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INTRODUCTION

**On Weak Links and
Plagiotropic Relations**

The organic line is a line of space that lies between.

In 1954, the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark observed that when she abutted a work's framing mat, or *passe-partout*, with a collage element of the same color, a line of space appeared between them (fig. I.1). She observed that the line was liminal, contingent, and that it was found, not made. In a series of paintings that year, Clark deployed this line to "break the frame" of the painting support. The line of space entered the composition, while the painting moved out to envelop the frame. Clark soon connected this "undrawn line" to the lines of space that appear between doors and lintels, windows and frames, and tiles on the floor.¹ She named it "the organic line" and began to use it as a structuring element in her work. It played a significant role in her painterly and sculptural investigations of the late 1950s and 1960s, as well as in her subsequent explorations of social and therapeutic practice. For while the organic line initially manifested as a graphic phenomenon internal to the work and its conventions of display, its actualized, spatial character just as firmly secured it to an experiential realm beyond the work itself.

In this book, I argue that the organic line allows us to reconfigure the field of modernist art as a flexible and topological surface, porous to what has exceeded its purview and capable of formation

and deformation through critical description and artistic practice alike. The organic line thus has far-reaching consequences for articulating the relations between modern and contemporary art, the canon and the so-called periphery, and formal innovation and the politics of making. On the occasion of Clark's 2014 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, cocurator Luis Pérez-Oramas argued that the organic line transforms the "archaeology of painting" embedded in her work, signaling its archetypal character vis-à-vis the history of art.² In a 2006 essay, the artist Ricardo Basbaum proposed that Clark's organic line offers a paradigm of "between," rather than "beyond," thereby suspending schemas of linear development that undergird modernist thought.³ His essay builds on sustained engagement by the psychoanalyst Suely Rolnik with Clark's later notion of an embodied and porous subjectivity.⁴ The conceptual force of the organic line is activated by, indeed demands, "concrete engagement," Basbaum argues.⁵ In part, this book is an answer to that call. But it recognizes that "concrete engagement" also requires an interrogation of method and scope (fig. I.2).

We might begin with the observation that while Clark's organic line has been familiar to Brazilian artists and critics since the 1950s, it remains relatively obscure within a broader history of art. For several decades, scholars have invoked alternative, synchronous, and multiple modernisms in order to complicate the notion of modernity as a Western phenomenon that spreads to the so-called periphery, erasing local expressions of difference in its wake. Yet as a scholarly subfield, modernist art history regularly insists on the comprehensive import of certain artistic articulations—the collage, the readymade, the grid, the monochrome, to name a few—that have had, in relation to this scholarly field, what might be described as a structuring force.⁶ Such phenomena are often described with the language of invention: Pablo Picasso's and Georges Braque's *papiers collés* revolutionized the pictorial surface; Kazimir Malevich's *Black Square* blasted open the possibilities of abstraction; Marcel Duchamp's nomination of industrial commodities transformed

