



*Mário Pedrosa and Emygdio de Barros. C. 1950.
Courtesy of Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente.*

Learning from Madness: Mário Pedrosa and the Physiognomic Gestalt*

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*How can we decide what comes from the
inside and what comes from the outside?*

—Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 1985

“Denn was innen, das ist außen.” The phrase—what is inside, is outside—is from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s short poem “Epirrhema” (c. 1820), a Romantic reflection on nature that posits a dynamic relation between inner and outer worlds, the laws of nature and of the mind. This very line is taken up in the late 1920s by experimental and Gestalt psychologist Wolfgang Köhler in the context of his study *Gestalt Psychology*, originally published in English, presumably to appeal to an American audience.¹ But rather than serve toward a poetic rumination on nature, the line is mobilized to describe sensory organization and how the (inner) nervous system orders the (outer) perceptual field. For my purposes, I find it telling that the Brazilian art critic Mário Pedrosa also invokes the line “Denn was innen, das ist außen” in his first two studies on Gestalt structure and perception.² In his first study, his 1949 thesis “On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art” (“Da natureza afetiva da forma na obra de arte”), Pedrosa refers to Köhler’s citation of Goethe in order to similarly describe the sensory organization of the external perceptual field.³ Two years later, he again refers to how the inside is the outside in his 1951 “Form and

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1. Wolfgang Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology: An Introduction to New Concepts in Modern Psychology* (1929; New York: the New American Library, 1947).

2. These two studies, “On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art” and “Form and Personality,” are published in Mário Pedrosa, *Arte, forma e personalidade: 3 estudos* (São Paulo: Kairós, 1979). All citations of these two works are from this edition.

3. Pedrosa, “On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art,” pp. 64–65.

Personality” (“Forma e personalidade”). Yet this time the discursive context of the statement’s enunciation had shifted; the phrase now served to describe a perceptual reversibility specific to the mentally ill. Pedrosa writes: “[The mentally ill] do not need to be induced to a prior emotional attitude to perceive the ‘face’ of things. They see everything simultaneously from inside and from outside.”⁴

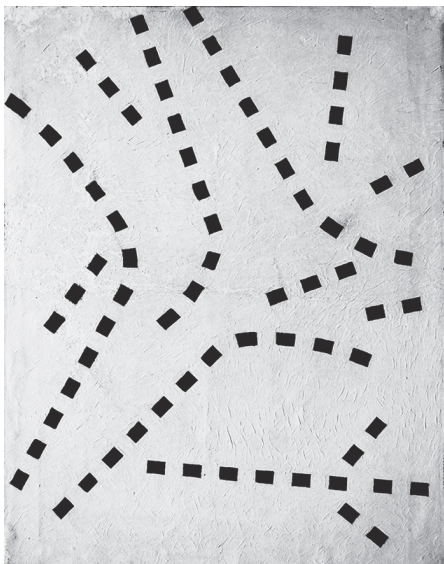
As a young Marxist, Pedrosa had studied philosophy at the University of Berlin in the late 1920s, when Köhler was director of the university’s Psychological Institute. Subsequently, he played a key role in bringing modern art from Europe and the United States to Brazil, also penning key essays on European, North American, and Latin American avant-garde artists.⁵ Pedrosa was also central to the foundation of the country’s modern-art institutions such as the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro. In the 1950s, as the main art critic in Rio, Pedrosa insisted in his lectures and in his early writings on Gestalt on the autonomy of form and on a modern global perception that, for him, was universal in scope (global should be understood in this context as *comprehensive*—that is, perceiving a whole rather than fragments—and not as the “global” that often frames contemporary-art discussions today). To be sure, at the time Pedrosa’s universalism was doubly strategic: With it he inscribed Gestalt perception and modernist abstraction in Brazil within a universal art history and simultaneously incorporated the creative production of psychiatric patients within his universalist account of aesthetic response.

I would thus like to ask: What does looking to the art produced by psychiatric patients (in this case, primarily schizophrenics) bring to our understanding of mid-century modernism in Brazil and Rio de Janeiro more specifically, a time generally aligned with a highly rational cultural outlook and accelerated modernization, both of which are associated with the development of a geometric or concrete aesthetic in art? If in the Gestaltist context of Pedrosa’s early writings the inside is claimed as the outside, it is also necessary to recall one of Gestalt perception’s rationalist counterparts: the mathematical and topological figure of the Möbius strip, which holds a privileged place in Brazilian art historiography of the 1950s. Max Bill’s work *Tripartite Unity* (1948) won first prize for international sculpture at the inaugural 1951 São Paulo Biennial. *Tripartite Unity* includes a Möbius form whose sinuous curves confound Euclidean notions of front and back, inside and outside. With Bill’s work, the mathematical concept on the inside (in one’s mind) is projected onto a material support on the outside, which here takes sculptural form. Following Theo van Doesburg, what Bill called Concrete art he described as the “pure expression of harmonious measure and law.”⁶ The narrative of Bill’s reception, as well as the Bauhaus “influence” via the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm (for which Bill served as director) on the visual arts of Brazil, has been rehashed multiple times, so I will not linger on it

4. Pedrosa, “Form and Personality,” p. 97.

5. See the four volumes of Pedrosa’s collected writings in Mário Pedrosa, *Textos Escolhidos*, ed. Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1995–8). For a critical biography, see Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico* (São Paulo: Editora Página Aberta, 1991).

6. Max Bill, “Art” (1936–49), in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists’ Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 74.



Top: Max Bill. *Tripartite Unity*. 1948–49.
 Courtesy of the Coleção Museu de Arte
 Contemporânea da Universidade de São
 Paulo. © 2015 Artists Rights Society, New
 York/ProLitteris, Zurich.

Bottom: Artur Amora. *Untitled*. C. 1940.
 Courtesy of Museu de Imagens do
 Inconsciente.

here.⁷ Suffice it to say that within this still dominant narrative Bill is credited with having introduced geometric abstraction to Brazil. That Bill's status remains key to this history was most recently upheld at the 2013 Venice Biennial: In the Brazilian pavilion Bill's work counted as an origin for the abstract work on display.⁸

But what if in the interest of polemics I identify the first truly modern geometric abstraction in Brazil as the small black-and-white oil paintings produced by Arthur Amora around 1940, almost ten years prior to Bill's appearance on the Brazilian art scene?⁹ How would our understanding of this art shift if we take into account the fact that Amora produced his work while a patient at the National Psychiatric Center in Rio? I introduce Amora's work not to claim that the so-called art of the insane served as a formal reference or an aesthetic model for avant-garde artists in Rio (as it did in the work of some European artists), but rather to explore the highly mediated ways in which the reception of psychiatric patients' work came to inflect the practice of art and

