

barracão

hélio

oítica

galeria

nara roesler





exhibition view -- galeria nara roesler | são paulo -- 2016















Londres 19 agosto 1969

HÉLIO OITICICA

BARRACÃO

- formulação da idéia de Parangolé em 1964 : raiz raiz brasileira ou a fundação da raiz Brasil em oposição à folclorização desse material raiz - a folclorização nasce da camuflagem opressiva : "mostrar o que é nosso, os nossos valores ..." - a afluência da arte primitiva, etc. - PARANGOLÉ se ergue desde 64 contra essa folclorização opressiva e usa o mesmo material que seria outrora folc-Brasil como estrutura não-opressiva , como revelação de uma realidade minha-raiz - Jerônimo , na foto vestindo a capa (Atêrro, 1967) , revela tãda uma síntese : é inexplicável o que se passa aí : o modo com que se veste na planta e veste a capa é dado pela posição gestual-facial que expressa mais do que um simples "posar" : é Brasil-raiz, intransferível, mas não se limita a uma "imagem Brasil" : é raiz-estrutura e é não-opressiva porque revela uma potencialidade viva de uma cultura em formação : digo cultura em formação como a possibilidade aberta de uma cultura, em oposição ao caráter por que se designa habitualmente algo cultural - em certo sentido , e muito, é anti-cultura porque propõe a demolição do que é opressivo : a cultura , como é imposta artificialmente, é sempre opressiva, é o não-criar que vem com a glorificação do que já está fechado, se bem que possibilidades de reinformação possam ser tiradas daí - mas, no contexto geral, tãda a parafernália cultural-patriótico-folclórica-nacional é opressiva - PARANGOLÉ é a descoberta da raiz-aberta pela primeira vez - TROPICÁLIA (a imagem-estrutura) e BARRACÃO (comportamento-estrutura) são as evoluções naturais disso ou o projeto da raiz-Brasil → a fecundação universal da raiz-Brasil : as possibilidades culturais intransferíveis se expressam através de estruturas puramente universais → a busca imediata para o que denominei PARANGOLÉ COLETIVO (redundância, já que PARANGOLÉ desde o início propunha o coletivo como condição inerente) : propor propor já em 1966-67 era a condição primeira de tudo : TROPICÁLIA foi a proposição de uma condição aberta de descoberta dessa raiz-estrutura-proposição de um completo ambiente-comportamento — a idéia de BARRACÃO absorve, como o super-mataborrão , estrutura e participação-proposição , no que chamo comportamento-estrutura : a descoberta do crelazer como essencial à conclusão da participação-proposição : a catalização das energias não-opressivas e a proposição do lazer ligado a elas.

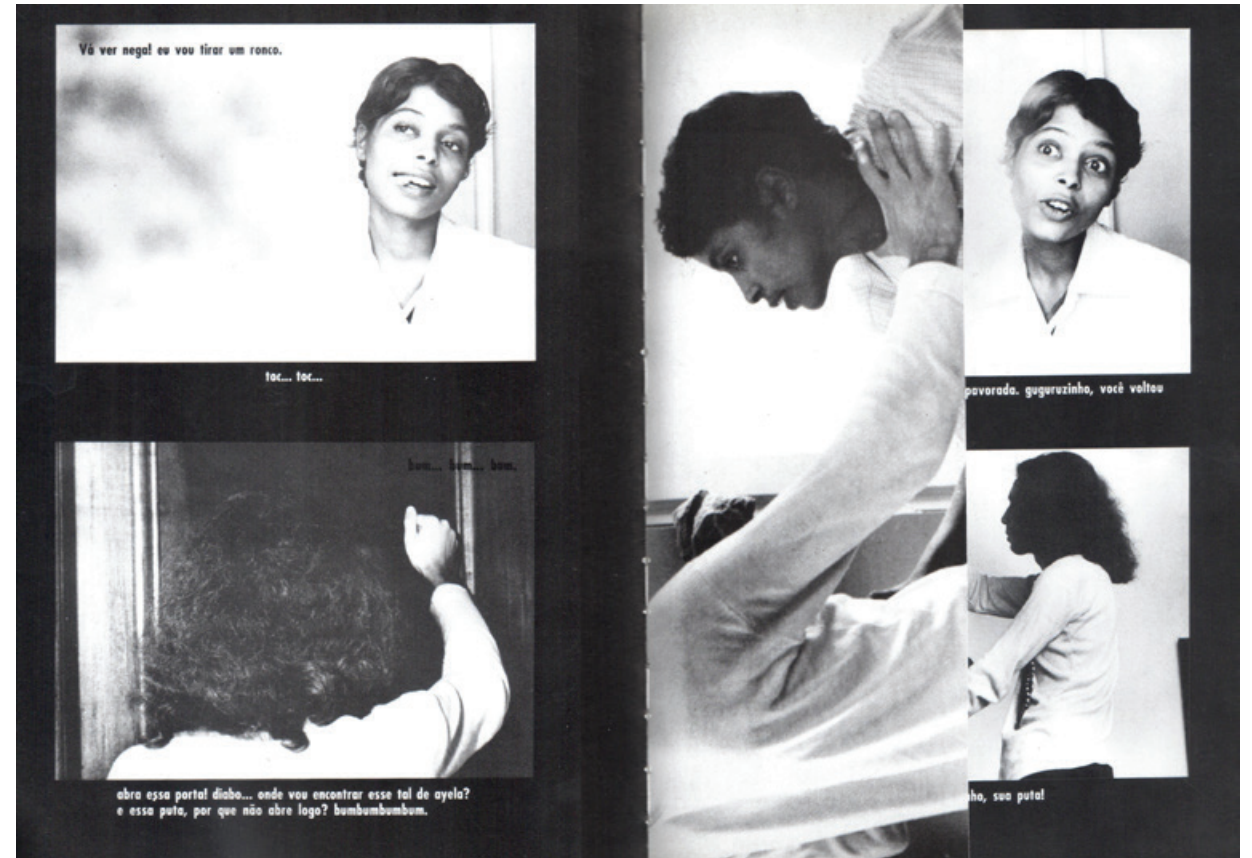
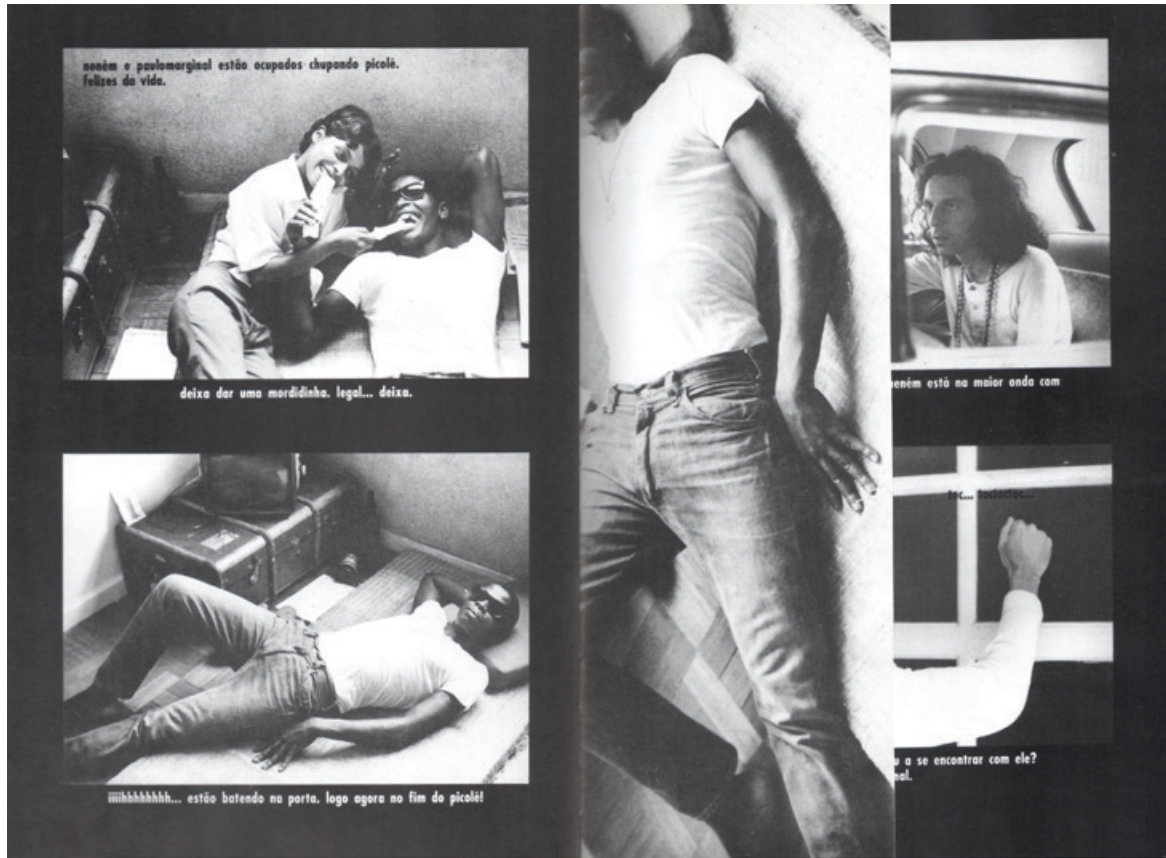
fac-símile of BARRACÃO, written by Hélio Oiticica in 1969

