Maiolino’s Trajectory: A Negotiation of Differences
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“I’m not an artist who makes a clean copy. I am a completely contaminated artist,”¹ says Anna Maria Maiolino. This contamination allows for dialogue between opposites, the negotiation of differences. It is the modus operandi of the main artistic stages of Brazil’s cultural life, of “Antropofagia,” Neoconcretism, New Brazilian Objectivity. Maiolino’s polyvalence appears in her paintings, engravings, drawings, sculptures, objects, books, performances, films, and installations. This text will concentrate on a few moments to illustrate the complexity of Maiolino’s trajectory, but also to situate her production in the historical process of Brazilian art and culture of the past four decades.

I

Upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro in April of 1960, Maiolino enrolled in 1962 in the “Atelier Livre,” or open studio, of the National School of Fine Arts [Escola Nacional de Belas Artes], which at the time was the center of the Brazilian woodcut art, overseen by the best engraver in the country’s history, the Expressionist master Oswaldo Goeldi, and by disciples like Adir Botelho, Maiolino’s teacher. It was also the Rio center of the New Brazilian Objectivity [“Nova Objetividadade Brasileira”] movement, which incorporated aspects of Neoconcretism, Pop Art, “Nouveau Réalisme,” and New Figuration [“Otra Figuracion”]. Also attending the school were artists like Rubens Gerchman (whom Maiolino would eventually marry), Antonio Dias, and Roberto Magalhães, each with his own graphic project: Gerchman’s work drew from the well of popular graphics, newspapers, and painted advertisements; Dias’ experimented with comic strips, architectural design, and visual programming; Magalhães’, which was also both graphically synthetic and narrative, remains among the most refined such work made in Brazil. As for Maiolino, she found affinity with the woodcut: “I have always had a vocation for the abyss.”²

¹ Conversation with the artist.
² Conversation with the artist
In the earliest of her landscapes and interior scenes, she combines white spaces with black figures whose contours indicate the open space of the matrix, the excavation of wood. The cut comes to be a significant gesture of Maiolino, a pronounced form of intervention, emphasizing the action of the artist. In the following decade, she opens more precise planes, tearing paper and creating a topology of crevices and cuts. In the nineties, she cuts clay with a razor. “The cut,” Maiolino says, “allowed me to stimulate my imaginary in the dialectic interrelation of one space to another, the occult.”

This dedication to cutting is very evident in Maiolino’s work in the xylographic tradition of the ‘folheto de cordel,’ a form of “popular printed narrative poetry” published in small booklets usually with a rugged expressive woodcut on the cover. In her ‘cordel’ work, Maiolino was joined by Antonio Henrique Amaral and Gilvan Samico, among others. Samico’s sophisticated engravings are heraldic and epic, and his images find a solemn elegance in their symmetry and economy of craftsmanship. Amaral exaggerated the rough character of his woodcuts to make brash images that criticize the military dictatorship. As for Maiolino, her woodcuts maintain a relationship to ‘cordel’ in their engraved wood, in the way they are stripped of expressionism, in their ingenuity of design, and in the way they comment on everyday facts. The primitive aesthetic of her work at this time, together with its division of space into panels and scenes even suggests a melding of ‘cordel’ and Pop, evoking comic books.

But while ‘cordel’ woodcuts provided the anthropological prototype and the graphic style for Maiolino’s work, they did not yet furnish the imaginary content for her articulation of political utopia. This only begins to happen in the last woodcut of this series, “Anna” (1967), which marks a break with the spatiality of her earlier woodblocks. The pairing of the figures of the father and mother, the repetition of the word “Anna,” the palindrome – all dissolve the piece into a play of visual echoes, a space of

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3 Conversation with the artist
5 Riva Castleman appears to recognize the unique quality of Samico’s work, placing one of his pieces among the 68 illustrations of her book “Prints from Blocks, Gauguin to Now” (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983), pl.46.
repercussion and diachronic time. In Anna’s grammar, there is a visual anagram. It is as “Anna” – her self-portrait and false mirror – that Maiolino questions the representation of herself in her own work and reclaims her presence as subject.

II

At her important 1967 exhibition at Rio’s Goeldi Gallery, Maiolino displayed a varied repertory of images of everyday banality, including “Jupiter, the Hairdresser” (1966); “The Baby” (1966); “Butcher” (1966); “Operation” (1966); “Ecce Homo” (1967); “Glu,Glu,Glu…”(1967), as well as “Anna.” Much of the work amounted to a meditation on the condition of women in patriarchal society, especially as seen in a domestic context. In the relief on wood “Waiting” (1967-2000), for example, a woman stands by a window – a real clothesline covered with real laundry, evidence of her labor, in front of her – looking for her homecoming husband. It is a weaving of spaces of desire and subjectivity: a combining of the house and the street, the domestic and the public. The quotidian scene of “Waiting” is organized like the stage of a marionette theater. “I believe that at a very sensory level, in this work, I am working with the inside and the outside of representation,” Maiolino says of “Waiting” and related works. “The window is a border space, dramatizing the empty and the full – the external is the possibility of a vacuum, and the interior of the house is fullness.”

In addition to the domestic focus, however, this exhibition also articulated Maiolino’s commitment to “viscerality” [visceralidade]. In the 60s Brazilian art milieu, the words “visceral” and “viscerality” were used by such contemporaries as Maiolino, Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Clark, Arthur Barrio, Anna Bella Geiger, Rubens Gerchman, Antonio Dias, and Antonio Henrique Amaral to indicate the body’s expressive intensity, as well as the organic production of meaning. Through viscerality, one sought to give an account of individuals from the perspective of their psychological experience as a way of encouraging political resistance and nonconformity. The measure of viscerality was the density or vehemence of the subjectivity of a work, rather than its drama or crudity. “It is the consciousness of

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6 Conversation with the artist.
things, where the organism has to act, to live,” Barrio has observed, “the brain must exceed itself, come out, burst.” Indeed, the visceral potential of such Maiolino pieces as the series “Holes” was one of the main characteristics that peers of hers, like Lygia Clark most admired.

In Maiolino works like “Glu Glu Glu…,” a good-humored representation of the human digestive apparatus, the viscerality seems almost Pop. Stomach and intestines are indicates by padded volumes akin to the early Claes Oldenburg as well as the Argentinean artist Jorge de la Vega, who made dissections with similar padding, wrinkled fabrics, and pieces of plastic. But “Glu Glu Glu ...” makes no claims about the human condition. Maiolino unlinks her representations of domestic life from any tragic notions: “I worked on the quotidian, on the narrative of feminine representation. I was obsessed with my role as a woman.”

Later that year, Maiolino showed “Glu Glu Glu …” in the New Brazilian Objectivity show organized by Hélio Oiticica at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro. In the catalogue, Oiticica affirmed that the New Objectivity was a “singular instance of Brazilian art at the time” of which he had found traces in the “two great currents of the day: Pop and Op, and also those linked to them, “Nouveau Réalisme” and Primary Structures (Hard Edge).” According to Oiticica, the New Objectivity accomplished several things: It allowed for a multiplicity that incorporated different tendencies and covered great distances; it negated the framework of the easel; it demanded the participation of the spectator and the taking of a position in relation to “political, social and ethical problems”; it encouraged the tendency toward collective art; and it acknowledge the resurgence of the “problem of anti-art.”

