

**Inventions of Acratic Lives:  
José Oiticica, José Oiticica Filho (JOF), and  
Hélio Oiticica's "Antiart"**

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"Are you an anarchist?" asked a journalist from a popular entertainment magazine in 1966. "*Body and soul,*" replied the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica.<sup>1</sup>

The above statement stands out for those familiar with Hélio Oiticica's (1937-1980) remarkable career because he rarely declared himself an anarchist. Hélio was never a "political personality" in the Brazilian anarchist movement, and, in fact, the movement was much reduced during Brazil's twenty-one-year military dictatorship (1964-85), when anarchists were persecuted by the state, attacked by hostile conservatives, and depreciated by leftist groups. Living under these circumstances, Oiticica manifested his anarchism through ethical stances infusing aesthetic experiments. This article traces the interweaving strands that led him to adopt this strategy and the ways in which his artwork intersects with the viewpoints and artistic activism of his father and grandfather.

**Chromatic: from *Neoconcreto* to *Bólido***

Hélio Oiticica was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1937. His father was José de Oiticica Filho (1906-1964), an engineer, entomologist and photographer, and his mother was Angela Oiticica (1906-1974). He was grandson of the poet, philologist, and teacher José Oiticica (1882-1957), an active anarchist and editor of the acritic publication *Ação Direta* (*Direct Action*) from 1946 to his death. In 1954, encouraged by his father, Hélio started his artistic training with the artist Ivan Serpa, who taught a "free painting" course at the Museum of Modern Art in

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Rio de Janeiro. Hélio's artistic initiation took as its starting point early twentieth century "constructivist" avant-garde traditions, which enjoyed great resonance in Brazil's art circles during the 1950s and 1960s. His first works, executed with rigor and accuracy, echo the paintings of artists such as Kazimir Malevich and Piet Mondrian. In 1955 and 1956, he participated in exhibitions held by the *Grupo Frente*, a collective of artists brought together by Serpa. The exhibitions attracted the attention of Brazil's most important art critics: Mario Pedrosa and the poet Ferreira Gullar. The latter regarded *Grupo Frente's* formation as the most important contemporary event in Brazilian art.

However, the group dissolved, and some members, including Hélio, joined the Concrete Art movement, which had emerged in the city of São Paulo.<sup>2</sup> At that time, Brazilian concrete artists were holding exhibitions in Rio de Janeiro, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo. In 1959, a new *Neoconcreto* group was formed by Hélio Oiticica, Ligia Pape, Franz Weissmann, Lygia Clark, former members of *Grupo Frente*, and additional artists (notably, the poet Ferreira Gullar). They met frequently to discuss their work and related procedures and experiences. The *Neoconcreto* group distinguished itself from the Concrete Art movement by placing greater emphasis on the question of art as a vehicle for social transformation through organic and sensorial experiments.

The involvement in these movements gave Hélio, in his own words, "pictorial thought without content."<sup>3</sup> His work was informed by the absence of representation, as he incorporated mathematical knowledge, a structure, logical sequences between the elements distributed in the plan, and studies of insights developed by Gestalt theory. In the era of the *Frente* group, his works consisted of studies concerning the possibilities of plane and color that were elaborated utilizing gouache on paper or cardboard or the medium of oil painting on wood. Plates of color saturated rectangles. While working with the Concrete Art movement, Hélio started the *Metaesquemas* series, in which he researched the rhythm of shapes in the traditional plane of painting: his subject was the rectangle without the rigidity of adjacent color plates that had featured in his previous works. Here shapes gained movement and lightness. He then carried out monochromatic

experiments, starting with “white on white” – a reference to Malevich’s *White on White* (1918-19) paintings, and went on to research the transition from canvas to space through the expansion of color beyond the picture plane.

In 1959, Hélio started the *Invenção* series: these were monochrome works in square plates hovering slightly out from a wall, in which colors (yellow, red, orange, white) were applied in superimposed layers. This marks Hélio’s first experience with departing from the two-dimensional plane in painting. Hélio commented at the time: “Here I think I discovered, for me, the technique that becomes expression, the integration of the two, which will be important in the future.”<sup>4</sup> From this he reiterated the following principle: “all true art does not separate technique from expression; the technique corresponds to what the art expresses, and therefore it is not something artificial that is learned and adapted to an expression; it is indissolubly linked to it.”<sup>5</sup> In *Invenções*, a painting’s “support” was absorbed, or dissolved, into expression, and this opened the way for subsequent works.

While part of the *Neoconcreto* group, Hélio embarked on systematic research concerning form, materials, and the expansion of color-light, pursuing “painting after painting.” He created *Bilaterals* and *Spatial Reliefs* (1959), three-dimensional works composed of painted wooden surfaces hanging from the ceiling, whose suspension allowed the viewer to optically apprehend the monochromatic surface from different angles, imbuing temporality with the experience of color. In 1960, he executed works that intensified the active participation of the spectator. The *Nucleus* was composed of monochromatic plates hanging in a labyrinthine arrangement. He also created the first of his *Penetrable* series. PN1 had movable wooden plates that could be manipulated by people, allowing entry to a monochromatic cabin. With *Penetrável*, Hélio believed he had integrated spectators into the color-structure by placing them in the center of it, thus advancing the transition from painting to space and bringing time’s passage, duration, into play as a component of the work. “In the penetrable, definitely, the relationship between the spectator and the color-structure takes place in complete integration, since he is virtually placed at the center of it.”<sup>6</sup>

Hélio's search for "the painting after the painting," subsuming body and structure within color, led, in 1963, to a new art form, the *bólide* ("fireball" in Portuguese), composed in two main series: *Glass Bólides* and *Box Bólides*. Both artworks were to be manipulated by people, thus revealing shapes and color pigments that saturated one's hands, along with poems, images, and smells. What mattered here was the sensory stimulus provided by each *bolide*: the experience was no longer merely of color expanding in space. It integrated gestures to realize the shape of the *bolide*, and for complete enjoyment of the work. Experiences with these and other objects led to the formulation of the *supra-sensorial*. This mode of art goes beyond optical perception; it expands sensitivity and reaches other senses – touch, smell, and kinesthesia (proprioception). More and more people were involved in the realization of artworks envisaged by Hélio.

### **Carnival: the margin is inside the river**

The politics of *bolide* are complex. At the end of 1963, Hélio had been invited by the sculptors Amílcar de Castro and Fernando Jackson Ribeiro to collaborate making carnival floats for the "Vê se me entende" ("Watch if you understand me") component of the *Estação Primeira da Mangueira* samba school parade scheduled for the 1964 Rio de Janeiro Carnival. Unexpected experiences and productive encounters resulting from this engagement had an important impact on his life and art. Carnival in Brazil, especially in Rio de Janeiro, features championship competitions between samba schools that parade along a central avenue in the city center for several nights. The parades must develop a plot using costumes, floats, and a samba specially composed for the occasion. Each samba is performed, sung, and danced by residents of a given school's neighborhood. Many neighborhoods in the suburban areas and favelas (slums which are built on hills throughout the city) are inhabited by very poor populations — these include people descended from former slaves manumitted during the era of slavery or freed after slavery's abolition in 1888.<sup>7</sup> Samba associations that perform in the streets on carnival days could involve participants from these districts. In the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth-centuries, samba dancers descending from the impoverished "hills" (favelas) into

wealthier “asphalt” districts were not well regarded by the population of the “asphalt.” They were even prohibited by the authorities because the samba art form and Afro-Brazilian dances were associated with “backwardness” and “poverty.” At the time, the Brazilian establishment aspired to show the world a “civilized and progressive” face.<sup>8</sup>

However, the spread of radio and the phonographic industries in Brazil popularized, commercialized, and legitimized the samba. Two famous musical movies publicized samba songs and carnival “marchinhas” which were well-known thanks to the radio: *Alô Alô Brasil* (1935) and *Alô Alô Carnaval* (1936).<sup>9</sup> Neither movie included Afro-Brazilian characters or musicians, though the government of the time, the Getúlio Vargas Dictatorship (1930-1945), mobilized this popular musical genre as a component of its nationalist project to nurture a genuinely “Brazilian” official culture. Subsequently, Afro-Brazilian samba clubs officially organized themselves, and competed on the “asphalt” for the title of Carnival Champion. Over the years, carnival parades attracted a multitude of tourists, including foreigners, who were seduced by Rio de Janeiro’s many festivals, which included elegant balls for the elite along with street block parties and samba school parades outdoors in the avenues. Brazilian governments supported these celebrations and publicized them outside Brazil. Furthermore, beginning in the 1950s, Rio de Janeiro youths from the “Southern Zone” (the wealthiest area of the city) began attending rehearsals of samba schools as well as the carnival parades, sometimes disrupting the cadence of dancers and musicians.

