The Taming of the "Saccadic" eye:

The work of Vieira da Silva in Paris

As it is often the case in modern art history, Vieira da Silva has had a very different reception on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. In Europe she is considered one of the most important figures in modern art history and even recognized as a master of Post-War French abstraction. Although the artist had worked in Paris since the 1930's, only upon returning to Paris in 1947 after a stay in Brazil during the war, did her work become recognized as one of the finest expressions of contemporary Parisian production. She was recognized by the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, where her work was acquired as early as 1948 (La partie d'échec, 1943). She soon had exhibits all over Europe (Paris, Stockholm, London, Basel, etc.) and also in the Americas, where she won a series of prestigious prizes: Sao Paulo Biennale in 1953, Caracas Biennale in 1955, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, in 1958, etc. Although many other female artists in Paris in those days, were taken seriously [1] Vieira da Silva was exceptional in being able to keep her place in the European art world while other were fading away with the arrival of new stylistic fads.

What makes her even more interesting these days, is that her career in many ways has taken the opposite trajectory of painters such as Lee Pollock and Elaine De Kooning, wives of famous American artists whose work was long eclipsed by their husbands and only lately are being fully recognized. The reverse is true in Vieira da Silva's case. Her Hungarian husband, Arpad Szenes, whom she married in Paris in 1930, was himself a sensitive and sophisticated abstract painter, who was never able to attain the level of recognition his wife achieved. Her recognition occurred while the Parisian art scene was being reorganized after the war, amongst the clamor of critical disputes centering around

the validity of abstraction confronted with a still very aggressive realist tradition. I contend that Vieira da Silva's work was luckily caught in the struggle to establish a reformulated School of Paris and that she provided crucial elements for this reconstruction. To perform this role, her work had to be seen through a classical Parisian grid, leaving aside what was, interestingly, a somewhat destabilizing and vacillating artistic proposition.

For many American painters, musicians and writers for a while-lets say, between 1946 and 1953, before Abstraction Lyrique became hegemonic - Paris was a sort of heaven for intellectuals. One could live cheaply, possibilities were numerous, and the liberal atmosphere was tremendously productive for many artists who would have had a hard time expressing their unconventional views at home during reactionary political moments. Gay artists, for example, flocked to Paris to find breathing space, understanding, and productive support. African-American writers, painters and musicians also discovered a city open to difference, often to the point of indifference, as James Baldwin put it. Paris still, for a few years, carried the bohemian myth of the 1920's and 1930's. These were times of high hopes for the French, in general, and for intellectuals, in particular, because possibilities for radical changes were envisaged with a certain sense of realism. It seemed unthinkable that France would ever go back to a social and political system as corrupt and cynical as the last, which could not even prevent the ascension of Fascism and war. The enthusiasm for change after such an horrendous past was such that André Breton, still in North America, published in a new liberal newspaper ironically called Terres des Hommes a powerful piece calling for a dramatic transformation of world values. If dominant male behavior was responsible for the war and its massacres, Breton wrote, then it was high time to look for other alternatives: women's values.

His attempt, if not universally accepted, was characteristic of other post-war/revolution moral crises: "Artists should definitively be suspicious of destructive male culture and replace it as soon as possible by female culture in order to avoid a global disaster. Time has come to promote women's ideas rather than the totally bankrupt ones of men. It is the artist who should, in particular, only if in protest, promote female systems of ideas." These words written while he was in exile in North America as part of his book Arcane 17, resonated when published in February 1946, and in particular because they came just after women were finally allowed to vote in France (5th of October 1944). A new era seemed, indeed, to flourish. This, supplemented by a euphoric feeling that French culture was being rebuilt on respected grounds-Matisse, Bonnard, Villon, Braque and Picasso- were still all very active and visible- produced a short but intense elation during which everybody seemed to have a chance to participate in the reassertion of a very specific French Renaissance.

When Vieira da Silva went back from Brazil to Paris in 1947, French nationalistic euphoria ebbed somewhat, due to the progressive realization that the post war world was going to be a world in which France would have only a small part to play. During the cold war, Paris became the site, the playground, for a raucous debate about contemporary culture in which artistic styles became the nodal point for political positions. Vieira da Silva's paintings where caught in the maelstrom, as they seemed to express several key elements critics thought to be emblematic of what the new Parisian culture was or ought to be in its search for universal values. This at least will be my contention when trying to understand and explain the resonance her semi-abstract work had in an artistic culture, which had difficulty in dealing with an advanced type of painting.

