

AESTHETICS, CARE AND RESISTANCE: USES OF LYGIA CLARK'S *STRUCTURING OF THE SELF*¹

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ABSTRACT. This article reflects on artistic practices in their relationship with the body, based on the artwork *Structuring of the Self* by the visual artist Lygia Clark. In this sense, it problematizes the relationship between aesthetics and politics within the context of proposing forms of resistance to biopolitical domination from a political ontology of bodies. Lygia Clark's work provides tools that enable access to experience through experimentation of bodies with so-called relational objects. Through this experimentation, a sensory deconstruction occurs, enabling us to resignify the signs of power and the devices of subjection that regulate our experience based on the normative frameworks reified by culture. This analysis was conducted as part of a research project involving students and professors from the psychology program at the Federal University of Jataí, state of Goiás. The studies conducted constitute a positioning in relation to the current totalitarian and extremist scenario.

Keywords: Relational objects; body; resistance.

ESTÉTICA, CUIDADO E RESISTÊNCIA: USOS DA *ESTRUTURAÇÃO DO SELF* DE LYGIA CLARK

RESUMO. Este artigo reflete sobre as práticas artísticas em sua relação com o corpo a partir da obra *Estruturação do self* da artista plástica Lygia Clark. Neste sentido, problematiza a relação entre a estética e a política, pensando-as no contexto da proposição de formas de resistência à dominação biopolítica a partir de uma ontologia política dos corpos. A obra de Lygia Clark nos fornece instrumentos capazes de acessar a experiência por meio da experimentação dos corpos com os chamados 'objetos relacionais'. Através deles opera-se uma desconstrução sensorial que nos possibilita resignificar os signos do poder e os dispositivos de sujeição que regulam nossa experiência a partir dos enquadramentos normativos reificados pela cultura. Tal análise foi realizada no contexto de um projeto de pesquisa envolvendo alunos e professores do curso de psicologia da Universidade Federal de Jataí-GO. Os estudos realizados se constituíram como um posicionamento frente ao cenário totalitário e extremista no qual vivemos na atualidade.

Palavras-chave: Objetos relacionais; corpo; resistência.

Estética, Cuidado y Resistencia: Usos de la *Estructuración del Self* de Lygia Clark

RESUMEN. Este artículo refleja sobre las prácticas artísticas en su relación con el cuerpo a partir de la obra *Estruturação del self* de la artista plástica Lygia Clark. En ese sentido, problematiza la relación entre estética y política, pensándolas en el contexto de proponer formas de resistencia a la dominación biopolítica a través de una ontología política de los cuerpos. La obra de Lygia Clark nos brinda herramientas capaces de acceder a la experiencia por medio de la experimentación de

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cuerpos con los llamados ‘objetos relacionales’. A través de ellos se produce una deconstrucción sensorial que nos permite resignificar los signos de poder y los dispositivos de sujeción que regulan nuestra experiencia desde los encuadramientos normativos reificados por la cultura. Este análisis se llevó a cabo en el contexto de un proyecto de investigación en el que participaron estudiantes y profesores del curso de psicología de la Universidad Federal de Jataí-GO. Los estudios realizados se constituyeron como una posición frente al escenario totalitario y extremista en el que vivimos hoy.

Palabras clave: Objetos relacionales; cuerpo; resistencia.

Introduction

This article aims to reflect on the question of aesthetic experience based on the proposition *Structuring of the Self* by the visual artist Lygia Clark. We evaluate the possible unfolding effects of this work on the micropolitical plane of resistance, seeking to affirm new modalities of care of the self in the contemporary world. In a scenario where subjection is established as a determining condition of the modes of subjectivation in the biopolitical context of domination by power devices (Foucault, 2018, 2020a), the search for practices of resistance on the ethical plane becomes fundamental. Since subjection is realized by a normative soul that imprisons the body, as exposed by Judith Butler (2019), the search for ruptures in the reifying injunctions that operate through normative frameworks becomes a strategic issue. We therefore invest in the thesis that the practices involved in the *Structuring of the Self* enable a true seismic shift in the realm of our sensory agencies, capable of leading us to inhabit, through the body, other dimensions of experience, contributing to possible subversions of the signs of power.

This study is the result of a research project from the psychology program at the Federal University of Jataí (UFJ), state of Goiás. In it, we dedicate ourselves to analyzing the artist’s proposition, using it as a territory for the development of a work focused on the theme of care as a form of biopolitical resistance. We highlight the importance of the so-called relational objects, a name given by Lygia to all the elements used in the *Structuring of the Self*. These, at first glance, are seen as simple and precarious. However, this simplicity has the power to invoke the body to sensorially experience a multiplicity of diffuse stimulations, where each participant is affected uniquely. The practice consists, according to the artist, in the systematized use of these objects, which have this designation because they do not constitute themselves in themselves, but rather in relation to the participants, being placed on their bodies.

