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Immanent Vitalities

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Studies on Latin American Art

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Immanent Vitalities

Meaning and Materiality in Modern and Contemporary Art

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4 Art without Art

I begin with two photographs, both taken at the Centre psychiatrique Sainte-Anne in Paris. The first photograph documents psychiatric patients' creative work as presented in the context of the *Exposition internationale d'art psychopathologique* (International exhibition of psychopathological art; fig. 52). The exhibition, which ran from September 21 to October 14, 1950, was international in scope, including approximately two thousand works created by more than three hundred fifty patients and representing forty-five psychiatric collections from seventeen countries.[1] In this image, we see how one of the hospital rooms was turned into an exhibition venue with a gallery dedicated to patients' work from French and Brazilian psychiatric collections. I wonder, given the exhibition's popularity and its more than ten thousand visitors, if artist Lygia Clark, then studying painting in Paris, would have visited or seen the exhibition's rave reviews in the contemporary press. By this time, she would have likely known of art critic and fellow Brazilian Mário Pedrosa's

FIGURE 52. *Exposition internationale d'art psychopathologique,* 1950. Photograph. Exhibition view at the Centre psychiatrique Sainte-Anne, Paris. September 21–October 14, 1950. Instituto Municipal Juliano Moreira Collection.

enthusiastic support of the creative work of Dr. Nise da Silveira's patients, seven of whom were exhibited in Paris.[2]

Now fast-forward twenty years to the second photograph, taken about 1970–71 (fig. 53). We see the entrance to the same Centre psychiatrique Sainte-Anne, with five posters illegally glued to its façade. The posters read, "Psychiatrists and psychoanalysts are all dangerous lunatics for themselves and for others" (fig. 54). Sited in the box below this prominent tagline, another text implores passersby to "join the group of their victims and of honest psychotherapists who strive, for the good of all, to study and apply the new discoveries of psychokladology." On the far right of each poster, a note proclaims that their publication was supported by *La revue de la psychokladologie et de psychothéie,* a journal founded by Lettrists Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaître. While the first photograph testifies to a moment in the history of psychiatry that is characterized by the scientific context's persistent diagnostic drive, which insisted on the visibility of pathology in the

FIGURE 53. Lettrist appeals on the walls of the Centre psychiatrique Sainte-Anne, Paris, 1971. Photograph. Bismuth-Lemaître Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

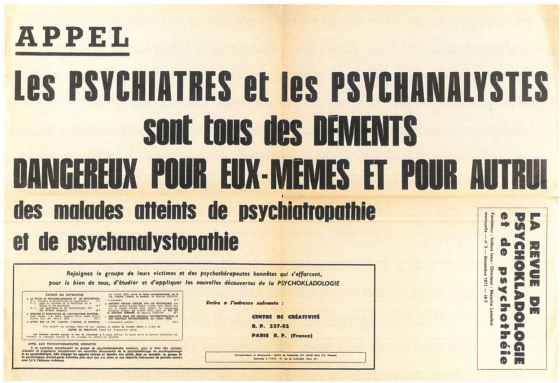

FIGURE 54. Isidore Isou, "Les psychiatres et les psychanalystes sont tous des déments dangereux pour eux-mêmes et pour autrui," *La revue de psychokladologie et de psychothéie,* no. 3, Paris: Centre de créativité, 1971. Poster.

painted sign and in the patients' works on view at Sainte-Anne, the second photograph instead takes us to a little-known chapter in the history of Lettrism: Dr. Gaston Ferdière treated Isou for a mental breakdown after the uprisings in Paris in May 1968.[3] Isou was held against his will for twenty-one days. After his release the Lettrists launched a public assault against the psychiatrist and against psychiatry more broadly.[4]

The two photographs bring to mind intersections and discontinuities in the artistic practice of two artists who resided in Paris: Isou and Clark. The two overlapped there not only in the early 1950s but also from October 1968 to July 1976, the years of Clark's second residence in Paris. Isou, a Romanian Jew, founded Lettrism with Gabriel Pomerand in 1946. Initially a poetry movement, Isou eventually expanded the Lettrist universe to include all disciplines, early on experimenting with the potential crossovers and cross-contamination between media: music within poetry, painting within the novel, and the novel within cinema. In contrast, Clark initially practiced painting and turned to geometric abstraction. In the late 1950s, she participated in Rio's short-lived neoconcrete movement and its reorientation of the space of geometric abstraction, of concrete art, toward a spatialized phenomenological experience.

