



LYGIA PAPE
MAGNETIZED SPACE

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A PERMANENTLY OPEN SEED

GUY BRETT

As you can see, all is connected.
The artwork does not exist as a finished and resolved object,
but as something that is always present,
permanent within people.

Lygia Pape¹

If one were to place side by side images of two works by Lygia Pape—*Ttéia Quadrada* (first version 1976) and *New House*, one of her last installations (2000)—the contrast between them would be almost shocking [see p. 282 and fig. 1]. On the one hand, an ethereal beauty of the utmost delicacy, a kind of late flowering of the orderly system of constructivism, filled with light; and on the other hand a scene of complete ruin and visceral chaos incongruously mounted as a house amidst the lush vegetation of Rio de Janeiro's Tijuca forest.²

Both scenes carry a powerful conviction, and each is as typical of the artist as the other. Construction vies with destruction. Interpreted more broadly, there is in Pape's work an equal identification and simultaneous immersion in cosmic reality, the universe, infinity, and in the low-down, nitty-gritty of human social and material life on earth. It is remarkable how pervasive this theme—this contradiction or interaction of apparent opposites—has been throughout the twentieth century in the art and the literature of Latin Americans. In that sense, Lygia Pape's twin consciousness can be seen as a recent extension, expressed in new forms, of a tradition that stretches back at least until the 1930s.

In her perceptive overview, *Latin American Vanguards: the Art of Contentious Encounters* (1994), the North American scholar Vicky Unruh has shown that this theme can be traced as a continuing thread across the gaps and discontinuities that have characterized artistic production in Latin American countries. She deals mainly with literary avant-gardes in the 1920s and 1930s, focusing on such figures as Roberto Arlt (Argentina), Miguel Angel Asturias (Guatemala), Alejo Carpentier (Cuba), Oswald de Andrade and Mário de Andrade (Brazil), and Vicente Huidobro (Chile). Looking for common features among them, Unruh finds that "A combative ... interaction between 'celestial poetics' and a concern with the contingent world, permeates vanguardist concerns all along." A frequent feature of the Latin American avant-garde novel, she continues, is "the artist's lament, calling to mind once again the stresses between cosmic aspirations and the pulls of a contingent world."³

A continual switching between these worlds characterizes Lygia Pape's entire oeuvre and is linked with her insistence on the freedom to experiment, driven by her rebellious spirit. The Neo-Concrete movement in Brazilian art was for her as a young artist something defining and unprecedented:

"When the Neo-Concrete group was formed, there was none more constructive. We began inventing new languages, but without stringency, without systematizing. Freedom was absolute. That is what my work always pursued."⁴

If this new language was based in geometric abstraction it was not the result of:

"deforming anything gleaned from the real world. Our objective was to create from

three basic forms: the circle, the square and the triangle."⁵

Cosmos and Street

This economy of form and semantic compression was then applied by Pape to subject matter of vast proportions: the origins of the universe and the evolution of human life on earth, which is the subject of her *Livro da criação* (1959), and of time, in her *Livro do tempo* (1961–63).

All the more remarkable, then, that Pape could move to an apparently opposite pole in her following series of works, the *Caixas* (Boxes), towards the end of the 1960s. When the Neo-Concrete group began to break up in 1961, Pape had turned her attention to film. She worked for several years as a visual designer with the leading figures of the Cinema Novo. As a Neo-Concretist she found most Cinema Novo films old-fashioned in their visual language.⁶

Pape returned to the world of visual art with the *Caixas*, a series of objects deliberately intended to shock and to confront the "shut away, dead art of museums"⁷ with raw life itself. Even in the avant-garde context of the epochal *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition of 1967 her *Caixas* caused puzzlement. Sometimes called the "black humour boxes," these works kept the formal compression associated with Neo-Concretism but aimed to provoke a physical reflex of repugnance, even abhorrence in the viewer. Looking into the *Caixa das baratas*, (1967), a mirror at the base reflects back one's face, surrounded by the detested insects. In *Caixa das formigas* (1967), massive Brazilian ants gorged themselves on a piece of red meat mounted at the centre, "in an action full of eroticism and lust."⁸ *Caixa Brasil* is a box painted blue with a sumptuous red felt lining;

you open the lid to see the word “Brasil” in silver along with hanks of hair from the three “races” forming the miscegenated Brazilian people—indigenous Indian, African, and European—in the order in which they arrived in the country.⁹

Particularly important to Pape in these new works was that they would communicate ideas “through the skin, in an essentially sensorial way ... and not by formal discourse.”¹⁰ She called it an *epidermização* (“epidermization”) of an idea, an extraordinarily succinct way of summing up what may be seen as a characteristically Brazilian take on the relationship between mind and body. In his brilliant text on Pape, the artist Hélio Oiticica, who movingly described her as a “permanently open seed,” went on to assert that the “living act of having an idea” did not abandon the sensual for the cerebral. On the contrary, it constituted “a search for the direct sensorial consciousness for the act of seeing and feeling by touch—intellect defying itself.”¹¹

It is extremely revealing of the artistic climate that linked Neo-Concretism and Pape’s experience with cinema to discover that Glauber Rocha’s remarkable first film, the eleven-minute *O pátio* (Terrace, 1959), was first screened in Pape’s house. The film is a lyrical and almost abstract observation of two bodies, a woman’s and a man’s, lying on and moving sensuously around a floor of regularly spaced black and white tiles. The film poses the geometric rigour of the floor against the organic intimacy of the two bodies as a sort of endless conundrum.

Later, and especially in her work with the cineaste Paula Gaitán, Pape was to use film to expand our perception of the “object” conventionally associated with the plastic arts. By slowing time down, through extreme close-up and the introduction of a drawn-out or pulsat-

ing soundtrack, she gives the full sensuousness of the process that is encapsulated in the object. The cloacal mouth in *Eat me*, the very gradual birth of the body from the *Ovo*, the billowing sheet of *Divisor*, at first seen without the presence of people, produce an opening beyond the constraints of the material thing—something equivalent to the subjective charge that we all bring to the experience of art.

Three artists emerged from Neo-Concretism with radically new ideas: Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica. They looked beyond the conventional categories of painting and sculpture and they opened the artistic process to the active participation of the spectator. Their questioning was not only radical but also profound, since they made a conscious link between the transformation of the nature of the work of art and the great changes taking place in our perception of the universe. It was a vision both kinetic and dialogic. The three artists had distinct trajectories, but for a period their experiments intertwined.¹²

For example, Pape’s *Ovos* (1967) and Clark’s *A casa é o corpo* (The House is the Body, 1967–68) are linked by metaphors of birth. In the latter, participants struggle through a dark room packed with balloons to emerge into the light-filled transparency of the central tent. Pape’s *Ovos* are fabric-sided boxes in which a person is enclosed and can break out through the thin material. “You are enclosed in there, enveloped in a sort of skin, or membrane; and then you stick your hand out like this—the membrane starts to give: suddenly it breaks and you are ‘born’; you put your head through the hole and roll out.”¹³

Dividing is uniting

The tension between the organic and the recitilinear in Pape’s *Ovos* is clear—after all, the

Ovos are not ovoid in shape but cubic. There are similar tensions in her celebrated *Divisor* (1968), a work providing one of the most memorable poetic-political images of the 1960s [fig. 2-3]. A great piece of cloth, 30 x 30 metres, holds together, yet apart, a crowd of people whose heads protrude through the evenly spaced holes. It was an ambivalent metaphor: either referring to an atomization, the “massing together of man, each inside his own pigeon-hole,”¹⁴ or to an ethic of community, since each individual’s movements have a direct effect on those of others, on the whole group. The dividing-uniting dialectic extended down to each individual’s body, since the huge cloth separated the head from arms, legs, and trunk, an effect that Pape would have enhanced, if she had possessed sufficient resources at the time, by causing a freezing stream of air to blow across the upper part and a draught of hot air across the nether regions. “You feel your body without a head, or without arms and legs,” she wrote.¹⁵ *Divisor* focuses on people as individually and socially constituted, through the experimental creation of what Lygia Clark would later call a “collective body.”

Despite their convergence over the invention of forms of public participation, and the general challenge to the notion of unique authorship, Clark’s and Oiticica’s bodies of work remain very different from Pape’s. Clark went deeper and deeper into the implications of a dialogic relationship between the creative energies of “artist” and “other.” The progress of her work has an incredible internal logic, even if Clark herself experienced the stages as profound dislocations accompanied by psychological crisis. For us, now, the unity between her reliefs of the 1950s and her *Therapy with Relational Objects* of the last ten years of her life is clear to see. The pattern is similar

with Oiticica. Although Oiticica’s main, or ostensible, link was with the exterior world, and Clark’s with the interior—Clark herself made this comparison—his work has the same sequential drive as hers. Each stage leads to the next as a result of a powerful self-critique of previous work combined with the approach to a state where “the work is born from merely a touch upon matter ... nothing more than a breath: interior breath, of cosmic plenitude.”¹⁶ Every stage, every work of both artists, is of equal interest.

Pape’s work, by comparison, is diverse. Over the years she embraced many enquiries and enthusiasms, forms and formats. While this may mean that some groups of works or episodes strike us as less successful or less central than others—the literal figuration of the *Amazoninos* sculpture series for example—for the artist herself diversity is connected with creative freedom, a need to rebel, and has a rationale of its own. She saw everything she had done as essentially simultaneous: “I’ve never liked dates”;¹⁷ “My process of creating is circular. I’ve never had phases,”¹⁸ she told the newspapers. And it is interesting that the critic Mário Pedrosa, in the brief preface he wrote for Pape’s *Funarte* monograph in 1983, alluded to a “cycle of creativity” and “an endless circuit.”¹⁹ This movement can be traced all the way back to the *Livro da criação*, whose operation Pape described as a cycle. The pages are flat planes; when you take one out and open it up you realize it is a construction, a three-dimensional object in space, charging that space. You then press it flat and it returns to being a plane. In this action she sensed a nascent eroticism.

