

BREATH WITH ME, A BREATH OF LIFE:  
CLARICE LISPECTOR & LYGIA CLARK  
Charles Stankieveh

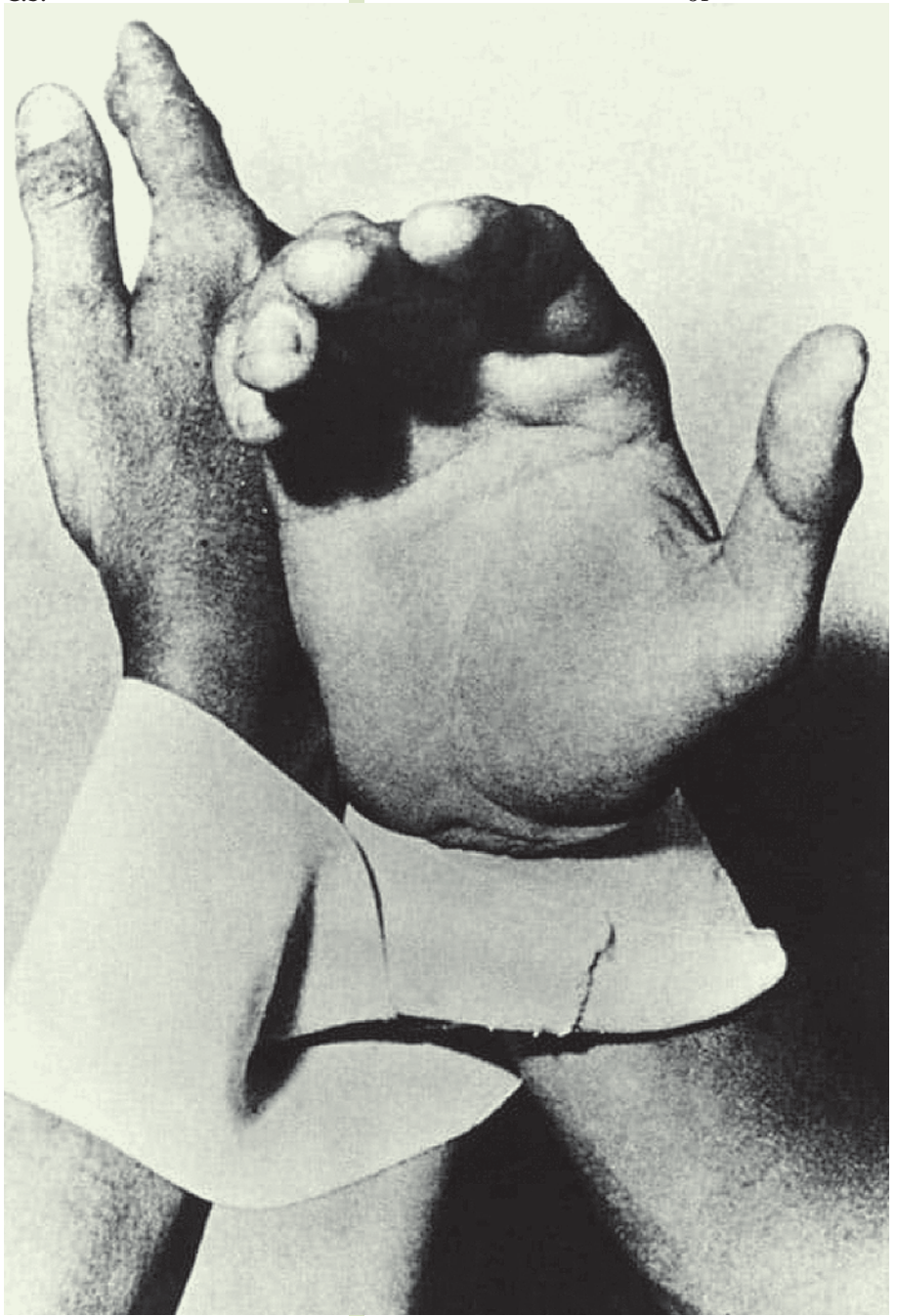
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Both born in 1920, writer Clarice Lispector and artist Lygia Clark produced some of the most radical work of the twentieth century: two bodies of work never touching but entwined like a Möbius loop, their worlds shaped unto themselves yet breathing the same air. Surprisingly very little, almost nothing, has been written focusing on a comparison between Lygia Clark and Clarice Lispector, including a record that sadly lacks a direct engagement or conversation that would have been intensely compelling between the two key feminist figures in Brazilian culture during the middle of the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it was their alternating international sojourns that made them ships passing in the night, but more likely I imagine the intense energy each possessed prohibited them from meeting and spontaneously combusting. Their shared context of course created a common foundational, historical backdrop—growing up, marrying and having children in colonialist Brazil, the trauma of an optimistic nation in the early 1950s sliding into a dictatorship in the following decade, an international zeitgeist of psychedelic counter-culture in the 1960s, and a rise in feminist discourse in the late 60s and early 70s—but a shared exceptional force emanates from their *oeuvres*: a material mysticism as expressed in the recurrent themes of the rapture of the instant, ritualistic celebration of the body, and a strong desire for the participation of the addressee in their work. While they both crafted numinous themes uniquely in their own fields, the result is a *sympathetic resonance*, a resonance best experienced by meditating on the rhythm of *breathing*.<sup>3</sup>