Isou and Clark may seem initially like an unlikely pairing. Notwithstanding the divergent origins of their practices (poetry on the one hand and abstract painting on the other), in this chapter I explore how both artists eventually turned to psychiatry as an inspiration for their work and incorporated therapeutic practice in their art, thus contributing to what I call the "artist as therapist" model.[5] Where Isou was a disciplined reader of psychiatric and psychoanalytic theory and produced a radical expansion of the "origins" of neurosis/psychosis to which the talking cure might lead, Clark worked more intuitively, attuned to the emergent capacities of subjects and objects. Despite these differences, the two artists-cum-therapists shared a common cultural context—one informed by the critique of the psychiatric institution in Paris and beyond. Presumably without knowing one another (there is no evidence that they did), they came together around a similar ambition: to move psychiatric practice toward an expanded understanding of art as creative care.[6]

* * *

Perhaps the single most important visual and verbal work for understanding Isou's experience during his various psychiatric internments in these years is the novel *Jonas, ou le corps à la recherche de son âme* (Jonas, or the body in search of its soul; hereafter, *Jonas*), of which he published an initial suite of twelve plates in 1977 before publishing the final 484-plate volume with fellow Lettrist Gérard-Philippe Broutin in 1984.[7] On the back cover, Isou describes the book's content as follows: "A day in one 'section' of the Sainte-Anne insane asylum as experienced by the main character, 'officially interned' among frightening beings, 'dangerous lunatics,' but also among some individuals of exceptional intelligence, imprisoned on account of their revolt against society or their unusual situation in relation to its citizens."[8] The extensive text is written in hypergraphy (initially known as metagraphy), a writing system the Lettrists established in 1950 by synthesizing multiple alphabets, symbols, and notational systems—both existing and invented. Isou showcases this comprehensive super-writing across all of *Jonas*'s pages. The pages' panels also juxtapose a coherent (typed) narrative to a subjectively expressive (handwritten) story that serves to question the "objectivity" of the former. In the pages' panels Isou describes visits by Jean-Paul Curtay, conversations with a patient who resembles Antonin Artaud, and discussions with Dr. Siamuni about his (Isou's) release. He also includes passages related to insanity and what it means to be institutionalized, and he establishes a relation between Nazis and psychiatrists on account of their failure, among other things, to recognize a subject's full humanity, a theme that echoes throughout Lemaître's various tracts, which have headlines such as "Pour en finir avec la psychiatrie réactionnaire super-nazie" (To have done with reactionary super-Nazi psychiatry).[9]

Jonas also includes drawings by Isou, thirty-two of which are quite crude—one might even call them *brut*. Their almost childlike rendering—with disjunctions in proportion and scale—makes psychiatric power plainly visible, as in the oversized psychiatrist who towers above the seated patient in the lower panel of plate 229 (see fig. 55). The doctor's left armband, similar to that of a military or police uniform, reads "psychiatre," while his speech balloon declares, "After having read [Philippe] Pinel, you read a book about anti-psychiatry. We should ban subversive works at Sainte-Anne." This panel, like other parts of the novel, is tellingly autobiographic. One need only peruse Isou's vast archive to take stock of his extensive reading: margin notes are scribbled across multiple pages of books on psychiatry, among them *L'Institution en négation: Rapport sur l'hôpital psychiatrique de Gorizia* (The negated institution: Report from the psychiatric hospital in Gorizia), edited by Italian radical psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, perhaps the very book to which the psychiatrist's speech balloon refers.[10] The violence in *Jonas* escalates with subsequent images of chained and beaten *fous* (madmen). One drawing's caption reads, "Young woman treated with a revolver blow by her father, [a] psychiatrist" (see fig. 55), and another drawing implies a patient's physical restraints are punishment for his preference for the poetry of Charles Baudelaire over that of Paul Déroulède. As Frédéric

