

- I. Chapter: **Overviews, Views and Reviews**
- II. Section: **Essay**
- III. Title: **For a State of Art: The actuality of Lygia Clark**
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- V. Number of Words: **3.039 words**

São Paulo, Sunday, May 15, 1994 (1). I am lying on the ground, blindfolded; a commotion of anonymous bodies moving around me. I don't know what will happen. A complete loss of reference points: apprehension, disquiet. I surrender. Pieces of bodies without image, gain autonomy and begin to act on me: anonymous mouths shelter bobbins for sewing machines, the threads coated with saliva are noisily unwound by equally anonymous hands, to then be placed on my body. Covered, little by little, from my feet up to my hands by an entanglement of threads, a composition improvised by the mouths and hands that surround me. I slowly lose my fear of seeing the image of my body dissolve - my face, my form, myself: I begin to be this entangled-droll. The sound of bobbins turning in mouths has stopped. Hands now become entangled in the damp, hot mold that enwraps me in order to extricate me from it; some more nervous, tear off tufts, others lift threads with the tip of the fingers as if they were intent on fraying and so it continues until nothing is left. The blindfold is taken off. Return to the visible world. In the flux of entangled-droll a new body, a new face, a new self was molded.

I am stunned. What has happened to me? I feel called upon to confront this enigma.

I look for clues in Lygia Clark's own texts, which always seemed to me more precise in saying the unsayable of her work. Although I don't have access at this moment, to her journals I can still count on her publications and some of hers unpublished texts, interviews, and correspondence. (2) I focused especially in the phase that begins right after *Climber* (1964) (3), the last of her famous *Beasts* - the one that according to Lygia, Mario Pedrosa kicked when he first saw it, an act he followed with the enthusiastic remark: "Finally an artwork you can kick." (4) From the moment this kick is possible, a shift in Lygia's work that could already be discerned takes concrete form. The new phase is inaugurated with *Walking* (1964) and ends with the sessions of the *Relational Objects*, an oeuvre that she produced from 1976 to 1981, and more sporadically in 1984. This is the period that I am interested in researching, for there is where Lygia created the "work" that happened to me - the one she called *Anthropophagic Droll* (1973). Together those works comprise the last 24 years of her production when (deliberately); it was no longer viable to display her isolated objects in museums, galleries, living rooms or salons. What point would there be in exhibition bobbins, for example, divorced from the experience I described?

I am drawn to the insistent repetition of some words and expressions, real *ritornellos*. I decided to take them as my line of investigation. I begin with one that mentions the body, as it was there that something disquieting happened to me: "memory of the body". Of what body and what memory is Lygia speaking?

I appeal to the memory of the sensations that I experienced during *Anthropophagic Droll*. I discover that the body into which I was launched and that Lygia spoke so often is neither the organic body, nor the image of the body, nor the envelope for a supposed imaginary interiority that would constitute the unity of myself. And moreover, it is these very bodies that were unraveled in me, dissolved in the mixture of drool. The lived body in this experience is beyond all those other bodies, though paradoxically it includes them: it is the body of the entangled-fluxes drool where I unmade and remade my self.

I think of the “body without organs,” an expression of Antonin Artaud’s taken up and expanded by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari at the same time that Lygia was making her *Anthropophagic Droll*. The body without organs is that “aformal” material of flux/drool that I experienced on a totally different plane from the one where my form, both objective and subjective, was delineated. I said “aformal” material not “unformed” because what I experienced there was not simply an absence or lack of definition of my form, but also “beyond form”. A plane inhabited by a burning agitation of the flux of saliva, threads, mouths, hands, in movements of attraction and repulsion producing constellations - a plethora of life in which a bundle of unknown sensations germinated, incapable of being expressed in the form in which I recognized myself. That was when I seemed strange to myself: something in me ceased to make sense. I was only pacified when I began to feel a new body, a new “me” gaining consistency; the incarnation of those sensations produced by the mixture of flux/drool.