cover image: Hélio Oiticica wearing parangolé p 22 capa 18 "nirvana", Hélio Oiticica and Antonio Manuel, 1968 -- ink on canvas -- variable dimensions



installation view of COSMOCOCA - program in progress CC2 onobject, Hélio Oiticica and Neville D'Almeida, 1973/2006 -- interactive multimedia installation -- variable dimensions





a arma fállica, antonio manuel and hélio oitica, 1970  
photo-novella -- 26,5 x 18,2 cm

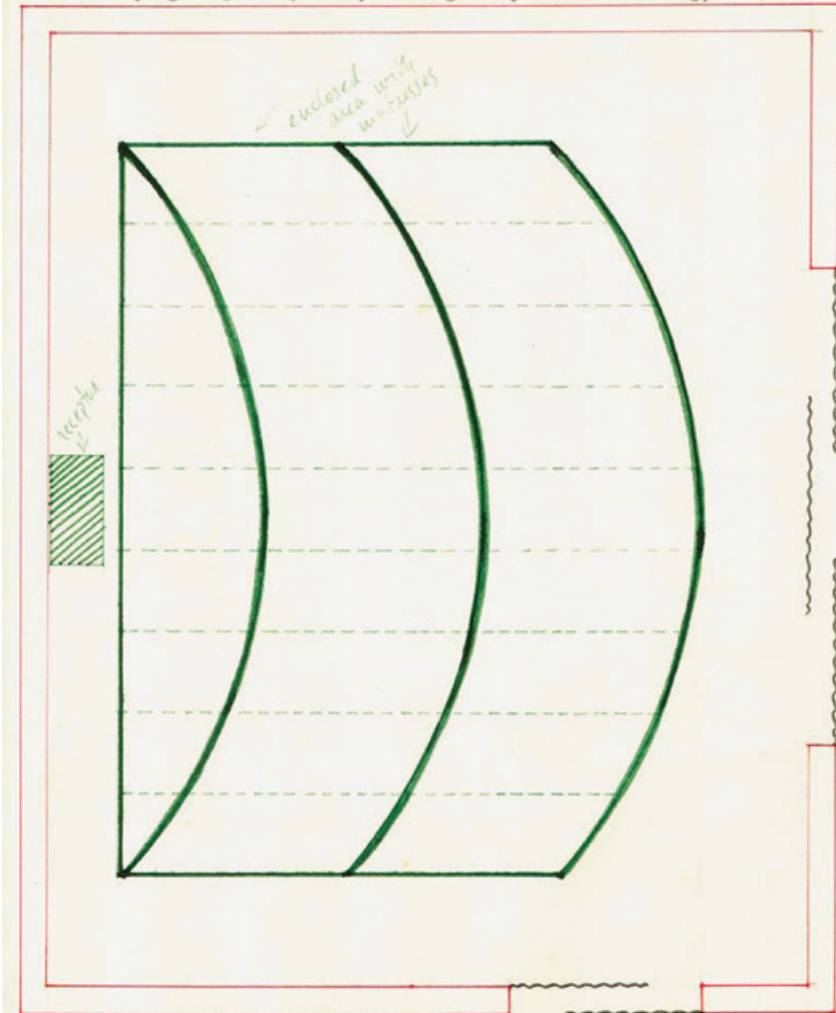




video still, part of the installation **INFORMATION**, hélio oiticica and lee jaffe, 1970/2016 -- multimedia installation -- variable dimensions



GENERAL SKETCH for the display of mats and TV receptor in the room. The entrances would be closed with black curtains. Any needed information, should be placed outside doors. People can leave their shoes, if they want, alongside the circulating areas around the mats. No need to. The mats have a heightened part indicated by curves here, so people can lay their heads, when lying completely down, although many will be sitting, etc.



SCALE : 1 inch = 1 yard

Please send further suggestions, if transformations are wanted; for instance if it can be changed the other way : receptor on the smaller side with audience longways, etc. The receptor is for internal video-tape (see letter)

Sketch number 146.0.000. Letter. April 4. 1970



hélio oiticica: experimental practice of freedom

ginevra bria

Hélio Oiticica's constitutive and curatorial format *Exercícios experimentais da liberdade* [*Experimental practice of freedom*] is based on a paraphrase of one of the major definitions that underlie a pivot of change; an axis around which an aesthetic paradigm of the postmodern Brazilian avant-garde rotates. A paraphrase (from the Latin paraphrasis, from the Greek παράφρασις, and translatable as 'reformulation') is, in general, a different way of expressing the content of a text while at the same time maintaining its recognisability and similarity to the original. A modern prose version that eases lexical or semantic difficulties (by substituting or explaining difficult words), clarifies syntax (by transforming complex sentences into simpler phrases), and resolves content-related issues (by explaining unfamiliar names and facts).

The presumed mechanism underlying a paraphrase in this case hinges on the degree of connectivity, permeability and openness to unlimited spontaneous and participatory offshoots found in the artistic activities of Hélio Oiticica (1937, Rio de Janeiro – 1980, Rio de Janeiro). It is a paraphrase that measures the processes of a dispossession, the drive for a liberation from individuality that is at the same time a revealing of uniqueness within a process whose very title, experimental practice of freedom, represents a complete understanding of the original quotation in all its interpretive references, but extended here to encompass a plurality, an allegorical multiplicity, and the collectivisation of the historical and formal aspects of various interventions. The phrase, written by the Brazilian theoretical art critic **Mário de Andrade Xavier Pedrosa** (1900, Timbaúba, Pernambuco – 1981, Rio de Janeiro), is taken from the columns of his article, *O Bicho-da-Seda na Produção em Massa* [*the Silkworm in Mass Production*] of 14 August 1966, which was published and made official as follows: "For some time now, the art of our day can be defined as an experimental practice of freedom".