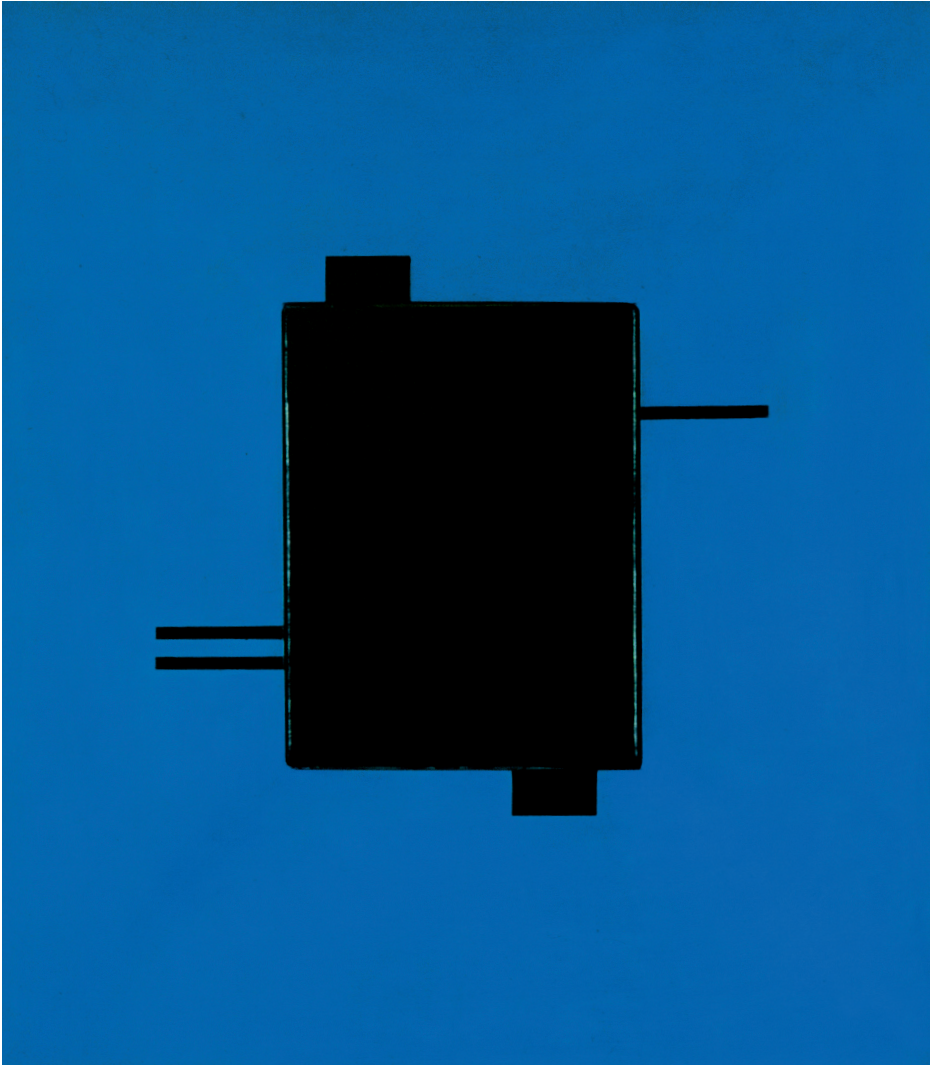


Figure 1.2. Lygia Clark, *Quebra da moldura*
(Breaking the frame), 1954. Courtesy of
Associação Cultural “O Mundo de Lygia Clark.”
Photo: Marcelo Ribeiro Alvares Corrêa.

art into a conceptual act. As Mikhail Bakhtin argued of speech acts, such articulations are dialogic and always shared between artist and audience within a given historical context.⁷ Moreover, precedents for such practices almost always exist. The grids of urban planning, woven cloth, and account books were what media theorists call “cultural techniques” long before modernist artists aesthetically represented their operations as art.⁸ The modernist difference lies in “laying bare the device,” as Viktor Shklovsky argued.⁹ As the title of Shklovsky’s 1917/1919 essay “Art as Technique” begins to suggest, the distinction between art techniques and cultural techniques is highly significant within the historiography of modernism. And while the former often strategically rework the latter (the ready-made internalizing the shop display; photomontage recasting the protocols of advertising, the postcard, and the family album), it is the artistic intervention that modernist art history holds dear. The concept of the avant-garde proposes that to lay bare the device first is a historical innovation. That such devices are disseminated through the vehicle of influence consolidates notions of authorship and intentionality. And that this circulation occurs across widely divergent contexts suggests that artistic techniques approximate a quasi-universal language that can be adapted and reactivated toward distinct, yet self-consciously modernist ends.

In several aspects, the organic line resembles the artistic devices described above. Like phenomena such as the grid or the monochrome, it preexists and supersedes its deployment as a specifically modernist expression. Spatial intervals play both instrumental and incidental roles in our physical environments and artistic practices. There is no construction without a seam. “A prime axiom for artistic practice,” as Gottfried Semper incisively put it, the seam allows for the aesthetic acknowledgment that composite entities are necessarily joined.¹⁰ Its “binding and linking” quality thus inheres in the pure mechanics of technics and the primal symbolism of art alike.¹¹ In his influential 1949 thesis, the Brazilian critic Mário Pedrosa remarked on the value of the void in Asian aesthetics, from

the hollowness of a vase to the emptied pictorial zones of paintings that result in differing velocities of attention.¹² Likewise, a long tradition of panel and pendant painting in Western art has harnessed the gaps between images toward symbolic and aesthetic ends.¹³ As Wendy Ikemoto has noted, such doubled works activate spatial intervals in order to thematize “their own interpictureality.”¹⁴ But when Clark called attention to preexisting intervals of space liminal to works of art and architecture and named them organic lines, she foregrounded the spatial and conceptual qualities of the interval itself. In this sense, her observation was a defined and historically punctual event. And although such lines have existed in relation to countless other works and quotidian phenomena, Clark’s second-order observation transformed them into a conceptual object in their own right.

The organic line is a unique phenomenon in other ways, as well. Unlike virtually any other line in the history of art, the organic line is not a positive entity, by which I mean an entity conceived—or *perceived*—as self-evident content or form. A point, followed by a line, is the minimal condition to establish figure against ground. As such, lines are often equated with cognitive and epistemological distinction. As Catherine de Zegher writes, “If, for the linguists, naming with the word was the act of consciousness through which we begin to know, for the artists the rendering of form in drawing transformed perception into naming, and so was the process through which they came to know. Cognition thus proceeds from creation, with line as indicator of cognitive process.”¹⁵ Whether scratched in stone or drawn in pencil, lines delineate, construct, and register, operations intimately associated with action and the activity of differentiating. As Aleksandr Rodchenko wrote in 1921, “The line is the path of passing through, movement, collision, edge, attachment, joining, sectioning” (fig. 1.3).¹⁶ Even when transposed into what Eric de Bruyn has evocatively termed “political geometries,” line is understood as a vector of force, whether disciplinary or emancipatory in character.¹⁷ In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism*



Figure 1.3. Alexander Rodchenko, *Line*.
No. 128, 1919. Oil on canvas, 62 × 53 cm.
The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts,
Moscow. © 2023 Estate of Alexander
Rodchenko/UPRAVIS, Moscow/ARS, NY