As part of this official support, Carnival attracted the attention of visual artists, who, working with set and costume designers, were invited to collaboratively choreograph the visuality of the parades and even joined the jury awarding the carnival’s champions. For example, the samba school *Salgueiro* won the title in the 1960 championship because it had a team of professionals trained at the *Escola de Belas Artes* to elaborate “modern and tasteful” costumes and allegories. The *Estação Primeira da Mangueira*, in turn, came to represent “old-fashioned” traditions in the parades. Sergio Cabral asserts that a “Professor at the *Escola de Belas Artes*, a member of the jury for the 1962 parade, confessed that he had given the school a bad grade because

he considered the combination of green and pink (the mandatory colors of Mangueira's identity) very ugly. And he wasn't alone. Many people had the same opinion."<sup>10</sup>

However, carnival was criticized by a significant portion of Rio de Janeiro's middle class, accusing "the favelados" of furthering "the enormous financial frivolity that the Carnival represents – expenses with the parade itself, the expensive costumes, and time wasted in endless preparations and rehearsals."<sup>11</sup> Some intellectuals, predominantly affiliated with left-wing parties, considered devotion to samba and related celebrations as forms of alienation, and attributed any joy to the ingenuity of sectors of the people who were alienated from a true revolutionary consciousness. Others, while upholding the alienation thesis, considered traditional samba associations such as Mangueira to be authentic manifestations of the people's creativity.

For his part, Hélio was not interested in making the schools look more suitable for tourists or the middle class, nor did he want to be mistaken for a youth of the "asphalt" who partied in the hills. He invited Miro, a famous dancer, to give him samba lessons and only when he considered himself ready to dance – capable of performing the most difficult steps – did he make his debut at the Carnival of the Fourth Centenary in 1965. Subsequently, he joined the school and paraded for some years. In the milieu of Morro da Mangueira, he was not recognized as an artist, he was only "*Hélio de tal* [Hélio so and so]."<sup>12</sup>

Oiticica's dexterity in socializing with people in Morro da Mangueira and Rio de Janeiro's *malandragem* territory was reinforced by his friendship with Rose de Souza Mattos—girlfriend of Mangueira's president at the time.<sup>13</sup> She was from a traditional Afro-Brazilian family in the Estácio neighborhood, a central region of the city and the birthplace of samba. Her father was a samba player and dancer. Oiticica often stayed at Rose's mansion near the Mangue area – a famous region of brothels. There he forged relations with people from that "other side" of Rio's social life: samba dancers, criminals, drug dealers, and workers. Many of them became close friends or partners. Incognito, he used to visit some when they were imprisoned. In these

circles he learned to dance, found partners for casual sex (Hélio was homosexual) and experienced an everyday way of being far removed from his usual life. “I felt old when I was a teenager. So, the street was a way for me to stop being old, and also a sexual initiation, of course.”<sup>14</sup> Hélio mixed with them in soul and in body—bodies in motion, bodies that dance and love each other.

These encounters marked the end of what Hélio called “bourgeois conditioning,” a reference to the class-inflected “intellectual paraphernalia of Ipanema” (a wealthy neighborhood in the south of Rio) and an ideas-driven lifestyle (granted, his anarchist family had served to some degree as a protective oasis from such influences).<sup>15</sup> Amongst the slums and poor neighborhoods, Hélio found a world in which carelessness implied detention and death, and survival depended on paying attention to the minimal possibilities of life. In these factors of living, he discovered intense vitality and strength.

“The bourgeois conditioning to which I was subjected since I was born fell apart as if by magic – I must say, by the way, that the process had already been taking shape before, without my knowing it.”<sup>16</sup> By breaking from this social strata, Hélio found himself positionless within the caste stratifications of Brazilian society: he perceived “his individual place as a total man in the world, as a social being in its total sense and not included in a particular stratum or elite. Not even the marginal artistic elite... What interests me is the total act of being that I experience here in me – not partial acts, but a total act of life, irreversible, the imbalance for the balance of being.” This restlessness, “this process that had already been taking shape before,” emerged from his artistic practice expanding colors into space, with the integrating spectators. It had manifested in his artworks and carried resonances derived from his anarchist teachings.<sup>17</sup> Reflecting on an exhibition of Hélio’s work in 1966, Pedrosa summarized: “Beauty, sin, revolt, love give this young man’s art a new accent in Brazilian art. No use in moral admonitions. If you want background, maybe this is one: Hélio is the grandson of an anarchist.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Total revolt: a family of anarchists**

Hélio's anarchist grandfather, José Oiticica, was the son of a senator in the newly proclaimed Brazilian Republic of 1889. He came from a family of sugarcane farmers in the state of Alagoas, whose members had held positions in medicine, law, the arts, and institutional politics since imperial times. In 1913, Oiticica, who held a Bachelor of Law degree, broke through the imaginary walls demarcating Brazil's segregated social strata when he climbed the stairs to the headquarters of Rio de Janeiro's *Federação Operária* [Workers' Federation] and joined the anarchist organization. This decision arose from his reflections and experience as an educator. Independently, Oiticica had conceived of a new theory concerning the state and society, which he shared with one of his cousins. The cousin replied: "But this already exists. It's pure anarchism!" He was dumbfounded and hesitated, because for him anarchism was a "kind of sect whose supporters intend to straighten the world by destroying it with the bomb."<sup>19</sup> Consulting various anarchist publications, including *Les Temps Nouveaux* and *Revista Blanca*, familiarized him with the ideas of martyred anarchist educator Francisco Ferrer y Guardia: he realized that his "discovery" had been put into practice for some time, not only in matters related to the education of children and young people, but as a way of life that could realize humanity's freedom.<sup>20</sup> Thus, he decided to build his life in accordance with acratid ideals, and immediately sought contact with the *Federação Operária* and other Rio de Janeiro-based anarchist groups. In short order, his new found militancy led to participation in the second Brazilian Workers Congress, which took place in September 1913.

Throughout his life, he helped families of activists, aided escapees from the law, and hid people persecuted by police in his house. He also took part in demonstrations and was very active promoting anarchism. His militancy aimed, above all, to inform, instruct and mobilize individuals: avoiding elevating himself into a position of authority, he sought to educate people and strengthen their capacities for autonomy and freedom. In 1918, he was accused by undercover informers of being the leader of an anarchist conspiracy to dynamite Brazil's Government Palace during a great working-class insurrection



that had shocked the city of Rio de Janeiro. After his arrest he was sent to Alagoas and confined for a few months on the Oiticica's family plantation. Returning to Rio de Janeiro in 1919, he founded the anarchist newspaper *Spartacus* and continued his militancy, an obstinace that earned him stretches of confinement in various prisons.