*The experimental practice of freedom* today is based on the capacity to resolve and match that exact sequence of words with the critical evidence of a two-way specular link that existed between Oiticica and Pedrosa with regard to a completely different audience for whom different authorial "offshoots" were conceived and adapted. A title that was translated and pluralised, whose collegial extension was demonstrated and became an ascribable sign: an amplified premonition that echoed within Hélio Oiticica's own independent and stratified *practices of freedom*. A definition that today marks a threshold between the first phase of Oiticica's artistic life, and the second, when he was living outside Brazil between the late 1960s and early 1970s. A definition that established the introspective nature and inter-subjective tendency of *Barnbilônia*, written in New York during his self-imposed exile, and one that multiplied the experimental range of his reliefs and earlier aesthetic explorations, highlighting the interaction between his own subjective development and the opportunity for other artists to create opportunities for reciprocal exploration, among them Lygia Pape and Lygia Clark, Neville D'Almeida, Antonio Dias, Lee Jaffe, Ivan Cardoso, Antonio Manuel, Miguel Rio Branco and Thomas Valentin, but also figures such as the superstar drag artist Mario Montez, or Jack Smith and Luis Buñuel. And, finally, a definition that reintroduces him to today's contemporary context by reinterpreting his role.

The story that nurtured and advanced the revolutionary course and basic substance or "humus" of Hélio Oiticica calls for an interpretation of many trajectories in the thought and predictions of Mário Pedrosa, the Brazilian political activist, art and literary critic, founder of a tradition of modern art criticism and of Oposição Internacional de Esquerda [International Left Opposition], the literary organisation created by Leon Trotsky.

Between 1966 and 1968, Pedrosa published over eighty newspaper articles in which he observed and reflected on the qualitative transformation in the visual arts that had occurred from the time he had participated in forming the Associação Internacional de Arte de Criticos [International Association of Art Critics], which, over the course of two decades, had led to his theorisation of postmodern art in the late 1950s.

It should be remembered that the constructivist tradition, which re-emerged in Europe under the influence of the postwar reconstruction, was adopted in Brazil during the late 1940s and '50s, and was symptomatic of a general desire for development and modernisation. Architecture was undoubtedly the field where these visions were most broadly manifested, but ambitious projects also emerged in the arts and were to have a lasting impact in the following two decades.

In Rio de Janeiro, the Neo-Concrete art movement radicalised the Constructivist tradition by emphasising the phenomenological character of the artwork. Although they still viewed art as an autonomous field of aesthetic enquiry, the Neo-Concrete group provided the opportunity for closer engagement with the viewer as a result of the increased interrelationship the works possessed and intrinsically established with the space around them. In this way, the movement offered a platform from which artists like Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Pape were able to launch their experiments in a predominantly socio-cultural domain, proposing an art based on human interaction. Moreover, **Antonio Manuel** (1947, Avelãs de Caminho, Portugal), who had initially inherited from Ivan Serpa a Constructivist sensibility, also shared a friendship and a general experimental approach with artists from the previous generation, such as Oiticica and Pape, as well as with Pedrosa.

In the 26 June 1966 issue of *Correio da Manhã*, Pedrosa undertook a deep analysis the work of Hélio Oiticica. Pedrosa, who was both a privileged observer of 1960s art and one of the theorists of the Brazilian avant-gardes of the 1940s, claimed the concept of transformation and change grew and was empirically constructed according to an implicit momentum.

When *Tropicália* erupted on the music scene in October 1967, Pedrosa was recognised as one of the most influential art critics in Brazil because of his methods and ability to galvanise the field of the arts to the point of influencing their flowering in the delicate post-Estado Novo period – the Brazilian political regime established in a coup led by Getulio Vargas that ruled from 10 November 1937 to 29 October 1945 and was characterised by the centralisation of power, nationalism, anticommunism and extreme authoritarian rule.

In the article *Do Purismo da Bauhaus à Aledia Global* [*From the Purism of Bauhaus to the Global Village*] ' of 16 July 1967, Pedrosa identified the social conditioning that requires and demands sensory art in order for all the perceptual receptors to be stimulated when experiencing an artwork.



Just as with the technological and cultural changes that are accumulating and will incessantly accumulate while we do nothing but debate in a chaotic and hopeless present, it is no longer a question of perceiving simply and directly what was once formulated as an autonomous, isolated artwork. Through audio-visual and electronic tools, combined with the formidable mobility of our era, we cover the old world defined by the word and drawn by sight. All the expanded senses have to fall upon us simultaneously or they will block the channels for its communication and we will die asphyxiated.

Hélio Oiticica embodied Pedrosa's concept, radicalising it in *Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade* [*General Scheme of New Objectivity*], the theoretical framework of the *Tropicália* installation, both of which were presented at the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition that took place in April 1967 at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro. Hélio Oiticica described *Nova Objetividade*, making it into the expression of the state of the Brazilian avant-garde, whose main features comprised: 1. A general constructive purpose. 2. The tendency for an object to be negated and surpassed by the profile of an easel. 3. The participation of the spectator (physical, tactile, visual, semantic, etc.). 4. Closer involvement and policy in relation to political, social and ethical aspects. 5. A readiness to develop collective proposals and thus the abolition of 'isms' that characterised the titles of movements from the first half of the twentieth-century (the same readiness embodied by Mario Pedrosa's concept of postmodern art); 6. The rebirth and new approaches in the concept of anti-art.

In that same year, Antonio Manuel spent more and more time with Hélio Oiticica, who was encouraging the creation of collective works and included Manuel's drawings, which were made on the pages of newspapers and used in a setting for Oiticica's *Penetrável Tropicália*, which was part of the *Nova Objetividade* exhibition. Oiticica found there were connections in their way of thinking, parallels between Manuel's drawings on newspaper and *Tropicália*, like fragments of a historical pageant, an anthropophagic ideal taken from the 1928 manifesto of Oswald de Andrade. The nature of this environment made it possible to incorporate stereotypic elements of tropical Brazil in an attempt to cannibalise extraneous, foreign images that colonised and gave an exotic character to Brazilian culture, which at the same time devoured international art styles and ideas. With *Tropicália*, Oiticica was searching to "create our own language" with the emphasis on "our": he was not promoting a separate grammar of his own.

Using the front page of a tabloid for his drawing on newspaper entitled *Matou or cachorro and bebeu or sangue* [*He killed the dog and drank the blood*] (1967), Antonio Manuel gave the human figures the typically recognisable features of vampires sucking the blood of a small animal. The vampire figure restored an important image for this group of Carioca artists during the years of a regime of military terrorism, not only in terms of the metaphor of sucking blood, but also for its connections to indigenous cannibalism. In his notes, Oiticica wrote that his artworks and Manuel's drawings shared an equal form of engagement, the "game" that confronts the "real". *Tropicália* was a paradox in which Brazil was presented as a tropical country feeding on its own myth, an image without real substance generated by different groups of individuals both within and outside the country.

A few months after, the term *Tropicália* also became the title of a song by Caetano Veloso,

and later grew to be the symbol of a new aesthetic adopted in various fields of work from the visual arts to fashion, film and, of course, music.

