

(NO)BODY WITH NO OBJECT

- On the relation of body and environment in the modern world -

BACHELOR THESIS
MILENA NAEF
GERRIT RIETVELD ACADEMY
GLASS DEPARTMENT
2015

THEORY SUPERVISOR DYVEKE ROOD

TABLE OF CONTENT

AN INTRODUCTION TO A PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED DETACHED SELF	1
1. HIERARCHY OF THE SENSES	
- THE VIRTUAL VS. THE PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE OF OUR REALITY	3
2.1 A BODY AS MEMORY OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE	4
2.2 BODY AND OBJECT	
- A BODY AS MOLDABLE PROPERTY	4
2.3 A BODY OF OBJECTS TO STRUCTURE	5
2.4 SEPARATION VS. CONNECTION	
- HOW TO STRUCTURE THE COMPLEX?	5
3.1 AN ARTISTIC APPROACH ON THE COMPLEXITY OF OBJECT SUBJECT MATTER IN RELATION TO THE PERCEIVING BODY	7
3.2 LYGIA CLARK	
- A BODY OF WORK	8
3.3 FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER	
- A BODY OF WORK	10
4. A PERSONAL APPROACH IN QUESTIONING THE SUBJECTIVE COMPLEXITY OF A BODY AND IT'S CONSTITUTION	12
5. TO CONCLUDE DANCING WITH THE DISEMBODIED	15
SOURCES	17

AN INTRODUCTION TO A PERSONALLY EXPERIENCED DETACHED SELF

In 2011 I moved to Amsterdam and I lived in a neighborhood called Slotervaart. The house which I would call ‚home‘ was part of a row of houses which all looked the same. I would orient myself by the house numbers and not by ‚natural‘ structures making sure I would enter the house with the number 15. The thought of ‚missing‘ 3 meters and ‚accidentally‘ entering a wrong home, yet the same by its outlines, fascinated me. The structure of the house would possibly be the same beyond the walls of my room yet the content would be completely different. The same structure repeating itself being filled with different lives and meanings. It was a simple thought followed by the action to consequently swap the house numbers of my cubicle with the one of my neighbor. I would now live in number 13 and my neighbor in number 15. I had never before seen him or her and had no idea whatsoever what kind of person lived next to me.

The following days I would receive his mail and he received mine. Without a word of my mysterious neighbor he would slide my mail through my door expecting me to do the same. Three days passed like that with no questions asked, nothing except the unspoken act of exchanging each other’s mail. It was until my landlord found out about the change and requested me to undo the disturbance of a happily structured neighborhood. And so I did, reversing the order to normal without having had a single encounter with my neighbor. And funnily enough I would never have for the entire time I lived there.



Google maps view of Maaseikpad in Slotervaart, Amsterdam, where I used to live in 2011

I am interested in the way we are being ‚choreographed‘ through our surroundings. Not only by space but also by everyday objects and how we choose to interact with them. Do we really choose to do so or is it all steered behavior?

As Susan Leigh Foster would say: ‚..space becomes a co-production between body and surrounding. It is not something through which you move, but something that you define in the act of moving. Each body becomes a duet with space‘¹.

Here I would also like to consider objects to be part of space and its structures. With this curiosity I would like to investigate whether this active ‚act of moving‘ can give body and object as well as space new meaning and purpose. And if ‚choreography is something that is happening to us‘ where we ‚are simply part of it regardless of our willingness to participate‘², I wonder if this could be an indication that we are not using our bodies to their full potential and are little aware of the potential that lies within the (physical) presence of our bodies in the context of the surroundings they inhabit.

In order to position oneself in the world we inhabit, it is unavoidable to interact with it on a phenomenological level. It is important for us to realize that the body as a whole provides us with information on everything that is external to us. To understand one's own position and potential in such a choreography it is important to understand that we can not escape our physical presence that is inevitably interwoven with the 'outside world' and thus consequently part of an cause-and-effect relationship. To learn how to 'dance' and to actively be part of the choreography would include to explore ways of relating the body as a whole, as well as the intellect, in the world it inhabits.

I wonder if this could indicate that there is a distorted and detached awareness of the own body in the way we relate it to the 'outside world'.

Furthermore we live in a society wherein many facets of our lives are mediated through virtual communication and our virtual world. We live in an environment with a constant overflow of visual information and we make use of the virtual world to create different representations of ourselves.

I have learned to create a virtual translation of myself, to manipulate this virtual presence and to enhance certain aspects of myself which I would not be able to do otherwise. I am constantly adapting to these phenomena and am sucked into this virtual world, for not to engage with it would make me an outsider. It helps me to structure my life and functions as an agenda I hold on to. Not to take part in it means to be disconnected from social engagements and to 'miss out'. Being connected to the 'source of all happenings' and events would give me a weird sense of satisfaction. I would not want to miss out of what is going on but nevertheless would I barely physically attend any of the events that are happening. My virtual persona lives or 'attends' a far other life than my physical one.

The decision to disengage myself from these virtual platforms has allowed me to use my time more effectively. I would actually 'attend' events in a physical manner.

It seems that the importance of the physical body and a 'real' physical experience is becoming less and less important as we get to communicate and to represent ourselves through these virtual media that cultivate a dominance of the mental presence as they link our mental aspect of being to a virtual experience that is conceived in the mind. Reenforcing the ongoing separation between the physical and the mental. The virtual world becomes a world of its own which is only able to address our mind leaving our physical body with all its senses disregarded.

