



**T H E
O B J
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Edited by Antony Hudek

Documents of Contemporary Art

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Documents of Contemporary Art

In recent decades artists have progressively expanded the boundaries of art as they have sought to engage with an increasingly pluralistic environment. Teaching, curating and understanding of art and visual culture are likewise no longer grounded in traditional aesthetics but centred on significant ideas, topics and themes ranging from the everyday to the uncanny, the psychoanalytical to the political.

The Documents of Contemporary Art series emerges from this context. Each volume focuses on a specific subject or body of writing that has been of key influence in contemporary art internationally. Edited and introduced by a scholar, artist, critic or curator, each of these source books provides access to a plurality of voices and perspectives defining a significant theme or tendency.

For over a century the Whitechapel Gallery has offered a public platform for art and ideas. In the same spirit, each guest editor represents a distinct yet diverse approach – rather than one institutional position or school of thought – and has conceived each volume to address not only a professional audience but all interested readers.



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Lygia Clark

The Relational Object//1980

The *relational object* (*objeto relacional*) has no specific nature in itself. As its name indicates, it is in the relationship established with the fantasy of the subject that it is defined. The same object may express different meanings for different subjects at different moments. It is the object of the aggressive and passionate affective charge of the subject, in the sense that the subject lends meaning to it; it loses the condition of a simple object in order to be impregnated, a being lived as a living part of the subject. The bodily sensation propitiated by the object is the starting point for phantasmatic production. The *relational object* has physical specificities. Formally it has no analogy with the body (it is not illustrative), but it creates relationships with it by means of the texture, weight, size, temperature, sound and movement (the motion of the diverse material used): 'It creates forms whose textures and continuous metamorphoses engender corollary rhythms to the sensual rhythms that we experience in life.' At the moment when the subject manipulates it, creating relationships of fullness and emptiness, by means of masses that flow in an unending process, the identity, with its psychological nucleus, is unleashed in the processual identity of shaping itself. I will cite some interesting examples by friends of mine who have experienced the *relational objects*.

B., a female writer, came to my house, very tired. She began by taking the 'light-heavy pillow', putting it on her leg, feeling it like a hot and living animal on her knees. She took the 'light pillows', squeezed them with her hands, and passing them over her body, had a sensation of euphoria, as if the little balls were living cells swarming over her body. When leaving my house, she had the feeling that she was part of a harmonious whole and at the same time she sensed her individuality. It seemed to her that she could have a clear communication with anyone. The balls had massaged her inside as if other people were feeling her. The sensation of well-being and euphoria lasted for a week.

V, an analyst, passed the 'big mattress' over his body, feeling greatly relaxed. At the end, he said, 'My body is a dense and total mass.' Then he manipulated the 'heavy pillows', which gave him a very unpleasant sensation of heaviness, being fenced in, blocked, wanting to break free. He made this clear, using the term 'spidering' (mother spider) and locating these perceptions in his pre-birth history: he had been in his mother's womb for ten months.

The Relational Object in a Therapeutic Context

For two years I have been conducting experiences in the use of *relational objects* for therapeutic ends. At the beginning I used them applying Edward Sapir's method, which I encountered in Paris: relaxation based on verbal induction; one session a week. I gradually abandoned induction, beginning to use only my own materials, increasing the number of sessions to three a week and an hour in length. The process becomes therapeutic through the regularity of the sessions, which allows the progressive elaboration of the phantasmatic production provoked by the potentialities of the *relational objects*. In manipulating the *relational object*, the subject lives out a pre-verbal image. The *relational object* directly touches the subject's psychological nucleus. The touch of the body is appropriated by the subject's psychological nucleus for the formation of the ego, a touch which is digested, metabolized and transformed into a symbolic equation. The *relational object* becomes a target for the 'acting out' of the subject who manipulates it.

The subject concretely experiences her aggressive or loving experiences in relation to the object. For example, if she destroys the *relational object* during the 'acting out', she understands that, even when it is destroyed, the mediator is present in order to deny this destruction. In the contrary case, the subject may destroy the mediating 'internalized object', maintaining the *relational object* in her hands as a guarantee that she hasn't lost the vital substance. Through this the subject captures a measurement of the real, focusing on the destruction as belonging to the world of her fantasy. Thus, simultaneously the object unstitches (de-compensates) and stitches (compensates). The process goes from the psychological nucleus to the periphery, creating a membrane. The texts that follow refer to therapeutic practice with the *relational objects*.