Some of these themes can be found in another Maiolino work of the same period, “Pssiu!…” (1967, also called “The Ear”), in which she transfers her viscerality onto the cloudy political horizon of the epoch, constructing a symbol of the climate of persecutory listening pervasive under the military dictatorship. In a certain way, “Pssiu!…” follows the same principle as the panopticon. In conveys the way in which everyone

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7 Conversation with the artist.
8 Conversation with the artist.
10 Conversation with the artist
feels policed in his or her daily civil life, just as the detained feel themselves watched in prison. In Maiolino’s Brazil, the control of the dictatorial order was efficiently transferred to individuals, who internalized that control through the mere diffusion of the news of its existence.

III

In 1968, Maiolino moved to New York with her husband, the artist Rubens Gerchman, who had received a grant that made the trip possible. “I arrived in the middle of 1968 and went back in April of 1971,” she says. “For me it was an eternity.” Indeed, the United States was the fourth country in which she found herself a foreigner. Nevertheless, she lived in close contact with Latin American artists, many of whom were experimenting with language art, including the Brazilians Hélio Oiticica and Amílcar de Castro, the Uruguayan Luís Camnitzer, and the Argentineans Liliana Porter and Luís Wells. New York had become a place of exile for such artists, but the United States was trying to rally some of its cultural triumphs – Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Minimalism – to confront European art, and by and large, the local scene remained refractory to the political, cultural, and economic absorption of Latin American art. Such art was denied cultural specificity and a meaningful history of its own, and as a consequence, artists like Maiolino were ghettoized.

But if New York was not ready to encounter Brazilian art, Maiolino was, and it was during this time that she had her second encounter with Neoconcretism, the Rio movement that aimed to rescue the subjective dimension of Concretist art (both through the participation of the viewer and through the artist’s relationship to the object). Thus it implied, in a redefinition of the artistic object, a concern with the symbolic character of form and the development of a phenomenology of perception relying on the ideas of Susanne Langer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Neoconcretism included Oiticica, Castro, Antonio Dias, Rubens Gerchman, Mira Schendel, Sérgio Camargo, and Cildo Meireles, among others. Maiolino also re-encountered Lygia Clark in this context, who was a guest for three weeks in her New York apartment. At first, however, despite these stimulations, Maiolino experienced a crisis, brought on by marital problems, material
difficulties, and culture shock, which was followed by her briefly stopping work. Eventually, however, she enrolled at the Pratt International Graphic Center, where she took up engraving, after conversations with Luís Camnitzer inspired her to begin again. This led to her series “Print Objects,” in which paper is subjected to etched lines and cuts, which result in the opening up of voids. The work is folded, graphic cohesiveness being achieved by thread, both drawn and real. The torn surfaces and cut spaces of these pieces expose invisible planes and define the presence of the full within the empty. During this time, Maiolino was working on “space through material questions,” a position similar to the one that Sarduy saw in the ‘Concetto spaziale’ – in the cuts and the holes – of Lucio Fontana.

The “will to construct” [vontade construtiva] evident in Maiolino’s work also allowed her to recall her Venezuelan period, when, as a young art student, she came to know the work of abstract-geometric artists like Alejandro Otero, Jesus Rafael Soto, Gego, and Carlos Cruz-Diez. Both her method of combining physical actions such as cutting, folding, and sewing paper, as well as her way of emphasizing the condition and life of the objects in the titles of works (e.g. “Print Objects”) show her affinities with Neoconcretism’s redefinition of the conceptual status of the artistic object. All of her actions are perceptible in her work. Sculpting for Maiolino at this time is a way of experimenting with the three-dimensional space that is latent in any plane once you bend it, whether the plane in question be a sheet of metal (Franz Weissman, Clark, and Castro) or a piece of paper. Her work thus makes reference to the Neoconcretist legacy of Amílcar de Castro’s extreme economy of cutting and folding the plate/plane, as well as the “Book of Creation” (1959-1960) by Lygia Pape and the spatial ratiocination of Lygia Clark, who believed that “to demolish the plane as the support of expression is to become conscious of unity as a living and organic whole.” Referring specifically to the spatiality of her “Print Objects,” Oiticica called her work “organic-visual.” Already Maiolino was seeking a different way of looking. She wanted to expand her agenda of phenomenological and semiological perception, and the process of

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11 Conversation with the artist.
constituting political meaning and affective topology, without neglecting precision of form.

IV

Some of the many challenges that Maiolino faced upon returning to Brazil were the sterility and the exhaustion of Concretist geometry, the relative inadequacy of Pop Art and conceptual art in regards to Brazilian cultural reality, the confrontation with the military dictatorship, the constant necessity to develop strategies for using her work as a political resistance, the New York encounter with the Brazilian artistic milieu. She responded by dedicating herself to drawing as a form of thought and action. Seen retrospectively, this moment marked the emergence of one of the most important artists in the area of drawing in Brazil, which was at the time also becoming particularly important to the world of drawing at large. The critic, Roberto Pontual, for one, has called attention to this fact, postulating as causes both the market and “the conceptual, mentalizing atmosphere, which solicited a form of immediate, economic and suggestive notation, of which drawing, the most ‘projectual’ of forms, could be master… These two impulses, isolated or in union, thus gave drawing a moment of particular brilliance in Brazilian art.”

At the beginning of the 70s Maiolino made isolated drawings like “Secret Poem” (1971), “To Veronica” (1971), and “Targed Shooting” (1973). She began to use Indian ink, diluted paint, paper, X-ray film, Styrofoam, string, sewing thread, Letra Set, cutouts, and fire in her drawings, most of which are framed in wooden boxes covered in glass. In her graphic semantics, “line” [linha] is both the abstract line of drawing and the real line of thread, just as a sign can be a comma or a dash. There comes to be a lot of tearing in her work, which may be seen as an action, and its generic physical result as a “hole,” regardless of the individual plastic contours it takes. Some are executed in both positive and negative form. In the “Drawing Objects” series, which includes “White Hole” (1974), “Black Hole” (1974), “Hole on the Side” (1974), “After the Center” (1975), “On

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the Horizon” (1975), “Loose Line”, “Spiral” (1975), “More Holes” (1975), and “Vacuum II” (1975), the works are structured by the superimposition of several sheets of paper, separated among themselves by Styrofoam, that form a kind of “block” in which Maiolino “sculpts” her drawings: She cuts, folds, tears, and opens up holes, working the three-dimensional space within these structures. The drawing are then mounted in frame-boxes, as in “Mental Maps.” “Loose Line,” for example, is structured by many layers of white paper, with a hole torn at the top with a black line running through the tears and again across the back. The line gives a sense of completeness to the pile of paper, while consolidating the hole as a place and not just as a modular form. The straight line at the bottom of the hole brings geometrical cohesion, stabilizing the gaze, introducing reason into the entropic space of the hole, which is torn without any formal plan except to destroy the surface. It is clear that there is a symbolic reference to the period of the dictatorship, as well as an invocation of Maiolino’s concept of viscerality.