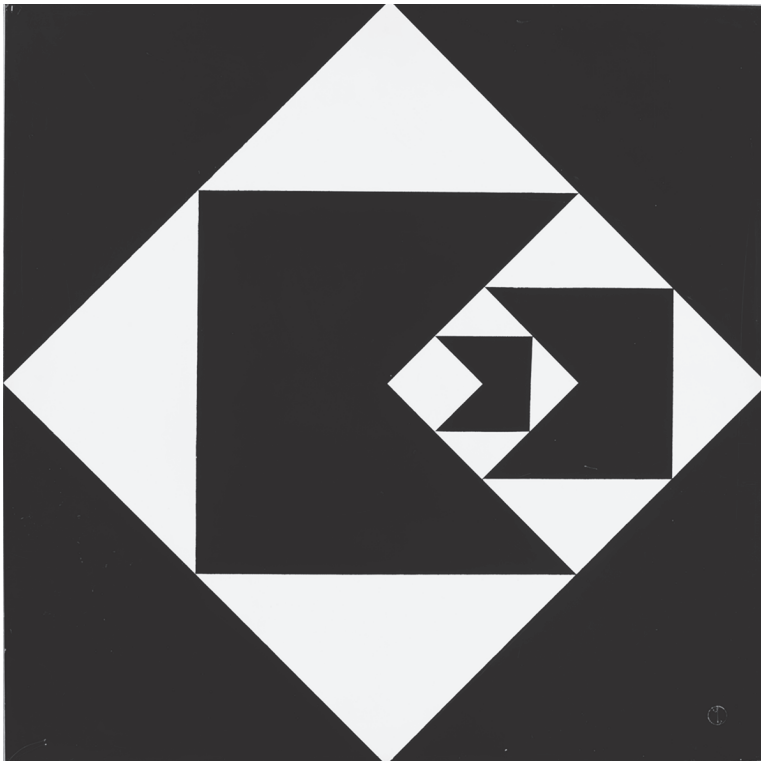
7. This narrative was again invoked in the press release to the gallery exhibition *Sensitive Geometries: Brazil 1950s–1980s* at Hauser and Wirth, New York, September 12–October 26, 2013. For an account of Bill's influence, see *Constructive Spirit: Abstract Art in South and North America, 1920s–50s* (San Francisco: Pomegranate, 2010); for a reading of Bill in relation to the artistic exchanges between Brazil and Argentina, see María Amalia García, *El Arte Abstracto: Intercambios Culturales entre Argentina y Brasil* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2011).

8. Curated by Luis Pérez-Oramas, the 2013 Venice Biennial Brazilian pavilion included the following artists: Hélio Ferverza, Odires Mlászho, Lygia Clark, Max Bill, Bruno Munari.

9. Bill's work was also the subject of an exhibition at Museu de Arte de São Paulo in 1950.

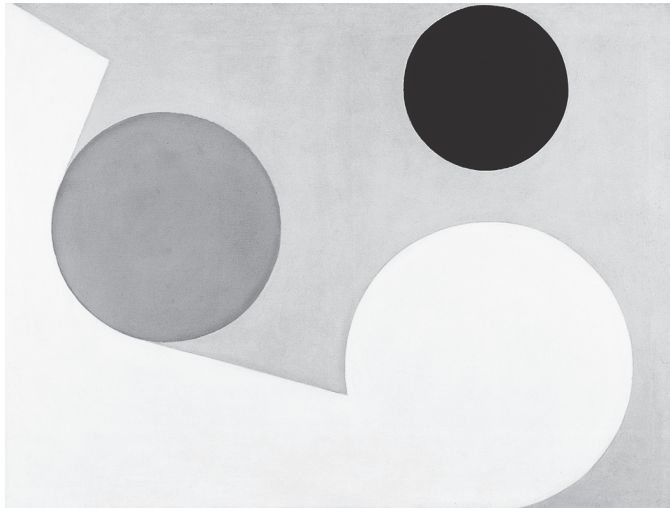
art theory, informing a shift at the heart of Pedrosa's critical project. On account of his reception of this art, Pedrosa begins to articulate the contours of a discursive field in which geometry would be understood as expressive rather than rational or purely visual. The difference with regard to geometric abstraction in avant-garde artistic practice at this time is perhaps nowhere better summed up than in the São Paulo-based Grupo Ruptura's (Rupture Group's) rejection of the Rio-based Grupo Frente (Front Group) because the latter promoted "expression" and "experience" rather than "theory" and "objectivity."¹⁰

10. These avant-garde groups were formed in São Paulo and Rio in 1952 and 1954, respectively. The differences between the two would be cast in relief on account of the first *Exposição Nacional de Arte Concreta* in São Paulo in 1956 and in Rio in 1957. See, for example, the differences in position between Waldemar Cordeiro's "The Object" and Ferreira Gullar's "Theory of the Non-Object," reproduced in *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*, ed. Fernando Cocchiarale and Anna Bella Geiger (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1987), pp. 223 and 237–40. For an excellent discussion of Gullar's text, see Sérgio B. Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil 1949–1979* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 17–46. See also Michael Asbury, "Neoconcretism and Minimalism: On Ferreira Gullar's Theory of the Non-Object," in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 168–89.



Geraldo de Barros. *Diagonal Function*. 1952.
 © The Estate of Geraldo de Barros.
 Courtesy of the Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.

Ivan Serpa. Forms.
1951. © The Estate of
Ivan Serpa. Courtesy
of the Coleção Museu
de Arte Contemporânea
da Universidade de
São Paulo.



Geraldo de Barros's *Diagonal Function* (*Função diagonal*, 1952) is a work by an artist based in São Paulo. Its composition is founded on operations of symmetry, including rotation, reflection, and inversion. He constructed the largest white square by connecting the center points on each side of the painting, and the black form from the halfway points on the white, and so on. The visual effect is one of rotation and recession, in which we progressively recognize the work's formal characteristics. Moreover, Barros used a limited color range of shiny lacquer on board, creating sharp and uniform areas of colored forms. Rio-based Ivan Serpa's work similarly exhibits a geometric aesthetic, but uses oil on canvas and a broader palette of color. The composition of his *Forms* (*Formas*, 1951) consists of a predominantly pale-blue background on which the brushstrokes remain evident. The painting includes two circular forms, a larger one in red and a black one that seems to recede both because of its placement and size but also its color. Moreover, the gray shape in the foreground with its curved and angled edges introduces a concerted asymmetry, reading neither as a polygon nor as an entirely curvaceous form. Serpa's *Forms* is not technically considered a work of Concrete art, but its form and composition unequivocally set in relief some of the differences between the two contexts in which geometric abstraction thrived.¹¹ (This work, like Bill's, was also awarded a prize at the first São Paulo Biennial.)

In the late 1940s and '50s, Serpa and other artists would often gather at Pedrosa's home, where they would discuss contemporary painting and Gestalt psychology, and also the art of psychiatric patients.¹² As a result, Pedrosa was one of

11. See Lorenzo Mammi's discussion in *Concrete '56: A raiz da forma* (São Paulo: Museu de arte moderna de São Paulo, 2006), pp. 23–51, esp. the discussion of color pp. 41–43.

12. Pedrosa's thesis remained unpublished until 1979, the year in which he granted permission for the later work "Form and Personality" to be republished. Nevertheless, the work seems to have circulated at the time. Ferreira Gullar remembers reading it even before moving to Rio. See Ferreira Gullar,

the primary interlocutors for the artists of Grupo Frente, who counted Serpa among their members in addition to Lygia Clark and Lygia Pape, and who were later joined by other artists including Elisa Martins da Silveira (a naïf painter) and Hélio Oiticica. Yet in order to understand the historical and cultural specificity of Rio-based artists' engagement with an expressive geometry, we must turn to Pedrosa's close friend and collaborator the psychiatrist Nise da Silveira, for it is in large measure what he learns from her work and that of her patients that stands at the center of this competing account of midcentury modernism in Brazil.¹³

Silveira began work as a psychiatrist at the National Psychiatric Center in the Rio neighborhood of Engenho de Dentro in 1944. In the course of her career, she was repeatedly referred to as a "rebellious psychiatrist" who vehemently criticized the psychiatric institution and its aggressive practices such as lobotomy and electroshock.¹⁴ She developed alternative therapeutic models for her patients and continually advocated for better conditions in the hospitals. In 1946, in collaboration with painter Almir Mavignier, she opened a painting studio for her patients at the hospital, a studio that continues its activities to this day.¹⁵

"A trégua—entrevista com Ferreira Gullar," in *Cadernos da literatura brasileira—Ferreira Gullar* (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 1998), p. 38. Almir Mavignier also remembers meeting at Pedrosa's home, where the critic read and discussed parts of his thesis. See Almir Mavignier in *Formas do afeto: um filme sobre Mário Pedrosa*, HDV, directed by Nina Galanternik (Rio de Janeiro: Gala Filmes, 2010).

