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Hélio Oiticica: Politics and Ambivalence in 20th Century Brazilian Art

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Abstract

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This study investigates the presence of ambivalence as a strategy of cultural politics from modern to contemporary art in Brazil. It focuses on the development of modern art leading to the work of Hélio Oiticica, whose approach to avant-garde practice in Brazil was concurrent with intense articulations between the forces of social change and re-evaluations of the legacy of Modernism.

The thesis has a strong historiographical emphasis and is organised in three parts: Part one attempts to view the emergence of Modernism in Brazil beyond the prevailing interpretations that emphasise its inadequacy compared to canonical paradigms. Part two discusses the development of abstraction in Brazil, particularly that associated with the constructivist tradition and its relationship with the prevailing positivism of a nation that saw modernity as its inevitable destiny. Such a relationship, between art and ideology, implicitly questions the purported autonomous nature of modern art. Again, what emerged were definite regional distinctions, themselves based on seemingly universal theoretical propositions. The context of Hélio Oiticica's emergence as a constructivist-oriented artist is discussed in order to establish the theoretical foundation for his subsequent articulations between notions of avant-garde and Brazilian popular culture.

Part three deals with Oiticica's theoretical and artistic proposals. It centres on the artist's transition from a position concerned primarily with the aesthetic questions of art, to one in which art became engaged on a social, ethical and ultimately political level. Oiticica's relationship with concurrent developments in theatre and later in music and cinema is given particular attention. The artist's questioning of the divides between such fields of specialisation, socio-cultural borders or categories of creative production is argued to have arisen out of Oiticica's lessons from Neoconcretism as well as his individual creative approach to relations of friendship. The latter integrated the wider concept of participation that eventually drove the work through the apparent equivocation between national culture and avant-garde practice. The study concludes with an analysis of the artist's posthumous dissemination and its relation with today's contemporary Brazilian art.

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Foreword

This thesis is divided into three parts that follow a general chronological order. The first deals with aspects of Brazilian *Modernismo* that specifically relate to Hélio Oiticica's (1937-1980) later reference to its legacy. It is therefore important to note that Part I does not represent a history of *Modernismo* but a discussion on cultural articulations that would become important for artists during the 1960s. Chapter 1 addresses the processes of mediation between the national culture and contemporaneous European Modernism. In this context, theoretical frames such as syncretism and hybridity are discussed in order to suggest certain distinctions between the current usage of such terms from other moments in history. Chapter 2 discusses the rise of Modernism in a predominantly agrarian country. It argues that the relationship between Modernism and modernisation meant that the category of the modern must be understood in the context of a continental nation such as Brazil, as a localised phenomenon. Chapter 3 emphasises the implicit ambivalence present in *Modernismo*, where on the one hand, there was an emulation of European movements that possessed their own national character, whilst on the other hand, an implicit mockery of the deeply embedded fears that underlie European culture was pursued.

Throughout this study the notion of the avant-garde is assumed to relate to an anti-institutional stance, referring to the local socio-cultural and aesthetic contexts rather than being exclusively formalistic and medium specific. Part I, ends (in Chapter 4) with a brief analysis of the institutionalisation of *Modernismo*, where particular attention is given to the rise of architecture as a representation of the nation purported by the holders of power.

Part II deals with the emergence of abstraction in Brazil as representing the achievement of a truly modernist art within the national borders. Chapter 5 therefore discusses the European dissemination of concrete art in order to undermine the premise that abstraction was a late arrival in Brazil, as is commonly argued, and instead to emphasise the fact that the particular ideals around concrete art were very much part of an international context. Discussions on the issue of abstraction argue however, that the concept was imported and that Brazilian artists accepted the ideas disseminated by modernist missionaries such as Max Bill. Chapter 6 attempts to relativise such claims positing again the

issue of regionalism and the existence of precedents, while Chapter 7 argues that there is a mythology associated with the first São Paulo Biennial particularly in relation to Max Bill's prize for sculpture. Hélio Oiticica's artistic career began within the loosely concretist group in Rio de Janeiro (Grupo Frente) that later rebelled against the dogmatic character of such imported aesthetic ideology. It is important therefore to establish clearly the nature of such debates historically (Chapter 8), politically (Chapter 9), and philosophically (Chapter 10). The final Chapter (11) in Part II deals with the original theoretical contribution that the poet and art critic Ferreira Gullar developed in the name of Neoconcretism.

The third and final part of the study deals with the development of Hélio Oiticica's position as an artist and as cultural activist. It begins in Chapter 12 with a discussion on his ideas relating to Neoconcretism. Here, the interest of the artist's enquiries is clearly on the aesthetic nature of his work. These theories are deeply related to our understanding of the nature of canonical modern art. However, rather than rejecting these ideas, once his work enters what the critic Mário Pedrosa described as a postmodern phase, it is argued that it was precisely his engagement in such concepts that guided his singular position of cultural articulation: what the study has defined as Oiticica's politics of ambivalence.

Chapter 13 discusses the political upheavals within the cultural domain in Brazil during the early 1960s: the period in which Oiticica was developing his theories on the transcendental nature of his art. The emphasis is on the militant basis of democratising movements such as the Popular Centres for Culture (CPC).

Chapter 14 discusses the arrival of theatricality in contemporary art practice, which in Brazil took a quite literal sense. It raises in this manner the relationship between events in the field of art and of theatre as equivalent responses to the political situation. Chapter 15 argues that through particular relationships of friendship Oiticica was able to develop a proximity to the *Other* while maintaining a level of ambivalence between the aesthetic and the social. Chapter 16 discusses Oiticica's operation as a cultural activist, his attempt to create a conceptual space for a Brazilian avant-garde and his reference to the ideas that had emerged within *Modernismo*. Chapter 17 argues that equivalent processes of mediation between national identity and the arrival of mass media were present within other avant-garde contexts. In this respect, the particular shift from

Constructivism to Pop Art is analysed within the scope of British and Brazilian contexts. Finally Chapter 18 discusses major re-evaluations of Oiticica's own work. The proposition is that processes of translation were necessary due to the artist's re-location from Rio to New York.

The conclusion discusses Oiticica's re-evaluation of his own process, arguing that his political position of ambivalence was possible because of friendship and that the references to national and traditional culture, what the artist called the search for 'myth', gave way to the less culturally specific yet equally inclusive notion of participation. Oiticica's personal re-evaluation during the 1970s is discussed in the light of the dissemination of recent Brazilian art.

Introduction

The first man was already a crowd. (Meireles, 2000)

In this manner the artist Cildo Meireles (b. 1948) defied the notion of origin within the creative process. On the one hand, the affirmation expresses how incredibly similar forms of creativity concurrently appear in various unconnected locations. On the other hand, it is a statement that stresses the pointlessness of attempting to search for origins within cultural production, since every act is based on an infinitude of previous acts.

The intention here is not to examine one artist's work but how that artist, Hélio Oiticica (1937-80), inscribed his work within history, and later how history has inscribed Oiticica within a particular historical narrative.

Recent international dissemination of Brazilian art has frequently placed Hélio Oiticica, together with some of his contemporaries such as Lygia Clark (1920-88), in positions of origin with respect to the advent of contemporary art in that country. In fact, Meireles' comment was uttered within the context of a conversation about his relationship with the work of such artists.

With regard to the relation between origin and place, Meireles (2000) offered another interesting insight:

It is important to state where you are coming from, and yes I did begin to work as an artist at a time in which Oiticica and Clark were amongst the generation that had preceded my own, yet if we are to speak of influences then, in my particular case, we must speak of Duchamp.

Meireles' comment was in response to certain erroneous statements about his relation with the work of artists such as Oiticica and Clark, made by the Cuban art critic Gerardo Mosquera. Mosquera (1999 p.8) began his interview with Meireles as follows:

I'd like to ask you first about the development of Neoconcretism in Rio de Janeiro and the way it relates to your work. In Brazil in the early 1960s there was a strong concrete art movement, derived from the traditions of Russian and European Constructivism, which developed in an orthodox manner in São Paulo. However, in Rio this tradition had evolved by the late 1960s into the more liberated, sensual and subversive movement known as Neo-Concretism that included Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and yourself. This is an interesting art-historical phenomenon: an art form with social implications that developed out of the formal and self-referential investigations of Brazilian Concretism. How do you place your work in relation to this movement?

In fact, concrete art developed in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro during the 1950s and Neoconcretism is described by this study as having taken place between 1959 and 1961. Mosquera could be forgiven for confusing the actual period in which Neoconcretism took place, since accounts on such movements have often been inconsistent, many of which consider much of Oiticica and Clark's work of the 1960s as neoconcrete.

Mosquera's seemingly insignificant historical error is worth mentioning since it makes evident a number of truths concerning the nature of current processes of dissemination in operation with regard to Oiticica's work. Firstly, such misconceptions are symptomatic of a worrying fragility of art historical narratives dealing with recent Brazilian art. This is the primary reason for this study's extended historical scope: its subject is the fragility of a particular history. Secondly, there is a current implicit assumption that for a contemporary artist working today, a relation with the work of the neoconcrete generation is desirable in order to authenticate his/her historical pertinence. Thirdly, in the same manner in which the notoriety of a Cuban art critic seems to determine assumptions relating to his competence as historian of 'Latin America', the work of Oiticica, is assumed to have influenced an entire generation of artists within a country of continental scale.

Certain questions can therefore be posed: Why write about an artist such as Oiticica, if his work is already internationally recognised? Would it not be more productive to write the histories of other lesser known, yet perhaps equally important, contemporaneous artists?¹

This study is interested as much on Oiticica's work as it is in the processes of dissemination to which his work has been submitted. Implicit in this narrative therefore, is the context in which the work is placed today. This is what determines the position of narration, and is also one of the reasons why the narrative rather than limiting itself to Oiticica's career as an artist, chooses to start by discussing the emergence of modern art in Brazil. Oiticica's work is therefore placed within a larger historiographical analysis that relates as much to the local developments as it does to the Western/modernist canon.

The predominant methodology for approaching the production of art in a so-called peripheral context, centres on the processes of historical exclusion to which such an art has been submitted. This study does not attempt to negate such arguments yet it adopts a position placed 'in between' the deconstruction of those 'grand narratives'

¹ These questions were put to the author by Brazilian artists and historians during the initial stages of research for this study, amongst them Milton Machado and Paula Terra Cabo.

which are paradoxically at once totalising and excluding, and the peripheral narratives that have arisen as, often submissive, responses to their imposed exclusion.

Any history of art must establish or assume a form of definition of art, while any history of modern art must establish or assume a definition of modernity. Any address to these problems will serve to animate a range of questions: where to draw the line between theory and practice, where to divide art from language or from literature or from politics, and so on. (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.2)

The above quote describes quite precisely the difficulties in tackling a historical narrative that attempts to deal with the creative ('artistic', literary, theoretical and political) production of an artist such as Oiticica. Firstly, modernity as a historical category becomes highly problematic when considered outside the domain of 'developed' Western countries. There are a number of issues at stake here, amongst them, the distinct or non-synchronous relationship between the development of modernisation and Modernism, in addition to the mediation of these with more traditional cultural elements. Secondly, Oiticica's production has become the subject of polemics due precisely to the 'drawing of the line' between his work as modern artistic practice versus those who see it as a manifestation of popular culture and/or as a postmodern practice; in other words, between the universality of his constructive aesthetic, against the specificity of the location of some of his cultural references. In addition, such distinct interpretations have implicit connotations that deal with the autonomy of creative production, particularly with respect to politics and society.

This study proposes a reading that traverses such entrenched borders, in an attempt to view the intrinsic ambivalence of a work that, it will be argued, was symptomatic of an intellectual and conceptual richness in addition to representing a strategy for overcoming the paradoxes imposed on an avant-garde practice outside the 'cultural centre'.

The study attempts to place the notion of the avant-garde expressed by Peter Bürger, as being connected to the praxis of life, within the so-called peripheral context. The hybridity of such work, rather than demonstrative of its inescapable relation to the place, becomes related to the continuous fluid relation between aesthetics and the cultural context. Therefore it is precisely because of its avant-garde nature that it relates to its location.

In a sense, the emergence of Oiticica's international reputation coincided, or perhaps more specifically was brought by, the critical re-evaluation of left-wing thought in the wake of the 1980s. According to Mosquera (1995) this reaction to the predominant politics of the Regan-Thatcher axis brought the Latin American critic, into a particularly pertinent position. Such a position was characterised by attempts to

escape dualistic, or binary models, where the emphasis was based on dichotomies such as centre-periphery, or left-right, Modernism-Postmodernism. The experience of Latin America, as Mosquera (1995 p.12) has argued, demanded a far more pragmatic approach, following the seemingly inescapable cycles of positivism and failure and the paradoxes between modernisation and tradition that have characterised the social history of the continent.

The methodology of this study adopts a historiographical and revisionist strategy in order to analyse the 'peripheral' narratives of national modern art, their association with the consensual history of Modernism and the inadequacy of such a relation. The process is at times reversed in order to investigate whether those elements that are inadequate in terms of established paradigms were not themselves present within the contemporaneous metropolitan context. In each part of the study, space is reserved for such comparative analysis: the 1920s artistic circles in Paris, the European spread of geometrical abstraction during the post-war period, the British engagement with the emerging mass culture and finally the international reception of Oiticica's work.

What becomes clear in Oiticica's writing is a productive disregard for established interpretations of movements and tendencies in modern art. However, his analysis of European as well as Brazilian artists, cannot be considered as an example of a postmodern 'mix and match' either. Such processes of historical simplification generally centre on particular dualities, opposing factions that although aiding the description of controversies in the field, act as alienating devices for those who do not entirely fulfil either category.

Part I

Brazilian *Modernismo*

Introduction

Such supposed antitheses as 'abstraction' and 'representation' have seldom been adequate to the task of formulating relevant distinctions among the determining commitments of modern art, however familiar they may have become in the literary scaffolding erected around it. (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.2)

The predominant historical interpretation of *Modernismo*² (the loose gathering of artists and writers involved with the emergence of the modern sensibility in Brazil) has been generally dismissive of its achievements in the field of art. This view tends to blame the colonial past for such an 'inadequate Modernism'. Portugal, Brazil's coloniser, had a strong literary tradition, and it was therefore evident that this would be reflected upon the colony's cultural development. Such a conclusion is reached by comparing *Modernismo* to the consensual interpretation of Modernism: namely, albeit oversimplifying, an autonomous language which tended towards abstraction.

Oiticica's career as an artist began at a moment in which such a historical view had consolidated itself and abstraction had finally been embraced in Brazil, very much in a spirit of rupture from the characteristically figurative tendency developed by *Modernismo*, its predecessor.

It seems therefore necessary not only to discuss the meanings of *Modernismo* but also to begin by establishing a more general discussion, beyond a purely national perspective, on the meanings associated with categories of the modern.

The convention adopted here relates to that used by Harrison and Wood (1992 p.126) where there are: 'three related moments in the dynamic of the modern: modernisation, modernity and Modernism.' Modernisation refers to the process of intense industrialisation and technological innovation - particularly with the arrival of the internal combustion engine - that characterised what has alternatively been described as 'the first machine age' (Banham, 1960). Modernity relates to the experience brought by modernisation, which was 'both a social and an inner experience'. The relationship between modernity and modernisation is fluid or unfixed: 'a deliberate reflection upon and distillation of [...] that inchoate experience of the new' (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.126).

According to Harrison and Wood (1992 p.3), there is an important distinction between Modernism and modern art which varies from an apprehension of the former as a

² *Modernismo* is used here to define a period in Brazilian art covering the 1920s and leading on into the 1930s. It is a term that describes a movement rather than the wide cultural and

'cluster of notionally independent values associated with the practice of modern art' to a more historiographical view positing Modernism as 'a particular form of critical *representation* of the modern in art.'

The prevalent consensual model of Modernism argues that the practice of modern art was one characterised by its autonomy from external factors, therefore placing the artist within a decisive and privileged position: not only being considered the unquestionable author, the origin of the aesthetic act, but guiding the process of the production of theory which emerged as a consequence (the connoisseur's recognition) and a means of accreditation or authentication of such an act. On the opposing side of such an argument, there is a more contextual interpretation that posits the artist and the object of his/her creation as belonging to a particular set of desires characteristic of the artist's social-cultural group. Harrison and Wood (1992) identify these interpretative extremes as generating the dynamics and tensions of Modernism itself.

Certainly in the case of Oiticica they represented key factors in the development of his ambivalent approach. This analysis, adopting a position of ambivalence itself, will approach those cultural moments of contestation, as having equally resulted from the experience of modernity, and therefore it considers events within what could be assumed to be a 'larger' apprehension of modern art. That is to say, movements and strategies that assumed 'anti-art' positions such as Dada, Surrealism, or even Oiticica's definition of anti-art practices are defined in this study under the general historical category of Modernism.

Early 20th century European modern art (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.125) was intrinsically ambivalent. On the one hand, it attempted to forge an identity for itself, imposing a rupture from the past while claiming that its achievements could stand along side those of the classical tradition. Its relation with the past was therefore both one of rebellion and of desire for continuity.

The idea of individual 'expression' arose as a key premise for the new art and with it the notion of the Self as a sign of authenticity. Following the 'partial' rupture with the classical tradition, evidence of the authentic self-expression became associated with 'natural' or 'essential' human creative force, which in turn was found in the non-European cultures. Such a process was also ambivalent (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.125) in that an essentially urban culture found its authentic expression through its association with nature:

aesthetic connotations of the term Modernism. As we will see however, there are great distinctions to be made within Modernismo itself.

It cannot be overstressed that the ideologies of the universal, of transhistorical forms and transcultural sensibilities, of the directly expressive and authentic, meant what they did to a relatively small group of urban sophisticates.

The gradual internationalisation that took place during the years preceding W.W.I saw distinct national characteristics emerge, keeping admittedly, France as the exemplary position. Therefore, while French modern art did not stray far from classicising and rationalist tendencies, in the German speaking cultural centres it became associated with subjective and expressive characteristics of the local philosophical and cultural tradition, while the arrival of modern art in countries such as Italy and Russia whose industrialisation was comparatively late, embraced the modern with an enthusiasm that was heightened by the rapidity of the social transformation:

Against the technical constraints obtaining within that tradition - a preoccupation with surface, and with the consequences of loosening colour and structure from depiction - there was room for the culturally relative experience to make its distinctive mark. In a sense, *that* is the underlying point: that the modern was not yet 'total' and as such could be measured, and its meaning assessed, against that which was not. (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.126)

In the context of this study it is interesting to reverse a statement by Harrison and Wood (1992 p.126) where it is argued that in the relationship between Modernism and modernity:

there is a sense in which experience cannot be grasped until it is represented; though at the extreme it would be absurd to say that the modern condition could not be experienced without a modern art to read the experience against.

The question that emerges by reversing the above comment is whether it would be possible to understand the representation without the experience. That is to say, could Modernism in the periphery have a cultural significance without the nation fully experiencing modernity?

To answer such a question it is perhaps helpful to juxtapose the varied responses to modernisation in Europe itself. Firstly, one can note a range of responses present within the most industrialised nations, for example: France, Germany and Britain. Secondly, for those European nations originally on the fringes of industrialisation - namely Italy and Russia - the experience of modernity was more intense since changes, brought by the abrupt industrialisation, were experienced far more intensively.

Similarly, the peripheral nation's experience of modernity might have been delayed, or perhaps incomplete, yet the eventual arrival of modernisation brought with it radical and for some sectors traumatic social transformations.

Therefore while the appearance of signs of Modernism in Brazil during the 1910s could understandably be assumed to have been removed from the nation's 'reality', the arrival of Modernism as a loose yet forceful cultural movement coincided with the rise of São Paulo as an industrial, commercial metropolitan centre. It was in this sense a localised rather than national phenomenon.

In effect, the emergence of Modernism in Brazil was condensed (and some would argue, incomplete) within little more than a decade. For those who saw it as incomplete, it suffered from the incapacity of internalising the experience of modernity as Cubism and later tendencies had done, remaining instead associated with the representation of the nation with its incomplete modernisation and primitive connotations.

This study will investigate the ambivalent approach adopted by artists and thinkers in order to overcome the paradoxes specific to the production of art in a country such as Brazil during diverse historical periods. Such strategies led to cultural productions that are sometimes labelled as hybrid. It is important to note that the terms 'hybrid' and 'ambivalent' are treated here as related, yet not as synonymous.

In Part I, the analysis concentrates on the particular relation that early Brazilian Modernism had with a particular European tradition. This study will focus primarily on the work of the painter Tarsila do Amaral and the poet Oswald de Andrade. It will be argued that their work gradually assumed an ambivalent position with regard to the national and the cosmopolitan. On the one hand, they attempted to represent the national popular character of Brazil while maintaining an aristocratic posture. On the other hand, they appropriated the European modern style, while mocking it. A further ambivalence relates to the actual Parisian movements that they drew upon. Positions such as the 'Call to Order' and the more disruptive Dada, were antagonistic within their original context, yet once appropriated into the Brazilian modernist scene became complementary.

Later, in the 1930s, as a consequence of political shifts, Modernism in Brazil acquired a far more overt leftist character while paradoxically being employed by the right-wing dictatorship as an instrument of propaganda. This was the context in which murals by the painter Cândido Portinari were introduced within the context of modern Brazilian architecture.

Central to the analytical approach of the study is Peter Bürger's (1974) definition of the avant-garde. The study, in an appropriatory move of its own, posits Bürger's

definition within the Brazilian context in an attempt to question the assumption that Brazilian Modernism was inadequate due to its relation to the local people, culture and landscape. If, as Bürger suggested, the avant-garde is characterised by its relation to the praxis of life, then a Brazilian avant-garde should naturally relate to life in Brazil.

Chapter 1

Modernismo: National Identity and Cosmopolitanism

The Brazilian art historian Carlos Zilio (1982b p.13) has argued that modern (European) art emerged out of the disruption of bourgeois ideology during the 19th century.³ Such an ideology had been intrinsically associated with the concept of nationhood that had developed with the ascension of the bourgeoisie. The rational principles in painting which arose in the Renaissance such as perspective and chiaroscuro, became later associated with the possibility of representing one's identity during the rise of the European nation states through the depiction of their history, politics and geography. However, the disruption of pictorial representation brought by Romanticism, Impressionism and that culminated in Cézanne, has led to interpretations that purport that modern art began to internationalise itself. In other words, the loss of the representation of specific cultural and geographical places brought by the increasingly abstract language, particularly with the arrival of Cubism, meant that it was then possible to perceive the new aesthetic as universal. This historical view (Zilio, 1982b), argued that such a shift beyond the national cultural boundaries was furthered by the European contact with non-Western cultures such as the Japanese and the African. Although Zilio argued that Modernism tended towards a universal language through such disruptions, he admitted however, that modern art did display some instances of nationalistic pretensions such as in 'German Expressionism' and 'Italian Futurism'. These are however seen as superficial, or alternatively, as reactions to French cultural hegemony. For Zilio the true international modern movements were Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism. In the case of the American continent the issue was different. Zilio (1982b p.13) describes the recurrence of a search for a national identity as a consequence of the colonial past:

The process of national independence brings with it the ideological desire to forge a new identity.⁴

This process is seen as both one of affirmation and of negation of the colonial culture. It negates it in an attempt to search for its own specificity yet such specificity

³ Zilio is also a practising artist and educator. He was a key artist in the 1960s participating in the New Objectivity exhibition organised by Hélio Oiticica. Following the 1968 military hard line, he became active in the armed resistance against the military regime. Wounded and imprisoned he later produced a series of highly political conceptual works. More recently, he played a key role in revitalising the teaching of art and art history at the School of Fine Arts of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He remains a practicing artist and art historian.

⁴ In the original: [...] o processo de independência nacional traz em si sua faceta ideológica de afirmação de uma nova identidade. [All translations are the author's unless otherwise stated.]

is then mediated through the coloniser's culture. This can be seen in Brazilian *Modernismo*, which initially attempted to update Brazilian art (in relation to European movements) while directing itself towards a renewed apprehension of Brazil (Zilio 1982b).

As Homi Bhabha (1990 p.293) has argued, the peripheral nation's claim to modernity is problematic due to the relation between nationalism and the Enlightenment: where national sovereignty and the universal ideals attached to it depended on the existence of an Other in order to affirm itself against. It is precisely this conflict, between the metropolitan and the local that continuously re-emerged in Brazilian cultural production throughout the 20th century. This process of articulation becomes particularly interesting when it involves the more disruptive metropolitan tendencies, thus adding another level of contradiction. Moreover, such contradictions are at the heart of Hélio Oiticica's references both to *Modernismo* and to European modernist movements.

Interpretations of the rise of Modernism⁵ in Europe such as that purported by Zilio (1982b) are seemingly antagonistic to Peter Bürger's (1974) argument in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* where modern art is defined as the culmination of art within bourgeois society. Interestingly, Bürger's definition of the avant-garde as corresponding to Dada, Surrealism and Constructivism, coincides precisely with those movements Zilio saw as the most characteristically modern. They remain, however, significantly distinct interpretations.

For Bürger, rather than disrupting the possibility of representing a national history modern art fulfils the bourgeois project of establishing structures of specialisation that order the social system. Art's role in such a structure becomes one in which it attains autonomy as an individual field of enquiry.

The distinction between Zilio and Bürger's interpretations is the nature of the historical detachment present within modern art. In Zilio's view, with the advent of Modernism, art is freed from the burden of representing the nation through the disruption of the pictorial tradition developed throughout the ascent of the bourgeoisie, art therefore internationalised itself. In Bürger's interpretation, the development of art in bourgeois society adheres to an ideal - or idealised notion - whereby it tends towards an autonomous area of specialisation, referring to itself and being separate from the other sectors of life. It does not disrupt bourgeois ideology but is accommodated within the bourgeois hegemony. Therefore, what Zilio saw as

⁵ The definitions of *modernity*, *modernisation* and *Modernism* in this study as emphasised in the introduction, are seen respectively as: a historical stage, a social-economic process and a heterogeneous cultural project.

proof of an international character, Bürger interpreted as the autonomous nature of Modernism.

The two descriptions may in fact not be so apart. New mechanised processes more akin to the Cartesian rationalism of Enlightenment philosophy replaced art's role as that of representing a national reality. In this sense photography became a seemingly more reliable, scientific, form of representation. Moreover, the Enlightenment's rational process that gave rise to the transferral from the laws of similitude towards those of differentiation brought in an age of increasingly specialised areas of knowledge (Foucault, 1966 p.51). Art thus disrupted its traditional representational role only to gain a new role within bourgeois society.

Bürger's argument becomes pertinent in the current study through the distinction that he makes between the terms modern art and the avant-garde. However, the very possibility of the avant-garde or of art as institutional critique, praised by Bürger through the example of Dada, when seen from the outside (Brazil for instance), becomes an occurrence that seems only possible within the confines of the cultural centre.

In both interpretations European Modernism was seen as the model. Within such a structure, *Modernismo* in Brazil, did not manage to free itself from the burden of representing the nation and therefore could not have operated as an autonomous aesthetic nor could it be considered as an avant-garde, since the institutionalisation of Modernism had not yet taken place in Brazil. Autonomy was sacrificed by the inevitable attachment to the local and its representation. The Brazilian modernist revolt is therefore directed at the establishment not as the Dadaist rebellion against the institutionalisation of modern art but as a force of renewal: as an attack on the backwardness of the establishment and not against the establishment *per se*.

While Dada's position was one of negation, *Modernismo* was therefore affirmative. However, this did not mean that it was free of conflicts and contradictions. In its rebellious nature, a more appropriate parallel with *Modernismo* would be Italian Futurism since Italy, recently unified at the time, searched for a modern vision of itself through the total rejection of the nation's classical past.

Recent re-evaluations of Brazilian *Modernismo* have often tended to search for its affinities with the postmodern condition. Such is the case of Beatriz Resende's (2000 p.199) view in which one of the characteristics (she named three) of *Modernismo*:

is the identification of a Brazilian cultural identity which turns out to be multiple, plural and hybrid, rather than singular and stable as it was thought in modernist times.⁶

⁶ The other two characteristics of *Modernismo* emphasised by Resende (2000) are: The questioning of the canonical status of Modernism and art as a renegotiation of memory.

The principle problem with such an argument is that the hybridity of Latin American culture, implicitly assumes the 'purity' of its constitutive elements. The idea that (European) Modernism represents a stable homogenous entity frequently re-emerges in recent historical narratives dealing with Modernism in Brazil. Although this is identifiably a hegemonic discourse on Modernism, it belongs, perhaps more precisely, to a North American historical construction whereby Modernism is equated with autonomy and linearity, which was championed by Alfred Barr⁷ and later by Clement Greenberg.⁸ It is perhaps appropriate to mention that Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* represents a critique of such a model. Bürger's approach remains philosophical, owing to the legacy of the Frankfurt School, yet there is an implicit historiographical dimension to his argument. In the forward to the 1984 edition of (Bürger, 1974 p. xxxvi) *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Jochen Schulte-Sasse is more explicit:

Most theories of Modernism current in American criticism exaggerate the significance of the shift from realism to aestheticism to such a degree that they neglect or insufficiently appreciate the important effort of the avant-garde praxis to destroy the 'shell of the no-longer-beautiful illusion' and aim to make art 'pass unsublimated over into life'. As a result most American criticism has lost sight of the goal the avant-garde set up for itself ... avant-garde artists weren't merely reaching to society with last-ditch efforts at breaking up and dislocating prevalent styles.

Central to the historical view purported by the 'American criticism' was the creation of the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1929. As Norbert Lynton (1980 p.169) argued:

the museum [MoMA], its exhibitions and publications associated with them, played a major role in establishing an agreed, almost official history of modern art.

This view of Modernism has caused particular difficulties - albeit not always acknowledged - for the peripheral artist, critic and ultimately, the art historian, since it contributed towards equating autonomy to universality and Modernism to homogeneity and/or historical linearity. As a model, it excluded the peripheral production, critique and dissemination by considering it as merely an inferior copy or alternatively as a culturally specific product, unconnected to the canon.

On the issue of hybridity, see: Canclini (1989).

⁷ Alfred H. Barr Jr. (1902-81) was the first director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The institution was the first of its kind and therefore was highly influential in determining the way in which modern art was collected displayed and ultimately interpreted.

⁸ Greenberg's (1909-94) prominence as a critic dedicated to the promotion of North American abstract art has meant that his critique of modern art is often confused with its definition or essence.

Bürger (1974 p.24) suggested that although the development of art in bourgeois society was one that tended towards autonomy, art was also a subsystem within the overall synthesis of subsystems that compose the history of bourgeois society. This distinction is perhaps useful as a tool for understanding the non-synchronous development in the 'periphery' between Modernism and modernisation. These were generally seen to have developed in Europe in a fairly synchronous way, forging the experience of modernity. The peripheral nations due to the legacy of colonisation, appear to possess non-synchronous modernities, whereby aesthetic Modernism might have been recognisable before its actual institutional structure had been established through the processes of modernisation.

As far as Bürger's definition of the avant-garde is concerned, for the Brazilian modernists the institution that acted as the target for their attacks was one based on past models. Unlike the situation in which Dada emerged, modern art in Brazil had not been institutionalised; therefore action was seen to rely on an aesthetic concurrence with events in Europe, while adopting a rebellious position with regards to the local academic establishment. Such a process did not correspond precisely to those contemporaneous occurrences within the European movements, such as the various manifestations of post-Cubism, which had served as *Modernismo's* aesthetic models.

Modernismo's confrontational character *vis à vis* the existing academic institutions is often undermined by critics who argue that it was the lack of modernist institutions that led to the movement's inadequate or incoherent aesthetic development, and to the movement's eventual exhaustion. Related to such arguments is the view that readily accepts the impossibility of continuous art historical development in the country due to its continuous reference to metropolitan tendencies.

Paulo Venancio Filho (1980) developed the analysis of the problematic surrounding the lack of a solid local art institution: history, market, critique. Venancio argued that while in the 'First World' artists are able to react against the institution of art, thus acquiring a historical significance, in Brazil, critical work of this kind becomes almost accidentally representative of a 'Brazilian reality': a process which Venancio describes as a form of auto-colonialism. Due to the lack of direction, imposed by institutional practice, art is continuously fixed as inherently representative of the nation. Contrary to Bürger, Venancio (1988 p.7) suggests that it is the institution that guides the avant-garde, and that the local element interferes with the universal aspirations required of the avant-garde. This is evident in Venancio's analysis of the notion of the avant-garde in relation to early Brazilian modernists:

Our Modernismo was not an avant-garde in the explicit sense of the term, except in a strictly local sense, and certainly not in terms of the plastic arts. It was an uncertain, diffuse avant-garde with no unity. One does certainly not require from an avant-garde an organised coherence, but a confrontational direction. Here, Modernismo placed itself against Academicism and searched for a national identity. The fight against Academicism is a basic premise of modernity; the search for a national identity is not. It is against this that modernity fights, against the languages and national identities, for an internationalism of languages.⁹

Venancio argued that true Modernism only became possible in Brazil with artists' adherence to abstraction during the 1940s. A moment, it has been said, in which the terms Modernism and modernisation were seen to converge most dramatically in Brazil's history.¹⁰ Furthermore, *Modernismo* did not create the necessary processes that led towards the adoption of a pure, universal, abstract art. Instead, it was the issue of continuity - or the lack of it - that emerged as the reasoning (Venancio, 1988 p.9) for the difficulty in establishing an avant-garde in Brazil:

Concretism marks the first organised formulation of abstraction in Brazil. With all its rationalist orthodoxy it placed itself apart from the more or less diffuse propositions of the first Modernismo. It was the case of obeying a strict program, almost a plan. The *Ruptura* manifesto states amongst other programmatic points, the following: 'There is no continuity' and distinguishes 'the ones who create forms from old principles' from 'those who create forms from new principles'. The old is old, the new is new: there is no continuity. In fact, the discontinuity is not so theoretical, but historical; it is the result of the artistic institutions. It seems that each time it is necessary to start again, not because it is necessary to disassociate from the old, but because the old does not dialectically develop into the new.¹¹

A central figure in the literary field of *Modernismo*, Mário de Andrade (1893-1945) in his address at the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Modern Art Week¹², described the event as essentially destructive. Its destructiveness, in a Futurist spirit

⁹ In the original: Nosso Modernismo não foi uma vanguarda no sentido explíto do termo, a não ser em termos estritamente locais, e, certamente, não em termos de artes plásticas. Uma vanguarda incerta, difusa, sem unidade. Certamente não se pede de uma vanguarda uma coerência organizada, mas uma direção de luta. Aqui o Modernismo se colocou de imediato contra o Academicismo e pela procura de uma identidade nacional. a luta contra o Academicismo é a premissa básica de toda a modernidade; a busca de uma identidade nacional não. É contra isso que a modernidade luta, contra as linguagens e identidades nacionais, por um internacionalismo das liguagens.

Venancio has since changed this view. See: Venancio (2001) p.188.

¹⁰ This period will be covered in Part II of this study.

¹¹ In the original: O Concretismo deflagra a primeira formulação organizada de uma abstração no Brasil. Com toda a sua ortodoxia racionalista contrapunha-se às propostas mais ou menos difusas do primeiro modernismo. tratava-se agora de obedecer um programa estrito, quase um planejamento. O manifesto *Ruptura* coloca entre pontos programáticos o seguinte: 'Não há continuidade' e distingue 'os que criam formas de princípios velhos' e 'os que criam formas de princípios novos'. O velho é o velho, o novo é o novo: não há continuidade. De fato; porém, a descontinuidade não é tanto teórica, mas histórica; resulta da fragilidade das instituições artísticas. A cada vez parece ser necessário começar de novo, não porque seja necessário romper com o velho, mas porque o velho não se desenvolve dialeticamente no novo.

was aimed at the backwardness of the cultural environment. Mário de Andrade claimed that the closed circle of members resembled an aristocracy. Their individualism - a resurgence even in the most desperate attempts at anti-individualism - meant that they did not form an aesthetically coherent group but a multitude of voices. Such coherence would only emerge later with the appearance of abstract and particularly concrete art.

However, such an assertion is nevertheless dependent on how one defines an avant-garde and its coherence. Peter Reyner Banham (1960) has described different types of avant-garde groups during the early 20th century: those who adhere through the development of a common aesthetic as could be argued with Cubism and those who worked under a common rhetoric such as in Futurism where artists developed individual aesthetic responses. The latter would be the case of *Modernismo*. For this reason, this study will initially concentrate on the paintings of Tarsila do Amaral¹³ (1886-1973) and their relation to the manifestos written by Oswald de Andrade¹⁴ (1890-1954), not because they are in any sense representative of the wider group but due to Tarsila's and Oswald's personal and creative proximity and to Oiticica's later reference to Oswald's theories and manifestos, issues that have a particular pertinence to this study.

Hybrid and Syncretic Strategies

As we have seen, Brazilian art historians have in the not so distant past interpreted *Modernismo's* preoccupation with the representation of a national identity as a burden in the path towards its development as an autonomous and emancipated avant-garde. More recently however, the hybridity implicit in *Modernismo* has been evaluated as an example of a possible Postmodernism *avant la lettre*. Neither interpretation seems satisfactory, since they ignore the specific conditions of artistic production at different historical moments and reinforce the notion of national identity as fixed.

Hybridity, if a useful term, serves as an interpretative tool that evades the polarisation between the figurative association to a specific cultural place and the purported universality of abstract language. While the latter - the prevalent modernist canon -

¹² The *Semana de Arte de 22* (The Modern Art Week of 1922) is considered the inaugural event of *Modernismo* in Brazil. Mário de Andrade is best known for his novel *Macunaíma*, of 1928.

¹³ Tarsila do Amaral, like Oswald, is usually referred to in Brazilian texts by her first name. This convention will also be adopted here in order to distinguish Tarsila do Amaral from the art historian Aracy Amaral who is frequently referred to throughout this study.

¹⁴ Rather than referring to the author by his family name Oswald de Andrade is referred to in Brazilian texts by his first name in order to distinguish him from Mário de Andrade. This will be the convention adopted here.

has been generally discredited, the relation between cultural production and its place of origin has undergone important, if subtle, changes. The ambivalence of hybridity was a central characteristic in the emergence of modern painting in Brazil and continues to be a predominant conceptual element in today's production.¹⁵

To speak of hybridity in the context of Latin American art is to refer unavoidably to the writing of Néstor García Canclini. In his most notorious publication, Canclini (1989) placed the notion of hybridisation within the context of the politics of subaltern struggles. Rejecting the claim that Modernism in Latin America did not attain the level of cultural purity present in Europe and North America due to the late or incomplete modernisation of the continent, he argued that Latin American modernity, instead of replacing pre-modern culture, coexisted with the traditional. Within such coexistence, the subaltern, through the process of hybridisation, opens a space of negotiation with the dominant culture, while maintaining a sense of identity through the preservation of local traditions. These are in turn articulated with modernity.

In effect, Canclini acknowledged operations that have been present within the history of the continent, particularly at the time of its colonial experience, and placed them within the specific context of the more recent relations and negotiations with Modernism and modernisation.

Prior to modernity, the colonial period witnessed the emergence of the syncretic religions such as Candomblé and Santería, which established forms of cultural translation as strategies for dealing with the imposition of a dominant religion. The Catholic Saints of the coloniser were equated to African Gods. The slaves thus cunningly deceived their masters by worshipping syncretic icons: forms with ambivalent meanings. Marcos Becquer and José Gatti (1991 pp. 65-81) have suggested syncretism as a more appropriate term in which to designate processes of articulation between contemporary discourses and traditions.¹⁶ Becquer and Gatti argued that the politicised nature of the syncretic articulation defines more appropriately such subaltern strategies. In their definition, the syncretic does not occupy a third space, which the notion of hybridity implies, but proposes ambivalence as a subversive strategy. For Becquer and Gatti syncretism defines the unavoidable political nature of such cultural combinations and evades the biological connotations: as a third and sterile outcome of two other supposedly pure entities.

In his search for the possible origins of such processes, the French sociologist Roger Bastide (1898 - 1974) located the emergence of the syncretic Brazilian religions

¹⁵ The distinctions between these two moments will be discussed later in this study, which through a discussion of the emergence of modern painting in Brazil, will attempt to distinguish Brazilian *Modernismo* from the articulation of its legacy within contemporary production.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Jean Fisher for drawing my attention to Becquer and Gatti's essay.

within the interaction between Africans from different and often rival tribes who were placed in extreme proximity through the machinery of slavery.¹⁷ Their predicament demanded the transcendence of old rivalries and the development of new operations based on syncretic strategies. These centred on cultural translations of distinctive elements of their respective cultures, enabling communication and understanding with each other. Syncretism thus demands an understanding of the *Other* in order to delineate a territory for the *Self*. Bastide's study is coherent with Becquer and Gatti's (1991 p.69) description of syncretism's etymology and consequently its distinction from hybridity:

The etymology of syncretism points to the tactical articulation of different elements, exemplified in Plutarch by the communities of ancient Crete which, despite their differences, joined to face a common enemy. Thus, syncretism foregrounds the political - rather than the (un)natural - paradigm of articulation and identity, a paradigm under which the factional inhabitants of Crete, rather than forming a homogenous whole, compose a heterogeneous front of distinct communities in altered relations to each other. As such, the discursive alignment implicit in syncretism 'remains contingent to relations of power and subject to change according to historical specificity; the elements united in it are denied any *a priori* 'necessary belongingness', and are precluded any sense of originary fixity both to their identities and to their relations. In this manner, syncretism designates articulation as a politicised and discontinuous mode of becoming. It entails the 'formal' coexistence of components whose precarious (i.e., partial as opposed to impartial) identities are mutually modified in their encounter, yet whose distinguishing differences, as such, are not dissolved or elided in these modifications, but strategically reconstituted in an ongoing war of position.

Today's perception of syncretism as a harmonious translation between different cultures, ignores its history as a strategy arising from a brutal struggle. The repression of Afro-Brazilian cultures for instance, remained present until the 20th century. Sérgio Cabral (1996 p.27) in his account of the rise of the Samba Schools in Rio de Janeiro described the frequent instances of police persecution suffered by many of the pioneering samba musicians due to the association that their music had to the then outlawed practice of Afro-Brazilian religions. An awareness of this fact as a contemporaneous occurrence to *Modernismo* further emphasises the necessity of distinguishing the hybrid or syncretic nature of culture at different historical moments, in addition to adding a certain level of radicality to - what now seem naive or inadequate - references to Afro-Brazilian culture contained within *Modernismo*.

In a similar manner, neither can hybridity, in itself, be presumed to be a trustworthy sign of political correctness. Hybrid strategies, as Bhabha (1984 p.127) has argued, were also present within colonial discourse. A politics of encouragement of hybrid

¹⁷ I am grateful to Maria Moreira for drawing my attention to the work of Bastide and for discussing his ideas in relation to her current and previous artistic practice. See: Bastide, R. (1973) *Estudos Afro-Brasileiros*. São Paulo: Perspectiva.

subjects - British educated but not quite British - served the purpose of creating a class of mediators or translators between the Empire and its colonial subjects. Bhabha refers to a document written by Charles Grant in which such strategies are elucidated as preventive of 'dangerous political alliances' and contributing to maintain the colonial subjects under British 'protection'.¹⁸ Hybridity in this instance served as a counteraction to syncretism in its original meaning. Bhabha, nevertheless identifies in such mimicry the emergence of the hybrid figure as a 'menace' to the very premises to which the colonial discourse based itself upon. Such premises relied on difference as legitimisation of a colonial narcissistic authority. However, as the distinction between the *Self* and the *Other* diminishes so does the effectiveness of an argument that associates inferiority with difference. Similarly, the ideal of a 'universal' modern art cannot admit the presence of difference since it deviates from the same, and is suspiciously associated with 'mimicry'.¹⁹

¹⁸ Grant, C. (1812) Observations on the State of Society among Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, *Sessional Papers* 1812-13, X (282), East India Company. Quoted in: Bhabha (1984).

¹⁹ For a discussion on Universality and Pluralism and their relation to the national character of art, see: Benjamin, A. (1991) p.138.

Chapter 2

Modernismo's Precedents

Some signs of proto-modernity were already present in Brazil during the early 20th century, as much in the development of urbanistic projects as in literature. The period was characterised by the economical stability achieved by president Campos Salles²⁰ in the aftermath of the economic crisis that followed the creation of the Republic in 1889 (Prado Jr., 1945 p.218). The turn of the century was also marked by the control of yellow fever through measures imposed by Oswaldo Cruz²¹ and the re-urbanisation and sanitation of the capital Rio de Janeiro by Pereira Passos.²² The latter was based on Haussmann's large Parisian boulevards and even included a third scale replica of the Paris Opera. Although these are commonly seen as positive signs of modernity, the social historian Nicolau Sevcenko (2000 pp.75-107) has discussed the brutality with which they were imposed, particularly in relation to the underprivileged population. Modernisation, Sevcenko argued, was generally for the benefit of the privileged classes.

In the economic sector the period saw major transformations in the country's infrastructure: the capital's street illumination, telegraphy, the railway system, factories, power stations. Transformations that were intrinsically related to the development of agriculture: mainly sugar, cocoa, and coffee. Around the turn of the century, Brazil became the major exporter of coffee in the world, producing 70% of the global production.²³ Rather than the capital Rio de Janeiro, the state of São Paulo was the prime beneficiary of this particular agricultural activity having a more appropriate terrain for its cultivation. The development of agriculture and the infrastructure that it entailed also brought a great number of European immigrants to the state of São Paulo both from within Brazil and from outside (mainly Japan and Italy), their numbers had radically increased following the abolition of slavery (Prado Jr., 1945 p.190).

The symbol of modernisation is perhaps best described by the image of the pioneer of Brazilian aviation, Santos Dumont flying around the Eiffel Tower in 1899. [Fig. 1, 2] Such an image was invoked by M. S. Brito (1978) who described modern art in Brazil as appearing out of the contact of the coffee fields and the Eiffel Tower. The young

²⁰ Manuel Ferraz de Campos Salles (1841-1913) as President of the Republic (1898-1902) achieved national economic stability through foreign loans (Prado Jr., 1945).

²¹ Oswaldo Cruz (1872-1917) was responsible for the programme that eradicated Yellow Fever in Rio de Janeiro by 1907 (Prado Jr., 1945).

²² Francisco Pereira Passos (1836-1913) was the mayor of Rio de Janeiro between 1902-06 (Prado Jr., 1945).

poets and artists, direct or indirect beneficiaries of the great wealth produced by coffee, were able through the favourable economic climate to participate within the Parisian avant-garde circles throughout the 1920s.²⁴

Coffee exports were however controlled by foreign investment companies (British in particular) that benefited from most of the profits through the process of market speculation (Prado Jr., 1945 pp.225-35). The major development of the state's capital São Paulo as a thriving metropolis occurred out of the necessity for an intermediary position between the coffee fields and the state's port, Santos. The product was stored in the city of São Paulo and smaller quantities would then be transported to Santos and then abroad. The quantity that was exported could then be controlled in order to control the international market price.

The modernisation/Europeanisation of the urban environment of Rio was very much exclusive to the privileged classes. People were expected to wear appropriate (European) dress in order to promenade on the boulevards and at the outbreak of World War I these people would greet each other (in French) with 'vive la France' (Sevcenko, 2000 p.89). Brazil's internal *Other*, especially the predominantly black people of the slums were, until the early 20th century, still persecuted for attempting to practice and maintain their 'African' traditions: slavery itself had only been abolished in 1888. The practitioners of Candomblé, Capoeira and even Samba ran the risk of police prosecution and imprisonment (Cabral, 1996).

In this respect it is interesting to note that the aspirations towards the representation of the nation adopted by the early Brazilian modernists undoubtedly related to a Parisian desire and fascination for all forms and associations to the 'primitive' rather than an innate sense of national pride *per se*.

Modernist painting itself had already appeared during the 1910s with artists such as Lasar Segall (1891-1957) and Anita Malfatti (1889-1964). The former, a Lithuanian immigrant with first hand experience of German Expressionism, presented an exhibition of his paintings in 1913; but his isolation from Brazilian intellectual circles²⁵ with modernist inclinations, meant that the exhibition was only recognised retrospectively.²⁶ The latter, however, caused a scandal amongst Brazilian conservative intellectuals when she exhibited her cubist and expressionist paintings in

²³ This percentage is taken from Prado Jr. (1945). Prado Jr. also mentioned that the figure for the state of São Paulo alone was 60%. Brito, M. S. (1978) suggested that the figure was 82.5% of global coffee production.

²⁴ These indicators of modernity have been described by Sevcenko (2000). However, if we are to talk about coffee beneficiaries it is important to mention that those who really profited from coffee were European and North American speculators. See: Prado Jr. (1945) pp.225-35.

²⁵ Although having exhibited in 1913 he only resided in Brazil from 1923.

²⁶ Lasar Segall, through his acquaintance with Otto Dix and George Grosz, joined the expressionist movement in 1911-12. See: Ades (1989) p.356.

São Paulo in 1917.²⁷ Malfatti's paintings were the product of her studies in Germany and later, due to World War I, in the USA, where she met various European modernists also displaced by war.²⁸ [Fig. 3, 4, 5]

On her return to Brazil and due to the insistence of her colleagues she was persuaded to exhibit her paintings.²⁹ The exhibition was initially warmly received. Tarsila do Amaral for example - not yet acquainted with the modernist aesthetic - is said to have been interested but perplexed by the colours and loose brushstrokes (Brito, M. S., 1978 p.50).

Initial reviews claimed that 'this is the art that is produced in the most advanced cultural milieus', that her work 'presents original and bizarre aspects from the disposition of the pictures to the motifs of each one of them'.³⁰ Another article claimed that Malfatti's work represented 'an advanced art, that due precisely to this fact, is not always accessible to the general public', the exhibition 'was visited by a vast number of artists and amateurs, who had acquired a considerable number of paintings'.³¹ The article explained that:

²⁷ Monteiro Lobato was the author of a vicious attack on Malfatti's exhibition in 1917. Lobato later became a main reference for regionalist and indeed modernist literature, through his depiction of the Brazilian rural character. Lobato M. (1917). A propósito da Exposição Malfatti. *O Estado de São Paulo*. 20 December. Quoted in its entirety in: Brito, M. S. (1978) pp.52-6. For a translation into French of Lobato's article and Oswald de Andrade's own response to the exhibition, see: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (1987) pp. 62-5.

On this topic see also: Zilio (1982a) pp. 40-1.

²⁸ Mário da Silva Brito states that during her one and a half year stay in the USA Malfatti met amongst others: Isadora Duncan, Juan Gris, and Marcel Duchamp. In: Brito, M. S. (1978) p.46.

²⁹ In particular, the artist Di Cavalcanti who would be amongst the originators of the Modern Art Week of 1922. See: Brito, M. S. (1978) p.47.

³⁰ *Correio Paulistano* (1917) 14 December. Quoted in: Brito, M. S. (1978) pp.50-1.

Original paragraph (including Brito's remarks) from which these quotes were taken:

De início tudo corre bem. A arte de Anita Malfatti causa estranheza, surpreende, e é natural, pois seus processos pictóricos constituem novidade para o meio. A crônica jornalística é simpática, embora registre a maneira pessoal e incomum de sus telas. As notícias afirmam que a exposição 'apresenta um aspecto original e bizarro, desde a disposição dos quadros aos motivos tratados em cada um deles.' Destacam que a 'arte da Srta. Malfatti se distancia consideravelmente dos métodos clássicos' e esclarecem que 'esta é a arte que se faz atualmente nos mais adiantados meios de cultura.' Aludem ao 'imprevisto do motivo' e à similitude 'na técnica, na fatura quase arbitrária do desenho' que há nesses trabalhos da Anita Malfatti com os dos 'desenhistas modernos da guerra.'

³¹ *Vida Moderna* (1917) n. 326 Ano XIV, 27 December. Quoted in: Brito, M. S. (1978) p.51.

Original paragraph from which these quotes were taken:

Numa revista da época, de ampla circulação, a 'crítica', antes simples nota, também é compreensiva e, se faz retrições, à expositora, não lhe nega valor. Assinala que Anita Malfatti cultiva 'uma arte adiantada e, por isso mesmo nem sempre acessível ao grande público', o que, no entanto, não lhe prejudica o sucesso da exposição, 'que é visitada por avultado número de artistas e amadores, tendo sido já adquiridos boa cópia de trabalhos'. E comenta: 'Filiada à mais moderna escola de pintura, a Srta. Anita Malfatti executa com uma largueza e uma liberdade inexcedíveis os seus trabalhos, manchando as paisagens a largas pinceladas violentas, com segurança de quem se sente absolutamente à vontade na sua arte. Choca, por isso, às vezes, o observador, - pouco afeito àquele gênero de pintura, - mas ninguém, ao fim de algum tempo de observação, deixa de reconhecer na expositora um formoso e original talento e, nos seus quadros, brilhantes qualidades técnicas, de observação e de colorido.' (Brito, M. S., 1978 p.51).

Affiliated to the most modern school of painting, Miss Anita Malfatti executes her works with inexorable broadness and liberty, staining the landscapes with large and violent brushstrokes, with the self assurance of someone who feels absolutely at ease with their art. Shocking thus sometimes the observer - not accustomed with that genre of work - yet no one, after observing for some time, will avoid recognising in the exhibiting artist, the elegant [formoso] and original talent in her paintings, the brilliant technical qualities of observation and colouring.

After a short period however, the exhibition was viciously attacked in a review by the novelist Monteiro Lobato (1882-1948). The review, persuasive due to its tone and the notoriety of its author, resulted in the few paintings that had been sold being subsequently returned. The article has reached a mythical status in Brazilian art history, completely overshadowing the more positive articles that preceded it. Lobato - who is still considered as one of Brazil's great literary figures of the 20th century - began his review of the Malfatti exhibition, claiming authoritatively that:

There are two types of artists. One comprising those who see things normally and consequently they make pure art, keeping the eternal rhythms of life, adopted, in order to make concrete the aesthetic emotions, the classical processes of the great masters. [...] The other type is comprised of those who see nature as anomaly, they interpret it in the light of ephemeral theories, under the strabismic suggestion of the rebellious schools that have emerged here and there as furuncles of excessive culture. [...]

These considerations are provoked by the exhibition of Mrs. Malfatti where one can see, very much emphasised, the tendency towards a forced aesthetic attitude in the sense of Picasso's and co. extravagances. [...]

Let's be sincere: futurism, cubism, impressionism and 'tutti quanti' are non other than branches of caricature art.³²

On the one hand, Lobato's article demonstrates the conservative environment the modernists were attempting to overthrow. On the other hand, the previous, more positive articles', by emphasising how Malfatti's art 'followed' the most 'advanced' centres of culture, demonstrate a colonised mentality in which the superiority of imported values is taken for granted. The problematic that would face *Modernismo* was thus established and so, although devoid of any attempt at developing a modern

³² Lobato, M. (1917) A propósito da Exposição Malfatti. In: *O Estado de São Paulo*, 20 December. Quoted in its entirety in: Brito, M. S. (1978) pp.52-6.

In the original (according to the edited translation): Há duas espécies de artistas. Uma composta dos que vêem normalmente as coisas e em consequência disso fazem arte pura, guardando os eternos ritmos da vida, e adotados para a concretização das emoções estéticas, os processos clássicos dos grandes mestres. [...] A outra espécie é formada pelos que vêem anormalmente a natureza, e interpretam-na à luz de teorias efêmeras, sob sugestão estrabica de escolas rebeldes, surgidas cá e lá como furúnculos da cultura excessiva. [...] Estas considerações são provocadas pela exposição da Sra. Malfatti onde se notam acentuadíssimas tendências para uma atitude estética forçada no sentido das extravagâncias de Picasso e companhia. [...] Sejam sinceros: futurismo, cubismo, impressionismo, e 'tutti quanti' não passam de outros tantos ramos da arte caricatural.

Brazilian aesthetic, the controversial exhibition opened a confrontational space for the modernist group. This is the context in which M. S. Brito (1978 p. 40) described Malfatti's exhibition as the trigger for *Modernismo*.

The cosmopolitanism of Malfatti's paintings marked an extreme antagonism to the conservative nationalism present at that time. The project of *Modernismo* in the visual arts would be to articulate a nationalist rhetoric through such cosmopolitan aesthetics.

Already in 1912, during a Parisian sojourn Oswald had come across Futurism. It was the free verse and the abandonment of metric systems in poetry that caught his attention. As Oswald mentioned:

I was never capable of counting syllables. The metric was something that my intelligence would not adapt to, it was a subordination that I refuted terminally.³³

Setting the tone for debates that would be central to *Modernismo*, in 1915 Oswald, in an article entitled 'For a National Painting', criticised the blind adoption of European landscape painting and the subsequent exclusion of Brazilian landscape as not responding to the 'proper' standards of aesthetic composition. The article, in a mocking style that would become characteristic of his later manifestos, described the general distaste for Brazilian nature prevalent at the time:

Confronted with our landscape our man is positively shocked: Oh! This is not a landscape! What horror, look at that bunch of coconut trees breaking the compositional line!³⁴

In a footnote, M. S. Brito (1978 p. 33) reminds his readers that it was precisely those coconut trees that Tarsila would use as a compositional instrument in her now paradigmatic modernist paintings of the 1920s. [Fig. 6] At the core of M. S. Brito's argument is the idea that the premises of Oswald's *Pau-Brasil*³⁵ manifesto of 1924 were already present within the rhetoric that he had developed between 1912 and 1915. Although not representative of *Modernismo* as a whole, the relation between the painter Tarsila and the poet Oswald will be discussed below as an important example of the ambivalent strategies of early Brazilian Modernism.

³³ Statement by Oswald de Andrade (no source given) quoted in: Brito, M. S. (1978) p.30.

³⁴ Andrade, O. (1915). Em Prol de uma Pintura Nacional. *O Pirralho* no. 168 Year iv, 2 January. Quoted in: Brito, M. S. (1978) p. 33.

In the original: Diante da paisagem, o nosso homem choca-se então positivamente: _Oh! Isto não é paisagem! Que horror, olhe aquê! maço de coqueiros quebrando a linha de conjunto.

³⁵ *Pau-Brasil* is the name of a wood native to Brazil, giving indeed the country its name. For a translation of the manifesto see: Ades (1989) p.310.

The establishment of *Modernismo* as a literary movement with varied responses in the fine arts, occurred at the time of a complex moment of re-evaluation of Brazilian national culture: it is revelatory that its inaugural moment, 'The Modern Art Week' in São Paulo in 1922, coincided with the celebrations of the Centenary of Brazilian independence. The nationalism implicit within *Modernismo* related specifically to the socio-cultural conditions of the particular region of the prosperous South, and in particular, to the city of São Paulo.

Zilio (1982a) described the institution of art in Brazil at the beginning of the 20th century as inextricably associated with the country's capital Rio de Janeiro, where, together with government, the main cultural institutions were based: such as the *Academia de Letras* (the Literary Academy), and the *Escola Nacional de Belas Artes* (the National School of Fine Arts). The latter, founded by the French Artistic Mission, continued until the 1930s along the 19th century academic tradition of teaching. With respect to the cultural environment during the 1920s in Brazil, Malfatti (Zilio, 1982a p.38) stated in 1951 that:

Brazil did not have art critics at that time. There were no museums dedicated exclusively to art, there were no specialised studies on constructive criticism, one felt the lack of this.³⁶

However, it is possible to argue that it was precisely the centrality of literature within the cultural field - at the expense of the visual arts - that enabled women artists such as Malfatti and later Tarsila, to emerge as central protagonists in the development of modern painting. The lack of a proper institution had therefore allowed a truly radical and pioneering event to take place. This is evident if we are to compare the presence of women painters with the totally male dominated field of modernist literature: the Modern Art Week inauguration photograph is demonstrative of the fact. [Fig. 7]

Zilio (1982a p.39) saw the provincialism of the field of art at that time as the main reason for the 'travel-prizes' (annual awards for artists to extend their studies in Europe) being regarded as artists' 'ultimate objective.' However, contrary to what one would assume, these prizes did not disrupt the *beaux-arts* tradition in Brazil since, the selected artist tended to follow European teachers who corresponded to the Brazilian academic model.

For Zilio (1982a p.38), the appearance of Modernism as a 'systematic programme of renovation' suffered various difficulties and hesitations due to such a retrograde cultural environment. Malfatti's 1917 exhibition represents a first stage in the modernist attack on the academic tradition in Brazil. However, aesthetically Malfatti

still referred to pre-W.W.I. European modern movements and the issue of creating a specifically Brazilian modern aesthetic would only be addressed in the course of the 1920s.

Modernismo Versus Regionalism

It is not possible to place the efforts of *Modernismo* as the sole example of a hybrid articulation between the national and the modern. Distinct from the academic tradition in Brazil and in opposition to the modernists from São Paulo, other tendencies emerged such as Regionalism, in the North East, that corresponded more closely to Canclini's (1989) definition of hybridity. The diversity of cultural approaches during that period inscribed itself within strong internal geo-political distinctions. São Paulo, as the beneficiary of intense coffee production, was a city that was rapidly and chaotically growing. Its rebellion against Academicism could be interpreted as a reaction against the capital Rio de Janeiro: its colonial traditions and architecture, its cultural institutions and archaisms.³⁷ Moreover, *Modernismo's* distinctive modern European aesthetic served as an affirmation of its cosmopolitan pretensions compared to the rurality of the concurrent Regionalism in the North East.

For M. S. Brito (1978 pp.203-7) *Modernismo* also promoted the questioning of the 'Brazilian ethnic trinity'. The negation of the three races served as a rebellion against the Parnasianism (Art for Art's sake) of writers such as Olavo Bilac (1865-1919):

The repudiation that the modernists held towards the affirmation that the three ethnic groups founded the Brazilian race, is further related to the negation of Parnasianism, which, through the notorious sonnet by Bilac, consecrated the Native Indian, the African and the Portuguese as constitutive factors of our people and made our music the amorous flower of three sad races. (Brito, M. S., 1978 p.203)³⁸

This negation related to the opposition to the retrograde nature of culture prevalent in Brazil at the time. In M. S. Brito's (1978 p.203) examination a character such as *Peri*,³⁹ represented a:

symbol of past historical stages, [that] was also for the modernists, the prototype of the Indianist literature, which in that polemical moment was negated in its entirety by the modernists, being considered false, in a word: romantic.⁴⁰

³⁶ In the original: [...] críticos de arte, o Brasil não possuía então. Não havia museus só de arte, não havia estudos especializados sobre a crítica construtiva que muita falta nos fez.

³⁷ It is important to state that modernist circles were not exclusive to São Paulo. For a study of modernist groups in Rio de Janeiro during the early 20th century. See: Gomes (1999).

³⁸ In the original: O repúdio pelos modernistas à afirmativa de que três grupos étnicos fundamentaram a raça brasileira, prende-se ainda à negação ao parnasianismo, que, através de célebre soneto de Bilac, consagra o índio, o negro e o português como fatores constitutivos da gente brasileira e faziam da nossa música a flor amorosa de três raças tristes.

³⁹ Native Indian mythological character.

If M. S. Brito's argument is correct, this amounted to a direct attack on the basis of Regionalist, and Indianist rhetoric, leading one to conclude that originally Modernism rejected 'Brazilianist' ideals in favour of a European ideal of cosmopolitanism. However, it seems that distinctions were not as clear as M. S. Brito purported.⁴¹ Although the Regionalist conference took place in 1926, the sociological formulations associated with it would only emerge later in the 1930s. Gilberto Freyre (1900-87) was the author of the notorious sociological study which purported that the ethnic synthesis of the Native, the African and the Portuguese, corresponded to an 'essence' of the Brazilian people.⁴² Freyre's theory, implied that the universal qualities required of true culture were not to be found in the heritage of these 3 cultures, but that the cultural processes that acted upon such miscegenation characterised the specificity of the Brazilian. Although Freyre would only publish *Casa Grande Senzala* in 1933, it is conceivable that Regionalism already held such associations. However, as the historian Jorge Schwartz (2000 p.543) has argued, it was with the arrival of intellectuals such as Freyre, followed by the historian Caio Prado Junior⁴³ (1907-90), and Sérgio Buarque de Holanda,⁴⁴ that the Brazilian people became the subject of serious academic studies that replaced the prior emphasis on race by a less fixed

⁴⁰ In the original: [...] símbolo de etapas históricas ultrapassadas, é também, na mente dos modernistas, protótipo da literatura indianista, que, neste momento polêmico, é negada integralmente, considerada falsa, romântica numa palavra.

⁴¹ Treece (2000) concisely emphasises the on-going and complex debate on the relation between Indianism and the development of national culture:

'In the 1970s, following some early surveys of the literature offering little in the way of analytical insights, Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna and Regina Zilberman applied structuralist approaches to Alencar's fiction, typically the chief or exclusive focus of most subsequent work. In the following decade, David Haberly's *Three Sad Races: Racial Identity and National Consciousness in Brazilian Literature* (1983) included chapters on Gonçalves Dias and Alencar, with a shift of emphasis toward the contribution of Indianism to the cultural imaginary and mythology of national identity. Haberly's central themes, applied in a somewhat reductionist fashion to his material, were the notion of a perennial Brazilian search for the Lost Eden and the concept of "whitening": a central plank of Brazil's particular brand of racist ideology since the second half of the nineteenth century. As thoroughly examined in Thomas Skidmore's *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (1974), "whitening" signifies the denial of African and indigenous ethnicity, both through individual aspirations to lighter skin colour, and through official, eugenicist immigration policies aimed at Europeanising the nation's complexion. David Brookshaw's *Paradise Betrayed: Brazilian Literature of the Indian* (1988), as the title suggests, adopted a similar mythical typology to Haberly's and is also concerned with the literature as an evolving discourse on issues of race and identity but is a rather more nuanced and detailed analysis of the Indianist tradition as a whole. Apart from my own doctoral thesis ("The Indian in Brazilian literature and ideas [1500-1945]," University of Liverpool, 1987), it was also the only attempt hitherto at a global study of this kind, including a number of little-known regionalist texts as well as the contemporary literature on the theme.'

⁴² Freyre, G. (1933). See also a discussion on Freyre in: Resende (2000) p.203.

⁴³ The first Marxist analysis in the Country. Prado Jr, C. (1933) *Evolução Política do Brasil: Ensaio de Interpretação Materialista da História Brasileira*. Empresa Gráfica Revista dos Tribunais.

⁴⁴ Holanda, S. B. (1933) *Raízes do Brasil*. Editora José Olympio.

emphasis on culture. In addition, Schwartz (2000 p.543) related the definitions of 'Brazilianess' of *Jeca Tatu*⁴⁵ as stemming from the:

prejudicial theories about laziness of the tropics, inherited from 19th century anthropology.

Created by Lobato,⁴⁶ the character *Jeca Tatu*, represented a vision of the harsh reality, but also inherent laziness, of the Brazilian rural man and was therefore seen by some modernists as an image of the Brazilian to be overcome (Brito, M. S., 1978 p.141).⁴⁷ Therefore, if the modernists attempted to define a Brazilian school, this should not be understood - at least initially - as a search for origins. As M. S. Brito suggested, São Paulo was the yardstick through which intellectuals and artists gauged the rest of the nation. Brazil, as far as *Modernismo* was concerned, had the mission of achieving a state of a '*Paulista* civilisation'. In this way a relation between the hegemonic perception of high culture in Brazil and the internal political and economical location of power was established and to a certain extent remains to this day.⁴⁸

M. S. Brito (1978 p.201) stated that Regionalism represented another target - other than Academicism - for attack by the cosmopolitan *Paulistas*. In 1926 a conference on the notion of Regionalism was organised in Recife, in the North-East of Brazil, in which Freyre presented a manifesto in defence of the local culture. The sections of the manifesto reflected the diversity of concerns and their distinction from the aims purported by the *Paulista* group. These included arguments in favour of: regional values; of 'plebeian values and not only those of the elegant and erudite'; a distinction between Regionalism and the traditionalist snobbism; Regionalism and Populism. In addition, it was also interested in the culinary history and traditions of the North-East region (Teles, 1972 pp.344-5). Lobato's character *Jeca Tatu*, became (Brito, M. S., 1978 p.141) in this manner, appropriated as a model for characters within the Regionalist literary movement:

The nationalist climate surrounding the centenary of independence [the year of the Modern Art Week, 1922] contributed towards the emergence of a Regionalist literature that was concerned with the Brazilian man, above all the poor man of the interior

⁴⁵ Monteiro Lobato, M. (1919) *Idéias de Jeca Tatu*. São Paulo.

⁴⁶ As mentioned, Lobato had been the most fierce critic of Anita Malfatti's 1917 exhibition.

⁴⁷ This statement although true in relation to Oswald de Andrade cannot be generalised, since as stated by Schwartz (2000 p.543), towards the end of the 1920s a severe nationalism affected a number of writers previously involved with Modernism (and its implicit cosmopolitanism) such as Menotti del Picchia, Cassiano Ricardo (1895-1974) and Plínio Salgado (1895-1975) who placed themselves in direct opposition to Anthropophagy.

⁴⁸ For example, the contemporary art galleries which retain the interest of the international market are all located today in São Paulo.

[countryside]. Jeca Tatu transformed himself into a symbol. Lobato began to be imitated.⁴⁹

According to M. S. Brito (1978), the nationalist climate predominant during the celebrations of the centenary of independence, brought a surge in 'regionalist' inspired literature whose subject was the simple man of the countryside. The modernists reacted against such rural identities in favour of an urban *Paulista* image of Brazil: an antagonism that went beyond Lobato's attacks on Malfatti's 1917 exhibition.

Although the 'Modern Art Week' occurred at that moment with a clear anti-traditionalist stance, the *Paulista* cosmopolitanism - placed originally in opposition to the academy and to the notion of 'Brazilianess' promoted by proto-regionalist references - would gradually realise that the model to which it referred was not as antagonistic towards its national rivals as it first supposed. Indeed, Menotti del Picchia, who was associated with the literary section of the Modern Art Week, created the character *Juca Mulato*, who, as M. S. Brito (1978 p.141) argued, was the other side of Lobato's *Jeca Tatu*, the former suggesting the difficulties of the Brazilian peasant in confrontation with the seductions of the city while the latter remaining an idealised vision of the rural man.

One cannot however, associate an individual position to a general shift within the movement, since *Modernismo* can hardly be considered homogenous. The contradictory presence of images of the cosmopolitan urban environment and the agrarian vision of Brazil had already been recognised as problematic during the Modern Art Week: José Pereira da Graça Aranha (1868-1931) in his inaugural speech argued that Regionalism although appropriate as a literary subject could not form a national literary school with universal aspirations (Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1987 p.71). Such discrepancies were symptomatic of a transitional period that the country would undergo during the following decades, from a predominantly agrarian society into an urban and industrial one. However, they also underlie the often hypocritical approach that the cultural producers have held, and arguably still hold, with respect to the nation's internal others: the native Indians, the Blacks and the urban and agrarian socially alienated populations. Such positions are characterised by nostalgic celebrations accompanied with the refusal to approach such matters as contemporary issues.

⁴⁹ In the original: O clima nacionalista que festeja o Centenário da Independência faria florir uma literatura regionalista voltada ao homem brasileiro, sobretudo ao pobre homem do interior. Jeca Tatu transformou-se em símbolo. Lobato passa a ser imitado.

Chapter 3

Modernismo: Between Mimicry and Mockery

As we have seen, individual responses to the idea of nationalism and its representation varied enormously. The shift which led *Modernismo* towards an identification, or at least an attempt at representing the Brazilian people can be seen within the painting of Tarsila.

Faced with the dilemma of aesthetic renewal in relation to Europe, *Modernismo* attempted to develop an art that addressed a particularly *Paulista* vision of the Brazilian reality. The project of *Modernismo*, developed its premises of cosmopolitanism and nationalism through interesting reversals. These were to a large extent the result of the experiences of its protagonists within the diverse artistic circles that they frequented in Paris.

Tarsila,⁵⁰ who had been in Paris during the São Paulo 'Modern Art Week', had only become acquainted with Modernism on her return to Brazil through her friend Malfatti. Tarsila is said (Zilio, 1982a p.44) for instance to have been 'perplexed and confused' by the *Salon d'Automne* in Paris 1920.

It was only later, while again in Paris with her new partner Oswald, that Tarsila became aware of Brazil as a cultural reference. Indeed, in a letter from Paris to her family, she wrote of her discovery of her own country:

I feel ever more Brazilian: I want to be the painter of my land. How I am grateful to have spent my entire childhood at the farm [fazenda]. The memories of those times become increasingly precious for me. In art I would like to be the little peasant girl from São Bernardo, playing with dolls in the vegetation as in my latest painting. [...] Don't think that this Brazilian tendency is thought badly here. On the contrary, what is wanted here is that everyone brings a contribution from their own country. This is what explains the success of the Russian Ballet dancers, Japanese prints, and black music. Paris is tired with Parisian art.⁵¹

Tarsila do Amaral's *A Negra* (Black Woman) of 1923 [Fig. 8], is often referred to as a premonitory painting displaying a number of issues and themes that would emerge in her production throughout the 1920s. However, it did not possess the sense of synthesis that her later work of the 1920s presents.⁵² *A Negra* has also been posited (Amaral, 1991 p.49) as a link between the early modernists and the abstraction that

⁵⁰ Emphasis is placed here on Tarsila do Amaral for her relation to Oswald de Andrade's manifestos and her distinction from the Picasso model adopted by other Brazilian modern painters such as Di Cavalcanti and Portinari. See: Zilio (1982a) p.79.

⁵¹ Amaral, A. (1975). *Tarsila sua Obra e seu Tempo*, V. 1 and 2. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva. p. 84. Quoted in: Zilio (1982a) p.48.

In Amaral (1975) V.2, which contains a catalogue of Tarsila's work, one can note quite clearly how her work 'became' modern over the year 1923.

would arrive in Brazil with the advent of concrete art. Similarly, Oswald's manifestos have also been associated (Schwartz, 2001 p.540) with the emergence of concrete art:

The 'poem' written in 1918, is in fact an intuitive forerunner of what would eventually become concrete poetry almost four decades later. In the 1928 'Manifesto Antropofágico', Oswald de Andrade also wrote the premonitory words: 'We are concretists.'

Such claims are perplexing in view that the term 'concrete art' was coined by Theo van Doesburg only in 1930.⁵³ Nevertheless, the most immediate formal aspect of Tarsila's *A Negra* is its distinct approach to the relationship between foreground and background.⁵⁴ The critic Frederico Moraes (1987 p.53) has described this distinction as an abyss that separates the figurative foreground from the abstract background, thus implying an unresolved dichotomy between a representation of the national and the abstract tendencies of European modern art. However, the abstract background could be read as symbolic of the wall of European culture which enclosed the artist's perceptions of Brazil and its popular classes, which were quite distinct from her own experiences.⁵⁵ A more plausible reading of *A Negra*'s timid abstraction, rather than representing a premonition of the abstract project which would appear in Brazil during the 1940s and 50s⁵⁶, would posit it as a consequence of Tarsila's associations with the French movement Purism.

One could also see this abyss as the product of an artist recently arrived in Paris attempting to assimilate the diverse tendencies associated with Modernism in the early 20s. *A Negra* possesses the conflict that confronted Tarsila - the recently converted modernist - during those early days in Paris. She was exposed: on the one hand, to the ideal of a return to the classical tradition that would act as a 'purification' of Cubism, ridding it from its romantic connotations; while on the other hand, the Parisian fascination for the non-European, the primitive, the Other.

In its compositional relationship between nature and the female body, *A Negra* referred overtly to the ideal of primitivism which had been current in Paris since the beginning of the century: the figure of the black woman is rooted in the ground as if an integral part of nature; the banana leaf further specified the location of such nature

⁵² Such as in Tarsila do Amaral's painting *Antropofagia* (1929) where she combined the figures from her other paintings *A Negra* (1923) and *Abaporu* (1928).

⁵³ The emergence of concrete art is discussed in Part II of this study.

⁵⁴ Such relationships between foreground and background were central to concrete art and its relation to Gestalt theory. This however has no bearing on Tarsila's work due to its figurative nature.

⁵⁵ The distance held by the *modernista* circle from the wider Brazilian social context was expressed by Mário de Andrade who during the celebrations of the 20th anniversary of the Modern Art Week, admitted that his circle had held a generally aristocratic attitude. Translated into English in: Institut Valencià D'Art Modern (2000) pp.593-601.

as clearly tropical; the prominent breast emphasised the associations with motherhood.⁵⁷ Moreover, her reference to the figure of a wet nurse is an indication of the level in which the artist interacted with the poor rural classes, being as she was from a wealthy land-owning family where black wet nurses were an intrinsic part of the everyday experience of the landlord's child. Tarsila do Amaral's *A Negra* therefore displays the 'primitive black woman' not as a regionalist representation of the Brazilian but as a Parisian fascination with the exotic, translated through the artist's nostalgic childhood memories. The painting's background served as a means to place such a primitive character clearly and without ambivalence as the subject of a modern artist working in a specifically French tradition.⁵⁸

Modernismo and the Rappel à l'Ordre

As we have seen, the dilemma whereby the production of a national identity is set against the possibility of being modern is generally understood as characteristic of the peripheral condition. This belief pertains to an identification of Modernism with European culture. However, once the myth of universalism is uncovered it becomes apparent that Modernism - European Modernism - often displayed national or even nationalistic characteristics. Other than Italian Futurism, and German Expressionism the pre-revolution Russian avant-garde displayed uncanny similarities with Brazilian *Modernismo* in the representation of national themes through modern pictorial

⁵⁶ See: Amaral (1991) pp.32-3.

⁵⁷ Zilio (1982a p.50) has associated the lips of the woman in Tarsila's *A Negra* with Brancusi's 1923, *La Nègresse*.

⁵⁸ Nicolau Sevckenko (2000 pp.89-90) offers an insightful interpretation of overlooked aspects of the development of *Modernismo* through the unexpected transferrals of influences and interests: 'One of the most interesting [events relating to this] was the visit to Brazil of the acclaimed French poet Paul Claudel and the young composer Darius Milhaud, who fell in love with Rio de Janeiro - not with the scenery of the Avenida Central and the boulevards of the modernised city, which resembled an urban European setting, but with the popular culture of the outskirts and the *favelas* on the hillsides. Milhaud made contact with several popular musicians and through them developed his research on the rhythmic languages of the Brazilian tradition. From here he went to the United States, where he made contact with black jazz musicians. From his apprenticeship during this period a work resulted which had enormous impact on the post-war European scene, a symphony called *The Ox on the Roof*. The title was considered bizarre, in surrealist taste and in line with the aesthetic sensibility of the time. In fact it was the name of a *maxixe* which had been a hit with the population on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, written by a local composer, Zé Boiadeiro, and with a humorous allusion to a husband betrayed by his wife. In any case, its success was such that the music gave rise to a circus ballet of the same name, the fruit of a partnership between Milhaud and Jean Cocteau. This ballet caused such a sensation in cultured circles that when Milhaud and Cocteau decided to open a night club in Montparnasse, where music and the scenic and visual production of various artists involved with modern art were being promoted, the name which they hit upon for the dancing cabaret was *Le boeuf sur le Toit*. The cabaret soon became the showcase par excellence of the post-war aesthetic revolution in Paris. Thus, paradoxically, when the young Brazilian elite went to Paris on their customary annual visit to breathe 'the superior airs of civilisation', they discovered, to their enormous surprise, that the latest trends

language. Examples can be found in the early paintings of Goncharova in which there is a frequent representation of notions of national culture through the depiction of Russian peasants.⁵⁹ Moreover, as Bürger (1974) has argued, it was only after W.W.I that an institution of modern art became recognisable. Institutionalisation requires classification and categorisations which in turn affected the production of art itself. Central within such processes was the notion of national culture, which following W.W.I became an important characteristic within sectors of modernist production. As Harrison & Wood (1992 p.217) argued:

August 1914 [...] put a stop to mutual [European] fertilisation and gave xenophobia a foothold in the avant-garde which it has never quite lost [...] It is scarcely to be wondered at, then, that the war years and their aftermath should have proved a traumatic period for the artistic avant-garde. Two different and opposed responses are discernible among the various groups of artists, related to the different wartime circumstances of specific countries and cities [...]

These 'opposed responses' were the *Rappel à l'Ordre* (Call to Order) and Dada. The former, an attempt to direct post-cubist art towards the classical tradition seen as inherently French. In opposition to this clearly nationalistic section of French Modernism in the 1920s, was Dada, and later Surrealism, being: internationalist, aggressive, disruptive, specifically anti-bourgeois and against the establishment of art.

The French movement Purism, was itself embedded in the ideal of nationalism which had emerged following W.W.I. The purist aesthetic promoted, through the Journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*,⁶⁰ the idea of a *Rappel à l'Ordre*, which considered French culture as the rightful inheritor of the classical tradition.⁶¹ It therefore proposed a re-evaluation of Cubism, through the sobriety of Classicism, as a means of eradicating all forms of irrational and romantic connotations seen - particularly in the post war context - as intrinsically Germanic in nature. Tarsila would have been exposed to such ideas as a student of André Lhote (1885-1962), Albert Gleizes (1881-1953) and later Fernand Léger (1881-1955).⁶²

Moreover, Tarsila's Parisian influence is indicative of the diverse and often ambivalent nature of French cultural interests at that time. The poet Guillaume

in Paris were based on the despised culture of the marginalized population of their own country.'

⁵⁹ Zilio (1982a p.75) also raises this parallel.

⁶⁰ Research has shown that other central figures of Brazilian Modernism had intimate knowledge of this section of the Parisian artistic circles, such as in Graça Aranha's use of the term *Espiritonovismo* and Mário de Andrade's collection of the entire run of the *L'Esprit Nouveau* Journal. See: Teles (1972) pp.25-35.

⁶¹ On the importance of the *Rappel à l'Ordre* on Brazilian *Modernismo*, see: Fabris (2000) pp.533-9.

⁶² See: Golding & Green (1970).

Apollinaire (1880-1918), a central figure in the establishment of the rhetoric of a *Rappel à l'Ordre* until his death in 1918, had been an enthusiastic promoter of the primitive amongst the avant-garde.⁶³

In the Parisian modernist circles Apollinaire represented the merging of the classicist and the primitivist interests. Apollinaire is also behind a possible view of Modernism as a linear progression particularly in his writings on the nature of Cubism.⁶⁴ Having been involved with the most experimental period of Cubism, and one of the great enthusiasts for non-Western references, after the war he argued for a return to order, for a disciplined art with no German romantic connotations. Apollinaire's essay *L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes*⁶⁵, published in Paris 1918, provided the name for Jenneret's (Le Corbusier) and Ozenfant's purist journal (1920-25) *L'Esprit Nouveau*: the major promoter of *Rappel à l'Ordre* ideas. Apollinaire's significant shift towards a nationalist and classicist stance is emphasised by the fact that his *The Cubist Painters* had been published in the German *Der Sturm* in 1913,⁶⁶ and that he was involved in the stealing of ethnic sculptures from the Louvre,⁶⁷ and that he remained a constant reference for the Surrealists.⁶⁸ In addition, Apollinaire's (1918c p. 6) Calligrammes offer another route from early Modernism to concrete Poetry as an example of the convergence of form and meaning. The fact that the Brazilian modernists in Paris during the 1920s could so 'naturally' appropriate or refer to what today are so seemingly incompatible political and aesthetic positions is indicative perhaps of the ambivalence and the diversity of individual opinions present in such movements.⁶⁹

For Teles (1972), the combined influence of Dada and *L'Esprit Nouveau* arrived in Brazil via the intellectual and diplomat Graça Aranha who also played a central role in the Modern Art Week of 1922. Although *L'Esprit Nouveau* in Teles' account refers

⁶³ See: Archer-Straw (2000).

⁶⁴ Apollinaire, G. (1911) *Le Cubistes, L'Intransigent*. 10 October. And: Apollinaire, G. (1912) On the Subject of Modern Painting. *Les Soirées de Paris*. February. Both essays are reprinted in: Harrison & Wood (1992) p.225.

⁶⁵ Reprinted in: Harrison & Wood (1992) p.225.

⁶⁶ Apollinaire, G. (1913) Die Moderne Malerei. *Der Sturm* v3. n.148-9, p.272, February. See: footnote no. 19 of the re-edition: Apollinaire (1918c) p.57.

⁶⁷ This led to his wrongful arrest for the theft of the Mona Lisa. See: Steegmuller (1963).

⁶⁸ Apollinaire is cited frequently in *La Révolution Surrealiste* (n.I: p.5, 20; n.VII, p.31; n.VIII, p. 9; n.IX-X, p. 38 and n.XII, p. 7, 11). The journal ran from Dec. 1924 to Dec. 1929, (12 volumes). See: Naville, P. & Péret, B. [later Breton, A. from July 1925] (1924-29).

André Breton on Apollinaire:

'On dira que je ne suis pas avancé très loin dans l'exploration de cette âme. A cela je répondrai que si l'enchantement m'avait dévoilé tous ses secrets, je l'eusse enfermé déjà dans un cercle magique et fait entrer au tombeau.' Breton, A. (1924) [Essay dated 1917] Guillaume Apollinaire. In: *Les Pas Perdus*. N R F. Paris: Librairie Gallimard. (Les Document Bleus, no. 6). p.25-45. Quoted in: Apollinaire (1918c) p.54.

mainly to Apollinaire's text on poetry, Teles also mentioned that Mário de Andrade possessed the entire collection of the *L'Esprit Nouveau* Journal. However, Teles' development on the content and ideology of the journal - other than emphasising its relation to Apollinaire - overemphasised its connection with Dada and Surrealism at the expense of its rhetoric of the *Rappel à l'Ordre*:

The journal *L'Esprit Nouveau*, its name being a homage to Apollinaire, developed a reconciliatory poetical theory between the past and the present, between the irrationalism of dada and psychologism of surrealism, disappearing in 1925 when the surrealist investigation was at its most intense. (Teles, 1972 p.31)⁷⁰

For Teles (1972), Graça Aranha brought with him from Europe, a profound knowledge of European movements: proved by Aranha having published in 1925 Marinetti's principal manifestos and by his obsessive phrase (that according to Teles, comes from a debt to Apollinaire rather than the contemporaneous Journal) 'espírito novo'.