Lygia Clark is a Brazilian artist who gained notoriety in the world of visual arts starting in the 1960s. Her work at the Faculté d’Arts Plastiques St. Charles at the Paris-VIII Institute (Panthéon-Sorbonne), and her participation in the founding of the Brazilian Neo-Concrete movement, alongside Ferreira Gullar, Lygia Pape, and other important artists, are just some of her notable achievements. Throughout her career in the visual arts, she has worked in both painting and sculpture, culminating in her performative approach. It is worth noting that towards the end of her career, the artist increasingly focused on exploring sensations through aesthetic experimentation, aiming to dissolve the artistic object defined a priori as the artist’s creative product. More than that, she understands that the artist occupies a supporting role in the co-production of the object to be created, a process that, while initially involving the spectator as a participant, ultimately affirms the spectator’s role as the creator of the work. It is in this sense that Lygia delves into an increasingly fruitful relationship between art and clinical practice, in which her propositions even acquire therapeutic aims (Rolnik, 2005) and where the body is summoned to engage with relational objects. A key aspect of the use of objects is the absence of any a priori element of meaning or form to guide and determine the users’ experience. Objects, consciousness, body, signs, or sensations dissolve in favor of an openness to a pre-sensory plane in the exercise of a completely demodulated perception, the foundation of our subjectivity. This is a work of sensory deconstruction that sought to explore affective and corporeal memory, beyond the symbolic universe and signified structures, triggering processes of transformation of experience.

Lygia Clark’s work profoundly impacts us, particularly in a contemporary context marked by a return to extremism, political polarization, radicalism, and the reaffirmation of a tropical neo-fascist totalitarianism. We highlight, in particular, the possibility of reformulating the experience of oneself based on her

propositions. Thus, in 2019, we initiated the research project “Care of the Self: Inflections Between Art, Subjectivity, and Clinical Practice in the work of Lygia Clark” at the Federal University of Jataí. The current political situation in the country, as well as the reaffirmation of fascist movements on a global scale, beyond the sad affections and nefarious effects observed in clinical practice (Mizoguchi & Passos, 2021), impelled us to seek solutions aimed at proposing modes of resistance committed to a micropolitical approach, in contrast to radical identity polarizations. Professors and students then engaged in a series of studies on Lygia’s work and its relationship to the issues of perception, the body, and resistance. Our objective was to conduct a theoretical reflection on the relationship between aesthetics and politics and to investigate the artist’s artistic devices, aiming to gather elements to support the construction of practices of the care of the self through the sensory deconstruction produced by the use of relational objects. To this end, we carried out simulations of the *Structuring of the Self*, creating a series of artifacts like the visual artist’s proposal. These were used in the space of the social psychology laboratory at UFJ by the research participants. The sessions with the relational objects were followed by analysis and discussion associated with theoretical reflection. The emphasis was on exploring, to the fullest extent in the body, the perceptive experience in its destabilizing potential. The artist’s experiments allow for an aesthetic reconfiguration, breaking with already established sensory modulations, in addition to allowing us to inhabit the perceptual dimension at its core.

The aesthetic question

The work surrounding Lygia’s works thus emerges as the result of a commitment to proposing modes of resistance sustained by existential becomings, investing in the confluence between politics and aesthetics through experience in art. Aesthetics is here conceived as belonging to the domain of a multiplicity of actions in which we express ourselves artistically and politically. We do not adopt the perspective of a theory of beauty given from the ontology of a pre-established rationality. According to the *Neoconcrete Manifesto* proposed by Ferreira Gullar (2005), this would be common to the concrete artist who, in a mechanistic conception, produces the artistic object in order to seek a specific response from the public, a pre-conceived interpretation or effect. The neoconcrete artist, however, claims an art that aims at greater sensitization and critical mobilization on the part of the spectator.

Following the neoconcrete intuition, we abandon this rationalist tendency in art. In modernity, aesthetics is often linked to the capitalist mode of production, in which forms serially reproduce standards of beauty determined by dominant values. Beauty, in this sense, is what reflects the logic of the neoliberal model, which dictates the norms of objects, bodies, and spirits, in a biopolitical regime of serialized production. As Michel Foucault (2018) shows us, the market economy constitutes the general index under which the rule that will define all social relations must be placed. “It is necessary to govern for the market, instead of governing because of the market” (Foucault, 2018, p. 165). Our body image, our way of dressing, what we eat, the products we use, the architecture of our spaces, our way of feeling and thinking are constantly shaped by a priori aesthetic values that reflect this general market indexer, in a biopolitical conception of the world (Soares, 2016). Thus, artistic discourses are always in a state of borderline tension. Sometimes engaged in a critical exercise of resistance to these forms pre-established by capitalist values; other times on the verge of being captured by them.