His enemies were not only governmental authorities. In 1928, he was shot at during a conference of the Graphics Union, and only escaped death because the assassin missed his target. The would-be killer had acted at the behest of the newly founded Brazilian Communist Party, which, obedient to Moscow, was seeking to force workers' organizations into its orbit. Such sectarian violence led Oiticica to regard Communists as little better than the social oppressors anarchists were trying to free workers from:

Freeing the men from the boss is a lot, but it's not all. It is necessary to remove them from the tutelage of political and religious leaders; and from the tyranny of "morals," creation of oppressors to fanaticize slaves. Thus, we do not understand a revolutionary whose action stems from servitude. How to institute a free regime if we do not get rid of the traditional handcuffs? How to propose a free life if we live by imposing rules and listening to orders? How can we desire a "man for himself," if we are habituating ourselves and others to vexatious disciplines, obsolete censures and degrading punishments?<sup>21</sup>

From 1916, Oiticica had taught Portuguese in a traditional public school, the *Colégio Pedro II*, where his knowledge so impressed the examiners that they hired him even though he was a well-known anarchist and anticlerical militant. Neither periods in prison, nor accusations that he was an incendiary prevented him from continuing to teach at that school until he retired in 1951. He was also a professor of prosody at the Municipality of Rio Janeiro's School of Theater, and taught Greek at the University of the Federal District. Oiticica was a poet and dramaturgist as well. He took musical composition classes with the Afro-Brazilian musician, teacher, and erudite com-

poser Paulo Silva (1892-1967), a specialist in counterpoint and Bach. He even composed songs, although they remain unpublished. Moreover, in addition to being a militant anarchist, there was an esoteric side. Oiticica belonged to the Rosicrucian Order, which propagated “Natural Laws” as the path to social harmony.

In 1929, he founded the anarchist newspaper *Ação Direta*, but its publication was interrupted months later. He renewed the newspaper following the end of the Vargas dictatorship in 1946, and it continued to be published until 1958, a year after Oiticica’s death. Its foundational principle: “Only direct-action shakes thrones, threatens crowns, convolves worlds. Alone, it mainly educates and strengthens the dispossessed people, in their millenary struggle.”<sup>22</sup> In explaining direct action — the “core” of anarchism’s realization in life and politics — Oiticica ascribed this ethos to the attitudes of the first Brazilian abolitionists who, by hiding and defending slaves fleeing captivity, defied the law and police of their time.<sup>23</sup> Direct action promoted individual and collective initiative by dispensing with mediation and representatives in favour of full responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions.

Libertarian action also required a libertarian personal posture. Oiticica was guided by his faith in people’s capacity for autonomy and self-government. In this spirit, he emphasized individual choices and the courage to try out one’s own path, which he argued is necessary for the practice of freedom. But this individualism does not prescind attention to others. Writing on the principles and purposes of anarchism, he built from these premises: “1 - Men associate to ensure their existence and reproduction, obtain maximum happiness, improve the species, physically, morally, and mentally. 2 - The maximum happiness of one depends on the maximum happiness of all.”<sup>24</sup> The latter echoes Bakunin’s notion that liberty for all, far from being a limit on the individual, as liberal individualists claim, constitutes liberation’s confirmation and infinite expansion. Anarchism was the only societal practice capable of realizing truly collective freedom and happiness. “Only the individual has the right to direct his reasoning, regulate his language, confront his style, moderate his judgment, guide his action.... [Anarchism] repels the prison regime of capital-

ism, condemns the factories of doctors, priests, soldiers, men cast in a single mold, mannequins cut in a single model, scarecrows whose filling is the same dry straw.”<sup>25</sup>

Amongst Oiticica’s artistic activities, playwriting was the most significant avenue for disseminating ideas. This art rendered social theory more impactful and sensuous, not only through the spoken word, but thanks to its capacity to make direct contact with an audience. Plays were part and parcel of initiatives dedicated to informing and instructing workers. In the case of anarchist theater, performances often occurred in the humble rooms of a union organization or similar venue. Routinely staged by amateurs, those with some theatrical training would help interpret the characters and provide technical support, such as costumes, scenery, lighting, and stage organization. The play on stage was contiguous with the audience. In fact, performances were often but one part of an ensemble of events that included lectures and even dances. Between 1919 and 1923, Oiticica wrote plays propagating anarchist ideas and practices: *Azalan; Who saves them; It’s not a crime!; Rolling Stone*; and in 1936, *Pirlimpimpim’s Powders*. The plots are infused with discursive passages addressing anticlericalism and free love as well as criticisms of bourgeois mentality, property, and the exploitation of workers. Activists staged these works several times in worker halls and union centers in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. *Rolling Stone* and *Who saves them* were even integrated into the repertoire of a professional theater company.

Oiticica also theorized how other art forms could foment revolutionary consciousness. Regarding poetry, he staunchly rejected modernism and free verse, and defended the classical metric in poetic construction. His own poems followed the rigor of the nineteenth-century French Parnassians (a poetic movement whose ranks included Stéphane Mallarmé and Paul Verlaine). For him, form and structure were integral to an artwork:

To write badly is to think badly. If nothing else, it is thought that is devious, lame, ill-taken, unreliable as a work of art. Thinking must be, above all, aesthetic creation. Thought without beauty is not thought; it is

at best a bit of truth spoken by a sage; it is only a possibility, a dough for a fiat, a stone for a cameo. Hence, the Idea is worth as much as the phrase. A thought embedded in a truncated or harsh sentence suffers; keen ears hear its cry. On the contrary, a fragile thought, embedded in a clear phrase, sings, and prays. Great thoughts, embedded in lapidary periods, are living beings, have blood and lymph, breathe, speak, move, and commove.... This is the reason for the perpetuity of classical art. Moderns or modernizers wrongly rebel against rigor, the “tyranny” of classicism.... Correctness of contours and firmness of design are less prime qualities; [what] they [classical artists] want [are] the vague, the indefinite, the imprecise, the disconnected.<sup>26</sup>

Bringing together form and idea seamlessly, the artwork comes alive. The poems of Oiticica and the poets he admired followed the rules of a strict classical metric. However, unlike his Parnassian counterparts, Oiticica did not support so-called “art for art’s sake.” For him, formal rigor was in the service of the idea, and the content of the artwork, social transformation. In this reading, anarchism put into practice requires formal structuring and self-constituting order, otherwise it will be an undeveloped amorphous possibility, merely a “rough stone.” Would the constructive rigor of an anarchic practice infused with freedom as envisaged by Oiticica be the “antecedent” that shaped Hélio’s art that critic Pedrosa suggested in his review of 1966 (see endnote 18)? Commenting on the exhibition of the artist’s maquette project *Cães de Caça* (*Hunting Dogs*) at Rio de Janeiro’s Museum of Modern Art four years earlier in 1961, he had also called attention to this relationship, announcing: “Hélio Oiticica, an austere young artist, as befits the grandson of an illustrious anarchist, brings to our museum the latest ideas.”<sup>27</sup>

Hélio’s brother, the architect Cesar Oiticica, who, like Hélio, studied with artist Ivan Serpa, confirms Pedrosa’s intuitions. He has summarized: “The entire formation of the Oiticica family, at least since our anarchist grandfather, has as its goal to think and act according

to our own ideas, based on our own experiences, without accepting dogmas or authoritarianism. Education was not an exercise in schooling, but in formation based above all on example. A poem by José Oiticica could be said to model the extended family's approach. "Become an example, the example is what builds."<sup>28</sup>

The eldest son of José Oiticica and Francisca Bulhões was Jose Oiticica Filho (JOF), father of Hélio, who made his living as a mechanical and electronic engineer. He had never attended high school because his father feared his children being subjected to standardized curricula, civic dates, and state indoctrination. Instead, JOF and his seven sisters studied at home and took qualifying exams to enter higher educational institutions. JOF, in turn, adopted the same educational program for his children. The initial education of Hélio, César, and their younger brother, Claudio, was carried out at home by their parents. In Hélio's words, "my father was against all kinds of teaching... [he] allowed me a type of excessive non-conditioning to certain types of adjusted behavior...with time I came to love the maladjustment as if it was something precious and rare: [within] my power to experience."<sup>29</sup>

In addition to being an autodidact zoologist publishing studies on insects (including hitherto unknown ones), JOF taught mathematics in higher educational institutions from 1928 to 1962. To enhance his scientific investigations, he perfected microphotography techniques and invented a device to better capture infinitesimal details. At the same time, he became interested in the aesthetic aspects of photography. This led him to join São Paulo's "Photo Club Bandeirante" (founded 1941; "Bandeirante" refers to a spirit of adventure and experimentation—but bandeirantes historically were real people who charged into the forests to enslave indigenous peoples). He would go on to participate in numerous photography exhibitions, both national and international, and receive several awards. In 1948, the Guggenheim Foundation awarded him a two-year fellowship to pursue entomological studies at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. While in residence he regularly visited museums and art galleries, especially Washington's National Gallery of Art. Upon returning to Brazil, he branched into non-figurative photography, a move which

brought considerable acclaim. In practice his turn to non-figurative photography drew him into the realm of painting and sculpture: masterly studies in contrasts between black and white were in tune with its aesthetics. Framing and compositional deliberations involved harmonizing measurements and mathematical calculations.<sup>30</sup> In this regard, JOC's decision to enroll his children, Hélio and César, in a painting course taught by Ivan Serpa was not fortuitous. Serpa was an exponent of geometric constructive trends in Rio de Janeiro and JOF was interested in São Paulo's concrete and neo-concrete movements, which had begun to inform his artistic activity.