Both forging a voice in their male dominated disciplines—Lispector’s texts defining an *écriture féminine* as promoted by Hélène Cixous, Clark inspiring the practice of participatory art (from Relational Aesthetics to Art Therapy)—one could connect these two Brazilians to a longer history of spiritual women writers. Most importantly, we can go back to the earliest writings attributed to women, who were themselves, like Lispector and Clark, practicing a visionary rhetoric as priestesses, poets and mystics. Enheduanna, a priestess from ancient Mesopotamia (who wrote in the cuneiform language that enchanted Lispector) is considered history’s first known author, positioned right at the birth of the written word.<sup>4</sup> After the exceptional celebration of Sappho’s fragmented collection, Western culture muted its acknowledgment of female voices only to be marginally resurrected by 13th century Christian mystics. Within this lineage we would include

(far from exhaustively) Mary Oigenes, Marguerite Porete, Marguerite d’Oingt, Catherine of Siena, and Teresa of Ávila.<sup>5</sup> The socio-economic dynamics of the upper class in the 13th century created a surplus of unmarried women that bolstered religious orders such as the *beguines*. Existing in a unique scenario of communal living with sustenance through nursing and the textile industry, some of the *beguines* offered the most important somatic versions of mysticism expressed through a combination of newly appreciated courtly love metaphors, the primacy of participation in the ritual of the Eucharist (the literal eating of Christ’s Body) and erotic ecstasy.<sup>6</sup> One does not desire to entrap Lispector nor Clark within a Western Christian tradition in order to appreciate their work, but rather to acknowledge both women were tapping into a continually flowing underground stream running throughout history—from pagan through monotheistic—of mystical experience grounded in desire, the body and ritual.<sup>7</sup> Such a powerful practice that redeemed the body and the senses from a uniquely celebratory, and feminine, position was of course a challenge to orthodoxy. Marguerite Porete (the most well-known *beguine*) was famously burned at the stake in 1310 for heresy.<sup>8</sup> The persecution also transcended any religious sect. As Silvia Federici points out in *Caliban and the Witch*, the Inquisition trials for heresy “provided the metaphysical and ideological scaffold of the witch-hunt.”<sup>9</sup> Heretic or witch: labels used to suppress women historically, and roles Lispector and Clark inversely embraced. Lispector, who was often called a witch by those who knew her, was personally invited to speak at the *First World Congress of Sorcery* in 1975; Clark was never officially accepted into the professional community of psychoanalysis. Tellingly, both women resisted the reliance on myth for the power in their art, crafting instead a new language, a new experience. Lispector used as the epigraph to *Água Viva* a quote from the artist Michel Seuphor: “There must be a kind of painting totally free of the dependence on the figure—or object—which, like music, illustrates nothing, tells no story, and launches no *myth*”; Clark, in a documentary on her later work titled *O Mundo de Lygia Clark*, states: “There is no more *myth*. This is an art of participation.”<sup>10</sup> Unifying the religious, poetic, and philosophical—all while resisting myth—Lispector and Clark establish a new language of the mystical through their meditation on the everyday.