It is in this sense, for example, that Andy Warhol’s movement in his *Factory*⁵ promotes (with his *Campbell’s Soup Cans*, his silkscreen prints of famous faces, or in performances like *Eating a Hamburger*) an aesthetic subversion within a capitalism that serializes everything, from canned goods to household appliances, paintings, sculptures, bodies, gestures, and souls. Nevertheless, art and the discourses that sustain it recurrently conjure the danger of becoming serialized and modulated as a device for reproducing these same dominant values, on the razor’s edge between resistance and subordination. In the latter case, it is a matter of art captured by biopolitical devices. The transcendental aesthetic imposes itself, in the utilitarian sense of beauty, as determinant in the production of artistic objects, with forms being its mirror. These, in turn, reflect the convenient images of a productive system whose intrinsic value is profit.

Critics of this rationalist view of art and its subjugation to the logic of consumption, Danichi Hausen Mizoguchi and Eduardo Passos (2021), point out that this transcendental regime, as a defining instance of beauty or art, is realized through a distancing from the artistic object in question. The critique focuses on

⁵ Factory was the name of the artist’s studio in New York (Shore, 2016).

aesthetic judgment as a mold for artistic creation, being the goal to be achieved by the artist in the work, which is presented as a product to be consumed by the public. Thus, the works would be contemplative objects produced from a valuation external to the spectator subjects. The defining elements of beauty would be the result of aesthetic judgment according to this rationalist tradition. As the authors explain, “[...] the judgment of beauty, therefore, is not determinant – it is not in the object itself – but reflective – it is in the subject that it occurs” (Mizoguchi & Passos, 2021, p. 34). In this sense, aesthetics imposes itself as a kind of transcendental, expropriated from the sensitive dimension of experimentation. This, in turn, becomes the artist’s field of action, accessible only to them, who, through their practices, can apprehend and express in their works the beautiful forms that reflect judgment, delimiting the field of the arts and the legitimacy of the artist as an agent of their discourse. It is in this sense that beauty gains a utility produced amidst the hegemonic values of our culture, disqualifying the perception and role of spectators, forcing them to always access cognitive models produced outside their experience. The creator’s role is to access transcendental aesthetic judgment, expressing it through the work. The public’s role is to access this judgment (expressed in the artist’s synthesis) through the act of contemplating it.

We follow the authors’ critical position as an alternative to this transcendental viewpoint of aesthetics or the utilitarianism of beautiful form. We do not seek aesthetics as a universal value, nor do we affirm a pure form of judgment beyond the sensible dimension of experience. Instead, we defend an aesthetics of immanence in the political field, a ‘political aesthetics’ that operates through perception and the body. Thus, we consider the theme not in the sense of a fetishization of the work and its formal stagnation aligned with the glamour of the market in the ultraliberal context, but in a dimension of potential not apprehended by the established networks of knowledge-power. Mizoguchi and Passos ask: “Taking away the fetish of the work, what remains of art? What remains of it is what does not remain in it, what does not stop in it” (Mizoguchi & Passos, 2021, p. 35). For the authors, the work of art is a device for activating processes of mutation of sensitivity and understanding in their inseparability. We thus begin with their critique of the utilitarian view of art or the sensory judgment of aesthetic experience, which points to the question of what is beautiful, towards the fundamental problem of ‘how beauty is made’. It is important to remember that this act of making also implies another significant shift. It is not about the artist’s act as an agent of revealing the aesthetic dimension to the public through the work as a product of their creation. The aesthetic act shifts politically as a gesture common to the spectators. Hence, the importance of Lygia’s work. Thus, aesthetics related to art, politics, and care practices present themselves as procedures of collective involvement that demand from us an action related to the processes of reality production. And it is precisely this action that defines the work of art and its context of production. Art and politics gradually shed determinations and objectives defined before their creation, finding in the discussion about method the aesthetic conception on which we focus.

Jacques Rancière (2012, p. 15) discusses the aesthetic plane of politics and art and points to a regime of sharing the sensible, characterized as “[...] the system of sensible evidence that reveals, at the same time, the existence of a common ground and the divisions that define respective places and parts within it.” In this regime of sharing, aesthetics is identified as inherent to artistic practices⁶. Thus, we consider it as “[...] a specific regime of identification and thought of the arts: a mode of articulation between ways of doing, forms of visibility of these ways of doing, and modes of thinkability of their relations” (Rancière, 2012, p. 13). We emphasize that in Lygia’s work, the ways of doing are not exclusively restricted to the artist’s domain, being inherent to the public’s own doing. And the shift in the making of the work, from the domain of the proposer towards the participant, leads us to the problem of “how to do it.” In Lygia’s proposal, there is a management of practices aimed increasingly at the production of the work by the public. In this sense, we go beyond the question of the participant’s involvement in the process. The participant is not simply an assistant, a guinea pig, or an auxiliary figure in the process. They literally become producers of the work, a movement that culminates in the experience of making in themselves. In other words, the work is created in the very act of experiencing it, as the artist indicates in the proposition “Walking”:

⁶ Artistic practices are the *way of doing*, a process of production that is constituted in the doing itself and not beyond it (Rancière, 2012).