JOF tried techniques such as "solarization," in which the laboratory light is turned on while developing the negative. JOF related: "The role of the camera is much less important than what comes after. If the photographer takes the plate, develops, and then orders a copy, he hands over to the copier the most important phase of the photographic creation work. How much can you do when copying one. It's at this time when the grays, the lights, and the cut are graduated that photography is, in fact, born."<sup>31</sup>

He was progressively turning to technical means for unexpected, thought-provoking results. A negative could be "worked" to release new aspects and forms in countless combinations. For example, it could be copied to a transparent material and thus become a "transparent positive" that serves as a negative for opaque paper copies. In a series called *Derivações* [*Derivations*], these negatives and positives have some reference to external objects. In the series *Recriações* [*Re-creations*], some negatives incorporated brush strokes, collages, or adhesive tape, and were often copied directly onto photographic paper, which could later be worked on in positive and negative interactions. The negatives integrated paint, collage, and, occasionally, objects and glass plates. At the opening of a solo exhibition of photographs in 1954, Oiticica Filho stated: "I am the most dissatisfied with the work I've done.... I'm always dissatisfied, knowing I am a prisoner of a camera that is stubbornly copying instead of creating. I know what is entailed in being a prisoner of a medium of expression as limited in its possibilities as a sheet of chlorobromide paper is. Hence, my struggle; trying to master the medium through technique to print

something aesthetic on a rectangle of paper, keeping it as much as possible in sync with my inner self.”<sup>32</sup>

Around 1957, while Hélio and César were exhibiting with *Grupo Frente*, JOF began painting. In the beginning his artworks were an accessory activity as his photograms and manipulated negatives remained central; but then came his *Geometric Paintings* and, from there, the construction of wooden reliefs. According to Hélio, his father had reached a stage “where color and visual space became problems for aesthetic study. The plastic problem that involves them (the wooden reliefs) is still very current (color-light, object-frame, unlimited space) and they are, without a doubt, unique works.”<sup>33</sup> Underlining the anarchist implications, JOF reflected: “The man who creates and therefore thinks, is essentially himself, an individual in and of himself, who marches proudly in search of the goal to reach.... The creative impulse does not admit a master, it cannot be a slave, it is, on the contrary, a relentless destroyer of idols, it is a one hundred percent iconoclast.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Rupturing the fabric: “from adversity, we live”<sup>35</sup>**

. . . and my olive grove green country  
grew dark  
the green became violent....  
the violence.....turned black  
and the blue of the sky no longer lit up the day  
APRIL  
Roberta Camila Salgado<sup>36</sup>

The year 1964 was one of ruptures for Hélio. He had plunged into the transformative culture of Carnival, but also experienced personal loss as authoritarianism spread throughout Brazilian society. On April 1, 1964, almost two months after the luminous parade of Rio de Janeiro’s Carnival, tanks occupied the country’s main roads and cities. Student and union organizations were attacked, and their offices set on fire. It was the onset of Brazil’s military coup and the inauguration of a two-decade dictatorship.<sup>37</sup> With the support of the United States, the military and reactionary civic forces backed by most of the Na-

tional Congress overthrew the government of President João Goulart, which was planning important social measures, including agrarian reform. Military personnel were placed in key government posts and in April, Institutional Act No. 1 was enacted. This suspended the political rights of anyone opposed to the regime or deemed to endanger it. Dissident politicians were intimidated by threats of impeachment, imprisonment, and expulsion from the country as persecutions, dismissals, and arrests swept across Brazil. These developments undermined JOF's health: he died of a stroke on July 26, 1964.

A few months later, on October 3, 1964, after a spectacular manhunt that lasted five weeks, a young man nicknamed "Cara de Cavalo" (Horseface) was shot 120 times by police officers, thereby "avenging" the death of detective Milton LeCoq. The detective's death had occurred weeks earlier during a shoot-out involving the police and Cara de Cavalo, who had been threatened by a gang of crooks to whom LeCoq offered illegal protection. The fatal shot was from a policeman's gun, but this only stirred the vengeful rage of authorities.<sup>38</sup> Over the next few weeks, the hunt for the "slayer" made headlines in popular newspapers. In a statement by one of LeCoq's partners about the manhunt, he said "We made a great chaos in the State of Rio. We killed the criminals who resisted and arrested those who hid Cara de Cavalo....We were not thinking straight, our only concern was to catch the thug."<sup>39</sup>

Hélio's first solo exhibition at Galeria G4, Rio de Janeiro, in 1966 included *Bólido 33 Bólido Caixa 18 Homage to Cara de Cavalo Poema-Caixa 2* (1965-66). The *Bólido* structures consisted of hand-made boxes containing materials of different textures and shapes which spectators were to interact with and manipulate. *Bólido 33* was received by critics as a "pop-art novelty" which "would put an end to the rationalist coldness of concretism." The allusion to pop-art was due to the inclusion of a newspaper photograph of Cara de Cavalo with one of the boxes—an unprecedented move in the artist's creative trajectory (until then he had never incorporated figurative imagery). However, apart from the pop art reference, no critic or journalist drew attention to the controversial photo, despite the well-publicized events surrounding the young man's death. Cara de Cavalo (Manuel



Moreira) was a close friend of Hélio. We have no record of Oiticica's conduct during events leading up to his friend's killing, but the following year, when he paid tribute to his friend, he revealed his intention with *Bólido 33* was to contrast the degenerate status that the "oppressive dirt – police, press, politicians" had bequeathed to Cara de Cavalo with an artistic tribute to his friend of "great sensitivity."<sup>40</sup> Hélio relates: "This work represented for me an ethical moment that was powerfully reflected in everything I did afterward: it revealed to me more of an ethical problem than anything related to aesthetics."<sup>41</sup> The artwork was a "symbol of social oppression on the marginal. He (Cara de Cavalo) was the scapegoat, public enemy No. 1 . . . all possibility of his survival was castrated" as he was transformed into a "leprosy" to be extirpated.<sup>42</sup>

Hélio also made a *bólido* featuring a photograph of a second deceased youth (*B 44 Caixa Bólido 21-poem box 3*), Alcir Figueira. The death photo had been reproduced in newspapers, but Hélio didn't know the Figueira personally. What impressed him was the youth's story: pursued by the police, Figueira chose to commit suicide at the edge of a stream, where his body was found and photographed. In 1968 Hélio would emblazon the photo on a bright red banner with the slogan "be a marginal, be a hero," – to this day, this is one of Oiticica's most famous, defiant artworks.