13. Sociologist of art Gláucia Villas Bôas offers a detailed account of the atelier and the critical debates surrounding the patients' work in her article "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), pp. 197–219. In art-historical and curatorial writing in Brazil, Silveira's importance to the context of geometric abstraction in Rio is often invoked but has not received sustained, in-depth analysis. In a 1999 essay on Lygia Clark, Paulo Herkenhoff suggestively wrote: "Lygia Clark's own environment was impregnated with this proximity between art, reason and madness. Geometric art in Rio has a remote origin [*raiz remota*] in the occupational therapy sector of the Centro Psiquiátrico Pedro II (the so called Engenho de Dentro Hospital), directed by Nise da Silveira." See his "A aventura planar de Lygia Clark—de caracóis, escadas e Caminhando," in *Lygia Clark* (São Paulo: MAM-SP, 1999), p. 49. More recently, Luiz Camillo Osorio offers Alexander Calder's exhibitions in Rio and Dr. Silveira's workshop as two origins for understanding the specificity of abstraction in Rio; see his essay "The Desire of Form and the Forms of Desire: Neoconcretism as a Unique Contribution of Brazilian Art," in *Das Verlangen nach Form—O Desejo da Forma: Neoconcretismo und zeitgenössische Kunst aus Brasilien* (Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2010), pp. 226–34.

14. See Ferreira Gullar, *Nise da Silveira: Uma psiquiatra rebelde* (Rio de Janeiro: Prefeitura da Cidade do Rio de Janeiro/Relume Dumara, 1996), as well as *Nise da Silveira: Caminhos de uma psiquiatra rebelde* (Curitiba: Museu Oscar Niemeyer, 2009).

15. In May 1952, Dr. Silveira founded the Museu do Imagens do Inconsciente (Museum of Unconscious Images), which, under the committed direction of Luiz Carlos Mello, remains dedicated to the preservation of the patients' work. Studies on the painting studio at Engenho de Dentro published from within the field of psychology or occupational therapy include Gustavo Henrique Dionísio, *O Antídoto do Mal: Crítica de arte e loucura na modernidade brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz, 2012); *Marcas e memórias: Almir Mavignier e o ateliê de pintura de Engenho de Dentro*, ed. Lucia Riley and José Otávio Pompeu e Silva (Campinas: Komedi, 2012); José Otávio Pompeu e Silva, "A psiquiatra e o artista: Nise da Silveira e Almir Mavignier encontram as imagens do inconsciente," MA thesis (Campinas, São Paulo: 2006); Walter Melo, *Nise da Silveira*, Collection: Pioneiros da Psicologia Brasileira, vol. 4, ed. Ana Maria Jacó-Vilela and Marcos Ribeiro Ferreira (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora; Brasília: Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2001).

In his capacity as studio monitor from 1946 to 1951, Mavignier helped to organize exhibitions of the patients' work and encouraged art-world figures such as the Belgian critic Léon Degand and Pedrosa, as well as painters Serpa and Abraham Palatnik, to visit. These cultural figures were not just visiting the patients' studio as a psychiatric curiosity; each was profoundly affected by the work he saw. Pedrosa developed a deep and lasting commitment to the work of the patient Emygdio de Barros. On account of his support of the patients' work, Pedrosa also developed the concept of *arte virgem* (virgin art), which designates their work as an art free of academic convention and naturalistic representation.¹⁶ Serpa, an important art teacher in Rio, extended his teaching activities to include some of the patients. In part due to his exposure to their work, his own pedagogical practice was driven by experimentation rather than prescriptive dictates.¹⁷ Palatnik, on account of the quality of the patients' work, gave up traditional painting altogether in order to begin his aesthetic experiments with a type of chromo-kineticism. Finally, even São Paulo-based Geraldo de Barros's early photographic work can be traced to this vital context.¹⁸

A photograph from the late 1940s shows Mavignier, together with Madame Léon Degand, Emygdio de Barros, and Silveira. Perhaps taken by Léon Degand, the photograph testifies to the early contact between modern-art and psychiatric professionals—the institution of modern art and the psychiatric clinic—at this historical moment in Rio de Janeiro.



Almir Mavignier, Madame Léon Degand, Emygdio de Barros, and Dr. Nise da Silveira. C. 1949. Courtesy of Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente.

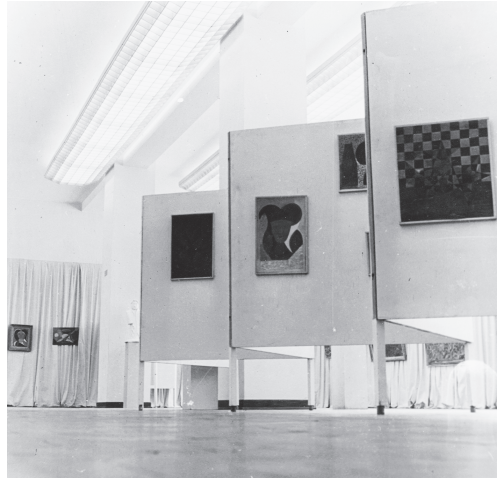
16. See, for example, Mário Pedrosa, "Pintores de arte virgem," *Correio da manhã*, March 19, 1950. Press clipping in the Fundo Mário Pedrosa, Centro de Documentação e Memória da UNESP, São Paulo, Brazil.

17. Aleca le Blanc references Serpa's indebtedness to the painting studio and the experimental art therapy practiced therein in her essay on his pedagogical program in *Ivan Serpa: Pioneering Abstraction in Brazil* (New York: Dickinson Roundell, 2012).

18. For an account of Palatnik's response to the patients' work, see Luiz Camillo Osório, ed., *Abraham Palatnik* (São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2004), p. 52; for Geraldo de Barros's contact with the painting studio at Engenho de Dentro, see Heloisa Espada, "Fotoformas: Luz e artifício," in *Geraldo de Barros e a fotografia*, exh. cat. (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles/Edições SESC São Paulo, 2014), pp. 25–27.

Moreover, at this time Degand was serving as the first director of the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM-SP), which was inaugurated in 1949 with his exhibition *From Figuration to Abstraction* (*Do figurativismo ao abstracionismo*). It had been on account of Mavignier's invitation that Degand went to see the work of the patients in the painting workshop at the hospital in Engenho de Dentro. Thanks to the visit and Mavignier's efforts, Degand initiated the organization of an exhibition of the patients' work in São Paulo, with an eye to bringing the work to the attention of a broader public.

The first exhibition of the patients' work actually took place at the hospital, just three months after the painting studio opened. A similar exhibition was again on view in early 1947 at the Ministry of Education and Health from which a selection was then featured at the Brazilian Press Association, where Pedrosa first encountered the work and also delivered his lecture "Art, Vital Necessity" ("Arte, necessidade vital") the day of the exhibition's closing. A year and a half after the exhibitions in Rio, *9 Artists from Rio de Janeiro's Engenho de Dentro* (*9 Artistas de Engenho de Dentro do Rio de Janeiro*) opened on October 12, 1949. As its title suggests, the exhibition represented the work of nine patients (Adelina, Carlos, Emygdio, José, Kléber, Lucio, Raphael, Vicente, and Wilson) and included 179 works across various mediums.¹⁹ In a letter to Mavignier dated September 9, 1949, the museum's second director, Lourival Gomes Machado, stresses the criteria for selecting the work: "We are interested in *works of art* and, therefore, all works predetermined by clinical interests (for example, simply 'cathartic' paintings) or educational (the long repetitions of the same series of drawings) should be excluded [*relegados*]. From there, I think, you could exercise a merciless cut,



9 Artists from Rio de Janeiro's Engenho de Dentro. Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1949. Exhibition view. Courtesy of Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente.