Make your own Walking: take one of those paper strips that wrap around a book, cut it widthwise, twist it, and glue it together to create a Moebius strip. Then take a pair of scissors, pierce one point into the surface, and cut continuously lengthwise [...] When you have gone around the Moebius strip, *choose between cutting to the right and cutting to the left of the cut already made. This notion of choice is crucial. The only meaning of this experiment lies in the act of doing it. The work is your act.* As you cut into the strip, it thins and unfolds into interweavings. In the end, the path is so narrow that it can no longer be widened. It is the end of the shortcut (Clark, 1980, pp. 25-26, emphasis added).

Walking invites the one who experiences it to be inseparable from the device, since the act of doing is the work itself (Louppe, 2005). Mizoguchi and Passos (2021) point out, based on this proposition by Lygia, an inversion in the traditional etymological meaning of the word method, where what is initially considered a goal to be achieved (*méta-hodos*) is reversed in the aesthetic experience, understanding that the goal is constructed in the process itself (*hodos-méta*) and not as an essential guide to the objective to be achieved. In this way, Walking reveals to us the possibility of thinking about aesthetics in this methodological reversal, as an exercise in the production of the self, inciting us to immerse ourselves in this singular experience. According to the authors, “[...] without an a priori that confers upon the beyond the value of an end to be achieved [...], the path then becomes an act of self-production in the gerundive action of walking” (Mizoguchi & Passos, 2021, p. 36). Hence, Lygia’s propositions lead us to the political struggle, evoking a dimension of care as management/governance of the self. A governance carried out through the exercise of the body’s sensitivity in all its potential. The *Structuring of the Self* is central to this discussion, inviting those who participate in the proposition to inhabit the plane of experience, not as mere spectators, but as producers of the modes of doing in question.

Body, subjection, and the practices of the self

It is in this sense that the artist’s work aligns with her own practices, in an ethical-political sense. In works such as *The History of Sexuality* (2020a) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2018), Foucault points to a type of exercise of power over life called biopower, aimed at regulating bodies and forms, normalizing them. Biopower acts in the service of a politics of life management, a biopolitics as the management of populations as a form of domination in modern societies. Following Judith Butler’s (2019) Foucauldian reading of the theme of subjection, the machinery of power operates in the biopolitical context, through the submission of bodies and existences to a normalizing soul that, through processes of incessant discursive framing and reframing, promotes an inversion of the logic of imprisonment in the soul/body relationship. Therefore, it is not the first (pseudo-foundation of freedom) that is imprisoned by the second, but rather, the idea is that “[...] these discourses imprison the body in the soul, animate the body and enclose it within this ideal structure, and, in this sense, reduce the notion of psyche to the operations of an ideal of external normalization and structuring” (Butler, 2019, p. 93). Hence, subjection operates through the imprisonment of the body by the soul. In this sense, we develop a kind of attachment to this subjection insofar as it is established in the genesis of being, that is, it is part of our own constitution. We understand that the normative soul carries out its regulatory frameworks before a structured self, operating at the level of perception, configuring itself at the same time as part of our primary vulnerability, a subordination to a power that created us. Thus, “[...] this primary vulnerability qualifies the subject as a type of exploitable being” (Butler, 2019, p. 29).

Hence, the importance of the theme of resistance. Power devices provide us with the possibility of subverting the domination they establish. Butler then highlights, in the process of the body’s imprisonment by the soul, a perspective of insubordination of the latter. Hence her interest in psychoanalysis, in the imaginary dimension of a psychic residue that does not submit to unconscious regulation by law. She also detects, in the Foucauldian reading, a bodily residue that does not submit to regulation by the normative soul, a residue that is the object of permanent destruction and that establishes itself as the engine of a resistance of the body to the incarcerating soul. It is in the possibility of access to and experimentation with these residues that we can think about the production of viable solutions on the plane of resistance: so that the Foucauldian subject “[...] is never fully constituted in subjection, but is constituted in it repeatedly; and it is in the possibility of a repetition that repeats itself against its origin that subjection acquires its involuntarily enabling power” (Butler, 2019, p. 101). These are resistances operated in/by the body. His proposition in

Frames of War (2020) is of a political ontology of bodies in which our constitutive vulnerability (the primary subjection to which we are all exposed) becomes susceptible to re-elaboration and re-signification.

Therefore, it is in the arena of the body that struggles for political sovereignty are waged, and it is through the sensory regulation of bodies that domination is imposed: "War sustains its practices by acting on the senses, making them apprehend the world selectively, attenuating the commotion in the face of certain images and sounds and intensifying affective reactions to others" (Butler, 2020, p. 83). Thus, Butler's reading points us to a kind of activism of the body based on vulnerability and commotion (becoming sensitive to our vulnerability in relation to the perception of the vulnerability of the other) as a way out of biopolitical domination. And it is in pursuit of an activism of bodies that we embark on experiences with the *Structuring of the Self*. Dismantling the shackles of the imprisoning soul requires the development of constant exercises, of the most varied kinds, to awaken this sensitivity. And working with relational objects led us to perceive their importance as a technique to be employed in this sense. Intellectual understanding is not enough to break through the micro-regulations of power that already operate at the sensory level. It is necessary to destabilize the sensory frameworks produced by the imprisoned soul and give way to the bodily residue of insubordination in order to inhabit new existential territories. Hence, our appreciation for Lygia's work.