Both his friend and this youth, according to Hélio, embodied a "visceral, self-destructive revolt" against Brazilian society. Both had also been moved by the "search for happiness, security, affection . . . filling a void." Oiticica made it clear their actions and eventual fates signaled "there was "something rotten in society," that they were not the problem. In his words, it was "society, with its prejudices, outdated legislation, which creates its anti-heroes, the 'animals' to be sacrificed."<sup>43</sup> Hélio conceived of his homages as a means of objectifying their plights, autonomous from State power. His art had nothing to do with romantic idealization, nor was he "deploring a crime." "I don't want to make any accusations here," he stated, "nor exercise 'justice,' since reactions to crime or against [restive] developments tend to be increasingly violent: the oppressors are strong and deadly."<sup>44</sup> He underlined violence on the part of the oppressed was an inescapable

facet of revolt. Hélio's anarchism came to the fore when he stated, "I'm not for peace, I find it useless and cold; how can there be peace or how can one wish for it while there are still master and slave?!"<sup>45</sup>

### **The experimental exercise of freedom**<sup>46</sup>

On August 12, 1965, in the gardens of the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro, during the opening of the group exhibition *Feira Opinião 65* [*Opinion Fair 65*], which Hélio participated in (involving twenty-nine artists, thirteen from Europe and sixteen from Brazil), museum administrators prevented Mangueira samba dancers from performing. The dancers were to wear and parade Hélio's Carnival-inspired *Parangolés* (brightly coloured capes that could double as banners) in procession through the museum, however the group was deemed too noisy and their dress inappropriate. Hélio had not counted on the institution's managers being frightened by an "invasion" of irreverent, perhaps dangerous, *favelados* celebrating Carnival. Hélio protested: "Is that right? Black people can't go into the MAM [Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro], that's racism!"<sup>47</sup> The dance Hélio learned and performed in carnival parades reverberated in his new *Parangolés* series. He recalled, "[Dance, samba] is, for me, an experience of greatest vitality, essential mainly as a demolition of prejudices, stereotyping, etc.... There was a convergence of this experience with the form that my art took in *Parangolé* and everything that is related to it.... Not only that, but it was the outset of a definitive social experience, and I don't even know which direction it will take."<sup>48</sup> Additionally, "*Parangolé* reveals...its fundamental character of 'environmental structure,' having a main core: the 'participant-artwork,' which is divided into 'participant' when he is watching, and 'artwork' when he is being watched in this environmental space time. These participant-artwork nuclei, immersed in a specific site (in an exhibition, for example), create an 'environmental system.'"<sup>49</sup> Art expands in space with the active presence of the so-called spectator, who now becomes a participant, or better yet, a co-creator, as the work only fully exists thanks to the actions of other people within the totality. The result, in context, could be considered an anti-art, in as much as it broke with the then conventions of contemporary visual art that centered on an artwork's autonomy and aesthetic values.

In fact, a *Parangolé* was an “anti-artwork” par excellence. Rebelling against modernism’s succession of aesthetically-loaded “isms,” there were no pretensions of inaugurating a “new aesthetic” embodying a generalizing “moral” divorced from the creative agency of the subject: “*Parangolé* does not intend to establish a new moral or something similar, but to overthrow all morals, as they tend to a stagnant conformism, to stereotype opinions and create non-creative concepts.”<sup>50</sup>

Developments in Oiticica’s oeuvre found echoes in the artwork of other artists who were also grappling with public involvement as a factor in artistic activity. This led him to speak of a *Nova Objetividade* [“New Objectivity”] movement that distinguished Brazilian art from international currents such as Pop-Art, Op-Art, New Realism, Primary Structures, or Hard Edge painting. *Nova Objetividade* was conceived as a convergence of multiple tendencies up to that point. Amongst its main features, the following stand out: spectator participation; a position on social, political, and ethical issues; and collectivity which expands public participation within complex artistic environments – samba schools and popular street parties being exemplary.<sup>51</sup> In April 1967, he staged a major exhibition of *Nova Objetividade* artwork at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro. Hélio created an “environment” which he called *Tropicália*. This consisted of an ensemble of *Penetráveis* [“Penetrables”] – “human-scale structures composed of tents and banners made of different fabrics [*Parangolé*] and painted wooden panels or other materials, which can be penetrated, crossed and manipulated by living bodies, in an informal and spontaneous way”<sup>52</sup> – distributed among tropical plants. In addition, poetry by Roberta Camila Salgado printed on fragments of construction material, politically charged figural drawings on newspaper created by Antonio Manuel, and other artworks permeated the installation. The exhibition’s audience proved heterogeneous. “People from the artistic class and I-don’t-know-what were a little wary,” the artist recalled. “But for people who came from the streets it was the biggest thing. The people from Mangueira were delirious. ‘Look here! *Parangolé!*’ And they wrapped the cloth around their heads.”<sup>53</sup>

At that time, Hélio formulated the notion of the “supra-sensorial,” in which environments would be “directed at the senses . . . led the

individual to a ‘super-sensation,’ to the dilation of their usual sensory capacities, to the discovery of their creative center, their dormant expressive spontaneity.” Instigated by art, the individual could be freed from social-political conditioning and “imposed truths” outside their lived experience.<sup>54</sup>

*Tropicália* evolved into a term loosely associated with Brazil’s youth-hippie artistic subculture, involving popular music, contemporary fashion, new theater, and experimental cinema. However, this diluted the radicalizing intent of the exhibition. As Hélio related, *Tropicália* was not supposed to be a new ‘artistic movement,’ but the denial of such concepts as art-isms – it is important to have an activity that is not limited to art.”<sup>55</sup> The years 1967 and 1968 were rocked by massive anti-dictatorship protests and acts of resistance across the entire spectrum of society, including the arts. In August 1968, Hélio and other artists involved with *Nova Objetividade* contributed to the unrest with an event entitled *Apocalipopótese*, which was staged in a public park. Interactive artworks included “Lygia Pape’s *Ovos (Eggs)*, cloth boxes from which an enclosed person breaks forth; Antonio Manuel’s *Urnas quentes*, wooden boxes that participants broke open to reveal slogans like “Down with the Dictatorship” and “Power to the People;” and poet Torquato Neto and critic Frederico Morais donning Oiticica’s *Parangolé* capes.”<sup>56</sup>

On December 13, 1968, the military dictatorship promulgated Institutional Act No. 5, which gave it extensive powers, including the right to shut down the powerless Legislative Congress. Arrests and disappearances intensified as the military dictatorship’s bloodiest phase began. This involved kidnapping, torture, and the assassination of political opponents or those suspected of protesting; extrajudicial death squads that terrorized the impoverished population; the intensification of censorship of the arts and the press; and a final dismantling of any popular organizations still resisting military rule.

Not long after the proclamation of Institutional Act No. 5, Hélio Oiticica left Brazil for England with most of his artworks. There, in 1969, he held his first major exhibition outside Brazil at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. Several environments were set up, including

Tropicália and a set of Penetraveis entitled Eden.<sup>57</sup> The experience propelled his trajectory beyond creating immersive participatory environments. He imagined the possibility of generating new life through artworks which he called *Nests*. These would generate new experiences in which each individual constituted a “mother cell.” Hélio coined the term *Crelazer* to encapsulate the concept of being in the world without occupying a specific space and time, living pleasure without a-priori thoughts, and fostering an environment in which leisure, as opposed to work, was the portal for creating value: “*Crelazer* promises to build a world where I, you, us, each one is the mother cell.”<sup>58</sup>

In July 1969, along with fellow Brazilian artist Lygia Clark, Hélio participated in the *First International Symposium on Tactile Sculpture* at California State College, Long Beach, organized by Professor August Copolla.<sup>59</sup> He gave a talk on *Crelazer* and *Nests* and discussed the nuances of his conception with students, suggesting “it is useless to have ‘participation’ or ‘propositions’ if they are not guided by a complete change in the object relation; the same with what might be called ‘sensory participation.’”<sup>60</sup>

In 1970, despite knowing “if I don’t stay quiet, they will arrest me,” Hélio returned to Brazil.<sup>61</sup> He was eager to build communities modelled on those he had encountered in England, notably North London’s “Exploding Galaxy” collective of artists, dancers, musicians, and poets (1967-8). A related inspiration was the convergence space of the *Barracão* — the site where the samba school parade was rehearsed, and participants assembled before leaving for the main parade. In a letter to Lygia Clark, Hélio reflected on his expansive conception of art merging with life, “if a practice is not repeated or grouped, communication becomes limited. That’s why I must definitely create my community in Rio, I’m not interested in anything anymore, and then, all communicative experiences will be able to enter into a context; I will not compromise; clothes, daily life etc., everything becomes a revealing experience for me.”<sup>62</sup> In Brazil, the dictatorship’s regime of intolerance enforced by censorship, imprisonment, and torture was at its peak. Under these circumstances, Hélio’s home in Rio de Janeiro was filled with friends and friends of

acquaintances who found it to be something of a refuge. “In 1970, on one of my trips to Brazil, I almost went crazy,” Hélio recalled. “My return was a real horror. There were too many people around me, and I was doing things here and there in a huge dispersion.”<sup>63</sup> In September 1970, police raided and searched his home after an imprisoned friend falsely accused Hélio of filming “terrorist” actions.<sup>64</sup> The dreamed-of creative community was impossible to realize under a military dictatorship.

