# Lygia Clark: In Search of the Body

*Recognized in Brazil as an artist of the first importance, Clark produced innovative work over a period of three decades. She both anticipated today's concern with the body and broke new ground in examining the relation between art and society. This is the first major article on her work in English.*

**BY GUY BRETT**

The work of Lygia Clark (1920-1988) has not yet been introduced to a North American public.[1] It is true that some of her earlier paintings and sculptures have been included in recent surveys of Latin American art, staged both in Europe and the U.S. Clark could not be left out of such shows because she has long been recognized in her native Brazil, and increasingly in other countries, as an artist of the first importance. But she could not be properly represented either, because her work does not fit within the institutional framework and the rather conventional notion of "the work of art" which such surveys are based on.

Individual exhibitions of Clark's work outside Brazil, up to now, have been very few: one at Signals, an experimental art space in London, in 1965, one at the Brazilian pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1968, and a few others. An excellent retrospective was held in Rio de Janeiro at the Paço Imperial (jointly with Hélio Oiticica) in 1986, two years before she died. Aside from these shows, from the late '60s on her work did not reach the public through an exhibition format.

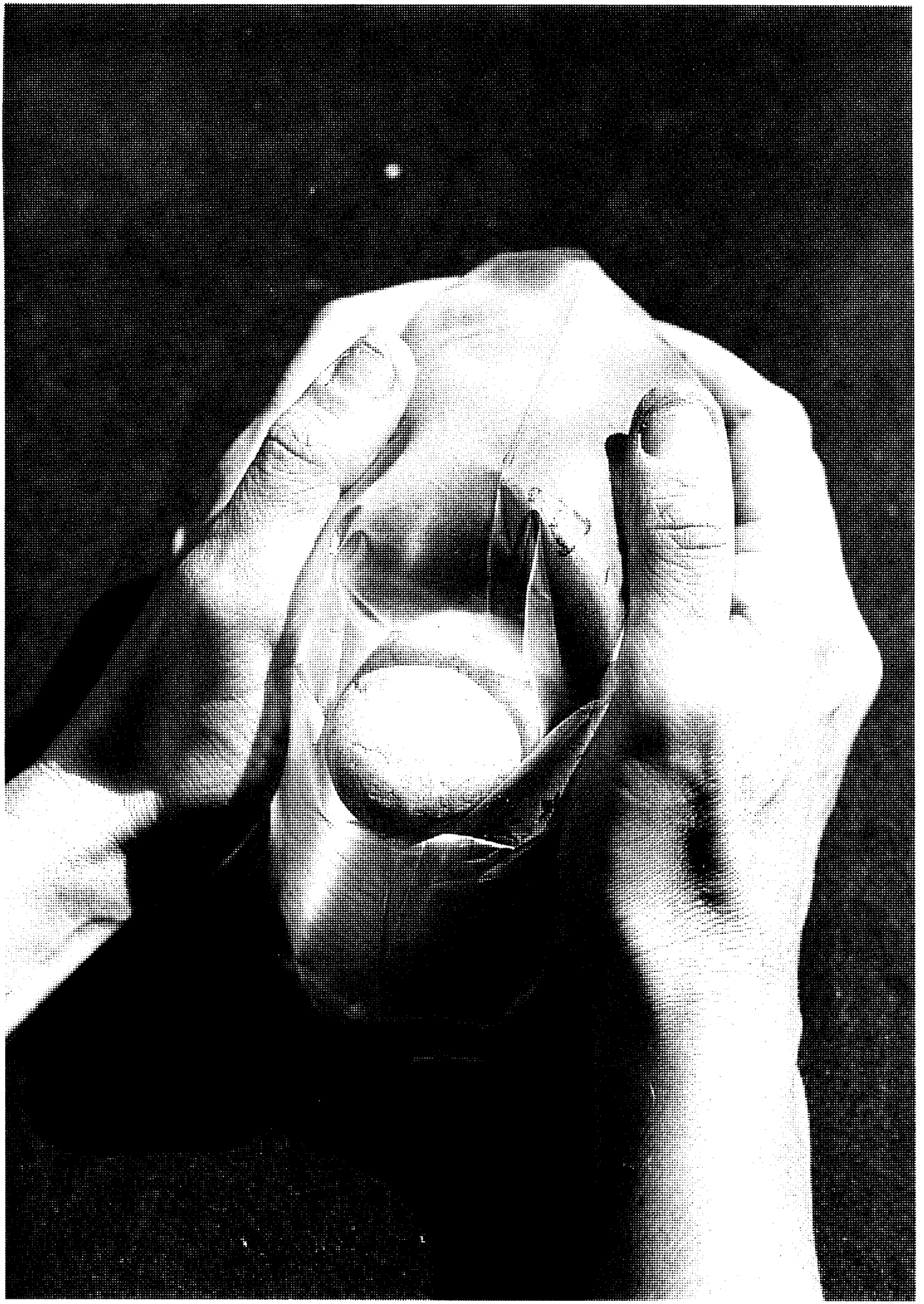
Clark began as a painter in the late '50s, producing small, monochrome painting/reliefs; these were followed by her own brand of neo-constructivist sculptures. In the '60s her work took a more conceptual direction, toward often ephemeral or soft objects associated with mutability and viewer participation. She developed a more elaborately collective way of working during the '70s, as she explored sensory perception and psychic interaction of various sorts: what she called "ritual without myth." The final phase of her work moved into actual psychotherapy and healing.