Once the political context of a biopower that invests in the capture of the body by a normative soul operating through incessant framing and reframing is established, it becomes important to consider the possibilities of resistance to this biopolitical machinery. It is on the ethical plane that we proceed, according to Foucault's intuition, in the search for the composition of practices that promote self-managed autonomy and a reevaluation of politics. Lygia's work, therefore, aligns with the ontology of bodies and constitutes an ethical way out of biopolitical domination. The *Structuring of the Self* is a device that leads us to a work of making oneself, constituting itself as a device of care. Foucault (2020c) highlights the art of care of the self (*epimeleia heautou*) as the development of a work of self-attention, an exercise of occupation with yourself as the foundation of freedom and political autonomy, where "[...] the endpoint of this elaboration is still always defined by the sovereignty of the individual over themselves" (Foucault, 2020c, p. 72). It is an affirmation of an art of existence, a singular way of occupying the common space of relations between men. This "[...] art of existence" (Foucault, 2020c, p. 58) is the fruit of lifestyles inspired by Greek culture, based on this occupation of the self in the pursuit of an autonomous moral and ethical life in the face of the established order. In this case, it involves a more intense concern with *aphrodisias*, that is, behaviors related to experiences with pleasures (not only sexual ones) as a potential expression of freedom or as a source of subjugation. As the author shows us, *epimeleia* is characterized as an autonomous regime of care, in which an experience of collective knowledge is affirmed in the pursuit of practices that converge towards balance and sovereignty of the self. In this sense, it presupposes the performance of constant exercises (*askesis*) to achieve its objectives. "This time is not empty: it is populated by exercises, by practical tasks, diverse activities" (Foucault, 2020c, p. 56).

In the context of this care of the self within the Greek way of life, we wish to highlight the fundamental condition of sensory experimentation in affirming mastery over the forces that can hinder our freedom. In our Christian worldview, man confronts these forces based on the logic of refusal and deprivation, in order not to be corrupted by them (as in the case of sin). In this case, he submits to moral rules always established outside of his experience. In contrast to this understanding, the Greeks experienced and sought to master pleasures, not through refusal, but through confrontation with them, this being the principle sustaining their freedom. Thus, he explored these forces in his body, refining his sensitivity to himself and to the world around him. The objective was to develop mastery of the self, an attitude necessary for the proper use of these pleasures (Foucault, 2020b). This mastery of the self is called *enkrateia*, one of the forms of relationship with oneself, a condition for the attitude of the temperate man. This refers to an "[...] active form of mastery of the self that allows one to resist or fight and guarantee one's domination in the realm of desires and pleasures" (Foucault, 2020b, p. 61). Temperance (*sophrosne*), on the other hand, is another form of relationship with oneself, which the philosopher describes as an attitude of deliberately deciding for reason (*logos*) in the face of desires and excesses. Unlike *enkrateia*, which occurs in confronting the forces that surround us, which "[...] dominates pleasures and desires, but needs to fight to overcome them" (Foucault, 2020b, p. 61), temperance experiences other pleasures that are not in accordance with reason, "[...] but does not let oneself be carried away by them" (Foucault, 2020b, p. 62).

For an aesthetic perception

But what would be the importance of the theme of the use of pleasures in our discussion about aesthetic practices? Well, what is at stake in the development of this temperance is not only the agonistic dimension of confronting the forces that dominate us, but the fact that this confrontation takes place in the arena of our body in a sensory dimension. Temperance is the fruit of a given mastery over experimentation in the body, and which is established in the triumph over the forces related to *aphrodisia*. And it is this confrontation, which Foucault points out, that we find in the artistic method of the *Structuring of the Self*. It is a confrontation in the aesthetic field, in the sensitive world of the individual's perception. Consequently, we use Lygia's proposal, in the sense of a modality of *askesis*, a wager on the production of a relationship with oneself, starting from a perceptual-sensory exploration in the body, aiming at mastery of the self as a condition of a temperate subject. As we previously highlighted, the search for Lygia's work takes place within the context of proposing practices that enable an ontology of bodies as the engine of political transformation, because, as the artist states, "[...] in everything I do there is a real need for the human body to express itself, or to reveal it, as if it were a primal experience" (Clark & Oiticica, 1998, p. 61). It is necessary to invest in a temperance based on the relationship with the bodily residue that is not subordinated to our normative soul. Let us remember that the captive body is the body scrutinized by power relations, demarcated and encompassed by the regulating soul, being a kind of double of it. It is in this sense that we understand that the soul regulates our perception through sensoriality.