At this juncture he applied for and was granted a two-year Guggenheim scholarship. He moved to New York, where he lived from late 1970 until 1978. Prior to the move, on July 1970, his work was featured in an exhibition, *Information*, curated by Director John Hightower at the Museum of Modern Art. Vito Acconci, who also participated, describes Hélio’s work:

In the middle of the museum there was a space for people! No one had thought about a space for people in terms of art. There were places in the middle of this public space that could be these private spaces. It was possible to have space for one or two people. He [Hélio Oiticica] was making small compartments – ‘nests’ where people could remain...he had an interesting notion of public space. It was composed of private spaces. His work was about the conjunction of privacies. You could have your privacy and have a person at your side. You may have social contact.<sup>65</sup>

### ***Nests in New York***

While living in New York he dubbed his various residences “Babylon” or “Abrigo do Norte” (“North Shelter”): these *Nests* (*Babylons*) were where he created art installations and drew people into his projects. In his opinion, Rio de Janeiro had become stifling and lacked avenues for new experiments.<sup>66</sup> In New York he could escape the expectations people had of him, and thus be freer to elaborate his conceptions. Upon arrival, Hélio created sketches and maquettes for a set of six large labyrinthine “penetrables,” the subterranean *TROP-*

*ICÁLIA PROJECTS*, which were to be enacted in Central Park.<sup>67</sup> Over the next seven years many such projects were envisaged as sketches on paper or in the form of maquettes, films, or serial photographs. Proposals and critical statements were also produced. Hélio, however, shunned a career in the New York art scene. He sustained his output by drug dealing, cocaine being his drug of choice, which he became addicted to.<sup>68</sup> Occasional works by Hélio were exhibited during these years: for example, in 1972 the “*penetrable*” *Filtro* was part a collective exhibition, *EX-Position*, organized by Brazilian artist Carlos Vergara at the Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro.

In addition to producing films, posters, photos, maquettes, essays on his art, and propositional statements, Hélio embarked on creative writing, which he gathered in a collection called *Conglomerate: Newyorkaises*. This included personal reflections, poetry, comments on readings, notes on everyday experiences, letters sent to friends, excerpts from other authors, and notes on propositions.<sup>69</sup> These activities reflect creative possibilities first explored during his youth, when, in 1953, he and his brother Cesar, with the help of his mother Ângela Oiticica and aunts (Sonia Oiticica, actress; Vanda Oiticica, actress and opera singer, and Vera Oiticica Pimentel, classical dancer) performed plays in an improvised theater near where they lived.<sup>70</sup> Something else reemerged from his adolescence:

My grandfather had a dream: to transform dwelling in a “house” . . . [a] THEATER OF MUSICAL PERFORMANCE: it doesn’t matter: many people have already lived DREAM LIFE-THEATER that would actually be like HOME-THEATER to communicate stage-audience-performance in everyday life: so distant and so close to what I want: SHELTER/BARRACÃO/ENVIRONMENTALMANIFESTATIONS/BABYLONESTS – but wouldn’t a SHELTER-PERFORMANCE approximate closely my grandfather’s old dream? And yet be so far from it!? <sup>71</sup>

José Oiticica had imagined a “Life-Theater” that would dissolve the separation between actors and audience, and he politicized this

endeavour as an anarchist mode of community building. In like fashion, his grandson sought to expand his own community-building strategies. At this juncture the term “invention” enters his artistic practice. Hélio argued “creating” was determined by impulses he dubbed “natural,” not to be confused with purposive experimentation with a preset goal.<sup>72</sup> An “invention” gave rise to a series of new inter-relating positionings based on experiences and the expansive consequences of their effects. In this sense, the initiatory invention remains “alive” and “vibrant”: one invention generates another invention, and so on. More than that, Hélio suggested that inventions could be “braided;” loose “strands” could come together in a large “fabric” involving numerous people (inventors). According to Hélio, “The state of invention is profoundly lonely, but it is profoundly collective.”<sup>73</sup> In this regard, Hélio’s best known work was conceived in partnership with filmmaker Neville de Almeida. “It was the realization,” Hélio recalled, “that changed my life and behavior and led to a multiplicity of proposals with radical and ever greater consequences.”<sup>74</sup> During 1973-74, the collaborators create a series of nine “supra-sensorial” environments, entitled *Bloco-Experienciâs in COSMOCOCA – programa in progress (Block-Experiments in COSMOCOCA – program in progress)*, which they numbered CC1 to CC9.

The *Cosmococas* were plans for complex installations (“blocks”) that incorporated concurrent slide projections, soundtracks, mattresses, balloons and other various materials, as well as sets of instructions for participants to create future public and private performances. Throughout the series the projected slides feature album covers, newspaper clippings and photographs of celebrities including Yoko Ono, John Cage, Marilyn Monroe, Luis Buñuel, and Jimi Hendrix among others. Images of the pop culture icons are stratified under white pigment drawings the artists made using cocaine as a raw material, illustrating the concept of constructing sensory experiences as well as the possibility of changing one’s perception of time.<sup>75</sup>

The *Cosmococa* program incorporated cocaine as artistic material to “play with what you can’t play with,” i.e., morals and guilt, with no prescriptive agenda. Hélio reasoned, “Madness! How can anyone know what poison each person needs?: all this is just another exten-



sion of Judeo-Christian hang-ups: no one is trying to save themselves!: on the contrary: as [anarchist theatrician Antonin] ARTAUD says: – LET THE LOST GET LOST!”<sup>76</sup> Each “block” of sensory experimentation was envisaged as a collective game, an insufflation to escape one’s habits, to become open to the unexpected. They would unleash “inventing: a process in progress that is not limited to the construction of the WORK, but which launches us into worlds that are simultaneous.”<sup>77</sup>

By the end of 1970s, repression in Brazil was easing as political exiles were allowed to return and opponents of the regime began to be released from prison. Hélio left New York for Brazil in 1978, having withdrawn from cocaine addiction and the drug dealing that sustained his lifestyle after the Guggenheim fellowship ended. In Brazil he picked up where he had left off, participating in various collective endeavours, including films, and realizing a few *Penetráveis* installations (PN 24 Rijanvieira at the Café des Arts, Rio de Janeiro and Nas Quebradas in São Paulo) before his untimely death on March 22, 1980.<sup>78</sup>

### **“Heir without inheritance”**

“I am the heir without inheritance: so, I am always at the beginning.”<sup>79</sup> Heir to an anarchist lineage, heir to the constructivist trend in twentieth-century art, heir to an impressive intellectual legacy, heir without the burden of inheritance, free to be within the threshold of invention, without knowing in advance where the next project will end up. “I don’t know what I do, because each thing I do, sets me up for what I’m doing; if projects are being done, that is, invented, inaugurated, they are inaugurating a situation, a new reality, each and every time.”<sup>80</sup> Hélio was not a militant, though militancy was his namesake. One of the first anarchist centers in Rio de Janeiro to be shut down after the Brazilian dictatorship unleashed the full force of repression in 1969 was the José Oiticica Social Studies Center (founded in 1958; raided and closed in October 1969). However, Hélio never attended events there.<sup>81</sup> His anarchism was embedded in his approach to life, and life’s relationship to art. Crossovers between life, art, and anarchism reside in each anarchist’s attitude, an attitude of

shared collectivity and anti-authoritarian resistance. This leads to the intensification of anarchist practices in everyday life wherein ethical modes of being disrupt manifestations of hierarchy and authority in a bid to eradicate them. The key fulcrum of resistance to repressive power, according to Michel Foucault, is a truthful relationship with oneself, an ethics and aesthetics of existence.<sup>82</sup> “Couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art?” Foucault once asked.<sup>83</sup> Considering art-making as a “technique” of self-realization, he also pondered “why should a painter work, if he is not transformed by his own painting?”<sup>84</sup> Hélio sought to go beyond the transformation of the self. His propositions aimed at a collective transformation enacted by freely interconnecting individuals. He engaged in reaching out and incorporating others, dissolving barriers of perception that confine us, and dishabituating lived experience from routines and fixed ideas. From the *Parangolé* forward he made it clear that his “environmental” program “never betrays those who practice it: it simply gives each one his own cargo, his individual responsibility; it is beyond good and evil [i.e., externalized moralities], etc.”<sup>85</sup>