Another of Teles' (1972 p.32) speculative arguments relates to a 'coincidence' between the European modernists and the Brazilian *modernistas*, involving the organisation of the Modern Art Week concurrently to André Breton's *Esprit Nouveau* Conference.

[...] since February 1921, André Breton had programmed, for March 1922, an *Esprit Nouveau* Conference. This did not occur due to the misunderstandings between himself and Tristan Tzara [...] Our Modern Art Week was only programmed in November 1921, one month after the arrival [from Europe] of Graça Aranha. All this leads us to assume that our early modernists, with an open eye on the latest literary events in Paris and compelled - perhaps even by Apollinaire's text - to fight for a national literature, and thus negated the foreign origins of the renewal they preached.

Purporting a linearity that seems at best simplistic, Teles' argument is pertinent with regards to the emphasis on nationalism. Although failing to relate nationalism to the purist ideals, Teles does mention the broad range of movements and influences adopted or adapted by Oswald (claiming that these were a combination of Futurism, Dadaism and *Espirito-novismo*). He emphasises in particular the nationalism of the *Pau-Brasil* period compared to seemingly Surrealist oriented Anthropophagy. The general view Teles provides is that of *Modernismo* as a parallel or subsequent manifestation, that followed the general development of Surrealism. It is incredible

⁶⁹ For a general view of the diverse avant-garde movements during the period between W.W.I and II, and the ambivalent role played by the journal *L'Esprit Nouveau* amongst these movements, see: Fer, Batchelor & Wood (1993).

⁷⁰ In the original: A revista *L'Esprit Nouveau*, cujo nome foi dado em homenagem a Apollinaire, desenvolveu uma teoria poética conciliadora entre passado e presente, entre o irracionalismo

therefore to remark that there has been little discussion - by Teles as well as elsewhere - on the importance of the notion of primitivism within European culture and its centrality within *Modernismo*. The primitive in *Modernismo* is invariably placed as a symbol of the national, yet it seems difficult to disassociate such references from the Parisian fascination with the exotic. The contemporaneous Parisian interest in the primitive, in addition to Tarsila's realisation of her own country as a modern aesthetic subject, enabled her articulation between what today seems to be opposing factions of the Parisian avant-gardes.

Petrine Archer-Straw (2000) discusses the Parisian fascination with Black culture and exoticism during the 1920s in her study of the Parisian avant-garde during the 1920s. From images of savages in advertising, through the less negative representations of Black people in sports, music, and in the avant-garde, Archer-Straw traces the fascination Paris had with Black culture (or a certain representation, ideal and more than often a preconception of it). She tends to associate the avant-garde's interest initially as revolt against the Western bourgeois tradition expressed mainly through Dada, and following W.W.I, through the conservative connotations of the *Rappel à l'Ordre*. Although very well researched, the book considers the development of the avant-garde in too linear terms: Dada is seen to precede the *Rappel à l'Ordre* as if one followed the other linearly. Again, there is a perception of modernity as a stable homogenous event. For the Brazilians arriving in Paris in 1923, the ideological conflicts within Parisian modernist circles could not have been so obvious, but they were certainly there. From Francis Picabia's *Revue Cannibale*, Tristan Tzara's *Cabaret Negre*, Léger's stage set for 'the Creation of the World', and of course, Apollinaire's involvement with *Les Arts à Paris* - "a tasteful review of Paris" modern art world interspersed with articles about art from other cultures' (Archer-Straw, p.61) - exemplify the broad interest in non-European cultures present at the time. Tarsila could not have avoided discovering Brazil in Paris.

Through the progression developed in the paintings of Tarsila⁷¹ one can note not only a relation with respect to Oswald's manifestos and the development of a Brazilian modern pictorial language but concurrently the convergence of a number of distinct and often opposing tendencies and ideals existent in the European artistic avant-garde milieu.

Tarsila illustrated an anthology of poems (Cendrars 1924) by the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars (1887-1961) who had found his inspiration from a journey which he had

dadaísta e o psicologismo surrealista, desaparecendo em 1925, quando era intensa a investigação surrealista.

⁷¹ This analysis is specifically directed at her production and therefore should not be generalised as applicable to other contemporaneous Brazilian artists.

made from Le Havre to São Paulo. The trajectory of the poems and their respective illustrations seem to describe Tarsila's own 'discoveries'. On the cover, the sketch of *A Negra* [Fig. 9] sharply contrasts with Cendrars' final poem in the publication, a description of his entry into the modern city of São Paulo:

At last here are the factories a suburb a nice little tramway
Electricity conductors
[...]
a petrol pump
At last a station
St. Paul
I think it could be Nice's station
or an arrival at London's Charring Cross
I find all my friends
Hello
Its me.⁷²

The poem is clearly coherent with the image of São Paulo that the modernists desired to portray: that of a modern metropolis. However, Cendrars' visit would have a profound influence on their apprehension of Brazil and its relation to modernity.⁷³

When Cendrars visited Brazil, the *modernistas* took him on a voyage across Brazil, a journey which they described as the 're-discovery' of Brazil. Its impact was as important to the modernists as it was to their European guest. Tarsila's subsequent paintings would include references to the Baroque architecture of the state of Minas Gerais and to the popular traditions of carnival. In opposition to the closed environment in *A Negra*, the new paintings predominantly display open spaces, landscapes in which typically modern objects relate to each other within the tropical scenery. In the painting *EFCB* (Central Railway of Brazil) [Fig. 6] of 1924, signs of modernity, characteristically Brazilian elements of nature, and a Baroque church on the horizon, form its compositional basis. Such transition could be seen as a consequence of two distinct events. Léger's influence over Tarsila's approach to the stylisation of objects, and Oswald's *Pau-Brasil* Manifesto of 1924. The latter argued for a national modern poetry, and its rhetoric was clearly transcribed by Tarsila onto the canvas. In the spirit of the *Pau-Brasil* manifesto, Tarsila transposed contemporaneous French aesthetics within the Brazilian context. The relation between Tarsila's paintings and Oswald's manifestos cannot be placed in a hierarchy

⁷² In the original: 'Enfin voici des usines une banlieue un gentil petit / tramway / Des conduites életriques / Une rue populeuse avec des gens qui vont faire leurs / emplettes du soir / Un gazomètre / Enfin on entre en gare / Saint-Paul / Je crois être en gare de Nice / Ou débarquer à Charing-Cross à Londres / Je trouve tous mes amis / Bonjour / C'est moi'. Quoted in: Institut Valencià D'Art Modern (2000) p.77.

⁷³ The importance that the visit held for Tarsila was expressed by the painter in a statement for the *Revista Anual do Salão de Maio*, n.1, 1939. For an English translation see: 'Pau-Brasil Painting and Antropofagia, in: Institut Valencià D'Art Modern (2000) p.587.

of precedence. The influence of one over the other, should be seen as a genuine collaboration expressed in different media. On the one hand, *A Negra* preceded Oswald's claim in the *Pau-Brasil* manifesto that:

We have a dual heritage - the jungle and the school. Our credulous mestizo race, then geometry, after the baby's bottle the herbal tea.⁷⁴

On the other hand, the manifesto, while not a precise prescription, contains descriptions similar to the contents of Tarsila's subsequent paintings:

Lift Shafts, skyscraper cubes, and the compensatory laziness of the sun. Devotions, Carnival, intimate energy. The songbird. Hospitality, somewhat sensual loving. The nostalgia of the medicine men and military airfields. Pau-Brasil.⁷⁵

In her *Pau-Brasil* paintings, Tarsila portrayed a culture that until then had been considered an obstacle to the 'Europeanisation' of the Brazilian cultural environment. In some retrospective accounts (Zilio, 1982a p.52) formative of the history of modern Brazilian art, Tarsila is seen as the catalyst for the development of the notion of 'Anthropophagy' - or cannibalism - which defined a process of Brazilian cultural appropriation, and became the title of Oswald's most notorious manifesto.⁷⁶ This role is attributed (Zilio, 1982a pp.51-2) to her painting *Abaporu* [Fig. 10] of 1928 and to her comments following a humorous and nonsensical impromptu speech given by Oswald at a dinner party. It was Oswald together with Raul Bopp (1898-1984) however who suggested the title *Abaporu* - 'the one who eats' -, after consulting a dictionary of native Brazilian Tupi language (Schwartz, 2001 p.541).

The painting *Abaporu* other than its title has been identified (Fraser & Baddeley, 1989 p.19) as referring to the European mythological creatures, the Sciapodes [Fig. 11], who are said (Wittkower, 1942 p.160) to possess a 'single large foot on which they move with great speed and which they use as a sort of umbrella against the burning sun'.⁷⁷

The connection between the work of the poet and that of the painter seems far less literal during the 'Anthropophagite' period: a consequence perhaps of Oswald's increasing closeness to a repertoire of ideas and imagery expressed by the

⁷⁴ English translation in: Ades (1989) p. 311.

⁷⁵ Admittedly the manifesto's futurist tone is not present in the paintings.

⁷⁶ The *Manifesto Antropofágico* is commonly equated to *Modernismo* as a whole. However, it was written in 1928 - shortly before the market crash in 1929 which would bring considerable changes to the work of modern artists.

⁷⁷ This will be discussed further in this chapter.

Surrealists.⁷⁸ Tarsila's paintings distance themselves from the previous portraits of a contemporaneous Brazil expressed through a classicised vocabulary of Purism, into an increasingly imaginary world based on the mythology and the legends of the Brazilian natives. It nevertheless maintains its associations with aspects of the *Rappel à l'Ordre* through a recontextualisation of the European Arcadian ideal - prevalent within the imagery of that section of Parisian art⁷⁹ - into a particularly national vision of cultural origin: the Brazilian native. The apparent peacefulness of these pictures seemingly betrays the ferocious rhetoric of the 'Anthropophagite' manifesto and its call for a Caribbean Revolution. This rebellious spirit, is given its inaugural moment in the devouring of the Portuguese Bishop Sardinha in 1554.⁸⁰

Anthropophagy and European Monsters

The manifesto illustrates the manner in which European culture could be irreverently appropriated, distorted, mocked, or rejected. Oswald's appropriation or cannibalistic process extended beyond the more literal reference to Caliban in Shakespeare's play 'The Tempest'. The manifesto demonstrated an ironic or paradoxical sense of national belonging that is best exemplified by the playful parody on Hamlet in the statement: 'Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question'.

As the literary critic Roberto Schwarz (Gledson, ed. 1992 p.9) has argued, the manifesto is itself an expression of the contradictions that it attempted to overcome: as the search for a national identity passed through the English language, whose classical quote was irreverently distorted by the play on words. Moreover, using the cannibalism of the natives as a metaphor was particularly fitting: in the native's rites associated with the cannibalistic act, the devouring of one's enemy pertained to a process of acquiring the Other's strength and attributes. Reverence therefore was an integral part of the rite. The manifesto revealed another form of ingenuity in its appropriation of the European image of the Other. Deeply ingrained fantasies of absolute otherness were transformed in this way into an affirmative stance.

⁷⁸ Although many accounts have associated the Anthropophagite movement with Surrealism, it was neither a movement nor directly a 'follower' of the French movement. Oswald de Andrade did claim however, in his usual irreverent tone, that 'After Surrealism, only Anthropophagy'. In: Andrade O. de (1929) *Revista de Antropofagia*, 2a Dentição, no. 1, *Diário de São Paulo*, 17 March. Quoted in: Calil (2000) p.568.

⁷⁹ The reference contained in the Arcadian ideal to one's cultural origin is expressed below: 'The myth of the purity of the primitive has been the great myth of modern times, and indeed all the classical revivals that have occurred from the time of Winckelmann onwards have been intimately bound up with this ideal, for the return to the classical past is conceived as a return to origins.' In: Cowling & Munday (1990) p.25.

⁸⁰ Andrade, O. de (1928) *Manifesto Antropofagico*. *Revista de Antropofagia* no. 1. São Paulo. An English translation is available in: Ades (1989) pp. 312-3.

Contained within such notions were the ambivalence of the European fantasy itself: the savage menace and the noble savage. [Fig. 12, 13]

Moreover, this ambivalence is reminiscent of Bhabha's (1984) descriptions on the colonial mimicry in addition to exemplifying, through an elegant reversal, his critique of symmetrical or dialectical relations between Self and Other:

The closure and coherence attributed to the unconscious pole of colonial discourse and the unproblematised notion of the subject, restrict the effectivity of both power and knowledge. It is not possible to see how power functions productively as incitement and interdiction. Nor would it be possible, without the attribution of ambivalence to relations of power/knowledge, to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed - those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts.

Anthropophagite appropriation of the European imaginary deserves therefore a detour into the history of such references. More specifically, such a detour will contribute towards an understanding of the Anthropophagite mockery of the European affirmation of the Self through the constructed image of the Other. In 'Marvels of the East: a study in the history of monsters', Rudolf Wittkower (1942) traces the legacy of Greek mythological people who were said to inhabit the farthest lands of the East: for the ancient Greeks, India represented such a place. These peoples, variously described as monstrous, marvellous, fabulous, wild, included hybrid beings (part human part animal), or presented entirely human, yet with unusual characteristics.⁸¹ [Fig. 14] Wittkower discusses the different routes through which such accounts entered the European imagination: geography, literature, and religion were some of these propagators. While geography used mythology as the basis for a demarcation of the unknown, medieval theology's interest in the subject pertained to the origin of such 'monsters'. If their belonging to Adam's stock was established, they were granted the possession of a soul and were therefore recognised as creatures of God; otherwise, they would be labelled as beasts, or worst still, as creatures of the devil. Wittkower's account (1942 p.181) located the development of the association between India and the lost Garden of Eden in the 12th and 13th centuries:

According to all reports, India lay on the eastern borders of the world and this was also the position of Paradise, for it is said in Genesis (ii, 8): 'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden.' It is therefore habitual in medieval geography to show Paradise in the extreme east; and there it remained as part of the marvellous country India into the 16th century.

⁸¹ Wittkower (1942 p.174) describes the location of these races on the 13th century Hereford map: 'In India live the sciapodes, the pygmies and the giants, the mouthless people, the martikhora and the unicorn. North of India, in Scythia and bordering countries and islands, there are horse-hoofed men, people with long ears, Anthropophagi and Hyperboreans [...]'

The same bizarre logic led Columbus, who until his death was convinced he had discovered a sea route to India and that, indeed, he had passed near paradise. Wittkower (1942 p.197) stressed the ambivalent position that the monstrous people held for the Greeks and the role that these creatures maintained in the European imagination for 1500 years:

They shaped not only the day-dreams of beauty and harmony of Western man but created at the same time symbols which expressed the horrors of his real dreams.

The geographical transfer from the East to the 'West Indies' of the assumed location of the mythological peoples went beyond Columbus's misgivings. Roger Bartra (1992 p.11) studied such myths in the context of the newly discovered Americas and argued for their extended influence beyond the limits defined by Wittkower. While the latter claimed their gradual disappearance with the development of scientific thought during the Enlightenment, Bartra argued that through the legacy of Renaissance literature, the mythological imaginary continued throughout the Enlightenment. Authors such as Montaigne, Cervantes and Shakespeare, explored characters such as the cannibal, Cardeiro and Caliban. The image of the cannibal is particularly interesting considering the contradictory descriptions of the natives provided by early explorers such as Columbus:

In these lands I have not discovered monstrous men, as many have believed but instead people of a pleasant deference [...] thus I have not found a trace of monsters, except on a Caribbean island [...] ⁸²

The presence of cannibals on the Caribbean islands was seen as the confirmation that mythological Anthropophagites who ate human flesh actually existed. Bartra posited the European perception of the newly discovered people as varying between Rousseau's notion of the noble savage and Linnaeus's *homo ferus*. In addition, Bartra's description of mediaeval theology differed from Wittkower's approach in that he considered an account of the 'wild men' which assumed their belonging to a lineage unconnected to Adam. In the 16th century, Paracelsus' *Liber de nymphis, syphis, pigmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus* placed the mythological peoples in a hybrid position between man and beast. In the words of Paracelsus:

Just as we say that man is the image and likeness of god, that is, an imitation of his form, we might also say that these people are the image and likeness of man,

⁸² Colón, C. *Textos y Documentos Completos*, (1982). Madrid Alianza Editorial. p.144 Quoted in: Bartra (1992) p.21.

constructed in his form. Man is not God but in appearance, though he was created in the image similar to him. Similarly, these are not men, even though they are created in the image and likeness of man..., they cannot boast of possessing a soul like that of men, though they are like him. Just as man does not boast of being God, in spite of being made in his image and likeness as a reflection of him. In other words, man refrains from being God and wild men renounce the soul, and therefore cannot be called men.⁸³

Bartra's (1992 p.12) suggestion that 'Paracelsus conceived the inhabitants of the new American colonies when he reflected on the wild man' reminds one of the fact that the wild people remained in European folklore located in a non-specific wilderness. However, as the Americas were discovered at the height of Renaissance, these myths provided or reinforced fantasies of absolute otherness. The return to the classical tradition and the interest in the primitive are not of course exclusive the post W.W.I period in European history.⁸⁴ Like Bartra, Hal Foster (1985 p.45-70) has argued, that the primitive appeared as Europe's Other with the discovery of the Americas, at precisely the moment when Europe was experiencing the Renaissance of classical values.

The new and mysterious world thus reinforced Europe's redefinition of itself as a culture born out of the classical tradition (Bhabha, 1990 p.293). In this sense, the monstrous peoples stand as the hidden Other of Renaissance representations of the classical body.

Although the Brazilian artist/curator Paulo Herkenhoff (1995 p.69) has argued that:

The political connotations of the process that defines cultural identity are variable. If, by breaking away from the Graeco-Roman patterns, primitivism represented for Europe the search for the Other, in Brazil it meant the opposite: in Tarsila's paintings the search for a nationalist identity goes back to the native Indian, who until then was the Other, and starts the search for the Self as part of a Brazilian Self.

The distinction above, does not define sufficiently well these different apprehensions of notions of otherness. In the Brazilian case, Tarsila's was an idealised notion. Her travels of 'discovery' with Cendrars are indicative of this. Herkenhoff is right to emphasise the semantic difference between what the primitive meant for the European as opposed to the Brazilian. However, it is important to stress that the

⁸³ Philipus Aureolos Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, known as: Paracelsus, *Liber de nymphis, syphis, pigmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus*. Original German work in: *Sämtliche Werke*, 1 volume 14, pp 115-151, Medizinische Naturwissenschaftliche und Philosophische, the Karl Sudhoff edition, Munich/Berlin, 1922-1933. Quoted in: Bartra, (1992), who also provides references for the following translations:
In Spanish: Gálvez P. ed. [bilingual edition] (1983) *Libro de las Ninfas, los Silfos, los Pigmeos, las Salamandras y los demás espíritus de Philipus Aureleous Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim*. Barcelona: Olisco.
In English: Sigerist, Henry E. ed. (1941) *Four Treatises of Theophrastus von Hohenheim called Paracelsus*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press.

notion of Arcadia is also intrinsically connected to this (Cowling & Munday, 1990 p.25) differentiation:

The myth of the purity of the primitive has been the great myth of modern times, and indeed all the classical revivals that have occurred from the time of Winckelmann onwards have been intimately bound up with this ideal, for the return to the classical past is conceived as a return to origins.⁸⁵

While the European interest in the primitive is motivated by a desire to transcend tradition, to break from one's origins, as Herkenhoff (1995) argued, in Brazil it came to signify a search for origins. It is perhaps because of this ambivalence, contained within the notion of the primitive that Tarsila's and Oswald's connections with the Parisian modernists ranged from those interested in re-establishing the classical tradition to those interested in disrupting the established values of Western culture. Tarsila opted for the former, Oswald for the latter, the combination of these disparate influences seemed to resolve the paradoxes that confronted Brazilian Modernism: the rupture with the past (the academic tradition) and the search for symbols of national identity (a recontextualisation of the past).

The notion of Arcadia is intrinsically related to the Western tradition, from the frescos in Pompeii through to the Renaissance, the 19th and 20th centuries, the Arcadian idyllic and mythological landscapes are a recurring theme. It has been suggested (Gardner, 1926 p.201) that the notion of Arcadia is a theme that arises particularly at moments of intense urban experience [Fig. 15], and as such it represents an expression of particular feelings for the lost equilibrium and harmony with nature. Arcadia symbolises a search for authenticity, for a lost purity, and above all, it suggests the ideal of a cultural origin. However, in the context of the 'new world' it becomes problematic not only because of the apparent lack of a 'distant past' but also in relation to modernity. While European modernity is able to distinguish between the Arcadian ideal (an idealised origin of the Self) and the primitive (the Other), American culture is obliged to merge both notions. However, this synthesis remains problematic in the distinction between primitivism and the contemporaneity of modernity. The Brazilian modernists willingly invoked such a Arcadian moment as a synthesis of their Self as the European Other and its articulation with the language and aesthetics of Modernism: the classical and the primitive present within the same cultural space. However, the balance between these two idealisations remained a fragile one. As Treece (2000) has argued, the primitive in Brazilian culture, is

⁸⁴ The period that Tarsila and Oswald lived in Paris.

⁸⁵ The argument purported in this catalogue could be described as a '*rappel au Rappel à l'Ordre*.'

invariably invoked within modernity via a nostalgic and/or invented notion of the past, never as a contemporaneous presence. Therefore, while Anthropophagy made a mockery of the European myths, it created its own national mythologized past in Tarsila's landscape paintings of the late 1920s, which signified a form of translated Arcadia. [Fig. 16]

Chapter 4

Modernismo: Between Institutionalisation and Radicalism

The Anthropophagite spirit was cut short by events following the international stock market crisis of 1929. As we have already seen, the profits of coffee had enabled São Paulo to become Brazil's economic centre. In culture, the fortunes coffee had generated also financed many of the Brazilian pioneer modernists: enabling them to spend long periods during the 1920s in Paris enjoying a leisurely life within the European avant-garde circles. Those sojourns had led to various leading European artists to visit Brazil (Calil, 2001 p.568). Most notably amongst these was Cendrars, who was invited to tour the country with Tarsila, Oswald and others on what became known as the tour of 're-discovery': an appropriate title not only in Cendrars' case. Other notorious visitors included, the Futurist leader Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1876-1944), the Surrealist Benjamin Péret (1899-1959),⁸⁶ and the American singer Josephine Baker (1906-75) who accompanied Le Corbusier on his 1929 tour of South America.

The crisis therefore cut short a period of rich and informal interaction between the Brazilian and European avant-gardes. Such interaction had increasingly demonstrated the level of confidence amongst Brazilian modernists. For instance, Oswald de Andrade claimed that 'after Surrealism only Anthropophagy' (Calil, 2001 p.568). Of course, this confidence would disappear following the foreign and subsequent national economic and political crisis, as art became far more politicised and programmatic.

These are some of the key elements that went into forging Brazilian Modernism in the 1930s. A decade very much distinct from the ad-hoc non-institutional, yet somewhat aristocratic, nature of *Modernismo* during the 1920s. The nature of the modern movement would, during the 1930s reflect the country's political and economical shift: far more inward looking, with increased centralisation and institutionalisation. Exchanges with the outside had from 1930 until the end of W.W.II to operate within those new parameters.

The Political and Economical Shift

According to Miguel Arraes (1972 p.37), until 1930, there were three main groups holding the economic and political power in the country: the coffee planters, the other

⁸⁶ Péret married Mário Pedrosa's sister-in-law and lived subsequently in Brazil for a period. During such time he developed a strong interest in the Afro-Brazilian religions, writing articles on Macumba for example. He nevertheless maintained some of his 'Surrealist-hobbies' such as shouting abuse to passing clergy in the streets. He was eventually expelled from Brazil in 1931 due to his subversive activities. See: Calil (2000).

large estate owners and international financial interests. International interests imposed a policy of valorisation - through speculative strategies - of coffee based on the storage of stocks in order to control the quantity, and thus the price of the product in the international market (Sevcenko, 2000). Such a policy although aimed at assuring international financial interests also benefited the land owning elite in São Paulo throughout the 1920s. This in turn stimulated production even further and following the crisis, Brazil found itself with enormous unsold stocks. Arraes (1972 p.39) described concisely the extent of the problem:

In 1930, when the great economic crisis occurred, Brazil had more than 2,500 million heads of coffee. Production for export had increased excessively while world consumption developed only very slowly. During the three years 1927-9 exports scarcely reached two thirds of the quantities produced; during the last of these years, when production had risen to upwards of 28 million sacks, only 14 million sacks could be exported. The increase in unsold stocks from this harvest alone amounted to more than one tenth of the value of Brazil's gross national product for this year (1929).

Coffee had created a rich agricultural oligarchy based in São Paulo. It had also been central to foreign interest and financial, mercantile speculation in Brazil. With the collapse of the coffee price in the international market following the crisis, foreign involvement in Brazil slowly diminished to a point where the country began experiencing shortage of imported goods. Ironically, the international crisis caused the advent of import substitution, and due to the capital raised by coffee production the south and in particular São Paulo was in a favourable position with regards to potential further industrial development. The 1930s thus represents the consolidation of the industrial sector in the southern states, and particularly São Paulo. Until then it was common for politicians - perhaps due to their complicity with the rural oligarchies - to claim that Brazil was, and should remain so, essentially a country with an agricultural vocation. The economic crisis in the 1930s would paradoxically pave the way for the possibility of Brazil (Amaral, ed., 1981 p.304) seeing itself as 'a country condemned to modernity.' Not surprisingly São Paulo became politically divided: on the one hand, the old oligarchies who attempted to hold on to power, while on the other hand, the industrial sector which was eager to gain political control. During the 1920s another political development was the growth of the workers movements such as the communist party and Italian influenced anarcho-syndicalism.

The 'revolution' that placed Getúlio Vargas (1883-1954) in power, in 1930, was at the centre of the shift in political control from the rural oligarchies towards a nationalist middle class that was particularly favourable to industrial development. The liberal Alliance had only come into being the previous year, its leader, Getúlio Vargas had lost the presidential election to Júlio Prestes, only to subsequently take power

through a *coup d'état*.⁸⁷ The crisis and the political and European commercial/imperialist interests that ultimately led Europe into World War II were also a favourable factor in the increased economic autonomy of the country. However the price of such industrialisation would be an economic division within the country itself: the industrial South and the poor and rural North and North-East. In addition, 1932 brought a failed attempt by a coalition led by the 'coffee elite' to regain political control, known as the constitutionalist Revolution. In 1934 Vargas was re-elected president by the National Congress, he would remain uninterrupted in power until 1945. He was later re-elected in 1950 and remained in power until his suicide in 1954.

In 1935 the National Liberation Alliance was formed by a leftist, anti-imperialist and anti-fascist coalition. It was declared illegal shortly after its formation, and the government adopted measures specifically directed at political repression. By 1937, under the pretext of an anti-Communist stance, Vargas declared the *Estado Novo* (The New State), congress was dissolved, and a new constitution was established along fascist lines.⁸⁸

With so many political and economic upheavals it is perhaps not surprising that the period was also marked by a substantial aesthetic and rhetorical shift amongst the modernists.⁸⁹ From the increasingly introspective Anthropophagite period there was an overt politicisation amongst the circle. The most drastic shift was that of Tarsila who began painting 'social' themes. From a position of Parisian socialite she subsequently identified herself, and indeed her friends, with the emerging *Paulista* working class.⁹⁰

Following Tarsila's separation from Oswald in 1930, she suffered financial difficulties relating to the economic crisis, particularly due to the situation for coffee producers. Following a visit to the USSR in 1931 - a significant change of itinerary from the previous Parisian sojourns - she was imprisoned for a short period in 1932 due to political militancy. From 1933 her art had both politically and culturally redefined itself, a shift that would be paralleled amongst most of the leading intellectuals and modernist artists. The paintings *Operários* (workers) and *Segunda Classe* (Second

⁸⁷ See: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. (1987) p.378.

⁸⁸ See: Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. (1987) p.382.

⁸⁹ Certain modernists however, adopted extreme nationalist positions which were opposed to those held by Oswald de Andrade. See: Schwartz (2000). Amongst them Plinio Salgado who formed the Nazi-Fascist *Integralista* party which also came into confrontation with the Vargas regime. Interestingly the *Integralistas* adopted the references typical to *Modernismo* such as the use of Tupi words in order to promote their own ideals of ultra-nationalism. See:

<http://www.quartahumanidade.hpg.ig.com.br/index.htm>

⁹⁰ This was expressed most vividly in her painting *Operários* (Workers). The painting includes various portraits of her modernist friends. Another characteristic in the painting's background is the clearly modern characteristics of the buildings.

Class), both from 1933 are indicative of such transition (Zilio, 1982a p.83). [Fig. 17, 18] These paintings other than their demonstrative ideological engagement, approach their subjects in a far more intimate way. Those of the *Pau-Brasil* period seem to keep a distance from their Brazilian subjects, and the Anthropophagite can hardly be said to attempt a representation of 'real' subjects. Nevertheless, the politicisation of Tarsila's work clearly rose at the expense of the poetic nature of her previous compositions.

The Emergence of the Art Critic Mário Pedrosa

It was during this period of political, cultural and economic turmoil that the formative stage for Brazil's most notorious art critic, Mário Pedrosa (1900-81) would take place.⁹¹

As discussed in Chapter 1, for those who considered themselves as 'educated', Brazilian culture was directly equated with French culture. The dilemmas and equivocations which emerged with regard to national identity in culture, were directed towards the question of renewal in relation to the interpretation and translation of French culture within the national context.⁹² Pedrosa had spent some time in Paris where he met various members of the Parisian avant-garde and was therefore in a

⁹¹ Pedrosa, M.. *A Arte Atual Reflete a Crise do Proprio Homem*. Interview to Lourenço Dantas Mota and Ferreira Gullar, In: Mota, L. D., ed. (1978). *A Historia Vivida I*. São Paulo: *O Estado de São Paulo*. pp. 237-238. Pedrosa's account of his involvement with the arts through politics was quoted in: Cabo, P. T. (1996) and is reprinted below:

The first political demonstration I ever saw in my life, and which I remember well, was the discourse made by Ruy Barbosa, when returning from Buenos Aires where he had taken on the defence of the allies during the First World War, this was in 1916. I was very touched. By this time there was intense propaganda for Brazil to enter into the war. In the cafes, the ones we had in Rio then, the Marseillaise was played and everybody sang along. I was deeply patriotic, and was in favour of the French people, against the Germans. I started to change under the influence that the great French writer Romain Roland exerted on me and my friends. It is at least curious that I understood the political aspect of Romain Roland - his pacifism - through his criticism of music. The first text I read was about music, in which he said he was not among the French who believed the Germans were barbarians, because it could not be forgotten that there existed the Germany of Beethoven. From then, I turned into a pacifist and from pacifism to social criticism. I was filled with enthusiasm by the Russian Revolution. I used to receive many books and magazines especially from Paris, and in a short time I was reading the Communist Manifesto by Marx and Engels. Thus, this was the political evolution of the first years of my youth. In the early 1920s, a cousin who was a printer for the official press put me in touch with the communist party. I joined the party in 1926.

In 1927 I was sent to Moscow, recommended by a member of the board of directors of the party. I left the country under the excuse of travelling to Germany. I arrived in Berlin in the winter and there I fell ill. Under these circumstances, the comrades thought I had better not go to Moscow. This was the time when the tenth anniversary of the revolution was being commemorated, and was the time that the party started to persecute Trotsky, who shortly afterwards was expelled from the Soviet Union. In Berlin, I received the newspapers from the party, but also the ones from the left-wing Trotskyism opposition. The platform of this leftist opposition to the communist party affected me forcefully and I participated in meetings with these opposition groups. Actually I did not go to Moscow because of these groups. On my return to Brazil, some friends and I founded the Trotskyist opposition here.

⁹² Sevscenko (2000) also refers to this fact.

favourable position as a potentially authoritative art critic. In addition he had already established some contacts within the Brazilian modernist circles.

Although graduated in Law, in 1924 he met Mário de Andrade and Emiliano Di Cavalcanti (1897-1976) amongst other modernists through his work as a literary critic in the *Diário da Noite* newspaper. In 1927, Communism was declared illegal yet he continued his militancy until he was sent to Moscow by the party. However, due to reasons of health, once in Berlin he was advised to stay in Germany rather than continuing his journey. During his stay in Berlin, he studied philosophy, sociology and aesthetics at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Berlin. During that period, he also came into contact with the expressionist circle, meeting, Erwin Piscator (1895-1966) and George Grosz (1893-1959). In 1928 he travelled to Paris where he became acquainted with Pierre Naville⁹³ (1906-94), André Breton (1896-1966), Yves Tanguy (1900-54), Joan Miró (1893-1954), and the writers Luis Aragón (1897-1982) and Paul Eluard (1895-1952).⁹⁴

Pedrosa returned to Brazil in 1929 and continued his left-wing political engagement. This engagement culminated in the establishment of the *Liga Comunista Internacional* (International Communist League) itself a consequence of the Leftist International Opposition, that had been formed in Paris in 1930. The activities of the 'Liga' led Pedrosa into various confrontations against the Brazilian Fascist faction *Os Integralistas* (The Integralists) and consequently the police. This culminated (Cabo, 1996 p.114) in various spells in prison, the first already in 1929. Pedrosa was thus known as a subversive militant by the authorities and with the 'Constitutionalist Revolution' attempt, both Pedrosa and his partner Mary Houston, were jailed. Vargas who forcibly came to power in 1930, by 1937 had increased drastically the national security, forming the truly dictatorial *Estado Novo* (New State). According to Arraes (1972 p.88), this move to the right had two main objectives: first to reduce the power of the regional parties, in order to consolidate government centralised control and; secondly to restrain the popular movements that were increasingly active. Vargas had previously attempted to restrain the popular movements by adopting a populist political banner. Having failed, he took a position of political repression.⁹⁵

Following the hardening of the regime, Pedrosa was forced into exile. He had been living clandestinely since 1935 and finally managed to escape (ironically on a Nazi

⁹³ Naville had been interested in Surrealism and was later the leader of the Communist Student's Union, meeting Trotsky in Moscow in 1927. See: Naville, P. & Péret, B. [later Breton, A. from July 1925] (1924-29).

⁹⁴ See: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (1991) pp.52-3.

⁹⁵ As we will see in Part III of this study, the adoption of a hard line, following a *coup d'état* some years earlier, would be repeated in the 1960s with similar consequences for intellectuals and artists.

controlled ship!) in 1937. He subsequently lived in Paris where he became involved with the organisation of the IV International, becoming a member of its secret organisation committee. Following the mysterious deaths and disappearances of his fellow committee members, Pedrosa became the sole responsible for the committee archives. The IV International's Secretariat headquarters was transferred to New York following the Congress. In New York, Pedrosa once again became involved in the arts where he worked in the Office of the Co-ordination of Inter-American Affairs of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York.⁹⁶ According to Paula Terra Cabo (1996 p.115), it was the combined engagement with politics and the arts that enabled Pedrosa's prominent position as an art critic following his return from exile. This placed him in a position that enabled him to revitalise the utopian avant-gardist spirit, and to contribute to the renovation of the artistic milieu in the post-W.W.II period. Abstraction - and in particular geometrical abstraction - would play a central role in such revitalisation.

Transitions Within *Modernismo*

A few years prior to Pedrosa's return to Brazil, Mário de Andrade (1942) had reviewed the first years of Modernism in Brazil - the heroic *Modernismo* of the 1920s - in a critical manner. He claimed that the modernists of the Modern Art Week should not be considered as examples for those who follow but should be seen as a lesson in what should not be done:

The modernist movement was essentially destructive. It was even destructive of ourselves because the pragmatism of research always weakens the liberty of creation. [...] I have reached a suffocating paradox: I have deformed my work in order to pursue an anti-individualism directed and wilful, yet all my entire oeuvre is nothing more than an implacable hyper-individualism! It is thus melancholic to reach one's dawn, without being able to count on one's own solidarity. I cannot be satisfied with myself. My past is no longer my companion. I am wary of my past.⁹⁷

Andrade's discontent might be interpreted as a sign of the stagnation of the modernist spirit of renewal. From 1930 onwards *Modernismo* had become increasingly complicit with the Vargas propaganda machine. This was perhaps not a

⁹⁶ See: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil (1991). See also: Terra Cabo (1996) p.114.

⁹⁷ Andrade, M. (1942) Address to the Conference: The Modern Movement, in celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Modern Art Week. Quoted in: Teles (1972) p.310.

Translated from the following abridged quote: O movimento modernista foi essencialmente destruidor. Até destruidor de nós mesmos, porque o pragmatismo das pesquisas sempre enfraqueceu a liberdade de criação. Mas eis que chego a um paradoxo irrespirável: Tendo deformado a minha obra por um antiindividualismo dirigido e voluntarioso, toda a minha obra não é mais que um hiperindividualismo implacável! E é melancólico chegar assim no seu crepúsculo, sem contar com a solidariedade de si mesmo. Eu não posso estar satisfeito de mim. O meu passado não é mais meu companheiro. Eu desconfio do meu passado.

conscious move: in a country with no institutional infrastructure for the arts, government sponsorship was practically irresistible.⁹⁸ *Modernismo* from an independent, semi-aristocratic activity, gradually tended towards a tool within the populist Vargas machine. This of course was not intended by the artists themselves, they had a quite different agenda. Perhaps the most indicative factor in this transition was the rise of the artist Cândido Portinari (1903-62). Unlike his predecessors, for instance Tarsila and Malfatti, Portinari had humble origins. He became a painter not by studying in Europe, but through a long apprenticeship that included the academic *Escola de Belas Artes* in Rio. He was only later able to travel to Europe by winning the travel prize for (academic) painting. Unlike the 1920s modernists, who felt inclined to discover the popular Brazil through their tour of rediscovery, Portinari arrived at a similar subject matter through childhood recollections. These were quite different from those of Tarsila, who was the daughter of the land-owning family and painted *A Negra* based on recollections of the estate's servants. Portinari's parents were simple farm workers. In this sense he was truly a man of the people, an ideal tool for a populist government intent on portraying a country in tune with its people. Ironically, Portinari's early 1930s subjects reflected or recollected a country that was no longer solely dedicated to its rural vocation. His depictions of coffee plantation workers are thus partly related to what Tarsila's *Pau-Brasil* paintings searched for: a depiction of the Brazilian people and places. [Fig. 19] Nevertheless, it lacked the Legeresque-symbols of the machine-age that were interspersed within Tarsila's compositions. However, there is a monumentality in Portinari's paintings that goes beyond anything Tarsila did. While her *Caipira* (peasants) themes were those of intimacy - an intimacy she had with the servants of her parents, an intimacy with one's subalterns - Portinari depicts the heroic work of peasants. [Fig. 20] Perhaps this is why Pedrosa has identified him with the Mexican Muralist tradition. It is important to note that Pedrosa (Amaral, ed., 1981 pp.7-25) was careful to emphasise that Portinari was not following

⁹⁸ This is not dissimilar to the current situation in Brazilian contemporary art. Since 1960, there has been a minimum of public expenditure within the field. However, since the 1980s a small number of galleries have proved to be quite successful in promoting Brazilian contemporary art abroad, where the art market is far more developed: initially in New York and now increasingly in Europe too. The success of these enterprises has been astonishing. Most probably due to such success, there has been increased interest in corporate sponsorship of artistic events. Of course, this has mainly focused on the grand events such as the São Paulo Biennial. An interesting turn of events has occurred during the preparation of the 500 year celebrations. A particular sector of such corporate sponsorship has aligned itself with governmental bodies and is increasingly establishing control (through the allocation of funds) over the national and international dissemination of contemporary Brazilian art. It is also behind the current negotiations for the implementation of a branch of the Guggenheim Museum in Rio de Janeiro. The latter funded by a government that so far has starved other institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art in that same city. If we are to consider both the historical precedents and also the nature of those parties involved, this seems a very worrying situation indeed. For an enlightening article on this subject see: Martins, L. (2002).

that tendency but arrived at a similar aesthetic and rhetoric experience. Only then did his interest turn towards mural painting.⁹⁹

In the words of Zilio (1982b pp. 16-17), Portinari without being an 'official artist' managed to receive unanimous approval from both the left and from those in power:

Portinari's style would envelop the assimilation of various sources, each being predominant at different moments over one another.

The formalisation, however, that he lends to this group of influences would be perfectly adjusted to the level of acceptance possible for the visual Brazilian culture of the time, that is, an art that being modern was not 'unintelligible'. Concurrently he achieved the perfect register of the historical necessities of such culture. He would allow himself to be part of the rhetoric of a political discourse that was capable of embracing the denunciatory platform of the left, with regards to the 'social' preoccupations but also to the modernising populism of the Getulist dictatorship. [...]

Zilio's (1982b pp.16-7) views as a historian of *Modernismo* are particularly interesting since as an artist during the 1960s he came into direct confrontation with the Military regime.

One cannot presuppose that, at that time and even today, there is the necessity for the elaboration of a cultural project with the purpose of maintaining the dominant ideology in Brazil. This would be to attribute the country with a level of social sophistication that it still does not possess. This does not mean that power omitted itself. All evidence leads to assume that the project of the left, with its imprecisions, was capable of fulfilling the cultural space without antagonisms with the dominant ideology. In this sense, we only need to remember the manipulation to which the basic categories - the people and the nation - are employed due to the ambiguity that they carry.¹⁰⁰

For Zilio (1982b p.19), the complexity within the relationship between the holders of power and the cultural politics that questioned it, inscribed itself within the hegemony. Although antagonistic towards the dominant ideology, the national popular project in Brazil, legitimised the very object of its criticism. As a country that could only see itself as modern, there could be no ideological rhetoric that did not recall ideals of

⁹⁹ The original text by Pedrosa dates from 1942 (written in Washington USA).

¹⁰⁰ In the original: [...] O estilo de Portinari compreenderá uma assimilação destas diversas fontes, com predominância momentânea de uma sobre a outra.

A formalização, porém, que ele empresta a este conjunto de influências vai se enquadrar perfeitamente no nível de possibilidades de aceitação visual da cultura brasileira da época, ou seja, uma arte que sendo moderna não era 'ininteligível'. Ao mesmo tempo, atingia o registro perfeito desta cultura. Permitia em torno de si a retórica de um discurso político capaz de englobar tanto a plataforma denunciadora de esquerda, quanto as preocupações 'sociais' do populismo da ditadura getulista.

[...]

Não se pode pretender que naquela época, e até mesmo hoje em dia, tenha existido a necessidade de elaboração de um projeto cultural para a manutenção da ideologia dominante no Brasil. Seria atribuir ao país um nível de sofisticação social que ainda não possui. Isto não significa que o poder se haja omitido. Tudo indica que o projeto da esquerda, pelas suas imprecisões, tenha sido capaz de preencher o espaço cultural sem antagonismos com a ideologia dominante. Neste sentido, basta lembrar a manipulação a que se prestam suas categorias básicas - povo e nação - devido à ambiguidade de que são portadores.

'egalitarianism', 'the people' as the collective of citizens and the notion of 'nation' as sovereign state.

Zilio's views are distinct from those who simplistically saw Modernism in Brazil to be incapable of transcending a particular necessity for representing the nation. Perhaps more importantly as far as subsequent historical interpretations are concerned, *Modernismo* has traditionally been seen to be incapable of evolving, of becoming as it had purportedly become in Europe and the USA: an autonomous aesthetic practice.

Another critic, that went beyond a purely formalist analysis was Roberto Pontual. Pontual emphasised that the shift from the 1920s to 1930s did not only bring along a greater participation of the middle and sometimes lower classes, but the increased institutional nature of *Modernismo* meant that Rio de Janeiro - the country's capital at the time - was increasingly the centre of artistic activities. Pontual mentioned in particular the new director of the *Escola de Belas Artes* (EBA: National School of Fine Arts), Lucio Costa (Lucio Marçal Ferreira Ribeiro de Lima e Costa, 1902-98). Until then EBA had been deeply complicit with the academic, neo-classical tradition: indeed, it was the main target against which the initial modernist rebellion took place. Costa's strategy was one of educational reform, opening the school to modernist tendencies. This new emphasis could be seen in the 1931 National Salon, whereby, in its 'openness to all tendencies' it became described as 'revolutionary'. It was presided by one of the participants of the Modern Art Week in 1922, Manuel Bandeira (1886-1968) and the selection of prizes was the responsibility of Malfatti. Consequently, it became dominated by the modernists, (Pontual 1987b p.33) displaying considerably the demise of the academic section.

Pontual mentioned two other decisive incidents that contributed to the increased acceptance, or institutionalisation, of Modernism in Brazil. The first was the travelling exhibition, brought to Brazil by Vicente do Rego Monteiro (1899-1970) and the French critic Geo Charles.¹⁰¹ It contained work by leading artists from the *Ecole de Paris*¹⁰² and some Brazilians such as Tarsila and Rego Monteiro himself. The governor of the state of Pernambuco - where the exhibition first took place before travelling to Rio and São Paulo - also bought a painting by Rego Monteiro as a state acquisition (Pontual, 1987b p.33).

The second important event, according to Pontual, was the visit of leading modern architects to Brazil: Le Corbusier in 1929 (he would also return in 1936), and Frank Lloyd Wright (1890-1978) in 1931. This had the effect of calling the attention for a

¹⁰¹ Géo-Charles (1892-1963) was one of the editors of '*Montparnasse Mensuel. Nouvelle Série*' with Paul Husson, and Marcel Say.

¹⁰² Pontual mentioned: Picasso, Braque, Lhote, Léger, Masson, Gris, Gleizes, Miró, Vlaminck, Severini, de Chirico, Herbin, Campigli, Marie Laurencin, Laurens, Marcoussis.

reformulation of architectural principles along the lines of the International Style: an ideal that, particularly in Brazil would be very much associated with the notion of synthesis of the arts. Painting, sculpture and landscape design would become integral to Brazilian architectural projects and Portinari and the painter and landscape designer Roberto Burle Marx (1909-94) thus became inextricably associated with it. Pedrosa described the sudden emergence of modern architecture in Brazil around 1930, as a reconciliation (apart from some key distinguishing factors) with the Modernism in literature and the visual arts. For Pedrosa they were all imported from the Parisian circles. The prevailing 'fashion' for the primitive in Paris, allowed the Brazilians to combine this interest for the exotic with the notion of a specifically Brazilian modern yet primitive iconography, creating a Brazilian modern identity:

It was in Montparnasse and in Montmatre that they discovered their own country.¹⁰³

For Pedrosa, Modernism in literature inscribed itself within Brazil based on the fusion of two opposing principles: culture and instinct. These were represented respectively in the field of architecture by the pioneers Flávio de Carvalho (1899-1973) and Gregori Warchavchik (1908-88). Pedrosa (Amaral, ed., 1981 p.256), who saw architecture as the highest example of Modernism in Brazil, was eager to differentiate it from the other modernist modalities, affirming that the notions of primitivism and ideological nationalism were not an issue within architectural form. According to him, for architecture the country was a given: geographical and physical.

As we have already seen, there were a variety and often contradictory tendencies in Paris during the 1920s. The adoption of a representation of the national as both modern and primitive embraced those opposing ideologies, transforming them into a seemingly coherent argument based on identity: the primitive, the regional, the Arcadian, the mechanised, the irreverent rejection of the academic, the ideal of being Brazilian. In short, these were categories that could fit within Pedrosa's parameters: culture and intuition. From this perspective the implementation of modern architecture in Brazil is not distant from those sources that according to Pedrosa fed into the implementation of modernist literature and painting in Brazil. As argued in the previous chapters there was a strong influence of the Purist aesthetic and the rhetoric of Dada. There are, similar connections with the implementation of architecture.

In 1925, Warchavchik published a manifesto entitled *Acerca da Arquitetura Moderna* (On Modern Architecture). The date is pertinent since it brings the origins of modern

¹⁰³ In the original: Foi de Montparnasse e de Montmatre que eles descobriram seu país. Pedrosa. A Arquitetura Moderna no Brasil. In: Amaral, ed. (1981) p.256.

architecture in Brazil within close proximity with the polemics and manifestos of the modernist group in São Paulo during the 1920s. Indeed, Carvalho had produced designs for important buildings as early as 1927 and Warchavchik built his first modern building - his own house - three years after publishing his manifesto. It therefore preceded Corbusier's first visit to Brazil in 1929. It was the reaction to this first modern building by a conservative establishment that attracted the attention of the modernist circle in São Paulo. When indeed Corbusier visited Brazil for the first time, Warchavchik was constructing his second house, which:

opened to the public in March and April of 1930 as the *Exposição de uma Casa Moderna* [(Modern House Exhibition)]. Presenting the 'tropical garden designed by [Warchavchik's] wife Mina Klabin Segall, furniture and lighting by the architect, works by leading modernist artists, a small bronze by Lipchitz, cushions by Sonia Delaunay and carpets by the Bauhaus, as well as soiree[s] with the experiments of modernist literature, the *Casa da Rua Itápolis* (House in Itápolis Road) achieved the objective of promoting awareness among the general public and also the hoped incorporation of modern architecture with the efforts of the Brazilian avant-garde.¹⁰⁴

Costa, describing the appearance of modern Brazilian architecture wrote:

They became modern without realising it, uniquely worried about re-establishing the reconciliation of art with technique and making accessible to the majority of men the benefits of industrialisation which were now possible.¹⁰⁵

The rhetoric present in the above quote reminds one of those aspirations Le Corbusier had for the field of architecture. He had, after all, visited Brazil in 1929 and as Pontual (1987b) stated, had sparked the enthusiasm of a new generation of Brazilian architects, including Costa himself.

Interestingly, Pedrosa did not fully recognise the impact that Purism had on the visual arts, but insisted that the Purist doctrine was inspirational in creating amongst the young Brazilian architects a revolutionary spirit. Such a set of beliefs was in direct opposition to the political climate of the country: embarked on what would be a very long period of dictatorship under Vargas.

The rapidity with which the new architecture developed in the feverish years that preceded the last war [W.W.II] did not allow a more natural type of growth. Dictatorship is the total liberty of the state and the almost total oppression of the citizens. The one in Brazil, not constituting an exception to the rule, conceived of laws based above all on the day to day concerns of its propaganda, searching as such, in its totalitarian tendency to attract towards itself the young architects whose ideas and

¹⁰⁴ Martins, C. A. F. (2000) p.579.

¹⁰⁵ Costa, L., quoted in: Pedrosa, M. (1953) p. 255.

In the original: Eles se tornaram modernos sem se aperceber disso, preocupados unicamente em estabelecer de novo a conciliação da arte com a técnica e de tornar acessíveis à maioria dos homens os benefícios agora possíveis da industrialização.

concepts were, however, of totally opposite inspiration. They worked in effect for the dictatorship but without renouncing their ideas.¹⁰⁶

Pedrosa therefore saw the nature of the pre-W.W.II buildings, in particular the Ministry of Education and Health (later becoming the Ministry of Education and Culture, MEC) [Fig. 21] and Niemeyer's *Pampulha* Complex [Fig. 22] (in the state of Minas Gerais) as tending towards a grandeur and luxury that were not fundamental characteristics of Modernism itself but were impositions made by their specific form of patronage. This capacity that Pedrosa had for distinguishing ideology from pragmatism would be a key to his interpretation of the developmentalism of the 1950s and the art and indeed architecture of that time.

Returning to the issue of the involvement of Portinari within architecture and its patron, the Vargas regime, an interesting note could be added. Portinari, who by the mid-1930s had already developed into an almost official modern artist, was commissioned to provide murals for both MEC and *Pampulha*. Perhaps this is confirmation of Pedrosa's theory that in the 1930s it was architecture that held the torch of Modernism in Brazil. Portinari did nothing to contribute to architecture as far as the synthesis of the arts was concerned. His murals did not act as architectural features other than providing a decorative cover for surfaces: a function that, as we will see, received severe criticism. In this sense it would be reasonable to include Roberto Burle Marx as the Brazilian modernist painter in architecture. Burle Marx, a purist inspired painter, architect and landscape designer contributed by providing specific elements of national identity to Brazilian architecture, framing the buildings within a 'purified' space composed of local flora. His choice of vegetation, combined with its purist design acted as a mediator between the natural landscape and the international style architecture. It provided the architectural form with a credible sense of belonging. Burle Marx in this sense articulated the International Style and the local landscape [Fig. 23, 24].¹⁰⁷

Following W.W.II, with the advent of abstract geometrical and concrete art, the associations that art held with the field of architecture seemed to increase to a level whereby it was argued that the fields would become indistinguishable. As we will see in Part II, the integration of the arts would not be as simple as had been imagined.

¹⁰⁶ Pedrosa, M. (1953) pp. 258-9.

In the original: A rapidez com que se desenvolveu a nova arquitetura nos anos febris que precederam a última guerra não deu tempo a um crescimento mais natural. A ditadura é a liberdade total do Estado e a opressão quase total dos cidadãos. A do Brasil, sem constituir exceção à regra, concebeu leis em cima de cada dia, cuidando acima de tudo de sua propaganda, buscou em sua tendência totalitária atrair a si os jovens arquitetos cujas idéias e concepções eram, entretanto, de inspiração completamente oposta. Estes últimos trabalharam, com efeito, para a ditadura, mas sem renunciar a suas idéias.

¹⁰⁷ This argument was put forward by Martin Grossman (2001a).

Part II

Abstraction and the Ideal of a Modern Nation

Introduction

A number of issues relating to the development of *Modernismo* in Brazil have already been discussed. Amongst them, the relation between Modernism and the modernity of the nation; the essential regional character of art in a continental country such as Brazil; how social and political changes affected the character of creative production amongst modernist artists; the eventual involvement of institutions within the cultural sector, and perhaps more precisely, how those in power appropriated the modern aesthetic for their own benefits. In terms of historiography, we have also seen how accounts dealing with the rise of Modernism in Brazil have focused on what was perceived as its inadequacies. However, when compared to concurrent developments within the international cultural capitals, these 'inadequacies' can in fact be also noted.

It is a general historical assumption that Modernism in Brazil only fulfilled the conditions necessary for a 'truly' modern art following W.W.II. This is attributed to the emergence of abstraction, which in some cases is associated with the achievement of the industrialisation of the nation.

This part of the study maps the debates around the time of Oiticica's emergence as an avant-garde artist. The contrast between Part I and II is intentional in order to emphasise the 'extreme' legacies that Oiticica would later attempt to articulate: namely the search for proximity with the Brazilian people and the modern rationalism of the abstract language.

The production of culture is characterised by ambivalent movements of rupture and continuity. The relationship between the movements described in this section and those discussed previously, although aesthetically distinct, display certain implicit affinities. The current dissemination of contemporary art from Brazil within the international art circuit has perhaps over-emphasised these affinities arguing for connections between *Modernismo*, the post-war constructivist influenced movements, Oiticica's subsequent 'experimentalism', and the evaluation of such legacies amongst today's artists. This study is sceptical of facile connections, and the relation between Part I and II exemplifies this concern. Underlying the distinct approaches to aesthetics within the two periods lies a constant concern amongst artists: to respond to the spirit of the times. To respond to the pressing issues of one's time is a noble enterprise yet it can also imply a certain complicity with hegemonic values. The figurative pre-W.W.II artists and the post-war generation of geometric abstractionist shared the respective visions of the identity of the nation and its relation to modernity.

Ambivalence in this context is therefore quite distinct from that discussed in Part I. Here it relates to the arguments between the two factions of the concrete art movement in Brazil. Central to these disagreements was the opinion, expressed by the Rio de Janeiro group, that it was possible to produce an abstract geometrical art that was both precise and intuitive. The main protagonists in these arguments were the São Paulo concrete group members, Waldemar Cordeiro, Décio Pignatari, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos, and in Rio de Janeiro the critic and poet Ferreira Gullar. Mário Pedrosa is highlighted for his ambivalent position between both groups. A further ambivalent characteristic of the period related to the political position that artists held. Although claiming to hold left-wing ideals, it cannot be denied that the constructivist art produced by those groups inserted itself within the ideology of development. *Developmentalism* was the name given to government plans to impose progress 'from above', transforming the country into a modern nation through industrialisation. The ideology of development would be later discredited by the left due to its distance from the reality of the people.

Other issues raised here relate to the constructions of histories that have equally failed to emphasise the parallels between the insecurities, equivocations and disagreements at a national level with their 'metropolitan' equivalent. As in Part I, it was felt that it would be productive to discuss briefly those parallel occurrences in Europe in order to avoid any connotations of inadequacy when discussing the national inconsistencies. The emergence of concrete art in Europe seems therefore an appropriate starting point for such a narrative:

The Basis of Concrete Painting

We Say That:

1. Art is Universal
2. The art object should be entirely conceived and formed by thought [par l'esprit] before its execution. It should not receive formal data from nature, neither from sensuality nor from sentimentality.
We wish to exclude lyricism, dramatism, symbolism, etc.
3. The picture should be entirely constructed with purely plastic elements, that is to say, planes and colours. A pictorial element, has no other meaning than << itself >> consequently the picture has no other meaning than << itself >>.
4. The picture's construction, similarly its elements, should be simple and visually controllable.
5. The technique should be mechanical, that is to say, exact, anti-impressionist.
6. Effort for absolute clarity.

Carlsund, Doesburg, Helion, Tutundjian, Wantz.¹⁰⁸ [Fig. 25]

¹⁰⁸ First Issue of the: *Groupe d'Art Concret*, Journal, Paris April 1930. Originally in French [Fig. 25]. See: *Espace de l'Art Concret* (2000) p.17.

Chapter 5

Concrete Art

The history of concrete art is distinct from the majority of 20th century *isms*, due to its uncharacteristic longevity. Unlike Surrealism, a movement that also spanned various decades, concrete art's true international impact was only felt following W.W.II. Founded in 1930, it was a movement that connected the pre-W.W.I avant-gardes to its wider dissemination during the post-W.W.II period. This was largely a consequence of Max Bill's (1908-94) energetic role as promoter and disseminator of a particular interpretation of concrete aesthetics.

Concrete art possessed associations with renowned pioneering modernist artists yet as a movement it remains relatively peripheral to narratives of Modernism and historical analysis. This fact is exemplified by its absence from major surveys and anthologies of 20th century movements in art.¹⁰⁹ The most likely reason for this omission is precisely its connections to those pioneering modern art movements that contributed towards its establishment - de Stijl, Russian Constructivism, Dada, Futurism, Cubism, in addition to the artists and the specifically rationalist aspects associated with the Bauhaus - since these are referred to directly in art history rather than through references to concrete art itself.

Concrete art was a diffused movement with wide-ranging and varied influences. It is chronologically placed between the so-called historical avant-gardes and the neo-avant-gardes, a factor that possibly also contributed to its relative historical obscurity. Evidence of the historical associations conjured by the movement can be noted in remarks such as Mário Schenberg's (1988 p.215) view of the effects that concrete art's introduction had in Brazil. These were seen to allow at a local level, the assimilation of an aesthetic language developed since Cubism, passing through Casimir Malevitch (1878-1935), Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), the Bauhaus as well as the further developments proposed by Max Bill and the Ulm group. Concrete art in this sense could be seen to have 'corrected' the apparent 'incompleteness' of the historical references (towards the European pioneering avant-gardes) hitherto established by modern art in Brazil, particularly those related to the perceived limitations of *Modernismo* with respect to its apparent traumatic deviation from Modernism: the fact that it did not lead towards abstraction.

Historically, rather than an inclusive concept, concrete art emerged from the will to distinguish itself from the more general term abstract art. Essential differences

¹⁰⁹ These range from generalist publications such as: Stangos, ed. (1971); Lynton (1980); Hughes (1991); to more specialised anthologies such as Harrison & Wood (1992).

between the central figures of Mondrian and Théo van Doesburg (1883-1931) were already evident during de Stijl. A divergence that emerged out of Mondrian's insistence on associating geometrical characteristics with a spiritual symbolism: namely the horizontal and vertical as representing essential opposing forces. Camille de Singly (2000 p.148) has associated Max Bill's use of the diagonal in his painting with an affirmation of his affiliation to van Doesburg as opposed to Mondrian's consideration of the horizontal and the vertical as the 'two poles of the constructive world (passive and active, female and male).'

The actual term 'concrete art' arose out of a reaction against Joaquin Torres-Garcia, (1874-1949) and Michel Seuphor's (1901-99) exhibition *Cercle et Carré*¹¹⁰, which surveyed the diverse manifestations of abstract art. Van Doesburg, Jean Helion (b.1904), Otto Gustaf Carlsund (1897-1948), Leon Tutundjian (1905-68) and Marcel Wantz (date of birth/death unknown), organised a parallel exhibition in order to counteract what they saw as a dilution of the characteristics between these tendencies.¹¹¹ The term emerged therefore as a distinction from abstract art itself: that is, art not abstracted from nature but as a concrete creation in the real world.

According to Fernando Cocchiari (1987 p.15), van Doesburg's perception was precise in that he realised that the concept of abstraction could not theoretically take into account an art whose project did not allude to the external world, since the process of abstraction necessarily has that world as its origin, albeit in an abstracted form. Therefore the notion of abstraction as a non-representative art that did not allude to nature was itself a contradiction.

The concretist critique therefore attempted, from the outset, to posit art as a definite rupture from representation, going not only beyond the level of visible resemblances with the world, but positing itself against any other form of representation including the artist's own subjective expression. That meant (Cocchiari, 1987 p.15) that painting became a thing in itself, equivalent to any other object in the real world.

¹¹⁰ The exhibition was formed by the following artists many of whom would later become involved with concrete art: Joaquin Torres-Garcia, Michel Seuphor, Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), Pedro Daura y Garcia (1896-1976), Willi Baumeister (1889-1955), Aleksandra Exter (1882-1949), Franciska Clausen (1899-1986), Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943), Fernand Leger (1881-1955), Antoine Pevsner (1886-1962), Luigi Russolo (1885-1947), Charles-Edouard Jeanneret (1887-1965), Jean (Hans) Arp (1887-1966), Wassily (Vasily) Kandinsky (1866-1944), Amedee Ozenfant (1886-1966), Georges Vantongerloo (1886-1965), Henryk Stazewski (1894-1988), Cesar Domela (b.1900), Joseph Stella (c.1877-1946), Jean Gorin (1899-1981) See:

<http://www.sahlmanart.com/Bios>

¹¹¹ See: Cocchiari (1987 p.15). Another interpretation is proposed by Sebastian Lopez, who has argued that Garcia was in fact far more instrumental within the development of the tenets of concrete art affecting Doesburg's notion of the universality in art. Lopez, S. (2002). Curating Latin American Art Conference. University of Essex. 26 October.

Launched in 1930 as an aesthetic position that radicalised the opposition between abstraction and figuration, following the death of its principle instigator van Doesburg in 1931, concrete art lost much of its original impetus. Rather than an explosive aesthetic manifestation its adherence developed gradually.

During the 1930s, particularly due to the political polarisation at the heart of the abstraction versus figuration debates, concrete art could not be perceived as other than a short lived movement. Van Doesburg and those associated with concrete art took part in major exhibitions that emphasised a more general view of abstraction. This in fact stood as anathema to what van Doesburg had argued as the principal characteristic of concrete art: its distinction from abstraction.

According to Valerie Vergez (2000 p.20), the recognition of van Doesburg's legacy was very much the result of the efforts of his widow Nelly van Doesburg (1899-1975) and the formation in 1931 of the *Association Abstraction-Création* in Paris by August Herbin (1882-1960) and Vantongerloo. Other repercussions occurred in Poland with *Unism*: with Wladyslaw Strzeminski (1893-1952) and Katarzyna Kobro (1898-1951), who in 1931 declared the use of calculus within their creative process. Later Kandinsky and Arp would also declare themselves adherents of concrete art.

Abstraction-Création did not adopt exclusively concrete premises (Vergez, 2000) but included them in its broad front in defence of abstraction. Moreover, major exhibitions tended to be organised around the more general notion of abstract art. Although many exhibitions included concrete productions, they were often not exclusively dedicated to its tenets: namely Alfred Barr's *Cubism and Abstract Art* 1936, *Abstrakte Kunst* organised by Nelly van Doesburg at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1938 and *L'Exposition des Réalités Nouvelles* in Paris 1939 in which Nelly van Doesburg also had an organisational role.

Those who had participated within the pioneering abstract experiments, such as de Stijl, *Cercle et Carré* and *Abstraction Création*, and were still alive - the critic Geneviève Bonnefoi (1988) mentions in this respect: Vantongerloo, Domela, Pevsner, Naum Gabo (1890-1977), Max Bill, Herbin and the 'less dogmatic' Frantisek Kupka (1871-1957), Alberto Magnelli (1888-1971), Arp, and Robert (1885-1941) and Sonia (1885-1979) Delaunay - received recognition by the younger generation of artists during the closing years of the W.W.II. Such a list of artists certainly indicates a growing internationalism and the number of competing tendencies at the time suggests a certain loss of references that in hindsight could be interpreted as symptomatic of attempts to circumnavigate the omnipresence of the *École de Paris* or alternatively the diminishing role of Paris as the cultural capital. Concrete art, particularly for the post-war generation, appeared with a respectable heritage

(Bonnefoi, 1988) and for many seemed coherent with the historical moment: a rationalist art at a moment of reconstruction.

The Emergence of Geometrical Abstraction in Paris

Bonnefoi (1988) described the first post-war exhibition (July 1945) displaying this tendency as being held at Galerie René Drouin gathering a coherent collection of 'premier maîtres' and having been organised by Arp.¹¹² Its title was *Art Concret* - following van Doesburg's definition - and included amongst others: Arp, R. Delaunay, Domela, Herbin, Magnelli, and Mondrian. It is worth noting that the Galerie Denise René, having inaugurated with a Victor Vasarely (1906-97) exhibition in 1944 would later move towards a kinetic art agenda, in this way reflecting the transitions and evolution of many Latin American artists involved, if not precisely with concrete art, with the geometrical abstraction tendency.¹¹³

Bonnefoi (1988 p.157) interpreted the concrete tendency as a whole generation that attempted to perpetuate their previous researches, perceiving art as:

solely submissive to the laws of equilibrium and reason [...] that attempted to completely eliminate the affective aspects and also the mental content from within the work.¹¹⁴

She (Bonnefoi, 1988 p.159) also mentioned that there was a shift from Kandinsky's notion of an 'interior necessity' towards a radical Constructivism such as that typified by Vasarely. Indeed, the latter would become the archetype of the tendency in Paris. Bonnefoi also mentioned that:

for Giulio Carlo Argan, the new *Constructivism* was defined as a rational art with a proximity to scientific thought that corresponded to a need of a society strongly affected by the war that searched for its own reconstitution, 'to change its structures its concept of the world and its life.'¹¹⁵

¹¹² René Drouin and Denise René were responsible for the selection of São Paulo's Museum of Modern Art's inaugural exhibition *Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo* (From Figuration to Abstraction) in 1949. See: Amaral, ed. (1998).

¹¹³ See: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (2000) p.187, 193.

¹¹⁴ In the original: [...] soumis aux seules lois de équilibre et de la raison qui, [...] tend à éliminer complètement l'apport affectif et, pratiquement, le contenu mental de l'oeuvre.

¹¹⁵ In the original: Pour Giulio Carlo Argan, ce nouveau *constructivisme* se définit comme un art rationnel, proche de la pensée scientifique, qui correspondait alors au besoin d'une société fortement ébranlée par la guerre et qui cherchait à se reconstruire, << à changer ses structures, sa conception du monde et de la vie.>>

Argan's comments in Bonnefoi are from: Paris Art Centre (1984). 'Galerie Denise René'. Retrospective Catalogue.

Moreover, Bonnefoi (1988 p.158) quoted Denise René, who was described as having provided a focal point for the abstract 'hard line' geometrical artists through her gallery at Rue La Boétie:

We can read in [the paintings] the domination of human reason, the triumph of man over chaos.¹¹⁶

The *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*, although an ambivalent disseminator of abstract art, increasingly demonstrated a polarisation amongst its various sectors. By 1948, with an increasing membership,¹¹⁷ it devised a questionnaire in order to prove the aspirations of the involved artists and to produce a manifesto. The latter denounced the lack of interest in abstraction by the French art institutions together with the gradual but systematic disappearance of abstract art from the great exhibitions such as the Venice Biennale: a sign that even in Paris geometrical abstraction remained relatively restricted to a few galleries and salons. The manifesto also reacted against the communist attack on abstraction and attempted to categorise abstraction in terms of adjectives such as spontaneous or radical. It clearly tended towards the latter position claiming that the only defensible abstraction was that which responded to thought and an Euclidean regularity. The dogmatism of the manifesto caused disapproval from the diverse quarters of abstract practitioners. This anecdote indicates clearly that concrete art's emergence in Brazil and previously in Argentina was not a case of Latin Americans adopting a style that was verified and accepted in Europe but one in which they were able to identify as a particular avant-garde that held a highly contested position which was supported by a limited yet international number of individuals. Admittedly, its specific history related to pioneers of modernism, yet hardly the canonised figures of those who had dominated the *École de Paris* such as Pablo Picasso (1882-1973) and Henri Matisse (1869-1954) or their 'descendants'. Moreover the disagreements which emerged in Brazil - as we will see - between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro rather than a provincial rivalry reflected deep rooted concerns with the very nature of abstraction, and indeed the concept and philosophy of concrete art itself.

Perhaps the confrontation between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro was itself due to a certain extent to polemics coincidental¹¹⁸ with those confrontations Max Bill had with the Parisian abstract circles (d'Orgerval, 2000), such as the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*. The poet and critic Ferreira Gullar (1960b) has described these as a reaction by Max Bill and the Swiss group with regard to the indeterminate nature that

¹¹⁶ In the original: On peut lire en elles, aveuglant, écrit-elle, la domination de la raison humaine, le triomphe de l'homme sur le chaos.

¹¹⁷ From 89 in 1946 to 366 in 1948. In: Bonnefoi (1988).

the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* held towards concrete art: demonstrated namely in the abstract art of Arp, Herbin and Seuphor, and the group associated with *Art D'Aujourd'hui*. Bill nevertheless, had also attempted to place himself as responsible for the selection of the Swiss representation within the Salon, suggesting that perhaps there were reasons other than theoretical ones for the disagreements. Bill's request had been refused and consequently he was excluded from the Salon (d'Orgeval, 2000 p.30), while Arp became informally responsible for selecting Swiss artists.

It is important to remind the reader that Parisian galleries had played a major role in the selection of artists for the inaugural exhibition of the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo. It can therefore be assumed that there was an awareness of such polemics occurring in France around the subject of abstract art and by extension Max Bill's implication within them. Décio Pignatari's association of the artistic environment in Rio with the French tradition - as we will see - might be pertinent in relation to the less orthodox approach of the Parisian constructivist circle.

The statement might have also served to deny a sense of radicalism or rupture from the past, since *Modernismo* had been a figurative school that, although having developed certain similarities with Mexican Muralism, had always maintained a strong correspondence with French Art, and particularly with the *École de Paris*.¹¹⁹ D'Orgeval (2000 p.24-39) discussing the figuration versus abstraction debates of the immediate post-war - which emerged in Paris within the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles* - claimed that abstraction was synonymous for many at the time with foreign art and as such it was judged as suspect and distinct from what was usually described as national art.

Bonnefoi's (2000 p.157) remarks posit the emergence of 'cold' geometrical abstraction in France, at the end of W.W.II, 1944-46, as signifying a renewed interest for the pre-war avant-garde being partly fuelled by the 'quasi-simultaneous' death of two pioneers of modern art, Kandinsky and Mondrian in 1944. Both artists had suffered a certain isolation under the predominance of the *École de Paris* in France. According to the Brazilian poet and critic Ferreira Gullar (1987), war had affected the international cultural scene, particularly in the transferral of the cultural centre from Paris to New York. Gullar's opinion is interesting for it offers a view often ignored by discussions on the transferral of the cultural capital. In other words, rather than the

¹¹⁸ In the sense that they arose out of similar positions amongst the respective groups.

¹¹⁹ For a discussion on the relation that artists such as Di Cavalcanti and Portinari had with Picasso, see 'O Sistema de Di Cavalcanti' and 'O Sistema de Portinari', in: Zilio (1982a) p.85, 90.

idea of modern art being stolen¹²⁰, it is possible to view such an event as the dissolution of a dominant aesthetic leading to a proliferation of competing and diverse groups and movements. For the historian, the latter causes some difficulty yet as a cultural environment it is admittedly far more interesting. The rise of New York as the new international cultural capital, as Gullar (1987 p.85) argued, meant that a place like Ulm in Germany - Max Bill's project for a second Bauhaus - would then have the possibility of being recognised since previously European validation had to operate through Paris.

I remember when the director of the Museum of Modern Art of Paris, Jean Cassou came here [Brazil] we had already the Biennial and the questions of Concretism were quite advanced. I went to interview him and asked about Mondrian. He asked: 'who is Mondrian?'¹²¹

Max Bill and the Wider Dissemination of Concrete Art

Concretism as a distinct category amongst abstraction gained a particular relevance during the period of the immediate post-war. Although Max Bill wrote a manifesto in 1936, it was only in 1944 (Singly, 2000 p.148) that he was able to organise the first concrete Art exhibition at the *Kunsthalle* in Basel entitled *Konkrete Kunst*. Therefore by 1950 when Bill exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, there was a certain 'freshness' about his art that must have appealed to a younger generation of Brazilian artists. [Fig. 26]

Bill had studied at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* in Zurich before enrolling at the Dessau Bauhaus to study architecture where he met Paul Klee (1879-1940), Kandinsky, Oskar Schlemmer (1888-1943), and László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946). Through their influence, Bill produced his first abstract paintings. On his return to Zurich in 1929 he became involved with publicity and later formed his own publicity agency, the *Bill-Zürich Reclame*, which gathered high profile clients such as Wohnbedarf, Shell, and Wechlin-Tissot. Concurrently he became acquainted (Singly, 2000 p.148) with artists such as Arp and Mondrian, which in 1932 led to his affiliation to the *Abstraction-Création* group.

During the 1930s, Switzerland saw an increased avant-garde activity, fuelled as had occurred during W.W.I, by the displacement of artists due to the political situation in Germany. Vergez (2000 p.21), described the gradual development of the Swiss artistic milieu - which would culminate in the strong concrete tendency led by Bill -

¹²⁰ As famously suggested by Guibault (1983).

¹²¹ In the original: Eu me lembro que quando veio aqui aquele diretor do Museu de Arte Moderna de Paris, o Jean Cassou, em 56, já tinha Bienal e o problema de Concretismo já era uma coisa avançada aqui dentro. Eu fui entrevista-lo e quando perguntei sobre o Mondrian, ele falou: 'quem é Mondrian?'

through the example of the increasing number of exhibitions held in Zurich which centred particularly on the theme of abstraction. These again displayed a broad view of avant-garde activity rather than being specifically constructivist in their orientation. One of the first, according to Vergez (2000), to contain the seeds of the new concrete tendency was *Abstrakte und Surrealistische Malerei und Plastik* at the Kunsthhaus in Zurich 1929: this included a number of constructivist artists such as van Doesburg in conjunction with Jean Arp's prominent contribution as designer of the exhibition's poster. Arp organised subsequently the exhibition *Produktion Paris 1930, Malerei und Plastik* at Zurich's Kunstsalon Wolfsberg which included work by artists who had signed the original 1930 concrete Art Manifesto, in addition to Max Bill himself. In 1935 the Museum in Lucerne held the exhibition *Thèse, Anti-Thèse, Synthèse* which contained figurative, Surrealist and abstract works. Vergez highlighted the exhibition *Zeitprobleme in der Schweizer Malerei und Plastik* (Current Problems in Swiss Painting and Sculpture) held in 1935 at the Kunsthhaus in Zurich as the first instance of concrete art's emergence as a distinct movement from the more generalised abstract tendencies. Notable in this exhibition was Max Bill's prominence as the poster designer and the inclusion of his text *Konkrete Gestaltung* describing his own perception of the notion of concrete art. The principal emphasis of which was the required intellectual conception of the work of art prior to its execution. As Vergez (2000 p.22) argued, such conception evidently ran along precise rules which would appear in the work's composition:

Concrete creation is that which is born from its own means and follows its own laws without deducting or borrowing those from the exterior natural appearances.¹²²

The following year, 1937, saw the emergence of the *Allianz* group led by the artists Richard Paul Lhose (1902-88) and Leo Leuppi (1893-1972) along the lines of the Parisian *Abstraction-Creation*. As the name suggests - and as is further emphasised by Vergez (2000 p.21) - *Allianz* gathered Swiss abstract artists regardless of their style or affiliation. *Abstraction-Creation* equated abstraction with freedom in the light of the preferred figurative art expressed, and indeed imposed, by both communism and fascism.¹²³ The group did not however, distinguish - as concrete art did - from other categories of abstraction. The broad front represented by the association was

¹²² In the original: création concrète est celle création qui naît des ses propres moyens et suivant ses propres lois sans les déduire ou les emprunter aux apparences naturelles extérieures.

¹²³ A fact explicitly expressed in *Abstraction-Creation's* Cahier no. 2 whose introduction states: 'the Journal *Abstraction-Creation* Cahier no. 2 appears at a moment when free thought is being fiercely contested, in many ways, on all levels, in some countries more than others, but everywhere.' Editorial (1932) *Abstraction-Creation* Cahier no. 2. Translated from French in: Harrison & Wood (1992) p.357.

reflected by its organising committee - Héliou, Herbin, Kupka and Vantongerloo - and was expressed explicitly (*Abstraction-Création*, 1932-33 p.357) in the first editorial of its Journal:

Non-figuration, that's to say a purely plastic culture which excludes every element of explication, anecdote, literature, naturalism, etc....
abstraction, because certain artists have come to the concept of non-figuration by the progressive abstraction of forms from nature.
Creation, because other artists have attained non-figuration direct, purely via geometry, or by the exclusive use of elements commonly called abstract such as circles, planes, bars, lines, etc....

It is therefore possible to assert that concrete art's wider dissemination as a specific and distinct aesthetic movement only gained momentum during the closing years of W.W.II. This is emphasised (Vergez, 2000 p.22) by Bill's blunt rearticulation of van Doesburg's initial definition, in the bulletin for the *Abstrakt + Konkret* exhibition in 1944 at the *Eaux-Vivent* Gallery in which he stated, 'concrete is the opposite of abstraction.' Moreover, it was in the late 1940s that Bill formulated a set of 'principles' as a model to be followed by other artists. This appeared in the review *Werk* under the title *Mathematical Thought in the Art of our Times* in 1949, being reprinted in the *Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Bill* exhibition catalogue at the Kunsthhaus in Zurich that same year.

The mysteries of the mathematical problematic, the ineffable space, the distance or proximity of infinity, the surprise of a space that starts at one side and ends on another, which at the same time is the same, the limitation without exact limits, the multiplicity which albeit forms a unity; the uniformity that is altered by the presence of a single emphasis of form, the force field composed of pure variables, parallels which cut across each other and infinity returns to itself as a presence and still the square again in all its solidity, the right angle that is not troubled by any relativity, all these realities, that seemingly have nothing to do with the quotidian life of man, are nevertheless of a transcendental importance. These forms which we handle, are the fundamental forces in which all human order is submitted to and that are precisely contained in all knowledgeable order.¹²⁴

Bill's statement is demonstrative of the tenets of the sculpture (Tripartite Unity) that would win him the prize at the 1st São Paulo Biennial in 1951. [Fig. 27]

¹²⁴ Max Bill, *Pevsner, Vantongerloo, Bill*, exhibition catalogue, Kunsthhaus, Zurich, 1949. Quoted in: Vergez (2000) pp.22-3.

Translated above from the French: Les mystères de la problématique mathématique, l'ineffable de l'espace, l'éloignement ou la proximité de l'infini, la surprise d'un espace qui commence d'un côté et se termine par un autre, qui est en même temps le même, la limitation sans limites exacte, la multiplicité qui malgré tout forme une unité, l'uniformité qui s'altère par la présence d'un seul accent de forme, le champ de force composé de pures variables, les parallèles qui se coupent et l'infini qui revient à elles-mêmes comme présence et encore le carré à nouveau avec toute sa solidité, la droite qui n'est troublée par aucune relativité et la courbe qui en chacun de ses points forme une droite, toutes ces réalités, qui en apparence n'ont rien à voir avec la vie quotidienne de l'homme, sont malgré tout d'une importance

Chapter 6

Brazilian Constructivism

Although the emphasis of this study is clearly on those movements which demonstrated a closeness in their approach to Max Bill's premises, it is important to state that the overall production of geometrical abstraction in Brazil was far broader. Key Brazilian artists whose work cannot be placed under the 'concrete' category, yet who remained within a wider view of constructivist oriented art, include: Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988), Rubem Valentim (1922-91), Milton Dacosta (1915-88), Dionísio del Santo (1925-99), Cícero Dias (1907-2003), Samson Flexor (1907-71), Maria Leontina (1917-84), Sérgio de Camargo (1930-90), Mira Schendel (1919-88), etc.¹²⁵

The constructive tradition in Brazil inscribed itself within a set of historical conditions which pertained both to a local political context as well as the more general post-war re-evaluation of modernism which affected artists around the world. For Brazilian modern art the events that have characterised the constructive movements had profound repercussions which are felt to this day. The poet and critic Ferreira Gullar (1986a) concisely described the legacy that the 1950s left to Brazilian art:

The fifties were, in the artistic field, disturbing, polemical and fertile, moreover, they were indicative of a moment of maturity and of an increasingly profound aesthetic experience. While one could say that Brazilian art from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, experienced a phase of renewal and of creativity, it did not develop the essential questions that governed the modern artistic tendencies from impressionism onwards. Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism and Surrealism did not possess their true significance when adopted and assimilated by Brazilian artists and critics. It is from the Fifties that these questions were placed at the centre of Brazilian art. It lost in this way, its innocence and precisely due to this, it experienced the crisis of art of the moment. And this is why it became capable, in some cases, of anticipating European and North American art, responding through theory and practice to this crisis.¹²⁶

Before discussing the emergence of constructive avant-gardes in Brazil, it is important to differentiate the meaning of the term Constructivism from the term's use

transcendentale. Ces formes que nous manions, sont les forces fondamentales auquel tout ordre humain est soumis et qui sont contenues précisément dans tout ordre connaissable.

¹²⁵ For a discussion on this section of Brazilian abstract art, see: Venancio (1988).

¹²⁶ In the original: Os anos cinquenta foram, [...] no plano artístico, inquietos, polêmicos e fecundos, mas, além disso, assinalam um momento de maturação e aprofundamento da experiência estética. Se é verdade que a arte brasileira, a partir do final da primeira década do século, vive uma fase [...] de renovação e criatividade, ela não aprofunda as questões essenciais que movem as tendências artísticas modernas a partir do impressionismo. O cubismo, o futurismo, o dadaísmo, o surrealismo não têm seu real significado apreendido e assimilado pelos artistas e pela crítica no Brasil. É a partir dos anos cinquenta que essas questões se colocam no centro da arte brasileira. Ela perde, desse modo, sua ingenuidade e, por isso mesmo, passa a viver a crise que caracteriza a arte de nossa época. E é por essa razão que ela se torna capaz, em certos casos, de antecipar-se à arte européia e norteamericana na resposta teórica e prática a essa crise.

in the context of the 1950s in Brazil. As we have seen, *Modernismo* rather than a late follower of Cubism referred to the contemporaneous European re-evaluation of that tendency which informed the *Rappel à l'Ordre*. Similarly, in Brazil during the post-W.W.II period, the adoption of geometrical abstraction was associated with contemporaneous European re-evaluations of the legacy of Constructivism. Such a legacy should be understood as drawing on a variety of movements such as de Stijl, Dada, as well as Russian Constructivism itself.

The constructivist tradition in Brazil although referring to precursors such as Mondrian and Malevitch, was not a localised phenomenon but - as briefly indicated - was associated with an international concern for re-evaluating the legacy of Modernism. This was particularly pertinent in the context of the post-war spirit of reconstruction. However, accounts dealing with the significance of Constructivism within the Brazilian context, have varied according to local prejudices, particularly those between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as can be noted in the accounts by two poets - Gullar (b. 1930) and Décio Pignatari (b. 1927) - which will be described below.

Rio de Janeiro Versus São Paulo

Positioned clearly within the Rio de Janeiro context, Gullar (1987 p.85) described the post-war period in Brazil as an environment marked by a radically new context: one in which change seemed both necessary and inevitable. With the end of the war the number of questions concerning art practice that had emerged in Europe during the pre-W.W.II period began to affect Brazil. However, according to Gullar (1987), these experiences arrived in Brazil all at the same time. Therefore, rather than following the historical order in which they occurred in Europe, a plethora of styles and movements appeared simultaneously. Gullar's statement invokes the common complaint that cultural dependency is a consequence of the non-synchronised relation between modernity and modernisation. Such a view implicitly relies in its linearity, on a Hegelian view of history, whereby progress is interpreted as totalised and homogeneous.

Gullar mentioned that the generation of artists in Brazil belonging to the period of *Modernismo*, from the 1920s and 1930s, for instance Portinari and Segall, possessed a level of drama in their art that referred to that historical moment. This was a reference to the drama of war and the events that led to it. According to Gullar, in the

immediate post-war all those issues were forgotten and a climate of renewal was installed.¹²⁷

The increased commercial exchange, another post-war occurrence, and the renewed interest of foreign companies in Brazil had an effect that went beyond the commercial sector affecting diplomatic as well as cultural exchanges (Gullar, 1987): the São Paulo Biennial which began in 1951, was a consequence of such changes.