19. The exhibition of psychiatric patients' work in an artistic context did have a historical precedent in Brazil. In 1933, artist and architect Flávio de Carvalho and psychiatrist Osório Cesar organized the exhibition *Month of Children and the Mad* (*Mês das Crianças e dos Loucos*) at the Clube dos Artistas Modernos (CAM) in São Paulo. The exhibition and related events form the subject of the first chapter of my study "Expressive Restraint."

so that the works fit into our small museum.”²⁰ Such criteria, he also suggests, were agreed upon in conversation with Silveira.

Gomes Machado’s stance is reaffirmed in the exhibition catalogue’s introduction: “Interested exclusively in the artistic value of the works coming from Engenho de Dentro, the Museum of Modern Art opened its doors to them.”²¹ At the level of museum politics, the statement makes patently clear the work’s assimilation to a particular conception of aesthetic modernism based on autonomy and aesthetic quality. What is on display on the museum’s inside is the aesthetics of an autonomous modern art; what remains outside is the psychic condition and institutional context from which the works arise. Here, the inside is decidedly not the outside. Rather, the museum opened its doors to psychic difference but at once framed its expression as exclusively aesthetic in order to position the museum’s identity and the institution of modern art against such expressions of nonnormative subjectivity. What is more, such a purely aesthetic discussion of these works continues today, as in the catalogue to the recent exhibition *Raphael and Emygdio: Two Moderns in Engenho de Dentro* (*Raphael e Emygdio: Dois Modernos No Engenho de Dentro*) at the Instituto Moreira Salles.²²

20. Letter from Lourival Gomes Machado to Almir Mavignier, September 9, 1949, Arquivos Históricos Wanda Svevo (formerly the Arquivo Beinal), São Paulo. (My emphasis.) In this context, Gomes Machado also proposes the conditions for the works’ display, for which he planned to allocate the larger gallery, whose walls could be extended through the use of portable panels. In this way, the smaller gallery could be used as a comparative room for other artists. From the existing correspondence, it seems that Gomes Machado prepared his letter to Mavignier the same day that he received a letter from Silveira, which included her preface to the catalogue as well as information regarding the works’ possible transportation. Nise da Silveira to Lourival Gomes Machado, September 3, 1949. Mavignier responded, somewhat warily, to the director’s proposal for a second comparative gallery: “for this first exhibition a more direct comparison between our artists and those outside of Engenho de Dentro had not been thought, as I am led to understand from your letter; . . . [it] is a new angle that requires study in order not to suggest precipitated, even malevolent, comparisons.” Letter from Almir Mavignier to Lourival Gomes Machado, September 20, 1949, Arquivos Históricos Wanda Svevo, São Paulo.

21. *9 Artistas de Engenho de Dentro do Rio de Janeiro* (São Paulo: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 1949), n.p.

22. In his essay to the exhibition catalogue, art historian Rodrigo Naves introduces the psychiatric context in which the work was produced only to state that, on account of Emygdio de Barros’s internment, “one of the major Brazilian artists remained excluded from our art history” (p. 97). While engaging in close formal analysis of the paintings, he continues: “Few times in Brazilian art have colors had such importance and structural force as in the painting of Emygdio de Barros” (p. 99). Yet he ultimately represses the conditions determining the patient’s use and choice of color to a footnote: “At the end of the 1960s, at times, Emygdio de Barros uses only a few pigments (yellow, black, red) due to a lack of artistic material in the painting workshop at Engenho de Dentro” (p. 98, note 3). In this way, the structure of Naves’s text reveals a tension between formalist criticism (in the body of the text) and an account of the psychiatric context (in the footnotes). In so doing, he reveals the uneasy relation these works have to the history of art and artistic subjectivity as well as his conception of art’s autonomy. See his “Emygdio de Barros: O sol por testemunha,” in *Raphael e Emygdio: Dois Modernos No Engenho de Dentro* (São Paulo: Instituto Moreira Salles, 2012), esp. pp. 97–99. In the case of Naves, he reads the works as modernist, thereby also shoring up his position as a modernist critic and by extension the historiography of modernist art in Brazil. Such a stance, I argue, contrasts with the present emergence of patients’ work on the contemporary global circuit, as in the recent Venice Biennial; here, as Benjamin Buchloh explains, patients’ work served “to revitalize a myth of universally accessible creativity.” See Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, “The Entropic Encyclopedia,” in *Artforum* 52, no. 1 (September 2013), p. 312.

In the work of modern European artists from the Surrealists to Jean Dubuffet, the “art of the insane” was posited as radically other and marked by externality, while at times used to refresh and expand the formal vocabulary of modernist art. As a result, these forms of psychic expression were mined as a formal device and as a way to disrupt the official spaces of culture, hence Dubuffet’s sustained opposition between what he called *art brut* and the *culturel* in the post-war years.²³ In the case of MAM-SP’s discursive policing of the inside and outside, the catalogue’s opening statement bracketed the clinical reading of the work in order to proclaim it as a triumph for modern and abstract art and its institutions. In this context, it is important to note that European collections of patients’ work, such as the notable Prinzhorn collection, would not be shown in art museums in Europe until the mid-1960s, whereas in Brazil the patients’ artistic production was not only crucial to the discourse of modernist abstraction and its institutionalization but was also regularly exhibited in the very space of the modernist museum. In fact, *9 Artists* was followed at MAM-SP by the *Exhibition of Alienated Artists* (*Exposição de Artistas Alienados*) in 1951, exhibiting patients’ work from the Juquery hospital in São Paulo.

The controversy surrounding the work of Silveira’s patients began with the first exhibitions in Rio in 1947, with critics both supporting and criticizing an understanding of such creative production as art. But the debate between Quirino Campofiorito, an art critic, painter, and professor, and Pedrosa intensified on account of the exhibition at MAM-SP, that is, as a result of the works’ presentation in a museum of modern art.²⁴ In his reviews Campofiorito repeatedly focused on the works’ scientific dimension as well as the rationality that he claimed differentiates artistic subjectivity. After all, he explained, the artist has an obligation to be a “dignified professional” engaged with his *métier*.²⁵ He also suggested that the exhibition constituted a mere pretext for endorsing abstract art. In this way, as sociologist Glaucia Villas Bôas has also noted, he positioned the works’ reception within the larger battle between figuration and abstraction that structured art criticism and production at this time.²⁶

With his article “Schizophrenia and Art” (“Esquizofrenia e arte”) published in *O Jornal* on December 14, 1949, Campofiorito finally broached the issue of the

Additional critical work is needed in order to assess how the categories of outsider art, which include the work of psychiatric patients and self-taught artists, are used to frame the production of contemporary art in a global context. The uncritical return of these categories abandons contextualized histories of both modernism and the contemporary, but also fails to account for changes in psychiatric practice. These initial observations emerged from a conversation with Sophie Cras and Rachel Silveri, December 19, 2013, Paris.

23. See the discussion in Hal Foster, “Blinded Insights,” chapter 5 in *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2004), pp. 192–223.

24. In addition to Pedrosa and Campofiorito, other critics wrote about and engaged the patients’ work, including Rubem Navarra, Antonio Bento, Flavio de Aquino, Jorge de Lima, Quirino da Silva, and Sérgio Milliet. See Glaucia Villas Bôas, “A estética da conversão,” pp. 197–219.