Later, she expanded her notion of the eroticization of space to take in the entire city, whose system of forces, pulling this way and that, building up and dissipating, attracting

and repelling, could be followed all the way down to the street vendor in the city centre:

He comes to his corner and opens up his little case and starts his sales pitch, suddenly creating a kind of magnetisation. People flock around him, identifying with that irregular, sometimes brief, sometimes long-winded patter. And then, all of a sudden, he shuts his mouth, closes his case and the space dwindles into nothingness.²⁰

*Christo and Jeanne-Claude,
Serra, and Pape*

Expanding again to the large scale we could ask ourselves if there is a Brazilian, or more specifically a *carioca*,²¹ ethos or sensibility in Pape's work, a quality that asserts itself in relation to recent art internationally, in particular to European and North American art. This is not an appeal to "the sad anachronism of nationalism," as Caetano Veloso called it;²² nor is it an attempt to establish a hierarchy of aesthetic values, nor even to reverse a historical injustice. What we are seeking is in fact an aspect of diversity, which does imply an assertion of particular values.

Pape's *Divisor* has interesting points in common, and in contrast, with another membranous structure made six years later, and presumably without knowledge of the Brazilian's work: Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *Ocean Front*, Newport, Rhode Island 1974 [fig. 4].²³ *Ocean Front* was one of the artists' technical and logistical tours de force, by which they extended the strange visual assuaging effect of Christo's packaging principle over the vicissitudes of the landscape. This was a tethered white sheet of polypropylene that covered over a vast area where the sea meets the shore at King's Beach, Newport, USA, for eight

days. The "natural" energies of Christo's work compare very strikingly with the "human" ones of Pape's. People *are* present in photos of *Ocean Front*, but only as skilled professionals or helpers whose role is to implant the artificial surface in the flux of nature. Associations of nature—seawaves and light—*are* present in photos of *Divisor*, but they arise spontaneously out of a work that is essentially about the body, anybody. Revealingly, Christo and Jeanne-Claude emphasize the professional nature of their projects, stressing an almost puritan concept of "work." Christo writes: "If 300 people are used it is not because we might want 300 people to play roles, but because we have work for them."²⁴ Pape's *Divisor*, on the other hand, fits within an ethos of leisure, of play, of festivity you could say, an ethos with deep roots in Brazil.

There are differences, too, between Brazilian scale and North American scale. Both are big countries, but Brazil reacts differently to space and the body: it always joins the vast with the intimate. From the point of view of the public's experience, a work like *Divisor* can be compared with Richard Serra's big walk-in sculptures, such as have recently been shown at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao [fig. 5]. Serra's steel sculpture imposes itself as a indestructible monument beside the soft materials and collapsible flexibility of *Divisor*. Both works set up a relationship between inside and outside. In the Serra the final inside arena is reached by a winding path that stretches the time taken to penetrate the labyrinth, not knowing what the end will be. "Outside" and "inside" are absolute states, whereas in the Pape they are fluid and interwoven states: the heads are apparently outside and the rest of the body inside, but with the movement of participants the reverse can become true. In

the Serra, the visitor confronts the work as an individual and is heedless of others. In the Pape, it is impossible for an individual to avoid an interaction with others because the movement and even the stasis of one affects all the others. "You have to find a chink for yourself," Pape mused, "can you imagine all those disembodied heads talking to one another against the white cloth?"²⁵ The work is paradoxical: it unites by dividing. Yet *Divisor* does not obliterate the individual in the collective: it envelops all in a particular state of creative energy, just as carnival does in its true nature.

Manto tupinambá

The two sides of Pape's art, her two "lives" as she called them—pure abstraction and immersion in the pressing problems of contemporary Brazil—continued. For a long time she had supported the struggle of the indigenous population in Brazil. There is little information about her precise role in these affairs, but as long ago as 1988 she wrote to me in London:

I am working very hard with the movement to defend the Amazonian Indians and those of the north and border with Venezuela (Ianomami, Macuxi, Maiongong, etc). They live in the most dangerous part of our country: there are cruel farms, gold mines, big fires [destroying] the forest, and the indians are being killed My friend Gilberto Macusi is the representative of 400 chiefs at Roraima who have made a foundation for themselves, safe from Government and Church.²⁶

These concerns coalesce in her multi-format work *Manto tupinambá*, which occupied her in the second half of the 1990s. The Tupinambá lived along the coast of what is now Brazil before the Europeans arrived, and the feather mantle

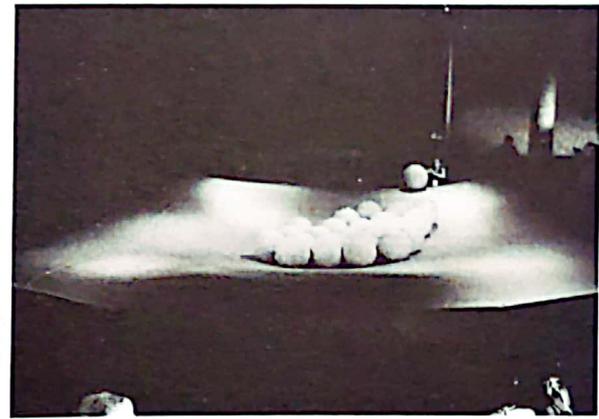


fig. 6. *Manto tupinambá*, 1996-1999

was their symbol of power [fig. 6]. They practiced anthropofagy, which Pape is at pains to distinguish from cannibalism: "The Tupinambá devoured their prisoners, their enemy, not from hunger, as in cannibalism, but to swallow and assimilate the spiritual capacities of the other."²⁷ The Tupinambá provided, therefore, the key concept that, in metaphorical form, was taken in the modern period, originally by the poet Oswald de Andrade, to define Brazil's unique cultural assimilation of the "spiritual capacities" of other peoples: *antropofagia*. But in a kind of defiant irony, Pape's work points to the Tupinambá's absence, not their presence (among other matters, surviving feather mantles can be found in Denmark, Germany, and Belgium but not in Brazil). In one of its guises,²⁸ Pape's *Manto tupinambá* is materialized as a vast red fabric field/cape, reminiscent of *Divisor* but tethered to the ground, with, instead of heads, disquieting balls of red feathers, each with a protruding limb streaked with red paint. Or the Mantle could be evoked in a dematerialized, digitalized, virtual form as a red cloud hovering over the city of Rio, or covering the artist's shoulders like a cape as she waits at a bus stop (impossible in this last image not to see a passing tribute to Oiticica's *Parangolé*) [fig. 7]. In another culture that has valued the

mantle above all other fabricated objects—the New Zealand Maori—to throw one's own cloak over the shoulders of another is a gesture of peaceable welcome.

Paradox of construction

Right at the end of her life Pape knew a period of intense creativity. Although physically weak, she was mentally very strong and was able to produce a number of large-scale and ambitious installations. Though thin and fragile, she maintained her youthful and mischievous dress sense. Her clothes had always made her seem one step ahead of others, on the move, impossible to pin down. But now, allied to her playful side, in works like *Carandiru* (2001) and *New House* (2000) there is anger. *New House*, particularly, represents an extraordinary departure in Pape's work. In both venues where it has been shown—the gallery of the Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica and a neglected spot in Tijuca forest—the impact has been immediate and extremely disturbing. This scene of ruin, with its rubble, its jagged hanging fragments of plasterboard and clotted strings, is, as we noted at the beginning, visceral in its material presence. Both the white cube of the gallery and the “constructive will” that had marked Pape's motivation from the Grupo Frente days, seem to be shattered in chaos and mess. The spectacle is made all the more powerful by being sealed off from the spectator. In the Centro Oiticica exhibition it was an unreachable, no-go area in the centre of the gallery, visible only through gaps in the walls. And in the Tijuca forest it was estranged by its lack of any organic relationship to the nature surrounding it. Its removed quality seems to refer in equal measure both to the artwork sealed off in museums and to the daily disasters safely distanced from

us in newspaper and TV images from across the world.

Pape stresses the poetic rather than didactic nature of these installations, and, despite its closures, *New House* is certainly a work open to interpretation. It is ambivalent in its affirmations and negations. At the same time, it is a strictly architectural allegory. There are no agonized human references.

Brazilian cities are in a constant state of construction—of two kinds: on the one side the high-rise apartment blocks and corporate offices produced by the great construction companies, gleaming, distant, mechanical, and impersonal, and on the other side the hands-on, improvised and personal house construction of the favelas and squatter settlements. Here, construction is part of a struggle for survival in which everyone is continuously involved. Pape had a long-term admiration for the way in which favela dwellers improvise structures starting from nothing. As part of the architecture courses she gave at the Universidade Santa Úrsula in the 1980s, she took hundreds of photographs of what people could do just with lashed-together sticks and mud. When Pape interprets *New House* in a positive spirit, it may be to pay a tribute to the favela builders: “A *New House* comes from debris.”²⁹

New House, however, does not evoke favela housing so much as the cheap, capitalist mass production of homes “which do not serve the occupant,” a minimum schematic dwelling of which he/she becomes a mere “prop” (*adereço*).³⁰ An element in the formation of the work is Pape's disgust with a cycle of destruction in Brazil as persistent as her cycle of creativity, whose two sides could be seen in the wanton destruction of precious environments in the name of “progress,” and the lethal entomb-

ment of favela dwellings in floods and landslides. "When something grows," she wrote:

it becomes bothersome and is knocked down ... the University of Brasília, which was truly a marvel, was demolished and turned into something completely mediocre. Penelope weaves, and someone is undoing it. We are always blundering, by choice.