Over the course of the 1960s, Pedrosa thus came to coin the term *experimental practice of freedom* to refer to the problems of an artistic process that once again rejected a pure form and took a conceptual turn.

Experimentation by certain artists and various ruptures also led Pedrosa to recognise a route legitimised by the growth of art, and he began to support the work and most radical developments not only of Lygia Clark and to a lesser degree that of Antonio Manuel Antonio and Hélio Oiticica, but also of the young artists who formed their main support network, such as Reinaldo Jardim and Ferreira Guillar. As intellectuals they had to confront artists' relationship to their audiences, the void between the visual arts and popular culture, and the change in the relationship between art and life: interconnected aspects that brought the viewer's perceptual life to the heart of the art-object. Clark and Oiticica developed and represented a profound reformulation of innovations in modern art in the context of modern Brazil – a tropical country, culturally rich and syncretic, suffering from marked underdevelopment and a phenomenological neo-colonialism – which in its turn transmuted into a radical reflection on some of the deepest and endemic dilemmas of the contemporary world. Most notably in certain of Hélio Oiticica works, the urgency of the questions posed by the contemporary world were refracted through the declination of a main theme and the challenges encountered in the history of Brazil by categorically employing the relationship between body and mind, the involvement of the senses, the celebration of intellectual expression, the analytical and the rational, and the relation of an aesthetic *reverie* to different forms of violence, often forms of oppression and revolt.

In this way, in light of the most effective changes in Brazilian art from the mid-1960s on, Pedrosa was once again forced to review his critical position. And it was precisely at this juncture that he formed, adapted and began to use the expression of *exercício experimental da liberdade*. In a text from 1967, Pedrosa tried to define the artist's place and role in a time of mass production. Returning to a phrase often used by Adam Smith and Marx – who defined the artist as an "unproductive worker" whose product, with no trade-in value, meant the full autonomy of the artwork – Pedrosa forged the concept of the "artist as silkworm": an independent producer of works with no market value. At the time of Warhol and pop art, when an artwork was to be deliberately transformed into a mass product, Pedrosa addressed the processes of commodifying art as capitalism's greatest act of expropriation: its capacity to provide any item, any entity, physical or otherwise, with a market value. Faced with the rampant and equally inescapable capitalist expansion that affects everything, reducing its intrinsic worth to its monetary value, he outlined two possible positions for artists: immediate adhesion to the new means of production, with the consequent transformation of the artwork into a simple object of exchange, or resistance to the allocation of a capitalist value by assuming a critical position and a permanent willingness to rupture the status quo.

As if it were not directing its criticism to a rupture in current methods, the *experimental practice of freedom* alerted the artist with a call to make man a producer of work with no immediate goal, once again ennobling the work of a niche group, a protected beehive with



no useful or exchange value, and therefore even more essential to the production of life. "Today's artists will not see themselves as their predecessors did, but will acknowledge their existence by their impetus towards a new use of freedom". This quotation from Pedrosa, taken from a context in which the critic defended his profession with an almost scientific rationality, also provides a semantic outline of the scope of this exhibition. Freeing itself from Lyotard's proclamation of the fallacy of metanarratives, Foucault's suspension of theory, and Clifford's questioning of authorities, the statement embodies a critique of the critical process that had to find a new place in time. Through Hélio Oiticica, on the one hand, criticism could once again return to being a work of art located in an exhibition space, reclaiming its status as an object of appreciation. On the other hand, contemporary art could for once claim its lead as an avant-garde model, eternally breaking away from institutional narratives, therefore relieving the museum from assuming the role of also providing non-institutional spaces, and thus seeking a nearness to life and creating the paradox of a museum that contradicts itself.

In the summer of 1968, Oiticica organised an outdoor event called *Apocalipopótese*. The event took place in a park near the MAM-RJ, and artists, filmmakers and musicians participated. All the works were conceived on the basis of direct and unpredictable participation by the spectators.

Lygia Pape's *Ovos* [Eggs] were matte red, light blue or white wooden and plastic structures, which the participants burst through. Oiticica introduced new *Parangolé* capes that could be worn and used by the public. One of these shape-changing 'structuring' garments was created together with Antonio Manuel and titled Nirvana. Manuel's preparatory drawing of a young black man on the surface of the *Parangolé* recalled the emaciated figures of the semi-alive from his newspaper drawings, which had been part of *Tropicália* the year before. Here, the use of allegorical images for externalising and disguising collective feeling was comparable to a coded symbolism used to deflect censorship. Thus, for the most part, the official inspection staff were unable to act since they found no incriminating evidence that could be concretely considered anti-government. In later works, Manuel found similar ways to convey a message, sometimes with an antagonism that was perhaps more ironic and playful, but less obvious. One such example was in the black and white pages of the photo-novel *A Arma Fállica* (1970), which contained dialogues and captions written in collaboration with Lygia Pape, and photos in pose of Hélio Oiticica, Tineca and Estacio from the community of their beloved Mangueira.

Another significant event intrinsically linked to a new search for experimental, participatory freedom was also held as part of the programme of the *Salão Nacional de Arte Contemporânea*, held in Belo Horizonte from 12 December 1969 to 5 February 1970. This marked the start of the *Semana de Arte de Vanguarda* [Avant-Garde Art Week] coordinated by Frederick Maurice and Samantha Tristan to celebrate the opening of the Palace of Arts. In two separate moments during the *Semana da Inconfidência* art week in April, the event inaugurated first the exhibition *Objeto e Participação* [Object and Participation] in the Palace of Arts, with work by artists such as Theresa Simões, George Helt, Orlando Castaño, Manoel Serpa, Manfredo Souzanetto and Terezinha Soares; and second, the manifestation titled *Do Corpo à Terra*, [Body to Earth] held at the Municipal Park, on the streets, in the mountains and among the city traffic. Among the participants were Cildo Meireles, Artur Barrio, Luciano Gusmão, Lotus

Lobo, Dilton Araújo, Décio Noviello, Eduardo Ângelo and even the New Yorker **Lee Jaffe** (1950, the Bronx, New York), who took a full part in Hélio Oiticica's proposal. For these events the artists worked on conceptual, political, ecological and environmental projects alongside symbolic rituals. One of them attempted to disrupt the daily life of the city, while others emerged in their environmental guise as seeds planted by Lotus Lobo or Lee Jaffe, or as sugar drawings by Oiticica in the Serra do Curral.

Even when Oiticica moved to New York a few months later, the *Experimental practice of freedom*, must have echoed like a distant formula, but in some way one dissolved within an evolving approach, which must have given those earlier projects the language of an apprenticeship, an experimental significance that Oiticica had learned in the family through the scientific methodology adopted by his father. Oiticica's "archive fever" (or "mal de arquivo", a term borrowed from Jacques Derrida) seemed to increase in proportion in the United States – sometimes as a symptom of absence or excess – components that indeed allowed the artist to establish an experimental language, but one that was open and deliberately founded on the unfinished.

On 14 March 1970, Oiticica was in Rio de Janeiro when he received a letter with the letterhead of The Museum of Modern Art. Curator Kynaston McShine had written from London after a reconnaissance trip to South America that had "revealed many promising young artists in Rio, and naturally [I] became very intrigued with the idea of Tropicalia. Some lines later, the curator revealed the first real motive for the letter. I am writing to say that the Museum would be honored to have you participate by providing one of the "environments". The only two other situations on this scale would be Joseph Beuys of Germany and The Group Fronter of Argentina". The exhibition was scheduled from 30 June to 27 September and the Museum offered to host Oiticica in New York for two weeks prior to the opening in order to set up one of his works, most probably linked to *Tropicália* (1969, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London). McShine not only provided a description of the exhibition but also a plan indicating the "possible space you might have".