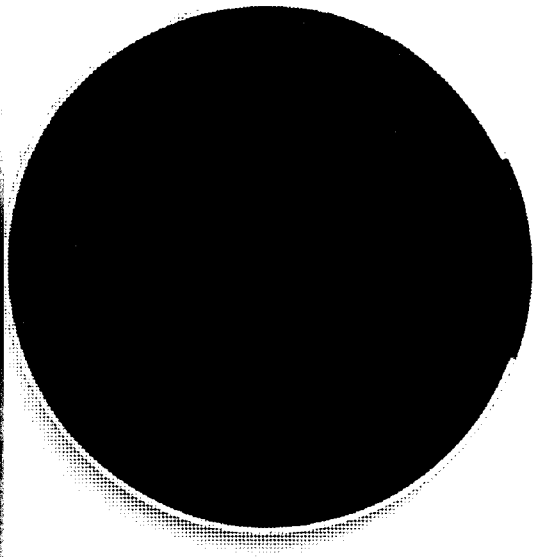
An article in an art magazine can give a kind of introduction to an artist's work. If the article is a retrospective one, we are privileged (or fated) to see all the work at once—a whole life laid out. It is impossible, however, for us to live the evolution of the work over time, as the artist did, and to fully comprehend what the later developments meant in relation to the earlier ones. I think that this caveat is particularly pertinent to the work of Lygia Clark. The production of any period of her life can be enjoyed, certainly, for its own sake (in rather different ways), but, for her, each stage represented a moment in an evolution in search of something. This search continued up to her death. For her, each stage superseded the one before because she felt she had gone further and the old conditions no longer applied. For us, looking back, the logic of her development is extraordinary. For her, each change was accompanied by a painful crisis.

*Above, Lygia Clark, Rio de Janeiro, 1958.*

*Opposite,* Air and Stone, *1966, inflated plastic bag and pebble.*

*Below, Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's* Dialogue of Hands, *1966, the artists' hands with elastic Möbius band.*





**Egg** ***from the "Unity" series, 1958, nitro-cellulose paint on wood, 13 inches in diameter.***

The evolution of Clark's work may perhaps be summed up as a radical journey beyond the traditional relationship between artist and spectator. Traditionally, the artist is the giver of a communication and the spectator the receiver. This transaction is mediated by the "art work." The art work is expressly constructed to be apprehended by the visual sense. Art-making is part of an ongoing process which itself, over time, has refined the visual sense in isolation from the other senses, and independent of the body as a whole.

The artist produces a representation—a compressed sign—of some form of physical fact, life-experience or spiritual energy, which is encoded in the work of art; this is then decoded and read by the spectator, and to some extent relived by him or her. Suppose, instead, that the artist's production was not her own encoded expressivity directed toward the other person as spectator, but provided some means for that other person to become conscious of his/her own expressivity, in the role of participant. The roles of "artist," "spectator" and mediating "object" would all change. Since the object would no longer be a representation, it would have no meaning or structure outside the participants' manipulation of it in the here-and-now. Its existence would be meaningful only in an intimate relationship between the participants as whole, pluri-sensorial beings. The external shape of this object would no longer have primary importance since it would not be intended exclusively for the eye, nor even for the other senses explicitly defined, but for something vaguer, broader. As the Brazilian writer and psychologist Lula Wanderley has put it, the "Relational Objects" of Lygia Clark depend "not on a sensorial outlining of shape nor some quality of surface, but [on] something that dilutes the notion of surface and makes the object to be lived in an 'imaginary inwardness of the body' where it finds signification. This is where the frontier is broken between body and object."[2]

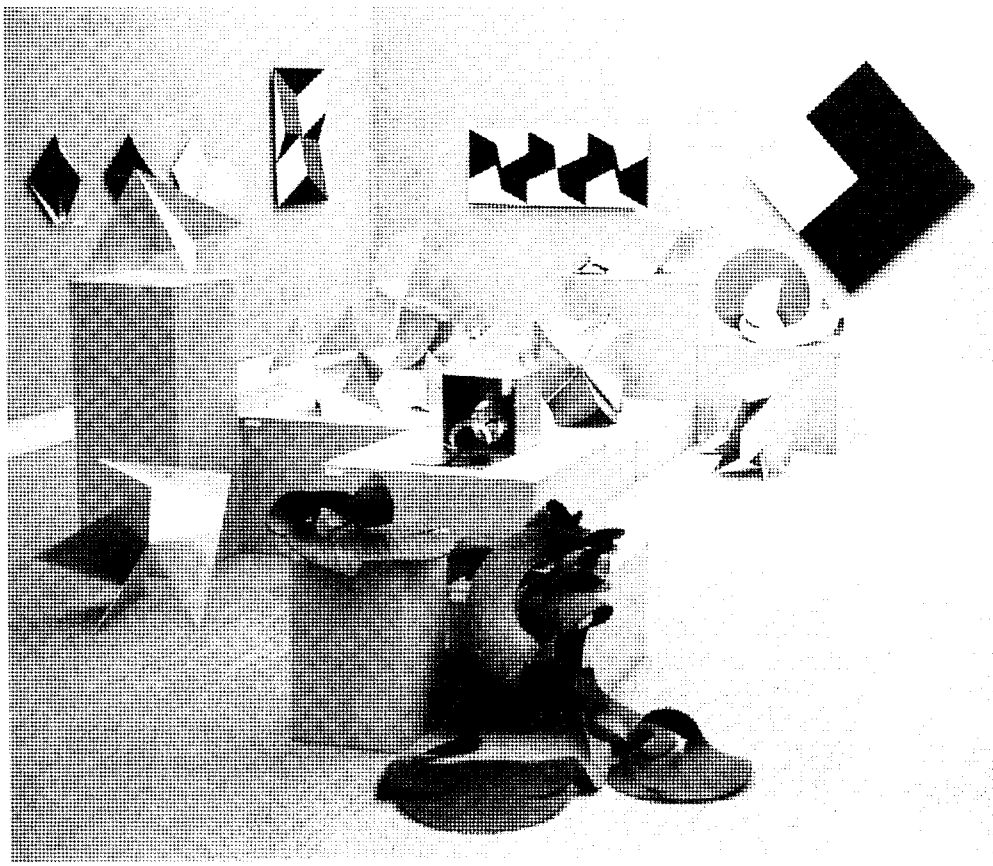
From a brief description this may sound arcane and difficult. In practice Lygia Clark's development had an unusual clarity. Its coherence enables one to account for a trajectory which began with painting and ended in the practice of a form of psychotherapy. For Clark this was not a change of métier but a continuum in which the implications of her experiments change our understanding of what "artist" may mean. She moved from a visual language in the purest sense to a "language of the body," not performed or spectated but lived by the participant in a way which enabled an efficacious, "healing" relationship to take place in the face of life's crises.