Thus, the arena of the body evokes the dimension of experience in a phenomenological sense. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1994), points out the crucial role of the body, the perceptual field of experience, a fertile ground for working with relational objects. For the philosopher, our condition of being-in-the-world (intentionality) is obstructed by the consolidation of the sensory plane as a mediator of experience. Hence his critique of the regime of sensoriality as an a priori form of organization of being, since the classical notion of sensation would not be a concept of reflection, "[...] but a late product of thought turned towards objects, the last term of the representation of the world, the most distanced from the constitutive source, and, for that reason, the least clear" (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 32). It is therefore necessary to avoid the error of "[...] constructing perception with the perceived" (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 26), to overcome pre-established sensory modulations and access the intentional plane of experience, in an opening, through perception, to the *spectacle of the world*; that is, the intensive plane of forces independent of any signification. In this sense, intentionality is not something abstract that is independent of extended substance (the body), but is realized within it. "The body is the vehicle of being in the world, and to have a body is, for a living being, to join a defined environment, to merge with certain projects and to continually engage in them" (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 122). Consequently, we understand, from a phenomenological reading, that the aesthetic dimension of the *Structuring of the Self* is related to the body and to sensoriality in the sense of an aesthesia, as proposed by Helia Borges (2013, p. 2, author's emphasis).

Thus, the common understanding of the term *aesthetic* distances and distorts the aesthetic experience from its ontological basis, which is: aesthesia, as a sensitive condition of the body that, in its encounter with the world, enables the apprehension of differential fields, allowing the unveiling of worlds.

The notion of aesthetics returns to the sense of a sensitivity awakened in the body in contact with the world. Thus, our choice of art is driven more by the artistic process than by the content of the works, so that from it "[...] one desires the gesture, not the representation" (Borges 2013, p. 3). This aesthesia occurs beyond the field of judgments and representations, on the plane of an openness to perception in the body. "This means that I cannot assimilate perception to syntheses that are of the order of judgment, acts, or predication" (Merleau-Ponty, 1994, p. 5). Hence, *estesis* is the point of contact with the world; it is intentionality in the body. Therefore, Lygia's artistic work is aesthetic/aesthetic, since it seeks to escape the phenomenal/sensory world of the captive body and the soul that subjugates it.

This is our proposal for the research project. Practices with relational objects as a care device evoke attention to the body and perception. It is in the sense of reclaiming autonomy through care of the self that we conjecture an aesthesitherapy, aiming at sensory destabilization in the use of relational objects, to open ourselves to perceptual experience in a transindividual field. This occurs because such objects are not

produced a priori from the individual's relationship, but in the singular experience within the common plane; through the experimentation of objects not marked by judgments but constituted in relation, in the process of perceptual experimentation, as in Lygia's proposition. This is, therefore, a work of emerging from the womb through intentionality in the body; suspension of judgments and values constituted in modern culture a priori to our experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1994). Ethical work based on experiencing the common plane from an immersion in the universe of each individual's perceptions. Sensory art is thus understood in its interface of care, production of the self, and an aesthetic way of confronting biopolitics as a form of resistance. The inflection between Lygia Clark's aesthetic *Structuring of the Self* and resistance to biopolitics is configured, in the field of artistic experimentation, in sensory deconstruction through the use of relational objects. *Structuring of the Self* is a work that invites us to inhabit the universe of the body and perception, since its elements are not ready-made data to be observed and analyzed by the public, but are constituted through experimentation. Precisely for this reason, we make use of Lygia's work, as it is a sensory experimentation in the sense of a perceptual opening.

Hence, the significance of a revaluation of aesthetics, since it does not refer to the individualization of works of art as products of a creator. In Lygia's work, art is created through the involvement of the public. Hence her statement: "[...] we are the mold, [...] it is up to you to breathe into it [...]" (Clark, 1997, p. 233). The meaning of the work lies in the making, as we saw in *Walking*. And that is why the artist chooses to call her works propositions instead of works. The propositions are configured as mere instruments, triggers of the experience. The breath is given not by the proposer but by the participating subject, who subverts their condition as a passive spectator. In this sense, the ways of making refer not only to the making of the work, but also to a making of oneself. This is perhaps Lygia's most radical provocation. Artistic making implies a making of oneself, (auto) *poiesis*, making them inseparable. Thus, aesthetics no longer merely denotes an individuation of form within the context of an external product called *the work*. Instead, it is now conceived as an enactive process of self-production, as vital and psychic individuation, on a collective transindividual plane (Simondon, 2020). In the *Structuring of the Self*, the subject is the work itself, which is configured as a making of oneself. There is, therefore, a possibility of radicalizing Lygia's proposal. If the work was born from the encounter between the proposing device and the participants, now, in the *Structuring of the Self*, the participating subject is the mold and the breath within themselves. The relational objects provoke a reconfiguration of the sensory and cognitive frameworks of the participants, towards an open and embodied perception in the experience. Hence, the ethical sense of this proposition by the author. Each singularity is modulated as a work of art, in which aesthetics reveals itself as the plane of (artistic) practices proper to a making of oneself. Hence also the encounter between aesthetics and politics. A proposal to affirm a political field of resistance and action in the affirmation of freedom, aiming to explore the forces in our body and refine sensitivity to oneself/within oneself in the development of temperance as a mastery of action, a governance of the self.