The letter ended by asking Oiticica rather sardonically, and with specific references to his work, to provide a "description of the physical components and materials needed and any diagrams, instructions [...]. I need not tell you that like all museums at the moment we have great financial problems, so please do not suggest a new Garden of Eden". Oiticica replied on 25 March (after an insistent cable from McShine on 3 March, in which he asked Oiticica to confirm his participation). His letter reveals some apparent difficulties in getting to New York, and the need to establish, even at a distance, the correct set-up procedure for the space. "I would like to know how long before this opening I should go; I have a compromise with a film production for scenography, costumes, etc. and the film starts shooting at the last week of May; so, as you see (I have to be present during the shooting, but I am arranging to be dismissed to [sic] weeks before it ends so I can go to New York)".

Oiticica's tone in his second point becomes more direct: "I need to know details of what I have exactly to do; of course, the plans I have already in mind, and I could make them out and send; but concerning the building (in site) of them, is the problem; are you counting on



the staff of the Museum or are you expecting to hire carpenter etc., whoever we would need for it?"

Although Oiticica voices no concerns about the supply of materials or the assembly of the various works, given that they could be constructed perfectly easily, he doubts focus on whether or not the museum staff is "acquainted with my work present". For this reason Oiticica suggests the presence of a construction expert such as Rubens Gerchman, who knew the artist's work. On March 30, McShine's assistant Cintra Lofting wrote to Oiticica on behalf of the curator, forwarding the letters that had been sent from England to Rio de Janeiro and urgently emphasising: "We are under enormous pressure to get the catalogue material in as soon as possible".

On 4 April, Oiticica sent a further letter from Rio de Janeiro after having finally read in full the material relating to McShine's project thanks to the efforts of Guy Brett. He reassured McShine and confirmed that unlike the earlier plans, there would now be no need for an assistant to help construct the project. But Oiticica's first enquiry concerns whether it would be possible to make a videotape in Rio de Janeiro of about an hour, with its production costs fully covered by the Museum. Oiticica then adds, "I am about to see one of our TV stations, and I could plan with them to give us the material through an order from you [...]; I am making it with an art [sic] with whom I have close affinities, Lee Jaffe; he is American, living here now, and we're planning this together; we want to make something as a direct, dry, instant, alive information; not about anyones [sic] works etc. but a "state of being" in itself; the room you marked in the plan, would be the set where the TV receptor would be placed".

Oiticica also states in the letter that the video receiver (a screen) should be placed at a certain height so that the viewers, lying on mats on the floor, would be able see the film in one go, with the hour-long contents constantly repeated in a loop, and that dark curtains should cover the entrance, but without blocking it, so that people could freely come and go.

Oiticica also mentions the possibility of holding events inside and outside the museum that would accompany the running time of *Information*, the film's title. He expresses his interest in "making something outdoors, but I would have to have some contact with people like the Streets Works ones [...] then in the beginning of July, and propose to have some event on Central Park, maybe". After asking McShine for unspecified "printed material (catalogue, or printed texts, etc.)" and an example, a publishing model to help him understand the kind of catalogue McShine was planning to produce, Oiticica ends the letter by saying: "I hope you dig the plan; I like the way it can be as a meta-language, in the idea of an Information show, the INFORMATION itself, with no esthetic manneirisms [sic]". Oiticica wanted the room to be transformed into a place of reinforcement for the spectator as spectator, so that the latter, being able to see the "TV screen reception", could perform the deliberate act of an open viewer by proposing the "height of visibility on a non-visual proposition". The enclosure with the letter ("GENERAL SKETCH for the display of mats and TV receptor in the room") shows Oiticica's perfectly drawn bird's eye view of the arena, a sort of "enclosed area with mats (note in pencil) and crash barriers" conceived as the propagation of a wave emanating from the receptor (note in pencil), shown as a screen placed sideways on the left of the page, but centrally with respect to the entrances to the room – entrances designed as overlapping

undulating black curtains, placed frontally. Any other necessary information, typed Oiticica, should be placed outside the exhibition space. The public would be able to take off their shoes and, if they wanted to, leave them along the edges of the circulation areas around the mats. Oiticica specifies that "the mats have a heightened part indicated by curves here, so people can lay their heads when lying completely down, although many will be sitting etc."

Lastly, Oiticica adds some information about proportions, indicating possible alternatives for the exhibition set-up: "SCALE: 1 inch = 1 yard Please send further suggestions, if transformations are wanted; for instance if it can be changed the other way: receptor on the smaller side with audience longways, etc. The receptor is for internal video-tape (see letter)".

Two days after this letter, on 6 April 1970, the *Correio da Manhã* published a short paragraph with the news that Oiticica was going to participate in the summer exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and that he would be assigned an exclusive room. On the ground, there were to be pillows (*almofadas*) and mats (*colchões*) required for sitting or lying down during the screening of a videotape that Rogerio Sganzerla, Miguel Rio Branco and Lee Jaffe would make, following no more than a kind of tresloucado improvise [insane improvisation]. The article ended with the fact that afterwards Oiticica would coordinate and shout: "Adoro trabalho coletivo!" [I love collective work!]

The project was designed as a multimedia environment set in a timeframe between the Eden installation at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1969 (a project that embraced the notion of Tropicália and the iconic proposals of the *Cosmococa*, formulated together with **Neville Duarte de Almeida** (1941, Belo Horizonte).

Although Oiticica never mentions the scope of the video's content, Lee Jaffe says (in an email sent on 6 August 2015): "As can be seen in the drawing and notes that Hélio sent to MoMa, his concepts of "Crelazer" and the "Supra Sensorial" is apparent. Hélio had already begun to appropriate photographic images – "Seja Marginal, Seja Herói" for example – in previous work, and I was to be charged with collaborating on the creation of new images – still and moving – to be projected both inside and outside the *crelazer* space".

Between 1969-1970 Oiticica and Jaffe considered using TV monitors, slides and Super8 projectors, together with speakers that would surround the space in such a way that the sound would seem to come from everywhere and nowhere. In addition, the two artists attempted to plan a trip: "It was decided (at my urging because Hélio was from there and I had never been) to take a trip to the Amazon to create the images. The idea was to transform the sterile walls and urban topography of the New York museum into a phantasmagorical setting both meditative and provocative". An evocation of the ecological themes eviscerated earlier at Belo Horizonte in the exhibition *Do Corpo à Terra*. In those years, Jaffe had just met d'Almeida and had been a member of the cast in his film *Piranhas do Asfalto*, [*Asphalt Piranhas*], which had included Maria Gladys. In the same email sent on 6 August, Jaffe emphasises that: "Hélio had told me that he had been very moved by Neville's previous movie, "Jardim de Guerra" for its courageousness in exposing the brutality of the ruling military government, but also in particular for its innovative use of slide projection. As for myself, I was in awe of Neville's knowl-



edge of cinematic history and his charismatic directing infused with an urgency dictated by the fact that his previous movies had been censored and the real physical danger in shooting another. And of course Maria Gladys was just sensational”.

Jaffe suggested the recording of Gladys and d’Almeida’s voices to be included in the sounds of the jungle (“Hélio was all for it”). It was a performance element that would impact on the environment. They planned, in fact, to use a 35mm cinecamera, a Super8 camera and one of the first Sony Portapacs, all, however, commonly used, non-professional products.