I then had a glimpse that the body without organs of the flux/drool is a sort of spring of worlds - modes of existence, “I”s, bodies, like events as what is always about to appear, to be produced. (5) It is an outside of me, but one that curiously inhabits me and also makes me differ from myself - as Lygia says: “the inside is the outside.” This paradox brings me to a new question: If it isn’t inside me, where is that the outside inhabits me?

I remember a comment Lygia made about a work from the period I am researching: “When man puts on those masks he turns into an authentic beast. Since the mask is his appendix.” (6) I find a lead: the outside is the body without organs of the authentic beast - a beyond me as a given form, with its contours, its inside, its structure, its psychology. The outside is the nonhuman alive that inhabits me: a material made from drool that is mixed ad infinitum, producing folds and more folds, whose contours circumscribe insides. And the insides are swallowed in the entanglement of drool - an anthropophagic beast that devours them, rendering them contingent and finite. Each inside is an outside fold, a fold of the authentic beast.

The association with *Beasts* in their multiple folds is immediate. But also with *Walking* which immediately follows them, inaugurating this last phase of Lygia’s work: the initiation of the spectator to the fold of the outside, forming ephemeral insides that are unfolded only to be diluted once again in the outside. In Lygia’s own words: “*The Walking* allows for the transformation of a virtuality into a concrete undertaking. “ (7) Virtuality produced in the outside that will be actualized in the creation of a new form.

I go back to *Anthropophagic Droll*: it is from this outside that a new inside of me was produced. It is easy to imagine that if this experience would be repeated in other contexts - composed of other fluxes, other mixtures - it would produce other insides of me.

If this is the body that I inhabited in *Droll*, what does the memory of this body consist of? What type of memory did this experience activate in me?

It is obvious that what was triggered in me was not a chronological memory, nor a storage/file of a biographic sequence that my conscience would have accessed, or a hiding place for the repressed representations of the past.

Once again Lygia is the one who answers. What *Droll* activated was the memory of the "archaic" another one of her *ritornellos*: the beast - the nonhuman in man and its affects - that is, paradoxically, always contemporary. The memory of the entangled-droll body, the field of experimentation in a chronogenesis: the engenderment of threads of time specializing in new worlds. The prospective memory accessed by reactivation (of the beast) and not by regression (to the human past and its repressed contents).

At this juncture another question imposed itself to me, the last one I have to confront in order to have some understanding of what happened to me on that Sunday: what is Lygia after in inventing objects whose aim is to access the memory of the body?

If the memory to be accessed is the chronogenetic one, the function of Lygia's objects is neither sensitization, nor the cathartic liberation of the body proper as a fount of pleasure, nor the expression or constitution of an image of the body as a fount of psychic unity, nor the redemption of those repressed representations, that would be found in a secret file. On the contrary, the function of these objects is to foment subjectivity to be exposed to the beyond human in man, that is, toward the authentic beast (the living one).

It is Lygia herself who affirms that the ritual that this memory invokes is not aimed at "capturing a form to be found either in the past nor in the future, but rather, the experimental living of the present participle of the incessant evolution of forms. A ritual that will serve as a bridge to cross from the land pseudo-solid of one's alienation to the unstable and inexhaustible waters of one's freedom to act the "precarious as the new concept of existence." (8) A ritual that gives back to the "cosmic lung" (another of Lygia's *ritornellos*) the potency to breathe the outside air.

Lygia does not simply want to open access to the unformed (the negative of the form, its absence), or to the capacity of changing forms (metamorphosis), which is a very frequent proposal in this generation of artists that Lygia belongs to, and it's usually taken as a value in itself. What she wants is to create conditions to gain or regain a certain state in subjectivity that would make it possible to bear the contingency of forms, to detach oneself from an absolutist inside experienced as identity. To navigate in the unstable waters of the aformal body and to acquire the freedom to make other folds, each time that a new bundle of sensations in the beast requires it. It is as an answer to this requirement that changing forms gathers meaning and value, imposing itself as necessary for the vital adventure.