Gullar (1987 p.87) distinguished two types of abstraction emerging during this period: one that had evolved through the abstraction of the object, such as in the case of Milton Dacosta; and the other, concrete art, that arrived with the Biennial:

A leap occurred with the Biennial through the appearance of the Swiss and Mário [Pedrosa]'s position defending those works theoretically. In São Paulo a group formed around him with a certain influence coming from Buenos Aires. When it became public it was already in terms of concrete geometry.¹²⁸

Pedrosa was described by Gullar (1987) as attempting to understand the new post-war environment, by seeing art as a universal language that - through a lexicon of geometrical forms - distanced itself from notions of regionalism and nationalism. These as we have seen, pervaded the development of Brazilian *Modernismo*. Abstraction in this sense was seen to be trans-national, defining within the field of visual arts the general openness that was occurring in other fields following the war: the re-opening of the ports, the creation of the UN, etc. It represented a rationalism that went in opposition to the passionate, irrational expression of violence that had previously dominated the world. The arrival of abstraction therefore could be assumed to represent for Gullar a re-establishment of Brazilian art as historically pertinent. Brazilian art through the advent of abstraction could therefore transcend the backwardness of the local (its association through figuration with the Brazilian character) and enter the domain of the universal.

It is striking how historical accounts describing that period vary according to whether they are narrated from a position in Rio de Janeiro - like that of Gullar - or whether from São Paulo such as Pignatari's.

France had been the main reference for Brazilian *Modernismo* and with the end of W.W.II, a shift began to occur. The shift was felt initially within the confrontational spirit - which became increasingly evident during the 1950s - between the two main

¹²⁷ Later in this study (Chapter 7) these statements will be relativised: where it will be argued that the post-war period and particularly the Biennial did not entirely rid the institutional promotion of *Modernismo*.

¹²⁸ In the original: O salto foi dado com a Bienal, o aparecimento dos artistas suíços e a posição do Mário, defendendo teoricamente esses trabalhos. Havia um grupo formado em torno dele e um que se formava em São Paulo através de certa influência de Buenos Aires. Quando vem a público já vem em termos de arte geométrica concreta.

cities São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This rivalry has dominated virtually all historical accounts of the constructive movements in Brazil.

Answering to the question on whether the emergence of concrete poetry represented a rupture within the literary climate in Brazil, Pignatari (1987 p.71) claimed that it proposed a re-evaluation of considerations that prevailed at the time. These concerned the 'famous two Brazils': one industrial, the other agrarian. Pignatari, saw these 'two Brazils' as a reversed model of the structure of the USA: the South, particularly the industrialised city of São Paulo, possesses a Yankee mentality, while the North is associated with visions of the Mississippi and Dixieland. The use of the USA as a comparative model also served the purpose of declaring himself as clearly positioned within a *Paulista* position.

For Pignatari, concealed under the sense of renewal that pervaded the period, was the fact that the cultural centre had transferred from France to New York. This transferral had according to him, the consequence of installing a new impetus which was influenced by an Anglo-Saxon industrial mentality, and was far more direct in character. Such vitality was equated to the metropolitan spirit present in São Paulo, while the French literary tradition (itself associated with Rio intellectuals) was seen to be exhausted. Pignatari (1987) described this as an anxiety and hunger that was noticeable in Brazil amongst other things by the amount of cultural supplements being published: 'every "little tabloid" would have its cultural supplement.'¹²⁹ The sense of a general renewal came from this enthusiasm for the modern that increasingly counted with institutional support. The post-war period brought a great increase in productivity, particularly in São Paulo and this, in turn, influenced a widespread feeling of progress. It was within this atmosphere that the Museums of Modern Art were built and the *Bienal de São Paulo* was implemented. Most importantly, according to Pignatari (1987), because of the unprecedented access that the Biennial offered for Brazilian artists, the direct contact with internationally renowned artists became a real possibility.¹³⁰ It was a time in which science, industry and art purported a new vision in a country that was actually engaged in a process of industrialisation. The ideological problem that this posed constituted the actual novelty of the situation according to Pignatari (1987), since the separation of the arts was no longer acceptable.

¹²⁹ 'Little tabloid' is translated from Pignatari's (1987) use of the derisory term 'Jornaleco'. It is possible that he was referring to the *Jornal do Brasil*, the main platform for the Rio de Janeiro group of abstract artists and poets.

¹³⁰ Pignatari (1987) mentions meeting Max Bill and Calder during the first Biennial for instance, claiming that such encounters prior to the event were unthinkable.

The [concrete] poets tuned in [ficam ligados] to music, to architecture, to painting and drawing. They began to be interested in other fields, no longer from a purely literary point of view, causing a far greater intimacy, between these fields.¹³¹

In this scheme it was the field of visual arts that had the greatest impact on concrete poetry, particularly through the figure of the artist Waldemar Cordeiro (1925-73). Pignatari differentiated concrete art from geometrical abstraction claiming that the former, as opposed to the latter, placed itself as indicative of the future. More than simply the differing characteristic between the Rio and the São Paulo groups, the affirmation possesses a trace of the positivism contained in the ideology of *Developmentalism*, the dominant political rhetoric of the time. According to Pignatari, art in Rio maintained an emphasis on 'crafts' that was associated with the French tradition of abstraction while São Paulo with its spirit of industrialisation referred to the legacy of the Bauhaus in its industrial approach. Moreover, it was precisely this ideal of abstraction that the *Paulistas* criticised, since according to Pignatari (1987 p.72), after Mondrian it was no longer possible to abstract from an object, instead there was the necessity to develop a new concrete vision whereby 'the object has no longer any importance'.

However, the distinction was not as clear as Pignatari claimed. As will be discussed in this chapter, the reality of an industrial nation was only partially achieved, and the dismissal of *Modernismo* by the establishment had not occurred to the extent that it has often been claimed. Pignatari's comments on the distinctions between São Paulo and Rio should be seen in the light of the rivalry of the two cities - particularly that of their respective constructive movements -, yet they remain pertinent since he identifies characteristics that throughout the 20th century continuously arise within the cultural sector in Brazil: the articulation and the confrontation between the cosmopolitan and the regional. Moreover, these distinctions are often closer to the views purported by narrators and commentators than the actual artists themselves.¹³² Although consensually the first São Paulo Biennial is posited as the catalyst for the constructive avant-garde in Brazil, there are some historians who have attempted to see earlier precedents. Perhaps the earliest painting to be posited in this light was Tarsila's *A Negra* of 1923, discussed by Moraes' (1987 p.53), as containing an 'abyss' between its figurative foreground and its geometrical abstract background.¹³³

¹³¹ In the original: Os poetas ficam ligados na música, na arquitetura, no cinema, na pintura, no desenho. Começam a se interessar justamente por outros campos, quer dizer, há esse contato de universos de modo mais íntimo, não apenas de um ponto de vista meramente literário.

¹³² Neoconcrete artists such as Franz Weissmann, did not see any distinction between their work and that of the concrete group in São Paulo. See: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

¹³³ See also Part I in this study.

More recently, Aracy Amaral (1998) based on an in-depth research on predominantly small works, many of which on paper, argued that abstraction had indeed been present in Brazil since the early 1920s in the work of artists such as: Segall, Rego Monteiro, Cícero Dias, Antonio Gomide (1895-1967), Regina Gomide Graz (1902-73), John Graz (1891-1980), and Ismael Nery (1900-34). In addition, Amaral suggested that there were associations with abstraction evident in the work of Tarsila. Amaral's argument concerning Tarsila seems to serve the purpose of countering accusations that *Modernismo* did not represent a true avant-garde since it did not develop towards abstraction. However, to somewhat forcibly impose aspects of abstraction upon a production that clearly was little concerned with such issues re-enforces the argument that *Modernismo*, as an avant-garde was inadequate and backward.

Interestingly, many of the abstract works described by Amaral were produced as applied arts studies, whether in textile design or relating to architecture: panels, flooring, windows, etc. Architecture in Brazil was inextricably connected to abstraction, yet this relation was not as straightforward as it is often described. Although the predominance of architecture during the 1950s is obvious, particularly due to the international attention it received and Pedrosa's writings on the subject, Aracy Amaral's work demonstrated, other than the early existence of abstraction, the centrality of ideas concerning the integration of the arts as early as the 1920s. This indeed would be an implicit concern of the constructivist movements.

Flávio de Carvalho and the III Salão de Maio

Central to Amaral's (1998 p.49) survey of the origins of Brazilian abstraction, was the III Salão de Maio of 1939.¹³⁴ Amaral described the III Salon as a precursor to the enthusiasm towards abstraction that occurred during the 1950s. Yet more than the Salon, it was its organiser, the artist and architect Flávio de Carvalho who although until recently has been generally ignored in historical accounts, must be given his due recognition. Carvalho could also be described (Grossmann, 2001b) as having played a central role within the origins of not only modern architecture and abstraction in Brazil, but of performance art: as such he has been rightly compared to Hélio Oiticica. The association with Oiticica - although admittedly formalist - is striking, particularly in Carvalho's proposals for tropical clothes in 1956 [Fig. 28, 29] and his urban performances (*Experiência N.2*, 1931). He is also pertinent in relation to his role in the organisation and the writing of the manifesto for the III Salão. Defined as an

enfant terrible by Amaral (1998 p.49), Carvalho fulfilled the role of a radical avant-garde activist in the São Paulo of the 1930s. According to Amaral, Carvalho's Salon offered a preview of international tendencies in Brazil.

Carvalho's pertinence (Amaral 1998) as far as the *III Salão* was concerned, was so due to: (1) the fact that the catalogue was bilingual, thus indicating a desire for the event and its retrospective documentation of modernism since the 1920s, to have an international repercussion. (2) The event and its catalogue represented a distinct approach to art compared to the social and regional preoccupations of much of the work being produced by prominent artists in Brazil at the time: such as Portinari. It could thus approach foreign and national artists in the same light without the hierarchies that such differentiation ultimately entailed. Amaral (1998 p.49) quotes Carvalho as seeing the art of the participants as 'striving towards a greater sensibility.' (3) She saw such an internationalist outlook as a direct predecessor of the nature that the São Paulo Biennial would take twelve years later. Although further research would be required to establish exactly the extent of Oiticica's knowledge of the Salon and its catalogue/manifesto,¹³⁵ it is possible to add another important aspect of the manifesto's precedence. This refers to the association of emotive/expressive and rational characteristics that would be the distinguishing factor in Neoconcretism and more so in the radicalisation of Neoconcretism by artists such as Oiticica. Carvalho (1939) saw the possibility of a hybrid form in the merger of two important equations present in the art of the 20th century: the mental values of abstractionism and the unconscious within Surrealism. The manifesto's first page is indicative of such preoccupations:

One of the most characteristic features of the aesthetic revolution in progress is a gradual abandonment of the merely visual perception and an ever intense development of psychological and mental perception of the world. All movements sharing in the aesthetic revolution reveal something of this process of dehumanisation of art, this abandonment of the visual image for penetration into deeper regions of the psychological and mental perception. Such a change of Man's perception does not come about so much from conscious volition as from his striving towards greater sensibility. This abandonment of visual perception, which culminates in the abstract movement is perhaps the most important aspect of the aesthetic revolution; for by rejecting the merely human and abandoning visual perception we achieve the radical changes observed today. Art definitely ceases to be a ritual in its struggle for greater sensibility; and as much one cannot but recall Anna Pavlova's words: 'Dance with your heads' [the footnote reads: the sentence 'with your heads' indicates the mind and the emotion, both free from routine ritual]. We would recommend Pavlova's dictum to all whose principal sphere is manual training and technical dexterity: 'Paint and build with

¹³⁴ Although rarely mentioned in this respect, the salon was also identified by Mário Barata as having been crucial in the formation of the enthusiasm for abstraction that would ensue during the 1950s. See: Barata (1987) p.115.

¹³⁵ During the entire course of the research for this study Oiticica's writings have been unavailable due to a project to reproduce them digitally for the purpose of wider consultation and conservation. The project has been undertaken by Itaú Cultural in São Paulo.

your heads' and yet: 'use the unconscious material, abandon the dogmas, the routine habits.' Although many moods similar to those in contemporary art have flourished in the past, at no time hitherto has art reached the mental and emotive sensibility of today and it is this mental exploration which will determine the art of tomorrow. Art criticism has never ventured closely to regions bordering the very essence of Man's psyche; not achieved so close contact with all that is significant in the human mind. Never has it been so critical and so turbulent, so capable of demolishing and creating; never has it been so refined an expression of intelligence and emotion.

It could be argued that Neoconcretism's attempt to find expressiveness through abstraction and Oiticica's radicalisation of that experience, through what could be described as a neo-Dada strategy, fulfils the premises of Carvalho's project. Although Carvalho's manifesto inscribed itself within an institutional context, and Oiticica's radicalisation of the artistic experience distanced itself from what at the time were the conditions of exhibiting within the museum, both artists would maintain an ambivalent relation with the existing institutions and the function of art within society at large. Carvalho, from a radical position within and against the fabric and traditions of society moved increasingly towards the institution of art becoming deeply involved within the organisation of the Biennials throughout the 1950s.¹³⁶ Oiticica's trajectory could be described as operating in the opposite direction: away from the institution and towards the street.

The art critic Mário Barata also saw precedents to the impact of the first Biennial in terms of the already existent influence of geometrical abstraction in Brazil. Like Amaral, he referred to the *III Salão de Maio* in 1939 organised by Flávio de Carvalho, mentioning that it contained works by Ben Nicholson (1894-1982) amongst others. The impression that abstraction arrived only in the 1950s was due to the war, which according to Barata (1987 p.117), was a period when abstraction was less evident. As we will see, Barata's argument concerning the permanence of the figurative tradition in Brazil, seems coherent with the contemporaneous situation in France. The implication of such a comparison is that it undermines arguments claiming that abstraction had not become predominant prior to the 1950s due to the 'backwardness' of the institutions in Brazil but instead was coherent with international trends.

The end of the war brought with it the end of Vargas' presidency. He was later re-elected (the only time he held office democratically) in 1951 and remained in power until his suicide in 1954¹³⁷. The effects of the Varga's populist dictatorship were ambivalent: on the one hand, intellectuals such as Pedrosa were forced into exile depriving the country of the possibility of an ideologically diverse intellectual

¹³⁶ Carvalho is mentioned in this respect in the São Paulo Biennial's catalogues throughout the 1950s.

¹³⁷ For a concise account of the events that led to Vargas' suicide see: Dunkerley (1992).

community; on the other hand, the period was one of increasing modernisation in terms of industrialisation and consequently urban growth. Following the end of war, there was a profound transformation within the field of art in Brazil caused by an impressive sequence of Museum inaugurations. In São Paulo the Art Museum (MASP) in 1947, and the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-SP) in 1948, in Rio the Museum of Modern Art (MAM-RJ) in 1949 (Klabin, 1984). In 1949, Waldemar Cordeiro created the 'Art Club' in São Paulo, offering a meeting place for artists. Cordeiro later became the main spokesperson for the São Paulo concretists. Max Bill held a solo exhibition in 1950 at the recently inaugurated Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo and the following year the São Paulo Biennial occurred for the first time: other than the prestige awarded to Bill in the form of a prize for sculpture, the Brazilian abstract painter Ivan Serpa (1923-73) also received a prize for his geometrical abstract painting.

The Biennial's jury included Romero Brest (1905-89), who already in 1948 had given a lecture (Brest, 1948 pp.97-8) in São Paulo entitled *Architecture is the great art of our times*.¹³⁸ Pedrosa saw Romero Brest, together with Tomás Maldonado (b. 1922) as those who initially discussed the tenets of concrete art thus initiating the impetus for the organisation of a retrospective of Max Bill's work. Therefore, Pedrosa acknowledged an often forgotten debt to the Argentine constructive avant-garde.¹³⁹ The Max Bill retrospective was organised by Pietro Bardi a year prior to the first Biennial in 1950. Another factor that emphasises (Amaral ed., 1977 p.21) the important influence of the Argentine constructivists was the move, following Maldonado in 1951, of key precursors of abstract art such as Mary Vieira (1927-2001) and Almir Mavignier (b. 1925) who left Brazil to pursue careers as constructivist artists in Europe. Mavignier in particular would play a crucial role in various abstract groups in Europe, which will be discussed later in this study.

As has been described in various accounts, the introduction of the São Paulo Biennial is generally seen to have 'officialised' the position of the emerging abstract tendency. Pedrosa (1970 p.254) himself described it as follows:

Before anything else the Biennial of São Paulo widened the horizons of Brazilian art. It was created literally on the model of the Venice Biennale and its first result was to break the closed circuit in which the artistic activities in Brazil developed: taking it out

¹³⁸ See also: Amaral, A. (1977).

¹³⁹ This link is particularly suppressed. This association was suggested by Sebastian Lopez at The Curating Latin American and Latino Art conference at the University of Texas (19-22 October, 1999) which was received with some scepticism. Ivo Mesquita (1999) has also rejected such a connection in conversation with the author during the opening of the first Liverpool Biennial.

of its provincial isolation, facilitating the Brazilian artists and public's direct contact with what was new and most audacious in the world.¹⁴⁰

Pedrosa's statement, itself a re-iteration of the Biennial's (Machado, L. G., 1951 p.14) aims and objectives, has been echoed in virtually all subsequent historical narratives on the constructive movement in Brazil, yet it casts a shadow on another crucial event that occurred with the end of W.W.II: Pedrosa's own return to Brazil in 1945. His return did not occur as a consequence of the dissolution of the Vargas dictatorship but (Amaral, ed., 1975 p.312) as an active participator in its dissolution. Other than his intense political activity, Pedrosa played a central role as disseminator of abstract and constructive ideas in Brazil, gathering around him and 'tutoring' both artists and critics. It is impossible to state that Pedrosa kept both these interests - politics and art - totally distinct from each other, yet he did seem to establish in his working methodology the two fields as parallel activities. This political ambivalence would allow Pedrosa - unlike Gullar, as will be discussed - to maintain his position as art critic and radical politician over a period of extreme cultural shifts.

Constructivism, or more precisely concrete art, in Brazil had another and most unlikely source of origin: the Psychiatric Centre *Engenho de Dentro* in Rio de Janeiro run by Dr. Nise da Silveira (1906-99). Pedrosa and a small group of artists - which included Mavignier, Serpa and Abraham Palatnik (b. 1928) - had gathered there from 1946 onwards in order to install a painting workshop for the patients, as part of the occupational therapy section. The results (Amaral, ed., 1998a p.278) were as rewarding for the artists as they were for the patients themselves. *Engenho de Dentro* provided a focal point for discussion and interaction between artists and Pedrosa. The latter, brought with him not only an awareness of recent European activities in art but his own research on Gestalt psychology. More astonishing was the geometrical nature of the work of some patients, whose creativity has been argued to have contributed towards the subsequent emphasis that Neoconcretism in Rio de Janeiro would place as an art that although based on geometrical premises, concurrently entertained the seemingly paradoxical notion of expressiveness. Such a concept was, as will be discussed, totally unacceptable for the São Paulo concrete group.

The relation between the art of the mentally ill and the origins of abstraction in Brazil is not new, Amaral (1998 p.59), had already discussed the association positing as particularly pertinent Pedrosa's role as an 'open-minded critic.' Amaral referred in

¹⁴⁰ In the original: Antes de tudo a Bienal de São Paulo veio ampliar os horizontes da arte brasileira. Criada literalmente nos moldes da Bienal de Veneza, seu primeiro resultado foi o de romper o círculo fechado em que se desenvolveram as atividades artísticas do Brasil, tirando-as de um isolacionismo provinciano. Ela proporcionou um encontro internacional em nossa

particular to the work of the patient Arthur Amora who during the 1940s produced highly sophisticated geometrical designs. [Fig. 30, 31] She also mentioned the impression that these works had on Mavignier. Mavignier's comments on Amora are indicative of this:

[Amora] discovered a box of dominoes and copied them all. After that he began to simplify them by ignoring the dots, covering up the black lines, breaking angles, devising curves and creating structures of strong optical contrast.¹⁴¹

Theon Spanudis (1915-86) who later became associated with the neoconcrete movement also referred (Gullar, 1958a) to Jung in this respect, whereby mentally ill patients made use of geometrical forms in order to transfer psychological problems into existential symbols. The expression through geometry would later become a central issue in the disagreements between the Brazilian concrete artists, as the following account (Gullar, 1958a) of the argument between Spanudis and Haroldo de Campos (b. 1929) exemplifies:

With Cordeiro's affirmation that concrete art is not an expression but a creation, a discussion emerged on the 'meaning' of concrete works. We [Gullar, Clark and Spanudis] asserted that all art was creation and also expression because it would be inconceivable to imagine an art that did not express anything. Lygia Clark assured that her painting had an expressive character. At that moment Haroldo de Campos stood and affirmed that from the artist's point of view it is useful to distinguish between two categories of (semiotic) signs: the sign that is a sign of something else and the sign that is a sign of itself. The art of the past and all figurative art is placed in the first category, whilst concrete art, from Mondrian onwards, belongs to the second. Spanudis did not agree, claiming that abstract signs, particularly geometric ones, possessed an expressive character. He mentioned Jung who in his profound psychology studies, discovered that many mentally ill patients used circles, squares, triangles, as existential symbols, that is, they transferred psychic problems onto geometrical forms in an attempt to resolve them through the use of these symbols. (At this moment there was a quick and violent exchange of words between Spanudis and Haroldo de Campos, but calm returned and the debate continued).¹⁴²

terra, ao facultar aos artistas e ao público brasileiros o contato direto com o que se fazia de mais 'novo' e de mais audacioso no mundo.

¹⁴¹ Mavignier, A. (1994) Museu de Imagens do Inconsciente. In: *Bilder des Unbewussten aus Brasilien / Images from the Unconscious from Brazil / Brasil*. São Paulo: Câmara Brasileira do Livro. p.25, pp.31-39 Quoted in: Amaral (1998) pp.57-58.

¹⁴² In the original: Dai passou-se à discussão do 'sentido' das obras concretas, tendo Cordeiro afirmado que a arte concreta não é uma arte de expressão mas de criação. Alegamos que toda arte era de criação sendo ao mesmo tempo expressão, porque seria inconcebível uma arte que nada exprimisse. Lygia Clark assegurou que sua pintura tem caráter expressional. Levantou-se Haroldo de Campos e afirmou que do ponto de vista do artista é útil distinguir entre duas categorias (semi-óticas) de signos: o signo que é signo de alguma coisa e o signo que é signo de si mesmo. A arte do passado e toda a arte figurativa estaria no primeiro caso, enquanto a arte concreta, de Mondrian para cá, estaria no segundo. Spanudis discordou, afirmando o caráter expressivo dos signos abstratos, particularmente dos geométricos. Disse que, em seus estudos de psicologia profunda, Jung descobriu que muitos doentes mentais usam círculos, quadrados, triângulos como símbolos existenciais, isto é, transferem problemas psíquicos para formas geométricas, procurando resolve-los através desses

The Constructivist tendency in Brazil would have as one of its prime concerns the eventual possibility of affecting society: a concern that seemed inevitable given the fact that it occurred in a 'developing' country. In this sense the utopian character of the modernist avant-garde could be said to be further emphasised. The different strategies adopted would become key factors in the differentiation between the two main groups in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

Constructivist oriented painting thus began in Rio with the meeting of artists and the critic Pedrosa which eventually affected an entire generation. The type of interaction was predominantly based on a personal basis within small groups of artists whose output was then mediated within the emerging institutions. Mavignier, Serpa, Palatnik and Pedrosa, through their initial contact at *Engenho de Dentro* subsequently contributed towards the establishment of a wider basis for the reception that geometrical abstraction would have amongst artists in Brazil in the early 1950s. [Fig. 30, 31] Serpa in particular played a vital role as a teacher for many of the future neoconcrete artists, such as Hélio and his brother Cesar Oiticica for example.

Another predecessor that has received little acknowledgement is Palatnik whose pioneering kinetic work although initially too 'strange' to be accepted in the 1951 Biennial, was nevertheless included due to the cancellation (Palatnik, p.127) of the Japanese section. Palatnik's *Aparelho Cinecromático* (Kinechromatic Apparatus) was then awarded a special mention by the Biennial's jury. In 1949 Palatnik, Mavignier and Serpa formed the first abstract group in Rio de Janeiro. In São Paulo, artists also began to adhere to abstraction towards the late 1940s and following the inauguration of the Museums (MASP and MAM), exhibitions and conferences were organised around the theme of abstraction. Amongst these was the Museum of Modern Art's inaugural exhibition *Do Figurativismo ao Abstracionismo* (From Figuration to Abstraction) in 1949. The exhibition was particularly (Amaral, ed., 1998 p.283) important since it brought the work of artists selected by two important Parisian galleries - René Drouin and Denise René - indicating an alternative association with abstraction beyond the Zurich *Art Concret* group and its Argentine adherents. This will be discussed later in this study. It is sufficient to mention here that France remained the primary reference for the visual arts at that moment. While it is true that examples of abstract art can be found as early as the 1920s, we should distinguish

símbolos. (Neste momento houve rápida e violenta troca de palavras entre Spanudis e Haroldo de Campos, mas a calma voltou e o debate proceguiu o seu curso).

Chapter 17 of this study will discuss how in Britain similar ideas concerning the intuitive nature of geometrical abstraction were being discussed.

these precedents from the emergence of a Constructive, or more precisely a concretist tendency in the early 1950s.

For Pontual (1992 p.41), the Constructivist tendency in Latin America arose out of the desire to disassociate themselves from an imposed view of the place as essentially exotic, of an expectation that Brazil held within the European imagination, as being a place of the fantastic. Rationalism was certainly not associated with Brazil's cultural production so that for 'the European, construction in Latin America was a suspect notion, an aberration.'¹⁴³

However, as we will see, the mood of renewal was far from generalised. Since, Concretism cannot be seen as being the predominant tendency of that particular moment, but shared the cultural space with others, particularly with the *École de Paris* and the artists associated with Brazilian *Modernismo*.

The art critic Ronaldo Brito (1975), who saw the emergence of abstraction as a significant epistemological shift, concisely distinguished the implications that the different modalities of abstraction had with regards to the artistic engagement with society:

Abstract art arose as a form of emancipation of the work of art: it was an affirmation of its autonomy before empiric reality, a recognition of its level of abstraction and formalisation, necessary, after all, to every process of knowledge. But while the diverse abstract informalists grew closer and closer to the sensitive, the mythical, the romantic plane of inspiration; constructivist tendencies radicalised even their rational, abstract character searching to integrate it to science and technique in the process of social transformation. Art left its plane in the shadow, away from the logic and history and went on to be integrated into the order of practical knowledge and positive learning.¹⁴⁴

The divergence of the accounts described above, rather than showing an inconsistency of historical narratives emphasise the variety of significations that the period held and indeed holds.

¹⁴³ Originally published in French: Pour l'Européen, la construction, en Amérique latine, est suspecte, au sein de l'aberration.

¹⁴⁴ The essay was originally published in 1975 as: *Neoconcretismo: Vértice e Ruptura do Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro*, Rio de Janeiro: Marcos Marcondes. Various re-editions of Brito's essay exist. The latest edition: Brito (1999). All quotes and page numbers referred to throughout this study (unless otherwise stated) relate to the English translation in: Brito, (1985). A shorter essay was also published: Brito (1977).

Chapter 7

The Constructive Will

During the 1950s an enlightened and anti-provincial cultural spirit was irreversibly established in Brazil. This manifested itself in what was called the 'constructive will', meaning the use of modern technical, scientific and artistic procedures to solve the problems of an underdeveloped country, which emphasised the importance of planning and designing for the future. (Venancio, 2001 p.181)

The term *constructive will* describes the 'cultural moment' quite precisely, in the sense of a will or desire rather than actual reality. It has led however to certain imprecise views that see Brazil during the 1950s as engaged in a unified project that pervaded all sectors of society and that manifested itself primarily in the monumentality of the new architecture. Of course, the period was one of intense social transformation, particularly with regards to the trend that had begun during the *Estado Novo*: that of the gradual industrialisation of the nation and its intensification under the ideology of developmentalism of President Juscelino Kubitschek (1902-76). However, as the political historian Prado Jr. (1945 p.309) argued, the legacy of the economic experience of the early 1950s has been:

an unfortunately badly assimilated lesson whereby the industrial development of the country demands far more profound actions and of a far more general nature than the momentary and precarious valorisation in the international markets of our export products.¹⁴⁵

Significantly, during the 1950s coffee still represented (Prado Jr., 1945 p.212) between 60 and 70 per cent of exports from Brazil. W.W.II had radically reversed the country's economic balance, with countries such as Britain owing considerable sums to Brazil. With their economies in crisis, the Marshall Plan devised a deal in which the debt of European countries devastated by war, would be paid. Nevertheless, such an advantageous situation did not necessarily deliver long-term benefits. In Britain's case for instance, repayments took the form of exports to Brazil (Prado Jr., 1945 p.306) of mostly obsolete rail equipment. Moreover, Prado Jr. discussed the continuous change of Brazil's government policy towards importation, as seriously affecting the stability of the industrial sector and thus denying the possibility of long lasting economical stability. This was also a moment of intense political instability that ultimately culminated in Vargas' suicide. James Dunkerley's (1992) account of the circumstances which led to the fall of Vargas also paints a very different portrait from

¹⁴⁵ In the original: a lição, infelizmente não bem assimilada, de que o desenvolvimento industrial do país exige medidas muito mais profundas e de natureza muito mais geral que simples providências fundadas em circunstâncias excepcionais, como foi a momentânea e precária valorização, nos mercados internacionais, de nossos produtos de exportação.

the positivist scenery of a nation in the midst of experiencing a blooming modernity: the latter representing the version commonly described in accounts by art historians. Dunkerley (1992 p.28) described the final years of Vargas as a president unable to deliver the promised 'nationalism, order and redistribution' due to circumstances arising from the conditions imposed by the Cold War and economic stagnation.

With regards to the effect this unstable economic and political situation had on the arts perhaps the most 'colourful' (the term could not be more inappropriate) example was the III National Salon of Modern Art in 1954. Protesting against the price of imported paint - which since 1952 had been categorised as a luxury imported good and thus subject to high taxation - around six hundred artists submitted works in black and white, leading to the exhibition to be known as the Black and White Salon (Herkenhoff, 1985). Iberê Camargo (1914-94), the leader of the protest, in an interview to the newspaper *Correio da Manhã*, gave a statement that adds a less idealist view of the situation during the *developmentalist* 1950s:

The Black and White Salon signifies our fight for survival. With regard to the results, we need to believe in something even if it is in the absurd. Victory is essential for our class. We have the largest Biennial in the world, the largest football stadium in the world. The reality is that: we have the largest misery in the world. How can a people be great if its artists do not have even material to work with?¹⁴⁶

Writing in the catalogue of an exhibition that re-evaluated the event of the *Black and White Salon*, Paulo Herkenhoff (1985) has suggested that it could have affected the Constructive tendency which was emerging at the time:

In a country that was surpassing Modernismo and developing its first abstract experiments... could the Black and White Salon have pointed towards the constructive experience? There is in another dimension, the modulated surfaces of Lygia Clark, the woodcuts of Lygia Pape, the Madri Albums of Ivan Serpa, some of Hélio Oiticica's metaesquemas, or Ferreira Gullar's poem.¹⁴⁷

The statement is however misleading since many of the constructivist artists, and Lygia Clark in particular, were interested in the application of industrial methods and products that did not enter the category of 'fine art' materials.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in: Moraes (1994) p.230.

In the original: O Salão Preto e Branco significa nossa luta pela sobrevivência. No tocante aos resultados, precisamos acreditar em alguma coisa mesmo que seja no absurdo. A vitória é essencial para a classe. Temos a maior bienal do mundo, o maior estádio de futebol do mundo. A realidade que ninguém diz é essa: temos a maior miséria do mundo. Como pode ser grande um povo cujos artistas não tem sequer material para trabalhar?

¹⁴⁷ In the original: Num país que superava o Modernismo e desenvolvia as primeiras experiências abstratas...o que o Salão Preto e Branco poderá ter indicado à experiência construtiva? Há, numa outra dimensão, as superfícies moduladas de Lygia Clark, as xilografias de Lygia Pape, os álbuns de Madri de Ivan Serpa, alguns Metaesquemas de Hélio Oiticica, ou o poema de Ferreira Gullar.

The *Black and White Salon* was in fact a direct consequence of the policies of *developmentalism* that began with Vargas and that continued until the early 1960s. Primarily this took the form of a policy in which importation would be substituted by national manufacturing. The painters were protesting against the quality of the national product and the inaccessibility of the imported one due to tax: an indirect way in which to dissuade consumption.¹⁴⁸

Admittedly the term *Constructive Will*, rather than a wider social political description of the nation, is generally directed at the arts. The origins of the expression *Constructive Will* possibly relate to interpretations of statements such as Michel Seuphor's (founder with Torres Garcia of the Journal *Cercle et Carré*) claim that:

Art will be submitted to our desires [or will] of certainty and precision, to our efforts towards a consciousness of order. As all that comes out of our minds or of our hands, art will be examined: it will first pass through a rigorous control.¹⁴⁹

The *Constructive Will* is specifically seen as a definition of a perceived conceptual unity between the constructive tradition in art and modern Brazilian architecture: a view that was promoted by Pedrosa. Admittedly, Brazilian modern architecture during the 1950s did indeed reach a high level of international recognition.¹⁵⁰

One of Pedrosa's most notorious quotes that 'Brazil is a country condemned to modernity'¹⁵¹, seems to describe a similar condition. For Pedrosa, Brazil could only be a modern nation since, unlike Europe with its millennial past, Brazil was historically very new. Rather than attempting to 'create' a sense of tradition, Pedrosa thus argued that modernity should inevitably be embraced. The affirmation represents a rupture from the *Modernismo* of Tarsila, Oswald and Mário de Andrade where an idealised past - in the form of the Arcadian landscape of Anthropophagy - was manufactured in order to create an art that was identifiably Brazilian. Central to Pedrosa's concept of Brazil as an inevitably modern nation was the notion of an integration of art and architecture: a view that purported a coherence between the aesthetic experience of the constructive avant-garde and its application within architecture.¹⁵² The *Constructive Will* on the other hand, has a more restrictive signification, referring specifically to the historical importance of Constructivism's adoption and development in Brazil (and Latin America) and positing an exaggerated

¹⁴⁸ On the rate of industrial growth and government policies concerning the rapid industrialisation of the nation see: Arraes (1969) pp.60-61.

¹⁴⁹ Seuphor, M. (1971) *Cercle et Carré*. Paris. Quoted in: Brito (1975) p.93.

¹⁵⁰ Such attention could already be noticed during the 1940s. See: Goodwin (1943).

¹⁵¹ Pedrosa (undated) *Reflexões em Torno da Nova Capital*. Reprinted in: Amaral, ed. (1981) p.304.

¹⁵² Pedrosa (1955) *Integration of the Arts. Brazilian American Survey*. Reprinted in: Terra Cabo (1996) p.213.

view that such a tendency was embraced pervasively. Both descriptions however, possess a common positivist stance that was characteristic of the 1950s, particularly from 1956 with the Kubitschek government that drew on a utopian belief that progress would be the inevitable consequence of modernity.

Pedrosa however, cannot be accused of being restrictive in his interests. The poet and critic Ferreira Gullar (1998 p.38) - himself a beneficiary of Pedrosa's art historical and theoretical tutelage - claimed that Pedrosa was interested as much in the developments of the abstract avant-garde, as he was interested in the creations of the 'insane'. Such a statement points to the wide ranging interests and the openness that Pedrosa possessed towards all forms of visual production.¹⁵³ In fact, Pedrosa's project was to relate the diverse trends in Brazil within a wider view of modernism which unavoidably emphasised the centrality of modern architecture. The idea of architecture as representing a synthesis of the arts is pertinent in this sense and provides perhaps the only viable historical continuity for abstraction - through its association with the architectural space - from the period of *Modernismo* to that of the *Constructive Will*.

For Pedrosa the repercussion of the Brazilian modern architecture vernacular was important in terms of the general promotion of modernism from the 1930s onwards, particularly in its association with the visual arts. He mentioned in this respect Alfredo Volpi (1896-1988) and Dacosta as two artists that painted in architectural terms, and the figurative painting of Djanira da Mota e Silva (1914-79) and the monumentality of Lygia Clark as examples of the younger generation's association with the Brazilian modern architectural tradition. As for the concretists, Pedrosa (1959a p.27) rather more apologetically, claimed that:

[Their] grammar and syntax will always serve for something. When the youth will forget about it - and that time will come - their works will be mature, full of life [...] but also bathed in the same Brazilian and international spiritual atmosphere that our architecture created.¹⁵⁴

While for Pedrosa, architecture served as the paradigm from which the arts could be evaluated, the application of the experience of concrete art as well as its place in society as a product of the social environment would be used in order to make quite different arguments.

¹⁵³ See also: Gullar (1987) p.93.

¹⁵⁴ In the original: [...] essa gramática e essa sintaxe concretistas têm servido sempre para alguma coisa. Quando os jovens se esquecerem dela - e esse tempo chegará - suas obras estarão maduras, cheias de vida e de suco, mas banhadas na nossa atmosfera espiritual brasileira e internacional que a nossa arquitetura criou.

According to Pedrosa (Cocchiarale & Geiger, eds., 1987 p.105), it was Romero Brest who in Brazil had first proposed the differentiation between abstraction and concrete art in 1948. Brest had organised six conferences which dealt with contemporaneous tendencies in art at the Museum of Art in São Paulo (MASP).¹⁵⁵ Portinari was said to have found Brest's distinction between concrete art and abstraction comparable to the popular debate between *Fla* and *Flu* (two of Rio's football clubs: Flamengo and Fluminense). The anecdote is demonstrative of Portinari's gradual loss of prestige amongst younger avant-garde circles. Indeed, it is indicative of the sense of renewal that abstraction and particularly concrete art saw itself as being able to provide: a revitalisation of modernism in Brazil which had become stagnated since at least the early 1930s. A situation that was particularly evident in the work of artists such as Portinari who had become so intrinsically associated with state sponsored *Modernismo*. Moreover, it also emphasises the fact that concrete art was being discussed in Brazil at least three years prior to Max Bill's prize at the first Biennial.

It is worth noting that Mário de Andrade had already been critical of *Modernismo* as early as 1942.¹⁵⁶ The conjunction of so many factors (the end of war, the end of the Vargas dictatorship, the inauguration of a variety of great art institutions) significantly contributed towards the impression and indeed the imminence of renewal.¹⁵⁷ However, as will be discussed, the establishment did not abandon the tradition of *Modernismo* as rapidly as it is often claimed.

Following his one-person exhibition in São Paulo and his prize for sculpture at the first São Paulo Biennial, Max Bill himself contributed to the controversies associated with such a local sense of renewal. In 1953, he spoke in Brazil on the occasion of a conference entitled *The Architect, Architecture and Society* at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning of the University of São Paulo. In the conference Bill criticised the widespread inclusion of murals by Portinari in Brazilian modern architecture. The criticism was re-iterated during a visit to Serpa where Bill questioned (Morais, 1994 p.223) in particular the Ministry of Education and Health and Niemeyer's Pampulha, both buildings that display murals by Portinari. [Fig. 21] Lúcio Costa's response to Bill's accusations (Morais, 1994 p.223) was indicative of an awareness of the hybrid condition present in Brazil particularly since *Modernismo*, displaying a strong sense of continuity rather than rupture: a continuity that perhaps was more evident in architecture than in the fine arts:

¹⁵⁵ See also: Amaral, ed. (1998) p.282.

¹⁵⁶ Mário de Andrade's address at the 'celebration' of the 20th anniversary of the Modern Art week is discussed in: Teles (1972) p. 308.

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion on the political complexity of this issue see: Arraes (1969).

Well, the tiled ground floor wall and the fluid sense adopted in the large compositions has the clear function of absorbing the density of the walls in order to eliminate the impression of support, since the superior block is not suspended by the walls but by the columns. Since tiles are a traditional element in Portuguese architecture, which was ours, it seemed fitting to renew its use.¹⁵⁸

Indeed, architecture was perhaps the most explicit example of how the process of renewal occurred gradually. Much of the notion that the constructive tendency replaced the ageing *Modernismo* during the 1950s is due to certain restrictive views of the advent of the first Biennial and particularly the effect that Max Bill had upon that event.

The First São Paulo Biennial and its Mythology

In reality concrete art emerged as an avant-garde, it emerged politically and did not benefit from a broad support in the press nor from the critics. That is, Mário [Pedrosa] had a clear position, some supported it, others did not, [...] Evidently, the prestige of Portinari and Guignard was far greater and the buying public did not change with great ease to other forms of art, [...] ¹⁵⁹

It is generally assumed that Brazilian concrete art emerged as a consequence of the Swiss artist Max Bill, winning the 'first prize' for sculpture at the first São Paulo Biennial in 1951. The assumption implicitly suggests that it was a tendency whose contemporaneous pertinence was assured by means of an official approval by the emerging institution of art in Brazil. Although it would be imprecise to simply reject such a claim - indeed Bill's influence over the constructivist tendency is undeniable - there are other factors that increase the complexity of the circumstances around the first Biennial, the adoption of concrete art by young Brazilian artists and the movement's duration throughout the 1950s. To view simply the constructive tendency as an outside movement that was adopted or followed by the Brazilians would be to ignore some of the interesting particularities of its 'adaptation' within the Brazilian context. Indeed, it ignores the adverse conditions of such adaptation. For a better understanding of the context of concrete art in Brazil during the 1950s it is necessary to understand not only the situation that gave it a seemingly national coherence but to view the post-war 're-emergence' of the constructive tendencies in Europe as also

¹⁵⁸ In the original: Ora, o revestimento de azuleijos no pavimento térreo e o sentido fluido adotado na composição dos grandes painéis têm a função muito clara de amortecer a densidade das paredes a fim de tirar-lhes qualquer impressão de suporte, pois o bloco superior não se apoia nelas, mas nas colunas. Sendo o azulejo um dos elementos tradicionais da arquitetura portuguesa, que era a nossa, pareceu-nos oportuno renovar-lhe aplicação.

¹⁵⁹ In the original: Na verdade a arte concreta surge como uma vanguarda, ela surge politicamente e não encontra apoio pleno nem na imprensa e nem na crítica. Quer dizer, o Mário tem uma posição, alguns apóiam, outros não, entende? Evidentemente que o prestígio de Portinari e Guignard era muito maior e o público comprador não passa com facilidade pra outro tipo de arte, não é isso? (Gullar, 1987 p.90).

offering concrete art favourable 'conditions of existence' which were not entirely different from those in Brazil.¹⁶⁰ This supposition is affirmed by Brito (1975 p.99), who saw the almost simultaneous emergence of geometrical abstraction groups in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as not solely the consequence of exhibitions in Brazil of artists such as Max Bill, Alexander Calder (1898-1976) and Mondrian. Brito's extensive survey of the constructive tendencies in Brazil, acknowledged other precedents¹⁶¹, but fell short of questioning the consensual view of the first Biennial. It is the intention here to argue that central to such an evaluation is the uncovering of certain myths that surround the first *Bienal do Museu de Art Moderna de São Paulo*, as it was then called.

One of the key factors within the consensual narrative of the event is the notion that concrete art appeared during the Biennial as a confrontational force intent on renovating the tradition of Brazilian *Modernismo*.

Such accounts are evident in assertions by critics such as Gullar (1987 p.85) who described the great polemic that emerged at the first Biennial regarding *Modernismo*. Gullar mentioned the controversy that originated from an article written by Pedrosa in which he claimed that Portinari - who had not been included in the exhibition - had not been missed at the Biennial. This caused a scandal that, according to Gullar, was what ultimately led many young artists to disassociate themselves from the legacy of *Modernismo*. The fact that Gullar mentioned Portinari being excluded suggests that a shift from *Modernismo* to Constructivism was already in process. After all, as we have seen, Portinari had been the 'pseudo-official' modernist painter throughout the 1930s. However, the situation in 1951 was not as straight forward as many historians and critics associated with the constructivist tradition have claimed. It is not entirely precise to suggest that Portinari was excluded from the Biennial. The organisation of the exhibition operated on two distinct levels. On the one hand, each national committee would select a number of artists to represent the nation, on the other hand, a jury would select works from an open and international submission, which would run for the prizes. There were therefore two sections one composed of national invitations the other open to international artists which were selected by the jury and ran for the prizes. Portinari was excluded from the international competition, however he was invited by the national section. One did not exclude the other, for instance the pioneering *Modernista* sculptor Victor Brecheret (1894-1955) was included in both sections. Pedrosa's article clearly referred to Portinari not being selected by the jury, but what Gullar did not mention was that the artist was amongst

¹⁶⁰ Stuart Hall defines the 'condition of experience' for cultural production in: Hall (1999) pp.8-23.

those invited to participate in the Brazilian section. Indeed, artists representing Brazil were predominantly from the ranks of *Modernismo*: with 14 paintings by Emiliano Di Cavalcanti (1897-1976), 8 paintings by Portinari, 7 paintings by Segall, 10 sculptures by Brecheret, 7 sculptures by Bruno Giorgi (1905-93), 17 sculptures by Maria Martins (1900-73); 43 prints by Lívio Abramo (1903-92), and 45 prints by Oswald Goeldi (1895-1961).¹⁶²

While the national representation was therefore clearly dedicated to *Modernismo*, the selection of Brazilian work by the jury was undoubtedly more diverse. However, it remained nevertheless predominantly figurative and included other key figures of *Modernismo* such as Tarsila and Malfatti. Moreover, amongst their exhibited paintings were Tarsila's *EFCB* from 1924, a key work of the *Pau-Brasil* period, and Malfatti's *A Boba* which was exhibited in her controversial exhibition of 1917.¹⁶³ [Fig. 6, 3]

Although Max Bill's sculpture *Tripartite Unity* is seen to have influenced an entire generation of artists, it is perhaps worth noting that many amongst those who are said to have been influenced by him, were included in the jury's selection with works (judging by their titles¹⁶⁴) already under the influence of concrete premises. Waldemar Cordeiro, who would later become the spokesman for the São Paulo concretists exhibited two paintings entitled *Movimento* and *Espaço Duplo* (Movement and Double Space); Antonio Maluf (b. 1926) exhibited a painting entitled *Equação dos Desenvolvidos* (Equation of Developments), Mavignier, *Formas n.17* (Forms n.17); Luiz Sacilotto (1924-2003), *Pintura 1* (Painting 1); and Serpa showed 3 paintings all entitled *Formas* (Forms), the latter being awarded a prize by the jury. Although small in numbers the future Brazilian concretists therefore were already present within the selected section of the Biennial, other artists that showed abstract tendencies to a greater or lesser extent, included: Iberê Camargo, Milton Dacosta and Alfredo Volpi.¹⁶⁵

Perhaps the greatest myth surrounding that first Biennial was the nature and the extent of the allocated jury prizes. Although Max Bill is widely known to have received the first prize for sculpture [Fig. 27], such an assertion is not entirely correct. The system of prizes operated on a sponsorship basis, each sponsor allocating an individual prize. There is no reference in the catalogue to a distinction between the prizes other than their value: such as a first prize, second prize, etc.. However, the

¹⁶¹ These precedents have been discussed in Chapter 6.

¹⁶² See: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951).

¹⁶³ A list of participating artists in the jury's selection can be found in the catalogue: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951) pp. 172-200.

¹⁶⁴ The exhibition catalogue does not provide images of these.

¹⁶⁵ See: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951).

value of the prizes differed so that a certain hierarchy was inevitably associated with them. Nevertheless one cannot say that Max Bill received the first prize for sculpture since another prize, also for sculpture and of the same amount was awarded by another sponsor to the Brazilian sculptor, inescapably associated with *Modernismo*, Brecheret. Both Brecheret and Bill received prizes worth of Cr\$ 100,000.00. In painting, Serpa's prize for instance was of Cr\$ 10,000.00, while Tarsila received Cr\$ 50,000.00 for *EFCB* and Roger Chastel (1897-1981) and Damilo di Prete, both from France, received the highest prizes for the painting category, Cr\$ 100,000.00.

From the allocation of the prizes we can conclude that rather than an institutional seal of approval to the concrete avant-garde, the Biennial served to maintain the prestige of both Brazilian *Modernismo* and Paris as world centre for cultural production.

Another aspect of the event that is not clear in the Brazilian art historical narratives is the distinction between the Swiss section and Max Bill's participation in the open competition. Only prints and paintings by Bill were included in the Swiss national section which other than concrete art included a wide range of styles and tendencies. In the introductory essay to the Swiss section, the section's curator Heins Keller (1951 p.122) seemed somewhat apologetic in that he was not able to include distinguished artists associated with his country such as, Paul Klee (1879-1940), Le Corbusier (who was included in the open architecture section winning the highest prize) and Alberto Giacometti (1901-66).

Above all the Swiss section does not provide an extensive view of the extent to which non-figurative art has reached in our country. Our effort in selecting the works of art has tended essentially to show which are characteristics tendencies in Switzerland in such a domain, and who are the most striking personalities.¹⁶⁶

Of particular interest for this study is Keller's (1951 pp.122-3) analysis of Swiss concrete art as a direct descendent of Dada, through figures such as Sophie Taeuber-Arp (1889-1943). In fact, the introductory essay reads almost as a posthumous homage to her influence over the contemporaneous activities of artists such as Max Bill:

Sophie Taeuber [...] is amongst those modernists of the first hour, together with Hans Arp, her husband, and Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara and other artists and poets who gravitated around the 'Cabaret Voltaire': she was, in 1916, in Zurich, one of the founders of Dadaism. Yes, while the main tendency of Dadaism would arrive at surrealism, the art of Sophie Taeuber continued developing in its consequences

¹⁶⁶ In the original: Sobretudo a seção Suíça não dá uma idéia da extensão que o movimento da arte não-figurativa alcançou em nosso país. Nosso esforço, ao proceder à escolha das obras, tendeu essencialmente a mostrar quais são, atualmente, na Suíça, neste domínio, as tendências características e as personalidades mais marcantes.

towards the direction of concrete art, reaching finally, on the plane of severity, objectives close to those associated with Neoplasticism. [...]

It seems that this tendency towards construction and geometrical art is particularly adequate to the temperament of those from Zurich. Since today in this city there exists [...] one of the most active combat groups of absolute painting and sculpture. Max Bill (born in 1908) is of course 20 years younger than Sophie Taeuber: however, the path of this artist, who from 1927 to 1929 was a student at the 'Bauhaus'¹⁶⁷, took him towards such a resolution of the new art, that he has already integrated himself within the international avant-garde whose cause he fights inexhaustibly as a painter, printer, architect, industrial designer and publicist. Equally belonging to the 'Alliance' group Leo Leuppi (born in Zurich in 1893), and Richard Paul Lohse (born in 1902 in Zurich) who as painter and printer respectively are partisans of concrete art, Lohse in the sense of a rigorous counteraction of forms, Leuppi more in the sense of melody and harmony.¹⁶⁸

Keller's introduction other than establishing a linearity between Dada and concrete art, defined the *Allianz* group as new. It is perhaps the presentation of Bill as an enthusiastic promoter of these new ideas, and the fact that rather than overwhelming the Biennial they actually represented a relatively small group, even within the Swiss section itself, that probably appealed to Brazilian artists. For once they had a chance to be a part of a movement in the process of formation rather than condemned to follow already well established tendencies: thus explaining the overwhelming sense of emancipation that Concretism offered young Brazilian artists. The emphasis on Tauber-Arp's trajectory from Dada to geometrical abstraction is also worth emphasising. As discussed later in the study, Dada re-emerged as a central characteristic amongst the work of artists such as Oiticica, who had previously been engaged with concrete art or more generally geometrical abstraction.

Another interesting fact not often mentioned was that the Uruguayan section which although not having presented an introductory essay in the catalogue, did include

¹⁶⁷ Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951). In the catalogue: 'Bill was a student of Bauhaus'. (My emphasis).

¹⁶⁸ In the original: Sophie Taeuber (nascida em 1889, em Davos, e morta em Zurich em 1943) está entre aqueles modernos da primeira hora, com Hans Arp, seu marido, com Hugo Ball, Tristan Tsara e outros artistas e poetas que gravitaram em volta do 'Cabaret Voltaire': ela foi em 1916, na cidade de Zurich, uma das criadoras do dadaísmo. Mas, enquanto a corrente principal do dadaísmo deveria chegar ao surrealismo, a arte de Sophie Taeuber continuou desenvolvendo-se de uma maneira conseqüente em direção da arte concreta, para atingir, finalmente, sobre o plano da severidade, objetivos próximos daqueles dos adeptos do neoplasticismo. [...]

Parece que essa tendência à construção e arte geométrica é particularmente adequada ao temperamento dos de Zurich. Porque existe, hoje nesta cidade - que Sophie Taeuber deixou em 1926 - um dos grupos de combate mais ativos da pintura e da escultura absolutas. Max Bill (nascido em 1908) é sem dúvida 20 anos mais jovem que Sophie Taeuber: entretanto, o caminho desse artista, que foi de 1927 a 1929 aluno de 'Bauhaus', o conduz com uma tal resolução à arte nova, que ele já se integrou na vanguarda internacional por cuja causa luta infatigavelmente como escultor, pintor, gravador, arquiteto, desenhista industrial e publicista. Pertencem, igualmente ao grupo da 'Alliance' Leo Leuppi (nascido em Zurich no ano de 1893), e Richard Paul Lohse (nascido em 1902 em Zurich) os quais, um pintor e outro gravador, são partidários da arte concreta, Lohse no sentido de um rigoroso contraponto das formas, Leuppi mais no da melodia e da harmonia.

work by the pioneer of Constructivism, Torres Garcia.¹⁶⁹ The list of his works in the catalogue included two of his paintings entitled *Construção* (Construction), and another *Pintura Construtiva* (Constructive Painting).¹⁷⁰ Torres Garcia is surprisingly absent from most of the accounts of the Constructive tradition in Brazil, demonstrating perhaps a chauvinist attitude regarding the debt owed to other Latin American countries.

Finally, the First Biennial of the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo set out to place São Paulo within the international art circuit and by doing so, create an opportunity for a vastly increased proximity between the national cultural production and the renowned centres of art, amongst which Paris was still clearly recognised as the most prestigious.

Lourival Gomes Machado (1951 p.14), the event's Artistic Director, clearly stated in his introduction to the catalogue, the aims of the Biennial:

In his own definition, the Biennial should fulfil two main tasks: to place modern art in Brazil, not only in simple confrontation, but in live contact with the art of the rest of the world, while São Paulo would attempt to conquer a central position within the artistic world. The reference to Venice was inevitable. [...]¹⁷¹

It was this determination for achieving a status equivalent to those in the international cultural centres that ultimately led Brazilian artists associated with the constructivist tradition to see their creative experience in the same light as their European contemporaries. Rather than a resuscitation of a pioneering modern movement, Max Bill's missionary zeal in disseminating the tenets of concrete art emphasised the contemporaneity of the tendency. Moreover, although the Biennial in purely quantitative terms still showed a propensity for figurative art or *abstracting* figuration - of a type that would establish an association between the *École de Paris* and Brazilian *Modernismo* - a combination of factors led it to be historically associated with the emergence of the constructive tradition. Max Bill's prize has been recorded at the expense of Brecheret's, undoubtedly due to the subsequent emergence of the *Paulista* and *Carioca* concrete avant-gardes. Admittedly, the diversity of fields which concrete art would claim as its own was somewhat if unwittingly coherent with the rhetoric of the Biennial itself which argued that it did not distinguish between the different fields of fine arts and applied arts. Prizes were established for architecture, musical composition, cinema and ceramics. The organisers (Machado, L. G., 1951

¹⁶⁹ See: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951) pp. 128-130.

¹⁷⁰ See: Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1951).

¹⁷¹ In the original: Por sua própria definição, a Bienal deveria cumprir duas tarefas principais: colocar a arte moderna do Brasil, não em simples confronto, mas em vivo contato com a arte

pp.21-2) claimed that such a decision was based on the acknowledgement of a non-hierarchical attitude:

The competition for musical composition and the ceramics competition consciously and voluntarily restricted to a national scope, are the first indications that in the Biennial there are no dominant limits or distinctions between the arts, and, worst still, between the 'major' and 'minor' arts.¹⁷²

In short, for those who wished to believe it, the evidence was that art could finally affect all fields of cultural production and ultimately industry and therefore by extension society itself.

The second Biennial proved that the references had not changed as a consequence of the first. In the 1953 Biennial the emphasis was quite different yet the *École de Paris* still remained central to the exhibition. The second Biennial was certainly more impressive than the first, since its emphasis was far more historical. In addition to the national representations and the open competition, thematic displays were organised. Interestingly, these were all dedicated to European nations with the exception of Brazil which had an exhibition of Brazilian landscape art until 1900 which included around 90 paintings. Britain organised a Salon dedicated to much of the production of Henry Moore (1898-1986). In the British section of the catalogue, Herbert Read (1951 pp.182-3), echoing the position of Brazilian artists and critics, affirmed:

One will notice the influences from the school of Paris, but each artist contributes with something strongly individual. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that something could rise that could be considered characteristically British - the modern movement can hardly be encompassed within the artificial limits of nationality: it is a universal phenomenon, but universal in its individualism. The individuals learn from each other, but they learn how to better express their own vision of reality.¹⁷³

The perceived supremacy of France as the artistic international centre could be seen by the prominence of its section. This included a special Salon displaying a retrospective of Cubism which contained 57 paintings of prominent artists including: Georges Braque (1882-1963); Delaunay; Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968); Gleizes;

do resto do mundo, ao mesmo tempo que para São Paulo se buscava conquistar a posição de centro artístico mundial. Era inevitável a referência à Veneza [...].

¹⁷² In the original: O concurso de composição musical e o concurso de cerâmica que voluntária e conscientemente se restringiram ao âmbito nacional, são as primeiras indicações de que não dominam na Bienal limites ou distinções silibinas entre as artes e, o que seria pior, entre artes 'maiores' e 'menores'.

¹⁷³ In the original: Nota-se-ão influencias da Escola de Paris, mas cada um contribui com algo fortemente individual. Contudo, é duvidoso que surja alguma coisa que possa ser considerada caracteristicamente Britânica - o movimento moderno difficilmente pode ser enquadrado nos limites artificiais da nacionalidade: é um fenomeno universal, mas universal no seu individualismo. Os individuos aprendem uns com os outros, mas aprendem como expressar melhor sua propria visão da realidade.

Juan Gris (1887-1927); Herbin; Roger de la Fresnaye (1885-1925); Marie Laurencin (1885-1956); Léger; Lhote; Marcousis; Metzinger; Francis Picabia (1879-1953); Picasso, Sonia Delaunay, Jacques Villon (1875-1963). It also had galleries for individual artists such as: Henri Laurens (1885-1954); Henri-George Adam; Germaine Richier (1902-59); in addition to a general room predominantly composed of work by the young school of Paris. Pablo Picasso, in addition to the Cubist retrospective received a special individual display which contained 51 works, amongst them *Guernica*.¹⁷⁴

Although the Brazilian general section included a number of artists associated with the constructive tradition from both São Paulo and Rio - Aluísio Carvão (1920-2001), Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape (b. 1929), Waldemar Cordeiro, Abraham Palatnik, Luiz Sacilotto, Anatol Wadyslaw (b. 1913), Ivan Serpa, Décio Vieira (b. 1922), Sérgio Camargo, Lothar Charoux (1912-87) - the international Constructive tendency was hardly noticeable. Switzerland dedicated a room for Ferdinand Hodler (1853-1918), who in the catalogue essay by Heins Keller, was comparable to Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), Van Gogh (1853-90) and Edward Munch (1863-1944).¹⁷⁵ Moreover, although his students were included in the Uruguay section, Torres Garcia himself was not amongst those exhibited.

It is possible to conclude therefore that the Biennial although offering a proximity to the international artistic milieu cannot be considered as having provided an institutional approval for the constructive tendency in Brazil. Moreover, it is to the credit of the concrete and later neoconcrete artists and its critics that they stood by their convictions despite the constantly changing emphasis of the Biennial. In fact, such a uncompromising stance would be characteristic of the movement throughout the decade, particularly with respect to the increasing public disagreements between the *Paulistas* and the *Cariocas*.

It is impossible, however, to posit the emergence of the constructivist oriented movements as a united front, as suggested by such terminology as 'Constructive Project' or 'Will'. The most blatant differentiation was, of course, between the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro groups: a distinction that is present to this day and was expressed equally in artists' interviews and historical narratives. However, to view Brazilian Constructivism purely within the scope of the dichotomy of *Paulistas* versus *Cariocas*, would also be restrictive. The critic Mário Schemberg (1988) was critical of the survey *Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro* for precisely this reason. Although acknowledging the historical importance of such movements within Brazilian cultural

¹⁷⁴ Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1953).

¹⁷⁵ Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (1953) p.294.

history, Schenberg argued that the 1977 exhibition's choice of works and texts did not lead towards a correct understanding of the dialectics of Brazilian Constructivism which go beyond the two factions. Schenberg argued that some of the most notable contributions to the art of the period were not included in the survey. Perhaps the most outstanding example being Mira Schendel. Schenberg highlighted her case as exceptional since, although Concretism and Neoconcretism assimilated the experimentation of early European avant-garde movements, they ignored the metaphysical character contained in the art of otherwise highly quoted and referred artists such as Mondrian and Malevitch. Schendel (Schenberg, 1988), through the existentialism of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, in addition to her later references to oriental thought, stands as the exception. Schenberg's cautious remarks are necessarily stated here in view of the extensive discussion which this section gives to both movements. Such attention is necessary nevertheless in view of the importance that the polemics between concrete and neoconcrete factions represented during the formative years of Oiticica's career as an artist: a neoconcrete artist.

Chapter 8

Concretismo and Neoconcretismo

With hindsight [...] the inherited classification of modern movements, usually based on the positions of warring factions and *isms*, comes to seem increasingly wobbly and rudimentary. (Brett, 2000a)

The consensual notion that concrete art in Brazil, emerged amongst an atmosphere of rebellion against the tenets of *Modernismo* is seemingly coherent with the rhetoric of its manifesto. The São Paulo concrete art group, formed shortly after the 1951 Biennial, published its manifesto based on the premises of renewal: its title, *Ruptura* (Rupture) reflected such a state of consciousness. [Fig. 32] The manifesto (1952) - signed by Lothar Charoux, Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros (1923-98), Kazmer Fejer (b. 1922), Leopold Haar (date of birth unknown -1954), Luis Sacilotto, Anatol Wladyslaw - was unambivalent, claiming that 'there is no continuity' distinguishing what was old:

All the hybrid varieties of naturalism;
the mere negotiation of naturalism, that is the wrong naturalism of children, of the insane, of the primitives, of the expressionists, of the surrealists, etc...;
the non-figurative hedonism, product of gratuitous taste, which searches for the mere excitement of pleasure or displeasure.

from the new:

The expression based on the new artistic principles;
all experience that tends to renew the essential values of the visual arts (space-time, movement and matter);
the artistic intuition pertaining to clear and intelligent principles and great possibilities of practical development;
posit art within a well-defined place in the sphere of contemporary spiritual work, considering it a means of knowledge reducible to concepts, placing it above opinion, demanding prior knowledge for its judgement.

The *Ruptura* manifesto clearly intended to go beyond the local context of disassociation from *Modernismo*. It invoked the rhetoric of previous constructivist orientated manifestations, namely those associated with de Stijl, and particularly de Stijl *Manifesto I*.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, it certainly placed itself (Brito, 1988 p.7) firmly within the presuppositions established by Max Bill and the Superior School of Form in Ulm.

Like the gradual dissemination of concrete art in Europe, in Brazil rather than the São Paulo Biennial establishing a generalised approval of abstraction, it relied on a

¹⁷⁶ 'There is an old and a new consciousness of time. The old is connected to the individual. The new is connected to the universal.' Doesburg (1922). *De Stijl V*, Amsterdam. Translation by Nicholas Bullock, in: Bann, S., ed., (1974). *The Tradition of Constructivism*. London. Reprinted in: Harrison & Wood (1992) p.278.

number of smaller - yet important - events which served to maintain the impetus of the movement. These exhibitions were not always solely concerned with concrete art but often covered the scope of a more generalised view of abstraction. In 1952, the year the São Paulo based *Ruptura* Group exhibited for the first time and published its manifesto (Amaral, A., ed., 1977 p.21) Sansom Flexor had initiated the Abstraction studio in São Paulo. Other contemporaneous events included the gathering of poets such as Haroldo de Campos, Augusto de Campos (b. 1931) and Décio Pignatari, who would become central figures within the international development of concrete poetry.¹⁷⁷ They published (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.21) in 1952 the first edition of the *Noigandres* journal in São Paulo. In Rio de Janeiro that year, *Grupo Frente* a more diverse gathering yet which contained a majority of artists with varying levels of affiliations to concrete art, was formed.

Although the second Biennial (1953) did not demonstrate any explicit inclination towards concrete art, in 1953 the first National Exhibition of Abstract Art took place in Petrópolis in the state of Rio de Janeiro. That same year, the *Frente* Group (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.21) exhibited for the first time at the Brazil-United States Institute (IBEU) in Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, an exhibition of concrete art from Argentina with conferences led by Romero Brest (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.23), took place at MAM in Rio de Janeiro in 1953, as well as Max Bill's conference on architecture: entitled *The Architect, Architecture and Society*, at MAM in Rio and at the Faculty of Architecture and Urban Planning (FAU) at the University of São Paulo (USP).

The divergence of the two constructive avant-gardes in Brazil - *Ruptura* and *Grupo Frente* - was a gradual process which developed from certain distinguishing factors present at the groups' respective inceptions: namely a rigid set of parameters expressed from the outset in the *Ruptura* manifesto compared to the loose gathering of artists around a common front, with *Frente*. The broadness of the abstract tendencies during the first half of the decade meant that allegiances rather than differences were sought.

The critic Ronaldo Brito (1975 p.100) summarised *Concretismo* in São Paulo as follows:

The specificity of art as an information process, it is irreducible to ideological content and the objectivity in its manner of production make up the basic formulation of Brazilian plastic Concretism.

¹⁷⁷ For a concise view of the development of concrete poetry and the international impact that the *Paulista* circle had concerning its dissemination, see: Encrevè (2000) pp.65-75.

Brito saw the concrete avant-garde as following the postulates set out by Max Bill. These represented the last constructivist manifestation, what Brito (1975) called its adulthood, positing Bill's formulations as representative of 'an ending and synthesis' of the ideas that had surrounded the constructive tradition. Brito further emphasised the restricted meaning that concrete art had held in van Doesburg's definition, as a differentiation from its partisan nature during the post-war period.

With regards to the Rio de Janeiro group, there is a surprising imprecision in Brito's discussion of Pedrosa's 1955 essay for the Second *Grupo Frente* exhibition. Brito (1975 p.92) claimed that Pedrosa 'did not mention Concretism and not even the constructive tendencies' in the catalogue essay. This however is incorrect, Concretism was mentioned - admittedly *en passant* - as one of the *isms* which according to Pedrosa the *Frente* group questioned due to the distinctive approaches of its members.¹⁷⁸ Nevertheless, this imprecision does not affect the pertinence of Brito's argument which refers to the impossible task of associating a group such as *Frente* to the constructivist tendency when it contained such diverse production to the extent that it included the 'primitive' or naïf painter Elisa Martins Silveira (1912-2001). According to Brito (1975 p.92), such diversity was symptomatic of an 'extremely dispersive environment, unprepared to embrace the work of art as a specific study'. The aim rather than a program of action, was one of reaction against the association of Brazilian art with 'ideological propaganda.' Brito (1975) mentioned in this respect the legacy of *Modernismo*, namely the figures of Portinari, Segall, Di Cavalcanti and José Pancetti (1902-58). Adding that Portinari's 'reading' of Picasso was simple and anecdotic. [Fig. 33, 34]

Theorising about the effects of Concretism and Neoconcretism in Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s is a task that can only be done partially and insufficiently. In this case, the decisive question is the elaboration of a historical study about the constructivist ideology's penetration and influence in the country from the 1930s with the formation of Brazilian modern architecture up to the neoconcrete outburst in the 1960s. This type of study offers a substantial amount of information for analysis of the specific emergence that occurred within the setting in question. It also clearly determines the effects of these emergences in the Brazilian cultural environment and discovers the socio-economic links that motivated this penetration. (Brito, 1975 p.99)

Beyond the context of the *developmentalist* ideology prevalent during the 1950s, it is difficult to imagine a constructive project - as it has been described following the first major re-evaluative exhibition in 1977 (Amaral, ed., 1977) - amongst the diversity of events regarding abstraction during the early 1950s. The notion of a project - that is,

¹⁷⁸ This imprecision is surprising since Brito's study remains one of the most comprehensive essays to deal with the advent of the neoconcrete movement in Rio de Janeiro.

a programme for aesthetic development - can perhaps be ascribed nevertheless, to what gradually developed in various texts by Cordeiro and Pignatari in the *Arquitetura e Decoração* (Architecture and Decoration) journal in São Paulo. Contrary to Europe, concrete art in Brazil was adopted as the avant-garde project *per se*, becoming as Brito (1975) has argued:

a symptom of a rationalist, objectivist work, favoured mathematical procedures and positive integration into society. It took a stand so that the artist - transformed into a type of superior designer, a researcher of forms for industrial use - could participate in various sectors of urban life in a complex industrial society. The Superior School of Form in Ulm, is, in many ways, the continuation of the Bauhaus, adapted to the historical circumstances of the 1950s.

While the title of 'Project' may be attributed to the activities of the concrete artists and poets in São Paulo, it was precisely the reaction to such a notion, which led to the eventual explosion of Constructivism in Brazil. It was in the domain of poetry where the polemic that initiated the process of disagreements between the *Paulista* and *Carioca* concretist/constructivist groups emerged. This was the consequence of the *Noigandres* publication and particularly its 4th Volume in 1958 which included the *Plano Piloto da Poesia Concreta* (Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry) by Pignatari, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos.

Gullar, through his friendship with Pedrosa and his increasing prominence as an avant-garde poet, progressively established himself as the spokesperson for the concrete art group in Rio de Janeiro. His reputation as a radical poet was established following the publication of his second book of poems *A Luta Corporal* (The Bodily Fight). The main characteristic of which was the destruction of language itself into phonetic sounds. In answering the question, 'when, in Concretism, did the insertion of other sectors such as poetry occur?' Gullar (1987 p.92) made a distinction between what occurred in São Paulo and in Rio de Janeiro. He argued that in the former, it happened around 1955 but in Rio it was later. Gullar claimed that he had been always interested in the visual arts, having even contemplated becoming a painter before actually becoming a poet. Therefore when he arrived in Rio it was Pedrosa with whom he became acquainted rather than someone from the field of literature. Those involved in literature he came across via Pedrosa. Gullar (1987 p.92) did not initially relate his activity as an art critic with his poetry:

[...] I became engaged with Concretism as an art critic, yet my poetry at that time, *A Luta Corporal*, which I consider to have ended around 1953 and published in 1954

contrary to abstract art it is something existential, passionate [...] So it was something far closer to what Tashism would have been, is it not?¹⁷⁹

For the São Paulo Concretists *A Luta Corporal* represented a destructive approach, compared to the constructive - or positivist - character of concrete poetry. However, Gullar stated that his dialogue with the *Paulista* concrete group began precisely due to the interest the *Paulistas* expressed in *A Luta Corporal*. They saw Gullar's (1998) position as representing a rupture from what had occurred prior to Concretism, yet admitted that his 'economical' approach to language had much in common with concrete ideals.

When Gullar moved to Rio in 1951-2, there were, as we have seen, already some abstract geometrical experimentation, namely through the work of Serpa and Mavignier. There was also the work of Mary Viera who although unknown to Gullar, had been working with abstract sculpture since 1946-7. Gullar (1987 p.86) met her in 1951 through the painter Milton Dacosta shortly before she moved to Switzerland. However, Gullar's contact with the group in São Paulo occurred around the time of the second *Frente* exhibition in 1955, when he (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.23) established a working relation with the concrete poet Augusto de Campos. Moreover, *A Luta Corporal* also attracted the attention (Gullar, 1998b p.38) of Oswald de Andrade, who read its manuscript through Gullar's friend Oliveira Bastos. Oswald de Andrade was enthusiastic about the publication by the young poet (Gullar was 23 at the time) and promised to review it in the *Jornal da Manhã* in addition to including it as his final lecture in a literary course he was going to give in Rome. Oswald de Andrade, however, died some months prior to its publication in 1954.

Although Oswald had been one of *Modernismo*'s central figures, both the São Paulo concrete poets and Gullar shared an admiration for his writing. This is perhaps symptomatic of the predominance of the literary field over that of the fine arts, since while it was possible for concrete poets to see precedents in *Modernismo* within their field, the hostility of concrete painters towards *Modernismo* remained unanimous.

In 1956 the idea of a national concrete art movement became a viable thought. Rio's *Frente* Group exhibited at the Itatiaia Country Club, and that same year, the First National Exhibition of Concrete Art took place at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, and later travelled to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro in 1957. With the first National Exhibition of Concrete Art, it became evident however, that profound distinctions between the artists' approaches were present. These were

¹⁷⁹ In the original: [...] eu me engajo no movimento concreto como crítico desde que chego ao Rio em 1952, mas minha poesia na época, *A Luta Corporal*, que dou por terminada em 53 e publico em 54 é, ao contrário da arte geometrica, uma coisa existencial, passional, [...] Então uma coisa muito mais perto, vamos dizer, do que devia ser o Tashismo, não é isso?

characterised - with few exceptions - by a division between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition was followed (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.23) by a conference in which the respective positions were fiercely held, speakers included: Pedrosa, Pignatari, Cordeiro, Bastos, Volpi, Alexandre Wollner (b. 1928) and Gullar.

A similar debate (Gullar, 1958a,b) occurred following an exhibition of works by Clark, Franz Weissmann (1914) and Charoux at the *Galeria das Folhas* in São Paulo in 1958, which gathered concrete artists, poets and critics from São Paulo and Rio.¹⁸⁰ It included: Spanudis, Schemberg, Clark, Charoux, Pignatari, Cordeiro and Gullar himself who spoke on behalf of Weissmann. In Gullar's account, three distinct positions emerged during the debate, concerning the nature of concrete art. These were held by (1) Cordeiro, Pignatari, Haroldo and Augusto de Campos; (2) Spanudis, Clark and Gullar; and (3) Schemberg. Already the positions that would, the following year, characterise the concrete/neoconcrete divergence were present. The first group according to Gullar held the principles of rationalism and mathematics as main characteristics of their art. The second group although adhering to geometrical principles rejected the over-emphasis on rationalism. Clark expressed that her reliance on intuition did not restrict her capacity to objectify the result of a piece before proceeding to her next work. Schemberg, acknowledged Clark's intuitive process (Gullar, 1958a) as valid yet in his evaluation of the necessity for mathematical principles emphasised the scientific at the expense of the aesthetic as a key factor in concrete art.

In fact, these positions had been expressed following the first National Concrete Art Exhibition, fuelling the increasing disagreement between the groups. Central to the arguments that emerged from such a proximity was the idea of expression - or intuition in Clark's words - within the geometrical language. For the São Paulo group the necessary objectivity of the concrete work of art could not admit any form of intuition. [Fig. 35, 36, 37]

Cordeiro (1956) published a manifesto entitled *O Objeto* (The Object) where he purported the centrality of the object within the concrete avant-garde. The notion of art and its primary characteristic as an object would develop into a central issue within the discussions and eventual disagreements of the São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro groups. In the text Cordeiro (1956 p.74) emphasised the materiality of the work of art, as determining its status in the world:

¹⁸⁰ No record of the debate that followed the 1st National Concrete Art Exhibition is - as far as the author is aware - available. This is probably due to the fact that Ferreira Gullar only joined the *Jornal do Brasil* as an art critic in 1957. It was Gullar after all, who reported the 1958 'Folhas' debate in addition to representing Weissmann (who could not attend the event) during the debate itself.

[...] There is no expression of an object but an object of an expression. Art differs from pure thought because it is material and from the ordinary things because it is thought. Art is not an expression of intellectual, ideological or religious thought. Moreover, art is not an expression it is a product.¹⁸¹

The centrality of the *object* within the concrete discourse of the *Paulistas* was reiterated in another text by Pignatari (1956), entitled *Arte Concreta: Objeto e Objetivo* (Concret Art: Object and Objective). In the text Pignatari outlined some of the central characteristics of Concretism as: the engagement with the problem of movement; of dynamic structures; and of qualitative mechanics. Further emphasising:

And don't be surprised if we speak here of mechanics: Norbert Wiener (Cybernetics: the Human use of Human Beings) has already warned us of the equivocation and the useless individualistic nostalgia of treating mechanics pejoratively.¹⁸²

The associations with science served the purpose of affirming the non-subjective character of concrete art, and its reliance on rational principles. According to Cordeiro (1956), subjectivity in art served to alienate the public at large. Only through an objective process whereby a symbiosis between social groups occurs, does art rid itself of its intellectual connotations and its subjectivity to become inserted within ordinary life. The political implications of such an ideal and their distinction from the politics of the Rio group will be discussed shortly.

In an article following the first neoconcrete exhibition and manifesto, Gullar distinguished the Rio group as having had, since its initial gathering, an intuitive approach while the *Paulistas* followed a dogmatic approach that led to a systemisation of the process and expressive values. Amílcar de Castro (b. 1920) has recalled that already at the time of Max Bill's conference on architecture¹⁸³ at FAU at USP, there was a reaction towards the orthodox nature of Bill's approach.¹⁸⁴ Castro mentioned that it was through a common reaction to Bill's conference that he was brought into contact with Gullar. Their mutual criticism was directed towards Bill's mathematical impersonality particularly in his *Tripartite Unity*. 'we reacted immediately since we believed that without man's participation art cannot exist, it is

¹⁸¹ In the original: Não há a expressão de um objeto, mas o objeto de uma expressão. A arte se diferencia do pensamento puro por que é material, e das coisas ordinárias por que é pensamento. A arte não é expressão do pensamento intelectual, ideológico ou religioso. A arte não é igualmente, expressão mas produto.

¹⁸² In the original: E não se estranhe falar aqui de 'mecânica': já Norbert Wiener (Cybernetics: The Human Use of Human Beings) nos adverte do equívoco e do inútil saudosismo individualista de tratar pejorativamente tudo o que é mecânico.

¹⁸³ Castro, A., (1983). *O Globo*, 21 July. Cited in: Moraes (1994) p.223.

¹⁸⁴ Bill's criticism of Brazilian architecture and particularly of Portinari's murals, has already been discussed in this study: see Chapter 7.

inconceivable.¹⁸⁵ Although the actual split between the two factions occurred in 1959, Gullar (1959b) argued that a distinction existed as early as the 1956-7 joint concrete art exhibition. Gullar was particularly critical of Cordeiro's analysis where the latter claimed (Cordeiro, 1956 pp.74-5) that as far as Concretism is concerned, art is a product of its time, and as such it possesses a historical value within the social life of mankind. Therefore, art could not be expression but rather the fruit of an inevitable coincidence between individual and social mechanisms.

Gullar argued that such a mechanistic view of society as well as of man allowed Cordeiro 'to assume that art, accomplished without any subjective participation, would encounter *a posteriori* its expression.' Gullar (1959b) further criticised Cordeiro's emphasis on the 'product' based on the construction of a geometrical 'idea'. Within this 'objective' structure the role of colour was secondary, it existed only as a means to indicate form. Gullar related this attitude towards colour as an attempt to avoid any contamination at a level of 'vivência' (lived experience), whether subjective or individualistic, accusing Cordeiro of proposing a 'purely mental/cerebral art.' Claiming to be aware that Cordeiro would reject such accusations, Gullar (1959b) saw no option other than to assume that Concretism aspires 'to construct structures which explore the geometrical possibilities of our eyes. [...] They admit viewing man as a mechanism, empty of any transcendental signification, who finds meaning only outside of himself, in the social environment of his time.'¹⁸⁶ Neoconcretism, Gullar (1959b) argued, attempted to return to an intuitive expression on the part of the artist: 'The neoconcretes reaffirm the creative possibilities of the artist independent from science and ideologies.'¹⁸⁷

In relation to the local characteristic of the Brazilian concretist movement Ferreira Gullar (1987 p.94) was quite pragmatic:

Amilcar de Castro, with all his rigor, attempting to create constructive sculpture needed a workshop, but which workshop in Brazil could make a Tripartite Unity? There were no technical resources to create such work, that was as it were, the expression of the whole cultural structure. So sculpture, the sculptural domain, that involved these questions had to be adapted to these real conditions, without compromising what had been learnt as the essential concrete experience. He [Castro] created his sculpture and it is precisely due to this that it is original, from, on

¹⁸⁵ Castro, A., (1983). *O Globo*, 21 July. Cited in: Moraes (1994) p.223.

¹⁸⁶ In the original: Poder-se-ia afirmar então que se trata de uma arte puramente mental. Mas Cordeiro refuta essa alternativa. Não há outra saída, portanto, senão a de admitir que esses artistas pretendem construir estruturas que exploram as 'possibilidades geométricas do nosso olho' [...] Admitem ver o homem como um mecanismo, vazio de qualquer significação transcendente, que encontra sentido apenas fora de si, no meio social, na época.

¹⁸⁷ In the original: Os neoconcretos reafirmam as possibilidades criadoras do artista independente da ciência e das ideologias.

the one hand, his own personality and on the other, from the objective conditions imposed by the environment.¹⁸⁸

The divergence between the two groups became explicit in 1957, when Gullar disassociated himself entirely from the São Paulo concrete poets. Moreover, with Gullar's position as art critic and Amílcar de Castro and Reynaldo Jardim becoming involved in the graphic design (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.23) for the *Jornal do Brasil* the ingredients for establishing a separate constructive voice in the Brazilian artistic circles became a palpable reality. In fact, the rupture was very much the result of a difference of opinion between Gullar and the São Paulo group. Jardim (2000) was correct in affirming that the neoconcrete movement was the direct result of the existence of the weekend supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*. However, it was also the result of Gullar's role as art critic within its pages. His personal disagreements with the *Paulistas* which originated in the field of poetry led him to gather a group of artists - many of whom had been previously associated with the *Frente* Group - and forge the distinguishing term Neoconcretism.

Objectivity Versus Intuition

With the *Paulista* concrete poets' publication of the Pilot Plan for concrete poetry, in the 4th Noigandres Journal (Amaral, ed., 1977 p.25), Gullar was ready to make full use of the newly established influence in the press, making public his opinions and disagreements with the *Paulistas*. Gullar was asked by the São Paulo poets to publish a text entitled *Da Psicologia da Composição à Matemática da Composição* (From the Psychology of Composition to the Mathematics of Composition) in the weekend supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*. Although invited to include his name amongst the signatories, Gullar (1998 p.35), who could not accept the premises of mathematics as an *a priori* formula for poetry, wrote instead another article which was published next to the *Paulista* text, entitled *Poesia Concreta: Experiência Fenomenológica* (Concrete Poetry: Phenomenological Experience). Gullar (1987 pp.92-3) later commented on the decision:

The São Paulo group, Haroldo, Augusto, etc., considered that in order for the poem to be valid it had to have at its core a pre-established mathematical structure. All that would arise from the quotidian language was romanticism, passadism, did not

¹⁸⁸ In the original: O Amílcar de Castro, rigoroso, buscando fazer uma escultura construtiva, precisava de uma oficina, mas qual oficina no Brasil que iria fazer a *Unidade Tripartida*? Não havia recursos técnicos pra fazê-la, isso como expressão de toda uma estrutura cultural. Então, a escultura, o plano da escultura que envolve estas questões, teve na verdade de ser adaptado às condições reais, sem abrir mão do que era essencial ele tinha apreendido da experiência concreta. Criou a sua escultura, que por isso mesmo é original. Devido em parte à sua personalidade e em parte às condições objetivas do meio.

possess real validity, the poem had to be a predetermined mathematical structure. You see there a neopositism. So I told them that I would not sign the manifesto, that I did not approve of it and if they published it, I would publish another counteracting it. There is no possibility of establishing a causal relationship between a mathematical structure and verbal language. It is arbitrary. You can make a mathematical structure and overlay it with words, now, to say that words will emerge from it is impossible.¹⁸⁹

The disagreements between the groups as far as the visual arts were concerned, were very well summarised by the minutes (noted by Gullar) of the debate on the work of Clark, Weissmann and Charoux exhibited at the *Galeria das Folhas* in São Paulo, 1958. With regards to her intuitive approach and disregard to a *a priori* theory, Clark (Gullar, 1958a) stated that:

[...] her painting, taking the surface as an abstract support, differs from the concrete painting which operates based on serial forms, and as such it offers a composition within the space. In her case - LC makes clear - the composition is not produced over the *a priori* space. The space [in her painting] is created simultaneously with the picture, with the surface. The spectator, instead of reading the forms one by one in order to reach the overall picture, is asked to look less and see more, establishing an organic form of communication between the work of art and the spectator.¹⁹⁰

Clark's distinctions between her work and that of concrete painting are significant, for they already describe a clear disassociation between the two groups. Indeed, Gullar's (1959c) notorious text *Teoria do Não-Objeto* (Theory of the Non-Object) was a direct consequence of his response to her work.¹⁹¹

In 1959 the neoconcrete rebellion was officialised with the publication of a manifesto, an exhibition at MAM RJ, and the neoconcrete Balé by Pape and Jardim at the Teatro da Praça in Rio. The *Jornal do Brasil* held an exhibition of poem-books which included: Gullar, Pape, Jardim, Spanudis, and Willys de Castro (1926-88). Jardim created the neoconcrete prose and a neoconcrete exhibition was also held in

¹⁸⁹ In the original: O grupo de São Paulo, Haroldo, Augusto, etc., considerava que o poema para ter validade, tinha que ter como base uma estrutura matemática pre-estabelecida. Tudo que partisse da linguagem cotidiana era romanticismo, passadismo, não tinha validade real, o poema tinha que ser uma estrutura matematicamente predeterminada. Você vai ver aí um neopositivismo.

Aí eu falei que não assinava, não aprovava e se publicassem o manifesto eu publicava outro contra.

Não há possibilidade de estabelecer uma relação causal entre uma estrutura matemática e a linguagem verbal. É arbitrário. Você pode fazer uma estrutura matemática e sobrepor a ela palavras, agora dizer que as palavras vão nascer dela não há possibilidade.

