

An analysis of empathy in creative-based methods and processes

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation analyses the creative process of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, and how it developed into being in direct understanding of others, or empathic, especially in her last work, *Structuring of the Self*. Using Lygia Clark as a predecessor and her correspondence with Hélio Oitica as a theoretical reference on methodologies of artistic production that are prompt to promote empathy; two projects – *Sendas en la Isla Nena*, from Cuban-Puerto Rican artist Rosina Santana and *Day to Day*, from Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo – are researched to identify empathic methods and processes in their respective artistic practices. Notions of memories, oral history, the paradoxical museum and the nature of the gift are presented as examples of conceptual basis to promote empathy within their respective practices. A counter-case study is presented to contrast how the same kind of project (participatory and community based) can have a different outcome. Lastly, a reflection on those projects and their methodologies serve as example of a methodology for empathic methods and processes within the contemporary art practice. Empathic design is also analysed briefly to establish how empathy serves as a valuable tool in order to merge ethics and aesthetics.

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## Introduction

Like constellations, new theories and new names have been aligned in an attempt to evolve from older ways of thinking and producing in the art world/machine/arena. Unfortunately, they seem to maintain a similar structural condition to the predecessor. Rasheed Araeen mentions how 'art has a historical responsibility, [ ... ] a subversive function which can only be achieved if one is able to penetrate the system and challenge its structures.' (2002, p.341) By acknowledging that art production can still be conveyed behind a Postcolonial, Post-conceptual or 'Relational' agenda to criticise the institution or the State, it can be understood that all forms of creative practice – especially those that seem to have been born of a desire to challenge the Institution, such as participatory or public-based artworks – nowadays can be produced under standards far from empathic. The purpose of this text is to search for examples of methods and practices that show different methods of production within the creative practice that understand others, and others' points of view; in other words, this text aims to identify empathic practices within the creative realm.

In this realm of creative practice first delineated – in terms of the object (and the lack of it), the audience, the level of participation of the audience – by Brazilian artists Lygia Clark (1920-88) and Hélio Oiticica (1937-80), there are contemporary examples which can be related to the kind of practice in which the artist can be, like Cuban-Puerto Rican artist Rosina Santana (1950-) stated, 'designer of the processes'. This may be possible, not only in the common ways this could be analysed such as the formal and conceptual bases of the work, but also in the intricate, more systematic, more subtle ways, such as its methods and processes. Here is where form and content intersect, like Oriana Baddeley accurately mentioned, and thus this dissertation aims to show some examples of methods and

processes that are twinned from an empathic perspective, as a ‘proof’ of the possibility of new ways of developing empathic creative practices. Why shall we use the term ‘empathic’ to define such practices? Because it would be accurate to define empathy as the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in their situation (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2009). According to *The Dictionary of Psychology*, empathy is the objective awareness of another person’s feelings and their possible meanings. It is also the identity of feeling and thought with another person exemplified by ‘I know how you feel’. (Corsini 2002, p.327) Nevertheless, to bring a clearer understanding of how empathy has been linked in creative practices before, the already established method of empathic design (which is confused with empathetic design) has a motto to describe how the creative process varies with the use of empathy as a tool:

Hence the current managerial mantras: ‘Get close to the [user]’ and ‘Listen to the voice of the [user].’ (Leonard and Rayport 1997)

If that confusion seems to be an everlasting condition of the term empathy in itself,<sup>1</sup> I would like to bring to attention another way to describe empathetic design:

Empathetic Design [...] has a less clear definition. While we cannot point to any papers that lay out a different meaning for it than that defined for Empathic Design, we note that the term has come up with several ad-hoc meanings, from ‘center creative concepts around the people [the designers] will influence’ to ‘living the user’s life’. When discussing the latter definition with Dr. Sweeney, she explained that by this she meant the designer should actually spend a day living as the user, for example spending a day in a wheelchair to get a feel for being handicapped. (Landwehr 2007, p.1)

It seems this design method, going as far as getting a ‘feel for being handicapped’, would produce a better lifestyle for all the involved parties. If designers are able to choose a method such as this, there is no reason to believe that artists, within their creative process, can conscientiously produce projects in which they live the life of others, and thus, provoke a

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<sup>1</sup> Since conducting this research I have been led to the conclusion that there is little knowledge of the meaning of empathy, and its often confused with sympathy or compassion.

real change in structures concerning artistic practices (Araeen 2002). Artists can take these seemingly objective measurements from the field of design and thus apply them to their subjective practice without sabotaging the nature of the creative process. After all, empathy itself is an objective concept embedded in a mostly subjective realm, such as is the field of human emotion. This is a proof of the existence of the objective in the subjective.

This dissertation investigates through various artists, projects, theories and processes, which can be identified as empathic. The first chapter of this dissertation highlights how the creative practice of Lygia Clark can be analysed to establish a precedent in which empathic practices and methods were able to function within her practice. It will explore deep connections between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's work, and how their complementary practices benefited both artists in terms of their methodologies. The second chapter will present two case studies of contemporary projects studied in depth to confirm parallelisms between the predecessor (Lygia Clark) and the successors (Rosina Santana and Carolina Caycedo). Thus, both studies will be analysed in contrast to an example of an unempathic creative practice and methodology. The last chapter of this dissertation will reflect on the written and practical research I've embarked upon throughout the length of the program. It will consist of a specific account of previous and current projects within my practice, with an analysis of methods and processes that I have used, or intend to use in future projects, that reflect a my ethical position in relation to empathy.

## 1. **Lygia Clark and empathy: The objective in the subjective**

### *An introduction on Lygia Clark*

Lygia Clark was born in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 1920. She died in Rio de Janeiro in 1988. After getting married and becoming a mother of three, she began her studies: first in Brazil, then in Paris. Her first paintings reflected a compilation of influences in which the organic was pivotal in architecture and constructivist painting. (Herkenhoff 1998, p.36) Her first sketches and drawings showed an organic spiral that resembles Klee's dual movements (1998, p.36). Also, when she studied with Roberto Burle-Marx, she 'ate' his method of the 'organic equilibrium' (that Burle Marx himself inherited from Le Corbusier) within the landscape, and 'vomited' the 'concept of organic garden and the pictorial nature of the graphic planes of gardens.' (1998, p.37) Herkenhoff also mentions how 'later, her painting worked the surface with plays of flat forms centered on the background'. (1998, p.37) At that time she had very specific preoccupations as an artist, such as the death/rupture of the picture frame, which Hélio Oiticica saw in her 'breaking of the frame' a new order of time-duration (1998, p.38), and the background, the flatness of the painting, the analysis of the dynamic relationship between the planes of the painting and the wall, (1998, p.38) and the 'drifting away' from the conventions of the pictorial representation (Brett 2001). These preoccupations were fuelled in part by her influences (Léger, Albers, Mondrian, Malevich) and by an aim to 'make visible' certain problems within the history of art. The ways in which her work presented these problems, thus 'solving' them at the same time, made her a key artist to analyze and 'understand'.

She was part of the Neo-Concrete artists who in 1959 signed the Manifesto Neoconcreto, written by Ferreira Gullar, to coincide with the first *Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta*, and who later that year published the 'Theory of the Non-Object' (Asbury



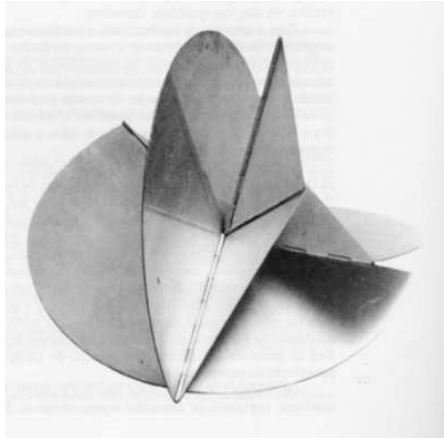
2003), in Rio de Janeiro. Both events constituted a break with the Concrete tradition and artists who succumbed to it. (Mesquita 2008, p.215) The Neo-Concrete artists had several aims concerning their work as a whole. As Anna Dezeuze mentions:

Lygia Clark invites her friends to dinner at her house. Some of them are artists and poets who have recently come together, with Clark, to form the Neoconcrete group, and their first exhibition has taken place earlier that year. As they arrive, she shows them a new work of hers, a painted object lying on the floor. The two critics associated with the group stop and look. "I don't know what to call this," she says to them. "It's a kind of relief," suggests art historian Mário Pedrosa. But Ferreira Gullar, a poet and the author of the Neoconcrete Manifesto, disagrees: "it can't be a relief – it has no surface." So Gullar starts thinking: "It's not painting, it's not sculpture, it's an object. But, look, a table is an object, a chair is an object. So this work by Lygia is not an object." Joining the others at the dinner table, Gullar proudly announces: "I have found a name: it's a non-object." (Dezeuze 2006, p.2)

Lygia Clark's individual creative process led her to pursue other ways of doing, which eventually, after the demise of the Neo-Concrete, took an almost revolutionary path:

The Neo-Concrete artists opened themselves to the environment and gradually turned away from the easel painting and static sculpture, demystifying the artistic object. In this way original artistic propositions were born, based on experiments with chromatic values, cinechromatism, viewer-manipulated work, as well as the original tactile-work of Lygia Clark, which resulted in [the creation of] a sensory universe and a new subject-object relation. (Mesquita 2008, p. 215)

It seems that, as Guy Brett mentions, Clark's innovations had far-reaching implications. (2001) In the short-lived period of the Neo-Concrete, from 1959 to 1961, (Rolnik 1999) the work *Bichos*, which consisted in several aluminium plates hinged in order to be able to take different forms and positions, was fundamental in order to understand Clark's position while associating herself to this movement. In *Bichos* [Animals], a 'founding work, Clark fully creates the Neo-Concrete space as a field for experience and otherness. The work awaits the Other.' (Herkenhoff 1998, p.42)



Lygia Clark, *Bichos* [Animals], 1960.

From the *Bichos* onwards the Other gains a predominant role in Lygia Clark's work. Such is the case of *Caminhando* (1963), as well as the instalment of the 'work in progress' and the subtle substitution of the object for the act to imply a continuous 'infrasensoriality'. (Herkenhoff 1998, p.46) The pivotal importance Lygia confines in the 'participator', most needed to complete the work by following the instructions: twist and glue a strip of paper and then to cut the paper along its length following the form of the Moebius strip, shows a fixation for the process to get from one place to another, from the inside to the outside. Lygia Clark explains how she used the Moebius strip to break our spatial habits; right-left, front and reverse, etc. (Clark 1983, p.151) In this exploration of the outer and the inner world, Clark was aware of her position within the world, and it was being on the inside of it, while being aware at the same time how Oiticica's world revolved in the outside. Therefore, the infrasensoriality of Lygia Clark complements the suprasensoriality of Hélio Oiticica.

The relationship, complementation and contrast between the two spurs from the innings of *Caminhando* and *Parangolé*:

Infrasensoriality is underlying in *Caminhando*. Converging with it, Hélio Oiticica proposes a *Parangolé* with the structure of the Moebius strip, to be used, to dance and to live with the sounds of the Other. The continuous surface of intersubjectivity, for Oiticica, is that of the senses on the level of suprasensoriality. Phenomenological and psychological orientation affect Lygia Clark, who even works with the production of phantasms, or as an intersubjectivity which emerges from regions of interiority, while Hélio Oiticica's phenomenological and

anthropological orientation (carnival, shanties, social marginalization) goes from the social tissue to subjectivisation. Although opposed, the two seem to act through reasons of the complementariness of the differences and not from antagonism. It is then when Clark deals with infrasensoriality while Oiticica becomes involved with suprasensoriality. (Herkenhoff 1998, p.46)

In the sense that Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica both worked with the physical, phenomenological and experiential way of the Moebius band, their approach during the course of the sixties and the seventies was complementary to each other. The base of this intersubjective approach, as it was based on sharing (experiences, letters, appreciation for one another), and which oscillated between organic spaces mediated by objects/materials, was characterized as sensorial-conceptual spaces, according to Ricardo Basbaum. (2008) Basbaum presents a hypothesis (active in both his writing and practice) in which Clark and Oiticica developed ‘propositions [which] always invited YOU to activate them, to “plug in and be plugged in”’ (Basbaum 2008), which designated the ‘YOU’ into the ‘participator’. He designated this process into a ‘formula’ called ‘PRODUCING TRANSFORMATIONS’:

PRODUCING TRANSFORMATIONS: this formula permeated the work of the Brazilian artists Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark. It meant, in one aspect, that they engaged themselves radically in their own lives, living a process of permanent actualization, through self-construction, deconstruction, and experimentation. Unlike body-artists, however, their main support was not their own bodies, but those of others. The pattern:

YOU the spectator  
ME the artist

was sensorially reversed by them into the conceptual flux:

YOUwillbecoME

not through a simple mirror-like inversion, but in the sense of moving ‘YOU’ from the spectator’s passive position to the active and singular role of being the subject of your own experience.’ (Basbaum 2008, p.115)

It is with the inundation of this ‘body/object/world connection’ (2008) that a possible empathic process of identifying with others emerge, in this case the spectator; to have a shift in the way him or her would be accustomed to experience the artwork. This

suggestion is made upon the relationship between empathy and intersubjectivity, as the latter was a pivotal phenomenological aspect of both Clark's and Oiticica's body of work after the Neo-Concrete movement. This is also a suggestion that Lygia Clark, upon her creative process and individuation, could have been already pondering a more immediate effect of her work on others, which becomes clearer in *Structuring of the self/Objetos Relationais*; even if this link was more intuitive than analyzed at the specific moment of this formula, years before the conceptualization of the *Objetos Relationais*. Within this formula of constant reflection, the correspondence between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica becomes an active part of the process. They wrote much about the specifics of their respective projects between 1964 and 1974. The following section will present and highlight some of the concepts and thoughts that affected both artists very differently, especially those that deal with a possible reflection of different kinds of empathy in relation to the spectator in their work.

#### *Letters between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica*

Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica had an active correspondence, in which they discussed ideas about the art world, the artwork, but above all, about the role of the spectator. In their works from 1968 and 1969, a key term was *vivências*, or lived experience: the body's heightened sensory presence as authentic, immediate, and resistant to ideological capture.<sup>2</sup> The term attains importance when Hélio Oiticica describes an event in which certain thoughts about the *vivências* spur out:

This issue of being deflowered by the spectator is the most dramatic thing: in fact everyone is, since beyond the action there is the moment-consciousness of each action, even if this consciousness is modified later on, or incorporates other lived experiences [*vivências*]. (Oiticica 1968, pp.111)

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<sup>2</sup> For the fragment of these letters covered in this dissertation, see "Letters 1968-69" on *Participation*, pp. 110-116. For the complete version of these letters (in Portuguese) see Lygia Clark y Hélio Oiticica. *Cartas 1964-1974*, Luciano Figueredo (Ed.). Rio de Janeiro: UFRJ, 1996.

What I think is that the formal aspect of this issue was overcome some time ago, by the 'relation in itself', its dynamic, by the incorporation of all the lived experiences of precariousness, [...] because the artist cannot in fact measure this participation, since each person experiences it differently. This is why there is this unbearable experience [*vivência*] of ours, of being deflowered, of possession, as if he, the spectator, would say: 'Who are you? What do I care if you created this or not? Well, I am here to modify everything, this unbearable shit that proposes dull experiences, or good ones, libidinous, fuck you, and all of this because I devour you, and then I shit you out; what is of interest only I can experience and you will never evaluate what I feel and think, the lust that devours me.' (Oiticica 1968, p.111)

In the spirit of the reflection these two quotes reside in, Hélio Oiticica is aware (and shares with Lygia Clark) that the *vivência* is not to be determined by him because 'as the proposer, alone [he] does not exist' (Clark 1983), even he could feel a slight sense of authorship towards the prompt experience. It appears as a possible existential conflict in Oiticica's creative process, which he instantaneously 'solves' because he understands (and is empathic towards) the spectator:

This is what is terrible: the disjunction between the always noble, etc., intentions of the artist and the fury of the participatory relation. [...] But it is a good test of the validity of the proposition: to not accept passively is more important than to accept everything, and in this dynamic of the relation new possibilities arise which, even if painful, are essential. (Oiticica, 1968, p.112)

In a sense, it seems that Oiticica reflects upon the spectator with an empathic attitude towards him. This could be an unconscious reflection of the suprasensoriality that embarks upon his creative process, even if the conscious awareness of that reflection comes along later.