The scope of literary styles in Lispector’s *oeuvre* ranges from newspaper



Lygia Clark, *Hand Dialogue*, 1966.  
Photo by unknown.  
Courtesy of "The World of Lygia  
Clark" Cultural Association

writing (*crônica*) to short stories, experimental novels to children's stories. Within this diverse body of work, one could collect three major works as a mystical trinity of novels that progressively, and fittingly, deconstructs: *The Passion According to G.H.* (1964), *Água Viva* (1973), and *A Breathe of Life* (1977, posthumous).<sup>11</sup> All three could be seen as streams of consciousness (either in monologue or dialogue form), and the three novels are perhaps the most personal of Lispector's as they purposefully blur the boundary between confessional and fiction. They were in a sense less a genre of literature and more a chimera of philosophical feminism, something akin to the new genre celebrated today of ficto-criticism or auto-theory—a genre less interested in citing the Western philosophical canon (often of men) and more interested in pulling together a web of embedded lived experiences with a methodology arising out of process.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, three artistic vocations of the protagonists tie the three novels together, establishing a conscious working through a methodology of creation. In *Passion* the narrator is a sculptress who is triggered into a mystical encounter by a painting left by her maid. In *Água* the narrator becomes the painter (after an earlier manuscript composes her as a writer). In the final post-humous work *Breath* the method cannot resist becoming recursive: Clarice the writer creates the character of an author who in turn creates a character who is a painter, who claims: "My ideal would be to paint a picture of a picture."<sup>13</sup> A Möbius loop is formed: "a snake swallowing its own tail."<sup>14</sup>

As for the "narratives" themselves, the first, *Passion*, embodied an experimental form of a single meditation, recounting the casual entering of a maid's room and spontaneously experiencing a mystical revelation. While the narrative follows a realistic description, the literary strategy of each chapter's last sentence being repeated as the first sentence of the following chapter strings together a continuous movement across the entire novel. An incessant stream of consciousness pulls the reader further and further into the void of a swirling vortex. The later novel, *Água*, explodes any linear (or any Euclidian geometric) representation of an experience, into a formless novel: "Let me tell you: I am trying to seize the fourth dimension."<sup>15</sup> Instead, tentacles out of the depths of darkness grip the reader, pulling them apart:

As if ripping from the depths  
of the earth the knotted roots

of a rare tree, that's how I write to you, and those roots as if they were powerful tentacles like voluminous naked bodies of strong women entwined by serpents and by carnal desires for fulfilment, and all this is the prayer of a black mass, and a creeping plea for amen: because the bad is unprotected and needs the approval of God: that is creation.<sup>16</sup>

The single long build toward the climax of *The Passion*, as expressed in the traditional arc of the novel, morphs into the continuous rapture of *Água Viva*'s ebb and flow.

Without a singular character anchoring the drama, *Água* shifts from third person narrative into an intimate dialogue between the self and an unorthodox addressing of the second person. But is this "you" the reader or another identity within the writer's consciousness? The didactic devotional style of the text recalls Porete's unique *Mirror of Simple Souls*. The full title dramatically clarifying Souls "Who Are Annihilated," and it is such dissolving of the identity of the writer that matches the "formlessness" of *Água*: "I am a little scared: scared of surrendering completely because the next instant is the unknown. The next instant, do I make it? Or does it make itself? We make it together with our breath."<sup>17</sup> The final novel in the trinity, *A Breathe of Life* propels this dialogue into a recursive relationship.<sup>18</sup> One cannot be certain that a final draft of the novel would not have recomposed the character's roles (as was the case in the final form of *Água*), but it seems the content was too developed for *Breath* to deviate from this strategy. One can also not under appreciate that Lispector knew this was her last work. Conflating identities further this time between fiction and life, the only posthumous editorial excision from the manuscript—out of respect to the family—was one sentence the "Author" asks God to give her character cancer—the pathology that concurrently took Clarice's own life in 1977.<sup>19</sup> The prologue to *Breath* ends with the conventionalized retraction established with medieval mystical texts.<sup>20</sup> Recognizing the limits of knowing, Lispector humbly resigns: "May peace be upon us, upon you, and upon me. Am I falling into discourse? may the temple's faithful forgive me: I write and that way rid myself of me and then at last I can rest."<sup>21</sup> Her fall from silence into the profane act of speech articulates the limits of our bodies, and

her failure is our falling in love. We dive into *The Passion*, float in *Agua Viva* and drown in *A Breath of Life*.