Lygia called this “attaining the singular state of art without art”: the last of her *ritornellos* that I will evoke, because it defines the experience that I am interested in problematizing here. One question immediately arises: why “without art?” This is an essential detail: for her, to experience the “state of art”- to embody a new bundle of sensations, which are unique by definition - it doesn’t happen only in the creation of the so-called “object of art”. Experience the state of art also happens in the creation of the objective existence and/or subjective existence. What Lygia wants is to rescue life in its creative power, whatever the terrain in which such power is exercised.

Attaining the state of art in the artist’s own subjectivity is nothing new, since it is in this state that the artist creates. Lygia always experienced real convulsions during the gestation of each phase of her work. Her turbulence was not merely a picturesque biographical detail, a peculiarity of her “psychological structure,” but part of her creative process, during which an idea, at once artistic and existential, took shape.

To achieve this state of art in her work, to shake it loose from its reification in the object - reification that has substantial support in the art market - is doubtless an important step. But if that were the only question in her work, Lygia would bring nothing new in her time.

I think that Lygia’s main target is the subjectivity of the spectator: it is there that she wished to achieve what she called the state of art - she hoped to dust off the position of the spectator, to de-reify it radically. This goes far beyond the simple notion of participation, common to her generation and reducible to a politically correct democratism. (9)

Here lies the originality and major strength of Lygia’s oeuvre. This is what made her move herself gradually from those who visit museums and galleries, a public that is exaggeratedly reified in its identity as spectator. She then started to look for her “spectators” among the young students of post 1968 Sorbonne, and later, among anonymous passersby in the streets of Paris. In the end she looked for her spectators one by one, preferably among the borderlines, in the context of what she herself called the “experimental doctor’s office,” that she installed in her apartment in the Prado Junior Street at Copacabana. The spectators’ access to the objects comes to depend on his giving himself over to an initiation; on surrendering his subjectivity to the state of art. As Guy Brett writes, “would not Lygia’s exclusion of an audience, in fact be a paradoxical means of searching for a “creative audience?” (10)

What Lygia is trying to provoke in the spectator can be confused with the counter-cultural propositions of her contemporaries. Among them, to liberate the body, and to develop creativity - whether by using objects ludically as in a playground, or incarnating the cliché of the artist dormant in everyone, a Sleeping (Art) Beauty that can and should be awakened. None of this is what Lygia is after; what she strives for is that existence be made into a work of art, one spectator at the time.

It is true as an aesthetic proposal this is nothing new: one could say that such an aesthetic accompanies Modernism from its very beginning. But Lygia goes further: she strives for the dereification of individual and collective existence, the decoagulation of forms, the conquest of fluidity in the processes of subjectivization. To be molded, as she says, to

allow oneself to be unsewn and sewn (11) through the pullulating of the subterranean work in the strengths/fluxes of our beast. Agitation of forces that occurs in silence, the germination of sensible states that demands a body to come and incarnate it, a body of thought, of art, of existence, etc. Lygia proposes an anthropophagic mode of subjectivization: the beast devouring the man, another man being born from this devouring, ad infinitum.

It is also true that there is nothing new in proposing to rip apart figures in order to allow foreseeing the activating forces in action. Such a proposition is formed in conjunction with modernity in art that already reached its highest degree of refinement with Cézanne. But each artist has his own way of proceeding in order to do it concretely. What is singular in Lygia's method is to have achieved this in the body of the spectator; she places it on-line with the forces, close to life. She launches it into his becoming.