25. Quirino Campofiorito, “Arte e ciência,” *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), December 11, 1949.

26. See *Abstracionismo Geométrico e Informal*.

works' aesthetic quality. Writing with respect to how such work was being harnessed toward a justification of modern abstract art, he maintained, "If some healthy artists produce things that look like those [patients'] works, it is necessary to consider that in this fact resides their *debilidade* [weakness]." ²⁷ Campofiorito shifts the terms of his position away from a consideration of the works' clinical origins, and thus the discursive conditions and differences between the ends of psychiatry and the ends of art, and in a perverse dialectical twist also relegates modernist abstraction to the realm of *debilidade*. Here "debilidade" suggests not only weakness but also intellectual disability (or what was formerly known as mental retardation). For Campofiorito it was a question not only of whether the patients' work was art. At issue was also whether modernist abstraction, from Kandinsky to Klee, was the product of "mediocre" artistic demonstrations with what he designated as a "schizophrenic covering" (*vestimento esquizofrênico*). ²⁸

Such a view of modern art hews closely to Fascist assessments of such work, as made public in the Nazi-mounted exhibition *Degenerate Art* in 1937. The Nazi exhibition's didactic slogans included, among others, "Madness becomes method" and "Nature as seen by a sick mind." Even though Campofiorito would always praise the therapeutic work of psychiatrists such as Silveira, there remains a troubling reversibility that haunts his discourse: If the patients' art is seen as modernist in appearance, then the art of modernists could be considered as pathological in origin. ²⁹ Indeed, the specter of Fascism and what it might mean in the context of Brazil's democratic Second Republic would not have been lost on Pedrosa.

In the case of Silveira and what was at stake for her as a psychiatrist, in the catalogue to the MAM-SP exhibition she explains, "There might be artists and nonartists among the mentally ill." At issue was not whether such work constituted art or whether her patients might qualify as artists, for, as she continues:

Individuals affected in this way become unfit for our kind of social life and for this are segregated. Before seeking to understand them, it is concluded that they have blunted affectivity and their intelligence is in ruins. They would thus very well inhabit the building-prisons called hospitals, given shelter and food. In the best of these institutions one sees beds lined with very white mattresses and hallways of the shiniest floors. But what if you discover how the long hours of the days pass for the inhabitants, for months and years on end? Come and see them wandering in the walled-in courtyard, such ghosts. . . . This situation is due from having arbitrarily admitted that our mentally ill have extinguished all human needs other than sleeping, eating, and at most working in rudimentary jobs. However, only the powers of inertia favor a conformist acceptance of this state of things. ³⁰

27. Quirino Campofiorito, "Esquizofrenia e arte," *O Jornal* (Rio de Janeiro), December 14, 1949.

28. Ibid.

29. This insight is indebted to Hal Foster's work on European modernists' engagement with the Prinzhorn collection. See Foster, *Prosthetic Gods*, esp. p. 196.

30. Nise de Silveira, in *9 Artistas de Engenho de Dentro do Rio de Janeiro*, n.p.

Her preface ends as follows:

The current exhibition could be a message of appeal in this regard, addressed to everyone who came here and intimately participated in the enchantment of forms and colors created by human beings enclosed in the sad places that are the hospitals for the mentally ill.³¹

Silveira's text was a plea to the public that offered a critique of psychiatric practice and the material conditions present in psychiatric institutions. Hers was a challenge to "civilized" society, one that also informed Pedrosa's writing on art, uniting her ethical stance to a specific mode of aesthetic reception.

Pedrosa's thesis, "On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art," begins as follows: "The problem of apprehension of the object by the senses is the number one problem of human knowledge."³² For Pedrosa to approach this problem was to approach the work of art. How is a work of art perceived, and, crucially, 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.³³ He describes various Gestalt principles, including figure-ground articulation, the closure principle, the subordination of parts to whole, as well as Max Wertheimer's well-known discussion of "good form," in which the privileged forms of the perceptual field are identified as regular, simple, and symmetrical. For Gestalt psychology the process of perceptual organization must be considered spontaneous, and other components of the perceptual field, including color and luminosity, form and space, are treated as independent from but also subsumed within the psychologist's focus on emerging organizational patterns that are considered prior to knowledge formation and pragmatic meanings. For Pedrosa, Gestalt theory, beyond its emphasis on "good form," also guarantees the *relational* aspect of perception. He affirms, following the inaugural work of Kurt Koffka in the psychology of art, that "the emotional response is not just any contingent or automatic response; it is an intelligent result of the properties of the object."³⁴

31. Ibid.

32. Pedrosa, "On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art," p. 12.

33. As stated above, Pedrosa was first introduced to Gestalt theories while studying philosophy in Berlin in the late 1920s. Twenty years later, he would return to the subject after reading an interview with the young non-figurative painter Atlan, in which the artist describes the affective-physiognomic character of his paintings. Subsequently, Pedrosa decided to compete for a chairmanship in art history at the National School of Architecture. See the introduction by Arantes in *Arte, forma e personalidade: 3 estudos*, p. 2.

34. Pedrosa, "On the Affective Nature of Form in the Work of Art," p. 61. Pedrosa follows Koffka's formulation quite closely. Koffka wrote, "In such a view the emotional reaction is an intelligible, not a purely contingent, result of the properties of the object." Indeed, in this first study Pedrosa relies heavily on Koffka's work in order to account for aesthetic response. See Kurt Koffka, "Problems in the Psychology of Art," in *Art: A Bryn Mawr Symposium* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Bryn Mawr College, 1940), p. 208.

Between the years 1949 and 1952, in addition to his study of the psychology of form, Pedrosa engaged extensively with and repeatedly reviewed the art of psychiatric patients, or what he called *arte virgem*. The patients' work increasingly inflected his writing on aesthetic reception as well as his understanding of Gestalt. By the time of his 1951 work "Form and Personality," Pedrosa's primary references had shifted away from the principal Gestalt psychologists and toward the work of developmental psychologist Heinz Werner, as well as art historian and psychiatrist Hans Prinzhorn. As a result, the principles of Gestalt partially recede behind Pedrosa's engagement with the nuances of what Werner designated as physiognomic perception. Pedrosa affirms: "The artistic phenomenon consists, basically, in seeing everything physiognomically, as if it were a set of planes and lines animated with expression, that is, a face, a whole."³⁵

Like the Gestalt psychologists, Werner was interested in the active and organizing role of the subject in perception and formulated the concept of "physiognomic perception" in 1925 as a way of approaching a modality of perception attuned to an object's expressive qualities.³⁶ It is important to emphasize that Werner's study *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (1926) is similarly directed to the study of perception and an analysis neither of behavior nor of feelings and empathetic projections as in the psychological studies of prior decades. Yet unlike the Gestalt psychologists who often assumed a neutral subject of perception, Werner turns his attention to differences in perception through his accounts of children, the so-called primitive, and the mentally ill (I return to this subject below).³⁷ With regard to physiognomic perception, Werner explains: "All of us, at some time or other, have had this experience. A landscape, for instance, may be seen suddenly in immediacy as expressing a certain mood—it may be gay or melancholy or pensive. This mode of perception differs radically from the more everyday perception in which things are known according to their 'geometrical-technical,' matter-of-fact qualities."³⁸ Explaining why he designates this type of perception as physiognomic, Werner continues: "In our own sphere there is one field where objects are commonly perceived as directly expressing an inner life. This is in our perception of the faces and bodily movements of human beings. . . . Because the human physiognomy can be adequately perceived only in terms of its immediate expression, I have proposed the term *physiognomic perception* for this mode of cognition."³⁹

Physiognomy, or the discernment of the inner qualities of a person's character based on their outer appearance, has a long history that extends to ancient Greek

35. Pedrosa, "Form and Personality," p. 96.

36. See chapter 1, Ulrich Mueller, "The Context of the Formation of Heinz Werner's Ideas," in *Heinz Werner and Developmental Science*, ed. Jaan Valsiner (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, 2005), pp. 25–53, esp. pp. 45–50.