### EXHALE

Propelled by constant crises, Lygia Clark continually pushed the boundaries of her work, always questioning what role art plays psychologically, politically and spiritually.<sup>22</sup> One consistent strategy throughout her life was her lucid and powerful writing: starting with the co-authorship of the “Neo-Concrete Manifesto” in 1959, through her dizzying prolific mid-career publications, and finally as essential collected elements to her posthumous retrospective catalogues.<sup>23</sup> One cannot think about her work without thinking through her own thinking on the work.<sup>24</sup> As deeply perceptual and somatic work, the participant can immediately engage her sensorial objects, but this is not to discount her carefully considered cosmology and theories of subjectivity powerfully articulated in her letters, essays, interviews and even a children’s story.<sup>25</sup> With such a heterogenous field, rather than focus on a historical stage, one way to immerse oneself into Lygia Clark’s work is following the continual rise and fall of the *breath*—a rhythm in the shape of a Möbius loop.<sup>26</sup> The interior of our lungs inhales the exterior of the atmosphere into the depths of our body only to exhale this same air transformed by the alchemy of our interior: inside and outside continually connected, constantly cycling with our breathing. We need only look at one of Clark’s early work using the form of a Möbius loop to see this connection: “What strikes me in the “*inside and outside*” sculpture is that it transforms my perception of myself, of my body. It changes me. I am elastic, formless, without definite physiognomy. Its lungs are mine. It’s the introjection of the cosmos... Its internal space is an affective space.”<sup>27</sup>

Clark was from the beginning connecting the act of breathing with non-Euclidian space that turned itself inside out.

If forced to make a paradigmatic cut (and most do, including Clark), it happened when she cut a Möbius strip.<sup>28</sup> In 1963, Clark constructed *Walking*, a proposition that requested the reader to take a Möbius loop and start cutting it in half along the grain of the surface as it turns upon itself. In doing so, the now reader-turned-participant proceeds to iteratively cycle through the looping form never reaching an edge of the paper and suggesting an infinite procedure. Composed by a deceptively simple gesture, *Walking* continued the *avant-garde*’s spiritual obsession

with the fourth dimension and non-Euclidian geometry.<sup>29</sup> *Walking* enacts diagrammatic thinking *par excellence* as a response to Clark’s own proclaimed “Death of the Plane” (1960):

To demolish the picture plane as a medium of expression is to become aware of unity as an living whole... We plunge into the totality of the cosmos; we are a part of this cosmos, vulnerable on all sides—but one that has even ceased having sides—high and low, left and right, front and back, and ultimately, good and bad—so radical concepts been transformed. Contemporary humanity escapes the spiritual laws of gravity. It learns to float in cosmic reality.<sup>30</sup>

The move from geometry to topology (as it did in physics) created a new understanding of the cosmos for Clark. Particularly, the Möbius loop opened a portal to the phantastic interdimensional: “more than a surface less than a volume.”<sup>31</sup> Paradoxically, such a new space provided an escape plan (“line of flight”) from the traditional forms of painting and sculpture, while also importantly adding the fourth dimension of temporality. “I am trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant—now so fleeting that it’s already done because it’s already become a new instant—now that’s also already gone” writes Lispector in a line that easily could have escaped from Clark’s text “Concerning the Instant” (1965).<sup>32</sup>

Crucially, the mathematical Möbius loop morphs into a more existential and embodied work as a direct result of Clark’s own body undergoing crisis and repair. After an accident that fractured her wrist and resulted in the application of a poultice, a frustrated Clark ripped off the plastic encapsulating the limb and exhaled into the bag to fill it like a pillow. On this she balanced a small stone.<sup>33</sup> The simple gesture of holding the bag necessitates squeezing the inflatable, resulting in the stone’s magical rising and falling. *Stone and Air* was created in 1966 but was still used even at the end of her life as she transitioned to conducting therapeutic engagements.<sup>34</sup> In an important pairing created the same year, *Breathe with Me* externalizes the lung to create a rhythmic apparatus of the breath. Using again ready-made objects, Clark took an underwater diving tube and inserted one end it into its



Lygia Clark, *Abyss Mask*, 1968.  
Photo by unknown.  
Courtesy of "The World of Lygia  
Clark" Cultural Association

other end, creating a hermetically sealed organ. By stretching the accordion ribbed tube, a small amount of air seeps in and out at the joint, the mouth of the tube, producing a wheezing sound like breathing. One could use it as a mediative device breathing together with the apparatus or psychologically associate one's own lung as exteriorized. Clark herself said of the work, "The first time I did it... the consciousness of my breathing obsessed me for several stifling hours, at the same time as an unknown energy seemed born in me..."<sup>35</sup>