To arrive at this, Lygia had to perfect the object to the point that it became almost-nothing. This could be understood as a "non-object", a concept forged by Malevich at the beginning of the century and in vogue in the '60s. Ferreira Gullar thought about the *Beasts* in this way, but Lygia already disagreed then. There is an "almost" that remains, and this almost is what essentially mobilizes in the object what I described in relation to *Droll*. What produces, on the body of the spectator, an experience of the destabilization of his subjectivity, allowing him to live the form in the moment of his drowning, the moment that is also that of a germination. Lygia wanted and succeeded in reducing the mediation of the object to the bare minimum, the almost-nothing that produces this effect. Hence her *Relational Objects*, her last work.

To produce this effect is, in my opinion, the most significant mark of Lygia's work and not simply in the post-*Beasts* period. What happens then, with this mark is that it is radicalized, achieves greater visibility, revealing its presence from the first to the last of Lygia's work. As with every mark of the memory of our beast body of flux/drool, it is eternal, always virtual, capable of being reactivated at any moment. It is only meaningful to bring Lygia back if it means reactivating this mark, reactualizing its power to promote the surrender of subjectivity to the state of art, in order to contaminate contemporary culture: a prospective outcome that such a mark would unfold in the present rather than a retrospective of her formalizations in the past.

This is the challenge inherent in any attempt to exhibit the art of Lygia Clark - especially when one intent to include her objects post 64's turning, daring to confront their mystery, which is indispensable for the intelligibility of her work as a whole. How can her work's power of proliferation be reactivated today and in the context of a museum or gallery? How can the disruptive voice of the beast that Lygia left us be made to emerge in each "visitor"? The challenge remains open...

Translated by Wilson Costa Leite de Almeida

Fist published in *Trans. arts. cultures. media* # 2. Passim, inc., New York, 1996.

Presented as a lecture in the *Hundred Days, Hundred Guests* program at Documenta X, in Kassel, Germany (July 1997).

(1) The experience described here is one I made of Lygia Clark's work Anthropophagic Droll, in the context of the sessions with a group dedicated to her work, initially aimed at the preparation of it's retrospective for the 22nd International Biennial of São Paulo.

(2) Lygia Clark wrote two journals: a clinical journal (notes on the "sessions" with the *Objetos Relacionais* [Relational Objects], her last work) and a personal diary (*three volumes of text that date from 1955 to 1973). I researched this material on two occasions: the first time in 1978, in response to a request from Lygia: to choose her last work as the topic of my thesis (*Mémoire du corps*) [*Memory of the body*], defended at the University of Paris VII). As well as to help her in composing her text "Objeto Relacional" for the book that Funarte dedicated to her work. I returned to work on the journals publishing for a project for the edition of her texts, that we worked together and that was interrupted by her death, which also meant the end of my access to her journals.

(3) Mario Pedrosa is one of the most important landmarks in the history of art critic in Brazil. He was a privileged interpreter of Lygia Clark's and Hélio Oiticica's work.

(4) Extract from the personal diary of Lygia Clark that comprises the book jacket of *Artes* by Sonia Lins, her sister (Nova Fronteira: 1995).

(5) An extract from a talk given by Carlos Basualdo at a round table during the 22nd International Biennial of São Paulo on October 14, 1994.

(6) Letter to Hélio Oiticica dated November 14, 1968, in *Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 1987).

(7) "1964: Caminhando," in *Lygia Clark* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, col. Arte Brasileira Contemporânea 1980), p.25.

(8) "1966: Nós recusamos..."[1966: We refuse..."] in *Lygia Clark* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, col. Arte Brasileira Contemporânea, 1980), p.30.

(9) Cf. Paulo Sergio Duarte, "Depoimento a Glória Ferreira, "[Deposition to Gloria Ferreira] in *Lygia Clark e Hélio Oiticica* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte/Inape, 1987).

(10) Guy Brett, "Lygia Clark: The Borderline Between Art and Life," *Third Text* (London: # 1, 1987), p. 94.

(11)"Objeto Relacional," in *Lygia Clark* (Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, col. Arte Brasileira Contemporânea, 1980), pp. 49-50.