If the mind is mostly being addressed through sight and hearing as the most important tools of communication in our society and the other senses such as touch, smell, taste are neglected, it automatically leaves us unable to fully connect to our body.

Ironically it is the physical 'touch' which connects us and grants us access to this virtual world by touching and swiping the glass layer of our 'smart' devices. The glass screen is the outermost layer to which we can connect physically. I would almost like to call it a skin - but in the end it is the surface of an object that mediates between two different worlds. It is an object which grants us access to an imaginary world that slowly replaces the actual one.

In this thesis I will examine the rupture between ourselves and reality (the self and the world) as we chose to create it by addressing the dualisms of mind versus body, sight versus touch and subject versus object. These dualities are imposed on our experience of reality in all its subjectivity.

In order to find a different approach of looking and perceiving these dualisms and the notion of detachment when relating ourselves to our surroundings I will relate to the theories of Bruno Latour and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The art practice of modernist artists Lygia Clark and Franz Erhard Walther will be taken as example of how art is able to question and break the rupture of these inherent dualities.

Furthermore I will describe my artistic approach in two projects to accentuate my personal interest in this thesis.

1. HIERARCHY OF THE SENSES

- THE VIRTUAL VS. THE PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE OF OUR REALITY

Richard Kearney addresses the duality of sight and touch in this 'increasingly virtual world'³ as he states it in an article of the New York Times. He questions whether we 'are losing touch with the sense of touch itself?'⁴

He explains that through the 'Platonic doctrine'⁵ where the 'sight is held as the 'highest sense'⁶ the western universe became a system governed by 'the soul's eye'⁷. The sight is described as the 'highest sense'⁸ as it is 'the most distant and mediated; hence most theoretical, holding things at bay, mastering meaning from above. Touch by contrast, was deemed the lowest sense because it is ostensibly immediate and thus subject to intrusions and pressures from the material world'⁹.

In western philosophy sight was understood to be the closest to the intellectual and 'theoretical ideas'¹⁰. Our society has thus been characterized by the division of the intellectual sight and 'the lower 'animal' sense, stigmatized by touch'¹¹.

If we look at our 'increasingly virtual world', as he describes it, the question on the importance of the physical body arises. Even dating nowadays is common to start on a virtual level and many people enjoy this 'relative anonymity of the one-off hook up'¹². These 'hook-ups' don't require much preliminary efforts and the body becomes an object which is to be consumed. Only the act itself requires the physical body.

He further argues that there is an obvious paradox that 'what is often thought of as a 'materialist' culture is arguably the most 'immaterialist' culture imaginable - vicarious, by proxy, and often voyeuristic.'¹³ He questions whether we are 'entering an age of 'excarnation', where we obsess about the body in increasingly disembodied ways? For if incarnation is the image become flesh, excarnation is flesh becoming image. Incarnation invests flesh, excarnation divests it.'¹⁴

Especially in western societies these social norms which are rooted in our upbringing can be observed over the centuries. Art historian Monika Wagner speaks about the sight sense in her book 'Das Material der Kunst. Eine Andere Geschichte der Moderne'¹⁵: 'The disregard of the touch sense arose from its seductive quality - it was ostracized as the meanest seducer as its lust deriving from taste and touch was regarded as the most abominable. Those who devote themselves to these two senses would be equated to beasts'¹⁶. She states that the sight sense is capable of self reflection and able to perceive knowledge of the world but is nevertheless exposed to deceptions and seductions. Yet it is regarded as a sense which is intelligible and could be disciplined and should therefore lead and guide all the other senses.¹⁷

Immanuel Kant and Alexander Baumgarten also considered sight and hearing to be connected to the mind which 'belonged to the realm of freedom and imagination'¹⁸. Whereas 'the body belonged to inferior realm, pertaining to the lower needs and appetites, clearly distinguished from the higher, mental faculties.'¹⁹ The body is furthermore described to work under 'natural laws'²⁰ referring to its 'needs and drives'²¹.

The cultivation of the human body in trying to 'tame' our touch sense could be seen as an attempt to differentiate the human from other animals. Our behavior should not be brought into connection with animalistic instincts.

A civilization process is motivated through the separation of the human body and materiality, as controlling ones' own body is taught and trained since the beginning of early childhood. Otto Mühl, a Viennese artist who was predominantly working during the 60's and whose work would use (and in my opinion abuse) the human body to address this separation of the body with materiality and cultivated behavior, would write about 'table rules' as a presumed civilization process which is being taught to children from an early age on. The control of the body and its separation from other material communicates cultivated behavior. Immaculate eating skills are praised highly - the body should not touch the food and keep itself 'clean'²². In the western world we would rather not

touch the food but use cutlery instead. This is just one simple example of how often we ‘separate’ ourselves, leaving out a tactile experience through the use of tools in order to deal with the world around us.

Over time we have come to treat the mind and the body as two separate entities, where sight becomes a mediator of the mind - and the intellect - the virtual - which is not brought in connection with the body - the touch sense - the physical.