¹⁹⁰ In the original: [...] sua pintura, tomando a superfície como suporte abstrato, difere da pintura concreta que trabalha com formas seriadas e que desse modo oferece uma composição dentro do espaço. Em seu caso - esclarece LC - já a composição não se faz sobre um espaço *a priori*. O espaço é criado simultaneamente com quadro, com a superfície. O espectador, em lugar de ler as formas uma a uma para alcançar o conjunto do quadro, é levado a olhar menos e ver mais, estabelecendo-se uma comunicação por assim orgânica, entre a obra e o espectador.

¹⁹¹ The essay will be discussed shortly in Chapter 11. See also: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

Salvador in Bahia. Oiticica who did not take part in the first neoconcrete exhibition participated in the latter.

All the neoconcrete activity somewhat obscures the fact that if indeed there had been a generalised enthusiasm for Constructivism - implied by the so called *Constructive Will* - it was by then clearly in decline. The most obvious sign of such a shift could be seen in the Biennial of 1959 (the year in which Gullar published the Theory of the Non-Object) which had been overwhelmed by 'informal abstraction'.¹⁹² According to Gullar the 5th Biennial had as much an impact as the first. The difference was that while in 1951 the impact of novelty was restricted to the Swiss section¹⁹³, in 1959 the entire Biennial was dominated by Tashism. As Gullar (1987 p.90) mentioned: 'Even Mário Pedrosa came back from Japan defending it.'¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² As already discussed, it is dangerous to judge the relevance of the avant-garde movements by measuring the tendencies displayed in the Biennial. This however, has been a common argument throughout the history of the São Paulo Biennial. The statement that the event was overwhelmed by the Tashism is stated in: Amaral, ed. (1977) p.25.

¹⁹³ The mythology surrounding the first Biennial has been discussed previously in this section.

¹⁹⁴ Pedrosa had been in Japan on a project for the establishment of cultural links with Brazil.

Chapter 9

Politics and Constructivism in Brazil

Although the term Constructivism invokes politics through its association with the Russian Revolution, as Brandon Taylor (1991) has convincingly argued, the immediacy of the invocation is owed to historical surveys that demonstrated restrictive views marked by a consensual interpretation of Western modernism. Taylor, who emphasised the scarcity of exhibitions and publications on Russian art - contemporaneous to Constructivism - in the West during the 1920s, nevertheless singled out the 1922 *Erste Russische Kunstausstellung* (First Russian Exhibition) at the Van Diemen Gallery in Berlin, as having displayed a significant variety of styles present in Russia at the time. However, Taylor added that already in the 1920s Western attention centred on those aspects that related to its own prejudices towards modernism. Such perceptions were further consolidated in Barr's 1936 diagrammatic analysis of the flow of influences within modernism, particularly that of abstraction. The emphasis (Taylor, 1991 p.x-xi) being on the evolution described by Barr of abstract tendencies which emerged at the time of the notorious exhibition - *Cubism and Abstraction* - under the title Geometrical Abstract Art. Moreover, Taylor traced a lineage of such misconceptions from the 1922 Berlin exhibition through Barr, finally leading to their wider dissemination in Camilla Gray's (1962) survey on Russian art: *The Great Experiment: Russian Art, 1863-1922*. Rather than associating the revolutionary nature of abstraction, Taylor (1991 p.126), whose study enlarged the responses to the political context in Russia during the critical post-revolutionary years, placed the relationship of Constructivism and the holders of power as an ambivalent one:

[...] the status of Bolshevik 'modernisation' was (perhaps still is) indistinguishable from its wider ideological aims and aspirations; provides even a litmus test of its historical and practical credibility. This raises the question of whether Bolshevism was primarily a set of startling and novel ideas, or whether it was primarily a coercive political strategy capable of generating rapid and fundamental change. The gap between theory and practice was never more complex or difficult to negotiate than in this, the field of labour policy and industrial design. And within this problematic, Constructivism occupied a doubly ambiguous place. For alongside the question of its practicability in the real world of manufacture, questions inevitably lingered over its previous associations with Futurism and the artistic 'left'. Perhaps too it personified the gap between theory and practice that became visible within Bolshevik culture in such a multitude of other ways.

Such an ambiguous relationship between the holders of power and the perceived applications of art in society were also characteristics of the Brazilian Constructive Project. Although at first the political circumstances might seem far removed there

are certain similarities between the post-revolutionary situation in Russia and the period characterised by the ideology of development in Brazil during the 1950s. The latter too, was a period in which discrepancies between the theoretical developments of the 'avant-garde' seem - in hindsight - to be far removed from any practical means of implementation.

Indeed, the political nature of the constructivist avant-gardes in Brazil pertains to the wider hegemonic context of the *developmentalist* ideology which pervaded the country particularly during the post-war period: achieving its height during the final years of the 1950s. We have already seen how this ideology did not entirely fit the reality of the economic situation. It is, nevertheless, undeniable that the country was experiencing an unprecedented phase of industrialisation and urbanisation which consequently led many artists to envisage their production - particularly towards the end of the decade and in conjunction with the construction of the new capital Brasília - within a substantially differentiated frame from that which had characterised the production of artists associated with *Modernismo*. In terms of the dissemination of the constructivist movements and particularly its coherence with the State's rhetoric, there is however little to distinguish between the respective non-conflictual natures of *Modernismo* during the 1930s and the constructivist tendencies in the 1950s.

This subsection will outline some of the major political distinctions between the two factions with the intention of establishing the sources for such differentiation and attributing a level of political ambivalence implicit within them. Such ambivalence contributes to an understanding of some of the seemingly unlikely alliances which would later emerge during the 1960s following the dissolution of the constructive tendency. The predominant source for this part of the study will be Brito's seminal work on Neoconcretism (1975) since it represents the most thorough analysis of the movement to date. It is necessary to note therefore that Brito distinguished the context in Russia from Western examples of Constructivism. Central to such differentiation (Brito, 1975 p.96) was the distinction between aesthetic and political motivation:

As is evident, the Soviet Constructivism displaces the central question of the Western constructivist tendencies: it passes from the aesthetic to the political, from the aesthetic organisation of the environment to a political and ideological construction of society. The positive sense that the Bauhaus, for example, intended to give the teaching of art and its social integration remained idealistic (formalistic) in comparison to the [Russian] constructivist project. And it was not just because the Western art tendencies were confined to a mythical autonomy - there were always productive rules, such as the horizontal-vertical scheme raised to metaphysical paradigms -, but also because their social projection occurred, as we say, in the realm of aesthetics. Art did not fulfil, was neither meant nor expected to fulfil, a role in any way political. For the Western constructivist tendencies, social classes did not exist, there was only humanity and its linear progress in a scientific and technological civilisation.

Taylor's (1991) historiographical view of the Russian context argues that - rather than its political inclinations - it was precisely the aesthetic character of Russian Constructivism that led to it being singled out by Western historians as a relevant modern movement. Moreover, a further question can be posed with regard to the case in Soviet Russia: did Constructivism pertain to a politics of class-struggle (a characteristic which according to Brito the Western model did not possess) or was it a case of engagement by association? The answer to such a question inevitably entails a discussion on the implicit positivism of Constructivism as a whole. Its apparent lack of a disruptive character meant that it would be automatically complicit with the hegemony. Brito's (1975 p.94) argument that Western Constructivism was essentially apolitical must be seen therefore in the light of this particular prejudice: that Russian Constructivism did possess a political character due to the context in which it was developed as opposed to the Western model which remained essentially concerned with the domain of aesthetics. Although it is argued here that the one cannot distinguish - as far as the relation art and society is concerned - so easily between the Russian and the Brazilian constructivist experiments, in a seemingly paradoxically manner it will be argued that, there was a clear differentiation between the constructivist groups in Brazil. These were based on their respective views on art and its applicability to society in general.

In the first major evaluation of the constructive movement in Brazil, Amaral's essay (1977 pp.311-7) maintained the spirit of rivalry between the two major cities: São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Taking side with the *Paulista* concretists she argued, in complete contrast with the Rio based critic Brito (1977), that it was the market that contributed towards the valorisation of Neoconcretism to the detriment of Concretism in São Paulo. Amaral differentiated the two groups in terms of their members' respective professions and social positions: according to which in São Paulo artists were mainly from lower middle classes and involved professionally with industry through activities such as graphic design, while in Rio they were mostly from the upper-middle class, many of which were professional artists. This, Amaral maintains, explains the 'realist' nature of the *Paulistas* compared to the 'idealist' character of the *Cariocas*. Amaral stressed the importance of the applied arts in São Paulo by emphasising a further distinction in the nature of the dissemination of their theories: the concretists through the journal *Arquitetura e Decoração* while the neoconcretists through the *Jornal do Brasil*. The former, as the name suggests, was a publication that focused predominantly on issues of interior design, while the latter was a rather provincial newspaper in the midst of transforming itself into a serious national

broadsheet.¹⁹⁵ Although the neoconcrete artists took control of the *Jornal do Brasil's* Sunday supplement (its editorial and graphic design and above all its content) their activity - particularly the role Amílcar de Castro played in 'simplifying' the paper's layout - did affect the graphics of the entire paper. As Jardim (2000) has argued, the *Suplemento Dominical* represented a key element in the dissemination of the neoconcrete movement: a fact that is often not given its due recognition. Amaral's analysis however, emphasised the status of the publications at the detriment of the content of the articles themselves. Moreover, her emphasis on the distinct social origins of the opposing factions seems at odds with the possibility - in a developing country as was the case also in Russia - of artists and intellectuals originating from anywhere but from the privileged classes.

Brito's position was quite distinct from Amaral's. He described the distance that Constructivism in Brazil had from any form of overt political positioning due to the limitations evident at the time within the nationalist proposition.

The politics of nationalism have been a continuous presence within 20th century cultural production in Brazil. Every generation of artist has had to deal with such a presence. As already argued, for the cosmopolitan *Modernistas* in São Paulo during the 1920s, it was necessary to place their project as opposed to both the regionalists and the academicists. The constructivist avant-garde had to deal with the legacy of *Modernismo*, which by then, far removed from its initial cosmopolitanism and anti-academicism, had achieved the status of national art, which is what Brito implies by 'nationalist propositions'. Brito (1977 p.304) thus ascribed an ideological lucidity to the constructivists' 'abdication of politics', by describing the position taken by *Concretismo* as one posited within the neutral field of culture and economics and *Neoconcretismo* as one placed within the neutral fields of culture and philosophy.

Other than his distinctly *Carioca* position, Brito's argument therefore becomes pertinent to this study since its methodology operates through a structure based on dialectical relationships: *Modernismo* and the constructivist tradition; Concretism and its neoconcrete opposition; and the two opposing tendencies contained within Neoconcretism itself. Moreover, central to such a scheme was the political nature of these oppositions. The nationalism of *Modernismo* against the internationalism of the constructivist tradition meant that the latter, in order to escape being politically reactionary, necessarily posited itself as a supposedly apolitical project: since the figurative tradition at the time was championed by the communist party. Such an argument is tenuous since on the one hand, as Taylor (1991) has argued, Russian

¹⁹⁵ Reynaldo Jardim (2000) argued that it was the involvement of artists that contributed towards the transformation of the Newspaper from one predominantly dedicated to classifieds

art during the post-revolutionary period had also presented a variety of aesthetic responses to a political reality; while on the other hand, the supposedly neutral politics of Brazilian Constructivism, nevertheless clearly inserted itself within the governmental project of developmentalism which ironically gave it an undeniable political character. Paradoxically therefore, the constructivists although sometimes referring to the left, were part of the government's capitalist project: in attempting to distinguish themselves from *Modernismo* politically they seemed to be equally naive. Perhaps realisation of this fact is indicative of Pignatari's retrospective insistence on referring to the political nature and involvement of concrete artists such as Cordeiro and himself: an argument that very much opposes Brito's (1975) description of *Concretismo*.

Brito (1975) emphasised the apolitical nature of concrete art due to its apprehension of culture as a non-ideological and autonomous development. As a specialised field of enquiry it saw itself as ideally entering a centralised state program that would direct its aesthetic production as meaningful in its relation towards society as a whole, rather than applicable within the context of class conflict. Brito (1975 p.101) clearly identified the consequence of concrete art's apoliticality:

The repression is obvious: where in all of this is the ideological struggle, that which can be observed and accompanied daily through the means of communication, in the so-called customs, in sexuality, and in the production of art?

However there is evidence that the *Paulistas* were aware of such a problematic. Cordeiro (1956 p.75) in his role as spokesman for the concretist group, argued for instance that:

We believe with Gramsci that culture only exists historically when it creates a unity of thought between the 'simple [people]' and the artists and intellectuals. In effect, only within this symbiosis with the simple does art rid itself from the intellectual elements and from its subjective nature, and so becomes life.¹⁹⁶

Pignatari (1957), expressed what he saw as the distinguishing factors of the constructivist project:

Confronted with the antagonistic contradictions between industrial production and hand-made production - which opened the abyss between art and the public - the conjunction of the useful and the beautiful has become a necessary attempt, in order to serve a new kind of consumer, the consumer of physical projects, [...] and of

to one in which serious journalism prevailed. In: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

¹⁹⁶ In the original: Acreditamos com Gramsci que a cultura só passa a existir historicamente quando cria uma unidade de pensamento entre os 'simples' e os artistas e intelectuais. Com efeito, somente nessa simbiose com os simples a arte se depura dos elementos intelectualísticos e de natureza subjectiva, tornando-se vida.

superseding the individualistic phase of critical rebellion against the machine, which only led to the design of the Picabian useless yet beautiful machines, which were purely literary. The Bauhaus marks the turning point of that position, in a positive-constructive sense: beautiful and useful machines.¹⁹⁷

Through the example given by the Bauhaus, Pignatari proposed a re-evaluation of the ideal of integration of art into life which distanced itself from the disruptive or negative strategies of Dada and emphasised Constructivism's positive approach as an experience of art applicable to society at large. He mentioned architecture, urban planning, industrial design, cinema, and publicity, as fields that would profit from the immediacy of the new non-verbal language. Adding that the application of concrete poetry also inscribed itself within the fields of publicity, graphic design and journalism. This direct form of integration with society would, according to the *Paulista* concrete movement, be non-expressive, pragmatic and reliant on modernity as a preliminary condition.

Ronaldo Brito and the Historicisation of Brazilian Constructivism

Bruto's (1975 p.96) historical view was of course, quite distinct from Pignatari's (1957). He saw Constructivism together with Dada and Surrealism as tendencies which sought to propose 'cultural action' upon society. Central to his analysis was the fact that Constructivism was posited as the 'Other' of Surrealism and Dada - not as complementary as respectively representing Apollonian and Dionysian currents but - as tendencies that were incapable of comprehending and acting upon situations that escape their programs. On the one hand, Constructivism with its utopian desire for an integration of art into life - based on the precept of functionalism - within the hegemonic means of production, was uncritical if not conformist. It did not disturb the Cartesian subject's relation to the world, nor the ideological objectivity of logic and reason. In other words it failed to assimilate the theories of Marx and Freud. On the other hand, Dada and - to a lesser extent - Surrealism, in their attempt to escape the boundaries of Western rationality (Bruto, 1975 p.97) relied on the heterogeneous, the savage, the gratuitous and irrational as pertinent yet paradoxical ideological functions.

¹⁹⁷ In the original: Face as grandes contradições antagônicas entre produção industrial e produção artesanal - que abriram um abismo entre a arte e o público - a conjunção do útil com o belo tornou-se uma tentativa necessária, a fim de atender a um novo tipo de consumidor, o *consumidor de projetos* físicos (consumer of Physical design) - no dizer de *Neutra* - e de superar a fase individualista de rebeldia crítica contra a máquina que apenas conduzia ao desenho de 'belas' máquinas inúteis picabianas, puramente literárias, a *Bauhaus* marca o *turning point* daquela tomada de consciência, no sentido positivo-constructivo: belas máquinas úteis.

The surrealist and dadaist utopia (it is always possible to bring them together on this point) differed radically from the constructive utopia: the latter respected, generally speaking, the capitalist utopia, its prime motive being the rationalisation and humanisation of the social relations in effect; the former is confusedly connected to a revolutionary project or at least to a fight against the power structures.

However, the concretists saw in their project a disruptiveness directed at the privileged status held by art. Indeed, they saw themselves as politically engaged through a complicit approach to the quotidian and the elimination of all forms of subjectivity in their art, a fact that was explicitly expressed by Pignatari (1987 pp.72-3):

Ideologically, we had a vision of an art that came, as Cordeiro would claim, from Fiedler and Gramsci. The objectivity of concrete art was profoundly connected to the Marxist revolution. Few know this due to the sociologism which only now begins to lose its breath, that had crushed everything during 15 years in Brazil. But the truth is that we had an ideological position of struggle. Both myself and Cordeiro fought together with Vilanova Artigas, who represented the [Communist] party. This idea today is common but at the time Gramsci represented a truly novel position. It was Cordeiro who brought him to our attention. The ideal was of an art that was placed at a level of evidence, in which you would form complementary ideograms and simple visualities that could be found on a dry-cleaner's [tinturaria] door or that a factory worker would draw and a child would make. It concerned making an art that was beyond the norms [anórmica] that would find the fundamental characteristics of its own articulation. It was not an art for painting pictures, these were matrixes for the future.¹⁹⁸

Pignatari (1987 p.73) explained the ambivalent position that the concretists had with regard to the communist party:

Of course, one cannot eliminate contradictions since they exist inherently in the process. We did not agree in any way with the Stalinist position of the party, therefore we never became members. When the time for decisions came we would break away, it was not possible to join. Socialist Realism was terrible. Nevertheless in 1953, Waldemar Cordeiro, myself and Afonso Schmidt went to the culture congress - the first Congress of Latin American Culture in Santiago in Chile - through the party. We crossed Peron's Argentina and met with Maldonado, the Argentine concrete artist. He had his suitcases ready for Germany, to Ulm where he would soon become rector of the Superior School of Form [...]

Cordeiro came to an obvious limit with his contradictions, since he would say: the CP was not only that, it was a concrete party too. In relation to the concrete he was

¹⁹⁸ In the original: Ideologicamente nós tínhamos uma visão de uma arte, que viesse, como diria Cordeiro, a partir de Fiedler e de Gramsci. A objetividade da arte concreta estava profundamente ligada a uma revolução marxista, o que pouca gente sabe, porque o sociologismo, que finalmente agora está perdendo fôlego, esmagou tudo durante 15 anos no Brasil. Mas a verdade é que nós tínhamos uma colocação ideológica de luta. Eu e o Cordeiro lutávamos junto com o Vilanova Artigas, que representava o partidão. Essa idéia é hoje muito comum, mas naquele tempo a grande novidade era Gramsci. O Cordeiro foi quem trouxe Gramsci para nós. A idéia era de uma arte que estivesse ao nível da evidência em que você formasse ideogramas complementares e simples da visualidade que poderiam ser encontrados numa porta de tinturaria, ou que um operário desenhasse e que uma criança fizesse. Trata-se de fazer uma arte meio anórmica que encontrasse os fundamentos de sua própria articulação. Não era uma arte para pintar quadros, eram matrizes para futuras artes.

absolutely Stalinist, in all other respects he was absolutely anti-Stalinist. Our position was a Gramscian one and these contradictions remained until we parted company.¹⁹⁹

This lengthy elaboration on the political awareness that both himself and Cordeiro (and by extension both the literary and visual art quarters of the *Paulista* concretists) held during the 1950s could be perhaps understood as a reaction against the realisation that the movement was ideologically inscribed within the *developmentalist* hegemony. It is therefore ironic that Pignatari's evaluation of the movement's ambivalence towards communism, operated through an acknowledgement of Gramsci: who is inescapably associated with the notion of hegemony.

Brito's (1977 p.306) description seems to understand the ideological inscription of the movement within the hegemony, since he claimed that both the concretist and neoconcretist strands were a part of a unified cultural strategy and therefore 'pointed to the same direction' and yet maintained essential political distinctions. Such a direction was indicated by the example that Concretism attempted to intervene within the domain of industrial design in an attempt to transform the social environment. It was related, according to Brito, to Wiener's progressive pragmatism, and his concept of the cybernetics of social relations, in addition, it referred of course to Max Bill's and Maldonado's formalism and to their ideas concerning contemporaneous society. As such it 'attempted to aestheticise politics' rather than engage with the politics of aesthetics. Interestingly, Brito also suggested that the concretists were interested in the efficiency of the mass media believing in its reliance on semiotics and the positivities that this implied. Nevertheless, Brito (1977 pp.306-7) added that they were not concerned with questions such as the relationship between the ideology of the dominant classes and the manipulation of information within mass media.

Neoconcretism on the other hand, with its operation strictly restricted to the field of culture was, according to Brito (1977 p.307), far more apolitical. It did not actively seek to proclaim its aspiration to inform industrial design, preferring to remain strictly

¹⁹⁹ In the original: É claro que ninguém pode eliminar as contradições porque elas existiam inerentes ao processo. Nós não concordávamos de jeito nenhum com a posição estalinista do partido, portanto, nunca ingressamos nele. Quando chegava a hora das decisões, rompíamos porque não era possível. O realismo socialista era terrível. De qualquer maneira, em 53, o Waldemar Cordeiro, eu e o Afonso Schmidt fomos para o congresso de cultura - Primeiro Congresso de Cultura Latino-Americana em Santiago do Chile - pelo partido. Atravessamos a Argentina de Péron e ali fizemos contato com Maldonado, artista concreto na Argentina. Ele estava de malas prontas, partindo para a Alemanha. Para Ulm, e logo depois se tornaria o reitor da Escola Superior da Forma [...].

O Cordeiro chegou ao limite, claro que com suas contradições, porque ele dizia assim: o PC não era só aquilo, o PC era um partido concreto também. Com relação ao concreto ele era absolutamente estalinista, fora isso ele era antiestalinista. A nossa posição era gramsciana e essas contradições permaneceram até o fim, e em 60 eu rompi com ele.

within their activity as artists: 'almost amateur artists.' As such the neoconcrete production was interpreted by Brito as an autonomous experimental production:

Characteristically of underdevelopment such a typically Brazilian paradox occurred: a constructive avant-garde that did not guide itself based on a plan of social transformation and that operated in a manner that was almost marginal.²⁰⁰

According to Brito (1977 p.307), this marginality in relation to society is one of the most significant characteristics of Neoconcretism, opening the possibility for a questioning not only of the premises of Constructivism but of the nature of art itself. Brito (1977 p.305) suggested an epistemological differentiation between the two groups: Concretism placed Man as social and economic agent while Neoconcretism placed Man as a being in the world leading to its notion of art posited as an entity which is perceived by Man's interaction in the world.

Acknowledging the retrospective nature of his essay, Brito admitted that Neoconcretism - in attempting to escape the technicist nature of Concretism - found two solutions contained in humanism: one that represented the peak of the constructive tradition in Brazil (in which he posits: Willys de Castro, Weissmann, Hécules Barsotti (b. 1914), Carvão and to a certain extent Amílcar de Castro). Such artists engaged in a research which held the sensibilisation of the work of art and preserved its specificity. In the other, more disruptive side to Neoconcretism, the sensibility was replaced (Bruto, 1975) by a dramatisation of the work.

Neoconcretism thus held, two distinct tendencies (Bruto, 1975): a rationalist humanism which tended to inform industrial design qualitatively while preserving the specificity and aura of the work of art²⁰¹; the other more disruptive, distancing itself from the constructive tradition through a dramatic transformation of art's function and *raison d'être*. Both nevertheless maintained a united front (Bruto, 1977 p.306) against the precepts of Concretism, on the one hand, due to its technicism (as opposed to the neoconcrete sensibility) and, on the other hand, due to its 'fear for the loss of the specificity (and aura) of the work of art.' Concrete art was therefore not only essential as a precedent for the neoconcretes, but was what maintained the neoconcrete group's sense of unity or identity.

Bruto's evaluation of the constructive tendency and in particular his argument that Neoconcretism represented its peak and rupture, is undoubtedly the most acclaimed and arguably the best retrospective analysis of Constructivism in Brazil. Bruto placed

²⁰⁰ In the original: Ocorreu então esse paradoxo tão brasileiro e tão próprio do subdesenvolvimento: uma vanguarda construtiva que não se guiava diretamente por nenhum plano de transformação social e que operava de um modo quase marginal.

the constructive tradition as the only 'organised' strategy against the 'nationalist, intuitive and popular' currents during the 1950s. He saw such currents as not only diametrically opposed to Constructivism but as forces which would culminate in the formation of the Popular Centres for Culture (CPC): a highly politicised cultural movement which became very influential during the early 1960s, that attempted to engage with the population through an unmediated approach.²⁰² Brito offered therefore, an interesting analysis of the politics of Constructivism, which is particularly pertinent with respect to the paradoxes and the ambivalence that it unavoidably contained and that would eventually contribute towards its dissolution during the 1960s.

Brito's initial argument placed the figure of Pedrosa as evidence that Constructivism was not simply formed of liberal cosmopolitans but also included members of the dissident left. Although initially the affirmation might seem inconsequential, the left in Brazil has continuously been associated with an anti-avant-garde stance.²⁰³ Concretism was politically naive and thus inserted itself within the capitalist reliance on technological advance, and Neoconcretism was politically opaque. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to consider the movements as reactionary. They were movements that were inserted within the context of cultural development between 1940 and 1960, and were coherent therefore with the reformist character of the period. Brito however failed to see the implicit disruptive element that the idea of art's effect on society contained. An aspect of Neoconcretism, which was already present during the formative years of European concrete art, particularly through its early association with Dada, and that did not hesitate making itself explicit in Brazil, once the ideology of developmentalism showed its weakness. Brito nevertheless, posited the movements as contributing towards a political project of emancipation from the European cultural domination that had maintained its grip on the continent until then. Modernisation and rationalism (Brito, 1977 p.303) in this sense contributed towards a belief that the nation was able to find its own solutions based on the local context. Once such positivism evaporated, some artists maintained their theoretical and aesthetic confidence albeit redirected towards a more disruptive and critical stance. It is hard to disagree with Brito's thorough analysis of the constructive movement. As an overall view of the specific groups he is right in affirming the positivism of the *Paulistas*, their complicity with the capitalist rhetoric of a government's excessive

²⁰¹ Franz Weissmann's comments that he did not see the necessity of adding a 'Neo' to Concretism seem coherent with this claim. See: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

²⁰² The formation and position of the CPCs with regard to avant-garde practice will be discussed in Chapter 13.

²⁰³ Such positions will be discussed in relation to Oiticica and other members of the neoconcrete group in Part III of this study.

enthusiasm with development, and the hermetic nature of the *Cariocas*, engaged in a philosophical analysis on the nature of perception of art. The intention here, however, is to view certain distinctions and developments amongst individuals rather than amongst groups: particularly in the events that would lead to the dissolution of both the neoconcrete group and the ideology of *developmentalism* itself. In other words, to analyse the impact that such movements had on establishing the basis for the experimentalism of the 1960s. Central in such a study is the theoretical and philosophical confidence that critics such as Gullar demonstrated with respect to the creation of his aesthetic discourse and their effect on the later writings and works by Hélio Oiticica.

Chapter 10

Gestalt Theory and the Phenomenology of Perception

A symptom of the confrontational positions that characterised the constructive movements of the 1950s, was the concretist rejection of the work of the insane. This clearly distanced the *Paulista* group - that held such prejudices - from the circle that had formed around Pedrosa at Rio's *Engenho de Dentro* Psychiatric Hospital in the late 1940s.

Pedrosa played a key, albeit ambivalent, role within the split that later developed between São Paulo's and Rio's constructive tendencies. Retrospective accounts have claimed that each group attempted to gain his allegiance whether through personal contact or by means of referring to his critique and theories. Initial associations with Pedrosa have received increasing attention with hindsight, through claims primarily in articles and statements that drew on Pedrosa's theoretical studies. One of the most frequent citations has been Pedrosa's thesis on Gestalt psychology. The study was, according to him, an attempt to understand art through the theories of Gestalt. The thesis was 'defended' in 1949 (and was therefore contemporaneous with his involvement at *Engenho de Dentro*) as part of his submission to the chair of Art and Aesthetics at the National Faculty of Architecture. Although it circulated amongst intellectual circles,²⁰⁴ it was however only published (Pedrosa, 1987 p.105) in 1979. This evident informal nature of training predominant at the time was fully encouraged by Pedrosa's generosity. This opens a number of speculative avenues for the historian. Anna Maria Belluso (1998 pp.107-8) in her account of the *Ruptura* Group and concrete art, prior to discussing the origins of the tendency, mentioned that Pedrosa:

[...] was certainly the first to disseminate, in Brazil the precepts of psychology of form and the existing laws that rule observation, regardless of other factors. The so-called *gestaltpsycologie* serves art's quest for independence, while holding perception as the primordial human sense for creators and observers alike. In other words, Pedrosa viewed the sensible human perception of objects as abiding to the same laws of form that rule artworks. He regarded the regular, simple and symmetric forms as privileged by the way in which they affect human senses.

Brito also referred to concrete art's interest in Gestalt theory as an additional element in their drive for a scientific interpretation of art's function and action upon the world. This occurred as Brito (1975 p.101) argued, within the specificity of the field, as an

²⁰⁴ Such was the case through which it reached Gullar: Lucy Teixeira took a copy of Pedrosa's thesis to the Northeast state of Maranhão where Gullar was able to read it. The young poet was then able to write to Pedrosa - very pretentiously as he recalls - questioning some concepts. See: Gullar (1998) p.38.

autonomous enquiry that could benefit the rest of society. Such autonomy was perceived as coherent with concurrent scientific developments:

[...] the concretists projected a method of artistic production which incorporated manipulation, invested with forms and a rigorous equating of data (in the scientific manner). Influenced by Robert Wisner in his work *Engineering of Human Behaviour*, the concretists were not far from contemplating the question of art utilising cybernetic organisation. In other words: art would be a type of engineering of the visual communication process. A brief analysis of concretist visual production immediately reveals its poles of interest and therefore, to a certain extent, its truth. This production characterised itself by the systematic exploration of serial form, of time, mechanical movement and it defines itself by its strictly ethical-sensorial intentions. That is, it proposed a perceptivist game against representational content - a program of ethical exercises that were, in themselves, 'beautiful' and significant, that meant the explication and invention of new visual syntagms whose interest was their capacity to renew the possibility of communication and their capacity to act as feedbacks, factors of the fight against entropy, to use the terminology of the theory of Information. Concrete art is an aesthetic repertory of the optical and sensorial possibilities prescribed by the *gestalt* theory.

It was through philosophy that Brito established the development of Neoconcretism with respect to concrete art: a development that would achieve the exhaustion of the constructive project itself, which according to the critic, Neoconcretism took it to its limits. Brito, posited Concretism as the implementation period of the ideas brought into the country from Zurich and Ulm while Neoconcretism represented their absorption within the local context. Moreover, he stated as being of key importance the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty as well as, to a certain extent, Existentialism in general. Claiming that Merleau-Ponty's attacks on Gestalt theory could be seen as analogous to Neoconcretism's investments against concrete art, Brito (1975 p.105) quoted Merleau-Ponty's *Structure du Comportement* extensively:

It is the soul and not the brain that sees, it is through the perceived world and its structures that we can express the spatial value assigned, in each particular case, to a point in the visual field. The co-ordinates of the phenomenal field, the directions that at each moment receive the values 'vertical', 'horizontal', 'frontal direction', or 'lateral direction', the ensembles that are affected by the indication 'immobile' and through which the rest of the field appears 'in movement', the coloured stimuli that are seen as 'neutral' and determine the distribution of apparent colours amongst the rest of the field, the frames of our spatial and chromatic perception, do not result from the effects of mechanical criss-crossed actions, they are not the function of certifiable physical variables.

Gestalt theory believed that a causal or even physical explanation remained possible as long as we could recognise in physics, other than mechanical actions, the structuring processes. However, the physical laws do not provide, as we have seen, an explanation of *these* structures, they represent an explanation *within* the structures. They express the least integral structures, those where the relations of simple variable functions can be established. Already they become inadequate within the 'acausal' domain of modern physics. Within the functioning of the organism, the process of structuration is achieved according to new dimensions, - the typical activity of the

species or the individual, - and the action's privileged forms and perception can least of all be treated as the summative result of partial interactions.²⁰⁵

For Brito (1977 p.305) the neoconcrete rejection of Gestalt was symptomatic above all of their interest in expression, since one could not achieve expressiveness through the simple manipulation of visual information. It is possible to assert that *Gestalt Psychology* and *The Phenomenology of Perception* act as the distinguishing theoretical factors within the divergence of the two Brazilian constructive avant-gardes. However, rather than simply opposite theories, the distinction is more subtle and indicative of a complex level of ambivalence present in Merleau-Ponty's thought, which in turn was understood and re-interpreted by Gullar. This, on the one hand, pertains primarily to Merleau-Ponty's critique of Empiricism - and its over emphasis on the sensible - and on the other hand, to intellectualism as a reduction of perception into an *a priori* operation. Such dichotomies (Chauí, 1884) are seen by Merleau-Ponty as a consequence of the dichotomies inherent in the Cartesian legacy: the construction of thought based on seemingly diametrically opposed principles - object and subject, interior and exterior, life and work, etc.

Neoconcretism - or perhaps, Gullar's interpretation of it²⁰⁶ - did not see Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology* as entirely antagonistic to Gestalt psychology. The distinction was in this sense coherent with the distinction between Concretism and Neoconcretism itself: that is, not a rejection but a re-evaluation. Gullar (1959a) expressed the differences in a column in the *Jornal do Brasil* in 1959, shortly after the first neoconcrete exhibition:

²⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1972). *Structure du comportement*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France. Quoted in French, by Brito (1975 p.105).

In the original: C'est l'âme qui voit et non par le cerveau, c'est par le monde perçu et ses structures propres qu'on peut expliquer la valeur spaciale assignée dans chaque cas particulier à un point du champ visuel. Les axes de coordonnées du champ phénoménal, les directions qui à chaque moment reçoivent la valeur de 'verticale' et d'"horizontale", 'direction frontale' ou 'direction latérale', les ensembles qui sont affectés de l'indice 'immobile' et par rapport auxquels le reste du champ apparaît 'en mouvement', les stimuli colorés qui sont vus comme 'neutres' et déterminent la distribution des couleurs apparentes dans le reste du champ, les cadres de notre perception spaciale et chromatique ne résultent pas à titre d'effets d'un entrecroisement d'actions mécanique, ne sont pas une fonction de certaines variable physiques.

La Gestalttheorie a cru qu'une explication causale et même physique restait possible à condition qu'on reconnût dans la physique, outre les actions mécanique, des processus de structuration. Mais les lois physique ne fournissent pas, avons-nous vu, une explication *des* structures, elles représentent une explication *dans* les structures. Elles expriment les structures les moins intégrées, celles où des rapports simples de fonction à variables peuvent être établis. Déjà elles deviennent inadéquates dans le domaine 'acausal' de la physique moderne. Dans le fonctionnement de l'organisme, la structuration se fait selon des nouvelles dimensions, - l'activité typique de l'espèce ou de l'individu, - et les formes privilégiées de l'action et de la perception peuvent encore bien moins être traitée comme le résultat summatif d'interactions partielles.

²⁰⁶ Lygia Pape has recently denied that neoconcrete artists, other than Gullar, had any form of profound knowledge of Merleau-Ponty's theories. See: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

An important point expressed in the neoconcrete manifesto [...] concerns the insufficiency of Gestalt Psychology in defining and comprehending, in all its complexity, the phenomenon of the work of art. It is not a question, of course, of negating the validity of the Gestaltian laws within the field of the perceptual experience where the direct method of this psychology really opened new possibilities in which to comprehend formal structures. Gestalt's limitation, according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty ('La Structure du Comportement' and 'La Phenomenology de la Perception') is in the interpretation that the theorists of form give to the experiments and tests that they have carried out, the laws that the experiments permitted being observed within the perceptual field [...] after thorough scrutiny of the concept of form show that Gestalt remains a causalist psychology, which in turn obliges it to give up the concept of 'isomorphism' in order to establish a unity between the external world and the internal one, between the object and the subject. We do not intend in this short note to do more than to draw the attention towards this important aspect of the new attitude - in practice and theory - that the neoconcrete artists adopt faced with 'constructive-geometric art'.²⁰⁷

Gullar (1958b). in a previous 'clarification' had made reference to Gestalt theory in order to argue against the notion that Lygia Clark's paintings made use of strategies of optical illusion. The argument which is translated below, shows that ideas of Gestalt psychology - contrary to certain accounts²⁰⁸ - still remained important in Gullar's thought processes as late as 1958, in other words, five months prior to the neoconcrete rupture:

[...] we have mentioned the contribution that Gestalt theory has offered towards the understanding of such phenomena. If we now approach this element of our discussion in an isolated manner, it is because it seems that it is fundamental for the compression of visual arts in all its manifestations, although its importance towards aesthetics and art criticism has been to this day largely ignored by the majority of scholars.

The expression 'optical illusion' was created in order to name certain cases in which visual perception contradicts other types of perception held - through prejudice - to be 'more precise'. It is the case for example, of the drawing of two vertical lines 'of the same size' that appear to be of diverse dimensions once opposite and oblique lines are added to their extremities. Gestalt, seeing perception as a complex phenomenon whereby it will always be impossible to separate the object from its environment, the figure from its background, understands such 'illusion' in a different manner: for Gestalt the two vertical lines are forms that are entirely transformed with the addition

²⁰⁷ In the original: Um ponto importante do manifesto neoconcreto [...] é o que se refere a insuficiência da Psicologia da Forma (Gestalt Psychology) para definir e compreender em toda a sua complexidade o fenômeno da obra de arte. Não se trata, evidentemente, de negar a validade das leis gestaltianas no campo da experiência perceptiva onde realmente o método direto dessa psicologia abriu novas possibilidades para a compreensão das estruturas formais. A limitação da Gestalt, conforme o afirma e demonstra Maurice Merleau-Ponty ('La Structure du Comportement' e 'La Phenomenology de la Perception') esta na interpretação que os teóricos da forma dão as experiências e testes que realizam, ou seja, as leis que as experiências permitiram objetivar no campo perceptivo [...] depois de um exame minucioso do conceito da forma mostra que a Gestalt é ainda uma psicologia causalista, o que a obriga a lançar mão do conceito de 'isomorfismo' para estabelecer a unidade entre o mundo exterior e o mundo interior, entre o sujeito e o objeto. Não pretendemos nesta pequena nota mais do que chamar a atenção para este aspecto importante da nova atitude - prática e teórica - que os artistas neoconcretos tomam em fase da arte construtivo-geométrica.

²⁰⁸ See: Coutinho (1984). The argument that Gullar opposed Gestalt psychology can also be found in key texts such as: Brito (1975) and Favareto (1992).

of the oblique segments in their extremities; it is not therefore a case of an 'illusion', but that of a visual reality that can only be explained through the laws of the visual field. What significance is there, as far as visual apprehension is concerned, to say that a line is ten centimetres long or that a man that is 50 metres away is 1.7 metres tall? Gestalt comprehends the autonomy of the diverse perceptive fields, it recognises their specific laws and, instead of creating special conditions in order to apply visual phenomena, it prefers to examine them in this natural context, the quotidian, searching for an understanding of the nature of perception instead of judging them according to an ideal model. Such a point of view is of extreme importance for the comprehension of the visual arts, since it discredits all intellectualist preconceptions, in the name of which formal inventions that go beyond the conventional context of 'true perceptions' are condemned.²⁰⁹

Gullar's (1958b) article referred to the Müller-Lyer example of optical illusion, which admittedly, was also discussed in Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945 p.6). The latter, in relation to the notion of sensation as perception, argued that the perceived object is affected by the sensed object's surroundings, again this is referred to as demonstrated in Gestalt theory. Merleau-Ponty's (1945 p.6) argument is pertinent however in its emphasis on the subjectivity present in such phenomena which Empiricism has tended to omit:

The object, psychologists would assert, is never ambiguous, but becomes so only through our inattention. The bounds of the visual field are not themselves variable, and there is a moment when the approaching object begins absolutely to be seen, but we do not 'notice' it. But the notion of attention [...] is supported by no evidence provided by consciousness. It is no more than an auxiliary hypothesis, evolved to save the prejudice in favour of the objective world. We must recognise the indeterminate as a positive phenomenon. It is in this atmosphere that quality arises. Its meaning is an equivocal meaning; we are concerned with an expressive value rather than with logical signification. The determinate quality by which empiricism tried to define sensation is an object, not an element, of consciousness, indeed it is the very lately developed

²⁰⁹ In the original: [...] aludimos à contribuição da teoria da Gestalt para o esclarecimento desses fenômenos. Se abordamos agora, isoladamente esse ponto das discussões, é porque ele nos parece fundamental para a compreensão das artes visuais em qualquer de suas manifestações, embora sua importância para a estética e a crítica de arte pareça até hoje negligenciada pela maioria dos estudiosos.

A expressão 'ilusão de ótica' foi criada para denominar certos casos em que a percepção visual contraria outros tipos de percepção tidos preconceituosamente como 'mais precisos'. É o caso, por exemplo, do desenho em que duas verticais 'do mesmo tamanho' parecem de tamanho diverso desde que se lhes acrescentem, nas extremidades, linhas oblíquas em direções opostas. A Gestalt, vendo a percepção como um fenômeno complexo em que será sempre impossível separar o objeto do meio, a figura do fundo, compreende de modo diferente essa 'ilusão': para a Gestalt as duas linhas verticais são uma forma que é transformada inteiramente com o acréscimo dos segmentos oblíquos em suas extremidades; não se trata pois de uma 'ilusão', mas de uma realidade visual que só pode ser explicada pelas leis do campo visual. Que sentido tem, para a apreensão ótica, dizer-se que uma linha tem dez centímetros ou que um homem que está a 50 metros de distancia mede 1,70m.? A Gestalt compreende a autonomia dos diversos campos perceptivos, reconhece suas leis específicas e, em lugar de fabricar condições especiais para aplicar os fenômenos visuais, prefere examiná-los no contexto natural, quotidiano, procurando compreender a natureza da percepção em lugar de julgá-la segundo um modelo ideal. Tal ponto de vista é de suma importância para a compreensão das artes visuais, uma vez que esmaga todo e qualquer preconceito intelectualista, em nome do qual se queira condenar as invenções formais que rompem o quadro convencional das 'verdadeiras percepções.'

object of scientific consciousness. For these two reasons, it conceals rather than reveals subjectivity.

The consequences that Gestalt offered as a scientifically credited analysis of the apprehension of art-objects were clear. As Susanne Langer (1942) stated:

The nervous system is the organ of the mind; its centre is the brain, its extremities the sense-organs; and any characteristic function it may possess must govern the work of all its parts. In other words, the activity of our senses is 'mental' not only when it reaches the brain, but in its very inception, whether the alien world outside impinges on the furthest and smallest receptor. All sensitivity bears the stamp of mentality. 'Seeing,' for instance, is not a passive process, which construes forms out of these amorphous data to suit its own purposes. 'Seeing' is itself a process of formulation; our understanding of the visible world begins in the eye.

Langer too, served as a key philosophical reference for Gullar²¹⁰, and by extension Neoconcretism, in the development of an emphasis on an ambivalence between (Langer, 1942 p.91) expression and the 'objectivity' of geometrical forms:

This psychological insight, which we owe to the school of Wertheimer, Köhler, and Koffka, has far-reaching philosophical consequences, if we take it seriously; for it carries rationality into processes that are usually deemed pre-rational, and points to the existence of forms, i.e. of *possible symbolic material*, at a level where symbolic activity has certainly never been looked for by any epistemologist. The eye and the ear make their own abstractions, and consequently dictate their own peculiar forms of conception. But these forms are derived from exactly the same world that furnished the totally different forms known to physics. There is, in fact, no such thing as *the* form of the 'real' world; physics is one pattern which may be found in it, and 'appearance,' or the pattern of *things* with their qualities and characters, is another. One construction may indeed preclude the other; but to maintain that the consistency and universality of the one brands the other as *false* is a mistake.

The ambivalence of Merleau-Ponty in relation to Gestalt theory, pertained to what Marilena Chauí (1984) described as the philosopher's attempt to propose a 'rescue of the sensible's ontological dignity', that is, an apprehension of dialectical pares not as extremes but as part of an enquiry into the effective relations established between them. Such a position argued that it was precisely because of the differences between the subject and the object for instance, that they related to each other. This idea, in turn, relates to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the field of a work. Contrary to the empiricist emphasis on the author's subjectivity or the intellectualist view whereby the work exists in itself, the notion of a field encompasses the idea of a work of art from its emergence as the author's creation, to its dissemination, that is, its posteriority or exteriority: the meaning associated with it which transcends that of the author. The dogmatism of Concretism whereby a work should be conceived by the author before

²¹⁰ Langer is mentioned as a key reference in the Neoconcrete Manifesto in 1959. See: Gullar et al. (1959d).

its actual production seems anathema to the notion of the work's field. This primary concept is also reflected in Gullar's insistence on neoconcrete theory as inescapably *a posteriori* to the work itself.²¹¹

As far as the work's exteriority is concerned (Chauí, 1984 p.16), there is a distinction between the notion of memory in art and culture in Merleau-Ponty's view: art and philosophy possess a noble form of memory that pertain to creation, they belong to the process of formation of the work's field. The work's field - its posteriority as art, as an active cultural entity - acts in this sense as a counterpoint to institutional culture. The latter formed by the museum or the library, although proclaiming to maintain the work's memory are in fact hypocrites since 'the best way in which to forget is to pretend that the work is not forgotten.' The stagnation or preservation of the work's field is therefore equated to the death of the very essence of its art. Such institutionalisation was defined by a notion of erudite memory. It is possible to extrapolate that Gullar, when in the early 1960s suggested destroying the entire neoconcrete production, had this notion of Merleau-Ponty in mind.²¹²

The notion of the work's field and its relation to the praxis of life also pertain to the idea of memory and the function of the museum. Based on Merleau-Ponty's text *Cézanne's Doubt*, Chauí (1984 pp.17-8) was able to assert that in Merleau-Ponty's thought, it is not the life of the artist that explains the significance of the work, but that the work demands the type of life led by the artist. Art is, in this sense, a motive which arises from (1) a psychological sense, (2) from a particular situation and (3) from the work's internal logic or trajectory. The work of art is not therefore caused by external or internal phenomena but motivated by both. It is not explained by history but is posited as a deciphering of history. Such ideas could be seen as highly significant in the direction that Oiticica's work would later take.

It is also possible to speculate on the relevance that Merleau-Ponty's ideas held for a critic such as Gullar in his insistence on strictly non-figurative geometrical yet expressive art. Merleau-Ponty (Chauí, 1984 pp.19-20) argued that figurative painting possessed an inevitable artifice that pertained to the illusion of three-dimensionality: the more 'objective' towards nature it attempted to be the more sophisticated the level of artifice it required. The principal effect, in terms of perception, that such artifice had, was to eradicate the natural relation which objects held with each other. That is, the 'perceptual battle' in which real objects are engaged in order to enter our field of vision. Figurative painting - particularly that developed during the Renaissance -

²¹¹ This has been expressed in various *Jornal do Brasil* essays by Gullar (1959c) such as *The Theory of the Non-Object* (English translation in: Appendix 1) and has more recently been reiterated by Lygia Pape in: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

²¹² This will be discussed in more detail further in this study. See: Chapter 15.

proposed a totalised and eternal vision that is distinct from our quotidian experience. From such an assertion we can understand the importance placed by Neoconcretism on the spectator's movement around the work, and in some cases the manipulation of the work itself. In sculpture too this became important for Neoconcretism. Although at first this might seem paradoxical since sculpture does possess the three dimensionality which Merleau-Ponty equated with 'real objects' in perceptual competition with each other, neoconcrete sculpture places such perceptual relateness within the actual (or virtual) planes of the sculptural structure itself.

Such issues are for instance very clear in the sculpture of Weissmann where the perception of elements which constitute the work are affected by the viewer's position. [Fig. 38, 39] Weissmann creates sculptural objects that contain a minimum of mass, volume or planes are suggested by the emptiness of the space contained within the lines, this in turn is affected by the movement of the spectator in relation to the object of art. The work therefore was no longer seen as a totalised entity but its components would act in the same manner as objects in the real world: that is to say, the art object is perceived in the same manner as other objects in the world.

The distinction between the concrete and neoconcrete apprehension of the object of art lay in the distinction of emphasis between the object produced by the artist according to specific laws that would enable its 'objective' apprehension by the spectator, and the object placed in the world, perceived by the spectator through, what Merleau-Ponty (Chauí, 1984) called, a process of subjective rationalism. As far as the ideas of Gestalt psychology are concerned, for the concrete artists, the composition, formed by geometrical arrangements, appeared to the viewer through the distinction foreground/background, while in Neoconcretism the work became the foreground and its environment (the world), its background.²¹³

The neoconcrete manifesto stated that the movement attempted to re-instate the autonomy of art which Concretism had diluted through its emphasis on the usefulness of its designs within the context of an industrial society. The neoconcrete manifesto - written by Gullar (*Os Neoconcretos*, 2000) and signed by himself, Amílcar de Castro, Weissmann, Clark, Pape, Jardim and Spanudis - stated from the outset that it represented a positioning with regards to 'non-figurative geometrical art'²¹⁴ and the rigorous rationalism purported by concrete art.²¹⁵ The latter was seen as incapable of fulfilling the expressive experiences that the neoconcrete artists had

²¹³ See: Interview with Ferreira Gullar. In: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

²¹⁴ By this it included: Neoplasticism, Constructivism, Suprematism, and the Ulm School. See: Gullar et al. (1959d).

²¹⁵ Concrete art is referred to here in a general sense, that is, beyond the context of the São Paulo group.

demonstrated during their first exhibition. Gullar (1959d) argued that during the art historical processes that characterised 20th century movements, two types of reactions had emerged against an increasingly mechanised society: the reactionary Magical Realism and the irrationality implicit in Dada and Surrealism. However, according to Gullar, the movements that had embraced such modernising processes had suffered from a misunderstanding whereby theory was emphasised at the expense of the aesthetic experience. Neoconcretism (Gullar & al., 1959d) was an attempt to recuperate the forgotten expressiveness of pioneering movements such as Neoplasticism and Constructivism through an emphasis on expression over theory.

Mário Pedrosa: Gestalt and Other Theories

Neoconcretism's perceived association with Phenomenology of Perception and distance from the Gestalt theory is further credited by the fact that at the time of the neoconcrete rupture, the publication of its manifesto and its first exhibition, Pedrosa was in Japan. The role Pedrosa held as Gullar's philosophical mentor, Pedrosa's prominence as disseminator of ideas concerning abstraction and particularly his association with Concretism through his studies on Gestalt theory, are elements that seduce the historian into imagining a scene where the disciple, Gullar, taking advantage of the tutor's absence, inaugurates his own school or movement. Indeed, Pedrosa's (1987 p.107) silence on the matter at the time seems to indicate that he saw the rupture as unnecessary.²¹⁶ However, contrary to general assumptions, Pedrosa (1987 p.105) claimed that he was never very close or a partisan to the concrete rhetoric: stating that he 'was in favour, but when they became excessive [he] moved away.' Pedrosa justified his adherence to the concretist precepts as being indicative of an attempt to move away from preconceived expectations, even if in elaborating such an argument Pedrosa (1987 pp.105-6) showed signs of such prejudices himself:

There are countries that are far more theoretical than others. Argentina is more theoretical than Brazil; the United States more than England; Italy more than France; and São Paulo more than Rio.

[...]

The predominance of Concretism was the result of the victory of modern architecture. What I adhered to was that Concretism was an anti-romantic movement. Brazil is a romantic country par excellence. Concretism was a movement that required discipline, Brazil too required discipline, a certain character, order so that the people could be educated. I think that Concretism was important in this aspect. The European was not

²¹⁶ Pedrosa claimed that: 'Neoconcretism was a reaction by Gullar, I did not take part in the formation of neoconcrete group.' In the original: O Neoconcretismo foi uma reação do Gullar. Eu não participei da formação do grupo neoconcreto.

Later, however, Pedrosa did admit to the relevance of Gullar's theories such as The Theory of the Non-Object. See: Pedrosa (1970) p.290.

interested in our cultural formation. They wanted pleasant sensations, parrots, exoticism, and at that moment there was a struggle for the cultural affirmation of the country. This is my thesis.²¹⁷

It would be possible to imagine that due to the fact that Pedrosa's statement was significantly *a posteriori* to the events themselves, it took into account the subsequent recognition of Neoconcretism, particularly if its historical significance, at a local level, is compared with that of Concretism. However, at the time of the interview the recognition of Neoconcretism as historically pertinent had not become consensual and widespread as it is today.²¹⁸ Moreover, Pedrosa's introduction to the first *Frente* Group exhibition - which included many of the future neoconcrete artists - praised their diversity over the proliferation of *isms* which according to him, tended to restrict diversity through their sense of partisanship. Amongst the examples of such movements Pedrosa (1955) mentioned Concretism, positing the undogmatic characteristic of the *Frente* group as its distinctive factor.

The association between Gestalt and Concretism has been raised - as has already been mentioned - in various historical accounts. Another analysis of the role Pedrosa's theories played within the emerging concrete avant-garde was that of Amaral (1984 p.232), who argued that Gestalt Theory acted as the basis in which concrete art could explain its reliance on 'simple forms' as a means of eliminating any association with subjective characteristics. The concrete aesthetic language having its origins in the Bauhaus experience implied that the objectivity of form and colour as perceptual facts was nevertheless directed towards specific applications such as industrial design and architecture.²¹⁹ With concrete art, the Bauhaus objectivity was radicalised since, according to Amaral (1984 p.232):

[...] the reduction of form and colour into simple vehicles of visual dynamics was insufficient for establishing a new expressive artistic language.²²⁰

²¹⁷ In the original: Há países que são muito mais teóricos que outros. A Argentina é mais teórica que o Brasil; os Estados Unidos mais que a Inglaterra; a Itália do que a França; São Paulo mais que o Rio. [...]

O predomínio do Concretismo se deve à vitória da arte na arquitetura moderna. O que eu sustentava é que ele era um movimento anti-romântico. O Brasil é um país romântico por excelência. O Concretismo era um movimento que precisava de uma disciplina e o Brasil também precisava de uma disciplina, de um certo caráter, ordem, para educar o povo. Acho que o Concretismo foi importante neste ponto. O Europeu não se interessava pela nossa formação cultural, eles queriam sensações agradáveis, papagaios, exoticismo e naquele momento, havia uma luta pela afirmação cultural do país. Esta é minha tese.

²¹⁸ The first major re-evaluation took place in 1977 and did not overtly emphasise one over the other. See: Amaral, ed. (1977).

²¹⁹ The Bauhaus however, rather than purely rationalist contained paradoxical positions which were expressed by its teachers: these varied from rationalism to certain transcendental ideas which had their origin in German Expressionism. See: Banham (1960) p.269.

²²⁰ In the original: Mas a redução das formas e das cores a simples veículos da dinâmica visual não era suficiente para a estruturação de uma nova linguagem artística, expressiva.

Bill - who Amaral emphasised was a student at the Bauhaus - thus introduced mathematics as a form of 'thematic myth,' which then took the role of 'true reality'. Amaral (1984 p.232) argued that the emphasis on mathematics as a justification for avoiding references to the natural world was precisely what brought concrete art into decadence, since:

[...] the search for a proximity between the fields - art and science - would fatally result, as it later did, in the predominance of the principles of the latter over the former.²²¹

Gestalt served concrete art, therefore, as a means of explaining form through the association between the laws of perception with those of the physical world. This acted as a process that would overcome the fact that expression would, through the concrete orthodoxy, become simply reduced to exercises limited to variations on a simple physical phenomenon.

Pedrosa wrote his thesis *Da Natureza Afetiva da Forma* (On the Affective Nature of Form)²²² in 1949. It concentrated on how ideas on Gestalt psychology could be applied to the arts and vice-versa. Gestalt attempted to replace the idea of empathy, such as that expressed by Wilhelm Worringer (1881-1965), by the notion that the emotive qualities rather than being projected by the viewer (Terra Cabo, 1996 pp.195-207) were already inherent qualities of the object.²²³ Worringer is pertinent in this respect since his theories countered the European classical tradition, they thus received praise amongst sectors of the emerging modern art circles (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.68) particularly those associated with expressionism due to the centrality of notions of the primitive and their association to abstract art. This is a yet unexplored avenue in the argument between the neoconcrete expressiveness and the rationalism of concrete art.

The purported objectivity of Gestalt psychology therefore offered, for groups such as the concretists, a means of disassociating the expressive character which had been entwined in theories concerning abstraction since the early 20th century and that were particularly present at the time amongst the increasingly prominent American Abstract Expressionists. However, as was the case in Merleau-Ponty's theories, object and subject are also treated in Pedrosa's study as being related, therefore

²²¹ In the original: [...] passou-se a buscar uma aproximação maior entre os dois campos - o da arte e da ciência - o que fatalmente resultaria, com resultado, no predomínio dos princípios desta sobre os daquela.

²²² Pedrosa, M., (1949) *Da Natureza Afetiva da Forma na Obra de Arte*. In: Pedrosa (1979) *Arte, Forma e Personalidade*. São Paulo Kairos. For a comprehensive analysis of Pedrosa's theoretical texts during the late 1940s and 50s see: Terra Cabo (1996) p.200.

²²³ See: Worringer (1908) p.68.

form in his scheme cannot be treated as entirely objective as was the case within the concrete orthodoxy. On the other hand, Pedrosa claimed (Terra Cabo, 1996 p.201) that he avoided a psychoanalytical view since it was for him, unavoidably subjective. It was this ambivalent character which would allow Pedrosa to interact with the 'warring' factions of the 1950s avant-garde.

Pedrosa's ambivalent approach gained another level of complexity (particularly if we are to consider it, perhaps wrongly, as a counteraction to Worringer) in his subsequent study *Forma e Personalidade* (Form and Personality)²²⁴ of 1951. According to Terra Cabo (1996 p.203), this text was very much the product of Pedrosa's work with the 'insane' during the late 1940s. Placing himself between the extremes of Roger Fry's (1866-1934) formalism and Breton's subjectivism, Pedrosa purported that in the same manner that language as well as mathematics are both symbolic, one cannot place as contradictory the primacy of form and the primacy of inspiration. Pedrosa thus agreed (Terra Cabo, p.203) that automatism in Surrealism represented 'the expression of [a] symbiosis between form and intuition, sensibility and thought, matter and spirit.' Terra Cabo elaborated the position held by Pedrosa in this respect:

[T]he aesthetic impulse is beyond psychoanalytic interpretation since it cannot determine how the authentic impulses that move the creator are elaborated, which from another viewpoint recognises also the impossibility of science to control and explain the phenomenon of creation, it is beyond logical knowledge.

Form and Personality, although not referring specifically to the work that Pedrosa, Mavignier, Serpa and Palatnik carried out in Rio de Janeiro's asylum for the insane, did focus its theoretical analysis on the processes of creation amongst the insane, children and the primitive. The assumption would be to associate such a work to the contemporaneous project of the *Companie de l'Art Brut* by Jean Dubuffet (1901-85) as demonstrative of the Zeitgeist. The São Paulo Biennial offered after all, the possibility for Brazilians to imagine their participation as such. Although no evidence has been found to connect these projects, Pedrosa when returning from Japan at the time of the 5th São Paulo Biennial, was supportive of the *Informel*, which according to Gullar had been the undeniable tendency of that year.²²⁵

Pedrosa's closeness to Oiticica could explain the latter's openness in attempting to achieve a synthesis of apparent opposing tendencies in the field of art. Such a

²²⁴ Published in: Pedrosa (1979) *Arte, Forma e Personalidade*. São Paulo Kairos. For a discussion on this text, see: Terra Cabo (1996) p.202-5.

²²⁵ During the 1950s there were a variety of overlapping definitions for art produced in France such as *Informel*, *Tachisme*, *Une Art Autre*, and *Art Brut*. Additional terminology was later added such as Bonnefoi's (1963) *Artistes de la Matière*.

synthesis, as Oiticica himself described it, explains the irrational, the spontaneous, the geometrical rigidity that stemmed from his constructivist experience, the formlessness of his appropriations of pure matter, and ultimately the disruptive character of his art. Terra Cabo (1996 p.204) makes a similar suggestion by associating Pedrosa's notion of a psycho-aesthetic contained in the work of 'outsiders' with the subsequent notion directed at Oiticica's work, as an experiment which operated at a psycho-social level.

Terra Cabo (1996 p.228) however, placed the relationship between Pedrosa and Gullar as one divided by the dichotomy of Concretism and Neoconcretism respectively. It is difficult however to associate Pedrosa, as already argued, with the orthodox nature of Concretism. The association - via Gestalt theory in opposition to Merleau-Ponty's - seems rather restrictive. It was precisely Pedrosa's non-partisan approach that isolated Gullar as the 'the only theoretician of Neoconcretism' at a time in which Pedrosa was closer to Tashism than Concretism. Arguably, such openness to abstraction - in its varied forms - also distinguished Pedrosa from other dogmatisms such as the Greenbergian one.

Chapter 11

Ferreira Gullar's Theory of the Non-Object²²⁶

Gullar's most outstanding contribution as an art critic and central spokesperson for Neoconcretism was undoubtedly the (Gullar, 1959c) *Teoria do Não-Objeto* (Theory of the Non-Object). More than the Neoconcrete Manifesto and other articles that appeared in relation to the first neoconcrete exhibition whose emphasis pertained to the distinctiveness the new movement held in relation to Concretism, the Theory of the Non-Object embodied in its very conception Gullar's philosophical interests while implicitly standing as the antithesis to the *a priori* nature of concrete theory.

It is no longer necessary for the neoconcretes to justify their position with regard to the other faction's orthodox insistence on the basic condition for the development and unity of their work! Since Kant, the field of art has been, once and for all, defined as an independent territory between pure reason and practical reason. The notion of an orthodox art, an art founded on *a priori* laws has passed. The neoconcrete group does not make eclecticism its flag but attempts a rigor that it cannot predict with equations.²²⁷

The objectivity claimed by the *Paulistas* versus the purported expressiveness of the *Cariocas*, could lead to assumptions that the 'Theory of the Non-Object' could by its name alone be seen as a statement of differentiation from the former's emphasis on the 'object'. It most certainly represented the prime moment of assertiveness by the young poet transformed into an avant-garde theorist, particularly when considering his mentor's silence on the matter. Pedrosa in his (1960) essay on Clark diplomatically avoided mentioning Gullar's recently published theory. A fact that further emphasised the significance of Pedrosa's silence was the publication of Gullar's (1960a) re-elaboration, earlier that year, of the central ideas within the 'Theory of the Non-Object' which he published (only months prior to Pedrosa's article on Clark) in a more pedagogic format under the title *Diálogo sobre o Não-Objeto* (Dialogue about the Non Object). The centrality of Clark in this matter is also highly significant since according to Gullar's own account (1987 and 1998), the notion arose out of a discussion between Clark, Pedrosa and himself, in which both critics

²²⁶ Gullar (1959c). For a translation of the entire article into English, see: Appendix 1.

²²⁷ Anonymous Letter, in response to an article by José Lino Grünewald, addressed to the Sunday Supplement. In: *Jornal do Brasil*. (1959) 6 March. Although no author is attached to the letter this was probably a response from Ferreira Gullar.

In the original: Não seria mais necessário aos neoconcretos justificar a sua posição quanto a outra facção afirmar que na ortodoxia reside a condição básica para o desenvolvimento e unidade do seu trabalho! Desde Kant que o campo da arte foi, de uma vez por todas, definido como terreno independente entre a razão pura e razão prática. A noção de uma arte ortodoxa, arte fundada em leis *a priori* já passou. O grupo neoconcreto não faz do ecleticismo a sua bandeira nem põe menos rigor em seu trabalho. Só que não se conforma a um rigor ditado antecipadamente, mas procura, no fazer, um rigor que não se pode prever com equações.

attempted to define a recent work by the artist.²²⁸ The work held an ambivalent position with respect to established categories of artistic production such as painting, relief, and sculpture. Gullar mentioned that while Pedrosa described Clark's new work as a relief, the fact that there was no background plane meant that it could not be described as such. Realising that it was also neither painting nor sculpture, Gullar could only define it as an object, yet, such a definition remained unsatisfactory since it would not distinguish it from other more mundane objects such as the table, chair and so forth.²²⁹ Therefore the only possibility left, was to call it - initially jokingly, Gullar admits - a non-object. Of course, Gullar's own account (1998 p.36) also described Pedrosa's claim that to call something a non-object would be nonsensical. Pedrosa's subsequent silence and distinct writing on Clark's work indicate that he continued to consider Gullar's theory as a humorous comment.

The distinct responses to Clark's work by the two critics represents individual apprehensions into the nature of art at that time. On the one hand, Pedrosa interpreted Clark's contemporaneous work as operating in opposition to, what he saw as, the general decadence that sculpture was experiencing at the time: his complaint was directed towards the fact that sculpture was following certain tenets pertaining to painting, rather than asserting itself as an autonomous field in its own right. Gullar, on the other hand, affirmed that the domains of painting and sculpture were becoming indistinguishable, that Clark's work was symptomatic of a general tendency that pertained to the 'best' examples of modern art, a tendency that became explicit in the neoconcrete production. This central disagreement is the most likely reason - as opposed to Pedrosa's complicity with concrete art - for remaining silent on Gullar's novel theory. In a contemporaneous essay, Pedrosa (1959 pp.11-22) discusses the problem of sensibility, where he clearly adopts a position of ambivalence towards the concrete orthodox approach to rationality and the appearance of *Informel* abstract tendencies, claiming that the disagreements between the abstract factions was nothing more than a stupid argument.

Other than the fact that theory emerged from the work rather than vice-versa, the 'Theory of the Non-Object' could be considered as distinct from Concretism in its consideration of art beyond the domain of ordinary objects. Indeed, the art object, in Gullar's view, was a special object, with characteristics which set it aside from other, more ordinary, objects. The 'Theory of the Non-Object' (Gullar, 1959c) suggests that art waged a battle against the object: a process which began with the elimination of representation from the painted canvas which in turn emphasised the objecthood of

²²⁸ The actual work is not specified.

²²⁹ See also Gullar's account of the incident in: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

painting itself. The non-object was not, however, the antithesis of the object but a special or privileged object that due to its non-utilitarian nature possessed 'a body that is transparent to phenomenological knowledge, that is entirely perceptible' or in other words, a 'pure appearance'.

The non-object by its very nature represented a stage in art history in which art transcended the categories of painting and sculpture. Gullar argued that Neoconcretism did not represent the first instance of such occurrences, but had enabled the apprehension, or the understanding that this was indeed the direction that progressive modern art had taken: again the *a posteriori* nature of Gullar's criticism is evident in such an account. The linearity suggested by Gullar, although including in its path certain interventions with real objects such as Duchamp's Readymades, remained strictly within a constructivist frame. Symptomatic of such development was painting's transcendence of the frame and sculpture's transcendence of the base. Once such a move had been taken (Gullar, 1959c), the categories inevitably became closer to each other:

To break from the frame and to eliminate the base are not, in fact, merely questions of a technical or physical nature: it concerns the effort of the artist to liberate himself from the conventional cultural frame, in order to encounter that 'desert', of which Malevitch mentions, where the work of art appears for the first time free from any signification that does not pertain to its own appearance.

This fact distinguished Neoconcretism as belonging to a truly progressive linearity within Modernism as opposed to the *Informel* and *Tashist* movements, which had dominated the São Paulo Biennial the year of the 'Theory of the Non-Object's' publication (1959). The reliance on the pictorial framed space of such abstract movements emphasised, according to Gullar, their reactionary character.

The objecthood therefore was central not only to the theoretical differences between the two constructive factions but with respect to modern art in general: both contemporaneous and historical. Underlying the distinguishing character of the non-object in relation to other more mundane objects was an implicit belief in art as an autonomous activity. Such autonomy was posited by Gullar's affirmation that ordinary objects - due to their inescapable association to their name and thus to their function or place in the real world - were semantic hybrids. Their own specific form being the only aspect which presented itself to the perceptual field of man. The non-object, in this manner, possessed an immanent signification associated with its form: the latter, according to Gullar, represented its pure signification.

It is in this sense perhaps that Neoconcretism maintained what Brito (1975) defined as its aristocratic character in its insistence on the autonomy of art as a specific field

of research (its perceptual purity in Gullar's view), and consequently as Brito (1975 p.107) argued, an activity comparable to that of an experimental aesthetic laboratory. Michael Fried's (1967) attacks on the theatricality present in the work of North American artists such as Donald Judd (1928-94) and Robert Morris (b. 1931), during the 1960s, has been associated in this sense as unwittingly defining the outstanding character of the art of that era.²³⁰

Lying behind the rehearsal of the 'specific object' seems to have been a deeper sense that something altogether new - in a way that painting and sculpture could never - was required by an altogether new form of life. (Harrison & Wood, 1992 pp.797-8)

The similarities that the 'Theory of the Non-Object' holds with Judd's (1965) essay *Specific Objects*, have been raised by Ricardo Basbaum (1996 p.13) in a study on the ambivalent relationship between art and writing, and by Milton Machado (1999 p.111) in discussing art and its exteriority.

For today's historians, perhaps the most interesting characteristic of the 'Theory of the Non-Object' and by extension the neoconcrete movement, is precisely the out-of-jointness that the movement and the theories that emerged from it, represent with respect to the wider History of Art.

Coincidences: Neoconcretism and Minimalism

Similarities between the 1950s in Brazil and the earlier example of Russian Constructivism have already been discussed. However, the theoretical and aesthetic 'coincidences' which occur with subsequent movements, and particularly with North American Minimalism are also uncanny. On Fried's (1967) attack on Minimalism in *Art and Objecthood*, Harrison and Wood (1992 p.822) claimed that:

This was Fried's response to the claims of Judd and Morris, whom he designates as 'literalists'. Attacking what he defines as a corrupted sensibility, Fried reiterates the 'abstractionist' account of Modernism and its distinguishing characteristics and virtues. In Fried's view it is a symptom of the decadence of literalist art that it theatricalises the relation between object and beholder, whereas the experience of authentic modernist art involves the suspension both of objecthood and of the sense of duration.

Gullar (1960a) in turn, drew on existential philosophy in addition to the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, in order to develop the relation object-subject. The increased emphasis on the individual perception, and therefore the presence of a certain theatricality, places the neoconcrete experiment within a theoretical proximity to debates which would dominate the reaction by Abstract Expressionist apologists:

²³⁰ See: Foster (1996) p.53, 56. See also: Machado (1999) p.134.

Whilst the subject exists for itself, the object, the thing exists in itself. Leaving aside the implications that [Sartre] draws from such a fundamental contradiction, let us stay with the fact that it reaffirms the opacity of the thing that rests on itself and the perplexity of the man who feels exiled amongst them. A nexus of significations and intentions constitutes the human world, in which the opacity of the non-human world persists, exterior to man. The experience of the object without-name is the experience of exile. The fight to overcome the subject-object contradiction is at the core of all human knowledge, of all human experience and particularly of the work of art.²³¹

Foster's (1996 p.40) positioning of Minimalism as transcending a set of dialectics is in this sense coherent with the neoconcrete premises: and if we are to strip these sets of oppositions down to their essence we will find a familiar concrete rhetoric, that of objectivity versus subjectivity:

For it is precisely such metaphysical dualisms of subject and object that Minimalism seeks to overcome in phenomenological experience.

Foster's (1996 p.42) claim that 'Minimalism is an apogee of Modernism, but it is no less a break with it' other than unintentionally reminding one of Brito's (1975) description of Neoconcretism, is intended as an argument against, or perhaps more precisely, a supplement to Rosalind Krauss²³² affirmation that as a movement Minimalism represented Modernism's apogee. Foster's rhetorical addition is intended in order to posit the movement if not entirely within the field of Postmodernism, then certainly against the tenets of high modernity. In order to do so, Foster (1996 p.43) is required to make some historiographical speculations:

It is true that, as represented by Edmund Husserl and Ferdinand de Saussure, phenomenology and structural linguistics did emerge with high Modernism. Yet neither discourse was current among artists until the 1960s, that is, until the time of Minimalism, and when they emerged in tension.

It can nevertheless be argued that the tension created by concrete poets' interest in linguistics provided similar theoretical tensions. Confronted by Gullar's (1958a) reading of Merleau-Ponty (an indirect route to Husserl), Haroldo de Campos insisted that in relation to concrete art, it is important to distinguish two semiotic categories: 'a

²³¹ In the original: Enquanto o sujeito existe para si, o objeto, a coisa, existe em si. Deixando de lado as implicações que o filósofo [Sartre] tira dessa contradição fundamental, fiquemos com o fato de que ela reafirma a opacidade da coisa que repousa em si mesma e a perplexidade do homem que se sente exilado entre elas. Um tecido de significações e intenções constitui o mundo humano, sob a qual persiste a opacidade de mundo inumano, exterior ao homem. A experiência do objeto-sem-nome é a experiência do exílio. A luta por vencer a contradição sujeito-objeto está no cerne de todo conhecimento humano, de toda experiência humana, e particularmente na realização da obra de arte.

²³² Here, Foster is referring to Krauss, R. (1977) *Passages in Modern Sculpture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

sign that is a sign of something else and a sign that is a sign of itself'.²³³ Foster's (1996 pp.37-8) description of the pertinence of Minimalism is worth quoting at length:

On first glance it all looks simple, yet in each body a perceptual ambiguity complicates things. At odds with the specific objects of Judd is his non-specific composition [...]. And just as the given gestalts of Morris are more contingent than ideal, so the blunt slabs of Serra are redefined by our perception of them in time. Meanwhile, the latticed logic of Le Witt can be obsessive, almost mad; and even as the perfect cubes of Bell appear hermetically closed, they mirror the outside world. So what you see is what you see [...], but things are never as simple as they seem: the Positivism of Minimalism notwithstanding, perception is made reflexive in these works and so rendered complex.

Although the experimental surprise of Minimalism is difficult to recapture, its conceptual provocation remains, for Minimalism breaks with the transcendental space of most modernist art (if not with the immanent space of the dadaist readymade or the constructivist relief). Not only does Minimalism reject the anthropomorphic basis of most traditional sculpture (still residual in the gestures of abstract-expressionist work), but it also refuses the siteless realm of most abstract sculpture. In short, with Minimalism sculpture no longer stands apart, on a pedestal or as pure art, but is repositioned among objects and redefined in terms of space. In this transformation the viewer, refused the safe, sovereign space of formal art, is cast back on the here and now; and rather than scan the surface of a work for a topographical mapping of the properties of its medium, he or she is prompted to explore the perceptual consequences of a particular intervention in a given site. This is the fundamental reorientation that Minimalism inaugurates.

Such an inaugural event can be affirmed only within a strictly provincial context,²³⁴ since the above quote - with only a few exchanges of names - could very well define the characteristics of Neoconcretism. The work of individual artists retain of course, their specificity, their individual creative character and response or contribution to theoretical propositions. Moreover, in such comparisons the most striking distinction, as Gullar has remarked in relation to Swiss concrete art, remains uncontested: it is of course, the means of production available to each group.

However, when it is theory that acts as the common thread for a group of diverse artists, it is theory and not the work that must be judged. Neoconcretism remains therefore a strange precursor. It stands as the peak of the localised constructive tradition, a rare opportunity to conclude the efforts of a heroic European avant-garde, yet as such, it is posited in relation to the modernist canon as a late re-articulation. It also represents the rupture from that past, being posited as the inaugural moment of Brazilian contemporary art. Such a role authenticates the art of today's young generation of Brazilian artists, giving them a sense of belonging, of place. It is ironic

²³³ Campos is quoted in Gullar's (1958a) account of the debate. In the original: Levantou-se Haroldo de Campos e afirmou que do ponto de vista do artista é útil distinguir entre duas categorias (semi-óticas) de signos: o signo que é signo de alguma coisa e o signo que é signo de si mesmo.

²³⁴ Speaking at the Royal College of Art in London, *Performance and Process in Relation to Judgement and Excess*, 24 February (1999), Foster had, at that occasion, admitted the provincialism of his position.

that the Brazilian constructivists' desire to operate within an international forum of aesthetic experimentation was finally translated into a means of establishing a strictly Brazilian historical linearity. In fact, Foster's discussion on Minimalism, written in the 1990s, was published at a time in which Neoconcretism was receiving international attention, not because of itself but as a reference for a new generation of artists from Brazil receiving unprecedented international attention. Here too, there are coincidences with Foster's (1996 p.35) re-evaluation of Minimalism. Indeed, one could see in Foster's argument, a blueprint for the proliferation of art criticism based on historical recurrences:

For the rightists in the 1950s sought to bury the radicalism of the 1930s, so the rightists in the 1980s sought to cancel the cultural claims and to reverse the political gains of the 1960s, so traumatic were they to these neoconservatives. Nothing much changed for the Gingrich radicals of the early 1990s, and political passion against the 1960s runs high as ever.

Foster saw in Minimalism a search for the re-assessment of the transgressiveness of the historical avant-garde: from Russian constructivists such as Aleksander Rodchenko (1891-1956), and Vladimir Tatlin (1885-1953) to *enfants terribles* such as Duchamp. Through *Nachträglichkeit*, or deferred action, Minimalism other than representing a rupture from the late modernist order encompassed according to Foster (1996 p.59), an institutional critique since:

[...] even as Minimalism turned the objective orientation of formalism to the subjective orientation of phenomenology, it tended to position artist and viewer alike not only as historically innocent but as sexually indifferent [...]

Foster (1996 p.36), who attempts to associate a level of political progressiveness to the Minimalist neo-avant-garde, also suggests a precursory element to it:

For all its apparent freedoms, Neoexpressionism participated in the cultural regressions of the Regan-Bush era, while for all its apparent restrictions, Minimalism opened up a new field of art, one that advanced work of the present continues to explore [...]

Cynically, one could see such neoconcrete recurrences in the Brazilian case, as paradoxical and ill-informed means of authentication: placing the contemporary production of Brazilian young artists strictly within an autonomous and above all alternative, unmediated or contaminated, historical lineage. In the case of developed countries this strategy is usually beneficial, distinguishing their particular productions as signs of a thriving cultural scene, a reflection of the country's confident climate. Admittedly, some positive repercussions have indeed occurred in Brazil in terms of

the prominence that certain galleries have achieved within the international market. However, this has also served to restrict the dissemination of Brazilian art which does not present the required strictly formal lineage, in addition to those whose work does not insert itself so easily into the saleable qualities imposed by the market. Moreover, for a historian interested in the processes of articulation between ideas at the local and international level, these nationally restricted narratives are problematic.

Interestingly, often such narrow narratives placed Neoconcretism as a movement which took place during the latter part of the 1960s as if unconsciously or not it seemed too improbable that it could have occurred six years prior to the official inauguration of Minimalism.²³⁵ In any case the specificity of dates and who preceded who are of little relevance since these were aesthetic articulations of particular modernist ideals and therefore pertain to an ongoing process rather than an absolute rupture or inaugural moment. Moreover, Foster's analysis is highly competent and it would therefore be unwise to reject it purely on the basis of its provincial character. On the contrary, the existence of a 'mainstream' parallel enables a discussion that encourages contamination (even if this is not Foster's project and neither that of those who have discussed Neoconcretism with regard to recent Brazilian art).

Contamination is of course present in Foster's (1996 p.38) discussion of Minimalism, yet this referred to as a reaction to the perceived purity of the high modernist work of art:

Made explicit by later artists, this reorientation [which Minimalism set in motion] was sensed by early critics, most of whom lamented it as a loss for art. Yet in the moralistic charge that Minimalism was reductive lay the critical perception that it pushed art toward the quotidian, the utilitarian, the nonartistic.

Again such a statement could be²³⁶ posited with respect to the subsequent work of artists who formally belonged to the more disruptive sector of Neoconcretism. However, implicit in the argument that Minimalism represented a rupture from Modernism is the assumption that Greenbergian high Modernism represents Modernism as a whole. This in fact is the most negative consequence of Foster's (1996 p.54) provincialism and consequently why a parallel discussion of

²³⁵ Due to the significance of its author, the publication and the absurd muddle of facts, perhaps the most obvious example of such assumptions is Gerardo Mosquera's (Herkenhoff, Mosquera, & Cameron, 1999 p.8) interview with Cildo Meireles, where Mosquera states: 'In Brazil in the early 1960s there was a strong concrete Art movement, derived from the traditions of Russian and European Constructivism, which developed in an orthodox manner in São Paulo. However, in Rio this tradition had evolved by the late 1960s into the more liberated, sensual and subversive movement known as Neo-concretism which included Lygia Clark, Hélio Oiticica and yourself. This is an interesting art-historical phenomenon: an art form with social implications that developed out of the formal and self-referential investigations of Brazilian Concretism.' (My emphasis).

Neoconcretism - in the context of the 'peak and rupture' of the less totalising Brazilian constructive project - serves the purpose of questioning such a dichotomy.

[...] rhetorically at least, Minimalism is inaugurated when Judd reads late Modernism so literally that he answers its call for self-critical objectivity perversely with specific objects. [...] In short Minimalism appears as a historical crux in which the formalist autonomy of art is at once achieved and broken up, in which the ideal of pure art becomes the reality of one more specific object.

In a relatively recent publication Alex Coles (1996 pp.62-3) suggested that Foster's argument in *The Return of the Real* (in which the neo-avant-garde brought the disruptive element of the historic avant-garde²³⁷ within the institutional space of the gallery/museum, as a form of critique from within) seemed oddly coherent with the Greenbergian maxim that:

The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic method of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence... Modernism criticises from the inside, through the procedures themselves of that which is being criticised.²³⁸

We have therefore various critiques based on categories of specificity. First, the Greenbergian essentialism which reduced the activity of the modern artist - preferably a painter - to the domain of the activity itself, framing the artist within *his* category. Secondly, we have Gullar's and Judd's ideal of wholeness or specificity, whereby the work's phenomenological character invokes the space around the object, considering it intrinsic to the viewer's apprehension. Thirdly, and with the benefit of hindsight, Foster (and Brito, in the case of Neoconcretism) places such a form of apprehension as being symptomatic of the completion of, and rupture from the modernist project. This inaugural moment establishes the process of contamination of high modernist purity through the deferred action of the rebellious avant-garde. According to Foster's interpretation, such action is consciously devoid of the previous utopian character, and operates within the existing structures and institutions of modern art.

Any comparison between Neoconcretism and Minimalism ultimately fails if the consequence of each movement is considered. Foster (1996) states from the outset that his argument stands as a critique of Bürger's (1974) *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. He argues that the utopian desire to merge art into the praxis of life, the heroic ideal of the historic avant-garde, is re-placed by a pragmatic exercise of institutional

²³⁶ As it has been, for example by Brazilian critics such as Brito & Venancio (2001).

²³⁷ As outlined in: Bürger (1974).

²³⁸ Greenberg, C. (1960). *Modernist Painting* (originally published as a part of the Forum Lectures, *Voice of America*, Washington D.C. 1960). In: O'Brian, J., ed., (1993). *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol.4. p. 85.

critique from within. With Neoconcretism however, such a progression cannot be asserted. The radical neoconcretes, and particularly Oiticica, transformed the work's phenomenological character, its relation with the viewer, into a participative element, that eventually transcended the domain of the institution of art, eventually questioning wider socio-cultural hierarchies. Such a connection to life was admittedly a consequence of the concurrent political transitions of a country suffering from the hangover of the *developmentalist* dream. However, was Foster's elegant paradigm, not equally dependent on the specificity of his cultural Milieu?

The specific socio-cultural context of Oiticica's creative development following Neoconcretism, will be the main focus of attention in the next part of this study.

Part III

Hélio Oiticica and the Politicisation of the Artistic Milieu

Introduction

More than a simple local version of international ideas and ideals, the cultural transition that took place in Brazil between the 1950s and the 60s was intrinsically related to the development of local political and social events. The cultural shift from the optimistic 50s to the radically politicised 60s marked a period in the history of Brazil in which the arts (theatre, cinema, music and the fine arts) converged in their increasing association with political thought. This pertained on the one hand, to the questioning of hierarchies between high-art and popular culture, and on the other hand, to a desire to distinguish national from imported culture. While the issue of the popular in 'developed' countries related, at that moment, to a large extent to the emergence of mass culture (advertisement, films, product and graphic design) in Brazil although often disseminated by such media, the term 'popular' brought with it a strong traditional connotation. However, the definition of what 'traditional' actually meant, in the context of a 'young' nation, was anything but consensual. The political context of the emerging concern with the 'popular' amongst artists and intellectuals pertained to differing definitions of what the term encompassed. It often related in this sense, to a policing of the limits of Brazilian popular culture and as far as the left was concerned, it appealed to a negation of imported (predominantly North American) 'imperialist' mass culture. Differing ideologies (Schwarz, in: Zahar, ed. 1987), in this manner, would define what was and, perhaps more importantly, what was not traditional national culture.

The attempt to apprehend the popular character of national culture was not exclusive to that period. As already discussed, during the second phase of *Modernismo* artists attempted to represent what they saw as the essential character of the Brazilian people. During the 1930s there was a political coincidence between the left and the right with regards to the defence of such representations, whereby both extremes of the political spectrum would claim the national character of culture as belonging to their own ideology. Similarly, during the 1960s, and particularly during the pre-1964 period, such paradoxes also occurred to the extent that many intellectuals saw the political pertinence of their activity solely in relation to its engagement with the popular classes.²³⁹

It is important to remark that the context in which the concerns towards the popular re-emerged during the 1960s is quite distinct from its appearance during previous

²³⁹ This was the year in which the military coup took place, the sequence of events leading to it is described further in this study. See Chapter 13.

decades. The voyages of 'discovery' undertaken by the protagonists of *Modernismo* had little in common with the emergence of the Popular Centres for Culture (CPC) that were created during the early 1960s and travelled the country in order to promote their activities. The former, as already mentioned, emulated the Parisian fascination with the exotic and searched for examples of primitivism and folklore within national culture. In its ambivalent search for an original national tradition and its search within the national culture for elements of primitivism, it 'invented' a form of Brazilian Arcadia. The CPC, as will be discussed, being driven by ideological convictions, not only searched for the 'authentic' national culture but also attempted to politicise the masses through its engagement with the 'popular' sectors of society. In fact, one could see in the CPC the development of ideas that emerged in Regionalism, particularly if the association that the CPC had with the emergent Movement for Popular Culture (MPC) in the North East is considered.