[...] That does not mean I'm an unhappy person or pessimistic at all. I think, rather, that art has such vitality, it is so powerful that it overcomes all. I say this not as an idealization, or utopia. It is a creative energy that every person has within themselves. And I think we have to use it very well.³¹

In a brief tribute elicited by a newspaper on Pape's death, the artist Amélia Toledo described Pape as close to the Brazilian populace, the multitude, "living together" (*conviver*) with it in a way that is "not common among artists."³² Even given the generous scope and scholarly precision of the exhibition at the Reina Sofía, I believe we still have more to learn about the way Lygia Pape's work and life were intertwined.

¹ *Como você vê, está tudo ligado./Não existe obra como um objeto acabado e resolvido, mas alguma coisa sempre presente,/permanente no interior das pessoas.* Quoted in Denise Mattar, *Lygia Pape: Intrinsecamente Anarquista*, Rio de Janeiro: Relume Dumará, Perfis do Rio series, 2003, p. 86.

² *Ttéia Quadrada*, virtually unknown in Europe, was a revelation when installed in the first room of the Arsenale at the Venice Biennale of 2009.

New House was first shown in 2002 as part of Lygia Pape's solo exhibition at the Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica in Rio de Janeiro, curated by Paulo Sergio

Duarte. The following year it was remodeled by the artist and built as a permanent installation in the Tijuca forest for a project curated by Márcio Doc-tors. Three artists, Pape, José Resende and Nuno Ramos, were invited to make new work as part of a program of commissions for the forest initiated by the Museu do Açude, part of the Museus Castro Maya.

³ Vicky Unruh, *Latin American Vanguards: the Art of Contentious Encounters*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, pp. 74, 87. Vicky Unruh is Associate Professor of Latin American Literature at the University of Kansas.

⁴ "Quando o grupo neoconcreto se forma, ninguém é mais construtivo. Passamos a inventar linguagens novas, mas sem a necessidade daquele rigour, daquela sistematização. Era a liberdade absoluta. Minha obra sempre perseguiu isso". Mattar, op. cit., p. 65.

⁵ "uma deformação de algo recolhido do mundo real. Nosso objetivo era criar a partir das três formas básicas: o círculo, o quadrado e o triângulo". Lygia Pape, interview with Angélica de Moraes, *O Estado de São Paulo*, April 22, 1995, p. D4.

⁶ Lygia Pape went on to make fifteen or sixteen films of her own. About her cinema, see Ivana Bentes' essay, pp. 333–348.

⁷ Lúcia Carneiro and Ileana Pradilla, *Lygia Pape: entrevista*, Rio de Janeiro: Lacerda Editores/Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, palavra do artista series, 1998, p. 29.

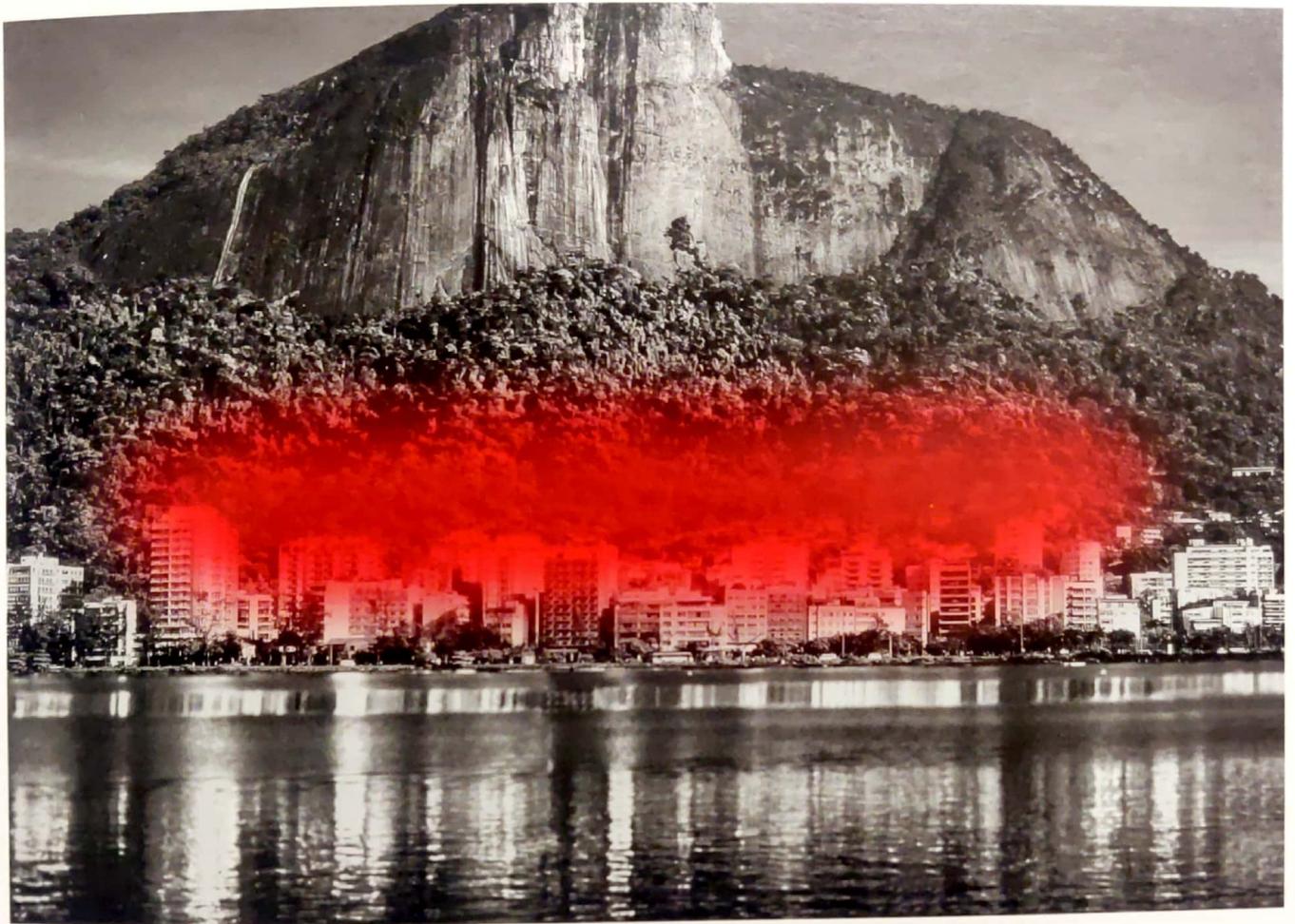
⁸ *Lygia Pape*, Rio de Janeiro: Edições Funarte, 1983, with texts by Lygia Pape, Mário Pedrosa Luís Otávio Pimentel and Afonso Henriques Neto, p. 45.

⁹ This earthy strain, invading the museum with assemblies of everyday objects, set at a basic level of eroticism and hunger, and including sound and smell, continues with *Objetos de sedução: The Loss* (Seduction Objects: The Loss, 1976), *Eat me: a gula ou a luxúria?* (Eat me: gluttony or lust?, 1976), *Narizes e línguas* (Noses and Tongues, 1994), and *Eu Como Eu* (I Eat Myself, 1999), etc.

¹⁰ Mattar, op. cit., p. 71.

¹¹ The above quotes are from a text written by Oiticica in English, "Tropicalia Times Series 2. Lygia Pape", London-Paris, May 1969. A version in Portuguese was published in *Lygia Pape: Obras* (São

- Paulo: Galeria Arte Global, 1976). This publication also included a facsimile of three hand-written fragments by Oiticica in Portuguese, written in New York in 1973, which discusses Pape's *Ovo*. A complete version of both texts is included in this catalogue, pp. 245–247 and 249–252 respectively.
- 12 Pape and Clark had mutual respect but the relationship was not warm. Oiticica maintained a close friendship with both Clark and Pape.
- 13 Lygia Pape, Funarte monograph, op. cit., p. 46.
- 14 “Você fica trancado ali dentro, envolto por uma espécie de pele, de membrana, e então você enfia a mão assim, a membrana começa a ceder e de repente ela se rasga e você ‘nasce’, bota a cabeça pelo buraco e rola pra fora”. Ibid.
- 15 Lygia Pape, letter to Guy Brett, September, 1988.
- 16 Hélio Oiticica, diary entry September 6, 1960, in *Hélio Oiticica*, Rotterdam: Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Paris: Galerie nationale du Jeu de Paume, 1992, p. 32.
- 17 Lygia Pape, quoted in *O Estado de São Paulo*, May 5, 2004, Caderno D6.
- 18 Lygia Pape, interview with Angélica de Moraes, *O Estado de São Paulo*, August 5, 1997, Caderno D12.
- 19 Pedrosa, Funarte monograph, op. cit., p. 1.
- 20 Lygia Pape, Funarte monograph, op. cit., p. 47.
- 21 Popular term for an inhabitant of Rio de Janeiro.
- 22 Caetano Veloso, *Verdade Tropical*, São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997. Published in English as *Tropical Truth* (trans. Isabel de Sena), London: Bloomsbury, 2003, p. 183.
- 23 Christo and Jeanne-Claude, *Oceanfront*. The making of this work was recorded in *Christo: Oceanfront*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, with text by Sally Yard and photographs by Gianfranco Gorgoni.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Lygia Pape, Funarte monograph, op. cit., p. 46.
- 26 Lygia Pape, letter to Guy Brett, December 31, 1988, written in English.
- 27 Lygia Pape, interview with Óscar Faria, Lisboa: *Público*, June 18, 1999, p. 5.
- 28 About the versions of *Manto tupinambá*, see footnote 10 of Ivana Bentes' essay, p. 347.
- 29 Lygia Pape, quoted in Mattar, op. cit., p. 95.
- 30 Lygia Pape, interview with Ethel de Paula, Fortaleza: *O Povo*, May 5, 2002, p. 5.
- 31 Lúcia Carneiro and Ileana Pradilla, op.cit., pp. 80–81.
- 32 Amélia Toledo, quoted in *Folha de São Paulo*, May 4, 2004, p. C4.