Although apparently gauged down to the smallest detail, the project evaporated over the years, beginning from the weeks after April 1970. So did the links and contacts that had existed between the group of artists. “As I mentioned to you, I had lost contact with my Brazilian connections and was only reunited in 2009. My subsequent trip to Rio and the Amazon in 2010 and especially with reuniting with Neville, Gladys, and Miguel Rio Branco inspired me to resume my art practice which I had left after my traveling survey show initiated by Moderna Museet in 1992 and which included several environmental works from the 1980’s using sound and tv monitors”.

Jaffe reported that during the development of the idea, the mental planning of the environment, the idea had been to create “something live yet immobile – poetic – entropic yet evolving – a devolving of a closed system. Voices ephemeral – gathered in space – lost in time, a theatre without a stage – a box without a wall, spanning continents”. The intention in 1970 had been to allow energy to flow in and out of multiple shadings that would highlight various complexities, and produce from the stasis, from the recurring, rhythmic systematisation of images and content, a hive for chaos.

Despite the excitement of the preparations, on 8 April 1970 McShine sent a telegram from New York to Oiticica in Rio desperately asking to receive materials for the catalogue and the proposal for the exhibition. On 27 April, under pressure from the time that was passing and the difficulties of exchanging letters without a delay, Oiticica sent a further letter to McShine, abandoning for good the proposal he had sent him about three weeks earlier. “I am sending here the new plans [...]. This is a development of the “nests” idea and the Sussex University experiment [...] as a synthesis of my work in the past 10 years. It is the complete transformation of the object-environment into the exploration of the leisure-behavior structures”. Moreover, in a list of four points Oiticica sent the curator suggestions on materials for the catalogue, how to get hold of documentation about it (including a video filmed by the BBC in London the year before), and, finally, the promise to follow the setting-up in person during the last two weeks of June, given that the film he was about to make was to commence shooting in July. Last of all he said he was pleased and relieved that McShine had not wanted the videotape he had previously proposed, and he concluded with certainty “[...] and I’m sure I’ll be much more what my work has been with this built leisure-structure”. This letter was followed by an exchange of others between the curator and the artist who, in brief letters dated 18 and 26 May, worked out among budget problems and retrieving materials, the inclusion of films inside the “nests”, among them, Raymundo Amado’s *Guerra e Paz*; Paulo Martin’s *Arte Publica*; and Antonio Carlos Fontoura’s *Ver Ouvir*, as well as the materials that should have

been sent from Barrio and Meireles, and were logistically late. The set-up was anticipated to take place less than three weeks later, during the first week of June, and every idea for a new project for *Information* was set aside and left unmentioned. Oiticica travelled twice to New York in 1970. The first time in June to set up the *Ninhos* in the historic exhibition *Information*, one of the cornerstones of the investigation into conceptual art undertaken by Kynaston McShine at the MoMA. In August, after his return to Rio, Oiticica received the news that he had been included in the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation scholarship programme. The scholarship, a sum of about nine thousand dollars, was offered for a period of twelve months as financial support for the artist in residence. It should be noted here that Oiticica’s project proposal for the scholarship is still currently registered at the New York Foundation as *Experiments in Polysensorial Art*.

And so, in November 1970, Oiticica began to live permanently in New York, making his definitive return to Brazil in 1978. Oiticica left his country of origin in a deep crisis. In 1971 he wrote to Lygia Clark that “things are falling apart. There are some cool young people [...], but what future do they have if they can’t escape like I did?”<sup>1</sup> In this period he began to conceive films and plays that deconstructed conventional ideas of cinema and theatre. His thoughts in this area of research required a new space for civil resistance, transgression of the representation and libertarian action. He focused on narration and on structuring the viewer’s role as a participant in a phenomenological and perceptual fabrication of the moving image. In taking this route, Oiticica used referential functions from Roman Jakobson’s work that established the foundation of a taxonomic system for his own artistic language, and a poetic function to express games of images and propositions within the signs he developed according to an innovative form. For the poetic function, appropriation and displacement were frequent meanings, essential in manifesting and transmitting the artist’s code in a contiguous way. Thus we can say that the poetry of Oiticica’s work was more metonymic than metaphorical, especially in New York, where the artist augmented his work with images he assigned to become a Repertoire: “they are open-ended images that are merely presented, not directly conceived as “representation” of something “significant,” but as poetically-given repertoire images . Between finite limits, the physics of visual language and infinite dimensions. Between construction and action”<sup>2</sup>.

Oiticica noted in his diary: “This is a good place to read and think in; to see everything from afar and closer, from the perspective of Jet information; I’m not sure whether the grant will be renewed or not, at the end of the year; I believe so, but even if it’s not, I’ll stay here; I feel strong enough to want to survive; I feel the will to do things; when I left there in December, I felt like a wreck, destitute, alone; now, I’ve managed to turn my solitude into something fruitful [...] but all in all I don’t feel connected like I did in the past; something’s lacking and I can’t put my finger on it; the problem is that these grants will give you relief at first, but eventually they’ll make you grow frustrated; it’s like time stood still, like I’m convicted; my work, as always, is problematic, a lifelong burden to bear; a lot of it is intuited, but there’s always a wait for the conditions to stabilize, ad infinitum”.<sup>3</sup>

1 [...] as coisas andam caindo aos pedaços. Há gente jovem bacana [...] mas qual o futuro deles se não escaparem também [...].

2 [...] são imagens abertas meramente apresentadas, não diretamente concebidas como “representação” de algo “significante”, mas como imagens de repertoire poeticamente-dadas’ [...].

3 Aqui é bom para ler e pensar; ver tudo de longe e de mais perto, do ponto de vista da informação Jet; não sei se renovam a bolsa ou não, no fim do ano; creio que sim, mas, mesmo que não, continuarei aqui; sinto forças para procurar sobreviver; sinto vontade de fazer as coisas; quando vim daí em dezembro, sentia-me arrasado, sem nada, só; hoje consegui transformar minha solidão em algo que dê frutos [...] mas; no todo, não me sinto ligado, como antigamente; falta algo, não sei; o problema é que essas bolsas dão um alívio inicial, mas depois frustram; parece que o tempo parou, como se estivesse condenado; meu trabalho, como sempre, é problemático, um fardo para toda a vida; muita coisa é intuída, mas há sempre uma espera para que as condições se estabeleçam, ad infinitum.



On 13 March 1973, or perhaps even beginning from the time of the initial and by then distant project involving the experimental collective gathering of information he had suggested in a letter dated 4 April 1970 to Kynaston McShine, the first quasi-cinema came into being at Loft 4 New York. (CC1, “[...] setting aside the one-sidedness of spectacle-cinema”<sup>4</sup>). A trans-subjective action without confines, a constant productive flow based on collaboration between Oiticica and d’Almeida which channelled their transgression from Duchamp-like impulsiveness to a non-restrictive architectural structure for cinematic contents; in other words, the Babylonists. The reinvention of cinema therefore began from the projection room and aimed to break the imperative viewer-film relationship in which images were used in an inactive, ‘sitting and watching’ way. Oiticica and Almeida agreed that both standing up and not being silent were possible during the projection of multiple images, no longer ‘on stage’, and in this way making viewers an active centre of vision and control while at the same time losing control over their own presence, between totality and simultaneity.

In the United States, says Neville d’Almeida, we wanted to be freer than they were. “This much was clear to us: the only thing that interested us was to make something we’d never seen before, something no one had ever done before”<sup>5</sup>.