37. See the discussion in *ibid.*

38. Heinz Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development* (1926; New York: International Universities Press, 1980), p. 69.

39. *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

philosophy and returns intermittently across the centuries, reappearing again with increased popularity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries largely on account of the Swiss poet and physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater, who was briefly a friend of Goethe's. In the realm of art, we find a notable example of eighteenth-century physiognomic studies in the group of sixty-nine sculptural heads produced by the German sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt (1770–83). *The Vexed Man*, for example, is emblematic of Messerschmidt's obsession with expression, the face, and the communication of various psychic states. Messerschmidt also allegedly suffered from psychotic illness when making these works. Consequently, as artwork made by mental-health patients became increasingly the object of aesthetic scrutiny in the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, art historian and psychoanalyst Ernst Kris featured these character-heads in one of the first studies to apply psychoanalytic principles to interpret works of art.⁴⁰ Messerschmidt's work thus displays the Enlightenment obsession with expression and physiognomy and proffers an aesthetic production central to the origins of psychoanalytic interpretations of art. Subsequently in the nineteenth century within the regime of medical science there emerged the use of photography to create physiognomic portraits of the mentally ill. Such photographs problematically suggested that madness could be seen and classified based on faces and bodily gestures.⁴¹

In the 1920s and '30s, when Werner was developing his conception of physiognomic perception, his objective was less a pseudo-scientific interpretation of faces than an attempt to account for a type of perception responsive to the expressivity of form. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in a move similar to that of modernist artists in Europe, Werner aligns physiognomic perception with the child, the "primitive," the schizophrenic, and the artist on the one hand; on the other hand, he aligns what he calls geometric-technical perception with the adult, the engineer, and modern civilization. His study features various visual images, including children's drawings and drawings by schizophrenics as well as the visual graphs characteristic of scientific experimentation and discourse. With regard to a drawing by a seven-year-old boy, Werner analyzes how the child's line shows the activity of walking not through geometric precision or the exact placement of limbs, but through two kinds of lines that represent two kinds of legs: "walking legs" and "running legs."⁴² Moreover, in the course of the study he refers to various experimental situations in which, for example, a shape is perceived as cruel or a line is perceived as happy or sad.⁴³

Such tertiary properties of object perception—that an object of perception is perceived in its dynamism as gay, melancholic, or pensive, rather than through

40. See the discussion in John M. MacGregor, *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 252–61. This volume provides an excellent overview of the emergence of the "art of the insane" as an object of study.

41. For a discussion of the emergence of the physiognomic analysis of the signs of madness, see Alexa Wright's *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), esp. pp. 71–78; and Sharrona Pearl, *About Faces: Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

42. Werner, *Comparative Psychology of Mental Development*, p. 77.

43. *Ibid.*, esp. pp. 71–73.

primary and secondary properties such as form and color—are central to the analysis of physiognomic perception, which, Werner also claimed, developmentally preceded a logical-intellectual grasp of the world. It follows that for Werner, children, primitives, and schizophrenics exist in greater dynamic relation with their worlds. When reporting on physiognomic perception under pathological conditions, Werner notes:

For example, a paranoiac schizophrenic says, looking fearfully at some doors that swing back and forth: “The door is devouring me!” Affect, it will be seen, has once more become a factor in the configuration of the surrounding world. . . . And this occurs not in the sense that the world of things becomes invested with an especially strong overtone of emotion, but rather in the sense that affect actually forms the world itself. The doors and their movements in the case just cited are experienced directly related to physiognomy. The peculiar blurring, the gradually increasing “queerness” (*Verseltsamung*) of everything, the sense of abnormal focus and orientation . . . are partly grounded in the changed appearance of objects as the physiognomic and dynamic stand forth boldly. The properties of things cease to be entirely objective, geometric, and “out there.”⁴⁴

Werner later maintains that the “schizophrenic world of perception is characterized by a marked participation of subjective factors in the process of [perceptual] configuration.”⁴⁵

Werner plainly understood that any study of physiognomic perception presented a methodological quandary within a normative Gestaltist-holistic framework. By way of example, Werner speaks again of the human face. He explains how if the eyes are looked at in isolation they lose their specific expressive character, whereby “the ensouled center of the face has . . . become a [mere] physical part of the body.”⁴⁶ It follows that Gestalt principles such as the dissociation of figure and ground are ultimately insufficient to capture the specific dynamism of an object’s physiognomic character, just as the affective range of tertiary qualities (e.g., a shape can be cruel or maybe sweet, a line can be happy or sad, agitated or calm) exceeds the prescriptive dictates of good form.

More importantly in the context of this essay, because Gestalt psychologists such as Koffka did not allow for subjects’ nonrational perceptual experiences in their description of art (such as the paranoiac-schizophrenic account detailed above), it was by turning to Werner that Pedrosa found a way to incorporate the patients’ creative production within his contribution to the psychology of art. In so doing he delved deeper into a discussion of the work of art’s physiognomic charac-

44. Ibid., p. 81.

45. Ibid., pp. 414–15.

46. Werner as cited in Mueller, “The Context of the Formation of Heinz Werner’s Ideas,” p. 47.

ter and expressive power, thereby negotiating the rift between the formal or structural gestalt and the physiognomic gestalt and thus a methodological difference between what it means to focus on the internal coherence of organizing patterns versus expressive forms. Yet what always remained key for Pedrosa's comprehension of aesthetic response was the notion that physiognomic expression was located in the formal properties of the work of art (not a priori in a subject).⁴⁷

Another limitation of the studies of the formal or structural gestalt is that they do not deal with color.⁴⁸ I had anticipated that color and its capacity to unsettle the perception of gestalt patterns would play a crucial role in Pedrosa's critical reviews of the art of psychiatric patients. What I discovered was that with his shift to the physiognomic character of the work of art, Pedrosa calls upon color for its expressivity without naming its effects or potential symbolism. Thus, for example, in a review of Emydio de Barros's work,



*Emydio de Barros. Window. 1948.
Courtesy of Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente.*

he writes: "It really has to do with a real painter, one of the best that has emerged in Brazil."⁴⁹ He continues, "In *Window* [*Janela*] (guache) the chromatic play already appears more a function of the [structural] relation between colors on the canvas than the chance of unconscious symbols."⁵⁰ Here Pedrosa addresses the undeniable

47. With regard to aesthetic response, as discussed in note 34, Pedrosa's thinking is deeply informed by Kurt Koffka's "Problems in the Psychology of Art," in which the author describes tertiary qualities and physiognomic characters, stating, "The artist constantly creates physiognomic characters" (p. 220; see also the discussion pp. 211–12). Indeed, Koffka's text is telling since it negotiates physiognomic expression with the normative gestalt properties he attributes to works of art. Yet Koffka does not extend his discussion to works produced by "nonnormative" subjects. Consequently, Werner's study proves crucial for the development of Pedrosa's thinking in relation to psychiatric patients' creative production.

48. Wolfgang Köhler's study *Gestalt Psychology* is largely blind to color. For Köhler, when color is introduced, it is in absentia: He references color-blindness or daltonic vision in order to corroborate his theory regarding the predominance of sensory patterns in the organization of a phenomenal field. Köhler explains: "Color-blind people are, on the whole, quite capable of dealing with their environment, although their visual experience has fewer hues than that of other people." Köhler, *Gestalt Psychology*, p. 163. Given the secondary status of color within Gestalt theory, one color historian responded: "Among the prevailing schools of psychological thought that place color in a corner is Gestalt theory." Charles A. Riley II, "Color in Psychology," chapter 6 in *Color Codes: Modern Theories of Color in Philosophy, Painting and Architecture, Literature, Music, and Psychology* (Hanover, Conn.: University Press of New England, 1995), p. 299.