Structuring of the Self

Structuring of the self was my first systematizing of therapeutic method with the *relational objects*.

The person lies down, lightly dressed, on a large plastic mattress filled with polystyrene balls, covered by a loose sheet. With her weight the person makes impressions in the mattress in which the body can become 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 touch the joints in a way which gives many people the sensation of 'gluing' or 'soldering' sections 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 long time, and the palms 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 this process, the little stone is fundamental. It is experienced as a concrete object, which is not the subject nor the mediator that applies it. It is outside of the relationship, acquiring the status of a 'proof of reality'. In all of my experience there has only been one exception to this rule: a 'borderline' case who experienced the stone within his phantasmatic production as excrement. I pass the 'plastic bags filled with water' over the body, then the 'plastic bags filled with air', then blowing hot air through a tube over the whole surface of the body. I place the 'light pillows' around the head, I press the mattress around the body in order to 'shape it', I also place the 'heavy pillows' around the waist, between the legs, suppressing all the emptinesses of the body. In the place in which a 'hole' (*manque*) was discovered, I insert my hands, pressing them down, possibly substituting them with 'light-heavy pillows'. I cover the body with a woollen blanket, I sit on the floor behind the subject's head, very close to her, I let the silence settle in, or the subject verbally expresses all her fears, all her sensations, even perhaps living out her 'primitive agonies' (see D.W. Winnicott). I place my hand like a shell on the person's face, on her belly, or on another place, depending on the fissures which the person shows. In some cases the removal of my hands from the body is felt as a fragmentation, as the loss of a part of the body. An example from a witness to this experience: 'When you take your hands away from my body, I feel that a part of my body goes away and what is left of it doesn't have the structure to carry on alone.' At the end I calmly remove the blanket, the pillows, I take the subject by the head, turning it this way and that way. For some of them I pass the 'big mattress' over their body. I ask the person to stretch out for a while. Sitting down, I take hold of the whole surface of her back. At the end I give out one or more 'plastic bags filled with air' for the person to manipulate them or perhaps burst them. I massage the person's head during this manipulation, creating conditions favourable for her to go on to the 'acting out'. When the subject bursts the bag, she is experiencing 'ambivalence' in relation to the object. In destruction the 'relational object' is a receptacle for the receiving of the attacks of the subject, not as an even partial object (see Melanie Klein), but still within indifferenciation: the two bodies as communicating vessels, a continent in which the child does not differentiate between what it is and what the object is. Then I get the subject to fill up another plastic bag to replace the bag which has been destroyed. A process of 'reparation', which guarantees a stable identification to the beneficial object ('good object') reinforcing the ego and taking away its culpability. The process takes place at the same time as the appearance of the global object, through the return of the wholeness of the love object which had been the target of the subject's aggressive attacks. This moment thus has a structuring role. The 'structuring of the self' takes place in a pre-verbal space. During this phase of the work, silence is totally respected and the word comes in

afterwards, if the person wishes verbally to express images or sensations experienced, or even in the next session if she has noticed modifications in her real behaviour. The 'structuring of the self' consists in massive maternalization: to establish between the mediated and the subject, in a real and a symbolic manner, a relationship analogous to that which existed between a 'good mother' and her child. The action has a reparative effect – it brings the subject the real satisfactions which had been frustrated by her mother. It is a question of understanding the subject's fundamental needs and responding to them by means of the contact with the body and not classical analytic interpretation. [...]

Lygia Clark, extract from 'Objeto Relacional' (Rio de Janeiro, 1980); translated from Portuguese in Lygia Clark (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1997) 319–22.

A.M. Fine Fluxtheatre Answers//1980

Props:

A modest-sized table, preferably covered by a large black cloth.

A large gong, preferably, or a similar substitute like a pot-lid, centrally suspended in a visibly *square* frame.

A symphonic 'triangle', suspended.

One wooden chopstick.

One wet-mop.

Also: One water glass, and a pitcher of water.

One pocketwatch.

Performers: Two (Speaker and Mopper).

Instructions: Table with props except mop, centre proscenium along with Speaker.

Speaker instructs audience to think up mentally questions to the ten answers he will give them, without any permitted 'verbalization' on the part of any of the audience. Sufficient time between each 'answer' must be allowed for the audience