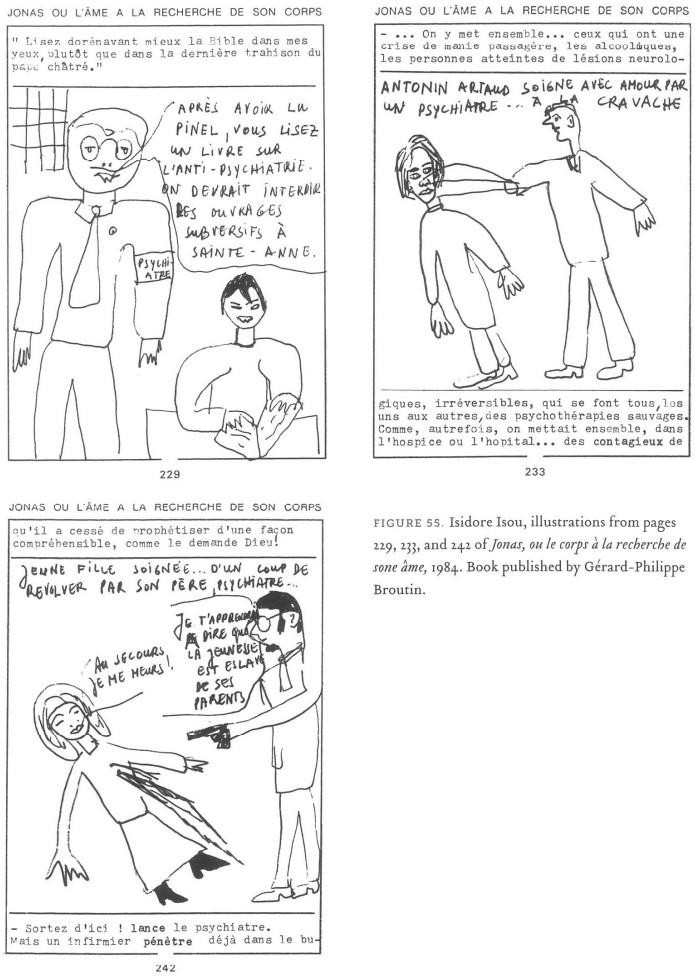

FIGURE 55. Isidore Isou, illustrations from pages 229, 233, and 242 of *Jonas, ou le corps à la recherche de sone âme,* 1984. Book published by Gérard-Philippe Broutin.

Acquaviva notes, these drawings and their adjacent texts display "a rare violence that does not appear elsewhere in [Isou's] visual art or novels."[11]

On page 233, the central panel shows a patient and a doctor with a descriptive text that reads, "Antonin Artaud treated with love by a psychiatrist at the whip" (see fig. 55). Isou's drawing of a menacing doctor ironically belies his use of the term *amour* (love). Artaud's experience as Ferdière's patient in the mid-1940s played a significant role in Isou's critique of psychiatry (and antipsychiatry), as evinced by his publication of *Antonin Artaud torturé par les psychiatres* (Antonin Artaud tortured by psychiatrists) in 1970 and by articles he published in popular venues such as *Paris-Jour.*[12] Furthermore, the Lettrists regularly listed Isou as the most recent in a lineage of maligned artists and writers, including the Marquis de Sade, Friedrich Hölderlin, Vincent van Gogh, Gérard de Nerval, Raymond Roussel, and Artaud. That Artaud would also make an appearance in *Jonas*'s pages is unsurprising.[13]

Beyond a shared history of internment, the two artists were both participants in the debate on the relation between art and madness. Upon Artaud's release from Rodez, he published *Van Gogh, le suicidé de la société* (Van Gogh: The Man Suicided by Society, 1947), a vitriolic critique of psychiatric practice that also offers deeply moving descriptions of van Gogh's paintings. Coinciding with the Dutch painter's retrospective at the Musée de l'Orangerie, Artaud's text describes how society invented psychiatry "to defend itself against the investigations of certain superior lucidities" and poses the question, "What is a genuine lunatic?" His answer: "a man whom society has not wanted to heed and whom it has wanted to keep from uttering unbearable truths."[14] Here, as in the conclusion to his censored radio program *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (To Have Done with the Judgment of God, 1948), Artaud inscribes his own relation to art, society, and psychiatry: "I will never again, *without committing a crime,* tolerate hearing anyone say to me: 'Monsieur Artaud, you're raving,' as has so often happened to me."[15]

Isou's *Jonas* proceeds similarly, but Isou ultimately goes further with the alternative therapy evoked there, fully articulating it in his *Manifeste pour une nouvelle psychopathologie et une nouvelle psychothérapie* (Manifesto for a new psychopathology and new psychotherapy), published as a special issue of *Lettrisme* in 1971. The manifesto constitutes his contribution to the model of artist as therapist. In the course of the text, Isou repeatedly asserts how the majority of psychiatric and psychoanalytic concepts are "erroneous and falsifying." For Isou, these fields do not take into account the totality of the person or of life; it thus follows that "all models of 'madness' should be envisioned as a fragment of a partial formula of the domain of *Kladologie* and *Paradilogie,* of complete knowledge

and of perpetual joy." *Kladology* refers to the branches of knowledge (in ancient Greek *klados* is "branch") and includes art, philosophy, science, and technique, as well as empirical or quotidian existence. Isou even provides a mathematical formula for the kladologic ensemble of the human personality, while the classification of psychological elements occurs within the specific field of psychokladology. To this end, he affirms how his work represents a Copernican revolution of psychopathology by showing how the supposedly "healthy and balanced ground of social thought" had become "the most frightening dementia."[16]