Clark herself had a clear idea of the context in which her work evolved. Hers was not a local "Brazilian" expression, she felt, but a contribution toward "the universal development of art."[3] At the same time she maintained that her work, after the geometric sculptures of 1960, at least, "could only have been done by someone with the roots I have."[4] It was not intended for the art milieu of galleries and museums but was aimed, ideally, at "the person in the street."[5] How did these elements of context, which might appear to be mutually contradictory, come to be intertwined? The question already gives a clue to Clark's significance.

Clark's work deals with intimate feelings and interior life. To link it with broad generalizations about society and culture can appear crass. But it seems to me that she, like her contemporary Oiticica [see *A.i.A.*, Jan. '89], embodies an intricate and reciprocal relationship between the international and the local in culture which resulted in an important reorientation of the avant-garde.

For all the changes it went through, Clark's work never quite lost the marks of its grounding in the "constructivist" movements in Brazil of the 1950s. These were born in a period of great artistic and intellectual excitement in the country. While Abstract Expressionism was emerging in New York, contemporaneously with *l'art informel*, *l'art brut* and *tachisme* in Paris in the aftermath of the war, Brazil was being exposed to the pioneer generation of European abstract artists: Mondrian, Malevich, Klee, Moholy-Nagy, the Russian Constructivists, the Bauhaus artists and others, as well as younger "concrete" artists like Max Bill and Josef Albers. Their work was seen firsthand at the early São Paulo biennials in the 1950s; Bill and Albers both lectured in Brazil during the same period. If on the one hand these influences represented the typical delay suffered by peripheral cultures in the arrival of ideas from the metropolitan art centers (though Le Corbusier was lecturing on architecture in Latin America, including Brazil, as early as 1929 and 1936), on the other hand they corresponded to the needs of a progressive middle class intent on developing Brazil. The postwar period is symbolized by the building of Brasilia, the modern capital in the center of the vast country. It was marked in another way by the remarkable Sunday Supplement which the *Jornal do Brasil* published at the turn of the 1960s. Employing the best writers, and often designed by artists, it offered intelligent analysis of the whole modern movement from Cézanne to Pollock, and from Mallarmé to the just-emerging Beat poets of San Francisco.

***Partial view of the artist's installation at the Venice Biennale in 1968.***



As Ronaldo Brito has written in his excellent study, the Brazilian constructivist movements represented the desire of a new intellectual generation to be "absolutely modern."[6] At that time the reigning style in Brazil was the "regionalist realism" associated with artists like Candido Portinari: closely identified with the programs of the left political parties, it was illustrative and populist and in its day had been an attempt to assert a notion of Brazilianness in the face of foreign cultural domination.

The new forces developed their own momentum, rebounding—although this has never been acknowledged—to influence art in Europe. When the young artists of Latin America's wealthier cities came to Europe in the 1950s—from Caracas and Buenos Aires as well as from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo—the art they sought out (by Mondrian, Malevich, Brancusi, Vantongerloo) was still underrated even by many champions of modernism in Europe and North America. "At that time [1950] no one in France was talking about Mondrian, still less might one see any of his work," wrote the Venezuelan artist Alejandro Otero.[7]

The early, or Concrete, phase of constructivism in Brazil drew heavily on the mathematical abstraction of Max Bill, and the ideas for "scientifically" integrating art into industrial society were associated with the Ulm Superior School of Form in Germany, of which Bill was director in the early '50s. One can hardly escape the ironies of trying to translate this tidy Swiss-German rationalism, with its Calvinist overtones, to Brazilian tropical and "underdeveloped" conditions. Brito speaks of a "messianic project" on the part of a middle-class vanguard attempting to surmount underdevelopment. Its idealism was another expression of the contradictions of dependence; "there was something 'colonial' in their mimicry of Swiss Formalist rationalism."[8]

The decisive moment of Brazilian constructivism came when this European influence produced its rejoinder, in the form of Brazil's Neo-Concrete group, which was founded in 1959. This group included, besides Clark and Oiticica, Lygia Pape, Amilcar de Castro, Franz Weissmann, Reynaldo Jardim and Theon Spanudis; the artists were deeply influenced by the writings of the poet Ferreira Gullar and the art critic Mario Pedrosa. Without leaving the language of geometric abstraction or the general social concerns of constructivism, the Neo-Concretists attacked the positivism and mechanistic reductionism of the Bill-Ulm philosophy. The Neo-Concrete Manifesto (1959) called for a reinstatement of the values of intuition, expression and subjectivity. "If we have to look for an equivalent to the work of art we will not find it in the machine, or even the object as such, but . . . in living organisms."[9]

