing program. Without the taste of great comfort, of fruition, of the authority and wealth of a state governor with unlimited powers, Oscar Niemeyer's first great complex—the Pampulha—would never have been commissioned or built. A part of the new architecture's ostentatious side undoubtedly comes from its initial exchanges with the dictatorship. Certain aspects of experimental gratuitousness in the Pampulha buildings proceed from the program of caprice and luxury of the small local dictator. Real social concerns only appeared much later, after the war, when everywhere the restoration of democracy had imposed itself. Therefore, it is clear that Pampulha could not but be a fruit of the dictatorship, whereas the Pedregulho¹⁰ is the work of an already democratic age.

The discrepancy between an architecture of truly social orientation—made according to the spirit of its creators in order to put at the service of man the benefits of mass production—and the social, economic, and political conditions under which it was born, put its stamp on all the early years of achievement. Until our day, the architect in Brazil was nothing but an engineer and did his studies at the Escola Politécnica [Polytechnic School].¹¹ Moreover, the majority of them are, at the same time, their own employers. This hybrid combination is not always a happy one because the respective functions are quite dissimilar, and this appears often in the practical work right now at the designer's table, at the moment of the project's conception. Nor is the rapid development of the new architecture an exclusive consequence of the period's political conditions; in the final analysis, it is a consequence of abnormal economic conditions: economic prosperity due to the war and to inflation. Buildings were going up then everywhere, at random, in accordance with the frenetic march of speculation. In São Paulo, in 1951, it was estimated that four and a half houses were built every hour. Naturally, at this crazed, super-American speed, the future was sacrificed to immediatism.

Since then, the fever has abated. At this very moment, we are involved in a serious financial and productive crisis. The initial enthusiasm of the young architects gave way to more serious concerns.

Awareness of more serious problems referring to all real architecture, such as that designed for public housing, does not leave the builders unconcerned; they worry about more complex matters, with the creation of an industry and with crews that know how to make use of new techniques.

In a radical manner, modern architecture presents the problem of urban planning, which, in turn, presents in a no less radical way the problem of rational organization of society as a whole. The best of our architects nowadays are increasingly more aware of all these problems. Lúcio Costa, our veteran of architectural “modernism,” nicely expresses all these concerns when, in a fairly recent essay, he hopes for the reconciliation of art and technology for the good of the entire population. Unfortunately, we are still quite far from that.

It must be acknowledged that our finest achievements, our most beautiful palaces, are still an island in the vastness of this country. Lúcio Costa himself acknowledges the irksome fact that the new architecture has fallen behind when compared with Brazil’s overall development. This creates a regrettable discrepancy between what is conceptualized and what is possible and achievable.

The most serious problem—public housing—remains untouched; it is merely sketched out. In our first architecture Bienal, the international jury awarded the prize to A. [Affonso] Eduardo Reidy for his Pedregulho housing complex. The jury considered Reidy’s fine achievement as an example to Brazil because through its bold solution in the field of housing, social work was accomplished. A new path to achievements opens up.

The unit erected by Rio’s municipality is located in one of the city’s oldest and poorest neighborhoods. The terrain presents a 50-meter difference in levels. The sinuous form of the building’s main block corresponds precisely to the existing topographical conditions. But Pedregulho is still an isolated work, surrounded as it is by favelas and shacks, by the effervescence of poverty and chaotic urban planning.

Trends

By unanimous opinion, the most original and significant contribution of Brazilian architects, from the technical point of view, is the protection against the heat. It is normal that the boldest and most efficient solutions for this problem should come from a country with a tropical and subtropical climate.

Le Corbusier was also instrumental here; it was he who, for his unrealized Barcelona project, introduced the earliest movable and directional *brise-soleil*. It was up to the young Brazilian architects to use them in practice, but even in this case they demonstrated remarkable personal inventiveness and lightness. It was they who introduced this wide variety of movable and fixed directional *brise-soleil* systems, horizontal and vertical louvers now known, adopted, and adapted the world over. Their purpose is twofold: they not only protect from the heat, but they allow for capturing the breeze that, in the coastal cities of Brazil, blows, indeed, with a warm gentleness, alleviating the excesses of the tropical sun. P. A. [Paulo Antunes] Ribeiro,¹² for the Caramuru building in Bahia, devised a system that, though not a *brise-soleil*, is a veritable natural air conditioning system. For his hotel in Ouro Preto, Niemeyer used the principle applied to the windows of old colonial houses, which was already a *brise-soleil* system.

The movable panels of the *brise-soleils* animate the facades and sometimes create a pictorial impression, thanks to the play of shadows and lights and to the use of color. The brothers Roberto,¹³ initially, then Lúcio Costa, Niemeyer in his early years, Reidy, Rino Levi,¹⁴ and [Francisco] Bolonha,¹⁵ elevated these inventions to a true, bidimensional graphic art.



Lúcio Costa, Carlos Leão, Jorge Machado Moreira, Oscar Niemeyer, Affonso Eduardo Reidy, Ernani Vasconcelos, Le Corbusier (consultant). Ministry of Education and Health, Rio de Janeiro. 1937–42. Photograph by Marcel Gautherot, c. 1946. Instituto Moreira Salles

Affonso Eduardo Reidy. Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. 1953–67. View of the roof terrace looking south toward Sugarloaf Mountain, 1958

Through the *brise-soleil*, the formal imagination of our architects re-created the façades, and through the windowed walls, roof frames, patios, *cobogó* brick, and panels mounted on chassis, they gave our modern architecture its own individual touch, made of charm, a bold gracefulness, and nervousness.

This eventually created a sort of tendency among our architects, who distinguish themselves by the attention given to the formal investigations of surfaces, to the possible detriment of a deeper, more articulate spatial logic in the play of volumes and interior spaces.

A sign that this problem of functional and formal integration has not yet been resolved is reflected in the curious fact that attempts at covering walls in azulejo tile mosaics, for instance—in the manner of the charming age-old Portuguese art that was transplanted to colonial Brazil and died out during the last century—have yet to produce convincing results.

Nothing of what was done in this sense of the decorative point of view in our modern buildings can be compared with the brilliant results the architects themselves obtained with their own means, in the subtle play of surfaces.

After he, too, had lingered over certain successful experiments with this play of surfaces, Oscar Niemeyer, undoubtedly obeying the demands of temperament, once again surrenders more and more to a Baroque taste for large irregular forms and wide curves. From that perspective he represents another tendency, one that searches for formal solutions in the play of volumes, in the articulation of spaces, the true field of formal architectural experimentation. With Niemeyer, the danger, one might say, is that he often forgets the importance of the program as a result of freedom of expedient, giving preference to gratuitous form—to a large curve in the spectacular contour of the whole, for example. There is danger in mistaking the articulated volumes for the sinuous profile of the curves, but, at any rate, this tendency perhaps corresponds to a cultural, if not racial, constant. Let us not forget that Brazil was born under the sign of the Portuguese (and, partially, of the Spanish) Baroque.

However, one must acknowledge the linearity our architects observe in old colonial and imperial seignorial constructions built by crude Portuguese foremen with the intuition of a necessary harmony with the environment, the climate, and the

materials they found themselves among. One of the most typical features is the constant predominance of horizontality.

Bolonha, M. M. Roberto, and Lúcio Costa are quite sensitive to the quiet charm of this dominant horizontal. You will find in the old rural houses, especially in Pernambuco, the region from which our [painter] Cícero Dias hails, windows with light latticework made of wood and windowed walls to allow for ventilation. You see, these architects did not deliberately seek a tradition in their concerns about facades and horizontality in relation to the sun and to irregularities in the land but, in the end, they discovered certain quite remote affinities between what they do today and the old houses of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is linear beauty that seduces the spirit of a Lúcio Costa or a Bolonha, more than monumentality or the dynamic explosion of volumes in the manner of Niemeyer. The old Baroque churches of Minas possess some of Niemeyer's love for the curved form.

Thus, the love for Niemeyer's courageous undulations and for his sinuous lines does not signify a sudden irruption, a purely individual whim, and the expression of a temperament in the severity of the Brazilian architecture of our times. It's a matter of a distant repercussion, a cultural explosion in the shape of the people's creative genius. Arouca¹⁶ plays the part of one of Niemeyer's forerunners.

Surrounding Spaces, Gardens, Integration

The ideal would be not to make any distinction between interior and exterior spaces. In this regard, there are many examples. Not a single serious architect has neglected this aspect of construction. Lúcio Costa is a master of the integration of buildings and their surrounding environments. Henrique Mindlin¹⁷ won the [São Paulo] Bienal prize for his personal home in Petrópolis where, from the living room, one is transported to a garden terrace below the bedroom wing; open on three sides, discontinuous, were it not for a sliding glass window. The exterior spaces are an extension of the house. Next comes the problem of the garden; that we may well have intended offering a new solution to it has been underscored by Prof. [Siegfried] Giedion.¹⁸

The park in the French eighteenth-century manner was the ideal of the champions of an allegedly colonial style. It is still a habit of gardeners in our municipalities to trim trees as one might playfully trim the fur on a pedigreed puppy. This practice is nothing but a syncretism between the old "art of topiary" of Roman origin and the voluntary stylization of the French style garden.

True nature, our overflowing tropical nature, was once admitted, albeit ceremoniously so. The gardens were conceived around privileged beds of flowers with rare essences—that is, cultivated—whereas the flowers of our country were never allowed admission there.

It was necessary for a young artist—painter Roberto Burle-Marx—to arrive, so that these prejudices might be forgotten. He was the first to make a remarkable contribution to the new architecture in a field of art that complements that of the garden. He granted the right of citizenship to the plebeian plants. He made use of them like a true landscapist, painter, and architect.

Brazilian novelist José Lins do Rego¹⁹ was quite right to say that our Portuguese forebears began their attempt at civilization in the wild land by fighting the landscape, for it was the enemy. They had no time to love nature, and dealt with the forest with axe in hand. According to him, in founding the first botanical garden in Rio,²⁰ the regent D. João imported from the Antilles the solemn, towering imperial palm, which would become the vegetative symbol of a new age. It became the mark of the imperial- (that is, neoclassical-) style garden brought over by the French art-

ists who came with [Joachim] Lebreton in the nineteenth century, at the invitation of D. João.²¹

With the exception of the garden, neither sculpture, nor painting, nor even the decoration of walls with azulejo tiles achieved a reasonable level of integration with the architecture. All the attempts made in that direction until now are still random, unresolved, and far from conclusive. With rare exceptions—and on happy occasions—painters and sculptors are not yet prepared for the task that the new architecture asks of them. Unlike that of architects, their education no longer adapts itself to the new conditions. They do not have the humility needed to understand that the great art of our time cannot be made by individual or romantic whims.

The integration of the arts required by the new architecture excludes the *vedettes*, the stars of easel painting, stripped of any spatial imagination. The new generations of painters and sculptors are closer to this synthesis. They would make of art a practical and efficient activity of our civilization. That is why they penetrate the constructivist school—in order to arrive at a true synthesis, the indispensable condition for the creation of the style that the world and the future expect of us.

—Originally published as “A arquitetura moderna no Brasil,” in Aracy Amaral, ed., *Mário Pedrosa—Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981).

Notes

1. See Mário Pedrosa’s “Modern Art Week,” pp. 177–87 in the present volume.
2. Gregori Warchavchik [1896–1972], Ukrainian-born Brazilian architect. His 1928 design for a residence on Rua Santa Cruz in São Paulo is considered Brazil’s first modern architectural project. On his work, see the following, considered the first Brazilian manifesto on modern architecture: Gregori Warchavchik, “Acerca da arquitetura moderna,” *Correio da manhã*, November 1, 1925.
3. Formed by Lúcio Costa, the group—with architect Ernani Vasconcellos and consultancy from Swiss-French architect Le Corbusier—executed the project for the Ministry of Education and Health, also known as Palácio Ministro Gustavo Capanema, a landmark of modern Brazilian architecture.
4. Carlos Leão (1906–1983) was a Brazilian architect, painter, printmaker, and illustrator. He was chosen to design the Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto (1938) but his neocolonial plan lost out to Oscar Niemeyer’s modern project. See “O Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto,” in Lauro Cavalcanti, *Moderno e brasileiro: A história de uma nova linguagem na arquitetura (1930–60)* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2006).
5. Brazilian architect and urban planner Jorge Machado Moreira (1904–1992) was the author of the Edifício Residencial Antônio Ceppas project in Rio de Janeiro (1946–52) and chief architect of the project plan for the Cidade Universitária da Universidade do Brasil (1949–1962), now the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, on the Ilha do Fundão. In this group, his projects for the Instituto de Puericultura e Pediatria (Institute of Child Welfare and Pediatrics) and the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo (College of Architecture and Urban Planning)—which won a prize at the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal in 1957—are outstanding.
6. Lúcio Costa became director of the Escola Nacional de Belas Artes in 1930–31 and organized the thirty-eighth edition of the Exposição Geral de Belas Artes (General Exhibition of Fine Arts), known as the “Salão Revolucionário” (Revolutionary Salon) or “Salão de 1931” (Salon of 1931), the first exhibition to accept modern artists in Brazil.
7. On the Ministry of Education and Health, or Palácio Gustavo Capanema, in Rio de Janeiro, see note 3; the monument group is further composed of azulejo tiles by Candido Portinari and a landscape project by Roberto Burle Marx.
8. Ernani Vasconcellos (1909–1988), Brazilian architect, painter, muralist, and teacher.
9. See Mário Pedrosa, “Reflections on the New Capital,” pp. 346–55, in the present volume.
10. The Pedregulho Residential Complex (1947) was designed by Afonso Eduardo Reidy (1909–1964), and located in the neighborhood of São Cristóvão, Rio de Janeiro.
11. The Escola Politécnica was founded in 1792 as the Real Academia de Artilharia, Fortificação e Desenho (Royal Academy of Artillery, Fortification, and Drawing), later called the Academia Real Militar (Royal Military Academy) (1810). In 1874 the school severed its ties with the Ministry of the Army and took on its current name. In 1965 its seat was transferred to the Cidade Universitária neighborhood of the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, where it remains to this day.
12. Brazilian architect and urban planner Paulo Antunes Ribeiro (1905–1973) authored the project for the Caramuru building (1946) in Salvador, Bahia, which received an honorable mention from the jury of the Exposição Internacional de Arquitetura (International Exhibition of Architecture) at the first edition of the São Paulo Bienal in 1951.
13. The MMM Roberto architecture office was made up of the Roberto brothers, Marcelo (1908–1964), Milton (1914–1953), and Maurício (1921–1996).
14. Brazilian architect and urban planner Rino Levi (1901–1965) was one of those selected in the official competition for the project of Brasília. On his work, see: Renato Anelli, Abílio Guerra, and Nelson Kon, *Rino Levi—arquitetura e cidade* (São Paulo: Romano Guerra, 2001).

15. Francisco Bolonha (1923–2006), Brazilian architect and urban planner.
16. Arouca is a Portuguese municipality in the greater metropolitan area of Oporto, within the district of Aveiro.
17. Henrique Mindlin (1911–1971) was a Brazilian architect, urban planner, architectural historian, and teacher. At the first São Paulo Bienal (1951) he was awarded a prize for George Hime's country home in Petrópolis, Rio de Janeiro. He is the author of *Arquitetura moderna no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Aeroplano/IPAHN, 1999), with a preface by Siegfried Giedion and introduction by Lauro Cavalcanti.
18. On the architectural historian and critic Siegfried Giedion (1888–1968) and his relationship to Brazilian architecture, see: "Le Brésil et l'architecture contemporaine," *L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui*, nos. 42–43 (August 1952); and the preface to Mindlin, *Arquitetura moderna no Brasil*.
19. Brazilian writer and journalist José Lins do Rego (1901–1957) wrote the Brazilian literary classics *Menino de engenho* (1932) and *Fogo morto* (1943), among other works.
20. The Botanical Garden of Rio de Janeiro—created on June 13, 1808, by D. João VI, prince regent and future seventeenth Portuguese monarch—was initially a greenhouse for spices brought from the West Indies, but it came to introduce other botanical species in Brazil, among them the garden's symbol, the so-called imperial palm tree.
21. The French Artistic Mission was a group of French artists gathered by Joachim Lebreton (1760–1819), comprising painters Jean Baptiste Debret (1768–1848) and Nicolas Antoine Taunay (1755–1830); his brother, the sculptor Auguste Marie Taunay (1755–1830); the architect Grandejean de Montigny (1776–1850); and the printmaker Charles-Simon Pradier (1783–1847). Some of them became teachers at the Escola Real de Ciências, Artes e Ofícios (Royal School of Sciences, Arts, and Crafts), which was inaugurated in 1816 but did not begin its activities until 1826. Its principal purpose was to establish the teaching of art in Brazil, based on the academic model of French Neoclassicism; this institution was the genesis for the Escola de Belas Artes (School of fine arts), currently housed in the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro.

Reflections on the New Capital

Brasília or Maracangalha?¹

In his study on ancient Egypt, [Wilhelm] Worringer² develops the thesis of peoples who emerged artificially as children of an oasis civilization, which can be understood without knowing anything about its practically nonexistent "natural history." He differentiates them from those whose history, in contrast, has followed a course something like the paradigm of his own political and cultural history. He defined the Egypt of the pharaohs as "the greatest instance of the oasis in the history of the world," or "a colony upon an artificial soil."³

For this he leaned on [Leo] Frobenius (*Das unbekannte Afrika*),⁴ for whom a culture essentially explains itself or is conditioned by its relation with the earth: "Culture is the soil rendered organic by man."⁵ According to this relationship between culture and the land upon which it was erected, Egypt did not actually possess a culture, but only a civilization. And the great art historian compared Egypt's role in antiquity to that of America in the contemporary age. The point of comparison was given by "that power of transformation of a non-indigenous culture" because of its absence of resistances, "natural" obstacles. Not encountering obstacles, it can "quickly engender a unified artificial type" which, in a few generations, appears "even in the sphere of physical characteristics."⁶

A high civilizing discipline imposes itself in an oasis. "Life," Worringer says, "concentrated in a narrow oasis immediately takes on the over-cultured form belonging to growth in a forcing-house."⁷ The most important feature of this oasis civilization is the extremely natural ease with which it accepts higher and more external cultural forms, and the extreme naturalness with which it denies its own nature. Here, the negation of nature is "natural." In this extremely natural negation lies its formidable power of absorbing any cultural contribution, no matter how complex and lofty, wherever it may come from.

That is why we Americans, Brazilians, as we have often said, are “condemned to be modern.”⁸ The modern increasingly becomes our natural habitat. America was not an oasis between deserts—it was simply new, a place where everything could start from the beginning. It did not seem to the English colonists who disembarked in the north of the continent that the culture and civilization they found were worthy of preservation. So they produced a *tabula rasa*, and thus were able to transplant, so to speak, their most advanced cultural forms intact, as if they were transplanting them to an oasis. Being new, being vast, not having anything in its soil other than the virgin forest and earth (a case specific to us, on this side of the meridional Atlantic divide), America was made from these massive transplantations of cultures from abroad: What style, what form of art was immediately transplanted to barely discovered Brazil? The latest, the most “modern” one in force in Europe—the Baroque. And in the English part of the North? What we saw there was a renaissance that led quickly to the Neoclassical. And so, on they went up there, from *revival* to *revival*; that is, from modernism to modernism.

This is why there is something intrinsically anti-natural about the American, the Canadian, the Argentinean, and the *paulista*. In Egypt, whose existence contained “a system of artificially introduced benefits to life,” life evolved in “the rarefied air” where natural growth no longer flourished.” “The Egyptian does not surrender to nature, but tames it through technical know-how.”⁹ In Brazil, we did not surrender to nature, nor did we tame it. A mediocre *modus vivendi* was established. We never had a past, nor did we have traces of one behind us. For example, there were no formidable paved roads here like those of antiquity, of the Roman Empire in Europe and, at our backs, the Incas. And if, in some remote past, we did not have those indestructible roads paved with flagstones for respectable legions of pedestrians to walk upon, we still do not have roads for locomotives to travel. However, we do have something extremely new: communication airlines, even though they only skip and do not penetrate like the stone roads of the Roman or Inca legions, or the iron roads of the old Russia of the czars or the young bourgeois North American republic.

In the colony we formed a series of population centers, inevitably isolated from one another, by virtue of the “technical” desert of distances and forests.

Throughout the years we have arduously been conquering these desert-intervals. In various parts of the national territory, the stage of these “historical” oases has been surpassed, and they were eventually transformed into centers of diffusion—that is, into the antithesis of an oasis. Thanks to this transformation, relatively vast areas already constitute a grid of interrelationships that are no longer purely geographical, albeit still of limited social and cultural density. Thus, historical evolution already begins around then to be conditioned by the land. That is to say, civilization acclimates itself, while adaptation to the land becomes organic, creating enough roots to allow for indigenous cultural sproutings.

Here it is, then—the emergence of the idea to create a new capital precisely for this Brazil that has already passed the colonial stage of the oasis. But how? Through the ancient, almost symbolic process of “taking possession” of the land, through the massive establishment of civilizations and the mechanical domination of uninhabited, solitary land, through imported technology. So do we want to found a capital or plant a new oasis? Brasília is also part of the oasis-civilization concept. Evidently, the new oasis is no longer a narrow strip of land between deserts. (Yet the ecological conditions of the central quadrilateral—a positive abstraction of the Republic’s precursors—leave a great deal to be desired: the land around the future capital is arid.)

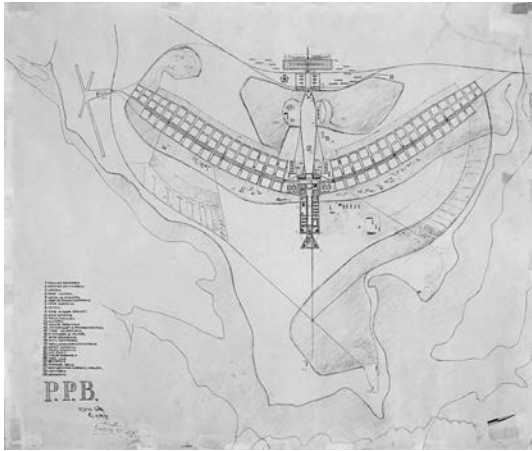
It is no accident that there is something contradictory hidden within the extremely modern envelope of its concept. For the part of the country that matters economically, socially, and culturally, the stage of simply occupying territorial lots circumscribed, oasis-style, by the virgin hostilities of surrounding nature, belongs in the past. This begs the following question: Once the occupying colony stage has been completed—with its characteristics of a synthetic artificial product that somehow resembles the ruins of a piazza under siege—will it be possible to build the new capital outside the areas of naturalized civilization where the first offspring of an ultimately organic and autochthonous culture blossomed? Wouldn't such an undertaking mean the recommencement of the oasis stage? Would it not be a paradox to destine such an ultramodern "colony" to be the country's ruling city—its seat of government? Brazil's political-administrative center would once more be established in an oasis—that is, in a colony of occupation removed from the areas where the vital process of growing identification between its "natural" history and its cultural and political history is developed.

Fatally isolated from the Brazilian people, its government will ignore—will not participate in, except from outside—the spectacle of its growth, the maturity of its culture, the formation of its personality. Brasília would be a sort of bunker impermeable to external noises, to conflicting opinions, like some general command that takes cover in armored subterranean shelters in order to command operations and escape the bombardments and attacks of guided enemy missiles in some future atomic war.

This is why there is something immature and simultaneously anachronistic in the immediacy of Brasília's program. Brasília's obscure, hybrid nature was reflected in the so-called philosophical vagueness of the propositions and also in the programmatic indistinction of the pilot plans presented. In one such, Rino Levi's,¹⁰ the concept was masterfully developed, although in an entirely abstract and gratuitous way in light of the plan's indifference to the natural environment; in others, the program inspired perplexity. In its excessive detail, M. M. Roberto's¹¹ revealed a certain awareness of this shift in immediacy and anachronism inherent to the established program itself. For this reason, he sought to resolve the incongruence with a sort of logic, although unfortunately, to our eyes, he did so in an eclectic way, emphasizing those elements that negate isolation and oasis. Hence, to the detriment of the urbanistic core, he gave detailed treatment to the regional stage of the spiritual functions of the political metropolis, surrounded by a rigidly closed outline of a polygon that emphasized its irremediable insularity with meaningful symbolism.

Lúcio Costa's wisdom consisted in accepting the program's inherent incongruence and, avoiding any short-term (or eclectic) solution, deciding resolutely in favor of the inexorable, given the immediate objective conditions: full recognition that the possible solution was still fundamentally the colonial experience—that is, taking possession of the land in the style of Cabral,¹² chamfering in soil the sign of the cross, or in a more "modern" and optimistic evocation, creating an airplane shape to land softly upon its surface. In what did he trust, though? In one hope: in the hope that the very same vitality of the faraway country (situated on the periphery) would skip stages to arrive at the oasis-capital planted in the middle of the central plateau, and fertilize it from within.

The dangers of the solution are obvious, for they do not ensure the future of the experiment, and may ossify the vices inherent to its conception. These vices are bureaucratic centralism (and this is why Lúcio brilliantly evaded any type of closed form) and the administrative omnipotence of one who makes decisions without the resistances of a clear opinion and of nondispersed contrasting forces. In this isolated, artificial climate, moral irresponsibility will flourish luxuriantly as the centralism



Lúcio Costa. Pilot plan for Brasília (competition entry). 1957. Ink and colored pencil on drafting paper, 22 7/16 × 26 3/8" (57 × 67 cm). Casa de Lúcio Costa

of a new technocratic bureaucracy—all-powerful as a result of its remoteness from national life proper, along with the tremendous availability of resources of an indispensable technical superprogress—not only to plant but to develop the city under the unnatural, artificial, and immature conditions of its founding. Lúcio Costa's Brasília is a beautiful utopia, but will it have anything to do with the Brasília that Juscelino Kubitschek wants to build?

Lúcio Costa—Victory of an Idea

No matter how much external circumstances may suggest appearances to the contrary, Lúcio Costa smoothly won the competition. Some of the competitors are architects of recognized talent, having presented careful and, occasionally, even whimsical work.

In contrast to the sumptuousness and complexity of other presentations, Lúcio's modest presentation—a card and a few explanatory typewritten pages, with a few sketches on hand here and there to illustrate the text—perplexed the general public. They did not understand the jury's decision. And soon enough, naturally, insinuations of favoritism, shady dealings, and even dishonesty were made. One building company spent over 400,000 cruzeiros on models and aluminum presentation boards, whereas the winner pulled out of his pocket some paltry twenty-five cruzeiros' worth of paper, pencil, ink, and eraser, and that was all he spent, in addition to a few dozen hours' work. With this pittance he won the million-cruzeiro prize! What a scandal!

There was no scandal. There was an agreement by the majority of the judging committee. Rarely has a jury commission come to a fairer decision, which suddenly emerged to the unbiased eyes of the principal foreign judges and captured their attention. Here is the first virtue of Lúcio Costa's modest, simple work. For that badly finished drawing, with its few suggestions marked only in pencil, hid a miracle: the idea pursued through a chaos of formulas, of inventions (some of them magnificent), of precise descriptions, of details and more details, most of them preposterous. And immediately for the impartial judges—and there is no reason to think that a Sir William Holford¹³ or an André Sive¹⁴ are not impartial—they understood what it was about. As Sir William publicly confessed, although on first encountering Lúcio's project he initially had an impression of superficiality and elucidative insufficiency, on the second and third reading of the report he was convinced by it. Better yet: enthusiastically so. The eminent French representative's reaction was identical. I do not wish to speak of Mr. [Stamo] Papadaki, for his relations with Oscar Niemeyer are well known,¹⁵ nor do I want to talk about the latter, given his close ties with the

winner. No one of sound mind, however, can say that Papadaki was also thrilled by Lúcio's clarity of thought.

And their reaction was like our own—a veritable chain reaction. At the outset we, too, had serious reservations about the competition and its formulation, and even the composition of the jury did not seem to us to be unbiased. The current government does not deserve from us any trust that it could carry out, under desirable conditions, as transcendent an undertaking as that of moving our capital to the interior. The prospect of quickly moving it forward is doubtful, in light of the galloping inflation in which we find ourselves. We know that, in fact, for JK [Juscelino Kubitschek] it is a matter of making a new Pampulha,¹⁶ that is, a beautiful though sumptuous prefectural structure in which several walls may be reserved for his own likeness in various poses and attitudes. Beyond these good reasons from one who knows his country, there were still others of a sociological and cultural order that distressed us: what devil of a city could come from the awful above-mentioned conditions? What monster of “modernisms” and “nationalisms” might not result from all this uproar, forever ruining the wonderful opportunity to build a new capital for Brazil and, with it—given the country's conditions of development, in the midst of a growth crisis, in search of its national affirmation—the finest model of twentieth-century culture, civilization, and art?

But Lúcio Costa emerges from this sea of anxiety and disappointment with his idea. Although still within the restrictions of an immediatist program (with something of an inorganic quality) and the characteristic folly of current Brazilian leaders, for whom the making of the new capital must still be conceived within the limits of the colonial era—a fact that was actually underscored by the victorious architect himself as a “simple taking possession” of the land—his plan contains such clarity of purpose and, simultaneously, such intimacy or retreat that it somehow exceeds the boundaries of that era. A monumental axis bisected by another, arched one; alongside the former, the city's political, ideological, civic, and cultural life thrives in its various modalities, while the latter processes the material circulation even as, on either side of it, beautiful, wide spaces are reserved for the intimacy of its residents' private lives—it's Columbus's egg.¹⁷

Lúcio gave the vague idea of Brasília (horrible synthetic name!) the basic concept it was missing—its physical structure, its malleable form, its first visual image—and eliminated everything else as premature. Everyone saw it, then. Starting with the experts, everyone finally understood the problem and the proposed solution. But to understand the solution of a problem, to visualize form, is something no one does unenthusiastically. And this is why specialists and laymen became enthusiastic about his idea when they understood it. Sovereign imagination was erected here to dominate formless matter—and it was done emphatically, with a tender solemnity.

Lúcio's competing colleagues, some of them eminent in their specialty, got lost in the particulars. They moved from the parts to the whole, while he took the reverse *démarche*. The thinker in him overcame the technician. The visionary Columbus discovered America based on a logical deduction—the Earth's roundness. Because of this, America was a product of faith in man's intelligent reason. And not in vain was it the seat of the earliest of the post-Renaissance utopias. Brasília was ultimately defined by an idea; it therefore transformed itself into a utopia. However, whenever one says “utopia,” one says “art” and “creative will.” From that point on, we can all work toward it.

That a man, our contemporary, a fellow countryman, endowed with creative imagination, should leave his home to propose to his community a utopia, a clear, perfect idea—here is an event that transforms everything. No event is rarer and more tran-

scendent in the history of a community. Faced with this brilliant idea, we other, proud talents, should surrender enthusiastically. That is what I do, recalling the words of Socrates to Phaedrus: “As for me, my dear Phaedrus, when I think of meeting a man capable of learning at the same time the whole and the details of an object, I walk in his tracks, as in the tracks of a god.”

Anachronisms of a Utopia

Brasília's designers and builders should keep their eyes permanently open to two chief points for the proper execution of their task: an awareness that they are designing for the future, and a will to not submit to the immediate contingencies of the present. These are the most serious threats that weigh upon the future metropolis.

The politicians who want it right away do so in order that they may enjoy the attendant prestige, advantages, wealth, and power. Actually, they want Brasília to be just like today's Brazil: they want Brasília with commotion, only horribly, greedily in the current status quo. They want it to be an instrument of their politics. This is why its program was formulated—as we have already said—in a contradictory manner, both “premature” and “anachronistic.” In order to preserve it from the fetters of created or vested interests, to place it above the current circumstances, it would have to be built by some mentality other than the opportunistic, contemptible, petty, or contradictory mentality that prevails on the national scene: the revolutionary mentality of the utopians. For in fact, to be realistic, if Brasília is to achieve its ultimate goals, it must be considered a utopia toward which men of good will—whether the best of them or an entire social group—may march. A utopia as conceived by Lúcio Costa.

For this reason, it is necessary that—within Lúcio's program or in the adopted pilot plan—we pull the weeds of anachronism that grow there with unexpected tenacity. To some degree, even the most visionary often found themselves tied to the worst of the elements that composed and wove the reality of their time. Routine (or habit) often subdues the wildest imagination.

The other day, in his explanations in the visual arts column of the *Correio da manhã*, M. Roberto made a few pertinent observations with regard to a certain institutional conservativeness of the presented program or plan. Rebellious against the habit of seeing public administration “divided into ministries, each ministry with a great building where the minister works, surrounded by all his assistants,” he showed how (since each ministry is “a grouping of governmental functions of a similar nature”) “the general group of these functions is in continuous expansion and transformation.” “When the grouping is no longer satisfactory, new arrangements are created and the group of ministries is altered,” and, for this reason, he rightfully ends by saying that “these modifications being constant . . . it would be foolish to plan for the distant future based on the current ministries by designing a building for each one, for example.” No one can deny the preponderance of reason contained in this argument. And so, rather than include ministerial groupings in his plan, he preferred to represent “only functional groupings.” We supported him loyally in this respect. Nevertheless, even the most cautious among our planners fall into the same carelessness. He himself “located the summit of the Republic's three powers” as if such a division were a given for all eternity, “and not mere doctrinaire preference, and one that may not exist tomorrow.” Indeed, a simple constitutional amendment can suppress it; for this, it would be enough for Congress to approve the yellowed piece of paper that Dr. Pilla¹⁸ has been carrying in his pocket ever since he joined the Chamber of Deputies in 1946, which, as late as last year, might have passed, had it not

been for General Lott's¹⁹ extra-parliamentary veto: naturally, we are referring to the parliamentary amendment. No one, not even Mr. Juscelino [Kubitschek], can guarantee to us that, before Brasília becomes reality, we could not have parliamentarianism as this country's present regime, instead of presidentialism, with its three powers.

For that matter, who would believe that in Brasília we would still have an anachronistic Ministry of War, an anachronistic Ministry of the Navy, and an anachronistic Ministry of Aeronautics, instead of a global Ministry of Defense, with secretaries subordinated to the three armed forces? In spite of his creative imagination, in spite of also being part of the great brotherhood of inveterate utopians that pervade our age (and of which I also feel I am a member), Lúcio Costa tends to yield to anachronisms. One of the most flagrant is worth highlighting here. It reminds us of an analogously anachronistic slip committed by the master [novelist] Anatole France in a description of his utopia in *Sur la pierre blanche*, set in the year 270 of the European Federation, or the year 2270 of our era.

One fine day, Hippolyte wakes up smack in the future, on a street entirely different from the streets of his old Paris; through it, he tells us, passed "neither trains, nor automobiles," but "shadows flitted over the soil." "I looked upwards and saw masses of huge birds and enormous fishes glide rapidly through the upper atmosphere, which seemed to be a combination of heaven and ocean." At the invitation of a worker who takes him to lunch in an "aeroplane" with his colleagues, Hippolyte observes, "We were soon cleaving the air so rapidly that I lost my breath."²⁰

Nevertheless, during the course of a lunchtime conversation, the last surviving bourgeois of the Christian era wanted to know how things had come to be and how they were at present. He is astonished to learn that permanent armies had been abolished, and asks whether there might not be any danger of an external attack. The danger, they reply, could come from the "American Federation," as advanced as the United States of Europe. But a wise, old informant soothes the newcomer. There is no danger, he says, with great assurance, because "the ocean separates us."²¹

Lúcio's plan envisions the city's monumental axis above the municipal sector, beyond the "automobile parking lots following one beltway and the barracks following the other." What barracks are these? According to him, they are really army troop barracks. The transplantation of the Vila Militar to Brasília might well be foreseen.

First, one asks oneself: Why these barracks within the city? Second, what are the specific functions of these troops when the new capital—for this very reason situated within the Planalto Central [Central plateau], hundreds and thousands of kilometers from the coast—is sheltered from sudden enemy landing and can only be reached by air? There is no military justification for detaching land troops. Defending the city can only be the mission of a radar network around it and, in a wider circle, aerial bases strategically situated to cover possible attacks coming from those quarters most susceptible to penetration. To imagine a situation in which it must be defended by terrestrial combat on the surrounding plains is to imagine an irremediable endgame in which the entire country would already be occupied.

In the utopian Brasília there is no place for traditional military forces and arms—unless these troops were not meant for defense against external enemies, but, at certain moments deemed opportune, for driving their *tanks*, in the way we know all too well, through the city's central axis, in order to affect the inhabitants themselves and weigh, with their vote, upon the deliberations of one or more of the powers of the Republic. But why change, then? Why Brasília? Why dream of utopias? A utopia cannot bear anachronisms of this order.

Controversy Surrounding Brasília

In the small and natural controversy that emerged as a result of the competition for the pilot plan of Brasília, between M. M. Roberto, on one side, and the judge Sir William Holford and the victor, Lúcio Costa, on the other, one concept stood out above all others: that of monumentality. The first architect dismissed it as a nineteenth-century bias, saying that it would imply “the noisy, ostentatious destruction of man.”

In fact, what was monumental in the last century, or in other centuries, continues to be monumental today. The former concept of monumentality never disrespected the human scale. When this occurs, monumentality is replaced by bombastic exhibitionism, very much in favor with ultra-twentieth-century modern dictators of the Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin variety.

However, the architect is correct in saying that the monumental must be attained “by subtler paths.” Nevertheless, we beg to differ with his next statement, in which he considers monumental “that which moves us to respect, rather than which stuns us.” Many things may move us—a portrait of our parents, for instance, or the relics of a hero or saint—and no one would think to speak of “monumentality.” There is nothing more moving than the adjoining shallow graves of Vincent and Theo van Gogh in that tiny cemetery on the outskirts of Paris, from which one arrives—over a wall—at a wheat field in which the former saw the crows that were the harbingers of his death. No transition is more moving in its utter absence of monumentality.

Nothing is more moving in painting than the depiction of a religious or intimist subject by any Flemish painter, but nothing is also more distant from monumentality. On the contrary, what moves us there is the profound, touching intimacy that humble things possess in connection with saints and exalted themes; it is the patient, affectionate description of the most modest, most insignificant particulars—a low stool, sandals, a dog with its muzzle to the ground, the tureen, the street lamp, the oil lamp, and the door that envelops the mysteries of the sacred and of transcendence in figures of the Christ, Madonnas, saints, and apostles in the same everyday, prosaic expression. A Flemish “Resurrection” is touching; an Italian one is monumental. The touching quality is conveyed through love of detail, the monumental through a love of the global concept, of the idea to the detriment of detail, regardless of historical time and space. Whereas Italian piazzas are easily monumental, Nordic ones do not achieve such monumentality easily.