Manto tupinambá, 1996-1999

CHAOS-CONSTRUCTION. THE FORMAL AND THE SENSORY IN LYGIA PAPE'S FILMS¹

IVANA BENTES

During the 1960s and 70s, in visual arts circles and beyond, film emerged as a privileged locus for the invention of languages and experimentation, prompting dialogue across different media. Highly visible in the context of contemporary art, the “film effect”² made a dramatic impact in terms of both concept and process in a number of different fields. It marked a major turning point, or even a breakthrough, in the world context (artists’ film, expanded cinema, experimental film, etc.) as well as on the Brazilian cultural scene (Cinema Novo, Cinema Marginal, super-8 movies etc.). With its figures of speech, kineticism, montage procedures, incorporation of time and duration into spatiality in the visual arts, and its artisanal-industrial process, film was inscribed in the discussion of a peripheral or offbeat modernity, as experimenters and conceptualizers in different disciplines pursued a *linguagem-Brasil*, i.e. a specifically Brazilian language.³

Lygia Pape’s interest and intensive involvement in film may be seen as a structural aspect of her oeuvre rather than an intermittent or sidelined feature. It pervaded her conceptual experiments with new processes as a multimedia artist. For Pape and the Neo-Concrete group of Rio de Janeiro (in particular Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark), the issue was the expansion of the poetic space of the fine arts toward a temporal poetics, one of “becoming” and of the body, or as Oiticica put it, “from picture toward an environmental structure.”⁴ In this way, the process was stressed to the detriment of the work itself—since “conceptual aspects ought to be subordinated to the live thing.”⁵

In Oiticica’s words, “there is no such thing as ‘experimental art,’ just *the experimental*, which assumes not only the notions of modernity and avant-garde, but also a radical transformation in the field of current value-concepts; it is something that poses

changes in context-behavior.”⁶ It is in this context of chaos-construction that Pape’s experience with film takes place, albeit informed by her more far-reaching concerns during a period of extraordinary effervescence in terms of aesthetic, cultural, and social trials and manifestos, conceptualizations, and propositions. In Brazil, this meant the Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements, a reinterpretation of creative “cannibalism,” *Tropicalismo*, slapstick comedy, Cinema Novo, Cinema Marginal, the novelty of television, etc.

Neo-Concretism emerged, writes Ronaldo Brito, as a “series of lab experiments” that raised “the most advanced and groundbreaking issues of the period,” including the avoidance of a “confrontation with the market.”⁷ Neo-Concrete artists broke away from the rationalism, formalism, and scientism of Brazil’s Concrete thought in search of “expression.” “Neo-Concretism represented both the apex of Constructive thought in Brazil and its blast.”⁸ It referenced the art critic Mário Pedrosa, who defined art as the “experimental exercise of freedom”; Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, Existentialism, and many other theoretical and aesthetic arsenals mobilized in opposition to Gestalt theory, Charles Pierce’s semiotics, Norbert Wiener’s definition of information, and even “Concrete reductionism” and geometric language.

Whereas the Concrete sought to intervene in the core of industrial production with new cybernetic conceptions of social relations, foregrounding the cradles of mass-media and mass-culture—design, visual communication, and signage in line with Brazil’s economic development project—the Neo-Concrete looked to chaos-construction, marginalization, *linguagem-Brasil* and anonymous creators; to process, rather than product. The difference between São Paulo’s Concrete movement and

Rio de Janeiro’s Neo-Concrete movement may be summarized in the words of a provocative essay by Aracy Amaral:

In São Paulo, sculptors were doing sculpture and painters confined themselves to the two-dimensionality of the picture, whereas in Rio people like Lygia Clark carried out research, going from painting to relief; from relief to non-object; from there to her *trepantes* [climbers] and on to tactile-body experiences, opening out into non-art, self-expression, and the artist’s totalizing integration with her surrounding reality. One could describe the same trajectory in the oeuvre of Oiticica or Lygia Pape years later: this opening out to their surroundings, from object to body, and thence to a relationship with the other, and to film (Pape), or to labyrinths and then the spoken word, the written word, and the register (Oiticica).⁹

In the footsteps of Pedrosa, Pape took a similar evolutionary line: the constructive project in Brazilian art. The turn to Neo-Constructivism, however, ultimately prioritized “expression” rather than “product,” unrestricted investigation, aesthetic research, spatial insertion, and mobility, and a relationship with the environment.

It should be noted that Neo-Concretism was also closely aligned with ideas related to Oswald de Andrade’s notion of intellectual “anthropophagy” (cannibalism), which provided a glimpse of a Brazilian facet in the global context. This cannibalism, revisited in the age of technical reproducibility, could be viewed as a postulate to parody the films of that period, and led to certain procedures that we shall see in some of Pape’s films, as well as being present in Cinema Novo and the experimental film of the 1960s and 70s.

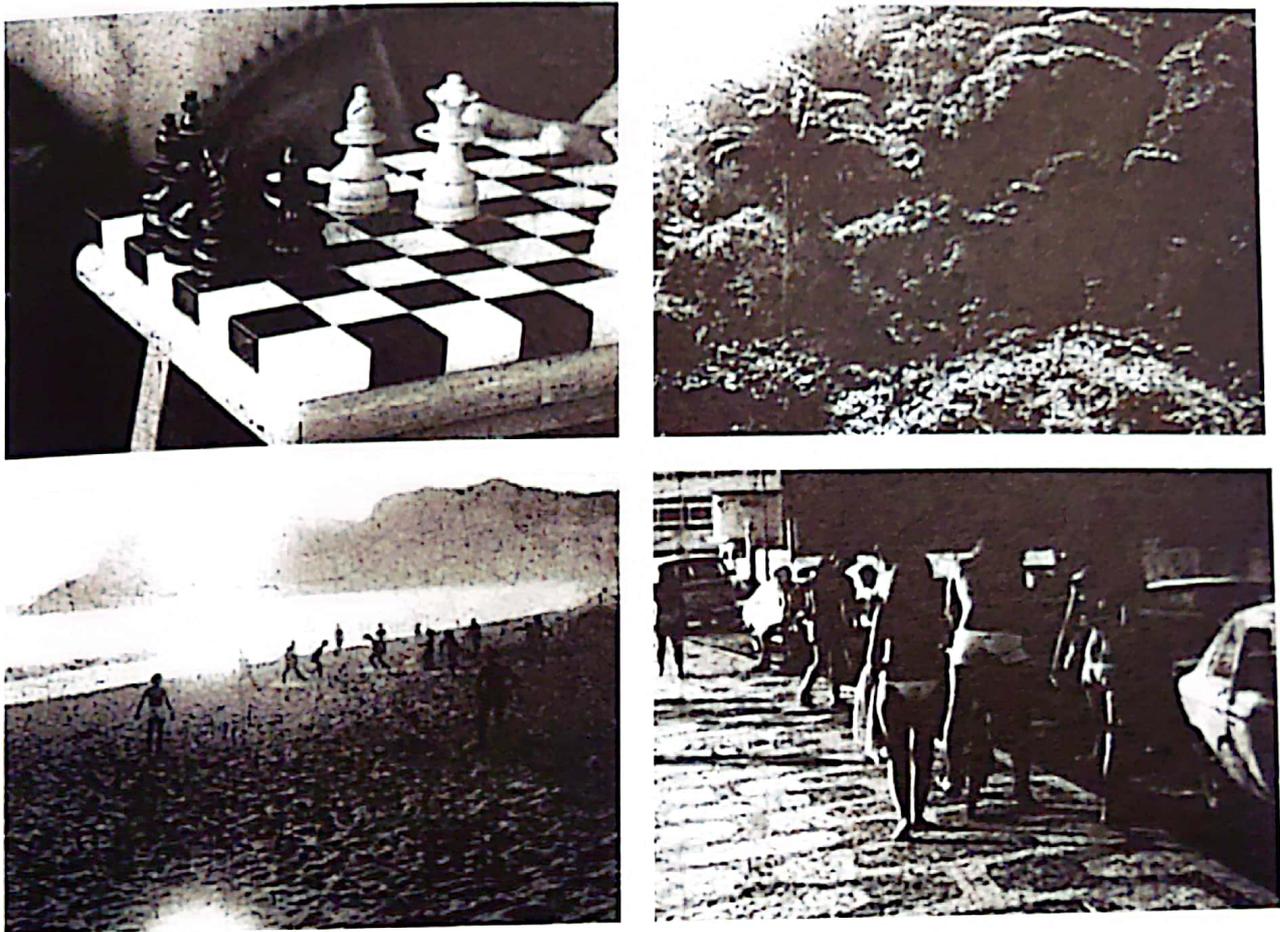


fig. 1. Film stills of *Catiti-Catiti, na terra dos Brasis*, 1978

Through the use of wide-angle sequences, travelling shots, montage, and manipulation of time and space, the motion pictures (and, later, television and video) renovated literary-style narrative, inventing new syntaxes and an extremely elaborate audiovisual approach, adopting procedures such as carnivalization, parody, allegory, meta-language, fusion, collage, polyphony, point-of-view shots, shock, and a new relationship with the viewer. Pape was also to adopt “chaos-construction” as a key feature of her cinematic proposals and experiments. Among her films, which cannot be dissociated from the rest of her oeuvre, I would highlight certain concept-films or proposition-films, such as *Catiti-Catiti*, *Eat me*, *Our*

Parents, and *La nouvelle création*, all of which function as a conceptual collage expressing issues key to Pape as well as to an entire generation.