During the 1970s Hélio argued conventional art had devolved into “a category of a structure in decay.”<sup>86</sup> He had in mind not only visual art – painting, sculpture, photography – but also artwork incorporating the “spectator’s participation and the introduction of sensory elements.” This “had been important for the introduction of a new form of behavior (more aimed at daily life)” but it too was being recuperated as an experiential “object” for consumption, as opposed to a portal for self-transformation.<sup>87</sup> When sensory and participatory-based projects become art objects, the distancing between spectator and artwork returns and interrupts the flow of self-initiated invention. A year before his death, he declared: “Normal people become visual artists. I do not.... I declanche [trigger, set off] .... I didn’t become a visual artist.... I became a declancher [sparker] of states of invention!”<sup>88</sup> Inventing a proposal and trying it out was the only way to evaluate its effectiveness as a conduit for free agency: it was not possible to predict in theory what would happen, it was necessary to take risks for the experience of this agency to be realized. During these endeavours, Hélio transformed the category “art” — painting, sculpture, performance and so on— by taking it to its limit and beyond

into anti-art through the dissolution of the compartmentalization of the work-author-spectator relationship. Hélio explains:

*Anti-art*, recently taken to dramatic forms, to the edge of experience, now demands a definitive radicalization....I call it, in my experimental efforts, a crebe-behavior, it is not simply “creative behavior,” although it can be, but something much more amplified; it is not an object-creation through behavior, nor the transformation of living acts into creative ones, which would be a simplistic notion: in such a case conditions would only become distant Utopias, but if, from inside conditioned behavior, the elements start to grow as necessities, like germs which burst from the center of the conflicts themselves, and inform behavior in a new open way, completely attuned with individual lived acts: process which conducts and informs to the very center of behavior conflict itself and opens into surprising transformations — not to be content with the effort to “attain a model” of life, but to live in a continuous consciousness of such conflicts, which could be the only way for such a transformation process to take place.<sup>89</sup>

Hélio envisaged artworks as experimental vectors fostering freer behaviors and ideas, opening us up to the transformation of values and attitudes and to the flourishing of collective diversification based on individual responses to the process at hand. Discussing anarchism’s relation to his transformative conception of anti-art, he declared: “First of all, I must immediately clarify that such an [ethical] position can only be a totally anarchic position, such is the degree of freedom implied in it. Everything oppressive, socially and individually, is in opposition to it—all fixed and decaying forms of government, or existing social structures, come into conflict here.” The individual’s most passionate “intuitions and yearnings” were anti-art’s foundational touchstone.<sup>90</sup>

Heir without inheritance, what legacy did he leave? After all, he’s

been gone for over forty years, but despite this, his propositions have not been exhausted: many remain to be pursued. Some unrealized projects have been revisited in exhibitions and lectures, but without the living presence of their author, his legacy, arguably, is in danger of being “pacified” in museums. With Hélio’s *The Invention of Color: Magic Square #3* installed on the grounds of the Banco do Brasil Cultural Center in Brazil and his *Cosmococa* environments being recreated for various exhibitions (uncomprehending visitors taking “selfies”), researcher Paula Braga asks: “How can we resume the explosion of life force germinations in contemporary art?... Have we lost the possibility of exploding the germs of desire for a total relationship with the world?”<sup>91</sup> Beyond the posthumous urge to recognize the worldwide importance of his art, there is the drive to recover Hélio’s virulence in art and life. What arsenal did Hélio Oiticica leave for twenty-first century anarchism and our struggles?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Hélio Oiticica. “Interview with Marisa Alvarez de Lima. *A Cigarra magazine*, 20 de julho de 1966,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azogue, 2009), 41.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg coined the term in 1930, arguing lines, colours, and planes were the most “concrete” or “real” features of an artwork. Thus “concrete art” restricts itself to these elements. Concrete art was introduced to Brazil by Swiss artist Max Bill at the São Paulo Biennale in 1952. His ideas attracted many young artists, poets, musicians, to “concrete art” practices. See Museum of Modern Art, “Art Terms”: <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/concrete-art>

<sup>3</sup> Hélio Oiticica. “Meta esquemas 57/58,” *Hélio Oiticica. Catálogo* (Paris: Editions de Jeu du Paume, 1992), 27.

<sup>4</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “A transição da cor,” *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 50.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>7</sup> Brazil was the last country in the Western hemisphere to abolish slavery in 1888.

<sup>8</sup> The expressions “hill” and “asphalt” mark a cleavage between the poor and the rich in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The *hill* refers to slum districts built on the city’s hills. The *asphalt* references well-planned urban neighborhoods with good housing and services inhabited by the wealthier strata.

<sup>9</sup> Musicals from the Cinedia cinematographic studio, founded in 1930.

- <sup>10</sup> Sergio Cabral, *Mangueira: nação verde e rosa* (São Paulo: Prêmio Editorial, 1998), 92-95.
- <sup>11</sup> Janice Perlman, *O mito da marginalidade* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977), 290.
- <sup>12</sup> Hélio Oiticica, Interview with O Pasquim, 6 de agosto de 1970, in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 71.
- <sup>13</sup> The term *Malandragem* implies a zone for casual sex.
- <sup>14</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Um Mito Vadio,” Interview with Jary Cardoso, Folha de São Paulo, 5 de novembro de 1978 in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 241.
- <sup>15</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Mangueira e Londres na rota,” Interview with Norma Pereira Rego, Última Hora, 31 de janeiro de 1970, in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 99.
- <sup>16</sup> Hélio Oiticica, *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 73.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.
- <sup>18</sup> Mario Pedrosa, “Arte Ambiental, Arte pós-Moderna: Hélio Oiticica,” *Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília* (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1981), 209.
- <sup>19</sup> Roberto das Neves, “Prefácio,” in *Ação Direta*, ed. José Oiticica (Rio De Janeiro: Germinal, 1970), 25.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.
- <sup>21</sup> José Oiticica, “Contra o sectarismo,” in *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>24</sup> José Oiticica, “Princípios e fins do anarquismo,” in *Ibid.*, 247.
- <sup>25</sup> José Oiticica, “Contra o sectarismo” in *Ibid.*, 96.
- <sup>26</sup> José Oiticica, “Culto à forma,” *Correio da Manhã*, Rio de Janeiro, 3 de dezembro de 1921: 2.
- <sup>27</sup> Mario Pedrosa, “Os projetos de Hélio Oiticica,” *Acadêmicos e Modernos: Textos III* (São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1998), 341.
- <sup>28</sup> César Oiticica, Testimony, 18 July 2008.
- <sup>29</sup> Hélio Oiticica, Manuscrito de 1973.
- <sup>30</sup> In 1954, during his first solo exhibition in São Paulo at Foto Cine Clube Bandeirantes, he presented the lecture “Harmonic analysis of a rectangle.”
- <sup>31</sup> José Oiticica Filho, “Discurso na Inauguração da Exposição no Foto-cine Clube Bandeirantes,” *Foto-cine Boletim* ano VII, no. 88 (abril 1954): 14.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*: 14
- <sup>33</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Ciência das Imagens: José Oiticica Filho.” *Paparazzi: arte fotográfica* ano III, no. 18 (agosto-setembro 1998): 15.
- <sup>34</sup> José Oiticica Filho, “Discurso na Inauguração da Exposição no Foto-cine Clube

Bandeirantes,” 15.

<sup>35</sup> Note written in P16 Parangolé Capa 12.

<sup>36</sup> Roberta Camila Salgado, *Verdes Correntes\ Tropicália* (Rio de Janeiro: Azougue, 2015), 19 (in English).