Her work was clearly related to a modern, even cubist vocabulary. While analytic cubism was often seen by French critics as too intellectual, Da Silva's idiosyncratic formations brought together two elements that revitalized Parisian tradition. Her study with Hayter,

Torres-Garcia and Bissière gave her work a soft constructivist vocabulary, addressing some of the post-Mondrian questions posed by artists at the end of the war: How could one produce meaningful but emotional abstract statements about everyday experiences without falling into the hated decorative? Also beneficial was her decision not to censor her non-French identity. On the contrary, she played with it, without fear of offering a modern exoticism to wary and hungry Parisian eyes. She introduced famous Portuguese blue tiles in her paintings that cleverly phagocytized Cèzanne's blue constructivist brush strokes. Square tiles overwhelmed the faceted cubist surface, giving coherence to an otherwise traditional cubist space. [2] These complex tiled spaces provided a tumultuous depth, a maelstrom of accelerating and decelerating curves and broken perspectives. By the same token, Vieira da Silva was also recalling the beautiful, intimate red squares inhabiting the work of another giant of French art, the luscious Bonnard (She remembered vividly Bonnard's show of checkered tablecloths at the Galerie Georges Petit in 1928). This, allied with what she learned of spirituality in Bissière's studio, was literally too much to bypass for certain Parisian critics in search of a renewed expression of Parisian qualities.

Vieira da Silva was prolific within a reduced, well-defined corpus of topics referring to privacy, in particular when representing modern cityscapes. In constructing this new modern space, she pulled many traditional modern strings. She recalled Cèzanne (La foret des erreurs 1941), reworked through Marcel Duchamp (La partie d'échec 1943), Robert Delaunay (Les portes 1947) or Bonnard and Villon. What was new was the seemingly realist urban landscape couched in abstract terms. Her abstraction carried in its folds enough realistic figuration to lead the viewer into a monstrous faceted labyrinth, which nevertheless offered enough clues that one could follow a trail designed and lined as if by some wicked Ariadne.

Like other painters of her generation (Franz Kline or Pierre Soulages), Vieira da Silva attempted to express the spiritual and structural qualities of cities but with more attachment to the recognizable. Hers are also lyrical expressions of the city. If Soulages and Kline articulated their virility through speed (Kline) or through quiet, monumental, and archaic force (Soulages)- the confident and optimistic relation with representation of the sites of everyday living- Vieira da Silva displaced unmediated experiences into maps, into dreamed and distanced metaphorical cityscapes difficult to grasp but as a consequence visually exciting. These cityscapes, are places where thinking and dreaming intertwined, where action is minimal, where physical display is restrained, where representation is more intellectual than physical. She was quick to explain: "Painting is very consoling. One can paint with a tremor, or almost blind. One's physical condition does not matter, almost." [3] If Soulages in his constructions has the seriousness of a monk, Vieira da Silva in hers is like a magician. Under a gracile surface, she represents, nevertheless, a disconnected world, always in turmoil, fast moving, strident and cutting, charged with cool phantasmagoria.

The picture of contemporary life in her work is one that is as disconcerting as the drawings of cities by Wols. It is as if she was scrutinizing the world from the wrong end of a telescope or, more accurately, binoculars. Wols drew The City (1951) after a close up glance at his environment, which becomes threatening by the sheer claustrophobic jumble of unengaging things and people that he represents, clustered together like a colony of suffocating mussels. Wols investigates the dirty water stagnating between the cobblestones of the winding, archaic streets, looking for his reflection in the sullied water of the gutter. More detached, Vieira da Silva saw herself in the constellation of the map. She turned the binocular around and gazed from the other end, overlooking the scene from afar, protected from the crushing forms that she knew are so destructive, a gaze that rapidly produced a kind of out-of-body experience. To protect herself from the crushing

hustle of the modern city, she constructed an apparently modern point of view: from the top of a skyscraper or from an airplane. It is a place to enjoy the view without wanting to know too much about it, or at least to be able to manage a heterogeneity there for the taking but too close for comfort: the ethereal conflicts with the libidinal.