The powerful paradox in both of these works exudes from the ephemeral breathing action in contrast to both the objects' industrial plastic materiality. Thinkers such as Roland Barthes mythologized plastic in the 1950s as a novel material full of possibilities, and Clark celebrated such ready-made objects as "valueless"—meaning accessible.<sup>36</sup> However, the extreme difference between its quotidian reality and its psychic phantasy cannot be understated. Clark imaginatively transubstantiated "colorless transparent plastic," into "an ectoplasm that immaterially binds bodies together."<sup>37</sup> Ectoplasm becomes the medium for the medium, and with a characteristic *coup* by Clark, she sublates the term's dual biological and magical meaning. This paradoxical pairing is inherent within the problematics of breath for a visual and somatic artist. Clark is not interested in air, she is interested in breath, and thus vessels and containment are necessary to shape such immateriality. The breath naturally connects people and the subject both to the surroundings when inhaled in lungs and as a therapeutic act when exhaled in plastic envelopes—be they a relational object, a sensory mask or organic architecture. After making *Breathe with Me*, Clark started making masks that participants wore to engage their own bodies, the world around them and other people.<sup>38</sup> Moving from objects to play with, to second skins to explore with, plastic mediates the "psychic plasticity"<sup>39</sup> for participants, providing an *infra-sensory* experience:

The moment the spectator wears the infra-sensory mask, they isolate themselves from the world (after being already situated in it) and in that introversion they lose contact with reality and find within themselves a whole range of fantastic experiences. It would be a way to find the breath of life. Everything that is revealed through sensory

sensations brings them to a state equivalent to a drugged state. Would this state be the immanence of the absolute? Would this loss of apparent reality be the capture of another kind of reality?<sup>40</sup>

The "breath of life"—once an ancient mystical source of the soul—manifests in the everyday as breathing into (or with) plastic.<sup>41</sup> Both Lygia Clark and Clarice Lispector translate the abstract language of religion and mathematics, ignoring a traditional desire for the Platonic "realm of forms" or the afterlife of paradise, instead transmuting their reality into a material mysticism manifested through the breath in the here and now. In a rare moment in her writing, Lispector creates the neologism "*imanesença*" [immanescence] as a portmanteau fusing immanence and transcendence. She does so in her last novel *The Breath of Life* and paradoxically uses it twice. The first time: "I'd rather have stayed in the immanescence of the sacred Nothing." The second: "I'd rather have stayed in the immanescence of nature."<sup>42</sup> Clark "stayed in the immanescence" through the simplicity of a stone floating on plastic bag of breath, and Lispector with an egg lying on a kitchen table:

In the morning in the kitchen on the table I see the egg... The egg is a suspended thing. It has never landed. When it lands, it is not what has landed. It was a thing under the egg. I look at the egg in the kitchen with superficial attention so as not to break it. I take the utmost care not to understand it. Since it is impossible to understand, I know that if I understand it this is because I am making an error. Understanding is the proof of making an error. Understanding it is not the way to see it.<sup>43</sup>

So much has been written about Clarice and Lygia, but each time I return to an immersion in their actual words, their dark lucidity and *punctum* negates the need for any exegetical glossing. Their works already speaks for themselves and my only desire is that they enter into dialogue with each other. I resign to silence with two last passages destined to resonate with each other—and I hope with *you* the reader:

L.C.: Every time I breath, the rhythm comes out right, but it's almost an internal rhythm, totalized within the act. I have become aware of my cosmic affective "lung." I'm entering into the topological rhythm of the world... I feel the rockets passed over my body without hurting me. My breath is the cosmos, my lung is the cosmos.

C.L.: These instants passing through the air I breathe: in fireworks they explode silently in space.<sup>44</sup>

## ENDNOTES

1 The title is a phrase composed out of two titles by Clark (*Breathe With Me*, 1966) and Lispector (*A Breath of Life*, 1977). An early version of this essay was commissioned by *Afterall Journal* for publication in 2015, which I thank them for immensely for the first version, and humbly admit my failure to deliver a final version.

2 The very rare passing mention, footnote or association with larger movements, like Neo-Concretism exist, but no direct comparison of the two biographies and bodies of work exists to my knowledge—at least in English.

3 Sympathetic resonance is a phenomenon in physics when two bodies not touching vibrate to the same frequency—one body's vibration picked up by the other due to a careful attunement, providing a feedback loop. Both Clark and Lispector, while most known for their poetic vocabulary, were very much interested in mathematical and scientific language, such as the fourth dimension, the topology of Möbius loops, and wireless communication.