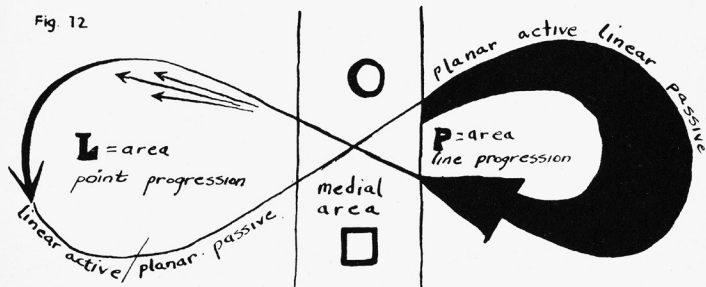
and *Schizophrenia*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari juxtapose lines of rigid and supple segmentarity with “lines of flight” that “blast the two segmentary series apart,” causing systems to leak and malfunction, like a hole in a pipe. Among other sources, the philosophers were inspired by the fugitive thought of George Jackson’s prison writings and the *lignes d’erre* (errant or wander lines) Fernand Deligny traced in the movements of nonverbal autistic children.¹⁸ Unlike Jackson’s dynamic “line of escape,” Deligny’s “arachnean” itineraries resist production in favor of mappings of desire and convergence. But they, too, forge a network that circumvents existing inscriptions of power. As Deleuze and Guattari write, “There is nothing more active than a line of flight.”¹⁹

As a line of space between features — a fissure that is observed, rather than made — the organic line is ontologically distinct from these technical, artistic, and philosophical articulations. In his 1925/1953 *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Paul Klee describes a nonagential line that brings us somewhat closer to its operations. Here, Klee contrasts active lines that move “freely, without a goal,” with medial lines that delineate “planar effects” and finally with passive lines, which result from the “activation” of such planar shapes.²⁰ In an accompanying illustration, Klee diagrams the “conjugations” of active, medial, and passive lines, providing linguistic equivalents apropos of a man who cuts down a tree: *I fell, I fall, I am being felled* (fig. I.4). But the organic line corresponds to none of these formulations. It is not a degree of agency in relation to a line: it is the space between the tree and the ax. Indeed, it is this *nothingness* that otherwise escapes legibility that invites metaphoric elaboration. Once recognized as actual, relational, and substantive, the interval of space appears to become a living, organic entity: a breath, a blade, a trace of air; a gutter and furrow; a void that irrigates and cleaves; a crevice and cleft that differentiates matter and ruptures the plane.

Although several of these metaphors convey demarcation, the organic line is unusual in the history of art, if not distinct, in that it is a line devoid of a mark. Of course, sight lines and perspectival



THREE CONJUGATIONS:



Semantic explanation
of the terms active, medial, and passive:

active: I fell (the man fells a tree with his ax).

medial: I fall (the tree falls under the ax stroke of the man).

passive: I am being felled (the tree lies felled).

Figure 1.4. Paul Klee, from *Pedagogic Sketchbooks* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1953), p. 21.

Figure 1.5. Ugo Mulas, *Lucio Fontana, Waiting, Milan, 1964*. Photo: Ugo Mulas, © Ugo Mulas Heirs, all rights reserved.



lines are also lines without marks. But the organic line is not primarily or solely a concept or a projection. As a liminal, indexical phenomenon, the organic line activates — and is activated by — the material and temporal behavior of its contiguous borders.²¹ The line of space that it concretizes is thus a thick void: thick in the sense that it is neither pure emptiness nor a virtual abstraction, but a dimensional, responsive, and actualized entity. The organic line cannot exist without flanking objects or surfaces. It is not a form that delimits its own boundaries so much as a shape that gets filled in. In this sense, one could provisionally define the organic line as *space materialized within a relation of material dependence*. By conceptually concretizing this space, the organic line recovers the paradoxical materiality of the cavity itself. The voids that riddle Lucio Fontana's *Tagli* (Cuts) series, begun in 1958, are likewise materializations of space (fig. 1.5). Yet as registers of the gesture of cutting, they remain marks in an ontological sense. Photographs of



Figure 1.6. Lygia Clark with *Quebra da moldura* (Breaking the frame) paintings, 1954. Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro, 1986. Courtesy of Associação Cultural “O Mundo de Lygia Clark.”



Figure 1.7. Gabriel Orozco, *Empty Shoe Box*, 1993. Shoe box, 12.4 × 33 × 21.6 cm. © Gabriel Orozco. Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA/Art Resource, NY.

Fontana dramatize this moment, the artist piercing the canvas and recreating a spectacle of heroic, expressive, even violent action.²² By contrast, the signal image of Clark with the organic line might be her seated alongside her *Quebra da moldura* (Breaking the frame) paintings and looking out toward the viewer. For it is the *viewer* who must perceive the organic line in order for it to count (fig. I.6).

Perceiving the organic line unleashes its conceptual potential as a device, and if we approach other works with this framework, we can begin to see its analytic force. Moving forward in time, take, for example, Gabriel Orozco's placement of a shoebox on the floor as his contribution to the Venice Biennale of 1993 (fig. I.7).²³ For Orozco, who had encountered Clark's work during his travels in Brazil, it was crucial to preserve the slender plane of space that exists between the box and the surface upon which it rested.²⁴ Rendering this space *thick*, Orozco figured forth an organic line. But by insisting on the continuity of this space and that around