In other “Drawing Objects,” where the drawing consists of a line traced across the paper and projected into a hole – or void – as a thread, Maiolino objectifies her idea of the void as an active and concrete place, with the discontinuity of space achieving a kind of unity in the thread, its moment of integration into the third dimension. For Maiolino, “it is the aggressive and spontaneous gesture of the tear that will uncover the mystery of the void – and will be quickly and regretfully sewn up.” The void is not nothing or absence, but a graphic substance and a place. As Mira Schendel puts it: “At any cost, what matters is the vacuum, the active vacuum... The vacuum is not a vicarious symbol of non-being.”

Maiolino’s “Drawing Objects” “Black Hole” (1974), like Plato’s cave, is a space if interrogation, where the artist uses shadows to derive a hypothesis of knowledge and a critique of the real. It is the focal point of the darkness in which the eye looses itself, as if among collapsed stars, from which neither light, matter, nor any other kind of signal can escape. (In the same period, Cildo Meireles’ work also reflects on astrophysical notions of the “black hole.”) The “Black Hole” is a space without any

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topographical dimension; its depths is its only dimension. There is an afflicted silence, which is to be distinguished from that of a work like “Aleph” (1982), which consists almost entirely of commas. The work’s cosmic sense is that of a vast and formless space.

“Black Hole” is subject to a double interpretation. On the one hand, its dense atmosphere recalls deep places in the individual’s topography, phenomenologically worked-out, pre-conscious terrains (once again, in the tradition, opened up by Neoconcretism). On the other hand, the grave political situation in Brazil under the dictatorship confers on these works the metaphorical sense of a dim place of struggle, a prison beneath a gravitational collapse. Maiolino gives the concrete “abstract” space a tragic character, holding up a mirror to the political moment in which the work was produced. Paralleling Maiolino’s practice, in the mid-70s Waltécio Caldas developed work in which the rhetoric of images gives way to a rigorous economic logic. Ronaldo Brito discusses this conceptual problem in “The Shape of Holes” (1979), comparing it to the ‘Concetto spaziale’ of Fontana and the aesthetic of the hole in Lacan. In Caldas’ work, the hole is an eye, sometimes occurring in pairs, as in “Holes” [Buracos] (1976) and “B-A” (1978). This correlation evokes the anatomy of the eye as a persistent anthropomorphic vestige, a notion of space as anatomy that is absent for Maiolino’s work. For Brito, Caldas’ holes are “empty interrogations” with political and conceptual overtones.

Works like “Black Hole” are also akin to certain of Meireles’ pieces, especially those that express his notions of the ghetto, such as “Tiradentes: Totem-Monument to a Political Prisoner,” which was presented in Belo Horizonte for the commemoration of the Week of the Conspiracy [Semana da Inconfidência] in 1970.¹⁷ Meireles set up a post in a public park with a thermometer tied to the top and ten live chickens tied to the bottom. He then doused the chickens in gasoline and set them on fire. As might be expected, Meireles’ performance of this terrifying gesture at an art opening created a sense of unease in the artistic scene. Meireles’ performance sought to give an essential voice to those who lived in the verbal vacuum produced by the tyranny, like vulnerable political prisoners, each in

isolation. The enormous power of this work implied an attitude based as much in ethics as in aesthetics.

Taking Brazilian art in a psychoanalytic direction, the economy of the hole in Maiolino’s work also evinces a notion of lack, what Lygia Clark, in “Structuration of the Self,” called a “manque.”\(^\text{18}\) It can be seen, for example, as both a symbolic space of censorship and death and as a space of hope and knowledge. In her work, there is no verbal language, no convention of signing, to mediate the process of confrontation with the real. The drawings of this period might be compared to “Monument to the Political Prisoner,” a project designed by the Swiss artist Max Bill for a competition in London in 1952, consisting of a cube traversed by a kind of tunnel that crossed from one side to another, as if in search of transparency and light. In contrast, Maiolino’s work is a cavern, in which meaning must be attributed to opacity and shadows.

V

In 1971, Maiolino began to create artist’s books: “Opposite Movements,” “Infinite,” and “Meeting Point,” all done in Indian ink on paper, and “E+U,” which was constructed out of Letra Set. In 1976, she edited five books with a total printing of a hundred copies, all made by hand, all containing tears and sewing: “Trajectory I,” “Trajectory II,” “Point to Point,” “Routes,” and “On the Line.” Her goal was to investigate the book as space, thereby positioning herself in a debate begun in the 1950s with the Concrete poetry of the brothers Augusto and Haroldo de Campus, Décio Pignatari, and others. In the “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” the first three writers affirmed that “Concrete poetry begins by investigating graphic space as a cultural agent,” announcing their commitment to dealing with “thing-words.”\(^\text{19}\) But in his Neoconcretist counter-manifesto a couple of years later, Ferreira Gullar criticized the notion of “object-words” and called the poem a temporal being: “The page in Concrete poetry is the

spatialization of verbal time: it is pause, silence, time.” Maiolino brings the “readers” of her books close to this experience.

With her books, Maiolino belongs to a Brazilian tradition that includes Pape, with her “Book of Creation” (1959-1960); Raymundo Collares, with his “Gibis”(1971); Mira Schendel with her “Notebooks” (1971); and Ivens Machado with his “Rolls” (1974). In their sequences of lines and accidental marks, Machado’s “Rolls” take the form of a Torah or a Japanese ‘emaki’. At the same time, they signal a disturbance in the very process of industrial production via ruled paper and notebooks. As for Pape, her “Book of Creation” is a space and a structure that produces and carries its own meaning. Its pages are framed in color, recalling the Josef Albers of “Homage to the Square” and Bruno Murnari’s experiments at the beginning of the 50s. In Pape’s work, color and geometry come together in the formulation of meanings: An open square on a yellow page permits light to pass through it, almost expressing the founding command, “Fiat lux!” A mesh net with 196 small square holes stands for agriculture on the page reading, “and man was gregarious and sowed the earth.”

Maiolino books, like “Meeting Point,” engage in a dialogue with Collares’ comic books in “Gibis,” which throw Mondrian into the dynamic of Concrete time. The planes of color begin to open, double back on themselves, interweave, and form larger planes. But Maiolino’s interest does not lie in making an inventory or a taxonomy of holes, something that could be organized into a logic of formlessness. What she wants is to construct a passage, not through space, but through time. In this sense, the book is a becoming of the void. In words that recall the “qualified space” described in the “Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry,” Maiolino describes her books as phenomenological spaces: “In an attempt to literally create emptiness, I cross over the torn places with sewn seams, drawing in the void … Here, as in the engravings, I work with space, looking for the ‘other space’ – the back side. In trying to articulate and make dynamic this space that is ‘one, and at the same time double’ – the inside and the outside – the void appears, along with the possibility of filling this void. The result is that, when you look at them, these “Drawing Objects” with torn surfaces, hollow spaces crossed by lines of sewing, are passages that point to the

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possibility of the existence of other, invisible planes. They suggest the existence of fullness in the empty space, which makes us aware that, in these works, space is being worked on through material questions.”

Maiolino makes no recourse to typographical, lexical, or even syntactical skills to make herself heard and to construct her books. Her process, because it is silent, affirms the reality of the book.