Michel de Certeau well describes this phenomenon. Looking down from the new World Trade Center in New York he mused:

"To be lifted up to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp...An Icarus flying above these waters, he can ignore the devices of Daedalus in mobile and endless labyrinths far below. His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance. It transforms the bewitching world by which one was possessed into a text that lies before one's eye. It allows one to read it, to be a solar Eye, looking down like a god."[4]

This is what Parisian critics read in Vieira da Silva's pictures and evaluated positively, without seeing that her vision from above was a bit trickier, mediated by the construction of a labyrinthine grid that renders the reading, the grasp of the city elusive and the transparent fiction of display opaque. This distorted grid, in fact, produces a complex, baroque space, a multitude of fragmentary glimpses. As the geographer Derek Gregory writes of city spaces, Vieira da Silva's cultural production seems to be one of "consolation" rather than one of "resistance", [5] a place to dream rather than to act. Those public spaces, through distantiation, are transformed into private areas. She often superimposes architecture and plans of cities onto the labyrinthine rows of libraries, as if, structurally speaking, they were similarly baffling. Indeed, her two major themes are city plans and labyrinthine libraries, where the sweetness of reading and learning is as terrifying as the Tower of Babel. As any book lover knows, and as Walter Benjamin has explained, a library simultaneously shows the pleasure of private delightful reading and knowledge and the anxiety resulting from the sheer number of books collected but not read, of unprocessed knowledge. One has the illusion of owning the totality of knowledge

while simultaneously knowing the impossibility and arrogance of the project. In fact, the library, in its structural diversity can be said to be the empire of non-sense. This was a space used in the nineteenth century by modernist writers, paradoxically, to express a wild imagination. Michel Foucault discusses Gustave Flaubert's use of the “library” of the book in order to carve out a space where "the visionary experience arises from the black and white surface of printed signs, from the closed words; fantasies are carefully deployed in the hushed library....The fantastic is no longer a property of the heart, nor is it found among the incongruities of nature; it evolves from the accuracy of knowledge, and its treasures lie dormant in documents."[6]

The city and the library became sites of tourism, waves of distorted perspectives on which one could surf without too much danger but with much exhilarating delight, slaloming around the everyday.

Several times Vieira da Silva commented on her interest in private isolation, an isolation she rapidly realized was peopled with dreams and fantasies. She mentioned that, being the daughter of the owner of a large Lisbon newspaper, in her youth she could hear the noise of history crashing at her doorstep, a hum produced by an ungraspable history. She was a witness without engagement- an attitude no doubt extremely interesting to those French intellectuals distressed by so much intellectual engagement in the late 1940's. Her art was miles away from political social realism or the depressing existential realism of Bernard Buffet. Her studio was another world, a place of morality, an abstract space similar to that occupied by Lewis Caroll, a funny philosophizing space. Commenting on Zurbarán, for example, she said: “Those people in monasteries, who led such austere lives. I am not a believer, but for me that would have been paradise, that cloistered, concentrated life." [7]

Vieira da Silva understood her position as a modern painter confronted with an accelerating modernity with all the implied anxieties and decided to represent it from her specific vantage point. By the same token her complex vision allowed a French critical establishment in search of a renewed Parisian school to extract and use part of her discourse for its own interests.

The modern city does become an excuse for the production of a powerful modernist grid, but serves also as an excuse to project the viewer out of a traditional way of looking. Once caught by the net of flickering lines, the viewer becomes suddenly the floating psychoanalytical Redon eye over the land of our miseries, a kind of a crazy Nadar looking down from his balloon at a strange world that seems, nevertheless, to make sense when seen from so high.

In picture after picture her work addressed the new city spaces which developed during the Postwar reconstruction of France: representations always on the verge of collapsing due to the thinness, the arachnidan quality of lines that convey an airiness more appropriate to the representation of impressionistic landscape than to modern architecture but that suggest impending doom or a palpable fragility inherent in those new utopian cities (*villes nouvelles*, as the French called them). In the late 1950's, her paintings are full of new glass buildings, transparent, translucent, intimidating in their openness, their fake communicative appeal replacing private thinking and isolation with spectacularization and decodification of urban activities comparable to what Jacques Tati was presenting in his films during those same years (*Mon Oncle*, *Playtime*). Vieira da Silva offered not so much a radical critique of Mondrian's utopian grid as an enrichment of it, more tactile, less visual. Her sophisticated and elegant grid corresponded to desires of part of the Parisian intelligentsia, always uneasy about Mondrian's dryness, to find a representation of contemporaneity between rigid realism and wild, unchecked and

unformed abstraction. Part of Vieira da Silva's work responded to this, but, I would argue, Parisian critics' cursory glance at the work, necessitated by the urgency of their task, left many facets in shadow, in particular those that contradicted their theoretical constructions.