4 *Água Viva* (here in referred to simply as *Água*): "I am enchanted, seduced, transfixed by furtive voices. The almost unintelligible cuneiform inscriptions speak of how to conceive and give formulae about how to feed from the force of darkness. They speak of naked and crawling females. And the solar eclipse causes secret terror that nonetheless announces a splendor of heart." (35); Clark wanted to return to a pre-Modern anonymous art, where perhaps patriarchy didn't reign so exclusively under the "Name-of-the-Father" (see video *O Mundo*). For the original proposition of Enheduanna as the first author in history see the 1968 text by William Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk: *The Exaltation of Inanna*.

5 See Caroline Bynum's book *Fragmentation and Redemption* (1991) for an account of 13th century mystics Mary Oigenes and Marguerite d'Oingt's somatic theology. Marguerite Porete's *Le Mirouer des simples âmes* is one of Old French's spiritual classics from c.1300. Catherine of Siena, a saint from the 14th century, left us not a *Summa Theologica* but a *Dialogue* between lover and Beloved. Teresa of Ávila, who lived in the 16th century and is most popularly known, was officially beatified and later memorialised in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's Baroque sculpture capturing the moment of her penetrating ecstasy (and who Lispector was directly compared to when alive).

6 When speaking of d'Oingt, Bynum observes "the experiencing of Christ is to 'turn on,' so to speak, the bodily sense of the receiving mystic." (1991, 192). And to quote at length the beguine Hadewijch circa 1220: "After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him, and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported. And then, for a short while, I had the strength to bear this; but soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to nought and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference" (Bynum, 1984, 180). And of course, the much later and famous passage from St. Teresa: "In his hands I saw a long golden spear and at the end of the iron tip I seemed to see a point of fire. With this he seemed to pierce my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails. When he drew it out, I thought he was drawing them out with it and he left me completely afire with a great love

for God. The pain was so sharp that it made me utter several moans; and so excessive was the sweetness cause me by this intense pain that one can never wish to lose it, now will one's soul be content with anything less than God?" (quoted in both Bataille, 224, and de Beauvoir, 635). It is important to note that while sketching out a hagiography of women mystics that Bynum resists any simple essentializing of gender for a more fluid understanding, there still remains an importance in the facticity of the body, noting devotion and projection across boundaries: nuns associating with the body of Christ, men feminized by their love for Christ (see Bynum, 1991, ch.VI).

7 A recent biography by Benjamin Moser frames Lispector's life, perhaps a little too eagerly and reductively, within a Jewish mystical tradition from her prebirth to her burial—though strictly in a male defined discourse from *zaddikim* to Spinoza. Amy Hollywood, in *Sensible Ecstasy* (2002), provides an interesting critique of 20th century philosophers engagement with 13th century women mystics and the limits of Christianity, but the intention of this essay is to provide an alternative thread of philosophical thinking and writing as continued in Lispector and Clark. Including Islamic mysticism such as the Sufi Rabia Al Basri would provide an interesting extension of this research but is beyond the scope of this essay. See also Sharon Faye Koren's *Forsaken: the Menstruant in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (2011).

8 Porete crossed over from religious scholarship to more mainstream literature with engagements such as by contemporary Canadian poet and Classics scholar, Anne Carson. See *Decreation*—originally an experimental opera (2001), then as an academic meditation (2002), together collected into a book (2006). See the author's own text, "Desire: The Moment and Movement in Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls*" (2000).

9 Federici quote from 168. While Federici acknowledges the Marxist interpretations of the witch hunts by Carlos Ginzburg and Michael Taussig, Simone de Beauvoir earlier proposed a Marxist, feminist critique of witch-burning as an early modern subjugation of women to usurp their medicinal knowledge and power in her last television interview ("Pourquoi je suis une féministe," 1975). De Beauvoir was also well-schooled in the female mystics in her adolescent Catholic schooling, recounting how she eroticized their experiences. While maintaining a connection throughout her life between the erotic and the mystical, in the classic text *The Second Sex*, she articulates how "The Mystic" can enact a bad faith if performing her otherness

for a patriarchal audience—be it clergy or God, 633-40.