This is why Lúcio Costa’s plan—an idea—achieved, without emphasis, the monumental, while that of M. M. Roberto did not, even though it simmered with good ideas. The “polynuclear metropolis” is one of these; but in order to transform it into reality, the cellular nuclei need not be regular, closed circles or polygons. That’s why the formal solution provided by the designers makes them look like geometric flowerbeds in a suburban garden. In order to observe human scale, they divided the metropolis into autonomous urban units of seventy-two thousand inhabitants. Very well; however, they forgot that to accommodate to autonomous life within a rigorously orthogonal symmetry is to flee from what is human, to violate nature, favoring geometry to the detriment of the organic. We must admit that Sir William Holford was right in this point of his criticism.

As for M. M. Roberto’s understandable reservations, the monumentality of Lúcio Costa’s project ennobles rather than diminishes the human scale. Why? Because of the simplicity of his concept. Because of this simplicity, it may be grasped by all minds and senses. Although the concept of Lúcio’s plan establishes through the central axis a visible hierarchy that is necessary to the nature of the metropolis, this nonetheless

gives him the organic progression of a tree that branches out, or a river that meanders along through leafy backwaters.

Modern city planning can no longer be two-dimensional, says [MM Roberto], the eminent city planner of the cove in Búzios: and there we have another masterly thesis. But, here still, the victorious pilot plan passes the dimensionality test better than M. M. Roberto's, we are sorry to say. The fact that the Roberto brothers' project is precise as to densities and determination of positions does not mean that it was necessarily conceived in three dimensions. Its development, the enormous mass of information and precious data that it contained, did not assure its three-dimensionality. Let us acknowledge, once again, that the English judge did not exceed himself when, in praising that plan, he nevertheless declared it to be first and foremost "a creative plan." Indeed, what was lacking was a total vision, the only kind that can precisely impart three-, quadri-, or n-dimensionality. And it appears to us, on the outside, that if the competent professionals properly expressed the problem of dimension, they did not, however, "see" their "polynuclear metropolis" in three dimensions, but in two.

In fact, we see it in the plan only in succession, and from above: a series of regular polygons drawn across the flatlands, intersected by angular planes or orthogonal crisscrosses. There isn't even a hint of a curved surface of development. On the other hand, Lúcio Costa's project is much richer in visual angles, in its various polyhedral and curvilinear planes. Its spatial articulation is clear, condensed, and rhythmic, even as circulation flows smoothly, to the capillaries, coming and going from extremity to extremity, as in a good cardiovascular system. In M. M. Roberto's project, however, spatial articulation is discontinuous and the circulatory system requires compartmentalization to facilitate it. And so the communication between the units, such as connections between the metropolitan group from the central nucleus to the farthest perimeters, would be accomplished by additions rather than by integration.

As for not being built for democracy, old [Frank Lloyd] Wright is right. As is M. M. Roberto. But it will not be yet, this time in Brasília: an oasis, with its inevitable climate and atmosphere of exception.

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Notes

1. "Maracangalha" is a well-known popular song by Bahian composer Dorival Caymmi (1914–2008), and a district in the city of São Sebastião do Passé, near Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia. The name is used here as a metaphor for provincialism.
2. Wilhelm Worringer, *Ägyptische Kunst: Probleme ihre Werte* (Munich: R. Piper & Co., 1927).
3. Wilhelm Worringer, *Egyptian Art*, trans. Bernard Rackham (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928), pp. xvi, xv.
4. Leo Frobenius, *Das unbekannte Afrika: Aufhellung der Schicksale eines Erdteils* (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1923).
5. Worringer, *Egyptian Art*, p. xv.
6. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
7. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
8. Mário Pedrosa, "Introdução à arquitetura brasileira—I," *Jornal do Brasil*, May 23–24, 1959.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. xx, 8.
10. The Brazilian architect and urban planner Rino Levi (1901–1965) was one of those selected in the competition for the Brasília project. On his work, see: Renato Anelli, Abílio Guerra, and Nelson Kon, *Rino Levi—Arquitetura e cidade*. (São Paulo: Romano Guerra, 2001).
11. The architecture office MM Roberto (given by Pedrosa as "M.M." and later changed to MMM Roberto) was formed by the Roberto brothers, Marcelo (1908–1964), Milton (1914–1953), and Maurício (1921–1996).
12. Pedro Álvares Cabral (1467–1520) is the Portuguese explorer credited with the discovery of Brazil.
13. British architect and town planner Sir William Holford (1907–1975) was heavily involved with the development of post-World War II English city planning, and was a member of the Brasília project competition's judging committee.
14. French architect André Sive (1899–1958) was an adviser to the French Ministry of Reconstruction and Urban Planning, which was part of the project judging committee for the Brasília competition.
15. Stamo Papadaki (1922–1990) wrote several books about the architect, including *The Works of Oscar Niemeyer* (New York: Reinhold, 1950) and *Oscar Niemeyer: Works in Progress* (New York: Reinhold, 1956).

16. Inaugurated in 1943, the Pampulha Architectural Complex was commissioned to Oscar Niemeyer by the mayor of Belo Horizonte (capital of the state of Minas Gerais) and future president of the Republic Juscelino Kubitschek. It comprises a group of buildings around the man-made Pampulha lake, and includes the outstanding design for the Igreja de São Francisco de Assis (Church of Saint Francis of Assisi), or Igreja da Pampulha (Church of Pampulha), with paintings by Candido Portinari and landscaping by Roberto Burle Marx; the Museu de Arte da Pampulha; the Casa do Baile (a casino), and the Iate Tênis Clube (Yacht Tennis Club).
17. “Columbus’s egg” refers to a significant achievement or idea (like Columbus’s voyages to the Americas) that seems easy after the fact. See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_of_Columbus.
18. Brazilian politician Raul Pilla (1892–1973) championed republican parliamentarianism in Brazil.
19. General Henrique Teixeira Lott (1894–1984) was minister of war during President Juscelino Kubitschek’s (1902–1976) administration.
20. Anatole France, *The White Stone*, trans. Charles E. Roche (New York: John Lane, 1910), pp. 189–90, 198.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Architecture and Art Criticism I

At the beginning of the modern architectural movement—as the result of discipline and simplicity, in an absolutely indispensable reaction to the predominant aesthetic of styles and ornaments elevated to autonomous categories that could be applied everywhere, under any circumstance and for any program (as continues to be the practice in Russia, which has gone to the absurd lengths of serially fabricating capitals, columns, volutes, pediments, etc.)—there was a need to retain what was strictly functional and to radically abandon all aesthetic or formal concerns.

From the Dutchman [Henry] van de Velde—the dean of modern architects, now nearly one hundred years old—to those who came after him, architects surrendered to a terrible diet of functionality, soon followed by the discovery of the materials of modern industry and their intensive exploitation. It was the time in which so-called new materials from concrete to glass somehow became principal protagonists in the drama of contemporary building. It may be said that the opening to the artwork-architecture phase is relatively recent. And Brazilians—were we not men of the southern tropics, bathed by the soft waters of the South Atlantic?—were the first to send the functional diet to blazes. Since then, our terrible, our great Oscar Niemeyer has cut loose. Thank God.

From this period of fasting—of the deliberately prosaic—we were left with an inhibited, complex-ridden architectural criticism with a diabolical fear of escaping, of surrendering, tender or impassioned, vigorous or complacent, to its specific task, which is aesthetic appreciation. To the critic, architecture is art, and not civil construction. Geoffrey Scott, in a work that became famous as soon as it was published (1914) and that, despite being somewhat dated, has become a classic (*The Architecture of Humanism*),¹ commented on Sir Henry Wotton’s famous dictum (in his *Elements of Architecture*), that “building hath three Conditions, Commodity, Firmness, and Delight.”² He emphasized that if, through the first concept (Commodity), architecture was obliged to satisfy an external need and thus an expression of human life, through the second—Firmness or Solidity—it had to obey scientific norms, the expression of mechanical laws. As for the third concept, that of Delight or Pleasure, with the practical objectives and the fully assured mechanical solutions, he translated it as the impartial aspiration to beauty.

However, Scott tells us that such a desire does not culminate here in a purely aesthetic result, for it must deal with a utilitarian concrete base. But it is not, for all

that, any less a purely aesthetic impulse, distinct from all the others that architecture simultaneously satisfies—the impulse by virtue of which architecture becomes art. It is a separate instinct. This impulse has its own rules, and claims the recognition of its authority. Hence the legitimacy of asking to what point and what measure this impulse was successfully incorporated into the work. “How far,” Scott asks, “that is to say, [have] the instincts which, in the other arts, exert an obvious and unhampered activity . . . succeeded in realizing themselves also through this more complicated and more restricted instrument,” architecture?³ And, our author further speculates, might there not be aesthetic instincts for which such an instrument, as restricted as it is, would not furnish, even so, its unique and peculiar expression? This, for him, is what it means to study architecture in the strict sense—that is, as art. This is why Wotton’s three conditions for good building (following in the footsteps of Vitruvius) seem to him to correspond to three modes of criticism and to three provinces of thought.

To Scott, then, the reigning confusion in art criticism of architecture has been fed by a mixture of considerations from different orders—moral, technical, social, and aesthetic. In appreciating architecture, it is necessary to isolate its three essential conditions for analysis. In order to be precise and efficient, criticism must consider a building from one alone among those propositions, whether in terms of its accommodation to its purpose, its structural merits, or as a work of art.

Modern criticism has finally learned this lesson and—albeit without giving way to the systematic exaggerations of a Bruno Zevi, who raised the flag of antifunctionality as a sort of absolute—already circumscribes its field and is unafraid to take on a building from a specifically aesthetic angle. For this new criticism, only Delight—the third condition proposed by Wotton—can supply a foundation for the establishment of rules by which to judge *buildings* of different styles, given that construction methods change and the ends become obsolete; man, however, continues to delight in these manifestations of the human spirit, commonly designated, for lack of another definition, as works of art. What is the danger of this purely subjective approach to a building? Subjectivism, or the inevitable limitations in the power of appreciation of a single individual in light of a multiplicity of styles and manners, and the usually sterile or empty aesthetic-philosophical theoretical digression. On the other hand, it frees us from the almost endless myriad of irrelevant details that, most of the time, serve to confound and conceal the critic’s very lack of orientation, his lack of comprehension as to what is essential in architecture—the formal arrangement of all its parts and the balanced integration of its contrasting forces and inclinations. It also frees us from the interminable social implications that accumulate around a building and end up obstructing consideration of the work in itself and in its ahistorical or, rather, permanent values.

—Originally published as “Arquitetura e crítica de arte I,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 22, 1957.

Notes

1. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism* (London: Constable and Company, 1914).
2. Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (London: John Bill, 1624). Available at: http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2012/1870/pdf/Davis_Fontes68.pdf.
3. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), pp. 4–5.

Architecture as Work of Art

The problem of architecture is new for art criticism. It is new because, until the advent of the architectonic revolution of our time, architecture was, above all else, the art historian's subject. And its criticism or appreciation was already based on a historically enshrined value.

Nowadays, things have changed. Achievements in the domain of art and in the technique of building have undergone an enormous transformation and have even taken on an unusual quality, for they shun what has been traditional for millennia. Upon their emergence, they caused surprise and provoked bewilderment analogous to what the earliest Impressionist works produced in the public. A typical [Frank Lloyd] Wright or [Walter] Gropius building initially drew indignation or sarcasm in the same way that [Paul] Cézanne's still lifes, [Pablo] Picasso's distortions, or the strident lines and colors of [Henri] Matisse did. Such a phenomenon was never common in the history of mankind.

For this very reason, a tactic of probing and prudence became necessary in order for the new architecture to be introduced into and accepted by society. The original concept of habitation that would culminate, through the expression's symbolism, in Le Corbusier's famous "machine for living" needed to be wholly enclosed in an antilyrical or aesthetically neutral envelope par excellence, protected by a cuirass of ideas that were "serious," "bourgeois"—that is, prosaic and objective, practical, technical, social, and scientific—and easily digestible by rich clients or "discretionary" or "progressive" governments. Without such precautions, the new pattern of building architecturally—that is, as a work of art—would take much longer to be accepted.

This preparatory initial stage is over: the new architecture is no longer discussed. And no government and no appreciable social influence dare reject or deny it (nowadays, not even in Russia). This is because the hour of art criticism has arrived—active, performative, quotidian—just as it is practiced with the other arts. Formerly, writers treated the noble art of architecture particularly in terms of social environment, the political or religious forces at play, or the state of constructivist technique during a given period. Through the study of an important architectural unit or style, a sort of interpretation or analysis was produced, one that was often profound and subtle, but focused on the sociological, political, philosophical, or religious order of the society in whose breast it was born. To this day, there is discussion regarding whether the Baroque in architecture represents the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation—that is, revolution or reaction. What's worse is that arguments for both sides are equally good, penetrating, and convincing.

Be that as it may, the masters of the last century, despite being peerless in defending and upholding masterly theses of this sort, amid brilliant demonstrations, often gave us pages of profoundly critical penetration in which architecture was effectively elevated to the category of an art as disinterested or concerned with form as sculpture or painting. Even [John] Ruskin, who, in his famous *Seven Lamps of Architecture* [1849] proposed to demonstrate that all architectural form is somehow the embodiment of the political institutions, life, history, and religious faith of nations, is among the first—before even the brilliant retinue of Germans [August] Schmarzov, [Jacob] Burckhardt, and [Aloïs] Riegl—to approach it armed with the elements through which one appreciates a sculpture, for example; that is to say, as a problem "of masses, space, lines, and color."¹ And Geoffrey Scott, although, of course, far more sophisticated than his old Romantic compatriot, ends up not being all that different from him when he declares that the architecture that interests him is that which is "simply

and immediately perceived,” or “a combination, revealed through light and shade, of spaces, masses, and lines.”²

Here, for many, is an unpardonable slip or a heresy, because to admit such a thing is to “reduce architecture to sculpture.”³ What answer is there to such an objection? None, replies David Winfield, one of the most powerful and cogent representatives of the new criticism, in his admirable “An Essay in the Criticism of Architecture.” He acknowledges the fact and unblinkingly accepts it: “There is no answer to the charge that treating of architecture from an aesthetic viewpoint, which is to treat of it as an abstract art, means removing the difference between architecture and sculpture, but I do not think that this matters.”⁴

Let us pause for a moment. On second thought, the objection is truly unimportant. If architecture is art, a building that is elevated to architectural quality is a pure work of art: and, like sculpture, or a special abstract or concretist construction, the qualities that should dominate it, the qualities that are specific to it, will inevitably be formal ones, in the same way they are in a sculpture by [Henry] Moore, in a mobile by [Alexander] Calder, in a construction by [Antoine] Pevsner or by [Max] Bill. And let us also recall, for submission, illustrative confirmation of Winfield’s bold thesis, the case of our Oscar Niemeyer: his formal genius is so irrepressible that the central objection we make to him nowadays is that he is no longer an architect but a sculptor.

Let us listen to our critic once again: “The difference,” [Winfield] tells us, “is after all, only one of words, and more important than the traditional differentiation of the fine arts by material is their objective classification into types of Effect; as abstract or representational art. There is a greater kinship of Effect between a building by Corbusier, a painting by [Piet] Mondrian or Ben Nicolson, and a sculpture by [Naum] Gabo, than there is between the works of these artists and that of any other artist who is producing orthodox representational (figurative) art in the same medium.”⁵

Truly, as a result of the “types of Effect,” we are dealing with abstract art or representational art, and comparison between artists is only possible if they possess a common denominator. Winfield finds this common denominator in the affinity for or kinship with abstract form that thrills Mondrian or Ben Nicholson, that is part of a construction by Corbusier or Gabo. However, the same comparison is not possible between these artists, all of whom work with abstract form, and those who work with representational form, for the only thing they have in common is the use of identical materials.

For Winfield, the question of confusing architecture and sculpture is a false problem. And, by the way, he reminds us that “the two, and indeed painting as well, have always been used in conjunction to achieve a unified impression and therefore must be criticized in terms of the unified effect and not as separate elements.”⁶ It is time for us to look at a work of architecture with the same eyes we use to look at a painting and a sculpture. The famous integration of the arts shall not exist as long as that “unified impression” or “unified effect” is not found. And it will not be found until we learn to appreciate the three conjointly: as simple modalities of a single essence.

—Originally published as “Arquitetura, obra de arte,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), February 23, 1957.

Notes

1. This exact quote could not be found, but these appear to be tenets of “The Lamp of Beauty”; see John Ruskin, “IV. The Lamp of Beauty,” in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, vol. 1 (London: Smith, Elder, 1849), pp. 94–135.
2. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), p. 261.
3. This exact quote does not appear, but the idea is discussed in *ibid.*, p. 80.
4. David Winfield, “An Essay in the Criticism of Architecture,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (Department of Philosophy, Temple University, Philadelphia) 13, no. 3 (March 1955): 371.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 371–72. The parenthetical “(figurative)” is Pedrosa’s insertion.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 372.

Architecture and Art Criticism II

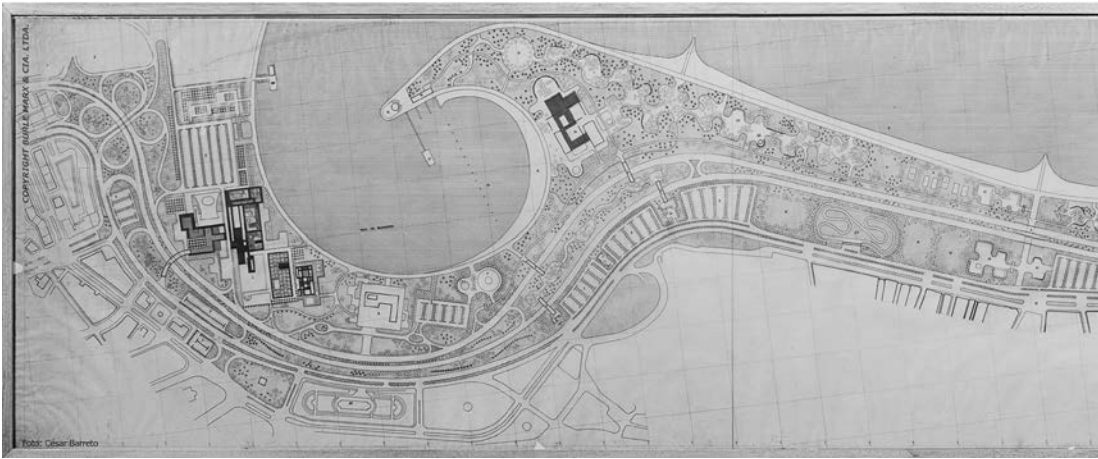
In its complex simplicity, “architecture, simply and immediately perceived”¹ is the art critic’s attitude toward a building of artistic qualities. Just the other day we were discussing this principle formulated by G. [Geoffrey] Scott.

For some, such an attitude would signify being compelled, like fools, to admire from without the façades of palaces and houses. However, the thing runs deeper. When one says “immediately perceived,”² one does not mean it in the chronological sense. “Perceiving simply and immediately” is a difficult operation within contemporary man’s highly automatized mental habits and, for most ordinary beings, a later rather than an earlier one. Anyone can distinguish a house, a mansion, palace, pavilion, bridge, or skyscraper, and know of what material it is made and how it was made.

The philosopher [Alfred North Whitehead] explains that we look and see before us a colored form and we say: it’s a chair. But what we saw was only a colored shape. And perhaps an “artist” might not have “jumped” so easily to the notion of a chair. Why? Because he might have stopped in mere contemplation of a beautiful color and a beautiful shape. But, Whitehead continues, those of us who are not artists are always in too much of a hurry (especially if we’re tired), passing directly from the perception of the colored shape to the enjoyment of the chair, whether for its immediate use or for any other idea. The philosopher calls this operation “logical inference.”³ He does not consider a mentality of high degree to be necessary, to get from colored form to chair. This is because he knows that his friend, the artist, who kept himself to the contemplation of color, form, and position, is a highly trained spirit, and only at the cost of arduous effort did he acquire the ability to ignore the chair. Another reason for the philosopher to be skeptical as to the lofty mentality required to arrive at the chair conclusion is that, if he were also accompanied by a pet puppy in addition to the artist, the puppy would not have hesitated for one second to act on the hypothesis of a chair, on which, moreover, it would have leapt in order to use it as such. But, observes Whitehead, if the dog had stopped itself from acting thus, it would be an extremely well-trained animal. From this the philosopher concludes that the transition from a colored shape to the notion of an object that can be used for different purposes having nothing to do with color seems very natural, whereas careful training is required of us, men and pet dogs, so that we may abstain from acting according to that transition.⁴

To perceive architecture simply and immediately as such is an operation that requires extensive training, and means that we feel it acting upon us as mass, line, color, and space. Because of many highly complex factors of a sensitive technical, cultural, and historical nature, none of those elements exercise greater fascination upon us today, in our time, than space. All modern sculpture since, perhaps, [Henry] Moore, revolves around the apprehension of space. “Space affects us and can control our spirit,” G. Scott said in 1914; and much of the pleasure that we get from architecture, “springs, without our realizing it, from space.”⁵ It is thus, today, the chief element for aesthetic appreciation [of architecture].

And how do we perceive it? Frontally, stopped before a façade? Of course not. We perceive it in motion, from many angles. Modern architecture, for example, brings us a perception, a new aesthetic or formal sense, of participating in two or more planes in space. This is the aesthetic privilege of architecture. The notion of movement breathes a new life of its own into the building—one that goes on to breathe, to dilate and recoil rhythmically, like an organism.



In search of the perception of space in its diverse modulations and, above all, of what [Henri] Focillon called an “inversion of space,”⁶ aesthetic criticism distinguishes and analyzes—beyond the static mass or the forms in repose of the great ancient monuments—various directions and modes of movement: directed movement, supported, first and foremost, by the line; free movement, supported, above all, in the modulation of the mass with space; and finally, dynamics of multidimensional spatial modulation, including within it the observer himself.

—Originally published as “Arquitetura e crítica de arte II,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), August 4, 1957.

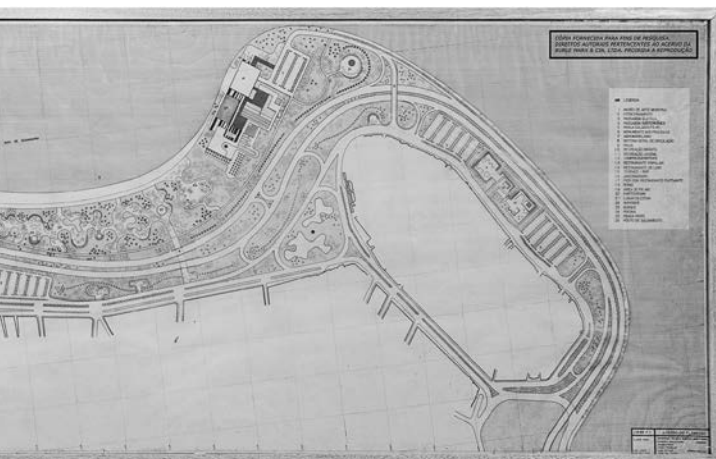
Notes

1. Geoffrey Scott, *The Architecture of Humanism: A Study in the History of Taste* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), p. 210.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Alfred North Whitehead, *Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect* (1927; New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), p. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
5. Scott, *Architecture of Humanism*, p. 227.
6. Henri Focillon, *La vie des formes*, quoted in Rudolf Arnheim, “Inside and Outside in Architecture,” in *The Split and the Structure: Twenty-eight Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 45. Originally published in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 25 (Fall 1966).

Burle Marx, the Landscape Architect

All the while he was renewing the art of landscaping in Brazil, Roberto Burle Marx never forgot he was a painter. From the outset, his revolutionary gardens were the work of a painter. And so, that beginning may be called a pictorial stage in the art of which he became a world-renowned master.

He begins by abandoning the regular flower beds and closely mowed lawns of academic and erudite tradition and, instead of disseminating his warm, brilliantly colored plants by touches, in a sort of impressionist chromatic divisionism, here and there, across lawns and flower beds, he uses a more modern, vigorous technique: the technique of great stains, of large areas in a single color, of free forms in a vast, irregular arabesque. One might call it a Fauvist or Expressionist canvas.



Roberto Burle Marx and Affonso Eduardo Reidy. Parque do Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro. 1962–65. Landscaping plan. c. 1962. Ink on paper, 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ " \times 13' 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ " (100 \times 420 cm)

Through this process, the still purely painterly landscape architect emphasizes the hues, accentuates the values, sometimes in search of the intensity and sometimes of the suppression of a range of brusque intervals that descend from yellow to blue and rise from green to red in the most unexpected, luminous variations. The landscape around the building is alive and inspiring. If the result is principally pictorial (because of its adaptation to the whole), it is, nonetheless, architectural. In the lushness of their plants and the vigor of their colors, Burle Marx's gardens are also a piece of nature, although they still participate in the life of the house and serve as a sort of cadence to its spatial rhythm. Now their function is to expand it, to make it overflow into open spaces.

Like every renovator, Burle Marx is also a restorer, a resuscitator of the past. Thus, whereas the anti-imperial fashion that came with the first so-called nationalist wave cast the imperial-style garden into ostracism and, along with it, the label of "colonial"—a short-lived, merely picturesque invention, and stillborn for its merely erudite and historical inspiration, intentionally directed to the past—the revolution in architecture wound up also banning the pseudocolonial, just as in literature modernism had banned anecdotal, picturesque, and overoptimistically patriotic *jequismo*,¹ Monteiro Lobato style. The colonialist solution that had condemned the great imperial palm tree had done no more than copy the Romantic gardens, *avant la lettre*, of the late eighteenth century. Burle Marx exposed the false nature of that alleged solution by seeking the material he needed in real sources—that is, in the inexhaustible resources of Brazilian vegetation, from the Amazon forest, whence he brought us specimens in the full splendid vigor of their wildness, to the backyards of little caboclo cottages or roadsides where he gathered abandoned, disdained plants and flowers that are nonetheless familiar to the environment of Brazil's rural regions, like ownerless stray dogs in backyards.

Nevertheless, the formal requirements and architectural conditioning do not allow the artist to rest on his laurels; they constantly exercise his imagination. Burle Marx is not fond of limitations or exclusions. And just as he called for forest plants to adorn the gardens of modern palaces, he believes it is time to end the ostracism that republican taste has inflicted on the great royal palm ever since the modernist revolution.

Thus, he began a new stage in his gardener's art—a stage in which the purely pictorial is surpassed, to the benefit of the purely architectural landscape. In several of his projects, he intends to make revolutionary use of the ancient palm tree, imbuing

it with essential formal importance. But he no longer treats it as a solitary, proud individuality, or sadly, in the military style, or precisely, in rows of two, as in the good old days of the Empire. He would have them democratically united by masses, albeit in preestablished order as in a temple filled with Egyptian-style columns. Grouping them in majestic blocks, his idea is to enhance appreciation of the spaces surrounding buildings that house culture, such as museums, schools, libraries, etc.

Now the garden is no longer passive in the presence of the spaces and planes of architectural construction itself. Its function is no longer to make the rhythms of structures and open spaces cadenced, in the relationship between interior and exterior. It tends, rather, to define the spirit of the place. In structuring the surrounding spaces, the artist seeks to create a counterrhythm that simultaneously isolates the architectural unit so that it can define itself and expand, in a kind of accentuation or complementing of its concept and its program, and, finally, integrates it within the totality of the environment, the climate, the atmosphere, light, and nature.

Burle Marx's new murals are dictated by a synthetic thinking that leads each detail to participate in the idea of the whole. Anecdotal figuration has disappeared altogether. The color scheme itself is no longer independent, a mere product of the painter's impressionist taste. All is now form, rhythm, and space. Fortunately, for him the garden is a supreme art, like music, painting, and sculpture. For this very reason he composes it like a symphony in which the colors, the morphology of the plants, the spatial intervals, the areas of separation, the orientation, the environment, the communication pathways, the articulations—everything responds and corresponds to forms, in rhythms, in spaces, in an orchestration that should speak to our eyes, sense of smell, taste, and thought.

—Originally published as “O paisagista Burle Marx,” *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), January 10, 1958.

Note

1. The term refers to the peasant character Jeca Tatu, created by Brazilian author Monteiro Lobato (1882–1948).

Oscar Niemeyer's Statement I

No document in the Brazilian cultural world of our day is more filled with meaning or, indeed, is more pathetic than Oscar Niemeyer's “Depoimento” [“Statement”], published in the current issue of *Módulo* (as well as in the *Jornal do Brasil*).¹

It is a sort of self-criticism. However, it differs from the everyday variety of such documents because one finds in it not a chest-thumping humility, but a clear and brave recognition of mistakes and deficiencies, together with the recognition of his own worth. The first thing that surprises us is the very initiative of such a statement by a world-renowned architect such as Oscar Niemeyer. For suddenly, Oscar—that veritable *playboy* of modern Western architecture—pauses amid his triumphs to look within himself and at his past work. And the side of his nature that had hitherto hidden in shadow emerges, awakened to the heat of an artist's consciousness. Whether a dilettante because he was a skeptic, or a skeptic because he was a dilettante, the careless, bohemian, jovial Niemeyer reveals himself to be serious, capable of enthusiasm and devotion, assured. His faith in architecture is reinvigorated and, with it, the enthusiasm, the seriousness, the dedication to professional work.

He had, however, already given proof of enthusiasm when, with the ingenuousness of the New Christians of politics, he embraced (after the messianic hope awakened by the results of the Second World War) the communist cause, and walked, flashlight in hand, in groups of comrades, into the night, scrawling slogans on walls and putting up posters for an idealized party (as if Stalin's communism were the communism of Lenin and Trotsky).

The experience served to awaken in him a social consciousness, indispensable to any intellectual and artist of our time, principally to an architect. But, on the other hand, this consciousness filled him with reservations about Brazilian architecture, for its lack of social foundation which, in his view, reduced the architect's situation to "merely satisfying the whims of the wealthy classes." Oscar then felt a vague discouragement and, as he confesses in the "Statement," went so far as to deem "naive those who surrendered body and soul to architecture as if they were building works that would endure." It disgusted his generous nature to see art, the profession he embraced through unquenchable vocation, demoted to serving as mere "complement to more important things more directly connected to the life and happiness of men."

Here, Niemeyer made the same mistake in perspective we all make: he thought there was an absolute priority for all men and all callings with regard to certain activities, to the detriment of others and of his particular one. "There are things more important and more directly linked to the happiness of men" than others—than, in his case, architecture. And, then, like all of us, he engaged with a political machine while believing himself engaged in a radiant utopia. Consequently, the activity of architect became, for him, only "an exercise that must be practiced with sporting spirit and nothing more." However, such a state of mind cannot favor any applied and fruitful work in whatever field a gifted spirit may embrace or dedicate himself to; the result could only be that of a dilettante. And with admirable lucidity and personal courage, the great architect admits the following: "And this allowed for a certain negligence—facilitated by my own careless, bohemian temper—and led me to accept too much work, executing it in a hurry, trusting in an ability and capacity for improvisation that I thought I possessed."

Here, in clear words, is a judgment of his own work more severe than that of any other criticism that his adversaries, not always just and impartial, may ever have made of his work.

The nobility of this attitude commands the respect of all and sundry. Above all, his faith in architecture was reborn, even more powerfully than his faith in the ethical values of his art.

—Originally published as "O depoimento de Oscar Niemeyer I," *Jornal do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro), July 24, 1958.

Note

1. Oscar Niemeyer, "Depoimento," *Módulo* (Rio de Janeiro), no. 9 (February 1958). Edited by Niemeyer, the magazine *Módulo* originally circulated from 1955 to 1965 (its publication was forbidden by the military dictatorship in Brazil in 1964). It returned to circulation in 1975 and went out of print in 1989.

Lessons from the International Congress of Critics

According to the participants themselves, the International Congress of Art Critics, held in Brasília, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro,¹ was crowned with great success. All those present—especially the members of the AICA [International Association of Art Critics]—deemed it the most important one they had attended in the last ten years. In my experience, it was the most productive. The close collaboration between art critics, architects, and urban planners on view at the Congress was remarkable and will, from now on, be indispensable at similar meetings. As a matter of fact, one of the motions approved underscored the importance of this collaboration, and expressed the hope that it will continue.

No one came away from it with a sense of indifference and, above all, without having given careful consideration to the serious cultural, philosophical, aesthetic, and social matters debated there with regard to the experiment of Brasília. In this sense, it may be said that the Congress is not over yet. It lives on in the minds of the participants, and many of its results are yet to come. Georg Schmidt, the eminent director of the Kunstmuseum Basel, made an incisive intervention during the session dedicated to the visual arts,² and was the first in Brasília to observe that most of the foreign delegates arrived armed with copious amounts of ready criticisms, but in the contradictory presence of facts and reality, had to rearrange or alter them. Of course, not all were erased, but I believe it is possible to say that none remained intact as they were when they arrived inside European minds. Not even for [the Italian architect and theorist] Mr. Bruno Zevi,³ who always (and coherently) differs from respectably doctrinaire positions. During the Congress and afterward, opinions about Brasília were formed and unformed. The city's presence has an impact on even the most wary. To the qualified global elite, it is a living and spectacular thing. Among the most daring fruits of Western culture, its failure would be (in part) a failure of that culture. Zevi himself was the first to recognize that the weaknesses or errors of Brasília are not her own, but belong to the crisis in which he believes this culture finds itself.

Indeed, according to the convictions, experience, and temperament of each one, those who took part in the Congress are more or less optimistic, more or less skeptical as to Brasília's success. However, for most of them, its failure may have seemed to them a failure of the very culture they represent. It was not only the Argentinean [Tomás] Maldonado⁴ who expressed himself thus. Jacques Lassaigne,⁵ a discerning, typically French critic not readily prone to enthusiasm or reverie, somehow also expressed himself accordingly, despite his objections to what he saw regarding a synthesis or integration of the arts in Brasília. It was he who proposed that those responsible for Brasília should appeal to the great international creators to collaborate on the task of constructing the new city, whose destiny, he acknowledges, "affects all of us."

For us Brazilians, the results of the Congress could not be better. Our objectives were fully achieved: Brasília is now under the scrutiny of professional foreign critics, under observation by enlightened international opinion. Its principal builders know that they are now under the watchful eye or the pressure of such opinion and these critics. It is also up to us Brazilians, regardless of political persuasion, to assist them with our own criticism and our collaboration. But it is especially important to emphasize criticism over retraction. The importance of Brasília, its transcendence and implications, is too great, too serious for it to continue to need advertising. No more advertising. What Brasília needs is comprehension by competent foreigners and especially by Brazilians themselves. If the Congress of Critics somehow managed to cooperate in order to better comprehend, its promoters should be satis-

fied because they have performed a real service to the country and to the cause of Western culture.

A Record of the Congress—Debates about Brasília

According to the program, had it not been for a misunderstanding during the panel, [French art historian] André Chastel (who presided over the closing session⁶ of the Congress of Critics) would have attempted to draw a few conclusions from the debates that began in Brasília and ended in Rio. Even so, though, in his brief intervention during the opening remarks for that session, he was able to discern what is perhaps the Congress's most enduring meaning.

Indeed, after mentioning the general tendency today to favor smaller meetings to the detriment of "macro-congresses," he declared that although not exactly small, ours possessed "an originality" that would suffice to evince its importance: for, this time around, instead of basing itself upon a purely ideological program, the debate centers on an experiment. Brasília is an experiment that will matter in almost all of our careers. Why? Because this vast accomplishment unfolds before us as a demonstration of the importance of the act of building.

From the confrontation of such diverse points of view—expressed with total freedom—it was possible, according to Chastel, "not to pass judgment for or against Brasília"—such was not the intention—but "to show, in the face of that exceptional experiment, how the principal problems of architecture and urban planning are presented today." Indeed, Brasília provided a sort of backdrop to all the debates that emerged throughout the course of the Congress's eight sessions, even the most remote or abstract.

In this sense, it might be said that the second session (dedicated to urban planning) was the one in which all of the problems developed and debated in subsequent sessions were first presented. In Lúcio Costa's absence, Sir William Holford⁷ was appointed principal moderator. He carried out this duty with the precision and sobriety that already characterized him when, as part of the jury that selected project plans for the new capital, he listed his reasons for preferring Lúcio Costa's project. Building on the idea we had expounded upon in an earlier session, according to which Brasília itself is an adventure, a challenge posed by history to Brazilians, their rulers and people, he was able to conclude, most appropriately, that if Brasília is "a challenge of such historical importance, it seems to me that it is not enough to produce an organization. Something must be produced that communicates and, consequently, what you tend to do is to produce a work of art." "Throughout history" only the artist has been able to "communicate" over the centuries. However, "this faculty of communication must now be extended not only to the dimensions of a single building or a group of buildings, but to an entire city."

Here, in all its simplicity (but also in its extreme complexity) is the angle of the Congress of Critics' central theme—or, so to speak, the not directly urbanistic, not directly material and social or economic side of Brasília the enterprise, but its mythical, imponderable side, the search for a symbol-image endowed with the faculty of communication for an entire people. This point, he explains, was not raised during the competition for the pilot plans. He confesses that many conservative minds asked him how he, a subject of H.R.H., could have accepted a plan with the conditions of the one described for Brasília. His answer was that, in pronouncing its verdict, the jury was, in fact, thinking in terms of conservation—but taken in their true historical sense, that is, something "that might constitute a stable center or focal point not only for the region but for the country as a whole. And if this focus had to be a work of art,

then there was no sense in making small plans, or prefabricated houses, or a diplomatic concentration camp.”

Naturally, only a congress of art critics could give this capital idea all its attention, and draw from it transcendent implications. The Congress made an effort to do just that.