I believe this was a break which defined a new position within the evolution of contemporary art. The "organic" is its key term. "We do not conceive of a work of art as a 'machine' or as an 'object,' but as a '*quasi-body*' [my italics], that is to say something which amounts to more than the sum of its constituent parts; something which analysts may break down into various elements but which can only be understood phenomenologically."[10] Writing about Lygia Clark's articulated metal sculptures in the late 1960s, the artist David Medalla felt they had an "invisible" heart, "to which all the possible phases of each construction are organically linked, comparable to the nucleus of the atom or of the biological cell."[11]

The espousal of expression and subjectivity by the Neo-Concretists did not imply a polar swing to a form of "expressionism" or "surrealism." However much Clark's later works may have been concerned with the visceral, they never lost their abstract quality: abstract not in the sense of geometry, which they soon dispensed with, but in concentrating on a dialectic of abstract qualities which are also physically experienced, such as heaviness and lightness, fullness and emptiness, warmth and cold, light and dark.

In Brazilian terms, the critical absorption in the '50s of European modernism brought to mind an earlier instance of the same process. In 1922 the famous Modern Art Week—roughly equivalent to New York's epochal 1913 Armory Show—was held in São Paulo. Its guiding spirit, the great poet Oswald de Andrade, reflected much on the character of Brazil's culture. Rather than speaking of mutual influences, or the merging of superficial traits between the indigenous Indian culture of Brazil, the Portuguese colonial/feudal/Catholic systems, the African culture which came with the slaves, and the various waves of later European migration, he used a much more powerful metaphor: *antropofágia* (cannibalism). As reformulated in a contemporary definition by Brazil's outstanding poet Haroldo de Campos, this meant "the critical swallowing-up of the universal cultural heritage, elaborated not from the submissive, reconciliant perspective of the 'good savage' but from the disillusioned viewpoint of the 'bad savage,' the whiteman-eater, the cannibal. It involves . . . transvaluation: a critical view of History . . . as well-suited to appropriation as to expropriation, dis-hierarchization, or deconstruction."[12]

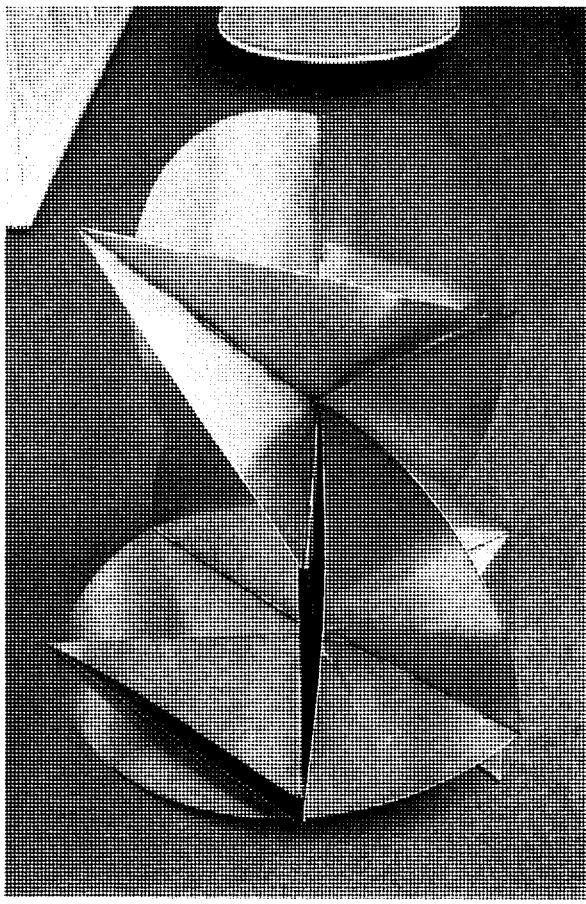
De Andrade's theoretical concept in the form of a corporeal metaphor was also, in a way, the intellectualization of a lived experience of tropical nature and popular culture of Brazil. Like most such generalizations about national character, perhaps, the "popular culture of the body" exists both as a stereotype and a truth. It is what makes it possible to read a phrase like "Brazilian elasticity of body and mind" in both a football report and an article on Lygia Clark! As Caetano Veloso says: "This image isn't forced, it's in the air."[13]

No value, however, is without negative aspects. The "popular culture of the body" undoubtedly has its other side, including horrendous corporal punishments meted out to slaves in the 19th century, and political torture in the 20th (practices not limited to Brazil, of course). Paradoxically (by a strange dialectic found in her work between the monstrous and the joyful), some of Clark's forms have subliminally referred to this abuse of the body as a way of proposing its freedom and plenitude. Her work would have no purpose if it simply reflected easeful, unproblematic relationships of the mind to the body in the individual, or between individuals and others in couples and groups. Perhaps its real originality lies in the primary importance it gives to "lived experience," or "embodied knowledge."

This brings us to another consideration of the relationship between the art milieu and the broad population in Brazil during the '50s and '60s. The gap between rich and poor, and the lack of a developed artistic infrastructure, made it difficult to survive economically as an artist. Pressures were growing for the establishment of artistic institutions, galleries, an art market and publications. Yet there were some objections: reproducing a professional art world and plugging Brazil into the international art system might result merely in the rote annexation of the latest artistic codes. Artists might lose their independence. In their anxiety to overcome provincialism, they might progressively cut themselves off from what was most vital in their own environment.

