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Within the Organic Line and After*

When the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark invented the *organic line* in 1954, she had no way of suspecting this gesture would prove to be decisive for the development of contemporary art and thought. After all, several of the trends of the post World War II period through to the 1960s were intent on finding an escape from the linearity of dialectics. The *organic line* is a line that has not been drafted or carved by anyone, but results from the contact of two different surfaces (planes, things, objects, bodies, or even concepts): it announces a way of thinking beyond the logic of true or false, without awaiting a synthesis of previous counterparts to evolve — it points to a way of thinking “without contradiction, without dialectics, (...); thought that accepts divergence; affirmative thought whose instrument is disjunction; thought of the multiple. (...) We must think problematically rather than question and answer dialectically.”¹ The *organic line* does not have the touch of human hands, thus revealing a process of creation through another mind-body articulation — everyone familiar with Lygia Clark’s work from the 1960s and 1970s understands the radical meaning of such a gesture — the creation of the *organic line* should not be underestimated. If we follow her writings in which she reveals how she arrived at this discovery, it’s interesting to see the artist’s incredible lucidity — highly aware of modern art’s developments — appropriating small events around her (a Duchampian gesture, although not assumed as such, in which she escaped the object in favor of the “event” quite early on) to establish a continuity between the artwork and the real world, between art and life.

Lygia Clark liked to exemplify the organic line as the one we can see “between the window and the window-frame or between tiles on the floor”² — she states that it first appeared when she was observing the line that formed where a collage touched the passepartout paper, in the frame. This was in 1954 — “I set aside this research for two years because I did not know how to deal with

this space set free”³ — and then in 1956, when she found the relation between this line and the adjoining lines encountered in doors, floors, and windows, she created the designation “organic line”: “it was real, existed in itself, organizing the space. It was a line-space.” Clark was particularly aware of how these lines acted “to modulate all of a surface,” and stated that her major plastic problem was then “simply the valuation or devaluation of this line.”⁴ A short while later, in 1958, the art critic Ferreira Gullar had already observed that “little by little, the organic line (...) becomes the structural determinant of the picture.”⁵ Because “it is a limit between bits of space, (...) it is space”, Gullar goes on, the artist began making it manifest outside of the painting’s surface, as an “external line (...) between the painting and the outside space.” Lygia Clark had managed in just a few short years to transform an apparently formal problem within the picture’s protected surface into a matter that questions the very nature of the artwork in relation to real space: with Clark, contemporary art is necessarily an investigation of the art field’s borders in terms of its relationship to the continuity of mind-body, in which the senses — all, not only the visual — contribute to producing a way of thinking that is ultimately the production of a body: the production of life-forms.

In order to make Lygia Clark’s first steps more precise, in terms of actual artworks, it is important to note that her process of “discovering” the organic line,⁶ playing with it within the paintings’ surface, and then shifting it progressively to the borderline between art object and real space, can be traced in terms of a very clear set of works — such development is described clearly by Ferreira Gullar in his famous article, quoted above: more than a sort of classic piece of art criticism in terms of the Brazilian historiography, Gullar’s text is also exemplary in the way it depicts Clark’s investigation as entirely linear step-by-step research — the contemporary reader is granted a reading that affords the “pleasure” of having closely followed the artist in her achievement; and is left with at least one question: was Lygia Clark’s investigative method really so linear? Art, viewed from an “after-modernism-perspective,” is a matter of moving in several directions simultaneously and

confronting several impasses — in fact, closer to a non-linear and chaotic process. But Gullar describes a transparent and direct accomplishment: (1) breaking the frame; (2) using the organic line to modulate the surface; (3) getting from the plane to the space, having the organic line as the border in between “real” and “fictional” space.⁷ Interesting is to perceive, some decades later, how both — the artist and the writer — were immersed in the modernist credo, in the sense of having linear project development as the “norm” or standard mode of progress. Yet art should not be naturalized as a project-oriented task, nor should Clark and Gullar’s testimonies of their procedures be taken as the objective description of a process, which we can easily comprehend as much more complex than merely following a straight line from dark to light. Nevertheless, their testimonies demonstrate the crucial role that both artist and writer played in questioning art’s conditions in their time and in promoting solutions that offered new ways to move out of the crisis of modernism in the 1950s.