Later studies on the development of intellectual involvement within the domain of popular culture have pertinently argued that both the art inspired by popular traditions and art which addressed itself to the popular classes as its primary audience, remained highly problematic:

From an art inspired by the popular traditions to an art that adopts the people as its privileged receptacle, the problem of the limits and nature of the popular remains. If in the first case it is difficult to characterise it due to the fact that a sociologically improbable cultural unity is assumed [as representative] or at least, isolated manifestations 'signify' such a unity; in the second case, it passes through the intelligentsia or through the dominant political power.

The dilemma is not resolved by submitting the popular to a process of refinement [depuração], if only that would be possible, but through the questioning of its specificity. The more or less aprioristic acceptance of the existence of a popular culture, inevitably leads to a defence of a mythology of the roots and morals of a people, which are in turn freely translated into an idea of nationalism for official consumption; or alternatively for the dominant culture. In both cases the result is similar: the popular is the basic relationship of production-consumption. At the limits one can ask: if it is not the projection of a myth, could the popular today be more than just a question?²⁴⁰

²⁴⁰ Editorial, in: Centro de Estudos de Arte Contemporânea (1980). In the original: De uma arte inspirada nas tradições populares a uma arte que faz do povo seu destinatário privilegiado, permanece o problema dos limites e da natureza do popular. Se no primeiro caso é difícil caracterizá-lo porque supõe uma unidade cultural sociologicamente improvável ou, pelo menos, manifestações isoladas que 'significam' tal unidade; no segundo, passa-se pela 'intelligentsia' ou pelo poder político dominante.

O dilema não se desfaz por uma depuração do popular, como se isto fosse possível, mas justamente por um questionamento sobre sua especificidade. A aceitação mais ou menos apriorística da existência de uma cultura popular, via de regra leva à defesa da mitologia das raízes e qualidades morais de um povo, passíveis de serem traduzidas em idéia de nacionalidade para consumo oficial; ou então da ideologia dominante. Nos dois casos o resultado é semelhante: o popular é a relação básica de produção-consumo. No limite pode-se perguntar: se não a projeção de um mito, será o popular hoje mais do que uma questão?

Oiticica understood these issues and developed an art that through ambivalence evaded such problematics. Rather than searching for the authentic popular culture of Brazil, he maintained his production as 'high art' while overlaying it with the elements of popular culture that he encountered. In this sense, he posited the high modernist ideal of the sublime (Oiticica, 1961b p.26) as a notion that could be accessible to the popular classes due precisely to their non-intellectual apprehension of life. Additionally, one can sense an ambivalent approach in his openness with regard to the references he used in his art historical and critical writings. Such an attitude enabled him to speak of disparate 20th century Brazilian art movements as representing a common legacy.

The latter is central to the present historical narrative since it highlights the problematic of ambivalence itself. On the one hand, Oiticica uncovered a hitherto non-existent coherence within Brazilian art history based primarily on the strategy of appropriation, participation and the 'Constructive Will'. On the other hand, by doing so, he opened the possibility for the facile linearities purported primarily by non-Brazilian historians, curators and critics. These are currently tracing predominantly formal commonalities between Oiticica's generation and Brazilian artists working today.

Chapter 12

Hélio Oiticica and the Neoconcrete Legacy

Oiticica developed over the 1960s, a singular position through which he maintained his previous activity as an avant-garde artist while nevertheless being open, and particularly following 1964, responding to manifestations of popular culture, whether national or international. His production inscribed itself first and foremost within the field of fine art and was therefore independent of immediate political factions. This is not to say, however, that it was apolitical. Oiticica's re-evaluation of cultural appropriation and his association with popular culture did not rely on any form of attempt to 'represent' the people or the imagery associated with popular culture. He offered therefore a significantly distinct position from *Modernismo* and Pop Art. His proposition re-interpreted Oswald's ideas expressed in the notion of Anthropophagy while maintaining a coherent development with his previous constructivist orientated production. He nevertheless acknowledged the advent of mass culture while referring to Brazilian popular and marginalized sectors of society. These strategies were used, it will be argued, as a means of manoeuvring through the paradoxes confronting intellectuals at the time and will be defined here as Oiticica's politics of cultural ambivalence.

Following the Neoconcrete Manifesto and prior to the publication of Gullar's 'Theory of the Non-Object' (1959c), we encounter in Oiticica's work a concern for colour (often expressed through the use of *warm coloured* monochromes) and a preoccupation with the relationship between the work of art and its surrounding space: neoconcrete concerns *par excellence*. Already, signs of strategies of mediation as a means of developing a highly personal apprehension of artistic production were evident in his writing of the time. Oiticica's writing in 1959, attempted to elaborate the relationship between colour, space and time positing the discussion within a particular development of art history that related to Bergsonian notions of intuition. As already argued, intuition acted as a central issue in the disagreements between the São Paulo concretists and the Rio de Janeiro neoconcretists. Oiticica admitted that during the 20th century, art tended inevitably towards the metaphysical, and his discussion becomes clearer if we are to consider his artistic production of the time: *Monocromáticos* (Monochromatics), *Bilaterais* (Bilaterals) and *Relevos Espaciais* (Spatial Reliefs) all of 1959. [Fig. 40, 41, 42]

Various elements of Oiticica's thought during the neoconcrete period can be identified in Bergson's writing on metaphysics.²⁴¹ This is particularly so in Bergson's discussions on the relationship between intellect and intuition as characteristics of perception. Indeed, some of Bergson's comments (1907 p. 140) might invite those with a speculative incline to see in them the seeds for later works by Oiticica.

The whole of matter is made to appear to our thought as an immense piece of cloth in which we can cut out what we will and sew it together again as we please. Let us note, in passing, that it is this power that we affirm when we say that there is a *space*, that is to say, a homogenous and empty medium, infinite and infinitely divisible, lending itself indifferently to any mode of decomposition whatsoever. A medium of this kind is never perceived; it is only conceived. What is perceived is extension coloured, resistant, divided according to the lines which mark out the boundaries of real bodies or of their real elements.

The Bergsonian distinction between perception and conception seems coherent with Oiticica's development of the concept of the object in space while maintaining the perceptual power of colour. A relationship which could be equated to Bergson's (1907 p.141) coupling of intellect and intuition:

[...] Intuition may enable us to grasp what it is that intelligence fails to give us, and indicate the means of supplementing it. On the one hand, it will utilise the mechanism of intelligence itself to show how intellectual moulds cease to be strictly applicable; and on the other hand, by its own work, it will suggest to us the vague feeling, if nothing more, of what must take the place of intellectual moulds.

However, it was Bergson's 'discovery' (Worms, 1992 p.7) that scientific time possesses no *duration* that affected Oiticica's apprehension of his own neoconcrete work. Bergson realised that there was a 'gap' between scientific thought and the reality to which it attempted to relate but ultimately failed to reach. In other words, the scientific act of measuring time inevitably required a conceptual 'freezing' of time, that is, the consideration of time as indifferent, or as a neutral space. Real time, or as Bergson (Worms, 1992 p.9) defined it, duration, pertains to a subjective experience of time, being always different never homogeneous.

If science does not attain real time because it betrays it in an exterior and general manner, the only means of attaining it without betrayal is through an individual and interior form of knowledge, of which we only have a negative form of description yet which precisely needs developing: the conscience.

²⁴¹ Oiticica referred specifically to Bergson. Although the topic of his investigation at that moment was concerned with the fact, as he saw it, that art in the 20th century tended towards the metaphysical, he might also have been implicitly attempting to explain the neoconcrete ambivalence between rationalism and intuition. See: Oiticica (1959a) p.16.

Oiticica equated the metaphysical element of the work with a silence that emanated from within the work. Since silence can only be perceived as time, the work of art became inescapably associated with duration: in his view, it became this duration. He argued, in contrast yet not entirely in opposition to Gullar, that although the work inevitably related to space, the artist's task was to temporalise space. Therefore, the intuitive nature of the work (Oiticica, 1960 p.36) did not pertain to its spatial relations since space is always rational. Instead, it was the relation to time and not space that belonged to the realm of metaphysics.[Fig. 43, 44]

Oiticica therefore offered an elaborate theoretical differentiation between the rationalism of concrete works and the metaphysical and intuitive nature of neoconcrete production.

It is worth noting that Oiticica (1972a) retrospectively entitled a series of works of gouache on card dating from 1957-58 as *Metaesquemas*. [Fig. 45] Ironically, he began his comments on these works by affirming that: 'There is no reason to take seriously my pre-1959 production.' The apparent paradox can be explained by the fact that the artist saw his entire creative activity as an ongoing process. Although disregarding his pre-1959 production he saw those works as a formative process or a scheme rather than considering them to represent a stage that preceded the subsequent neoconcrete production. Perhaps the most apparent characteristic of the *Metaesquemas* were their dynamic compositions. The surface appears through 'cracks' which are seemingly formed by partial dislocations. Time therefore appears for the first time as a crucial element in the work.

Oiticica (1959a) also saw colour in a similar manner: 'colour time' as he labelled it. Similar to the relationship space-time, the notion of colour-time pertained to the domain of metaphysics through the elimination of intelligible senses, becoming 'pure action'. Such a process required, according to Oiticica, the use of textural monochromes. However, while colour possesses a temporal quality and therefore belongs to the domain of metaphysics, texture affects the surface through division, transforming its duration. As such, texture was a product of intelligence and rarely of intuition. This idea reflects on Oiticica's apprehension of artists associated with 'the matter'²⁴² such as Dubuffet whose 'texturologies' were admired by Oiticica for their infinite fragmentation, which according to him led to the point in which the pictorial space was divided into infinitely small spaces, in Oiticica's (1961c p.43) words, a 'microilimited' space. Subsequent works by Oiticica such as the *Bólides* would

²⁴² This definition was proposed by Bonnefoi (1963), to define the post-war French artists. I am grateful to Caroline Perret for drawing my attention to Bonnefoi.

incorporate the use of raw materials that could be equated with the idea of *texturology*.²⁴³ [Fig. 46]

Although the arguments during the late 1950s and early 60s seemed quite removed from any association that Oiticica's work might have had with the praxis of life, there is nevertheless an engagement with certain relationships, such as space-time, colour-time, rationality and metaphysics, which would later be 'superimposed' upon the 'social space'. Like the *Metaesquemas*, these issues would act as theoretical schemes which would subsequently be applied in very different contexts becoming instruments in his program, or aesthetic/theoretical development. They represented the foundations for a conceptual frame that would enable the singular approach adopted by the artist over the following decades.

This frame seemed already evident in his ambivalent apprehension of art historical references in his writing during the neoconcrete period (1959-61). Unlike Gullar's partisan position with regard to geometrical abstraction, Oiticica's (1961d pp.30-1) writing at that moment seems closer to Pedrosa's broader defence of modern art:

Today more than ever, it seems clear to me that it is not the external appearance that gives the work of art its characteristics but its signification, which emerges from the dialogue between the artist and the matter which is used to express. That is the origin of the error in the distinction <<informal>> and <<formal>>. In the work of art all is informal and formal, since it is not the <<geometric>> appearance or the appearance <<without outlines or stains>> that determine the formal and the informal. Who would say that Mondrian, for example, is not close to Wols, in their proximity of an expression of internal greatness and their concept of life. Mondrian is the founder of the ilimited space, an infinite dimension within the <<geometricisation>> that is attributed to him, while Wols does the same within his own <<non-geometricisation>>. They both create the <<making>> of ones space, giving it absolute transcendence, infinite dimension.²⁴⁴

It is perhaps not surprising that Oiticica's evaluations of the metaphysical characteristics of his neoconcrete production has not gained a wider dissemination.²⁴⁵

²⁴³ For a brief description of Dubuffet's *Topographies and Texturologies* see: Tate Gallery (1966) p.49. For a broader view of Dubuffet's work, see: Abadie (2001).

²⁴⁴ In the original: Hoje está para mim mais claro do que nunca que não é a aparência exterior o que dá a característica da obra de arte e sim o seu significado, que surge do diálogo entre o artista e a matéria com que se expressa. Daí o erro e vulgaridade da distinção <<informal>> e <<formal>>. Na obra de arte tudo é informal e formal, não sendo a aparência <<geométrica>> ou a aparência <<sem contornos ou manchas>> que determinam o formal e o informal. Quem diria que Mondrian, p.ex., não está próximo a Wols, tão próximo na expressão de grandesa interior e de concepção de vida. Mondrian funda o espaço ilimitado, uma dimensão infinita, dentro da <<geometrização>> que lhe atribuem, fazendo o mesmo Wols na sua própria <<não-geometrização>>. Ambos criam o <<fazer-se>> do seu espaço, dando-lhe absoluta transcendência, dimensão infinita.

²⁴⁵ They were reprinted in the first collection of his writings as evidence of a young artist struggling to come to terms with the last vestige of modernist thought. However, they are placed at the beginning of the book followed only by the editor's introduction and Pedrosa's seminal text on Oiticica, where the critic describes the artist's work as postmodern. Such a claim has been widely quoted, both as a means of equating the work of the artist with

The predominant interpretation of Oiticica's shift from concrete artist to the experimentalism of the 1960s posits the body as a key conceptual element in such a transition. Recently, the artist Nuno Ramos (b. 1960) has equated (Ramos, 2001) the emergence of fissures in Oiticica's work as a progressive entrance of the body into the artist's work:

In effect, from the gaps in the metaesquemas to the fissures in the Spatial Reliefs that are invaded by the eye, until the *Bóides* that are manipulated by the hand, the Parangolés that the body is dressed in, the Penetrables that we promenade in or the Ninhos which we inhabit, there is a gradual and minutiae entrance of the body within the boundaries of the work. This movement towards the inside of the work offers a counter point to the objectivisation of the pictorial space.²⁴⁶

Ramos (2001) identifies a duplicity in Oiticica's neoconcrete work based on the formal inside-outside characteristics of the objects. However, his analysis remains retrospective in nature, viewing the oeuvre as a whole and identifying the development of themes. Oiticica was the first to propose such a reading of his work and it has remained the dominant interpretation. Commenting in 1968 on the reverse of one his early concrete gouache paintings - *Metaesquema Sêco 27* of 1957 [Fig. 47] - Oiticica (Witte de With, 1992 p.30) mentioned how the work had gained a retrospective importance for him:

Today I consider this work important, and for me, at the time, it was disconcerting for its sense of 'structural dimension' beyond the merely pictorial space - I still wanted the renovation of this space, but I had not yet been prepared for this leap or for the transformation, but today I see that this work was well ahead in the conflict between pictorial and extra-space and directly foretold the appearance of the *Bilaterals*, *Nuclei* and *Penetrables*.

Ramos' (2001) excellent article is critical of the increasing 'institutionalisation' that Oiticica's work has undergone since his death, yet it differs in methodology from the

contemporary critical thought but also in order to place the critic as one of the precursors of such thought. It is important however to note that Pedrosa's essay, published in 1966, although very insightful in terms of the characteristics that would later become common distinctions between modern and postmodern, cannot be entirely read as such. Instead, it should be understood within the context of the 'transcendence of the object', which occurred in Neoconcretism and the subsequent strategies of artistic production that such a position entailed.

Pedrosa's essay (1966) will be further discussed in the context of Oiticica's later production. For the moment it is sufficient to investigate possible processes that the artist developed throughout the transition/articulation between the metaphysical concerns of the neoconcrete period to the subsequent references to culture at large.

²⁴⁶ In the original: Com efeito, desde os vãos dos Metaesquemas e das frestas dos Relevos Espaciais, que o olho invade, até os *Bóides* que a mão movimenta, os Parangolés que o corpo veste, os Penetráveis que percorremos, as Praças em que passeamos ou os Ninhos em que vivemos, há uma minuciosa e paulatina entrada do corpo no invólucro da obra. Este movimento para dentro da obra oferece na verdade um contraponto à objetivação do espaço da pintura.

current study. The aim here is not to negate such interpretations but to identify how and when thought processes present in the work and writing began to relate to the specific social-cultural circumstances. The ambivalence of Oiticica's creative process pertains to the fact that he maintained a formal and philosophical coherence while responding to a rapidly changing socio-cultural and political environment. The process to which his work was submitted went beyond a simple transition from the two-dimensional plane and into three-dimensional space. This has been the predominant interpretation disseminated by, amongst others, the 'Hélio Oiticica Project' in Rio de Janeiro.²⁴⁷

Oiticica did of course discuss this process, yet the theoretical elaboration through which his work transcended the pictorial space is more pertinent than the process itself. Such a process relates, on the one hand, to the artist's re-evaluation of the tradition of Constructivism, and on the other hand, to the contemporaneous activities of artists such as Clark. More importantly, it was a transition that, according to the artist (Witte de With, 1992 p.211), never abandoned the category of painting itself. In 1962 he claimed that:

I am already planning a work which at this point I think will be called 'painting after painting', in which I will try to expose and develop the theory and practice of this consequence, which I initiated in 1959.

Prior to 1961, his work was concerned with the nature of modernist painting. More specifically, the tradition which he identified as stemming from Mondrian and van Doesburg, the constructivists and reaching Oiticica's own investigations into the potential of colour and those of his immediate circle: Clark's transgression of the picture frame and Gullar's readings and interpretations of phenomenology. Moreover, Pedrosa's presence is also felt throughout Oiticica's (1962) wider art historical references since they often went beyond the constructivist heritage.

The results to which I have arrived have nothing to do with the post-Mondrian concrete painting, and I consider that they are to Mondrian as Mondrian was to Cubism. It is not a question of supplanting Mondrian, but of opening a path for a pure painting of colour, space, time and structure. Maybe, as Mário Pedrosa would argue, it is a new constructivism, yet without owing anything to constructivism itself. I attempt, through the elements mentioned, to give painting an architectural character, and already in the new Nuclei I introduce movement (Mobile nucleus). There emerges here an important element which is that of the participation of the spectator. The experiences in this field were significantly initiated in sculpture by Lygia Clark with her 'Bichos'.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ See: Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica (undated) *Hélio Oiticica: Do Plano ao ESPAÇO*.

²⁴⁸ In the original: Os resultados a que cheguei já nada têm a ver com a pintura concreta post-Mondrian, e considero que estão para Mondrian assim como Mondrian estava para o Cubismo. Não se trata de epigonar Mondrian, mas de abrir caminho para a pintura pura de cor, espaço, tempo e estrutura. Talvez, como o quer Mário Pedrosa, ou seja isso um novo

The Centrality of Colour

What Oiticica seemed to be proposing during that period was a parallel interpretation to the concurrent reading of Clark's work by Gullar. The relationship between rational form and intuition, expressed in Clark's work through such notions as the organic line, is 'translated' by Oiticica into the domain of colour. Oiticica was engaged in developing ideas related to the nature of painting and its relation to recent propositions by Gullar, which to a certain extent privileged three dimensional space. Oiticica discussed Clark's *Unidades* in relation to colour and time. Indeed, the fact that Clark's *Unidades* and Oiticica's *Monocromaticos* possess similar dimensions further confirms the assumption that Oiticica's use of colour could be seen as equivalent to Clark's use of lines. [Fig. 40, 48] Both entered into space through these individual premises.

Every time I attempt to situate historically my aesthetic development in relation to its origins I arrive at the conclusion that not only is it a strong individual development, but that it completes a historical context and creates a movement together with other artists. It is an active group necessity. There appears therefore a relationship with the work of Lygia Clark, who amongst us is what exists of most universal within the field of fine art. (Oiticica, 1961f p.33).

Oiticica (1960) had produced a substantial essay where he developed his ideas on the relationship of colour, structure, space and time. Its title was 'Colour, Time and Structure'. It represented a major theoretical interpretation of his neoconcrete production. He saw these elements as a fusion, rather than a juxtaposition, which occurred within the work, the nature of such a fusion being organic.

His discussion of colours attempts to search for the essence of each colour and particularly the relationship between them through each individual intensity. The search for the essences of colours privileges their relationship with light and displays an awareness of their representational qualities. In this manner, white - a 'colour-light' - is the synthesis of all colours and therefore is 'the most static, privileging in this manner, a dense, metaphysical, silent duration.' Yellow according to Oiticica, 'is less synthetic than white, possessing a strong optical pulsation and tending towards real space, expanding and disassociating itself from the material structure.' Orange and

construtivismo, mas sem nada dever ao próprio construtivismo. Procuro, através dos elementos de que falei [cor, estrutura, espaço e tempo], arquitetar a pintura e, já nos núcleos novos, introduzo o movimento (núcleo móvel). Aparece aqui um elemento importante, que é a participação direta do espectador. As experiências neste sentido foram iniciadas magistralmente por Lygia Clark na estrutura, através dos seus 'Bichos'.

'red-light' are distinct from other colours, they possess their own individual characteristics. Structure represents Oiticica's (1960 p.46) transcendence of the picture frame, and it is achieved through colour and the relationship with time:

Structure is therefore taken into space turning 180° around itself, this is the definite step for the encounter of its temporality with colour; here the spectator does not see only one side, as in contemplation, but turning around it, completes the orbit in a pluridimensional perception of the work.²⁴⁹

The notion of time as one of the elements of the work is associated with Gullar's (1959c) 'Theory of the Non-Object', it is in this sense an existential quality of the work, a consequence of the fact that the plane - now structure - operates as an active element of the non-representational work. Oiticica differentiated this existential/neoconcrete notion of time from the mechanical time in concrete art. This distinction was due to the apprehension of space since it was still an analytical concept in concrete art, and therefore maintained a certain association with representational space. Space in Oiticica's work operates dynamically, yet he did not elaborate on the discussion of previous stages in the development of static and dynamic space, beyond affirming that: while Mondrian's pictorial space is static the futurist's is dynamic, concrete and neoconcrete art would take these two apprehensions of pictorial space respectively into the domain of real space.

Oiticica (1960 p.49) concluded the essay by emphasising the intuitive element in creation:

The genesis is related and participated by the artist who no longer can separate matter from spirit, since as emphasised by Merleau-Ponty, matter and spirit are dialectics of a single phenomenon. The conducting element of the creator is intuition, as Klee once said, 'in the ultimate analysis the work of art is intuition, and intuition cannot be overcome'.²⁵⁰

In Brazil it is possible to view the occurrence of ideas relating to intuition through the writings of Pedrosa. Rather than the pragmatic objectivism purported by concrete art, Pedrosa (1959 p.20) saw the use of geometrical abstraction as a means of pre-verbal communication. Central to this notion was intuition and the ideal of a re-evaluation of

²⁴⁹ In the original: A estrutura, então, é levada ao espaço girando 180° sobre si mesma, este é o passo definitivo para o encontro da sua temporalidade com a cor; aqui o espectador não vê só um lado, em contemplação, mas tende a ação, girando em volta, completando sua órbita, sua percepção pluridimensional da obra.

²⁵⁰ In the original: A gênese da obra de arte é de tal modo ligada e participada pelo artista, que já não se pode separar matéria de espírito, pois, como frisa Merleau-Ponty, matéria e espírito são dialéticas de um só fenómeno. O elemento condutor e criador do artista é a intuição, e, como disse certa vez Klee, 'em última análise a obra de arte é intuição, e a intuição não poderá ser superada'.

Western civilisation, 'by means of new symbols, of intuitive forms still unknown that have their origin in the imagination or in the extraperceptual.'²⁵¹

A particular approach to intuition was also central to Oiticica's progress where he: (1) transcended the picture frame with the use of raw pigment within ready-made recipients; (2) rebelled against the concretist dogma of form through the use of monochromes, where colour replaced pictorial form, leading the relationship foreground-background to become work-world; (3) and eventually radicalised the notion of intuitive perception through the 'disintellectualisation' in his experience of popular culture.

What is evident therefore is a re-evaluation of modernist thought based on the ideas circulating amongst intellectuals such as Pedrosa and Gullar, which were then articulated in Oiticica's writing and work. This often meant ambivalent and sometimes paradoxical premises such as formal concerns present in high modernist discourses and the adoption of an avant-garde position - in the sense defined by Bürger (1974) - that has generally been equated with an anti-art position.

Transcendental Concerns

Clearly responding to the dilemmas of the moment Oiticica claimed that the notion of purity in art was distinct from notions of art-for-art's sake and from art as a function of political ends. For Oiticica (1963a p.53), at that moment, art represented the pinnacle of the spiritual in human achievement and it therefore could not be submitted to dogmatic concepts that ran against the act of creation. He saw his work at the time, *Nucleus* and *Penetraveis*, as operating within such premises, developing aspects still unexplored within the tradition of Constructivism. [Fig. 49, 50] His reference (Oiticica, 1963a p.54) to Pedrosa's suggestion that these were related to a new Constructivism was however critical of the prefix 'new' since such an assumption tended towards the notions of 'isms' in modern art. This related to Oiticica's (1963a p.50-63) rejection of formalist nomenclature such as 'geometrical abstraction'. His position in relation to movements in art becomes clearer when considering his discussion of contemporaneous achievements in painting: from past and contemporaneous constructivists to American abstract expressionists and French *nouveau realistes*. It is important to add that he did not define them as such, speaking instead of the individual artist and his/her effect on the 'structure' 'space' and 'colour' of painting. In

²⁵¹ In the original (integral paragraph): Os próprios concretistas, geométricos ou construtivistas, procuram trazer o mundo, ou melhor reatualizar no plano da mentalidade hodierna um modo de conhecimento abandonado pela civilização ocidental; eles querem rejuvenecê-lo, por meio de símbolos novos, de formas-intuições ainda não conhecidas, de origem imaginária ou extraperceptual.

discussing the transgression of easel painting in the work of Jackson Pollock (1912-56), Oiticica quoted Herbert Read (rather than Greenberg) arguing that the British critic claimed that in Pollock's work the will to give expression to sensations was combined with the will for pure harmony. According to Oiticica, such a dichotomy was not only representative of Pollock's case but was valid for all modern art. Perhaps as a response to the debates on the national character being raised at the time in Brazil, Oiticica placed Pollock as an example, not of a North American artist since his basic artistic concerns pertained to those of the entire world of art.²⁵² Oiticica (1963a p.59-60) defined these concerns in Pollock's work as the reduction of the picture to a 'field of hyperaction'. This was the first condition for the work to operate in space, through its structure and colour. According to such a paradigm, the element of time would then rise from the 'dissonance' between the painting's action and its expression.

In other words, in an Anthropophagite act, Oiticica placed the North American artist within his own theoretical tenets. Moreover, he emphasised (Oiticica, 1963a p.60) the necessity for a synthesis of 'thought, concepts and aspirations' of art in the most general way. It was through such processes that a new conception of form would emerge, no longer associated with the traditional analytical apprehension of space, time and structure. In this new 'formalism', subject and object become associated with the spectator and the work, overcoming the contemplative dialogue in which the spectator searched for the ideal form. Oiticica claimed that such a contemplative position was no longer possible due to advances in science, psychology, and the enlargement of the fields of sensibility and intuition: transformations that deeply affected human existence. There were, according to Oiticica (1963a p.61), two new ways in which the artist could position him/herself in the world and relate to it through the work of art. One in which the artist plunged into the world, into its 'microstructure', where his/her reality was determined by the artist's intuition within such a world; the other, whereby the artist does not relate to the world but attempts to create the world, in its absolute. The latter was interpreted as a 'macrocosmic' approach.

Oiticica was also fascinated at that time with the relation that intuition had with ideas of the sublime. He (Oiticica, 1961b p.26) quoted a passage from Goethe in his diary and related it to his concurrent theoretisations with space and time:

²⁵² The critic Paulo Sérgio Duarte (1998 p.21) has argued that Pollock was a successful Anthropophagite in that he truly digested the idea of European Modernism: 'Note, for instance, Pollock's early works, made in the '30s and early '40s: In them we see the great myths Miró and Picasso, the Indians' totemic painting, being devoured one by one and, at the same time, incorporated on a scale that integrates the cultural values of the new landscape, from the territorial extension and the abysses of its canyons to the new urban American and its iron and concrete valleys.'

Goethe: 'What is certain is that the sentiments of youth and the uncultivated peoples, with their indetermination and broad extensions, are the only adequate [receptors] for the "sublime". Sublimity, if it is to be awoken in us by external things, has to be "informal" [informe] or consist of "inapprehensible forms", enveloping us in a greatness that superseded us... But as the sublime is easily produced at dawn or at night, confusing the figures, it also disappears during the day which separates and distinguishes everything; that is why culture eliminates the sentiment of the sublime.' At the moment I find this paragraph exact in relation to all the disquiet and mobility that I feel concerning the 'sublime'. Goethe is excellent in his observations. And what I desire in the exteriorisation of my art, will not be 'inapprehensible forms'; the artistic form is not obvious, static in space and time, but mobile, eternally mobile, changeable.²⁵³

The sublime in this sense emerges as an interest for Oiticica in its counteraction of the rationality of concrete art. It is also not surprising that such a topic is rarely raised with respect to Oiticica, since it would stand as a paradox with the associations that his work has received in relation to Postmodernism.

As Jean-François Lyotard (1982 p.1012) has argued, the sublime emerges 'when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept.'

The associations between art and the notion of infinity fascinated Oiticica at the time and these issues were associated through the passage by Goethe to the uncultured mind relating to the origins of geometrical abstraction in Brazil,²⁵⁴ and the emerging concerns for the popular, taking place during the early 1960s.

In this sense, Lyotard's (1982 p.1013) critique of the sublime in Kantian philosophy, as acting as a mechanism of concealment in modern painting is worth quoting at length:

To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible: this is what is at stake in modern painting. But how to make visible that there is something which cannot be seen? Kant himself shows the way when he names 'formlessness, the absence of form', as a possible index to the unrepresentable. He also says of the empty 'abstraction' which the imagination experiences when in search for a presentation of the infinite (another unrepresentable): this abstraction itself is like a presentation of the infinite, its

²⁵³ In the original: Goethe: 'Mas o certo é que os sentimentos da juventude e dos povos incultos, com sua indeterminação e suas amplas extensões, são os únicos adequados para o 'sublime'. A sublimidade, se há de ser despertada em nós por coisas exteriores, tem que ser 'informe' ou consistir de 'formas inapreencíveis', envolvendo-nos numa grandesa que nos supere... Mas assim como o sublime se produz facilmente no crepúsculo e na noite, que confundem as figuras, assim também se desvanece no dia, que tudo separa e distingue; por isso a cultura aniquila o sentimento do sublime.'

Acho esse parágrafo no momento exato em que sinto em mim toda essa inquietação e mobilidade de 'sublime'. Goethe é genial em suas observações. E o que desejo, na exteriorização da minha arte, não serão as 'formas inapreencíveis'? Só assim consigo entender a eternidade que há nas formas de arte; sua renovação constante, sua imperecibilidade, vêm desse caráter de 'inapreensibilidade'; a forma artística não é óbvia, estática no espaço e no tempo, mas móvel, eternamente móvel, cambiante.

²⁵⁴ See Pedrosa's, Mavignier's and Serpa's involvement with the insane during the early 1940s in Rio in Chapter 6.

'negative presentation.' [...] Little needs to be added to those observations to outline an aesthetic of sublime paintings. As painting, it will of course 'present' something though negativity; it will therefore avoid figuration or representation. It will be 'white' like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see only by making it possible to see; it will please only by pain. One recognises in those instructions the axioms of avant-gardes in painting, inasmuch as they devote themselves to making an allusion to the unrepresentable by means of visible presentations. The systems in the name of which, or with which, this task has been able to support or to justify itself deserve the greatest attention; but they can originate only in the vocation of the sublime in order to legitimise it, that is, to conceal it. They remain inexplicable without the incommensurability of reality to concept which is implied in the Kantian philosophy of the sublime.

If indeed, such transcendental ideas operate through processes of legitimisation or concealment they acted as a grounding for Oiticica's work within the domain of aesthetics, enabling the possibility of thinking of such work as an avant-garde practice. Lyotard's critique, could in this instance be directed towards Oiticica's neoconcrete production. Favareto (1992 p.22, 23, 29,) nevertheless relied on Lyotard's writing as a theoretical tool in his praise of the totality of the artist's work. The apparent paradox emerges from the apprehension of the oeuvre as a totality rather than a continuous process of self-evaluation. Oiticica's radicalism pertained to the fact that he was able to articulate the aesthetic, philosophical nature of art with increasing effectiveness within the context of the wider social sphere. The manner in which Oiticica approached such a context was highly individual. His struggle to produce a work that would encompass such distinct positions was expressed clearly in his writing, yet within the 'postmodern' discourse to which the work is often submitted, the artist's early 'transcendental' notions are rarely referred to. In total opposition to the universalist discourse which enveloped Oiticica's own interpretation of his neoconcrete production, the prevalent contextualisation of the work pertains to the question of cultural identity. According to Sônia Salzstein (1994 p.122-3), who proposes a productive reading of the artist's work, Oiticica established the grounds for a *cultural zero* that transcends the duality of centre versus periphery to which art in Brazil had been (and to a certain extent still is) submitted. She argued that:

Nothing better to express this *cultural zero* - which is not privation, but the condition for the possibility of a 'new culture' - than the constructivist lineage of modernity, especially the one stemming from Mondrian and from Neo-Plasticism, and in whose heritage Oiticica would find affirmation for his deepest aspirations as to an aesthetic revolutionary experience, capable of becoming totally blended in the *social form*. This stated, the fact that the artist recognises and defines a place for modern Brazilian art in the European tradition of constructivist extraction, should not at all be understood as a strategy to push the local culture latecomer forward in the inexorable march of modern reason. On the contrary, with this gesture Oiticica demonstrated the local validity of the constructivist premises, attained outside their natural *habitat* but now appropriated under a strictly autonomous point of view.

The transcendental apprehension of colour would act in this way as the vehicle for the work's rupture from the picture frame and the adherence to neoconcrete thinking whereby the viewer related to the work through space. A gradual progression took place in Oiticica's production from the 'work in space' (such as with the *Relevos Espaciais* or Spacial Reliefs) towards a moment in which the work defined its own space. [Fig. 42] This new series began with the *Núcleos* and developed into the *Penetráveis*. [Fig. 49, 50] They maintained Oiticica's interest in colour, being composed predominantly by monochromes of warm colours such as red, orange and yellow yet their engagement with the viewer becomes far more direct, particularly with the *Penetráveis* where actual manipulation of the work is required.

The Origin of the Work as Participatory and Environmental

Such works operate across the boundaries of architecture in the tradition of the Russian constructivists, de Stijl, and Dadaists such as Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948). However, their originality pertained to their investigation of the perceptual nature of colour and increasingly the place of such an experience within the social fabric. The interaction with the actual social fabric of the city of Rio de Janeiro would however be a gradual process. *Projeto Cães de Caça* (Hunting Dogs Project), is a crucial work that indicated the new collaborative nature that would characterise much of Oiticica's later production. Its date, 1961, and its content are also revealing. [Fig. 51]

Oiticica constructed a model for a labyrinthine public environment, furthering the process of transcending the two dimensional pictorial space through colour, and initiating a process of openness towards collaboration which brought the presence of others within Oiticica's production in a variety of manners.²⁵⁵

Oiticica's *Projeto Cães de Caça* in this sense was both prophetic of the direction his work would take during the following years and symptomatic of a strategy of ambivalence that he was already in the process of adopting in order to intellectually deal with potentially conflictual positions.

From *Projeto Cães de Caça*, Oiticica's work took a new dimension, which Morais (1980) described as an increased sensorial experience contained in Oiticica's *Penetráveis* parting from the previous *Núcleos* series. Interpreting the work retrospectively, Morais, suggested that the *Penetráveis* already contained the

²⁵⁵ The project was never actually constructed, it remains as a model. See: Witte de With (1992) p.58.

'apparent disorder of organic things, like all spontaneous structures created by the people in their daily fight for survival.'²⁵⁶

Although it is arguable that such social preoccupations informed directly the work of the early 1960s, it is perhaps possible to acknowledge that Oiticica developed in parallel to his theoretical thought (on the possible nature of the future of painting), a means of negotiating the increasing presence of the social space within his artistic practice. This approach would become evident in his work of the late sixties and can be seen to have germinated in the years between 1961 and 64.

Projeto Cães de Caça incorporated the work of two other members of the neoconcrete group, Gullar's buried poem and Jardim's Integral Theatre. The choice of collaborators is another indication of the new direction his work would take. This pertained on the one hand, to the incorporation of theatricality²⁵⁷, and on the other hand, the inclusion of Gullar's poem/installation which can be seen as proof of the mutual respect between the artist and the poet. This was particularly significant considering that it took place at such a crucial moment of socio-political transition.²⁵⁸

In *Projeto Cães de Caça*, Oiticica remained however attached to transcendental ideals for his art yet a new level of engagement with the viewer was developed. He argued that in his first 'Penetrable' (*Projeto Cães de Caça*) there was enough available space so that musical concerts could take place, demonstrating the desire to place his work within the public domain, and to create an arena for further cultural and social events. Seeing this engagement still in terms of the apprehension of colour, the *Penetráveis* also opened the possibility for collective experiences and therefore the interaction of the work within the fabric of life. However, Oiticica at this moment was still equating the 'Penetrable' with a sense of purity in art. He saw it as the 'logical justification' of pure art. An interesting argument arises here (Oiticica, 1963a pp.53-4) which resembles a desperate attempt to remain within the domain of avant-garde practice while various calls for an abandonment of 'elitist aestheticism' were being made:

The fact that art does not admit, with regard to its development in this century, any extra-aesthetic relation with its content, leads us towards the meaning of *purity*. 'Purity' means that art for art's sake is no longer possible, nor any other submission to political or religious ends. As Kandinsky argued in the *Spiritual in Art*, such connections and concepts are only predominant in phases of cultural and spiritual decadence. Art is one of the pinnacles of Man's spiritual realisation and it is as such that it should be approached, since in any other way the equivocations are inevitable. It is a question

²⁵⁶ In the original: Têm a aparente desorganização das coisas orgânicas, como todas as estruturas espontâneas criadas pelo povo em sua luta diária pela sobrevivência: (des)caminhos, (re)favelas, barracos e barracas de camelôs, tapumes - estruturas vivas.

²⁵⁷ The derisory term coined by Michael Fried (1967) p.826.

²⁵⁸ This moment of transition will be analysed in Chapter 13.

therefore of becoming aware of the essential problematic of art and not of its enclosure within the concepts and dogmas, incompatible as they are with creation.²⁵⁹

Although Oiticica would reject the ideal of 'Purity' in art in his installation *Tropicália*, the aesthetic concern would remain an important aspect of his work throughout his career.

The next stage in the development of colour in Oiticica's work took place in 1963 with the series of works that was given the generic term *Bólides*. [Fig. 52] Like the *Penetraveis* they maintained an association with architecture since they contained a number of compartments that were discovered by the manipulation of the viewer.

In '*Pequeno Roteiro Cronológico das Invenções de Hélio Oiticica*', published shortly after the artist's death in 1980, Morais (1980) poetically described the *Bólides* as objects that:

The hand touches, grabs and deeply penetrates in an attempt to capture the materials - pigments, gravel, small sea shells, sand, earth and charcoal -, a subjective world of tenuous emotions. The *Box-Bólides* are like miniaturised architectures, they are cosy, revealing the warmth and intimacy of nests, cocoons, and all the small and hidden 'fortunate spaces' of which Bachelard describes. The hand captures and reveals the dialectic of space - unwritten pure poetry. One can almost speak of a thought that flows through the fingers, as if confirming Suzanne Langer, for whom thought is not a privilege of discursive language. Or of a sensorial etymology, that is, colour as temperature, weight, as a body. Until 1969 he created around fifty *Bólides*, employing in their construction, wood, glass, cloth, stone, tin, plastic containers, buckets, bags, beds and clothes. Some are appropriations, others are poematic, imagetic and olphatic.²⁶⁰

Oiticica (1963b p.63) describes some of these as 'transobjects', that is, those that presented the act of appropriation of an existing object in the world into which pure

²⁵⁹ In original: Pelo fato de não admitir a arte, no ponto a que chegou seu desenvolvimento neste século, quaisquer ligações extra-estéticas ao seu conteúdo, chega-se ao sentido de pureza. 'Pureza' significa que já não é possível o conceito de 'arte pela arte', ou tampouco querer submetê-la a fins de ordem política ou religiosa. Como dizia Kandinsky no *Espiritual na Arte*, tais ligações e conceitos só predominam em fase de decadência cultural e espiritual. A arte é um dos pináculos da realização espiritual do Homem e é como tal que deve ser abordada, pois de outro modo os equívocos são inevitáveis. Trata-se pois da tomada de consciência da problemática essencial da arte e não de um enclausuramento em qualquer trama de conceitos ou dogmas, incompatíveis que são com a própria criação.

For a discussion on notions of purity within the development of modern art see: Chapter 1.

²⁶⁰ In the original: A mão apalpa, pega e penetra fundo tentando captar nos materiais - pigmentos, brita, conchinhas do mar, areia, terra, carvão, - um mundo subjetivo, de tênues emoções. Os *Bólides-Caixa* são como que arquiteturas miniaturizadas, aconchegantes, revelando o calor e a intimidade dos ninhos, casulos e todos estes pequenos e escondidos 'espaços felizes' de que fala Bachelard. A mão capta e revela a dialética do espaço - poesia pura, não escrita. Quase se pode falar de um pensamento que flui entre os dedos, como que a confirmar Suzanne Langer, para quem o pensamento não é privilégio da linguagem discursiva. Ou de uma etimologia sensorial, isto é, a cor como temperatura, peso, como corpo. Até 1969 realizou cerca de meia centena de *Bólides*, empregando na sua construção madeira, vidro, tecido, pedra, lata, plástico em cubas, bacias, sacos, camas ou roupas. Alguns são apropriações, outros são poemáticos, imagéticos e olfáticos.

pigment would be added. These 'containers' would then be placed outside their ordinary 'existence', becoming incorporated within an aesthetic experience. Oiticica associated the notion of transcendentalism with the specific quality of these works since they belonged to a universal ideal while remaining attached to their original structure: thus the term transobject. Oiticica compared the *Bólides* to the 'combined-paintings' of Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925) and Jasper Johns (b. 1930), since they transported objects from the world into the field of symbolic forms. However, the difference between the *Bólides* and the work of those North American artists was that while in the latter, the objects' structure was altered through the process of becoming art, with the *Bólides* the object's structure was already that of the work. This in turn created an ambivalence between the dissolution of the boundary between the object's and the work's structures. Recalling the activity implicit in Duchamp's ready-mades, Oiticica affirmed that the choice of such objects was never one left to chance. They were always sought after for their specific qualities. For Oiticica, the *Bólides* developed his concern with the relationship between subject and object, creating a dialogue and ultimately a fusion between both extremes. However, he distinguished (Oiticica, 1963b p.65) the form in which this dialogue took place in the Transobjects and in the other *Bólides* where the structure was created or constructed by the artist:

I believe that the problem, put this way, in structures totally 'made' by me, will change vision, dialectics, in its phenomenology. In structures totally made by me, there is a wish to objectify a subjective structural conception, which only realises itself upon becoming concrete by the 'making of the work'; in the 'Trans-objects', there is the sudden identification of this subjective conception with the previously existing object as necessary to the structure of the work, which in its condition of object, opposed to the subject, already ceases to be opposed in the moment of identification because, in reality, it already existed implicitly in the idea.²⁶¹

Bólides that had constructed structures possess a certain roughness of surface while transobject *Bólides* are raw (container and pigment). [Fig. 52] The latter, although still referring to transcendental ideals, are also clearly a response to accusations that associated the object of art with luxury items. There is a great distinction therefore between the planed marble to be used in *Projeto Cães de Caça* and the ordinariness of the 'transobject', or the smooth painted wooden surfaces of the *Relevos Espaciais* and the rough finish of the painted wooden surfaces of the *Bólides*. [Fig. 52] Like Clark's *Bichos* [Fig. 53], *Bólides* were objects for manipulation, for interaction with

²⁶¹ In the original: Creio que posto desse modo o problema, nas estruturas totalmente 'feitas' por mim, mudará de visão, de dialética, na sua fenomenologia. Nas estruturas totalmente feitas por mim há uma vontade de objetivar uma concepção estrutural subjetiva, que só se realiza ao se concretizar pela 'feitura da obra'; já nos 'transobjetos' há a súbita identificação dessa concepção subjetiva com o objeto já existente como necessário à estrutura da obra,

the viewer, yet they do not possess such finesse, they are in a sense precarious objects. Even today they do not fit the description of 'fine art' objects so easily. It is possible to speculate that, beyond Oiticica's interest in 'texturology', such an intentional 'impoverishment' of the object stemmed from a response to the debates dominating the intellectual circles at the time. However, if indeed that was the case, they did not distract Oiticica from his aesthetic program.

Chapter 13

Art and Politics in the Early 1960s

The presidential election in 1961 and subsequent resignation (7 months later) of Jânio Quadros (1917-92) put in power the leftist vice-president João Goulart (1918-76). The change of government was concurrent with a general shift towards the left. This tendency became apparent in various socio-cultural manifestations. The general liberalisation in politics was accompanied by an increase in trade-union activities, the movement for agrarian reform, plans for a radical scheme of alphabetisation, and a nation-wide cultural and political mobilisation by the student's union. Roberto Schwarz (Hollanda & Gonçalves, 1982 p.8) has described the period as a moment in which the country showed itself to be recognisably intelligent pursuing an independent foreign policy, initiating structural reforms, and experiencing a renewed national sense that was associated with struggles against North American imperialism and the national rural oligarchies.

The arts responded to such a shift through various and sometimes antagonistic concerns with notions of the popular. It has already been argued that during the 1950s artists saw themselves connected to socialism and the communist party, while perceiving their work as useful to society at large through the application of their aesthetic and/or intellectual research. They saw themselves, in other words, in a position whereby they would inform good practice in design.

Political involvement with socialist ideas had already been widespread. Other than the already cited examples of Pedrosa, Cordeiro and Pignatari, such was the case of architect Oscar Niemeyer, the novelist Jorge Amado (1912-2001) and the film maker, precursor of Cinema Novo, Nelson Pereira do Santos (b. 1928).²⁶² In the early 1960s the politicisation of the arts would demand far greater engagement with the people, a consequence perhaps of the increasingly important role that the communist party had amongst various sectors of society.

Although illegal (Ridenti, 2000 p.48), the activities of the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) became tolerated by the Goulart presidency, bringing an increasing openness to militancy. This was also accompanied by the emergence of various competing left-wing factions. Hollanda and Gonçalves (1982 p.11) described the political context of the period as a consequence of the tradition of populism that had begun with Vargas. The presence within power of such a populist discourse opened a space for the emergence of left-wing factions and the Brazilian Communist Party that in its semi-legal position established its power base in trade-unions, student and intellectual

²⁶² See: Ridenti (2000) pp.67-82.

groups and therefore became able to act as a mediator between these groups and the Goulart government:

Its proximity to the State and its access to some of the hegemonic apparatus enabled its revolutionary ideals of a 'democratic and anti-imperialist' revolution to openly circulate within the national debate.²⁶³

Hollanda and Gonçalves (1982 p.11) conclude:

Brazil during the first years of the 60s: perhaps there are few moments in our history where the so called 'progressive forces' saw themselves so close to political power.²⁶⁴

One of the most radical repercussions that this transition entailed in the arts was its effect on Gullar, who as a poet and art critic under Pedrosa's influence became the theoretician of the neoconcrete movement. Two years after publishing the 'Neoconcrete Manifesto' and the 'Theory of the Non-Object', Gullar (1959c and 1959d) abandoned the neoconcrete group to become involved with a movement of popular engagement, the CPC (Popular Centres for Culture), associated with the National Students Union (UNE).

Although individual artists - such as Weissmann and Amilcar de Castro - associated with the movement maintain their neoconcrete aesthetics to this day, this study considers Gullar's abandonment of Neoconcretism in 1961, as representing the end of the movement as a collective of artists.²⁶⁵ Another contributing factor in defining the end of the movement was the demise of the *Jornal do Brasil's Suplemento Dominical* in December 1961, which until then had been the central arena for the promotion of neoconcrete ideas.

During this period the UNE became a focal point for debates dealing with questions of national culture and political mobilisation. Associated with UNE, the first CPC was formed in 1961 in Rio de Janeiro. It saw as its task the creation of strategies towards a national popular and democratic culture. It gathered artists and intellectuals intent in creating a new art, revolutionary in character and accessible to all. Consequently the CPC posited itself in opposition to abstraction favouring didactic and collective styles. The most immediate repercussion was the development of theatre plays which took place at factory doors, *Favelas* and trade-unions. In addition to theatre it was also

²⁶³ In the original: Sua proximidade em relação ao Estado e o acesso a alguns aparelhos de hegemonia permitiam que seu ideário da revolução 'democrática e antiimperialista' circulasse abertamente no debate nacional.

²⁶⁴ In the original: Brasil, primeiros anos da década de 60: talvez em poucos momentos da nossa história o que poderíamos chamar de 'forças progressistas' tivessem se visto tão próximas do poder político.

active in diverse areas such as poetry and film production. Developing the accessibility of culture (Hollanda & Gonçalves, 1982), UNE organised mobile-courses in film, theatre, fine arts and philosophy, touring during three months all the country's state capitals making bridges between factory workers, peasants and students.

The CPC began as a consequence of a discussion concerning the type of audience that progressive theatre attracted at the time. Realising that the São Paulo based *Arena* Theatre attracted a predominantly middle class audience, a debate arose around the issue of how to reach 'popular' sectors of society.²⁶⁶ At the time of Quadro's resignation in 1961, a group previously involved with *Arena*, decided to organise in Rio de Janeiro an alternative and improvised play having as its aim the 'clarification' of the notion of added-value. Carlos Estevam Martins who would subsequently become the first president of the CPC and who at the time worked for the Superior Institute for Brazilian Studies (ISEB), was invited to advise on how to approach the subject of added-value in a manner that was both scientific and didactic. The play, based on the pursuit by three workers of the origin of profit, was entitled *A Mais-Valia Vai Acabar, Seu Edgar* (Added-Value Will End, Mr. Edgar), it was eventually performed at Rio's faculty of architecture. The fact that it contained a good musical score and humorous lyrics ensured its popularity amongst students. Based on its success, the organisers invited the popular philosopher José Américo Peçanha to give seminars. Again due to their popularity amongst students, professionals, lecturers and artists, these were later transferred to the head-quarters of the recently formed UNE. Influenced by the work of another intellectual involved with the ISEB, the pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-97), and the work carried out by the Movement for Popular Culture (MPC) in Pernambuco in the North-East of the country, the CPC consolidated its relation with UNE and organised itself into different departments which had the aim of acting directly with popular sectors of society. These attempts failed since, on the one hand, CPC members falsely identified organisations such as trade unions as possible vehicles of dissemination while on the other hand, the didactic means through which political messages were communicated did not raise the level of attention that was expected. Ironically, rather than achieving its aims of engaging with the popular classes, the CPC became a vehicle through which UNE could disseminate its existence to students around the country. Moreover, according to Martins (1980), the influence that the CPC received from the ISEB during its formative years was later reversed when the ISEB adopted various approaches that had their origin within CPC activities.

²⁶⁵ Opinions on the nature of the coherence of the group vary significantly amongst surviving artists. For a survey of such opinions, see: *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

Conflicts Between Content and Aesthetics

In relation to the aesthetics of political engagement, tensions had been present within the CPC from the outset. These concerned the relationship between the content and form of such productions. According to Martins (1980 p.81):

People became involved with the CPC because they were artists or wanted to pursue an artistic career. They would enter the CPC adventure because they thought that it was possible to be an artist whilst making art for the people. People who did not have artistic pretensions, as was my case, did not take long to realise that this was a doomed project. That is, either you would engage in political pedagogy, using art in order to produce political conscientisation, or nothing would be achieved, you would return to theatre, music, literature and cinema for the elite. This tension ran along the entire history of the CPC and caused some very dramatic moments. [...] There were no requirements in terms of aesthetic creation, the dominant philosophy of the CPC was the following: form was not important in order to communicate with the public, our public.²⁶⁷

The CPC had a strong impact amongst intellectual circles and its effect on Gullar was exemplary of this fact. Indeed, Gullar later succeeded Martins, assuming the presidency of the CPC in 1963. From neoconcrete poet concerned with formal experimentation in language, Gullar reinvented himself as a politically-engaged playwright. Convinced that the avant-garde was essentially elitist, he attempted to create a popular and accessible language that could be adapted to theatre or popular lyrics and poetry. Gullar's position as a neoconcrete poet became in this sense untenable. Like Clark and Oiticica, he too had developed his art, poetry, into space and invited the viewer to interact, to manipulate the work, in order for it to be read. Gullar claimed that neoconcrete poetry has received little acknowledgment due to the fact that from an early stage it transformed itself into 'book-poem' and so became impractical for publications - whether in book form or in newspapers - because it contained cuts in its pages. The only means of dissemination were exhibitions. According to Gullar (*Os Neoconcretos*, 2000) it was the inclusion of these book-poems, which in fact were objects that were intended to be manipulated, that gave rise to the notion of the participation of the spectator. [Fig. 54, 55] Perhaps as a

²⁶⁶ For a concise history of the origins and activities of the CPC, see: Martins, C. E., (1980).

²⁶⁷ This passage was also quoted in: Zilio (1982b) p.36.

In the original: As pessoas faziam parte do CPC porque eram artistas ou porque queriam fazer uma carreira artística e entravam na aventura do CPC porque achavam que era possível ser artista e, ao mesmo tempo, fazer arte para o povo. As pessoas que não tinham pretensões artísticas, como era o meu caso, perceberam rapidamente que isso era um barco furado. Quer dizer, ou se fazia pedagogia política, usando a arte para produzir conscientização política, ou então nada feito, voltava-se para o teatro de elite, a música, a literatura, o cinema de elite. Esta tensão percorreu toda a história do CPC e teve momentos muito dramáticos [...] Não havia exigências em termos de criação estética, e a filosofia dominante do CPC era essa: a forma não interessava enquanto comunicação com o público, com o nosso público.

response to the intuitive strive of Neoconcretism, while concrete poetry maintained a relationship between form and content, Gullar's work disintegrated language. He reached a point in which his use of language became totally abstract and therefore he realised (Gullar, 1998 p.37) that to continue along that route would be to abandon poetry and to enter the domain of fine art.

In 1961 the exhibitions came to an end.²⁶⁸ The [neoconcrete] movement ended there, because at that same moment the Sunday supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* was drastically reduced in size. They said that it had uselessly wasted too much paper. At this stage I was invited to work in Brasília. [Following the election of Jânio Quadros, Ferreira Gullar became the director of the Cultural Foundation in Brasília] There, my head began to change.²⁶⁹

Not surprisingly due to his art related background, Gullar was far more apologetic of the actions of the CPC than Martins. In his defence of the activities of the CPC, Gullar posited the importance that the idea of a national character held for the CPC's concept of cultural production:

The CPC considered that it was necessary for the work of art to become engaged with Brazilian problems, with the Brazilian reality and that this should be done through an accessible language reaching the widest possible public. There was an exaggeration in underestimating artistic quality. As long as it was correct, artistic quality was secondary. There was a tendency that saw artistic quality as a residue of elitist and aesthetic attitudes. This was however understandable because at that time it was very audacious to do that, to break away from commercial theatre, from conventional positions common to the intellectuality, even left-wing intellectuality. It was greatly audacious and there was a heavy price to pay for it.²⁷⁰

In opposition to the view expressed by organisations such as the CPCs, Pedrosa has emphasised the potential that popular art has offered to more reactionary sectors of the political spectrum. Claiming that institutions and politicians alike, readily mythified

²⁶⁸ In 1960 a second neoconcrete exhibition took place at MEC in Rio while MAM RJ held a major concrete art retrospective. By 1961, MAM in São Paulo held a neoconcrete exhibition yet the end of the cultural supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil* and Gullar's abandonment of the movement signalled the group's decline.

²⁶⁹ In the original: Em 1961, as exposições cessaram. O movimento acabou aí porque, ao mesmo tempo, o 'Suplemento Dominical' do *Jornal do Brasil* foi reduzido drasticamente de tamanho. Diziam que ele gastava papel inutilmente. Nessa altura, fui convidado para trabalhar em Brasília. E lá a minha cabeça começou a mudar.

²⁷⁰ Gullar, F., (1980). Depoimento à FUNARTE, 2º Semestre. Quoted in: Zilio (1982b) p.36. In the original: O CPC considerava necessário que a obra de arte passasse a tratar dos problemas brasileiros, da realidade brasileira e com uma linguagem acessível a um público o mais amplo possível. Havia o exagero em subestimar a qualidade artística. Desde que se estivesse correto, a qualidade artística seria secundária. Havia uma tendência a ver na qualidade artística um resíduo de atitude elitista, esteticista. Mas isso é compreensível porque naquela época era uma audácia fazer aquilo, romper com o teatro comercial, romper com as posições convencionais, que era o comum na intelectualidade e, mesmo, na intelectualidade de esquerda. Era uma audácia muito grande e havia um preço muito grande a pagar por isso.

popular cultural production, he (Pedrosa, 1975 p.22) argued that these were projects that had little to do with revolutionary purposes:

On the contrary, the ideology of dependency is frequently expressed through it, whereby it is a production that is destined to respond to the folkloric interest of the tourist market. Such an interest is a reflection of colonising image that the capitalist countries impose on our America. At other times [popular culture] has been used for the service of the fascist ideology.²⁷¹

Such an interest can be confirmed in the rather poorly informed institutionalised attempts to address the issue of popular culture during the Military regime in Brazil. This can be noted in the report published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1975. It claimed:

Amongst the basic objectives of the cultural policy to be implemented, the primary action should be that of revealing what constitutes the basis of the Brazilian man and the nature of his life. Before any measure is taken we need to assert the very essence of our culture.²⁷²

Indeed, Edward Said (1993 p.248), discussed the 'return' to fundamental ideals of national identity as one of the ideologically operative characteristics of culture:

In time, culture comes to be associated, often aggressively, with the nation or the state; this differentiates 'us' from 'them', almost always with some degree of xenophobia. Culture in this sense is a source of identity, and a rather combative one at that, as we have seen in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. These 'returns' accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the permissiveness associated with such relatively liberal philosophies as multiculturalism and hybridity. In the formerly colonised world, these 'returns' have produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism.

Returning to the specificity of the Brazilian context, Marilena Chauí (1980 p.15) also identified the problems at the centre of left-wing attitudes towards the popular during the 1960s. She claimed that the populist is inevitably drawn towards a position whereby the 'rawness' of popular culture is accepted at face value while concurrently being submitted to a process of judgement. The latter is based on the ambivalent

²⁷¹ Originally in Spanish. Portuguese version from which the above was translated: Pelo contrário, frequentemente nele se expressa a ideologia da dependência em que é uma produção destinada a atender o interesse pelo folclórico do mercado turístico. Esse interesse é o reflexo da imagem colonizadora que os países capitalistas impõe a nossa América. Outras vezes [a cultura popular] esteve ao serviço da ideologia fascista.

²⁷² Ministry of Education and Culture, under: Braga, N., (1975) *Política Nacional da Cultura*. Reprinted in: Centro de Estudos de Arte Contemporânea (1980) p.5.

In the original: Entre os objetivos básicos da política cultural a ser implantada, a primeira ação deve ser de revelação do que constitui o âmago do homem brasileiro e o teor da sua vida. Antes de qualquer medida, precisamos verificar a própria essência da nossa cultura. For an interesting analysis on the institutionalisation of popular culture and its political manipulation see: Silveira (1980).

potential that popular culture has for socio-political action while also being open to the contamination exerted by the contact with mass produced culture. From such a process, notions of authenticity are projected onto an imagined 'ideal' popular culture. Therefore, although many such activists rejected the activities of the avant-garde, their intrinsically ambivalent approach to popular culture - which accepted it as a given, while also judging it from a position of self acknowledged enlightenment - were as elitists as the position they were rejecting.

Zilio was one of the few historians to be critical of the CPC whilst accepting its impact on artists such as Oiticica. He (Zilio, 1982b) inscribed the activity of the CPC within the context of the national-popular tradition: a historical mobilisation of intellectuals and artistic circles which took an anti-elitist position and which identified erudite culture as a whole, without internal contradictions and at the service of the ruling class. Zilio (1982b p.38) saw in Oiticica's work not an identification with such a thought but an example of how erudite culture does not represent a totalised whole:

In general, the theoretical program of Oiticica possesses various apparent points of contact with the CPC. They approach each other, for example, in the demystifying of art and the figure of the artist (art dilutes itself into life, works of art have no individual authors). But if we examine in more detail their postulates and, above all, their works, the differences become evident.²⁷³

In 1964, the activities of the CPC were brought abruptly to an end due to the repression it received from the newly established Military Regime. Increasingly the Goulart government had become politically isolated. Following the 13th of March rally in Rio de Janeiro (in the surroundings of the *Central do Brasil* Railway Station) organised by the government in order defend a program of basic reforms, various sectors of the ruling class manifested their dissatisfaction. On the 17th of March the Industry Federation together with the Bank Owners Union expressed their concerns about the general mood of the nation; on the 19th of March, a protest march took place in São Paulo, organised by the right wing 'Family with God for Property' group; the following day a circular letter was issued by the Armed Forces' Head of General Staff, calling for anti-subversion action; Marshal Odílio Denys, General Morão Filho and the State Governor of Minas Gerais held a meeting which set the date for a military *coup d'état*; on the 31st President Goulart met with members and ministers of the armed forces in Rio de Janeiro. On the 1st of April 1964 the second army adhered to the military movement. Miguel Arrais, the Governor of Pernambuco responsible for

²⁷³ In the original: De maneira geral, o programa teórico de Oiticica possui vários pontos de contato aparente com o CPC. Eles se aproximam, por exemplo, da desmistificação da arte e da figura do artista (arte diluindo-se na vida, obras sem autores individuais). Mas ao

the Movement for Popular Culture, was arrested that day by the Fourth Army and finally by night fall, the Congress declared the presidency vacant. During the following days Goulart was forced to seek refuge in Uruguay, General Castelo Branco assumed the presidency, the military released the first Institutional Act with the consequence of several leading figures losing their political rights including the ex-presidents, Kubitschek, Quadros and Goulart.²⁷⁴

In theatre those who remained with the intention of producing plays with political character were forced to reconsider their position and strategy. The principal issue for obvious reasons, could no longer be that of engaging with the people. Following the *coup*, the arts in general and particularly theatre, became increasingly involved in developing methods in which to criticise the regime.²⁷⁵ From this re-evaluation was born the *Opinião* Theatre Group, which produced a number of musicals the first of which was *Opinião* directed by Augusto Boal (b. 1931). Subsequent plays would include productions by key ex-members of the CPC such as Gullar's and Oduvaldo Viana Filho's (*Vianinha*) (1936-74) *Se Correr o Bicho Pega se Ficar o Bicho Come* (If You Run the Beast Will Catch You If You Stay It Will Eat You).

examinarmos mais detidamente seus pressupostos e, sobretudo, suas produções, evidenciam-se as diferenças.

²⁷⁴ This series of events is taken from a social cultural and political chronology, in: Duarte (1998) pp.276-7.

²⁷⁵ Shortly after the military *coup* a group of right-wing activists burnt down the head quarters of UNE. See: Veloso (1997) p.107.

Chapter 14

From Theatre to Theatricality

While the year of 1961 brought with it a number of radical changes within the field of culture, 1964 brought much of the overt political activity to an end following the military *coup d'état* in April. For Oiticica the year was also personally significant. Following the death of his father in July 1964, Oiticica, who until then had been his father's assistant at the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, felt obliged to seek alternative employment. He began working as a telegrapher at the *Companhia de Radio Internacional do Brasil* (International Radio Company of Brazil).²⁷⁶

The dullness of the office work further intensified the apparent freedom that he would experience when he encountered the popular culture of the *favela*.²⁷⁷ Around the time of the military coup, the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro had become a focal point for artists to meet and discuss art, politics and generalities. However, Oiticica (Galeria BANERJ, 1988) did not participate in such meetings due to his night work as telegrapher. He was seen ambivalently by his peers as an artist at once removed but also central to the activities of the avant-garde. The latter, very much a consequence (Gerschman, 1988) of his participation within the neoconcrete group.

Indeed, since 1961, Oiticica had been aware that the creative path he was taking would be one of equilibrium between opposites. This realisation can be noted in his (Oiticica, 1961a p.25) writing:

The infallible is fallible and the fallible is infallible.

Not always a serene and highly harmonious expression indicates the absence of drama in an artist. The artist, in fact, by his very condition already possesses drama in himself.²⁷⁸

The year of 1964 would mark the elaboration of arguably his most dramatic work, the *Parangolé*. [Fig. 56] It was the year when Oiticica discovered the culture of the *Favelas*. Invited by his friend Jackson Ribeiro (b. 1928) who together with Amilcar de Castro was participating in the construction of the carnival floats. Oiticica entered the *Favela of Mangueira* in the first instance as an artist: he would leave as a *passista*.²⁷⁹ [Fig. 57] Fascinated with the new environment and the culture of dance and carnival Oiticica followed an apprenticeship and subsequently became a dancer in the actual

²⁷⁶ Biographical information in: Witte de With (1992) pp.211-2 See: Appendix 4.

²⁷⁷ This aspect of Oiticica's life was confirmed by Waly Salomão, in: Salomão (2000).

²⁷⁸ In the Original: O infalível é falível e o falível infalível.

Nem sempre uma expressão serena e altamente harmônica indica ausência de drama no artista. O artista, aliás, por condição já possui em si drama.

²⁷⁹ 'Passista' is the name given to the central dancers in the carnival parade. See: Witte de With (1992) p.212. See also: Appendix 4.

procession. The artist's friend, the poet Waly Salomão (2000), argued that for Oiticica, particularly following his father's death, the experience was further intensified by the affirmation of his own sexuality. The development of the *Parangolé* signified in this sense, more than a radicalisation of his aesthetic experiment. It was a shift from an art concerned with the apprehension of the object as primarily an interior experience to one in which interior and exterior were entirely related. The work (Oiticica, 1964b p.85) enveloped the viewer/participator and the interior apprehension became entirely related to his/her bodily movement.

The discovery of what I call *Parangolé* marks a crucial point and defines a specific position in the theoretical development of my entire experience of colour-structure in space, principally in reference to a new definition of what would be, in this same experience, the 'plastic object', or rather, the work. It is not a case - as the name *Parangolé*, derived from slang, could lead one to suppose - of implying a fusion of my work and folklore, or identifications of this nature, transposed or otherwise, are completely superficial and useless [...].

Oiticica associated the generic name *Parangolé* with Schwitters's *Merzbau*, that is, he saw it as a program of activity within contemporary art and in relation to his previous work, as opposed to having an essential relation to the specificity of the material used.

The 'radical leap' that occurred in Oiticica's work could be interpreted as originating from two quite distinct sources.²⁸⁰ On the one hand, from art historical writings such as those on Mondrian (Oiticica, 1959b p.17), whereby abstract art's ultimate destiny lay in its extension into the real world. On the other hand, from the experience that Oiticica had through his contact with the people and the popular culture of the *Mangueira* shanty town and Samba School. The significance of the latter was clearly expressed by Oiticica (1965 pp.72-3) himself:

Before anything else it is necessary to clarify my interest for dance, for rhythm, in my particular case it came from a vital necessity for a disintellectualisation, an intellectual disinhibition, for a necessary free expression, since I felt threatened by my excessively intellectual expression. [...] It was therefore, an experience of greater vitality, indispensable, particularly in the demolition of preconceived ideas and stereotypification, etc. [...] there was a convergence of this experience with the form that my art took in the *Parangolé* [...].

The collapse of social preconceived ideas, of separations of groups, social classes etc., would be inevitable and essential in the realisation of this vital experience [...]. The bourgeois conditioning which I had been submitted since I was born, undid itself as if by magic [...] I believe that the dynamic of the social structures were at this moment revealed to me, in all their crudity [...] [M]arginality [...] would be a total lack of

²⁸⁰ The expression 'radical leap' was coined by Guy Brett (1989) in order to describe the transition that occurred amongst a number of artists from constructivist influenced art in the 1950s to the experimental practices of the 1960s. The period is characterised - in the case of Oiticica, Clark and Pape - by the move from Neoconcretism to an art that had a strong emphasis on participation of the spectator.

social place [...]at the same time being a discovery of an individual place as total man in the world [...].²⁸¹

Opinião 65 and the Inauguration of the Parangolé

The inauguration of the *Parangolé* was performed at the opening night of the *Opinião 65* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro. [Fig. 58] In 1965 Brazil witnessed in the arts the arrival of the American Pop Art and French *Nouveau Realisme* tendencies, and the *Opinião 65* exhibition not only demonstrated a loose or vague adherence of Brazilian artists to these tendencies but exhibited Brazilians along side international artists.²⁸² It was also the year following the military *coup d'état* and much of the art displayed political concerns and themes. Gullar (1965 p.22) who reviewed the exhibition claimed that it presented itself as marking a rupture, and that:

it reveals something new which is occurring in the domain of art, a new characteristic which is expressed in the actual title of the exhibition: the return of opinionated painters. This is fundamental!²⁸³

In the review, Gullar also discussed the issue of internationalism in the arts arguing that in the case of a critical position in relation to the world it should be recommended, while in the case of aesthetic and formal preoccupations such as in abstract painting it is representative of a subjective and elitist attitude. It is interesting therefore, that Gullar did not mention Oiticica's *Parangolé*. A surprising omission considering that its 'inauguration' during *Opinião 65* was controversial and attracted a certain attention in other press coverage of the exhibition.²⁸⁴ The fact that Gullar did not mention the *Parangolé* in the review is indicative of his assumption that Oiticica's

²⁸¹ In the original: Antes de mais nada é preciso esclarecer que o meu interesse pela dança, pelo ritmo, no meu caso particular o samba, me veio de uma necessidade vital de desintelectualização, de desinibição intelectual. Seria o passo definitivo para a procura do mito, uma retomada desse mito e uma nova fundação dele na minha arte. É portanto, para mim, uma experiência de maior vitalidade, indispensável, principalmente como demolidora de preconceitos, estereotipações etc. como veremos mais tarde, houve uma convergência dessa experiência com a forma que tomou meu *Parangolé* [...].

A derrubada de preconceitos sociais, das barreiras de grupos, classes, etc., seria indispensável e essencial na realização dessa experiência vital. [...] O condicionamento burguês a que estava eu submetido desde que nasci desfez-se como por encanto [...] Creio que a dinâmica das estruturas sociais revelam-se aqui para mim na sua crudeza [...] a marginalização [...] seria a total 'falta de lugar social' [...] ao mesmo tempo que a descoberta do meu 'lugar individual' como homem total no mundo.

²⁸² The exhibition was organised by the art dealer Jean Boghici and the art critic Ceres Franco as a means of approaching Brazilian artists with international developments in the field of painting. See: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (1965).

²⁸³ In the original: [...] revela que algo de novo se passa no domínio das artes plásticas, e esse carácter novo se pronuncia no próprio título da mostra: os pintores voltam a opinar! Isto é fundamental. (my emphasis).

²⁸⁴ Vera Pacheco Jordão (1965) dedicated a large section of her review of the exhibition to Oiticica, the *Parangolé*, and the dancers from *Mangueira*, emphasising in a positive manner the shocking character of the exhibition.

post-neoconcrete art operated outside the domain of art.²⁸⁵ It is indeed significant that Gullar actually reviewed the exhibition, considering his self-exile from the field of fine art.

This apparent paradox can be explained by the fact that the exhibition *Opinião 65* marked a moment of increased politicisation of the arts that went beyond the content of various paintings. In reality, it is impossible to dismiss the activities of movements such as the CPC as entirely separate from activities in the field of the fine arts, since the boundaries are not easily established. In a reassessment of the exhibition, organised at the Galeria BANERJ (1988) in Rio de Janeiro, Moraes (1988) argued that its title was appropriated from the *Opinião Theatre*, which in 1964 had organised a show which became associated with the feeling of revolt felt by the artistic milieu against the military regime and its policy of censorship.²⁸⁶ Moraes further emphasised the political nature of the exhibition by quoting Pedrosa who reviewed the subsequent *Opinião* exhibition in 1966 mentioning that:

The idea [for the exhibition's title] was a fortunate find for that moment. Why? Because it was inspired by theatre, by the popular theatre that was so close due to its very nature, to the social and political climate of the period. One could say that the *Teatro Arena* group, with its *Opinião*, was a breath of fresh air for the citizens suffocated by the climate of terror and cultural oppression established by the military regime in 1964 [...]. From this general oppressive context there emerged a formidable symbolic and revolutionary creation which was '*Carcará*', by João do Vale. Few who heard that song, expressing the reality so utterly ugly cruel and egoistical which was the natural and social misery of the Northeast, could do so without a trembling feeling inside and without tears in their eyes. Since then '*Carcará*' is a hymn of the peasant revolution in the Northeast. [...]²⁸⁷

Opinião had been the title of a musical directed by the pioneer of popular theatre Augusto Boal. Boal's circle included writers who had been key members of the CPC, amongst them Gullar and Oduvaldo Viana Filho (Vianinha). The composers of *Opinião* were Zé Ketí (1921-99), a popular composer from a *favela*, and João do Vale (1934-96), a traditional composer from the Northeast. The play also included the

²⁸⁵ This has been confirmed by Gullar in an interview for *Os Neoconcretos* (2000).

²⁸⁶ The essay also includes a statement by Jean Boghici where the art dealer and organiser of the exhibition (together with Ceres Franco) claimed that the title was his idea. See: Galeria BANERJ (1988).

²⁸⁷ Pedrosa, M. [In: (undated) *Correio da Manhã*] quoted in: Moraes (1988). In the original: A idéia foi um achado naquele instante. Por quê? Porque se inspirava no teatro, no teatro popular tão próximo, por sua própria natureza, ao clima social, à atmosfera política da época. Pode-se dizer que o grupo de teatro Arena, com sua *Opinião*, foi o grande respiradouro dos cidadãos abafados pelo clima de terror e opressão-cultural de regime militar implantado em 1964 [...]. Desse contexto geral e opressor surgiu uma formidável criação revolucionária e simbólica que foi '*Carcará*', de João do Vale. Pouca gente ouvia então aquele canto, expressando a realidade implacavelmente feia, malvada e egoística da miséria natural e social do Nordeste, sem ser sacudido por dentro e sem lágrima nos olhos. Desde então '*Carcará*' é um hino da revolução camponesa nordestina [...] [unpaginated, subsection: 'Do show à exposição: opinar'].

singer Nara Leão (1942-89) previously associated with Bossa Nova. Caetano Veloso's (b. 1942) sister Maria Bethânia (b. 1946), who subsequently was at the forefront of the *Tropicália* movement in music, later replaced Nara Leão. To adopt the title '*Opinião*' for an exhibition at that moment therefore represented an association with concurrent events in theatre and by extension, an identification (Veloso, 1997 p.72) with a broad front of cultural production, and an open engagement with political expression.

Theatricality and the Re-Evaluation of Avant-Garde Practice

Taking into consideration the complex nexus of friendships and cultural and political alliances amongst cultural activists during the 1960s, it is indeed strange that the association between experiments in popular theatre, cinema and the emergence of performative and participatory art in the work of artists such as Oiticica, Clark and Pape, remains to be studied in more detail. Experiments that were engaged with the popularisation of theatre would lead to concepts such as the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' elaborated by Boal, the premise of which was based on the encouragement of the popular classes to become involved as actors, and express their dissatisfactions in a more articulate and indeed audible manner. Although not having a clear ideological program, in the field of art, the participation of the spectator required the involvement of the public as part of the creative act.

Similar to the impact of Duchamp's 'Fountain' at the Armory Show,²⁸⁸ the organisers and the museum staff during the opening of *Opinião*, could not have imagined the arrival of Oiticica's *Parangolé*. At the opening reception for the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Oiticica arrived accompanied with his friends from the *Mangueira* shanty town dressed with the *Parangolé* capes and banners only to be expelled from the museum. [Fig. 59] Although Oiticica had been invited to take part in the exhibition, museum officials were totally unprepared for the form which his participation took.

This fact explains the surprise of the artistic milieu who during the exhibition's private view witnessed Oiticica's arrival. Rubens Gershman (b. 1942), one of the exhibitors described openings at the MAM during the period, as highly formal events whereby men were expected to wear suits and ties and invitations were an essential requirement. Gershman described Oiticica's arrival:

It was the first time that ordinary people [povo] entered the museum. Nobody knew if Oiticica was a genius or a mad-man, I saw it and was amazed. He walked through the museum with the people from *Mangueira* and we followed them. They tried to expel him and he [Oiticica] answered with swear words, shouting so that everyone could

²⁸⁸ It proclaimed accepting any work and displaying it in alphabetical order according to the author's name. See: Duchamp (1917) The Richard Mutt Case.

hear: 'Yes that's right, blacks cannot enter the museum, this is racism.' And he became highly excited. Expelled, he went to perform in the gardens, bringing with him the crowd that had been squashed amongst the paintings.²⁸⁹

News of the inaugural event also reached London and a report was published in the Signals Gallery Bulletin. David Medalla (b. 1942) who had become aware of Oiticica's work through Sergio Camargo, who was living in Paris at that time, reported on the event.²⁹⁰ It is quoted at length (Medalla, 1965 p.14) as an indication of the level of recognition Oiticica had already reached by the mid 1960s and to emphasise the proximity and understanding of his project present in the Signal's circles.

The exhibition caused great controversy (which is still raging in Rio) and disturbed the artistic establishment in Brazil.

At the exhibition the audience were invited to participate by dancing with the *Parangolés* to the tunes of the samba de *Mangueira*, one of the greatest schools of the Brazilian samba. [...] the jaded *habitués* of Rio's art galleries were scandalised by the entire demonstration, and at one point the police were nearly called by the stuffy museum officials to stop the demonstration. [...]

The question whether the *Parangolés* of Oiticica belong to the realm of art or not is an academic one. One may, if one wishes, see them in an historical context: as an extension of the ideas of Yves Klein and Lygia Clark.

Lygia Clark's articulated sculpture which depend for their kinetic realisation on the spectator's manual actions, and Yves Klein's paintings made from the spontaneous impressions of naked human bodies on canvas. These ideas of a truly social art have been brought forward by Oiticica into a new lyrical dimension: the *Parangolé* and the dancer become one to the tune of the samba; the old division between the art-object and the spectator is abolished; the cape and the individual are united in dynamic rhythms, creating new and unpredictable experiences of forms in space: billowing forms, enveloping forms, and colours in motion.

Jean Boghici, director of Rio's Gallery Relevo, summed up when he said: 'Hélio Oiticica is our Flash Gordon. He doesn't fly through sidereal spaces. He flies through the layers of our social structures ...' We at Signals hope Oiticica's work will help in breaking down those constricting layers, divisions, boundaries of an uneven, unequal, unhealthy social structure.

Other than the disruption that the *Parangolé* caused during the opening, the *Opinião* exhibition offers the opportunity for a comparative analysis of the concurrent development that occurred from the concrete and neoconcrete art of Cordeiro and Oiticica respectively. Cordeiro who - as already mentioned - was the central spokesman for the São Paulo concretists had by 1965 developed what he called a 'semantic concrete art': these have been defined however almost unanimously as

²⁸⁹ Galeria BANERJ. (1988). In the Original: Foi a primeira vez que o povo entrou no museu. Ninguém sabia se o Oiticica era gênio ou louco e, de repente, eu o vi e fiquei maravilhado. Ele entrou pelo museu adentro com o pessoal da *Mangueira* e fomos atrás. Quizeram expulsá-lo, ele respondeu com palavrões, gritando para todo mundo ouvir: 'é isso mesmo, crioulo não entra no MAM, isso é racismo'. E foi ficando exaltado. Expulso, ele foi se apresentar nos jardins, trazendo consigo a multidão que se acotovelava entre os quadros.

²⁹⁰ Although Signals Gallery had exhibited work by Clark and Oiticica, Medalla had not yet personally met Lygia Clark. See: Clark (1968) p.37.

'Popcrete'. [Fig. 60] The German critic Max Bense had already done so the previous year, when Cordeiro showed these works at the Atrium Gallery in São Paulo:

Popcretos presuppose [...] a previous artistic experience, that of Pop Art and concrete art. But one can note the dialectic relation between the two principles of style, that behave as thesis and antithesis. It is also noteworthy that the platonic principle in concrete art is the strongest, in the sense that the banal residues of the corporal pragmatic world are submitted to a clear and dominant ideal concrete surface. Perhaps it is also possible to express such a situation in the following manner: the idea of the banal trash is liquidated by the idea of ordering. Without any doubt, this is the Hegelian trajectory, albeit not in the idealist sense, of the Popcrete production.²⁹¹

Cordeiro saw his new works as operations that took the object of art from the sphere of production to the sphere of consumption. Such a process was intrinsically connected to the shift in theoretical emphasis which he undertook from concrete art to an empathy with the experiments carried out in France around the notion of a *Nouveau Realisme*. Cordeiro (Galeria BANERJ, 1988) claimed that his Popcrete work was a consequence of a dislocation of his rational enquiry into optical phenomena towards an analysis of the signification of such phenomena within the socio-historical context: a shift which he identified as operating from the perceptual studies of Gestalt theory towards apprehension in the Sartrian sense.

Oiticica (1965c) on the other hand, was entirely aware of a continuous process of investigation within his work even at that point when his work went through the 'radical leap' that was the invention of the *Parangolé*:

The creation of the *Cape* (Nos. 1 and 2 already produced) raised not only the question of considering a 'cycle of participation' in the work, i.e., that the spectator both 'watches' it and 'wears' it as part of a complete vision, but also of tackling the problem of the work in space and time - as if it were no longer 'located' in relation to these phenomena, but a 'magical experience' of them.

There is no point here for the appreciation of work-space and work-time, or better, work-space-time, towards considering its transcendentalism as a work-object in the environmental world. My entire evolution, leading up to the formulation of the *Parangolé*, aims at this magical incorporation of the elements of the work as such, in the whole life-experience of the spectator, whom I now call 'participator'. It is as if there were an 'establishment' and a 'recognition' of an inter-corporal space created by the work upon its unfolding. The work is made from this space, and no sense of totality can be demanded from it as simply a work located in an ideal space-time, whether or not requiring the spectator's participation.

²⁹¹ Max Bense quoted in: Galeria BANERJ. (1988). In the original: Popcretos presumem [...] uma anterior experiência artística, a saber pop-art e arte concreta. São arte de arte. Mas se pode perceber a dialética entre dois princípios de estilo, que se comportam como tese e antítese. Cabe, também notar que o princípio platônico na arte concreta é o mais forte, na medida em que os restos banais do mundo corpóreo pragmático são submetidos a dominante clara da superfície concreta ideal. Talvez se possa ainda exprimir esta situação da seguinte maneira: a idéia da sucata banal é liquidada através da idéia da ordenação. Sem dúvida, este é o percurso hegeliano, embora não no sentido idealista, na produção dos popcretos.

Brito's (1975) description of Neoconcretism as a movement with two distinct tendencies (one that saw art as an autonomous activity 'informing' society through an increased sensibilisation towards the designed object, the other tending towards the questioning art's function and *raison d'être*) although insightful, is also opened to questioning in relation to Oiticica's production leading to (and beyond) the *Parangolé*. Although it has been established that Neoconcretism ended its activities as a coherent group around 1961, accounts such as Brito's (originally written in 1975) clearly take into account subsequent developments in the work of the 'disruptive' section of neoconcrete artists such as Clark, Pape and Oiticica. It is possible to counter-argue that in fact, the *Parangolé* - and contemporaneous works by Pape and Clark - does not question the function of art. Unlike the activities of the CPC, the *Parangolé* did not attempt an overt overthrow or necessary re-direction of the audience/spectators of art. It was certainly more inclusive than objects created for the gallery space and questioned assumptions concerning the expected class of such audiences, but it did not attempt to substitute one class for the other. The same all-inclusiveness is appropriate in its relation to the constructivist tendency. The incorporation of ready-mades that had occurred already with the *Bólides* together with the performative character of the *Parangolé* are aspects of the work that were brought within the investigation of the perceptual quality of colour. The latter, according to Oiticica (1964b p.66), had been an integral part of the work's development since the 1950s. The actual questioning of art's function in relation to this disruptive potential of the work was already a part of the history of art to which Oiticica openly related. As has been argued, it was later defined by Bürger (1974) as the essence of the avant-garde: the period when Duchamp took ready-made objects from the real world and inserted them within the field of art; or the Dadaist's introduction of performance during the *soirées* at the *Cabaret Voltaire*; aspects also present in the chaotic Futurists' concerts. All these events during the early years of the 20th century had already acted as powerful means of questioning the very meaning of art. By the mid-1960s these characteristics were already part of a history of rebellion that had characterised responses to modernity and informed the development of Modernism. Admittedly, Brito argued that such a rupture pertained to the constructivist tradition in Brazil and therefore the emergence of characteristics relating to the historic avant-garde should be regarded as not belonging to this context. Brito's analysis refers to the specificity of the Brazilian art environment. However, although disruptive artists until then had been rare in Brazil, there had been the presence of Flávio de Carvalho. [Fig. 28, 29]

When Oiticica (1966 p.82) described his activities as anti-art, it was the tradition of abstraction and the autonomous object of high Modernism that was being questioned: art itself remained as it had been, that is, potentially capable of encompassing its antithesis. To say that the *Parangolé* questioned the function of art is to ignore an art historical lineage - Bürger's definition of the avant-garde - which had been expanding the limits of art since the early 20th century. Oiticica's originality pertained to the fact that he drew on disruptive characteristics already expressed within the history of art without abandoning the premises that had delineated his hitherto transcendental concerns.²⁹² Moreover, such a move was also entirely appropriate within that historical moment with its particular cultural and political circumstances. Ambivalence was therefore at the centre of the creative singularity of the *Parangolé*. Indeed, the ambivalence of the *Parangolé* was its fundamental differentiating characteristic from the more politically overt attempts to draw on the traditions of Brazilian popular culture. Consciously or not, it counteracted the ambivalent nature of popular culture itself and the romanticised apprehension of the popular by ideologically motivated cultural movements. The *Parangolé* was not in this sense, a hybrid of popular traditional culture and transcendental ideals associated with fine art. It was the result of the meeting of two very different types of aesthetic and sensorial experiences. Oiticica was aware that he was not producing carnival costumes nor any other form of 'traditional' cultural product.²⁹³ The *Parangolé* however, distinguished itself from previous attempts to incorporate popular traditions within the field of art, such as those in *Modernismo* due to its reliance on participation. The participatory element was fundamental for the possibility of 'presenting' the *Parangolé*, without becoming a simple 'representation' of popular culture. The participation of the spectator enabled the work to operate as an experience rather than as a representation. That experience, unlike the experience of fine art, was all-inclusive: it did not create an unbreachable gap between the appropriated and the appropriator, but offered a space of commonality, free from cultural hierarchies. It is a space that has proved to be highly difficult to re-create in posthumous exhibitions of Oiticica's work, since these rely on an *a priori* art-specific cultural space. The *Parangolé* did nevertheless establish a position of tension between the two cultural categories as opposed to attempting to bring both together or to resolve them achieving a state of synthesis. It questioned and pushed the boundaries of what was understood as art within that context, yet art was ultimately

²⁹² As Oiticica (1966 p.79) claimed: O Museu é o Mundo (The Museum is the World).