The significance of Clark and Oiticica, in the opinion of the Brazilian critic Sonia Salzstein, was that they carried out their work, they posed their questions, beyond the provincial-versus-international or traditional-versus-modern dilemmas which have always dominated the Brazilian art world. "The pop-

**For all the changes it went through, Clark's work never lost its grounding in Brazilian "constructivist" tendencies of the '50s—movements born in a period of great artistic and intellectual excitement.**



**Animal, *1962, aluminum hinged plates. Private collection. Photo Clay Perry.***

**Clark thought of her work not as a local expression but as a contribution to the "universal development of art." She also felt that it "could only have been done by someone with the roots I have."**

**Abyss-Mask,** ***1968, plastic bags, stones, elastic, netting. Photo Michael Desjardins.***

ular substratum of Brazilian society appears in their work not as a theme, to be sure, but as a kind of strategy to be placed immediately in life, in the 'process' sense, assigning to art a power of constituting social life which is, I feel, at bottom a very Brazilian cultural demand."[14] These artists, in Salzstein's view, were searching for something other than an "institutionalizing destiny" for art in the contemporary world. They "conceived the broader project of a Brazilian art directed towards the social scale as a strategy of cultural emancipation."[15]

These aspirations found an echo in events in Europe and North America. When Clark lived and worked in Paris between 1968 and '75, she was drawn to those tendencies in which the concept of the art object was expanded beyond the gallery and museum, into the environment, mixing mediums and inviting the participation of the public. She felt close to groups like the Exploding Galaxy (started by David Medalla [see *A.i.A.*, Nov. '89] in London in 1967), which tried to reinvent a way of life from scratch, and to magazines like *Robho* (edited by Jean Clay in Paris), which featured kinetic and process art, concrete poetry and performance, guerrilla theater and artists' activism both against the Vietnam war and against exploitative structures in the art world. *Robho* published features on Clark's work in 1969 and 1971, in issues edited by Jean Clay and Yve-Alain Bois that included a large selection of her writings. Despite sometimes regretting her own "domesticity," compared with the energy in the streets, Clark felt her work would aid in an attempt to "release the general creativity of everyone, without any psychological or social limits."[16]

By the early 1970s it was difficult any longer to speak in such terms. In Brazil, the huge energy of the youth revolt and counterculture, both in its militant political and pacific hippie form, came into conflict with the growing hegemony of military government, with its repression, censorship and political killings, creating a pervasive atmosphere of fear and traumatizing the public space. Spending most of the dictatorship years in Paris, where she had a teaching appointment at the Sorbonne, Clark concentrated on working regularly and evolving her ideas. The definition of her "public" changed as her work changed. Having left behind the old relation between artist and spectator to engage the participation of the gallery-going public, she then proceeded to develop interactive works with initiated groups, such as her students at the Sorbonne. Finally, after her return to Brazil in 1975, she would move into the private sphere of psychotherapy, where the context changed from one of play and experiment to one of healing. Against the notion of a retreat from public to private space, one can put forward the idea of different ways of conducting "the experimental exercise of freedom."[17]

Whether living in Paris or Rio, Clark herself always felt relatively isolated in her artistic thinking. This was partly because the fusion she made between the "European" and the "Brazilian" went so far beyond the formal. Clark's (and Oiticica's) early interest in Mondrian involved a profound comprehension of the inner development of his work, not a practice "in the manner of," or the addition of local color to an international language. Theirs was an understanding of Mondrian's pictorial language of nonrepresentation, but also of his works as "models" towards a social art which, in Oiticica's words, would be "neither the mural nor applied art, but something expressive, which would be like the 'beauty of life,' something he could not define because it did not yet exist."[18] These artists read Malevich, as well, in their own way. Oiticica's interpretation of Malevich's "White on White" paintings was highly unusual. He saw them as "a necessary state in which the 'plastic arts' divest themselves of their privileges and whiten themselves into skin/body/air. The drives towards absolute plasticity and suprematism," he wrote, "are drives towards life and they lead us to take our body (to discover it) as life's first probe."[19]

Life, skin, body, air: these set the tone for a playful, provocative reorientation of the legacy of 20th-century abstraction. If we see Clark's and Oiticica's *Dialogue of Hands*, 1966—two people with their wrists linked by a Möbius loop—beside Max Bill's version of the Möbius, *Endless Ribbon*, 1935-53, which the Swiss artist produced as a ponderous granite monument; or if we see Clark's "Borrachas" (Rubber Grubs), ribbonlike structures cut from discs of rubber flooring and joined in Möbius loops, beside Robert Morris's soft felt pieces (of a few years later), we realize the Brazilians had a different attitude toward the object. They had a different understanding of the "endlessness" of spatial relationships, with which all these works were concerned. For them the idea of the endless incorporated the body and was incorporated in the body. How did Lygia Clark arrive at this perception?

**Rubber Grub,** ***1964, green flooring rubber; photographed in Wales in 1966 by Guy Brett. Private collection.***

**Body Nostalgia,** ***an interactive work from 1968, plastic bag, stones, net, rubber band.***

"I began with geometry but I was looking for an organic space where one could enter the painting," she said.[20] It could be stated equally well that Clark began with the eye, but the entire body began to make itself felt early on. By the late '50s, Albers-like linear figures suggesting deep and elastic space had ceded in Clark's work to a preoccupation with surface. The works in the "Unidade" (Unity) series, 1958, are paintings with extremely absorbent, dense matte black surfaces, produced with a nitro-cellulose paint on board. There is no frame. The black surface, raised slightly from the wall, is dissected or bordered by slightly recessed, narrow white lines, which sometimes close it, sometimes open it, to the surrounding space. Its dark void fluctuates between a feeling of fullness and emptiness. Her next works, also made in '58, were wall-hung metal sheets, sometimes unpainted, folded over to form a double plane, producing an interior space between, which she called "Casulos" (Cocoons). After this the painting format vanished, never to return. The planar structure came down from the wall, was articulated in hinged constructions, and her diverse and beautiful series of "Bichos" (Animals), 1960, began.