Like Mira Schendel’s “Notebooks” (1971) – books of transparencies engraved with a sign, letter, or word – Maiolino’s “Trajectory” (1975) and “E+U” (1971) are bodies offered up for reading. Each page of the “Notebooks” retains light in the translucency of its body, and, leafing through the book, the reader accumulates information, as the signs of previous pages show through. The page just passed invites us to see its reverse side, letting us read the word backwards. The time of the “Notebooks” is not a linear time. Similarly, Maiolino’s “Trajectory” and “E+U” deconstruct the linguistic time in which meaning develops out of reading. In “Trajectory,” the parts taken out of the book by the artist’s gouging are brought together by a thread, reintegrated into a necklace of remains. It is as if there were two books: the necklace of the full and the notebook of the empty. The thread is economy: It stands guard, assuring that the physical operations visited upon the paper, such as tears, dilacerations, cut-away pieces, and reordering, are made with care, and that nothing is lost or dispersed. This economy can extend the space of the book beyond the surface of its pages, because the fragments remain attached. The economic precision at work in these books impedes the entropy and accumulation implied by the capitalist model. There is neither physical loss nor profit. Economy is signaled in the book “E+U” by the addition sigh (+): The book’s violation is followed by its reconstruction through suture, as a kind of cure, a demonstration of the indestructibility of the book itself and of the subject.

“E+U” – the word ‘eu’ in Portuguese means ‘I’ in English – acts through syntactic dislocation: With no sentence to place itself in, the word – could it be the subject itself? – wanders through the book in search of meaning, in search of ‘my’ meaning. From the beginning, this book atomizes the word, leaving it isolated and stripped, as in Cummings. In

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“E+U”, the word ‘eu’ loses its linearity, loses and recuperates the motivation of the sign: After all, is “E+U” any specific subject? If the subject is Anna, she of the woodcut entitled “Anna,” has she substituted the proper noun for a pronoun? Is this “I” the critic, or is it every reader? Could this “I” be the book itself as subject, since it is in its body that the subject of the action declares itself, fragments itself, reiterates and composes itself? Here, Maiolino’s book distances itself from the “thing-word” of Concrete poetry – though it may preserve something of it – to become a “subject-word.”  

Such is the multivalence of this word-book: to be all subjects in their singularity. This multivalence brings Maiolino’s book closer to the “verbal non-object” of Neoconcretism, which Ferreira Gullar defines in his “Theory of the Non-Object” as an “antidictionary: the place where the isolated word irradiates it charge.” The book not only dissolves, but points to the imaginary unity of the human being. The child who, in a state of impotence and poor motor coordination (in “E+U,” is there not a state of poor linguistic coordination?) learns in the mirror (the book is the mirror) of his corporeal unity (in the book, we learn the unity of the subject). “E+U” is stammering of the subject, which permits a translinguistic operation of successive translations: ‘Eu’ goes into German as ‘Ich,’ and thereby, through Freud, returns to Portuguese as ‘ego.’ Beyond the mere epistemological space at issue, this makes Maiolino’s book a living energy of meaning.

VI

It was at the Expo-Projection [Expo-Projeção] 73 at the Grife gallery in São Paulo in 1973 that Maiolino showed her crucial “In-Out (Antropofagia)” (1973), which pointed to the emergence, in the early 70s, of a feminine triad consisting of Maiolino, Lygia Clark, and Lygia Pape – all of them on

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22 Augusto de Campus, op.cit.
23 Rio de Janeiro, ‘Jornal do Brasil,’ pamphlet made for the second Neoconcretist exhibition in Rio de Janeiro, November, 22, 1960. There, Gullar defined the non-object in the following terms: “The non-object is not an anti-object, but a special object in which we attempt to realize the synthesis of sensory and mental experiences: a body transparent to phenomenological knowledge, perceptible in its integrity, which gives itself to our perception without leaving anything in its wake.”
the margins of Brazil’s well known “marginal cinema” – working in “Antropofagia” [Anthropophagy]. “Antropofagia” was originally a cultural strategy or mode of constructing an autonomous artistic language in a society on the economic periphery through the absorption of any and all contributions to that culture. From “Antropofagia,” a latent process in Brazil since the seventeenth century, the poet Oswaldo de Andrade’s “Manifesto Antropofago” (1928) extracted and created a proposal articulating cannibalism as a symbolic practice. However, this manifesto is not a recipe. Language should be reinvented all the time by each individual artist, since the “Antropofago” mode searches for no aesthetic models, concepts, or images to follow. What Maiolino, Clark, Pape did was to dislocate “Antropofagia” from its role as a cultural strategy in order to consolidate social and psychological perspectives of cannibalism as a symbolic practice. Clark dislocated “Antropofagia” to the field of fantasmatic and came to be involved with psychoanalysis. In the early 70s, she taught at the Sorbonne, where she brought her artistic practice to life, working with young people “whose nostalgia for the body has prepared them … to reconstruct what I call the collective body, anthropophagic drool or cannibalism.”

In this period, Clark underwent psychoanalysis with Pierre Fédida, who in 1972 published “Le cannibal mélancholique” in the “Destines du cannibalisme” issue of the “Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse.” Of Clark’s conception of the body at this time, Suely Rolnik observes, “I discover that the body into which I have been thrown, and of which Lygia speaks so often, is not the organic body, not the image of the body, nor the envelope of a supposed imaginary interiority which would constitute the unity of my self. And, furthermore, it is exactly these bodies that have been falling apart in me, diluted in the mixture of salivas. The body that is lived in this experience is beyond all of these, although paradoxically it does include them: it is the body of tangled flux, the drool in which I undo and redo myself.”

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Meanwhile, Maiolino and Pape took cannibalism to the level of social metaphor. In Pape’s film “Eat Me, Gluttony or Lust” (1975), seduction and other games of desire are dislocated from the territory of affectivity to the politics of genre. With Pape, Fédida’s ‘melancholic cannibal’ no longer inhabits the space of desire, but rather that of the macho patriarchy and the role it assigns to women. In Maiolino’s “In-Out (Antropofagia)”, social cannibalism takes the form of tyrannical linguistic cannibalism, the historical opposite of the negotiation with difference that ‘Antropofagia’ proposes.

In “In-Out (Antropofagia),” Maiolino uses a still camera to film in close-up a mouth, first a man’s, then a woman’s. The film has no logical sequence. Each part is an isolated point. Initially, the mouth in “In-Out (Antropofagia)” is taped shut. There is censorship, silence, grunting. The film mixes asphyxia, aphasia, and trauma with the attempt to speak: It presents mute, inarticulate discourse. Close to the degree zero of language, Maiolino produces a confrontation with aggressiveness in order to introduce tenderness. Some words are stammered or vaguely overheard: “I,” “Anna.” Formless sounds organize themselves into an affirmation of the subject. It is an attempt to discover speech. There is a scene where speech is impossible because of an egg in the onscreen mouth. A piece of thread is swallowed. Though we see the mouths of both a man and a woman, nonetheless it is the woman who communicates with the world through the word, the egg, the thread that goes in and out. Here, human language has no exterior; it is an enclosed place. The impossibility of speech, or its constraint through censorship, struggles to produce a discourse with any movement of life, any fragment of a sign – color, food, vomit, smoke, heartbeats. Even so, Maiolino’s film differs from the representation of swallowing and abjection in “marginal cinema.” The scene of the mouth full of strings in “In-Out” points to the linguistic topology of Maiolino’s sewn drawings, but it also shares something with Clark’s “Anthropophagic Drool” [Baba Antropofágica]. The film’s climate of censorship and death, however, affirms the pulse of life that infiltrates political territory. This is a dramatic search for language that exacerbates the sensations she experienced upon viewing Clark’s “Baba Antropofágica.”