In this respect, *Catiti-Catiti* or *Um xadrez de palmeiras* (1974) is almost a film-manifesto containing Pape’s ideas—a hot fusion of Tupinambá symbolism, cannibalistic ingestion, and Brazilian romanticism and modernism, with allusions to historical vanguards and a view of the tropical landscape as the conceptual character that provides the structure for this imaginary. The film builds up a fabric of signs: mountains and palm trees in a Tarsila do Amaral painting; a scene of Marcel Duchamp playing chess [fig. 1]; a plastic image of a

blue sea; scenes of young men and women on the sands of Ipanema Beach, and a parodied, heavily Portuguese-accented voiceover declaiming foundational texts from the Luso-African-tropical tradition: the epic poem *The Lusiads* by Luís Vaz de Camões; the letter written by Portuguese navigator Pero Vaz de Caminha describing the beauties and charms of the newly discovered land (Cagarras Islands, Sugar Loaf mountain, the Pedra da Gávea rock formation) and its people; and the poem *Canção do exílio* by Gonçalves Dias.

The voiceover is full of interjections (literally, “Oh, Jesus, what a beautiful harbour!”) that produce an immediate comic effect.

The film shows the new “Indians” on the shore: young men playing soccer and bikini-clad “girls from Ipanema” flaunting their beautiful bodies and exposing “their pudenda.” Tribal sounds, African and Amerindian drumming, along with the noise of industry, birds and flutes, weave a heterogeneous acoustic fabric. *Catiti-Catiti* includes in the same mesh advertising images and urban signage such as a Shell gas-station logo, and defines the women strolling along the beach as “objects of seduction.” The cannibalistic principle of cultural ingestion is put to work in a montage that chews up and swallows everything to create a cinematographic synthesis out of affirmation, parody, and diluted signs of “Brazilianness.” The film is a comic updated version of Brazil’s foundational myth, based on the “harmonious” blending of three races: native Amerindian, Portuguese white and African black. It features a cannibal aborigine, a Portuguese individual wearing the shirt of the Vasco da Gama soccer team, and a black man sporting a criminal’s mask holding a threatening piece of brick [fig. 2].

In addition to presenting Brazil as a tropical paradise and exportable product with its own jingoistic and “good-times” clichés,



fig. 2. Film still of *Catiti-Catiti, na terra dos Brasis*, 1978

its myth of “harmonious” interracial fellowship, and the triumphalist discourse of the military dictatorship itself, Pape introduces an entire range of political issues. One image features newspaper headlines from *Jornal do Brasil* reporting Institutional Act No. 5 (aka AI-5), which in 1968 further restricted democratic rights during the military dictatorship installed in Brazil in 1964.

Another reference to de Andrade’s “anthropophagic” principle of cultural ingestion ends the film: watermelons, pineapples, bananas and tropical fruits are parodically and literally devoured. Food and fruit are smeared on the faces of characters who peel off the skins with their mouths. Grossness, disgust, “binge-eating”... Is what Oiticica referred to as “Brazil-diarrhea” rendering everything the same? The transition from anthropophagy—a sophisticated and modernist form of *tropicalista* consumption—to what we might call “autophagy,” or the cannibalism of the weak eating themselves and each other, is a recurring theme in the anthropophagic trend of the 1970s (for example, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s film *Macunaíma*, or Oiticica’s *Brasil diarreia*): anthropophagy as entropy and consumerism, remedy and poison.

By describing *Catiti-Catiti* as a postulate film, I am underscoring the importance of Tupinambá symbolism and anthropophagic philosophy in Pape's work and ideas. Cannibal ontology was to play an important role as experimental Brazilian art blended the most "primitive" and avant-garde modernist issues in a "developing" country with profound social inequalities and an urgent here-and-now. In 1980, Pape came back to the subject in her Master's dissertation for the philosophy course at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro under the title of *Catiti-Catiti, na terra dos Brasís*, and in the dialogue between film and the plastic arts in Pape's works, we find Tupinambá symbolism and anthropophagic processes in various non-film works, including *Memória tupinambá* (Tupinambá Memory, 1999) *Pássaro mítico tupinambá* (Tupinambá Mythical Bird), *Manto tupinambá*, *Bus Stop* (1999), *Banquete* (Tupinambá Banquet). These are works of great sensory and visual impact that employ symbols such as the colour red, plumage, cockroaches, plastic human breasts in different media (installation, poetry, photography) to suggest heavy political undertones (the massacre of the Amerindians, anthropophagy, autophagy, bloodbath).¹⁰ The point here is the power of synthesis, allusion, blending, montage, and remixing, in which the same idea traverses different supports and transubstantiates into colours, sensations, and rhythms to present aesthetics as politics in the sensory-formal shuttling back and forth between the plastic arts and film.

The same type of procedure, the monumentalization and deconstruction observed in the various objects and environments named *Manto tupinambá*, the magnificence of the mantle and violence permeated with symbolism, are to be found in a different register and tone in the film *Our Parents* (1974), in which

the imaginary constructed around Brazilian natives is deconstructed and reconstructed from postcard images of Amerindians found at newsstands or in mass-circulation magazines at the time. Images that were initially threatening, exotic, or even erotic—Amerindian warriors, Botocudo aborigines, bare-breasted native girls—are gradually replaced with images that take us close to our forebears (for example, the picture of a native man playing with his child, sporting highly sophisticated ornaments and facial and body paint), featuring the integration of native long-houses with the environment, and the intimate relationship of the natives' bodies with domesticated animals or pets. Feelings of estrangement and identification arise from the way in which the postcards are displayed. The travelling camera lingers on still images, which are literally clichés that come to life and gain meaning from montage and the soundtrack of tribal background noises.

Believing that "poetic ideas are better expressed in concrete images than in commentaries," Pape goes on [visually] to cite the haiku poet Matsuo Basho and Zen philosophy. This type of plastic and audiovisual thought also informs her first film, *La nouvelle création* (1967), which was awarded a prize at the Montreal Film Festival. In this her shortest film, lasting only fifty seconds and based on Antoine de Sainte-Exupéry's book *Terre des Hommes* (Wind, Sand and Stars),¹¹ Pape featured a slow-moving cosmonaut floating in the vastness of outer space, connected to his craft by a tenuous umbilical cord. Used with NASA's permission, the image of the astronaut just starting out on his spatial mission was abruptly and sharply mounted on a blood-red screen, with a crying child as soundtrack: two cosmoses, two worlds before and after the violent "cut-off" that dislodges us from the

comfort of the womb and disconnects us from our familiar and nourishing “home,” “spacecraft,” or “earth” to eject us out into the infinite space of new worlds. Through the precise use of montage and chemical toning effects to flood the image with bloody colour, Pape creates a film-poem expressing “new creation” and “new man,” and refers us to cosmic ecology and perception. This experience of “birth” or connection/rupture is also seen in *O ovo*.

The idea of Pape’s film-poems was to echo Concrete poetry’s proposals for non-verbal communication. Her 1958 manifesto *Plano-piloto para poesia concreta* (Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry) expresses her filmic and plastic poetics. While Concrete poetry sought to integrate sound, visuality, and meaning in “verbivocovisual”¹² synthesis, to use James Joyce’s neologism, Pape proposed “visual poems,”¹³ “anti-films” or ongoing films. This research was directly related to her proposal for her Object-Poems, (1957) and *Poemas-xilografuras* (Woodcut-Poems, 1960) suppressing words to achieve a pure visual language.¹⁴ In this respect, Pape’s twenty-second vignette for Rio de Janeiro’s Cinemateca do Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) is a small masterpiece, in which each syllable of the Portuguese word CI-NE-MA-TE-CA (Film Library) is placed beside a film still until reaching the word/logo “MAM,” which is combined with sound to become the “Mammmmm” of cattle lowing taken from the Nelson Pereira dos Santos film *Vidas secas* (Barren Lives, 1964). Word and logo become literally an audiovisual structure, a living design that winks, moves and “moos.”

Pape’s concepts, procedures, and different languages traverse and cross-fertilize each other. She designed title art and posters for ten or more Cinema Novo films, including dos Santos’s *Vidas secas* and *Mandacarú vermelho* (Red Mandacaru, 1961); *Deus e o diabo*

na terra do sol (Black God, White Devil, 1964) directed by Glauber Rocha; Joaquim Pedro de Andrade’s *O padre e a moça* (The Priest and the Girl, 1965); *O desafio* (The Challenge, 1965) by Paulo César Saraceni; Leon Hirszman’s *A falecida* (The Deceased, 1965), and Walter Lima Junior’s *Menino de engenho* (Plantation Boy, 1965). These were innovative or avant-garde films in terms of their subjects, characters, aesthetics (flared lighting, handheld cameras, shock montage) and production procedures, and they established Brazilian modern film. The experience that Pape gained as a printmaker in the remarkable series of woodcuts on Japanese rice paper *Tecelares* (Weavers, 1955) was applied to her poster for *Mandacarú vermelho*, with its “crumbling” lettering [fig. 3]:

For *Mandacarú vermelho* (the most trying) I carved alphabets on woodblocks and printed all the title art letter by letter on exquisite Japanese paper that let the texture of the wood emerge, as in the string-bound *cordel* booklets of northeastern Brazil.¹⁵

Engraving themes reappear in the film *O guarda chuva vermelho* (1971) based on the dramatic expressionist prints of Oswaldo Goeldi that influenced the chiaroscuro photography of Cinema Novo films such as *Arraial do Cabo* (1960) by Paulo César Saraceni. Pape’s camera roams the streets to show Goeldi’s characters and landscapes, including prostitutes, beggars, stray cats, creatures of the night, men at work, fishermen, street markets, fairs, and the repeated fish images that so fascinated the printmaker: fish on hooks, fish in nets, huge chunks of dead fish, glassy-eyed fish staring back at us. The camera explores the texture of these prints (predominantly black with touches of red) and the paths of the drawings to create a new realm within two-dimensional

space, animating scenes with camera movements that “cinematize” the prints. Pape also uses narrations from Manuel Bandeira—the poems *Vou-me embora pra Paságarda* (I’m off to Paságarda) and *Balada das três mulheres do sabonete Araxá* (Ballad of the Three Araxá Soap Women)—and Oiticica’s recital of Murilo Mendes’ poem *Homenagem a Oswaldo Goeldi* (Homage to Oswaldo Goeldi): “The fish’s almost human eyeing / It’s time for dying.” The highly lyrical music of Heitor Villa-Lobos provides a counterpoint to the plastic and poetic rudeness, violence, and solitude of the images, attaining an extraordinary multimedia result.