2.1 A BODY AS MEMORY OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE

The distinction and hierarchy we have created between body and mind provides us with and inadequate understanding in our experience of life. Once we are born into this world it requires the whole body to experience the dynamics and relations in space and time. The body becomes a source of knowledge and experience gives us a broad understanding of our surroundings and how we relate to it. That the body serves as memory for lived experiences can also be seen by the many proverbs which relate to body parts. To say that something ‘gets deep under your skin’ indicates the great affect a person can experience. In this sense the affect of the context literally enters your body. That experiences can have tremendous impacts on our bodies is also indicated in the saying that ‘my knees are like jelly’ whereas the physical properties of a body are changed in its characteristics. ‘Time heals all wounds’ speaks of the properties of the body and mind in relation to time. These proverbs can also highlight social norms that are being placed upon us such as ‘clothes make the man’, this indicates the potential of objects onto the human being and how they create social structures and implement desired behavior.—

2.2 BODY AND OBJECT - A BODY AS MOLDABLE PROPERTY

Roland Barthes wrote in his essay ‘Toys’²³ about the conditioning of children into accepting already existing social structures and norms before they can contemplate about it themselves. Instead of letting children explore and understand the world from their own source of curiosity they are being given toys which ‘condition’²⁴ and prepare them for their role in society. By implementing these interactions onto children with these objects, they get to ‘identify [themselves] as owner[s], and user[s], never as creator[s]’²⁵. Children do not get to create their own world but learn how to play and become part of an ‘established’ one being instructed on how to ‘use’ it. The toys constitute shapes which the ‘adult does not find unusual: war, bureaucracy, ugliness, Martians, etc.’²⁶ Children get to accept ‘the world of adult functions’²⁷ by being introduced to all these ‘loaded’ objects ‘even before [they] can think about it’²⁸. Man-built structures are appropriated and therefore understood as natural. Barthes would describe the interactions with these toys as ‘actions without adventure, without wonder, without joy’²⁹. By doing so children are ‘turned into little stay-at-home-householder[s]’³⁰ who get to use and consume the world cut off from their own source of creation and inspiration. The relationship of children towards toys described by Barthes reveals a process in which children learn to adapt rather than explore their own position within the structures of society. Social norms treat us as a material which is shapable so that we are able to fill out the space prepared for us in society.

2.3 A BODY OF OBJECTS TO STRUCTURE

Objects, such as toys, can become politically charged tools as they inhabit a great impact in shaping and preparing children for their role in society. Not only objects but also other man-made structures such as those of architecture inhabit a great political purpose. That ‘Artifacts have Politics’³¹ was formulated in an article for the MIT Press by Langdon Winner in 1980. He states that artefacts are politically charged as they undergo complex decision making processes in their creation. Objects are always made for a specific purpose loading them with political content. We often like to think that people have politics and authority but we do not necessarily associate the same power structures within objects and the relationship we have with them. There are many structures which have been built to favor certain social groups over others. One of the examples Langdon makes is the one of the overpasses over the parkways on Long Island in New York. These overpasses were designed by Robert Moses, an architect who influenced much of the urban structures of New York from the 1920s until the 1970s. The overpasses were designed with a specific height allowing only passenger cars to pass through. At that time citizens owning a car would be mostly ‘whites of ‘upper’ and ‘comfortable middle’ classes’³² which indicates Moses’ ‘social-class bias and racial prejudice’³³. Most of the black community was mobilized by public busses which were simply unable to surpass these overpasses and to reach certain areas of the city. As time passed social circumstances changed and left the original purpose of an artefact (*) behind as it seems that the materiality of the built structure has maintained itself better than the social and material circumstances of humanity. With this example I would like to reintroduce the idea of the body as a material, object or even a ‘thing’, which is choreographed and moved by the structure of the architecture and navigated through space, whereas the structure functions as intervention and limitation.

According to Bruno Latour the complexity of an artefact is not to be foreseen by the time of its making process as an artefact can always function in more ways than it was originally intended to. The complexity of the real world in which artefacts become situated can never be fully considered, which then results in ‘unintended consequences’³⁴. ‘Human[s] and non-human[s]’³⁵ could be regarded to be part of bigger chains of actions in which they stand in relation to each other, introducing the notion of a ‘corporate body’³⁶ that is forming its own entity. This makes the assumed differentiation between subject and object problematic as this differentiation neglects the fact that mankind can never be ‘separated from their [own] creations’³⁷. Subjects and objects are inseparable and the relations they enter with each other are too complex to be understood and pinned down by man in order to consider ourselves as superior and in control of other entities. He would even propose the concept of a ‘Parliament of things’ in which both, subjects as well as objects are represented, pointing out the rights of objects as well as the ‘delusions’ deriving from ranking politics above science. It is yet another man-made differentiation that Latour calls into question.

(*) Artefact (Definition by Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy):

An artifact may be defined as an object that has been intentionally made or produced for a certain purpose.

2.4 SEPARATION VS. CONNECTION

- HOW TO STRUCTURE THE COMPLEX?

The way Latour looks at the relation between human and non-human, stating the impossibility of distinguishing ourselves from our creations, is a notion that suggests an impossibility of separation. This notion applies not only to the relation of man and object but extends to the relation of man and reality and questions the classical western point of view on reality.

J. Bullington addresses in her book ‘The Expression of the psychosomatic Body from a

Phenomenological Perspective⁷³⁸ that mankind has the tendency to look 'at' the world as if separated from it, perceiving reality through a notion of 'objectification'. We are brought up in a society with an 'objectivist point of view'⁷³⁹. As explained by Bullington the objectivist point of view 'assume[s] that there is an independent reality that can be correctly described in symbolic representations (language) which correspond to things and relationships in the 'real world'. According to the objectivistic view, there is a neutral perspective beyond human limitations, independent of human subjectivity and embodiment, a transcendent 'objective' stance outside of the relationship person-world, in which the alleged correspondence between things and what-is-said-about-things can be judged. Knowledge is objective, in the sense that it can be verified as factual states of affairs in the real world. The ideal of objectivity is one of the most cherished and prominent characteristics of natural science. The notion of a subject-independent reality is so ingrained in our cultural thinking that it is difficult to imagine knowledge and meaning in any other way.'⁷⁴⁰ This shows that the objectivist point of view creates a big differentiation between subject and object. Our very own way of perceiving and understanding the world in a subjective manner is neglected and does not serve a bigger understanding of the 'real world'. The more objective we learn to observe the world, the more scientific our observations, the more they are accepted as 'true'.