Three series of works mark the achievement of the organic line and its further development into pieces that unfold into the real space: the *Quebra da moldura* (Break of the Frame) series, from 1954, depicts the progressive integration of the painting with its frame — two of the individual paintings are titled *Descoberta da linha orgânica* (The discovery of the organic line). Like in the other examples from this series, we see a sort of central core where a certain event takes place (through geometric forms or color surfaces) — it is important to say that the event is not restricted to the center, but slides to areas alongside the paintings’ borders. Their specificity resides precisely in the fact that the paintings’ dynamics, in its entirety, takes part in the work’s surface as a whole, making it a painting that is becoming an object as well. There is a borderline inside, which operates as an internal limit that does not prevent things from crossing but modulates the internal space. In the two series that follow, *Superfícies moduladas* (Modulated surfaces; 1955-1956) and *Planos em superfícies moduladas* (Planes in modulated surfaces; 1956-1958), the surfaces become more solid and concrete, as the canvas is abandoned in favor

of woodcuts that are mounted over wood: the cut pieces — initially colored and then reduced to black and white — are displayed side by side, separated by organic lines (or space lines), which take more and more of a structural role in the works. For Ferreira Gullar, it is the painting *Planos em superfície modulada nº1* (1957) that indicates the leap forward: the two juxtaposed wood plates leave between them “a half centimeter separation that constitutes a line of void, of empty space, which cuts the surface in an irregular, diagonal mode” — the organic line — but “the difference is that now the line is left there, created there, to irrigate the painting’s surface with real space.”⁸

Klein x Clark

In the 1950s, Yves Klein was another artist contributing with work around the notion of the void, the emptiness. It is very well known that he developed a quite consistent and coherent body of work in just a few years, which departed from monochrome paintings to reach the blue as “pure color,” as well as the immaterial as a realm and concrete dimension. Both Klein and Clark are among those artists who successfully dealt with the heritage of classical modernism, in the sense that they managed to confront the crises following the post-war/post-avant-garde period, and discover a productive way out of a few of its dead ends. Their work functions as a true gateway opening to large passages throughout the following two decades, providing references that disperse to almost all of the subsequently emerging trends and movements — Conceptual art, performance, Happenings, earth-works, body-art, experimentalism, etc; the names Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Piero Manzoni can be mentioned in this context. Truly remarkable is that they inhabit a sort of turning point from where multiple lines of flight open up, not only pointing to a future yet to come, but more precisely, announcing art’s present state as an expanded territory of investigation, invention, and resistance.⁹ They most certainly experience another use of history, in which “the dilated present reveals a change from the — modern — habitus of organizing multiple representations of the same phenomena as evolution and history to the —

post-modern — habitus of treating them as variations available simultaneously.”¹⁰

However, although Klein and Clark reveal certain parallel preoccupations with the presence, operation, and meaning of the empty space — and in relation to their respective art and cultural contexts play the role of “filtering” (establishing breaks, threading links, producing lines of flight) certain avant-garde practices in order to keep investigation updated, pointing to open up possibilities — they also demonstrate positions that emphatically differ one from the other. Confronted directly, their strategies unfold in opposite sorts of ways — the mystical and transcendent Yves Klein and the organic and immanent Lygia Clark. Around the same time — the 1950s — Klein was also experimenting with the plane and the surface, but in terms of the monochrome, since for him it was a matter of obtaining maximum intensity: “it is through color that I have little by little become acquainted with the Immaterial.”¹¹ But his self-declared engagement with monochromatism led him to reject juxtaposition and the line — the same operation that was productive for Clark, Klein strongly rejected: “I precisely and categorically refuse to create on one surface even the interplay of two colors. (...) two colors juxtaposed on one canvas prevent [the observer] from entering into the sensitivity, the dominance, the purpose of the picture. (...) one can no longer plunge into the sensibility of pure color, relieved from all outside contamination.” This rejection of internal borders or limits indicates that for him there was no possibility for lines and divisions (that is, the recognition of difference) to somehow become productive within his art system; his “leap into the void” not only points to the absence of any ground whatsoever (otherwise his body would be facing too literally a “borderline shock”), it also dismisses the existence of any line: “I felt more and more that the lines and all their consequences, the contours, the forms, the perspectives, the compositions, became exactly like the bars on the window of a prison.” Here, the line has no function of mediating the encounter of two different contacting entities exactly because there is no perspective of such meeting, as far as the aim is to move to a space where “in the realm of the blue air more than

anywhere else one feels that the world is accessible to the most unlimited reverie. It is then that a reverie assumes true depth” — for “blue has no dimensions, it is beyond dimensions.”