Lygia Clark's reflection on the proposition is quite different. It reflects her creative process (infrasensoriality), and how it differs (but complements) Oiticica's:

I think that now we are those who propose, and through the proposition there should be thought, and when the spectator expresses this proposition, he is in reality gathering the characteristic of a work of art of all times: thought and expression. And for me all of this is connected. From the option, the act, to immanence as a means of communication, and the lack of any myth exterior to man and more so, in my fantasy, it connects itself with the anti-universe where things are there because it happens *now*. (Clark 1968, p.114)

For Lygia Clark, this proposition is very internal and biological. She explains this in a very straightforward manner:

Another thing that I am very impressed with is today's youth who, like us, want to give themselves meaning from the inside towards the outside as opposed to, as it has always been, from the outside towards the inside. True participation is open and we will never be able to know what we give to the spectator-author. (Clark 1968, p.114)

The authorship of the participation is completely given to the spectator, without full conscience – of the producer – of what that authorship implies. What is implied is a realization that there are others thinking along the same lines as Clark and Oiticica. This would explain their attitude towards such issues in terms of their creative process. It would also seem that Lygia Clark's creative process was shifting towards a realization on the possibility of being able to understand others through her work (it 'becomes visible' with *The structuring of the self*) but Clark's awareness of this is not entirely clear. This reflection can be interpreted as a preamble to further reflection on the nature and outcome of the propositions, in order for Clark to experience a crisis that would open her eyes in order to 'connect the dots'. This point will be expanded later on, when relating her reflection with her work more directly. These letters could serve as a tool for a deeper understanding on both Lygia Clark and Helio Oiticica's respective creative processes with relation to others.

#### *Empathy on the work of Lygia Clark*

There are three specific quotes that reflect the link between empathy and the work of Lygia Clark at the stage where she worked with the *Structure of the self* (1976-82):

The empathetic discipline of 'feeling oneself into the other' is cultivated in some professions as a stimulus to the creative investigation, a tool of therapy, and a goal to social action. (Katz 1963)

... I don't want to be a psychoanalyst but I want to put my work at the service of people who can make it worth something in this sector. (Clark 1971 p.279)

To insist on considering Lygia's final proposal as a therapeutic method may

lead us to miss that which is essential: The disruptive force of her hybrid made of art and clinical practice, which makes the tension of the tragic vibrate in each of these fields, making ethics and aesthetics indissociable. (Rolnik 1998, p.347)

As it has been mentioned before, her creative process is characterized by being internal, phenomenological and psychological. Paulo Herkenhoff (1998, p.46) has used the term ‘infrasensoriality’ in order to describe Lygia Clark’s creative process. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, infrasensoriality is divided, as it is a compound word; *infra* is Latin for ‘below, underneath, beneath’, and sensory comes from the Latin *sensorium*, from *sensus*, of *sentire* ‘to perceive, feel’. This term is also used because it is related to the sensorial-conceptual intersubjective approach Clark and Oiticica derived from the structure of the Moebius band. It is important to mention that intersubjectivity is the sharing of subjective states by two or more individuals.

The structure of the Moebius band was of vast importance to both Clark and Oiticica because it was a concrete way of depicting the ‘experience of time and space’ (Brett 2001). As Lygia herself explains, ‘if I use a Moebius strip for this experiment, it is because it breaks with our spatial habits: Right-left, inside-outside, etc. It makes our experience limitless time and continuous space.’ (1973) Hélio Oiticica explored these questions through colour. Guy Brett explains how Hélio Oiticica deals with the particular influence of Piet Mondrian (2001), and furthermore, how Oiticica interprets Lygia Clark’s approach to Mondrian’s influence as an understanding ‘from inside, as a living thing...’ in which ‘black [doesn’t function] as a “graphic colour” next to white, but as an elemental colour/non-colour [...] [in which both colours] meet and vitalize each other through space-time counterposition’ (Oiticica 1961, p.56) This “intersubjectivity” of both colours/non-colours is an echo of the properties of the Moebius band, for their complementary, bound to be shared nature.

Slightly drifting away from the relationship between Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica, I would like to address Lygia Clark's creative process in her own terms, towards the internal, psychological and biological aspect of her thinking, her writing and her work. Also, I would like to establish some links between her creative processes as a whole from an ethical standpoint of understanding others (empathy). This analysis will start from a specific point in Clark's work onwards.

When Lygia Clark analysed *Caminhando* (Clark 1973, pp. 187-89), she realised that the subsequent proposition, the soft *Bichos*, which consisted in the same kind of structure, but instead of being in aluminium, were in rubber, 'seemed to be a regression, a return to the object.' (1973, p.187) This caused her a terrible crisis, even though she later realised that 'the soft *Bichos* anticipated [her] sensory experiments: The sensuality of their elasticity unconsciously heralded what was to follow.' (1973, p.187) It is important to mention that Clark regarded the crisis provoked by *Caminhando* (the shift from the object to the act, to the completion to the process, to dissolve the notion of authorship to let the participator surge) as one she had been looking for unconsciously. As Clark herself explains:

*Caminhando* left me in a kind of void: The immanence of the act, the abandonment of the transfer to the object, the very dissolution of the concept of work and artist, all that plunged me into a severe crisis which I had long been unconsciously searching for. (Clark 1973, p.187)

This scenario shows an interesting *modus operandi* in which the unconscious is aware of shifts in thought that are brought into awareness years after. Therefore, it is possible to trace an unconscious understanding of the other as affected directly by Lygia Clark's work several years prior to the conscious awareness of this event. This could be called an intuitive preparation/physical reflection of the work's self-capacity to understand others until it becomes 'visible', which would equal a conscious awareness of the work capacity at the same moment the work is carrying on, or it could happen after the work is completed. This



reflection is a very specific pattern within Lygia Clark's own creative process.<sup>3</sup> In order to identify this pattern on a fairly chronological continuity (after *Caminhando*), all the series before *The structuring of the self* (*Estruturação do self*) (1976-82), *Nostalgia do corpo* (*Nostalgia of the body*) (1966-67); *A casa é o corpo* (*The house is the body*) (1967-69), *Homem, estrutura viva de uma arquitetura biológica e celular* (*Man, living structure of a biological and cellular architecture*) (1968-70), *Mute thought* (*Pensamento mudo*) (1971-72), and *The phantasmagoria of the body* (*Fantasmagórica fel corpo*) (1973-75) will be interpreted.

Lygia Clark reflected that the series *Nostalgia of the body* emerged from the sensorial qualities of the soft *Bichos*. (Clark 1973) Therefore, this series can be seen as a rediscovery of the body, with the nostalgia of past abandonment. This is the first basic notion, the origin, of a complete sensorial experience. With *The house is the body*, there is an awareness of the processes of the body, of the structural stages, and how the textures of the body can be severely contrasted, when looking at some 'clothing objects' (Schober 2004, p.81) that constitute this stage of the work's development. Works such as *O eu e o tu: Série roupa-corpo-roupa* (*The I and the You: Cloth-body-cloth series*) (1967), with the exchange of genre-based sensations was to be explored by touch; and the *Máscaras sensoriais* (*Sensorial masks*) (1967), a stimuli of colour and senses all over the face, represent the rediscovery of sexuality, and the notion of sequence within the body. *Man, living structure of a biological and cellular architecture* bring the body to the exterior, having a more elaborated notion of the sequences of the body, while at the same time, aiming at the micro within the macro. For example, in *Estructuras vivas* (*Living structures*) (1969), the human web made of elastic bands connects the internal and external architectures; the great events of men, and the awareness of the exterior life are present in these series. The retreat is the symptom of *Mute thought*. Like

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<sup>3</sup> Various examples of these patterns can be found on Lygia Clark's reflective texts, letters and journal entries. The catalogue of Fundació Antoni Tàpies (1998), Pinacoteca (2005) and the compilation of the letters between Clark and Oiticica (1996, 2006) are some of the texts in which this literature can be found.