The "Bichos" are exactly poised between the cerebral schematism of geometry and the pulse of life and nature. They address the spectator on an active as well as a passive level. The spectator either picks up the object and plays with it or moves the hinged metal parts of the larger structures as they stand on the floor. Clark herself fought a constant battle for people to be able to continue to handle and play with the sculptures after they had passed into public and private collections. They were never intended to be merely looked at. Clark wrote, "The Animal has his own and well-defined cluster of movements which react to the promptings of the spectator. He is not made of isolated static forms which can be manipulated at random as in a game: no, his parts are functionally related to each other, as if he were a living organism, and the movements of these parts are interlinked. The intertwining of the spectator's action and the Animal's immediate answer is what forms this new relationship, made possible precisely because the Animal moves—i.e., has a life of its own."[21]

Clark's transferral of her attention, at this point, from the object to the spectator's act, exemplified her radicalism and the freedom with which she was able to rethink the activity of the artist. She soon drew out the spectator's act, so to speak, from its embryonic appearance in the context of the "Bichos," to make it the work itself. In a proposal of 1964, she simply invited the spectator to take a pair of scissors, twist a strip of paper and join it to form a Möbius loop and cut continuously along this unending plane. She titled this with a verb instead of a noun, *Caminhando* (Going). "The whole meaning of the experience," she wrote, "lies in the act of doing it. The work is your act. The Going left me in a state of void: the immanence of the act, the abandonment of any transference to the object, the dissolution even of the concept of the 'artist's work,' produced in me a very deep crisis. I wonder if, after the experience of the Going, we do not become more intensely conscious of every gesture we make—even the most habitual."[22]

However, Clark did not immediately abandon the autonomous object. Later in 1964 she produced the "Borrachas," a significant movement away from the rigidity of the "Bichos" toward sensuousness and elasticity. These flexible, changeable sculptures need no pedestal nor even a neutral wall space; metaphors of fluidity, they can be attached to any existing surface or structure, indoors or outdoors.

Clark's attitude toward the object now developed in three linked directions which implied three resounding negations as far as reigning notions of art were concerned. She conceived of an object that, first, would dissolve any idea of speculative financial value or collectibility by being made of everyday, cheap components obtainable anywhere, expendable through use and renewable. Second, the object would have meaning and structure only in the moment of direct bodily interaction with the spectator, now more accurately called participant. And third, the object would no longer privilege the visual sense, but treat the mind and body as one. The "work" became the "proposition."

In *Ar e pedra* (Air and Stone), 1966, the participant takes a small plastic grocery bag, blows into it to fill it with air, seals it with an elastic band and places a pebble in one corner of the air cushion, so the pebble rises and falls when the bag is gently squeezed. The weight of the pebble interacts with the weightlessness of air, by this incongruous means producing the tremulous feeling of a body. The associations are multiple: breathing, birth, tenderness, sexuality. At the same time the work presents a simple sculptural dialectic between empty and full, inside and outside, solid and immaterial.

Clark produced many devices to dissolve the visual sense into an awareness of the body. For example, the "Máscara sensorial" (Sensorial

**Relational Objects in a Therapeutic Context: The Structuring of the Self, *1976-82, Rio de Janeiro. Photo Sérgio Zalis.***

Hoods), 1967, incorporate eyepieces, ear coverings and a small nose bag, fusing optical, aural and olfactory sensations. A number of helmets hold small movable mirrors in front of the eyes: one can either look out into the world or back into oneself, or any fractured combination of both. "Máscara-abismo" (Abyss-Masks), 1967, often blindfold the eyes. Large air bags weighted down with stones can be touched, producing the sensation of an imaginary empty space inside the body, and so on.

Clark soon progressed from inward-looking solo works to interpersonal dialogues. In *O Eu e o tu: roupa/corpo/roupa* (The I and the You: Clothing/Body/Clothing), 1967, a man and a woman, their eyes covered by their hoods, each discover in pockets and cavities in the other's suit metaphorical suggestions of their own gender, "discovering one's own sex in the other."[23] Such works allow us to experiment with latent feelings, not only about the male/female parts of our own individual identity, but also to discover whether, in communication, we are able to give ourselves to the other, or must remain locked within ourselves. These works were collectively titled "Nostalgia do corpo" (Body Nostalgia).

Her next phase, beginning in the early 1970s, involved working with groups in a series called "Collective Bodies." Clark developed with her students in Paris two startling and ambivalent games, issuing from, or recalling, the celebrated cultural metaphor of Oswald de Andrade. These were *Antropofágia* and *Baba antropofágica*, both of 1973. In the first, a person lies down and the others, sitting around the body, blindfolded and communicating only by touch, eat the fruit lying in a large pocket of the person's suit, which forms a "stomach." In the second, a group of people again surround an individual, and, holding cotton reels inside their mouths, they continuously pull the thread from their mouths and allow it to fall upon the person lying in their midst, eventually covering the entire body. Clark felt that previous works had been limited to a "motor or muscular linking" of body to body. Once again she turned from the exterior and the surface toward something more internal. She described the new works as "the exchange between people of their intimate psychology"—by no means necessarily a pleasant thing! "The idea is that a person 'vomits' life-experience when taking part in a proposition. This vomit is going to be swallowed by the others, who will immediately 'vomit' their inner contents too. It is therefore an exchange of psychic qualities and the word communication is too weak to express what happens in the group."[24]

The idea for *Baba* came from a dream. There was indeed, in these propositions, a strange combination of physical actuality and dreamlike phantasmagoria. *Baba* means "slobber" or "drool" in Portuguese. The connotation is of letting go, of incoherence, of babyhood; yet the work is also a model of communication, or at least of exchange. For the physical is not literal: in *Baba* the cotton is still a metaphor, which links "saliva" with "life-experience."