Isou proposes expanding the nosological "cosmos" to account for the "infinitely more immense deviations and innovative deficiencies."[17] Among the examples he offers are: (1) *Judopathie,* referring to the mental illness when a disciple believes he knows more than his master; (2) *Dalilapathie* or *Jaquelinopathie,* referring to when someone delivers a "superior genius to inferior enemies," as when Artaud's mother approved Ferdière's actions against her son. For Isou, what was most important was to move beyond existing conceptions of pathological anatomy as well as Freudian complexes in order to develop mental charts that were more comprehensive, displacing the "mechanical" (understood as physiological) in favor of the "ensemble of intrinsic and specific sectors: images, associations, and themes and their aesthetic, philosophical, scientific, technical, and quotidian contents."[18] While Isou's attention to the whole human personality and social context holds physiological determinism at bay, in his desire for increasing diagnostic precision he paradoxically produces more measurement and standardization with his proliferating practices for naming what he identifies as nonnormative behavior. How would one then put psychokladology into actual practice with patients? The clinical case presented in *Un cas de "folie" dans le mouvement lettriste* (A case of "madness" in the Lettrist movement, 1983) provides a partial answer.[19]

The facts: Alain Satie anonymously mailed a pornographic photograph to fellow Lettrist Geneviève Tasiv and to members of her family, indicating via montage that the women in the photograph looked like her. When Tasiv discovered that Satie was the culprit, he apologized, but she refused to accept his apology, wrote an insulting tract against him, and filed a grievance with a lawyer. All this plunged Satie into greater despair, and his brother Roland Sabatier was called upon to intermediate, using psychokladology to help Satie return to a normal state. That it was his brother Roland, a Lettrist, guiding Satie's recovery is surprising by psychoanalytic standards, but that was part of the Lettrists' challenge. Sabatier's prominent role in the Lettrist movement combined with his closeness to his brother conferred on Sabatier more insight and thus "authority" to understand his brother's condition within Isou's psychokladologic universe.

In his clinical summary, Sabatier describes how his brother was less frightened by his act than by the fact that he seemed "as if conducted by incontrollable forces."[20] Sabatier affirms how his approach to the case moved beyond psychoanalytic explanations that reduce behavior to complexes such as "psychic masochism," "delirium of persecution," or "castration anxiety." Rather, following Isou's psychokladology, he describes how the offensive act (the mailing of the pornographic photograph) was committed at a moment when Satie was "already fragile due to excess fatigue and the accumulation of nonhabitual torments [ones related to his professional income]."[21] He recounts how he interviewed his brother, listened attentively to him, and encouraged him to also see a medical doctor. To put things into perspective, Sabatier acknowledges how Satie's action did not define the entire person but was of limited scope. In so doing, and in the name of psychokladology, Sabatier holds at bay the conclusions of "erroneous" therapies such as psychoanalysis, affirming instead that the causes of his brother's distress were of a social and economic nature. Sabatier thus moves beyond ego psychology to consider the socioeconomic—and thus materialist—conditions that exacerbated his brother's condition, but he does not address the issues of gender and sexual power that enabled Satie's aggressive act against Tasiv, whereby contemporary power relations within society remain unchallenged. In his conclusion to the volume, Isou thanks Sabatier, who identifies Satie's lack of sleep and economic difficulty as the causes of his lapse into madness.[22]

Isou's psychokladology attempted to embrace all facets and stages of a subject's existence, as well as all epistemic and creative domains. Consequently, psychokladology may be considered progressive vis-à-vis Isou's contemporary targets (psychoanalysis and psychiatric nosology), while his therapeutic approach remained primarily within the "medium" of language (i.e., the interview) and depended on the therapist's power of clinical reason, which in the case of *Un cas de "folie"* also materialized and naturalized existing gendered lines. Isou took a rationalist conception of subjectivity as given, whereby the knowledge and mastery to classify, identify, and objectify a psychic condition remained within the purview of the therapist alone. Isou multiplied categories seemingly ad infinitum to arrive at a more specific and precise diagnosis (if one were to adopt Isou's own methodology, his efforts might be called a form of *Isou-pathie*), whereby he positioned human subjectivity in relation to art, science, philosophy, and everyday life but kept an analysis of power relations at bay. As such, even when Isou painstakingly tracks

how psychoses are socially produced rather than immutable conditions, his expanded form of the talking cure maintains the binaries of subject/object, mind/body, life/matter on which a rationalist conception of subjectivity depends.