Immediately obvious is that both artists relied on the current image of the “window” as a metaphor for art’s condition. Assuming that the modern era’s start is marked by the Renaissance’s perspective devices, which permitted a break with Plato’s mimesis and the initiation of development and progress in terms of artificial means,¹² the “window” is the classic referential image for Western art, present from Leonardo Da Vinci to Marcel Duchamp: how to deal with the passages from art to life (and vice-versa) that indicate the autonomy of the art object and its connectedness with the real? Although during the development of perspective, painting was compared to a “window” opened to the outside, for Clark (who had her production departing from constructivist tradition), the “window” was the source of the organic line — not a matter of looking through, but of being aware of the limits between the frame and the architecture/world; but Yves Klein kept his eyes attached to the window’s surface, anxious to enter its still metaphysical depth, perceived as some sort of protection from the impurity of the world. However, what is interesting to extract from the Clark-Klein confrontation — *between* versus *beyond* — is how both faced a similar problem at the same time but got different responses and pointed to diverse practices.

art&life, silence, membranes

Somehow Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, and Piero Manzoni also touch on a similar problem having to do with “emptiness, borders and lines” — to remain with dematerialization (in all its different inflections), which proved decisive for Conceptualism and Conceptual art, and was accepted as one of its brands. Both Johns and Rauschenberg were taken into John Cage’s philosophy, performed, via Zen, in the border between art and life: two of his written pieces make this point absolutely clear.¹³ The two texts, it is important

to mention, were conceived according to Cage's compositional methods, which accept the presence of empty spaces among the blocks of writing (these become silences in the moment of the reading performance). For "Jasper Johns: Stories and Ideas," he writes, "I decided for the plan to make use (...) of my Cartridge Music," which is composed of "a series of materials with usage instructions" — through various operations, Cage arrives first at the structure and content of the text, and only then starts the proper writing. "The empty spaces are consequence of the same method. In the oral presentation (...) the spaces correspond to silence." For the reader/listener, the pieces on Johns and Rauschenberg invest in a mix of Cage's comments, quotes from the artists, and several daily episodes from moments when they meet, talk, work, or just perform life in its intensity (common, vivid unimportant instants): "There is Rauschenberg, between him and what he picks up to use, the quality of encounter. (...) But now we must have gotten the message. It couldn't have been more explicit. Do you understand this idea? Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.) The nothingness in between is where for no reason at all every practical thing that one actually takes the time to do so stirs up the dregs that they're no longer sitting as we thought on the bottom." Here it is necessary to recall Rauschenberg's decisive erasure gesture made in 1953, as a moment that indicates a change in the perception of history (space-time), showing that linear progress was no longer operative, and that the productive act should be interventionist — opening spaces between existing things, "additive subtraction," according to Cage, who writes: "The relationship between the object and the event, can the two be separated? Is one a detail of the other? What is meeting? Air?."

The Manzoni situation can be interpreted as a conflict involving, on the one hand, a taste for the absolute *beyond* infinite purity (similar to Klein's) and, on the other, a finite preoccupation with the body in all its proper immanent limits — clearly, not an easy dissent to administrate. His basic statement began with a reaction opposing the saturation of the painting's surface (like

Rauschenberg), claiming its liberation: “A surface with limitless possibilities has been reduced to a sort of receptacle (...) Why not empty the receptacle, liberate this surface? Why not try to make the limitless sense of total space, of a pure and absolute light, appear instead?”¹⁴ and, in search of purity, also pointed to a difficulty (again, like Klein) to administrate conflicting pairs of objects or events (continuous or not): “two matched colors, or two tones of the same color are already an alien element in the concept of a single, limitless, totally dynamic surface” — for Manzoni, if “infinity is strictly monochromatic,” it is “colorless.” Also the lines need to escape formal practice through the absoluteness “beyond all pictorial phenomena,” and in Manzoni’s system “it can only be drawn, however long, to the infinite, beyond all problems of composition or of dimensions,” as “there are no dimensions on total space.” But what is of particular importance for Piero Manzoni, pointing to a significant shift suitable for his proposal as compared to the mystical Yves Klein, is the emphasis on “total freedom” as the result of “pure matter (...) transformed into pure energy” — this shift is so important that subsequently “the entire artistic problematic is surpassed”: this leads Manzoni to locate his practice in the region of becoming (“the transformation must be total”), which indicates that his project is not completely subsumed under a transcendental and perennial goal. As he states, “a colorless surface (...) simply ‘is’. (...) the total being (...) is pure becoming.” Because he considers existence to be a value in and of itself, Manzoni can easily move from the *Achromes* to the other series of works that deal directly with the limits of the body and its fluids — the formal problem is solved when “the surface only retains its value as a vehicle”: and he can then open the perspective of directly involving the concrete, biologic, mechanical, impersonal, and non-subjective body (“there is nothing to explain: just be, and live”). The *Bodies of Air* is a key-piece for the artist’s leap, as it comprises “the membrane and the base” (in Manzoni’s words), as a receptacle “that one can let down or fill at leisure”: the piece is his first to deal with the problem of designing some container object to involve organic fluids (breath, shit, blood), which shouldn’t be seen as a “form” versus “formless” confrontation, but a much more intriguing problem of re-conceptualization of formal vocabulary, by