Throughout her career, Pape repeatedly posed a key Constructivist question: how can one find a formal solution for political, ecological, and social themes without instrumentalizing them? How to combine constructive rigour and sensuality? One of her films that presents a rigorous response to this question is *Eat me* (1975), a project that also included two installations. In this film, and in the work as a whole, we also find one of her recurring themes: the body-consumption-art relationship. *Eat me* is a “structural” film in the sense proposed by P. Adams Sitney: “a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified,” and where “it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film.”¹⁶ The predominant characteristics of the structural film include the relationship between form and structure, a fixed camera position, and the flicker effect. In the case of *Eat me*, we are treated to a luminous pulsation produced by alternating shots of mouths shown in extreme close-up. The film uses the “metric cinema” principles proposed by Peter Kubelka, which preceded structural cinema and were based on a rhythm determined by projecting static images and light pulses. What takes place between one static image and another produ-

ces a pulsation effect. In a piece she wrote for the *Cinema Marginal* exhibition, Pape noted:

The film was edited mathematically, in that sections were cut by the meter, based on the following principle: I divided the film into two parts, then divided each half in two again, and so on, until I obtained a pulsation that grows into a crescendo up until the end. Images were cut without aiming for a description of the moment—a number alone (one meter) determined the cut.¹⁷

Following the title, shown against a red background, we see extreme close-ups of male mouths (the artist Artur Barrio and Claudio Sampaio) filmed by a fixed camera at an increasingly fast and “obscene” pace while they ingest and excrete a coloured stone. These alternate with a female mouth ingesting and expelling a sausage covered with ketchup, also eroticized. Close-ups of mouths—with a black moustache, white teeth, saliva, tongue, red lips—are confounded with other sensory and sexual organs—eyes, vagina, and anus—arousing attraction and repulsion. These images are accompanied by the phrase “gluttony or lust?” spoken in German, English, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish. The two mortal sins, insatiable oral and sexual desire, letting oneself be ruled by passion, relate eroticism to consumerism; ironically, at the climax of the excitement produced by the ever-faster paced montage, the sensual/sexual mouths are interrupted in their movements of swallowing and expelling by an advertisement for *Conchas Cook* kitchen ladles.

The ambiguity of the images, and their dual affirmation and criticism of bodily excesses and pleasures, the mouth-image that consumes and is consumed, points to the impasse of consumption-art. At a time when ad-

vertising, design and the “culture industry” were gaining visibility in the Brazilian context, the question may be summarized by Oiticica’s question: “Does one take an objective position by shunning consumption? Of course not. This would be alienating oneself, pursuing an ideal or *extra* [external] solution—it’s better to consume consumption as part of this language.”¹⁸

Pape further explores the issue of consumption (of art, the body, sexuality, women, feminism), its ambiguity and discomfort, by inserting new elements in the installation *Eat me: a gula ou a luxúria?* (1975), which derived from the film. At the exhibition, her feminine *objetos de sedução* (objects of seduction)—lipstick, hair, false eyelashes—were sold in bags at a street vendor’s stall that was also offering feminist writings. Is everything consumable? From de Andrade’s powerful anthropophagy to *Brasil diarreia*, with its consumption and dilution as described by Oiticica, cure may become poison and vice versa. *Objetos de sedução* also appear in *Our Parents* (whose narrative parody associates images of native Amerindians with new urban “tribes”—girls from Ipanema showing off their bodies): newsstands sell postcards with pictures of naked Amerindian girls next to pin-ups and tourist images of the tropics—again, “antropophagic” capitalism and consumption.¹⁹

Among Pape’s “structural” films we may include *Sedução III* (Seduction III, 1999), *Mayakovsky* (2000), and *Ballet neoconcreto* (Neo-Concrete Ballet, 2000). These “form-films” foreground specific issues: camera positioning and manipulated frame-speeds in *Sedução III*, “ad-form” or agit-prop in *Mayakovsky*, and living geometry in *Ballet neoconcreto*.

The video *Sedução III* is a short essay on motion, acceleration, and constructivist space. The footage, shot from a high angle with a fixed camera, shows passengers disembark-



fig. 4. Film still of *Sedução III*, 1999

ing from Rio-Niteroi ferryboats. Pape turns a documentary into a conceptual film in which the coming and going of passengers yields an increasingly undifferentiated flux. Images begin at a normal speed, but then we realize that the people “boarding” the ferries are moving backwards. Later, the flow of images is reversed and frames are shown upside down [fig. 4]. The accelerated images filmed from above, and the paths taken by passengers entering and leaving the frame, create “abstract” shapes: a triangle and centrifugal/centripetal flows that “draw” people in or “expel” them from the frames. The images accelerate, passengers become non-human elements: ants, insects, or sheer flow. The image becomes a force field, a flux of energy. Pape materializes and lends visibility to these “magnetized spaces,” a concept that pervades several of her works and films, especially the “poetic records” of urban territories and areas, crowds at fairs, street markets, squares, or favelas analysed as points of concentration and dissipation of energy.

The very short *Mayakovsky* is another visual poem. Alexander Rodchenko’s profile portrait of Vladimir Mayakovsky appears on a yellow square. Emanating from the poet’s mouth are two phrases *De rua em rua* and *No automóvel*—borrowed from the titles of his poems “From Street to Street” and “In the

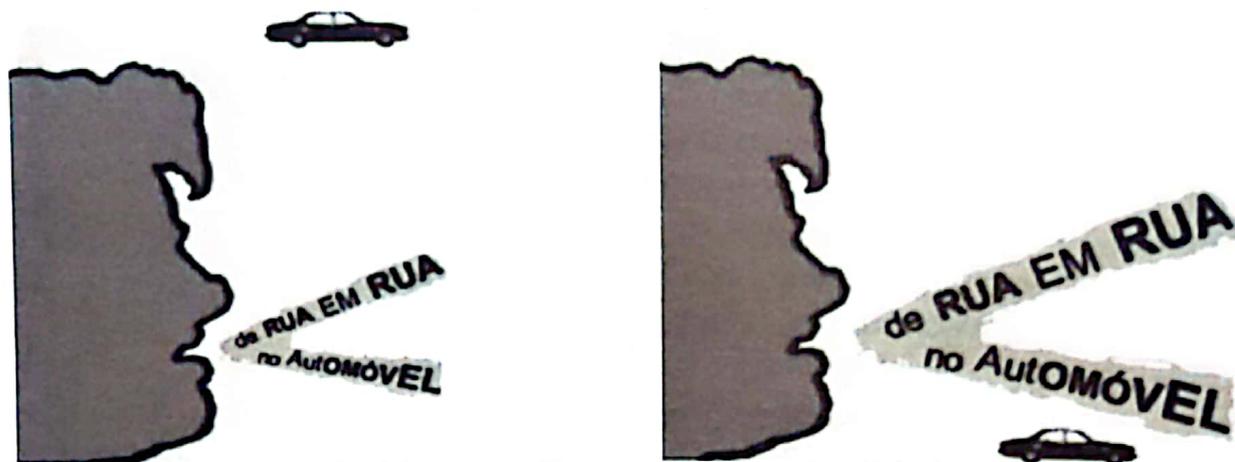


fig. 5. Film stills of *Mayakovsky, a viagem*, 1999

Automobile”—while small cars travel along the edge of the frame. As Concrete poetry, animated poster, agit-prop and design, this small work summarizes some of the transversal fields in Pape’s poetics. It was done for the São Paulo *Eletromídia* project, shown on the streets of several cities in Brazil [fig. 5].

Lastly, among the form-films, *Ballet neoconcreto* is a montage of Pape’s 1958 collaboration with the poet Reynaldo Jardim, in which they used geometrical shapes freed from their support and moved by professional dancers.²⁰ In the drama of these forms, we see cylinders, cobblestones and colourful cubes illuminated by light beams shifting around and “dancing” in a totally black space. Lateral, frontal, and diagonal movements are so strict and metrical that it is hard to believe the fluid and playful movements of the actors/performers hidden inside the pieces: live beings acting as engines for forms; the living and the artisanal in synergy with the formal and the structural. The film record of the work as seen today sparks references to a computer-graphics sequence.