Clark mentioned, 'Will the *Pensamento Mudo* be only the end of my experience? Or will it be, as I think, the tying down of a concept which is so great that it will take in all of life, the foetus, all in a new way ...' (1972, p.274) With the *Phantasmagoria of the body*, the opportunity of working with the students at the University of Sorbonne in Paris was a hands-on experience, an unconscious way of dealing with the physical presence of other kind of body in a scenario in which that body was completely surrounded to the proposition. That collective body prompted works such as *Relaxação (Relaxation)* (1974-75), and brings the collective to a predominant position, when the collective relaxation of the participants and the tactile stimuli received, proved to be an enhanced sensorial experience, an amplification of the senses and a coming together of others who are experiencing the same: a very empathic process of understanding others through the sensorial. The difference between the subsequent series *Nostalgia of the body*, *The house is the body*, *Man, living structure of a biological and cellular architecture*, *Mute thought*, *The phantasmagoria of the body* and the *Bichos*, even the *Caminhando*, is the willingness of the participator of being exposed on a seemingly attached basis. In a gradual way the propositions ask more of the other, Clark gives more of herself, she starts understanding the involvement and the compromise experiencing her work implies.



*Baba antropofágica*  
[Cannibalistic slobber], 1973.



*Máscaras sensoriais*, [Sensorial masks], 1967.

When Vera Pedrosa interviews Clark, there is a question that illustrates this particular awareness:

VP: But in your work what it is which lends meaning to this object?

LG: It is the spectator. So much so that the spectators have different experiences when faced with my propositions. But I appeal to you to find in yourself that depth of experience which identifies you with the others. (Pedrosa and Clark 1968, p.227)

It's also interesting to see how some of the elements of these three series, or derivations of them, are components that she used later on for the *Estruturação do self* (*Structuring of the self*), which is something that Clark also reflects upon. (1980, pp.319-327) It seems the process of that intuitive and physical preparation for *Estruturação do self* needed to be very intense, consistent, and conscious of the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical protection it required.

*Estruturação do self* is 'the first systematising of the therapeutic method with the "relational objects"'. (Clark 1980, p.320) There is a complete system depicted on each object, its purpose, and variations of how it is used on different cases. Clark wrote

extensively about the purpose of all the objects, and of methods used in psychology to work with her 'clients'. I quote Lygia Clark:

The "structuring of the self" consists of massive maternalisation: To establish between the mediated and the subject in a real and symbolic manner a relationship analogous to that which existed between a 'good mother' and her child. [...] 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 analytical interpretation. This obviously implies an affective engaging on the part of the mediator. (Clark, 1980, p. 322)



*Estructuração do self*, [Structuring of the Self],  
1976-1982.

In the texts that Clark wrote, it is possible to trace an empathic gaze upon the comments that the artist draws from her 'patients'. On an empathic method of work, such as *Estructuração do self* was, one of the ways in which an empathic intention can be expressed on a particular subject or context, is by using an 'empathic gaze'. I compare Clark's reflection of the development of this method with TJ Demos' article on Steve McQueen, it portrays how one of his projects achieve this 'gaze':

Through it, *Western Deep* allows audience and image to touch, thus engendering an empathic culture between forms of difference that nevertheless maintain their separateness. We – the viewers – are placed in a relationship with an outside world,

but not from the safety of an objective position; rather, we approach the other by becoming other. (Demos 2005, pp. 88)

This gaze would understand the exposed individual without judging or sympathising with him/her. Lygia Clark had a clear empathic 'gaze', as her work showed the capacity to understand others.<sup>4</sup> She made it clear in writing and in practice. The downfall with this kind of interaction was the little protection Lygia Clark exercised upon herself.<sup>5</sup> It could be called demise, downfall ... Suely Rolnik describes it as:

These situations, proper to clinical practice, weighed upon her heavily: In innumerable letters she complained of feeling impregnated with what was happening in the sessions, and was totally exhausted. [...] But she went too far, and the safety net of the artistic field which she lay under her trapeze disappeared: For this field, with extremely rare exceptions, her work no longer made any sense. (Rolnik 1998, pp.346)

Perhaps this exhaustion led her to an accelerated death? It is possible that a lack of protection could have caused her professional and personal 'demise'? What path the work could have possibly taken if Clark had taken into account a need for self-protection towards her work? Would her 'patients' have been able to understand her as she understood them in her 'consultations'? Would the ability of Clark to have empathy towards her patients be the trigger for her demise? We would never know the answers to these questions.

#### *An intrinsic view on Lygia Clark*

Lygia Clark was a mother before being an artist, and I think this clearly influenced her work in terms of the way the organic was embedded in every aspect of her life and work, like Guy Brett mentions:

For her, each stage superseded the one before because she felt she had gone further and the old conditions no longer applied. For us, looking back, the logic of her

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, the term 'gaze' is used as a structural characteristic of the method described, in which the producer assumes a position of spectator of his/her own work, to be able to reflect upon it more objectively.

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Suzana Vaz for this observation.

development is extraordinary. For her, each change was accompanied by a painful crisis. (Brett 1994)

Besides this methodological approach, Clark had a quiet obsession with the body, the organs. The birth was always present in her work, even in the phases where the work's predominance of the organic was subtler, as it happens with her paintings. The real presence of the mother becomes visible when the body is fully incorporated in her propositions, as well as when the empathic methods of production were 'activated' upon the other.

Like a mother, so much like a mother, who loves all her children but always finds that there is one child who has more affinity with her than the rest, Lygia Clark favoured the borderlines in her last work. In her own words:

And thus hundred of cases take place and I only like working with borderline cases. The neurotic is very defensive and takes much longer. Indeed, I am convinced that the neurotic is the sick person and the borderline is the healthy person who creates culture. (Clark, 1983, p.338)

The mother who has almost eternal patience, who is more capable of coping than others, is allowed to have the necessary crises. These crises nourish the unconscious in order to be fed with new knowledge that will be stored for posterity. In the future where that new knowledge is used, perhaps it will be used to create a shift from the subjective to the objective, in which the mother is finally free in front of her offspring, because she understands them as they really are.

## 2. Case studies on empathic processes: *Sendas en la Isla Nena* and *Daytoday*

For the purpose of this dissertation, Lygia Clark's analysis of her creative practice, methods and processes served as an example from which to compare other artists' work, in order to identify empathy within their practice. This doesn't mean that Lygia Clark is the quintessential artist to base an empathic notion in creative practice upon. Clark's and Oiticica's complementary reflection of their practice, manifested in their letters, serves as a theoretical framework from which to analyse other artists' work. In order to test this approach, I have researched two contemporary artists, Cuban-Puerto Rican artist Rosina Santana and Colombian artist Carolina Caycedo, and their respective projects, *Sendas en la Isla Nena* (Trails on Nena Island) (2004-06) and *Day to Day* (2002-07).

### *A short biography of Rosina Santana*

Rosina Santana Castellón was born on 29 of April 1950, in Cuba. At the age of 10, she became a refugee and was exiled to Puerto Rico, where she was raised. She has used the experiences of exile as a pivoting point to dialogue with communities who are suffering trauma due to urban redevelopment or underdevelopment. (Transart Institute, 2009) She holds an M.F.A. from Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and a Masters in Community Organization from the University of Illinois, alongside with a BA in Psychology and Anthropology. Santana has worked internationally with communities in-flux in Argentina, México, Puerto Rico, Spain, Germany, the United States, and her native Cuba. (International Sculpture Center, 2008)

Rosina Santana before *Sendas en la Isla Nena*

*SELIN* stands short for *Sendas en la Isla Nena* (2004-06), which is the first of two projects that will be studied later on this text. This project attempts to help the citizens of Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, to expose the real history of the island-municipality and by doing so, being able to build a strong economy of a type of tourism that isn't artificial and violent to the native soil.

This is not the first intervention of Rosina Santana in a specific soil. If we were to explore some of her previous projects to *Sendas en la Isla Nena*, we would find that they relate in responding to the soil as a pivotal entity. In terms of methods, Santana intervenes in a soil that has been affected in particular ways (violented, erased of its history, forgotten), and responds to the soil by fulfilling some of its needs.

We can see a strong relationship between *Sendas en la Isla Nena* and Santana's former project *Home flags* (2002), Santana, with the collaboration of fellow artist María de Mater O'Neill. In *Home flags*, Santana builds a community painting workshop in the beach side area of Piñones, Puerto Rico, – she builds a community workshop in Vieques as well, with the *Sendas* – which was (and still is) prone to disappear for the sake of tourist development. In the project in Piñones, the participants created a flag of their homestead, in the same site of the ruins of the sculpture *Habitat en Tránsito* (2002), by Puerto Rican artist Javier Cambre. The flags were painted on distress blankets used in disasters to warm bodies in hypothermic shock. (Santana, 2009)





Javier Cambre, *Habitat en Tránsito*, 2002



Rosina Santana (in collaboration  
with María de Mater O'Neill),  
*Home flags*, 2002



Rosina Santana (in collaboration with  
María de Mater O'Neill), *Home flags*, 2002.