Bruno Latour would think of the 'realist's and relativist's view of our relationship to the world'⁷⁴¹ as an 'erroneous assumption'⁷⁴². Instead of 'presu[ming] a gap between the cognitive subject - a 'brain-in-a-vat', as Latour calls it - and the outside world'⁷⁴³, that both realists and relativists assume, he simply believes that there is no such gap. 'Instead of starting from an a priori separation between the human and the non-human'⁷⁴⁴ he would rather focus on the 'relation between entities'⁷⁴⁵. He would describe reality to be consisting of 'acting entities'⁷⁴⁶ whereas 'human[s] as well as non-human[s] [...] enter into relations with one another'⁷⁴⁷.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty also deals with the thematics of mankind experiencing reality and both Merleau-Ponty and Latour question this 'modernist settlement' (as Latour calls it) of having to divide the body from the lived experiences or simply subject from object. Merleau-Ponty regards the body as the primary tool to perceive and thus to experience the world that is external to us. The body with its perceiving quality is emphasized as our vehicle to understand and to interact with the world and the experiences gained become our source of knowledge. Perception is the foundation for which it is able for us to have an experience and to interact with the world in the first place. The belief of the perceiving body forming ground to analyze the world and to construct knowledge stands in opposition to the Cartesian dualism, already formed by Plato and Aristotle but later defended by Descartes ('I think therefore I am'), whereas the body and the mind form two different foundations and where consciousness serves as the source of knowledge. Here knowledge 'is constructed in a purely cognitive, non-bodily subject'⁷⁴⁸ starting from an analytical rather than an experiential starting point. According to Merleau-Ponty this assumption is failing to recognize that 'the world is not what I think, but what I live through'⁷⁴⁹. To analyze and to construct knowledge from consciousness would mean to start from 'preconception[s] about the nature of sensation and perception on the actual experience'⁷⁵⁰ that in fact 'ignores the actual experience itself'⁷⁵¹. This assumes the capability of objective thinking to have 'total access to a universe of knowledge'⁷⁵² by which it 'claims the power to exceed the actual experience of perception and sensation'⁷⁵³.

Merleau-Ponty understands perception as a 'behavior effected not by consciousness but by the [living] body'⁷⁵⁴. Rather than detaching the corporeality from trying to make sense of the world it becomes the most important tool in order to perceive the world and reality. Instead of 'seeing the world as a counterpart'⁷⁵⁵, Merleau-Ponty writes in his '*Phenomenology of Perception*' that the world 'surrounds and engenders us'⁷⁵⁶. Our body is understood as our tool to experience life as it is not only 'our anchor in the world'⁷⁵⁷ but in fact 'that by which it is possible for us to have a world at all'⁷⁵⁸.

As Bullington describes the body that is investigated by Merleau-Ponty, it is 'not the objective body, in its materiality, but the subjective, lived body in its constant 'dialogue' with the world'.⁵⁹ The human subject is understood as an 'embodied subject'⁶⁰ within the world it inhabits and 'not [as] a disembodied consciousness'⁶¹, putting our body with its lived experiences in a primary perspective.

From the viewpoint of phenomenological philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty the ideas and concepts from natural science are not regarded as 'wrong' but it proposes another way of understanding our lived experiences. In natural science perception is understood in terms of stimuli-response and 'these notions make it hard for us to reflect upon and discover how we experience our bodies in the world, and how we experience the world through our bodies'⁶².

In natural science the visual perception is explained with the focus upon chemical and neurological processes but 'not the way we live seeing the world'⁶³. And in the words of Bullington: 'We miss the way in which the experience and meaning of the world unfolds for us. Human experience is the result of a unique relation between the bodied subject and that which shows itself to him/her at every instant. The subject and the world are 'born together'.⁶⁴

In the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty the body with all its senses is inhabiting a central position, whereas the body possesses knowledge gained through lived experiences of the world it inhabits and through which we can perceive the world as one entity. It is the body's intentionality to direct itself towards the world.

3.1 AN ARTISTIC APPROACH ON THE COMPLEXITY OF OBJECT SUBJECT MATTER IN RELATION TO THE PERCEIVING BODY

In an article on the work and life of Lygia Clark, Guy Brett describes the notion of the art work as it is commonly understood and perceived: 'Traditionally, the artist is the giver of a communication and the spectator the receiver. This transaction is mediated by the 'art work'. The art work is expressly constructed to be apprehended by the visual sense. Art-making is part of an ongoing process which itself, over time, has refined the visual sense in isolation from the other senses, and independent of the body as a whole.'⁶⁵

Both Lygia Clark and Franz Erhard Walther question this preconception of the 'untouchable' work of art by which, in two different approaches, the direct use of the spectator's body is put in central position. Lygia Clark would search to 'create an opportunity for the members of her audience to experience their own bodies and the effect that objects have on them'⁶⁶ whereas the interest in the work of Franz Erhard Walther, 'distinct from Clark, is the question of the extend to which the viewer's body itself is the sculpture'⁶⁷. Clark's work investigates the embodied subject exposed to the object and Walther's the extend to which the subject can become object itself (as well as the subjective experience of the interaction). In both their practices the importance of the spectator's experience and awareness of the body in relation to the work is being addressed that can lead to a new ground of contemplation. The reflection process derives from the direct experience of the spectator who through the interaction becomes an actant. Both their work give an opportunity to experience art as a unique and subjective experience that only requires a living, perceiving body that is invited to gain new knowledge made within the moment of the interaction. The exceptional quality of their work, as long as the spectator is willing to perceive and to act, is that the lived experience addresses everyone's own relationship towards the world they inhabit.