Vieira da Silva's paintings, then, must be seen in connection with the electric debate unfolding in Paris in the middle 1950's around the issue of abstraction versus figuration and, inside this debate, about what type of abstraction (geometrical or lyrical, "hot" or "cold," as they were called then) should represent Parisian talent and civilization. Her private world intersected so deeply with a form of public critical discourse in the early 1950's that it was never really dislodged from the reconstruction of a phantasmic "School of Paris".

Certain characteristics of her work described above explain why recognition came so early and so strongly. At the end of the war, the Parisian establishment wanted to restore their city's cultural hegemony to counteract its loss of political, military, and colonial power. Several attempts were made to recover this blessed time, without much success because of internal schisms, on the one hand, and the American challenge on the other. The arguments promoted in books by Bernard Dorival (Les Etapes de la Peinture Contemporaine,1911-1944), Les Peintres du XXe siècle), and even by Pierre Francastel in his Nouveaux Dessin, Nouvelle Peinture:L'école de Paris, (1946), defined the specific qualities of Parisian painting. They were the opposite of what German art was supposed to be: expressionist. French art was somewhat Cartesian, with flair, delicacy, and reasonable beauty. These reconstructions were rooted in deep nationalistic convictions. A large part of the French elite that came out of the war unscathed by collaboration was still clinging to a world rapidly passing them by; they were still articulating a cultural position that had been powerful and progressive under the Third Republic. Writers like Dhiel,

Dorival and Francastel, to name only a few, were re-establishing the old ideas of French culture in new garb. This ideology saw man as part of nature but without the de-stabilizing effect of instincts: in man, nature is confused with reason because the nature of man is nothing else than instinct controlled by reason. Thus Dorival dismisses Mondrian and Kandinsky, preferring Léger's and Modigliani's elegant reserve. French genius is exactly this: Dionysus tamed by Apollo, but a Dionysus still present and visible, in order to show the force and the passion being controlled. The struggle has to be visible, but the victory of taste over instincts must also to be displayed on the canvas for everyone to see. Dorivalwrites in La Peinture Francaise 1946: "French painting is foremost about discretion. It is weary of color and thickness...A particular characteristic of French tradition is poetical realism." For Dorival, humanist measure is so important and so ingrained in Parisian soil that it touches and transforms every form that comes in contact with it. Even the air of Paris pacifies, one would even say colonizes, the rough foreigner's habits. "The climate of our country has imposed itself onto painters, who were profoundly different from our genius-oriental Jews in particular- with such a soft convincing strength (force) that it modified their spirit and their forms, and made their art a kind of province or protectorate of real French art".[8] This identification became standard in the aesthetic and political discourses of people who could not understand abstraction or social or Bourgeois realism. This question of identity was hotly debated until 1956.[9]

The important role played by Vieira da Silva's work in this construction is shown in the first text written about her in 1949 by Michel Seuphor, the famous expert on abstract art, early defender of Mondrian, and friend and collaborator of Torres García. He saw in her work everything for which "real" progressive Parisians were looking:

"The beauty of this work is this canalized power, this explosion seen in slow motion so to speak. A severe discipline, hidden by a certain elegant playfulness, the apparent improvisation of lines and colors produces every brush stroke but never overwhelmed by

personality (temperament). Or rather, this personality in Vieira da Silva is tempered, is order, orchestration... Rigor and freedom here produce an exalting marriage. The art of Mondrian was pure style, that of Van Gogh pure scream. With Vieira da Silva, Style and Shout are simultaneously produced in each painting, closely intertwined in each moment of the painting."[10]