means of experimenting with new uses for the issues of “line” and “surface” (Manzoni reminds us: “all intervention destined to give them [the pneumatic sculptures] a form, even formlessness, is illegitimate and illogical”). His conceptual operation renews comprehension of the surface as “vehicle” and the line as “membrane” — both were used and experienced in a variety of modes in the few years of the artist’s intense existence (he died in 1963 at the age of twenty-nine): the proposition *The consumption of dynamic art by the art devouring people* (1960) invests in distributing the artwork through the spectator’s body through a viral contamination-like strategy — Manzoni imprinted his thumb into a number of hard-boiled eggs and “the public was able to make contact with these works by swallowing the entire exhibition in 70 minutes;” the *Living sculptures* (1961) had the body’s skin as a dynamic surface which, as an active membrane, would be touched by his signature providing its transformation into an art piece, a bio-sculpture ready (perhaps) to produce a modification of the environment in the recognition of the subject’s permeable condition in terms of inside/outside exchange. This operation continued with the *Magic Base* (1961) series, where a wooden plinth would mediate the transformation of ordinary bodies into living sculptures — with the most ambitious piece being the *Socle du Monde* (1962), where the whole planet was meant to be displayed at the base, conceived as a platform for transformation. It is remarkable to see how Piero Manzoni creates a shift from a preoccupation with the absoluteness of pure space to the gesture of working on structures for mediation — membranes, vehicles — that locate his artistic program within the issue of thinking about the space between things: How to open that space? How is this space produced? What kind of operation is it possible to develop there?

Dematerialization and discourse

In gaining access to the empty space through this matrix, the operative possibilities of “dematerialization” are foregrounded; not as an alternative to escape from the art object, leaving it behind, but as a set of tools that point to

the need to consider the contact zones or interfaces (internal or external) as one of the constitutive layers of any artwork, not necessarily more or less important than its other traces but fundamental for its functioning, operation, and existence. Note that in the situations indicated above, the lines of contact or empty spaces had to be extracted or built between given structures or events, by means of complex operations, simultaneously plastic and discursive. Historically, Conceptual art has usually been considered a moment in contemporary art when artists decided to strategically emphasize the discursive component of their practices, making it preeminent in exhibitions and related areas (text, magazine, newspaper, outdoors, public spaces, etc) — dematerialization was generally adopted (even if not all artists accepted the term) as a consequence of the decision to escape aestheticism and formalism, of not wanting to play with art only visually. Terry Atkinson, for instance, one of the main protagonists of the period, commented on “theory-objects” and a “technique of content-isolation,” and also about relating to objects by “reading-looking” at them¹⁵: for him and his group it was fundamental to produce an inversion of the established order — not the visual, but the discursive layer as “First-order information” — to develop a discussion engaged in the art field’s *word architecture* characteristic. Such a diagnosis, however, reveals a presupposition that a hierarchical structure in fact exists, one which would envelop the discursive dimension of art as secondary or alien to the art work and practice: therefore, many voices from the period promptly echoed the observation (and demand from the time) that artists were thus “working with what, in the visual art context, is traditionally recognized as the medium of the art-critic and art-historian,”¹⁶ that “conceptual artists take over the role of the critic in terms of framing their own propositions, ideas, and concepts,”¹⁷ and that “this art both annexes the functions of the critic, and makes the middleman unnecessary.”¹⁸