3.2 LYGIA CLARK - A BODY OF WORK

Since the 1960 Lygia Clark's work embodies 'an investigation of corporeality, that involved the making of interactive objects'⁶⁸. The work invites the spectator to investigate and explore through bodily interaction that 'activate[s] and expand[s] sensorial awareness'⁶⁹. The meaning and importance of the work lies within the exploration and expression of the spectator who, through the interaction, has turned into an actant. Most of Clark's objects are made from accessible materials such as 'plastic, bags, stones, air, shells, water, sand, styrofoam, fabric, nylon stockings and elastic bands'⁷⁰ and is not to be understood on an aesthetic level.

In her work 'The Mascara Abismo' (Abyss Mask), 1968, Clark intends to heighten the awareness of other senses by covering the sight sense of the spectator. The mask is developed to stimulate the inner perception of the person who explores the object on a sensory level while being deprived from vision. The weight of the object in the front and back is enhanced by a plastic bag filled with stones and the mask is put over the head of the spectator who examines via 'texture, scale, temperature, sound and movement'⁷¹.



*Lygia Clark, Mascara Abismo (Abyss Mask), 1968.
(Second photo: courtesy CDOC/Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro)*

The 'Elastic Net', 1973, as the title indicates is a net made out of elastic rings, which unlike the one-on-one experience of the Mascara Abismo, is a work that involves collective practice. The elastic net, as described by Gabi Schilling in the book 'Perception in Architecture: HERE and NOW', is 'growing from a small nuclear unit into a large network of knots and relational linear elements: a textile field negotiating between participants and their surroundings. The body used as stabilizing unit but also as moving entity to create an in-between space. A malleable formation of living bodies

creating spatial formations that arise from bodily gestures. Stretching, compressing, expanding, shrinking, living structures, dialogical spaces. Bodies on, in or underneath the net, inside and out. Forming a relational space and a 'Collective Body'.⁷² The bodies, interwoven with the net, create a new way of experiencing space and raise 'aware[ness] of our living and physical presence of the world'⁷³.



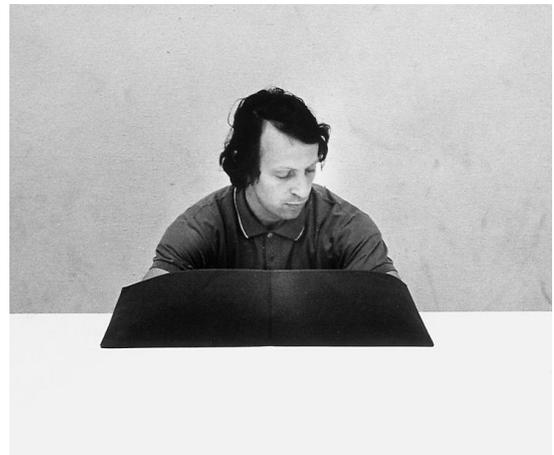
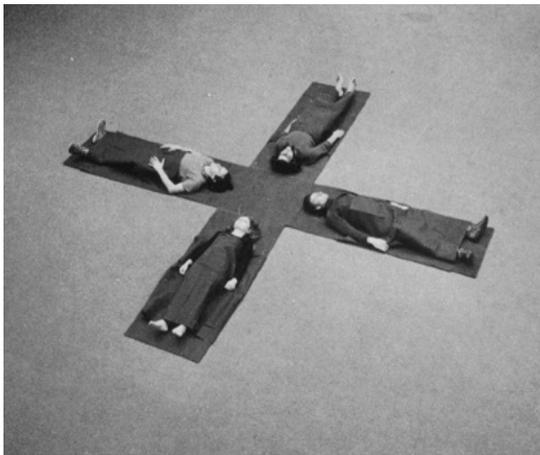
*Lygia Clark's proposition Rede de elsticos (Elastic net), 1974. Shown in use, in Paris
Courtesy Associa o Cultural "O Mundo de Lygia Clark", Rio de Janeiro.*

Clark was part of the Brazilian Neo-Concretism movement, a group of artists and poetry writers who would 'collaborate to challenge existing divides between high and low culture, between fields such as fine art and dance'⁷⁴. The position and role of the body within the art work and its subjective perception is central to their theory. The conceptualization of the theory, written by Ferreira Gullar in '*The Neoconcrete Manifesto*' and the '*Theory of the Non-Object*', states the impossibility to contemplate about the work before experiencing it through its practice. The experience is necessary to understand and grasp the meaning that lies within the object, indicating the importance of perceived sensations that require a responsive body. Gullar describes Clarks objects as non-objects (which are not meant to be 'anti-objects') as these objects would not fit the category of painting or sculpture but 'lie outside the realm of use or verbal designation'⁷⁵. The potential that lies within the activation of the knowledge of the sensual body that is gained through perception while relating itself towards the object. A 'distanced' contemplation about the work would not suffice to 'grasp' the work. And in the words of Lygia Clark herself: 'Deep down, the object is not the most important thing. The thought - the meaning which it lends to the object, to the act, is what matters: That which goes from us to the object (...) In my work, if the spectator does not propose himself towards the experience, the work does not exist.'⁷⁶