28 Conversation with the author.
the situation of speaking ‘sub censura’. Roland Barthes says that fascism is not the prohibition of speech, but the obligation to speak.\(^\text{29}\) Under a repressive regime, Maiolino’s work is an affirmation of speech: to make art implies also the re-vindication of the right of expression and its political existence. “In-Out (Antropofagia)” returns to the silence and emptiness of Maiolino’s drawings to emphasize the irreducibility of freedom and opinion. Decipher me or I will devour you.

The linguistic crisis “In-Out” is, again, clearly a reaction to the totalitarian regime established in Brazil in 1964, which among other atrocities, produced and index of forbidden words and subjects. Is also calls to mind the metaphor of cannibalism as the political “devouring” of the citizen by the State. In this sense, it recalls notions of the “body without organs,” as well as the work of Antonio Manuel, Cildo Meireles, Ivens Machado, Arthur Barrio, and Ana Vitória Mussi, who imbued photographs of sporting events with a mourning pathos.

As a challenge to imposed silence, to the condition George Steiner describes as one in which “[m]an is set back in a landscape without echoes,”\(^\text{30}\) “In-Out” also connects with the cinema of Glauber Rocha and once again to Cildo Meireles’ “Tiradentes: Totem-Monument to a Political Prisoner”, as well as to, on the larger Latin American scene, Luis Camnitzer’s “Uruguayan Torture” series of etchings. For Meireles, it was urgent to evoke the symbolism of freedom associated with the figure of Tiradentes (the so-called martyr of independence of Brazil hung by the Portuguese crown). Meireles’ goal is to employ the notion of “ghetto,” making his work the possible voice of a prisoner in a solitary cell whose cry is held back, not only for lack of air, but by the impossibility of being heard. The monks who set fire to their own clothing to protest the Vietnam war, Meireles’ “Tiradentes,” and Maiolino’s “In-Out (Antropofagia)” are all ways of producing speech in the face of the dehumanization of language under tyrannical regimes. They reject all aesthetic sublimation.

VII

With installations like “Monument to Hunger” (1978), “Prato do Dia” (1978), “Rice and Beans” (1979), “Between Lives” (1981), and “De Vita Migrare. Anno MCMXCI” (1991), Anna Maria Maiolino expanded her work to other dimensions of the real, in particular to food and hunger, tapping into a rich if sad tradition in Brazilian arts that ranges from “The Geography of Hunger” by Neto Josué de Castro, one of the contributors to Oswaldo de Andrade’s “Revista da Antropofagia” in the 30s, to the novels of Graciliano Ramos and the poetry of João Cabral de Melo. The Concretist poet Haroldo de Campos has written, in “Transient Servitude” [Servidão de Passagem] (1961):

“poetry in time of hunger
hunger in time of poetry”

Paraphrasing de Campos, we might say that Maiolino’s “Rice and Beans” is “art in time of hunger/hunger in time of art.” In the piece, there are four tables on which rice and beans, the basic staples of Brazil, are eaten. The show lasts long enough for rice and bean plants, which are placed in plates on the central, cloth-draped table, to germinate and grow. It is safe to say of Maiolino’s work in general that hunger is linked to political struggle, and “Rice and Beans” is not different. It alludes to the economic model of the military dictatorship, in which revenue is first used to finance investments, and only later to benefit individuals. This is the “cake” theory of Minister Delfim Neto, who, at great social cost (including hunger), promoted the notion that Brazil should make the cake first, and only then divide it up.

The elements used in “Rice and Beans” – food on table – may refer to “Analogy IV” (1972), a work by the important Argentinean artist Victor Grippo, who set up a table for a meal with real and glass potatoes. Grippo, to whom Maiolino was married for 1984 to 1989, often created installations using the metabolism of the potato as a bearer of social meaning, in dialogue with Beuys and his symbolic use of energy. In his later “Life-Death-Resurrection” (1980), Grippo experimented with closed lead receptacles in geometric shapes filled with beans, which, through the process of germination – that process so essential to Maiolino’s “Rice and Beans” – eventually exploded the containing objects.

In a way, Maiolino’s hunger work establishes a link with Glauber Rocha’s cinema, though the later establishes a critical friction between
hunger and violence. “To think hunger is perhaps the most ambitious proposal of Glauber Rocha,” writes Ivana Bentes. “From hunger, he deduces the crisis of thought. In his aesthetic of violence, Glauber produces an ethics of the intolerable. Hunger is transmuted into a metaphor for desire and revolutionary transformation.” Outside of Glauber’s films, social and political violence are treated, not by sublimating metaphors, but by concrete acts.

There is hunger in any society with great social gulfs, but there is another essential hunger – the prototype of the drive for self-preservation – one linked to another Maiolino installation: “Between Lives” [Entrevidas] (1981).

VII

If “In-Out (Antropofagia)” puts the death drive at its center, “Between Lives” deals with the tension of the drive to live. A ground is strewn with hundreds of eggs (70 dozen), spread with semi-regularity to allow for the passage of peripatetic viewers. There is a welcoming atmosphere, which comes from an awning of coarse fabric that covers the installation, forming a shelter that radiates a soft light. In the center, a pedestal holds a white plate with a fertilized egg, its presence suggesting fecundation. Making one’s way through the fragile field of eggs becomes a process of increasing tension, an anxiety that accumulates with each step, as if crossing a minefield, moving forward or backward become equally dangerous acts. The work constitutes the linguistic spatialization of the Portuguese expression ‘walking on eggs’ [pisar em ovos]: “to conduct oneself with caution, diplomacy; the ability to deal with a delicate or awkward situation,” as defined in the “Novo Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa.”

“Between Lives” emerged in the period of the so-called “democratic opening” of the dictatorship, as the state was beginning to loosen its far-

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32 The work was shown for the first time in 1981, at the Paço das Artes in São Paulo. It occupied a space of approximately 60 square meters.
reaching powers over individuals. It echoes the trauma of speech found in “In-Out (Antropofagia),” signaling that the outcry from civil society has begun to gather force against the military regime, which, through state terrorism, had all but eliminated calls for structural social change. The piece anticipates the thousands of wooden eggs painted white covered by a roof lined with thousands of rifle bullets in Cildo Meireles’ much later installation “America” (1992). As for Maiolino, the artist herself compares the symbolic aspect of her installation to Fontana’s “End of God,” an oval shape lacerated with holes: “Everything that ends is transformed. In nature, nothing is lost. In negation there is affirmation.” Elsewhere, she says, “I feel nostalgic for a space that would be ‘maggiore’ (even more, the largest), a space of the future, an optimistic life. Where being and nature could be expressed in a single creative act – prayer and work – a single interacting act. To discover in freedom ‘the power of causation’ that Teilhard speaks of, which unites being and doing. In the meantime, I continue my work on the nothing. In painting, I repeat the oval form, the zero, primal forms, embryos – the givers of life.”