The image shows a woman dressed in a long-sleeve striped shirt; she wears a skirt with a belt composed of metal rings and round discs. She extends her arms within the open weave of two jute sacks that reveal her gestures: arms outstretched, palms out, and fingers spread. Another two bags, each hanging by an elastic band, extend from below the sacks on her arms. These smaller bags contain stones, creating a downward pull that her arms resist. A larger sack—a mask—covers her head and hangs in front of her torso. The image is one of Lygia Clark's "propositions," taken in Paris in 1969. Its title, *Camisa de força* (Straitjacket; see fig. 51), is significant since it shows Clark explicitly engaging the iconography of bodily confinement practiced by psychiatry, reconfiguring the straightjacket's materials and purpose—for example, the disciplining of psychotic subjects and political dissidents during the dictatorship in her native Brazil—into a work she described as "dramatic but beautiful."[23]

Clark's knowledge of psychiatry also extended to the art produced by interned patients. Thus, when writing to Hélio Oiticica from Paris in October 1970, Clark, in addition to speaking of the friends she met there (e.g., Guy Brett, Carlos Cruz-Diez, and Jean Clay), notes, "I'm tired of closed people; I'd much rather be in a place like Engenho de Dentro [the hospital where Dr. Silveira worked] where the fabulous Rogério Duarte checked in; where someone like Emygdio expressed himself or someone like Raphael eats pencils and shit, but what a wonderful character, and what he expresses is magisterial!"[24] While this statement taps into a surrealist imagination regarding the purported "freedom" madness represents, what strikes me in the broader context of Clark's letters, especially those written in Paris, is how she displaces the madness-as-freedom trope to address contemporary experiments in psychiatric care. In one letter, dated March 31, 1971, she mentions how Clay was arranging for her to work at a clinic in the Loire, the "most advanced" clinic in France, she explains. She continues by describing how the clinic is "where [Françoise] Dolto works and other interesting professionals who work with the body. If it works out, it will be my salvation, which is a paradox, because for those like me who make art to escape the asylum, to end up there is incredible! But there is no place for me in the world of normal people."[25]

The asylum is clearly a reference to La Borde, a psychiatric clinic founded in the Loire Valley in 1953. Psychiatrist Jean Oury, La Borde's founder, had worked alongside François Tosquelles at the Saint-Alban asylum, where they practiced institutional psychotherapy, a therapeutic approach informed by Marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis, which understood the hospital, its architecture, activities, patients, and staff as a "healing collective."[26] Care was administered not only to individual subjects deemed "mad" but to the institution itself and to the social relations produced within it, developing situations (as in the various ateliers) for which the patients were responsible. Such collaborative work displaced divisions between caretaker and cared for, the healthy (sane) and others who are sick (mad), to reconfigure the ensemble of relations and dynamic of care. Whether Clark ever visited La Borde is unclear, though the institution and its work, as her letter makes clear, were familiar to her.[27]

Furthermore, Clark's *Camisa de força* was inspired by a documentary film about an experimental mental health facility for children. *Warrendale* (1967) by Allan King pictures the lives of emotionally challenged children at the Warrendale clinic outside Toronto. A scene toward the film's end depicts the caretakers telling the children that one of the clinic's workers has died, news that ignites despair and uproar among many of the children. Clark describes the difficulty she had watching the scene and later writes, "I was very impressed because instead of a straightjacket the method used was the body of the nurses who tried to pacify all the violence of the children during their crisis." What Clark describes is a "holding" session in which a child, while physically held by a member of the staff, can express his or her emotional frustration without harming self or others.[28]

In October 1972, Clark was invited to teach a course on gestural communication at the Sorbonne, a history that is now well known. There she developed sensorial propositions and collective experiences with a group of students and began psychoanalysis with Pierre Fédida. In the mid-1960s, Clark had investigated the emancipatory power of sensory experience outside codified language. She developed her artistic practice by moving from the act to the body, from the body to the relations between bodies, ultimately developing her celebrated *Baba antropofágica* (Anthropophagic slobber, 1973). In a sequence from her son Eduardo Clark's documentary film *O mundo de Lygia Clark* (1973; fig. 56), one sees how thread pulled from spools placed in various participants' mouths covers the body of an individual lying down in the center of the group; the wet, colored threads create a kind of second skin. Here bodies affect other bodies. Eventually, the tangled thread is