10 My emphasis in both.

11 In creating a mystical canon—apart from the major novels—I must add the early short text "The Egg and the Chicken" (1964), which sets out an early rendering of the experience of the mystical in the everyday, which is so uniquely crafted by Lispector. In the only interview for television she ever gave (and was released posthumously), Lispector claims this story as her favorite piece of writing that remained until the end of her life a mystery even to herself (it was also the text she had read at the Sorcery conference in 1975). I would also add a little-known short story "Waters of the World" (1971) as a minor epistle, and finally, it is important to mention as a part of the apocrypha (in a John Donne inversion of the "sacred" and the "profane"), the anti-mystical novel *A via crucis de corpo* from 1974, which includes (among a cornucopia of sexual encounters), a mystical consummation between a typist and a being from Saturn named "Ixtlan" (10). Unlike the painstaking composition and revising of *Água Viva*, which took over three years, *Via crucis* was ecstatically written over a weekend a year later (see Moser, p.346). There are of course early stories such as "Obsession" (1941) and "Imitation of a Rose" (1959-60) (to name two) that directly engage religious and occult ideas as content, but they are not mystical text in themselves. From here on *The Passion According to G.H.* is referred to simply as *Passion* and *A Breathe of Life as Breath*.

12 "There is much I cannot tell you. I am not going to be autobiographical. I want to be 'bio.'" *Água*, 29.

13 43.

14 *Ibid.* 12.

15 *Água*. 3. She explains the structure using the metaphor of a photographic flash—the instant (*Água*, 12). As Susan Best observed about Lygia Clark, who followed Bachelard's concept of time versus Bergson (see 55), one could equally engage Lispector's concept of the instant from this notion. While the perceived intention is to conflate at times the narrator and Lispector, one at times must also separate the narrator's existential struggle and attempts to communicate with the final editorial decisions of Lispector. See Hélène Cixous' "Foreword" to *Água* for a reflection on the organic structure and performance of the text.

16 *Água*, 13. Also, *Água Viva* is slang in Portuguese for jelly fish.

17 *Ibid.* 3. For "formless" see Bataille "Critical Dictionary," 51-52. Lispector

also quotes the Vedas in the epigraph to *Apple in the Dark* (1961): “By entering into all things, he became what has form and what is formless.” x.

18 *Água Viva* was first translated as *The Stream of Life* making the continuation into *The Breath of Life* more obvious.

19 See Olga Borelli’s comments in the notes at the end of the novel, *Breath*, 165.

20 For a contemporary example see also Bataille’s conclusion to *Erotism*: “But at this point I should like to counsel my hearers the most extreme caution. I am really speaking a dead language. This language, I believe, is the language of philosophy. I will go so far as to say that in my opinion philosophy is also the death of language. It is also sacrifice. ...I have cautioned you about language. I must therefore caution you at the same time against my own words. Not that I want to end upon a note of farce, but I have been trying to talk a language that equals zero, a language equivalent to nothing at all, a language that returns to silence,” 263-4.

21 *Breath*, 12.

22 It’s interesting to note—in a manner similar to the apophatic strategy of defining through negation—there are as many attempts to define Clark’s work through negating as much as through naming; i.e., it’s not art, not performance, not a Happening, not dematerialized, not an object, not-psychoanalysis, etc.). Even Clark herself—always looking for a breakthrough after crisis—expressed there were regressive phases in her work, and she continually re-evaluated her production to move forward and yet constantly re-appropriated her own work; e.g., the same works once “Sensorial Objects” becoming “Relational Objects” in a new context.

23 For the purpose of creating a dialogue between C.L. and L.C., I am primarily restricting the discussion to works from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s. Respecting the primacy of Clark’s work as “plastic” art, leading up to this period her writing begins with an early imaginary letter to Mondrian calling him a “mystic,” followed by several years of an intense investigation into the purpose of art with a rhetoric usually reserved for theological writing, as can be observed easily by the titles, and even more so within the prose that at times verges on poetry: “On Ritual” (1960), “The Death of the Plane” (1960), “The Empty-Full” (1960), and “Poetics in Art, Religion, and Space-time” (1963/5), “Concerning the Magic of the Object” (1965), to name a few of the more commonly published texts.

24 Her collaborator and main interlocutor, Suely Rolnik: “Actually, it was the artist herself who best found words to conceptualize her work,” 98.

25 Singularly, the one genre of work both Lispector and Clark crossed over was the “children’s story.” In 1975, Clark wrote the little discussed and untranslated story entitled *Mue Doce Rio [My Sweet River]*—a flowing, surrealist fairy-tale with morphing animals, virgins and ogres roaming an anthropomorphized landscape, where if the children “joined hands unifying all their bodies, the sensations multiplied,” 11. Perhaps less intended for children and more a transgressive product of her psychoanalytic sessions, the fiction articulated using literary tropes the research exercises she was doing with her students at the Sorbonne creating custom-made rituals such as saliva drooled collectively over a body (*Anthropophagic Drool*, 1973) or a group cannibalistically feasting on another student’s body (*Cannibalism*, 1973).