The Practice of the *Structuring of the Self*

At this moment, we are immersed in practices inspired by the *Structuring of the Self* and relational objects. According to Lygia, they have no specificity in themselves. As their name indicates, "[...] it is in the relationship established with the subject's fantasy that it defines itself. The same object can express different meanings for different subjects or for the same subject at different times" (Clark, 1980, p. 49). Suely Rolnik (2005, p. 15) states that "[...] relational objects are not finalized in themselves, being relational in their essence". We then made a series of artifacts, seeking to reproduce the effects of relational objects. Brushes, bags with water, sand, and air. Sponges, a duster, loofah sponges for bathing, stones, and seashells. Rubber balls, birthday balloons, and marbles. Stones, fabrics, potato and onion sacks, and a material originating from new contemporary ways of playing, *slime*⁷. The use of objects followed Lygia's methodological proposal, with the difference that we prioritized the exploration of sensations. In the social psychology laboratory, we lay on a mat so that the relational objects could be applied, just as the artist did.

⁷ A type of goo with a slightly dense texture used as a toy by children, but it differs from traditional modeling clay. It is also known as slime, amoeba, or even unicorn poop. The word slime, in English, means something viscous or sticky, and it has recently gained popularity in the children's world. An interesting characteristic is that children often put the slime on their bodies, sensorially experiencing the texture of the goo.

Initially, we manipulated them quickly and sometimes abruptly, but gradually we refined the technique in our own way. We proceeded through the serene use of objects in the search for a kind of regularity of emptiness, seeking “[...] silence, the duration of the encounter, in each session and in the process as a whole, the regular rhythm of the sessions” (Rolnik, 2005, p. 18). The main thing was the maintenance of a space focused on a making of the self based on immersion in experience from the openness to perception, “[...] in order to delve into a shared intimacy free from psychologism, situated in the invisible and unspeakable realm of micro-perceptions” (Rolnik, 2005, p. 18). At the end of the exercise, we discussed what had happened. The goal was to explore the widest possible range of perceptual experiences.

We highlight the eminently plastic and meaning-free nature of objects. Because they present themselves as independent of any categorization, they provide a dispersive experience that undermines the plane of pre-established sensory configurations of the normative soul, leading us to an open perception, so that “[...] sensations are brought, relived and transformed in the place of the body, through the relational object or the direct touch of my hands” (Clark & Oiticica, 1998, p. 223). In this sense, we invest in a true sensory deterritorialization based on the dispersive and non-signifying dimension of relational objects. Hot and cold objects, light and heavy objects, and small strings slid over the bodies. The slime enveloped a good part of the body surface like a second skin. One participant, for example, reports that as he lay down on the mat and as the objects were placed on his body, he began to feel his back being flooded by a liquid. He believed that water was being poured on the floor and that it was wetting his back. The participants’ cognitive and sensory interpretation of the stimulation with the objects proved to be completely random. For him, a large volume of water was poured onto the floor. However, no liquid was used during the session.

It was in the impossibility of a synthesis of sensory and cognitive meaning that the opening to a new perceptual experience occurred. As Merleau-Ponty (1994, p. 32, author’s emphasis) shows us, “[...] the sensitive is what is learned with the senses, but we now know that this *with* is not simply instrumental, that the sensory apparatus is not a conductor.” This is a true synesthetic practice in which new possibilities of meaning arose through immersion in the experience from the interaction with objects. The relational objects provided an encounter with sensations in the body, initially in a raw state, in a borderline perceptual experience where syntheses such as cold, soft, or rough were no longer so obvious, generating a sensory vertigo in which loss of spatial orientation was recurrent, in addition to numerous aspects of altered sensoriality.

Accounts such as those of the cocoon experience were common. Participants recounted that during experimentation with the objects, they felt their bodies being enveloped by a kind of cocoon, as if lines were slowly wrapping around them. There are also accounts of experiences of being enveloped by fabrics. These are experiences produced through and in the body. The accounts of the cocoon were associated with experiences of protection, re-elaboration, or remaking, and were confirmed in the practices carried out by Lygia. The symbolic dimension of the cocoon refers to this type of meaning, which can be re-elaborated and redirected at the moment of experimentation. The accounts also mention objects that disappear after being placed on the skin, and others that appear when removed. Such perceptual-cognitive syntheses occurred in interaction with relational objects completely different from this type of stimulation – a stone on the chest, for example.