Once more Paris was coopting, refining, and pacifying the exaltations of the world, forcing vehemence through the sifter of coherence in order to shape a civilized product. Noise became harmony, scream was transformed into song. Seuphor's superimposition of a woman's work on top of Mondrian's strict harmony would, recalling Mondrian's coolness about the feminine, have made the Dutch artist turn in his grave. But the moment was such that the defence of "cool", curvilinear abstraction was more important than theoretical purity. Important in this reading, which was later endlessly repeated and on which Vieira da Silva's reputation and success were based, was this balancing act, this mixture of emotion and coolness, this taming of the apocalyptic, swirling landscapes in which instability was seen as being checked by the often-quoted, happy Bonnard checkered table cloth. A nightmarish series of spaces pacified by a protected net knitted by an elegant and cultured woman able to fuse eighteenth-century Portuguese Azulejos (blue) with the red Bonnard tablecloth. The French saw her work as sophisticated and reasonable; she knew classical music, opera, painting, literature; in a word, she was cultured. Abstraction could then continue the elevated task of traditional painting.

The French found what they were looking for, but her work is actually situated in a cultural sphere that lovers of the School of Paris could not possibly appreciate. Vieira da Silva articulated a complex image of modernity parallel to that proposed by Walter Benjamin just before the war: pessimistic and baroque. Vieira da Silva was perhaps the last modern artist to try to continue the modernist tradition in attempting to represent the new city. But she avoided the overpowering male gaze, a gaze that she understood but placed in an antagonistic relation to modernist tradition. Eager to emulate Cézanne's

space, she was also serious about putting it in jeopardy, shredding it through a maelstrom of distorted tiled environment. This was a last attempt to represent the essence of modernity formulated only through phantasmagoria, activated by a Surrealist notion of the marvelous. Everybody noticed this last component but took it as influence, when in fact it was a tool to connect with the grand old project of description important to early modernism. It is not by accident that she and Benjamin were interested in similar topics and had similar reactions to modernity. Her paintings of city plans seen from above are a kind of futuristic vision that, paradoxically, relate to past representations. In fact, these images are syncopated, breathless in their shift of perspective and sinuous lines, returning to a medieval pre-modern city. The roller-coaster perspective of ancient streets evokes medieval Lisbon rather than Haussman's boulevards, remnants of the past city also present in Eugène Atget's early photographs: small, old, stubborn, primitive empty spaces lodged, forgotten, between the newer boulevards. Vieira da Silva's images represent cities emptied of humans, as if they had been systematically stamped out, annihilated, sucked out by the speed with which the painter propels us across the canvas, just as early cameras depicted empty streets because they could not register human activity due to the low sensitivity of the film.[11] These are monuments to failed, aborted progress, reflecting a strange, speechless fascination with modernity, its precious fairy-tale quality, the world transformed into empty Parisian "passages".

These views are located between Wols's pessimistic views of and Mondrian's optimistic and utopian ones of. Hers are nostalgic, protected views of a city that cannot be known or processed but can be enjoyed from afar as a fascinating touristic uprooting, (if not alienation), a personal resistance through nostalgia.

Although agoraphobic, Vieira da Silva seemed to be sucked into high heights, to be interested in the towering point of view. Her constructions offer a high-speed push-and-pull travel through space, a Dona Haraway "integrated circuit" that aspires to a global polymorphous network; the female, high Bourgeois Portuguese view of the world can

finally have a place, can describe the heterogeneous world without fear. Vieira da Silva's grid is all about the impossibility or unwillingness to give the eye a specific place from which to read the world. As Martin Jay writes:

"Baroque vision is deeply antiplatonic, hostile to the ordered regularities of geometric optics. As such, it opposes both Cartesian philosophy and perspective in painting. The space it inhabits is more haptic or tactile than purely visual, more plural than unified. It presents a bewildering surplus of images, an overloading of the visual apparatus. Resistant to any panoptic God's eye view, any "survol global"...It strives for the representation of the unrepresentable and, necessarily failing to achieve it, resonates a deep melancholy..." [12]

I do not want to transform da Silva's work into a post modern guerrilla tactic, because she was obviously not into this mode, but her work proposes a structure in which the well-understood modernist formal lessons and teaching mix with her own experience, which too often clashed with what she knew. This destabilization of tradition, nevertheless kept enough in its folds to make her work appealing to a critical establishment that wanted to revive a middle-of-the-road production, far from the shapeless extremes of the "Informel" painters. Vieira Da Silva's subject matter (libraries, city plans) and her way of representing her detached self produced a fantasy of limitless multiple embodiments whose openness, made it possible to kidnap parts of her project without fear: a Portuguese woman's decentered eye, became again, thanks to her untheorized position, a Parisian modern art through misreading and appropriation.