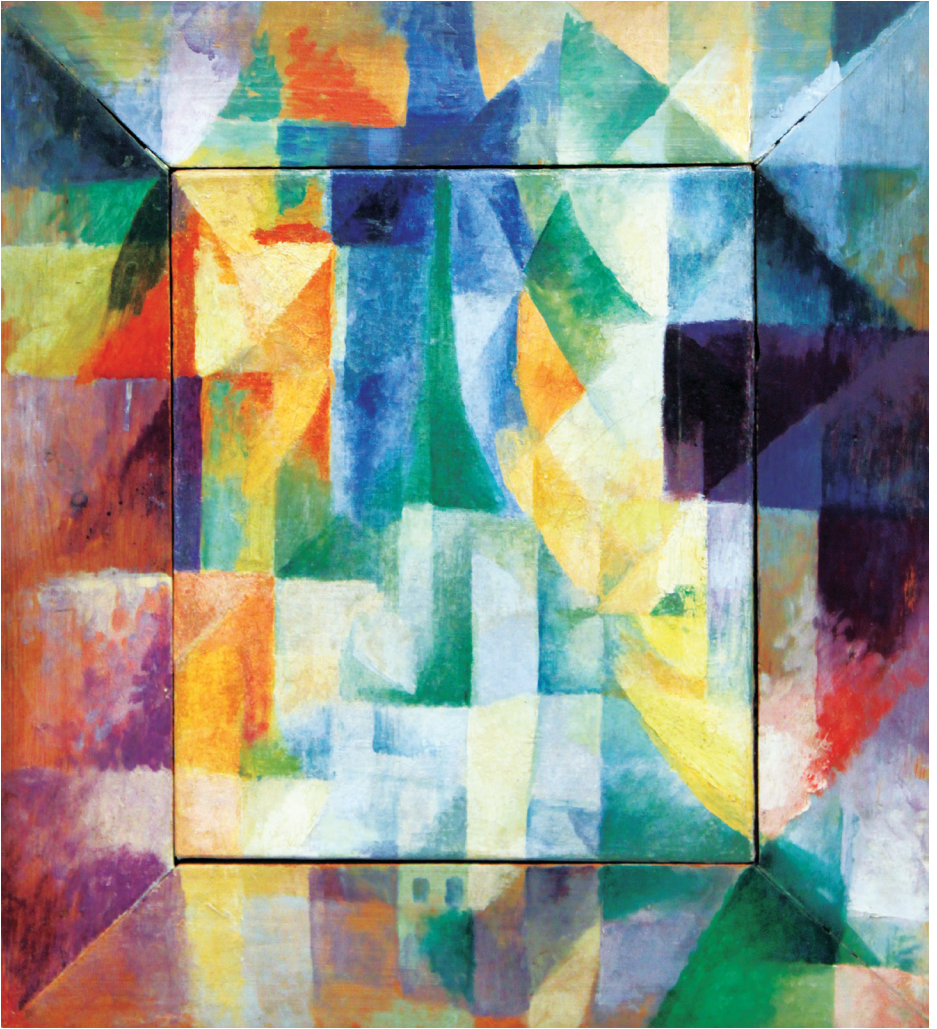


Figure 1.8. Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows onto the City (1st part, 2nd Motif, 1st Replica)*, 1912. Oil and spruce wood on canvas, 40 × 46 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle.

and within the box, Orozco displaced the form of the sculpture from the empty container to the volume of space that filled it. As he mused: “To occupy an empty space with another empty space.”²⁵ While the shoe box demarcates this spatial form’s interior edge, the plane of space beneath the box gestures to its exterior limit: that limit where a form (of space) disaggregates into a medium (of space), or full space once again becomes empty. It is now the *shoe box* that functions as the organic line of this sculpture, dividing medium from form and work from frame. From this perspective, Orozco’s intervention lies less in his recuperation of the category of sculpture than in the way he slots sculpture into the liminal interval described by Clark’s organic line.

The organic line can be retroactively located, as well. Consider Robert Delaunay’s *Simultaneous Windows onto the City (1st part, 2nd Motif, 1st Replica)*, 1912, exhibited at the 1953 São Paulo Bienal, in which Clark also participated (fig. I.8). Instead of battling the traditional association of painting with the pictorial illusion of the window, Delaunay converted this convention into a site of perceptual investigation, extending his composition across both canvas and frame. Delaunay aligned his pictorial grid with the work’s architecture in several instances. But in others, he disregarded the distinction between canvas and wood, stretching a swatch of blue over the miter (the diagonal joint of the frame) or elongating shapes so that they spanned the gap between the two elements. Such micro-adjustments result in a “double reinforcement and dissolution of the frame,” as Gordon Hughes has put it, frustrating assumptions of how we look *through* a window or *onto* a surface.²⁶ This torquing of convention is intensified by Delaunay’s actual frame, which is beveled so that it recesses from the canvas toward the wall, rather than the reverse. This convexity refuses the spatial recession and representational fragmentation inscribed within the Western tradition of the framed picture. And yet the parceled surface that flows across the frame flattens this material dimensionality, so much so, in fact, that it is all but impossible to detect in reproduction. For some observers,