In “Between Lives,” Maiolino experiments with Ferreira Gullar called “thinking with the body.” Individual and space come together as tension. Compare this with Clark’s painting “Linear Egg (Unity)” (1958), in which a black circle is surrounded by a line of white light, which remains open on one side, stimulating the spectator to close the space for herself. The artist describes this spatial project as follows: “When we see a circle that is almost complete, contoured by a light-line in real space, the circle tends not to close for us, because the extremities of the light-line distort our perception of the circle’s surface.” In the same way, the tension of passing through “Between Lives” occupies the place of the proprioceptive in the phenomenology of the senses, awakening unease and disturbing the body in its act of moving through this space.

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33 Conversation with the artist.
34 Unpublished manuscript by Anna Maria Maiolino, Buenos Aires, August, 27, 1987. Author is referring to Teilhard Chardin in her quote.
Both Maiolino’s “Between Lives” and Clark’s “The House is the Body” recall the experience of birth and deal with stages of the constitution of a new self. Maiolino’s work evokes a “primitive agony,” a concept developed by D.W. Winnicot. In “Between Lives”, one wanders in a linguistic territory that has boundaries with the pre-verbal and the non-verbal. In Clark’s “living architecture,” we see all the phases of gestation: “Penetration, Ovulation, Germination,” and “Expulsion.” (It should be noted that in its treatment of primal harmony, “The House is the Body” is also akin to Meireles’ record “Salt Without Meat”).

Clark has said, “My work is not far from sexual violence, since it liberates repressed instincts, but it is not necessarily linked to pleasure. Everything depends, logically, on the participants: Eroticism can be negated by playfulness, or vice versa.” The destructive hypothesis of “Between Lives” distinguishes itself from the cannibalistic voracity of Clark’s “Death of the Plane” (1960), which it nonetheless resembles. Clark speaks of the devouring of geometry represented by “this chopped-up rectangle, which we swallow and absorb into ourselves,” and which Clark later treats in “Baba Antropofágica” and “Cannibalism” (1973).

In her text “On Cannibalism,” Clark observes that “the tranquil oral-erotic phase of nursing leads to a cannibalistic phase. I that cannibalism is not only in the service of the self-preservation instinct, but that teeth are also the weapons which serve our libidinal tendencies, instruments which help the child to penetrate the mother’s body … In his first contact with the breast, the child tries to penetrate, to find the mother’s belly, his lost poetic shelter; when he finds this to be impossible, he introjects her, beginning the cannibalistic phase.” Clark adds that life and cannibalism are associated with one another, for, like an egg, “the belly is the poetic shelter of all matter; it encloses the fetus, and shape itself.” The fragile object – the egg – is the density of space, now transformed into the field of the fantasmatic. As for Maiolino, she links her work to Freud’s treatment of Eros as a life instinct and Thanatos as its opposite, the death instinct. Thus her eggs

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39 Clark, “On Cannibalism” (typed text, undated, one page.) Lygia Clark Archive, at the Centro de Documentação, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.
40 Conversation with the artist,
bring together strong archetypal images, producing, in “Between Lives,” an estrangement that evokes Freud’s theory of the uncanny, murmuring of strangeness that were already present in a phantasmagoric way in “In-Out (Antropofagia).”

In Maiolino’s work, speech is displaced from the space of a possible articulation to that of expressive silence. This pre-verbal moment in her work again bears some relation to a Lygia Clark piece, in this case to “Structuration of the Self,” which comes from her investigation of object relations after 1976. Once silence is respected, says Clark, the ‘structuration of the self’ takes place in the space before words. 41 In this space before the sign and before the language, even if a “malady of the soul” is predicted, “Between Lives” constitutes the privileged space of the imaginary and the symbolic, in which a drama of subjectivization unfolds. 42

IX

Beginning with Maiolino’s earliest relief in 1989, pliant matter [massa], like bread, has a primordial meaning. 43 Molding a wet substance is her archetypal gesture, as is making bread, caulking a house with raw earth, and molding vessels – giving form to the gods. Her repertory of materials has come to include plaster, the preparatory material for casting molds; cement, the material of modern engineering; and clay, the ancestral material. There are works in plaster (“In the Circle,” 1989), cement (the series “The Shadow of the Other I,” (1993), and clay (“More of These,” 1996, with 600kg of modeled clay). From this mass of wet earth emerge relief, geometrical solids, “rolinhos” [rolls], cobrinhas [snake-shaped coils of clay], strings, objects, things, pieces, modules, portions, holes, and voids.

When Maiolino began to work with clay, the Rio de Janeiro milieu was marked by the ceramics of Celeida Tostes and the cement works of Ivens Machado. Tostes’ radical ceramics employed clay and natural forms

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41 Clark, “Morte do Plano,” 37, paraphrased in this sentence.
43 The word “massa” in Portuguese has multiple meanings, two of which, at least, are relevant to Maiolino’s work: a) mass as paste, matter in a wet state and b) mass in physics, as a “fundamental largeness with measures by the International System in kilograms,” according to the “Novo Dicionário Aurélio da Língua Portuguesa”, 3rd edition (Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1999).
(like the nest built by the ‘Furnarius rufus’ bird, known in Brazil as the “joão-de-barro”) to make objects, installations, performances (like a ‘birth’ from a large bowl covered with soft clay), and social sculptures, always created in corporation with various ‘favelas’s, or slum communities, in the city. Ivens Machado made sculptures incorporating the vocabulary of the favelas’ vernacular architecture, using materials like cement, tiles, and iron bars to make brute and sensual structures with menacingly unstable equilibriums – diagrams of urban texture itself. More recently, Maiolino has made a singular contribution to the general flowering of Brazilian sculpture with her conceptual and political projects.

Maiolino acknowledges the perspective of cultural identity, but she knows it to be fragmented. For her, plaster, cement, and clay are substances related to pasta, the basic element of the cuisine of her native Italy. In some of her works, the artist commemorates the earth formations in the region of Scalea, where she was born: “The myth of the cavern rejoins the idea of the return to the womb of Mother Earth after death. When I start to work with mold, it is a hollow body, which retains the memory of the positive form that came out of it. The opening of the mold, the cavernous body of the sculpture, relates back to the cavern of the Earth and the myth of being born from the Earth. I was born in a place full of prehistoric caves. Near Scalea there are still descendants of the people who lived in those caves. In the south of Italy, there are several churches built inside caverns. The grotto as shelter and transcendent. Since the soil in Italy is volcanic, there are a lot of caves.”44 Thus her work with holes and voids comes no longer to connote the political tension of the drawings of the 70s; rather, it approaches a region of atavistic memory, the place of the fanstasmatic. The topography of Scalea is an uterus of earth, a subtle matrix of cultural identity.