Brasília was not to be just any city, reports Mr. Holford, or a large commercial metropolitan emporium, but a central administrative capital. Its functions are very different from those of the emporium-city, and really quite specific: a focal point for national determination and interest. Therefore, it had to be a “city unified by the equilibrium of its buildings.” In moving on to his examination of Costa’s urban plan, he underscored “extroversion as an essential quality.” “The city will not look inward, all secrets, comfort, and tranquility, but will face the exterior,” and, he emphasizes, “with a silhouette and form that may be appreciated by anyone at a glance.” With something like the quality of Italian cities climbing high upon hills, it also has a quality of the great compositions of European capitals: the Champs Elysées in Paris, the Mall in London. Unlike other capitals that look inward, such as Canberra, Brasília does not begin with an isolated element; the whole city emerges as a complete and unique object, rising up within the landscape, visible from all directions: like a capital. He draws the attention of Congress participants to the felicitousness with which Costa’s plan exposes the city alongside the pilot axis, advancing through open space even as—at the opposite extreme, as if coming to a full stop—the Praça dos Três Poderes [Three Powers Plaza] sits upon a kind of platform or pedestal “that will protect it forever from any subsequent development that might interfere in its skyline.”

Vividly illustrative of another particularly original feature of the plan is his comparison of Brasília to “a vertebrate animal,” with “its fixed and permanent column or spine.” He tells us that things would have been much easier if it had grown “by a mere multiplication of its parts, adding ministry to ministry, blocks of houses to blocks of houses” until it had gradually spread throughout the surrounding land. However, it is a “very complicated animal.” “It is endowed with a permanent and fixed framing within which cells grow to a certain point and may also change with time.” To him, the most important thing in it is its “system of growth.” Rio, “a very beautiful woman,” “has a cancerous growth. Brasília, however, was endowed with a growth method that could be healthy, orderly, and able to be stopped at a certain point.”

After listing these characteristic positive features of Brasília, the moderator arrives at the points he calls “most critical.” Given the complexity of this organic structure, given its vertebrate nature, he admonishes: “You will be extremely vulnerable to each thing that does not go well.” From a financial standpoint, you will have to inject large sums of money into projects that are not immediately profitable, starting with an entire network of highway systems. And, he adds, on a social level, “you will have to predict the wishes of those who are not yet citizens; very soon there will be protests that much too much was done for them, while they are not doing enough for themselves. This is still to come. From an administrative viewpoint, it is very easy to take shortcuts through the first steps of a project of such magnitude.” Although, he adds, not wanting to “prematurely prophesy complications, they do exist, they are right here, and they are all the more troublesome in view of the dimensions of the animal under discussion.”

In conclusion, he notes how the most important isolated factor in the city plan is the form of control established to avoid excess growth. “Between having to specify too much or not enough, Costa decided to focus only on the essential in order to allow, in his plan, and especially in the residential blocks, the city’s points of growth

to develop peacefully and slowly within the general framing. Thus, it is a matter of combining what is fixed and what is flexible, what can be designed and what should be left to develop on its own." He feels that this is one of the most significant points in Costa's final plan.

Thus, Brasília's urban planning problem was articulated with meridian clarity.

Bruno Zevi, the Congress's *enfant terrible*, spoke next. Everyone looked forward anxiously to his intervention. He proffered it with humor and generosity, albeit impartially. The effusive Roman extrovert is the opposite of Sir William's British discretion. After a brief, half-sarcastic, half-indulgent introduction, he even asks: "Whom shall we criticize? Dr. Lúcio Costa or Oscar Niemeyer?" There is no motive for this, for in "wandering through Brasília" or "examining the photographs and projects, as we did in Europe, even those who, like us, expressed many doubts or reservations about this adventure felt that Brasília's faults are the faults of our culture. We are all responsible. If there are a few defects, they stem from the fact that Brasília physically projects problems that have not been resolved—by any of us—in any part of the world."

Having established this broad and comprehensive point of view, Zevi goes on to explain what he understands to be the dynamics of the urban mechanism. He declares that there is a split, "nowadays, between the mechanism of urban structures and the process of the human dweller. It is everybody's task to attempt to find a way, an instrument capable of reestablishing the harmony that existed in the old cities between mechanical efficiency and the human possibilities of living in those cities." And there is a bit of pathos in his question, "Is our culture prepared to meet this challenge?" He answers himself by saying it is, despite his many doubts. Between a Lúcio Costa lecture in Venice,⁸ in which he had declared absolute certainty that it is possible "to build a city artificially, the structure of which would become automatically dynamic after the artificial start of its foundation," and a statement Niemeyer made a few months ago "in which he nobly and systematically expressed his doubts," he agreed with the latter. The generation of architects that Le Corbusier called "the youngsters"—[Walter] Gropius, Le Corbusier, [Ludwig] Mies van der Rohe—"was absolutely certain that it could artificially create a city with life, an automaton that would acquire a soul." "But we," he says, "the elderly thirty-, forty-, and fifty-year-olds, have many more doubts than the seventy-year-old youths." Investigating the reason for this, one discovers that modern architecture finds itself in a profound crisis, having won the battle "at the level of language—a crisis that is felt very strongly in Italy, is quite obvious in the United States and much less so in Brasília, but it exists in the whole world."

With regard to urban structures, a master plan, though necessary, is not enough. What is needed is architecture that will give life to the city plan, to render it three-dimensional, and a concept of human life that will make it quadridimensional, or human experience through time. History teaches that wherever there was no clear architectural concept, where the spatial concepts of architecture were not clearly outlined from the beginning, no large-scale city plan could be devised. Thus, he admonishes, "when some of us are concerned with the future of Brasília, the fact is they are worried about themselves, about something that concerns everyone, on an international level"—"it is the crisis of a certain spatial concept that characterized modern architecture." In comparison with the generation of Le Corbusier, Gropius, or Mies van der Rohe, "which had architectural concepts that could almost automatically be translated into planning, the new generations do not have them." Today's most gifted young architects—[Minoru] Yamasaki,⁹ [Bernard] Rudofsky,¹⁰ and Marcel Breuer among them—do not present an architecture that exhibits a mediation "between that

architecture and a vision on the scale of a city. They are very concerned with monumentality, grace, light, psychological idiosyncrasies, but they do not reveal a concept so strong and clear that it can be translated into urban planning terms.”

From this crisis of architecture, whose signs may be found almost anywhere, he moved on to the study of urban dynamics—that is, the dynamic of the pilot plan, the dynamic of the architecture that executes it, and, finally, that of the urban installations that presuppose a synthesis of the arts, meaning the collaboration of painting and sculpture with architecture. In analyzing the former, with regard to Lúcio [Costa]’s pilot plan, he confesses to not having quite understood “whether the same plan was open or closed. Perhaps it is both. Mr. Holford would say that the plan is open, and yet the form is such that it appears to be closed. In any event, it is dangerous in both cases. In general, in the theory of city planning, whenever a plan is said to be open it means that, once artificially created, the city can find its own equilibrium, its balance, its own development through spontaneous growth. The planner is the man who injects elements of life without defining the way in which these elements will be developed. Therein, too, lie great dangers.” The example of the plan for Ferrara, created during the sixteenth century, shows us that for an open plan “a very well established planning authority is indispensable. However, if the plan is closed, one need not depend on the planning authorities, since the plan is there to be executed, and becomes concrete.” However, such a supposition does not occur at any time, as historical examples everywhere prove to us.

As for a city’s architectural dynamics, it does not matter whether they are artificial or natural; the objections to Brasília being wholly artificial—“that, from the sky it looks like a model of Brasília” or that its buildings also look like models of themselves—are an unfounded criticism, for even though Venice is completely artificial, it still possesses a dynamic urban structure. What matters is that, at the architectural level, the dynamics of urban structures depend on a dialogue, a marriage between monuments and lesser architecture, between large buildings and certain vernacular buildings that are still harmonious. The dynamics of our ancient cities depended entirely on this.

“Meanwhile, in modern architecture I maintain that we have great architects, great monuments; however, we do not have a vernacular, we do not find a conduit between professorial language and popular speech, between written language and spoken dialect. Our architecture may be good or bad, but when it is bad, it is not popular, only pretentious, commercial, pernicious.”

On the subject of an intermediation of the city, Zevi confesses he is anxious to attend the fifth session of the Congress, devoted to the problem of the synthesis of the arts. But he immediately expresses his skepticism about the precedents. Such a synthesis is still very far from being achieved; it is enough to see the UNESCO building in Paris, a perfect example of a fiasco with regard to collaboration or synthesis of the arts, for “the painting[s] and sculpture we find there were carelessly juxtaposed or mere attempts to correct architectural mistakes.”

In closing, he bravely refuses to wholly blame this general crisis of city planning, of architecture, of landscape architecture, on society, as a result of the crisis of the latter, as many would have it. “We must not give up our own responsibility and pass it on to society or to politicians. There are many problems we can discuss together, for they are problems we ourselves can solve.”

In his own way, Richard Neutra¹¹ responds to Zevi’s cultural skepticism. In dealing with the nonvisual aspects of the urbanistic problem, he signals his pleasure at being present with his fellow architects at this core of the initiatives that are creating

Brasília. He sums up his thoughts and his enthusiasm for this initiative in an unexpected comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah: "They became famous for perversions of nature: Brasília shall become famous for attempting to find a path back to that which is biologically tolerable." This "biologically tolerable" feature can no longer be found in any of the world's great cities, including Rio and São Paulo.

Architect Eero Saarinen¹² focused the debate on the concrete terrain of his direct and fresh impressions of Brasília. Three things impressed him in particular, and he considered them "absolutely marvelous": the first is Lúcio Costa's pilot plan; the second is the architecture he saw; and the third, finally, is the enormous constructing organization. He recalls that, during the first part of this century, although city planning possessed some fine aspects, its architecture was somehow still "at the functionalist stage," and for this very reason "only worried then about what was good sociologically speaking." Consequently, we had the perambulatory plans of England, Sweden, and other countries that have nothing architectural about them, "although they are terribly convenient for mothers having more babies." Costa understood that the question is something else, for you can resolve all those problems, but with such problems you will not give form to the city. As an artist-architect, likewise underscoring a point made by Holford, but from another angle—that of the Congress—he declares: "Form must come from something else. By this we understand the importance of a national capital not only for the people who live in it, but as a symbol for the entire country and, undoubtedly, for all of Western civilization, which has not really built any city in the twentieth century, so that there is something entirely new here which I believe to be truly important: the symbol in relation to the people."

In the case of Brasília, he keenly observes that, in dealing with architecture, it is very difficult "to distinguish where the plan begins and where architecture ends, for when plan and architecture are at the highest level, they fuse completely." In view of the architecture they see there, he declares that many critics must reorient something in their thinking with regard to certain dogmas about what architecture should be, such as "functionalism," etc. "Nowadays, this is already a little passé," although it still resists. Now, the current principle is that of "absolute structural integrity."

"But," he opines, "what, in its simplest terms, typifies architecture as a problem of form is really the connecting of the soil upon which the building is raised to the sky above it; it is knowing how to make the connection between the two." "I believe that is being done here in Niemeyer's buildings in the most beautiful way." "It is something about which he has reflected long and well, and I believe that you must look at things from this perspective, and not necessarily from the old dogmatic point of view." And, in closing, referring to "the formidable task of organization that is being undertaken," which he called a "miracle," he hoped for "only one more miracle to happen—that the city be able to support itself. So many problems will emerge in five or ten years from seeds that are being sown now. By this I mean controlling traffic lights and billboards, parking lots and *their* lighting, so that the commercial district may become truly harmonious, and zoning conservation, landscaping, and all the rest of it may be controlled so that our entire generation may then feel proud of all this as something it has bequeathed."

[Austrian-American architect and theorist] Mr. F. J. [Frederick John] Kiesler presented a very personal point of view, both positive and negative—albeit one that reflects the experienced opinion of an old veteran of the century's artistic struggles ever since Dada, but also of a professional architect and specialized theorist. As bold as Zevi, he has over the latter the advantage of a long life, chock full of experience and knowledge acquired not just by study. Mr. Kiesler expresses himself with verve

and, underneath a noble skepticism, betrays an extremely perspicacious, inventive, and passionate nature. He says he brought to the debate two things, one positive and the other negative. In looking around and making his way through the new city, the most important thing to him, is “the new perspective that has been created and that I shall call *Fata Morgana* perspective. I believe it to be unique in the world, because it is simultaneously so far and so near.” As for the architectural unities, he makes no attempt to hide his contrary point of view toward monumentality of any kind. “I believe,” he says, “that monumental architecture, which has taken on a modern appearance here, is still monumental, imposing, full of determination, and I believe that this is contrary to modern man’s true inner life and sense and psyche. We feel that it is we human beings who are a city’s important monuments. The architects and planners of today’s cities were not educated to understand the human being in relationship to other human beings. We are primarily builders, principally architectural engineers, but we know nothing of the emotions of these beings, of their relationships with children, with the elderly, to mention but a few of the many important items that a city or a house would need to take into account. We must wait for new generations who will first be educated in the interrelationships of human society. I feel that what Mr. Zevi said—that there is a schism between great technological advances and the inner needs of human beings—is currently quite visible in cities here and in the new city, too. I fear that you will acquire all the high technological development and equipment created in Europe and incorporate it into a fantastic and beautiful desert land, when it is simplicity—the extreme simplicity of living and man’s truly basic needs—that should be the primary constructive factor of your city.”

In contradistinction to this pessimistic state of mind and in spite of the depth of the considerations, another (also American) architect, Douglas Haskell, intervened to share an opposing, optimistic point of view, expressed with some humor (and even sarcasm), which likens his manner to Zevi’s petulant (and somewhat plebeian) one. He says he will talk because Mr. Zevi provoked him, and to say something that had not yet been said. “None of us,” he declares, “who have come here from abroad is fully qualified to talk about this city, for here is Mr. Zevi, who hails from a city that has been in Brasília’s current condition for two and a half millennia; and there is Mr. Haskell from New York, a city that existed for two hundred years under the sort of conditions now prevailing in Brasília; and there is Mr. Neutra from Los Angeles, which allowed this opportunity to pass it by altogether and is creating something, in its ineffable way, that will be completed in about fifty years. Consequently, all of these differences in time periods come together, and it now seems that Mr. Holford hails from the only city that has some point of contact with this situation here.”

And how, he asks, “can you cross hundreds of miles of virgin territory in an airplane and arrive at an establishment such as this one and think in terms of what you are used to in New York, Los Angeles, or Rome? It is not possible. I believe that what is happening here is what Mr. Zevi wishes would have happened—namely, that osmosis between people and architecture, in which the determinant thing has been a kind of instinct about what was convenient to the space surrounding the city, to the country’s ambitions, and to the possibilities of what is most advanced in a country that on average has been the most advanced in following modern architecture. Consequently, we may salute it.” But Mr. Haskell did not restrict himself to this kind of defense of the Brasília enterprise for, in closing, in his simple-minded way, he did not fail to show the need for a rational occupation of the land around Brasília when he recommended the establishment of “large, robust farms for whatever is suitable for growing here. In spite of its being completely impossible for us to follow this example in New York

or Los Angeles, I believe that, down the road, we will have to find things that would be beneficial to us and, in the name of this, we congratulate you.” During this same session, Mr. A. [André] Wogensky, the French architect who was a longtime collaborator of Le Corbusier, also spoke. In comparison with the others, his intervention took a generic character, in a lofty and doctrinaire tone, that viewed Brasília as a sort of experimental field for confirming his spatial concepts as an urban planner and architect.

Israeli [art critic and museum director] Haim Gamzu gave a living testimonial: he brought to the debate the example of his small country, where youths go to the desert to build their communes and cities with their bare hands. And, with stimulating frankness, he warns us that if Brasília is not the fruit “of an idealist spirit, a pioneer spirit,” it will be a “city of official documents, of dossiers, of classified ideas and numbers.” It will then look “like a work of Kafkaesque revenge against the public servants, bureaucrats, pensioners, and the retired, with intellectual baggage that carries congealed and even sclerotic ideas.” “In the first years of living in Brasília, these people will undoubtedly consider themselves not as men with a national mission to carry out, but as exiles who impatiently await retirement in order to return to their respective cities, which are already ‘old’ enough to be able to offer them the comforts they no longer have.” And in a reference to his own country, he shows how the building process there is the inverse of Brasília’s: “We start from below. We bring immigrants over, give them a modest roof and, once the new arrivals have established themselves, they begin to build their houses while waiting for agricultural and professional apprenticeships. Once the houses have been built, they move into them and begin to organize their new society, to elect their administrators, to choose their municipal or rural authorities and their government representatives.” Brasília is the inverse, he tells us vehemently. “It is something unexpected,” but it might yield results “if the administration keeps in mind the unshakable principle that a city is made up not only of buildings but of men, of human beings, more complex than administrative organisms. If the builders of Brasília engage themselves in shaping their city in this way, always bearing in mind the profoundly human element of the city in general and, most particularly, of the modern city, then Brasília can become a promise of the future in which human beings can be proud of the work of their predecessors.”

Confessing himself there as in his own land, in the same climate of construction and dynamism, Mr. Gamzu reminds us that it is not enough for this pioneer spirit to be rooted in Brasília’s architects and urban planners, “but also and especially in the large mass of Brazilian youths who must prove themselves equal to the gigantic task of the Westward march.” Though architecture seems to him simultaneously beautiful and light, logical and flexible urbanism, which will allow the work to become “reasonable and moderate, and poetic to boot,” yet again (and he cannot remain silent) “it needs a new human species, a new type of citizen, able to make sacrifices for a cause that faces the future head on”

Following the moving and grave intervention of the distinguished Israeli critic, who brought with him such a profound example so full of highly important lessons for us Brazilians, we had to take part in the discussion to highlight certain points made by the principal moderator, respond to a few of Mr. Zevi’s objections, and situate Brasília within the country’s current social reality. It was up to Mr. Holford to wind up the entire debate by showing where in the urban plan lies “the connection between the monumental elements and the organic cells that will presumably grow”: in the superblocks intended for the residential units, to be delimited by rows of as yet unplanted trees. The invention is remarkable, for it is by means of these trees that

the frames for these pictures will be made, and the size of the city can thus be visualized even before the pictures have been painted in their respective frames, which will only happen with time. "Here we have something that had not yet been done. Even in Rome, Bath, and Venice, building was accomplished cell by cell, enclosing an inner patio or a piazza. Here, though, one is (or Costa is) furnishing a city with a series of frames that provide its dimensions and can, themselves, be filled in many ways and by different peoples, over time." This explanation completes several of the theoretical arguments now put forth. The moderator concluded that the debate in question appears to him to be "a kind of commentary that can only be described as a revelation—the revelation of the space that is being elaborated here, in one of the greatest countries in the world."

It may be said that in the session on urban planning, all of the Congress's most important questions were put to discussion in such a way that they stemmed organically from that session's debates. Even when highly technical problems were discussed in the next session, it was still a derivation of the important initial theme. And when Professor [François] Le Lionnais expounded in a clear and simple manner on the new science of "operational research," everyone realized its significance as a contribution to the good planning of the city under construction.¹³ Also at the level of engineering's extremely modern relations with architecture, Italian professor Giulio Pizzetti delivered a brilliant message about "new structures in architecture" that will open a brand new chapter in the history of modern architecture.¹⁴ For example, in talking about a new family of structures, he said: "To find something truly interesting and new, the structural engineers, mathematicians, and topologists must be able to work as a team and systematically propose new subjects to architecture that the architect will then bring to life." And he cites the specific case of structures in a hyperbolic paraboloid. When only engineers worked on them, they acknowledge that they only made "horrible things." "However, when the subject was proposed to architects, it had to be admitted that they made very good things." In closing, he proudly declared: "The time has come to hope for a very close collaboration between the mathematician, the structural engineer, the topologist, and the architect." Such a perspective might well be born in Brasília. This was the tacit conclusion arrived at by many.

As the Congress advanced in its business, the problems debated took on an increasingly greater emphasis on aesthetic order or aesthetics themselves. As for the session on the general theme of architecture, the principal moderator, Professor Raymond Lopez,¹⁵ addressed a provocative subject: "Is architecture the city's greatest art?" Under this banner, Mr. Lopez tackled all the questions concerning the city, from urbanistic spaces to family spaces, and from matters of circulation to the collaboration of sculpture and painting with architecture. Mr. Lopez is among those rare individuals who do not fear "monumentality," for he considers it, in Brasília, to be the very incarnation of the idea of the city's creation. Later, he emphasizes the "vision of three superimposed circulations" as one of the great moments of this creation, "all the more thrilling because the idea comes from Leonardo da Vinci." And on that subject, he adds: "We have been waiting for several centuries for this as yet unrealized idea of differentiated circulation to which [French architect] Auguste Perret returned at Le Havre, and which Le Corbusier dealt with in his texts, though not in constructed volumes, and finally executed here; we saw it this morning in the process of execution."

In his lengthy, erudite dissertation on the problem of placing public monuments in city spaces, Professor Alberto Sartoris¹⁶ says: "In the new city, decoration is not the purpose of monuments and public buildings. They are born from precise needs, they come from a constructivist perspective, they represent ideas; they signify the char-

acter of an ambiance and an atmosphere. Their placement must respond to the city's physical and geographical structure, to its urban autonomy, to its spatial, organic, and social sense. In a city that took regional configuration into account—where the traffic was fixed according to preestablished itineraries and in hierarchical order, where modes of communication were mapped out according to commercial axes, where the direction of distances and various needs were established according to the articulations of neighboring spaces—the logical placement of monuments and public buildings stemming from such a plan expresses the formal vision of the harmonious city in each block and in each perspectival space.”

Here Mr. Sartoris outlined the preconditions in order for the new city's urbanistic spaces not to get lost in the confusion, in the eclecticism, in the provincialism of easy, routine, and irresponsible solutions. Urbanistically speaking, Brasília is endowed with those indispensable prior conditions listed by the moderator. This begs the question: Will its interior spaces be distributed in such a way that they correspond to that “formal vision of the harmonious city” about which the Italian professor spoke? That is the question. It is impossible to continue to list the speakers and moderators of the various items of the day's topic. This session also included Congress president Giulio Argan's extraordinarily penetrating intervention, in the absence of Mr. James Johnson Sweeney,¹⁷ on an essential topic for critics and the process of artistic creation in our time: “What is the attitude of the architect and, even more so, in general, that of the modern artist toward tradition—that is to say, the past?” Yet another presentation at this session was the Belgian Robert Delevoy's¹⁸ very dense communication on art and architectural criticism, followed by an extremely interesting debate in which the American professor Meyer Schapiro¹⁹ made his first intervention of the conference, complaining that nothing had been said about architecture in Brasília from the perspective of style, character, or qualities. It was also during this session that [the influential French designer and architect] Mme. Charlotte Perriand, in a brave and moving intervention, gave a talk on *habitat* in Brasília; she spoke of hearing about “monumental architecture and other things”; about *habitat*, “which touches man's heart, we never talk. And yet it is the most difficult and generally the most badly resolved matter. This is true in all parts of the world, and probably here too. Habitat is architecture's poor relation.” “Brasília,” she concludes, “assured us of an improvement but, during my visit to an apartment there, I could see that the social improvement I would like to have found had not been introduced there. I hope that in the future very special attention is paid in Brasília to places for living, which are what touches man most closely.”

This was the last session in Brasília. On the following day, the Congress migrated to São Paulo.

—Originally published as “Lições do Congresso Internacional de Críticos,” *Módulo 3* (December, 1959).

Notes

1. The International Congress of Art Critics was held September 17–25, 1959. See Maria da Silveira Lobo and Roberto Segre, eds., *Congresso internacional extraordinário de críticos de arte. Cidade nova: Síntese das artes* (Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ/FAU, 2009).
2. The fifth session, “Artes plásticas” (Visual arts), took place September 21, 1959, at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo.
3. A talk by Bruno Zevi, “A dinâmica das estruturas urbanísticas” (The dynamics of urbanistic structures), was presented during the second session, “Urbanística” (Urbanistics), September 18, 1959, at the Palácio da Justiça in Brasília, and published in *HABITAT* 10, no. 57 (November–December 1959). On Bruno Zevi's criticism, see also “Crítica a Brasília,” *Zodiac*, no. 6 (May 1960), special edition about Brazil with the dossier *Rapporto Brasile*.
4. Artist Tomás Maldonado took part in the sixth session “As artes industriais” (The industrial arts), September 22, 1959, in São Paulo, and the seventh session “Arte e educação” (Art and education), September 23, 1959, at Rio de Janeiro's Museu de Arte Moderna.

5. A member of the French delegation, Jacques Lassaigne was then president of the professional union of art critics.
6. Held September 25, 1959, at Rio de Janeiro's Museu de Arte Moderna, the eighth and final session, "A situação das artes na cidade" (The situation of the arts in the city), launched participants into a discussion titled "Tem a arte uma missão na civilização que se abre?" (Does art have a mission in the civilization that is emerging?).
7. British architect and city planner Sir William Holford took part in the first session, "A cidade nova" (The new city), with the talk "O espaço urbanístico e arquitetônico de Brasília" (Brasília's urbanistic and architectural space) and, according to Pedrosa, actively participated in the second session, "Urbanística" (Urbanistics), September 18, 1959. His name is also listed among the panel participants for the third session, "Técnica e expressividade" (Technique and expressiveness), September 19, 1959. On Holford's criticism, see "Brasília: A New Capital for Brazil," *Architectural Review* 122 (December 1957), and "Problems and Perspectives of Brasília," *Módulo*, no. 17 (April 1960).
8. Lúcio Costa, "A crise da arte contemporânea" (The crisis in contemporary art), lecture given at the first UNESCO International Congress of Artists in Venice (September 1952). It was published in, among other places, *Brasil: Arquitetura Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro) (August–September 1953): 2–3.
9. American architect best known as the designer of New York's World Trade Center.
10. Moravian-born American architect, writer, designer, teacher, and social historian.
11. The modernist American architect Richard Neutra took part in the second session, "Urbanística" (Urbanistics), September 18, 1959, with the talk "Dos aspectos formais não visuais do plano da cidade e seu contexto urbanístico" (On the formal, nonvisual aspects of the city plan and its urbanistic context).
12. Eero Saarinen participated in the second session, "Urbanística" (Urbanistics), with the talk "Condicionamento sociológico e tecnológico ótimos" (Optimal sociological and technological conditioning), September 18, 1959.
13. French writer and chemical engineer François Le Lionnais gave his talk at the third session, "Técnica e expressividade" (Technique and expressivity), and was president of the panel, held September 19, 1959, at the Palace of Justice in Brasília.
14. Architectural engineer Giulio Pizzetti gave a talk at the third session, "Técnica e expressividade" (Technique and expressivity), September 19, 1959, at the Palace of Justice in Brasília.
15. French architect and urban planner Raymond Lopez presided over the panel at the fourth session, "A arquitetura" (Architecture), September 19, 1959, and took part in the fifth session, "Artes plásticas" (Visual arts), September 21, 1959, with the talk "É a arquitetura a arte maior na cidade?" (Is architecture the city's greatest art?). At the debate following the third session "Arte e expressividade" (Art and expressivity), Lopez questioned Pedrosa's famous statement to the effect that "Brazil is a country condemned to modernity," but the discussion was redirected to the subject of the session with Jean Prouvé's talk "As relações entre as profissões do arquiteto e do engenheiro" (The relations between the professions of architect and engineer).
16. The Swiss avant-garde architect Alberto Sartoris (1901–1999) took part in the seventh session, "Arte e educação" (Art and education), September 23, 1959, with a talk "O valor educativo da arquitetura e das artes individuais" (The educational value of architecture and the individual arts).
17. At the opening session, AICA (International Association of Art Critics) president James Johnson Sweeney, then director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, was replaced by vice president Giulio Carlo Argan, the Italian art historian and, later, mayor of Rome.
18. Art historian Robert Delevoy took part in the fourth session, "A arquitetura" (Architecture), with his talk "Crítica de arte na arquitetura" (Art criticism in architecture), September 19, 1959.
19. Meyer Schapiro took part in the fifth session, "Das artes plásticas" (On the Visual Arts), with his talk "A pintura e a escultura no coletivo urbanístico e arquitetônico" (Painting and sculpture in the urban and architectural collective); and in the debate on "Tem a arte uma missão na civilização que se abre?" (Does art have a mission in the emerging civilization?) during the eighth session, "A situação das artes na cidade" (The situation of the arts in the city), September 25, 1959, at Rio de Janeiro's Museu de Arte Moderna.

7. A Singular Socialist

Introduction Glória Ferreira

Mário Pedrosa's interest in communism and in social struggles was awakened early on and he maintained a militant stance throughout his life, talking and writing about the most diverse issues—from the Soviet Union and the crisis within the party to Brazilian situations associated with his no less militant art criticism. As he pointed out in 1981, "I was always a political animal."

In 1970, persecuted and accused of slandering the military government by denouncing torture in the country's prisons, he took refuge in the Chilean embassy, later going to Chile. At that moment, he was able to depend upon the solidarity of countless international artists and intellectuals—Alexander Calder among them—who sent a letter to President Garrastazu Medici (see pp. 421 in the present volume), holding him responsible for the physical and moral integrity "of this eminent Brazilian whose personality has earned the admiration and respect of his colleagues everywhere."

Upon his return from exile, late in 1977, he granted several interviews in which he discussed his life as well as his ideas for addressing the Brazilian situation. In "Art Is Not Essential. The Intellectual's Profession Is to Be a Revolutionary" (1981) which was not published until after his death, Pedrosa reiterates his sense that "art is not currently flourishing."

In analyzing the Brazilian situation, he considers the formation of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' party) to be a product of Brazil's history, underscoring the fact that it is "the only truly new political idea in this incipient decade," in which "healthy empiricism shall ultimately be its active strength." Along with Apolônio de Carvalho, a socialist activist important to the labor movement, he signed the very first party membership form in 1980. —*Glória Ferreira*

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Indigenous Art: The Choice of the Critic Who Grew Weary of the Avant-Garde

Clear thinking, vitality, and bold plans continue to render Mário Pedrosa an easily identifiable figure in spite of his seventy-seven years. For one who arrived in October, after seven years of exile, the work rhythm is intense. A week in São Paulo visiting friends has already allowed him to contact more people who may soon be collaborating with him on his new project: a large exhibition about indigenous Brazilian peoples to be inaugurated later this year at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

During the time he lived in Chile and in Paris, Mário Pedrosa published few texts among us: only a set of essays published by Perspectiva, with texts written prior to his departure (Mundo, homem, arte em crise [World, Man, Art in Crisis]) and the "Manifesto aos tupiniquins ou nambás" ["Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples"] published in Versus magazine simultaneously in the United States, Mexico, Portugal, and France. In Paris, the Fondation Maeght published an essay on his friend Alexander Calder, which was used in the great artist's final French exhibition. Mário published yet another text called "Miró and the Poets."

Jornal da tarde: During your time in Paris, what vision did people have of Latin American art? Was there any sense of it as being a single bloc?

Mário Pedrosa: No, there wasn't. It so happens that there are many Latin American artists living in Paris. Some live in Paris because they are exiles there and they need

to work. Others have already been established there for longer periods, and thus their activity has been more integrated into the city. But there isn't an overall picture of Latin American art. What there is, is a Latin American sentiment among the Latin Americans themselves—a solidarity that goes beyond mere coexistence. As a matter of fact, this is a very generalized sentiment in Latin America today and I believe it is really because of the exceptional political circumstances in which people live.

But to return to Latin American art, when I arrived in Chile in 1970, I went to work with Miguel Rojas Dominguez at the Instituto de Artes Latino-Americanas and we were trying to focus our work on this type of activity. A survey of what Latin American art might be. And at that point Latin American art was whatever we said Latin American art was.

Jornal da tarde: Did the arrival of so many Latin Americans in France during the last few years lead to any change in the Parisian art scene? Did anything happen? Any sort of disruption of the city's cultural life?

Pedrosa: There was some recognition of the existence of a large number of South American artists in Paris, of a certain search for something that was peculiar to all of them. Latin American influences in the Parisian artistic milieu . . . at the very least, there is an awareness of a certain importance, of a Latin American presence within the Paris art scene. I can say there is a substantial presence of Latin America in Paris.

(The problems of art in Latin America have long been a concern for Mário Pedrosa. And he was surely the first to suggest a Latin American biennial. A member of the jury for the [São Paulo] Bienals of 1953, 1955, and 1960, as well as director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, in 1975 he told Sheila Leirner of [the newspaper] O Estado de S. Paulo about the responsibilities that the Bienal should take on in the future.)

That's true. In an interview I gave to the *Estado de S. Paulo* I spoke of the need for a Latin American biennial, about how it should function as more of an interchange between Latin American peoples, as a sort of inventory of its common traits. At the time, I used to say that, from the perspective of its cultural program, the São Paulo Bienal has very particular features that are distinguishable from those of the metropolitan countries. Brazil is part of South America. In turn, South America is also part of Brazil. The destinies of one and the other are conjoined.

Jornal da tarde: The Art Council of the São Paulo Bienal has a plan to put on another, Latin American biennial during those years in which the international biennial doesn't take place. Seeing as how you were one of the first to express a concern in this regard, has the Bienal already spoken to you about it?

Pedrosa: No, they haven't invited me to do anything yet, but I think the regular biennial itself should become a Latin American biennial. It would be more interesting than to continue on as another international biennial that is indistinguishable from the others. As a matter of fact, I think a Latin American show would be important. And, on the other hand, I think we Brazilians are experiencing Latin America for the first time and this would represent the first serious contact between what goes on in Brazil and what goes on in Latin American countries, political difficulties notwithstanding.

Jornal da tarde: But is there an identity crisis in Brazilian art? A crisis in the available visual repertory?

Pedrosa: Well, I've been abroad, but I've been able to discern a questioning about what Brazil might be.

Jornal da tarde: There are certain doubts, for instance whether it is more important to work from popular culture or to appropriate the repertory of contemporary art in order to work on Brazilian terms.

Pedrosa: The contemporary art thing doesn't have to be done because it has already been done. Things here are exactly as they are in any other place. There is no initiative in any of the aspects of so-called modern art and, ultimately, they repeat themselves. I think there is a general weariness, and I think the reason for this weariness is exactly because what is done here is exactly the same thing that is done in the rest of the world with more or less the differences of the local personalities. Which is the very reason I'm not all that interested in this cosmopolitan aspect of art. Few people are. This is also why I have said again and again that I no longer consider myself to be an art critic. Plenty of people are surprised at this because I was an extreme champion of modern art. I used to think there was a purpose, a justification that no longer exists. Now as for artists of talent, interesting artists, they're around.

Jornal da tarde: But is there still anyone who stimulates you from an artistic point of view, for the work they have done?

Pedrosa: I have friends in the arts whose work I follow, but artists I can bet on, who represent something that might leave a mark . . . there aren't any, no.

I believe that artists today may well be of interest. It's not that I don't believe in their quality. The fact is I'm already a very tired, rather experienced man. I no longer believe that modern art in itself can prolong the current crisis. And then there's this: an international crisis. There is a cultural and a social crisis, a political crisis, there is a moral crisis, and there is a conceptual crisis. So art doesn't quite fit into this sector at the moment as an essential thing.

Jornal da tarde: And if art is no longer essential, what can people do as creative work?

Pedrosa: People don't only make creative art. There is also science and any other activity that involves creativity. You don't need to write a poem or make a painting to be creative.

(Mário Pedrosa is no novice at detecting or denouncing crises in man's creativity. In two essays—included in Mundo, homem, arte em crise [World, Man, Art in Crisis]—written in 1959 about “problems of sensibility,” he drew attention to the sensibility that is the driving force behind everything that man does, everything upon which he acts, everything he discovers through creative imagination and that is not exclusive to artists but exists in all realms, including those of politics and science. And he also emphasized the fact that debate on the sensibility—or absence of it—in modern art actually reflected something much deeper: the crisis of verbal civilization, one of the most pronounced traits of the contemporary crisis.)

At the darkest moment of the crisis, it may be very important to return to a perception of one's own roots. And this return to cultures that are not divided, to the Indians of the Amazon, where the joy of living and the joy of creating were present in everyday life, is the thing that excites Mário Pedrosa at this moment.)

I am going to produce a great exhibition of indigenous art and culture. They're going to give me the whole museum to do it in. I feel passionately about the cultural manifestations of the Amazon and I fear that Brazil is going to do away with all of them. They will end up disfiguring and destroying the Amazon.

Actually, I felt immense nostalgia for the Brazilian nation. I went to Peru and was fascinated by the work of anthropologists and their research on the Amazon. In fact I believe Brazil needs to become part of these investigations in South America—which

is its place. Until now, that hasn't happened. But, then, it gave me a powerful desire to work. I also found out that certain aspects of indigenous art are being abandoned and many Indians no longer produce them. Because of this, as soon as I arrived, I also spoke of feather work, which I am thinking of including in the exhibition. I proposed this project to the MAM [Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro], they accepted and I began to visit the Museu Nacional—there is a lot of good stuff in the old museum. I want to find out what there is in São Paulo, I want to go to the Goeldi Museum¹ and to Cuiabá. And I want to bring feather work back from Europe—things like the Tupinambá mantles that the French took during the sixteenth century and that are currently in museums such as the Musée de L'Homme or the Kunstmuseum Basel. Some Brazilian pieces went to Europe during the time of François I, others during the age of the Louis, some arrived through Rouen and were seen by [Michel de] Montaigne and by [Jean-Jacques] Rousseau, when he was portraying his noble savage. Brazil had four million Indians and was covered with forests. We kept none of it. This is why I say that today it is an incomplete country threatened by destruction. And it had a beautiful and important culture that can still teach Brazilians many things. I want to show the art of our Indians to the young. The theme of the exhibition will also be its title: *Alegria de viver, alegria de criar* (Joy of living, joy of creating).

The Indian takes pleasure in doing his basketwork, his ornaments . . . even some little implement used for grating things, and quite often scorns function in favor of the pleasure of creating good form. There may be beautiful design on the outside of a basket made for casting into water or setting upon the ground by the riverside. Nowadays, the crisis of modern art is a profound one because of the general world crisis, because of the quantitative economy that (in art) is reflected in the art market, which dominates everything. This is why I want to show these kids this other side—the work of the Indians, a world in which there are other values and there is pleasure in making and creating.

—“Escolha do crítico que cansou da vanguarda: A arte indígena,” interview conducted by Casimiro Xavier de Mendonça, *Jornal da tarde* (São Paulo), December 31, 1977.