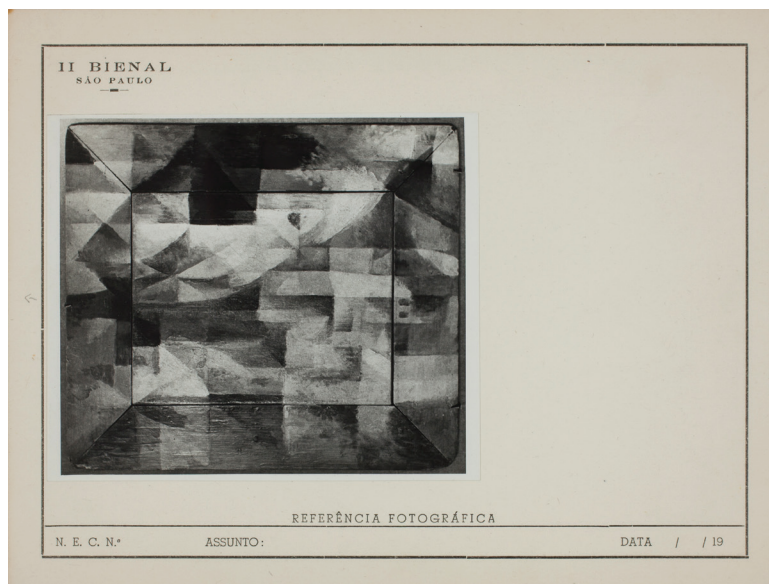


Figure 1.9. Robert Delaunay, *Simultaneous Windows onto the City (1st part, 2nd Motif, 1st Replica)*, 1912. Exhibited as *As janelas* (The windows) at the Second São Paulo Bienal, 1953. Courtesy of Fundação Bienal de São Paulo/Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo.

Delaunay's chromatic faceting surmounted the work's physicality altogether. As the Argentine critic Jorge Romero Brest wrote of the work in 1952, "every plane acquires its physiognomy by means of color, and not by line-limit [*línea-límite*] that disappears along the gradient."²⁷

Would Clark have agreed to Brest's assessment when she saw Delaunay's work, exhibited as *As janelas* (The windows, fig. 1.9) in 1953? Or did a horizon of aesthetic possibility attune her eye to the emergence of the "line-limit" between work and frame, rather than its disappearance? We know that such a revelation did not occur (or was not pursued) by Delaunay; he returned to the convention of the pictorially autonomous canvas in his subsequent explorations. Clark went the other way. When invited to participate in Brazil's annual modern art salon in Rio de Janeiro in 1954, she contributed



Figure 1.10. Lygia Clark, *Quadro objeto* (Painting object), 1954 (right), at the Salão Preto e Branco (Black and White Salon). Published in *Correio da Manhã*, June 2, 1954. Courtesy of Associação Cultural “O Mundo de Lygia Clark.”

a so-called *Quadro objeto* (Painting object) consisting of little more than two frames mounted on a wall (fig. 1.10).²⁸ A newspaper photograph of the lost work shows that Clark attached a stretcher or thin white frame to a larger, thicker black frame so that the smaller structure incurs upon its counterpart along the lower edge. She also appended a rectangular white tab to the black frame and a similar black tab onto the blank wall. The piece thus operates at

three, if not four physical strata, including the slice of space that hovers beneath the smaller frame above the wall. In laying bare the nuts and bolts of making — aspects she had depicted in early paintings of canvas easels, stretchers, and frames — Clark's idiosyncratic painting-object constitutes a radical intervention within a modernist genealogy that has investigated the pictoriality of the plane vis-à-vis its material architecture. By the time she participated in the Twenty-Seventh Venice Biennale as part of the Brazilian representation later that year, the organic line had appeared.

Yet the absorption of the organic line within an overarching narrative of the modernist device is not a clean-cut affair. The particular salon at which Clark exhibited her *Quadro objeto* was known as the Salão Preto e Branco (Black and White Salon), and here, if we begin to scratch the surface, the universalizing tendencies of this narrative begin to fall apart. The salon gained its moniker because the participating artists submitted works entirely composed in black and white. This withdrawal of color was a protest of the high tariffs the Brazilian government had recently imposed on imported artists' paints in an attempt to jump-start domestic industry.²⁹ Such economic policies were symptomatic of postwar strategies intended to correct structural dependencies produced and intensified during the early modern, colonial, and industrial eras in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Without a functional domestic industry for artists' paints, however, the Brazilian government's tariffs effectively deprived artists of their tools for material practice and intellectual work. As I have elaborated elsewhere, the protest at the Salão Preto e Branco and its aftereffects were deliberate disruptions of the developmentalist mandate and the asymmetrical geopolitics of modernization.³⁰ Clark's own decision to lay bare the apparatus of art was thus as political as it was aesthetic and inextricable from the *longue durée* of modernity's fraught relation to colonial extraction and trade as a means for the circulation and accumulation of power.

In fact, while the history of art typically pegs modernism's inauguration to the artistic provocations that accompanied European

industrialization at the end of the nineteenth century, anticolonial and decolonial theorists such as Sylvia Wynter and Aníbal Quijano have insisted that modernity and coloniality are cognate principles that stretch back to the era of encounter, when racialized schemas of knowledge and expropriation first took hold.³¹ Within art history, it has become increasingly common to term this period “early modern” and to comprehend the florescence of European fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century art as conditioned as much by this expansionist drive as by the reimagined relation to a Greco-Roman past. But perhaps the more radical implication of the decolonial perspective is to conceive of twentieth-century modernism as forming not a rupture with the immediate past, but a complex continuity with this longer history of epistemic, economic, and ontological dispossession. To this extent, revisiting and reimagining Hal Foster’s formative analysis of the neo-avant-garde, *all* modernist phenomena — the neo-avant-garde, but also the historical avant-garde, *modernismo*, high modernism, late modernism, even postmodernism — could be understood as deferred actions of working through — with greater and lesser clarity — the traumatic imbrication of coloniality and modernity.³²

Repurposing such a theory willfully redirects its articulated specificity. Yet the mere exercise of a shift in temporal scale elucidates what we know in other terms to be true. What was primitivism’s catalytic destruction of Western representational conventions if not a distorted mirror of Europe’s rapacious relation to Africa? What was the Brazilian modernist embrace of *antropofagia* if not an appropriative defense for remapping the relations of internal and external colonialism? The point is not that such modernist phenomena amount to *only* these relations or that coloniality is the secret meaning of modern art. Rather, it is that coloniality is fully entangled with modernity in ways that both the modernist rhetoric of universal formal invention and the additive logic of multiple or comparative modernisms tend to obscure.³³ To absorb the organic line into the former would be to ignore the asymmetry that

continues to structure the historiography of modern art. Merely to contextualize it as an instance of the latter would be to catastrophically localize its import. Setting aside both, I want to argue that the organic line's paradigm of interstitiality offers insights at the elemental level of techniques and descriptions. In other words, it bears on what modernism says at all.