<sup>37</sup> Pietro Ferrua, “O golpe militar de 1964,” *verve* (28 november 2015): 142-152. Italian anarchist Ferrua was living in Brazil at the time of the coup and participated in the Brazilian section of the *Center des Recherches sur l’Anarchisme* – CIRA.

<sup>38</sup> In 1965, these policemen set up the Scuderie LeCoq, a death squad complete with logo and anthem, to continue the killing of “bandits” previously undertaken by officer LeCoq. It was only disbanded in 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Testimony of José Guilherme Ferreira, “Sivuca,” in *Barra Pesada*, ed. O. RIBEIRO (São Paulo: Círculo do Livro, 1985), 215.

<sup>40</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Heróis e Anti-Heróis de Oiticica,” *Diário de Notícias*, RJ, 10 April 1968. <http://www.culturaebarbarie.org/sopro/arquivo/heroioiticica.html>

<sup>41</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Letter to Guy Brett.” 2 April 1968. *Hélio Oiticica. Catálogo* (Paris: Editions Jeu du Paume, 1992): 135.

<sup>42</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Testimony,” *Diário de Notícias*, RJ, 10 April 1968.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Posição ética (1966),” *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 82.

<sup>45</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Testimony,” *Diário de Notícias*, RJ, 10 April 1968.

<sup>46</sup> An expression of the art critic Mario Pedrosa referencing the activities of artists during the 1960s-1970s, which was frequently cited by Hélio and his companions. Mario Pedrosa, “Por dentro e por fora das Bienais,” *Mundo, homem, arte em crise*. 2 ed. (São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1986), 308.

<sup>47</sup> Gerschman, in *Opinião 65 ontem e hoje*, Ciclo de Exposições sobre Arte no Rio de Janeiro: no. 5, ed. F. Moraes, (Banerj, 1985).

<sup>48</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “A dança (november1965),” *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 73.

<sup>49</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Notas sobre o parangolé,” *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 72.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>51</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “New Objectivity. (1967)” [https://monoskop.org/images/5/57/Oiticica\\_Helio\\_1967\\_1999\\_General\\_Scheme\\_of\\_the\\_New\\_Objectivity.pdf](https://monoskop.org/images/5/57/Oiticica_Helio_1967_1999_General_Scheme_of_the_New_Objectivity.pdf)

<sup>52</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Penetrables, 1961-1980” (Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro) <https://mam.rio/obras-de-arte/penetraveis-1961-1980/>

<sup>53</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Interview with Aracy Amaral (October 1977),” in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 153-154.

<sup>54</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Aparecimento do supra sensorial na arte brasileira,” *Aspiro ao*

*Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986), 104.

<sup>55</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Information (1970)," in *Helio Oiticica: A Pintura depois do Quadro* (Rio de Janeiro: Silvia Roesler Edições de Arte, 2008), 212.

<sup>56</sup> "Apocalipopótese and after" (Museum of Modern Art: Rio de Janeiro) <https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/107>

<sup>57</sup> Guy Brett, Luciano Figueiredo, *Oiticica in London* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007).

<sup>58</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Possibilidades do Crelazer," *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986,: 116.

<sup>59</sup> First International Tactile Sculpture Symposium, July 1969: <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,901133,00.html>

<sup>60</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "The sense pointing towards a new transformation" (English), *ARTMargins* (2018): <https://direct.mit.edu/artm/article-abstract/7/2/129/18069/The-Senses-Pointing-Toward-a-New-Transformation1?redirectedFrom=PDF>

<sup>61</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Carta de Hélio Oiticica de 23/12/1969," in *Cartas*, eds. L. Clark and H. Oiticica (Rio de Janeiro: Editora UFRJ), 128.

<sup>62</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Carta de Hélio Oiticica de 24/06/1969," *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>63</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Interview with Cleusa Maria. *Jornal do Brasil*, 8 de março de 1978," in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 71.

<sup>64</sup> "Hélio Oiticica: artista de amanhã," *O Globo* (RJ), 17 de setembro de 1970.

<sup>65</sup> Vito Acconci, "Testimony for the film Heliophonia of Marcos Benisson, 2002," in *Experiments in exile*, ed. Laura Harris. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2018), 98.

<sup>66</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Manuscritos," *Caderno* (1973).

<sup>67</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "subterranean TROPICALIA PROJECTS," in *Hélio Oiticica. Catálogo* (Paris: Editions de Jeu du Paume, 1992), 143-157.

<sup>68</sup> Ben Davis, "Hélio Oiticica's Journey From Art Visionary to Coke Dealer and Back Again," *Art News* (July 14, 2017): <https://momus.ca/helio-oiticicas-journey-art-visionary-coke-dealer-back/>

<sup>69</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Uma parte de seus escritos foram publicados em fac-símiles dos manuscritos e datilografas," in *Hélio OITICICA. Conglomerado: newyorkaises*. Frederico Coelho e César Oiticica Filho, eds. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> "O clube da rua tem seu teatro em uma garagem," *Correio da Manhã* (RJ), 13 de março de 1953.

<sup>71</sup> Hélio Oiticica, "Mundo abrigo, 22 jul. 73," in *Conglomerado: newyorkaises*, eds. Frederico Coelho & C. Oiticica Filho (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2013), 40.

<sup>72</sup> Transcribed excerpt from an intervention during Lygia Clark's testimony, re-

corded on September 14, 1979 by the Museum of Image and Sound MIS (RJ).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Block-Experiences in COSMOCOCA- program in progress,” in *Hélio Oiticica. Catálogo* (Paris: Editions de Jeu du Paume, 1992), 180-181.

<sup>75</sup> “Hélio Oiticica & Neville D’Almeida: Cosmococas” (Lisson Gallery) <https://www.lisongallery.com/exhibitions/helio-oiticica-neville-d-almeida-cosmococas-programa-in-progress-1973>

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>78</sup> Hélio participated in documentaries about himself by the filmmaker Ivan Cardoso. See HO e Heliorama, available in <https://youtu.be/yGYHJaGXHOU> <https://youtu.be/0-e611g3K5s>

<sup>79</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Manuscript, 22 de abril de 1978.” Document 0094,77, p. 4, in *Catálogo Raisonné, Projeto Helio Oiticica*.

<sup>80</sup> Hélio Oiticica, “Testimony” from the film HO e Heliorama (January 1979) in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Cesar Oiticica Filho et al. (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 240.

<sup>81</sup> Pietro Ferrua, “O Fechamento do Centro de Estudos Sociais prof. José Oiticica,” *Verve* no.23 (maio de 2013): 65-79.

<sup>82</sup> Michel Foucault, *Hermenêutica do Sujeito*. (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2011), 225.

<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, “À propos de la généalogie de l’éthique: um aperçu du travail em cours,” in *Dits et Ecrits IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 392.

<sup>84</sup> Michel Foucault, “Une Interview de Michel Foucault par Stephen Riggins,” in *Op.cit.*, 536.

<sup>85</sup> Michel Foucault, “Une Interview de Michel Foucault par Stephen Riggins,” in *Op.cit.*, 536.

<sup>86</sup> Helio Oiticica, “Uma arte sem medo. Entrevista a Gilse Campos,” *Jornal do Brasil*, 29 de janeiro de 1970, 90.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>88</sup> Helio Oiticica, “Testimony from the film HO e Heliorama,” 234.

<sup>89</sup> Helio Oiticica, The sense pointing towards a new transformation (English) [http://legacy.icnetworks.org/extranet/enciclopedia//ho/index.cfm?fuseaction=documentos&cd\\_verbete=4523&cod=625&tipo=2](http://legacy.icnetworks.org/extranet/enciclopedia//ho/index.cfm?fuseaction=documentos&cd_verbete=4523&cod=625&tipo=2)

<sup>90</sup> Helio Oiticica, “Programa ambiental. Posição ética,” *Aspiro ao grande labirinto*, 78-79.

<sup>91</sup> Paula Braga, “Os sentidos e a urgência de transformação,” *Poiésis* vol.. 20, no. 34 (julho - dezembro 2019): 40.