Note

1. The Museu Emílio Goeldi is a research institution linked to Brazil's Ministry of Science and Technology. Founded in 1866 and located in the city of Belém in the Amazon region, its activities are focused on the study of the natural and sociocultural systems of the Amazon, as well as in the dissemination of knowledge and collections related to the region.

Pedrosa: The Time Is Right for Creating a New SP

“I believe conditions have never been better than they are today for the creation of a new Socialist Party. We are witnessing the birth of a workers’ movement based on the independence and freedom of unions,” declares art critic Mário Pedrosa, a socialist militant from the age of twenty. To him, the independent worker’s movement on the rise these days: “There has never been a movement like this—one that would inscribe the struggle against peleguismo¹ upon its flag. This is why I say there are new elements that favor a Socialist Party. It was, precisely, an independent workers’ movement that was missing in the Socialist Party.”

Pedrosa also speaks of art with great pessimism: “I don’t believe in art of this society in which we live, for many reasons. The conditions do not exist for art and few

people are interested in it. Nowadays soccer is much more important than art, isn't it?" The crisis in art seems to him to be profound and general, "because man himself is in crisis."

When did you become aware of the political problem and what influenced you at that time?

The first political act I attended—I remember it well—was a speech given by Ruy Barbosa² upon his return from Buenos Aires where he [had] participated in a conference at which he defended the points of view of the Allies; this was in 1916, during World War I. I was thrilled. The time was one of intense propaganda for Brazil to enter the war. The "Marseillaise" was forever being played in Rio's cafés and everyone would sing it. I was very patriotic, very pro-French, and excitedly anti-German.

I began to change with the powerful influence that the great French writer Romain Rolland³ exerted over my friends and myself. Curiously, I arrived at the political aspect of Romain Rolland—his passivity—through his musical criticism. The first text I read by him was about music, in which he said he was not among those Frenchmen who thought that the Germans were barbarians, for he could not forget the Germany of [Ludwig van] Beethoven. I became an ardent pacifist and, from pacifism, I moved on to social criticism. I was thrilled by the deed of the Russian Revolution. I received many books and magazines, principally from Paris, and, in no time, I was reading [Karl] Marx and [Friedrich] Engels's *The Communist Manifesto*.⁴ This marked the beginning of my political evolution.

After the war, during the early 1920s, a cousin of mine, a typesetter who worked at the Imprensa Oficial [São Paulo's official publishing house], put me in contact with the Communist Party. I joined the party in 1926. My friends and I even put out a little magazine during that period, with which the leaders of the party concurred. But it never got beyond the first issue because the police closed it down.

In 1927 I was sent to Moscow, on the recommendation of a member of the party leadership. I left here as a pretext to go to Germany. I arrived in Berlin in winter, and got sick there. Under these conditions, people thought it would be better not to let me leave for Moscow, where I wound up not going. The tenth anniversary of the Revolution was being celebrated. The period also marked the beginning of the persecution of [Leon] Trotsky, who, some time later, was expelled from the Soviet Union.

In Berlin I received the party newspapers as well as those of the Trotskyist left opposition. The left opposition platform shook me deeply and I took part in meetings with these opposition groups. In fact, it was precisely because I stood by these groups that I didn't go to Moscow. I returned to Brazil and, along with a few friends, founded the Trotskyist opposition here.

Had you already broken with the party?

No. The left opposition outlined by Trotsky when he was expelled from the Soviet Union was one of struggle for the party's regeneration against bureaucratic distortion. Those comrades who had been won over to the Trotskyist side could not leave the party; they had to defend their positions within the party line, which was very strict. When I returned to Brazil, some comrades and I founded a little newspaper called *A luta de classes* [Class struggle], which represented the international left opposition. But we couldn't engage in any sort of independent public demonstration. The acts of the Communist Party had to be obeyed. One could criticize, but the line had to be followed and decisions respected.

But later on there was a rupture.

Yes, because starting from a certain moment the party no longer accepted this type of divergence.

Was the entire Trotskyist group formally expelled?

Not in a general form. Some were expelled formally, others not.

Did you keep in touch with Luís Carlos Prestes⁵ during that period in which he had not yet decided to join the Communist Party, right after the Coluna [Column]?⁶

Our group had already broken with the party when Prestes released his manifesto breaking with the Aliança Liberal (Liberal Alliance)⁷ and declaring himself more or less pro-communism, but I don't remember the party. His popularity was fantastic. Then there was a race. Astrojildo Pereira⁸ soon set off to meet with him at the party's behest. Some of our own sympathizers also went. Thus Prestes received representatives from various tendencies but remained uncertain about who was right. It was around this time that I received an invitation to go to Buenos Aires to talk to him. I remember I received three *contos* for the trip.

Among the various parties that took part in the Russian Revolution, Prestes was impressed by the revolutionary socialists. And he then suggested that the best path for him might not be the Communist Party, but a Revolutionary Socialist Party to lead a peasant movement. There was much talk of agrarian reform at that time. I was against his founding an independent party. It would have hurt the Communist Party immeasurably, for with his enormous prestige he would have carried many people along with him. Except among the more advanced workers' circles, the Communist Party was still a relatively unimportant new party. I was opposed to the idea because we were Bolsheviks and Leninists. As I said, our aim was to restore Leninist historical truth to the party. We were all faithful to this principle.

Prestes welcomed me and heard out my opinions, just as he was hearing out others who called on him.

He was in touch with the South American International secretariat, which was then headquartered in Montevideo. He recently wrote an article that was published in Paris, saying that, at that time, he found a leader who guided him, saving him from opportunists, from Trotskyists, and who was known by the name of Rusticus.⁹ He confesses that he owed a lot to him, but doesn't tell the end of the story: Rusticus was assassinated because of his association to the Left Opposition.

Many later asked me why I had been against Prestes forming a party independent from the Communist one.

That is another question we would like to ask.

At the time, I couldn't accept the making of a party that wasn't Bolshevik. I was against it because I was upholding the rigid doctrinaire positions I had learned.

Nowadays, do you believe that to have been a mistake?

I do.

That could have been a great mass party, something the Communist Party never succeeded in being in Brazil.

Yes, it could have been. Our mistake was that we were all men who clung to doctrine, to principles. Prestes's Revolutionary Socialist Party could have been a really important party, for the masses, with other consequences.

Does it not seem to you that, by isolating himself within a small party, Prestes somehow threw away the great prestige that he had?

Nowadays I can accept that reasoning. Rusticus attacked any attempt by the independent Revolutionary Socialist Party because he defended the same principles that I did. All of us defended those principles. My position was truly orthodox and I now believe there was an excess of doctrinairism in us. At the time, I was not bold enough to advise Prestes to create that party.

Beyond ideological differences, many people currently regard Prestes as a morally unassailable figure who nevertheless lacked a sense of opportunity. Do you agree?

Yes, he also took part in that doctrinairism I just referred to. He is a figure of importance. And I believe his campaigning for the MDB [Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement)]¹⁰ in the last elections to be perfectly valid. I realize there has been criticism of such a stance but I think it was perfectly fair. There is no reason to prevent a man with his political importance, as leader of the Communist Party, to express himself and ask for votes for the MDB. We need to eliminate these taboos, these unjustifiable prohibitions.

The concept of history is not renewed. The military want to impose upon voters the same idea they had when they staged their coup or revolution in 1964. In '64, under the influence of the Americans, the Brazilian military decided that João Goulart's¹¹ administration had to be stopped, for what he had in mind was a syndicalist republic—a threat that was at once an abstraction, abusive and idiotic.

The truth is that, after their defeats in colonial wars, a series of French colonels wanted to re-stage the war, showing how it could no longer be fought as it had been in days past and that the French army was not preparing to impose its rule upon a nation that rose up against its will. They then created the theory of revolutionary war. The United States took inspiration from the ideas of the French colonels and came up with a new war tactic that they literally called struggle against the insurgency. We are not going to oppose ourselves as a block against Russia because we don't want war, they said. The enemy is not out there but internally, within each country.

At the time of the Third International, the Communist parties associated with it sent their leaders to Moscow so that they might analyze the situation all around the world, thus establishing a sort of general staff of the Revolution. For several years now, the United States has also established a sort of general staff to examine the situation around the world. If a pissed-off peasant went at some foreman with a scythe on a farm in São Paulo or in the Amazon, the incident would be used as a point of departure for studying the possibility of an insurgency. This process was adopted by Brazil. Every country in Latin America sent its officials to be educated in American schools in Panama.

One of the men who established this doctrine in Brazil was Marshal Castelo Branco.¹² And the importance of this doctrine here was such that war colleges were created, experimental fields in which the officers suffered the extremely harsh circumstances of a revolutionary war in order to learn how it was made and in order to prepare for it. This was during a time in which it was said that boundaries were ideological rather than territorial. And it is in the name of this absurd theory—which is officious, rather official here—that they wish to impose the continuity of the regime. Therein lies the crisis of the regime and one of its causes is the dismantlement of this theory, which was exposed by none other than [Jimmy] Carter himself, who declared that there is no

more fear of Communism and that a general international agreement must be reached. But the Brazilian government continues to assure us that Communism should be feared. A short while ago, General Figueiredo¹³ took time out to warn Brazilians against the dictatorship of the proletariat. Does anyone actually believe that there is any threat of a dictatorship of the proletariat in Brazil? That is madness.

I believe the Brazilian crisis exists and that it is an extremely serious one. It is also a repeat of all the crises Brazil has undergone since its discovery. It is unacceptable—and there are generals today who do not accept it—that Brazil should follow a policy that was imposed by the United States.

The way out of the crisis would be to convene a Constitutional assembly, for example?

It might be.

The Congress for Amnesty—which I attended—was recently held in São Paulo. During the opening ceremony, the masses that convened there manifested themselves with an extraordinary feeling of unity. There were no more divergences. Everywhere, everyone acclaimed—as did I and as I shall continue to acclaim—heroes like Lamarca,¹⁴ for whom I have a special sympathy in light of the greatness with which he faced his tragic end. I also have the greatest respect for another figure that stands alongside Lamarca, namely Marighella.¹⁵ I know that Lamarca and Marighella are wrong.

You think they are wrong?

Yes, but I acclaim them enthusiastically.

Why, then?

Because Marighella was a patriot who gave his life for an idea he considered to be just.

In the cases of Lamarca and Marighella, the regime maintains that both of them declared war against it and were killed in that war.

Before I returned to Brazil, while I was still in Paris, I began to write a book in which I wanted to show that we need to re-create our history, meaning we need to study it anew. We continue to have an incomplete historiography, whether because of class or professional idiosyncrasies. Brazil was shaped by the Dutch war, and I would like to say to those youths who took part in revolt that, if they had studied our history, they would at least have had more legitimate sources from which to draw inspiration. It was not the warriors of the Portuguese state but the Brazilian guerillas that took Pernambuco and Bahia back from the Dutch. Learning his lessons from the Indians, it was an eighty-year-old bishop—to whom leadership of the struggle to win back Salvador from the hold of the Dutch was entrusted—who put this in vogue. And, instead of forming an army, he led small groups of guerillas with which he rendered control of the city untenable to the Dutch. Hence the emergence of heroes such as Lamarca. Some of these modern guerilla fighters knew nothing about any of this, because they sought to learn revolutionary war tactics in Russia, China, and Indochina, when they had examples that would have given them extraordinary legitimacy right here.

Imbued with this idea of revolutionary war, the Brazilian military—many of whom are brave men—entered the struggle, fought and killed without quarter. In this case, they claimed they did not practice torture. I can accept that. I eventually proposed a bilateral amnesty. Nowadays I would like to amend that.

To your mind, why did Trotskyism become a, shall we say, inexpressive, residual movement to the working masses, *in spite of* Trotsky's great leadership and organizational skills?

I am no longer a Trotskyist, but it seems to me that the Trotskyist movement is much bigger than it was in my time. In France and in the United States it is much bigger than it was before. And so it is in various other countries.

What led you away from Trotskyism?

Several things, including my skepticism with regard to the idea of preparing a Fourth International.

Might Trotsky's position of total support to the Soviet Union, adopted soon after the war began, be among those several things to which you refer?

No, because his position—unconditional defense of the Soviet Union, because it was still a workers' state—was the position we all held.

A critique of the Soviet regime as a police state is widely disseminated nowadays. Do you agree with this criticism?

I do not respect or defend Stalinism. It was a terrible distortion of Marxism. It was Stalinism that demoralized Marxism as a revolutionary force. I believe Russia is currently a state with a few socialist features, but it is also an imperialist state. Russia's advantage is having the strength to oppose the United States and thus maintain peace.

So you think Russia is an imperialist state?

Ultimately, it possesses certain imperialist traits. But I believe it is very important for Russia to exist such as it is, for it is the only way by which peace may be maintained. There are some important aspects to Russia's opposition of the United States. Both are necessary to world peace.

In your opinion, is it a matter of a balance of imperialisms?

It is a balance of imperialisms.

Internally, what do you think of the Soviet regime today?

I don't like it. I think there is an absence of fundamental freedoms, and these are important to socialism, to the education of the people.

Do you no longer see a dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia?

No, and I haven't seen it in a long time.

And what about the United States?

I believe the United States plays an even more reactionary role. In itself, keeping Russia alive is a progressive element in maintaining resistance against the United States. The United States claims to champion freedom and democracy. This is true for Americans internally. But to my way of seeing it has lost something of its historical rhythm. It has been setting modernity aside.

It may be ignorance on my part, but I am also unaware of any new concepts having emerged in Russia. And what the United States proposes is the end of the world. American policy with regard to Somoza is shameful in a way that is unprecedented. On the other hand, I think Carter's campaign for human rights, which extends to the

Soviet Union, must already have strength enough to accept these principles that are important to the whole world.

I must also add that the socialist perspective is a global perspective. I see no way out other than the socialist form of state and government.

Upon your return from the United States in 1945, after the war, what political position did you take up?

I didn't join the Democratic Left, which was then a wing of the UDN [União Democrática Nacional],¹⁶ because it was my purpose to create an independent socialist party—something I did not succeed in doing. I had many connections with the Democratic Left, but I didn't join the movement. Because he was an independent and had no ties to the dictatorship, the UDN chose Eduardo Gomes¹⁷ as its presidential candidate. He supported a democratic program—he was the first to raise the issues of the union workers' right to strike and freedom for all parties, including the Communist Party. Because of this, although I defended socialist positions, I took part in his campaign for re-democratization.

A Constitutional assembly did, indeed, take place, but one of the essential forms of democracy was never established because of Getúlio [Vargas]'s reactionary and fascist labor legislation, which was based on the "Carta del Lavoro." Unions continued to be dependent on the state because of the union tax that is discounted from all workers' wages. Political opportunism obstructed the struggle for the real restoration of an independent labor union movement, bringing about the birth of *peleguismo*, to which the Socialist Party was associated for tactical reasons, among others. The Communist Party also came to an agreement in this regard.

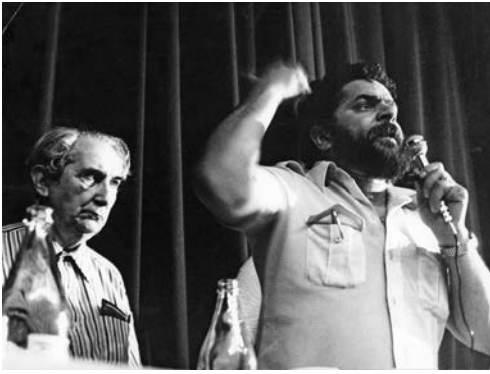
As for the Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party), the truth is it had no great importance, as it was stillborn. Between Prestes and Getúlio, it was not successful in finding an independent position.

There has been a great deal of talk lately about the creation of a new Socialist Party. Do you believe it could become a party of the masses, unlike its predecessor, which, as you said, was pressed between the PTB [Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian workers' party)] and the PCB [Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian Communist Party)]?

Who knows? I believe conditions have never been better than they are today for the creation of a new Socialist Party. We are witnessing the birth of a workers' movement based on the independence and freedom of unions. The movement that is emerging in São Paulo, and which is represented by Lula [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva], is an extremely important independent political force. It would appear to me to be a new element in the struggle against *peleguismo*. There has never been a movement like this—one that would inscribe the struggle against *peleguismo* upon its flag. This is why I say there are new elements that favor a Socialist Party. It was, precisely, an independent workers' movement that was missing in the Socialist Party. I'm not saying a party will grow out of this. What I am saying is that this is a new and favorable element for the Socialist Party. In my time there were no such things.

What do you think of the possibility of European social democracy influencing this Socialist Party?

It may have a possible influence, but I'm not sure it will be a successful one because the problems we have here are different, much deeper than the ones it faces in Europe.



Mário Pedrosa and Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva). 1980. Centro de Documentação e Memória da Universidade do Estado de São Paulo

Let's talk about art—your other passion. In the last few years, one is left with a sense that manifestations such as the São Paulo Bienal are wasting away. Do you feel that way?

As an idea, the São Paulo Bienal (which was inspired by the Venice Biennale) is finished. The idea of presenting what is happening in terms of world art every two years no longer has a reason for being. The subject has been exhausted.

Modern art was born during the latter part of the last century and in

the early part of the present one, especially after Impressionism. In order that one may have a clear, albeit shocking sense of the phenomenon, I would say it was born with the spread of Imperialism throughout the world. It emerged with the great international exhibitions, in which works from countries situated on the European periphery were shown. This captivated men like [Vincent] Van Gogh, for instance, who sought to discover and become aware of what was going on in the world beyond Europe. The exhibition held in Paris at the turn of the century exercised a powerful influence over the population and, in particular, over the artists of the age. Everyone was immensely curious to find out what was going on in terms of art in Africa, in South America, in Asia. This interest in civilizations that existed outside Europe grew with the great expeditions throughout Africa: the naturalists followed right behind the imperialists (who exploited the wealth of the region). This resulted in the emergence of museums of natural history in Europe and in the United States, along with shops that sold exotic objects, principally in Paris and London.

These were the things that attracted young artists who would later become the creators of modern art: [Pablo] Picasso, [Henri] Matisse, the Italian Futurists, and the German Expressionists. Those artists turned their backs on museums and fine arts school exhibitions in order to concentrate on museums of natural history and curiosity shops. Without African art, for example, modern art would not have had the thrust it had during this period. This phenomenon occurred in every one of the old European countries. The Futurist, Cubist, Expressionist, and Constructivist movements grew out of this. So it may be said that the origin of modern art lies in the advance of Western imperialism upon countries that belong to the periphery of the Old Continent and are, therefore, situated outside classical civilization.

Primitivism was one of the essential motifs of all modern art, including São Paulo's *Semana de Arte Moderna* (Modern art week). As a matter of fact, Paulo Prado¹⁸ used to say that Oswald de Andrade had discovered Brazil in Paris. The groundwork for this phenomenon took place in the search for new information by artists who had grown weary of Europe's old bourgeois culture. Everyone studied, engaged in discussion, and exchanged ideas, and the biennials served as places in which to review all this. An International Association of Art Critics was founded and it played a very important role: it allowed artists and critics to study these new forms and expressions of art.

The movement spread throughout the world and a conviction spread that modern art would become the art of a world civilization. But a proposition is one thing and its

execution is another. A saturation of sorts ensued, the first expression of which was American Pop art which, in its early days, was actually more British than American. That was truly a novel manifestation of art, one that did not aim to question the society whence it sprang. On the contrary, many of the “Pop” artists bowed before this society and created a series of things out of American advertising. The movement later won over Europe, as well, and was finally acclaimed at the Venice Biennale.

But let us return to modern art. In the 1920s, the 1930s, and 1940s, so-called avant-garde artists did not have access to the important prizes. The only privilege the avant-gardes possessed was having the critics on their side. Later, though, they began to win the big awards, to be recognized, and that was the end of their heroic role. Things came to such a pass that avant-garde artists had nothing left to do but break with preconceptions and dare to do whatever they pleased.

A great crisis then came about; one that involved social realism in Russia and modern art in Europe, because both of them ended up in the same position. In Russia, social realism crushed and annihilated everything without a second thought and, in Europe, the liberals accepted anything. The time when Van Gogh and [Paul] Gauguin were starving artists, for example, was long gone. Because people were afraid of being labeled reactionary, anything became acceptable. Art critics accepted everything: one could throw manure onto a canvas and it was accepted.

So this typifies a crisis in art.

Yes, one may speak of a general crisis of art—a crisis of saturation.

Does this crisis persist today?

It does. It began when modern art reached its end and there was no longer any place left in the world where important works were being presented. There was a general saturation and a sense that experimentation in modern art had come to an end.

To your mind, what might be the outcome of this crisis? How to face the future?

When I returned to Brazil from Europe, I proposed an exhibition about the Indian. The purpose was to show the indigenous community in its work process, in its way of life, with its “joy of living,” as it were, so that Brazil might return to its origins, to show that this art, disconnected from everything, is important, because it is made by a community that is able to overcome the fascination of capitalism. Indigenous culture is rich in artistic creations.

In your opinion, is the crisis of art taking place only in capitalist countries?

No. I see the crisis in the whole world. In socialist countries, when a type of art that is acceptable to bureaucrats is demanded of artists, Marx’s statement about artists as creative and productive beings is being negated.

The crisis is a general one because man himself is in crisis.

Is there any art form that is not in crisis?

I don’t see where any art that is not in crisis might be.

And do you associate the art crisis to man’s crisis in general?

Yes I do. I don’t believe in the art of this society in which we live, for many reasons. The conditions do not exist for art and very few people are interested in it. Nowadays soccer is much more important than art, isn’t it?

What is the source of modern man's lack of interest in art?

Modern life doesn't offer the same spectacle to works of art, the same interest that is paid to large collective manifestations: festivals such as Carnival, soccer, and others of their nature. But I don't know the underlying reason for all this. Everything is too organized—even leisure itself, which is also in crisis. There is an advertising machinery, a machine of domination, that extends its power everywhere and does not easily allow the artist to rid himself of this process—which is why the crisis does not manifest itself only in art. Science is in crisis. For instance, there is a crisis in medicine because in our countries it, too, is dominated by the market. I don't know what the process is in socialist countries.

Do you see any way out?

I'm with the rear guard.

Whenever anyone says they're with the avant-garde, everyone gets that immediately. But . . . the rear guard? What does that mean?

Formerly, artists were bearers of new things. There was a permanent intensification of the problem of art. Nowadays this has come to a stop. At the same time, what *is* happening? There is a vast, sweeping movement that carries everything along with it into the sea of capitalism. The rear guard is a defense against this movement. It resists the brutal pressure of these forces. The rear guard resists the fantastic retreat that is taking place. Its role is one of resistance.

In the name of what values does it resist?

Not the values of art, but the permanent values of men.

Recently, you declared that Brazil might well be the most ideologically and conceptually confused of all countries. What do you mean by that?

That's exactly right. The Army, for instance, says that it made a revolution. Later, it took that revolution and subordinated it to the RDE, that is, to the Regulamento Disciplinar do Exército [Disciplinary rules of the army]. A mess grew out of this in which no one any longer understands anything. Not even they themselves. Not even people who are more or less subordinated to this process. The conceptual mess in Brazil is total and complete.

How do you define yourself politically nowadays?

I am a socialist, because I believe that capitalism is the most monstrous machine ever assembled to liquidate man. As long as capitalism lasts, there is no solution. I cannot accept a society like ours that accepts hundreds of thousands of men dying of hunger. I must add that I accept progress with great difficulty.

. . . the type of progress that exists in Brazil, or progress generally?

This progress, this development that is taking place around us. . . . Do you believe the dominant economy is rational? Do you think the Angra dos Reis²⁰ project is anything that might enter the mind of a normal person? Generally speaking, the crisis within capitalism generates a cultural crisis, and I'm sorry that Russia still hasn't been able to offer a remedy for it.

In your opinion, is Russia also in crisis?

Yes.

So the crisis is general and not only a capitalist one?

Yes, it also exists in the socialist countries. Something may come of it, but I haven't seen anything yet. I cannot accept that dissidents be denied the right to say the truth.

—Originally published as “Pedrosa: Hora é ideal para criar novo PS,” *O Estado de S. Paulo*, December 24, 1978.

Notes

1. The term *peleguismo* emerged during the Estado Novo (1930–45) within the context of Getúlio Vargas's nationalist policies. It derives from “*pelego*,” the union leader who mediated between state interests and the workers' claims.
2. Ruy Barbosa de Oliveira (1849–1923) was a Brazilian lawyer, politician, diplomat, writer, philologist, translator and orator. One of the organizers of the Republic and co-author of the First Republic's constitution (along with Prudente de Morais), he acted in defense of federalism, of abolitionism and in the promotion of individual rights and guarantees.
3. The French writer Romain Rolland (1866–1944) was a great Champion of Peace during World War I and was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1915.
4. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Samuel Moore, and David McLellan, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
5. Luís Carlos Prestes (1898–1990) was a Brazilian military man and politician, Secretary General to the Brazilian Communist Party and the companion of Olga Benário, who was killed in a Nazi gas chamber.
6. The Prestes Coluna was a political movement that took place from 1925 to 1927, led by Captain Luís Carlos Prestes against the government of the Old Republic and the agrarian elites. They traveled some 15,000 miles throughout the interior of the Brazilian territory to spread their message. The fixed core of the group was made up of some two hundred men, but the movement eventually included as many as fourteen hundred individuals (members of the military and sympathizers of the movement). Their objectives were to overthrow the government of president Arthur Bernardes; to establish the secret ballot and compulsory grade school education in Brazil; the end of poverty and social injustice in the country. Although it was defeated, the movement politically weakened the Old Republic, making way for the Revolution of 1930 that led Getúlio Vargas to power.
7. A national oppositionist coalition formed in early August 1929, as an initiative by political leaders from the states of Minas Gerais and Rio Grande do Sul to support the candidacy of Getúlio Vargas to the presidency of the Republic during the elections of March 1, 1930.
8. Astrojildo Pereira Duarte Silva (1890–1965) was a Brazilian writer, literary critic, and politician who founded the Partido Comunista do Brasil (Communist Party of Brazil) in 1922.
9. “Rusticus” was the code name for Guralski which, in turn, was the most widely known code name for Abraham Iakovlevitch Heifetz, delegate of the Communist International, who was in South America in 1928 and who had a profound influence on the PCB during the early 1930s. His wife Inês Guralski was a sort of mediator between the PCB and the Communist International.
10. The Movimento Democrático Brasileiro attracted opponents of the military regime of 1964.
11. João Belchior Marques Goulart (1919–1976), popularly known as “Jango,” was vice president of Brazil from 1956–61 and president from 1961–64, when he was overthrown by the military coup.
12. Marshal Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco (1897–1967) was the first president of the regime established in Brazil by the military coup of 1964.
13. The presidency of João Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo (1918–1999) lasted from 1979 to 1985, the final person to hold such office in the military dictatorship.
14. Carlos Lamarca (1937–1971) was one of the leaders of the urban guerillas that opposed the Brazilian military regime established in 1964. A captain in the Brazilian Army, he deserted in 1969, taking with him a consignment of Brazilian Army rifles and becoming one of the commanders of the (Popular revolutionary vanguard). Hunted down by the military, he was assassinated in 1971.
15. From 1964, the Brazilian politician, guerilla fighter, and poet Carlos Marighella (1911–1969) was one of the principal organizers of the armed struggle against the military regime. He was killed in an ambush.
16. The União Democrática Nacional (National democratic union) was a conservative political party founded in 1945.
17. Eduardo Gomes (1896–1981) was a Brazilian aviator, military figure, and politician. He was twice defeated as a candidate to the presidency of the republic. In 1964 he took part in the military coup that ousted President Juscelino Kubitschek.
18. Paulo da Silva Prado (1869–1943) belonged to one of São Paulo's most influential families and was an important participant in the Semana de Arte Moderna of 1922, as well as in the 1932 founding of the Sociedade Pró-Arte Moderna (Pro-modern art society).
19. Poet, essayist, and playwright José Oswald de Sousa Andrade (1890–1954) was one of the most important participants of Brazilian literary modernism. He authored the “Manifesto da Poesia Pau-Brasil” (Brazilwood poetry manifesto) (1924) and the “Manifesto Antropófago” (Cannibalist manifesto) (1928).
20. Pedrosa is probably referring to the Brazilian Nuclear Program developed in Angra dos Reis, in the state of Rio de Janeiro.

Art Is Not Essential. The Intellectual's Profession Is to Be a Revolutionary

Artists, Priests, and Military Men

Lygia Pape: Of the people I know, you're the one who has most dialogue with youth. You're permanently young. To live intensely, involved with the core of things, is a life lesson. Not for nothing is your home always filled with students.

Mário [Pedrosa]: I'm a little conceited, right. For instance, I enjoy being interviewed by you all. Now I can't say I've led a good and lawful life, because I lived *unlawfully* for long stretches of time *unlawfully*. After I finished my studies, I lived illegally for nearly the rest of my life—as a communist, an anarchist, a Trotskyist, and so forth. My father belonged to a family of politicians, so I could have been part of the bourgeois police, but I had other ambitions, greater than politics: I wanted to change the world.

Ricky [Goodwin]:¹ And was wanting to change the world worthwhile?

Mário: I think so.

Lygia: When you're born for adventure, you can't change your course.

Mário: But I was always a political animal. My nature is to have an interest in all things. When I was young I used to say to Lívio Xavier: "Lenin was the greatest poet."

Ricky: So politics and art aren't irreconcilable?

Mário: Nor should they be. Being revolutionary is an intellectual's natural profession.

Lygia: But glory and power at micro levels destroy that.

Ricky: And even [President João] Figueiredo wanted to be an intellectual.

Mário: I always thought that revolution is the most profound of all activities. Even as a youth I was intrested in the revolutionary processes that emerged in Brazil, the Revolução Praieira,² the [Russian Revolution of 19]17, the uprisings fascinated me. The French Revolution made a deep impression on me. I studied in Switzerland, and it thrilled me to hear my history teacher speak of [Georges] Danton and [Maximilien] Robespierre. And then later the Russian Revolution. Men of my age who were not thrilled by the Russian Revolution . . . something in them is missing. And I still believe that a nation that does not undergo a revolution is not yet a fully formed nation. I always dreamed of a revolution for Brazil. Look at the countries that have had revolutions: France, the United States, Russia, China . . .

Ricky: But didn't we have the Revolution of [19]64?

Mário: The word was adopted because it was fashionable. Some people proposed that the coup be called a counterrevolution. It would be more honest, or more naive. The answer wouldn't be in the use of a term. In their case, revolution meant establishing that military rule was to be applied throughout Brazil. The military seized

power no longer to hand it over to the UDN,* as before, but to rise to power themselves, with a program of their own. Aided by so-called “technicians,” instruments of American imperialism, to lead the military in an integrated policy associated with the Americans. This happened when the Cold War was giving way to the theory of Revolutionary War. American policy ceased to be based on an external war so as to push back Russia and its satellites, promoting internal wars in each country, fighting against insurgencies.

Ricky: It is said that the army’s historical tradition differs from the image we currently have of it. Do you agree?

Mário: Yes. They wanted to create a professional army, which might have been admissible if we had a war problem. This army isn’t essential, we aren’t at war or anything. What is essential is to know Brazil, to conquer Brazil, the Brazilian land, to fully understand the origins of our people. This is the army of Brazil’s historical formation.

Ricky: Might this difference not be disturbing certain sectors of the military?

Mário: Of course it is. After fourteen or fifteen years, the army feels that the people are no longer on its side. Nowadays the Brazilian people (who were always congenial to them) are afraid of the military. There is increasingly greater mistrust of the army. This is the consequence of a wrong policy. When the army seized power, it wanted to do many good things, because not all was going well here. But then they created and imposed an ideology steeped in foreignness. The ideology of National Security was steeped in American imperialist policy. This ideology intended to divide Brazil into populations that should be defended and populations that should be exterminated because they were in favor of socialism. If the Left really wanted to establish socialism in Brazil, through some stroke of magic, it was a folly. But the generals succeeded in establishing an American-style form of capitalism in Brazil, without head nor tail. With this, for the very first time, the army became an oppressor of the people. Brazil isn’t cut out for American-style capitalism. The Northeast is increasingly poor. The north—more than half of Brazil—has even bigger problems, and is being submitted to a mechanical treatment of extensive exploitation, that will ultimately result in ecological destruction. Many military are now recognizing that the solution offered was wrong and, under many aspects, terrible.

Ricky: Let’s move on to another institution: from the military to the Church. What do you think of the activity of the progressive sectors of the Catholic Church?

Mário: In order for change to take place in the current situation, a deep awareness is needed—one that will extend to even the most distant populations. In this, the priests are the line of communication between the city and the interior. Young priests are becoming increasingly aware, even as the old ones fade away. I don’t believe a revolution or internal reform can take place here without the priests. That really is the great need: reform from within.

* The União Democrática Nacional (UDN) [National Democratic Union] was a conservative Brazilian political party founded on April 7, 1945, and frontally opposed to the policies and figure of Getúlio Vargas. It was extinguished by the military coup of 1964.

Ricky: But all this was a detour from a debate we started to have about art and politics. On one side are the art-for-art's-sake theorists. On the other, those who declare that all art should be political with a social content.

Lygia: That was a complete failure in the CPC [Centro Popular de Cultura (Center for popular culture)].³ They made a type of art their way, seeking to have a vision of the Northeast, only without any contact with the Northeasterner. In '68 a group of artists created something called "Arte no Aterro" [Art in the landfill], devoid of transformative pretensions such as those of the CPC, and the thing was a huge public success. So it's less dependent upon the degree to which art is "politicized" than upon the manner in which things are shown. The important thing is to enrich people.

Mário: People are always curious about things but social structure does allow this to develop. Social organization imposes an identical and monotonous way of living upon everyone. These people tend to pass by things and not see them.

Lygia: But Art is a form of breaking with this neutrality.

Mário: Of course it is, but no age has been more hostile to popular creation than that of today. With the current development of wealth, man should be expanding his individuality so that all of his senses might also develop. But what happens? All the monopolies are directed toward stifling this thing, driving the people's wealth toward a total consumerism. They force people to consume the most worthless, most contemptible things. The population is dying of hunger but they want to own TV sets. Thus they enter the circuit of total domination. Nowadays television is a drug.

Ricky: In both senses: as a sedative and of bad quality. [Translator's note: The pun on *droga*, meaning both "lousy" and "drug," is lost in translation.]

Lygia: But I still think social art is institutional art.

Mário: This debate is pointless when all anyone needs to do in the interior of Brazil in order to die of hunger or disease is to be born.

Ricky: In another interview, you said that art was no longer at the forefront of society. What happened? Has society become more dynamic—or more wretched—or has Art become decadent and lost its social punch?

Mário: Well, this decadence occurs all over the world, and not only in countries like Brazil, where social problems are more of a priority. And in the middle of this decadence you can also find important works of art. Art is not currently flourishing.

Lygia: I also have a sense that your dissatisfaction with the art of today is not so much because of art itself but because of your own constant state of dissatisfaction, which is what characterizes you as a revolutionary.

Mário: That makes me sound like an old curmudgeon. Certain things do give me satisfaction. I'm not saying I'm satisfied with what I do, but the notion that I try to accomplish something—that I struggle for my convictions—allows me a certain tranquility.

Lygia: I began the interview talking about that, saying how you are a young man, or rather, have no chronological age. Every day you look at things from a new perspective, without prejudices. You're always open.

Mário: Knowing how to grow old is one of the wisest things there is. I always try to be satisfied with myself, without crying or complaining, or feeling envious or disappointed. I seek the wisdom of knowing that's the way things are. Trying to do the things I feel I ought to do for myself.

Ricky: One thing is certain: an unconventional life is a lot more fun, right?

Mário: I don't know. My life has been very simple.

Indians and the Avant-Garde

Jaguar:⁴ Mário Pedrosa, what country is this?

Mário: It's the same one it was in 1970, when I had to leave it so as not to be arrested for having been accused of sending abroad information about torture. There are differences in progress—for the worse. When I returned (in 1977), it took me a while to get used to the noise but, little by little, I adjusted.

Jaguar: Did you locate the source of the noise?

Mário: Brazilians.

Jaguar: And Brazilian cars. There are a lot more cars in New York than in Rio, but they're quieter. Brazilian automobiles are hellishly noisy. Think of a hundred thousand VW Beetles all going at once, driven by a hundred thousand Brazilians?

Ricky: The last night we were here, we talked about you as a writer and the interview ended when you were talking about the beginnings of Brazilian popular music, a period during which you were already a music critic—before you became an art critic.

Mário: I was a friend of Pixinguinha, Donga, [Heitor] Villa-Lobos, [Mozart] Camargo Guarnieri⁵. . . I was a close follower of the early days of Brazilian popular music's dissemination, when Mário de Andrade, Aécio Dutra, and Villa-Lobos struggled to present the music of our culture to a public completely attuned to European music. My sister-in-law Elsie Houston also took part in this struggle; she was the first person ever to sing MPB [Brazilian popular music] in a concert. It was music of resistance that preserved its regionalisms. Later on Rio naturalized all these forms of music. Mário de Andrade made an enormous effort to bring songs of popular origin to the salons. Nowadays that battle has been won and the whole of the Brazilian people participates in MPB. Nowadays there is a similar resistance with regard to the Indian but that, too, is being overcome. Brazilians begin to understand and assimilate the Indian's forms of construction and creation, their delicacy, their beauty. The Indian is an extremely important building block in the construction of what we currently call Brazil.

Darwin Brandão:⁶ I'd like you to talk about your project of mounting an exhibition about the Indian.

Mário: When I returned to Brazil, one of my concerns was to find out the state of works in certain museums that own collections of Brazilian indigenous peoples. I was very impressed by feather art, which is extremely delicate, and wherein the Indian shows the qualities of an artist without knowing that he is an artist, a man who lives in his community and, despite all external pressures, maintains his individuality, even though he is historically and socially doomed to vanish. We owe a debt to this race—the first, the template which constitutes the formation of Brazil. Therefore, my exhibition has this aspect of historical, moral, political, and cultural reparation. It will be called *Alegria de viver, Alegria de criar* (Joy of living, joy of creating). In thinking about the Indian, one cannot escape this conotation of life, joy, and creation.

Darwin: Your idea is to put on a “non-compartmentalized” show, right?