In *The Signature of All Things: On Method*, the philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes a paradigm as a “singular object that, standing equally for all others of the same class, defines the intelligibility of the group.”³⁴ A paradigm does not operate by means of deduction or induction, he argues, but by analogy. In other words, it does not proceed from particular to universal or vice versa, but “from singularity to singularity” establishing “a force field traversed by polar tensions” that iterate and exemplify the paradigm in turn.³⁵ The organic line is such a paradigm. Clark's paintings, studies, and maquettes that concern the organic line are not. Thus, while Clark's works — as singularities — are necessary to excavate the paradigm embedded within them, they are not wholly sufficient for its explanation, nor do they comprehensively constitute its point of origin.

Indeed, the organic line's very status as a spatial hiatus, interruption, or breach encourages us to “dispel the chimeras of origin,” as Michel Foucault memorably wrote, so endemic to art history's narratives of modernist invention.³⁶ As I have already begun to intimate, Clark herself was deeply familiar with the historical avant-garde and had ample exposure to the work of artists such as Delaunay, Picasso, and Piet Mondrian, particularly through the São Paulo biennials of the early to mid-1950s (fig. I.11).³⁷ The organic line demonstrates a robust dialogue with such artists' propositions and to this extent was articulated in what could be called the “major” language of European modernism, a language that was considered universal — at least initially — even by Clark herself. Yet the organic

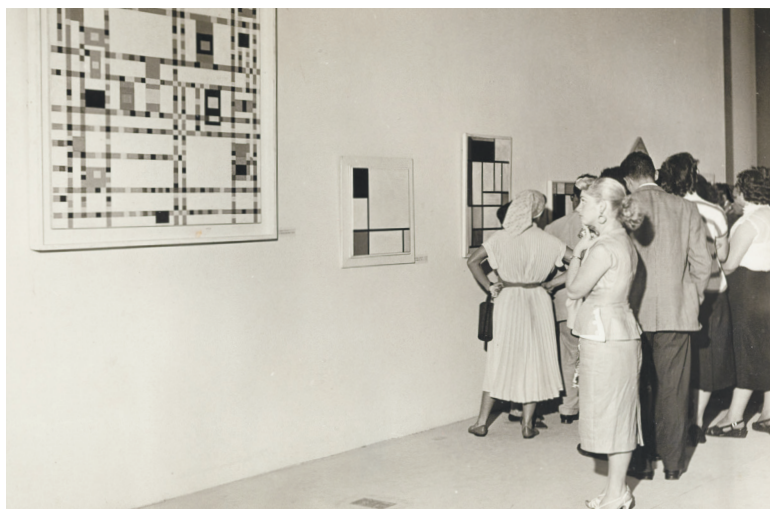


Figure 1.11. Sala Especial de Mondrian, Second São Paulo Bienal, 1953. Courtesy of Fundação Bienal de São Paulo/Arquivo Histórico Wanda Svevo.

line's creative action *upon* this language continues to be informed by an exteriority indicative of Clark's position as a woman from the so-called marginal context of Brazil. Although her work was exhibited in her lifetime in traditional artistic centers such as Paris, London, New York, and Venice, there is little history of sustained reception and public engagement in these locations, even as important exceptions include the British critic Guy Brett, the Filipino artist David Medalla, and the French critic Jean Clay (fig. 1.12).³⁸ While major histories of modern art tend to track what literary critic Harold Bloom termed "strong misreadings" of influence and intervention—think here of Vladimir Tatlin's response to Picasso's *Guitar* in his corner constructions or Jasper Johns's galvanizing reaction to Duchamp's readymades—Clark's organic line remains stubbornly, if generatively, in a minor vein. As Brandon Joseph writes, glossing Deleuze and Guattari's influential theorization, the major is "what can be made to serve an idea, category, or constant against which,

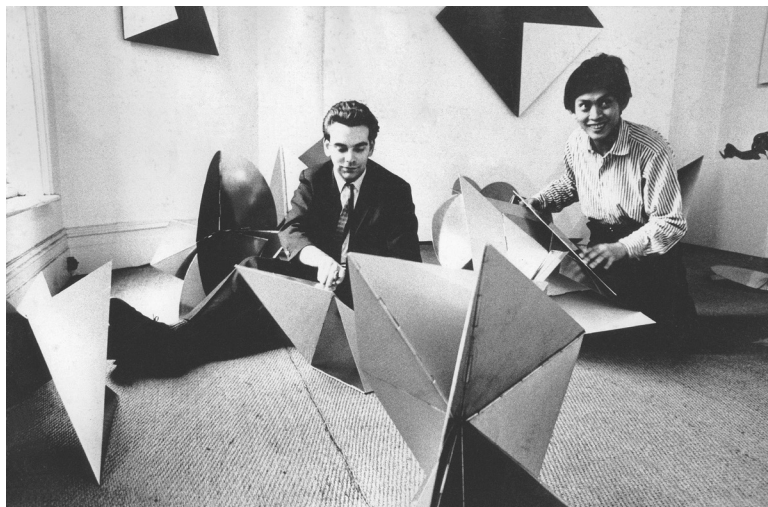


Figure 1.12. Guy Brett and David Medalla with *Bichos* at Lygia Clark's solo exhibition, Signals Gallery, London, 1965. Courtesy of Associação Cultural "O Mundo de Lygia Clark."