3.3 FRANZ ERHARD WALTHER - A BODY OF WORK

Another artist I would like to introduce is Franz Erhard Walther who between 1963-69 made 58 works constituting the '1. Werksatz' (First Work Set). In this set of works the human body is included into different geometrical shapes made out of fabric where the body either stands on, lays on or wears these objects. Some sets include one person others several persons at the same time. On the one hand the body as an objectified sculptural element is integrated into the work and on the other hand the subjective experience made while relating oneself towards the work is not to be neglected.

To take some examples of the '1. Werksatz', number # 23 'Zentriert' (Centred), 1967, is a symmetrical cross made out of fabric on which a person can lay on each arm of the cross, made for four persons. Number # 34 with the title 'Armstück' (Arm piece), 1967, is a fabric object in which the arms of a grown adult perfectly fit inside, it is a piece which is experienced by one person at a time. Another piece with the title #46 'Sehkanal' (Channel of Sight), 1968, is a long piece of fabric which can be stretched by two heads, connecting two bodies together in space.



23 from 1. Werksatz: 'Zentriert' (Centred), 1967
34 'Armstück' (Arm piece), 1967



#46 ‚Sehkanal‘ (Channel of Sight), 1968

By the time Walther made these objects he would refer to them as sculptures as he could not find another word for his creations. Walther’s objects, much like Lygia Clark’s, however do not fulfill the characterization of a static sculpture as it was regarded at that time. Walther would describe his work rather as ‘instruments that have little perceptual significance in themselves and are relevant only through the possibilities originating from their use’⁷⁷.

Instead of mystifying the interaction the spectator can have with the object he gives his work titles which indicate their direct relation to the body and ‘what they ‘do’ (or what can be ‘done’ with them)’⁷⁸. Even though his work has literal titles they are not meant to be imperative nor ‘rule bound’⁷⁹ in any way. ‘I never give instructions for the user. (...) How it is to be used is determined by the instrument, not by me.’⁸⁰ It is ‘the body (that) decides’⁸¹ (German translation ‚Der Körper entscheidet‘, also a title of his work, 1969) and ‘not the artist’s mind’⁸² putting the viewer’s body in an active position. It is the viewer’s experience that determines ‘the form, purpose and perception of the artwork’⁸³. The outcome of the artwork is an interaction based on both decisions inherent within subject and object. Most of the movements which are made while unfolding the potential of the objects are of mostly ordinary nature. Movements such as holding, folding, wearing, etc are simple gestures that anyone can relate to. The simplicity of the act allows the body to become part of the object, part of the sculpture, that opens up a space for reflection. Instead of only generating awareness of the object, the emphasis is now on the relation between the object and the body. It is not only the mind contemplating on a relation between two entities but it is an entity which is experienced with the whole body. The contemplation is a result of an experience made in that very moment from which a memory remains. A memory that keeps the purpose of the work of art alive. Once the same gestures are made in everyday life there might be an association of the presence of the body in relation to the work, which can create new value to the very moment one is experiencing the same gesture in an ‘ordinary’ context.

4. A PERSONAL APPROACH IN QUESTIONING THE SUBJECTIVE COMPLEXITY OF A BODY AND ITS CONSTITUTION

It is a rather contradictory practice to write and contemplate on art through text while the actual work can only be experienced through its relation with the spectator's body. Never have I been in contact with the work of Lygia Clark other than pictures of representations and the only time I ever saw one of Franz Erhard Walther's works was in the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin whereat the interaction with the object - as far as I can recall - was not allowed. The work was consequently displayed in a context which did not allow the work to unfold its potential through direct interaction. Therefore I find it important to point out my very own approach and subjective viewpoint regarding the subject matter of this thesis.

'WEIGHT OF FOUR GENERATIONS'

The work consists of a marble stone, with a total weight of 115 kg, which is untouched except of the part where the exact volume of my leg is carved out. One hole is drilled through the stone in order to lift it by a crane that allows me to carefully place the stone on my leg. I am now tied to the ground with the weight of the stone that encases my leg seamlessly. My body is physically connected to the object that from an outsider could be regarded as a prosthesis. The stone as an object is being activated through the interaction with my body whereby the purpose of the object enfolds. The act of placing the stone and its weight becomes a gesture of acceptance of the framework I am placed into. My grand-grandfather, my grandfather, my father and my uncle are or have been sculptors. As soon as I reach for stone as a material to work with I touch upon this tradition that is embedded within the context of my family. The weight of the stone symbolizes the pressure that is put on me to keep this tradition alive and to maintain a sculptor's tradition. What might look like a burden to an outsider becomes a liberating act for myself as I have decided to physically engage myself with the context I have been placed into - for I have decided to physically make it my own.



Milena Naef, Weight Of Four Generations, Marble and Body, 2015

'TWO DOORMEN'

The performance 'Two Doormen' was held three times at DITS, a performance gallery in the red light district of Amsterdam, in April 2015. The red-light district has a specific atmosphere which is a result of the very present physical and mental structures. It is a space that is characterized by the division of performer, client and spectator in which the procedure of a selection process is accepted as normal. The performance would address these given structures by creating a framework in which the spectator is confronted with the general understanding and behavior of this space.