Mário: It would occupy all three of the MAM’s [Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro] floors. It wouldn’t be just about painting, or feather art, but about indigenous cultural life as a whole.

Pelão:⁷ During the time you spent in Europe, did you visit any museum that contained records of the Brazilian Indian?

Mário: Yes. The works I want to put in this show include a tupinambá mantle – a very important work—that was taken to Paris during the early years of colonization, in the sixteenth century. It was never returned. In the museum of Geneva and the one in Basel there is also Brazilian indigenous feather work. There is a very beautiful collection of mantles and pottery in Denmark.

Pelão: In Germany there are recordings of Brazilian Indian chants made during the 1920s.

Mário: I’m in contact with [the Germans] to obtain those, since part of the exhibition will also be dedicated to film and to musical instruments. There will be a special room in which one may listen to Brazilian indigenous music.

Jaguar: Here we have the Museu do Índio, which nobody knows, because it’s only open to the public on weekdays and during business hours, when everyone is at work.

Mário: There should be lots of archeological stuff in this show. You know they’ve pushed back the date of the first men who arrived in America to some forty thousand years ago.

Ricky: Will the exhibition include things from that period?

Mário: From the Paleolithic era. To me, the Paleolithic era was the world’s great age of art. No one can explain how the hunters in Lascaux arrived at those fantastic paintings, with such astonishing technique.

Jaguar: They were the real primitive painters.

Mário: The first works of art appeared when primitive man used stone to make his instruments. And there are some extraordinarily beautiful Brazilian Indian spear

thrusts identical to works of the Paleolithic found in France and in Russia. The making of a film about the exhibition is also being planned—to be sold to a distributor. I want the people to feel that that race existed in Brazil. Indian ornaments, bracelets, necklaces, ankle bracelets show how integrated they are with Nature and are, indeed, creative men. The mantles show their mastery over Nature. The exhibition will be based on the need to show that art is not an artificial thing, that it comes from man, whatever the technology with which he coexists. Technology prepares but it creates nothing, neither yesterday nor today.

Ferreira Gullar: Based on this concept of art, would you revise your opinion of Concretism?

Mário: Not in the sense that it's no good. No. It was very important in Brazil as a way of reacting to what was natural in Brazilian romanticism. It was also important in terms of the advent of modern architecture. Nowadays artistic concepts have changed; I no longer believe in what is called modern art, although it once had a colossal importance in cultural development. But that's over, its function has ceased to exist.

Jaguar: At what moment did it end? With the death of [Pablo] Picasso?

Mário: When Pop art came along. The forms of primitive art were extremely important in destroying the European bourgeois notion that art was its supreme creation. It was discovered that art had also existed in underdeveloped countries, in primitive cultures, in abandoned continents. Naturalists and historiographers followed right behind the discoverers and imperialists who went to Africa, Oceania, and America, discovering prodigious monuments, although it took quite a while before some anthropologist said an African fetish was as important as the Venus de Milo. At the beginning of this century, there was a significant moment when young artists began to drop out of academies, when they stopped going to the salons and began to patronize museums of natural history and curiosity shops full of stuff brought to Europe. These youths were Picasso, Macni Manelli, Marco . . .⁸

Without knowing one another, the most important artists in Europe behaved the same way, although only a very few called those objects art. At best, they were curiosities.

Ricky: Prior to that, [Paul] Gauguin's encounter with primitive art transformed his entire life.

Mário: One of the first Europeans to become fascinated by primitive art was [Vincent] Van Gogh, at the World's Fair of 1900.⁹ Gauguin was next. But the contact of those young artists with primitive art resulted in Cubism which, in turn, influenced the whole of our century. So that—although it is now a thing of the past—modern art was one of the most important phenomena in world history.

Jaguar: What do you think of the Brazilian art scene?

Mário: Some important things happened, like the biennials, modern architecture, the museums of psychiatric art [*sic*], the discovery that the insane could also be creators.

Jaguar: There is Dr. Nise da Silveira's work with the Museu do Inconsciente [Museum of the unconscious].

Mário: The earliest exhibitions of work produced by art therapy took place in my time. That was also when they discovered that children are born creators.

Gullar: On one hand, children's art schools were created that sought to educate through the appreciation of artistic expression. On the other, there was an appreciation of the expressive abilities of the psychotic. Mario was a critic who proposed a broad view with regard to both, intuiting these manifestations and setting them right alongside experimental art and the avant-garde. He used to say: "To me there is only avant-garde art or art made by psychotics, by children, and by primitives. The rest is of no interest." What I mean to say is that you aren't just an observer of the phenomenon of the end of modern art, but a character in its drama. That's you coming to an end, because it was very much an adventure of yours. So when you dedicate yourself to the artistic manifestations of the Brazilian Indian, aren't you looking for an answer to the crisis of art? Wouldn't this be a return to [your] roots – the search for new templates?

Mário: Ultimately, that's true. Though it's not as if one thing were going to resolve the other. I can't say: "Modern art is finished! Long live primitive art!" I can't agree that modern art is a thing of the past, even as I maintain that nothing changed. The artists who made contemporary works continue to produce and present other works, albeit nothing new. But if we consider that which expands the repertory to be the vanguard, the avant-gardes [vanguards] are finished. It is not the avant-garde that expands the repertory today, for it expands nothing through which man might increase his knowledge. In this process, art doesn't quite reflect what goes on in the world. You can't call what keeps to one side of the street avant-garde while the events of today's world are taking place on the *other* side of the street. I never felt that artists had to be disinterested in what is happening in the world. I was never Art for Art's sake. Nowadays, actually, the essential problem of the world is not making art. Look at the Third World. What is happening? Men die of hunger by the millions. Our Western world presents no solutions to this. So I ask myself: how can I take time out to maintain the structures that exist today, to continue to repeat truths that have been stated and re-stated, to take part in activities that lead to nothing but conformity with the status quo? A friend of mine even told me I was very stoic.

Darwin: And are you stoic?

Mário: That's not the point. It's just that I'm for utopia. Nowadays, all good people are utopians. When global planning was first discussed, it was the transition from utopia to an attempt to control the situation scientifically. Because I followed a utopian line, I came to accept planning as a world solution but the world is actually very complicated.

Gullar: This planning to which you refer—would that be the creation of a socialist state?

Mário: A harmonious society. I want that utopia.

Gullar: You said you accepted planning because you believe in the possibility that it can be carried out, but . . .

Mário: Nowadays, planning has become something increasingly more complex, more variables come into play. In order to arrive at utopia one must travel an almost infinite path. For this very reason, there is a paradox of technique in regard to communication: the more technology increases, the more means of communication we obtain, the more confused the situation becomes, the more malleable the image that is sought. One no longer finds a single meaning, but many variable and contradictory meanings.

Ricky: Was this what led art to cease being essential? Because problems have always existed in the world so, earlier on, art shouldn't have been essential either.

Mário: Artistic activity is no longer at the forefront, as it was before. It is no longer essential, it is only one of the elements one can count on not to aggravate the conditions of the social problem, the cultural contradictions, the scientific contradictions. Everything is in crisis and in contradiction. I cannot forget to look to Africa, my country—for I come from the Third World—where the situation is a great deal more serious than that of Space. Even among us Brazilians, people dare to starve to death in droves. But over there, the white man's despotism makes a complete mockery of the blacks. I just can't accept that.

Ricky: Are you a Third World-ist?

Mário: I'm in favor of our remaining in the Third World. I don't believe that either Europe or the United States currently possesses any fundamental importance. What they do is important, but they can no longer rule the world. [Zbigniew] Brzezinski has said that technology is a prodigious, increasingly greater development, but no one knows any longer where this prodigious technological development is leading us. Increasingly, one moves on in studies with no actual purpose. He thinks that the USA, with all its power, its great civilization, should rule the world but, in fact, the USA is at a stalemate, for none of this is being coordinated.

Gullar: Perhaps because this technological development is not geared to the interests of a majority of men. That is the only purpose it could have. If not, it doesn't make any sense. But what you said there is very interesting: whereas, in the developed countries, the cultural problem presents itself in terms of art, in Africa it appears in terms of literacy, of basic notions of hygiene.

Mário: Precisely. This is why, in a way, I'm in favor of another world movement called counterculture. Big cities are a symbol of man's decline. New York is a prodigious American creation yet, simultaneously, it is a city that self-destructs. Snow piles up everywhere, garbage piles up everywhere, snow falls, pieces of everything fall, and huge clouds of dust are formed. There's a lot of creative stuff in this dust, but the rest of the country disdained it.

Jaguar: New York is our Rome.

Mário: The situation is dramatic and—as an intellectual—I can do nothing. I suffer dramatically because of this. I try to call upon the Brazilian people to think, to bring back some order and stability. The first order of business is to stand up for a Brazilian race that is doomed to disappear.

Darwin: And the way out, Mário?

Mário: The way out is to make the revolution.

Jaguar: And will that happen?

Mário: It depends upon Man.

Flashes of Mário Pedrosa's "Simple" Life

Ziraldo: Why did you need to leave Brazil the second time around?

Mário: In 1970 they drubbed me with a lawsuit: I was accused of sending abroad information about torture. They were going to arrest me but my lawyer found out in time and advised me to leave home. I left and only came back seven years later. They were here interrogating Mary, who said I had gone out and she didn't know where I was.

Ricky: And where were you?

Mário: I decided to seek asylum in the Chilean Embassy.

Ziraldo: Tell us about your arrival in Chile.

Mário: Some guy who was going to be appointed the Chilean Ambassador to Venezuela, I think, was on the same plane and would serve as a go-between for us. Instead of leaving the credentials with us, he took them goodness knows where and we had to wait for them under police surveillance. I even said to Túlio [Quintiliano]:¹⁰ "See? We're under arrest." After they let us go, they took us to a hotel where we rested up and I said to Túlio: "Now let's go out and eat that socialism Allende talks about." It was said that "socialism was empanadas with red wine."

The Case of the Museu da Resistência [Museum of Resistance]

Ziraldo: That was when you made the Museo de La Solidaridad (Museum of solidarity)?

Mário: The Museu da Resistência [Museum of resistance]¹¹ was created on an international level, in Paris, Spain, Germany, Rome. . . . Allende's secretary Miria Contreras and I set up the museum committee. . . . That extraordinary woman miraculously escaped from the attack on the Palácio de La Moneda. The young officers who occupied the palace recognized her and asked: "What are you doing here? You can't be here! Get down on the ground!" There was a pile of corpses and she laid down among them, they covered her with corpses and was taken along with them to the morgue. That was how she managed to escape.

Ziraldo: Where were you on that day?

Mário: In May of '73 I went to Europe to discuss a second remittance of works by artists who had not yet sent us any paintings. I went to Spain, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany, organizing and cataloguing those paintings. There was a very beautiful painting by [Walter L.] Berner, to whom I said: "Send the painting to the Chilean Embassy and they'll see to it that it's forwarded on to Santiago." That's how it worked

in many places, but things were already looking pretty bad the day Berner delivered his painting to the Embassy.

Ziraldo: Was the painting ever returned to him?

Mário: It wasn't returned to anyone and no one knows where it is. I was in Europe when the strikes began . . . those scoundrels promoted the strikes that were financed by the CIA . . .

Felix: Now they're complaining about the junta!

Mário: I was at my daughter's home in Madrid, but I needed to leave because I was worried about the paintings which, after all, were under my responsibility, since the museum hadn't yet been inaugurated. Mary stopped over in Brazil but I went straight to Chile. Two days later, early in the morning, Allende made a very beautiful speech in which he said goodbye to the people. When I heard that, I did what I had to do and went to the home of a friend. My nephew was also in Chile but, on that very same day, he had traveled to Peru with his family. The Air France plane was still on the runway when the coup took place and the pilot kept waiting for permission to take off which never came. After a long while without knowing what was going on, he decided to take off on his own and it wasn't until he reached Peru that he found out about the coup.

Ricky: Talk about the nick of time.

Mário: I received a message telling me to go to Neruda's funeral where I might reach some sort of understanding with the Ambassador.

Felix: Neruda died of civic sorrow a week after the coup.

Mário: He had cancer, you know. As we were leaving the funeral, I got into the ambassador's car and we talked about the possible ways of entering the Embassy which, at this point, was already packed with refugees waiting for the planes that the Mexican government would be sending. The entrance to the Embassy was guarded by a battalion of soldiers to keep everyone out! The Ambassador then said: "The first plane leaves today and, although you won't be on it, you can take advantage of the ensuing confusion to enter the building." I went with a friend to the street across from the Embassy, from where we could even see the door that the Embassy kept open for those who managed to make it there. There we stayed. Then a Brazilian comrade who was inside the Embassy recognized me and began to make signals to me. Signals were about the last thing I wanted at that point! I walked this way and that, always keeping an eye on the cars going in and out. Finally there came a quieter moment in which the military kept looking at I don't know what on the other side and then I swiftly ran in, unseen. So I waited out the arrival of another plane inside the Mexican Embassy.

The Case of the Two Exiles

Ziraldo: You experienced two exiles, right?

Mário: Yes, the first began on November 10, 1937, when I escaped from the Estado Novo.¹² I went underground before they could arrest me but Mary, my wife, was incarcerated for seven months.

Mary: I had already been arrested in 1932, during the Revolução Constitucionalista [Constitutionalist revolution].¹³

Mário: In 1932 she was confined to a penitentiary named Paraíso [Paradise] and I to one named Liberdade [Freedom].

Ziraldo: You'd already had an intense experience living undercover in 1934, right Mário?

Mário: In spite of the fact that I had been against the Intentona Comunista [Communist insurrection],¹⁴ in 1935, when political repression began, I went into hiding, working jobs in several places in the backlands [of the country]. One of the most interesting of these was while I was living undercover on the border with Uruguay, where we published a small newspaper.

Ziraldo: Hold it right there. First let's tell how you fled Brazil in 1937.

Mário: I didn't have a passport but I managed to escape on a German ship. The problem was that the ship was commanded by Nazis. The steward on my deck was a confirmed Nazi.

Ziraldo: Had he known who you were he would never have taken you, right?

Mário: Naturally. So I even left a book by [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe on my bed. When he saw that, he became excited: "Go to Germany! The current government is most welcoming to foreigners!" I said: "Why, certainly, I would love to go . . ." Of course I wasn't about to say that I'd been in Germany in 1928 fighting the Nazis on top of it. Nazism was on the rise and I belonged to the university's Red Group, which had been expelled from college by the Nazis for having raised a red flag in the [university] patio. I'd left Brazil for Russia, with Astrojildo Pereira's¹⁵ blessing, to acquire a deeper understanding of communism, but when I arrived in Germany, I fell ill. Meanwhile, Trotsky was expelled from the Party and I was left without a reason to travel on.

Ziraldo: Hold it! That's plenty for one interview! Your life has certainly taken you on the most amazing number of journeys!

The Case of the German Submarine

Mário: In 1916, as the war grew in intensity, my family became concerned and decided it would be best if I left the Swiss school [I had been attending] and returned to Brazil. We caught the train in Paris; all of them were running on irregular schedules, as they were constantly targeted for bombardment. The one I traveled on was packed with French soldiers. I felt surrounded by great heroes. Autograph books were very popular then, and we filled up our books with their signatures. We stood and waited for the next train, which wasn't due for another three days. It took us forever to get to Lisbon, where we had to wait another fifteen days for the next ship. I had no money and couldn't keep up with my colleagues, who went on an all-out spree, chasing women and all. When the four of us were down to a single suitcase, we finally embarked.

Hélio Pellegrino:¹⁶ How long did the trip take?

Mário: More than twenty days. The ship zigzagged [across the ocean] to throw the German submarines off our track. We made the entire crossing in darkness, covered by a tarp like stowaways. One day I was told: “Last night a submarine opened fire on us.”

The Case of the Battle of the Praça da Sé

Mário: The *integralistas*¹⁷ were going to make a triangular itinerary, starting at the Rua São Bento, moving through XV de Novembro [street] and entering the Largo da Sé [diocese square], where they were planning a demonstration against the unions. There was an armed militia commanded by Generalissimo Gustavo Barroso.¹⁸

The Anti-Fascist United Front—communists, Trotskyites, socialists—decided to prevent this because what they were actually planning was a massacre of the unions. We organized the following tactic: we would go over there, dissolve the demonstration, and when the mounted police intervened, we would leave and let the two confront one another. The attack would amount to a provocation. Each group has its armed core.

Hélio Pellegrino: Meaning it would be a real war.

Mário: There was enormous tension. We were stationed in XV de Novembro street, and when they returned, we were supposed to shout “Down with Fascism!” but they decided not to abort their triangular trajectory. They took a shortcut through Diogo Feijó. The Praça da Sé was packed with people! We had agreed that comrades carrying weapons would be the most targeted ones since the police were arresting anyone who bore arms. I, for instance, was searched several times, but I wasn’t carrying a weapon. The street was full of people. There came a moment when the police dispersed everyone. Only when everyone had been taken away did the *integralistas* come in through a small street. They began to arm themselves, unfurling flags, and we gathered to see how we might be able to put a stop to that. While we were having this conversation, shots came from where the Union members were. Today we know it was the result of provocations by a few cops, to see if the trade unionists would counterattack. There was a lot of running around because of the shots, and a group of *integralistas* fell to the ground and began shooting. Many people were wounded and fell, others ran and I found myself alone in a corner of the square. I was surrounded by a group of *integralistas*, shouting “Let’s finish this stinker off!” The only reason I didn’t die right then and there was a twelve-year-old girl standing in front of me.

Ricky: What did she do?

Mário: She was the daughter of Klassenkampf¹⁹—we called him Class Struggle—who had been arrested during World War I and later became a member of the Red Army. He always used to say: “Let us not be afraid, comrades, for on the other side they are even more afraid!” This girl was there, she saw that I was surrounded up ahead and she came and stood by me and said, “Don’t be afraid, I came here to help you, to defend you.” So the *integralistas* didn’t dare attack that girl. Several such episodes took place that day. There were one hundred and some dead and I was shot.

Washington [Luís Rodrigues] Novaes:²⁰ Assis Chateaubriand told me he remembers you in the middle of the square, surrounded by *integralistas* while bullets flew all over the place, and you were shouting, gesticulating, and holding forth. He said: “The man is a *cangaceiro!*”²¹

—Originally published as “A arte não é fundamental. A profissão do intelectual é ser revolucionário,” interview in *O Pasquim* (Rio de Janeiro), no. 648 (November 18, 1981).

Notes

1. Ricky Goodwin (b. 1956) is a Brazilian journalist and longtime contributor to *O Pasquim*.
2. The liberal, federalist Praieira Revolt, also known as the Beach Rebellion, took place in the province of Pernambuco from 1848 to 1850. It was the last of several revolts that took place during the Brazilian Empire, so named because the newspaper office led by the insurgent liberals (called *praieiros*) was located on the rua da Praia (Beach Street).
3. The Centro Popular de Cultura was an organization linked to the União Nacional de Estudantes (National Student Union), created in 1961 in Rio de Janeiro by a group of Leftist intellectuals with the purpose of making and disseminating “revolutionary popular art.” It brought together artists from various fields (theater, music, cinema, literature, the visual arts), defending the collective and didactic nature of the work of art as well as the artist’s political engagement.
4. Sérgio de Magalhães Gomes Jaguaribe, aka Jaguar (b. 1932), is a Brazilian cartoonist.
5. Alfredo da Rocha Viana, Jr., better known as Pixinguinha (1897–1973) was a composer, arranger, and flutist, saxophone, and clarinet player, widely considered one of Brazil’s greatest and best-loved musicians. Musician and songwriter Ernesto Joaquim Maria dos Santos, aka Donga (1890–1974), is considered one of the “fathers” of Samba. Mozart Camargo Guarnieri (1907–1993) was a Brazilian composer.
6. Darwin Brandão (1927–1978) was a journalist and writer.
7. João Carlos Botetzelli, aka Pelão (b. 1942) is a journalist and musical producer.
8. It is possible that there may have been some mistake in the transcription of this interview at the time of its publication. This makes it very likely that the artists to whom Pedrosa is referring were August Macke, Alberto Magnelli, and Franz Marc, although this cannot be stated with complete certainty.
9. The World’s Fair of 1900 was partially characterized by a celebration of the colonial activities of countries such as France, England, and the Netherlands and, within this historical context, the art of countries colonized by these nations was included. Van Gogh did not take part in this event for he had passed away ten years earlier. Given that this was his final interview, Pedrosa appears to have made a natural mistake.
10. Túlio Roberto Cardoso Quintiliano (1944–1973) was a Brazilian civil engineer and member of the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Revolutionary Brazilian Communist Party). He sought exile in Chile in 1970 where, under the influence of Pedrosa, he became one of the leaders of the Ponto de Partida (Starting Point) group, core organization of the future Workers’ League [Liga Operária], a Trotskyist socialist organization that fought against the military dictatorship in Brazil during the 1970s. Quintiliano was denounced and arrested one day after the military coup in Chile, after which he disappeared. In 1993 the Chilean government assumed responsibility for his murder.
11. The Museo da Resistência was created after the military coup in Chile, while Pedrosa was in exile, to provide continuity in the collecting of works for the Museo de La Solidaridad, which had come about as both movement and concept in Santiago in 1971, with a total of some fifteen hundred works donated by artists as a result of written requests made by Pedrosa and others.
12. Estado Novo is the name of the Brazilian political regime founded by Getúlio Vargas on November 10, 1937, which lasted until October 29, 1945, and was characterized by a centralization of power, nationalism, anti-communism, and authoritarianism.
13. The Revolução Constitucionalista (Constitutionalist revolution) of 1932, Revolution of 1932 or Guerra Paulista [Paulista war], was the armed movement that took place in the state of São Paulo from July to October 1932, with the aim of overthrowing Getúlio Vargas’s provisional government and promulgating a new constitution for Brazil.
14. Also known as the Revolução Vermelha (Red revolution) and Levante Comunista (Communist uprising), the Intentona Comunista (Communist insurrection) was an attempted coup against the government of Getúlio Vargas that took place in November 1935, promoted by the Brazilian Communist Party, in the name of the Aliança Nacional Libertadora (National Alliance for Freedom).
15. Astrojildo Pereira Duarte Silva (1890–1965) was a Brazilian writer, journalist, literary critic, and politician who founded the Communist Party of Brazil in 1922.
16. Hélio Pellegrino (1924–1988) was a Brazilian psychoanalyst, writer, and poet.
17. The Movimento Integralista (Integralist Movement) was founded in October 1932 by Plínio Salgado (1895–1975), a Brazilian politician and literary figure.
18. Gustavo Barroso (1888–1959) was one of the leaders of the Ação Integralista Brasileira [Brazilian Integralist Action].
19. The Hungarian militant Rudolf Lauff fought in the Russian civil war and was nicknamed “Klassenkampf” by Pedrosa.
20. Washington Luís Rodrigues Novaes (b. 1934) was a journalist specializing in environmental issues and Brazilian indigenous peoples.
21. *Cangaço* was the name given to a form of “social banditry” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the northeast of Brazil—a region known for its aridness and hardship. As a reaction to the domination of the landowners and the government, some residents became nomadic bandits, roaming the hinterlands seeking money, food, and revenge. Both Chateaubriand and Pedrosa came from this region, and Chateaubriand’s remark was clearly intended to compliment Pedrosa’s great bravery.

8. Correspon- dence

Introduction Izabela Pucu

The letters included in the following section, exchanged by Mário Pedrosa with people in his personal and professional circles from 1927 to 1978, reveal more than the particular aspects of a life. The many narratives they contain tell the partial history of a country—Brazil—and present various views of a world experiencing intense transformation.

The correspondence shows that in Pedrosa's life, art and politics articulated themselves as parts of an activity whose meaning, although utopian or visionary, bestowed the possibility of transforming the world and people. In a letter to Oscar Niemeyer, written at the height of the building of Brasília, Pedrosa responds to his architect friend about what an art museum in the country's future capital should be. Foreseeing issues that continue to challenge museums today, Pedrosa proposes a museum of documents, an archive of art from prehistory to contemporaneity—one that would include not just European art, but works by Africans, Arabs, Persians, Asians, and the people of the Americas, among other marginalized peoples. In the letter sent to Mário de Andrade when the latter was writing *Macunaíma*, the central novel of the modernist movement in Brazil, we also perceive Pedrosa's proximity to those who were engaged in building a possible—and, at that moment, desirable—identity for Brazilian art and culture.

Taken together, these letters shed light on Pedrosa's importance over several generations, both within Brazil and on the international scene. His significance is clear in his correspondence with André Breton as well as in his friendship with Alexander Calder, who in 1972 took the initiative to write a group letter to Brazil's president, General Garrastazu Médici, signed by artists and critics from around the world in repudiation of Pedrosa's persecution by the military dictatorship. There is the trust evident in the letters he exchanged with Lygia Clark and with Hélio Oiticica, both of whom considered him a true teacher and friend. In a letter to Giulio Carlo Argan, he spoke of the admiration he felt for Brazilian modernist poet Murilo Mendes.

A number of letters here refer to the construction of the Museo de la Solidaridad, in Santiago de Chile, and Pedrosa's role in mobilizing influential critics and curators, including Harald Szeemann, Dore Ashton, and Guy Brett, to help obtain donations of works for the museum's collection—extant today despite the pillaging that took place after Salvador Allende's fall. In a letter to Pablo Picasso, Pedrosa formally requests, with touching admiration and confidence, that the famous *Guernica* be transferred from The Museum of Modern Art in New York to the new museum that aspired to be both an aesthetic and a political statement.

Two letters reflect the political militancy with which Pedrosa began and ended his life. The first is a letter to Leon Trotsky, written in 1938 under the pseudonym of Lebrun, in which Pedrosa speaks out against the party's controlling faction and in defense of the autonomy of each revolutionary. Forty years later, still committed to voicing his ideals, Pedrosa penned an open letter to the labor leader with whom he founded the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' party) in 1980—the future Brazilian president Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva). —*Izabela Pucu*



Mário Pedrosa to Mário de Andrade

Berlin, n/d, 1927

My dear Mário,

A stronger than usual nostalgia for Brazil and for you has dragged me over to the table here. I've been meaning to write to you for a long time now. Today is Ash Wednesday and I awoke with a bitter taste in my mouth, as if I'd awakened in Rio! And that post-party melancholy. My body misses the warmth of Carnival days. The *choro*, the *rancho*, the *maxixe*, the music band and even the bugles of the Fenianos I repeatedly disdained. How we need Carnival, Mário! Anyone who doesn't feel that need while they're abroad wasn't born Brazilian—they had to have been grafted onto the land there.

I have not yet quite adapted to my life here in Berlin. Among other things, the language hampers adaptation. But little by little I penetrate further. With the help of women. Until one learns the language properly (still only enough for laborious reading, dictionary in hand, or dealing with everyday things), it is through them that we become integrated within the country—without much mental effort—to the point of “Germanification.” And who knows? Empirically, it may well be possible just by humping, rubbing up against the flesh of German women without cracking a book, to touch the very culture of these people?

Naturally, though, I'm not about to perform the experiment. It's a pity most of them already have a preconceived notion of what a man—a son of the tropics—may be. A very curious species of man that—when he finds a woman—proceeds straight away to lift up her skirt, etc. You will understand how, in the end, it's pretty amusing and even gives one a great deal of freedom. But it soon obstructs the march of the experiment I mentioned above: everything becomes oversimplified. Out of curiosity and in order to comply with an invitation, I went to a costume party. At some point in the evening, heavily bundled up, I was leaning in a corner of the room, taking in the revelry. I was by myself, and thus already feeling weary and predisposed to melancholy. A woman in costume, somewhat past youth's first bloom, came up to me and asked me point blank why I was sad. Because of whatever I answered, she saw I was a foreigner and asked me where from. “Süd-Amerika” (for no one knows where Brazil is). She found this amusing, took one look at my tailcoat, liked it, naturally asked where it had been made and how long I'd been in Berlin, etc. Finally, she took me by the hand, led me to a sparsely trafficked staircase and told me to cheer up, leaned into a corner and pulled me on top of her, etc. I obeyed. But I remained sad. She then became angry with me, saying I was not “Süd-Amerika,” but Russian, and left me in the room. Later on, she saw me dancing with someone else, but she had lost all interest in me.

I don't know whether or not she was drunk. But she wasn't a streetwalker. The escapade amused me and I mulled over the thing. I've been visiting museums and exhibitions. One of modern drawings from last autumn, some [—] landscapes of Marseille (a few watercolors). But I still haven't discovered his lyrical period which [Lasar] Segall talked about there. He isn't here at present. I'm expecting his arrival. Music: above all, I've been listening to Bach as much as I can. Last night I heard Stravinsky, *Oedipus Rex* (oratorio), *Mavra*, and *Petrushka*. Liked them all. I liked the last one best, surely out of affection, my personal correspondence with the content of the work. I had to go to Russia, but postponed the trip for health reasons. And I'm still not well. I've lost almost all my kilos. I'll probably take a rest cure in one of those small

towns in the South of Germany or on the banks of the Rhine. Which might possibly [—] me too much. People keep beckoning to me from Paris, to get myself over there. A constant temptation. Elsie [Houston] has written to me: she is well. She told me she was going to write to you. Give me two pieces of news: what have you been doing? A world congress of popular music will be held in Prague: Brazil will be studied. How goes Macunaima? Send him a hug. Do you have anything new? Send me your orders, Mário. And whatever you want from me, all you need to do is tell me. I should like to continue this conversation for a lot longer, like when I used to come over to Lopes Chaves, but to do so in writing is just too annoying for you and impossible for me. It's a curious thing. When I miss you, I also miss Brazil. And vice versa. You won't be upset about this, will you? As for the other you, my namesake simply, I wish him well, too; and from here, my hug, given with all the strength of muscle, of affection.

Mário

Lebrun [Mário Pedrosa] to Leon Trotsky¹

March 23, 1940

120 W 74 Street
New York, New York

Dear Comrade W. Rork,²

It is with great sadness that I realize that, in writing to you for the first time, I am obliged to make you aware of my incomprehension and doubt concerning policies you have pursued with regard to the fractional struggle within the North American party.

I am sorry, so much so that until now, ever since the day the international movement of the former Leftist Opposition was established, I have never had any serious divergence with you. I have been a member of the international organization since its Foundation in the West, practically since the first steps of the first Leftist Opposition in France, in 1928, where I found myself at the time. I founded the oppositionist movement in my country and, since that time, I have been militantly (and uninterruptedly) engaged in L.B. [Leninist Bolshevik] ranks under your direction. Forced to abandon the country, for I was then on trial because of my active participation in the movement in France and in the I.S. [International Secretariat], during the whole of 1938. The International Conference decided that I should come to North America, where I have been since the end of 1938.

Thus, I have had the opportunity to follow our international movement very closely and to become acquainted, since that period, with the North American party and its principal leaders, from whom, as a matter of fact, I have learned a great deal.

Due to the impossibility of continuing to live in N.Y. [New York], I had to leave it for some time, which left me, in spite of my wishes, somewhat removed from the active life of the organization during these last three months. For this reason, it was with some delay that I became aware of the latest events as well as the documents regarding the fractional struggle that is unfolding within our North American party.

This may explain why I only just became aware of your letter of March 4 to Comrade Dobbs,³ in which you declare, with all the authority of your name, that the I.E.C. [International Executive Committee] no longer exists. Not having been able to make out the reason that compelled you to publicly attack our international organism, I felt it my duty to express to you my astonishment, all the more so because, to this day, and to my knowledge, you have never addressed the I.E.C. with regard to the fractional struggle within the S.W.P. [Socialist Workers Party]—not even to ask them to take a stand, nor to propose anything whatsoever.

It is true that the I.E.C.'s performance was never stellar—not in Europe and not here in America. And you know this better than anyone else, Comrade Rork.

And it is true that the Administrative Secretariat chosen at the beginning of the War by those of us who are active members of the I.E.C. will not deign even to communicate calls for I.E.C. meetings to comrades whom we suspect of being in momentary disagreement with the politics of your faction, or who cannot count on your authority, Comrade Rork, or who—like myself—are no more than members of a small, unknown and illegal section of this distant and secondary country.

In spite of certain substantiations as to the inadequacy of our international organisms, which I had the opportunity to point out even before going to Europe, these organisms appeared to me, in any event, to be a good deal more vital than they actually were: from afar, they seemed to me to be imbued with a certain authority of their own, which they were unable to maintain—I say this with infinite sadness—when I was given the opportunity to see them up close. I believe this experience is shared by all comrades who, like myself, coming from small countries or distant countries, first came into contact with the international center, whether it was located in France or in America. I witnessed Comrade Camille's⁴ almost heroic struggle to give the I.S. a semblance of life. All of the European comrades, above all the emigrants, complained about this situation, about the nonexistence of our international organism. All of them (myself included) expected the International Conference to put an end to this not only scandalous situation, but a very dangerous one for the life of our International. They were unanimous in thinking—and I with them—that a true international center in Europe could not have been created and endowed with some authority without the possibility of a material life of its own being conferred upon it, as well as by placing a responsible officer at the forefront of its American leadership—one whose authority would be unquestionable throughout the whole of the International. The decision to maintain the I.S. in Europe was really made under the express condition that Comrade Trent⁵ should remain as its secretary. The leadership of the North American party did not respond to the appeal of the International Conference in this respect. Among other things, the result was the collapse of our organization in France. Intervention by the North American party came too late and ended—mercifully, in fact—above all after Comrade G.'s⁶ demoralizing intervention.

The nonexistence of leading international organisms in our International was, therefore, chronic. It truly was the diminished importance we attributed to the S.I. that facilitated the GPU [State Political Directorate]'s task, when it decided to assassinate Klement.

Came the war and it became necessary to take the existence of the international organization seriously, despite a widely disseminated sense of exhaustion with the International, above all among the comrade leaders of the North American party, who maintained that the Fourth International was a fiction and that there was nothing left of it beyond the United States. Many of these comrades then came to

the conclusion that it was necessary to retire to the sphere of the North American party and let the rest go down. This attitude could be felt especially after the defeat of the general strike in France and the dissolution of the French section, succeeded, it is true, by the magnificent effort of the North American party's base in response to the appeal for international solidarity to our French comrades.

It was not only the greater responsibility that weighed upon the leadership of the North American party but also the only possibility of conferring upon the Fourth International a stable organizational base.

None of the measures proposed in the event of war by the former Latin American Bureau—intended to maintain our international contacts, that is, to create a sort of small international bureau in a neutral European country and rescue some comrades from France who would be able to carry on the international work—were taken into consideration by Comrade G., who was then in charge of the I.S. in France. Thus we were unable to save any of our French comrades, which the centrist and Franco-Masonic PSOP [Peasants' Socialist Party] was able to do. Comrade Munis⁷ should be able to give you a detailed account of the North American party's attitude toward France during that period. We were able to maintain the few precarious ties with Europe thanks to nothing but chance, and especially to the fact that the war had not yet worsened. But our émigré comrades, who were in France because they had no other choice, are currently all in concentration camps or were forced to enlist in the French army. And, even then, they were literally dying of hunger—political and revolutionary solidarity existing only on paper.

Under current war conditions, I.E.C. members who are currently in America are the only ones who can meet easily; particularly after the split within our French movement cast at least three I.E.C. delegates (Boitel, Julien, and [Marcel] Hic)⁸ out of the organization. Thus, it was ascertained that a possible majority of the I.E.C. was to be found here. These comrades should therefore be considered representatives of the directive organ, instead of the Fourth International's I.S. A North American comrade was appointed to the post of technical secretary; certain international contacts were more or less reestablished, but—for the most part—the decisions taken remained on paper. Suffice it to say that the Fourth International was the only international organization not to launch a manifesto about the second great imperialist war, if we exclude the one I wrote published by the former Bureau Latino-Americano (and which was specially meant for the Latin America groups).⁹

The fractional struggle absorbs all the attentions of the North American leaders; and concerns with the leading international body are insignificant to the point that Comrade Cannon doubts that he can count on a majority of the committee with regard to the Russian question.

The situation that existed prior to the International Conference has not changed. Without the interest and support of the North American section, the Fourth International becomes a fiction as an international organization. This is even truer today than at the time of the Fourth International's founding Congress. Yet this does not mean to say that international leadership should, consequently, be a mere instrument of this party's executive faction, even if one were to admit that this faction retains the monopoly on political wisdom and exclusively represents the true Bolshevik spirit within our organization. If international leadership can only survive, under current conditions, with the material maintenance and moral support of the North American section, it still must not, for this reason, subordinate itself to the will—even if one were to allow for the fact that it is inspired by the healthiest and most legitimate reasons—of the party's leading faction. Unless

what is wanted is to decide once and for all that—from now on—the international direction should be established by a committee made up exclusively of you and Comrade Cannon, assisted by a stenographer.

I cannot believe that this is your intention, Comrade Rork, when you state that the I.E.C. has ceased to exist—because the Fourth International could not be constructed in such a way. Do not believe, Comrade Rork, that, in writing to you like this, I am being led by any kind of factional sentiment. As a militant for the future of our organization, my intention is simply to express my concerns to you with frankness.

It seems to me that a good method for preparing the International's executive committees would be that of permitting this directorship to forge its own path. The fact is that the war is here and we are unprepared for the task, because our executive committees do not yet have the necessary authority to best conduct the revolutionary tasks that await us amid the enormous difficulties of the moment. Comrades have grown politically with the habit of always looking to you in search of inspiration and a guiding word. The fear of making mistakes has paralyzed the actions of our finest international comrades; for many, this has been truly inhibiting. Nowadays, international events impose other responsibilities upon them. These comrades must be granted the chance to take on such responsibilities. In order that the Executive Committee of the Fourth International may be armed with the virtue of confidence that is in itself essential to revolutionary leaders, it seems unnecessary to me that they should be regarded with disbelief, with the sole purpose of winning the current factional struggle or of being expelled from the organization in an accusation that does not deal with treason to the flag of the Fourth International. If you are right, the events will confuse them and they will submit to the pedagogy of the facts, given that they could not be submitted to that of a teacher armed with a ruler for lack of more convincing arguments. It is with great sincerity that I can assure you this: I exercised as much goodwill as possible in giving in to your arguments about the matter of the USSR, but I was unable to be convinced.