whether explicitly or implicitly, other phenomena are measured.”³⁹ The major is what produces the canon as a disciplinary history. In this sense, although Clark had ample artistic interlocutors in Brazil, particularly during Neoconcretism and its outgrowths in the late 1950s and 1960s, it is also significant that in her later years, she chose to set aside her institutional affiliation with art altogether.⁴⁰

Donald Judd's typically terse review of Clark's 1963 exhibition of her manipulable *Bichos* in New York is symptomatic of the exteriority of her work to canonical histories of modern art. The entirety of the review reads as follows: “This sheet-metal sculpture is made of hinged segments and rectangles which adjust to various positions. The idea is clever. The style is ordinary capable Constructivism. Lygia Clark works and is well known in Brazil.”⁴¹ Written two years before his seminal essay “Specific Objects,” Judd appears unaware or uninterested that the *Bichos* sprung from an intense interrogation of the relations between painting and sculpture by Brazilian

artists such as Clark, Oiticica, and Lygia Pape. These debates, which resulted in the critic Ferreira Gullar's 1959 formulation of the Neoconcrete "non-object," provide an unacknowledged and chronologically anterior counterpart to the exploration of similar concerns in the mid-1960s development of Minimalism in the United States.⁴² Yet as the curator Paulo Herkenhoff argued in 2001, the geopolitics of dominant art history cannot assimilate Neoconcretism as anything but a latecomer to a preexisting canon. Highlighting formal comparisons between works by Pape, Frank Stella, and Robert Morris, Herkenhoff observes that while nobody would suggest that the Pape had influenced the North American artists, "had the situation been reversed, Pape would have been considered derivative" of Stella and Morris (figs. I.13–I.14). "This tendency," he wrote, "seems to be prevailing law of modern art historicism."⁴³ Faced with the same resonance during a recent Pape retrospective in New York, one critic chalked up the similarity to formal zeitgeist. "Following Stella's famous dictum, it doesn't seem wrong to imagine that, at least in the years around 1960, what you saw was, in fact, what you saw. Or, to put it another way, pseudomorphism were us."⁴⁴

Suffice it to say that both the "prevailing law of modern art historicism" and "pseudomorphism were us" are deeply unsatisfying art-historical options, as are their defensive inverse, namely, that Pape, not Stella, was the *true* pioneer or that the vastly different intellectual and aesthetic contexts of their works preclude their comparison. One strategy for obviating such analytic dead ends is to shift the axis of comparison, as the literary scholar Pedro Erber productively did in *Breaching the Frame: The Rise of Contemporary Art in Brazil and Japan* (2015). Here, Erber focuses on protagonists "working at the margins of the global art scene" to develop a notion of contemporaneity that sets aside the episteme of center and periphery and its associated symptoms of centrifugal spread, derivation, belatedness, and unidirectional translation.⁴⁵ In its place, following the Polish art historian Piotr Piotrowski, Erber advocates a "horizontal" history of modern art that proceeds from a "fundamentally



Figure I.13. Lygia Pape, *Untitled*, from the series *Tecerlares (Weavings)*, 1956. Woodcut on Japanese paper, 50 × 50 cm. © Projeto Lygia Pape.



Figure I.14. Hollis Frampton, *Frank Stella Painting "Getty Tomb,"* 1959. © Estate of Hollis Frampton. Photograph courtesy of the Addison Gallery of American Art, Philips Academy, Andover, MA/ Art Resource, NY.

decentered perspective.”⁴⁶ And yet “bracketing the center,” as Erber describes this strategy, can have methodological and political pitfalls of its own. One is that it fails to account for the dynamics of power that constitute the center as an *operative* fiction, one that generated real vectors of influence from Europe to Brazil in these years. Both Clark and Oiticica, for example, had passionate responses to avant-garde artists such as Mondrian and Malevich. In 1959, Clark penned a love letter of sorts to the deceased Mondrian, drawing marked distinctions between his ethos and her own: “They say you detested nature — is this true? Because today I felt this transcendence through nature at night, in love.” But Clark also expressed her searing loneliness, noting that “today you are more alive for me” than members of her immediate circle.⁴⁷ Beyond such expressed affinities, a second and perhaps more enduring danger in bracketing the center is that it precludes the possibility that so-called peripheral practices might have a reciprocal action upon “universal modernism,” such that the mythical coherency of the center itself is disturbed. This book situates itself within this possibility of disruption.