²⁹³ For an intricate discussion of Oiticica's connections between events in the world and the ideal of appropriation, see: Oiticica (1966).

its field of operation. These tensions were made explicit during the *Parangolé's* 'inauguration' and have remained in every exhibition which has included them since. Salomão (1996a p.53) has recently described the inauguration of the *Parangolé* as a:

precocious episode of the problematic which today, exactly three decades later, [...] occupies the centre of international discussions concerning the plastic arts which can be summarise in the following axiom: the museum is not in crisis, it is the crisis.²⁹⁴

Today the difficulty of presenting the *Parangolé* within the museum context, is indicative of the continuous pertinence of the work. Various strategies of exhibiting the *Parangolé* since Oiticica's death have been problematic. At Documenta X they were hung as art objects which the viewer was not allowed to touch: a display policy that, needless to say, ran entirely against the conceptual nature of the work. At the 1998 *Bienal de São Paulo* - in the spirit of re-establishing the interaction with the viewer - reproductions were made so that people could wear them in the gallery. [Fig. 61] However, there was a sense of inadequacy amongst those wearing them that probably stemmed from the austere gallery environment and the lack of intimacy between the work and the viewer: a sign perhaps of the work's alienation from life. Other display strategies have employed dancers (often from the *favelas*) to wear *Parangolés* in the museum or galleries. This tends to be at best a spectacularisation of the work and at worst exploitative of the dancers. An exception (Figueiredo, 1994) was when in one those demonstrations/performances with hired dancers during an earlier *Bienal de São Paulo*, a Dutch curator unaware of the event, shouted 'get out' to the surprised dancers. [Fig. 62] Although the work was never intended to be purely confrontational in character, for a short moment the original impact of the *Parangolé* resurfaced without the burden of nostalgia. This incident aside, the museum's failure to exhibit the *Parangolé* is also indicative of the work's continuous subversive power: it highlights the museum's own limitations. As will be argued in the following chapter, rather than questioning the function of art, the participatory nature of the work questions the function of the artist and his/her audience.

²⁹⁴ In the original: É um episódio precoce de uma problemática que ocupa, agora, exatas três décadas depois [...] que se pode resumir no axioma: o museu não está em crise, o museu é a crise.

Chapter 15

Friendship and Alterity

The responses towards the idea of a national popular culture during the early 1960s, adopted by Oiticica and Gullar are related through their shared constructivist inheritance and by the pressing issues of the historical moment. If we are to consider, as Foster (1996 pp.44-60) argued, that Fried's response to Minimalism was more effective as a definition than as a critique of the nature of creative production during the 1960s, then Oiticica's and Gullar's positions gain a further relation. They were in this sense, distinct responses to the undeniable theatricality of creative production. Fried had criticised the theatrical nature of the object of art in space essentially criticising what Judd had perceived as the new state of the art object: the 'specific object'. Considering the proximity that Judd's argument had with Gullar's 'Theory of the Non-Object', it is possible to propose that both Oiticica and Gullar radicalised the theatricality already present in Neoconcretism.

However, the nature of their respective approaches was quite distinct. The former acted within the field of fine art and the latter, abandoning the field, became engaged in theatre itself. These positions belong to a historical moment that has been described by Foucault (1976 p. 972) as being marked by the resurgence of the local:

A certain fragility has been discovered in the very bedrock of existence - even and perhaps above all, in those aspects of it that are most familiar, most solid and most intimately related to our bodies and to our everyday behaviour. But together with this sense of instability and this amazing efficacy of discontinuous, particular and local criticism, one in fact also discovers something that perhaps was not initially foreseen, something one might describe as precisely the inhibiting effect of global, *totalising theories*. It is not that these global theories have not provided nor continue to provide in a fairly consistent fashion useful tools for local research: Marxism and psychoanalysis are proofs of this. But I believe these tools have only been provided on the condition that the theoretical unity of these discourses was in some sense put in abeyance, or at least curtailed, divided, overthrown, caricatured, theatricalised, or what you will. In each case, the attempt to think in terms of a totality has in fact proved a hindrance to research.

The radicalism of both Oiticica and Gullar related to the questioning of totalising theories and the hierarchies of institutions, social class, geo-politics, etc. They both embraced the idea of the local as representing a rupture from totalising theories. Oiticica developed what he called an ethical position whereby his relation to the local operated within the scope of the imagined possibility of an avant-garde. Gullar adopting an overtly militant position, argued that the idea of an avant-garde in an underdeveloped country was impossible due to its totalising nature and therefore its disregard for the local circumstances.

The distance that these two systems reached can be measured by the review written by Gullar (1965) on the exhibition *Opinião 65*, in which he praised the return of 'opinionated painters' while omitting the inauguration of Oiticica's *Parangolé* that took place in the scandalous manner, already described.²⁹⁵ Gullar's position with respect to Oiticica's production has been subsequently articulated by the critic himself. In a recent interview, Gullar (2000b) admitted not considering such work as art but assuming it to represent something that went beyond it, that broke irrevocably with the field.

Their different approaches towards the popular are demonstrative of the individual radicalisation of the respective work by Oiticica and Gullar during the early 1960s. Oiticica's position had already been tested by Gullar's radical abandonment of all avant-garde activity. In another retrospective account, the poet/critic (Gullar, 1986b p.60) discussed arriving at the impasse that led him to abandon the neoconcrete movement:

At the time I was [...] the theoretician of the group, the one who was examining and speculating non-stop. When I realised the direction in which we were heading I proposed an exhibition to destroy everything. [...] The proposal was to place explosives behind or within all the works. People would see the works, at 6pm we would ask them to leave the gallery because the exhibition was about to finish, then the exhibition explodes.²⁹⁶

The proposed destruction of the works acted as affirmation of the importance of the idea - or concept - over the object of art, traditionally placed within the museum. It seems therefore paradoxical that Gullar rejected Oiticica's subsequent performative/participatory art. However, the rejection was not mutual. It will be argued here that Oiticica's subsequent development was an individual reaction to the general shift in cultural manifestations and that Gullar's radical change contributed towards the impetus for Oiticica's own re-evaluation of his production, which took place between 1961 and 1964.

For Gullar, the neoconcrete experience tended towards the transformation of art into idea and as such, the movement had reached its own limits. Although Oiticica's relation to popular culture and its effect on his own notion of art as a material yet transcendental entity, was very different in nature and took place far more gradually, the influence which Gullar's critical position had on Oiticica should not be

²⁹⁵ See Chapter 14.

²⁹⁶ In the original: Na época, vamos dizer assim, eu era o teórico do grupo, o que estava examinando, especulando sem parar. Quando me dei conta para onde íamos, propus uma exposição com hora marcada, começando às 17 e terminando às 18h. A proposta era colocar um dispositivo explosivo debaixo de cada obra, dentro das obras. O pessoal vê as obras,

underestimated.²⁹⁷ For Oiticica, Gullar's 'final' neoconcrete exhibition was inadmissible, yet, according to Gullar (*Os Neoconcretos*, 2000), although not willing to destroy his work, Oiticica was distraught by such a radical proposition: he was distraught for not being able to accept it.

There is something of the proximity and infinite distance that coexist in friendship (Blanchot, 1971) that occurred at that particular moment between Gullar and Oiticica. Friendship requires an acknowledgement of the Other's position through the proximity that it establishes and indeed requires. It accepts the ultimate difference between the Self and the Other through an operation which could be described as an interface between separate and distinct entities. In this manner, it also requires a shared space, a space of commonality, through which the interaction that friendship requires can occur. Through friendship there is an act of reciprocal translation between the Self and the Other, synthesis in this sense is never achieved.²⁹⁸ This articulating mechanism which friendship offers was essential to Oiticica's work. It allowed the artist to operate within an avant-garde frame beyond the totalised character that the notion implied. Indeed, it went beyond his relationship with Gullar, involving his engagement with other artists with profoundly diverse productions and was the basis for Oiticica's interaction with the people from the *favelas*. Friendship, in other words, established the premises for Oiticica's involvement with Brazil's internal Other, it enabled the relationship of mutual respect between the artist and the 'popular sectors' and therefore was at the core of the distinction between Oiticica's activity and those proposed by Gullar and organisations such as the CPC.

Friendship in this sense, was behind the singularity of Oiticica's oeuvre determining his politics of ambivalence. It was central to the possibility of the work's operation as performance and interaction with the participants. The nature of friendship has been poetically expressed by Maurice Blanchot (1971 p.291):

We must give up trying to know those to whom we are linked by something essential; by this I mean we must greet them in the relation with the unknown in which they greet us as well, in our estrangement. Friendship, this relation without dependence, without episode, yet into which all of the simplicity of life enters, passes by way of recognition of the common strangeness that does not allow us to speak of our friends but only to speak to them, not to make conversations (or essays), but the movement of understanding in which, speaking to us, they reserve, even on the most familiar terms, an infinite distance, the fundamental separation on the basis of which what separates becomes relation.

quando chegar às 18h a gente pede pra sair todo mundo pois a exposição vai acabar, e detona a exposição.

²⁹⁷ For an excellent account of Gullar's influence on Oiticica in this respect see: Zilio (1982b).

²⁹⁸ On the notion of translation see: Maharaj (2001).

Such an infinite distance, the separation that becomes relation, in Blanchot's words, opens the possibility for us to begin to understand the paradoxical nature of the abyss that stands as a symbol of the alterity that Oiticica's work bridged. Friendship, collaboration, participation were key elements that became increasingly significant within the artist's trajectory. If Tarsila's *A Negra*, [Fig. 8] presented the infinite distance, the abyss (Morais, 1987) between foreground and background, as (Pontual, 1992) an obligatory passage of the artist between the archaism and the modernity of the nation, Oiticica's *Parangolé* [Fig. 63] enveloped the background of European abstraction around the foreground of Brazil's internal Other.

The key distinction between these two works was that while the former presented *A Negra* (The Black Woman) as a representation of exoticism, Oiticica's *Parangolé* placed the subject (often but not exclusively, an inhabitant of the *favela*) in the centre of the work.²⁹⁹ The subject became literally the manipulator of the art, s/he is no longer a representation but becomes inextricably associated with the actual work. Such annulment of the abyss is symptomatic of a high level of complicity between the artist and his 'subject'. This complicity led to the partial dissolution of traditional categories of creative production since the role of the artist was partly transferred to the spectator/subject. The implications that participation entailed as far as the traditional role of the artist as the sole proprietor of the creative act, was a common topic of discussion between Oiticica and Clark.³⁰⁰ The notion of spectator participation marked therefore a shift in art from a position of distance between the object and the observer, or in the case of works such as *A Negra*, between identity as representation, towards an art that operated as ontology.

Oiticica, Nietzsche and the *Other*

Oiticica's capacity for introducing an element of social engagement into his work while maintaining the work's theoretical coherence was undoubtedly a consequence of his discovery of the culture of the *favela* combined with an intellectual evaluation informed by his reading of Nietzsche. This was already evident within his formal analysis (Oiticica, 1961a p.25) that would lead to the process of transition from constructivist abstraction to his later participatory work:

It is necessary to establish the great order of colour in the same manner in which there is the great order of architectonic space. Colour in its structural sense can only be admired. This great order will be born out of the desire for an internal dialogue with colour, in its structurally pure state; it is a special instance that in repeating itself will

²⁹⁹ In the *Parangolé* (P17, Cape 13, 1967) *Estou Possuido* (I am Possessed), the friend from the *favela* is the author of the words included.

³⁰⁰ See: Figueiredo, ed. (1996).

create this order; these are rare instances. Colour has to structure itself like sound in music; it is the vehicle of the cosmicity of its creator in dialogue with his element; the primordial element of the musician is sound; of the painter is colour; not the allusive colour, that which is 'seen'; it is the cosmic structure colour. But the dialogue creates its order, it is not unity but plurality: it demands time to express it; this time can be the crystallisation of expression, of which colour is the principal element, it is necessary that the artist becomes superior, that he should strive to move above, ethically.³⁰¹

The understanding of the concept of superiority, which has been the most distorted characteristic of Nietzsche's philosophy (Deleuze, 1962) is central in the distinction of Oiticica's and Gullar's approach towards the popular. As already mentioned, the project of the CPC was to 'simplify' political concepts and present these through a cultural form that would be recognisable, or empathetic with the mass of the population.³⁰² For Oiticica, there was never the question of simplification. He learnt their culture not because he was attempting to consciously bridge high art with popular culture but simply because it appealed to him as an individual. The experience was only subsequently integrated within his work. The process was also reciprocal. Therefore, the 'superiority' of his approach pertained to the acknowledgement that the transcendental power of colour, which he had previously theorised, would be 'felt' intuitively, without any simplifying aid, by those who participated in his work.³⁰³

This represents a central characteristic of Oiticica's work which unfortunately has been overshadowed by the dichotomy generally proposed between high art and popular culture. Other than Gullar's anti-modern position following his abandonment of the avant-garde, there are two distinctive views of Oiticica's work which have subsequently developed: the traditionalists who emphasise the constructivist or modernist character of the work, and those who tend to stress the post-neoconcrete, the anti-art side of the work; emphasising its relation to Postmodernism.³⁰⁴

Oiticica's development of a non-dualistic approach to the constructivist inheritance and the incorporation of, what he termed, anti-art related to a rejection of the object of art as purely contemplative within the specificity of the gallery or museum space. It

³⁰¹ In the original: É preciso dar a grande ordem à cor, ao mesmo que vem a grande ordem dos espaços arquitetônicos. A cor, no seu sentido de estrutura, apenas pode ser vislumbrada. A grande ordem nascerá da vontade interior em diálogo com a cor, pura em estado estrutural; é um instante especial que, ao se repetir, criará essa ordem; são instantes raros. A cor tem que se estruturar assim como o som na música; é veículo da própria cosmicidade do criador em diálogo com seu elemento; o elemento primordial do músico é o som; do pintor a cor; não a cor alusiva, 'vista' é a cor estrutura cósmica. Mas o diálogo cria sua ordem, que não é unidade, mas pluralidade: exige o tempo para se exprimir; esse tempo pode ser a cristalização da expressão, de que a cor é elemento principal, é preciso que o artista se torne superior, eticamente caminhe para cima.

³⁰² See Chapter 13.

³⁰³ See Chapter 12.

³⁰⁴ Arguably, Ronaldo Brito and Paulo Venancio hold the former position, curators such as Carlos Basualdo and Paulo Herkenhoff hold the latter.

would therefore be more appropriate to describe it as reacting against the institution of art, along the tenets established by Bürger (1974). His involvement with the people and traditions of the *Mangueira* shanty town operated initially through dance and the tradition of carnival and was therefore, markedly distinct from that of Gullar's in the sense that Oiticica did not adopt a position of authority. Although Oiticica clearly developed a political/ethical programme of engagement with the popular, its nature was participatory and non-moralistic. Moreover, such participation relied on friendship as its operative means. His politics therefore pertained to anarchism rather than Marxism.³⁰⁵

Oiticica and Gullar would from 1961, choose individual paths that would become irreconcilable. The radical changes which occurred in each of their careers indicates, other than the political circumstances of that historical moment, a mutual departure from the previous experiences and experiments. Oiticica's move towards popular culture could be seen in this sense as a parallel project to that of Gullar. A response to a friend's untenable position, that in fact turned out to be far more radical.

The distinction between Oiticica's and Gullar's involvement with Brazilian culture, like friendship itself, was essentially one of proximity and difference. Oiticica's relation to that disenfranchised social group was heterogeneous by nature. Friendship was by its very nature restricted to personal relationships, as opposed to the more organised approach by movements such as the CPC which, in general attempted to interact with the social group as a whole. Oiticica's presence within that social group ranged from that of friendship to the inevitable confrontation that his position of outsider entailed.³⁰⁶

Such ambivalence invites one to think beyond the categories of friendship that are usually associated with relations between those of the same social group. Nietzsche had discussed the distinctions between the idea of friendship amongst 'master' and 'slave' groups. It is clear that for Oiticica friendship could not operate within such a frame. However, Nietzsche is nevertheless interesting in terms of his critique of Christian morality and the relation that such ideals have with the homogenising or social grouping according to purely economic factors which occurs in Marxism.

Derrida's (1994) discussion on the 'Politics of Friendship' recalls Nietzsche's reversal of the quote attributed to Aristotle 'O my friends, there is no friend', into 'O my

³⁰⁵ Oiticica's political allegiance with anarchism is often attributed to the fact that his grandfather was a renowned member of the anarchist group '*Ação Direta*'. However, such a received legacy is distinct from the logic that questions the management of the artist's oeuvre based on family inheritance. Oiticica's politics might have been influenced by his upbringing yet they were ultimately his own.

³⁰⁶ The poet Waly Salomão has described how the artist was once tied to a tree by inhabitants of *Mangueira*, during the 1960s. Salomão (2000).

enemies, there are no enemies'. Derrida notes also that the Greek notion of friend is distinguished from that of the Neighbour in Christianity. In the context of the city of Rio de Janeiro these juxtapositions are pertinent because the city's topology is one of neighbourly proximity of distinct social groups often perceived as hostile to each other.

This condition of hostile neighbours was indeed powerfully expressed by the artist. Oiticica's political position is perhaps most radically articulated in his *Bólido 18 Poema Caixa 2, Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo* (Box Bólido 18 Poem Box 2 Homage to *Cara de Cavalo*) of 1966, exhibited for the first time at the exhibition 'The Brazilian Artist and Mass Iconography'.³⁰⁷ [Fig. 64] It was described by Moraes (1980) as 'perhaps the most radically poetic moment of all contemporary Brazilian art.'

Oiticica (1969a) wrote a text about this homage in the catalogue of his 1969 Whitechapel exhibition:

I knew Cara de Cavalo personally, and I can say that he was my friend, but for society he was public enemy number one, wanted for audacious crimes and assaults - what perplexed me then was the contrast between what I knew of him as a friend [...] and the image made by society [...] This homage is an anarchic attitude against all kind of armed forces: police, army, etc. I make protest poems (in capes and boxes) that have more social sense, but this to Cara de Cavalo reflects an important ethical moment, decisive for me, for it reflects an individual revolt against every social conditioning.³⁰⁸

It seems that the only non-exploitative relation that could possibly withstand such an encounter, that of the coming together of two social worlds, would be that of friendship. Moraes (1980) described Oiticica's homages, which according to the critic constituted much of the artist's production, as 'a form of re-reading the history of art, of dividing authorship and demonstrating affection, of re-affirming friendships.' Moraes continued:

with his *Bóldes* he had already paid homage to Modrian and Malevitch and also the outlaw *Cara de Cavalo*, who had been brutally murdered by Rio's police force. The process of collaboration and homage took place also in his *Parangolé* capes in homage to Mário Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, Jêronimo, Mosquito and Nininha da *Mangueira*, Guevara, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso and José Celso.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁷ The exhibition was held at the Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI), 1968.

³⁰⁸ Originally written in English.

³⁰⁹ In the Original: Boa parte da obra de Hélio Oiticica é constituída por homenagens - sua forma de reler a história da arte, dividir autorias e demonstrar afetividade, reafirmar amizades. Com seus *Bóldes* já havia homenageado Mondrian e Malevitch e também o bandido Cara de Cavalo, assassinado brutalmente pela polícia carioca. Este processo se amplia com suas *Capas-Parangolé* em homenagem a Mário Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, Jerônimo, Mosquito, e Nininha da *Mangueira*, Guevara, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso e José Celso Martinez. Seu *Bólido-Caixa 24*, de 1968, em homenagem a Cara de Cavalo, exposto pela primeira vez na mostra 'O artista brasileiro e a iconografia de massa' (ESDI, 1968), foi, talvez, o momento mais radicalmente poético de toda a arte brasileira contemporânea, ápice ilustrativo de sua teoria da marginalidade.

It is also clear that creativity for Oiticica (1968b) meant something that went beyond the individual:

creativity is inherent to everyone, the artist would just inflame it, put fire, free people from their conditioning - the old way at looking at the artist as someone intangible is dead; it has no connotations with life today - the individual manifestation has only one justification, that is to be a creative one, apart from all egoism or closed individuality.

As opposed to Gullar's decisive rupture, Oiticica (1965 pp.73-4) added this new experience to his artistic production in the form of new layers of meanings. Oiticica elaborated this position of the individual in the world as having a clear correspondence with Nietzschean thought. He (Oiticica 1965 p.74) argued:

The ancient position with respect to the work of art is no longer applicable – even works that do not require the participation of the spectator, what is proposed is not a transcendental contemplation but a state of 'being' in the world. Similarly, dance does not propose an 'escape' from this immanent world, but revels it in all its plenitude – what for Nietzsche would be the state of 'Dionysian inebriation' is in fact the 'expressive lucidity of the immanence of the act', an act that is not characterised by any form of partiality but by its totality as such – a total expression of the Self. Would this not be a fundamental character of art?³¹⁰

There was therefore, a clear attempt to assert the transition that his work had undergone through Nietzsche's philosophy, as a means of distinguishing it from other contemporaneous critical positions. Oiticica's approach to the popular distinguishes itself from those on the traditional Left and the Right for its affirmative stance, in a Nietzschean sense. Such an approach was also ambivalent in its relation to art, being both Classical and Romantic, or Apollonian and Dionysian.

The Marxist position of educating the people so that they understood class-consciousness displayed a position of negation similar to the notion of redemption in Christianity.

In contrast to the triumphant self-affirmation of the master morality, which spontaneously affirms itself as 'good' and only after this self-ascription feels the need

Other collaborations and homages included: *Projeto Cães de Caça*, which included Gullar's *Poema Enterrado* (Buried Poem) and Reynaldo Jardim's *Teatro Integral*, in 1961; *Cara de Cavalo: Bólide Caixa 21 Poema Caixa 3*, 1966-67; with Lygia Clark, *Dialogue of Hands*, 1966; with Antonio Manuel *Parangolé P22 Cape Nirvana* 1968; with Antonio Dias and Mário Montez, *Agripina e Roma Manhattan*, New York 1972.

³¹⁰ In the original: A antiga posição frente à obra de arte já não procede mais – mesmo nas obras que hoje não exijam a participação do espectador, o que propõem não é uma contemplação transcendente mas um 'estar' no mundo. A dança também não propõem uma 'fuga' desse mundo imanente, mas o revela em toda sua plenitude – o que seria para Nietzsche a 'embriagues dionisíaca' é na verdade uma lucidez expressiva da imanência do ato, ato esse que não se caracteriza por parcialidade alguma e sim por sua totalidade como tal – uma expressão total do eu. Não seria essa a pedra fundamental da arte?

to extend the word 'bad' to what it considers lowly and inferior to itself, the slave morality is able to define itself as 'good' only by first negating others as 'evil'.³¹¹

Nietzsche's approach to Christianity and the notion of good and evil is a means to further distinguish Oiticica's ethics from Gullar's politics. Nietzsche criticised the notion of evil proposed, as he saw it, by Christianity. This is not to claim that such a notion was created by Christianity: there were already substantial ideas of evil in the Classical Greek period. In 'Beyond the Genealogy of Morals' (Ansell-Pearson, ed., 1994) the idea of evil in Christianity is based on a reactive psychology. In this sense morality acts negatively, whereby good condemns evil. For Nietzsche the idea of evil, and indeed the idea of God, must be transcended: morality must therefore go beyond the concepts of good and evil, beyond a binary formula. Nietzsche saw the Christian moral code as a form of slave morality in its reactive nature and in its history, rising from a particular purpose. Precisely what is condemned within this frame is what Nietzsche saw as life affirming qualities, life's vitality, the capacity to exercise the will upon the world, remaking in this sense, the world in its own image.

Nietzsche argued that Christian moral codes serve the interest of the weak, it is in this sense an integral aspect of what he defines as the herd morality. As such, it purports a hatred of life that is both sadistic and masochistic. Sadistic in that it demands punishment for evil acts, and masochistic because it internalises guilt, it constructs a consciousness that is intent in torturing ones own inner life. The architectural historian Rosangela Motta (1996) visited *Mangueira* as part of her research on the work of Oiticica. The aim was to gather accounts of those inhabitants that recalled Oiticica's participation within the culture of the *favela*. Interestingly, one of those she encountered, now an evangelical Christian, rejected the *Parangolé* as a manifestation of evil. Motta's account is pertinent in relation to the Christian moral code and life affirming character of the *Parangolé*:

We were walking along the surfaced road when we met China. I had already seen a photo of China dressing a *Parangolé*. However, he was now wearing a dark suit and had a bible under his arm. Paulo Ramos [Motta's escort inside the *favela*] explained to me that he had converted to one of the Protestant churches that are proliferating in Brazil. Before being introduced to me, and not knowing that I was doing research on Oiticica, he took out from his jacket pocket a cutting of a photo taken when he was dressing a *Parangolé*. He explained that he was just coming from the church where he had been to confess his sin of having dressed the *Parangolé*. He advised Paulo Ramos to consider doing the same.

I was very impressed by the coincidence. China's behaviour provides strong evidence that the *Parangolé* is a sin for these churches [...] The *Parangolé* is the antithesis of these churches that repress the body and the feasts. They repress pleasure and desire. They dry up people's inventive power.

³¹¹ See: Ansell-Pearson, ed. (1994) Introduction. p.xiv.

The Christian morality represents - to this day - an operation that attempts to eradicate precisely those aspects of life that Nietzsche saw as most affirmative, most life enhancing. When asked what was his criticism of the cultural and artistic position of the left in Brazil during the 1960s, Oiticica (1980) replied:

in the majority of cases it was bad, but there were exceptions such as the case of Mário Pedrosa which was always good. However, the majority of things that were said were repeated clichés, it seemed like something that always remained the same, the dialectic was poor, and so was the spirit of analysis. This thing about message, of work/message, all of that is outdated.

I am tired of university theoreticians, really ... this tendency of theorising, it is a non-Marxist dialectic ... in fact, after Nietzsche the dialectic was already disintegrated, there is no use in attempting to adopt a Hegelian dialectic since it no longer works. In reality they are very Christian... in my opinion, the majority of these people have a Jesuitical education and if they don't, it seems like they have...³¹²

Nietzsche suggested that the evil man, may be judged favourably over the good man in Christian morality.³¹³ Oiticica's 'Homage' to *Cara de Cavalo* could be seen to fulfil such an idea. In fact, it has become a central reference for the political controversies that pervaded the field of culture during the 1960s. This politico-philosophical position was expressed most explicitly in this series of homages that Oiticica (Oiticica, 1969a) made to his outlaw friend:

[...] apart from any subjective sympathy for the person himself, [Homage to Cara de Cavalo] represented for me an 'ethic moment' that reflected powerfully on everything I made afterwards: it revealed to me more an ethical problem more than anything else related to aesthetics. I want here to homage what I think is the individual social revolt: that of the so-called bandit. Such thinking is very dangerous but something necessary for me: there is a contrast, an ambivalent character in the behaviour of the marginalized man: besides a great sensibility lies a violent character and many times, in general, crime is a desperate search for happiness.

There is a strong correlation between Nietzschean notions of the tragic and Oiticica's various homages to Cara de Cavalo. Nietzsche's notion of the tragic is set against the dialectical and the Christian views through the figures of Dionysus and Apollo in Greek mythology. These are not placed in dialectical opposition but - as Deleuze (1962 p.12) has argued - are reconciled through tragedy:

³¹² In the original: A maior parte das vezes é ruim, tem algumas boas, como Mário Pedrosa que é bom sempre. Mas a maior parte das coisas faladas são repetições dos mesmo chavões, parece uma coisa que sempre nunca muda, a dialética é pobre, o espírito de análise também. Esse negócio de mensagem, de 'obra/mensagem', tudo isso eu acho que já era. Estou cansado de teóricos universitários, realmente ... essa tendência a teorizar, isso é uma dialética não marxista ... aliás, depois de Nietzsche a dialética já foi também desintegrada, não adianta querer usar um tipo de dialética hegeliana porque não funciona mais. Na realidade são bem cristãos ... a meu ver, a maior parte dessas pessoas tem formação jesuítica e se não tem, parece que tem ...

[...] in tragedy Dionysus is the essence of the tragic. Dionysus is the only tragic character, 'the suffering and glorified God', his sufferings are the only tragic subject [...] on the other hand, [...] it is Apollo who develops the tragic into *drama*, who expresses the tragic' in a drama. 'We must understand Greek tragedy as the Dionysian chorus which ever anew discharges itself in an Apollonian world of images ...'

It is precisely this approach to suffering or pain in the Dionysian sense, which differentiates Nietzsche's position (Deleuze, 1962 p.16) from that of the dialectician or the Christian.

In Dionysus and in Christ the martyr is the same, the passion is the same. It is the same phenomenon but in two opposed senses. On the one hand, the life that justifies suffering; on the other the suffering that accuses life, that testifies against it, that makes life something that must be justified. For Christianity the fact of suffering in life means primarily that life is not just, that it is even essentially blameworthy. For Dionysus 'it is life which takes charge of justification,' 'it affirms even the harshest suffering'. [...] it does not resolve pain by internalising it, it affirms it in the element of its exteriority.

Oiticica's activity across the boundaries of cultural hierarchies operated at this level. He expressed the Dionysian tragic - the ambivalent condition of music, dance and suffering in the *favela* - within the Apollonian drama - that of the idealism of art and particularly the rationalism of the constructivist legacy. The stage for such drama was always Apollonian: the field of fine art.

In *Seja Marginal Seja Heroi* (Be a Marginal be a Hero) there is a condensation of all these Nietzschean references. [Fig. 65] The Christ figure is transformed into a Dionysian character by the slogan 'Be Marginal be a Hero'. Moreover, the hero in this case is not a working class hero in the Marxist sense, where there is a sacrifice of life for the greater cause. He is someone who celebrates life through the adversity he finds himself in. A condition that was confirmed by Oiticica's written slogan on one of his *Parangolés*: From adversity we live.³¹⁴ [Fig. 56]

Finally, the series of works dedicated to his friend, *Cara de Cavalo*, are perhaps the most appropriate example of how the ambivalence intrinsic to friendship was so fundamental to the work and the artist's creative process. In the same manner that such an ambivalence between the public figure of the outlaw and the relationship with a friend fascinated Oiticica, one can extrapolate that Gullar's radical transformation from avant-garde poet to militant activist would seem equally fascinating to Oiticica.

³¹³ See: Ansell-Pearson, ed. (1994) Introduction. p.xi.

³¹⁴ *Parangolé* P16, Cape12, 1964.

Chapter 16

From *Tropicália* to *Antropofagia* ³¹⁵

A new impetus can be perceived in Oiticica's work beginning with his involvement with *Mangureira* and leading subsequently to the series of exhibitions which occurred following *Opinião 65*. In fact, *Opinião 66* and *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (New Brazilian Objectivity) in 1967 all at the Museum of Modern Art (MAM) in Rio, can be seen as not only interrelated but as the consequence of a new generation of artists with a very different aesthetic and theoretical agenda from that of the neoconcrete group. Moreover, like *Opinião 65* it is impossible not to disassociate these exhibitions from the political situation in Brazil at that moment. From the first *Opinião* exhibition, Oiticica transformed himself from an artist working predominantly within the confines of his studio into an outspoken cultural activist.

The exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* clearly marked such a transition. As a central figure within the exhibition's organisation, Oiticica published an important essay in the catalogue and exhibited what became an influential installation, subsequently being recognised as defining an attitude towards culture and which would affect the fields of music, cinema, literature and fine art. Oiticica's 'environmental project' *Tropicália* has in fact become somewhat overshadowed by the music movement it named. The installation was exhibited for the first time at MAM in 1967. [Fig. 66]

It is appropriate to stress that although the *Nova Objetividade* catalogue contains no reference to the 1925 *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) exhibition in Germany, (indeed, to see it as a direct consequence of the earlier exhibition would be a grave error) there are some interesting correspondences.³¹⁶

Other than their name, the inclination towards figuration and the fact that they represented attempts to define artistic movements from external (or curatorial) positions³¹⁷, both exhibitions demonstrate an emphasis on figuration in the midst of an increased politicisation of culture brought by the traumatic experiences faced by

³¹⁵ The title of this chapter is an Anthropophagite homage to Carlos Zilio's (1982b) excellent essay 'From Anthropophagy to Tropicália'.

³¹⁶ Carlos Zilio who was one of the artists exhibiting with Oiticica in the 'New Brazilian Objectivity' exhibition has confirmed (Zilio, 2000) that he is not aware that any connection between the two exhibitions was made or discussed at the time.

³¹⁷ 'In 1925 G.H. Hartlaub, director of the Municipal Galleries in Mannheim, presented an exhibition which he called 'New Objectivity' (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). During the preceding two years he had gathered together artists and works that seemed to share an inclination towards realism. The exhibition attracted a great deal of notice and its title became the label for a new trend. This is probably the first clear case of a new 'movement' being formed, named, and defined from the outside: the critic/curator claims to have observed a tendency in individual and possibly quite independent instances and demonstrates their coherence by publicising them

society at large. In Germany as a consequence of W.W.I, in Brazil in the wake of the military coup in 1964. Such a political dimension may also be posited as a distinguishing factor between North American and Brazilian Pop Art.³¹⁸ More importantly, these exhibitions demonstrated strong relationships with their respective national cultures.

The return to figuration which had already manifested itself in exhibitions such as *Opinião 65* posed the problem of historical continuity within Brazilian art, and consequently the question of cultural dependency resurfaced. A formalist analysis would place Oiticica in particular, as having reasons to be concerned due to his insistence on defining his work as a continuous process or development and his previous absolute rejection of any form of representation: a process that had its origins in the resolutely abstract concrete and neoconcrete tradition (and more broadly, in the work of artists such as Mondrian, van Doesburg, and Malevitch). Although the question of a return to figuration did not affect Oiticica's work directly (his worry in this respect was to differentiate himself from *Nouveau Realisme*) it did affect the new generation of artists that constituted the core of the exhibition. The collective, albeit eclectic, together with the political and ethical concerns were central to Oiticica's attempt to re-evaluate the possibility of a Brazilian avant-garde. These concerns were elaborated at length in Oiticica's (1967a) catalogue essay entitled *Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade* (General Scheme of the New Objectivity). The central issues of which were further emphasised following the exhibition when Oiticica (1968a p.124) wrote:

Tropicália was born from the idea and conception of 'New Objectivity', which I initiated in 1966, it was exhibited (as an environmental project) in April of 67. With the 'Theory of New Objectivity', I wanted to institute and characterise a state of Brazilian avant-garde art, confronting it with the major movements of world art (Op. and Pop.), and aiming at a Brazilian state of art, or of manifestations related to this. The concept of *Tropicália*, presented at the exhibition 'Brazilian New Objectivity' (Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro) in April, 1967, came directly from this fundamental need to characterise a Brazilian condition. Actually, in the beginning of the text about 'New Objectivity', I invoked Oswald de Andrade and the meaning of 'Anthropophagy' (before it became fashionable after the revival of the 'Rei da Vela' ('King of the Candle')) as an important element in this attempt at a national characterization.

The reference to Oswald de Andrade's play *O Rei da Vela* (The King of the Candle) is another indication of how the arts in general following the *coup* had shared certain

and defining what they have in common' In: Lynton, N. (1980) [Quote taken from the 1994 edition] p. 156.

³¹⁸ The differentiation between North American Pop Art and the Brazilian 'version' is important in this context since it is indicative of the strategy of adopting new styles from abroad which are then transformed into manifestations which are pertinent to the local reality and culture: a factor that leads Oiticica to associate Nova Objetividade to Anthropophagy.

ideals and attitudes. The play had been a response to the didactic theatre produced previously by the CPC, and it emphasised a strong sense of irreverence and anarchy. It originated at the *Oficina* Theatre in 1967 (the same year as *Nova Objetividade*) and was described as a discovery of Brazil through Anthropophagy, where 'bad taste, the circus, carnival and opera were signs of a Brazilian reality which was captured without the civilising filter of European civilisation.'³¹⁹

Its director, José Celso (b. 1937) saw in Oswald a reaction to the 'good mannered' political conscientisation promoted by the CPCs. The situation required a more radical, violent stance, and the re-discovery of the Oswaldian irreverence fulfilled that need.³²⁰

Oiticica's disassociation from the play relates to an avoidance of an Oswaldian fashion that emerged as a consequence of the play.³²¹ His concern was one of emphasising the inevitability of appropriation within Brazilian cultural production. Ironically, the title of his installation '*Tropicália*' was fated to suffer the same dilution by also becoming fashionable.³²²

Defining the New Avant-Garde Practice

The notion of a 'new objectivity' attempted to bring together the premises of progressive art at that moment. Oiticica's (1967a) catalogue essay formulated the main characteristics of the Brazilian avant-garde at the time:

1 - A general Constructive Will; 2 - a tendency towards the object as easel painting is negated and surpassed; 3- spectator participation (corporal, tactile, visual, semantic, etc.); 4 - a positioning in relation to political, social and ethical problems; 5 - a tendency towards collective propositions and consequently the abolition of 'isms' characteristic of art of the first half of the century (a tendency which could be associated with Mário Pedrosa's concept of postmodern art); 6 - the resurfacing and new formulations of the concept of anti-art.

These six items demonstrate Oiticica's profound historical awareness and preoccupation.³²³ Item (1) established a sense of internal continuity within Brazilian art history, particularly in relation to the constructivist tendency. It describes Anthropophagy as a condition arising from social underdevelopment. This in turn led to the search for the characterisation of a national identity. The 'Constructive Will'

³¹⁹ Magaldi, S. quoted in: *O Oficina Começa a Inventar o Futuro* (1970) *Jornal da Tarde*. 6 October. Reprinted in the introduction to the interview of the play's director José Celso by Tile de Lemos (Celso, 1979).

³²⁰ See: Celso (1979).

³²¹ His appreciation of José Celso can be confirmed by the *Parangolé* cape that Oiticica created in homage to the theatre director. See: Morais (1980).

³²² Oiticica later expressed his dissatisfaction with *Tropicalismo*. See: Oiticica (1973a) p.17.

³²³ This aspect of Oiticica's creative character is discussed by Ricardo Basbaum (2000 p.20) in relation to the work of Artur Barrio.

was in turn imposed upon such an identify, as a means of moulding an apprehension of national culture that transcends the position of 'cultural colonialism' potentially present in the Anthropophagic act. Oiticica redefined this synthesis as a 'Super-Anthropophagy'. For Oiticica the first objective of what he defined a 'New Objectivity' was the search for the characteristically Brazilian, that which was still in a process of development. The apprehension of such a creative flux was the determining characteristic of the Brazilian avant-garde and the methods used by it would go beyond or indeed against what were considered as prevailing premises of culture.

In Item (2), the experience of the neoconcrete group is invoked. The main factor in which, was the transcendence of easel painting leading to the development of Gullar's 'Theory of the Non-Object'. Oiticica acknowledged the importance of poetry in this process together with Clark's unique and gradual contribution. He claimed that in his work the process was more abrupt yet still remained within the field of a transcendental questioning of the work's structure. Oiticica's recognition of Gullar's abandonment of the avant-garde is placed as the context in which the emergent 'Pop' oriented work of the mid-60s arose. The distinction that Oiticica made between his response to the shift which occurred in the avant-garde, following Neoconcretism, and those of 'Pop oriented' artists such as Gerchman and Antonio Dias (b. 1944) is central to the conceptual unity attempted by the notion of a 'New Objectivity'. It proves Oiticica's openness to diverse positions, ranging from Gullar's militant popularism and the emergent response to mass culture, while maintaining his own (Oiticica, 1967a p.111) individual aesthetic-ethic.

Thus in my work (from 1959) [the rejection of easel painting] takes place in a more immediate way, but still within a purely structural examination and dissolution, and [an equivalent rejection] can later be seen more violently, more dramatically, in the work of Antonio Dias and Rubens Gerchman, involving several processes simultaneous, no longer in a purely structural field, but involving a dialectical process which Mário Schemberg formulated as realistic.

The notion of realistic work, rather than signalling a return to figuration or an association with the French movement *Nouveau Realisme*, referred specifically to the inclusion of signs relating to both mass communication and to the political situation that the country (Oiticica, 1967a pp.111-2) found itself, under the military dictatorship.

In artists who could be called 'structural', this dialectic process would also come to manifest itself, but in another way, more slowly. [Here Oiticica seems to be referring to his own development and incorporation of aspects of Brazilian popular culture.] Dias and Gerchman deal, as it were, with the structural and dialectical necessities in a single stroke. It is worth noting here that this 'realistic' process, characterised by Schemberg, had already manifested itself in the poetic field. There Gullar, who had been absorbed in the 'neoconcrete' times with problems of a structural order and with

the search for a 'place for the word', up to the formulation of the 'Non-Object', suddenly breaks with every premise of a transcendental kind to propose a participatory poetry, and to deal theoretically with the wider problem: that of the creation of a culture which would involve itself in Brazilian problems rising at the time. His theoretical work 'Culture Put into Question' appeared then. To a certain extent, the realist proposition that would come with Dias and Gerchman, and, in another way, with Pedro Escosteguy (in whose objects the word always contains some social message), was a consequence of these premises raised by Gullar and his group, and also, in a different way, by the 'Cinema novo' movement, which was then at its peak.

Item (3) related to the involvement of the spectator with the work of art. Oiticica saw this as opposed to the 'transcendental contemplation' of the object of art. He also subdivided the possibility of a participatory art into two characters, therefore widening the concept beyond the mode he personally was engaged in, to include a wider range of practices. These two modes of participation operated according to Oiticica, on the one hand, through the 'manipulation' of the object which also included the 'sensorial-corporal participation', and on the other hand (Oiticica, 1967a p.116), through a 'semantic' participation:

From the 'playful' propositions to those of the 'act', from the 'pure word' semantic propositions to those of the 'word in the object', in 'narrative' works and works of political or social protest, what is being sought is an objective mode of participation. This would be an internal search, inside and outside the object, desired by the proposition of active spectator participation in the process: the individual to whom the work is addressed is invited to complete the meanings proposed by it - it is thus an open work.

It is not clear whether Oiticica was referring to Umberto Eco's '*Opera Aperta*' or to Haroldo de Campos' preceding article '*A Obra Aberta*'.³²⁴ Haroldo de Campos seemed to indicate the latter. Campos' argument that the historical moment (1955) was characterised by transitoriness, a point in which various courses within contemporary art merged, seems indeed coherent with Oiticica's approach to the concept of New Objectivity.³²⁵ Campos took Walter Benjamin's (1936) thesis in order to develop the idea that during the 1950s art had 'suffered' the 'temporariness' it was experiencing due to the increased fragility of the 'aesthetic' character of art which was a consequence of the work's lost aura. According to Haroldo de Campos (1992 p.219), Oiticica was capable of developing his work within this context due to the ambivalent nature of his personality. On the one hand, extremely intellectually organised, (Campos described his 'extreme diligence of organisation' as 'almost

³²⁴ Campos, H. de (1955) *A Obra de Arte Aberta*, *Diário de São Paulo* and *Correio da Manhã*. Rio de Janeiro. See: Campos, H. de (1992) p.217.

Haroldo de Campos was referring to: Eco, (1962). *Opera aperta*. Milano: Bompiani.

³²⁵ The issue of how concrete art allowed a whole nexus of approaches to be developed, not only in Brazil, will be developed further in this study.

Cartesian') while on the other hand, influenced by the intuitive and spontaneous bodily expression that he acquired through his contact with carnival.³²⁶

Item (4) dealt directly with the issue of 'position-taking in relation to political, social and ethical problems'. Here Oiticica clearly acknowledged as entirely valid the position that Gullar had taken following his abandonment of Neoconcretism. The principal concern informing such a decision had been that purely aesthetic concerns were insufficient for the cultural production of the time due to the necessity of direct involvement with the condition of Brazilian society. Instead the artist, in order to transcend the condition of cultural colonialism, imposed by the prevailing autonomy of art, must strive towards the formation of a socio-ethical-political consciousness. This indicated, according to Oiticica (1967a p.117) a 'return to the world' within the field of art.

Discussion, protest, the establishment of connotations of this order in its context, are thus fundamental to the 'New Objectivity', if it is to be characterised as a typically Brazilian state, coherent with the other lines of action.

Oiticica's reformulation of the premises of the Brazilian avant-garde at the time, unlike the position adopted by Gullar, rejected the fact that it would inevitably be elitist in nature. However, he (Oiticica, 1967a p.118) agreed with Gullar on various other points:

Gullar's propositions which interests us the most is also the main one which drives him: creative power and intelligence alone should not be enough for the conscience of the artist as an acting person; he should be a social being, not only a creator of works but also a modifier of consciousness (in the ample, collective sense), that he collaborate in this transformative revolution, long and arduous, which one day will have achieved its objective - that the artist 'participate', at last, in his time, in his people. Now comes the critical question: how many do this?

Item (5) discussed a phenomenon in art which Oiticica identified as a tendency to collective practice. Again, using a similar means of categorisation as with participatory art, he identified two ways in which this tendency manifested itself. The first through proposals which were created to be presented in the streets and the other where the actual public participated in the creation of the work. Oiticica described the emergence of this tendency as being catalysed by the increased awareness, within the field of fine arts, of popular manifestations such as carnival. Again Gullar is mentioned (Oiticica, 1967a p.118) to have described the carnival as an example of 'total art':

³²⁶ This duality of Oiticica's character has already been discussed in relation to his Nietzschean approach. See Chapter 15.

It would not be surprising, then taking into account, if artists generally, seeking a collective solution for their manifestations at the flowering of this process, discovered, in turn, the autonomous unity of these popular manifestations, of which Brazil has an enormous collection of unmatched expressive richness.

It is important to note that the relation with the popular was always referred to by the artist but never created as a popular event. The collective action to which Oiticica refers remains always within the domain of art as a form of 'happening'. This is evident in the closing paragraphs (Oiticica, 1967a pp.118-9) of the discussion of this item:

Experiences such as the one realised at the University of Minas Gerais, with Dias, Gerchman, Vergara, attempting to 'create' works of mine, searching, 'finding' in the urban landscape elements which would correspond to such works, and thus realising a kind of 'happening', are important as a way of introducing the ingenuous spectator to the phenomenological creative process of the work, no longer as something closed, far from it, but as a proposition open to his total participation.

A distinction emerges here in relation to the more militant attempts to interact with the 'people'. Oiticica's description of the public as 'the ingenuous spectator' would be inadmissible to sectors of the militant left who would argue that the proletariat due to its experience of hardship and its position within the machinery of capitalism, was entirely aware of its political and social condition. These sectors argued that the 'people's' preference for a specific form of culture, popular or folkloric, signified a refusal to accept bourgeois expectations for cultural production. This was symptomatic of the implicit revolutionary Romanticism that pervaded left-wing circles during the first half of the 1960s.³²⁷

Tropicália was one of a number of works which saw an emerging refusal to accept such a vision within the cultural sector. Those who were philosophically in line with Oiticica, that is, influenced by Nietzsche, and creating highly provocative works which related in a critical manner to the socio-political situation in Brazil at that time, took a very different view from the utopian vision established by movements such as the CPC.

A violent example of the expression of such a reality, was the scene in Glauber Rocha's (1938-81) *Cinema Novo* film *Terra em Transe* (Land in Transition): a worker, during a political gathering, attempts to explain the situation as he understands it and is promptly gagged. The poet who gags him shouts: 'This represents the people! A cretin, illiterate and depoliticised. Another worker in the crowd attempts to speak and

³²⁷ For a discussion of the romantic character of the revolutionary approach to culture during the 1960s see: Ridenti (2000).

is gagged by the barrel of a gun placed in his mouth by the candidate's security guard.³²⁸

Similarly, there was never an idealisation of the public in Oiticica's work, but a celebration of its spontaneous and sometimes violent manifestations. It was evident that through an interaction based on friendship rather than the totalising apprehension based on social class, the idea of the popular was understood by Oiticica and Rocha as a heterogeneous entity. Such heterogeneity also translated into the field of art as a less dogmatic approach to styles and methods.

Shortly after the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* (which took place in April 1967), a 'happening' of the type Oiticica had described in his text, took place in the *Aterro do Flamengo* (the long land-fill which runs along the Guanabara bay and contains the Museum of Modern Art). The event, inscribed within the scope of *Arte no Aterro* (a programme of art in the land-fill area) was entitled *Apocalipopótese* by Rogério Duarte (b. 1939). It did not present any formal coherence, but was a participatory event which attempted to bring art within a public area and included various 'manifestations' which often occurred concurrently. According to Moraes (1980) the event was marked by a climate of 'happiness and tension, of communion and violence'. This was exemplified by the light hearted performance proposed by Duarte in which a Dog trainer irreverently discussed issues with his dogs, and the more politically explicit performance by Antonio Manuel (b. 1947) entitled *Urnas Quentes* (Hot Ballot Boxes) where the artist with the aid of an axe destroyed the boxes in order to reveal their content: sheets of paper with images and text concerning the dictatorship in Brazil at the time.³²⁹ The following day the Institutional Act N.5 (AI5) was declared bringing in a period of extreme hard-line dictatorship and entailing the imprisonment and exile of almost the entire intellectual and artistic community.³³⁰

Item (6) in Oiticica's essay discussed the idea of anti-art in relation to Pedrosa's definition of postmodern art. This corresponded very much to Oiticica's other items in his essay particularly in its relation to the possibility of an avant-garde in an underdeveloped country such as Brazil. For Oiticica, the question posed for the artist in such a context, was one of defining the audience of art. The distinction between this preoccupation with the type of audience and that proposed by the CPC was that Oiticica saw the importance of transcending the elite and reaching as wide a group as possible through the production of characteristically open works. The notion of Anti-

³²⁸ A discussion of the film and the reaction it received by left-wing intellectuals and artists is described in: Veloso (1997) p.104.

³²⁹ According to Antonio Manuel (2001) one of these Boxes, intended to be destroyed several years later still remains intact.

art was therefore more than a simple rejection of the art of the past. It signalled the adoption by artists of new positions or roles such as those Oiticica defined as 'proposer', 'entrepreneur', or 'educator'. For Oiticica (1967a) the central question in this new approach would be one in which the question of what kind of 'promotion, proposition or measure' was required in order to allow a wide and popular participation within the domain of cultural production.

In concluding Oiticica raised a parallel with Dada. This association, in addition to representing a clear attempt to relate art with the praxis of life, allows us to associate Oiticica's definition of the avant-garde with that described by Bürger (1974) as occupying an anti-institutional stance and being opposed to the autonomous nature of art.

For Oiticica (1967a) the 1922 modernist movement in Brazil was related to Brazilian modern architecture, Concretism and Neoconcretism through the 'immediate reduction of all external influences within the national model.' Moreover, keeping the Brazilian constructivist tradition at a paradigmatic level, Oiticica thus attempted to resolve the problem of the apparent lack of Brazilian art historical continuity by relating previous and posterior events to the art of the 1950s.

At that particular moment debates on the notion of a Brazilian culture revolved around the danger of imported, mainly North American, mass culture. Both the left and the right searched to affirm an authentic Brazilian culture. They both rejected mass culture: the former as an anti-imperialist stance, the latter in the spirit of nationalist pride. As Schwarz (Gledson, ed. 1992 p.4) has remarked: 'In 1964 the right-wing nationalists branded Marxism as an alien influence, perhaps imagining that fascism was a Brazilian invention.'

It is to the credit of Oiticica's historical awareness that he was able to attempt a theoretical re-formulation of Brazilian art history which described the eclecticism of aesthetic influences of the period within a concept of a specifically Brazilian avant-garde. This should not be understood as an attempt to search for the essence of Brazilian cultural production. It was more akin to a concept of cultural appropriation rather than an attempt to define the 'Brazilianess' of the diverse production.³³¹ Oiticica's association of Anthropophagy with the 'Constructive Will' remained in this sense, at a level of an attitude against cultural hegemony that addressed the issue of mediation of the local culture through that of the dominant. Continuity did not operate therefore on a formal level but corresponded to what Schwarz's (Gledson, ed. 1992

³³⁰ There is however no causal relationship between AI5 and Apocalipótese.

³³¹ For a discussion on some of the problematics of definitions of identity and difference see: Genocchio (1998) p.9.

pp.2-3) more recent proposed arguing for a re-evaluation of external influences within the local prerogatives.

The situation for the peripheral avant-garde artist was evoked by Oiticica's (1967a p.120) concluding paragraph:

I want to evoke a sentence which, I believe, could very well represent the spirit of 'New Objectivity', a fundamental sentence which, in a way, represents a synthesis of all these points and the current situation (condition) of the Brazilian avant-garde; it could serve as a motto, the rallying cry of 'New Objectivity' - here it is: OF ADVERSITY WE LIVE!

Oiticica's artistic contribution to the exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, took the form of a complex installation that reflected many of the issues raised by his catalogue essay. Its title, *Tropicália*, immediately raised a connection with the local context. The 'environment' itself was composed of two Penetrables *PN2* and *PN3* which were, in turn, surrounded by various materials and objects such as sand; plants, pebbles, poems written on ordinary materials such as wood and tiles, it also included live parrots. [Fig. 67] The precarious construction of the Penetrables evoked the architecture of the *favelas*. [Fig. 68] The quality of the material employed in their construction reflected this fact, incorporating wood, various types of printed cloth, plastic, straw and in the case of the larger Penetrable, *PN3*, a television set tuned into a local station, was placed at the end of its labyrinthine structure, placed close to the floor. The visitor would hear the sound emitted by the TV set but would only reach it after entering the structure. *PN2* was a simple 'box' with an open side, painted roughly and in its red interior a written inscription claimed 'Purity is a Myth'. [Fig. 69] According to Guy Brett (1969):

On one level *Tropicália* is an environment of blatantly presented tropical images, and it would be easy to take it superficially as a piece of Brazilian folklore. But the hidden level of *Tropicália* is the *process* of penetrating it, the web of sensory images which produce an intensely intimate confrontation, specially perhaps with the innermost image of all, in pitch darkness, the universal switched-on TV set. The typical turns into actual in this mythical space.

Ironically, at that moment Oiticica was already questioning the folkloristic interpretations that his notion of *Tropicália* had unwittingly entailed. As will be argued in Chapter 18, the installation/environment *Eden* that Oiticica had constructed specifically for the Whitechapel exhibition returned to a more 'pure' constructive form, ridding the local connotations that his work had previously encouraged, while maintaining a strong emphasis on its participatory nature. Before entering such a discussion it is worth mentioning some parallel developments on the constructive

legacy in order to stress the complex nexus that is history and to avoid purely localised interpretations.

Chapter 17

From Constructivism to Pop

Today I see concrete poetry as a form of pop art.³³²

The ambivalent and seemingly contradictory consequences of Constructivism in Brazil, although pertaining to local prerogatives, were not a phenomenon specific to a strictly peripheral context. Brett (2001a p.78) has suggested that the 1956 exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, *This is Tomorrow*, although belonging to a different historical moment, could offer an interesting comparison in terms of its 'vision of a "future"' with Oiticica's environmental proposition at the same gallery in 1969. In fact, it is interesting to view such disparate events as cultural products related through the nexus of concerns and influences, which affected isolated groups of artists around the world following W.W.II.

The apparent otherness of Brazilian modernity is in this manner problematised as being partly symptomatic of a tendency in art history that avoids such 'transient' moments in which the conjunction of diverse influences is overshadowed by the grander or purer narratives associated with the art historical canon.

In the article entitled *A significação de Lygia Clark* (The Significance of Lygia Clark), Pedrosa's (1960 p.195) first comment related to what he perceived as the decadence sculpture was experiencing at that moment. From the early modernists, he remarked, great sculpture had arisen from developments quite distinct from the domain of painting. The decadence was therefore in his opinion, a symptom of sculpture's return to a position of submission to painting.³³³ It is interesting to remark that one of the first examples of such decadence given by Pedrosa, was the 'post-Henry Moore group' in England whose work he had previously seen as very promising. However, as the work of one of its youngest members Eduardo Paolozzi (b. 1924) demonstrated, according to Pedrosa, the group had reached a point of exhaustion.

Pedrosa placed Clark's work in opposition to such 'decadence', claiming that her work stemmed from a personal and profound process of discovery: a process that broke with the picture frame so that it eventually 'moved' towards the viewer, inviting his/her participation. Furthermore, he (Pedrosa, 1960 p.197) associated such a development with the statements by Gabo and Pevsner in the 'Constructivist

³³² In the original: Eu hoje vejo a poesia concreta como uma espécie de arte pop (Pignatari 1987 pp.82-3).

³³³ Such an opinion confirms Pedrosa's distance from Ferreira Gullar's (1959c) *Theory of the Non-Object*, whereby painting and sculpture were becoming indistinguishable domains. Both critics use Lygia Clark's work as a point of departure for their conflicting arguments, a symptom perhaps of the differing theoretical frames held by each: Pedrosa on Gestalt psychology and Gullar of Merleau Ponty's (1945) *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Manifesto' where they affirmed their 'conviction that only spatial constructions would touch the heart of the future human masses.' There are various issues at stake here: firstly, Pedrosa does not fully acknowledge Gullar's (1959c) contemporaneous arguments expressed in the 'Theory of the Non-Object', central to which were the increasing difficulty in distinguishing artistic categories such as painting and sculpture; secondly, it emphasises Pedrosa's references as being clearly positioned within the pioneering efforts of Modernism; thirdly, in hindsight one can also remark that it was precisely these reasons (the transcendence of the spatial concerns of the artist from the pictorial plane into the social space) that Pedrosa (1966 p.205) drew upon in order to define Oiticica's work as postmodern six years later.

Through a process that went beyond the domain of art and integrated itself within the field of culture, Pedrosa (1966) saw the fact that Oiticica's 'environmental art' signified a stage that could only be described as going beyond Modernism itself. This was, according to Pedrosa, an art that demanded an entirely new criteria of judgement, substantially different from that which emanated from the experience of Cubism. The apparent paradox whereby the same inherited constructivist values affirmed Clark's modernity while six years later would confirm Oiticica's 'postmodernity' pertained to certain events that occurred between Pedrosa's two essays (1960 and 1966). Due to Pedrosa's own references to English art, through the example of Moore, Paolozzi, Pevsner and Gabo (the latter played an important role as a pioneer of Modernism exiled in Britain) it seems appropriate to study certain events that might have contributed to such a shift both in Brazil and in Britain through their association with developments in France.

Although Pedrosa placed Clark in opposition to other sculptors such as Paolozzi, these will be analysed not in terms of precedents but as parallel developments under a worldwide constructivist inheritance.³³⁴ In other words, this chapter will analyse the variety of approaches towards 'spatial construction' particularly within art's involvement with the social space during the 1950s and 60s, implicitly questioning how this has been interpreted within subsequent historical narratives as the transition between what today is commonly called Modernism and Postmodernism. Central to Pedrosa's distinct critique of Clark's work in 1960 and later of Oiticica's work in 1965, was the appearance of Pop Art (Pedrosa, 1966 p.205):

³³⁴ Clark at the time was the driving force behind much of the theories on the neoconcrete movement, particularly influencing Ferreira Gullar's (1959c) *Theory of the Non-Object*.

It is no longer the expressiveness that interests the avant-garde of today. On the contrary, it fears above all the individual hermetic subjectivity. Thus the subjectivity in itself of Pop and the subjectivity for itself of Op (in the United States).³³⁵

Neoconcretism's insistence on the expressive character of art, even geometrical abstract art, leads one to associate the movement with Pedrosa's denomination of 'avant-garde' practice and by extension with Oiticica's past trajectory.

The relationship between Pop and the constructivist inheritance was a factor present in Oiticica's installation *Tropicália*, produced for *Nova Objetividade*, in 1967. The choice of the title *New Objectivity* implies a return to certain concrete precepts (namely the insistence on the objective as opposed to the subjective or expressive characteristics proposed by Neoconcretism) and indeed it included work by former concrete artists such as Cordeiro.

The Independent Group: Abstraction and Mass Iconography

If concrete art in Brazil remained dogmatic throughout the 1950s, its interests in mathematics, information theory, graphic design and ultimately science in general, are surprisingly close to those of the Independent Group in Britain during the 1950s: a loose association of artists, critics, architects and historians that converged during that decade around the ICA (Institute of Contemporary Art) and are usually associated with the emergence of Pop Art in Britain.³³⁶

Perhaps the first association to be made refers to the notion of national identity and its manipulation by the state. Therefore, if Brasília stood as a nation's affirmation of its own modernity, a similar situation could be seen to have taken place with the Festival of Britain in 1951. As national projects for redefining the aspirations of a nation, in both cases the contemporaneous fine arts were unavoidably affected. Brasília's inauguration coincided with the brief existence of the neoconcrete movement, the local adaptation of the architectural 'international style' could be seen as being coherent with the neoconcrete desire to contain expressiveness within geometric abstraction.

Richard Hamilton's (b. 1922) exhibition 'Growth and Form' could also be seen as an attempt to bring contemporaneous debates - such as notions of organicism³³⁷ - within

³³⁵ In the original: Não é a expressividade em si que interessa à vanguarda de agora. Ao contrário, ela teme acima de tudo o subjectivismo individual hermético. Daí a objectividade em si da Pop, a objectividade para si da Op (nos Estados Unidos).

³³⁶ On the relationship between the IG and Pop art, see: Massey & Sparke (1985) pp.48-56.

³³⁷ On the development of the notion of organicism within the British artistic postwar environment, see: Thistlewood (1982).

The disagreements between Read and the younger generation of British artists are perhaps equivalent to those between Pedrosa and the radicalisation of Neoconcretism or Gullar's theories.

the context of the Festival of Britain.³³⁸ In a wider context, the Festival has been described (Barry, 1988 pp.44-5) as 'a political allegory of the rebirth and restructuring of England and the post-war economy after the devastation of World War II.' Both instances - Brasília and the Festival - also represent moments of rupture, albeit only noticeable in hindsight. After all, the 1950s brought the spectre of cold war. In addition, the ideal purported by the Festival seemed increasingly incongruous with the continued rationing of certain products through the 1950s and also the realisation of the demise of the British Empire. Furthermore, the notion of a British modernity seemed increasingly feeble as it became confronted with the vision of abundance stemming from the United States.

In Brazil, with the dissolution of the utopian dream that had culminated in the construction of Brasília also came the realisation of the precarious reality of the surroundings: underdevelopment and the social condition of the masses could no longer be overshadowed by such positivism. Moreover, in Brazil the presence of American mass culture, was seen - as was the case in Britain - as suspicious by both the left and the right-wing factions. Artists became engaged with Brazilian popular culture and as the Sixties progressed - and particularly with the arrival of Pop Art - sought strategies of mediation that brought into proximity the iconography of mass culture, the experience of popular Brazilian culture and the incorporation of the legacy of prior constructivist aesthetics experiments. [Fig. 70, 71, 72, 73, 74]

Former orthodox concrete artists such as Cordeiro developed a hybrid approach between Pop and concrete art, which became known as *Popcreto*. Interestingly, the hybridity of Cordeiro's *Popcreto* work does not relate in any way to Canclini's definition of the term: the mediation between metropolitan and local cultures and traditions. Cordeiro was one of the first artists (Oiticica, 1967a p.110) to make use of a computer in Brazil, merging imagery of popular icons with the serialisation of words and/or numbers.

Beyond the preoccupation with form and its mathematical basis of composition, concrete art possessed an innate openness to new scientific processes and fantasies, communication theories and their consequences or applications (mass advertising or publicity methods and language). It is perhaps not coincidental that many of the artists and poets involved in concrete aesthetics in Brazil became variously engaged in publicity and advertising.

In both contexts the realisation of the downfall of the prevailing - governmental ideals of - national identity had ambivalent associations with the role of American mass

³³⁸ Hamilton's exhibition could be seen as an early example of environmental art or perhaps even as an installation.

culture. Thomas Lawson's (1988 pp.20-3) analysis of Paolozzi's Independent Group (IG) period stated that:

By the early Fifties [Britain] was no longer broke, but strangely it had lost its confidence. Control of the future no longer seemed so certain. Partly this had to do with the realisation that the days of the Empire were over, partly it had to do with the realisation that with the atom bomb firmly in place there was now a real possibility of there being no future at all. [...] One of the most remarkable forms of denial of this loss was a virulent anti-Americanism that possessed the ruling classes of Britain until the mid-Sixties. [...] Here then was a topic rich in possibilities for an artist, and the reason we continue to be so interested in the IG is the glimpse its history offers of a truth almost grasped.

Rather than a clear rupture with the constructivist ideology and the adoption of interests concerned with popular culture, artists who were involved in such a shift developed individual trajectories that seem incredibly coherent. What is usually considered as the arrival of the postmodern condition (the engagement with the popular, a view of art no longer as an autonomous activity, the questioning of the object of art as original) could in this sense be interpreted as a consequence of modernist proposals taken to their ultimate consequences: that is to say, the transformation of proposals into acts.³³⁹

In both examples - Brazil and Britain - the constructivist tradition, and in particular the precepts of concrete art seem to have been central within the shift towards the popular and/or mass culture. What becomes apparent is a non-linear transferral of influences and the chaotic intersection of tendencies that are then rearticulated between the local cultural stage and the wider context of the historical moment.

Pedrosa (1966 p.205) himself, suggested that the new cycle brought by Postmodernism (the replacement of the purely artistic by the wider concept of culture³⁴⁰) was arrived at thanks to the concretist and particularly neoconcretist production: leading to the conclusion that Brazilians were no longer merely followers but precursors. For Pedrosa it was art's involvement with the wider world that indicated its postmodern condition. This referred to a transferral from the constructivist preoccupation with form as autonomous artistic activity, to the abandonment of form - or indeed the object - and the adoption of a cultural engagement with the events in mass media, music, in short, culture at large.

In fact, this signified an acknowledgement of art's engagement with the real brought by an increased preoccupation with forms of communication. The applications of

³³⁹ Hall Foster's argument that the postwar neo-avant-gardes acted upon the deferred ideas of the heroic avant-garde is pertinent in this context. See: Foster (1996).

³⁴⁰ Ronaldo Brito (2001) recently argued precisely this point (the regretful replacement of art by culture) at a conference organised by the Centre of Brazilian Studies of the university of

concrete art in graphic design, architecture, and publicity meant that artists had a direct involvement with the production of form and its communication within society. It is no coincidence that such diverse groups of artists that previously were concerned with the aesthetics of Concretism became involved around the same time with the emerging theories and systems of communication. Such is the case of Pignatari in Brazil and Lawrence Alloway (1926-90) in Britain.

The emergence of Pop Art in Britain is associated with the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956. The exhibition comprised of a number of distinct spaces which were devised by groups of artists, architects and in some cases art critics. Although the Pop emphasis is usually placed upon Group 2 (Voelcker-Hamilton-McHale) with its installation that drew on mass media imagery [Fig. 75], the exhibition as a whole is pertinent in the analysis of a transition between abstraction to Pop Art, and the central role that the appearance of installation as a seemingly new form of art practice played in such transition. The exhibition was demonstrative not of a common aesthetic or theory, but of the diverse elements and influences expressed by the groups and their individual members. Like *Nova Objetividade* it was a manifestation of spatial approaches which displayed a multiplicity of aesthetic and cultural references.

The design historian and Independent Group member Peter Reyner Banham (1956a) in a review of the exhibition *This is Tomorrow*, saw it as an example of a recurring theme, the synthesis of the arts, which according to him had been somewhat overlooked in the history of the modern movements. Banham other than his important re-evaluation of the legacy of modern design, would later engage in an argument which equated product design as an expression of popular taste and desire.³⁴¹

At the time of *This is Tomorrow* however, Banham was concerned with his definitions of 'New Brutalism', a term that would embrace the aesthetic experiments of Dubuffet,³⁴² the contemporaneous architecture of Le Corbusier and the diverse experiments of members of the IG. His review is pertinent as a symptom of the transition of emphasis that he would undergo as a critic and historian. In the review Banham is critical of the 'New Brutalist's' contribution, he accuses Group 6 (Smithson-Henderson-Paolozzi) of succumbing to traditional values, for not taking the

Oxford, which took place at the Museum of Modern Art (Oxford) accompanying the Exhibition (Bowron, ed., 2001) *Experiment Experiência: Art in Brazil 1958-2000*.

³⁴¹ Note how the title of Banham's (1956a) article 'Not Quite Painting or Sculpture Either', recalls Ferreira Gullar's (1959c) central argument in *Theory of the Non-Object*.

See also: Banham (1956b).

³⁴² Michel Tapié and Dubuffet had founded the *Compagnie de l'Art Brut*. Dubuffet had also exhibited at the ICA in 1955. Herbert Read and Michel Tapié were closely associated. These are some indications that rather than a rupture with the previous generation the IG represented

idea of synthesis beyond the mere housing or decorating of each other's work.³⁴³ [Fig. 76] Banham (1956a) preferred instead the exhibits by Group 12 (Holroy-Alloway-del Renzio) and Group 2 (Voelcker-Hamilton-McHale), which he saw as 'smashing all boundaries between the arts'. [Fig. 77, 75] The former, by treating everything as 'modes of communicating experience' while the latter for embracing 'all available channels of human perception'.³⁴⁴ Indeed, the exhibits of these three groups - mentioned above - in *This is Tomorrow*, are representative of recurring preoccupations within the field of cultural production. They go beyond the local scene in Britain due to the awareness of the artists, architects and critics and so could be seen as preoccupations that were present on an international level.

Tropicália and the 'New Brutalist's' *Pavilion* (Group 6: Smithson-Henderson-Paolozzi), although ten years apart, are both concerned with the precariousness of human existence. The former as an expression of the reality of underdevelopment and the latter as an expression of the spectre brought by the cold war, that of an imminent nuclear holocaust. [Fig. 68, 76]

Accused of being traditionalist (Banham, 1956a and 1956b) for not tending towards a synthesis of the arts, Group 6 had constructed a space that through its roughness reflected a common view of that moment. The Cold War angst expressed in the Group 6 'Patio and Pavilion', whereby civilisation was under the threat of modernity itself, marked a shift from the notion of modernity embraced by the Festival of Britain. In this sense, it is possible to compare it to Oiticica's *Tropicália* installation that recalled the condition of underdevelopment in the aftermath of *developmentalist* era responsible for the creation of Brasília.³⁴⁵ Like *Tropicália*, which was exhibited for the first time in 1967 amongst works by artists with very different approaches, 'Patio and Pavilion' should not be seen in isolation from the exhibition as a whole. In both cases, there was the presentation of a number of re-evaluations of the relationships between art, architecture and society at large. The respective exhibitions also marked the collision of art historical tendencies consensually seen to be irreconcilable such as

a transition and taking to extremes certain ideas that had arisen within the modern movement itself.

³⁴³ Such a critique is reminiscent of Max Bill's attacks on Portinari's murals at the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio.

³⁴⁴ Banham's words sound surprisingly similar to those used to define the character of the *Paulista* concretists and the *Carioca* neoconcretists respectively.

³⁴⁵ The art critic Guy Brett, remembering Oiticica's 1969 Whitechapel 'experiment' has suggested that there are connections to be made between these quite independent exhibitions. Brett (2001a p.78) claimed that 'This is Tomorrow in 1956, which brought together artists like Richard Hamilton and architects like Alison and Peter Smithson, was the product of a different epoch, whose vision of the "future" would make an interesting comparison with Oiticica's.'

Dada, Constructivism, Pop, and contemporaneous French notions such as Art Brut.³⁴⁶

Symbolic Architectures

Tropicália could also be read as proposing a vision of art as symbolic architecture. Contrary to the idea of an architectural monument, the artist offered a spatial matrix for lived experiences into which the spectator would develop his/her own individual spatial and perceptual apprehension. His work which had become increasingly associated with popular traditions such as carnival and the notion of marginalisation brought these issues into the space of the art gallery through the apparent dichotomy of precariousness and mass communication. This could also be seen to represent both a position of Brazilian art with respect to the canon and the social condition of disenfranchised sectors of Brazilian society.

With respect to the positivist 1950s, with its constructivist art and pristine modern architecture, *Tropicália* was indeed a return to reality. Although Oiticica acknowledged the importance of the constructive inheritance, *Tropicália* seemed indeed very distant from the symbolic power (Martins, C. A. F., 2000 p.583) of modern architecture:

The modern city/capital, like its equivalent in the past, had the initial attribute of its status as a monumental city, 'not in the sense of ostentation, but in the sense of what one might call a palpable, conscious manifestation of what that meant and signified' [...] 'The urbanistic conception of the city' [...] 'came from the primary gesture of one who assigned a place or took possession of it: two axes crossing at right angles; in other words, the sign of the cross.' [...] The monumental axis extended from east to west, having at one end the building intended for the basic powers of the Republic which, 'being three in number and autonomous, find the appropriate elementary form to contain them in the equilateral triangle, linked with architecture since remote antiquity.' Along this great esplanade, arranged in an embankment, were the ministries, beginning with those of Foreign Affairs and Justice and ending with the Ministry of Education, 'so as to be next to the cultural sector.' In the continuation of this monumental axis, concluding the vista opposite the Praça dos Três Poderes (Square of Three Powers), is the Television Tower, indicating the hotel, banking and entertainment sectors.'

Presenting his work as an environment to be 'lived in', Oiticica's increasing insistence on integrating his work as a coherent whole enables one to speak of it as potential architecture. From interventions in the city-space to 'exhibitions' which suggested new forms of experiencing space and ultimately opening the 'visitor' to the possibility of creating new behavioural patterns in relation to the work of art, stress the radicality of an art with a strong architectural emphasis. However, if a city such as Brasília that

³⁴⁶ For an analysis of the association between Constructivism and Dada see: Ades (1984) pp.33-45.

represented the *developmentalist* dream of a nation that had seen itself as condemned to modernity, *Tropicália* would be the embodiment of a nation serving the sentence of underdevelopment. The work of Brazilian architects such as Niemeyer cannot be disregarded as purely rational. They too presented a sensibility that referred to specifically Brazilian forms. Nevertheless due to its specific patronage and particularly in the case of Brasília which cannot be disassociated from the desire to forge an ideal national identity, the local specificity was inevitably imposed from above. It was therefore inextricably connected to the hegemonic ideology of the period.

Both Brasília and *Tropicália*, are related through the ideal of a national 'Constructive Will', yet they stand respectively on each side of the abyss that irrevocably annihilated the possibility of imagining a Brazilian utopia: the military coup of 1964. As such, they are hugely significant interpretations of the national character.

Addressing the history of representation in Brazilian Modernism, Oiticica proposed a view of a reality that encompassed the extremes of the constructivist inheritance and the anarchic aesthetic of underdevelopment. As far as Brasília is concerned, its formal and above all, its societal purity excluded those who had participated in its construction: their temporary accommodation was transformed into permanent shanty-towns circumscribing the modern city. Claiming that purity is a myth, Oiticica brought the shanty-town aesthetic within the confines of modern art. It is in this sense that Oiticica's installation, *Tropicália*, has become an important reference of Brazilian cultural production in the 1960s. *Tropicália* functioned in this manner as an anti-monument. Evoking Oswald, rather than the idealised Arcadian vision of the original Brazilian expressed in the imagery of *Modernismo*, it was the embodiment of the spontaneous creative power of the popular social sector and the harsh reality of lived experience.

There is a further association between the context of the IG and the events during the 1960s in Brazil which is the phenomenon that Banham defined as the New Brutalism. The aesthetics of IG exhibitions such as *Parallel of Life and Art* [Fig. 78] and the *Pavilion* [Fig. 76] at *This is Tomorrow*, as Banham (1955b) remarked:

lie close to the general body of anti-Academic aesthetics currently in circulation, though are not to be identified exactly with Michel Tapiés's concept of *un Art Autre* even though that concept covers many Continental Brutalists as well as Eduardo Paolozzi.

Here, perhaps we reach the reason for Pedrosa's attacks on the decadence of sculpture and particularly his reference in this respect to Paolozzi, as a product of a primarily two-dimensional expression.

The initial concept for *This is Tomorrow* had been conceived by *Groupe Espace*. Their proposal having been rejected was later re-evaluated and re-submitted by Theo Crosby (1923-94) and a group of individuals some of which were associated with the Independent Group (Whitham, 1990 p.26, 37).

The fact that the project, albeit in a re-evaluated form, went ahead is indicative of a certain proximity of interest. This is confirmed by Banham's emphasis on the issue of the synthesis of the arts and Alloway's review of John McHale's (1922-78) exhibition in André Bloc's (1896-1966) *Journal Aujourd'hui: Arts et Architecture*. Bloc had been a central figure in formation of the *Groupe Espace* that arose out of a crisis within the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*.³⁴⁷ The crisis was not dissimilar to the 2 tendencies contained within Neoconcretism, defined by Ronaldo Brito (1975). The antagonism was described by Felix Del Marle (1889-1952) in correspondence to Jean Gorin (1900-92):

You see, there are two tendencies that without being hostile to each other, they are nevertheless, in spirit as in manifestations, totally different [...]. On the one hand, the object tendency, a tendency of manifestations that I would call 'gratuitous' coming from Calder, Moholy, etc. And then there is 'ours', the architectural tendency, rational, with all the important and fatal and happy consequences on the social plane par excellence. So sooner or later we will quit the objects for an architectural section.³⁴⁸

The similarity of these points with Oiticica's tenets for a new art in the catalogue essay of the *Nova Objetividade* exhibition are perhaps not so coincidental. As discussed (Chapter in 16) Oiticica had defined Brazilian New Objectivity as a tendency that aimed at (1) a synthesis of the arts; (2) the abandonment of easel painting; (3) the integration of colour within space. Oiticica (1963a) in another text, *Transição da Cor do Quadro para o Espaço e o Sentido de Construtividade* (The Transition of Colour from the Picture to Space and the Sense of Constructiveness), demonstrated his incredible knowledge of international developments in the constructivist tendency. Other than a reference to 'what has been already done by Victor Pasmore (1908-98), for example,' the text (Oiticica, 1963a p.57) is demonstrative of Oiticica's awareness of events in France: Bloc and the relation of his sculpture to architecture, Auguste Herbin '[t]he great primitive of construction,

³⁴⁷ For a discussion on the history of the salon, see: d'Orgeval (2000). The Salon is also discussed in Chapter 5 of the current study.

³⁴⁸ Correspondence Del Marle-Gorin, in Le Pommeré. Quoted by: d'Orgeval (2000) p.258. In the original: Vois-tu, il y a deux tendances qui sans être hostiles, sont tout de même, tant d'esprit qu'en manifestations, totalment différents [...]. Il y a d'une part, la tendance objet, tendance à manifestations, que je dirai 'gratuites' qui vient de Calder, Moholy, etc. Et puis il y a 'nous', la tendance architecture, rationnelle, avec toutes les importantes et fatales et hereuses conséquences sur le plan social par ex. Alor tôt ou tard, nous quitterons les 'objets' pour une section 'architecture'.

whose theories on colour reveal themselves as important to those who desire to develop polychrome work.'

Oiticica's text is impressive for its cross reference of historical figures of constructivist art, such as Malevitch, Gabo, Tatlin, etc., second generation such as Bill, but also Brazilian artists contemporaneous to Oiticica whose work was contextualised within such history not as followers but as contributors in their own right. Another noteworthy aspect of the essay (Oiticica, 1963a) was a non-dogmatic approach - which would also be characteristic of the subsequent *New Objectivity* text of 1967 - whereby artists not usually associated with the constructivist tendency were re-interpreted as such: 'one can see that Wols was a 'constructor of the indeterminate'; Pollock the constructor of 'hypercraction.' Particular attention was given to the *Nouveaux Realistes*. Oiticica remarked that their art was not revelling of a constructivist character but of a transposition of worldly objects into the field of expression. Oiticica nevertheless, defined Jean Tinguely (1925-91) as a constructor of colour-movement, and Yves Klein (1928-62) as a constructor of colour-light, further remarking that Pierre Restany (b. 1930) had observed certain relations with Oiticica's own 'experience'.

Such intersections of seemingly distinct movements and tendencies were also present in the repertoire of the IG. Alloway (1954 p.3), an art critic and central figure within the IG wrote on Pasmore (an artist that although of an older generation took part of many of the IG discussions and collaborations) and the establishment of concrete ideals in Britain:

In the fifties, none of the pre-war British artists are important for non-figurative art [...] A pattern of conversations has been established - with Victor Pasmore as culture-hero.

The date of Alloway's publication on British abstraction is pertinent since it occurred in the midst of IG activity, 1954. Alloway therefore had published (1954), two years prior to *This is Tomorrow*, an important survey on abstract art in Britain entitled *Nine Abstract Artists: their work and theory*, from where the above quote is taken. He began the study by referring to Read's contribution towards Modernism in Britain, particularly emphasising the internationalism of Unit One.³⁴⁹ He (Alloway, 1954 p.2) also mentioned the presence of 'important figures of the international movement [who] were forced out of Europe by political conditions. Gropius, Breuer, Moholy-Nagy, Gabo and, later than the others and only briefly, Mondrian were in England.' It was a publication that aimed at describing a continuation between the pre and post-

³⁴⁹ During the thirties this was a group of artists around Herbert Read that included Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, and Henry Moore. They exhibited regularly during the 1930s at Mayor Gallery in Cork Street, London.

war generation of abstract artists. Moreover, it is a text that demonstrates the extent to which the Independent Group's debt to abstraction has been overshadowed by the emergence of Pop Art.

Alloway (1954 pp.2-3) stated that after W.W.II those artists who had originally pioneered abstraction in Britain had 'either become romantics or, like Nicholson and Hepworth, at least tired of their thirtyish purity.' The re-vitalisation of geometric abstraction during the Fifties was interpreted by Alloway (1954 p.4) as a consequence of Pasmore and his group being influenced by Bill's concepts of concrete art. Alloway (1954) mentioned that Pasmore had a particular influence over the work of Mary (1907-69) and Kenneth Martin (1905-84), Adrian Heath (1920-92), Anthony Hill (b. 1930) and Robert Adams (1917-84). In addition, he associated these to concrete art, claiming that 'the Pasmore Group should be compared with Bill and Richard Paul Lohse (1902-88), both from the Zurich Group.'

One could assume that Alloway's position towards abstraction and concrete art as issues of central importance would change substantially during the following years particularly with the increasing interest in popular culture amongst IG members. After all, Paolozzi's notorious epidiascope projection at the ICA (considered as the first instance of Pop Art where he showed random images originating from a variety of popular and primarily North American publications) although having taken place in 1952 were not yet characteristic of the activities of the group at large.

However, in 1957 - one year after *This is Tomorrow* - Hamilton and Pasmore organised a collaborative project entitled 'An Exhibit'. [Fig. 79] Like Serpa in Rio de Janeiro, Pasmore acted as a great disseminator of abstraction through his teaching and through collaborations, such as *An Exhibit*, an environmental exhibition (exhibited twice with some variations).³⁵⁰ The exhibition has uncanny resemblances with Oiticica's *Núcleos* installations [Fig. 49], being composed of 'floating panels' arranged throughout the gallery space at right angles with each other and placed at different heights.

Oiticica's *Núcleos* distinguish themselves by the preoccupation with colour while Pasmore's and Hamilton's collaboration was concerned with the question of form within space. Hamilton arranged the disposition of the panels whilst Pasmore inserted black marks within them. Interestingly, Pasmore's operation was intuitive rather than mathematically composed. Other than an uncanny similarity in concept and form to

³⁵⁰ Originally shown as: *An Exhibit* (1957) Hatton Gallery, Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Oiticica's *Núcleos* series, *An Exhibit* demonstrated the ongoing constructivist inheritance amongst the members of the IG.³⁵¹

Alloway (1957 p.288) described the exhibition as follows:

A fuller degree of physical participation than is obtainable with separate works of art tempts the constructivist to dream of public monuments. *An Exhibit* is a way of accepting the limited conditions of an exhibition and overcoming them to make a drama of space that involves the spectator.³⁵²

When Hamilton and Pasmore developed the first year programme at the Department of Fine Art at King's College, Durham University, they turned to the foundation Course of the Bauhaus devised by Walter Gropius (1883-1969) and the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* at Ulm (itself a revaluation of the legacy of the Bauhaus by Bill). Hamilton (1966 pp.132-3) in an interview stated that:

Tomás Maldonado's main thesis about Ulm's pedagogical line is that it differs from the Bauhaus by rejecting self-expression.[...] If Ulm has any interest for me it is in this exclusion of self-expression from the education of someone who is beyond the need for it. At Newcastle the things we teach in the first year have this much in common with Ulm; we try to prevent enjoyment in the act of making marks for its own sake. I feel that a good deal of effort should go into considering whether art at the level we are talking about does overlap too much with therapy.