FIGURE 56. Eduardo Clark's *O mundo de Lygia Clark,* 1973, showing Lygia Clark's proposition *Baba antropofágica,* 1973. Documentary film, black and white, sound. 27 minutes. Screen captures.

removed from the prone body. Clark explains, "one must deinstitutionalize both the body and every concrete relation."[29]

Baba antropofágica and other works from these years have been associated with the "desiring machines" described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus,* as well as with their conceptualization of a "body without organs," a phrase they borrowed from Artaud that refers to processes of embodiment without organization, to vital forces instead of forms, and to a shift from what it is to be to what it means to *become.*[30] Undoubtedly informed in part by Pedrosa's insistence on art's affective character, Clark continually described the art object as a living entity and thereby blurred the distinction between the organic and inorganic, subject and object. With regard to her series of *Bichos* (also discussed in the introduction) and the relation between the art participant and the work, she explained, "There is a type of body-to-body relationship between two living entities."[31] Susan Best relates Clark's subsequent sensorial propositions to Daniel Stern's concept of "vitality affects" and explores how these works "explicitly stimulate the sensory and affective recollections of the preverbal body," also relating them to the theories of D. W. Winnicott.[32] Yet Best ultimately stops shy of fully engaging Clark's turn to therapy.

After returning to Rio de Janeiro in 1976, Clark began to adapt her sensorial propositions for individual therapeutic treatment in her *Estruturação do self* (Structuration of the self) sessions and through the use of what she called *objetos relacionais* (relational objects). In 1984 she captured her therapy in film with the production of Mário Carneiro's *Memória do corpo,* in which she explains the individual relational objects and rehearses the therapeutic process with a man who agreed to play the role of the client (fig. 57). Like her earlier sensorial work, the relational objects often combine disparate qualities, such as hard and soft materials as well as natural and industrial ones. They include plastic "pillows" filled with air, water, and sand and other pillows Clark designates as "light," "light-heavy," and "heavy" that are made with cotton cloth and filled with varying quantities of either polystyrene balls or sand so as to produce various pressures when placed on the body. The relational objects also comprise natural objects such as large and small seashells, as well as a small stone wrapped in a soft net. In the case of *Respire comigo* (Breathe with me, 1966; fig. 58), which dates back to her sensorial work, the object consists of the accordion tubing commonly used in diving equipment, and in the therapeutic setting it is mobilized on account of its materiality and hollow cylindrical form, which Clark highlights in the film by blowing through it. Each object mobilizes different sensations due to the materials' different densities, textures, and sounds—from the acoustic

FIGURE 57. Mário Carneiro, *Memória do corpo,* 1984, illustrating Lygia Clark's *Estruturação do self* therapy session. Documentary film, color, sound. 29 minutes. Screen captures.

FIGURE 58. Eduardo Clark's *O mundo de Lygia Clark,* 1973, picturing Lygia Clark's sensorial object, *Respire comigo,* 1966. Documentary film, black and white, sound. 27 minutes. Screen capture.

murmur of shells placed next to one's ears to the light pressure of air blown on one's body through the rubber tube.[33]

But given that these inanimate objects take on a life of their own in relation to the subject, how precisely did Clark's therapeutic sessions proceed? Clark describes the *Estruturação do self* in a passage worth citing in full:

> The person lies down lightly dressed on a large plastic mattress filled with polystyrene balls, covered by a loose sheet. With his weight the person opens ruts on the mattress in which the body becomes comfortable. I massage the head for a long while and then I compress it with my hands. I take the whole body in my hands, I softly but firmly join the articulations, which gives many people the sensation of "gluing" or "soldering" pieces of the body. For others the touch has the power of "closing" the "holes" of the body or "moving them" to other areas. I work the whole body with

> the "light pillows" rubbing the soles of the feet for a time and the palm of the hands. I put a stone wrapped in a soft textured bag (like the bags used to sell vegetables) in the hands of the subject. For all the people who go through the process, the little stone is fundamental.[34]

Clark continues by describing how she passes the water-filled plastic bags over the body, blows air through a tube over the body's surface, and places the "light pillows" around the subject's head and the "heavy" ones around the waist and between the legs, "suppressing all the emptiness of the body." She then covers the body with a blanket and sits in silence close to her client, possibly with her hand placed on him or her, the exact location depending on "the fissures which the person shows." At the end of the session (around forty-five minutes), she removes the blanket and asks her client to stretch. The final act consists in giving the subject a plastic bag filled with air "to manipulate or burst."[35]