Looking at the pictures above, a formal resemblance to Lygia Clark's projects within the phase of *Man, living structure of a biological and cellular architecture*, or Hélio Oiticica's *Eden* comes to mind. Nevertheless, this is not the only similarity these projects share. In the three projects, the participator acts upon the structure at hand (whether by painting, exploring or walking in it) in order to understand his/her own circumstance:

It is useless to want to pursue a new aestheticism through the object, or limit oneself to 'discoveries' and pseudo-advanced novelties through works and propositions. [...] In my propositions, I seek to 'open' the participator to himself – there is a process of interior expansion, a dive into the self, necessary for such a discovery of the creative process – action would be the completion of it. (Oiticica, 1968)

Rosina Santana is motivated to 'enlighten' the community of Piñones to their capacity to protect their land from foreign intrusions to diminish Piñones' singular touristy

capacities into an all-inclusive haven, deprived of its authenticity. This necessity for action and completion of the work by the residents of Piñones is affected by the political, social and cultural circumstances for which Santana chooses to intervene in a specific area.

Vieques Island and Piñones share few similarities, but what Piñones and Vieques don't share is the momentum of a political conflict that gained international recognition because of the intensity of civil rights being denied. Even if Rosina Santana's previous works would prepare her in terms of procedures and methodology, Vieques Island proved to be a hands-on experience for Santana's work to manifest itself with new methods, processes and interventions in which ethics and aesthetics merged.

#### *Overview of Sendas en la Isla Nena*

From 2004 to 2006, Rosina Santana worked closely on the soil at Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. Vieques is a municipality of Puerto Rico, and for more than six decades, the US Navy invaded the oriental and occidental shore, displacing the civilians to the centre of the Island. The US Navy retreated in 2003, but currently, civilians cannot step unto half of the Island as of yet, because of high levels of radiation contained, which have affected severely the population with cancer.

The first objective of *Sendas en la Isla Nena* was to know about the civilians' chronicles before and during the US Navy invasion to the island. It was pivotal to the artist to have an acute notion of the experiences the community had passed through. Santana and her assistant, fellow artist Catherine Matos Olivo, interviewed several people, and thus grew accustomed to Vieques' environment and customs. Later on, the community workshop was built, having the entire community represented, as the participants were men, women, children and the elderly, all of them displaying their experiences in drawings and paintings. The next step was having those drawings and paintings cast into bronze. Santana completed

this task. Later on, a path was chosen in which to place the castings according to the story that was told in each casting, which was placed on a concrete wall that was 4 feet tall. This specific height was significant in the semiotic aspect<sup>6</sup> of the project. Santana explained in our interview how the adults had to lower themselves a bit to be able to fully observe the castings, whilst the children could observe the castings just fine. She explained how the height would force adults to have to bow-down towards the castings in order to give the stories the recognition they deserve. A map was designed with the GPS coordinates of each casting.

#### *Castings, histories, symbols and location*

To understand how Rosina Santana's creative process, and subsequently, methods and processes within her work reflect an empathic mindset, it is imperative to show a reflective account of her aims within the *Sendas*. In an unpublished transcript of a lecture Santana gave in 2008, she spoke about the particularities of the circumstance with *Sendas*:

To speak about the relationship between oral history and public art is to speak about the relationship between the official story and that which resides in the memory of the public psyche. Governments have known from time immemorial: the victor writes history. Theoretically, a memorial can only occur once the conflicting stories are resolved. A visual artist becomes usually then, an agent of the official story. Nonetheless, what if an artist is brought into the process where the conflicting stories are still in contention? This is what happened in Vieques. (Santana, 2008)

What *Sendas* represents for Rosina Santana is the opportunity to promote that change in structures within the artistic production that Rasheed Araeen (2002) mentions, of the 'subversive function which can only be achieved if one is able to penetrate the system and challenge its structures.' (2002, p.341) It appears that the emotional link that Santana built with the community is very strong, judging from the stories she told me in our interview. She seems to be far away from the kind of community artist that would detach

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<sup>6</sup> Using the definition of semiotics as the study of signs and symbols as elements of communicative behaviour and the analysis of systems of communication, as language, gestures, or clothing.

herself from the intervened community after the work is completed (Milevska 2006).

Santana was aware of episodes regarding the castings after 2006, such as the time when five castings were stolen. Perhaps it has to do with Santana's predisposition not to forget, to give crucial importance to the memories, even if they are displeasing ones. As she recalls:

In the case of the project Trails in Nena Island, I was aware of the social and economic landscape in flux and that the island's volatile history was in danger of being submerged under some narratives more palatable to speculators and tourist housing developers. Vieques, unlike the other Caribbean islands, fought to secure its land and won by defeating the US Military. That fact, along with the other stories written in its soil—whether it be its glorious agricultural past of sugar mills, lighthouses, Amerindian sites, and including, the soil contamination as a result of the use of depleted uranium by the military, made Vieques' public space pregnant with oral historical cargo. If that story was lost, reconciliation between opposing factions would become impossible in the future. I argue, further, that an artist that claims to work in the field of community art cannot ---if it wants to remain faithful to the principle of *servant practice*---sanitize or clean up the stories to make them palatable to all. If it does so, then the work will become, in time, (and that is the key-- *historical time*), useless public debris. (Santana, 2008)

This proves that the methodology Santana used to work this project had to have been very understanding of the Viequenses' circumstance, because she put herself in their shoes, and thus, she wouldn't want to have an artificial, all-inclusive, digested version of the story of her violented soil. It is accurate to recall that empathy goes beyond sympathy, and Sendas took testimony of this particular trait, with the episode about the stolen castings, and how the community took mercy on the thieves, which were Viequenses as well.

#### *The stolen castings: the mercy of the community*

On 2008, I had the opportunity to visit Vieques in order to see the *Sendas*, as part of the Senior Seminar course at Escuela de Artes Plásticas de Puerto Rico, with Associate Professor María de Mater O'Neill. O'Neill handed copies of the map and guide Santana had produced for the project in 2004, and encouraged us to enjoy the trip to the island, but also to think about the castings, its locations and symbols.

To our surprise, we got to discover that some of the castings of *Sendas en la Isla Nena* had been stolen and only the concrete base remained. When interviewing Santana, I asked her if she knew about the missing castings. She immediately explained the incident. Residents with drug problems stole five of the castings. They were trying to sell the castings to local merchandisers who worked with metal, and bronze. The locals refused to buy the castings because they knew about the project, and thus, the thieves had to go to Isla Grande – how the residents in Vieques and Culebra Island refer to Puerto Rico – to sell them, where nobody knew what the castings were. Santana also explained the measures the locals took to deal with the incident. They approached the thieves in a peculiar way; instead of reporting the incident to the police, what meant the thieves would have ended up in jail, they spoke to them and tried to let them see what they did was wrong. Santana took no place in this incident, and was surprised to see the reaction of the community, treating the castings as their own, because they were really their own. Santana explains how this project is not about the object, but the process, and thus comes from the aim that the locals take control of their own soil. This incident reflects Santana's aim; her understanding for what Vieques is worth transferred to the residents. With the property frenzy after the Navy withdrawal<sup>7</sup>, the residents of Vieques were, yet again, displaced and deprived of their own land. This represents that there is yet ground to fight for. With the right mindset, the possibility of change gains a different perspective.

#### *A short biography of Carolina Caycedo*

Carolina Caycedo was born in London, United Kingdom, in 1978, to Colombian parents. She was educated in Colombia, earning her BA in Fine Arts from Los Andes

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<sup>7</sup> After the Navy left Vieques in May 2003, high stakes developers caused property values to soar by selling Vieques as an undiscovered paradise, downplaying the turbulent history written in the soil. (Santana, 2008)

University. She has lived in Colombia, the United Kingdom, the United States and Puerto Rico. Her work has been exhibited in Vienna, Bogotá, Ljubljana, Sevilla, Barcelona, Puerto Rico, Paris, Bern, Alcorcón, Istanbul, New York, London and Coslada, among other cities.

#### *Carolina Caycedo before Daytoday*

Before Carolina Caycedo's journey through the *Day to day*, the idea of the exchange and alternative economies was ever present in her work.