Now, forty years later, it is very clear that the conceptual artists were fighting against the role of visual-formal-artist imposed on them by a specific (rich, powerful, and dominant) art system (comprising mainly the U.S./European axis)

— where “a new kind of patronage” emerged, one that purchased art “at record rates,” due to the fact that the “circumstances were favorable, as the 1960s were boom years in economic terms and the future promised endless growth.”¹⁹ In this new scenario, characterized as the beginning of a new and very aggressive relationship of capital and culture intrinsic to the “society of control” described by Gilles Deleuze,²⁰ “the entrepreneurial, innovative and often historically naïve dealer replaced the highly specialized art critic as the central conduit between artists and their audience. (...) the critic (...) was no longer the primary arbiter of artistic success”²¹: then, as Joseph Kosuth correctly insists, facing this new dynamics and its effects, artists should not forget their “responsibility (...) to defend [the meaning of the work] against the theoretical encroachment of others”²² — the market will generally ignore what is not directly marketable and will stick to what is most profitable from labor, eliminating subtleties of any kind. In such terms, the conceptual artists assumed a decisive gesture by taking writing as a primary tool for their practices — the strategy proved efficient: a new production emerged, questioning the limits of the art object and practice; artists negotiated their presence in the art circuit from a more active behavior that intersected the roles of artist, writer, and curator; art production spread to a whole variety of media, chosen according to the needs of each particular proposition; artist’s statements became part of the daily art management, making its presence concrete, as first or second order information. This observation (clearly an over-simplified survey of Conceptual art’s influence on the present) is meant to point out some strategic aspects in recent art that involved the presence of the discursive field as an invisible, dematerialized layer.

Théorie des énoncés

Nevertheless, since modernism, discourse constitutes art practice as one of its principal operators. It can be said that “modern art is founded precisely from the possibility of objects that intend to be pure and completely visible, encountering a field of discourse that finds its proper location via these objects

crossing of it.” Moreover: “to be more precise: at the moment when the modern art making process was founded, there is the presence of a particular assemblage of image and language, the visible and the enunciable”; both modes of “meaning production configured themselves as autonomous entities, with their own structure, materiality, and fields of action constituted by differentiated strategies and practices — and it would be the particular mode of production of such assemblages, the attrition and friction born from the contact between both fields, that makes it possible to affirm the existence of a particular territory for the plastic/visual arts. Modern art, then, will be identified as a hybrid territory, where objects and meanings interweave.”²³ Thus, Conceptual art — in its proper project of playing with words and images — can be taken as just a particular moment of a broader and constitutive conceptual condition of modern art, given that the condition of the art territory is one of articulation of the visible and enunciated matters since the break with the principles of representation carried by modern times. There should be a conceptualism condition in art, of which Conceptual art is just a particular and important case. It is important to know that we are *not* speaking in Joseph Kosuth’s terms, nor quoting from his famous “Art after philosophy” article²⁴: when we emphasize a conceptual condition of modern and contemporary art, we are not entering the terrain of analytical philosophy, but taking as reference the “théorie des énoncés” (theory of enunciation) proposed by Michel Foucault throughout his work. The major writings where he develops propositions along these lines were produced during the 1960s and 1970s,²⁵ for example, “This is not a Pipe” (1968) explores Magritte’s seminal painting/statement as the actual departure point for the banishing of a hierarchy in a relationship between “enouncements” and “visibilities” (which legitimizes the representation regime) — for Foucault, Magritte demonstrates that representation is no longer productive, and therefore words and images are subsequently heterogeneous practices that cannot be reduced to each other’s terms (Deleuze indicates that for Foucault knowledge is “bi-form,” traversed by “the discursive practices of statements, or the non-discursive practices of visibility”²⁶). In this new regime, “it is in vain that we say what we

see; what we see never resides in what we say. And it is in vain that we attempt to show, by the use of images, metaphors, or similes, what we are saying; the space where they achieve their splendour is not that deployed by our eyes but that defined by the sequential elements or syntax²⁷ — here, words and images have nothing in common, are indeed different matters, without any region or territory where they could share a more stable and regular relationship. Looking at Michel Foucault's *théorie des énoncés*, three basic aspects of the relationship between discourse and images can be emphasized: enunciation and visibility are in "reciprocal presupposition"; consist of "heterogeneous forms" that have nothing in common; and are in permanent state of "heterogeneity of the two forms" and can therefore only operate in a situation of "mutual presupposition between the two, a mutual grappling and capture."²⁸

What is most remarkable about Foucault's theory is that, when it establishes the absolute otherness of the matters that constitute the discursive and visible dimensions, it brings forth the *in-between* space — contact zone, interface — as the principal site (or non-site) where productive events are generated, created, triggered. In fact, this model takes both images and words at the same level, indicating that if meaning (of any kind) is to be produced, it will be the result of a conflictive and disjunctive operation of (never peaceful) contact of these two matters²⁹ — the borderline is no longer what sets things apart in a sterile and anesthetized environment, but the hotspot where processes become productive.