49. Mário Pedrosa, "Os Artistas de Engenho de Dentro—Emídio," *Correio da manhã* (Rio de Janeiro), January 10, 1950; reproduced in *Raphael e Emydio: Dois modernos no Engenho de Dentro*, p. 183.

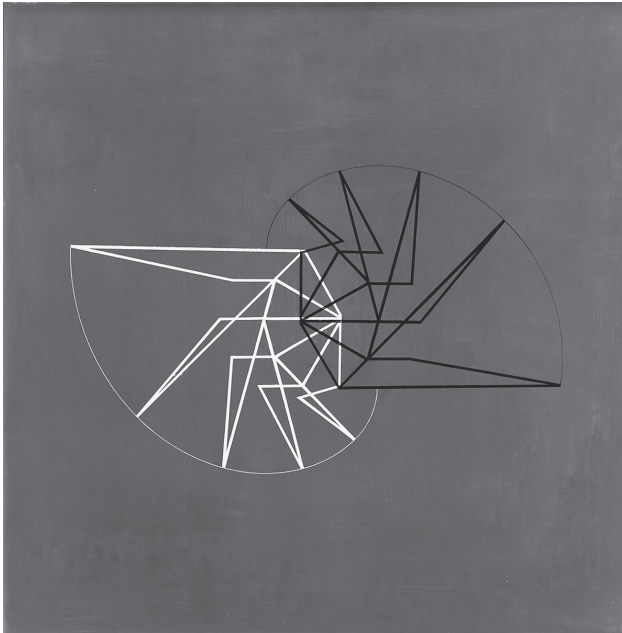
50. Ibid.

variety of de Barros's color. But since he is committed to the expressivity of aesthetic form independent of clinical classification, he holds the metaphoricity of color at bay. In so doing, he also avoids introducing modernist color theories such as those of Kandinsky, who wrote in reference to madness and color: "When compared with the frame of mind of some individual, [yellow] would be capable of the color representation of madness—not melancholy or hypochondriacal mania but rather an attack of violent, raving lunacy."⁵¹ Rather than assign a color or color perception to madness, Pedrosa summons color as part of the dynamic relationality of physiognomic expression. His study of physiognomic perception provided a way to introduce expressivity, rather than rationality, within his Gestaltist orientation.

In the context of midcentury modernism in Brazil, it perhaps comes as little surprise that Gestalt theories have been primarily aligned with the purported rationality of Concrete art and works of art exhibiting a Constructivist and at times mathematical logic. 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.⁵² Take, for example, Waldemar Cordeiro's *Visible Idea* (*Idéia visível*, 1956), which is painted with acrylic on Masonite. In the work, Cordeiro depicts two arrangements of spiraling lines, one white and one black, on a red background. The two sets are

51. Wassily Kandinsky, *On the Spiritual in Art* (1911; New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1946), p. 64.

52. Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: Vértice e ruptura do projeto construtivo brasileiro*, 2nd edition (1985; São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 1999), p. 41.



Waldemar Cordeiro. *Visible Idea*. 1956.
Courtesy of Colección
Patricia Phelps de Cisneros.

identical but for the 180-degree rotation that sets them apart. The work suggests a dynamic symmetry based on a logarithmic spiral, just as it points to the artist's interest in the pure viscosity of mathematical ideas. Cordeiro was a member of Grupo Ruptura in São Paulo, which made their commitment to a rationalist abstraction known through their 1952 Ruptura Manifesto, which, in its polemic against naturalism, also criticized "the 'erroneous' naturalism of children, of the mad, the 'primitives' among the expressionists, of the surrealists, etc."⁵³

Pedrosa's grappling with the art of psychiatric patients and what I will call the physiognomic turn in his understanding of Gestalt began to articulate the contours of a discursive field in which abstract geometry could be perceived as expressive rather than rational or purely visual. This is not to say that Pedrosa prescribed how geometric abstraction should be produced but that his ideas formed part of a broader conversation with artists and critics in the 1950s in Brazil, especially in Rio. Indeed, Pedrosa's understanding of physiognomic perception and expression provided fertile ground for the subsequent reception of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology, whose work was also informed by Werner's studies.⁵⁴ Such a conjunction of concerns between the physiognomic and the phenomenological suggests less a rupture between Concrete art in Rio and the subsequent Neo-concrete movement than a critical elaboration and intensification of the physiognomic gestalt's intangible expressivity taken to the realm of the spectator's actual corporeal participation. In the course of the decade we witness how various artists jettisoned the inner coherence and formal autonomy of art, while in their work they maintained a subjective investment in geometric forms' expressivity, as in Lygia Clark's famous *Animals/Creatures* (*Bichos*), an example that I return to below.⁵⁵ In short, the difference in theory responds to differences that can be tracked in practice, which in part depend on the divergence between the formal gestalt and the physiognomic one.⁵⁶

53. Reproduced in *Abstracionismo geométrico e informal*, p. 219.

54. Ulrich Mueller explains, "With the concept of physiognomic perception, Werner arrives at a primordial way of being in the world. Werner's idea that the initial and fundamental apprehension of the world is not logical-rational but expressive influenced Cassirer's (1957) philosophy of symbolic forms as well as Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology of perception. As Werner (1932) points out, a serious shortcoming of psychology is that it has mostly studied logical-analytical thought and forms of cognition in which objects are unambiguous and precisely determined." See Mueller, "The Context of the Formation of Heinz Werner's Ideas," p. 49.

55. As Sérgio B. Martins argues, Neo-concrete theorist and poet Ferreira Gullar's rejection of Gestalt was not wholesale. More specifically, he analyzes Gullar's updating of Pedrosa's interest in Gestalt theory through their shared "defense of the autonomy of artistic experience against heteronomous determination." See Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde*, p. 35.

56. Here, it is also possible to affirm that the emphasis on creative process that avant-garde artists observed in the patients' painting studio further helps to account for the opening onto artistic process and participation that came to characterize Neo-concrete work.

The displacement of the formal (or structural) gestalt in favor of the physiognomic gestalt that Pedrosa's work engaged on account of Silveira's patients is not just a difference of degree; it is a difference of kind. Where the formal gestalt focuses on perception's organizational patterns, physiognomic perception hinges on an understanding of perception attuned to expression. As Werner writes, "The most primordial objects of awareness . . . are not thinglike but facelike."⁵⁷ Pedrosa echoes this assessment: "[Art] is endowed precisely with the physiognomic power that we grasp so well . . . that the child understands in a face."⁵⁸ More specifically, he also extends his observations to geometric abstraction when he writes, "Not all physiognomic qualities reside in a face. They are also characteristic of the geometric figure, of a painting."⁵⁹

My account of physiognomic perception is not meant to displace the way in which Pedrosa, when dealing with the art of psychiatric patients, continually upholds the work's "pure formal unity," thereby holding the context of production (i.e., the psychiatric hospital) as well as the patients' subjectivity at bay.⁶⁰ After all, when he discusses the patients' work he concludes, following Hans Prinzhorn: "Difficult . . . to distinguish sane and insane of spirit when *only* contemplating the works."⁶¹ Nevertheless, we should also note that what was at stake for Pedrosa was the difference between the emerging fields of the psychology of art and psychopathology of art, the specificity of aesthetic response versus that of clinical classification.⁶² In maintaining this discursive difference, however, Pedrosa goes further.