The Spaniards Federico Guzmán and Alonso Gil, alongside the Colombians Adriana García and Carolina Caycedo composed the group Cambalache Collective. They met at Los Andes University around 1997 and from that date on towards the year 2000, the four artists worked in the area of Cartucho, a couple of streets in a very central zone of Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. Caycedo mentions in our interview that this area was characterised by being abided by their own laws, as a lot of youngsters lived on the street. This 'free for all' area was meant to disappear, as construction of a Third Millennium Park was meant to take the place of the lively area.

The collective created a *Museo de la Calle* (Street Museum) from objects found on the area, which served both as a flea market (because the items were exchanged for other items) and a museum (the items served as displayed objects on a specific surface). Nevertheless, this was a paradoxical museum in the sense that the items are not given that particular aura and god-like, untouchable condition objects in a museum tend to have, but they are redistributed in a flux of the everyday by the act of exchange with other people. Nevertheless, David Carrier argues that some sceptics claim that museums are essentially paradoxical because they both preserve historical records of the past and aim to be outside of time. (2006, p.70) Would the components of the Cambalache Collective agree with this idea of the paradoxical museum? In a sense, they wanted to preserve a moment in history, by

the exchange of items from Cartucho, but they would be outside of time, because once Cartucho would cease to exist, would the exchange end as well? Perhaps their museum was more than paradoxical; it was challenging the museum itself, by letting go (through the exchange) of the objects that represent the historical records of the past. It was this, after all, the aim for the *Museum of the street*; to preserve the Cartucho area, bound to disappear. Nevertheless, this apparently rebellious and challenging attitude towards the record turns into a method with a specific ethical position, when Caycedo works the *Day to Day*.

Carolina Caycedo, as part of Cambalache Collective, wanted to emphasize the alternate economy of the exchange, which existed already, among other economies such as the economy of recycling, because most of the inhabitants in Cartucho were 'recyclers' in order to feed themselves. It is important to point out that when it came to describe Cambalache Collective's methods and processes, Adriana García describes them in very specific terms:

About our methodologies we should say we don't like to work. We love what we do, but what we like is to search, to be on the fiddle and bustle about. We want to 'flip the tortilla' (turn situations upside down). We strongly believe in the political potential contained in fun and laughter.

Our tactics usually change but we always like to tune into nature.

As individual artists we can disappear in Cambalache or multiply ourselves whenever necessary. (García 2009, pp.45)

The aura embedded in the methodologies that characterise Cambalache Collective seem to have a core in a process of candidness that is bound to be transferred onto the *Day to Day*.

*Day to day: An overview*

Being in a foreign country with no money, no home and no food could seem like a desperate and unwanted situation for many people. For Carolina Caycedo, this proved to be



an opportunity to show the possibility of other types of economy, in which the exchange and the giving, thus, was a latent and very real one, along with the certainty that the line between art and real life is blurred in her experience as an artist. After Caycedo moved from Bogotá, where she was part of the Cambalache collective, she moved to London, and seeing she had no means to maintain herself, she made use of the methods of exchange, and alternative economies the Museum of the street helped to promote. To cover the basic necessities of food, work, shelter, Caycedo designed a process of exchange and experience that led her to the project of *Day to day*.

On 2002, the Wiener Secession at Vienna commissioned Caycedo to work on a public art project. Feeling that the institution wanted to have more visibility with this type of project, and not happy with being, in her own words, a 'clown' who contributed to the spectacle that Guy Debord (1967) identified and seemed to be embedded in this arena, Caycedo came up with the idea of *Day to Day*. She asked the institution to provide her with a van truck, a mobile phone, and gasoline to drive the van, for three weeks. For those same three weeks, she would offer her services in exchange for food, a place to shower, plane and train tickets, and more. The services she offered included babysitting, salsa classes and hairstyling, among others.

The process of exchanging items, services, experiences, time and knowledge are based on the concepts of the potlatch and the hxaro, both studied in the fields of anthropology, sociology and psychology. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, potlatch is a ceremonial feast among certain Native American peoples of the northwest Pacific coast, as in celebration of a marriage or accession, at which the host distributes gifts according to each guest's rank or status. Between rival groups the potlatch could involve extravagant or competitive giving and destruction by the host of valued items as a display of superior wealth. The hxaro, however, is a mutually reciprocal, resource

sharing system that reduces risk, creates inter-band ties, and maintains friendship bonds (Foote 2003). According to Mark Steward Fleisher, the only data we have for the potlatch are historical. From this perspective, the potlatch has become part of the intellectual history of anthropology. (Fleisher 1981) He argues that the motives, uses and effects of the potlatch had not been explored to its full at the time he wrote the article 'The Potlatch: A Symbolic and Psychoanalytic View' because:

I consider the potlatch as the link between the individual and group behaviour in psychology. On the one hand, we find in the potlatch the kernel of Northwest Coast operational values, symbolized in ritual drama and mythology. These values include sharing, cooperation, and perpetuation and intensification of kin ties. On the other hand, the potlatch is a public display of the culture's integrated system of affective structures, e.g., music, dance, mythology, and graphic art. From both these perspectives, the potlatch is a public art form with multiple social and psychological functions – the collective representation and metaphorization of individual and group social and psychological needs (e.g. status manipulations, entertainment). One of its functions, I suggest, is to reduce conflict in society and in the individual. In this sense, the potlatch can be considered therapeutic in the same sense as a shamanistic ritual or a Pentecostal revival. (Fleisher 1981, p.69)

Certainly, to classify the potlatch as a display of affection and emotion, as a public art form and as a therapeutic tool seems plausible with Lygia Clark's aims for her *Structuring of the Self*. Furthermore, when exploring deeper down into the sources of the term potlatch, Fleisher discovers that it has been cited before him, that the potlatch is derived from the verb 'to give', which he subsequently links to his symbolically feminine role imputed on potlatching societies. 'To give' implies reaching out to someone or extending to someone something of oneself. (Fleisher 1981) The correspondences keep arising, such as Lygia Clark gave herself, like a mother to a son, with her work, to the point of exhaustion, Carolina Caycedo promotes the act of giving in several cities, to all whom she is able to give herself, and exchange herself. She gives herself completely, for she sees no division between art and life, and thus the exchange of experiences in the numerous cities in which she has embarked on the *Day to day* have been valid episodes in her life as well.

It is interesting to see how this notion of giving and receiving a tangible object relates to the generous nature of the empathic exchange of identification with circumstances that aren't your own in order to promote deep understanding of the situation. The meaning of each gift, each experience, each exchange, on the *Day to Day*, is an account of deep understanding, of empathy in many levels of interaction. The process of immersing oneself in another mindset in order to appeal to their interest requires an empathic approach, especially if there are no common interests, or ways to sympathize from.

### *On the Whitney Biennial 2006*

The Whitney Museum of American Art in New York had the theme or metaphor *Day for Night* for their biennial in 2006. The museum and the curator's expectations for this Biennial were very specific in terms of aim. According to the Biennial's website:

The curators' metaphor for the exhibition—'Day for Night'—was not premeditated but realized much later in the process, [...] as it wasn't merely a selection of important works, but important works that reveal overwhelming evidence of certain artistic responses to a broad range of aesthetic, social, political, and cultural phenomena. (Whitney Museum, 2006)

Today's artistic situation is highly complex, contradictory, and confusing. It is an environment few can make sense of. Despite the proliferation of large-scale, comprehensive, international exhibitions—biennials, triennials, and the like—that aspire to reveal trends and meaning, the current state of affairs seems more complicated than ever given the sheer number of working artists and the morass of seemingly conflicting styles, conceptions, and directions. Curators are often at sea as to how to approach the overwhelming task of providing a coherent overview. Frequently, they simply cherry-pick and assemble what is perceived to be the best art of the moment in the hopes that quality alone (however one may define it) will carry the day. This strategy is far more difficult than it might seem on the face of it, if for no other reason than an exhibition of works by a hundred or more artists selected with little or no structural framework will likely be seen as an inchoate mess. Other curators might select a concept or theme that seems emblematic of the moment and sort worthy art into various conceptual baskets. The danger here is a heavy-handed, overly predetermined methodology that precludes a full consideration of the art itself. (Whitney Museum, 2006)

With this mindset, it wouldn't be a surprise that the work of Carolina Caycedo would be chosen to participate of this Biennial, as it deals with a social and cultural

phenomena seldom established in our selfish society. In our interview, Caycedo mentioned how her work was showed in this scenario – which in many ways would contradict the work itself, having in mind that the Whitney Museum is one of the most established, prestigious and important museums in the US, and its Biennial is an equally established event in the institution – without affecting the work’s ethical parameters. Outside the biennial site, a computer was placed, and beside it, a phone. The computer had visible a website with the project’s description and instructions, and the phone – which connected directly to Caycedo’s mobile phone – was placed to establish communication between Caycedo and those who dare pick up the phone. A deep understanding of others in this project comes from the basic principle of *Day to Day*:

In exchange for food or a place to shower and cook, Caycedo offered any number of goods or services that she was able to provide. The written inscription on the side of the van summarized the structuring principle of the work: ‘I give, I need. You give, you need.’ (Whitney Biennial, 2006)

The principle of the work shows a clear empathic overture. Caycedo was well aware of her standing within her work, especially when she mentioned in our interview how this project was like a postcard; as it was public in structure, but private in content. Her carefully arranged position shows a clear ethical standing, with empathic methodologies.