Seen through Foucault's *théorie des énoncés*, Conceptual art's efforts to justify its shifting of "dematerialized" written pieces as exhibits in exhibition spaces seem somehow unnecessary — although we have a sense of heroism in those gestures — for the shift from visual to verbal and vice-versa can be assumed as part of the investigation. The development of Conceptual art and Michel Foucault's investigations are, in fact, contemporaneous, and if we take their works as parallel and complementary research — aiming at the production of

new forms of thinking (Foucault's theories are quite strongly influenced by topological models that emphasize structuralism and offer other possibilities for conceiving thought in space³⁰) — one productive gesture today would be to build the terrain for the confrontation of both bodies of work. There is a certain philosophical naiveté in Conceptual art regarding this framework structure, as it is constructed primarily in terms of Anglo-American analytical philosophy and linguistic theory — perhaps, if it had escaped its self-referential modernist impulse during the 1970s, it would have been able to encounter other philosophical practices capable of reversing its direction (in a certain sense, the “post-conceptual generation” assumed such a meeting.³¹).

Organic line, again

This essay has not adopted a historical perspective, its premises unfold in the contemporary time-space of the present, which indicates equal access to events that although chronologically disparate, when linked, establish certain productive connections: it's more interesting to develop some “plastic force from the present (...) and transform the past” than to be blocked by the “hypertrophy of historical meaning.”³² Lygia Clark's organic line has been introduced to indicate the importance of its discovery in the mid 1950s, pointing out that her investigation had already produced certain possibilities for exploring empty or invisible space, which proved fundamental for Conceptual art's development — her contemporaries, Klein, Manzoni, Johns, and Rauschenberg have already been recognized as decisively influential, but Clark's contribution must also be considered in this matrix. By encountering the complex achievements of Foucault, who considers both discursive and non-discursive practices and processes, and extracts from them the disjunctive operation³³ of confronting the heterogeneous matters of visibility and enunciation, the organic line finds the correct resonance to become an accurate political tool. Nonetheless, it is necessary to clarify that the operation of disjunctive confrontation is not simply processed through the given dimensions of word and image — on the contrary, it has to be produced

through concrete engagement. Therefore, the organic line is not just a given, as part of the world, but must be produced and activated by an intervention, a gesture that opens things and produces a new flow of problems, situations, and events.

Because her work was directly invested in the body, Clark's investigation has attracted great interest as a fundamental reference. In an age of globalization and biopolitics, "'life' and 'living being' are at the heart of new political battles and new economic strategies"³⁴ — developing resistance now involves "the production and reproduction of life itself," that is, the creation of new forms of "intelligence, affect, cooperation and desire."³⁵ Indeed, Lygia Clark's final development — from 1968 until her death in 1988, she spent time in Paris and Rio de Janeiro — led her to more radical propositions, located at the borderline between art and therapy, notably the *Estruturação do Self* (Structuring of the Self), started in 1976.³⁶ This activity, which Suely Rolnik locates in a "new territory, which does not consider the borderlines of art, and of clinic"³⁷ (but certainly is produced from the contact zone between them) — reveals perceptive, sensorial, and political layers indicating how the artist also worked out several recent issues in contemporary art: likewise, a kind of organic conceptualism is present, investing in regions of discourse and visibility, and employing practices of appropriation. Rolnik points out how Clark involves the participant through Relational Objects "in two regimes of sensorial exercise — to connect with the world as diagram of forces or as cartography of forms," establishing a "paradox between micro- and macro-sensoriality": the "micro-perception" leads to the "resonant body,"³⁸ and the "macro-perception" to "objectification of things, separating them from the body" — what is important is to "establish a free micro and macrosensorial communication flux between the bodies," that will originate the "becomings of the self and of the world." For Rolnik, the importance of bringing Lygia Clark's experiences back to the art field is decisive to "reactivate, today, art's political potential" — here, the activation would succeed through a concrete and dynamic relationship of the dematerialized layers and the body in its limits.