After 1991, new questions appear in Maiolino’s work with modeled substances. In works like “1+1+1” (1991) and “6+1” (1991), she begins to create a poetics of units of volume and to employ the technique of the ‘rolinho’, a ceramic system used by native groups in the Amazon. Here she liberates her objects from their status as “relief,” in which they would have predetermined place along a wall; rather, they become things in and of the world. They emerge from the imminent chaos of the clay and the threat of

44 Conversation with the artist.
petrifaction. At this moment in her work, Maiolino undergoes an apprenticeship in archaic indigenous knowledge – the fabrication of vessels – to supplement her visual vocabulary, though without seeking to apply the aesthetic standards of native ceramics, as happened in the painting of Vicente do Rego Monteiro. Rather, Maiolino aligns herself with the tradition of the search for an understanding of Brazilian culture, while incorporating an agenda related to the material culture of the native peoples.

In these works, Maiolino calls to mind the claim of Karl Marx in his “Critique of the Gotha Program” that the emancipation of labor is dependent on making the instruments of that labor the common property society. Indeed, the work of Maiolino, Grippo, and Cildo Meireles all make explicit the exchange-value of work. In “Some Occupations” (1976), Grippo brings together art and work, the ritualistic dialogue of man with his tools. Maiolino unites Hegel’s ‘homo faber’ to Bachelard’s “volonté matérique” (material will) in a process of domination and alteration of nature. Every mass, whether of cement, clay, or plaster, has its own lifetime – its moment as the “optimal mass” – in the fugitive and ambivalent state between soft and hard. Indeed, with the “Codicilli” series (1993-2000), Maiolino begins to write on the pliant surface of the clay itself. The same thing happens in the technical specifications and titles of her works in clay, which tend to indicate quantity: the 3,500kg of clay used in the project “They Could Be More Than These” (1997) or “They Are These” (1998). In

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45 In the second half of the twentieth century, the most widespread native ceramics style in Brazil was that of the Carajás. See, for example, Gastão Cruis, “Arte Indígena,” in “Artes Plásticas no Brasil,” vol.1, organized by Rodrigo M.F. de Andrade, (Rio de Janeiro:Instituto Larragoiti, and Sul América), 75, and following. For the relation of color in Rego Monteiro’s painting to the archeological ceramics of the Amazon, see, by the author, “Color in Brazilian Modernism-Navigation by many Compasses” in “XXIV Bienal de São Paulo: núcleo histórico, antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos.” See also, by the author, “The Jungle in Brazilian Modern Design” (Miami, “the Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts,” 1995, n.21, 238-259) and “A Labyrinthine Ghetto: The Work of Cildo Meireles,” in exh. Cat. “Cildo Meireles” (London: Phaidon, 1999, 38 and following), which also contains a discussion of Indianist painting in nineteenth century Brazilian art. For other critical perspectives, one might also cite artists such as Victor Brecheret, Cildo Meireles, Rubens Gerchman, Anna Bella Geiger, Cláudia Andujar, Miguel Rio Branco, and the ‘carnavalesco’ Fernando Pinto. In the tradition of the Rio carnival, ‘carnavalesco’ is the name of the artist charged with planning the theme and visual design of a samba school.

the work, matter and time – as experience, discourse, energy, flux – become mere byproducts of the experience of making, not the aggregate value of prime matter and material vanity. Maiolino is interested in the intimate solidity of a material, whether it be a sheet of paper, an egg, or earth between her hands.

Maiolino’s installations remain exempt from the Richard Serra syndrome that infects much of contemporary Brazilian art, even those pieces of hers that use tons of clay, like “They Are These.” Their materials do not have a totalizing and lasting effect; instead, those materials are converted into sheer volume. Clay is obsessively split and divided; at times it comes back together as a result of the work being performed upon it, but always under the sign of transience. “To dust you will return,” it seems to say. Maiolino does not fix the shape of these weighty ceramic objects by firing them in a kiln; they are not just clay forms. These works retains something of what Mary Jane Jacob described in Eva Hesse’s work: “In her search for the ‘I’ and for the feminine, Hesse needed to find forms that were still unknown, forms that would resist permanent fixation.”

Maiolino’s most recent work can be seen alongside certain works by Lygia Clark, Eva Hesse, Hélio Oiticica, Mira Schendel, Gego, Cildo Meireles, and José Resende. The work of these artists has a certain introspection and concentration; some of them work with serial geometry and organic forms in a way that reminds one of what Jacob called “contention and chaos.” Although she refuses the notion of “duration as a means of expression,” Lygia Clark says that she has witnessed “the end of the work of art and the foundation it rested upon, the death of metaphysics and transcendence, the discovery of the here and the now in imminence.”

She goes on: “We propose the moment of action as a field of experience. We refuse all transference onto the object.” Eva Hesse, in an attitude that recalls much of Brazilian art, says that “there are a lot of things that I prefer to just let happen.”

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47 Mary Jane Jacob, “Contenção e caos: Eva Hesse e Robert Smithson” in “XXIV Bienal de São Paulo: núcleo histórico, antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos,” 470 and following
48 Ibid.
49 Maiolino, typed text, untitled and undated, one page. Maiolino archive at the Centro de Documentação, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.
50 Clark, “Nós recusamos,” in “Lygia Clark.”
of the object, encouraging the Other to construct a Moebius strip and then cut it longitudinally with scissors, creating an experience of transformation: “The instant of the act is not renewable. It exists for itself alone: to repeat it is to give it another meaning,” claims Clark.\(^52\) Oiticica’s “Parangolé” (1965) is a structure (or a cape) meant to be danced through and lived with to the sound of music. Discussing the concept of the New Objectivity, Oiticica observed that “the very ‘making’ of the work is violated, along with its ‘interior production,’ since true ‘making’ is the lived experience of the individual.”\(^53\) Evaluating her process, Clark says: “For the first time, I discovered a new reality, not in me, but ‘in the world.’”\(^54\) Her “Walking,” an act in immanent time, has echoes in Brazilian art – in Mira Schendel’s “Little Nothings” [Droguinhas] (1966), for example. The “little nothings” are sculptures made of sheets of paper twisted and tied in knots. This is an object that takes its strength from the pure investment of energy, without any aesthetic model beyond the accumulation of knots. In Gego’s “Reticulária,” metal rods come together to form the very fabric of the world, gushing forth like falling water.

As in Hesse’s “Accession II” (1967) and Schendel’s “Little Nothings,” Maiolino’s clay installations depart, not from a decision about one privilege form, but from a disciplined and obsessively repeated gesture. Her way of working has to do with the immanent time of making: “What is implicit in working with clay is continuity.”\(^55\)

The ethics of quantity permeates the work of Hesse, Maiolino, and Meireles. Beginning in 1993, Maiolino has made her installations out of natural, unbaked clay, sculpting them at the side of the exhibition itself. The first was “Study for an Installation” (1994), made with 100kg of clay. This evolved into the 300kg of clay used in “Many” (1995) at the Kanaal Art Foundation. Kortrijk, Belgium, before reaching its apogee in the 3,500kg of clay that made up “They Are These” at the XXIV São Paulo Biennal in 1998. Unlike in Serra’s sculpture, for Maiolino, weight is strictly