#### *La creación de la Playa de Ponce: A counter-case study*

I would like to bring another example of a project that contrasts, in methods and processes, the projects previously studied. This project is a public art project, a participatory-based project called *La creación de la Playa de Ponce* (The creation of Ponce Beach) (2003) by Puerto Rican artist and Antonio Martorell. Martorell, is an artist (who’s lately become a somewhat eccentric public persona) who has allowed himself the pleasures of performance in drawing, painting, engraving, writing, radio shows, television programs, movies, dance, environmental installations, and other indefinable structures, in a never-

ending conversation with art lovers and interlocutors. He is the resident artist and director of the Pío López Martínez Art Museum at the University of Puerto Rico in Cayey. 'Toño', as he is affectionately known, keeps workshops in Cayey, Ponce Beach, Hato Rey, and New York City's Barrio. (Public Art Project, 2003)

To summarise Martorell's ethical position in terms of methods and processes, I will quote a summary of his project, which was also, like Santana's *Sendas en la Isla Nena*, part of the Public Art Project commissioned by the government of Puerto Rico, in 2003:

The most noble of all beaches, Ponce Beach, is a centenary community. The building that is my workshop was constructed in 1815. It faces the sea and the square that are the object of this proposal, or rather the means by which this besieged and embattled community will provide to its young a learning process in the arts. The community workshop that I am proposing requires research before workshops are held on the site. However, the community will be active in both phases, because this project would not make sense without their involvement before, during, and after the project. The young will learn the trades of mosaic and typography in the context of a public art project whose process and product will be multidisciplinary and interactive. (Public Art Project, 2003)

This description seems to have a similar aim to Santana's *Sendas en la Isla Nena*. Nevertheless, the phases of the project show a different outcome. The 'product' of the workshops shows the same characteristics of Martorell's previous works. They don't reflect the circumstance of the community; their combative voices remained silenced throughout the duration of this project.



Antonio Martorell, *Unknown*.



Antonio Martorell, *La casa sin reloj de René Marqués* (Poster), 1969.



Antonio Martorell, *Creación de la Playa de Ponce* [Creation of Ponce Beach], 2003.

Looking at the pictures above, one can see that the similarities between Martorell's previous work and the work done by the community for the project *Creación de la Playa de Ponce* are latent. Unfortunately, projects such as *Creación de la Playa de Ponce* seem to be the kind of project that Suzana Milevska describes below:

The other part of this 'we' is the artist, the curator, the art institution, or even the State (in some public art projects) that supposedly cares for the invisible, marginalized, or neglected 'other' as the counter-part of the very same 'we'. The usual problem with this imaginary 'we' is that it mostly exists only during the period of a particular art event, with rare examples where the artists create self-sustainable projects that continue even when they leave with the circus. (Milevska 2006)

To me, it is very important to be cautious of these projects, as the line between *Sendas en la Isla Nena* and *Creación de la Playa de Ponce* is very fragile, and thus can be vanished if the components of the project are careless with their methods and processes and how those should be focused on ethical grounds to assure a fairer outcome, and just results.

### 3. Empathic methods and processes

The following section will explore, in terms of concepts, methods, processes of production and completion, how empathy as a personal ethical position has intervened in those phases within my own practice. The theoretical references in terms of artists' creative processes and case studies of their practice, complemented with other references in the fields of anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, art history, and new theories about public art allow for a fairly objective review of my own practice.

#### *The relational, the participatory and the ambitious 'solving' of modernism*

In the practice and the theoretical-based research I have embarked upon the last year, I have encountered several theories, theorists and very diverse, controversial and compelling positions that have shaped my own understanding of the specificity of the line of thought my practice aims for. Some of these have included Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002); Claire Bishop's counter-response to *Relational Aesthetics*, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004), Suzanne Lacy's 'New Genre Public Art', presented in the book *Mapping the Terrain* (1995); Wilhelm Worringer's *Abstraction and Empathy: A Contribution to the Psychology of Style* (1907), Richard Murphy's *Theorizing the avant-garde: modernism, expressionism, and the problem of postmodernity* (1999), the dialogue between Stuart Hall and Sarat Maharaj, 'Modernity and Difference' (2000), Rasheed Araeen's article on Third Text 'A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics' (2002) and Suzana Milevska's article 'Participatory Art' (2006), amongst others.

I don't intend to describe how each one of these theories has affected my research, as some of these theories have been disregarded. I do intend, as I have throughout this text, to show how the ones that have been taken (and not taken) in consideration have shaped and



added to my knowledge of current theoretical alternatives for producers like me to complement their practices with. Nevertheless, of all the different directions I could have taken according to the literature read, I believe that instead of aiming for a dogmatic attempt to 'solve' the problem of modernism (Murphy 1999) or agree with a theory that in writing, aimed to deal with intersubjectivity, but in practice, seemed to be far from it, I decided that a more personal approach could be made, still trying to change the structures (Araeen 2002) of the current art institutions and scenes, in order to include an alternative that looked into other ways of doing, from which practitioners and theorists can both benefit from.

#### *Empathy in public and participatory-based projects*

It is of no surprise to me to consider public, collaborative and participatory-based projects as the ideal scenario to pursue the empathic methods and processes I have depicted and analysed in this text. After all, it is because of this kind of projects that the producer's concern for understanding others gains more visibility than in other types of projects, such as the representative or the conceptual kind. This doesn't mean that these kinds of projects cannot achieve visibility in terms of their empathic methods and processes. For example, we can see how TJ Demos accurately analysed Steve McQueen's work, which is far from participatory; in fact, he really works and pushes boundaries with the spectator's role in his video work, *Western Deep* (2002). A methodology where empathy is considered in a specific work can be applied rather subtly; furthermore, this text's principal aim is on the *choice* of the producer to include processes that are objectively inclusive and plural in a subjective individual creative process. This is why Lygia Clark's creative process and work is recognised in this text as the main example of predecessor for this mindset in the creative process.

*Ethics as a gift and designer of the processes: The influence of the case studies*

Having the work and process of Lygia Clark as the theoretical framework from which to 'depart' with my research into methods and processes that could be used as examples of empathy in the producers' point of view, I analysed the work of Rosina Santana and Carolina Caycedo, as it was clear earlier in this text. Nevertheless, the nature of this text compels me to enunciate their methods and processes rather clearly, in a systematic way.

The analysis and research on Rosina Santana's work resulted in acknowledgement of the importance of giving credit to all the components of the specific project at hand, if the project is of collaborative or participatory nature. It also reflects a respectful way of dealing with the components, especially if their history is being told, and if that history is particularly traumatic and emotionally charged. Santana seemed to understand their experiences to such an extent that the community's collective psyche transformed from being a victim with no power over the predator, to a reinvindication of power to be gained by the people, a reclamation of the land that belonged to them, and a reclaim to have the official history changed to the real course of the events. Her desire to improve the current circumstance of this community – without being part of it physically, but emotionally – to the extent that the Viequenses can benefit economically from the *Sendas* by using them as pillars of honest ecotourism, shows a very different way of doing from artists such as Antonio Martorell, whose project in Ponce Beach, Puerto Rico, deals with the community, collaboration and credit very differently.