It is interesting to think of the organic line as a construction progressively gaining “thickness,” as it involves more and more spaces, issues, elements, and concepts, becoming a “membrane” — an active and autonomous structure functioning as the region of contact between neighboring territories of various kinds. Therefore, in order to operate effectively in the connection between art and life and all its mediations and contact zones with art and politics, systems and circuits, artists — and writers — should make the borders active, playing and experimenting with all of the passageways between them.

* Originally published in English in ed. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann, *Art after conceptual art* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2006), 87–99.

1 Michel Foucault, “Theatrum philosophicum,” (1975) in *Language, counter-memory, practice: selected essays and interviews* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 185–186.

2 Guy Brett, “Lygia Clark, the borderline between art and life,” in *Third Text*, no 1 (Autumn 1987): 67.

3 Lygia Clark, “Lygia Clark e o espaço concreto expressional,” in *Lygia Clark*, exh. cat., (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, Marseille: MAC, Galeries Contemporaines des Musées de Marseille, Porto: Fundação de Serralves, Porto, Bruxelles: Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1998), 83. Originally published in *Jornal do Brasil*, 2 July 1959. (Own translation).

4 Lygia Clark, “Conferência pronunciada na Escola Nacional de Arquitetura em Belo Horizonte em 1956,” in *Lygia Clark*, 1998, 72. Originally published in *Diário de Minas*, 27 January 1957. (Own translation).

5 Ferreira Gullar, “Lygia Clark – uma experiência radical,” in *Etapas da arte contemporânea: do cubismo à arte neoconcreta* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Revan, 1988), 278. Originally published in 1958. (Own translation)

6 The artist always referred to this gesture as “discovery,” rather than “invention” or “creation.”

7 Two other important writings from Ferreira Gullar, where he discusses the passage from neoplasticism to neoconcrete art — from Mondrian’s “fictional” space to the neoconcrete non-object installed into the “real” world, are the “Neoconcrete manifesto” (1959) and the “Theory of the Non-object” (1960). They are reprinted in Gullar, “Etapas da arte”, 283–88 and 289–301. An English version of the “Neoconcrete manifesto” was published in *October*, issue 69 (Summer 1994): 91–5.

8 Ferreira Gullar, “A trajetória de Lygia Clark,” in *Lygia Clark*, 1998, 62.

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- 9 Some of the issues pointed out here are resumed in my essay “Quatro características da arte nas Sociedades de Controle” (Four Characteristics of Art in the Control Society) from 1992. Published in Ricardo Basbaum, *Além da pureza visual* (Beyond Visual Purity), (Porto Alegre: Editora Zouk, 2007).
- 10 Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht, “Cascatas de modernidade,” in *Modernização dos Sentidos* (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998), 22–3.
- 11 Yves Klein, “Sorbonne Lecture,” in *Art in Theory 1900–1990—an Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 803–805. The subsequent quotes from Klein are extracted from this text.
- 12 The philosopher Gerd Bornheim indicates how, since Renaissance, the concept of “imitation” (from Plato’s mimesis) is replaced by the concept of “copy.” The latter is conceived of as artificial imitation, as it is produced by the means of a tool developed by human ingenuity, which progressively replaces God as source of knowledge. See Gerd Bornheim, *Páginas de Filosofia da Arte* (Rio de Janeiro: Uapê, 1998), 117–30.
- 13 See John Cage, “On Robert Rauschenberg, artist, and his work,” (1961) in *Silence* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 98–108, and “Jasper Johns: stories and ideas,” in *A year from Monday – new lectures and writings* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 73–84. The subsequent quotes are extracted from both sources.
- 14 Piero Manzoni, “Free Dimension,” in Harrison, Wood, *Art in Theory*, 709–11. All the subsequent quotes come from this source as well as from Piero Manzoni, “Some realizations... Some experimentations... Some projects...,” 1962, available at <http://home.sprynet.com/~mindweb/page14.htm>
- 15 Terry Atkinson, “Concerning the article denominated ‘The dematerialization of art’,” in *Conceptual Art: a critical anthology*, ed. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1999), 52–85.
- 16 Atkinson, “Concerning the article,” 54–5.
- 17 Ursula Meyer, “Introduction,” in *Conceptual Art* (New York: Dutton, 1972), viii.
- 18 Joseph Kosuth, “Introductory Note to Art-Language by the American Editor,” in *Art after Philosophy and After – Collected Writings, 1966–1990* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 1991), 39.
- 19 Alexander Alberro, “The contradictions of conceptual art,” in *Conceptual Art and the politics of publicity* (Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2003), 1–24. Although the author warns that his description has “a New York bias,” it is possible to take it as a valid account for the big change from modernism to contemporary art, when New York took the place of Paris as the world’s art capital — dramatic changes affect the status and the image of the artist, the art-critic, the gallerist, as well as all the other roles characteristic of the art circuit.
- 20 Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control,” in *October* 59 (Winter 1992): 3–7.
- 21 Alberro, “The contradictions of conceptual art,” 9. Later, in the 1990s, the curator had the function of the most powerful role in terms of the standard commercial art world. For one interesting critique on the hypertrophy of the curator’s role, see Olu Oguibe, “The Curatorial Burden,” paper delivered at *SITAC - International Symposium on Contemporary Art Theory*, Mexico City, 2002.
- 22 Kosuth, “History for,” in *Art after Philosophy and After*, 240.