Such as they currently exist, the International's Executive Committees (including those of the North American party) are the finest we have, the ones that your actions and your teachings shaped and harbored during these last fifteen years. It is from their collective action, from their ability to find their way through the hardships of the struggle and trust we deposited in them, that our International should expect to be able to live, because you yourself could not occupy their places. I do not believe that new committees can be formed at every moment. The tragic experience of our Spanish section proves this to us. When Nin¹⁰ and his friends abandoned our ranks to seek shelter in centrism and in opportunism, we were not able to improvise new committees in time to replace them. Despite the heroism of some comrades in the heat of battle, they were unable to take the place of former leaders who have left us, taking with them all of the prestige and the traditions of representatives of Bolshevism to the eyes of the masses.

Admitting the worst for you, to wit, that the majority of the I.E.C., chosen for the first International Conference does not agree with you with regard to the Russian question, should we conclude that you would refuse to recognize this direction, in remaining a minority within the International? If this is the meaning of your postscript, you shall have struck a terrible blow upon the whole of our international movement—that is, to the work of the latter part of your life. Disappointment would be intensified throughout the ranks of the entire International, from America to China, from France to Brazil, for then not only would the I.E.C. cease to exist, but the whole of Fourth International as an organization. I refuse to believe, Comrade Rork,

that, with this, you wish to prepare a small coup d'état within our International by prematurely discrediting the I.E.C. so as to dismiss it in the event that its current majority does not support your position with regard to the matter of the USSR.

In overcoming the fear—which I do not propose to hide—of taking the risk of compromising to your eyes the old and indestructible political and revolutionary solidarity that joins me to you, I have decided to go beyond and speak to you with all frankness, while simultaneously assuring you, dear Comrade Rork, that it is above all when I dare to oppose myself firmly to you with regard to a political matter of this importance that I never cease to consider myself your devoted comrade and loyal disciple.

Lebrun

Copies to members of the I.E.C.

The following excerpt is transcribed from the final part of a letter from Trotsky to F. [Farrell] Dobbs, dated April 4, 1940.

I received a letter from Lebrun about the I.E.C. A curious type! These people believe that nowadays, in the age of capitalism's death throes, in wartime conditions and in approaching clandestineness, Bolshevik centralism must be abandoned in favor of unlimited democracy. Confusion is everywhere. But their democracy possesses only individual meaning: "Let me do as I please." Lebrun and Johnson¹¹ were elected to the I.E.C. on the basis of certain principles and as representatives of certain organizations. Both abandoned the principles and utterly ignored their own organizations. These "democrats" acted entirely as free-shooting bohemians. If we could call an international congress, they would surely be expelled with the severest reprimands. They do not doubt it themselves. Simultaneously, they consider themselves to be senators for life—in the name of democracy!

As the French say: "*à la guerre comme à la guerre.*" This means we must adapt the leading organism of the Fourth International to real power relationships within our sections. There is more democracy there than in the claims of lifetime senators.

If the matter should come up for discussion, you may quote these lines as being my response to Lebrun's text."

Notes

1. We are grateful to French historian Pierre Broué for informing us of the existence of this letter. All of the following notes are by Dainis Karepovs, and are reproduced here, with permission, from Karepovs, "Mario Pedrosa e a IV Internacional (1938–1940)," in José Castilho Marques Neto, ed., *Mario Pedrosa e o Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Fundação Perseu Abramo, 2001). Karepovs published this letter, as well as the final fragment of a letter from Trotsky to Farrell Dobbs, which we also reproduce here, as an annex to his text.
2. Leon Trotsky's pseudonym.
3. Teamster Farrell Dobbs (1907–1983), was one of the leaders of the North American section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers Party, in which he occupied the function of national secretary. Pedrosa is mistaken here, for Trotsky's statement was made in a letter to James Cannon, dated February 29, 1940.
4. Camille, pseudonym of Rudolf Alois Klement (1910–1938), a philosophy student in Hamburg who was Trotsky's secretary from April 1933 to April 1934, and later became the administrative secretary to the International Secretariat in Paris. He organized the founding conference of the Fourth International, in which he did not take part because he had been mutilated and assassinated by the GPU [State Political Directorate]. Further on, Pedrosa once again refers to Klement (by his real name).
5. Trent, pseudonym of Max Shachtman (1903–1972), one of the founders of the Left Opposition in the United States. In the debate that took place within the SWP [Socialist Workers Party], he sided with the minority that criticized the characterization of the Soviet Union as a degenerate workers' state.
6. G. is James P. Cannon (1890–1974). Former leader of the North American Communist Party, he joined the Left Opposition during the 6th Congress of the Communist International, in 1928. He was the SWP's principal leader. From January to April 1939, he was sent to France at Trotsky's recommendation to resolve the crisis then being experienced by the French section of the Fourth International. The latter was divided over whether or not to admit the Workers and Peasants' Socialist Party (PSOP: Parti socialiste ouvrier et

paysan), a party that grew out of a more leftist-leaning split within the French Socialist Party. Trotsky and the International Executive Committee were in favor of the admission, but were defeated in the congress. Cannon's performance was highly criticized for allegedly having used funds raised in the United States to help French comrades as a form of political pressure. The crisis came to an end with the dissolution of the French section by the I.E.C. in June 1939.

7. Munis, pseudonym of Manuel Fernández Grandizo (1912–1989), a Hispano-Mexican member of the Spanish left opposition and one of the Spanish Trotskyist leaders in 1936.
8. Boitel was the pseudonym of the postman Joannès Bardin (1909), one of France's Trotskyist leaders. He opposed the dissolution of the French section and left the movement. Julien was the pseudonym of the Italian tailor Pietro Tresso (1893–1943). At the age of fourteen, he joined the Socialist Youth of the Italian Socialist Party. He joined the Italian Communist Party in 1921 and became a member of the Italian delegation to the 4th Congress of the Communist International in 1922. A member of the Bordiga fraction, he later joined Gramsci. Elected to the Central Committee in 1926, he was one of the principal agitators of the clandestine party center in Rome and a member of the Politburo [Political Bureau]. Excluded for criticizing "class against class" politics in February of 1930 along with Alfonso Leonetti and Paolo Ravazzoli, he founded the Italian Left Opposition. In 1936, he became a militant in the French section. He was a member of the Fourth International's S.I. Arrested in Marseilles in June, 1942, he was sentenced to ten years of reclusion. In October, 1943, following orders from the French resistance, he freed a group of prisoners from the prison at Puy, following which Tresso was assassinated by a Soviet agent of Italian origin who was in command of the "maquis liberator." The student Marcel Hic (1916–1944) joined the Left Opposition at the age of eighteen. He was a leader of the Leninist Youth. He rebuilt the clandestine Trotskyist organization in August 1940, and served as secretary of French section during the Occupation. Arrested in October 1943, he was tortured and killed in Dora.
9. In Brazil, this manifesto was disseminated in a bulletin published by the Partido Socialista Revolucionário [Socialist Revolutionary Party]: *Boletim* (Belo Horizonte), no. 3 (November 19, 1939): 1–3.
10. Andreu Nin Pérez (1892–1937) was a teacher and journalist, secretary of the Confederación Nacional del Trabajo and a militant in the Spanish PC. Sent to Moscow to work in the Profintern, of which he was secretary, a member of the Moscow soviet married to a Russian, he joined the Russian Opposition (which cost him exclusion from the CPSU. Expelled from the Soviet Union in 1931, he returned to Spain and transformed the Spanish Left Opposition into the Communist Left, later (in 1935) to become one of the members of a group that eventually gave rise to the Partido Obrero de Unificación Marxista (POUM/Workers' Party of Marxist Unification), in which he served as secretary. It was his appointment as Minister of Justice to the Catalan government brought about his break with Trotsky. After the military actions of May in Barcelona, brought about by a provocation orchestrated by Aleksander Orlov (1895–1973)—head of the Soviet NKVD in Spain—he was arrested, removed from prison by Orlov's men and tortured in a villa that belonged to Hidalgo de Cisneros and Constancia de la Mora. His refusal to "confess" led to his murder by a group of five men: two Spaniards, Orlov, the Hungarian Erno Singer Gerö (1898–1980) and a Brazilian known as José Escoyo, whose pseudonym was Luzik.
11. Johnson is the pseudonym of Cyril Lionel Robert James (1901–1989). As a young man from a wealthy Trinidadian family, he arrives in Britain in 1932, where he works as a sports journalist. The following year he joins the English Trotskyist group. He participates in the founding congress of the Fourth International. He is sent to the United States in 1939 to work with the African-American community.

Alexander Calder to Mário, Mary, and Vera Pedrosa

Roxbury, March 10, 1949

Dear Mário, Mary, Vera,

That makes quite a long time with not a letter from you and only an Xmas card from us (which perhaps you didn't receive). We flew back to California and picked up the girls, and drove home to Roxbury via New Orleans. Since arriving we have resumed the usual round of work, interlarded with festivities, or with festivities interlarded with work.

Before we left here for Rio I had started working with Burgess Meredith, the actor, who has brought a movie camera and is doing a small film or 2, on a short movie on mobiles (I get into it too). I got Herbert Matter the Swiss photographer to make it while we were in Rio, BM [Burgess Meredith] went to Paris but Matter worked on alone, and now since our return we have worked on it together. I think it is finally coming off in another 2 months or so—though it has been rather

long. However, I think the showing is arranged for New York, and some gallery in Hollywood wants to have a show of mine and show the movie at the opening. I don't know just when that might be and as [Christian] Zervos is trying to arrange one in Paris for June I feel a little bit up in the air—like a girl with too many beaux.

Did you ever get the mobile painted, or hung, or both—both or either?

How are you all? Please drop line immediately.

Sandy

Mário Pedrosa to Oscar Niemeyer

Rio de Janeiro, July 24, 1958

My dear Oscar Niemeyer,

Pursuant to our exchange of ideas regarding the creation of an art museum in Brasília and bearing in mind your suggestion that I put in writing my concept of what such an institution should be like, here is what I propose:

1. No building in Brasília of yet another museum of so-called art or modern art, along the lines of the many being organized throughout the country, nor even of the most important attempts in Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo. Anyone who is moderately well informed on the subject knows how precarious these attempts are. It is proving to be increasingly more difficult—if not impossible—to create a museum of visual arts from nothing and make it worthy of the name. Not even the Museu de Arte de São Paulo, which, despite the effort that has gone into it and the enormous amounts of money spent, is a museum of “modern” art or a museum of “ancient” art, notwithstanding the inclusion of some world-class works in its collection. Its flaws in one field and in the other are great and irremediable, no matter how great the efforts made or the money its organizers have already spent or may still spend to suppress them. The result is that it will always be an “American style” museum, that is, incomplete in its collections in terms of an authentic representation of schools and cycles of the art of the past, and “hybrid,” that is to say, devoid of a characteristic specialization, at a truly historical and scientific level. As for the two others in Rio and in São Paulo,¹ more specialized in terms of modern or contemporary art, they leave something to be desired in terms of their collections, in spite of the superhuman and patriotic efforts of their boards. One more museum of the kind [we hope to build] in Brasília would only increase the list of incomplete museums and, worse yet, disperse efforts and resources in a sort of competition with the already existing ones, without more important or more positive results.

Under the conditions in which it would be erected, in a city in the making such as Brasília—one that shall continue to be in the making for a long time—isolated from large cultural centers, it would only approach the level of its counterparts in the country's two former capitals with great difficulty, despite the enormous sums of millions and millions that the government wanted to or could invest continuously in order to build its collection.

And yet Brasília cannot do without an art institute able to give it the renown it must have, worthy of the privileges of the modern capital of Brazil.

2. The museum to be established in Brasília must be sui generis in character, in order to serve above all aims of an educational and documentary order. Therefore, it cannot be a traditional museum, characterized by its collection of original works. Since, per the considerations outlined, a collection of this order worthy of being called a museum is an extremely difficult thing, the Brasília museum will not seek to acquire original works for its collection. In its entirety, it will be a museum of copies, photographic reproductions, castings of every sort, models, etc. Its originality will consist principally in not aiming to compete with the country's equivalents, and much less with those of the world, in its inventory and original collection. In compensation, it will have over all other museums in the world the advantage of containing in its divisions and rooms the most complete documentation possible of all the cycles of the world's art history. It shall have no flaws or omissions as to the schools and styles of the past, to the artistic manifestations of the various historical civilizations and cultures, and to the various movements that define contemporary art. The museum will be designed in such a way as to give the public the exact curve of the creative and artistic evolution of humanity, from prehistoric cave art to the art of today. All that is representative of each period, of each culture and civilization, of each school shall be present in the museum. Thus, the museum will provide the most complete panorama of the artistic evolution of all peoples and offer the Brazilian people and future generations an exceptional document with which to build their artistic and cultural education, in visual and experiential terms, in the most satisfactory possible way.

3. The museum will be divided into historical cycles, and one or more appropriate area will be allocated to each cycle so that, in passing from one to the other, the visitor may follow an itinerary that represents the whole of humanity's artistic evolution. At the end of his tour, the visitor shall have a precise notion regarding the art of each cycle, within the cultural and historical setting of man's creative spirit, from the dawn of time until his own time.

4. Each cycle will be represented by its most characteristic and most notoriously valuable works, which shall be exhibited according to the most modern technologies of reproduction and presentation. To this end, the newest black-and-white and color photographic processes will be employed, whether life-size or smaller, as well as color reproductions, typography, molds, models in different scales, colored glass, cinematography, lighting, etc. Casts in plaster and other materials will also be used, as well as architectural supports, etc. Maximum use will be made of currently perfected exhibition and presentation techniques, as may be seen in various international exhibitions such as the Milan Triennale, international fairs, and exhibitions in advanced countries (Switzerland, Japan, the United States, Sweden, Holland, Italy, etc.) so that the Works on display may be appreciated and do not become chaotically or monotonously exhibited. Each historical-cultural space shall have an advantageous setting, a suggestive atmosphere able to arouse the public's curiosity, interest, and emotion, so that it may feel, through visual media, the message of each style, of each school, of each period and civilization. Alongside paintings and frescos, there will be solid castings of objects, sculptures, or architectural supports corresponding to time, etc.

5. In a succinct and abbreviated manner, and so that that one may envision the museum and its contents as a whole, here are the various cycles of the history of art in which the museum to be built should be compartmentalized:

1. Pre-History
 - a. Paleolithic
 - b. Neolithic

2. Ancient Civilizations of Asia and the Mediterranean
 - a. Mesopotamian
 - b. Egyptian
 - c. Creto-Mycenaean

3. Greece
 - a. Archaic
 - b. Classical
 - c. Hellenistic

4. China and Japan (three subdivisions)

5. India and divisions

6. Islam
 - a. Persia
 - b. Arabia, etc.

7. Rome
 - a. Etruscan
 - b. Republican
 - c. Imperial

8. Middle Ages
 - a. Primitive Christianity
 - b. Byzantine
 - c. Romantic
 - d. Gothic

9. Pre-Columbian Civilizations
 - a. Mayan
 - b. Aztec
 - c. Incan

10. Modern Age
 - a. Renaissance
 - b. Baroque and Rococo
 - c. Romanticism
 - d. Realism and Naturalism
 - e. Impressionism

11. Art of Primitive Contemporary Peoples
 - a. Africa
 - b. Polynesia
 - c. America

12. Contemporary Period (Modern Art and subdivisions)

6. Photographic reproductions and in color [*sic*], the casts, plaster molds, maquettes, models, architectural supports, etc., must be obtained in the countries where the works to be copied, reproduced, or molded are found. Thus, for example, a large, life-size photograph of the Ajanta frescoes, in India, will have to be specially made in loco for the museum; on the other hand, a complete collection of Japanese prints may be obtained at UNESCO for a reasonable price. Casts of Gothic porticos may be obtained from the Musée des Monuments Français, in Paris; copies of Byzantine mosaics may be obtained in Ravenna, Italy, with Prof. G. Bovino, by order. A cast of the Egyptian stele of Horus (which belongs to the Louvre) may be obtained by order from the museum itself, to be placed through official channels from government to government. In Beirut, by the way, there is a small museum of color reproductions organized by UNESCO, which possesses an excellent collection. These scattered and summary indications serve to suggest the work to be undertaken and the processes to be employed in order to organize the museum's inventory.

7. At the base of the small experiment that was the attempt to organize an institution of this kind for the quadricentennial celebrations of São Paulo, undertaken by a committee of experts made up of Sir Herbert Read, the architect Ernest Rogers, and the signatory of the present letter, in 1953, in Paris (unfortunately, the idea was never carried out due to financial and administrative reasons). Beyond things to be ordered—such as photographs, casts, etc.—as well as transportation, the installation of works, and personnel to be charged with efficiently carrying out the undertaking, we figured that expenses for the creation of a didactic and documentary museum should be estimated at an overall cost of 100,000 (minimum) and 150,000 dollars (maximum).

8. The proportions of the museum's collection and, therefore, the greater or lesser degree of representation of the various cycles of the history of art will depend upon the greater or lesser space reserved for the museum building and the total sum available for its construction. The installation of the cycles, with their respective collections and spaces may, however, be done gradually, rather than simultaneously. Of course the order of cycles' installation need not necessarily be chronological, and may comply with other considerations.

9. Of an eminently pedagogical and documentary character and in addition to the works on exhibition, the museum may have a section for slide projections with explanatory tape-recorded texts, so that instructive and educational purposes may be better achieved, thanks to the reproduction of the visual image and a clear and succinct verbal explanation, at the public's level of comprehension. These screenings will be presented in series according to cycles and schools, so that each day of the week may correspond to a previously designated group of works to be projected. A program of screenings should be elaborated each year and announced in advance through the museum's publications. In this way, those who are interested may choose the periods or cycles they prefer to see, during the times scheduled for the screenings.

10. Cycles in which this is possible shall be furnished with installations to exemplify technical and industrial innovations, new materials and mediums of

expression, discoveries and inventions that influenced certain styles or brought about changes or interruptions in the course of artistic evolution. Examples: the influence of the discovery of printing in the art of illuminations and manuscripts and in the birth of printmaking; photography's influence upon painting; optical discoveries and the Impressionist movement; modern industrial development and the use of iron and other metals and their influence upon contemporary style; film and its influence upon the world of visual arts, etc.

11. Explanatory texts and large-scale geographical maps in which artistic and historical places and centers of critical importance are indicated will be visible to the public at the entrance to each cycle or group of cycles. A complete catalogue of works on exhibition should also be published, with a text that may serve as a historical-artistic itinerary for the public, elucidating it with regard to the significance of each cycle and a general sense of artistic evolution.

12. The cycles should be compartmentalized according to chronology or in spatial terms according to the importance of each one of them. The affinity and connections that unite one to the other should also be observed, so that, whenever possible, the connections between them or the derivations of one with regard to the other may be exemplified. In order to break with the monotonous compulsoriness of a single itinerary through the museum, areas designated for each cycle shall be arranged in such a way as to occasionally allow visitors to choose an itinerary for themselves, to which end they shall be presented with some variations in the path to be explored. Similarly, it would also be convenient if visitors were allowed the possibility of going outside to rest, relax, or meditate upon what they had seen after a few cycles.

13. The didactic and documentary museum of art shall also maintain a film library specializing in art films and documentaries and experimental films of an objective, dynamic, and formal nature. It will also offer courses in art initiation, in art history and criticism, and aesthetic appreciation for the formation of the public's taste and its cultural and artistic consolidation.

In broad strokes, then, here you have the general idea for the Museum of art I propose for Brasília. I need not explain to you its importance and range. It would be regrettable if—among its monuments and institutions—the new capital did not include an establishment along the lines of the one described herein, considering that this would be the only way to have an art institute worthy of its educational functions and of Brasília's cultural mission itself within our country.

Should the idea interest you and if you should want new details, I am at your disposal to develop it, better specifying the cycles of art, etc. You are also authorized to make whatever use you see fit of this letter.

From your friend and admirer,

M. Pedrosa

Notes

1. Pedrosa is referring to the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro and the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo.

Ferreira Gullar to Mário Pedrosa

Rio de Janeiro, February 16, 1959

Dear Mário,

It took me a while to write to you for reasons you may well imagine: thrown out of the JB [*Jornal do Brasil*] I was hurled, slightly dazed, into the editorial offices of the DC [*Diário Carioca*] and, later, the DN [*Diário de Notícias*], simply to earn half of what I was making at the JB (editorial staff, supplement, news, and short pieces). Luckily, Reynaldo [Jardim] (this is a secret) forced me to collaborate anonymously for the SD [*Suplemento Dominical*] and, thus, I was able to balance my finances . . . but not my nerves. All of this upset me quite a bit and a great insecurity took hold of me, as well as a certain lack of interest in reading about architecture and painting. I stopped. Perhaps that is why I didn't try to write to you, aside from the fact that my *ritornello* kept repeating Odylo [Costa Filho]. But his time came and they kicked him out too, albeit without breaking any furniture. Everything happened as in a Western: the "bad man" paid [for his misdeeds] . . . but *good*. Is your leg better? I hope it hasn't hindered your work there. Reynaldo received your article. About our Congress, beyond what Luciano [Martins] has told me to tell you, I know the Itamarati [Brazilian diplomatic service] sent out a circular to all the Brazilian representations abroad, asking them to announce the Congress "that will take place in Brasília." This week, Meira Pena said to Mário Barata that the Itamarati's budget for the Congress depends on Negrão's signature and that it would be a good thing if we pressured the newspapers, talking about the Congress, news, interviews, etc. We shall do so. I spoke to Jayme Maurício who offered to poll the most important and prestigious literary figures: [Manuel] Bandeira, [Carlos] Drummond [de Andrade], Niomar [Moniz Sodré], etc. The critics shall write in their columns about the Congress. I wrote several items here at the DN while I took over the section from MB [Bandeira], who has just returned. These last measures were agreed upon at a meeting of the AICA [International Association of Art Critics], held at my request. [José] Bento and JRT [José Roberto Teixeira] Leite were more interested in going to Washington, but they promised to write about the Congress. Flávio [de Aquino] left Rio, on vacation; he'll be back by the end of the month. Jayme has led me to understand that Niomar is expecting a summons from the AICA (headquarters) regarding the Congress's closing ceremony at her museum. I told him that such a communication is the purview of the secretary here in Rio (Flávio), and that as soon as the latter arrived he would render the communication official. I believe that's right, isn't it?

As for Neo-Concretism, we will send you the manifesto. You may already imagine what it concerns. The title, disagreeable as always, is of necessity: we propose to affirm a continuity of Constructivist non-figurative art from Mondrian on down to us (!), only taking the work into account more than the theories. We consider some level of identification between art and science (transposing scientific concepts to the field of art) as the need of a certain period that no longer manifests itself today. A new interpretation based on the expressive values of this art is therefore required. In short: it is of secondary importance that [Antoine] Pevsner's sculptures may be strongly identified with the forms of descriptive geometry: what matters is that these forms be visual, formal, imaginative, and existential expression. We believe it is necessary to repeat these things because, in many cases, this affinity between contemporary art and science (deadly in itself)

is becoming an “aesthetic” principal, a “justification,” and certain artists are imitating science and geometry. Against the mechanistic and suicidal-rationalistic orientation of the *paulistas*, we declare that—without giving up the new visual vocabulary—the work of art shall express man’s realities rather than those of the machine. Whatever its constructive content, the work of art shall be “expression,” and not a mere product of the application of *a priori* principles. We deny that the notions of space, time, structure, or scientific reasoning are applicable to the field of art, which occupies a dimension previous to this objecthood: both art and science are born from within this dimension, with the necessary independence. Romantics that we are, we reaffirm the independence of aesthetic activity along with Kant, as regards practical reason and pure reason. . . . In short, we seek to put things back in their places: let us do away with this scientific demagogy that only frightens the bourgeois and confuses the artist himself. Art is not taught in school, and one need not be a doctor (rather, someone like [Alfredo] Volpi) to make it. Generally speaking, this is what we are going to say in our manifesto. As you must have realized, it is an amplification of the Rio group’s break with the São Paulo group, only now in a more clearly defined way. Truly, Concrete art and its extreme rigor, with certain dogmas born during a rudimentary period, was becoming an unbearable prison. We decided to tear down this apparent security and open up the future to experimentation. Of course we already had it, so much so that we never accepted the *paulista* postulates. The manifesto makes this stance public and, I hope, will alert many people. Lygia [Clark]’s show in São Paulo is already shaking up the *paulistas* who (says [Theon] Spanudis) are even imitating some of her things. It seems to me that Concrete art has arrived—or at least begun to arrive—at a point of maturation. I have read and reread [Maurice] Merleau-Ponty, and consider his criticism of Gestalt to be of great importance, for he believes that it is still a causal psychology. He gives a [—] death upon isomorphism which, says he, presupposes the existence of perceptual structures previous to perception; furthermore, the structures of which Gestalt speaks—he says—are structures as conceived by science, and the application of this concept of structure to the perceptual field seems impossible to him.

And so it goes. [—] hug Mary. Send her regards from Teresa. To you, too. A great hug to you all and come back soon with lots to tell us.

Your Gullar

André Breton to Mário Pedrosa

42, Rue Fontaine, Paris IXème
Paris, October 21, 1959

Dear Mário Pedrosa,

Where are you? After the death of Benjamin [Péret],¹ all our efforts to connect with you have been in vain. Despite the many telegrams that we sent him, we haven’t been able to get in touch with [Péret’s son] Geyser either.

You know that every human disappearance engenders for those close to the one who is no longer a certain number of obligations that, as painful as they may be,

must be taken on. That is why you and Geysler shall certainly authorize me to deal with what follows.

For the time being, Benjamin's apartment at 17 rue Gramme still houses all sorts of papers and objects (books, etc.), the destruction or dispersion of which we shall not be able to avoid unless an inventory is drawn up. Indeed, we understand that the apartment may very soon be declared vacant and subsequently emptied of everything it contains.

Dear friend, you know better than anyone what Benjamin's life was and what great key elements passed through it. His ideal, that for which he fought with singular disinterestedness, spurs us to attend to what he has left behind. Surely you and Geysler will not allow his correspondence, for example, to fall into just any hands any more than I would.

Therefore I am asking you to convince Geysler of the absolute necessity of procuring a suitable person of his choosing (whether trial lawyer Me. Dupin—whom he knows—or myself) for power of attorney, someone who would act on his behalf in order to safeguard whatever needs to be safeguarded. I repeat: it is extremely urgent that this be done, and that it be done within the law.

You know, dear Mário Pedrosa, that [with Benjamin's passing] I have lost my best and my oldest friend. You know, too, that I am acutely aware of my duties toward him and that what is at stake here is a veritable spiritual legacy for which I feel personally responsible.

It is possible that you may be far away. This is why I allow myself to address this letter jointly to Madame Mário Pedrosa as well as to you so that, in the event that you are not in Rio, she may stand in for you in order to receive the power [of attorney], or so that Geysler can relay his instructions to me.

Fondest regards, dear Mário Pedrosa,

André Breton

Note

1. The Surrealist poet and Trotskyist militant Benjamin Péret (1899–1959) was married to the singer Elsie Houston, the sister of Pedrosa's wife, Mary.

Lygia Clark to Mário Pedrosa

In a letter dated February 24, 1964, Lygia Clark writes to Mário Pedrosa from Paris, noting recent letters received from both Mário and Mary.

“Your letter made me feel radiant and, in case you don't already know it, take note once and for all: you are the most important figure ever to have appeared in my life, although we all know, our dear Mary included, that you and I never fucked and that this puts our friendship in an even more resplendent level, for it is always you who restore my balance, extinguishing my paranoia when it tends to run amok and saying the right word at the exact moment, whenever necessary.”

...



Lygia Clark, Arthur Luiz Piza, Mário Pedrosa, Pierre Restany, Niomar Moniz Sodré, and unknown man with *Cabeça Coletiva* (Collective head) by Lygia Clark, Paris. 1975

Mário Pedrosa and Lygia Clark, Paris (La Palette). 1974



“I keep repeating that I’m an artist artist artist, whether a shit artist I do not know, but at least I think I’m brilliant, for if my paranoia ends here, I will be lost once and for all.”

...

Noting José Simeão Leal’s¹ publication of Pedrosa’s criticism, Clark encourages Pedrosa, emphasizing the importance of his work:

“Repeat the following in bed every single day: I am an extremely, extremely, extremely important man.”

In the letter, Clark also refers to attempts at getting acknowledgment by Denise René, a notable gallerist specializing in Kinetic and Op art, who represented several South American artists at the time. She describes her delight with the positive reception of her works known as *Bichos* (Critters) in the exhibition *L’Aujourd’hui de demain* at the Musée d’Arras, France, in 1964. The letter also relays conversations and relationships with artists Yaacov Agam, Sérgio Camargo, and Georges Vantongerloo; tense interactions with the artists Paul Burri and Jesús Rafael Soto; and correspondences with several critics, including the Dutch critic and art historian Willem Sandberg and the columnist José Carlos de Oliveira. Indicating prior communications with Pedrosa, Clark states her intent to contact Pierre Restany, a friend of Pedrosa’s and—referencing reports on Hélio Oiticica’s work in the Mangueira Samba School in Rio—she writes of her admiration for the artist.

The correspondence also goes into great detail regarding the difficulties of living in Paris. To her disbelief, she writes that she has repeatedly been referred to as a black woman. She also describes her strained financial situation, living in small quarters and doing all manner of mundane chores: “I’m seriously considering buying a hook to fish in the Seine . . . me as a helper on some *bateau mouche*, how about that?”

Note

1. Art critic José Simeão Leal (1908–1996) was an important booster of Brazilian publishing. In 1961, as a member of the International Association of Art Critics, he was one of the founders of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, of which he became president in 1976.

Open Letter to the President of the Republic of Brazil General Garrastazu Médici

August 1970

We the undersigned, intellectuals and artists, have learned with indignation and concern of the warrant for political arrest issued by your government against the writer and art critic Mário Pedrosa.

M. Pedrosa is known to us for his works in the domain of art and—to all those who have read or approached him—epitomizes one of the most accomplished expressions of intelligence of a country that he has always represented most brilliantly and bravely known how to defend without compromise.

We believe you to be personally responsible for the physical and moral integrity of this eminent Brazilian whose personality has earned the admiration and respect of his colleagues everywhere.

We impatiently and anxiously await news that will tell us of the suspension of measures that weigh against him on the part of your government.

Alexander Calder
Henry Moore
Picasso
Pignon
Cristiane Du Parc
Jean Clay
Martin Barret
Chifré
Julienne Blaine
Soto
Cruz Diez
Lucena
Juvenal Ravelo
Yve-Alain Bois

Mário Pedrosa to Guy Brett*

Santiago, February 24, 1972

Dear Guy,

[Carlos] Senna has been keeping me informed of your kind cooperation on our project of a museum of modern and experimental art through donations of artists who are friendly to the Chilean process. This is fine. I received the list of the young artists you organized [who are] ready to send their works or their propositions for the museum, and among them I found our old friend [David] Medalla. It is our idea to invite them to come for a visit to Chile and then many of them may make their projects once here. I understood that you intended now to approach those artists who are not so young and therefore with a larger baggage and reputation already established. This is very important for it will give to the establishment and to the official people more assurance concerning the values and higher reputation of the works donated. For instance, a donation by a glorious name like H. [Henry] Moore or F. [Francis] Bacon would immediately give the works already collected a much higher appreciation in our mind, those artists would offer the basis of what in our project would be "the Museum of Modern Art" while the other artists, the younger ones, would assure the functioning of what we call the "Experimental" museum.

Dear Guy, in order to reinforce your initiative and authority we wish to invite you to join our Committee (International Committee of Artistic Solidarity with Chile), whose tasks you have already taken in exchange for a good part. Herewith I am sending you, with the official letter of invitation to participate in ICASC, some other documents which will give you a complete idea of our project. I hope you will agree with us and so we expect to see you later, here, when we will discuss together many problems related to the last developments of art in our time and to traditional and new institutions like museums, galleries, and so on.

Best greetings,

Mário Pedrosa

*Letter written in English.

Mário Pedrosa to Hélio Oiticica

Santiago, Chile, June 9, 1972

Dear Hélio,

I am finally getting back to the old correspondence. I'm not sure whether you know that my health has taken a regrettable turn for the worse since the beginning of this year, with one bronchitis after another and, finally, pneumonia which kept me bedridden from February until practically the beginning of April, when I firmly returned to my activities. And, along with this [letter], I am sending you a few documents that have concretized said activities: an exhibition catalogue and poster.

This is the first concrete result of the idea, which you know, of building a museum of modern and experimental art in Chile with donations from artists around the world, out of solidarity to Chile's socialist endeavors.

We managed to gather some 600 works here, including, of course, drawings and prints. With these works, we put together an Exhibition, the dimensions of which you will be able to gauge by examining the catalogue.

[Joan] Miró sent us a canvas made especially for the Museum, and which, as you know, possesses a market value of several hundreds of thousands of dollars. It's beautiful. We have a fine [Victor] Vasarely, a "critter" by Lygia (Clark), a Sérgio Camargo, a [Franz] Kracjberg, [Luiz] Piza, [Sérvulo] Esmeraldo (beautiful), as well as an excellent, first-class team of Spaniards, from [Jorge] Oteiza (*Desocupación espacial del cubo* [Emptying of the cube], quite beautiful), [Juan] Muñoz, [Equipo] Crónica, [Rafael] Canovar, [Manolo] Millares, [Antoni] Tàpies, and others, as well as the Argentinean gang, including [Antonio] Seguí to [Rómulo] Maccio, [Julio] Le Parc, kinetic Venezuelans [Jesús Rafael] Soto, etc., and several young artists. In addition to the Mexicans with a big, beautiful [Jorge Luis] Cuevas, we [also have] work from other countries and good French work by [Jean] Dewasne, [Pierre] Soulages, etc.

More works continue to arrive. There are some crates of works from Italy at the airport, among them Marino Marini, [Roberto] Grippa, and [Piero] Dorazio, as well as the gang from Milan and Turin, who will be sending things. We've just received a beautiful [Alexander] Calder. From the U.S. we are waiting for a group of artists gathered by Dore Ashton, among whom there are some good painters and sculptors. We are also waiting for the English group organized by [Roland] Penrose, among them [Henry] Moore, [Francis] Bacon, [Eduardo] Paolozzi, and others. And we expect others from Japan, from Germany, and from the Nordic countries. A long line of artists was ready to come from Brazil. But at the last minute something growled in some general's gut and things came to a halt on their way into the plane.

This whole first stage was made of works that are, shall we say, conventional in our sense (modern art). This limitation, of course, was never proposed—or should that be intentional? Rather, it is part of a first stage tactic when one is attempting to organize a collection of works for a museum, but above all one [consisting of] the most renowned artists in the world, for it is only with such works that the government and public opinion are impressed and become confident in the success of the enterprise. And, in fact, the opening of the exhibition and the launching of the idea of the museum was a great advertising success embraced by officialdom as well as the public, despite the reactionary opinion of the *mômios* (which is strong) and who were not a bit pleased with the idea of a Museum of donations by the world's artists to Allende's Chile (I'll send you newspaper clippings so you can see the social repercussion of the fact).

By the way, I'd like to ask you to look up Dore Ashton and try to find out what is being done because it's been a while since I phoned her and then wrote to her again, sending her a copy of my letter of March which she did not receive and, since the phone call, I've had no sign of her. Finally, I sent her a letter by diplomatic pouch as well as a telex message to the Chilean Embassy and we all remain in the dark. Could it be that neither Embassy nor Consulate has communicated with her?

The "Museum of Modern and Experimental Art" ended up by taking the name of "Museo de la Solidaridad" [Museum of solidarity] which is more indicative of its origins and, for this very reason, more suggestive in popular terms.

Our work here now is to prepare and equip the available spaces in the UNCTAD¹ building for the Museo de la Solidaridad definitive installation with the works already exhibited (at a local museum situated in a working-class neighborhood with

a wonderful and frequent visitation by proletarians and youths) plus the works that are in storage and the ones that continue to arrive. I hope the work will be ready by the end of the year, when the Museum's official and definitive inauguration is to take place. By then, all of us here are hoping to be able to bring together a certain number of personalities and friends.

We are trying to reserve areas for post-modern art within the museum's spaces so as to house H.O.'s [Hélio Oiticica] experiments and followers in the category of "creative creactivities" (see M=P=) [*sic*] etc., etc. Then or later on, we hope to have a veritable assembly of new artists, "non artists," or "anti-artists" at which to discuss social-aesthetic problems etc., etc.

Now you: what do you want to send us? The *Projeto cães de caça* [Hunting dogs project]? or any other in your respectable baggage? It would be fabulous if we could put one of some "non-object" from the old days into the *Projeto cães de Caça*! (If anyone can find him, Ferreira Gullar might send along one of those buried poems or non-objects of his! If necessary, we could remake them here!)

I also foresee studios in the Museum project so that artists might come and spend some time working here or just be "inspired." I would also like it if you could speak to Hans Haacke, telling him I received his letter and agree, on principle, to redo the inquiry project he sent me about Rockefeller of the NY MAM [The Museum of Modern Art, New York] over here.

I would also ask you to survey our Brazilian friends—[Antonio] Dias, [Rubens] Gerchman, Ciro, and others, about sending donations to the Museum. I received a letter from Dias in NY, and replied immediately so that I might still catch him there before he left for Brazil. In the letter I agreed with his idea of gathering artists from Milan for the Museum and also with his project of a Red Flag at the entrance to our museum. As for Gerchman, I never heard about him again. If he's there have him write to me.

Write and let me know what you think about all this and, if you will, about sounding out the younger crowd there on behalf of the Museo de la Solidaridad.

In London, Guy Brett has gathered a group willing to send things or "ideas" to us here. [David] Medalla is among them.

Last piece of news: we've just received official communication that the post office wants to put out a series of stamps with works by the Museum's artists. Funny, isn't it?

From Brazil, shit gets worse and worse. I received a long letter from Antonio Manuel with a request for a recommendation to the Guggenheim [Fellowship]. I've already received and returned the page for "confidential" recommendations. The devil of it is I received an identical request from our friend Aracy Amaral. I sent both recommendations off to the Guggenheim, defending each one according to their own merits. I cited you in Manuel's letter.

Mary sends you a big hug, and she is now notoriously one of the great authorities on Finnegans W.

Old affection, old affection, old affection

Note

1. The third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was held in Santiago in 1972.

Mário Pedrosa to Harald Szeemann*

Santiago, June 14, 1972

Münstergrasse 48 ch 3011
Bern, Switzerland

My dear Szeemann,

I am writing to let you know what it is we expect of you.