Consider a discussion she reports with the German abstract "informel" and "maudit" painter, Wols : "One day, right after the war, Wols asked me: 'Tell me, I like what you're doing a lot, but why are you doing perspective?' I answered that I knew it wasn't done in modern art, but that I had to do it anyway."[13] It was as if the modernist project in its tango with tradition was unavoidable for her. "Cartesian perpectivalism", as Martin Jay calls it, was identified with the modern scopic regime "tout court" without allowing other ways of

seeing. Da Silva's cultural and gender experience of modern life proposed a different point of view. What was missing in the unique eye of Cartesian perspective was a certain emotional component unable to surface under the technology of the grid. The bodies of the painter and viewer were forgotten in the name of an allegedly disincarnated, absolute eye. In her modern baroque, despite her traditional commanding gaze, Vieira da Silva restored the repressed blinking eye. It becomes dynamic again, moving with "saccadic" jumps from one focal point to another, opening up a different pleasure of seeing, procuring simultaneously an individual, protected space, undisciplined description bringing emotional elation. Neutrality is shattered by the active, emotional involvement of a canvassing eye. [14] Too bad that the Parisian critique was relentlessly taming precisely this liberating saccadic quality of the eye in order to recast it into a well-worn Cartesian point of view.

What was confusing was that Vieira da Silva used a modernist grid, managing to push it a notch over the formal, materialist project toward the construction of a staircase to the universal. Her work is located between the Grid which, according to Rosalin Krauss, declares its own surface, and Renaissance perspective. It is as if the modern grid was inflated with a dose of a perspective so unsure of itself that it loops in and out, allowing, insisting on, multiple points of view: a cubist space rendered hallucinatory by the rapidity, the acceleration of the reading provided by the collision of multiple sets of squared networks. It is a grid put into perspective with all the visual havoc it creates, permitting a dose of mysticism usually repressed by the grid to appear here as heterogeneity, as spirituality. Krauss has mentioned that if "perspective was the science of the real, the grid is ‘a mode of withdrawal from it"’. [15] Vieira da Silva is close to Mondrian in this case, but in the way two positive magnets reject each other when forced to face their similar poles. "Paris la nuit" of 1948 stands at the opposite end from

Mondrian's "Victory Boogie Woogie", but also from Dubuffet's representation of the city with walls, graffiti and dirt. Grid and perspective usually historically separated, here fuse in a breathless ascent recalling baroque painting, a rush towards the heavens, forcing the viewer to "desire the impossible spiral of ascending desire foredoomed to the earthly representation of appearances". [16] But here the spiral, accentuated by the tile/squares, produces a roller coaster ride in and out of a shallow space giving us tremendous pleasure of speed and vision before slamming our gaze against the surface again: a world without center, without fixed point of reference, a puzzle written by each viewer. If not spirituality, (as she did not like the word), then it was the unexpected meandering of the baroque that Vieira da Silva appreciated, the surprising vistas that baroque constructions give the eye, the illusion of independence and individual discovery. "I adored Bernini's colonnade. I could have gone forever walking between the columns," she said to Schneider. It is this decentered vision, this multiplicity of appreciation, this pleasure of play that she integrated into her modernism. But when one reads French criticism of her work, one is always directed by the word towards a form of classicism, of modern classicism, closer to Braque than to Wols. But her work pulls us literally out of classicism. She is a "Femme de la ville" all right, as she herself said, but the space she inhabits and that she displays is baroque. Libraries, like cities, are symbols of baroque culture. Libraries are collecting discourses in the world, but also dissonances, contradictory voices; they are Tower of Babel representing the impossibility of universality, as Roger Chartier explains. [17]