23 Short extracts from my essay “Migração das palavras para a imagem” (Migration of the words to image), published in *Gávea*, issue 13 (1995): 373–95. Reprinted in Basbaum, *Além da pureza visual*.

24 Reprinted in Kosuth, “Introductory Note to Art-Language,” 13–32.

25 See from Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (first published in French, 1966), *Archaeology of Knowledge* (first published in French, 1969), *The Discourse in Language* (first published in French, 1971), *This is not a pipe* (first published in French, 1973).

26 Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 51.

27 Michel Foucault, quoted by Deleuze, *ibid*, 66.

28 Michel Foucault, *This is not a pipe*, quoted by Deleuze, *ibid*, 66, 67-8.

29 Of course Foucault’s model does not propose any neutral or ideal situation, but indicates that at any moment these two layers are involved in a dynamics that is worth revealing, through his archeological approach.

30 See Jeanne Granon-Lafont, *La Topologie Ordinaire de Jacques Lacan* (Paris: Point Hors Ligne, 1985).

31 Alexander Alberro identifies three groups of post-conceptual artists: Mike Bidlo, John Knight, Louise Lawler, Sherrie Levine, Allan McCollum, and Richard Prince (identified by “exploration of structure” and “critique of authenticity”), Victor Burgin, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, and Mary Kelly (addressing the “construction of the subject through various overdetermining forms”), and Fred Lonidier, Martha Rosler, Allan Sekula, and Phil Steinmetz (who share the implication that “self-determination and communication (...) is still a historical option and artistic possibility”). Alexander Alberro, “Reconsidering conceptual art, 1966–1977,” in Alberro, Stimson, *Conceptual Art: a critical anthology*, xxviii–xxx.

32 Peter Pál Pelbart, “Deleuze, um pensador intempestivo,” in *Nietzsche e Deleuze – intensidade e paixão*, ed. Daniel Lins, Sylvio de Sousa Gadelha Costa and Alexandre Veras (Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, 1999), 65.

33 In the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari call the energy of disjunction “divine”: “The sole thing that is divine is the nature of an energy of disjunctions.” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 13.

34 Maurizio Lazzarato, “From biopower to biopolitics,” accessed at <http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcbiopolitics.htm>. Originally published in *Pli—The Warwick Journal of Philosophy: Foucault: Madness/Sexuality/Biopolitics*, Volume 13 (2002): 100–11.

35 Peter Pál Pelbart, “Império e biopotência,” in *Vida Capital – ensaios de biopolítica* (São Paulo: Iluminuras, 2003), 83.

36 See notes 2 and 3 for references, and also the catalogue *Lygia Clark, de l’oeuvre à l’événement: Nous sommes le moule, a vous de donner le souffle*, ed. Suely Rolnik and Corinne Diserens (Nantes: Musée de Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005).

37 Suely Rolnik, “D’une cure pour temps dénués de poésie,” in Rolnik, Diserens, *Lygia Clark*, 13–26. The following quotes are from the same source.

38 Notion developed by Suely Rolnik in a number of her writings (“corpo vibrátil,” in the original), to refer to a permeable and membranous body that “absorbs the forces that affect it,

making them into elements of its texture, the marks of sensations that will compose its memory." Rolnik, *ibid*, 16.