\(^{52}\) Clark, “1965: Do Ato,” in “Lygia Clark.”
\(^{55}\) Conversation with the artist.
a measure of the size of the labor involved. She has no interest in pointing out the accumulated value of her materials. Similarly, Meireles work deliberately exaggerates economic production to the point of absurdity and dissolution of value, as with the 600,000 coins used in his “Mission/Missions (How to Built Cathedrals) (1987). Here, the process of accumulation of capital takes on morbid connotations. Meireles laid the groundwork for this ethos in his “Geometry Kit (Neutralization by Opposition and/or Addition” (1977-79), which shows how the accumulation of razors and other cutting and perforating objects can result in the neutralization of their efficiency and capacity to cut. Hesse, in her “Accession II” (1967), placed more than 30,000 plastic tubes into holes drilled in a box, creating a confrontation between excess and chaos. In Maiolino’s economy, some titles quantify volume with great precision: “One in One” (1991), “One + Two” (1991), “Three in One” (1991), “1+1+1,” “Two no.1” (1995), “200 Other Configurations” (2000), “They Are 340” (2000). Others are marked by an approximate calculation, as if she had lost count: “More Than a Hundred” (1993), “More Than One Thousand” (1995), “They Could Be More Than These” (1997). Some titles make counting itself seem unimportant, like “Many,” “More of These,” “Even More of These” (1996). In the end, though, quantification is either a lot or nothing (as in the series “One, None, One Hundred Thousand,” 1993) or it affirms the process of socialization of this economy (“The Shadow of the Other”). In the oeuvre of Andy Warhol, quantification, according to his titles, only refers to the process of production or stockpiling, hiding the amount of labor invested in the formation of exchange-value. This happens with “Five Coke Bottles” or “210 Coca-Cola Bottles” (1962). However, the title of one of Warhol’s works from the “Mona Lisa” series elucidates his ethos: “Thirty is Better Than One” (1963) celebrates the surplus-value. This permits us to distinguish his approach from Maiolino’s, where work is understood in connection with the problem of self-consciousness; it is, as Hegel put it in his “Phenomenology of Spirit,” “desire held in check, fleetingness staged off” – “work forms and shapes the thing,” as the philosopher wrote.56

In Maiolino’s work, clay has an impermanent material state. This is not far from José Resende’s project in “City Art” [Arte Cidade] (1994), where he piled and re-piled large blocks of granite with a crane over a period of ten consecutive days. The expenditure of energy was itself the piece. Maiolino’s works in clay condense time into the labor performed on matter, which serves as evidence of the investment of time and effort into a work fated to dissolution and ephemerality. Such works, by Clark, Oiticica, Hesse, Maiolino, and Resende remain in an “emerging state,” in Jacob’s phrase. Maiolino does not fire her clay; she does not make ceramics because she does not seek hardening, resistance, or permanence in the forms she inflicts on the materials. Maiolino’s installations are pure ‘making’: “The destiny of clay is to dry and return to dust. This is the principle of making.”57 Not firing her clay also signifies her equilibrium with ‘physis.’

X

A strange tree can be found in Rio de Janeiro’s Tijuca Forest, an urban forest. This tree blooms in the manner of a ‘jaboticabeira’ (‘myrciaria cauliflora,’ from the myrtle family), displaying its generous fruits on its trunk in bunches, like bananas. It is the only example of a species that was unknown until the year 2000. It has been named “Here They Are” (1999). The Tijuca Forest, where the existence of this new vegetal entity was discovered, is not far from the property of a man who, because he loved plants, made a garden entirely of stones.58 No one, however, was disappointed to discover, in the middle of this luxuriant forest, that “Here They Are” is a tree with artificial fruit. It is art. This tree is not the result of any species-crossing graft; rather; the fruits of “Here They Are” assert a multiplicity of means, in contrast to the unity of means that is a fruit. It is a tree that bears fruits made of various kinds of wood, such as cedar, ‘ipê,’ Brazilian walnut, cherrywood, and marblewood; they are ‘Cedrela fissilis,’ ‘Tabebuia’ from the family of ‘biononiáceas;’ ‘Ocotea porosa,’ from the genre ‘Prunus;’ and ‘Balfourodendron riedelianum.’ They are not fruits of

57 Conversation with the artist.
58 I am speaking of the landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx and his project for the gardens of the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro.
the same species, genre, or family. The fruits exist as a kind of weed, a separate species from the tree.

Maiolino’s work for the past four decades has been rhizomatic, and this “tree,” no longer bound to a unity of type as a tree would be (giving just one type of fruit), becomes a rhizomatic hypothesis through its multiplicity of fruits. The fruits of “Here They Are” escape all taxonomy. They are not there through their filiations with a single genre or family, but as a rhizome, through their alliance among themselves, forming a bunch of differences on a common stem. The fruits of “Here They Are” made of hardwood. They would make a difficult meal for a termite. Maiolino rewrites the natural history of gardens; hers does not function through natural systems (pollenization, the transport of seeds and seedlings by means of wind, insects, bats, birds, quadrupes, and men), but as a natural history that is culturally produced. The ephemerality of “Here They Are” is in its offering itself up to the consumption of insects in the long run, just as Maiolino’s molded pieces of clay will one day return to their condition as dust.

“Here They Are” is at the Museu do Açude, in a sculpture park that includes works by Hélio Oiticica, Tunga, and Iole de Freitas. In Brazil, the landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx has gained international recognition for his sinuous flowerbed designs, which seek to allow for the organic, natural, and pictorial presence of plants. Oiticica included symbolic plants from Afro-Brazilian cults in his formulation of the large Edenic space of “Tropicália” (1967). His “Hunting Dogs Project” (1961) created an “abstract garden,” in the words of Frederico Morais, where he “planted” the works of other artists. The emergence of organic concerns can also be seen in Clark, who studied painting with Burle Marx’s rock gardens flourished in Brazil, as did the “dead gardens” of Frans Kraijcberg, which protested the destruction of nature in the country, and Antonio Manuel’s

59 The “fruits” consists of 500 rolls of wood, which evoke Maiolino’s earlier works in this ceramic techniques.

60 The sculpture project in the park of the Museu do Açude, the former residence of Raymundo de Castro Maya, the founder of the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, continues to evolve under the direction of Márcio Doctors. The program includes, besides Maiolino, works by artists such as Hélio Oiticica, Barrio, Tunga, and Iole de Freitas. See Doctors’ text “The Art of Immanence” in the publication “Vida Afóra/ A Life Line” by Catherine de Zeguer (New York: The Drawing Center, 2001), p.296-301.
“Fruit of Space” (1980), structures that evoked the graphic design of newspapers and the precarious architecture of the ‘favelas.’ These works were first displayed in a garden that had been created after the dislocation of a ‘favela.’ “Ku kka Ka kka” (1999) by Cildo Meireles confronts the abject and the sublime, the natural and the artificial, the fecund and the sterile, in an alternating play between the odors of natural and artificial flowers and natural and artificial feces. Maiolino worked with live plants in “Rice and Beans.” Nature for her is a place of desire and of language. Confronting the discussion of a “natural determinism” in Rio de Janeiro because of the strength of the natural landscape, artists in the city reinvent nature with poetic intelligence: the gardens of Burle Marx, the “Beasts” of Lygia Clark, or Maiolino’s tree; Art is like life, which is a river, which is a line, which is a thought, which is an energy flux, which is work, which is writing, which is a rhizome, which is a labyrinth, which is the body, which is experience, which is “the fullness of emptiness,” which is life, which is art in the process of Anna Maria Maiolino.