Vieira da Silva's importance in the post war French landscape is that she proposed a comprehensible representation of the modern city, allowing recognition of complexities and shifting meaning but producing a vocabulary more compelling in its baroque glitz than pessimistic and incoherent. France was simultaneously being destabilized by the drastic transformation of her own identity through the new consumerist culture and the

realization that her power to universalize culture was fading as fast as her power to colonize the world. Vieira da Silva's active engagement in the art scene (not her academic recognition) faded away in the late 1950's when consumerism pushed women back into their new, clean, and modern kitchens. Her reputation continued but rapidly became an archaeological artifact of modernity, an example of a historical style that lost out against "art informel". Moreover, women artists' visibility in Paris faded proportionally to the success of "Nouveau Réaliste" art and to Yves Klein's ascension to the new Bourgeois pantheon. Women lost the rank of recognized creators and moved to the role of object, not only of painting but literally of tools, as Klein loved to use them as brushes. That one of the most gifted painters of the period, Marie Raymond (Prix Kandinsky 1949), was symbolically obliterated by Klein's female brushes should give psychoanalytic art historians a pause, given that Marie Raymond was in fact Yves Klein's mother.

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[1] While many other women artists were working and visible in the late 1940s in Paris, including 1949 Kandinsky prize winner Marie Raymond, American artist Claire Falkenstein, Iranian painter Fahr-el-Nissa Zeid (defended with force by the art critic Charles Estienne), the other visible American Shirley Jaffe, Day Schnabel, the gestural painter Marcelle Loubschansky, and Christine Boumeister, none sustained visibility as did Vieira da Silva through her career.

[2] This system was so important for her that she is almost always represented in photographs of the time wearing blouses or skirts with the squares motif: a total identification with her logo.

[3] Cited in Pierre Schneider, Louvre Dialogues, Atheneum, New York, 1971, p. 169. She also identified with some of the characteristics of Mantegna's San Sebastian at the Louvre: This (is) my painting...Those gradations of gray in the volume of the bodies...That very sharp drawing. The tense, sustained, sharp drawing. Look at the arrows, how they are made. A great strength that conceals itself. One cannot be harder and quieter than an arrow. A pianist needs great strength to play without making noise. Bach's suites for violin and violoncello seem to me to be the loudest possible sound-louder than a large orchestra." Schneider p. 165.

[4] Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984. p.92

[5] Derek Gregory, Geographical Imaginations, Blackwell, Cambridge,1994, p.303.

[6] See Michel Foucault in "Fantasia of the Library", ed. Donald F. Bouchard,Language Counter-memory,Practice, Cornell university press, 1977, p.90-91.

[7] Schneider, Louvre Dialogues p. 168. One should also note that, according to de Certeau, Eramus said that "the city is a huge monastery" when it comes to managing growth of human agglomeration and accumulation. (de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life) P. 93.
[8] Bernard Dorival in Les Etapes de la Peinture Française Contemporaine, Gallimard, Paris, 1944,p.320-324.
[9] See the text by Laure de Buzon-Vallet: "L'école de Paris: Eléments d'une enquête, in Paris-Paris1937-1957, Paris, Centre Pompidou,1981,p.252-255.
[10] Michel Seuphor, "Le Style et le Cri", Préface to Vieira da Silva's show, galerie Pierre, Paris 1949, cited in Vieira Da Silva, Cercle d'art, 1987, p.184-185.
[11] Her pictures are only crowded when she tries to portray the horror of war. It's like a hymn to death in the tradition of Breughel (Le Désastre 1942). But this experiment is unique, as she prefers the soft music to the declarative, bombastic expression.
[12] Martin Jay, Force Fields, Routledge, London, p. 108. She often mentioned also that she "wants to paint what is not there."
[13] Schneider p. 170. This difference is understandable when one knows the enormous gap between their two lives. Wols was stateless and proud of it, a male not sure of his maleness (see a portrait of himself that he overdrew with lines showing that he did not know who he was –a question mark on his forehead and lines on his crotch transforming himself into a woman). Compared with Vieira da Silva, a Portuguese woman keeping her identity in Paris with a certain amount of success.
[14] See Martin Jay, Force Fields, p.116-117.
[15] See Rosalin Krauss "Grids", in The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths. M.I.T. press, 1985, p. 8-22.
[16] See Christine Buci-Glucksmann, Baroque Reason, The Aesthetics of Modernity, Sage, London, 1994, p.130.
[17] See Roger Chartier, L'ordre des livres, Alinea, Aix-en-Provence, 1992,p.71-75.