

## LEND ME YOUR EYES

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In a letter to Mário Pedrosa, Lygia identifies herself and describes herself as a scorpion. “I have never seen a more solitary animal: inside its skin, which it sheds from time to time, with the process being horrifying and beautiful.” She continues, “An enormous crust remains, stopped in time, and the beast comes out bit by bit in a slow process like birth.”<sup>1</sup> We immediately associate this strong image with the organicity proper to her work. However, when identifying with a scorpion, Lygia, perhaps, speaks of her own existence, with her plunges and her rebirths. Lygia’s work is at the heart of her existential crises. Lygia’s solitude, which can be seen in the text of the letter, is my point of departure for reflections much more poetic than psychological. Through works like *Pedra e ar* (*Stone and Air*, 1966), *Água e conchas* (*Water and Shells*, 1966), and *Respire comigo* (*Breathe with Me*, 1966), one perceives that the characteristic of Lygia’s work is proximity: Lygia glues matter to affections seeking the immanence of Art.

In works like *Túnel* (*Tunnel*, 1973), *A casa e o corpo* (*The House Is the Body*, 1968), and *Relaxações* (*Relaxations*, 1974–75), this proximity brings an intensity capable of leaving blurred the borders between

1 Lygia Clark to Mário Pedrosa, May 22, 1969, translated into English in *Lygia Clark*, ed. Manuel Borja-Villel and Nuria Enguita (Barcelona: Fundación Antoni Tàpies, 1998), exhibition catalog, 249.

death/rebirth, suffocation/liberation, the cut/the seam. Thus, proximity reveals itself as the search for the other/as the address to the other and, also, what happens, invisibly, between oneself and the other.

Communication—which due to the intensity of the lived experience reaches the most distant, like the psychotic—revealed itself to Lygia as a “therapeutic” possibility. Undoubtedly, solitude was what moved Lygia’s journey in search of an other—in my view, another body. I will return to the subject after describing a clinical history:

Pedro was twenty-two years old when his father brought him to me. He revealed on that occasion that his son had already been hospitalized twice, diagnosed as schizophrenic.

At the first meeting, Pedro described his family environment without revealing major conflicts. He had interrupted his preparation for the engineering entrance exam. In the following sessions, he demonstrated the beginning of an affective bond that allowed me to propose the *Estruturação do self* (*Structuration of the Self*, after 1976). As he lay on the mattress, I outlined his face, his eyes, the line of his nose, his mouth, and the contour of his chin. This act reaffirmed his features, which psychotic distress usually erases. I would glide my hand over his body, stopping at the joints and pressing them, as if to reaffirm a unity he had already lost. Of the objects on his body, what caught his attention in particular was the plastic air bag, because it produced in him the desire to bite it. Oneiric images usually appear when the object absorbed by the body encounters voids in the soul; they are common in the process of *Estruturação do self*. However, with Pedro they seemed absent until the moment when a delirious speech started emerging. From the established bond, Pedro entered a state of delusion that, surely, was encapsulated. *Strange people that he couldn’t see were entering his room to curl his hair like they do for women; further, recorders were hidden behind the door to record his thoughts.* This delirium appeared only in the sessions. In one of them, he revealed to me that his family was going to take him to a Candomblé center. He telephoned me later to say that the Candomblé priest (Pai de Santo) had called him the son of the Obaluaê “orixá” (Spiritual Deity). The following night, I received a call from his father: Pedro had tried to kill his mother with a knife and was tied to the leg of a table calling for me. The family asked me to go there. I took with me the stone that Lygia called “the proof of the real” [*a prova do real*]. I lay next to him on the floor and said, “Pedro, it’s me, Gina, I came to see you, do you see me? I want to understand your anguish.” He repeated,

“I am Obaluaê.” I continued, “I came to see and hear Pedro.” While insisting, I pressed the stone between my hand and his. He then said some disconnected things, but a little later he answered when I called him “Pedro.” Then I asked to untie him. Holding the stone, he sat down. He was medicated and fell asleep. The next day, he didn’t seem delusional and told me he wanted to hide in a closet. He did the *Estruturação do self* and burst the bag of air more than once, very forcefully. He repeated the gesture and reconstructed the object several times; he seemed to live a ritual. The Candomblé priest phoned Pedro to say he should participate in a new ritual. As a precaution, I went to the Candomblé center to caution against Pedro’s participation in spiritual rituals. At that moment, Pedro was weakened [*fragilizado*] by suffering. There was no well-marked border, no distinction between inside and outside. The invisible materialized itself, was more present. I respectfully asked that, if a ritual were necessary, it be conducted without Pedro being present, performed only with the family, since they were the ones requesting it.

I had the impression that something essential to his unity had not yet been revealed.