By the time she returned from Paris to Rio de Janeiro in the mid-1970s, Clark had a whole repertoire of what she now called "Relational Objects." So convinced had she become of the interconnections between the "physical" and the "metaphorical" in a person's lived experience that she felt she had evolved a kind of "language of the body." By means of the Relational Objects, she believed an interaction was possible with experiences locked in the body's memory, at a nonverbal, or preverbal, level. A verbal communication could not touch them, but a "language of the body" could by direct contact bring them back—"not as virtual living but as concrete feeling"—to be relived and transformed.[25] The therapeutic potential of this process interested Clark increasingly. Despite having no formal psychiatric qualifications, from 1976 to about '82, in her Rio studio, she treated many individuals with psychological problems ranging from profound psychotic disturbances to minor neuroses. A good description of her practice is given by Lula Wanderley, the psychologist whom I quoted earlier, and who continues to use Clark's methods in his own psychotherapy. He calls the process "a beautiful ritual, especially in the relationship between silence and gestures":

> The person lies down over a huge object, a mattress made of transparent plastic filled with small styrofoam balls. Its surface does not offer resistance. It allows for empty space inside and thus facilitates a perfect accommodation of the body. I cover the person's eyes with a small object, place sea-shells to his ears to bring about a sense of inwardness. I gently massage the person's head, press, gently and firmly, the joints' ends against each other. This brings many people to experience a sense of unity.

**Clark's development had an unusual clarity. Though her work began with painting and ended in the practice of a form of psychotherapy, it nevertheless followed a coherent trajectory.**

I touch the person's body with relational objects in a kind of massage and let the objects lie over the body, enveloping it. This, the longest step (about 40 minutes) . . . is when the language of the relational objects becomes strongest, without the touch of the mediator-therapist, who just stays away waiting.

A rounded pebble wrapped in a net has been placed in the person's hands. We call this pebble "proof of reality." Being totally different from the other objects, since it is compact, has well-defined contours, etc., the gesture of holding it makes a counterpoint to the whole process and, simultaneously, is part of it.

Slowly and gently I remove the objects. I massage the body with another huge object, a kind of blanket made of very light material and stuffed with small styrofoam balls. After the person is seated, the eyes open, I hand an object of air for the person to touch his/her own body in a gesture of transition on the way back to an attitude of verbalization. I then converse with the client about what was experienced during the whole session.[26]

***Above and below,* Antropofágia *and* Baba antropofágica, *participatory performances with Clark's students at the Sorbonne in Paris, 1973. Photos Huber Josse.***

The work of Lygia Clark raises many fascinating questions. It seems to me that these have become more pertinent with the passage of time, and that her own death in 1988 has not had the effect of consigning her work to a past epoch. Here there is only room to touch on some of these questions: they all need fuller treatment. As regards the efficacy of Clark's psychotherapy, I have heard a number of people movingly praise it. But I don't want to (nor can I) evaluate it here in that sense. Two things, it seems to me, are obvious. First, that Clark did not abandon art to become a therapist, as a change of métier, and second, that the link she made between art and psychotherapy was like no other one. Her work did not borrow existing concepts of art, or of representation, for use in a therapeutic context. On the contrary she transformed notions of art and of the artist. It is the implications of this profound reconceptualization which I would like to try to unravel.

In a sense, a bringing together of art and medicine, or healing, is not a new idea but a very ancient one. Ancient Greece abounds with evidence of a link between the idea of efficacy in an esthetic and a medicinal sense: the followers of Orpheus and of Pythagoras, for example, saw in music a magical means of purification and healing.[27] In some ways this idea continued in the Western world until the beginning of the modern period. Mikhail Bakhtin described Rabelais as a "fusion of the doctor and the artist in one person." This was on account of Rabelais's perception of the body in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.[28] In China, the Taoist concept of the

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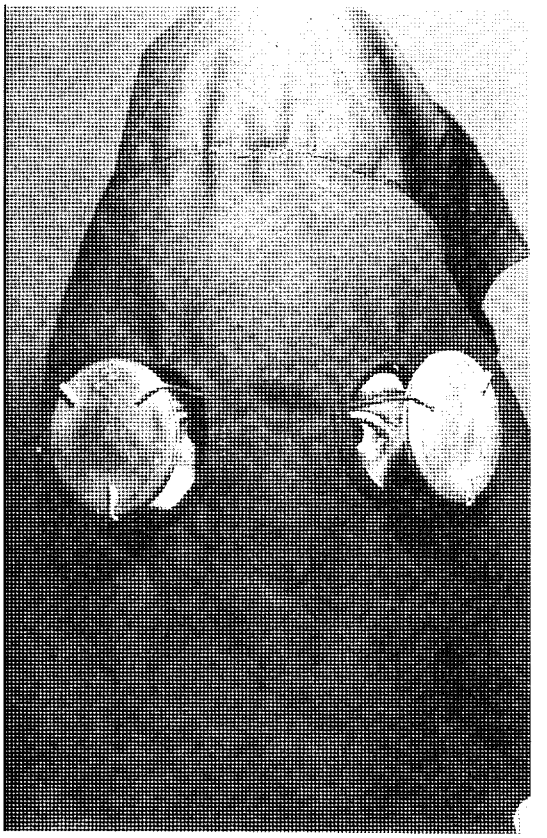
*chi* (breath, life force) runs without a break between the fields of philosophy, medicine and art.