Two doormen were hired to do their job as part of the performance. The first doorman was positioned at the entrance door and the second one inside the space in front of the exit door. Both were assigned the same task of making a selection of the people invited to the event. They would decide whether a person was granted access inside the space or not and on the other side would grant them permission or not to leave the space. This intervention would choreograph the spectator through the space in which he would probably find himself in a different power structure than expected as the understanding of the social and physical structure of this environment would not comply to the situation he or she would find him/herself in. The traditional roles of performer and spectator are questioned as the intervention is simply created by the two doormen being paid to do their profession which in this setting imposes an unsettling experience on the spectator. Through the selection process the visitor is put in an unavoidable situation that, no matter the outcome, requires his or her attendance and reaction, whereas a reaction inevitably becomes a response to the situation.

The relationship of oneself within given structures we have come to accept as normal is being questioned through manipulating the spectator physically as well as mentally. This manipulation should give the spectator a chance to experience a 'choreography' that has been imposed onto him or her and to subsequently reflect upon the encountered situation. The reflection process would exceed the moment of the experience itself as the behavior within the context of the performance addresses the subjective's background of experiences made in larger contexts. The knowledge gained in the situation requires the physical presence of the spectator who stands in conflict to his or her mental capacities of understanding what exactly is happening in that very moment.

To illustrate one situation, observed from an outsider's point of view, yet giving insight into the impact of the project on a subjective level, a group of about five students were about to enter the space when they were stopped by the doormen announcing them access to only one person of the group, pointing at one of them. The young man in the front was shocked and replied that either all or none would go inside to which the group was confronted by an indifferent reaction from the doorman. The group left as seemingly they would not want to partake in an unfair situation. A while later the young man came back to confront the doorman with his opinion about the unrightful selection process the group had been part of pointing out the very essence of the project. It is the potential that lies within each subject to experience and to reflect upon imposed mental and physical structures of every day life one is inevitably placed into.



Two Doormen, interactive moment between doorman and visitor(s), April 2015

5. TO CONCLUDE DANCING WITH THE DISEMBODIED

In order to make sense of the world we inhabit we have created dualities that are deeply rooted in the very essence of our being - a separation between ourselves and the world - body and mind - physical and mental - subject and object. It is in human nature to identify through distinction and therefore we desire to view ourselves as an entity that is distinctive and distinguishable from others, for this allows us to be superior and in 'control'. Yet through the research of this thesis it becomes clear that we as humans are much more intricately involved within its environment and its own creations. Through our creating abilities we assume to be in control, nevertheless the complexity of the real world in which an object or creation is placed can reveal much more potential that exceed the original intention. Our bodies become part of a huge choreography within its environment that needs to be redefined over and over again. A redefinition of the relation of body and environment can happen through the rupture in a given situation, structure or even the body itself. This rupture through which awareness can be created has the possibility to provide insight into the (political) powers that lie in all bodies - such as objects and subjects. Material can be politically charged and manipulate and influence our behaviour and choices in order for us to function in a certain way. It is thus not only us who manipulate material but it is material that manipulates ourselves through which we ultimately become material.

The assumption that we are a separated entity has led us to the belief that we are able to perceive the world from an objective point of view, starting from consciousness and not the perceiving body. Bruno Latour and Merleau-Ponty question this assumption that we as subjects are separated from an objective reality. Merleau-Ponty puts the perceiving, lived body (without neglecting mental capacities) in central position. The body with its perceiving quality builds the foundation for experiences and interactions with the world we inhabit and the relationship our body forms with the world it inhabits serves as a source of knowledge. The vision of Merleau-Ponty and Latour offer alternative valuable ways to relate ourselves to the world around us and let us rethink this relationship in a different term.

Lygia Clark's and Franz Erhard Walther's work reveal this potential that lies within experiences made with the body as a whole drawing attention to the limiting dualities we have come to embody - between us and our world as 'the other' - between our body and the mind. In both their practices the importance of the spectator's experience and awareness of the body in relation to the work is being addressed that can lead to a new ground of contemplation. The reflection process derives from the direct experience of the spectator who through the interaction becomes an actant.

Their work gives an opportunity to experience art as a unique and subjective experience that only requires a living, perceiving body that is invited to gain new knowledge made within the moment of the interaction. The exceptional quality of their work, as long as the spectator is willing to perceive and to act, is that the lived experience addresses everyone's own relationship towards the world they inhabit. The artists work are from the 60s and 70s when minimalists started to take the environment of the object into account, questioning if a work of art can be separated at all and thus questioning the traditional concept of art. Nevertheless after finishing my research I can conclude that the thesis should be elaborated on contemporary art practices dealing with the relation of humans and their surroundings.

It is essential that we interrogate already existing structures through interaction. For it is our bodies that are always filling up a 'space' for which it is up to us to experience and to contribute to it.

With regards to my neighbor on number 13 who will receive the first copy of this thesis.