For Clark, the *Estruturação do self* creates a "preverbal" space wherein "silence is totally respected and the word comes in afterwards, if the person wishes to verbally express [the] images or sensations experienced."[36] Clark also kept detailed notes on each of her clinical cases. For a client identified as T., a single mother and artist, Clark's file tracks T.'s relationship with the "heavy pillow" object:

> 5th Session. In the "structuring of the self," T. experiences the pillows between her legs like toys around her, with pieces missing, like in a puzzle. She says that her brothers and sisters used to play near to her, and she was always introspective. She did not participate in the game. She ends the sessions destroying three plastic bags with great joy, saying "Homage to my impotence."
>
> 6th Session. She again feels the pillows as entrails [as in session 4], saying that they are strange and uncomfortable, and identifies them as excrement.
>
> 13th Session. This time she expresses her experience with the "heavy pillows": "They are great, they support my whole body. I don't feel them like wedges, but they protect me."[37]

Another client, L., reports a different reaction to the "heavy pillow."

> 1st Session. L. feels the "heavy pillows" on her right shoulder like a little teddy bear that was her favorite toy.
>
> 2nd Session. The "heavy pillows" placed on her belly give her the impression that her belly is empty, which brings her a very old sensation: She was sleeping and her father was lifting her, playing with her, crushing her belly against his right shoulder.
>
> 3rd Session. We talk about the association teddy bear, favorite toy, her right shoulder, father's shoulder, and the remembering of a body pressed against her father's right shoulder, of the pain which she feels in her own right shoulder when she has problems in establishing order over her own child and the desires expressed in the previous session of a broad shoulder on which she can be supported. At this moment she began to lose her omnipotence, she was establishing a new relationship with her child and her sexuality was becoming unblocked.[38]

These two case histories reveal how objects, rather than responding to external forces or to a subject's conscious will, are mobilized as a vitality within an immanent relationality that actively engages the subject both corporeally and phantasmatically.[39] Her work introduces a form of new materialism that takes psychic life into account, challenging the artificial separation between subjects and the material objects of an external world. On the power of the objects, Clark maintains, "It is the object of the aggressive and passionate affective charge of the subject, in the sense that the subject lends meaning to it, losing the condition of a simple object in order to be impregnated, *a being lived as a living part of the subject.*"[40]

Within his foundational psychoanalytic writings, Sigmund Freud theorized an ego that initially included everything, only to have the subject later separate the external world so it no longer impinged on subjectivity. Freud, however, never advocated for the recovery of this impersonal unity, which was at odds with his model of developmental progression for both the individual and civilization. Yet it is precisely this pre-ego and preverbal relation to objects that Clark's relational objects put into practice and that was informed by her critical reading of psychoanalysts, including Winnicott and Melanie Klein.[41] On the one hand, the client initially begins in a regressive state and aggressively acts out against the relational objects until he or she abandons trying to dominate them and they create a kind of energetic unity, a second skin of sorts, whereby they are incorporated as living parts of the subject. The relational object is "lived" as a sensorial force rather than a form. This distinction is brought up again and again by Clark's dedicated

interlocutors and interpreters of her work. Lula Wanderley explains how the "relationship established between objects and body is not attained through meaning or shape (visual image of the object) but through its sensorial image: Something vague 'lived' by the body."[42] For Suely Rolnik, Clark's therapeutic process suggests "the experience of the undoing of our contour, of our corporeal image, for us to then venture into the fervent processuality of our vibratile-body without an image."[43]

As the cases of T. and L. suggest, individuals responded differently to the same relational objects. Clark reports how another client put a "light-heavy" pillow on her leg and felt it "like a hot and living animal on her knees."[44] For another client, a man, the heavy pillows' touch "gave him a very unpleasant sensation: weight, fencing in, blocking."[45] Present-day clients working with Gina Ferreira have reported experiencing other relational objects as snakes slithering on their body and have experienced *Respire comigo* like a sword on their sternum, piercing the body's surface.[46] Consequently, these lived moments recall the unsettling aspects of Clark's sensorial propositions, which often proceed by "binding, blocking, restricting" the subject.[47] As Guy Brett reminds us, the sensorial works' materials evoke "the whole panoply of devices of human bondage, from instruments used in the punishment of slaves and the torture of political prisoners."[48] Rather than liberatory in a touchy-feely or "back to the natural body" way (i.e., the way her sensorial work is often assimilated by US critics and curators who celebrate its participatory character), many of the propositions are quite simply terrifying to experience.