The following week he returned to the touch of *Objetos relacionais* (*Relational Objects*). He was delirious. He intended to devise a plan to catch the person who was entering his room to capture his thoughts. After the session, he said, “A skull is appearing in front of me; it is in front of me. It is death wanting to enter.” [*Tem uma caveira aparecendo diante de mim, ela está na minha frente. É a morte querendo entrar.*] The death that perfectly symbolized his psychosis.

I asked him to address the skull and demand that it show itself to me also. I asked what he could do to defend himself against it. He was slow to speak but remembered the movements of the martial arts. He stopped to think and choose the best movements for the situation. He said, “I can perform tai chi chuan” [*Posso fazer um tai chi chuan*]. He then started to move with the gestures of someone who was ready to fight, but his gestures were delicate, so well delineated that they more resembled a dance beautifully choreographed. I did not recognize the Tai Chi gestures there, but I reproduced them beside him, looking at the wall, just as he did. Until the moment he said to me, “It disappeared.”

During the sessions with the relational objects, he took longer to experience the objects, and at the end Pedro described an almost constant image: He opened a large closet to find something to be revealed

there. In the course of a session, he removed the flight blanket with Styrofoam balls that covered him, removed the other relational objects from his body, stood up, and said, “What I really want, Gina, is to get out of my body and to see me.” I replied, “But that is possible.” Surprised, he asked, “How?” “By photographing your body part by part,” I replied.

I talked to a photographer. I made an appointment with Pedro at my therapeutic practice on a Saturday morning. I photographed him standing, part by part, in seventy-two photographs. We went to the laboratory, where Pedro followed the whole process: develop the images, place them on the rope, let them dry. Then we went back to my practice, and using the photographs we reassembled the body, part by part. The meeting lasted more than four hours. He saw the montage of that body, its reconstruction.

There were no more delusional ideas, in any form.

In a new session of the *Estruturação do self*, still lying down, he for the first time touched the plastic bag of water that was at the height of the heart, caressing it. Then he touched his chest and, looking up, said to me, “I feel an immense emptiness in here, but when I look into your eyes I see that I am capable of love” [*Sinto um vazio imenso aqui dentro, mas quando olho nos seus olhos vejo que sou capaz de amar*].

Pedro reveals the dialogue with the object, the inner emptiness disappears, giving way to the gesture that places him in the world. Through his gaze, the certainty of his ability to love.

The *Objeto relacional* has no specificity in itself.<sup>2</sup> As Lygia explains, it is defined in the relationship established with each subject’s fantasy. It is the target of the subject’s affective, aggressive, and passionate charge, insofar as the subject lends meaning to the object, losing the condition of being a simple object to be lived as part of the subject. When objects are absorbed by the body and no longer felt, the inside and the outside can be said to have no distinction. The opposites, the full and the empty, the light and the heavy, flow continuously and at the same time. At that moment, the identity, with its psychotic core, emerges. While opposites are able to split, they are also facilitators of an integration process. I agree [with Lygia] that there are no losses [to identity] in this process. In the text “O vazio-pleno” (“The Full-Emptiness,” 1960), Lygia assumes that there is an exchange between the subject and

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2 See Lygia Clark, “Objeto relacional” (1980), translated into English in *Lygia Clark*, 319–20.

the object in a real space filling an apparent void.<sup>3</sup> The object placed around the subject is oversized, without representation, but also without tension. In this case the space is empty. But when the object is placed in the subject's space, it encounters a field of forces that are related to one another. Certainly, the emptiness and the fullness complement each other; they merge through an aesthetic experience [*vivência*]. For Lygia, the importance was in the search for the body, in the discovery, there in the experience and not in the participation of the given object. Working with psychotics—subjects without subjectivation, as Peter Pál Pelbart says, annulled and nonexistent—led me to realize that Lygia was looking for another body.<sup>4</sup> A body without language, a state of nothingness that—without language and without the conscience that nominates, that subjects the language—allows a body to creatively emerge that, from itself, restructures the relation with life. This body that, creating limits from there, between inside and outside, acts of its own free will, creating aesthetic relationships with the same simplicity as those who throw stones in the waters of a river. To discover this body is to free it from another, where it may be trapped in habits that perhaps do not belong to it.

For Lygia, this was the body that mattered. Not a circumscribed body. When a client arrived at her home, she said, “I don't care about your biography. If you knew it, you wouldn't be here.” Not knowing is to allow discovery. Thus, Lygia sought the unknown in herself. Breaking herself and merging herself into an Other.

3 Lygia Clark, “O vazio-pleno” (“The Full-Emptiness,” 1960), translated into English in *Lygia Clark*, 111–13.

4 See Peter Pál Pelbart, *O avesso do nihilismo: Cartografias do esgotamento/Cartography of Exhaustion: Nihilism Inside Out*, trans. John Laudenberger, bilingual ed. (São Paulo: n-1 edições, 2013).