Participating in the simulation of the *Structuring of the Self* alters the sensory reference point, allowing a new way of feeling, thinking, and imagining to blossom at each moment. The experiences were unique, as it was a process of experimentation in the individual’s relationship with objects, an experience of deconstructing sensoriality. From this, we find that the relational universe leads us to understand that there are no a priori meanings contained in objects or sensations. As the seminal studies of Antônio Gomes Pena (2000) show, there is no perceptual harvest in which our sense organs, seen as pre-defined structures, are responsible for collecting and decoding the sensory information contained in objects. All these codifications and stratifications are produced by the body in the perceptual experience, which, according to adaptive needs, reproduces a series of correlations repetitively, thus constituting the sensory basis of their meaning. It is in this sense that, for phenomenology, the sensory soul embodies a regulatory device that leads us to the world, a world of possibilities, of openness arising from inhabiting the experience. Nevertheless, by accessing perception at its genesis, it becomes possible not only to deconstruct the sensoriality regulated by the imprisoning soul but also to reterritorialize experience in the production of new meanings and perspectives.

And the perceptual plane communicates with the cognitive plane. The use of relational objects promotes a true structural drift (Varela et al., 2000) in which the bases of signification are undermined towards a *poiesis*, an act of resignification of the self, given from an enactive posture⁸. It is on the plane of sensory deconstruction that the possibility of a new making of the self emerges. If, therefore, there is a sensory soul that molds, regulates, and imprisons the body, it is in the experience with relational objects that all these layers of coding can be discontinued. In the context of a power machinery that recurrently promotes the subjection of bodies and subjectivity to a normative, regulatory soul, perceptual experience has become a concrete possibility for the realization of a sensory *enkrateia* in which the subject reworks and masters himself and the forces that surround him, on the condition of inhabiting the experience in an embodied way.

Final considerations

Faced with the fascist and totalitarian conjuncture imposed on the realm of relationships due to the unfolding of a biopolitics governed by a neo/ultraliberal order, the activism of bodies becomes a strategic issue, in the sense of proposing resistance to the mechanisms of subjection to which we are exposed. In order to overcome the effects of an incarcerating soul that regulates the body on the plane of sensoriality, we embarked on the adventure of practices with relational objects inspired by Lygia Clark's proposition. The COVID-19 pandemic was an event that forced the interruption of practices during this period. However, the experiences gained are already proving relevant, in the sense of highlighting the importance of work of this nature, as well as the continuity of our activities. Thus, with the return of in-person activities at the university, the conceptual study of Lygia's work unfolds into a deepening of practices with relational objects in the current moment of the research.

Far from proposing a struggle to impose identities detached from embodied experience, through stereotyped actions and the use of force, the ontology of bodies calls us to reflect on contemporary activism. In it, mobilization leads us to an ethics of otherness based on self-care and the recognition of our vulnerability through commotion as a mechanism for sensitizing us to our reality. In this sense, the body asserts itself as the arena of political struggles. The aesthetic experience through art offers us possibilities for breaking with the normative frameworks that operate on the body and soul, whether on the cognitive or sensory plane. Lygia's work consists of a work of resignation and care of the self through the body, in which transformation takes place in a process of making the self process, culminating in the aesthetic-political question. As we have stated, it is a constant transformation operated in function of the perception of our vulnerability (subjection to the imprisoning soul) based on the vulnerability of the other. If, for Foucault, *epimeleia* is affirmed as a collective knowledge given from sharing with the other, for Lygia, the discovery of a new reality and a walking outside of oneself are in alterity. In such a way that "[...] now I am no longer alone. I am aspired to by others" (Clark, 1980, p. 23). The practices inspired by the *Structuring of the Self* become a valuable instrument, aiming to liberate and manage, in a temperance exercise, the residues of the body that do not submit to domination by power devices. Hence, the power of Lygia's statement when she says that "[...] for the first time, existence consists of a radical change of world, instead of being merely an interpretation thereof" (Clark & Oiticica, 1998, p. 59). Hence, the ethical appeal of self-care in the affirmation of sensory practices based on the artist's work. Working with the body in its aesthetic/aesthetic dimension constitutes a potential tool in the practice of a clinic inseparable from politics (Passos & Barros, 2000), in the sense of liberation from normative frameworks reified by power devices and the recognition of our vulnerable condition through deviation (*Klinamen*). Just as in the accounts of the cocoon image, we need spaces in which we can develop libertarian and transformative practices, in an activism of bodies that mobilizes us at the core of experience. In this sense, the activities inherent to the *Structuring of the Self* are affirmed as practices of resistance from an ethical/political perspective. And we conclude here with a visionary statement by Lygia: "If man cannot achieve a new expression within a new ethic, he will be lost" (Clark & Oiticica, 1998, p. 34).

⁸ According to Varela et al. (2000), this is a process of the engender of oneself through an interactive and adaptive network specific to the living being, in a systemic process inherent to the living structure as a whole and not only restricted to intelligence as a system of representations of the world.

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