As I read this book's copyedits during the initial months of the coronavirus pandemic, Clark's *O eu e o tu* (The I and the you, 1967) seems less and less an emancipation from normative bodily coordinates. In this sensorial proposition, two participants each wear a rubber suit and are connected by an accordion tube as they explore one another's suit pockets, which are filled with different materials. Given the relative impermeability of the industrial material the suits employ, they look as if they are ready-made for adjusting expectations of bodily intimacy in an era of contagion. For me, her works' greatest challenge has always been the experience of suffocation: how the sensorial and ensuing relational objects actively redirect, disturb, and displace prevailing sensorial-corporeal relations as well as the perception of what is inside and outside. Given the disorienting effects produced by her therapy, Clark always included the little stone in the subject's hand in order to provide a "ground" for clients undergoing the *Estruturação do self*. As she explains, the stone "is experienced as a concrete object, one that is neither the subject nor the mediator who applies it. It is outside of the relationship, acquiring a status of a 'proof of reality.'"[49] Similarly, Clark would sometimes push on a client's feet at the end of a session in order to provide the sense of a stable foundation before he or she left the consultation room.[50]

In 1963 Clark developed *Caminhando* (Walking, 1963; fig. 59), an important transitional piece in her mounting experimentation with "anonymous work" and artistic "work" to be realized by others.[51] *Caminhando*'s materials are simple. One takes a strip of paper, twists it once, and then glues the ends together to form a Möbius strip. Using a pair of scissors, one cuts the strip along its length, an act requiring attentiveness if one is to avoid severing the paper. Writing in the context of her *Livro-obra* (Book work, 1964/1983), Clark refers to her *Caminhando* but in such a way that her insights about this work at once provide a retrospective through-line for understanding the ambition of her therapeutic practice: "It is true that the artist thus abdicates something of his personality, but he at least helps the participant to create his own image, and to achieve, through this image, a new concept of the world. This development is extremely important, because it is diametrically opposite to depersonalization—which is one of the characteristics of our time."[52] In the face of depersonalization, *Caminhando*'s importance for Clark resides in the "immanent act realized by the participant."[53] In addition to the displacement of the artist's personality, "The [later relational] objects have their own magic, it is not through transference that it acts on bodies."[54]

In the *Estruturação do self,* the relational objects not only resist psychoanalytic transference (i.e., that the objects become the repository of clients' unconscious redirections of their feelings about another person), but they also frustrate clients' conceptual appropriation or analogical association with the body through the objects' entwinement of materials—organic and inorganic, natural and industrial. By being lived by the body and incorporated by the subject, the relational objects trigger new patterns of subjective self-organization (or "self-structuring," to retain Clark's vocabulary). Against conceptions of the self in which subjective agency and mastery remain intact, Clark's therapeutic practice affirms a different process for structuring the self, ultimately revealing how any identity is but an "imperfect stabilization" within a continual process of subjective emergence and relationality between a subject and the material world.[55]

Clark set out to undiscipline the mind and body as well as the spaces they inhabit, by working, she maintained, "from what I see, from what I feel."[56] About her therapy, Clark continually insisted, "I tell the stories of the cases I took on; I do not theorize, because I know nothing, and it gives a great result."[57] Although she did not craft theories, certain of

FIGURE 59. Lygia Clark making a *Caminhando*, 1963, with paper and scissors.

her writings about relational objects are important for understanding her late work. Her written cases, for example, alternate linguistic description of the therapeutic setting and process with the metaphorization of the therapeutic experience, which actively suspends the binaries of subject/object, inside/outside. Where Isou multiplied diagnostic categories, Clark continued to blur them. As her therapist, Fédida, affirmed, "one must be capable of displacing categories. Because one of the strongest things . . . with Lygia Clark is a kind of instability compared to categories."[58] Clark's *objetos relacionais* enabled moments of subjective emergence whose precise meanings and effects could not be wholly anticipated.

Furthermore, with her *Estruturação do self* she deinstitutionalized the relations between artist and art, art and the public, and also between therapist and client. By embracing the body and moving beyond the talking cure, she implicated objects in the restructuring of subjectivity in the face of modern-day depersonalization, and she did so for neurotic, psychotic, as well as "borderline" cases.[59] Clark's practice provides a compelling model for what the yoking together of two professional identities—that of the artist and that of the therapist—can do and what such a conjunction of "expertise," informed by intuitive experimentation, might mean in relation to an artist's practice and art's reception. This is likely what Clark was referring to in 1983, when she wrote how an artist is content "to achieve the singular state of art without art."[60]