[...]

what puzzles me about Ulm, though, is that it was initiated by artists - Maldonado, Bill, and others, who were founders, came from the world of modern abstraction, and then the principle was adopted that fine art would have no place in their school of environmental design. They denied that style was an important aspect of the production of consumer goods but the school evolved coincidentally one of the strongest consumer goods styles that had emerged in recent years. I would have accepted this as one of the inevitable outcomes that one might have looked forward to with some interest. Yet Maldonado thinks of this as a disaster that has befallen Ulm.

This interview provides an insight into Hamilton's ambivalent approach towards design and the orthodoxy of concrete aesthetics. It is evident that he saw style within the wider context of consumerism, expendability, etc., yet there is no antagonism between the higher aesthetics of Modernism and the supposedly vulgar and expendable form of consumer goods. In fact, he praised the improvement of design, including its desirability, caused by the application of modernist methods.

Banham (1959 p.587) also had a close relation to Ulm, having been invited to speak on aesthetic problems of expendability. Penny Sparke described Banham's visit to the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* as encouraging Banham's interest in industrial design: an interest that had been present 'in embryonic form' during the years he was active within the Independent Group. Sparke (1981 p.17) described the contributing factors

³⁵¹ Pasmore was not considered a member yet one can place him as one of those like James Stirling who were close to members and to the activities of the ICA in general.

that Ulm offered Banham as the inclusion of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and semiology. Alloway also published an article that further confirms his ongoing interest for constructivist abstraction. The article (Alloway, 1958 p.249) entitled 'Real Places' discusses the integration of art within architecture and adopts a line that resembles Max Bill's arguments when condemning Portinari's murals at the Ministry of Education and Health in Rio de Janeiro.³⁵³

Continuities and Interruptions

The Independent Group's approach to the history of modern art also had certain coincidental concerns with Brazilian neoconcrete art, such as in Banham's (1957b) article on the intuitive nature of Mondrian's paintings. Banham, questioning whether Mondrian's philosophy really was applicable to architecture and design, argued that: (i) The historical relationship between Mondrian and, *the constructivist rosary* – 'CONSTRUCTION of CONCRETE ELEMENTS creating SPATIAL RELATIONSHIPS of CLASSICAL ORDER' - which appeared within de Stijl vernacular around the time of the Düsseldorf Congress of Abstract Artists of 1922, is questionable since it was a period in which Mondrian was distancing himself from that group.³⁵⁴ (ii) The idea of creating spatial relationships by projecting the lines and planes of the artwork beyond itself, although supported by Mondrian does not appear in his contemporaneous paintings. Instead, Banham (1957b) claimed that this idea has become engrained in modern design by the de Stijl magazine, appropriating Futurist ideas traceable to Umberto Boccioni (1882-1916) and subsequently in van Doesburg's manifesto of Elementarism, where artworks were seen to be 'co-spatial aesthetically with their surroundings.' (iii) The notion of Mondrian *the classicist* was valid in the sense that theories of geometrical abstract art have their origins within the beaux-arts tradition and that Mondrian's use of simple abstract forms to symbolise deity can be compared to similar activities in Renaissance Humanism. However, Classical design in terms of modular mathematics is not applicable to Mondrian's method for his was an intuitive process, based on trial and error. Mondrian's method is seen as being logical, yet its logic is subjective rather than objective. It is based on geometrical relationships to do with Theosophy and the artist's own intuition. The conclusion (Banham, 1957b) is that although aesthetically his work has been very influential within architecture, it would be misleading to assume this influence to be related specifically to Mondrian's philosophy.

³⁵² My emphasis.

³⁵³ Reference to Max Bill's attacks on the MEC building can be found in: Morais (1994) p.223.

³⁵⁴ Banham's emphasis.

Most astonishing of all was Alloway's (1955 pp.24-6) article on McHale, of 1955, entitled *L'Intervention du Spectateur* (The intervention of the Spectator). The article posits as central to 20th century art history and theory the developments of kinetic sculpture. Alloway (1955) described the intervention of the spectator as follows:

We can say that the artist maintains a long distance control over the constructions because he does the initial work, however, after doing so, all effective decisions are taken by the spectator. The play of forms, open or closed, free surfaces or shattered, colours apparent or hidden, etc., all these are under the responsibility of the spectator.

Brett (2001b) mentioned that neither himself nor the group involved around Signals Gallery (responsible for the initial dissemination in Britain of artists such as Oiticica and Clark) were aware of the Independent Group's involvement with the notion of spectator participation. Although Brett had began his career as an art critic writing for the Arts Review, a journal that had also received contributions by Alloway by the 1960s the IG had not yet been studied in any detail.³⁵⁵ The IG was referred to primarily by ex-members, who naturally emphasised their previous role within the development of Pop.³⁵⁶ Brett (2001b) mentioned that he was aware for instance of such exhibitions as *Growth and Form* but it was the continental European exhibitions on abstract art that attracted his attention. Similarly to the case in Brazil, each generation had in this sense to re-invent itself. The emergence of Pop therefore can be seen as having the effect of increasing a sense of provincialism, the idea of a swinging London, dissipating the internationalism that had prevailed: a characteristic that is not far removed to what is the case today.³⁵⁷

Brett became acquainted with the Brazilian avant-garde through Camargo who was living in Paris during much of the 1960s. He later met Oiticica and Clark and is considered today as one of those responsible for their international recognition. This occurred through Signals Gallery run by Medalla and Paul Keller.³⁵⁸ The gallery exhibited a number of artists to varying degrees engaged in kinetic art.³⁵⁹ Oiticica had been expecting a solo exhibition at Signals. However, with its closure³⁶⁰ and Oiticica's

³⁵⁵ See: Robbins ed. (1990) p.250.

³⁵⁶ See: Massey & Sparke (1985) pp.48-56.

³⁵⁷ Recent exhibitions such as *The Sixties Art Scene in London* at the Barbican Centre in 1993 have done little to describe the active international character of visual art in London during the 1960s. See: Brett (1993) pp.121-3.

³⁵⁸ See appendix 4.

³⁵⁹ Here too IG exhibitions such as Richard Hamilton's *Man Machine and Motion* at the ICA could be seen as relevant. For a review of the exhibition, see: Banham (1955a).

³⁶⁰ Medalla has explained the closure of the gallery as the result of the burning of the American flag within the premises as a protest against the Vietnam war, the patrons whose political persuasions were other, then proceeded to cut the gallery's funds. Medalla (1999) in conversation with the author.

work already in England, Brett subsequently found an alternative space: the Whitechapel Gallery.

Brett and those involved with Signals Gallery were interested in continental developments such as the *Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel* (GRAV). GRAV was a participant in a series of Biennials organised by *Nouvelle Tendance*, which included an exhibition that took place in Paris in 1961. *Nouvelle Tendance* was the product of the collaboration between, Matko Mestrovic, Bozo Bek and Mavignier. The latter, as already mentioned, had taken part in the emergence of abstraction in Rio together with Pedrosa, Serpa and Palatnik.³⁶¹

Lucile Encrevé (2000) described *Nouvelle Tendance* as an amalgamation of tendencies which could be considered as coherent with the 'basis for concrete painting' yet which were marginal to the *Salon des Réalités Nouvelles*.

'The Myth of the Independent Group'³⁶² whereby it was purported to be primarily concerned with Pop Art and mass communication, was partly a consequence of IG members' self-promotion following the emergence of Pop Art in the USA. This seems to have overshadowed a number of issues that had been central to the Independent Group's concerns, such as Kineticism, audience participation, the association between architecture and the fine arts, and the inheritance left by pre-W.W.II modernist movements such as Constructivism and Surrealism.

Contrary to the rebellion against the pioneering efforts of the early Modernists (suggested by Massey, 1995), the IG proved to be engaged with the revitalisation of their inheritance, with the development of a modern international movement. As Barry (1988) described, such re-evaluations often took the form of exhibition designs:

Richard Hamilton organised and designed another major exhibition at the ICA in 1955, [...] focusing on technological developments of all types of vehicles in an exhibition entitled *Man Machine and Motion*. For the design Hamilton used modular steel frames to which were attached photo blowups and Plexiglas panels. This flexible system of cubicle modules completely surrounded the viewer with an open, mazelike structure which had the effect of echoing the exhibition's content (an idea the artist apparently derived from Duchamp): the spectators motion in relation to the object.

Like the Brazilian constructivists the IG belonged to the post-war generation that, although associated with the pre-war personalities (who had pioneered the implementation of modernist ideals in Britain such as Read), had benefited particularly from the increased institutionalisation of modern art which occurred following W.W.II. While the Brazilians had greatly felt the benefit and influence that the Biennial had upon their work, the IG was very much the product of the formal and

³⁶¹ See Chapter 6.

³⁶² The expression was coined in: Massey & Sparke (1985) pp.48-56.

informal forum for discussions, and exhibitions, offered by the foundation of the ICA in London. They emerged amongst close contact with the early Modernists (through exhibitions and the presence at the ICA of people such as Roland Penrose (1900-84) and Read himself) yet proved to be driven by a desire to revitalise the modernist legacy which was seen as having lost its initial impetus.

One cannot claim that IG members were in any way concrete artists, in fact, those mentioned above in connection with concrete ideals such as Pasmore, were not members. However, it could be argued that the process through which they arrived at their pioneering work with popular culture, is indebted in part to the constructivist legacy. Although it might at first seem forceful to purport that the legacy of Constructivism was present within the IG, to view their activities from an international perspective clearly emphasises the fact that their era was one with few firm cultural dogmas and references. This was confirmed by the variety of tendencies and interests that were interconnected with each other.

Although the myth tells us otherwise, abstract art was considered an important aspect of the studies undertaken by the IG. Shortly after having published the article on Mondrian, Banham (1957a) writes of Alloway and his critique, which centred at the time around abstraction. Banham admires Alloway's 'coldness' his neutral, non-committal critique of abstract art. The article describes briefly Alloway's career as a critic for Art News and Review to more recent work like writing 'articles on key men (Pasmore, McHale) in foreign periodicals', staging discussions, catalogue notes and organising exhibitions. He finishes by claiming that 'Alloway can be sure of remaining Mr. Abstract until such a time as he cares to break it up.'

The IG is generally seen as lacking an engagement or interest in local popular expressions. This would indicate a crucial difference between approaches to popular culture in Britain with those expressed in Brazil during the 1960s by Oiticica. In Britain, it was a concern towards the imagery of mass culture while in Oiticica's case there was a preoccupation in establishing a connection between mass culture, high art and the local or traditional culture of the masses. However, although not possessing exactly the same level of proximity, work such as that carried out by Nigel Henderson (1917-85) in the East End of London could be seen to correspond to the approach towards the popular that emerged in Brazil in the early 1960s. The fact that the distinctions might be greater than the similarities does not alter the fact that between the 1950s and the 1960s there were a set of cultural references available to modern artists internationally which were then articulated within local contexts. These in turn underwent a significant shift in relation to the development of mass communication processes.

To raise the similarities of two obviously separate responses to such shifts serves the purpose of emphasising the fact that Brazilian 'Constructivism' was not a provincial example of artists responding to long gone events in Europe, but on the contrary, it emphasises the fact that they were totally yet independently engaged in issues which were at the core of avant-garde movements around the world.

Finally, a similar analysis could be made for a number of different national contexts during the 1950s-60s period. Foster proposes a similar association between Pop and Minimalism. The principle distinction is that Foster's (1996 p.60) association suggests that these were ruptures with high Modernism:

[...] in order to understand the crux of minimalism we must reposition it in its own time. One way to do so is to juxtapose minimalism with pop art, as related to the same moment in the dialectic of Modernism and mass culture.

Chapter 18

Translations

In Chapter 17, the issue of individual responses to popular culture within distinct socio-cultural contexts and their relationship with the legacy of Constructivism was discussed. This apparent interruption to the narrative on Oiticica's work is pertinent due to the artist's subsequent move to England and later to the USA. Additionally such a juxtaposition of parallel creative strategies in distinct cultural environments raises the issue of translation.

Exhibitions and recent re-evaluations of the artist's self-exile have focused predominantly on the relation that Oiticica had with other artists working at the time in London or New York. Robert Morris's Tate Gallery exhibition, which displayed a strong participatory element shortly after Oiticica's 1969 Whitechapel Experiment, was argued by Brett (2000b) as demonstrating a distinct approach to participation.³⁶³

Other analyses have associated Oiticica's work in the 1970s with contemporaneous New York artists such as Andy Warhol (1928-87) and Jack Smith (1932-89).³⁶⁴

The interest here is to analyse a shift that occurred in the actual work and its relation to the notion of Brazilian contemporary art. This will be studied through the question: how did the artist mediate his previous 'proximity' with cultural manifestations, seen to be characteristically Brazilian, with his new position as an artist living abroad?

Oiticica's previous theoretisations on the nature of Brazilian avant-garde art and his reference to mass/popular cultures would undergo subtle but significant shifts as the result of this re-location. It was not however, an entire abandonment of his previous work. His exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1969, although later (Witte de With, 1992 p.214) defined as an 'Experience', contained work from the neoconcrete period to Oiticica's contemporaneous production. It represented therefore an attempt to re-evaluate the retrospective exhibition format. Moreover, the changes that occurred in Oiticica's work in terms of its distancing from the specifically Brazilian references had already begun in Brazil as a result of simplistic interpretations or, as the artist saw it, the dilution of notions relating to the reception of his concept of *Tropicália*. Oiticica's (1968b p.135) comments to Brett, on his new ideas and concepts following *Tropicália* are indicative of a desire to transcend the purely local context to which the work had been submitted:

³⁶³ Morris' exhibition actually took place in 1972. For a comparative discussion on the exhibitions and their relation to the notion of participatory art see: Brett (2000b) p.50.

³⁶⁴ See: Basualdo (2002) and Klabin (1998).

[...] some weeks ago, very strong decisions, questions I made myself and discussed with friends of mine were decisive for me to formulate some points and the *Suprasensorial* sense came to a clear point of view [...]

The emphasis on the possibility of freely developing one's own behavioural response to the built environment had already emerged in the essay on the 'Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial' and was further emphasised in Oiticica's (1969b) text on the notion of '*Creleisure*' which appeared as a reflection upon the organisation of his 'Whitechapel Experience' in 1969.

It will be argued below that the two concepts are related as comments or reassessments on the interpretation of exhibited work. They are evidence of the artist's continuous dialogue between the act of creating and the nature of experiencing the work.

The Appearance of the *Supra-Sensorial*

Oiticica (1967b) began his essay on the 'Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial' referring to Gullar's (1959c) 'Theory of the Non-Object'. To do so, suggests that the artist was implying not necessarily an origin for his contemporaneous production but a theoretical basis from which his art developed. It also established the notion of the non-object as a moment of rupture from previous modes of production, dissemination and reception.

Oiticica (1967b p.127) recalls the neoconcrete experience as the impetus for overcoming a view of art that relied unquestionably on the aesthetisation of the object, positing instead one which would lead to a new state of being, that of an artistic/life experience or *vivência*:

For me, in my development, the object was a passage to experiences increasingly engaged with the individual behaviour of each spectator: I must insist that the search, here, is not for a 'new conditioning' of the spectator, but an overturning of every conditioning in the quest for individual liberty, through increasingly open propositions, aimed at making each person find themselves, through accessibility, through improvisation, their internal liberty, the path for a creative state - what Mário Pedrosa prophetically defined as the 'experimental exercise of liberty.'

Such a new basis for art, related very much to Pedrosa's (1966) postmodern-environmental description of Oiticica's work. Oiticica (1967b) further elaborated the idea, claiming that it represented a state in which the object of art gained a hybrid quality that extended its status as art, beyond the object itself, incorporating its exterior relations. The object became, according to Oiticica, problematised through the following questions: 'What is the object then? A new category, or a new mode of aesthetic proposition?' Answering these questions Oiticica (1967b p.127)

demonstrated the praxis of his creative approach, one that was forged through the ambivalent state of the object in art:

While containing these two meanings [a new category and a new mode of aesthetic], the most important proposition of the object, of the makers of objects, in my view would be that of a new perceptual behaviour, created through increasing spectator participation, eventually overcoming the object as the end of aesthetic expression.

The problematisation of the object of art and its conditioned apprehension as an aesthetic expression, was therefore questioned through the idea of a spectator participating on his/her own terms, free from any *a priori* patterns of behaviour. Oiticica (1967b) further emphasised the intentions of his definition of a 'New Objectivity' as a discussion on the nature of the avant-garde in Brazil rather than an attempt to establish new categories within artistic production; namely environmental as opposed to object-based. Instead, he claimed to 'have always considered the object as one of the environment's orders.' This was precisely what later became the central issue in his confrontation with the Whitechapel Gallery during the process of organising his 1969 exhibition.³⁶⁵

For Oiticica (1967b p.128) the notion of *suprasensoriality* appeared as an attempt to define the open character of the work or its new interaction with the viewer/participator. The work in this manner, was:

directed at the senses in order that, through them, through 'total perception', they may lead the individual to a 'suprasensation', to the expansion of his usual sensory capacities, to the discovery of his internal creative centre of his dormant expressive spontaneity, linked to the quotidian.

Creleisure

The idea of *suprasensoriality* was developed further in Oiticica's (1969b pp.132-3) subsequent text on the notion of *Creleisure*. The essay was written in order to accompany the artist's exhibition at London's Whitechapel Gallery in 1969. It therefore can be assumed to represent a 'translation' of contemporaneous ideas on art expressed in a new socio-cultural context. No mention is made of the specificity of Brazilian art, other than a brief mention of cannibalism without any further association made regarding Oswald de Andrade.³⁶⁶ Instead, the artist articulated the notion of leisure as a means of apprehending art as life, where art was considered a raw and

³⁶⁵ The confrontation will be discussed below.

³⁶⁶ Oswald de Andrade's (1928) Anthropophagite Manifesto equated cultural appropriation to the cannibalism of the original Brazilians. On Oswald's notion of Anthropophagy, see Chapter 3. On Oiticica's reading of Anthropophagy, see Chapter 16.

unconditioned experience of leisure/life. In a letter to Guy Brett, Oiticica (1968b p.135) affirmed that:

[...] the suprasensorial would be 'an exercise for the total reality' - I feel that life itself has to be a continuance of all aesthetic experience as a totality, and nothing should be set aside intellectually from it.

Brett (2002) has recently recalled some of the problems that the Whitechapel Gallery experienced concerning the nature of Oiticica's exhibition. Oiticica had insisted on creating an environment; a space in which individual objects would be part of a greater whole. For those accustomed to the organisation of displays according to individual works, this seemed problematic.³⁶⁷ Oiticica (1968d) also expressed this problem in a letter to Lygia Clark. He described his frustration with the situation claiming that it would have been easier to deal directly with the Whitechapel Gallery director, Bryan Robertson, rather than through Brett's courteous and diplomatic mediation.³⁶⁸

The conceptual importance of Oiticica's stance with respect to the environmental aspect of the exhibition can be grasped in essays such as Pedrosa's (1966) on the artist. According to Oiticica (1968b), his work since the *Parangolé*, was demonstrative of a desire for what he termed 'the return to myth'. Such an affirmation might invite a parallel to be drawn with the 'invention' of a native mythology such as that which occurred in *Modernismo*. This correlation is further emphasised by Oiticica's choice for the title of the environment he had developed prior to that exhibition: *Eden*. [Fig. 80] However, there is an important distinction to be made between the two. Associated with Oiticica's 'experience' was the necessity of elaborating a wider context through which the work was received. No longer did the work's reception necessarily relate to a specifically Brazilian reality, but it attempted to provide a frame in which 'visitors' could develop their own behavioural patterns. The remaining theoretical coherence with his previous work was the reliance on the belief that the environments proposed by the artist could encourage a participation that was essentially based on intuition, that is, an interaction with the work free from any *a priori* cultural conditioning. In this manner it is possible to perceive the pertinence of

³⁶⁷ As already discussed (Chapter 17), the Whitechapel was not a conservative establishment with regard to the pioneering of installation art. It was, after all the venue for *This is Tomorrow*. However, the director Bryan Robertson, had been recently appointed and perhaps his response was a consequence of someone who was not entirely accustomed to the work of the artist or perhaps to the installation format. It is also very likely that an exhibition such as *This is Tomorrow* like Oiticica's own Whitechapel Experience, only gained its recognition substantially later.

³⁶⁸ In the letter Oiticica (1968d) implies that the exhibition was postponed because of his plans for an environmental display rather than one based on objects.

an environment such as *Eden*, beyond the connotations of origin, Arcadia or savage nobility that the term might otherwise evoke. Here is the key distinction between Oiticica's apprehension of a primitive state and those proposed by the early *Modernistas*; particularly those ideals of a mythical cultural origin present in Tarsila do Amaral's paintings. Oiticica (1969b p.134) expressed this transition explicitly in an interview with Brett during the Whitechapel exhibition:

Earlier, before I made those new cabins, I had the idea to 'appropriate' places I liked, real places, where I felt alive. In fact the *Tropicália* penetrable, with its multitude of tropical images, is a kind of condensation of real places. *Tropicália* is a kind of map. It's a map of Rio and it's a map of my imagination. It's a map that you go into. But I think more important now the idea that people should make their own environment. In *Eden* I translate personal experiences into something open. In fact, those cabins are all quite alike. They are all based on a *leisure* feeling - a place to lie down, to think.³⁶⁹

It is important to note that the act of 'translating' the work or eliminating any aspect that might alienate a wider audience due to its cultural specificity, was not necessarily a conscious decision by Oiticica. In a sense, it can be seen as a consequence of Oiticica's operation as an avant-garde artist. That is to say, a producer of cultural manifestations that have a direct relation to lived experiences or *vivências*, a position in other words, similar to that defined by Bürger. Such an act of translation was therefore very different from the current use of the term within critical theory.³⁷⁰ That is, what might seem as an act of translation in fact was only a symptom of the work's operation in a different cultural context.

Oiticica's attempt to develop a proximity to life required shifts in emphasis that on the one hand, would avoid being easily interpreted within exoticising discourses (whether inside or outside of Brazil), while on the other hand, would enable the conceptual rigour of the work to continue to operate as it had previously. This is possibly at the core of the misinterpretations and misconceptions which currently apply to readings of Oiticica's work. These relate to the current production of Brazilian contemporary art and emphasise the location of production often at the expense of a deeper understanding of its concept.

In this sense, what is proposed here is to view Oiticica's 'move' as generating a process of translation precisely because of the 'untranslatability of the Other'. Sarat Maharaj (2001) has skilfully identified the problem affecting the emergence of 'Other' within current cultural productions, (a phenomenon broadly termed as

³⁶⁹ My emphasis.

³⁷⁰ As for example that used by Maharaj (2001).

multiculturalism), as a machinic process whereby translation actually produces difference.

Beyond the demand for assimilation, beyond absolutist notions of difference and identity, beyond the reversible stances of 'Self and Other' in which the Eurocentric gaze fashions itself as the Other, as the intoxicating exotic as in the heady stuff of a Smirnoff ad - in the 1990s, we have come to see the international space as the meeting ground for a multiplicity of tongues, visual grammars and styles. These do not so much translate into one another as translate to produce difference.

The context in which Oiticica worked was of course quite distinct from that of today. The hybridity that one can identify in his work seems quite at odds with the privileged position it now receives: what Maharaj (2001) describes as a 'catch all category' or a 'visual Esperanto'. The emphasis here is on attempting to recharge the productive tensions that such cultural juxtapositions initially entailed.

The exhibition at the Whitechapel marked a significant evolution in Oiticica's career. Although having exhibited *Tropicália* in London, his new environment, *Eden* was clearly a move away from the specificity of location. This is evident in his essays from the period, namely *Suprasensorial* and *Creleisure*, in addition to his letters to Brett. The importance of participation became an important strategy for the possibility of the work to operate beyond the scope of a 'purely' national culture. One can conclude from such a position that the artist engaged with his immediate surrounding rather than inescapably referring to a sense of cultural origin or an essentially Brazilian character. Such a position was clearly expressed the following year when he exhibited his *Ninhos* (Nests) (themselves a development that arose out of the Whitechapel Experience and his subsequent residency at Sussex University) at the *Information* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1970). [Fig. 81, 82] In his statement for the exhibition Oiticica (and Cildo Meireles, the other Brazilian in the exhibition) argued not to be representing Brazil.

The ideas that Oiticica was engaged in during that period cannot be narrowed within a strictly national context. Today there is additionally the spectre of easy historical connections that privilege one aspect of the work over its overall complexity. It is not surprising therefore to note that in a recent article on the participatory 'meta-movement' Brett (2000b p.36) chose to begin by quoting Jean-Christophe Royoux's review of Documenta X where he distinguished the contexts of each historical moment:

One of the recurrent traits of the art of the sixties and seventies was the idea that the actualisation of the work demands the spectator's participation. Redefined as practice, art was conceived as a critical model able to explode various forms of the individual's social, psychic, or linguistic integration to a reality informed and deformed by the all-

persuasive power of mass-culture. The aim of art, broadly aligned with the other manifestations of sixties counter-culture, was therefore clear: To expose the spectator, within the frame of a previously defined spatial environment, to a theatricalised experience offering the means of access to alternative modes of self-fashioning.³⁷¹

Royoux (Brett, 2000b p.36) further emphasised the distinction between what is today seen as participation from the notion it represented in the 1960s:

But the minimal and largely pointless form of interactivity that now serves as the basic principle of the new communication technologies had done much to trivialise the participatory model of the neo-avant-garde, eroding its initial effectiveness.

If the notion of participation can be relatively easily understood as radically different in both moments, the issue of Oiticica's relation to contemporary 'national' art seems, however, more complex. Such a complexity becomes apparent when discussing his activities during his period of self-exile.

Quasi-Cinema

Oiticica's sojourn in New York throughout much of the 1970s is usually considered as a combination of self-reclusiveness and self-imposed exile. Although, the seven years in which Oiticica lived in New York followed the very successful exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London 1969, his residency at the University of Sussex and his participation in the *Information* Exhibition at MoMA in New York in 1970, the period between 1970 and 77, was demonstrative of a desire to avoid operating within the structures of the art establishment.

Although not having exhibited during this period it would be erroneous to assume that Oiticica had abandoned his activity as an artist. On the contrary, he continuously produced projects for public spaces and individual works of art throughout the 1970s. In addition, his involvement with Brazil remained one of his prime concerns throughout his years in New York. In his characteristic ambivalence, on the one hand, he considered himself as an artist working within a Brazilian context albeit from outside, while on the other hand, his relation to the popular during that period demonstrated a clear proximity to mass North American culture. Again what emerges is a relation based on both proximity and distance.

The American critic Dore Ashton (1999) lived during that period close to Oiticica's loft. She met the artist through Mário Pedrosa and recalled being taken to *Mangueira* accompanied by Oiticica, and dancing with the residents at the Samba School.³⁷² She

³⁷¹ Royoux, J.-C., (1997) *Omnibus*, special number on Documenta X. Paris. Quoted in: Brett (2000b) p.36.

³⁷² Ashton was not precise about the dates of these occurrences. It is not certain whether her visit to *Mangueira* took place during the 1960s or following Oiticica's return to Rio in 1977.

became a regular visitor to Oiticica's loft (named *Babylonest* by the artist) in New York where they talked about politics and philosophy. She stressed Oiticica's isolation from the local art establishment, mentioning instead a performance he organised in Central Park.³⁷³

Oiticica (1971b) during the whole period could be described as being engaged in an intense process of cultural translation. He attempted for instance, to identify the places in New York described by the late 19th century Brazilian poet Joaquim de Sousândrade,³⁷⁴ with the aid of a study of the history of that city by his friend Ashton.³⁷⁵ This project represented a form of transcultural and transhistorical mapping of his new territory. Continuing such a process of constructing a sense of belonging within his new environment, his loft became a focal point for intellectuals, artists, film makers, where discussions would often revolve around the state of Brazilian culture and the peculiarities of the scene in New York. The assumption is that he fulfilled his desire to construct a space for the exchange of ideas, which he had originally envisaged in the geographical context of Rio de Janeiro. Oiticica (1969b) had described the environmental and leisure/life quality of his work in relation to ideas on leisure and suprasensoriality, arguing that:

I feel that the idea grows into a necessity of a new community, based on creative affinities despite cultural or intellectual differences, or social and intellectual ones. Not a community to 'make works of art', but something as the experience in real life - all sorts of experiences that could grow out in a new sense of life and society - kind of constructing an environment for life itself based on the premise that creative energy is inherent in everyone.

Other than the clear association that such a desire had with groups such as the *Exploding Galaxy* around Medalla, Oiticica (1969b) would actually accomplish such an idea over the following years in his New York loft.

The objective point would be to construct a kind of wood house as in the 'favelas' where people would feel it were 'his place' (or their place) – may be the mountains near here, where this group of mine would come to do things, to talk, to meet people...

In this manner, New York represented a period in which previous projects and ideas were transformed into the actual life pattern of the artist. Oiticica rather than producing works in the traditional sense, transformed his life into an artistic

³⁷³ Oiticica mentions the planning of such an event to Lygia Clark. In: Figueiredo, ed. (1996) p.198.

³⁷⁴ After having studied in Paris at the Sorbonne, Joaquim de Sousa Andrade (1833-1902), later moved to New York in 1870, where he published (in Portuguese) the journal 'O Novo Mundo' (the New World). His literary work was generally ignored until the Campos brothers 're-discovered' it during the 60s. See: <http://www.secrel.com.br/jpoesia/soua.html>

³⁷⁵ See: Appendix 2 for translated excerpts.

experience: the ultimate state of *Creleisure*. The artist transformed his living space into an installation, where the labyrinthine aspect of his previous Penetrables and environments was quite evident. [Fig. 83] Ashton spoke of Pedrosa's visit to Oiticica's loft, mentioning the critic's insistence on staying with the artist rather than enjoying the 'comfort' of her apartment. She also recalled the material difficulties met by intellectual's such as Pedrosa in being forced to live in exile. Ashton (1999) described Oiticica's loft as an environment with diverse levels and various structures hanging from the ceiling. Oiticica (1971a pp.199-200) mentioned in a letter to Clark that:

The *loft* is coming along great: I constructed six *Ninhos* [Nests] to live in, also a thing that has two levels, where you arrive at below by entering above; Mário [Pedrosa] was mad, because when he wanted to use the telephone he had to climb the platform; below it there is a kind of subterranean space or small basement, there is also a place where you have to crawl to arrive at; it is all at the beginning but I want to create a place so complicated-complex that it becomes a world in itself, without furniture and these boring things of apartments, etc.; Mário found it hilarious when I said that as a concession, because he was there, we had 4 chairs, which is scandalous [...]

Another interesting product of that period were the Hélio-Tapes. These were recordings made to be sent to friends in Brazil: alternative and perhaps more intimate forms of letters. Such tapes demonstrate the incredible richness and scope of his cultural references, and in hindsight contribute towards our understanding of his self-conscious marginal position and his collaborative activities as an artist during that period. Other than evidence of the creative approach to his cocaine habit, the tapes offer an insight into Oiticica's role as provider of a focal point for Brazilian intellectuals passing through New York. Frequently these were political refugees, such as Mário and Mary Pedrosa and the '*Tropicalist*' musician Gilberto Gil (b. 1942), in exile due to the hard-line military regime. Many of the tapes were produced at the occasion of such visits to his loft, visits that themselves provided opportunities for collaborative projects such as the *Quasi-Cinema* series amongst which was *Cosmococa* produced in collaboration with Neville d'Almeida. [Fig. 84]

Before discussing *Cosmococa* it is necessary to distinguish Oiticica's approach to cinema from other theories or perhaps more precisely to establish how *Quasi-Cinema* operated as a form of 'translated-cinema'.

For Roland Barthes (1977 p.65) the filmic, or the essence of the cinematic work, that which 'can only be located after having - analytically - gone across the "essential", the "depth" and the "complexity" of the cinematic work', is constituted by a 'third meaning'. This according to Barthes represents the 'passage from language to significance'. The 'third meaning' is associated with the reading of certain moments during the film, moments in which it is possible to obtain a variety of meanings: what Barthes called

the 'obtuse'. Ambivalence gives rise to the third meaning, which is thus unrepresentable, subjective and therefore outside the intended narrative of the author/director. It does not however, necessarily interfere (Barthes, 1977 p.64) with the intended narrative:

[T]he third meaning structures the film differently without [...] subverting the story and for this reason, perhaps, it is at the level of the third meaning, and at that level alone, that the filmic finally emerges. The filmic is that in the film which cannot be described, the representation which cannot be represented. The filmic begins only where language and metalanguage end.

According to Barthes, the filmic originates in moments, or stills, that paradoxically cannot be 'grasped' during the actual running of the film. This is why Barthes claims that the film can never live up to its promotional stills.

While Barthes privileges the 'still', arguing that it constitutes the essence of the cinematic work, Deleuze (1983) is interested in the 'movement-image'. Not the mechanism of how a series of 'stills' are set in movement through a process of illusion, but how both the movement of the filmed objects and the actual movement of the camera operate as part of a 'symbolic narrative'.

Oiticica's project with Neville d'Almeida, *Quasi-Cinema*, seems to be distinct from Barthes' and Deleuze's notions of the cinematic work. It would seem at first that Barthes' notion of the still would be more appropriate. Oiticica's *Quasi-Cinema* appears to suggest a notion of movement that prioritises the still or the pose. However, Oiticica's intention was to create an environment in which the spectators are free to act in parallel with the imagery projected, as opposed to the cinema room in which they are confined to chairs arranged in one direction. Oiticica's desire to create environments, such as those suggested in *Quasi-Cinema*, originates as a program in the 60s, where a move towards the spectator took place and where attitudes towards art went from the purely retinal perception towards multi-sensorial and participatory propositions. *Quasi-Cinema* was therefore an environmental experience in which sequential stills, projected upon all available surfaces, were central features.

While the preoccupation with the environment referred to previous works by the artist, the content of such imagery represented a clear relation to his new lived experience: the *vivência* of New York.

Salomão (1996a) on one of his visits to Oiticica's loft described the experience of being shown such work:

Whilst alive, he only exhibited COSMOCOCA to few. When I saw it in October 74, in New York, Hélio indicated to me in his vast non-verbal code that I should stay a bit longer, he waited for the others to leave his loft, made me swear secrecy, and only then, initiated the clandestine ritual of exhibiting it. Hélio was not bluffing when he affirmed [...] that: 'I feel as if I am sitting on a barrel of gun powder, that is wrapped

around dynamite sticks.' [...] He was right: COSMOCOCA is pure nitro-glycerine. It is a holistic ambient, it is cosmos not cosmetics.³⁷⁶

It is interesting to note how such a powerful work has become 'translated' into our contemporary world, which is now so used to the outrageous and controversial character of contemporary art. To a certain extent, seeing the *Cosmococa* series as well as other *Quasi-Cinema* installations, today is surprising. Taking into consideration their frequent reference to mass iconography, they are works that have 'aged' very little. They still maintain a strong contemporary character. It might therefore, be easily understandable to associate, or perhaps more appropriately, to believe the rhetoric that has emerged around such work, positing it within current thought on art practice.

Carlos Basualdo (2002 p.40) in the recent *Quasi-Cinemas* exhibition catalogue has argued that the New York period represented for Oiticica a total abandonment of the 'modern promise' and that an analysis of the artist's writing at that time entails the recognition of a radically new approach:

What emerges from the texts is no longer the concrete artist who forces art to fulfil its modern promise, extending it into the world through the viewer's active participation, but rather the inventor of ways of life, reconfiguring his work on the basis of a systematic consideration of the relations between the different regimes of labour and the subjective formations to which they give rise.

Such a statement seems however at odds with other work produced by Oiticica during that time or indeed following his New York 'residency'. The artist continued to produce *Parangolés* for example. However, these no longer had connections with carnival or Samba but although still wearable demonstrated Oiticica's continuous concern with the object's structure. [Fig. 85] In a text written in New York, Oiticica (1972b) indicated that he proposed a 'demythification of the *Parangolé*'.

We have already discussed how the distance from 'popular' Brazilian culture and the distrust that Oiticica developed in relation to the misappropriation of his work and concepts were both important factors in the 'translation' that the work underwent. On return to Brazil in 1977, one could witness the construction of perhaps Oiticica's

³⁷⁶ Except from: Salomão (1996a) p.105.

In the original: Enquanto vivo só exibiu COSMOCOCA para alguns raros. Quando assisti em outubro de 74, em Nova York, Hélio fez um sinal do seu vasto código não-verbal que eu esperasse um pouco antes de ir embora, aguardou as outras pessoas saírem do seu *loft*, me fez jurar segredo, para só aí, então, iniciar o ritual clandestino de exibição. Hélio não estava blefando quando afirmou-me sobre a mais secreta, mantida oculta a sete chaves, COSMOCOCA: 'me sinto sentado em cima de um barril de pólvora, enrolado em bananas de dinamite.' A imagem disparava, na tela da minha cabeça, os fotogramas da sequência final de *Pierrot, le fou*, de Jean-Luc Godard, um dos mais belos filmes do cinema. Ele estava certo: COSMOCOCA é nitroglicerina pura. É ambiência holística, é cosmo; não cosmético.

most constructivist inspired work in his entire career: for instance *A invenção da Luz* (The Invention of Light) [Fig. 86], *Ready Constructible* [Fig. 87], or the *Magic Square* series of projects, one of which has recently been constructed in Rio de Janeiro. [Fig. 88]

It is true that all these works although referring to that modern tradition remained also highly conceptual, never restricting themselves solely with aesthetic propositions: an example of such a procedure are the numerous *Penetráveis* that Oiticica envisaged, or constructed as models during the 1970s. [Fig. 89] Underlying the exhibition curated by Basualdo is the spectre of current North American hegemonic values. Other than the implicit argument that Oiticica's contact with the 'New York scene' represented an abandonment of all residue that his work might still have with the concrete legacy, or the impossibility of ambivalence between modern and postmodern operative modes, perhaps even the more arrogant assumption that contact with the USA would have a rupturous effect on his entire creative process, the exhibition was also indicative of a submission of the work to the current ideology of political correctness. The latter is expressed (Cameron, 2002 p.36) through the overshadowing of Oiticica's reference to drugs, in works such as *Cosmococa* by an emphasis on the homoeroticism or campness of the imagery [Fig. 90, 84, 91]:

[...] Oiticica's <<appropriation>> of such iconic stars as Marilyn Monroe and Jimi Hendrix, as well as his interest in <<found>> models, while diametrically opposed to Warhol's infatuation with fame, depended initially on a camp impulse that responded to male beauty and female glamour as a potentially subversive instrument for declaring one's autonomy within a heterosexist social order.

The denial of the pertinence of the artist's use of drugs within the *Cosmococa* imagery (a position made all the more preposterous by the work's title) was explicitly demonstrated during a round-table discussion accompanying the inauguration of the exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. There, d'Almeida (2002), the co-author of *Cosmococa* argued that the use of cocaine was purely due to its aesthetic quality. D'Almeida further emphasised this fact by claiming that it would be possible to 'reproduce' the work today using sugar or another similar material. Such a claim, other than entirely contradicting the assertion made by the exhibition's curator that the work had entirely abandoned the aesthetic premises that had dominated modern production, completely undermines Oiticica's interest in marginality and his previous challenges on consensual moral standards based on his reading of Nietzsche. Indeed, the ambivalent nature of Oiticica's production was the consequence of his concurrent questioning of the work's structure and the powerful socio-cultural context that it incorporated. These factors are key for an understanding of

Cosmococa. The work operated on a formal level whereby the environment and the sequential nature of the 'translated-cinema' were radically questioned. The space of filmic projections became in this manner transposed into a room in which all available surfaces, walls and even the ceiling were used as potential screens, obliging the viewer to adapt and invent his/her own viewing experience. This was sometimes enhanced by suggested activities such as nail polishing utensils left around in the space. The actual operative mode of filmic projections (a series of almost identical photographic images projected in rapid succession) was also questioned through a slower and more abrupt sequence of slides. Combined with the formal premises explored by the work, the actual content of the images provides an additional juxtaposition: the iconic figure and the illicit substance. Here, we find a strong correspondence with previous works such as Oiticica's homages to *Cara de Cavalo*, where the *Bólido* and its formal investigation of constructed space opens itself to the viewers' manipulation and eventual unveiling of the iconic/marginal image. [Fig. 64]

Quasi-Cinema was undoubtedly the result of a conscious investigation that arose from Oiticica's enthusiasm for Jack Smith's (himself a marginal figure in the New York art scene) projections and his ongoing engagement with the wider context of art.

Nietzsche's differentiation between the origin of things from their contemporaneous purpose, is also a pertinent reminder of the processes of 'correction' to which a work of art can be submitted. A notion that is discussed by Keith Ansell-Pearson (1994 p.xii) in the introduction to Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*.

The history of a thing can 'to this extent be a continuous chain of signs, continually revealing new interpretations and adaptations'. By uncovering a will to power behind the positing of moral values, and by tracing the origin and descent of values in such terms, it is the aim of a genealogy of morality to undermine the universalist and humanist pretensions of moral values and judgements.

This statement is relevant both in terms of Oiticica's approach and to the historical surveys of his work. Concealed behind the auspices of much of the recent theoretisation concerning his work, lies the morality of political correctness that identifies in Oiticica the Otherness of the peripheral artist. The *Parangolé*, his homage to *Cara de Cavalo*, and other works that possess a relation to an external ideal of what Brazilian popular culture is, become in this sense representations of a moral desire to readdress the exclusivity of art history. Although such inclusive approaches are predominantly motivated by good will, they are also often subject to *a priori* ideals and therefore are absolutely contrary to the intentions of the artist and

more importantly to the concept of the work. The exhibitionality of a work by a so-called peripheral artist within the 'central' channels of dissemination has been dependent on its fulfilment of certain expectations; amongst these, the requirement of apparent difference. The exhibition (Basualdo, 2002) of Oiticica's series entitled *Cosmococa*, produced in collaboration with d'Almeida, exemplifies this fact.

What I do is Music³⁷⁷

Beyond the translations of context, of operative modes and images from popular iconography, the 1970s was a decade in which Oiticica furthered the process of questioning the boundaries of artistic categories. If Neoconcretism questioned the distinctions between painting and sculpture, Oiticica's activity in New York could be defined as a period of intense investigations into other fields, questioning the limits between fine art, cinema and music. The general shift, which took place during the 1960s has been summarised by Augusto de Campos (1968 pp.283-4):

Since João Gilberto and Tom Jobim, popular music is no longer simply retrospective or more or less folkloric, but has become a new fact, a live aspect of Brazilian culture, participating within the evolution of poetry, of the visual arts, of architecture, in short, within the so called erudite arts.³⁷⁸

The association that Oiticica had with music is telling in terms of the identification of certain ideological shifts which occurred during the 1960s amongst artists and intellectuals. The increasing distance between Oiticica's and Gullar's political positions has already been discussed.³⁷⁹ Of particular pertinence to this study was their distinctive approach to the marginalized populations of the shanty-towns, and how carnival, and by extension Samba, was central to such distinctions.

Ambivalence towards categories of culture had been rejected by sectors of the left such as the CPCs yet had remained central to Oiticica's interaction with the marginalized sectors of society. However, rather than Samba, which had so intensely affected his work throughout the 1960s, it was Brazilian popular music (MPB) that demonstrated an intellectual proximity with the work of artists and particularly with that of Oiticica. Music provided a platform for the encounter of a number of figures who had previously, during the 1950s, belonged to warring

³⁷⁷ The title of this section is a translation from the essay by Hélio Oiticica entitled 'O q faço é música' (1979). Fragments of this essay were published in: Projeto Hélio Oiticica & Galeria de Arte São Paulo (1986) *Retrospective Exhibition*. São Paulo, February – March. Source: Favareto (1992). p.228.

³⁷⁸ In the original: Desde João Gilberto e Tom Jobim, a música popular deixou de ser um dado meramente retrospectivo, ou mais ou menos folclórico, para se constituir num fato novo, vivo, da cultura brasileira, participando da evolução da poesia, das artes visuais, da arquitetura, das artes ditas eruditas, em suma.

factions of the avant-garde. The 1960s saw the reconciliation of *post-concretist* artists such as Cordeiro with *post-neoconcrete* artists such as Oiticica through the advent of Pop Art. A number of exhibitions such as *Opinião* and *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio had brought together artists who merged the new Pop aesthetics with issues and imagery that dealt with the political moment and the effects of the military regime.³⁸⁰

The exhibition *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* was symptomatic of an emergent approach to the politics of culture that spanned the fields of cinema, theatre, music and the fine arts. The early *Parangolés* (shown for the first time at *Opinião 65*) were not only capes but also banners. Beyond referring to carnival parades they could also be seen to have had in this sense a political implication. It is not certain however, if in the first instance there was indeed an intentional desire to equate the work directly to politics. Oiticica's strategy was political yet not in an overt manner. However, the banner in Oiticica's work would become equally, albeit unintentionally, entangled with both politics and music.

Following the increased repression (Veloso, 1997 p.396), a consequence of AI5 (Institutional Act no.5), his banner in homage to *Cara de Cavalo* [Fig. 65], was the central reason for the arrest of the '*Tropicalist*' musicians Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil leading to their imprisonment and subsequent deportation.

Brazilian popular music's main arena of dissemination during the 1960s was the music festival: televised musical competitions that served as platforms for an emerging generation of musicians and song-writers. The audience at these events was mainly constituted of university students. Their politics was left-wing and like the CPCs they associated the national character of the song with its political message.

The emergence of musicians such as Veloso and Gil within the festival circuit caused a strong reaction amongst the audiences who could not identify the political engagement of their songs due to the eclectic nature of their cultural references. In other words, they did not follow a national musical tradition and therefore were perceived suspiciously foreign, as a product perhaps of cultural imperialism. Moreover, their lyrics combined traditional Brazilian elements with international and mass media references. The cultural historian Celso Favaretto (1996 p.18) has described the arrival of this new form of music as:

a consequence of urban experience, of young people's immersion into the fragmented world of news, shows, television and advertising. It was a kaleidoscopic language, of an open life, light hearted, and apparently not engaged. Such questions had been dealt in an overt manner by a great number of contemporary songs, these

³⁷⁹ See Chapter 15.

³⁸⁰ See Chapters 14 and 16.

articulated facts as news items. [With song-writers such as Veloso and Gil] [t]hese questions through a narrative process whereby social and political issues whether national or international, would be mixed with aspects of the quotidian life of young people of the middle-classes, losing as such, the aggressive and tragic character previously common in such songs.³⁸¹

Another parallel between music and art was the fact that musicians such as Veloso proposed a re-evaluation of the legacy of Bossa Nova in much the same way as Oiticica had re-evaluated the legacy of - Bossa Nova's contemporary - Neoconcretism. In both cases this did not take place as a reaction or rupture from their respective predecessors, but occurred through processes of layering: an ambivalent strategy where the original style is overlaid with often contradictory, cultural references.

Oiticica's thought on such creative processes can be seen in some of his reflections on North American 'counter-culture' during the period in which he lived in New York. Oiticica (1974) - in a recorded 'Hélio-tape' - spoke to Augusto de Campos of his discovery of Jimmy Hendrix (1942-70) emphasising particularly the musician's performance at Woodstock. Key aspects identified by Oiticica (other than the music itself, which he considered radically new) were the extravagant dressing of the musician. Oiticica saw this new phenomenon as something that had a profound effect on the spectators in terms of behaviour and attitudes towards the body. He distinguished Hendrix from Ravi Shankar (b. 1920), mentioning that the latter was seen by some as a serious musician, as a producer of authentic Indian music. Oiticica (1974) posed the question: 'what is the point of Ravi Shankar once there is Jimmy Hendrix?' Elaborating further on this statement Oiticica affirmed that once Indian music had been devoured by the Beatles there was no longer the necessity to attempt to return to authentic forms.

The argument might at first seem somewhat shocking. Nevertheless, it could also be read within the context of the artist's immediate past. One must remember that music was central to the debates on the 'authenticity' of Brazilian culture during the 1960s. Such arguments led to a hybrid trend in Brazilian popular music being called *Tropicalismo*, after Oiticica's *Tropicália* installation of 1967. The subject of this particular Hélio-Tape (1974) refers precisely to this, since Augusto de Campos was very close to both music and art circles: having published a collection of essays on

³⁸¹ In the original: fruto da vivência urbana de jovens imersos no mundo fragmentado de notícias, espetáculos, televisão e propaganda. Tratava, numa linguagem caleidoscópica, de uma vida aberta, leve, aparentemente não empenhada. Tais problemas, enunciados de forma gritante em grande número de canções da época, articulavam-se à maneira de fatos virados notícias. Através de procedimento narrativo, as descrições de problemas sociais e políticos, nacionais ou internacionais, misturavam-se a índices da cotidianidade vivida por jovens de classe média, perdendo, assim, o carácter trágico e agressivo.

Bossa-Nova and its legacy and having been, together with his brother Haroldo and Décio Pignatari, a founding member of the concrete poetry group and the Noigandres journal.

It was the photographer Luís Carlos Barreto who established the connection between art and music when he suggested to Veloso that the musician should name his latest album after Oiticica's installation. Until then Veloso (1997 p.188) had thought of using the expression *Mistura Fina* (Fine Mixture) which in addition to suggesting a level of hybridity, referred to a brand of cigarettes thus adding a further reference to pop culture and mass advertising.

Tropicália, the music movement, emphasised the strong coherence across the arts amongst an important sector of the 'avant-garde.' The emphasis on the body that was so important for artists such as Oiticica and Clark can also be seen as central to the music movement emerging from Veloso and Gil (Oiticica, 1971c). Central in the conjunction of body, music, and performance was the notion of paradox, as Silviano Santiago emphasised in an early article on the work of Veloso:

Caetano realised this contradictory and synthetic character that was being presented by the art of Glauber or José Celso, of Hélio Oiticica or Rubens Gerchman, and wanted his *body*, as a sculptural piece, within the quotidian or the stage, to incorporate the contradiction, to metamorphose into the contradiction that was spoken or acted out by the other artists but never actually lived by them. He wanted his body, its plasticity, to captivate the public so that it would be the live image of his artistic message. [...] The body was as important as the voice; clothes were as important as the lyrics; movement was as important as the music. [...] The emphasis was not to bring these six elements into harmony [...] but that they contradict each other in every extent, in order to create a strange ludic climate, a transitional state as if the singer on stage was a puzzle that could only be organised in the mind of the spectators.³⁸²

Santiago's affirmation that it was Caetano who brought these concepts into the street, into life, confirms the fact that Oiticica's work was not widely known. Oiticica was undeniably connected to the music movement through the name '*Tropicália*', yet

³⁸² Santiago, S. (1973) Caetano Veloso, Os 365 Dias de Carnaval. In: *Cadernos de Jornalismo e Comunicação*, no.40, January-February. p.53 Quoted in: Favareto (1996) p.31. In the original: Caetano percebeu esse caráter contraditório e sintético que estava sendo apresentado pela arte de Glauber ou José Celso, de Hélio Oiticica ou Rubens Gerchman, e quis que seu *corpo*, qual peça de escultura, no cotidiano e no palco, assumisse a contradição, se metamorfosasse na contradição que era falada ou encenada pelos outros artistas, mas nunca vivida por eles. Quis que seu corpo, pelo aspecto plástico, cativasse o público e que fosse ele a imagem viva da sua mensagem artística [...]. Caetano trouxe para a arena da rua e do palco o próprio corpo e deu o primeiro passo para ser superastro por excelência das artes brasileiras. O corpo é tão importante quanto a voz; a roupa é tão importante quanto a letra; o movimento é tão importante quanto a música. [...] Deixar que os seis elementos não trabalhem em harmonia [...] mas que se contradigam em toda sua extensão, de tal modo que se crie um estranho clima lúdico, permutacional, como se o cantor no palco fosse um quebra-cabeça que só pudesse ser organizado na cabeça do

due to the fact that unlike music, his art was not mass-produced, his work remained marginalized from the wider public. This situation was affirmed by Oiticica (1980) himself in one of his last interviews before his death in 1980. 'On returning from New York I was able to remark on the coldness and indifference of people in relation to what I do.'

Oiticica (1974) while living in New York, associated Rock music with Anthropophagy (the initial inspiration behind both *Tropicália* in music and art) being non-national and having assimilated a diversity of influences. He equated Hendrix's irreverent version of the American National Anthem as a mockingly anti-nationalist stance. Moreover, there is a strong sense that for Oiticica the Rock concert (he mentioned one that occurred in Central Park) represented a similar participatory experience to that of Samba and carnival, which had been so important in his creative development a decade earlier in Brazil. He affirmed this by arguing that the experience of Samba has the greatest proximity to the experience of a Rock concert. However, what distinguished the two musical forms was the sense of rhythm. Samba in this scheme was seen as elitist compared to Rock since it requires initiation while with Rock anyone is able to participate immediately. Luciano Figueiredo (1999) has denied the assumption that Oiticica 'translated' such experiences: that Rock offered Oiticica during his years in New York, a similar experience to Samba. However, there is evidence in other Hélio-Tapes that confirms such a suggestion.

Prior to Oiticica's tape to Augusto de Campos, he had already discussed certain similarities with respect to the involvement of the audience. In conversation with the artist Carlos Vergara (b. 1941), Oiticica (1973b) discussed the ambivalence contained in the *Blocos de Samba*. These distinguish themselves from the Samba Schools for their non-organisational character. Unlike the Schools that are running within a competition and require several rehearsals in addition to possessing a hierarchical structure in which the dancers are placed, the *Blocos* are groups of people joined by a common theme and dress. They are spontaneous occurrences where participants are welcome to join: they do not require invitation but become a part of the *Bloco* by acquiring the dress or costume. Vergara and Oiticica (1973b) discussed the ambivalence that the *Bloco* contained whereby it represented a group that nevertheless allowed the space for individuality. Vergara emphasised this point by claiming that:

In the Samba School there still exists, even at an individual level, a certain performance, this is not the case in the *Bloco* where there is only a desire since as

espectadores. Criando do número para número, Caetano preenchia de maneira inesperada as seis categorias com que ele trabalhava: corpo, voz, roupa, letra, dança, música.

there is no fixed choreography, there can be no good or bad dancer, it is this desire for participation that is marvellous.³⁸³

Oiticica added:

Rock, in my opinion, had something important about it which was that even the most awkward person could participate... you could never say ...ah! This person cannot dance, every one dances [...]³⁸⁴

The association between Rock and Samba raised by Oiticica is pertinent since it entirely eradicates any essentialist or primitivist connotation that might be associated with his work. Rather than being interested in establishing a hybrid between high and low in order to create as the *Modernistas* had previously done, a national art that was concurrently up-to-date with metropolitan tendencies, Oiticica was interested in the experience that Samba could provide, he referred not to contemporaneous tendencies but to a tradition within modern art which related to the association between life which undeniably required an intimate level of contact with the local culture, wherever that may be. It is at this subjective level, that of friendship, that his work operates as an avant-garde practice.

³⁸³ In the original: A escola de Samba ainda é quer dizer o uso do corpo por exemplo na escola de samba exige ainda mesmo em nível individual uma certa performance, no *Bloco* não, exige uma vontade como não tem uma coreografia fixa, como não existe bom ou mal sambista então é vontade isso é maravilhoso.

³⁸⁴ In the original: O que o rock a meu ver teve uma coisa importante que foi isso, que todas as pessoas mais sem jeito que ... que jamais você diria, ah! Essa pessoa não pode sambar, não pode dançar todas dançam [...]

Conclusion

From the early modernists to the work of Oiticica and beyond, the employment of hybrid strategies within Brazilian cultural production has been a regular occurrence. The modernists in the 1920s merged the European modern aesthetic with the local people and landscape. They later combined the ideal of cultural origin, which in Europe was associated with the classical tradition, with the native mythological vocabulary.

Although the art of the 1950s associated itself with an ideal of aesthetic purity, there were cases such as that of Neoconcretism where the notion of hybridity could be said to have been present. This was not as explicit as in the case of *Modernismo*, but related to the media of the work through the notion of the 'Non-Object' as exposed by Gullar (1959c). His 'theory' argued that the object was no longer identifiable as a painting or a sculpture, but assumed a new position between the two categories. Neoconcretism displayed a further hybrid quality in that it attempted to merge the precision of the constructivist language with an intuitive approach more often associated with the *informel*.

Oiticica took the legacy of Brazilian Constructivism and added elements from his experience of popular culture. This evocation of the popular distinguished itself from that proposed by *Modernismo* in that it was based on proximity with the popular classes and therefore relates far more to Bürger's (1974) view of the avant-garde as associated with the 'praxis of life'.

Like the notion of hybridity, the necessity for an ambivalent practice appears throughout these periods. The two notions are in this way related but are not however synonymous. The specific nature of ambivalence is what distinguishes the hybridity of each moment.

The ambivalence of *Modernismo* was above all aesthetic as it operated at the level of representation. Even its tentative examples of abstraction were in this manner a representation of European abstraction rather than non-representation *per se*. Its relation to the local life was distant due precisely to its desire to represent rather than participate.

While Concretism and Neoconcretism were genuinely abstract, their ambivalence was rhetorical since they were obliged to adopt a position that defended the universal quality of art while arguing that their production inserted itself within a national context. While the *Paulistas* saw their work affecting society through eventual improvements in the quality of design, their position with regard to the reality of the 'people' was detached. The *Cariocas* were equally distant, but instead

of purporting their usefulness towards society, they were content to maintain their intellectual and aesthetic practice as an independent activity.

Oiticica's ambivalence was aesthetic, rhetorical and ultimately political. It emerged from his insistence in sustaining an avant-garde position throughout a period of radical socio-political changes. This meant the continuous questioning of his own artistic production. An example of such re-articulation can be noted in his shift regarding his most notorious work, the *Parangolé*.

Towards the end of his life, Oiticica (Appendix 4:1977) made the assertion that all his previous work only represented a prelude for what would come. He associated this new direction in his art with a 'demythologising process'. One can only speculate on what would have been the consequences of such a process had he not tragically died in 1980. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that the elimination from his work, of what he had previously defined as 'myth' had already begun to take place from the late 1960s, and intensified (as argued in Chapter 18) during his residence in New York during much of the 1970s.

The idea of the work's association with 'myth' had been encouraged by the artist in relation to his early *Parangolés* (Oiticica, 1964b):

There is another point which emerges [...]: the occurrence of a true return, through the concept of the *Parangolé*, to a mythical, primordial structure of art, [...]. If this factor was obscured from the Renaissance art onwards, it has tended to increasingly emerge again in the art of our century. An approximation to dance elements, mythic par excellence, or the creation of special places, and so on, implicit in the *Parangolé*, still needs to be clarified. There is, as it were, a 'desire for a new myth', furnished here by these elements of art; they make an interference in the spectator's behaviour: a continuous and far-reaching interference, which would implicate the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology and history.

Oiticica considered the mythological character of his art of the mid-1960s as having strong associations with the primitive. The artist saw in the disenfranchised sectors of Brazilian society a window that opened onto the outside of western civilisation. He saw the 'desire for a new myth', as stated in the above quote, as a recurring theme in modern art. He was convinced, at that moment, that this theme connected his work to various moments in art history: the early modern European fascination with the exotic, the efforts of *Modernismo* to portray the Brazilian native myths, and the experience that Oiticica's mentors, Mário Pedrosa and Ivan Serpa, had with the work of the insane.

Such a position seems however strangely at odds with Oiticica's (1972b) subsequent notes entitled *Parangolé Synthesis*:

DEMYTHIFICATION OF THE PARANGOLÉ

program of the circumstantial

'object-event'

open

non-mythified

non-theatre

non-ritual

non-art object

what remained from PARANGOLÉ-
first were the circumstantial situations

non-myth

meetings-events of experimentalism
open without aspirations to myth
or ritualism of the moment

amoment

breast-feed the moment: don't elevate it to categories of

myth or of aesthetic preciousness³⁸⁵

Other than the obvious shift in the form of writing, the above note lists a number of characteristics that the artist wished to be disassociated from the concept of the *Parangolé*.

The significance of such a shift relates to Oiticica's bitter statement (written in 1970) on the state of Brazilian culture: 'Brazil Diarrhoea' (1973a). The essay was in this sense an anti-manifesto, a shout of frustration at a desperate cultural-political situation. It was not only symptomatic of the conservative environment imposed by the military regime but of the general misunderstanding of Oiticica's own 'politics of ambivalence'. The artist stated (1973a p.18) very clearly that his critical position was dependent on such ambivalences since according to him:

[...] to be ready to judge oneself, choose, create, is to be open to ambivalence, since absolute values tend to castrate any of these liberties; I would even say: to think in absolute terms is to be constantly in error, to age fatally, to direct oneself towards a conservative position (conformisms; paternalisms; etc.); not meaning that one shouldn't choose with firmness: the difficulty of a strong option is always that of shouldering the ambivalences and untangling each problem, piece by piece. To shoulder ambivalences doesn't mean to accept, conformistically, this entire state of affairs; on the contrary, one then aspires to throw it into question. That is the question.

Ambivalence enabled the constant re-evaluation of the artist's own position. It signified a condition of continuous questioning: a state of self-doubt necessary to inform one's own convictions. The artist's approach – which surprisingly remains to be discussed by art historians – was directly related to Oiticica's re-evaluation of his references to 'myth'. These are usually equated with notions of the primitive and/or popular culture. 'Brazil Diarrhoea' was a conscious process of eradication of all references open to 'dilution' or essentialist misrepresentations.³⁸⁶ One need only

³⁸⁵ Reproduced here according to the format presented in Witte de With (1992) p.165.

³⁸⁶ Such an elimination might also be indicative of the artist's *rapprochement* with the concrete poets Haroldo and Augusto de Campos during the 1970s. See excerpts from Hélió Tapes in appendix 2.

compare *Tropicália* of 1967 with the artist's subsequent *Magic Square no.5 – De Luxe* of 1978, to realise the extent of such a shift. [Fig. 67, 88]

However, the posthumous dissemination of Oiticica's work such as the *Parangolé* invariably relates to those produced during 1960s, that is, those that refer directly to the artist's experience of the shantytown and Samba: in other words, those that searched for 'myth'. Yet, if we are to look at his subsequent capes, particularly those produced in New York, we note a substantial difference in approach and aesthetic. [Fig. 56, 85] The early examples possess a level of crudity or rawness in their material and construction that is not present in the later versions which tend to be far more 'constructivist' oriented. The aesthetics of adversity was replaced in the later versions by an attempt to inscribe a constructivist attitude merged with the artist's interest in homoeroticism. The issue of marginality therefore remained albeit in a translated sense: from the social domain the emphasis shifted to that of sexuality.

Oiticica's shift from the aesthetics of poverty towards a re-evaluation or synthesis of his diverse output is perhaps a symptom of his own realisation that certain performative aspects contained within his work could only emerge under intense periods of proximity with the 'community' or friends he collaborated with. Friendship although bridging the alterity between Self and Other, is always a precarious condition. The fragility of the relationship of friendship, its inevitable end, parallels the material and conceptual degeneration of the *Parangolé*. The *Parangolé*, in this sense, is the vestige of friendship since in its first instance - its conception - it incorporates the paradoxes contained by the state of friendship itself.

This relationship has lost some of its intensity, now that in a museum, the dialogue between cultural domains has become a monologue, and that while the spectator is still invited – in some cases - to participate there is a distance installed by the institution that shadows the original invitation to adopt free patterns of behaviour.

Oiticica realised that within a foreign context, the search for 'myth' served only to alienate the participant. The artist also realised that to produce work in New York with such overt references to the culture of Rio could hardly be maintained as a practice connected to the everyday experience. The importance of Bürger's (1974) definition of avant-garde practice is in this sense obvious in understanding the significance of Oiticica's shift while in 'exile'.

It is strange therefore that the museum's preferred work – that is, that work which is most commonly disseminated abroad - is that which relates to Oiticica's 'search for myth' rather than the later production, where he attempted to eliminate overt Brazilian popular connotations.

Such a paradox could be equated with the interpretation that Oiticica's work is submitted to today: being referred to as a key reference for contemporary production. Interpretations of current Brazilian art are often guilty of seeing the evoked spectre of the past as a sign of its authenticity, which in turn acts as a mask that paradoxically becomes the significant element of the work's contemporaneity. This phenomenon has been identified as emerging on a general scale from the articulation between the universal and the national within the postmodern era. Andrew Benjamin (1991 p.135) speaking from a European position describes the contemporary artistic production in terms of:

the ability of a particular artist either to repeat and develop the themes that made up the national heritage or to give expression to a particular aspect - be it geographical or transcendental - of national character. The linking of tradition and nation would provide the grounds for a critical exclusion or inclusion; one sanctioning the promulgation of a canon of national artists. Admission to the canon would reside in the work's capacity to further artistic national identity.

The re-emergence of the national character in culture clearly stems from a notion of pluralism as diametrically opposed to universalism. References to the national within this binary scheme tend to gravitate towards a sense of unity and essence, where the main factor for judgement of cultural pertinence is equated with belonging. However, in peripheral or post-colonial cultures, reference to the national has often coincided with a struggle for autonomy from the dominant culture. Although this places such production in a different light compared to European and/or North American artists, it becomes problematical if seen as an exclusive and determining characteristic. It is possible to purport that - like the art itself - the current national aspect of contemporary Brazilian art is as much a consequence of its 'Brazilianess' as it is a sign of the artists' international awareness.

Discussing the writing of Pedrosa, Terra Cabo (1996 pp.307-8) argued that the critic's evaluation of Oiticica's work was symptomatic of the postmodern cycle brought by the artist's aspiration to a new state of 'myth'. This return was associated with the recuperation of the lost primitive ethos that had characterised much of early modern art. According to Cabo, Postmodernism's recuperation of the primitive occurred through a 'totalised experience' rather than through the modernist visual representation.

However, Oiticica's subsequent realisation that his 'neoprimitive' strategy for cultural production had been misunderstood, problematises most of the current discourses on the artist. Such discourses rely on the artist's development being synchronous with prevalent narratives on art and its theory. The assumption is that the artist's work corresponded to the shift from the field of art as a category of aesthetic

research represented by the constructive period, into the field of culture brought by the artist's interest in the popular. Terra Cabo (1996 p.309) associated the distinction between neoprimitivism and the modernist reference to the primitive by recalling Pedrosa's analysis of artists such as Oiticica and Clark with the more recent evaluations by Foster (1985). In fact, Foster's argument on the impact of the primitive on art is very similar to his analysis (Foster, 1996) of the radicality of the avant-garde and the subsequent institutional pragmatism of the neo-avant-garde. Foster (1996) argued that the failure of the modernists entailed the deferral of such issues. These would later re-emerge as true possibilities devoid of the original utopian character only with the arrival of the neo-avant-gardes in the 1960s. This is also the basis of Foster's critique of Bürger (1974) and it is precisely because of this that such an analysis cannot be equated with Oiticica's creative development.

Oiticica's ambivalent approach has enabled such arguments to be purported in a seemingly convincing manner. The artist claimed (Oiticica, 1973a p.17) that he was opposed to 'any insinuation of a "linear process"' arguing that in his interpretation, processes are inevitably 'global'. Such a statement is easily posited within a postmodern critique of modernist narratives. Nevertheless, Oiticica's critique of linearity is explained in relation to his desire to establish a state of radicality based on what the artist defined as 'global life-world positions – language – behaviour.' The 'language' Oiticica was developing during the 1970s signified a return to modern practices – following his exploration of Brazilian popular culture - rather than a rupture, as Basualdo (2002) argued, from the constructive vocabulary.

As already discussed in Part I, the term modernity is understood in the study as the experience brought by modernisation, being 'both a social and an inner experience' (Harrison & Wood, 1992 p.126), it therefore encompasses – as an experience – both positive and negative responses to modernisation, since these are reactions to the same event. The avant-garde on the other hand is defined by its rupturous nature, its disassociation from the institutional structures, against the autonomous nature of art within a rationalised vision of modernity, bringing art into life. Moreover, as Bürger (1981 p.91) suggests, the fact that those radical avant-garde movements produced works of art that are now considered classic, they also inscribe themselves within the wider historical sense of modernity.

Oiticica's ambivalent creative process meant that throughout his career he oscillated³⁸⁷ between the rational and the intuitive, the objective and the subjective, the transcendental and the wider cultural domain. His rejection of 'myth' related to

³⁸⁷ This is a very inappropriate term since in such oscillations traces of the antagonistic position remained. They were in this sense incomplete oscillations, or ambivalent shifts.

the institutionalisation of his references to the kitschness of popular culture. This is stated quite clearly when discussing the implications within the cultural field of his concepts, he (Oiticica, 1973a p.19) argued that:

The critique of the cult of 'good taste' generated by the ideas of *Tropicália* (that is, the discovery of creative elements in things considered corny, implying that the idea of 'good taste' would be conservative) was transformed into something reactionary by its diluters: stultifying 'corniness' was instituted, since to institutionalise the idea of the corny leads to the permanent glorification of things past (one looks back): today there is a reactionary fever of 'nostalgia' and 'rediscovering values', old-gardism; *Tropicália*'s criticism of Bossa Nova's 'good taste' was, and is, both ambivalent and specific.

Oiticica's oscillations can also be noted during the transition between the *developmentalist* 1950s and the emphasis on the popular during the 1960s, and also between the specificity of Brazilian culture promoted during the 1960s and Oiticica's interest in the subjective lived-experience during the 1970s.

Being associated with the emergence of Posmodernism Oiticica is therefore often posited as an important precedent for Brazilian contemporary art in general. This was particularly emphasised by the fact that his major posthumous retrospective (Witte de With, 1992) exhibition coincided with a number of exhibitions focusing on the work of a younger generation of artists that had emerged during the 1980s in Brazil. It becomes necessary therefore to analyse such connections, common themes and strategies that might run through Oiticica's oeuvre and that have informed associations that his work has with today's contemporary Brazilian art.

The implied linearity that is suggested through such associations between contemporary practice and history, is the result of an emphasis on three key moments in 20th century art in Brazil: (1) Oswald's 'Anthropophagite' Manifesto of 1928, (2) the participatory and environmental work of artists such as Oiticica and Clark during the 1960s and (3) the influence of these on today's generation.

For these three moments, Anthropophagy seemed undeniably paradigmatic. This interpretation was further emphasised by the 1998 São Paulo Biennial, which, under the general theme of *Antropofagia*, situated international contemporary art within the scope of a Brazilian cultural strategy: an interesting reversal which could be seen as an Anthropophagite act in itself. At face value, the assumption is that of a strong cultural tradition continuously developed by various generations of artists.

However, as discussed throughout this study, there are variously conflicting interpretations on the internal historical narratives of Brazilian modern and contemporary art. The formal narrative stated that no internal development was possible since *Modernismo* did not tend towards abstraction. Others recognised

constructivist characteristics within the early works of *Modernismo*: Tarsila's *A Negra* [Fig. 8] is paradigmatic in this sense. The painting was also a key reference in what Morais' (1987) saw as an abyss between the Constructive Will and the dream world of Anthropophagy. *A Negra* according to Morais, inhabits both worlds. Pedrosa saw the Modernism of the 'Semana' as individualistic and provincial compared to the social modernity that followed, arguing that it was architecture that coherently dominated the spirit of Modernism in Brazil, linking *Modernismo* with the 1950s and beyond. For Pedrosa (original undated, reprinted in: Amaral ed., 1975 p. 273), the advent of modern art biennials brought back the individualistic, and institutional nature of modern art. Oiticica's model saw an appropriatory strategy as a constant force since the advent of *Modernismo*, and more specifically since the Anthropophagite Manifesto, arguing that this represented a language rather than an aesthetic. More recently, Herkenhoff (2001) has described a historical linearity based on the music and colour of carnival: a form of postmodern baroque.

Brazilian contemporary art's emergence on the international art circuit during the 1990s was accompanied by certain expectations. These related to the perceived vitality of an art that demonstrated a contemporary pertinence, both conceptually and aesthetically, yet that belonged to an autonomous development, with a historical narrative of its own. Contained in a pre-established formal lineage that could be understood and interpreted with minimal interference from the consensual History of art, this production was formally traced to its predecessors.³⁸⁸

On the one hand, Anthropophagy may indicate that such a notion of continuity is finally emerging as artists refer as much to a local 'tradition' as they do to international tendencies.³⁸⁹ On the other hand, at a time when notions of historical linearity are rejected, it seems ironical that the international dissemination of Brazilian contemporary art can only occur if it is placed within this local and seemingly fixed historical context. Perhaps contemporary Brazilian art's experience over the last decade, is related to the process of globalisation, which Canclini (2000 p.45), in a recent article, has claimed that:

³⁸⁸ A typical dilution of the historical specificity of each generation in recent Brazilian art can be noted from statements such as Cameron's (2000 p.11):

'The history of Brazilian art since the sixties developed along quite a different trajectory from the rest of the West, and the implications of that evolution are only now [with the work of younger artists such as Ernesto Neto] being felt strongly outside its borders. From the new constructivist tendencies developed by Hélio Oiticica, among others, an entirely new form of art emerged called *Nova Objetividade* (New Objectivity). Spearheaded by Oiticica, Lygia Clark and Cildo Meireles, this new branch of activity was unprecedented in its placement of the spectator at the centre of the creative action, so to speak.'

Similar linearities are suggested by: Genocchio (1997 p.23), Herkenhoff (2001 p.11, 12,13) and Sevcenko (2002 p.106) among many others.

³⁸⁹ This duality is discussed in: Asbury (1999, 2002 and 2003).

destroys or weakens inefficient producers, and presents peripheral cultures with the choice of remaining fixed within their local traditions, or exporting themselves in a stylised, folkloristic form amenable to the demands of transnational [...] companies.

Canclini was not referring specifically to the field of art, yet there are certain affinities that allow a parallel to be drawn.

Although the '80s generation' is internationally recognised as representing a historical continuity with previous national movements, in Brazil their arrival was considered as a rupture. Many of those who were engaged with the legacy of conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s, were overshadowed by a generation that arrived *en masse* in a mood of renewal that was seen to correspond instead to contemporaneous international tendencies. Milton Machado's (1992 p.339) arguments in relation to the polemics associated with the emergence of the 1980s generation could be extended, in this manner, into the context of their wider international reception during the 1990s:

It seems more appropriate to believe, with Nietzsche, that the production of lies in art acquires a nobility due to the fact that this is how it produces truths. Today the good artists of the 80s generation have already affirmed themselves as such [...] many have managed finally to acquire their own genuine individualities, which they rescued from the attempted label: that normative and paradoxical description the 'individuality of the group'.³⁹⁰

Oiticica's connection with Brazil's internal Other is what distinguishes his position from today's production and connects him with the issues and debates of the 1960s. Moreover, this is the key for uncovering the myth that posits him as a paradigm for contemporary art in Brazil. This has occurred through the predominantly foreign desire (Mesquita, 1999) to posit him as a historical precedent for today's Brazilian art production. It is a process that appropriates Oiticica as symbolic of otherness in order to authenticate and thus market an otherwise undifferentiated contemporary production. This undifferentiation pertains to the process of the global aesthetic market whereby issues, even political ones, are transformed - through repetition - into marketable artistic trademarks, thus emptying any conceptual pertinence that the work of art might initially propose.

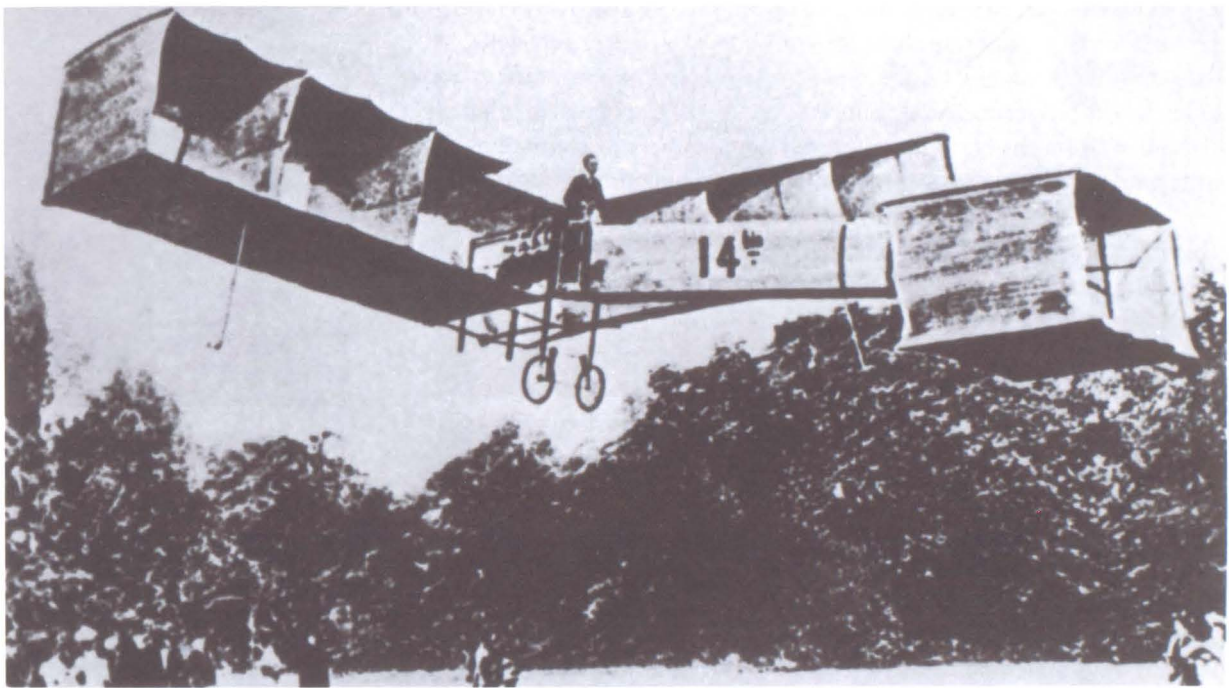
Oiticica's position of ambivalence offers a progressive strategy through critical resistance. It does not operate by means of totalised or linear notions of history but

³⁹⁰ In the original: Melhor que ficemos com Nietzsche, na crença de que a produção de mentiras da arte adquire sua nobreza pelo fato de que é assim que ela produz verdades. A essas alturas, os bons artistas da 'Geração 80' já se afirmam como tais – alguns, até como 'os tais'; muitos conseguiram finalmente adquirir suas genuínas individualidades, resgatá-las

through his re-evaluation of tradition within the problematics of contemporaneity. This is evident in his appropriation of the appropriatory strategy of Anthropophagy. Oiticica thus transformed an exhausted tradition into a relevant and critical stance for the present. If Oiticica is to serve as a true historical precursor in the sense that Oswald de Andrade's notion of Anthropophagy stood as a historical precursor during the 1960s, it is necessary that the Oiticician tradition be re-evaluated in terms of the contemporary. To do this without restricting it purely to a formalist view of art is the responsibility of today's generation of artists who claim this tradition as their own.

Illustrations

1. Santos Dumont, the Brazilian pioneer of aviation, flying the 14bis in Paris (undated), photograph.



2. Robert Delaunay, *L'Equipe de Cardiff* (The Cardiff Team), 1913. Oil on canvas, 195.5 x 132 cm.

3. Anita Malfatti, *Estudo para a Boba* (Study for The Fool), 1915-16. Charcoal on paper, 59 x 40 cm.



4. Anita Malfatti, *O Homem de Sete Cores* (The Man of Seven Colours), 1915-16. Charcoal and pastel on paper, 60.7 x 45 cm. Museu de Arte Brasileira da FAAP.

5. Anita Malfatti, *O Japonês* (The Japanese), 1915-16. Oil on canvas, 61 x 51 cm.



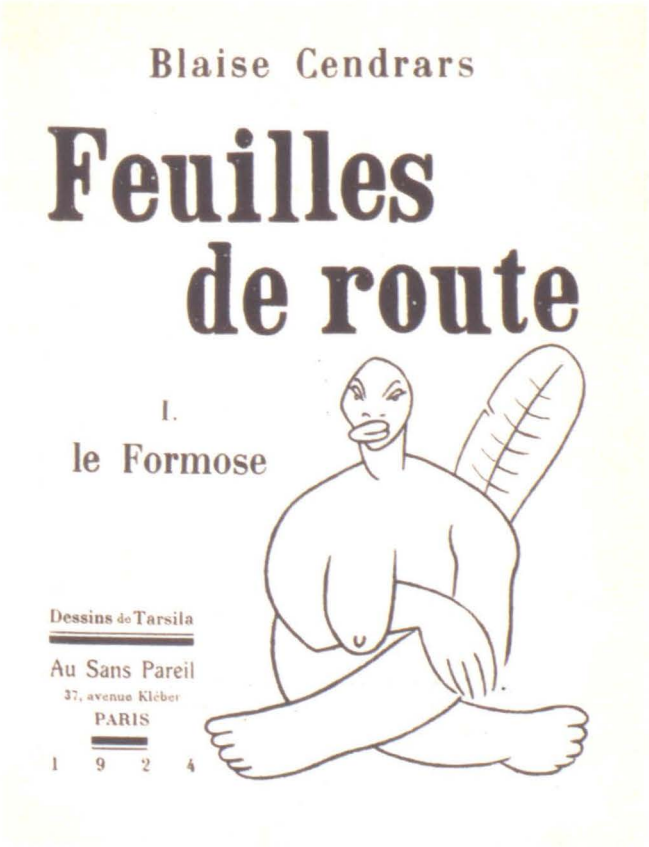
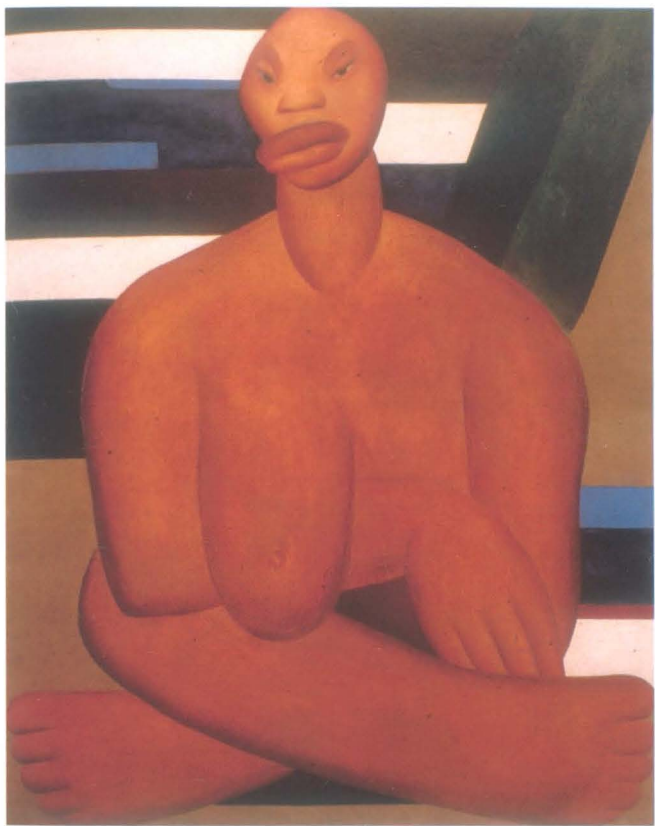
6. Tarsila do Amaral, *EFCB* (Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil / Brazil Central Railway Line) 1924. Oil on canvas, 142 x 126.8 cm.



7. '*Semana de 22*' (Modern Art Week of 1922) Group Portrait, [From left to right, top to bottom: Francesco Pettinati (Italian Journalist), anonymous, René Thiollier, Manuel Bandeira, A.F. Schmidt, Paulo Prado, Graça Aranha, Manoel Vilaboim, Goffredo da Silva Telles, Couto de Barros, Mário de Andrade, Cândido Motta Filho, Rubens Borba de Moraes, Luís Aranha, Tácito de Almeida, and Oswald de Andrade.] from Tarsila do Amaral's photo-album, 22 x 53.5 cm.