Who are we? An "International Committee of Artistic Solidarity to Chile" organized this year, following the idea that was launched here in Santiago. Last year, during a meeting of intellectuals that included our colleague [Francisco] Moreno Galvan,¹ from Spain, and Carlo Levi, from Italy, of creating a museum of modern and experimental art through donations by artists from all over the world, in solidarity and sympathy with the revolutionary experiment of Chile's new popular government. We have friends in common who are part of this Committee, including Jean Leymarie and Edward de Wilde who had the good idea to propose your name as a possible member. The purpose of this letter—long overdue because of various regrettable local circumstances, including my own deplorable state of health during the first months of this year—is to extend to you the Committee's unanimous and enthusiastic invitation.

I know that the moment I was given for making this invitation [to you] may not be the most convenient one for you in light of the many obligations and responsibilities that weigh upon you with the organization of the 1972 Kassel Documenta. But for us it is now a matter of making certain that you have, indeed, consented to being part of our committee. Our task has only just begun. We have just received the first remittances of works by front rank Spanish artists, including a truly beautiful canvas by Miró painted especially for our projected museum; also from Paris a fine consignment of works among which are a fine [Victor] Vasarely and a work by the [Equipo] Cronica, and now even a magnificent Calder, a[n] [Antonio] Seguí, L. Clark, [Sérgio] Camargo, [Carlos] Cruz-Diez, [Luis] Tomasello, [Jean] Dewasne, and, again, [Julio] Le Parc, [Jesús Rafael] Soto, and others on the way; from Argentina, the entire team is very strong, and we are expecting the imminent arrival of an entire group from Italy, where our representative in the committee is our friend [Giulio Carlo] Argan; the United States, Dore Ashton also sent us a brilliant team; from England, where Roland Penrose is responsible for a remittance of [Henry] Moore, [Francis] Bacon, etc. In New York there is also an even longer list of younger artists galvanized by Hans Haacke and Hélio Oiticica, as well as another that was compiled in London by Guy Brett. We are also expecting works from Japan and from other countries. In Switzerland and Germany we are still in the very early steps. Response from artists everywhere has generally been most encouraging.

I believe there are plenty of new and daring things we could do here from a cultural perspective that would be very instructive for these open people, who are relatively unbiased and starting from scratch, with full political and critical freedom, freedom of expression, etc.

As you may see in the enclosed catalogue, the show we put together with the best works was a cultural, social, and (in the best sense) political success; popular support, for instance, was formidable from the very beginning. Because it is a matter

of artistic solidarity with the people of Chile, the museum (project) finally took the name of Museo de la Solidaridad.

Our current task is to prepare appropriate spaces to install the works already received and still to arrive and to equip them in such a way that—without any of the luxury or ideas of ostentation that are so common in our Latin American countries—it should become a truly modern and absolutely experimental museum, open to and including the newest and most stimulating creative activities. We shall set to work without delay in order to be able to present this museum to the public by the end of the year. How we should like to be able to count on your experience and your advice for such an enterprise! I am convinced that with collaboration such as yours we could make great progress without too many mistakes on account of [our] natural shyness.

I have lived in Chile since October, 1970. After your Brazilian sojourn—the car trip with Lygia Clark from Rio to São Paulo, the Bienal—things got worse and worse. In the end, I had to choose between staying and going to jail or leaving. So as not to satisfy the generals, I left under the protection of the Chilean Embassy. And now I have settled in Santiago. I like the country; it is beautiful and poor. The little people are fearless, and possess a political genius of sorts; whence the extreme interest that is engendered everywhere by their bold and original current political and social experiment.

Your admirer and friend.

Mário Pedrosa

Los Conquistadores 2387
Pedro de Valdivia Norte
Santiago, Chile

*Letter translated from French.

Note

1. Spanish artist Francisco Moreno Galvan (1925–1999) took part in the meeting of intellectuals, in Chile in March 1971, known as “Operación Verdad” (Operation truth), where he had the idea to create an international museum in support of President Salvador Allende’s government. Management of this project was the responsibility of Pedrosa, who presided over the International Committee of Artistic Solidarity with Chile (CISAC) and mobilized the efforts of artists and intellectuals around the world.

Dore Ashton to Mário Pedrosa

[New York], February 17, 1972

Dearest Mario:

Got the masses of materials today from SAS [Scandinavian Airlines System] (mysteriously) and will do my part for the revolution by looking up addresses and paying the postage.

There is rather an accent on conceptual art—which of course is easy to transport but I don’t think will be that important within a few years. However, I’ll abide by your wishes.

The problems which your committee doesn't seem to understand are these: who will take care of the works? Where will they be hung? What will happen to them until a new museum is built? Will they be insured? What individual person is responsible? Many artists here are very much disgusted by committees, have lost works, or had them ruined, or found them winding up in someone's apartment when they were to have been donated to a properly run museum. Kindly clarify for me, and I will then clarify for them.

Item: Frank Stella is willing to give a "large work" but only if the invitation comes from the government and not a committee. His lawyer (!) called me to say that it must be an official invitation, from someone high up in the government, like the ambassador. (I have not been able to find out his reasons.) So, will you kindly get some minister or ambassador to relay the invitation.

Here are the firm commitments:

Robert Motherwell
Adja Yunkers
Philip Guston
Frank Stella (see above)
Jack Youngerman
Robert Israel

Absolutely no: [Willem] de Kooning and [Richard] Diebenkorn.

The rest have not yet contacted me, but I'll be after them this week. I am now in the process of inviting younger artists, and I think we'll get a lot of them. (Those who have not yet responded include [Jasper] Johns, [Robert] Rauschenberg, [Ellsworth] Kelly, [Saul] Steinberg, [Lee] Bontecou, [Louise] Nevelson, [George] Sugarman, [Sol] Lewitt, Marisol, [Roy] Lichtenstein, [James] Rosenquist, and Wiley).

Adja has a show at the Whitney now—very beautiful I think, and I think you would like it a lot.

I saw Leopoldo Castedo¹ at the opening and will get in touch with him soon to find out about you, Chile, and everything else. Meanwhile, whom am I supposed to be in touch with here at the embassy? And how will shipping be arranged. Will you please let me know?

Love, Dore

Notes

1. Leopoldo Castedo Hernández de Padilla (1915–1999) was a Spanish historian who became a naturalized citizen of Chile.

Mário Pedrosa to Dore Ashton*

Santiago, June 15, 1972

Dearest Dore,

Finally I got your letter. As I was expecting, it was a relief and a depression. I was relieved because here is the list of the American artists you selected since the beginning added to with some new names of post-Pop art as Carl Andre, whom I knew going to India in the same plane as I for the Triennale of New Delhi, Sol Lewitt whom I do not know personally, but I do know about his work. I do not know much about Jake Berthet, Harvey Quaytman and Robert Israel. But I trust you on all concerns. I was surprised too about the negative result of your previous consultations to the 15 artists on the list you sent to me by February or March. It is the first time such things have happened, for the general mood of the artists consulted is that of complacency. They are sympathetic to Chile, such a small, poor and undeveloped country that is in fight or permanently threatened by the Giant Goliath imperialist. But I am relieved—your list is there, the embassy finally was reached, and the artists have reserved their works for our Museo de la Solidaridad. I am glad, as I told you before, very pleased with the names of the painters you invited; all of them I admire and one has my friendship, beside the deep admiration for his art. (I remember Adja [Yunkers]'s painting of which you talk, hanging over your phonograph. It is a splendid painting and I will be proud to have it in our Museum.) I am going to put all the pressure we can on the high people of the Foreign Affairs. I have had hints sometimes—in view of your silence—that could be caused by the inefficiency of the embassy (of all embassies!). However I think that the Ambassador himself is a first-class man in relation to his own business and politics. Probably he put your list in his pocket and forgot about it. The problems he had to tackle with your Government—foreign debt, ITT, and UNCTAD [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development] III—were enough to absorb him and make him oblivious of our poor business, paintings, sculptures and so on. I am sure that now we will get someone in the embassy to take care of the works, collect them and ship them down, here to us, and all this in time before the dispersal of summer days. It means now in this current month.

Now, let me express to you my depressed feeling in face of your hard and rash criticisms. As I am responsible for the good things. I must be responsible for the bad ones. I agree entirely with you about the sloppiness of the typography and the pooriness of the design, not mentioning the misspellings. Many of them I noticed when I saw it printed. Of course, in “normal” conditions these errors could be, most often, avoided; “normal” conditions, that is, if I and Mary [Pedrosa's wife] could read it in galleys. Everything here was done graciously; nobody was paid for any special work. We never had one single penny for anything. The personnel of the Instituto de Arte Latino Americano gave us the help they could. When [Danilo] Trelles went out of the country the difficulties grew, for as a public relations of S.A.S. [Scandinavian Airlines System] and Salitre Co. he could offer some services from these companies. Most of the English and French translations came from him, and then I stopped it on account of the mistranslations. It is not easy, my dear Dore, to work under such conditions for such a foolish project as ours. But the things are going on; and since when? Since February of this year.

What you do not understand, my love, is the meaning of being an “underdeveloped country” in a very far corner of the world. We were here so glad to have pre-

pared, and in time, a catalogue, a poster, and an exposition with the donated works that I confess I overlooked the many deficiencies of the catalogue and I felt happy about what was done. The exhibition was good concerning the division of space, distribution of the works and meaning of the whole thing. And still more so in regard to the crowds of people coming to the exhibition held in a proletarian quarter: workers, common people, students by throngs, and sometimes I am afraid for the integrity of the pieces shown. It was really a democratic affair, starting with the entrance which is free to the visitors. They calculate that up to now we approach the 100,000 mark. This is much for Santiago. The exhibition will be closed by the end of the month.

I hope the American works will be here by that time or on the first days of July. They will be kept with the other works in our bodega in UNCTAD edifice. And then we will go on with the work for installing the museum. I hope that this work will be done in a decent way though with nothing ostentatious like in Rio or São Paulo. Modest. The country is poor, the people are poor and the government knows it and wants to act consequently.

We are living here in a special kind of civil war without weapons but with all kinds of tricks, legally and illegally, by reactionaries of all [—], gros bourgeois, American big business, CIA, Brazilian and Bolivian police to stop the state-machinery and the economy of the country while the Government is busy trying to expropriate their trades and financial means in order to introduce the deep reforms demanded. In spite of everything the people of this small and poor country have a kind of political genius. The experience they are doing here with hardships, errors, and persistently, in complete freedom and in a quite peaceful way, might be tomorrow a model for other countries, including some big ones in Europe and somewhere else.

I have no more places to go. We don't believe that the government can be overthrown by some military reactionaries like in Brazil. Anything approaching tentatively to that point will mean no doubt an open civil war. And most military men will recoil from that. Mary and I, we are here and we will stay. Mary is working hard on Finnegans Wake and getting some good encouragement from people who know better about it. She herself is now one of the most competent experts about Joyce's work. And I am integrated in the Institute and now have in front of me this delicate and tragic difficult project of building a museum for modern art and experimental cultural artistic activities in a country moving in a transitional stage for a kind of model of socialism not yet tried.

Excuse me, dearest Dore, for that transgression from our business. But everything today connects with everything. It is why even you, so fine a critic, so finally integrated in your field of knowledge and activity, are taken sometimes by the idea of moving to somewhere else where you will certainly be more frustrated than you are depressed in your own country. Art and politics are today inseparable. It might be that we feel this more acutely than in any other country. Our Museum of Solidarity could not even have been thought of without the consciousness of that idea.

But, please, don't look down at Chile, like a fine, intelligent New Yorker, impatient with our sometimes scandalous deficiencies of a poor undeveloped country, embarked however in a revolutionary process. But what for? For overcoming precisely this undevelopment.

Our best greetings to Adja

Love for you

P.S.: We have just received a very nice Calder. Wonderful guy! Latest news: the government is going to print a series of new stamps with some paintings of our museum. The selection, of course, will be ours.

*Letter written in English.

Mário Pedrosa to Pablo Picasso*

Santiago, July 19, 1972

Greetings, Comrade Picasso!

We, Latin American artists, your brothers, your admirers, have come to ask you something; the transfer of GUERNICA, the fruit of your hallowed protest and of your genius, from The Museum of Modern Art in New York (where it finds itself by virtue of your decision) to the Museo de la Solidaridad in Santiago, Chile.

What is the Museo de la Solidaridad? It is the newest of museums, made up exclusively of donations by artists from around the world who are in solidarity with the new Chile and its people, against imperialism and poverty, in search of freedom, emancipation, and Socialism.

And why do we ask you for it? Because the country in which GUERNICA—the eternal symbol of the pain [felt by] the massacred peoples of the world—[now] finds itself has unfortunately become the greatest producer of Guernicas in history. Our people's hearts will burst with joy when they learn that GUERNICA is honored and decently kept in our Santiago de Chile—which is today the hope of Che Guevara's continent, *our* Latin American homeland—until, according to your will, it may return to *its* homeland. Here, multitudes will come from everywhere and parade before your work, as did in days past the European pilgrims who sought another Santiago—the one from your country.

With thanks and reverence, Maestro.

*Letter translated from Spanish.

Mário Pedrosa to Giulio Carlo Argan^{1*}

Santiago, July 31, 1972

Via Gastano Sacchi 20
Rome, Italy

My dear friend,

Murilo Mendes has written to me saying that you are against the idea, if I understand correctly, of adapting a plaque from the UNCTAD² building for the Museo de la Solidaridad [Museum of Solidarity], because you believe that a museum should have a specific structure. I strongly believe that myself. But here are the circumstances:

1. The idea of a museum made up of artists' donations should be launched during the Santiago meeting of the UNCTAD assembly, when close to three thousand delegates from all countries will gather here. The President [Salvador Allende] is extremely keen on this. For political reasons as well as for others, he is right.

2. Around April we gathered nearly six hundred works between paintings, sculptures, prints, and drawings. We gathered them together in the Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano [Institute for Latin American Art] and, after a rigorous selection, we exhibited them at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo,³ which we occupied completely. The exhibition was a success both from the artistic point of view and from the cultural and social perspectives. Located within a park in one of the city's proletarian neighborhoods, the show was visited by more than one hundred thousand people, mostly youths and workers. It contained beautiful works and was good on an international level. I was pleased with my work.

3. After the show closes, where to store the works, where to find a place to exhibit them permanently next to other works that continue to arrive? In short, where to install the "Museum" that ended up being established as the Museum of Solidarity? The only available place in the entire city was the new UNCTAD building, which, for its dimension and the fact that it would be vacated after the closure of the assembly, could offer us spaces that could be arranged to house our Museo until it is able to find a permanent home. From the beginning, we spoke of building a specific structure for our museum.

4. Some of the architects who built the UNCTAD building do not like the idea of installing the Museum there, and would much prefer to build a special home for the Museum. But, as unobjectionable as it is, this solution is not now within our reach. Far from it.

5. First of all, there are dreadful social priorities. Let us not forget that this is an underdeveloped country. That it is really very poor. That it is in a very difficult political and social situation. A fierce, corrosive, and constant struggle for political power unfolds at each moment here, under cover of legality. The haute bourgeoisie is not creating opposition in a parliamentary sense, it is against the event by all available means—and there are still many of these—every possible manner of social, economic, and cultural relationship; it opposes by conspiracy with imperialism, the CIA, the reactionary military that may not be many but who exist and who move. The "Museo de la Solidaridad" that we are in the process of organizing does not possess the virtue of arousing their sympathy and enthusiasm. On the contrary. And they boycott as much as they can. Our Museum finds no support in their newspapers, their radios, their television. In haute bourgeois circles they grimace at the Museo and do not hide their rancor whenever they learn about the arrival of a [Joan] Miró, a [Alexander] Calder, or a [Victor] Vasarely; it is incredible, and they have plenty of ways to sabotage this blasted Chilean democracy. Deep down, it is understandable. With each passing day, they feel increasingly dispossessed. And their means of defense and struggle are all the more fierce, hysterical, and desperate. "Reformism," dear fellow, is no easy thing and does not run like clockwork. It is not easy at all. Even though the Chilean President possesses formidable means of legal action, legality is not on his side. The congress and the judiciary also rely on powerful means of action, and use and abuse them in a sense that is completely opposite to that of the Popular government. The country begins to be divided, not from top to bottom but in the sense of a transversal cut that would nevertheless leave the base two-thirds intact, one-third of it still remaining with the D.C. [Partido Demócrata Cristiano], the working-class base of which is quite respectable.

6. There is inflation; prices have gone up; there is a certain failure in the provision of certain genres and an absence of small change. This exasperates people. All the same, the government has succeeded in going back over the initiative and has just announced an impressive investment plan intended to thwart the drying up of private investment, to cope with the awful monetary crisis, and to overcome inflation without further sacrificing—as is the habit in capitalist countries—the quality of life and of the people. So it is at the onset of this positive offensive of the people's government that one hopes to find the right moment to present the idea of building our Museo as part of the urban construction plan for the city of Santiago.

7. Time does not count for much with Chileans. They have a habit of taking their time. The only time they hurry and were able to make something grand in record time was the UNCTAD building systematically constructed according to a real rationality in the economy of means. From workers to engineers and architects, everyone took participation in the common work seriously. Our museum can never be built of [illegible] without this state of mind, my dear Argan. The very generous idea that sustains and will sustain it until the end is that which could give its construction the necessary impulse to make it start and finish. Insofar as collaboration from all of us who are abroad, will not haggle, will not fade away, inasmuch as the chances that the work be brought to its conclusion will be favorable. It might be said that the principal means for building the Museo de la Solidaridad came and continues to come from the artistic and moral solidarity of artists and men such as yourself and other friends belonging to the International Committee for Artistic Solidarity to Chile. I shall not forget the warm reception you gave our invitation over the telephone. The idea continues to be such as was proposed, in its purity and in its transcendence, albeit occasionally with expressions of naïveté, especially from me.

8. I should like to convince you that the Museo is an integral part of the revolutionary process that, by means other than weapons and civil war, is relentlessly pursued here in Chile. And, rather than cool down, it heats itself up and warms the spirits inasmuch as people begin to become aware of what it is about and where the last and crucial bastions of private capitalism and of the haute bourgeoisie and of Imperialism may be taken. The Chilean revolution did not go through February 1917, in Russia, it is already grappling with the problems of October and after October, which does not mean that October has already been consummated. Far from it. But one gets inexorably closer.

9. Pardon me for this political digression. But it is from this plan—if one follows to the end of our thought—that the idea for the Museum came. If one forgets that, one loses accurate perspective. And one can no longer grasp in all of its importance the beautiful experience of a museum of modern and experimental art, founded upon the solidarity of artists and critics of the world toward a small country that found itself by winds and tides on the path of a socialism that cherishes human freedoms. The success of this experiment will also count for the artistic future of the world. Personally, I believe that the future of art is conditioned to the international future of the socialist experiment in the world, of which the modest Chilean model is the most recent example and, certainly, the one most charged with meaning.

10. Finally, I would like to give you some information. The exhibition we mounted last May closes at the end of June. We gathered the works in a room at UNCTAD. Along with the others that should arrive soon from the United States, Japan, England, and other countries, we shall mount them in spaces that will be reserved for us. Under the circumstances given, we are not thinking of considering these installations as definitive, like those of a museum at the level of the technical

and cultural demands of our days. However, they will be used for exhibitions that we shall mount as we receive new works to show and for other public acts related to the idea of the Museo de la Solidaridad and to the cultural and artistic education and enlightenment of the people. Our most urgent task here is to keep the works in the best technical conditions possible and to prepare a new show in November, far from the celebration of the popular government's second anniversary. We shall also produce a second catalogue on the occasion and other explanatory publications. There is a project for a documentary film. The government expressed to us the desire for using certain works, of our choice, for the issuing of new stamps. On the occasion, we also hope to organize a meeting here at which we may discuss, among other points, precisely the museum project. I very much hoped to be able to convene our comrades from the International Committee in Europe toward the end of vacation this year. Perhaps [Francisco] Moreno Galvan⁴ instructed by us here might take care of it.

11. I would be extremely grateful, my dear friend, if I could count on a response from you to all these problems—I have grown accustomed—after how many years!—never to listen to you or read you without learning something, a new clarification, a new angle of vision, an unprecedented point of view. And this is why we are certain that our project deserves as frank, as loyal and complete an opinion from you as possible.

We are waiting for you.

Your old friend and admirer,

Mário Pedrosa

Los conquistadores
2387. SANTIAGO. CHILE

P.S.: I had just finished writing this letter when I read a newspaper saying that President Allende had just delivered a speech at a public park under urban remodeling with the idea of building our Museo de la Solidaridad there along with other works. This is what I was waiting for. Now we shall ask you for at least a few ideas for a program project for the Museum's construction.

*Letter translated from French.

Notes

1. Giulio Carlo Argan (1909–1992), influential Italian art historian and author, was first recognized by the international academic community during the 1930s. In 1976 he was elected mayor of Rome and, in 1982, senator, in both cases by the Italian Communist Party.
2. The third United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was held in Santiago in 1972.
3. Pedrosa is referring to the exhibition of the first works donated by artists from around the world to the Museo de la Solidaridad, held at the Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Instituto de Arte Latinoamericano, Universidad de Chile, and inaugurated on May 17, 1972.
4. See p. 427n1.

Hélio Oiticica to Mário Pedrosa

New York, March 22, 1973

MARIO and MARY, I realize it's my fault: lack of time and *mood* for letter-writing; a thousand and one things: last year was almost completely taken up by making money to survive; it's eight a.m. and I'm still working my job (translation bureau) where I sign in at 11 p.m. or midnight (it varies with whether or not I'm late).

a) It's unbelievable that it has taken an emergency for me to write to you: see the attached Xeroxed note:¹ it arrived from RIO this week and was sent to me by ANTONIO MANUEL: I also sent a telegram about something else last month (did you get it?) after his phone call! And now the blow of this business of L [Lygia] PAPE's: I've been upset that it took me so long to hear of it: I had people here from RIO who knew nothing about it because it went down the week before CARNIVAL: what could have happened? I shall contact [Frank] GRINNON who directs the COMMITTEE FOR LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS² today but I really don't know the true reason for the thing; if it's anything like what ANTONIO tells me in his letter, it sounds pretty serious to me: I even fear for her life! This was all I needed, after everything that happened at the end of last year with my people: my mother died in October and, soon afterward, TORQUATO [Neto] committed suicide; now this; I cannot imagine how LYGIA got herself into this mess, but facts are facts; I'll see if I can phone them this weekend; I believe the COMMITTEE may well be the most effective measure to even try to determine the tenor of the thing: this has made me desperate not knowing which way to move; as you can see it really would be impossible to even think of going to BRAZIL; especially now with the new repression (guerrillas in the AMAZON)³ things are worse than ever, or so [Paulo] FRANCIS, who lives here, informs me; at any rate the violence of the news left me feeling a little groggy and disconsolate: I only hope in the end it's not that serious; please write quickly telling me what you think and what you suggest beyond this: you must know that GRINNON is a contact of DORE [Ashton]'s: I'll talk to her, too, since she already knows LYGIA's films etc., etc.: if signatures are needed, I believe I could arrange many and important ones: I'll talk to QUENTIN FIORE, who phones me every week from PRINCETON and should be coming over tomorrow for dinner (we're great friends), and I'll ask him to write to people asking for support: who knows whether [Herbert Marshall] MCLUHAN might sign a letter, a petition, whatever! Anyway, I'll do anything I can, with what energy I have left, which isn't much, I confess.

b) What to say after this: I have a lot of stuff, but it's useless because I can't think of anything, I know what I'll do: I'll Xerox my texts and send them, things I've been sending to newspapers, to (rare) publications in BRAZIL: the NAVILOUCA⁴ should be out this month (?) in RIO, and I'll send it as soon as it gets here (it was supposed to have been launched in NOVE[MBER], but with TORQUATO's suicide everything is running late): I have a lot of material in it, including a text titled TO EXPERIENCE THE EXPERIMENTAL (in which MARIO [Pedrosa] is quoted, and the text is almost entirely made up of quotations anyway); I wrote a new one about (my favorite filmmaker) NEVILLE D'ALMEIDA's MANGUE BANGUE [1971] which we watched here the week before last at the MUSEUM (OF MODERN ART): NEVILLE is brilliant and since I had a hand in the film's antecedents, etc., I feel very much a part of it all; he was here and he'll be back to shoot: at any rate we started [making] a film here at home: COSMOCOCA;⁵ I'd interrupted my filmmaking since September but I've started shooting material for [the film] AGRIPINA É ROMA-MANHATTAN⁶ [1972]

again, which I'd been making since May of last year to send to IVAN CARDOSO, who is the great new experimentalist of post-Cinema Novo cinema (to the great horror of GLAUBER [Rocha], whom I consider to be an idiot, the nonsense he has been writing about Brazilian film and literature, a scoundrel campaigning against the new boys, when he isn't coming out against [Julio] BRESSANE and other more experienced [filmmakers]; actually, CINEMA NOVO⁷ has become the champion of outdated conservative CPC⁸ things, etc.) IVAN [Serpa] has made several feature-length Super 8 films, of which I have seen NOSFERATO [*Nosferatu no Brasil*, 1970] which is a montage of several things ([about which] I've also written a text: I shall make a selection and sent it to you tomorrow, as I want to send this one off now): this is one of the subjects for lengthy conversation and debate, and I believe that if the NAVILOUCA comes out (it has already been printed) it will contain all this that is new and is worth reading or discussing nowadays, on the Brazilian art scene.

c) I continue to try to publish projects, I shall soon be doing a bilingual one with LEANDRO KATZ, with other things: because everything is difficult, I've decided to make a new series (series of total experiences, I mean) of CAPES I call SYNTHESIS-PARANGOLÉ.⁹ I take them to the streets to experiment [with them] in various situations, and I hope during the summer to be able to return to this: I want to do what I've always had in view: experiments in an anonymous street context, devoid of promotional artistic exhibitions, etc. (I'll send pictures along with the material: I took special photographs for the two of you that I never got around to sending); we did a thing in the graffiti-filled subway here, and it was filmed by ANDREAS [Valentin] (an old student of mine who now studies at SWARTHMORE and is already 20 years old); I've got plenty of dirt to dish after this long gap: the problem is I'm always hoping you'll show up here and I put things off, because telling and conversation is a thousand times better than writing like this: at any rate the SYNTHESIS-PARANGOLÉ thing is an attempt to synthesize and group everything important that remained from the crucial experiments of the 1960s in BRAZIL and elsewhere; I participated in something that happened in PAMPLONA in SPAIN in July of last year (LEANDRO went and represented me) with CAPES made ON THE BODY, in loco; it was cool because everybody you can imagine was there (ENCUENTROS DE PAMPLONA) including JOHN CAGE, who did a performance same place and date as mine, etc.

d) as I've said, in order to survive I've been doing translations 4 days a week at night here in addition to professional photography for a publishing company: I'm always exhausted by everything and only have time for myself, etc.; 4 thousand people come and go here in the LOFT but I've decided I now want to be alone, except for people whom I adore, such as you, etc.; it's been too much, believe me, and I'm all out of patience!

Well I shall send this off and try to keep my promise of sending you my informative material; I've received the CAMPAIGN, but not any information that might be of much value to them: what I know you already know [too].

Well, I shall continue in another [letter], a PROMISE is a PROMISE.

I shall remain quite listless until something is effectively done in the case of LYGIA: acknowledge receipt of this: one is always left with a sense that correspondence [to Brazil] never arrives or something.

MARIO and MARY love and love from this friend who adores you more and more: kisses

Notes

1. Lygia Pape was arrested in 1973 and remained missing for roughly ten days, while her family was kept completely ignorant of what might have happened to her. The artist Antonio Manuel and her daughter Cristina Pape interceded on her behalf to General Frota, a member of the military regime's so-called "hard line."

- and discovered that the artist had been seized, her head covered with a hood, and taken to the Vila Militar, in Rio de Janeiro's Deodoro neighborhood, but that she would soon be freed. Upon receiving news of this in a letter from Antonio Manuel, Oiticica composed a note and sent copies of it to several artists, intellectuals, and institutions, informing them of her disappearance. Days later, Pape was released.
2. U.S. Committee for Justice to Latin American Political Prisoners.
 3. Oiticica is referring to the Araguaia Guerrilla War, in which armed dissidents of the Communist Party of Brazil fought against the country's military dictatorship in the Araguaia River basin from the late 1960s to the mid-1970s.
 4. An art and poetry magazine edited by poets Waly Salomão (1943–2003) and Torquato Neto (1944–1972), published in 1974. Its single issue is considered a landmark in the cultural output of the period.
 5. *Cosmococa*, a series of works produced in 1973 by Hélio Oiticica and Neville d'Almeida consisting of sensory environments that include slide projections, soundtracks, and various tactile elements.
 6. *Agripina é Roma-Manhattan*, New York, 1972. Super 8mm film, color, 16'27".
 7. Cinema Novo was a movement that got its start in Rio de Janeiro and in the state of Bahia; it focused on Brazilian reality through criticism of the country's social and economic situations. Influenced by Italian Neorealism and by the French New Wave, it questioned the Brazilian film industry and its relationship to Hollywood standards, proposing cinema of an experimental nature. One of the movement's most important figures was filmmaker Glauber Rocha, who directed *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (*Black God, White Devil*) (1964), among others.
 8. The Centro Popular de Cultura, an organization associated with the União Nacional dos Estudantes, was created in Rio de Janeiro in 1961 by a group of leftist intellectuals. It congregated artists from various fields and was important to the ideological and cultural debate of the period. However, its later development reduced the importance of the debate on artistic commitment, popular culture, and the social function of art to a relationship between nationalism and populism, generating misunderstandings that led to the dogmatism and conservative inclinations of its artistic and cultural output.
 9. Capes, banners, and *parangolés* were types of works that Oiticica began on in 1964. Made from simple materials, these elements perform in the environment when activated by the spectator's body.

Open Letter to a Labor Leader¹

Rio de Janeiro, August 18, 1978

Lula [Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva]:

It is with great interest that I have been following your activity within the workers' movement—and, most recently, in the Congresso dos Trabalhadores na Indústria [Congress of Industrial Workers] that took place in this Capital. For this reason, I avail myself of this letter to bear witness of my joy as an old socialist militant for the firmness, clarity, and combative spirit you have displayed in the course of these proceedings.

I know that you, whose leadership of the Brazilian working-class movement has been growing in importance from North to South, are not fond of intellectual manifestations with union life. I understand and respect your aversion in this regard, for the history of this labor movement, principally in Brazil, is filled with examples of affected salutations, little pats on the back, and other types of enticements with which certain "intellectuals," particularly on the eve of an election, seek to flatter the workers. Fortunately, I have never suffered from their affectations, much less today, at an age when one is no longer a candidate for anything, except for continuing to be faithful to the ideas of one's youth. This loyalty to ideas is what leads me to write you this letter and, precisely, as an intellectual. What for? To give you advice? Positively not. A young militant of your mettle, of your intelligence, of your commitment, is not the happy product of chance. It is a necessary product of the new Brazilian society's emerging working class. You were shaped in São Paulo,

in the very heart of this new class. I am certain that others like you are being shaped throughout Brazil by the thousands, certainly by the hundreds; soon, I am certain, we shall all take notice of them. The reverberation of this class movement that rises from the depths of the land of Piratininga to the backlands, from the Prata to the Amazon [Rivers], can already be heard. This is the most important, productive, and historical movement ever seen in Brazil.

I can now smile and predict that Brazil will be a fortunate country: the hour for the emergence of the new working class and of the emergence of a new Brazil, finally free of oppression, coincide. In the last century, when my master Karl Marx proclaimed that “the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves,” this truth was never to be erased from history. What was it that his eyes beheld then? An ascendant capitalism, a proletariat in rags, and August Bebel, a true German worker, like you, founding the Social Democratic Workers’ Party of Germany that, over time, would become the model party for the whole of the European working class, including Lenin in the barbaric Russia of the czars. When the inter-imperialist killing began in Europe in 1914, and Lenin and Trotsky were able to pull Russia out of the massacre, overthrowing czarism, with a boldness never seen before, they attempted to establish the first republic of the (Soviet) Councils; founded by a heroic minority of the working class of Leningrad and Moscow, cities of the vast Russian empire, the Republic of the Soviets soon collapsed like the Paris Commune and, in its place, established by any means a totalitarian bureaucratic dictatorship that undoubtedly collected great accomplishments (above all of an industrial and military order), but with immense sacrifices for all the people and peasants of Russia and who, to this day, enjoy no freedom at all.

Another vista begins to emerge in Brazil; from where does one begin? From a bureaucratic-technical-bourgeois-military regime that brought with it some real progress, greater poverty, and even greater oppression. What is the driving force of the new situation, able to summon the people, to mobilize them, to guide them peacefully to a National Constituent Assembly, sovereignly elected by the people? This working class that you and your comrade workers are engaged in organizing into fully autonomous unions, free of the state’s tutelage, with the right to strike, collective work contracts, and an intransigent struggle against *peleguismo*.²

The constitutional amendment that Fernando Henrique Cardoso—the MDB [Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, or Brazilian Democratic Movement]³ candidate to the Federal Senate—has just sent to the MDB’s presidency so that his party may take it to the National Congress plenary is the most radical and profound initiative that the Opposition to the current regime has introduced. With it, Professor Fernando Henrique Cardoso has marked the difference between 1945–46 and 1978, that is, between the crisis of the end of World War II and the *Estado Novo*⁴ and the current one, in which we are watching the first signs of the death throes of the military-bureaucratic system that has governed us since 1964. In 1945–46, democrats, liberals, and socialists arrived, imposed upon the anti-*Estado Novo* candidate the raising of the flag of democracy in its totality, for the struggle for democratic rights also includes the right to strike and the freedom and autonomy to unionize in view of the State, which, as we know, were prohibited by the *Estado Novo*’s fascist legislation and resulted in the imprisonment of all those who proclaimed it.

The Constitution of 1946 won the right to strike; but as for the freedom and autonomy to unionize, the liberals and the leftist forces of ’46 were not yet able to regulate the fine democratic principles inscribed within the very text of the

constitutional charter in a positive sense. And since then the democracy of '46 has limped along and the workers' unions gone through the years devoid of autonomy, bound to the State, in absolute *peleguismo* until the final submission in which salary ceases to be the essential attribute of the worker and his union in order to become the exclusive domain of the State's high bureaucracy and that of some of its *pelegos*, both the ones who came from the working class itself and others who came from their employers.

The way is finally being cleared for democracy. This time, the remnants of dictatorial gangrene subsisting in the tissue of democracy will not be left along the roadside, as in 1950. New political leaders, like Fernando Henrique Cardoso, are alert and devote themselves to your Party, the Opposition Party, the means to excise these cancers from union legislation, already now with the guarantee that the core of the struggle for the emancipation of the state's working class, with its old fascist inclinations, shall not be forgotten, and thus ideal conditions will be created so that, finally, from the struggle for the re-democratization of Brazil, a truly profound, free, clearly working-class movement will emerge—one in which all legitimate popular forces will come together within a single branch of socialism: the Workers' Movement for Socialism. Thus, the party that the proletarian consciousness with which you and your comrades are imbued has been minted with the naturalness of elemental things. Such is the promise of the future: fruit of the traditions of masters, nourished by the blood of our proletarian heroes. Without the liberation of the workers' movement it is useless to speak of freedom, democracy, or socialism.

Proletarian greetings from the old comrade.

Notes

1. Letter written by Mário Pedrosa and co-authored by Plínio Gomes de Melo on August 1 and sent to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on September 10, 1978. In Mario Pedrosa, *Sobre o PT*, 2nd ed. (São Paulo: CHED, 1980).
2. See p. 389nl.
3. The Movimento Democrático Brasileiro was a Brazilian political party that harbored opposition to the military regime of 1964.
4. Estado Novo was a Brazilian political regime established through a military coup on November 10, 1937. It was characterized by the centralization of power, by nationalism and by anti-communism. It lasted until October 29, 1945, when Vargas was ousted by the armed forces.

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Chronology

1900

Mário Xavier de Andrade Pedrosa is born on April 25 on the Jussaral estate in the district of Cruangi, Timbaúba, in the state of Pernambuco, to Pedro da Cunha Pedrosa and Antônia Xavier de Andrade Pedrosa.

1906

In Paraíba, begins his schooling at the Colégio Nossa Senhora das Neves, after which he attends the Colégio Diocesano Pio X and the Liceu Paraibano.

1913–15

At age thirteen, goes to study in Switzerland, where he enrolls at the Institut Quinche, in Château de Vidy in Lausanne.

1916

With the escalation of World War I, his family decides that Mário should return to Brazil, specifically to Itajubá, Minas Gerais, where he takes his first college preparatory examinations.

1917–18

Travels to Campos for the last of his preparatory examinations—in Latin, English, and natural history—failing the last subject.

1919

Is accepted to law school by a decree exempting all students from examinations, but comes down with pneumonia and travels to Paraíba for a period of convalescence that delays the beginning of his studies.

1920–24

During his years at law school (Faculdade de Direito, São Paulo), his interest in social matters and in Marxism is shaped. In Rio de Janeiro, Mário takes part in different groups and meets poets Murilo Mendes and Manuel Bandeira, painter Ismael Nery, critic Antonio Bento, and journalist Aristides Lobo, among others. Lívio Xavier introduces him to Arinda Malta de Galdo and James Frank Houston, the parents of Mary Houston and Mário's future in-laws, and he frequents their home in Niterói.

In 1923 is awarded a bachelor's degree in law and social sciences. Named interim consumption tax inspector, he goes to São Paulo in 1924. He begins to write literary criticism for the daily newspaper *Diário da Noite*. He frequents literary circles and forges a friendship with Mário de Andrade.

1926

Enters the Partido Comunista Brasileiro (Brazilian communist party) and is named tax surveyor of revenue in Paraíba.

1927

Becomes a militant communist in São Paulo, and goes back to work for the *Diário da Noite*. The directors of the PCB decide to send him to the International Lenin School in Moscow. He leaves for Russia but becomes ill en route, upon arrival in Germany. He never makes it to Russia. At the University of Berlin, he attends courses in philosophy and sociology and becomes acquainted with Gestalt theory and the psychology of form.