Furthermore, when analysing Carolina Caycedo's creative process and work, I acknowledged the importance of protecting the privacy of the exchange at hand, for the sake of the relationship formed between the artist and the participant. It was also a reflection on an already established method within the artwork, such as the archival

*modus operandi* of the projects, and how Caycedo had an issue with it because she felt the archive would betray the deeply personal level of trust the participant had put in the episode of exchange with the artist in *Day to Day*. She did express that she has some documentation of the project, but she hasn't displayed it, except a few examples that she asked permission from first in order to be exposed to the public for a temporary period. She considered this process a rebellion against the utter necessity for the art arena to register (rather compulsively in some cases) all the phases of the project.

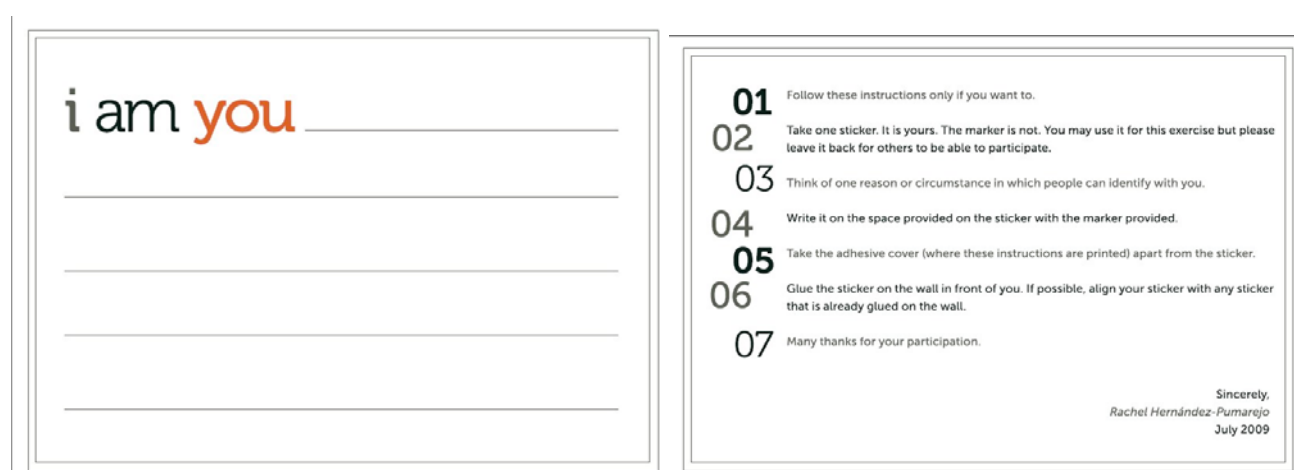
### *i am you*

The project *i am you* (2009), which will be presented in the Degree Show in House Gallery in Camberwell, consists of a compilation of stickers printed with the previous phrase, followed by five lines to complete the thought into something that would personalise the circumstance of identification of yourself into others and viceversa. In the back of the stickers, there are some instructions written on the adhesive cover. These give the individual an idea of what to do with the stickers; after assuring him or her that they don't need to participate if they don't want to, it explains that the individual can write a reason as to why others would identify or be empathic towards them. Afterwards, it tells the individual to place it onto the wall they would have in front of them, where one sticker, which I have placed beforehand, could serve as an example of placement.

This project requires the participation of the audience in order to be completed, such as David Medalla's *Eskimo Carver* (1977) in which 'visitors were invited to make knives out of a pile of waste and refuse collected in the neighbourhood. Each person's "knife" was titled and pinned to the wall in a playful parody of ethnographic museums.' (Brett 1989, p.95) In the case of my work, the completed project would suffice with a minimum participation of the audience with the work, having at least two or more stickers placed on

the wall. The maximum amount of stickers that shall be placed on the wall will cover the entire wall to its capacity, without overlapping stickers.

A non-artistic reference of the maximum arrangement of the stickers is anecdotal. In supermarkets and pharmacies in Puerto Rico, organisations such as the Association for Muscular Dystrophy hold yearly events for funding. One of the organisation's tactics was to have a piece of paper with a specific design (they were usually very colourful themes and symbols, for example, butterflies, symbolising hope) in which you would pay a dollar and your name was written on the paper and placed onto a wall in the supermarket where you made the donation. Then you would have walls full of these papers, a constellation of donators, contributing to the Association.



*i am you, 2009.*

In terms of methods, it was crucial for me that the audience wouldn't feel pressured in any way to participate of the project. That is why the first instruction is to follow the instructions only if the person wants to. That way, there is no feeling of being 'used' to fulfil a task, because those persons who choose to participate are willingly doing it so. I feel a necessity to have an active audience because of the nature of the artists and projects I have researched upon throughout the course of this academic year, in which it seems to me that participatory-based projects allow for a more straightforward approach to raise certain

issues so that the audience can think about them in a more immediate level than the subtle level that observatory-based projects allow instead. That approach to promote change more immediately appeals to Areen's posture of a need to change the structures at hand, being critical of the current institutions and its policies. I believe the only aspect the project could be unsuccessful in is in its placement within a gallery, which is, after all, a predetermined institution, so heavily criticised by many.

### *Communicating the communicating*

The project *Communicating the communicating* (2008), an installation – made possible with the collaboration of Arthur Asseo, Miguel Rivera, Filipino Tirado, Ileana Lara, Mabel Huertas, Carla Lara, Cynthia Oviedo, and Angel Lozada – for my BFA Seminar Course, was presented in the Graduate Exhibition of Escuela de Artes Plásticas in Puerto Rico, in the Museum of the Americas, San Juan Puerto Rico and the Sculpture Patio at the University. The part of the project that was presented in the Graduate Exhibition was a presentation of the project and a promotional piece/guidance map to the installation site.

The installation consisted of a wood structure that held three continuous rooms, which would decrease in size towards the end of the structure. The structure was covered with vinyl fabric on the inside and with plastic derived panels.



*Communicating the communicating, 2008.*

The purpose of the installation was to incite the audience to ‘feel the pain’ of the obese population that feels ‘too big’ and inadequate for many of the social structures – such as the seats on the bus and the airplane – in which they are the target of bias and discrimination. Using anthropometric comfort zone measurements as a reference, I designed the three internal modules in an organic architectural structure. The materials chosen to cover the structure had haptic characteristics, which prompt a sensorial experience of humanity and organicity.

Reflecting on this project, I acknowledged a major fault that led me to my current investigation into empathic methods. I felt that my aim within this project was too controlled, by forcing a specific interpretation from the audience into the installation. In terms of the organic element of the work, Lygia Clark’s work had been reviewed briefly, and thus I feel that the subsequent research I have embarked upon in the present comes as a consequence of that initial inquiry on the organic that constituted my practical and theoretical work<sup>8</sup> in the last two years. The body has been a pivotal subject in my work for the last years. It is, after all, a subject I can completely identify, and be empathic towards.

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<sup>8</sup> Like the present course, my Seminar year consisted of a dissertation that had relevance to the project produced within the Seminar. My dissertation for last year dealt with some aspects of the fragility of the body in its social experience, dealing with obesity as an expanded body, and how this circumstance was analysed in philosophical, medical, psychological, social and literary terms, amongst others.

## Conclusion

With this dissertation, I intended to find a way to acknowledge the possibility of empathy within methods and processes in artistic projects, as an alternative to producers of creative work that seek to impulse change within the structures of the current artistic arena. I analysed the creative process of Lygia Clark, establishing a trajectory within her practice in which her previous work was a preparation for the project that was most understanding of others, or empathic, *Structuring of the Self*. Using Lygia Clark as a predecessor, and her correspondence with Hélio Oiticica as a theoretical reference, the projects *Sendas en la Isla Nena* and *Day to Day* were analysed to identify empathic methods and processes in their respective practices. A counter-case study was presented to contrast how the same kind of project could have a different outcome. All the previous material led me to formulate a theoretical and practical alternative to the already known and established alternatives to produce art in the present time.

I find that the notions that were raised within this research were very interesting, but I do acknowledge that the connections between some of these notions and empathy were not easy to find. What I found compelling was the existence of 'better ways of doing'. Unfortunately, these ways of doing aren't as established or as widely used as other ways of doing that show no concern for ethics within the aesthetic.

Empathy has vast potential for inclusion within the artistic practice. An objective concept within a subjective arena has the potential for refreshing and interesting parameters of creative production. It is just a matter of identifying and understanding it. I believe on the possibility that my practice can serve, like the case studies I researched, as an example for further study on these kinds of methodologies.

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