SOURCES

- [1] Move Choreographing you, Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre 2011, p. 37
- [2] Ibid., p. 37
- [3] Richard Kearney, Losing our touch, 30 August 2014, © 2016 The New York Times Company, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/08/30/losing-our-touch/?_r=0
- [4] Ibid.
- [5] Ibid.
- [6] Ibid.
- [7] Ibid.
- [8] Ibid.
- [9] Ibid.
- [10] Ibid.
- [11] Ibid.
- [12] Ibid.
- [13] Ibid.
- [14] Ibid.
- [15] C.H. Beck, 2. edition 2013
- [16] Monika Wagner, Das Material der Kunst Eine andere Geschichte der Moderne, C.H. Beck, 2. edition, 2013, p.276 quoting Hartmut Böhme, translation by Milena Naef
- [17] Ibid. translation by Milena Naef
- [18] Adrienne Dengerink Chaplin, 30 June 2005, Art and Embodiment: Biological and Phenomenological Contributions to Understanding Beauty and the Aesthetic, <http://www.contempaesthetics.org/newvolume/pages/article.php?articleID=291>
- [19] Ibid.
- [20] Ibid.
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] Monika Wagner, Das Material der Kunst Eine andere Geschichte der Moderne, C.H. Beck, 2. edition, 2013, p. 278
- [23] Barthes, R., Mythologies, Toys, trans., Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, New York, 1984
- [24] Ibid.
- [25] Ibid.
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] Ibid.
- [28] Ibid.
- [29] Ibid.
- [30] Ibid.
- [31] Winner, L., Do Artifacts Have Politics?, Daedalus, Vol. 109, No. 1, Modern Technology: Problem or Opportunity? (Winter,1980), pp. 121-136, published by: The MIT Press on behalf of American Academy of Arts & Sciences, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024652>
- [32] Ibid., p. 124
- [33] Ibid., p. 123
- [34] Stalder, F., Beyond constructivism: towards a realistic realism. A review of Bruno Latour's Pandora's Hope., 2000, <http://felix.openflows.com/html/pandora.html>,
© by TIS
- [35] Ibid.
- [36] Ibid.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Bullington, J., Springer Netherlands, 2013
- [39] Ibid., p. 20

- [40] Ibid. p. 20
- [41] Stalder, F., Beyond constructivism: towards a realistic realism. A review of Bruno Latour's Pandora's Hope., 2000, <http://felix.openflows.com/html/pandora.html>,
© by TIS
- [42] Ibid.
- [43] Ibid.
- [44] Ibid.
- [45] Verbeek, P., On Art and the Democratization of Things, Cahier on Art and the Public Domain, Open, No 24, 2012, p. 20
- [46] Ibid.
- [47] Ibid. p. 20 - 21
- [48] Levin, J., Bodies and subjects in Merleau-Ponty and Foucault: Towards a phenomenological/poststructuralist feminist theory of embodied subjectivity, doctoral thesis in philosophy, Pennsylvania State University, 2008, p. 25
- [49] Merleau-Ponty, M., Phenomenology of Perception, trans., Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 1962, xviii preface
- [50] Levin, J., Bodies and subjects in Merleau-Ponty and Foucault: Towards a phenomenological/poststructuralist feminist theory of embodied subjectivity, doctoral thesis in philosophy, Pennsylvania State University, 2008, p. 26
- [51] Ibid., p. 24
- [52] Ibid., p. 26
- [53] Ibid., p. 27
- [54] Flynn, Bernard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/merleau-ponty/>>
- [55] Merleau-Ponty, M., Phenomenology of Perception, trans., Colin Smith, London and New York: Routledge, 1962, xvii preface
- [56] Ibid.
- [57] Ibid., p. 174
- [58] Ibid., p. 176
- [59] Bullington, J., The Expression of the psychosomatic Body from a Phenomenological Perspective, Springer Netherlands, 2013, p.26
- [60] Flynn, Bernard, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2011 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/merleau-ponty/>>
- [61] Keat, R., Merleau-Ponty and the phenomenology of the body, 1982, p. 3
- [62] Bullington, J., The Expression of the psychosomatic Body from a Phenomenological Perspective, Springer Netherlands, 2013, p.26, p. 23
- [63] Ibid.
- [64] Ibid.
- [65] Brett, G., Lygia Clark : in search of the body, Art in America (Westport, Connecticut). Vol 82, no. 7 (Jul. 1994), p. 58
- [66] Move Choreographing you, Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre 2011, p. 15
- [67] Ibid.
- [68] Fabiao, E., Lygia Clark The House is the Body. Penetration, ovulation, germination, expulsion (1968); Straight Jacket (1969); Elastic Net (1973), Move Choreographing you, Hayward Publishing, Southbank Centre 2011, p. 61
- [69] Ibid.
- [70] Osthoff, S., Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica: A Legacy of Interactivity and Participation for a Telematic Future, <http://www.leonardo.info/isast/spec.projects/osthoff/osthoff.html>, updated

23 November 2004, Leonardo On-Line © 2004 ISAST

[71] Ibid.

[72] Schillig, G., PERCEPTION in Architecture: HERE and NOW (edited by Claudia Perren, Miriam Mlecek), Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015, p. 60

[73] Ibid., p. 61

[74] Mariola V. Alvarez, The Anti-Dictionary: Ferreira Gullar's Non-Object Poems, 30 April 2013, feature issue #9, <http://nonsite.org/feature/the-anti-dictionary-ferreira-gullars-non-object-poems>

[75] Ibid., quote taken from Gullar, A Dialogue on the Non-Object, Sao Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2007, 145

[76] Clark, L., in Lygia Clark, Fundacio Antoni Tapies, Barcelone, 1997, p. 227

[77] Franz Erhard Walther, The Body Decides, WIELS, CAPC & Konig Books, 2014, p. 16

[78] Ibid., p. 18

[79] Ibid., p. 28

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.