Received histories of making condition patterns of viewing. But as a corollary, reorientations of making — and not making — have the possibility of radically *revisibilizing* the objects we view.⁴⁸ Returning to a comparison between Pape and Stella, we can note that Pape, who certainly knew of the organic line, explored and *differentiated* the implications of its interstitial space by way of the serial capacities of the woodcut (fig. I.15).⁴⁹ In Pape’s prints, the artist translates the preexisting organic lines of the block’s wooden grain into the active mark-making of her metal gouge. This gouging process creates an absence upon the surface of the wooden matrix, which allows a new kind of organic line to reappear in the form of the unprinted blank lines in the final print. In other words, an interval between matter becomes the model for how to mobilize

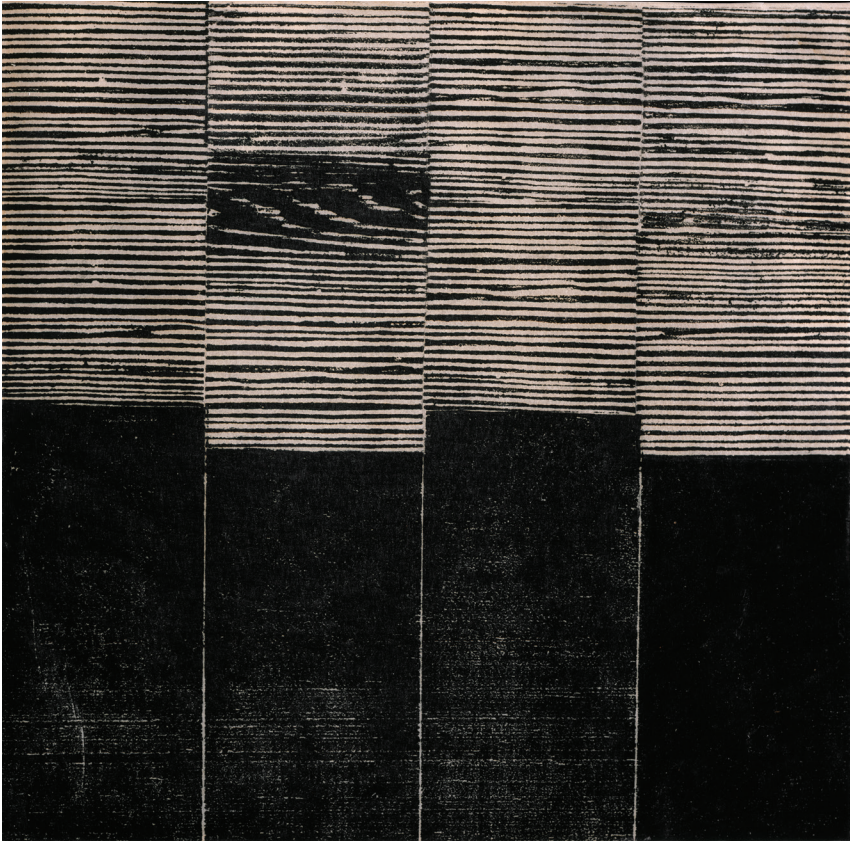
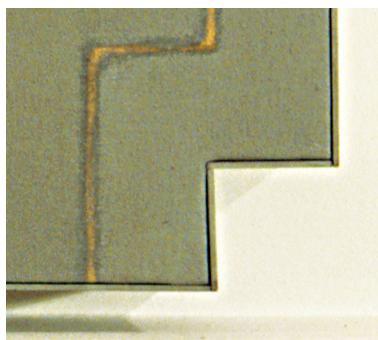


Figure I.15. Lygia Pape, *Untitled*, from the series *Tecalares (Weavings)*, 1959. Woodcut. Composition and sheet: 24.4 × 24.8 cm. The Museum of Modern Art. Gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund, 595.2013. Image courtesy of Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros. © 2023 Projeto Lygia Pape.



Figures I.16a–b. Frank Stella, *Kingsbury Run*, from the *Aluminum Series*, 1960. © 2023 Frank Stella/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



an apparatus of making that occludes its own mark. The generative and recursive character of Pape's printmaking is thus rooted not in a coincidence of medium and mark, but medium and the pursuit of rendering visible what *resists* being made.

Stella's painting is likewise characterized by unmade lines, namely, the residual "breathing spaces," as he described them, of empty canvas that lie between his stripes of paint.⁵⁰ Yet the reception of Stella's painting has occurred almost entirely within the discourse of medium specificity in the United States, wherein the advance of the painterly medium depended on the relation between the artist's mark and the delimitation of the painterly plane.⁵¹ Even when the sculptor Carl Andre developed his polemical reading of Stella's paintings as objects, his analogy was between Stella's brushstrokes and his own "pass of a saw."⁵² Likewise, when Michael Fried described Stella's paintings in terms of their "deductive structure," he referred to the relation between the work's pictorial motif and its "framing edge."⁵³ Yet details of Stella's paintings demonstrate that Fried's notion of "framing edge" suppresses the gap between the exterior limit of the canvas and the interior limit of the frame (figs. I.16a–b). In short, attending to the organic line that lies between them reveals that both "delimitation" (within the discourse on medium specificity) and "objecthood" (within the polemics of Minimalism) are dramatically less secure.⁵⁴ The organic line reveals that any delimitation is not a singular limit, but an interface or threshold. In this sense, the unacknowledged organic lines between the painting and frame of Stella's works lead us not only toward the "breathing spaces" that constitute the interior intervals of the canvas, but to a sequence of marks and nonmarks that proceed outward. This sequence turns the corner of Stella's painted frames — themselves the same width as his painted strokes — in order to arrive at the liminal space between the work and the wall, the wall itself, and finally the space of the gallery.⁵⁵ The new demarcation of the gallery as an operation of marked and unmarked spaces provides an unexpected twist to the old problem of pictorial autonomy. Finally, as an interval, absence,

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