In her filmmaking, Pape was also to develop one of her most unusual concepts, which had ramifications in different fields: the

“magnetized spaces”²¹ featured in films such as *O homem e sua bainha* (Man and his Sheath, 1968), *Favela da Maré* (1972), *Carnival in Rio* (1974) and *Espaços imantados* (1968–2002). These films focus on the informal side of the city and its anonymous “creative artists.” Pape makes an observation-record of interventions in fairs, squares and street markets—commonplace spaces invested with energy by peddlers, hawkers, street artistes, and the urban “precarious.” [fig. 6]

This is summarized in the short *Espaços imantados*, which shows small crowds gathering around goods and handicrafts—rolls of tobacco, hammocks, furniture, clothes, cheese, sun-dried meat, flour, tripe—and myriad other activities; informal street photographers with their old wooden box cameras on tripods; photos shown in plastic binoculars or monocular devices; spaces within spaces such as the Caruaru fair in northeastern Brazil and “transplanted spaces” like the São Cristóvão market in Rio de Janeiro, which is a microcosm of the Northeast of Brazil. Instead of the hyped up “folkloric” vision of mass culture, Pape perceives “mental spaces” and poetics in the precariousness of everyday life.



fig. 6. Film stills of *Espaços imantados*, 1968

Thus, in *Favela da Maré*,²² she takes a documentary journey through the mobile maze of homes, wooden walkways, shacks on stilts, and the precarious architecture of the favela. This “chaos-construction” is reorganized overnight to meet the needs of its users. Habitable space is modulated (living rooms become bedrooms, collective spaces become private ones), and architecture is dismantled and reassembled in a unique show of dynamism. In this film, the footage of the labyrinthine favela is screened back to front, with people coming backwards into the frame (as in *Sedução III*). In this way, through the camera, we experience the continuous flow of a living space that has no inside or outside, like the Möbius strip that

so fascinated Pape.²³ Like Oiticica, she finds “solutions” in these public housing spaces and in the inventive aesthetics of precariousness, which transform the most hostile forces into the potential for creativity. “In adversity, we live,” Oiticica writes in his *Parangolé/Capa12*.

Pape seeks to lend visibility and materiality to these spaces charged with potentialities, and a spatial eroticism to the agglomerations, chance encounters, gatherings, short-term fragile alliances, and micro-communities that convene and fall apart with urban fluidity. Her term “Magnetization” suggests a principle of organization amid chaos, an “attractor” that creates provisional and intense spaces, lived urban experiences, and temporalities in depo-

tentialized and anonymous urban space: the life of the streets.

In her *Carnival in Rio* (1974), another urban experience—street carnival as a folk manifestation in downtown Rio de Janeiro—is fluently and freely recorded as the camera-eye travels Avenida Rio Branco as if it were a finger pointing to the real. “Look, see!”, the camera seems to say while informally tracking the spontaneous performances and anonymous inventions of carnival revellers. The title art features tropical fruit: pineapples, oranges, and lemons, forming a triangle. Filmed images show black children dancing the samba, carnival revellers beating old cans, men dressed up as ballerinas in wigs and nightshirts, street vendors, locals in Native American costumes, including a handsome Apache, a character from the TV show *Sesame Street*, a *candomblé* group,²⁴ and capoeira performances, swaying girls in bikinis, very un-luxurious floats, masked and painted faces, all kinds of bodies and costumes parading along the streets: children, senior citizens, men, women, young people, toothless folks, humble and glamorous people, youthful bodies and “worn-out” bodies, “Miss Poverty” and the “Diplomat of Destitution,” with Amerindians, old blacks, whites, and hawkers mingling in their wake. Pape’s camera drifts among them; the film is not edited, so that the scenes flow past as they were shot, as raw material in which the viewer’s eye is free to observe this street carnival parade lacking in pomp and circumstance.

Carnival in Rio is an “anti-cliché” of carnival as tourist spectacle, or carnival as we know it today. It shows an “anti-carnival” that was still holding out on the streets, on its way to disappearing; an event in which unusual characters celebrating alone or gathered into blocs occupy the public space. At the end of the film, there is an eye-catching image of a car

full of armed police coming onto the scene, as part of the panorama of 1974: the institution of “anti-carnival” was a reaction to the military dictatorship and its control of the masses.²⁵ In this film, Pape shows a carnival, both merry and melancholy, taking place in urban spaces that may shift back and forth from “magnetization” to de-potentialization.

Also dated 1974, *Wampirou* features a decadent pop vampire (a recurring character in 1970s experimental cinema)²⁶ roaming the city. The film starts on a sunny day with the black-and-red cloaked vampire sneaking across the rock formation of Rio’s Arpoador Beach, looking extremely out of place. The vampire (played by the artist Antonio Manuel) drinks his own blood, drawn from his wrist with a syringe, and joins in a Last Supper parody in which he attempts to vampirize other characters (Pape herself, the poet Waly Salomão and the artist Lygia Clark). The mood is one of comedy, pastiche, irony, and farce. Pape’s depotentialized, disillusioned vampire (named Wamp) roams the city by day, or drinks Coca-Cola, watches TV cartoons, sleeps on floral patterned sheets, has erotic dreams about other vampires, and listens to Jimmy Hendrix. Pape literally identifies Wamp with an artist (Manuel) who is in a relationship of opposition-complementarity with the man who sucks his blood/exploits him: an evil-looking character (art dealer Jackson Ribeiro) who steals Wamp’s cape and plastic false teeth—his only signs of vampirism—from a safe. The references to vampirism among artists, and autophagy (the vampire drinking his own blood) culminate with the vampirization of the vampire-artist by the art dealer. At the end of the film there are two ironic and critical captions: “Blood is Life. Donate Blood,” written in red lettering, and “These films are available for sale at the reception desk in this

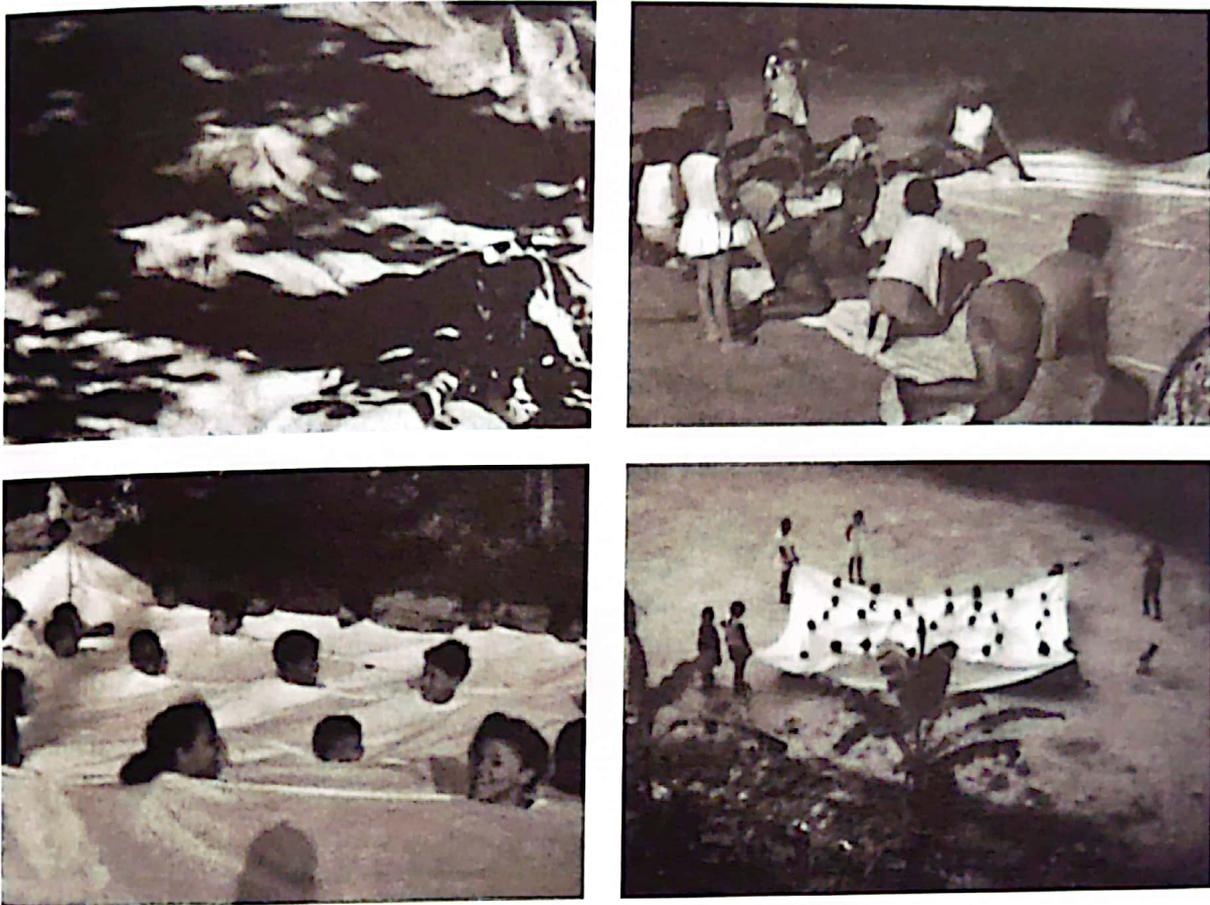


Fig. 7. Film stills of *Divisor*, 1967

gallery.” The whole set of vampiric relationships that exist in the art market, and amongst professional artists in the the artistic milieu, is ironized in this anarchic and informal film shot among friends.

The status of the “artist,” or “Who can be a creative artist?,” as Oiticica asks, is an equally important issue for Pape, who analyzes and discusses the creative processes taking place outside institutions, galleries or museums as unique, open-ended and ongoing collaborations that take place in all social strata, and all different media. Here, the “artist” is seen not as an exception, but as a force able to “magnetize” and to trigger generalized creative processes and collaborative intelligence.

In many of her films, and in Pape’s work in general, the city of Rio de Janeiro appears as a “sensory” space in opposition and complementary to Brasilia—the conceptual and constructive city par excellence that inspired many of the artist’s reflections as well as an unpublished screenplay. Chaos-construction provides the structuring principle even for Pape’s films that are poetic records of her works, such as *Trio do embalo maluco* (1967) or *Divisor* (1967). These works, shown in public spaces, focus on the idea of a scene-performance in which each element (landscape, characters, colours, natural light) is unique. In the former, three bare-chested male samba dancers (Nildo da Mangueira, Santa Tereza, and Hélio Oiticica)

beating tambourines each burst out from inside an “egg” (three wooden cubes covered with thin red, white, and blue plastic) onto the monumental background of an open-air quarry. The work is a playful and violent evocation of birth, eruption, and existence, the “hatching” of the egg disrupting the form, in which the participant is himself membrane and interface between interior and exterior.