Clark begins from the premise that this unity has been broken in the modern period. Her work implicitly acknowledges that the isolation and specialization of the visual sense has been an accompaniment of those changes. Some commentators associate the development of modern vision with the Renaissance perfection and later dissemination of the camera obscura, the dark room cut off from the world, which enabled the world to be represented and known in a way whose effect was to "sunder the act of seeing from the physical body of the observer, to decorporealize vision."[29] The result was to separate the knower from the known, subject from object. Clark's work questions this separation. Whether the medicinal aspect of her work is seen in terms of getting a person over an extreme psychological crisis or as a general "untying of knots" and relaxing, it aimed to recover a notion of the body's "plenitude." This implies a unity of knower and known, of subject and object. Her own Relational Objects, which have "no identity of their own," are therefore very different from the art objects of the art world.[30]

Just for that reason the radical nature of her position is not easy to sustain. It is most likely, indeed already happening, that in the art world her objects will increasingly be seen in formal terms. They will then be reduced to a set of sculptural practices, ironically even the same set of sculptural practices whose limits she had exceeded in her own lifetime. In formal terms—let's say of softness, nonrigidity, organicity—there are clear similarities between Clark's objects of the mid-'60s and some of Eva Hesse's sculptures of the same period. But compare Hesse's hanging net-bag pieces of 1966 with Clark's *Air and Stone* or *Abyss Masks*, in terms of a concept of the object in relationship to the "viewer," and the differences are obvious.

Today we hear much talk about "a return to the body." Where this is not simply a rerun of the old abstraction vs. figuration battle, resuscitated by today's conservatives, it takes up a poignant relationship to Clark's work. For in this recent current there is plenty of evidence of a crisis of relations between subject and object (*vide* Kiki Smith's figures, which attempt to put the "inside outside," or Antony Gormley's recent cast of his own body "in an attitude of extreme relaxation," revealingly called *Lost Subject*).[31] Such attempts to resolve the crisis by external images of the body, even if they acknowledge the problematic nature of the "surface," come up against an impasse and confirm the profundity and timeliness of Lygia Clark's insights. □

***The artist with* Breathe with Me, *1966, rubber tube for making the sound of breathing in one's own ear.***



**Sensorial Hood, *1967, eyepieces, nose bag, mirror, mixed mediums.***

1. In publishing terms at least, this will be remedied by a special Lygia Clark dossier to appear in *October*, edited by Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind Krauss. It will include many of Clark's own writings, either previously unpublished in English or available only in small magazines.
2. Lula Wanderley, "The Memory of the Body," 1993, unpublished. Quoted with the author's kind permission.
3. Lygia Clark, "Nous refusons," *Robho* (Paris), No. 4, 1968, p. 19.
4. Clark, letter to the author, Jan. 11, 1981.
5. Clark, undated letter to the author, c. 1966.
6. Ronaldo Brito, *Neoconcretismo: vertice e ruptura*, Rio de Janeiro, Edição Funarte, 1985, p. 91.
7. Alejandro Otero, quoted in José Balza, *Alejandro Otero*, Milan, 1977, p. 48.
8. Brito, p. 104.
9. Ferreira Gullar, "Neo-Concrete Manifesto," 1959, reprinted in English in Dawn Ades et al., *Art in Latin America: The Modern Period*, London, Yale University Press, 1989, p. 335.
10. Ibid.
11. David Medalla, "Participe présent: l'art de Lygia Clark," *Robho* (Paris), No. 4, p. 16.
12. Haroldo de Campos, "De la raison anthropofage," *Lettre Internationale* No. 20, Spring 1989.
13. Caetano Veloso, "Caricature and Conqueror, Pride and Shame," (about Carmen Miranda), *New York Times*, Oct. 20, 1991.
14. Sonia Salzstein, letter to the author, November 1993.
15. Sonia Salzstein, *Witte de With—The Lectures*, Rotterdam, Witte de With, 1993, p. 18.
16. Lygia Clark, "L'homme, structure vivant d'une architecture biologique et céllulaire," *Robho* no. 5-6, 1971, p. 12.
17. This phrase, coined by Mario Pedrosa to describe the aims of the Brazilian avant-garde, was often quoted by Lygia Clark and by Hélio Oiticica.
18. Hélio Oiticica, diary entry, 1961. Quoted in *Hélio Oiticica*, Rotterdam, Witte de With, 1992, p. 42.
19. Hélio Oiticica, letter to Edward Pope, August 1974, quoted in Oiticica, p. 227.
20. Lygia Clark, quoted in *Véja* magazine, Rio de Janeiro, December 1986.
21. Lygia Clark, "'Animals' 1960," *Signals* (London), Vol. 1, No. 7, April-May 1965, p. 2.
22. Lygia Clark, "'Going' 1964," Ibid.
23. Lygia Clark, letter to the author, 1967.
24. Lygia Clark, quoted in *Lygia Clark*, Rio de Janeiro, Edição Funarte, 1980, p. 41.
25. Ibid., p. 55.
26. Lula Wanderley, "The Structuring of the Self," unpublished, 1993. Quoted with the author's kind permission. In addition to the processes described, the artist Eduardo Costa remembers Clark herself using a cardboard tube (taken from a roll of paper towels) to blow breath on the patient. She would also use seeds which she would pour on the patient, and pieces of paper were allowed to fall on the body: "the timing, silence, and subtle noises were all part of the art therapy." I am grateful to Eduardo Costa for this information.
27. Cf. Alfred Einstein, *A Short History of Music*, London, Cassell, 1936.
28. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.
29. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1990, p. 39.
30. Lygia Clark, "The Relational Object in a Therapeutic Context," *Flue* (New York, Franklin Furnace), special Latin American issue edited by Regina Vater and Fatima Bercht, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1983, p. 26.
31. Press release for Antony Gormley exhibition, White Cube, London, April 1994.

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