A year later, on 3 March 1974, *BLOCO EXPERIENCIAS* in *COSMOCOCA*. Program in progress was officially drafted. The collaboration with Neville d’Almeida (CC1-CC5), Thomas Valentin (CC6), Guy Brett (CC8) and Carlos Vergara (CC9) led to new imagist experiences by Hélio in New York, characterised by three fundamental elements.

First of all, parody as a form of cinematic ambivalence, the concept of plagiarism – transmitted through appropriated but reinvented, camouflaged images, made unique in the ‘base-drawing’, depending on the slides employed to accompany the *Cosmococa* subject matter. Here the pigment was drugs. It was an intellectual attitude and the drawing was a process of preparation for inhaling “if smelling paint and other shit is part of the plastic art ‘experience’ then why not shining-white COUSIN so appealing to most nostrils”.<sup>6</sup>

Then there was the so-called deifying-mystical “absolutes”<sup>7</sup> of cocaine, required for pleasure without second-order moralism. But for Oiticica it was not a question of creating art under the effect of drugs: his project traced a dividing line, a demarcation between art as a further dimension for a state of freedom and the delirium of EXPERIMENT INVENT DESCRIBE. And, finally, the institution of the program in progress that was to branch out into a range of very diverse areas of possibility, including directorial instructions for the projections and the invention of the *Mancouillagens*, which conceal the state of mind by distorting the facial features.

Oiticica’s fascination for the altered states of consciousness (“*consciousness-expanding*”)<sup>8</sup> he experienced due to his involvement with the “Cousin” (Oiticica’s name for cocaine, taken from the line ‘sweet cousin cocaine’ in the song *Sister Morphine* by the Rolling Stones), led him to use it as a raw material for one of his wildest language experiments, based on Sigmund Freud’s 1885 essay “Über Coca”, a document that was part of the *Cosmococa. Program in progress*. Freud’s scientific article is a pharmacological treatise with meticulous records of the

psychological, physiological and therapeutic effects of cocaine, including, in a certain passage, a song of praise to this magical substance. An excellent binding agent for the kinetics of the “cinematic’of track making and it’s duration are fragmented in successive static positions as frames-moments INSTAMOMENTS....crystalline one-by-one not adding up to something but in themselves are something...moments (NOWandNOWandNOWand.....) in a MAKE-UP process”.<sup>9</sup>

But between the 1970 project and *Cosmococa* in 1974, only in the latter is it evident how Oiticica’s interest was heading towards dissatisfaction with the rationality of the language of cinema in and of itself, and turning instead to exploring the principally visual relationship between the spectator and the spectacle, such as overcoming the consequences-boundary that other filmmakers had begun to break. Moreover, once Oiticica was outside Brazil and writing the critical thesis for the *Cosmococa*, he was able to assume a point of view, especially with regard to the “BRAZILWISE experimentation is far more accessible: some individuals however became increasingly “grave” in their “concern with the destiny of brazilian cinema” and in their quest of “senses” and “significations” prerequisites of their hegher ideal-the creation of a brazilian cinematographic”<sup>10</sup>. So how to avoid the “NUMBNESS: the spectator paralysed: how to reconcile such imprisonment?”<sup>11</sup> Through less ‘cultural’ and more inventive experiments regarding Brazil “MANGUE-BANGUE:followed the first less cultural more inventive experiments: why limit? It pulses with pictorial sensuality (feel the color) and fragments into geometrically set episodes within its editing structure as if it were a cartoon strip made into sequence”.<sup>12</sup>

In the *Cosmococa* projections, every slide, every image had to follow a clearly specified numerical order, rather than mere “photos of NEVILLE’s arrangements”: they’re concurrent with them – in them – that (the slides) will accidentally vary in their projected duration, depending on who is projecting them, and conflate with the music whose track-tape is always wider than ½ our [...] fragmentation of kineticism: the hand that cuts the cokeline-makeup moves razor/blade/knife or whatever over the flat-finished-image”<sup>13</sup>.

Within this type of experimentation, the image was neither the supreme conductor nor the work’s unifying finale. What really honed the artist’s experimental position was to displace the supremacy and constancy of the image so that it becomes a “play-part of the fragmented game with originates in experimentation positing taken to a limit”.<sup>14</sup> This type of game with Neville reminded Oiticica of the inclusion of Antonio Manuel’s He killed the dog and drank the blood in *Tropicália* in 1967, defined as a “limit-tentative (not super realism)probing IMAGE’s displacement (visually and sensorially- the COMPOSITE IMAGE)throughout a kind of multi-media salad without the obtrusive dressing of sense or point of view”<sup>15</sup>. A fragmented foundation of the limits of non-representation, “they were the story-newspaper emptied of daily news”.<sup>16</sup> Compared with the project that Oiticica had proposed to the MoMA in New York, the *Cosmococa* were a mature reflection of the urgent need to establish a montage that would generate a feeling and transform the hegemony of the image into a channel, into the comfort that transforms the viewer into a participant in a film, a vision that unifies the fragmentation of reality. “The world of objects its unity under threat would be transformable(reducible to the atom) but never fragmented in its whole”.<sup>17</sup>

The second *Cosmococa*, *CC2 Onobject* (12 August 1973), for example, included the viewers

<sup>9</sup> Canção de louvor a esta substância mágica. Um ottimo collante per il cinetismo do “fazer o rastro” e sua ‘duração’ no tempo resultam fragmentados em posições estaticas sucessivas como momentos-frames one-by-one q nao resultam e malgo mas já constituem momentos-algo em processo-MAQUILAR.

<sup>10</sup> BRASIL de experimentalidade quase q ao alcance de mao o pessoal foi ficando cada vez mais “serio” e com obsessiva preocupacao quanto aos destinos do cinema brasileiro” e à busca de ‘sentidos’ e ‘significados’ q pudessem justificar outra ambição maior: criar a industria cinematográfica brasileira.

<sup>11</sup> [...] NUMBNESS q aliena o espectador cada vez mais impaciente na cadeira-prisao?.

<sup>12</sup> [...]Mangue Banguê ad esempio) porque limite? ao mesmo tempo q pulsa de glorificação do visual: da cor-comida de sensualidade pictórica: fragmentase em episodios geometricamente enquadrados no corte-montagem: como se fora um longo strip feito sequencia tirado de estoria em quadrinhos: um filme solucionado!.

<sup>13</sup> [...] fotos dos arranjos de NEVILLE” são simultâneos com eles –neles – q acidentalmente (os slides) hão de variar na duração projetada de acordo com quem projeta e juntar-se à música q tem fta-track sempre maior q ½ ora [...] fragmentação do cinetismo: a mão q faz o rastrococa-maquilagem move-se gilete/lamina/faca ou o q seja sobre imagem-flat-acabada [...].

<sup>14</sup> [...] parte-play do jogo fragmentado q origina das posicoes experimentais levadas a limite.

<sup>15</sup> tentativo-limite nao-superrealista de checar esse deslocamento da IMAGEM (visual e sensorial: o TODO IMAGEM) numa espécie de salada multimedia sem muito ‘sentido’ ou ‘ponto de vista’

<sup>16</sup> [...]o jornal-estoria esvaziado do vazio da noticia diaria.

<sup>17</sup> O mundo dos objetos mesmo com a bomba pairando sobre sua unicidade seria transformavel (reduzido ao atomo) mas nunca fragmentado enquanto todo.