The record of *Divisor* (1967) is surprising too, in terms of both the potency of the work and its visual and artistic elements. The film *Divisor* (1967) conveys the freshness of Pape’s first experiment with the work. Children from a favela near the street where she lived are invited to stick their heads through holes ripped in a huge piece of white fabric to form a single body that is at the same time amorphous, taking on a new shape with each movement, and structured, due to the regularity of the rips or tears [fig. 7]. *Divisor* is a device that joins and separates, creating a crowd-monster with dozens of heads—a morphous-amorphous singular and collective creature, a membrane and interface connecting inner and outer. The film explores the undulations of the fabric, which appear like a vast sea of floating heads, the sensuality of movements, the depressions in the fabric forming mountains and valleys, exposing unique faces and smiles. Emerging from the images is the startling and fascinating subject-object, singular-collective, each and everyone, singularity and multitude, film and experience that Constructivist film, the Russian vanguards, Cinema Novo, experimental cinema, and today’s contemporary art, have all sought to constitute.

Pape’s short conceptual and structural films, film-poems, poetic documentaries, and records of works echo the internal issues addressed in her oeuvre as a whole (cannibalism and consumerism, vibrant bodies, anti-film,

magnetized spaces) and cover the issues common to her experimental work on super-8 and Cinema Novo, as well as Cinema Marginal. She herself is situated both inside and outside in terms of her relationship with the groups and movements of filmmakers with which she was involved, or which she followed in her own unique way. Never totally empathizing with any of the differing film groups, she remained autonomous, “appropriating” and making her own the experiments of Cinema Novo and Cinema Marginal. In this respect, two of her own notes are informative:

I used to watch all the Cinema Novo rough cuts at the old Líder [film lab] in the 1960s and 70s. It was sheer visuality—bright, free-flowing images—and in my imagination I built chiaroscuro structures like paintings. I was rarely interested in viewing the finished films.²⁷

Being “marginal” —being on the sidelines of society— is still a bourgeois concept. The cinema in which I have been involved is not marginal in this sense. Cinema Marginal was a revolutionary act of invention, a new reality, the world as change, error as adventure, and discovery of freedom: films lasting ten or twenty seconds—anti-films.²⁸

There were films that dialogued with literary modernism, Concrete poetry, visual arts, musical movements, and that blasted old canons to constitute a new Brazilian audiovisual imaginary converging with innovation in the arts and music. We can, for example, trace an obvious relationship between the formal proposals of the Concrete and Neo-Concrete movements in Brazil and the aesthetics of Glauber Rocha’s *O pátio*, his first film (a short): formalism and nature, construction and chaos: a patio or chess

board on which characters move about unnaturally. "Concrete music," says the title art, against the background of a disorderly and exuberant natural setting. One can also see links with Pape's works in the discussion on light and chiaroscuro in Saraceni's short *Arraial do Cabo*, photographed by the painter Mário Carneiro, which also uses Goeldi prints in the opening sequences.²⁹ Clearly there was a field of issues that cut across the different groups and the dialogue between them was intense, critical, and fruitful, with many films screened at Pape's home in the presence of their respective directors, as well as Mário Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, and Hélio Oiticica. Talking of "certain filmmakers who made an impression on me," Pape mentioned, among others:

Nelson Pereira dos Santos, for *Vidas secas*, which would be perfect, were it not for the linear script taking away all its totality. The corresponding book may be opened at any chapter, the story is all there. In the film, a concession is made. You could say it would otherwise have become a Neo-Concrete film, if that can be taken as praise.³⁰

¹ I wish to acknowledge Paula Pape for the information and comments she provided during our conversations and during Lygia Pape Project screenings, and for making available to me Pape's unpublished material (her film scripts, for instance) and other works, in addition to extremely rich research material.

² Philippe Dubois, *Movimentos improváveis. O efeito cinema na arte contemporânea*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2003.

³ Hélio Oiticica, "Brasil diarreira", 1981. In: Glória Ferreira (org.), *Crítica de arte no Brasil: Temáticas contemporâneas*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte, 2006, p. 278.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

⁷ Ronaldo Brito, "As ideologias construtivas no ambiente cultural brasileiro." In: Glória Ferreira, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Aracy Amaral, "Duas linhas de contribuição: concretos em São Paulo/neoconcretos no Rio," 1977. In: Glória Ferreira, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

¹⁰ There are two disturbing objects in *Memória tupinambá*: a ball covered with red feathers from which a bleeding foot protrudes (leftovers from ingestion, perhaps?) and a ball covered with plastic cockroaches (both balls 50 cm in diameter). In *Pássaro mítico tupinambá*, a photo of a *guará* (a red bird sacred in aboriginal mythology) is set beside a poem about "soft blood-red feathers." In the various versions of *Manto tupinambá*, red is the predominant colour of objects and environments, as in the all-red room of the 1996 version. The Tupinambá Mantle also becomes a huge red cloud hovering over the landscape of Rio de Janeiro, and "magnetizing" the area with the presence/absence of indigenous peoples expelled from their territories. Pape herself is wearing a Tupinambá mantle in the photomontage *Bus Stop*. In *Mostra do Redescobrimento* (Rediscovery Exhibition, 2000), there was a monumental version of the mantle with 200 balls covered in red feathers attached to a huge 64 square-meter fishnet. This artistic and political operation also features in Pape's installations *Banquete tupinambá*, with tables and chairs covered with red feathers and the remains of human breasts, and *Carandiru* (2001), an installation in which Pape created a waterfall of blood to represent the massacre of Carandiru Prison inmates. The installation also featured projections of Hans Staden's prints depicting battles between the native Tupinambá and the Portuguese: massacres in the present, bloodbaths in the past.

¹¹ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Tierra de hombres*. Barcelona: Salamandra, 2000.

¹² See footnote 1 of Paulo Venancio's text in this catalogue, p. 224.

¹³ On this same line of investigation were Pape's *Livro da arquitetura* (1959-60), *Livro do tempo* (1961-63), *Livro da luz/Noite e dia* (Book of

- Light/Night and Day, 1963–76) and other “visual poems,” as well as the boxes that include *Caixa Brasil* (Brazil Box, 1968), containing three locks of hair—blonde, black and brunette, *Caixa caveira q geme* (Groaning Skull Box, 1968), and cases or boxes with live insects such as *Caixa das formigas* (Ants Box, 1967) or *Caixa das baratas* (Cockroaches Box, 1968).
- ¹⁴ The subject is the basis for Pape’s *Livro da criação*, and the film record of this work made in 1968 and 2002, which Pape herself visually narrates to introduce “live” pages (cut, folded, and masked in different shapes and colours) that recreate the world in a Neo-Concrete version of *Genesis*, the book of life. The moment Pape handles these works or they appear on film or in the hands of a participating “reader,” their loose 30 x 30 cm card-pages fold out, going from the two-dimensionality of books to three-dimensional space. The book is narrated as we read/handle it; its narrative is its own structure and materiality.
- ¹⁵ Lygia Pape, *Conversación con Eugênio Puppo e Vera Madda*. In: Puppo and Madda (orgs.), *Cinema marginal e suas fronteiras. Filmes produzidos nas décadas de 60 e 70*. Rio de Janeiro: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2002, n.p. See the translation of Pape’s complete text in this catalogue, pp. 326–329.
- ¹⁶ P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943–1978*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- ¹⁷ Puppo and Madda, op. cit., n.p.
- ¹⁸ Glória Ferreira, op. cit., p. 278.
- ¹⁹ The art-consumption relationship appears in a number of works and writings. Pape’s own commercial work included package design for cookie maker Piraquê. She developed the brand’s visual identity using optical illusion, symmetry, volume, rhythm, geometric principles, and the colour red. Thus she literally and ironically rendered Oswald de Andrade’s proposal in concrete form: “The masses will yet eat the fine cookies that I make,” he wrote, adapting the rigours of constructivism to mass consumption. Daniela Name, who curated the exhibition *Diálogo Concreto—Design e Construtivismo no Brasil*, commented on Pape’s contribution to design at <http://daniname.wordpress.com/tag/lygia-pape/>. Accessed January 2011.
- ²⁰ For *Ballet neoconcreto*, see this catalogue, pp. 161–167.
- ²¹ For *Magnetized Spaces*, see Lygia Pape’s text in this catalogue, p. 285.
- ²² For *Favela da Maré*, see Lygia Pape’s text in this catalogue, pp. 287–289.
- ²³ In a statement to me of January 2011, Paula Pape described Lygia Pape’s teaching work at Universidade Santa Úrsula, where her architecture students studied the semiotics of space by visiting the city’s low-income housing and sites, its favelas, the poor outskirts of the city, its wetland areas, the west side, etc. See Lauro Calvacanti’s text in this catalogue, pp. 293–308.
- ²⁴ One of the Afro-Brazilian religions whose rituals and celebrations are part of Brazilian culture and folklore.
- ²⁵ In the same year, 1974, Arthur Omar was to make his first feature film, *Triste Trópico* (*Sad Tropics*), a radical experiment in which Rio de Janeiro’s street carnival is deconstructed with a non-clichéd reading: the joy, resistance and melancholy of carnival revellers in an endangered world.
- ²⁶ Vampires appear as popular legends in the lyrics of Tropicalismo, as for example in “I wear sunglasses to hide my tears” (lyrics from *Vampiro*, scored by Jorge Mautner), and in films such as the sun-drenched tragedy *Nosferatu do Brasil* (1971) by Ivan Cardoso, in which Torquato Neto strolls along the beach at Copacabana, stopping to bite bikini-clad girls to the sound of the Rolling Stones and Roberto Carlos.
- ²⁷ Puppo and Madda, op. cit., n.p.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.