26 A Möbius loop is a two-dimensional form that is twisted in three-dimensional space creating a single surface. A Klein bottle is the analog with a three-dimensional volume twisted in fourth-dimensional space, but poses difficulties illustrating visually. One could argue Clark’s *Stone and Air* work attempts such an impossibility.

27 “1965: About the Act” in “Nostalgia,” 104.

28 It is unclear whether *Inside is the Outside*, or *Walking*, was created first as they both have the dates 1963. I would posit the two works were born not at the same moment but intertwined; *Walking* a result of cutting out the paper templates for works in the series of *Beasts* (which included *The Inside is the Outside*). Temporality folds in on itself and we are left with the classic paradox of which came first as expressed in the title of one of Lispector’s key stories: “The Egg and [or] the Chicken.”

29 See Linda Henderson’s exhaustive *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (1983), for various *avant-garde* movements concerned with such scientific-mathematic theories. It is important to note that the fourth dimension as understood by artists could be interpreted as *time* in the relativistic space-time continuum or as a higher non-visible spatial dimension. See Iris Murdoch’s “Existentialists and Mystics” treatise on the rise of mystical artwork not as an outmoded pre-modern inclination but as a reaction to 20th century science. See Lispector: “I studied mathematics, which is the madness of reason—but now I want the plasma—I want to eat straight from the placenta.” *Água*, p.3.

30 “Nostalgia,” 96-97.

31 Phrase is from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, whom we know

from letters to Mário Pedrosa, Clark read at least *Anti-Oedipus*.

32 *Água*, 3. One thinks here of Marcel Duchamp and his passion for the fourth dimension and the exploration of the undescribed as collected under the term the “*infra-mince*” (infra-thin)—something one cannot define but can only give examples of, such as: “When the tobacco smoke also smells of the mouth which exhales it the two odors are married by infra-thin,” 194 (translation slightly modified). cf. Clark describing how she existentially appropriated the interdimensional work *Walking*: “while watching the smoke from my cigarette: it was as though time itself were ceaselessly forging a path, annihilating itself, remaking itself continuously ... I already experienced that in love, in my gestures.” In “Nostalgia,” 100. Lispector described her process as “trying to photograph perfume.” *Água*, 47.

33 For a description of the genesis of the work (and other early pieces) see the exceptional essay by one of Clark’s earliest supporters, curator Guy Brett, 79. I encourage readers to make the work themselves to experience the richness within its elegant simplicity.

34 Clark not only still used the same apparatus but affectionally tells the viewer, “I consider it the purest and best.” Quoted in the documentary *Memória do Corpo*.

35 Quoted in Brett, *ibid*.

36 See Barthes’ exhibition review “Plastic” in *Mythologies*. Barthes’ writing on the “Death of the Author” (1967) and his radical injection of pleasure (*jouissance*) into theoretical writing and the academy has been noted as other significant influences in the 1960s that have been extended to Lispector and Clark. Clark’s descriptor “valueless” mentioned in Brett, 79.

37 Letter from Clark to Hélio Oiticica, “26.10.1968.” See *Cartas*, translation by the author.

38 A few titles: *Sensorial*, 1967; *The I and the You*, 1967; *Abyssal Mask*, 1968. It is important to note that while Clark’s masks created fantastical experiences, they were made out of the same context and material as the political revolts and the gasmasks used in the dictatorship of Brazil and the student protests in Paris. Just as in the past, when Clark’s poetics resonated with the political, today’s pandemic politics surrounding respiratory masks can be read through the same Sensory Masks, mediating our personal interiors with the exterior of the world.

39 I am borrowing the term “plasticité psychique” from Georges Didi-Huberman’s book *Gestes d’air et de pierre* in a chapter discussing Clark’s psychoanalysts, Daniel Lagache and Pierre Fédida, on the topic

of “Breath and Hallucinations,” 27.

40 Clark. (*Lygia Clark*, 1997).

219. Thank you to Filipa Ramos for helping translate this passage from Portuguese.

41 Nephesh [נֶפֶשׁ] is the Hebrew world that describes man as God breathed life into him, Genesis 2:7: “God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” (KJV). In Vedic writing “breath of life” or Prāna is not only in animals but in inanimate objects as well, see Ewing, “Hindu Conception of the Functions of Breath-A Study in Early Hindu Psycho-Physics” (1901).

42 18 & 130.

43 Lispector, “The Egg and the Chicken”, 276-77.

44 Clark, “November 1, 1963,” 163; Lispector, *Água*, 3.

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