<sup>4</sup> [...] pondo de lado a uniliteralidade do cinema-espetáculo [...].

<sup>5</sup> A gente tinha claro: só interessa fazer o que a gente nunca viu, o que nunca ninguém fez [...].

<sup>6</sup> [...] se se usam tintas fedorentas e tudo q é merda nas “obras de arte (plásticas)” porque não a PRIMA tão branca-brilho e tão afim aos narizes gerais? [...].

<sup>7</sup> [...]absoludo místico deifcado[...].

<sup>8</sup> [...] expansão da consciência[...].



as performers in a space delineated by thick black mats surrounded by coloured geometric blocks, also made of polyurethane foam, almost as if they were another component along with slide and sound installations. The instructions for the stage props call for three books (among them Yoko Ono's Grapefruit, Martin Heidegger's *What is a Thing*, and *Your Children* by Charles Manson), a knife, paper, a silver straw, cocaine, assorted objects scattered on the work surfaces, such as rulers, pencils and papers, as well as a small board to draw on.

Meanwhile, the public performance as a whole had to be 'S-O-M-E-T-H-I-N-G-N-E-W as Yoko herself is'. With the set of twenty-five slides, projected on different sides of the room cube to the rhythm of a soundtrack that included Ono's shouts, CC2 was to represent a unified environmental work. A show that would subvert the dimensions of object/function and spectator/spectacle also by means of audience participation in a joyful dance in the light, on top of the mats, that could be walked on even while projecting the images; although there was also the possibility of using white sheets to create spatial divisions.

This type of non-narrative by Oiticica should be inscribed within a *conceptual* field, as the artist designated it himself, but this does not necessarily apply to the structuring and creation of his work on Super8 film and slides, once the heart of his poetic languages reveals a narrative function, regardless of the medium used, and even if fragmented, elliptical, non-linear, non-literary or even unintelligible. More than once Oiticica wrote: "I detest conceptual art, I have nothing to do with conceptual art. On the contrary, my work is something concrete, as such".<sup>18</sup>

For Oiticica it was a question of constructing an allegory of language out of a combination of different processes that generate hybrids, thus breaking the categorisation of genres in art: "The hybrid, or the meeting of two mediums, is a moment of truth and revelation when a new form is born. The moment of a meeting of mediums is a moment of freedom and liberation from the stupor and the apathy that they impose upon our senses".<sup>19</sup> The hybridisation of meanings in Oiticica's artistic production was also made possible by including viewers in the work, and it widens the range of interpretations.

With his definition of New York as an "allegorical Barnbylon (the world is not as round is Manhattan-penis)"<sup>20</sup> (1971), Oiticica invested his artistic language with a sense that gave its flow a kind of circularity: from the time of the concept of quasi-cinema, or allegorical body where metonymic processes intensify, once the surface meanings, now no longer superficial, such as film, photography and video become essentially products for devices that emphasise the displacement and dynamics of contiguity at different levels of perception. By transubstantiating information that translates a conglomerate of experiences, everything becomes contaminated, wrapped in the dimensional coupling of language/life, which always generates hybrids. In the quasi-cinema works, the viewer's body is the device that disorganises the functional feeling of oneness that leads to Aristotle's classical postulate of 'organon', and the duality of 'adherent' thought, the attractor of two opposites. In this sense, Oiticica's body of language aims towards the organicity of experience and never the organisation of certainties: the artist

must remain possessed by the incantatory effect of the cinematic experience as well by its sensory aspects. The 'filmmakers of the body' have the body as their sole source for discovery. The body is an element on which every internal and external conflict is written.

The dimension of *quasi-cinema* turns any filmic projection into a sensory flow, transmitting the physicality of cinema through the dissolution of the deepest register of feelings: a sort of evolutionary and critical passage due to different elaborated contents and transcended laws when compared to the intuition behind the unrealised project Oiticica conceived on the page he enclosed in his letter of 4 April 1970 to McShine.

Therefore, in the rooms of São Paulo's Galeria Nara Roesler, critical exegesis encounters the precepts of participatory art in encompassing the life and experience of the freedom of artistic experimentation in two different cities: Rio de Janeiro and New York. With *CC2 – Onobject, Information, Nirvana* and *Arma Fálca*, Hélio Oiticica transcended exhibition boundaries by placing the audience in direct contact with the idea of a moving delirium, a form the artist used to arouse in himself and convey to the visitor the state of latent creation. His greatest ambition from the time of the *Penetráveis* (which began with the 1961 *Projeto Cães de Caça* and accompanied him during his time in New York and later towards the end of his artistic life) was the construction of open cosmic spaces within which people could create around themselves their own perceptual universe, beyond any historical or visual conditioning, representing that moment as an encounter with themselves and therefore reaching in their turn "a creative state in a supra-sensitive experience"<sup>21</sup>, the key for developing the *experimental practice of freedom*.

It was that same search for an encounter with oneself that grew, changed and became introverted when Hélio Oiticica moved to New York in 1970. In fact, in his works from the 1960s, projects that still reflect the influence of Ivan Serpa and the benevolent protection of Mario Pedrosa "(an austere young artist, as befits the grandson of an illustrious anarchist, see Os Projetos de Hélio Oiticica)"<sup>22</sup>, (1961), Oiticica found his inspiration in the interaction between people and the environment of the favelas, given that both the *Penetráveis* and *Parangolés* depend upon the active participation of people from different social backgrounds. Those works, which were interventionist by nature, and, significantly, took place in public areas from streets to museums, gave way in contrast to the series *COSMOCOCA: Program in progress*. Dark interior locations, hermetic, visceral and hidden from the life of the city and the frenzy of New York, like a kind of rejection or introjection of external impenetrability. A kind of urgently sought-after narrative alienation that perhaps even from the very first project for *Information*, shelved by Kynaston McShine, reveals Hélio Oiticica's position as an outsider intent on perpetrating "an exercise in concretion of the non-concluded/ or/ the proposing of determinate structures from the exercise of the indeterminate"<sup>23</sup>.

18 Detesto arte conceitual, scrive Oiticica più volte, nada tenho a ver com arte conceitual. Pelo contrário, meu trabalho é algo concreto, como tal.

19 [...]O híbrido, ou o encontro de dois meios, é um momento de verdade e revelação do qual nasce uma forma nova. O momento do encontro de meios é um momento de liberdade e de libertação do torpor e da apatia impostos por eles aos nossos sentidos [...].

20 Barnbilônia alegórica (o mundo não é tão redondo é manhattan-pênis).

21 [...] estado criativo em uma vivência suprasensível [...].

22 [...] jovem artista austero, como convém a neto de anarquista ilustre, vd. Os Projetos de Hélio Oiticica [...].

23[...] um exercício da concreção do não concluído/ ou/ a proposta de estruturas determinadas do exercício do indeterminado [...].



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## sobre **Hélio Oiticica**

Hélio Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro, 1937–1980) was one of the most creative artists of the 20th century and played a key role in the development of Latin American art and culture. Since his premature death at the age of 42, his influence and importance have continued to grow. A key figure in the Tropicália movement in Brazil, which revolutionized popular music and the arts in the 1970s, Oiticica had to escape the military regime and was forced into exile in London and New York, where he forged new alliances and was a key influence on a wide range of artists. Among his most original achievements was the innovative and uncompromising use of color that became a feature of his entire career, from his early abstract compositions to his later sculptures and large-scale installations. Combining it with rhythm, music, and performance, he used color to stimulate visual and tactile sensations, drawing in and involving his audience.