1928

Travels to Paris for the wedding of Mary's sister Elsie Houston and French Surrealist poet Benjamin Peret. In Paris meets Pierre Naville and the writers of the Surrealist group—André Breton, Louis Aragon, and Paul Eluard, among others. Also meets Heitor Villa-Lobos. Back in Berlin, corresponds with Naville (director of the communist magazine *Clarté*) and becomes aware of the Russian Left Opposition's ideas, which coincide with some of the concerns he had been expressing since 1926 in his correspondence with Lívio Xavier. He sides with Leon Trotsky in the struggle against Stalinism and abandons the idea of studying in Moscow.

1929

In August returns to Brazil and is expelled from the Communist Party as a Trotskyite. He begins to organize the Trotskyist movement in Brazil. He is arrested for the first time. Works for *O Jornal* in Rio de Janeiro.

1930

Arrested for the second time on May 1. On May 8, the Lenin Communist Group is founded by Pedrosa, launches *A Luta de Classes*, the first Left Opposition newspaper in Brazil.

The Revolution of 1930, an armed movement led by the states of Minas Gerais, Paraíba, and Rio Grande do Sul, deposes President Washington Luís. Getúlio Vargas assumes leadership of the provisional government. A short time later, Mário contracts another lung ailment.

1931

Still not fully recovered, goes to São Paulo with Mary Houston, his future wife. In January takes part in the founding of the International Communist League, associated with the International Left Opposition. Xavier, Peret, and Aristides Lobo, among others, are present. Throughout the following years, the League will expand its influence in unions.

1932

Moves from Campos do Jordão to Indianópolis, São Paulo. With a few comrades, founds the Unitas publishing concern for the publication of Marxist texts, and edits the first Marxist collection in Brazil. Translates, collects, and prefaces essays by Trotsky on the German crisis under the title of *Revolução e contra-revolução na Alemanha* (Revolution and counterrevolution in Germany).

From July to October, forces in São Paulo attempt to topple the Vargas government in the uprising known as the Constitutionalist Revolution. Mário and Mary are arrested.

1933

Makes his debut in art criticism with the lecture “As tendências sociais da arte e Käthe Kollwitz” (“The Social Tendencies of Art and Käthe Kollwitz”) at the Clube dos Artistas Modernos de São Paulo (Modern artists’ club of São Paulo).

The lecture on Kollwitz is published in parts in *O homem livre*, and has come to be considered a landmark in Brazilian art criticism. In the words of Aracy Amaral, this is “a new time in the country’s art criticism.”

1934

With the International Communist League in command of the União dos Trabalhadores Gráficos (Printworkers’ union), Mário engages in intense political activity to consolidate the Antifascist Front. The organization was responsible for the episode that became known as the Batalha da Praça da Sé, an armed confrontation between anti-Fascist militants and the Integralists. Among the several dead and many wounded, Mário is shot. This same year, Pedrosa publishes “Impressões de Portinari” (“Impressions of Portinari”) in the *Diário da Noite*.

1935

Moves from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro and goes to work for the Havas news agency.

Marries Mary Houston.

In November a group of officials led by Luís Carlos Prestes attempts to overthrow the Vargas government in a failed action known as the Intentona Comunista [communist conspiracy or uprising]. The repression that follows affects all segments of the left. Soon afterwards, with Mary in her last month of pregnancy, the police come to the home of Mário’s mother-in-law, where the couple lives, to arrest them. Arinda Houston circumvents police surveillance and gets word to Mário not to return home. This marks the beginning of a protracted period of clandestinity. The police confiscate his library, including several unpublished manuscripts.

1936

Daughter Vera is born.

Differences of opinion between the leadership of the international Trotskyist movement and the Soviet Union lead to a crisis that has repercussions in Brazil. The Internationalist Communist League becomes the Partido Operário Leninista (Leninist workers’ party).

1937

After a period of constant political persecution, the situation calms down. Mário rents an apartment in the Botafogo neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro and goes back to work at the Havas agency.

On November 10, Getúlio Vargas stages a coup d'état. The Estado Novo, a dictatorship that would last until 1945, is established. With the escalation of brutal police repression, Mário is indicted by the National Security Council. Forced to leave Brazil, he travels to Europe.

1938

In January the police search the Houston family household in Rio de Janeiro. Mary is arrested and is placed in detention for seven months.

The day after his arrival in Paris, Mário attends the burial of Leon Sedov, Trotsky's son.

With war approaching, the Secretariat of the Fourth International is transferred to the United States and Mário travels there shortly after the Munich crisis.

1939

In New York, takes part in meetings of the Executive Committee of the Fourth International, whose members include Max Shachtman, C. L. R. James, James Cannon, and Nathan Gould. He also dedicates himself to organizing and directing the Fourth International's Pan-American Committee (PAC).

During this period meets Mary McCarthy, Clement Greenberg, Meyer Schapiro, and other intellectuals and artists attracted to the ideas of Trotskyism.

In October Mary travels to the United States with Vera and her mother, Arinda Houston. Mary's dual nationality allows her to be hired as a bilingual secretary in the State Department. She and Mário travel to Washington, D.C., and he distances himself from the activities of the PAC.

1940

Writes essay titled "A defesa da URSS na guerra atual" ("The Defense of the USSR in the Present War") in which he expounds reservations to an unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and its characterization as worker state, published in the Socialist Workers Party internal bulletin.

Takes on responsibilities within the Secretariat of the Pan-American Union (the future Organization of American States) in Washington, D.C. As the result of a promulgation of the Nationality Act, Mary, the employee of a Brazilian governmental agency, is fired from her job at the State Department and loses her American citizenship. Mary returns to Rio de Janeiro in September. Mário publishes "What Next in Latin America?" in the New International.

Pens a letter to Trotsky, in which he reaffirms his position with regard to unconditional defense of the Soviet Union and criticizes Trotsky's allegations that disavowed the Executive Committee of the Fourth International. From Mexico, Trotsky reorganizes the Secretariat of the Fourth International. Mário is excluded.

1941

Returns overland to Brazil and is arrested soon after his arrival in Rio de Janeiro. Armed with an official invitation to Mário and Mary to become part of the Editorial Section of the Pan-American Union, Mário's father arranges with authorities for a deferment of his son's arrest, granted under the condition of his immediate departure from national territory.

Returns to Washington, D. C.

1942

Writes a long article for the *Boletim da União Pan-Americana* about Candido Portinari's murals in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and another one about the Widener collection in the National Gallery of Art, also in Washington, D.C.

1943

Leaves the Pan-American Union to work in the film department at the Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in New York. Mary joins him soon after. Is introduced to Paulo Bittencourt by Niomar Muniz Sodré and begins to pen articles for the *Correio da manhã*, a newspaper for which he continues to write until 1951.

1945

Enthusiastic over Alexander Calder's important exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, calls on the artist. The two become friends.

With the end of the war, decides to return to Brazil. Finds the weekly *Vanguarda socialista*, considered essential to the intellectual formation of a generation of readers.

Helps to create the União Socialista Popular (Popular socialist union), an organization that aims to launch the creative foundation for a large socialist party.

1946

Creates an exclusive section dedicated to the visual arts in the *Correio da manhã*.

1947

Joins the Socialist Party along with other contributors to the weekly *Vanguarda Socialista*.

In February he visits an exhibition of work by patients of the Hospital Dom Pedro II, a psychiatric center in the Engenho de Dentro neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro developed by Dr. Nise da Silveira and by Almir Mavignier. Writes several articles about it for the *Correio da manhã* (among them "Arte inconsciente" ["Unconscious Art"]).

Is sent to Europe at the service of the *Correio da manhã* and interviews André Gide, Albert Camus, André Malraux, David Rousset, and James Burnham. In Italy visits painter Giorgio Morandi and they become friends.

1948

Calder visits Brazil for the first time. Mário gives lectures on the American sculptor in the Ministry of Education auditorium, in Rio de Janeiro, and at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP).

Beginning this year, a group of artists made up of Serpa, Abraham Palatnik, and Almir Mavignier gathers around him; they create the first core of Concretist artists in Rio de Janeiro.

In November gives a new lecture at the Brazilian Press Association titled "Os socialistas e a III guerra mundial" ("Socialists and World War III"), with an analysis of imperialism and polarization during the postwar period.

At the Departamento Cultural (Cultural Department) of the UNE (União Nacional dos Estudantes [National Student Union]), he delivers a lecture on "*Albert Camus e a revolta do herói absurdo*" about the myth of Sisyphus, in which he establishes a parallel between Camus and Kafka, published in the *Correio da manhã*.

1949

Applies for the chair of History of Art and Aesthetics at the Universidade do Brasil's college of architecture with the thesis "Da Natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte" ("On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art"). The thesis pioneers the association between Gestalt and aesthetic perception but receives second place in the official examination. Albert Camus travels to Brazil and is received in Rio by Mário and Mary.

Writes a study on the mural of Tiradentes (Joaquim José da Silva Xavier) by Portinari. It is the third in a series of studies dedicated to the painter and contains harsh criticism of the artist's trajectory; at the time, Portinari was considered the most important artist in the country. The publication of the text in the *Correio da manhã* arouses great controversy.

Arte, necessidade vital (*The Vital Need for Art*), a collection of articles and essays written between 1933 and 1948, is published by Casa do Estudante do Brasil.

Publishes "Calder e a música dos ritmos visuais" ("Calder and the Music of Visual Rhythms") in the magazine *Cultura*.

Participates actively in the debate about abstraction on the occasion of the opening of the inaugural exhibition of the MAM-SP, *Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo* (From figuration to abstraction), organized by the Belgian critic Léon Degand.

In Paris, joins Sergio Milliet at UNESCO for the Second International Congress of Art Critics (AICA).

In October the exhibition *Nove artistas do Engenho de Dentro* (Nine artists from Engenho de Dentro), with works selected by Mário, Mavignier, and Léon Degand (then the director of MAM-SP), opens in São Paulo. Reception to the show is fueled by the press debate between Mário and Quirino Campofiorito, who questions the artistic quality of the patients' work.

1950

Opening of the *Nove artistas do Engenho de Dentro* (Nine artists from Engenho de Dentro) exhibition at the Salão Nobre da Câmara Municipal do Rio de Janeiro.

Runs for office as deputy for the Socialist Party, but is not elected.

1951

Applies for a chair in the Faculdade de Arquitetura (College of architecture) and becomes a *livre-docente* (a prestigious lecturer post). The Ministry of Education and Health publishes two of his books: *Forma e personalidade* (*Form and Personality*) and *Panorama da pintura moderna* (*Panorama of Modern Painting*).

1952

Is named professor of History in the Colégio Pedro II, Rio de Janeiro.

Acts as a consultant for the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (MAM–RJ).

Visits the course taught by Ivan Serpa on painting for children, and writes the introduction to the Exposição Infantil (Children’s art show) at the MAM–RJ.

Writes introductory text for Lygia Clark’s first solo show at the Salão do Ministério da Educação (Salon of the Ministry of Education).

1953

With Flávio de Aquino and Niomar Moniz Sodré, joins the jury of the first edition of the Exposição Nacional de Arte Abstrata (National exhibition of abstract art) at the Hotel Quitandinha, Petrópolis.

Spends most of the year in Europe, entrusted with the organization of the artistic program of the second edition of the São Paulo Bienal, celebrating the *Paulista* capital’s fourth centennial. The Bienal dedicates special rooms to Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Piet Mondrian, Edvard Munch, Henry Moore, Marino Marini, and Calder. Takes part in the international congress of art critics held in Dublin, where he presents a thesis on “Relações entre a ciência e a arte” (“Relations Between Science and Art”), later published in the book *Dimensões da arte* (Rio de Janeiro: Mec, 1964). Delivers a lecture on Brazilian architecture at the Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris, published

in the December issue of *Architecture d’aujourd’hui* magazine.

1954

Returns to Brazil and to lecturing. Resumes his activities as a journalist.

The first Grupo Frente exhibition is held; the group is made up of artists who gathered around Mário and had attended Ivan Serpa’s free courses. Exhibition participants include Ivan Serpa, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Aluísio Carvão, Décio Vieira, and Carlos Val, among others.

Joins the committee that selects the Brazilian delegation for the twenty-sixth edition of the Venice Biennale.

1955

Submits to official examinations for a position as lecturer in history at the Colégio Pedro II with a thesis “Da missão francesa: Seus obstáculos políticos” (“On the French Mission: Its Political Obstacles”). The examination never takes place.

Lectures at the Escola Superior de Guerra on “O poder nacional: As ideologias e sua significação para o poder nacional” (“National Power: Ideologies and their Significance to National Power”).

Writes introductory text for the Grupo Frente’s second exhibition, held at the MAM–RJ. Abraham Palatnik, César Oiticica, Eric Baruch, Franz Weissmann, Hélio Oiticica, Rubem Ludolf, Vicent Ibberson, and João José da Silva Costa join the group’s initial participants. In conjunction with the exhibition, delivers a lecture on “Apologia da arte de vanguarda” (“Apology for Avant-Garde Art”).

Joins the jury at the third São Paulo Bienal.

1956

Enrolls again in official examinations for *livre-docência* for the chair of History at Colégio Pedro II, this time with a thesis on “As principais correntes políticas na revolução russa de 1917” (“The Principal Political Currents in the Russian Revolution of 1917”).

Takes part in the conference on the occasion of the National Exhibition of Concrete Art, in the MAM–RJ and MAM–SP.

In June is expelled from the Socialist Party.

1957

Odilo Costa Filho invites him to be part of the *Jornal do Brasil's* graphic redesign project. He writes a visual arts column for the paper.

Participates in the award committee of the fourth edition of the São Paulo Bienal.

Elected vice president of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and is awarded a scholarship to UNESCO's East-West project, which takes him to Japan the following year.

Gives a lecture on Morandi at the Museu Nacional de Belas Artes, in Rio de Janeiro.

André Breton publishes *L'Art magique* based on a survey taken among major thinkers, including Pedrosa, Martin Heidegger, André Malraux, Georges Bataille, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Herbert Read.

1958

Travels to Japan, where he remains for most of the year and writes the essay "A caligrafia sino-japonesa moderna e a arte abstrata do ocidente" ("Modern Sino-Japanese Calligraphy and the Abstract Art of the West").

Mounts an exhibition about Brazilian architecture at the Tokyo Museum of Modern Art titled *From the Baroque to Brasília*.

In a letter to Oscar Niemeyer, presents a detailed project for the creation of the Museu da Fundação de Brasília, in which he proposes a documentary, didactic museum.

1959

Mary meets him in Japan.

In Rio de Janeiro, during Mário's absence, the first Neo-Concrete exhibition is held at the MAM-RJ.

Back in Brazil, he organizes an extraordinary edition of the AICA congress, which is held in Brasília, Rio de Janeiro, and São Paulo with the presence of the most influential art critics of the day. The general theme of the congress is "Cidade nova: Síntese das artes" ("New City: Synthesis of the Arts"). Mário opens the event with the lecture "Brasília, cidade nova" ("Brasília, New City").

1960

Inauguration of Brasília.

Selects the Brazilian representation to the second international print biennial in Tokyo.

Participates in the seventh edition of the AICA critics congress in Warsaw.

Is named artistic director of the MAM-SP.

Serves as a jury member at the 9th edition of the Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna.

1961

In São Paulo, he serves simultaneously as director of the MAM-SP and general secretary of the sixth edition of the São Paulo Bienal.

At the service of the Bienal, visits Peru, Mexico, the United States, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Italy, Spain, and the Soviet Union between the months of March and May.

In addition to contemporary artists, the sixth Bienal includes shows of Paraguayan Baroque art in the Jesuit missions, of Australian aboriginal art and of Japanese calligraphy.

During the trip he is named general secretary of the recently created Conselho Nacional de Cultura (National Council on Culture) by president Jânio Quadros.

Reelected vice president of the AICA.

Participates in the first consultative council of the Cinemateca Brasileira.

Jânio Quadros renounces the Presidency of the Republic.

1962

Travels to Mexico on the occasion of the XIV Assembly of the AICA. At the end of this year, he is elected President of the Brazilian section of the AICA, the Associação Brasileira de Críticos de Arte (Brazilian Association of Art Critics).

Francisco Matarazzo Sobrinho, president of the MAM-SP, is invited by Nelson Rockefeller to participate in The Museum of Modern Art's International Council and announces the break between the Bienal and the MAM-SP, creating the Biennial Foundation. The following year, Matarazzo decides, during an assembly, to temporarily close down the MAM-SP. The collection is donated to the Universidade de São Paulo and the university's Museu de Arte Contemporânea is created.

Mário is elected council member of the Internationales Kunstzentrum e.V. Erlenbach am Main, the aim of which was to create the Musée à Croissance Illimitée (Museum of unlimited growth) designed by Le Corbusier.

1963

Moves back to Rio de Janeiro. Resumes teaching at the Colégio Pedro II. Publishes articles on art and politics in the *Correio da manhã*. Before leaving São Paulo, he is honored for his performance as director of the MAM-SP and for the realization of the fourth Bienal.

Takes part in the AICA congress in Tel Aviv.

1964

In April then president of Brazil, João Goulart, is ousted by a military coup.

Dedicates himself to preparing two books on politics: *A opção imperialista (The Imperialist Option)* and *A opção brasileira (The Brazilian Option)*.

Publishes *Dimensões da Arte (Dimensions of Art)*, a collection of articles and essays for the Ministry of Education and Culture's documentation service.

1965

Is awarded a scholarship by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in Portugal. From there, he goes on to Paris at the invitation of Raymond Cogniat, secretary of that city's Bienale. Serves as jury member at the Youth Biennial. Elected president of the Jury Committee.

1966

Back in Rio de Janeiro, he runs for office as the Movimento Democrático Brasileiro candidate for Deputado Federal. He is not elected.

His books *A opção imperialista (The Imperialist Option)* and *A opção brasileira (The Brazilian Option)* are published by Civilização Brasileira.

Publishes several important articles on contemporary art in the *Correio da manhã*, including "Arte ambiental, arte pós-moderna, Hélio Oiticica" ("Environmental Art, Postmodern Art, Hélio Oiticica"), in which he introduces the term "postmodern."

1967

Hired to lecture for History of Art and Aesthetics at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro's College of Architecture, a chair he renounces the following year.

1968

In January travels to Buenos Aires, where he is named president of the Brazilian Advisory Committee for the Codex Prize of Latin American Painting.

In Rio de Janeiro, takes part in a protest march against the killing of student Edson Luís, which occurred as a result of a police invasion of the Restaurante Central dos Estudantes (Central student restaurant)—the so-called Calabouço. On this occasion suffers an ischemia. After months of recovery, goes to Poland to be part of the jury of the Krakow Print Biennial.

Attends the meeting promoted by the National Gallery of Czechoslovakia. During this same period, goes to Nuremberg, where he helps organize the biennial that will be held there next year, and to Kassel, to attend the opening of Documenta. Attends the Venice Biennale.

Participates in AICA's general assembly in Bordeaux. From there, goes to London and, in November, to Japan.

In December the Brazilian military government decrees the Fifth Institutional Act, which suspends constitutional guarantees and curtails individual liberties. The National Congress is closed down. Mário is advised by relatives and friends not to return to Brazil. He moves to Lisbon.

1969

Returns to Brazil in late March.

In May an exhibition is scheduled to open at the MAM–RJ, with works by artists selected to represent Brazil at the sixth Paris Biennale. On opening day, the military invade the museum, dismount the exhibition, and ban the show. As president of the Brazilian Association of Art Critics, Mário leads a protest against the act. At the Paris Biennale, the space reserved for Brazil is left empty—a protest to show that the exhibition had been censored.

In Paris, Pierre Restany begins a mobilization for the international boycott of the tenth edition of the São Paulo Bienal, in repudiation of the Brazilian dictatorship.

In Japan, serves on the jury for the Tokyo Print Biennial.

1970

Along with six other people, is indicted for “attempting to slander the Brazilian military government with denunciations of alleged torture in the country’s prisons.” During the first stage of the trial, Mário remains at liberty. Writes a lengthy study of the São Paulo Bienal.

Preemptive arrest of all the accused is decreed in July. Mário seeks asylum at the Chilean Embassy in Rio de Janeiro.

In August the 22nd General Assembly of the AICA is held in Canada and Mário is elected vice-president of the organization.

An open letter is forwarded to General Garrastazu Médici, the Brazilian president. It protests the arrest warrant put out for Mário and holds the Brazilian government responsible for his physical well-being. Among the first signatories are Alexander Calder, Henry Moore, and Pablo Picasso. Edouard Pignon, Max Bill, Yve-Alain Bois, Cristiane Du Parc, Cruz Diez, and Soulages later join the long list of signatories, including many other artists and intellectuals. The letter was published two years later in the *New York Review of Books* under the title “The Case of Mário Pedrosa.”

1971

Is indicted under the National Security Law that restricts the democratic regime’s individual guarantees.

Once settled in Santiago, is invited by Professor Miguel Rojas Mix, director of the Instituto de Arte Latino-Americano, to join the institute as chair of Latin American Art History in the Faculty of Fine Arts.

Travels to India to participate in the jury award of the New Delhi triennial. En route, stops in New York, where he meets Dore Ashton. She sends a letter to the *New York Review of Books*, revealing Mário’s situation and encourages readers to write letters of protest against the military trial.

Upon his return to Chile, is asked by President Salvador Allende to create a museum of modern art, procuring a collection made up of donations by international artists and critics.

1972

Dedicates himself intensely to convening artists and intellectuals to render the project in Santiago viable. As president of the International Committee for Artistic Solidarity with Chile, organizes the first exhibition of work donated to the museum, which becomes known as the Museo de la Solidaridad (Museum of solidarity). The number of donations exceeds one thousand works, and includes works by artists such as Joan Miró, Alexander Calder, and Henry Moore. The committee includes José Maria Moreno Galván, Carlo Levi, Louis Aragon, Giulio Carlo Argan, Rafael Alberti, Dore Ashton, Jean Leymarie, José Balmes, and Rojas Mix.

1973

Travels to Europe with Mary in search of new donations for the museum, returning to Santiago two days before the fall and death of Allende. Brutal repression against Allende’s partisans forces him to seek asylum. He enters the embassy of Mexico. Through the intervention of Carlos Fuentes, the Mexican government grants him the necessary document and he travels to Mexico City and, later, to Paris, where he is granted political asylum.

Meets Mary in Paris.

1974

In Paris, he coordinates the effort to recover works donated to the Museo de la Solidaridad that were seized by the military junta that took power in Chile. He begins to write the text “Teses para o terceiro mundo” (“Theses for the Third World”), published in 1978.

1975

Writes the exhibition catalogue text for the works of Calder’s final period at the Galerie Maeght, in Paris, and an essay titled “A crise mundial do imperialismo e Rosa Luxemburgo” (“The World Crisis of Imperialism and Rosa Luxemburg”). Goes to Mexico, where he participates in a seminar on popular culture with the thesis “Arte culta e arte popular” (“High Art and Popular Art”).

In Brazil, a collection of his articles is published under the title *Mundo, homem, arte em crise* (*World, Man, Art in Crisis*), edited by Aracy Amaral. His text “Discurso aos tupiniquins ou nambás” (“Speech to the Tupiniquim or Nambá Peoples”) is published in the journal *Versus*.

1976

Takes part in the Arte Negra (Black African Art) general assembly in Portugal.

Some of his texts are published in magazines in France, Mexico, Peru, and the United States.

Travels to Europe.

1977

A slow process of political opening begins in Brazil; two years later it results in the Amnesty Law.

The order for his preemptive arrest is revoked. Returns to Brazil in October and appears in court before Naval Intelligence for his trial, at the conclusion of which he is unanimously acquitted.

1978

In May, under the leadership of Lula (Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva), president of the Sindicato dos Metalúrgicos do ABC (Steel Workers’ Union of the ABC Region), a São Paulo industrial complex, the first major strike occurs after the decree of the Fifth Institutional Act takes place.

In August writes a letter to Lula, “Open Letter to a Labor Leader,” saluting Lula’s leadership in the reemergence of workers’ struggles in Brazil and supporting the creation of a new Left party.

In November attends the first Congress for Amnesty in São Paulo.

In Rio de Janeiro, he and Lygia Pape prepare an exhibition of indigenous art for the MAM–RJ, under the title *Alegria de viver, alegria de criar* (Joy of living, joy of creating).

A fire partially destroys the MAM–RJ and impedes realization of the exhibition. Mário becomes involved in the effort to salvage the museum, proposing a redefinition of it according to a new model as the Museu das Origens (Museum of origins). This museum would be subdivided into five interconnected modules: indigenous art; black art (Brazilian and African); virgin art (the art of the unconscious and children’s art); folk art; modern art and contemporary work.

His book *A crise mundial do imperialismo e Rosa de Luxemburgo* (*The World Crisis of Imperialism and Rosa Luxemburg*) is published by Civilização Brasileira.

1979

The Gestaltian thesis “Da Natureza Afetiva da Forma na Obra de Arte” (“On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art”) and other essays are published under the title *Arte, forma e personalidade* (*Art, Form, and Personality*) by São Paulo publisher Kairós, under the initiative of the University of São Paulo’s Departamento de Estética (Department of aesthetics), where Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes serves as director.

Dedicates himself to the campaign for the founding of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers’ party).

Organizes two exhibitions of work by patients of the Hospital Dom Pedro II: Fernando Diniz at FUNARTE’s Sergio Milliet Gallery and Raphael Dominguez at the MAM–RJ.

1980

In São Paulo, takes part in the launching of the Partido dos Trabalhadores at the Colégio Sion, signs party membership card number one.

Rio de Janeiro's Jean Boghici Gallery holds a tribute exhibition for Mário's eightieth birthday.

Edits the book *Museu de imagens do inconsciente (Museum of Images of the Unconscious)*, published by FUNARTE. The book *Sobre o PT (About the PT)*, about the Partido dos Trabalhadores, is published by Ched.

1981

Perspectiva publishes *Dos murais de Portinari aos espaços de Brasília*, a collection of articles and essays by Mário Pedrosa, edited by Aracy Amaral.

On November 5, Mário Pedrosa dies of cancer in his apartment at the age of 81. Many tributes are paid to him by intellectuals and artists. The Brazilian Association of Art Critics creates an annual prize in his name for distinguished Brazilian visual artists.

1982

Editora Antares publishes *Mário Pedrosa: Retratos do exílio (Mário Pedrosa: Portraits from Exile)*, edited by Carlos Eduardo de Senna Figueiredo.

1985

Mary dies in Paris.

In December, tribute is paid to Mário with the installation of a bronze bust placed in Praça General Osório and later transferred to the Praça Nossa Senhora da Paz, Ipanema, Rio de Janeiro.

1991

The exhibition *Mário Pedrosa: Arte, revolução, reflexão* (Mário Pedrosa: Art, revolution, reflection), organized by Franklin Pedrosa and Pedro Vasquez, is held at the Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, Rio de Janeiro.

1995–2000

For the EdUSP imprint, Otília Beatriz Fiori Arantes edits the following anthologies of Pedrosa's writings: *Política das artes (Politics of the Arts)* and *Forma e percepção estética (Form and Aesthetic Perception)*, in 1995; *Acadêmicos e modernos (Academics and Moderns)*, in 1998; and *Modernidade de cá e lá (Modernity Here and There)* and *Textos escolhidos IV* in 2000.

2006

Is decorated posthumously by the Brazilian Government with the Ordem do Mérito Cultural (Order of cultural merit).

Contributors

Glória Ferreira is Adjunct Professor at the Escola de Belas Artes, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, and is curator of the Casa de Cultura Laura Alvim, Rio de Janeiro. As an independent curator, she has organized such exhibitions as *Imagens em migração: Uma exposição de Vera Chaves Barcellos* (Museu de Arte de São Paulo, 2009); *Anos 70: Arte como questão* (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, 2007); *Trilogias: Nelson Felix* (Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, 2005); *Situações: Arte brasileira anos 70* (Fundação Casa França, 2000); *Hélio Oiticica e a cena Americana* (Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, 1998); *Luciano Fabro* (Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro, 1997); *Amílcar de Castro, Retrospectiva* (1989); and *Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica* (Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, 1986; Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo, 1987). Her publications include *Karin Lambrecht* (2013); *Wilton Montenegro: Notas do observatório* (2006); and *Trilogias: Conversas entre Nelson Felix e Glória Ferreira* (2005). She edited the anthologies *Crítica de arte no Brasil: Temáticas contemporâneas* (2006); *Arte contemporâneo brasileiro: Documentos y críticas/Contemporary Brazilian Art: Documents and Critical Texts* (2009); and *Entre falas* (2011). She coedited the collections *Escritos de artistas 1960/1970* (2006) and *Clement Greenberg e o debate crítico* (1997). She was coeditor of the periodical *Arte&Ensaio* from 1997 to 2006 and directed the *Arte+* collection from 2005 to 2009.

Paulo Herkenhoff is an art critic, curator, and cultural director of the Museu de Arte do Rio (MAR). He was director of the National Museum of Fine Arts (2003–06); Adjunct Curator of Latin American Art for The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1999–2002); curator of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (1985–90); and directed the National Institute of Fine Arts Funarte (1983–85). He served as general curator of the 1998 São Paulo Bienal. Among the many exhibitions he has organized are *Guignard e o Oriente: China, Japão e Minas* (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, São Paulo, 2010); *Guillermo Kuitca: Obras 1982–2002* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires, 2003); *Tempo* (MoMA, 2002); *Cildo Meireles, geografia do Brasil* (Museu de Arte Moderna Aloísio Magalhães, Recife, 2001, and Museu de Arte Moderna da Bahia, Salvador, 2002); and *Trajectoria da Luz na Arte Brasileira* (Instituto Itaú Cultural, São Paulo, 2001). He has lectured widely and has contributed articles to magazines and books published by such institutions as the Tate Modern, London; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; and Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona.

Kaira M. Cabañas is Associate Professor in Global Modern and Contemporary Art History at the University of Florida. She is author of *Off-Screen Cinema: Isidore Isou and the Lettrist Avant-Garde* (2014) and *The Myth of Nouveau Réalisme: Art and the Performative in Postwar France* (2013). In 2012 she served as guest curator for the exhibition *Specters of Artaud: Language and the Arts in the 1950s* at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, for which she also served as the catalogue's editor. Her writings have appeared in a wide range of scholarly journals and museum catalogues and include essays on postwar art and film in Europe and Latin America. She is currently at work on a book-length study tentatively titled "Expressive Restraint: Modern Art and Madness in Brazil and Beyond," which is supported by the Creative Capital | Warhol Foundation Arts Writers Grant Program.

Adele Nelson is an assistant professor of art history at Temple University, Philadelphia. A specialist in modern and contemporary art of Latin America with a focus on postwar and contemporary Brazilian art, she is the author of *Jac Leirner in Conversation with/en conversación con Adele Nelson* (Fundación Cisneros, 2011). Her writings have appeared in *Art Journal* and international exhibition catalogues. Her current book project, for which she has received support of the Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program and the National Endowment for the Humanities, examines how the practice and theory of abstract art developed in twentieth-century Brazil in close relation to newly formed institutions for the collection, exhibition, and teaching of modern art.

Lauro Cavalcanti is an architect, anthropologist, curator, and writer specializing in Brazilian modernism. Since 2014 he has been the Director of the Instituto Casa Roberto Marinho, Rio de Janeiro. He has been professor at the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI) of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro since 1998 and was previously director of the Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro (1992–2014). His books include *Oscar Niemeyer: Clássicos e inéditos* (2014); *Moderno e Brasileiro: A história de uma nova linguagem na arquitetura (1930–60)* (2006); *Roberto Burle Marx 100 anos: A permanência do Instável* (2007); and *Quando o Brasil era moderno* (2002). He contributes to various international publications and has been granted several research residencies. He is an advisor to the Fundação Oscar Niemeyer, Casa de Lucio Costa, and Fundação Roberto Marinho.

Catherine Bompuis has, among other activities, worked for the French Ministry of Culture's Délégation aux Arts Plastiques (1988–2005) and directed the Fonds Régional d'Art Contemporain Champagne-Ardenne (1984–87). Principal curatorial assignments have included *Frida Baranek: Confrontos* (Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (2013–14); *Various Artists* (Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo, 2012); *Cláudio Paiva* (Galeria Luisa Strina, São Paulo, 2002); *Raymond Hains* (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, and Serralves Foundation, Porto, 2000); *Raymond Hains: Guide des collections permanentes ou mises em plis* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1990); and *Raymond Hains* (Frac Champagne-Ardenne, 1987). She has contributed to numerous exhibition catalogues, including for the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, and has coauthored biographies of Willem De Kooning (1984) and Jackson Pollock (1982).

Marcio Doctors is an art critic and the curator of the Fundação Eva Klabin in Rio de Janeiro. At the beginning of his career, he was private secretary to Mário Pedrosa, as well as an art critic for the newspaper *O Globo*. He conceived and curated the Rio de Janeiro installation space Museu do Açude, with works by Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape, among others; and the Projeto Respiração (Breathing project), for which contemporary artists such as Anna Bella Geiger, Carlito Carvalhosa, and Claudia Bakker have created interventions in the Fundação Eva Klabin's collection. He is the author of the books *Projeto Respiração* (2012) and *Nocturno: projeto respiração* (2008), and editor of the book *Passagem Secreta: Brígida Baltar* (2010). He has written numerous essays, among them "As Nervuras do Devir" on the art of Anna Maria Maiolino (2010). As an independent curator, he has worked on exhibitions such as *Carne Misteriosa: Rui Chafes* (Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 2013). He is currently writing his doctoral thesis on the work of Mário Pedrosa.

Dore Ashton is a writer, professor, and critic of modern and contemporary art. She is the author or editor of more than thirty books on art, including *Noguchi East and West* (1992); *About Rothko* (1983); *American Art Since 1945* (1982); *The New York School: A Cultural Reckoning* (1972); and *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views* (1972). She has also contributed to many publications, including *Art Digest*, and worked as an art critic at the *New York Times*. She was one of the New York art critics who championed the New York School. She is a professor emerita of art history at The Cooper Union in New York and a senior critic in painting and printmaking at Yale University.

Aracy Amaral is a critic, curator, and art historian. She was professor of art history at the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo, Universidade de São Paulo, until 1990. She served as director of the Museu de Arte Contemporânea of the Universidade de São Paulo (1982–86) and of the Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo (1975–79). She was awarded scholarships by the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo and by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, and was also the recipient of a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation (1978). She was a member of the Prince Claus Awards Committee in The Hague (2002–05).

Otília Beatriz Fiori Arantes is professor emerita in the department of philosophy at Universidade de São Paulo. She has lectured in the department of philosophy (1973–93) and the college of architecture and urban planning at the Universidade de São Paulo Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo (1981–92), and in the Departments of Sociology and Philosophy of the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (1966–69). She coordinated the Center for Studies in Contemporary Art at the School of Philosophy, Letters, and Human Sciences, Universidade

de São Paulo (1979–93), as well as its periodical *Arte em Revista*. In addition to her many contributions to journals, newspapers, and anthologies, she has published *Berlim, Barcelona, duas imagens estratégicas* (2012); *Chai-na* (2011); *A cidade do pensamento único* (2000); *Urbanismo em fim de linha* (1998); *O sentido da Formação* (1997); *O lugar da Arquitetura depois dos Modernos* (1993); *Um ponto cego no projeto moderno de Jürgen Habermas* (1992); and *Mário Pedrosa, itinerário crítico* (1991; 2004). She edited and wrote prefaces to all four volumes of Mário Pedrosa's selected works for the EdUSP imprint (1995–2000).

Rodrigo Krul holds a master's degree in art history and criticism from the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais da Escola de Belas Artes da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, where he also gained teaching experience. He has contributed to numerous publications, including *Ascânio MMM: Poética da razão* by Paulo Herkenhoff, as well as to art exhibitions such as *Rubens Gerchman: Com a demissão no bolso* (Casa Daros Rio with the Instituto Rubens Gerchman, 2014–15); *Iberê Camargo e o ambiente cultural brasileiro do pós-guerra* (Fundação Iberê Camargo, 2011); and *Guignard e o Oriente: China, Japão e Minas* (Instituto Tomie Ohtake, 2010).

Margareth de Moraes is a visual art coordinator and producer of exhibitions. She directs the production office MM Museologia e Projetos Culturais in Rio de Janeiro. She is active in the planning and implantation of museums, and coordinates projects and exhibitions in Brazil and abroad, such as the special rooms for the São Paulo Bienal (1998), the Mercosul Biennial, and the Brazilian representation in the ninth, tenth, and thirteenth editions of Documenta in Kassel, Germany. She was an intern at The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1988); director of the Registrar's Department of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (1985–98); and adjunct professor of art history at the Faculdade de Museologia do Rio de Janeiro.

Quito Pedrosa (Marcos Pedrosa Martins de Almeida) is a composer, arranger, saxophonist, and guitarist. He has recorded four albums: *Vozes da Rua* (2012); *Noite Rasa* (2006); *Luz e Pedra* (2002); and *Panamericana* (1996); He spent his childhood and adolescence in Brazil, Spain, and Peru. He studied guitar with Marco Pereira in Brasília and saxophone, composition, and arrangement in Paris at the Institut Art Culture Perception, with Alan Silva, François Cotineaud, and Rosinne Feferman. With his quartet, he has performed in Denmark, Spain, and Sri Lanka. He has also composed soundtracks for films and theater. He has been a collaborator on several projects involving Mário Pedrosa, his grandfather, among them the organization and donation of Mário Pedrosa's personal library and collection to the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro. He is also a painter, draftsman, and photographer.

Izabela Pucu is a doctoral student in art history and criticism at the Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes Visuais da Escola de Belas Artes da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. She is currently director of the Centro Municipal de Arte Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro. Previously she was adjunct professor at the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro's Instituto de Artes (2008–12) and project coordinator for the Escola de Artes Visuais do Parque Lage in Rio de Janeiro (2008–11). She was coeditor of *Roberto Pontual obra crítica* (2013) and editor of *Imediações: A crítica de Wilson Coutinho* (2008), as well as researcher and editorial coordinator for *Brazilian Contemporary Art: Documents and Critical Texts/Arte contemporâneo brasileiro: Documentos y críticas* (2009) and *Crítica de arte no Brasil: Temáticas contemporâneas* (2006), both edited by Glória Ferreira.

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