Published three years before Michel Foucault's first work on madness, *Mental Illness and Personality* (1954), Pedrosa's "Form and Personality" offers a prescient account of the historicity of madness in a section titled "Inspiração e loucura no passado" (Inspiration and madness in the past).⁶³ He narrates the ways in which

57. Heinz Werner, as cited in William H. Rosar, "Film Music and Heinz Werner's Theory of Physiognomic Perception," *Psychomusicology* (Spring/Fall 1994), p. 157.

58. Pedrosa, "Form and Personality," p. 64.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 106. My emphasis.

62. At the time Pedrosa was writing, he turned to the psychology of art and its emphasis on form in part to argue against psychoanalytic interpretations of works of art as well as psychopathological approaches to patients' work, as later consolidated in Robert Volmat's *L'art psychopathologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1956). What is more, Pedrosa's "Form and Personality" begins by discussing a lecture by Roger Fry and ultimately inveighs against psychoanalytic and psychiatric interpretations of art: "These analyses are, without a doubt, of great value and interest, but from an exclusively clinical point of view. . . . [T]he psychiatrist is not broaching the problem of creation nor exploring the inner soul of the field of aesthetics. He is not offering any qualitative judgment on the work of art. He is simply in the admirable exercise of his clinic." Pedrosa, "Form and Personality," p. 86.

63. Gustavo Henrique Dionísio also remarks on this remarkable proto-Foucauldian section in his *O Antídoto do Mal: Crítica de arte e loucura na modernidade brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Fiocruz, 2012), p. 99.

different cultures have treated mental illness: from indigenous societies who considered epilepsy a revelation of “superior being” to the view prevalent during the Middle Ages that such manifestations were a “pact with the devil.”⁶⁴ Pedrosa writes, “Primitive man and, partially, ancient and medieval man did not distinguish between normal and abnormal, between standardized and nonstandardized behaviors [in ways] that conform to our present habits.”⁶⁵ What is more, by strategically focusing on the paintings exhibited in *9 Artists* at MAM-SP, Pedrosa makes an appeal to rethink contemporary forms of recognition and visibility in order to question the self-evidence with which modern society accepts established definitions of what is sane and insane: “What reaction does the public have in the face of these same manifestations considered in the past as highly inspired or with dignity?”⁶⁶ His admonishing response: “The vilest possible [reaction], the most prejudiced and malevolent. . . . [We] isolate them, crush them with a straitjacket and confinement; moral, spiritual and physical destruction; it is the realm of bourgeois rationalist utilitarianism in one of its most base and vulgar expressions.”⁶⁷

In the context of “Form and Personality”’s largely Gestalt orientation and the repeated invocations of the work of art as a “complete whole,” Pedrosa’s excursus on the history of madness constitutes a methodological interruption that compellingly challenges the contemporary conditions in which madness is accorded the status of mental illness and denounces the violence of its treatment. For some contemporary writers such as Otilia Beatriz Fiori Arantes, “Mário Pedrosa never ignored the differences between ‘*arte virgem*’ and cultured art.”⁶⁸ On the other hand, Gustavo Henrique Dionisio suggests how Silveira and Pedrosa tacitly accepted that “the patients’ creations are real works of art.”⁶⁹ For my purposes, however, whether Pedrosa collapsed or upheld the difference between the art of psychiatric patients and modern art is secondary to the fact that his support of the patients’ work was intimately tied to his critique of rationality and the methods of the modern psychiatric institution (a critique that can be fully understood only in relation to Silveira’s pioneering work). In accounting for madness’s historicity, he also goes beyond the evolutionary logic that subtends Werner’s comparative study with its developmental account of the child, the primitive, and the schizophrenic. Hence the productive tension at the heart of Pedrosa’s critical project: He insisted on the autonomy of form through an attention to the work of art’s physiognomic power and simultaneously critiqued bourgeois rationality for its exclusion of the mentally ill.

64. Pedrosa, “Form and Personality,” p. 103.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

67. *Ibid.*

68. Arantes, *Mário Pedrosa: Itinerário crítico*, p. 54.

69. Dionisio, *O Antídoto do Mal*, p. 14.

Consequently, rather than frame the “insane” as the outside to modern art or as within a model of transgression (as in the contemporary case of Jean Dubuffet), Pedrosa includes the patients’ work as part of the universal model of aesthetic reception he upholds. Within these terms, Pedrosa’s project to promote a modern-day perception in harmony with the expression of form is at once an aesthetic and ethical position.⁷⁰ His challenge was not only to the conventions of art but also to the norms that define who is and who is not a subject, who is considered sane and insane. Indeed, Pedrosa’s position and the particular constellation it entails—art and psychology; an aesthetics but also an ethics of reception—present a conjunction of concerns that, to be sure, reverberated in artistic practices in Rio in the decades to follow.

By way of conclusion, let us recall Pedrosa’s statement with regard to physiognomic perception and the mentally ill: “They see everything simultaneously from inside and from outside.” The phrase also evokes the spatial topography of the Möbius strip. If the latter was celebrated as a rational structure in the work of Max Bill, Pedrosa’s statement invokes the expressive interlacing of inside and outside that subsequently takes aesthetic form in the work of Lygia Clark. One of her Animals, *The Inside Is the Outside* (*O dentro é o fora*, 1963), for example, is cut from a single sheet of stainless steel. The curvilinear form and malleable metal emphasize a dynamic topology: When manipulating the work, the viewer, now a participant, experiences the relay and reversibility between inside and outside. Clark writes with regard to the actual experience of the work: “It changes me . . . ‘Inside and outside’: a living being open to all possible transformations. Its internal space is an *affective* space.”⁷¹ As is now well known, Clark increasingly investigated the emancipatory power of sensory experience outside of codified language in her *Sensory Objects* (*Objetos sensoriais*, 1966–68) and *Sensorial Masks* (*Máscaras sensoriais*, 1967). She developed her artistic practice by moving from the act to the body, from the body to the relation between bodies, and finally by engaging with subjectivity itself with the development of her *Structuration of the Self* (*Estruturação do self*) sessions and use of what she called *Relational Objects* (*Objetos relacionais*), which she placed on the bodies of her clients.

70. Psychoanalyst Tânia Rivera offers a different reading of Pedrosa’s ethics via the interpretive framework of Jacques Lacan. See her “Ethics, Psychoanalysis and Post-Modern Art in Brazil: Mário Pedrosa, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark,” *Third Text* 114 (January 2012), pp. 53–63. My account of Pedrosa’s reception of the patients’ work as well as his proto-Foucauldian stance challenges Caroline Jones’s claim that with the emergence of geometric abstraction in Brazil “enter[ed] the unmarked category of the normative.” See Caroline Jones, “Anthropophagy in São Paulo’s Cold War,” *ARTMargins* 2, no. 1 (2013), p. 35. See also Sérgio B. Martins’s incisive critique of Jones’s article in “Letter to the Editor,” *ARTMargins* [online], February 20, 2014, <http://www.artmargins.com/index.php/archive/731-letter-to-the-editor>.

71. Lygia Clark, “1965: About the Act,” *October* 69 (Summer 1994), p. 104. My emphasis.

Given the history of psychiatric patients' work in Rio as well as Brazilian modernism's entwinement with art therapy, Clark's work presents less an abandonment of art, as the title of the recent MoMA retrospective of her work implies, than a return to a moment when the link between art and psychiatry, art and therapy, formed part of official artistic and cultural production as well as critical debates.⁷² Clark's is thus a return as well as a dialectical reversal. If Pedrosa included work of psychiatric patients as part of a universal aesthetics of reception, in the 1970s—the moment of effervescence for anti-psychiatry movements—Clark revived the link between art and psychiatry, while therapeutic practice became the actual material of her art.

72. The exhibition *Lygia Clark: The Abandonment of Art* was presented at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, from May 10 to August 24, 2014.