8. Tarsila do Amaral, *A Negra* (The Negress) 1923. Oil on canvas, 100 x 81.3 cm.



9. Frédéric Sauser (Blaise Cendrars), *Feuilles de Route*. Design by Tarsila do Amaral, 1924.

10. Tarsila do Amaral, *Abaporu*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 85 x 73 cm.



11. Schedel, *Liber Crinicarum*, 1493 (pp. 185, 196). [Image of a Sciapode.]



f—Schedel, *Liber Cronicarum*, 1493
(pp. 185, 196)

12. Engraving in: Amerigo Vespucci, Strassburg, 1509.

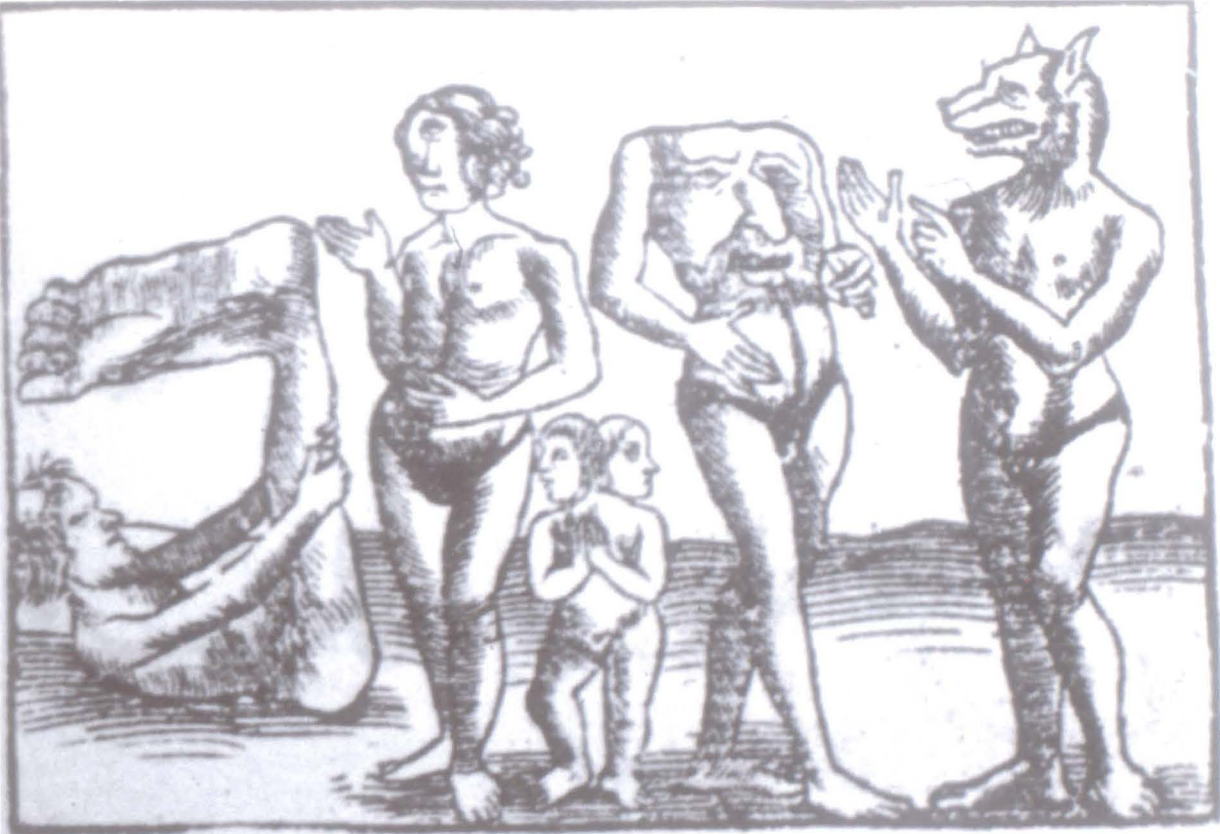
Von der newen Welt

mit welches willē wir danitzemal nit wenig belustiget
 ewesen. Von welcher leist sitten (da wir sie haben gese-
 hen/ hond wir die seitmal die Bequemlichkeit sich begibt/
 auch vnderweil herein wöllen ziehen.

Von irē leben vnd sitten

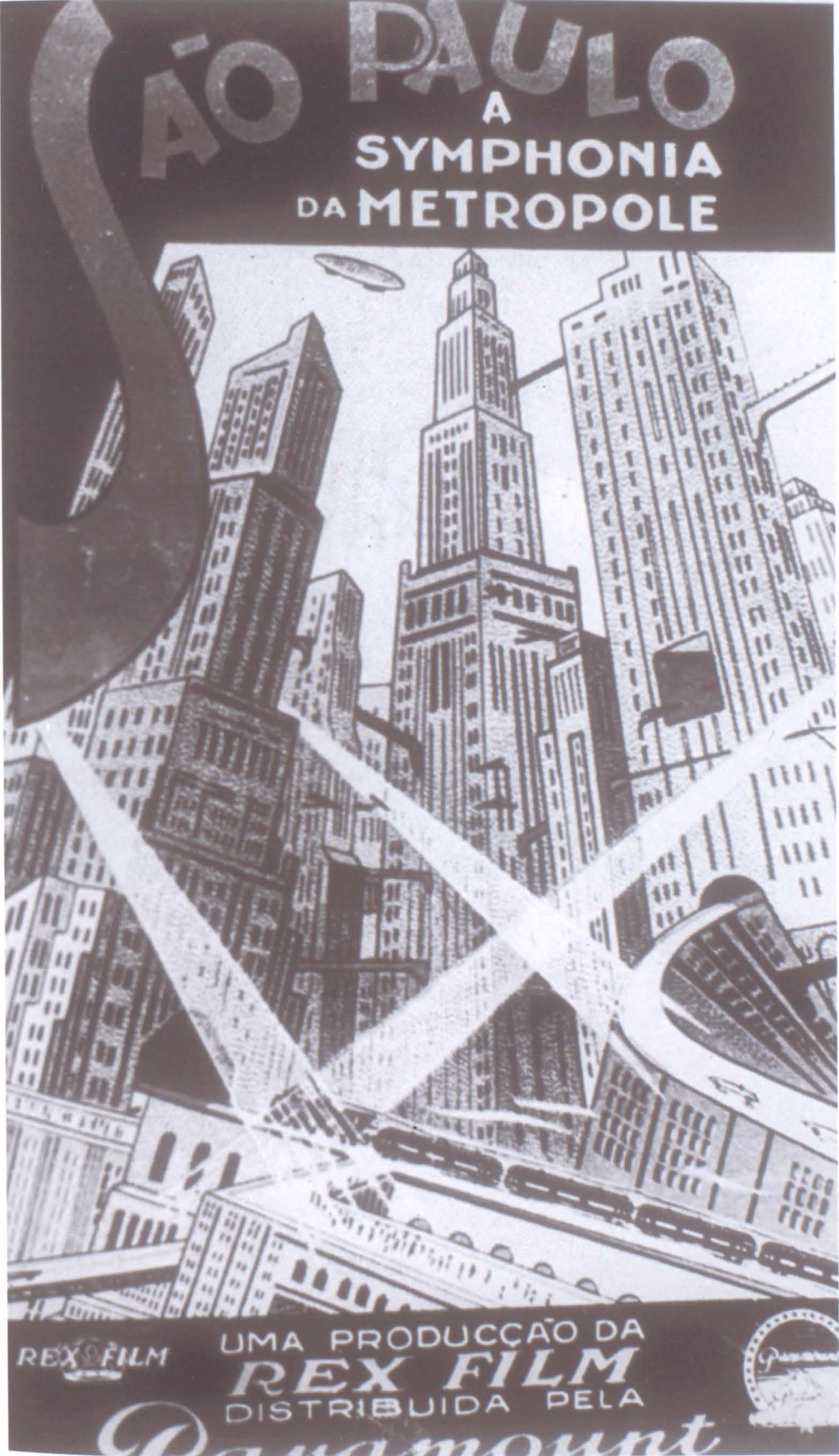


13. Master BXG (Germany, 1470-90), Albertina, Viena. Engraving. ['Medieval wild folk evolve to exemplify natural and original tenderness, and furthermore, they appear as a happy family in a paradisiac land.'] Source: Bartra (1992). p.22



h—Herold, *Heydenwelt*, 1554 (p. 184)

15. São Paulo, *A Symphonia da Metrópole* (The Metropolis Symphony), 1929. Photograph of the *Journal Focus na Cidade* (Focus on the City).



16. Tarsila do Amaral, *Antropofagia*, 1929. Oil on canvas, 126 x 142 cm.

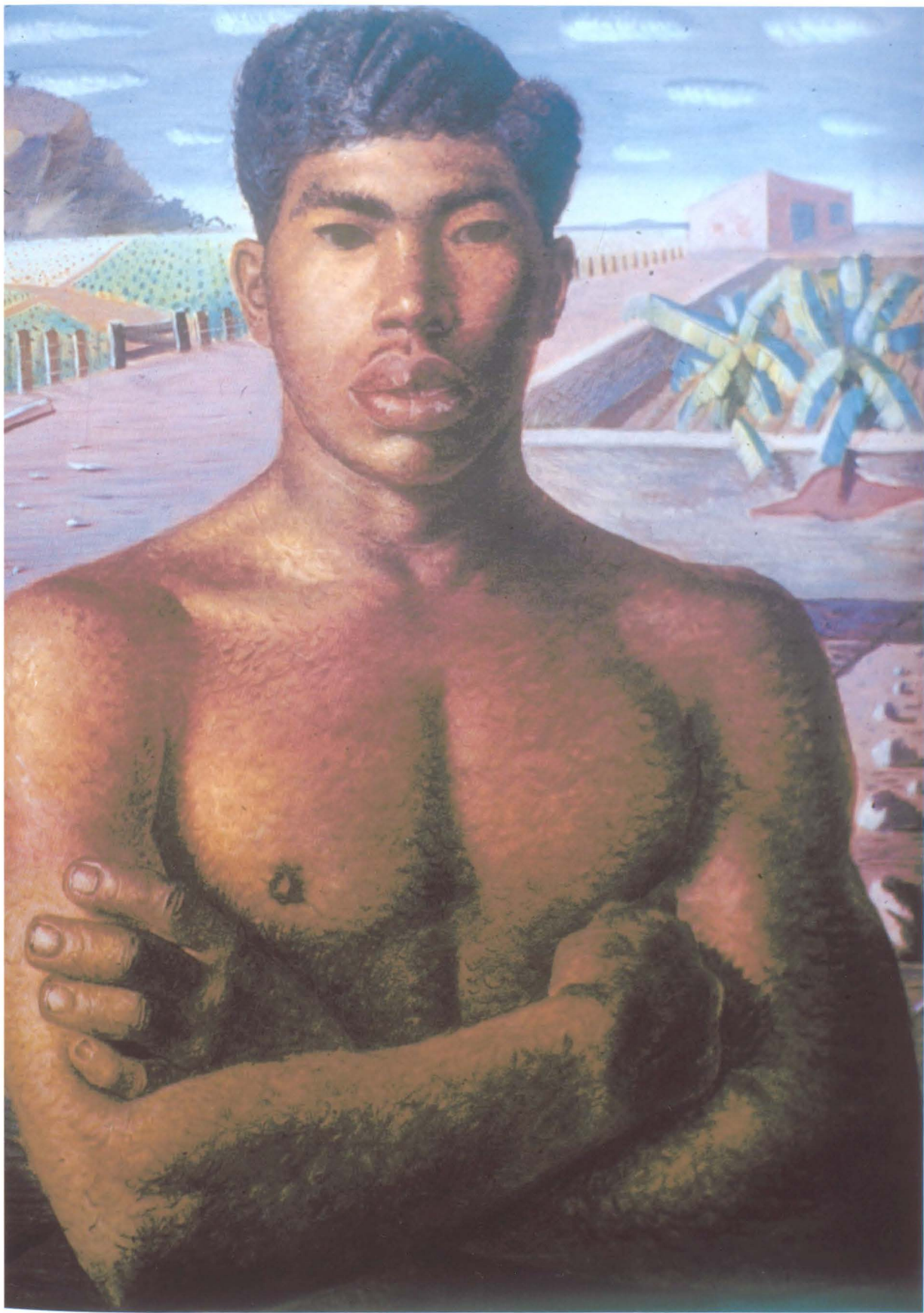


17. Tarsila do Amaral, *Operários* (Workers), 1933. Oil on canvas, 150 x 205 cm.



18. Tarsila do Amaral, *Segunda Classe* (Second Class), 1933. Oil on canvas, 110 x 151 cm.

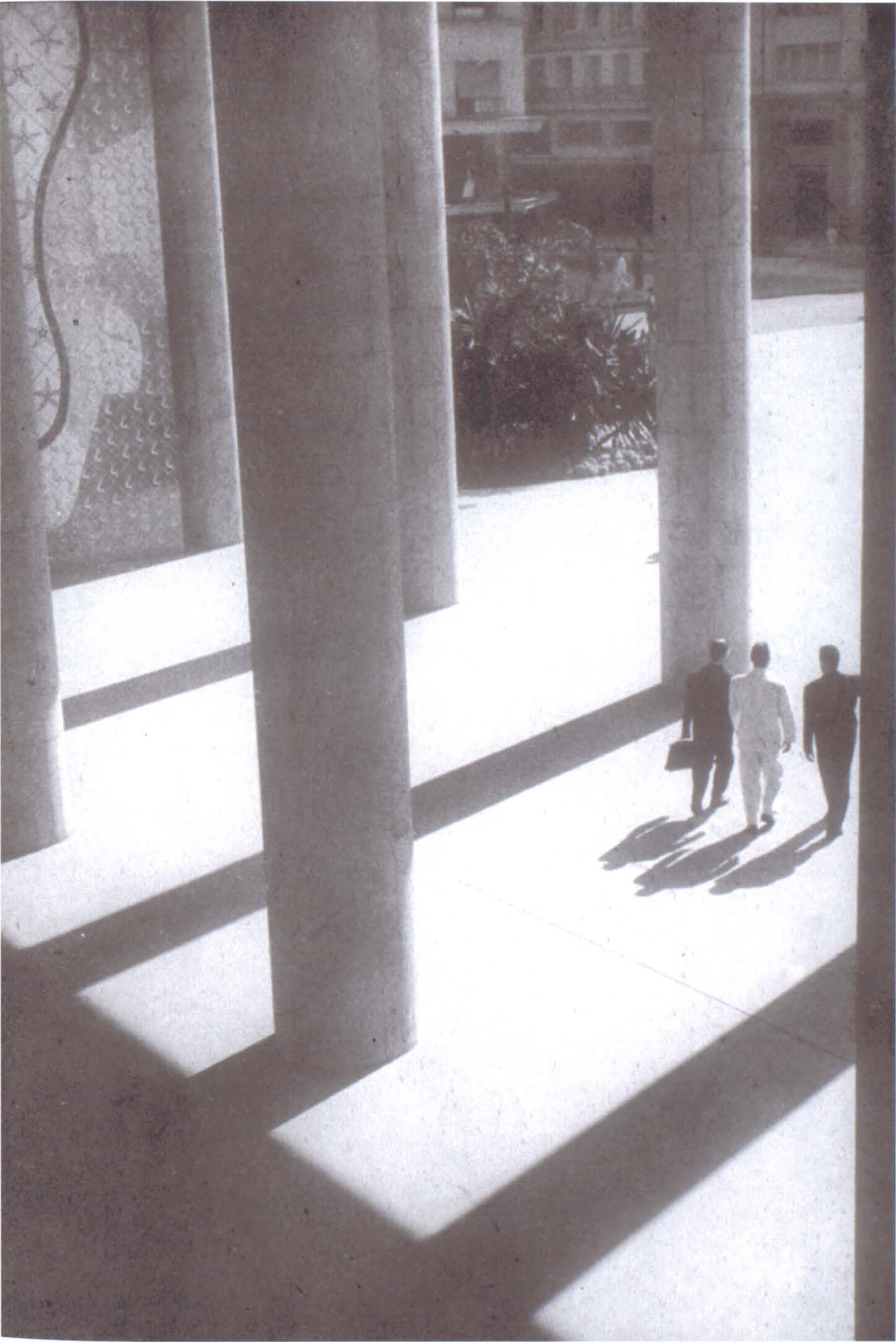
19. Cândido Portinari, *Mestiço* (Mestizo) 1934. Oil on canvas.



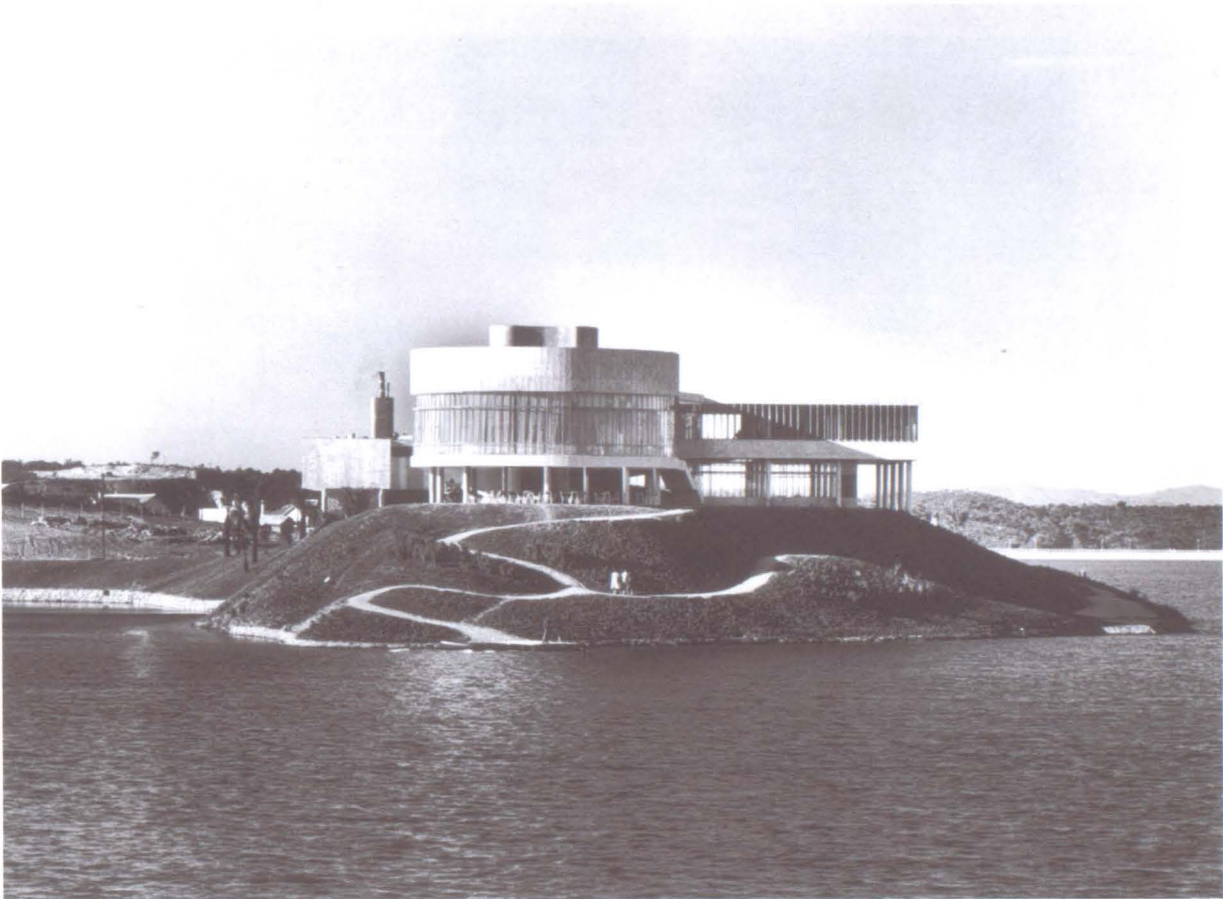
20. Cândido Portinari, *Café* (Coffee) 1933. Oil on canvas, 130 x 195 cm.



21. Lúcio Costa et al, *Ministério da Educação e Saúde* (Ministry of Education and Health), Rio de Janeiro, 1937-45.



22. Oscar Niemeyer, *Pampulha Complex*: Casino (view from the lake and main entrance) 1942.



23. Roberto Burle Marx, *Jardim Suspendido do Ministério da Educação e Saúde* (Suspended Garden at the Ministry of Education and Health) 1937. Gouache on paper.



24. Roberto Burle Marx, *Jardim Suspendido do Ministério da Educação e Saúde* (Suspended Garden at the Ministry of Education and Health) aerial view, Rio de Janeiro 1939-45.

ART CONCRET

GROUPE ET REVUE FONDÉS EN 1930 A PARIS

PREMIÈRE ANNÉE - NUMÉRO D'INTRODUCTION - AVRIL MIL NEUF CENT TRENTE

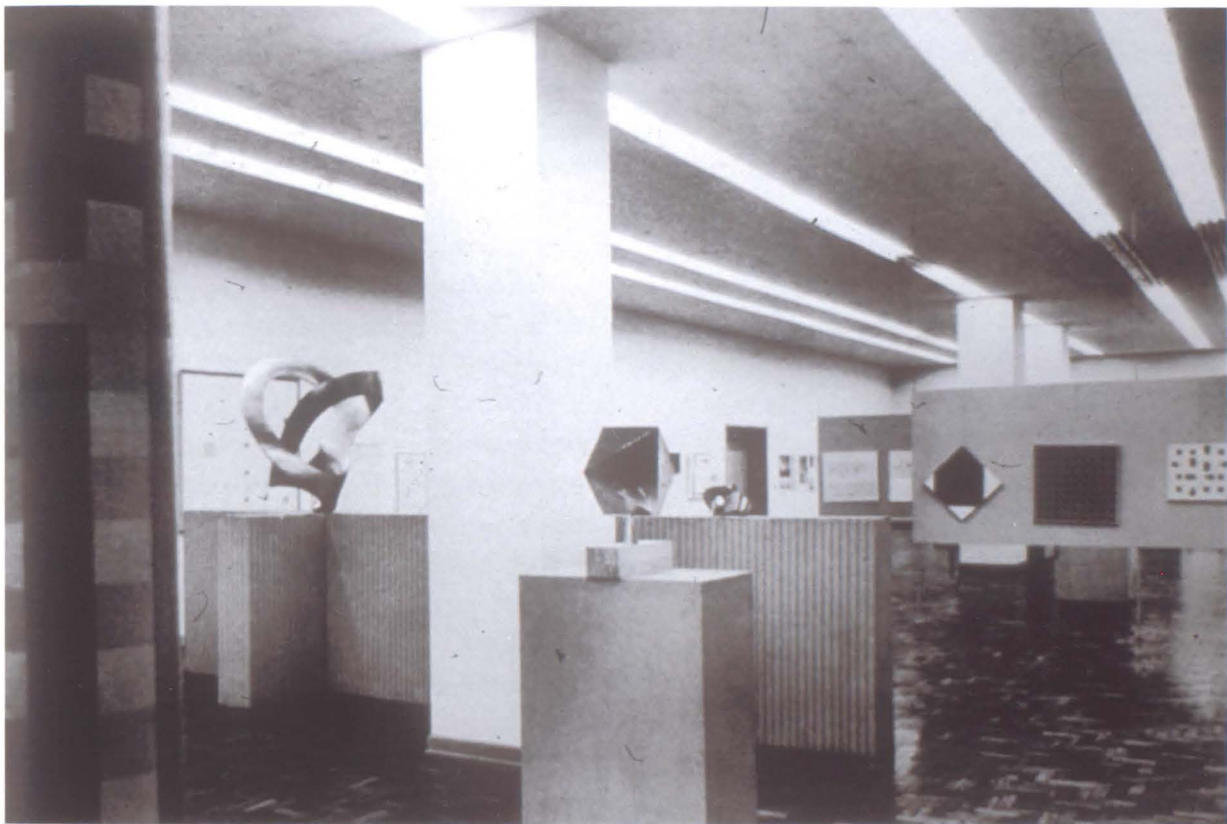
BASE DE LA PEINTURE CONCRÈTE

Nous disons :

- 1^o L'art est universel.
- 2^o L'œuvre d'art doit être entièrement conçue et formée par l'esprit avant son exécution. Elle ne doit rien recevoir des données formelles de la nature, ni de la sensualité, ni de la sentimentalité.
Nous voulons exclure le lyrisme, le dramatisme, le symbolisme, etc.
- 3^o Le tableau doit être entièrement construit avec des éléments purement plastiques, c'est-à-dire plans et couleurs. Un élément pictural n'a pas d'autre signification que « lui-même » en conséquence le tableau n'a pas d'autre signification que « lui-même ».
- 4^o La construction du tableau, aussi bien que ses éléments, doit être simple et contrôlable visuellement.
- 5^o La technique doit être mécanique c'est-à-dire exacte, anti-impressionniste.
- 6^o Effort pour la clarté absolue.

Carlsund, Doesbourg, Hélion, Tutundjian, Wantz.

26. Max Bill exhibition, installation view, Museu de Arte de São Paulo 1950.



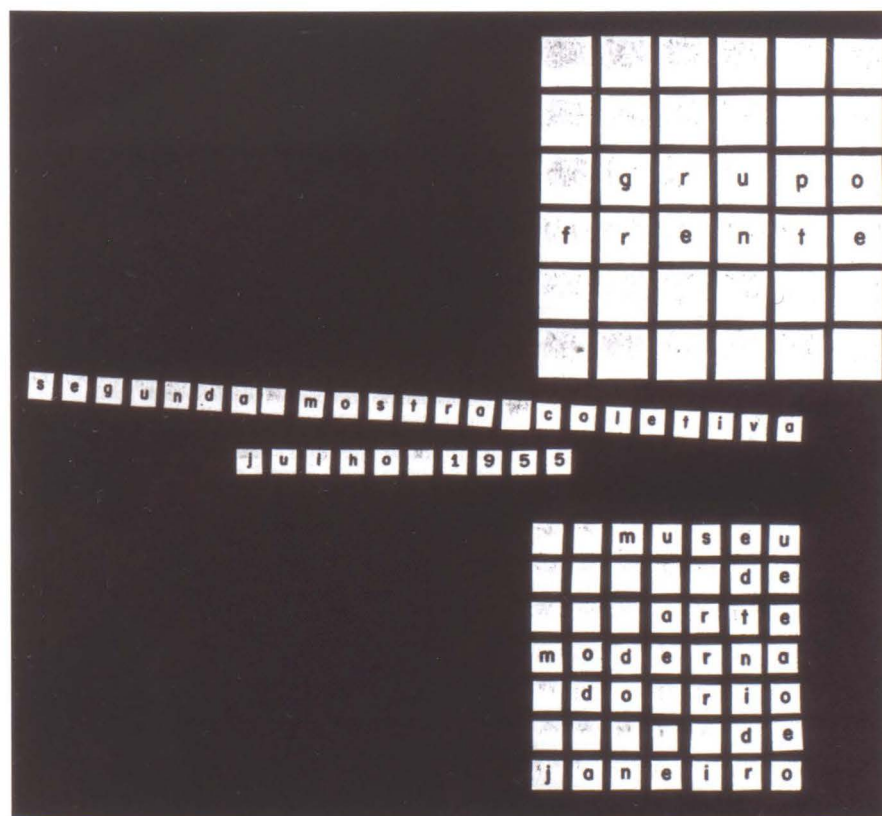
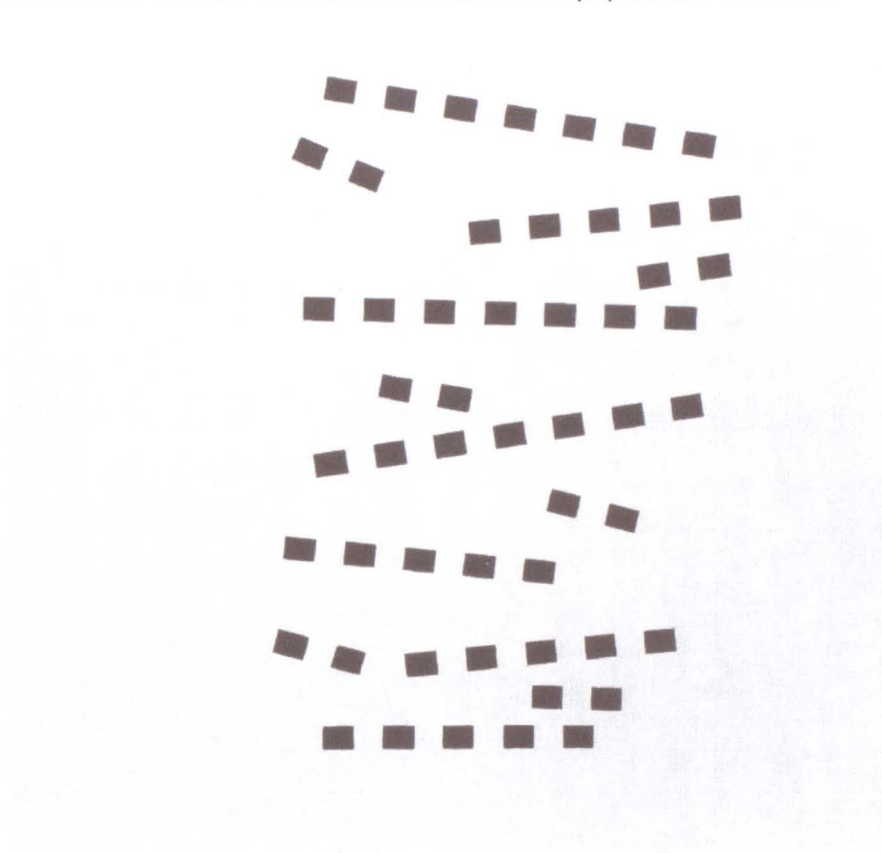
27. Max Bill, *Tripartite Unity*, 1948-49. Stainless Steel, 114 x 88.3 x 98.2 cm.

28. Flávio de Carvalho walking in São Paulo with his 'New Look' 1956. Photograph, 30 x 40 cm.



29. Flávio de Carvalho, 'New Look' *Traje do Novo Homem dos Trópicos* ('New Look' Clothing for the New Man of the Tropics) 1956.

30. Arthur Amora, Untitled, late 1940s. Ink on paper, 37.8 x 56 cm.



31. Grupo Frente, *Segunda Mostra Coletiva*. Exhibition Catalogue Cover, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 1955.

ruptura

charroux — cordeiro — de Barros — feijer — haar — sacilotto — wladyslaw

a arte antiga foi grande, quando foi inteligente.

contudo, a nossa inteligência não pode ser a de Leonardo.

a história deu um salto qualitativo:

não há mais continuidade!

então nós distinguimos

- os que criam formas novas de princípios velhos.
- os que criam formas novas de princípios novos.

por que?

o naturalismo científico da renascença — o método para representar o mundo exterior (três dimensões) sobre um plano (duas dimensões) — esgotou a sua tarefa histórica.

foi a crise

foi a renovação

hoje o novo pode ser diferenciado precisamente do velho. nós rompemos com o velho por isto afirmamos:

é o velho

- todas as variedades e hibridações do naturalismo;
- a mera negação do naturalismo, isto é, o naturalismo "errado" das crianças, dos loucos, dos "primitivos" dos expressionistas, dos surrealistas, etc. . . .;
- o não-figurativismo hedonista, produto do gosto gratuito, que busca a mera excitação do prazer ou do desprazer.

é o novo

- as expressões baseadas nos novos princípios artísticos;
- todas as experiências que tendem à renovação dos valores essenciais da arte visual (espaço-tempo, movimento, e matéria);
- a intuição artística dotada de princípios claros e inteligentes e de grandes possibilidades de desenvolvimento prático;
- conferir à arte um lugar definido no quadro do trabalho espiritual contemporâneo, considerando-a um meio de conhecimento deduzível de conceitos, situando-a acima da opinião, exigindo para o seu juízo conhecimento prévio.

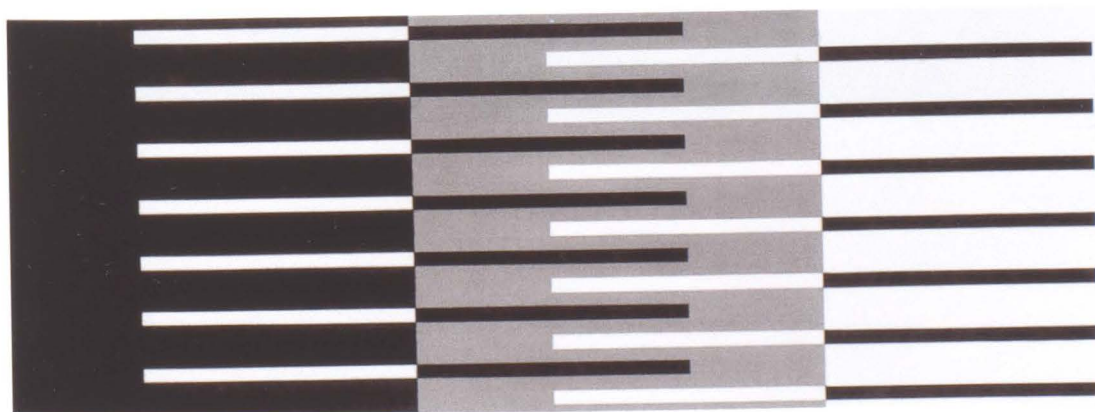
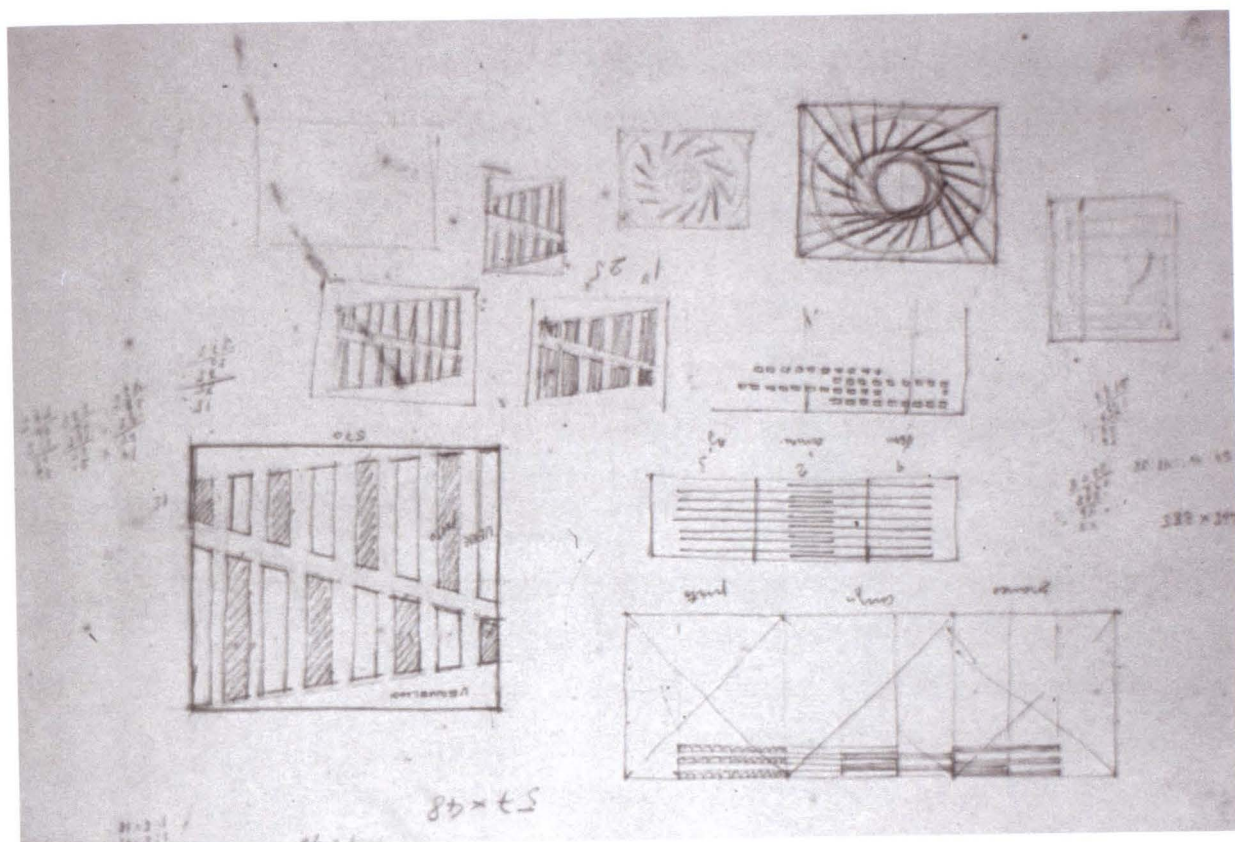
arte moderna não é ignorância, nós somos contra a ignorância.

33. Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* 1937. Oil on canvas, 349.3 x 776.6 cm.



34. Candido Portinari, *Lázaro* 1944. Oil on canvas, 150 x 300 cm.

35. Luís Sacilloto, *Projetos* (Projects) 1955. Pencil and ink on paper, 33 x 48 cm.

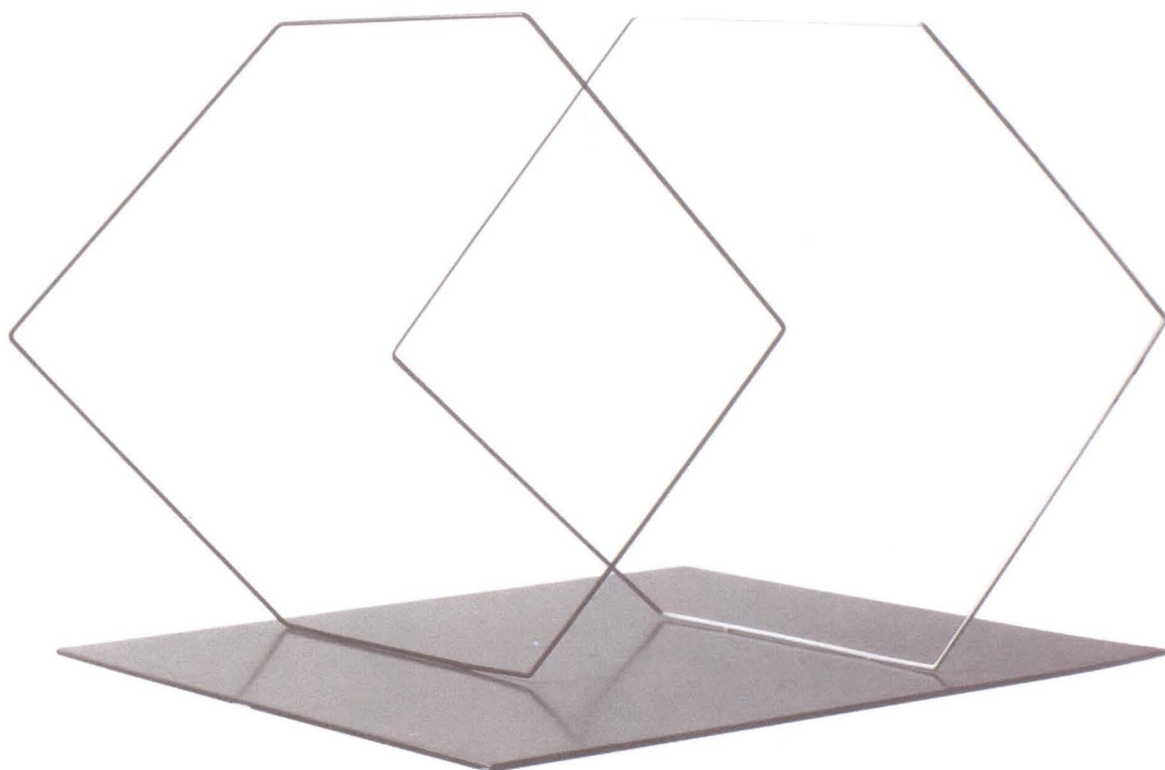


36. Luís Sacilloto, *Concreção 5521* (Concretion 5521) 1955. Enamel on wood, 30 x 90 cm.

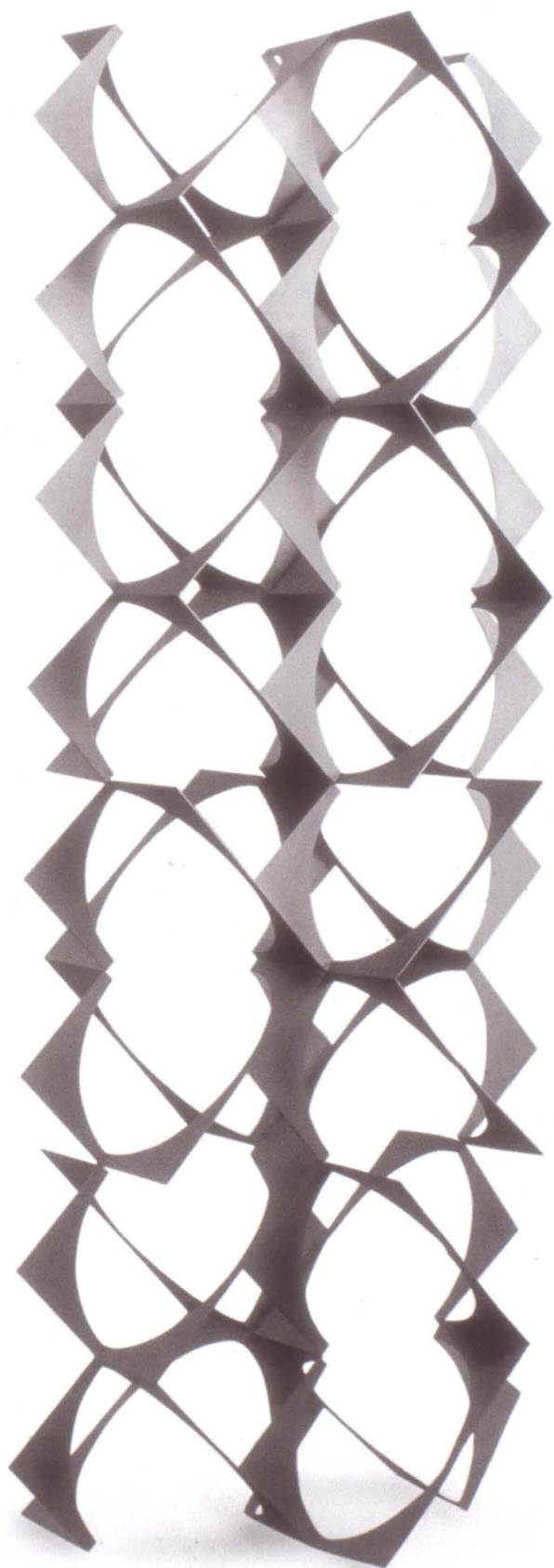
37. Lygia Clark in her studio selecting forms, Rio de Janeiro 1950s.



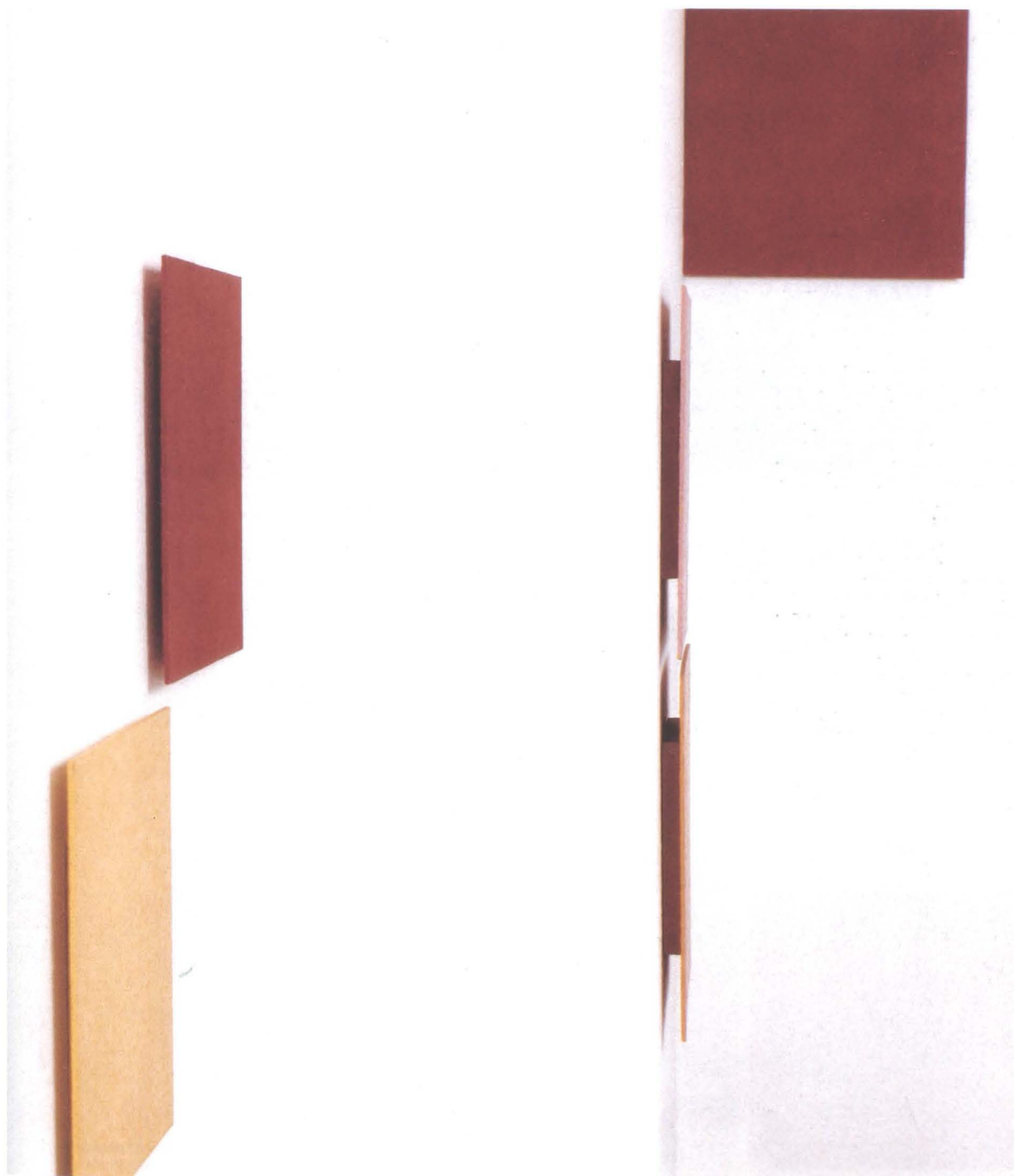
38. Franz Weissman, *Dois Cubos Lineares Virtuais* (Two Linear Virtual Cubes) 1951. Iron, 52 x 77 x 55 cm.



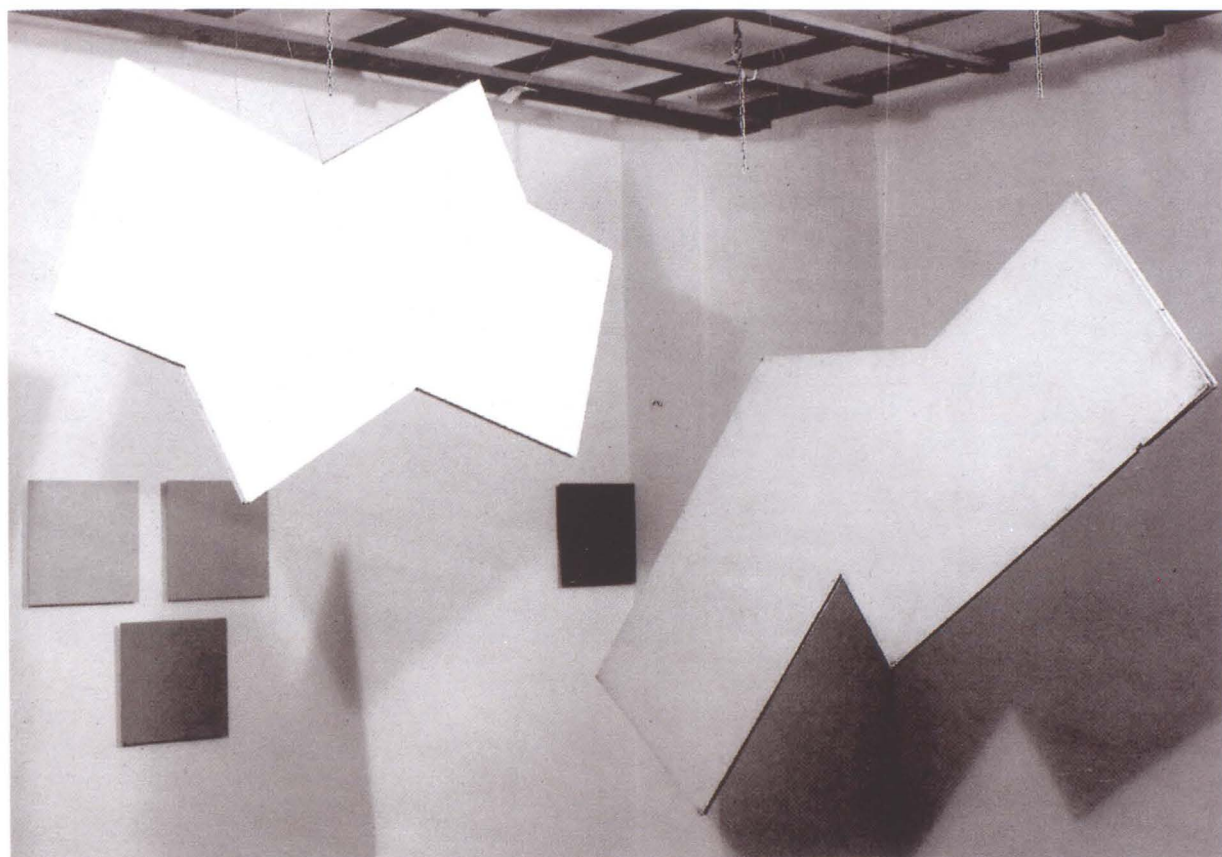
39. Franz Weissmann, *Coluna Neoconcreta* (Neoconcrete Column) 1958. Painted Iron, 196, 76, 52 cm.



40. Hélio Oiticica, *Monocromáticos* (Monochromatics) 1959. Oil on wood, 30 x 30 cm. (each).



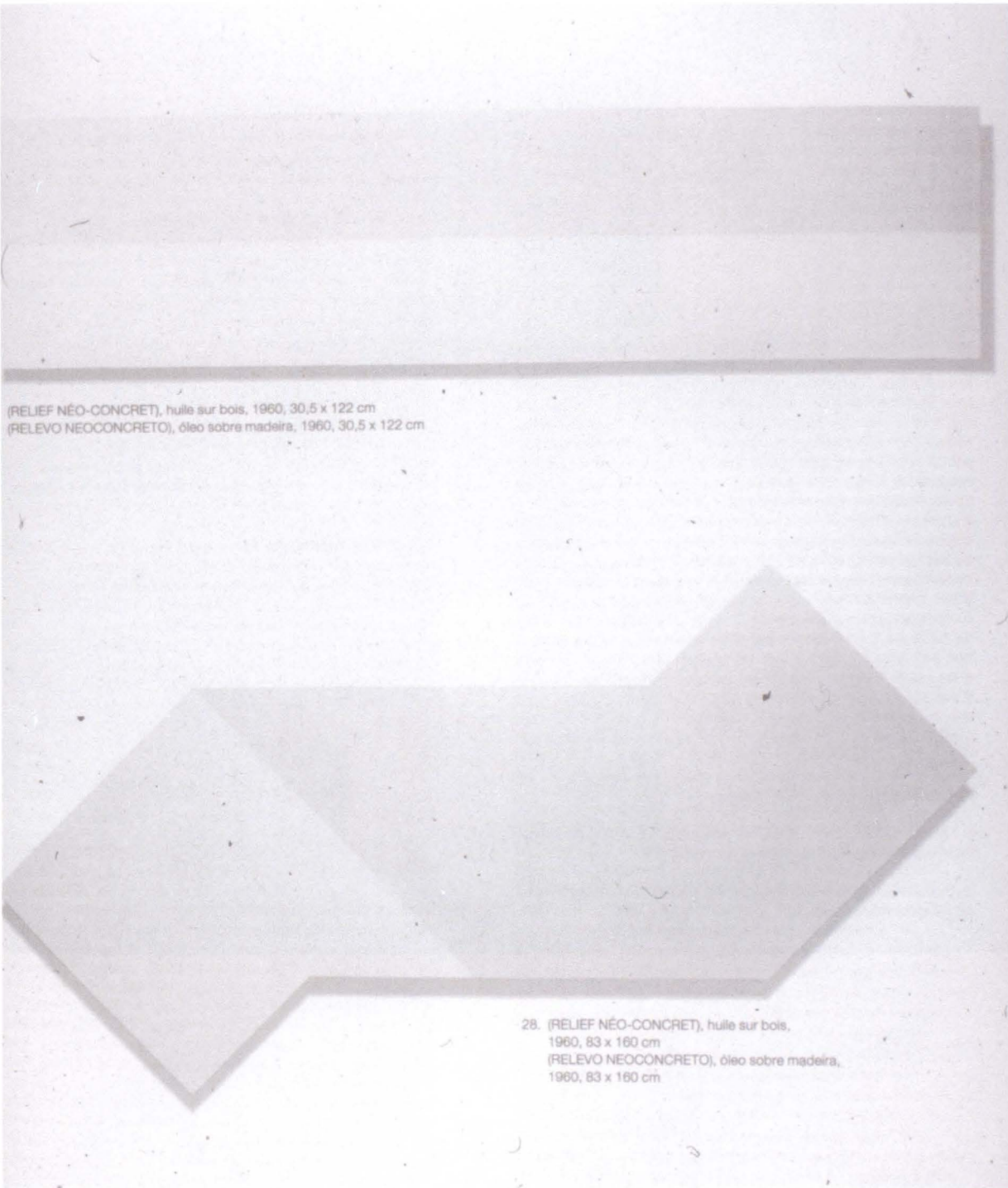
41. Hélio Oiticica, *Bilaterais* (Bilaterals) 1959. Oil on wood (variable dimensions).



42. Hélio Oiticica, *Relevos Espaciais* (Spatial Reliefs) 1959. Acrylic on wood (variable dimensions). Installation view XXIV São Paulo Bienal, 1998.



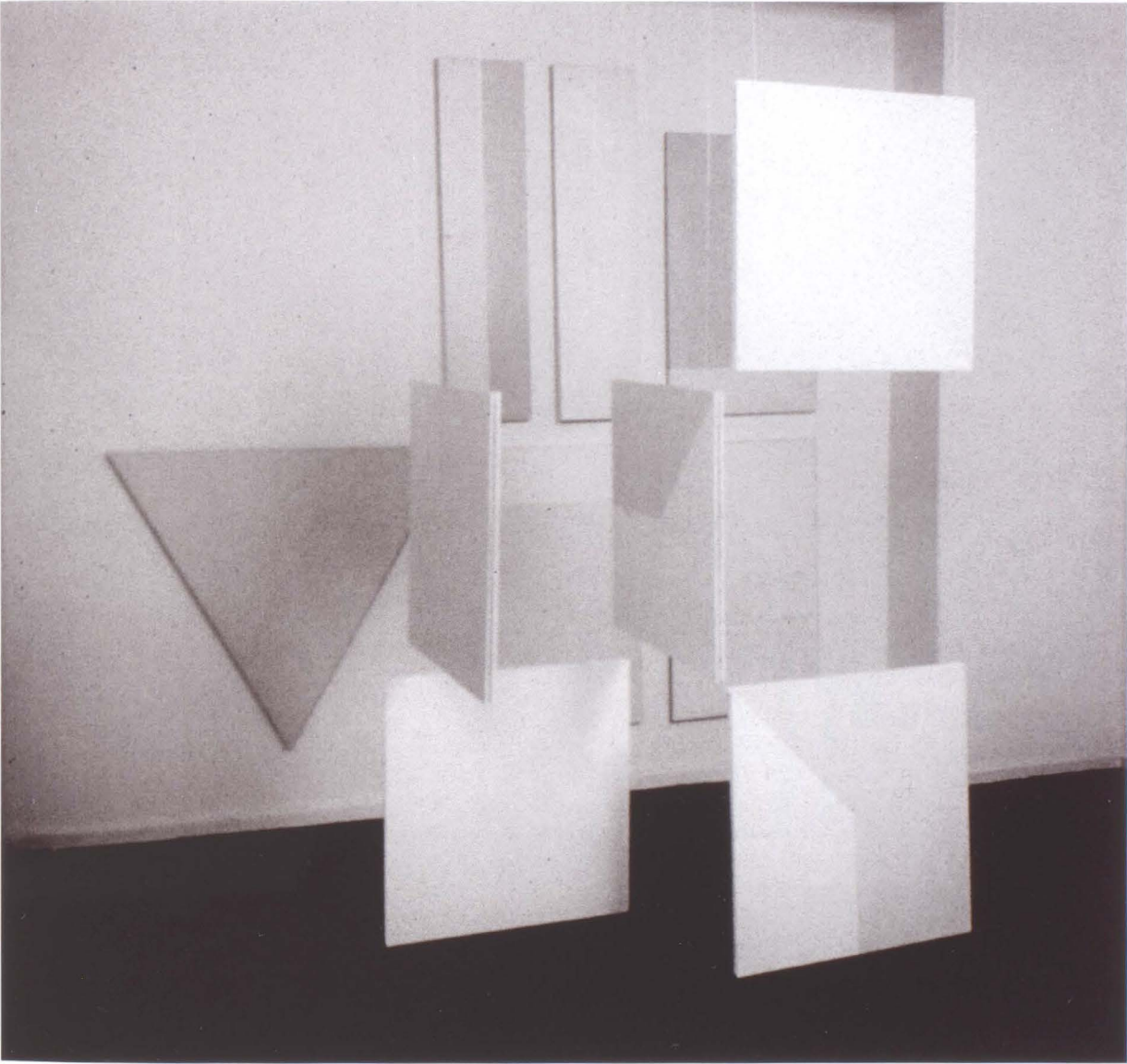
43. Hélio Oiticica, *Relevos Neoconcretos* (Neoconcrete Reliefs) 1960. Oil on wood, 30 x 122 cm and 83 x 160 cm.



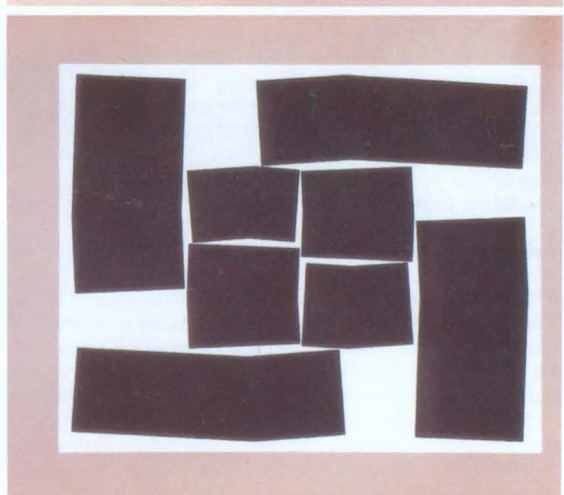
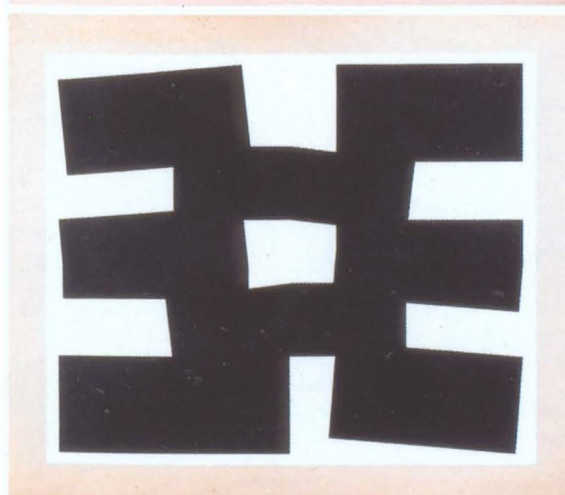
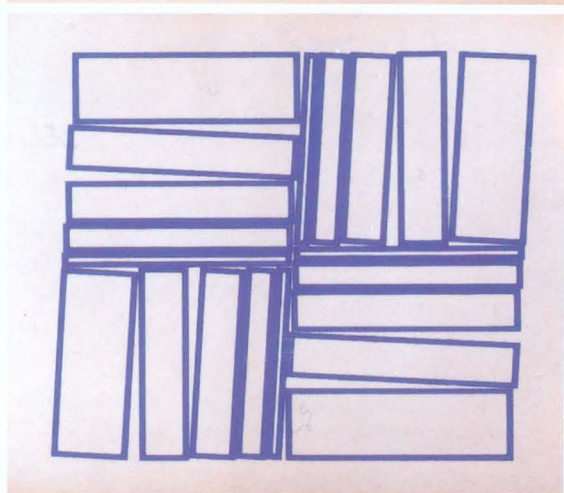
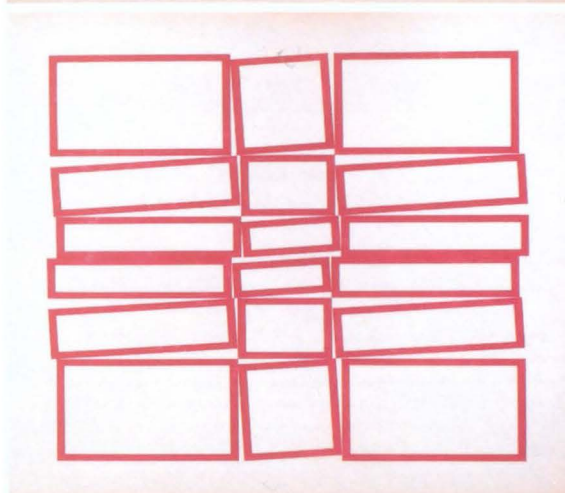
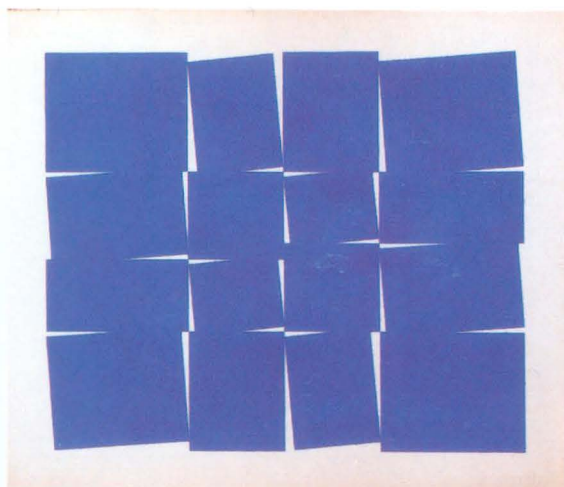
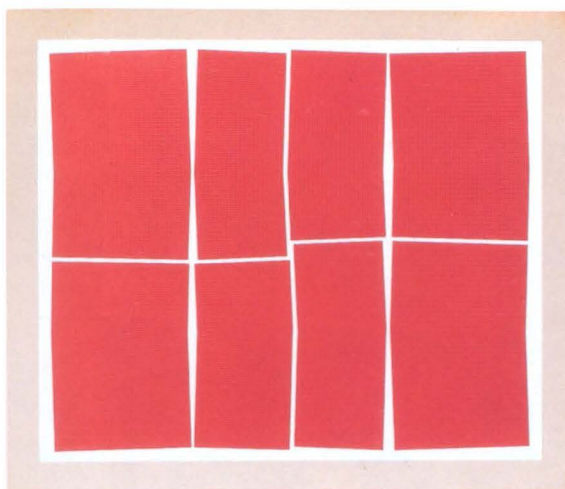
(RELIEF NÉO-CONCRET), huile sur bois, 1960, 30,5 x 122 cm
(RELEVO NEOCONCRETO), óleo sobre madeira, 1960, 30,5 x 122 cm

28. (RELIEF NÉO-CONCRET), huile sur bois,
1960, 83 x 160 cm
(RELEVO NEOCONCRETO), óleo sobre madeira,
1960, 83 x 160 cm

44. Hélio Oiticica, *Bilateral Equali, Não-Objeto* (Bilateral *Equali*, Non-Object) 1960. Oil on wood (variable dimensions).



45. Hélio Oiticica, *Metaesquemas* 1958. Gouache on paper, 55 x 64 cm (each).



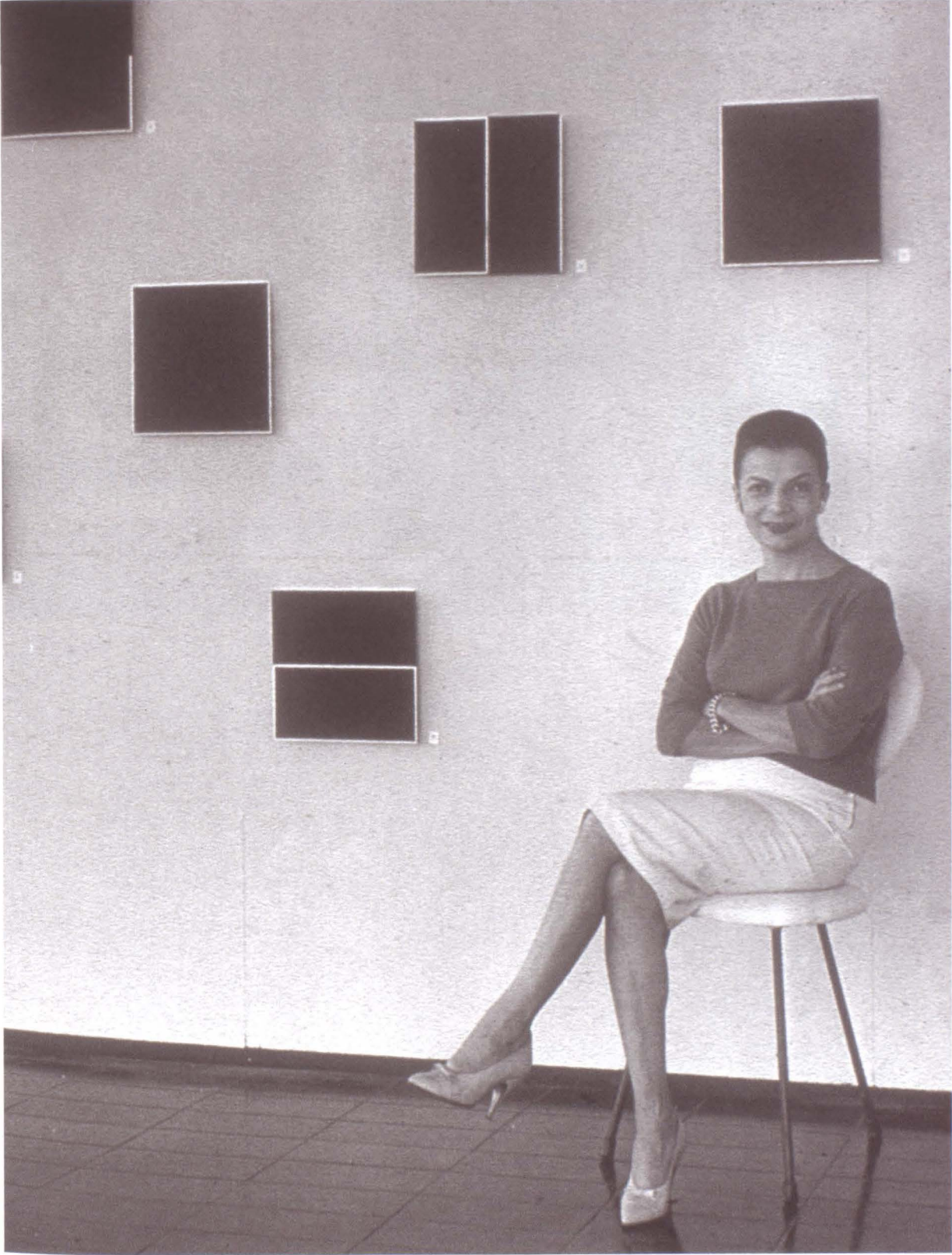
46. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólido Vidro 4 Terra* (Glass Bólido 4 Earth) 1964.



47. Hélio Oiticica, *Metaesquema Sêco 27* (*Metaesquema Dry 27*), 1957. Gouache on paper, 39 x 43 cm.



48. Lygia Clark, *Unidades*, no. 1 – no. 7 (Units, no. 1 – no.7) 1958. Industrial paint on wood, 30 x 30 cm (each). Photograph of Clark at the Neoconcrete exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro 1959.



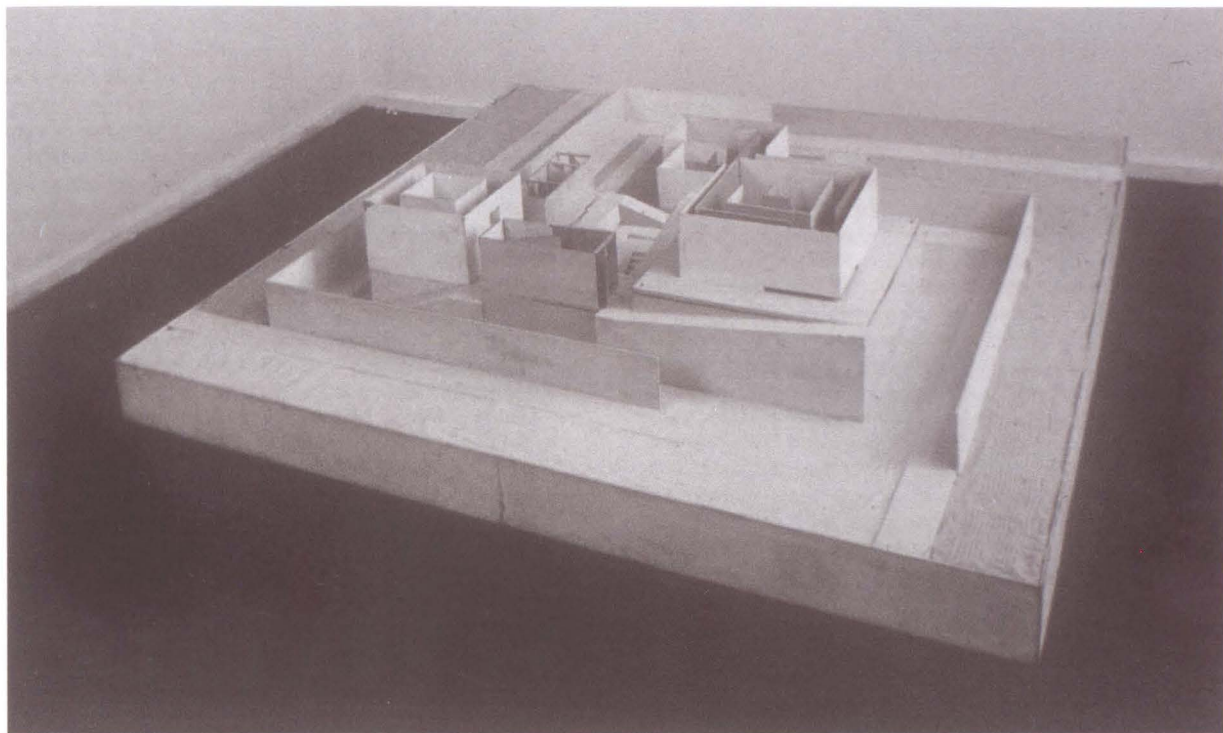
49. Hélio Oiticica, *Grande Núcleo* (Grand Nucleus) 1960. Installation view *Brazil Projects* exhibition, PS1 Museum, Long Island City, NY 1988.



50. Hélio Oiticica, *Penetravel PN1* (Penetrable PN1) 1960.



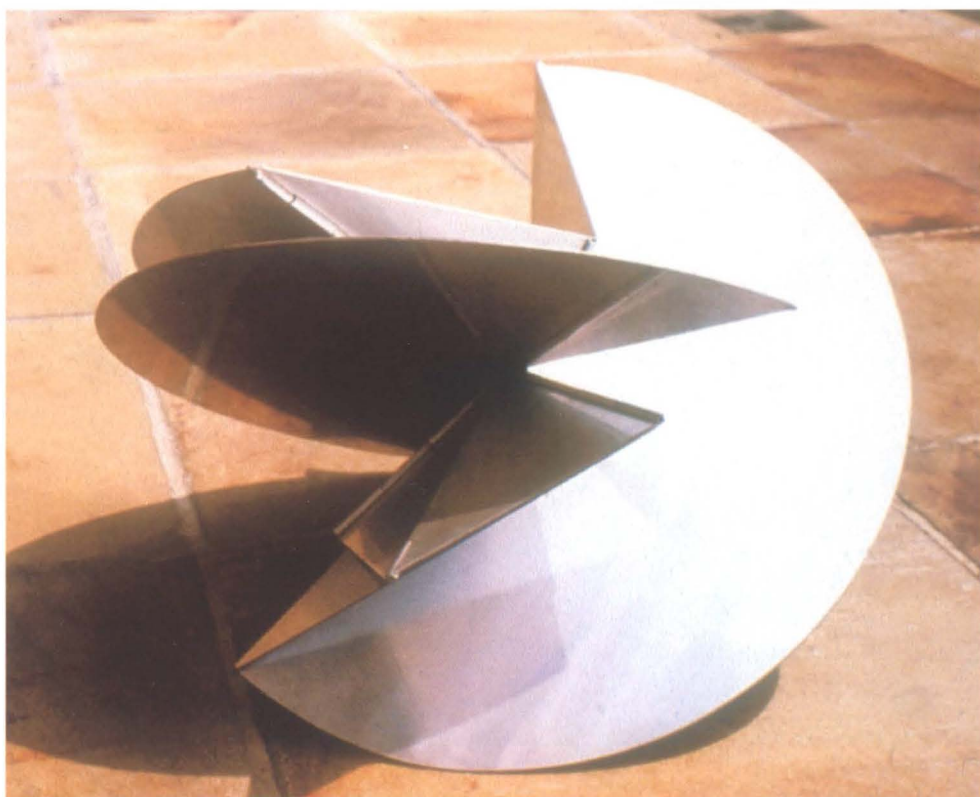
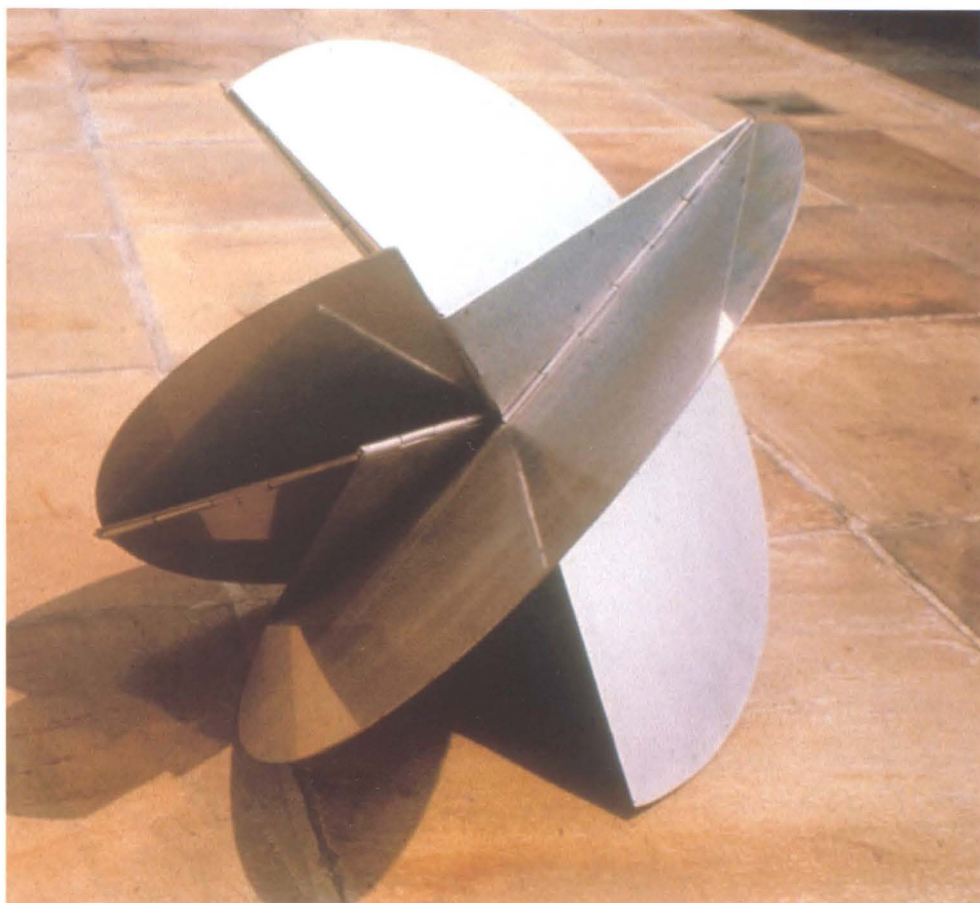
51. Hélio Oiticica, *Projeto Cães de Caça* (Hunting Dogs Project) 1961. [Maquette Composed of 5 Penetrables, Buried Poem by Ferreira Gullar, Integral Theatre by Reynaldo Jardim].



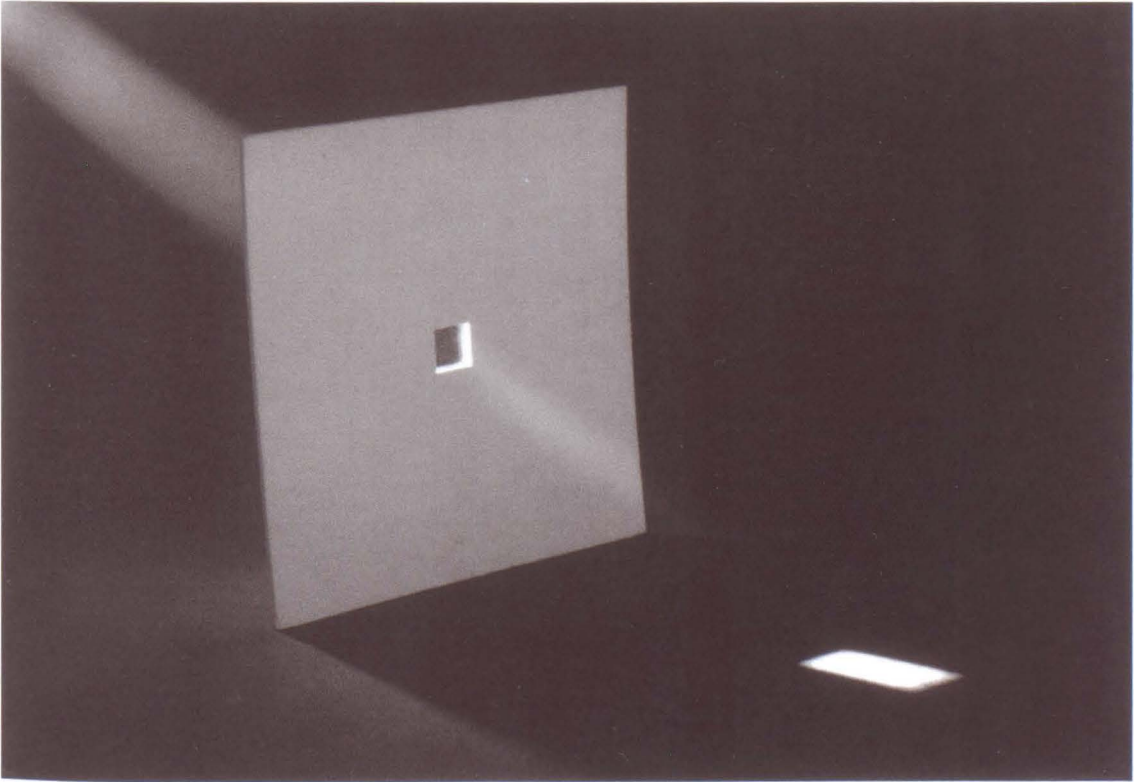
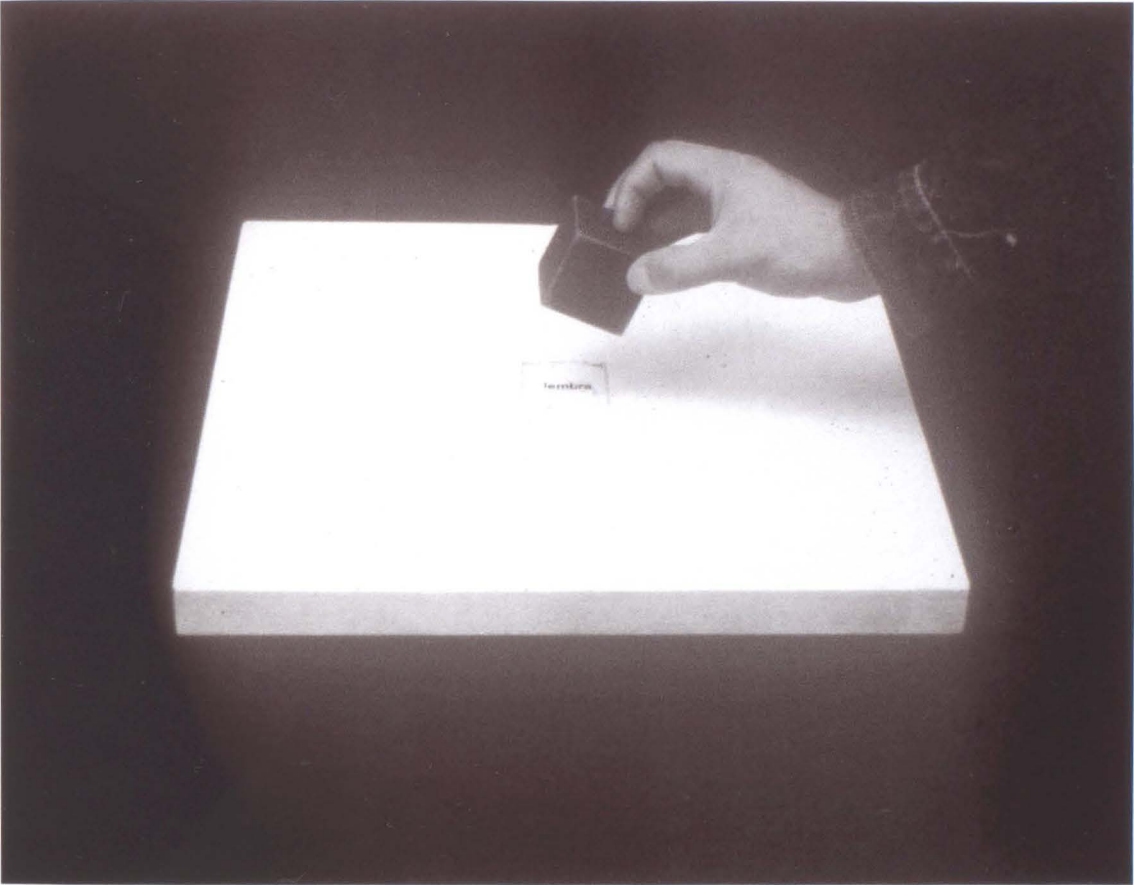
52. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólido Caixa 9* (Box Bólido 9) 1964. *Bólido Vidro 2* (Glass Bólido 2) 1963-4. *Bólido Caixa 11* (Box Bólido 11) 1964. *Bólido Caixa 8* (Box Bólido 8) 1964. [From top clockwise.]



53. Lygia Clark, *Bicho* (creature or beast) ca. 1960. Aluminium 60 cm diameter.

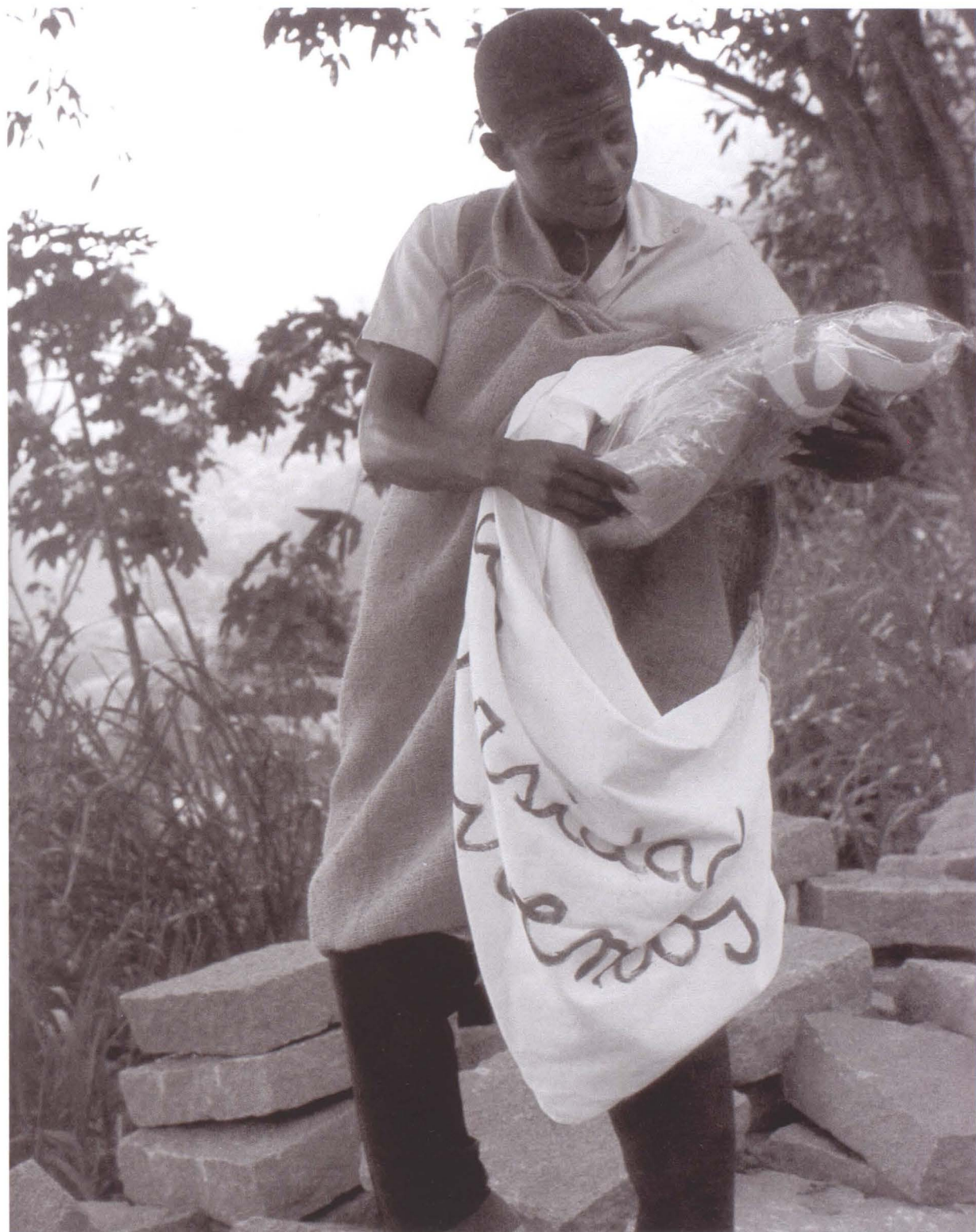


54. Ferreira Gullar, *Lembra* (Remember) 1959. Painted wood 3 x 40.5 x 50 cm.



55. Lygia Pape, *Livro da Criação* (The book of Creation) 1960. Gouache on card 30 x 30 cm.

56. Nildo from Mangueira with: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P16 Capa 12, Da Adversidade Vivemos* (*Parangolé P16 Cape 12 From Adversity we Live*) 1964.



57. Hélio Oiticica, rehearsing for carnival at Mangueira, Rio de Janeiro 1965.



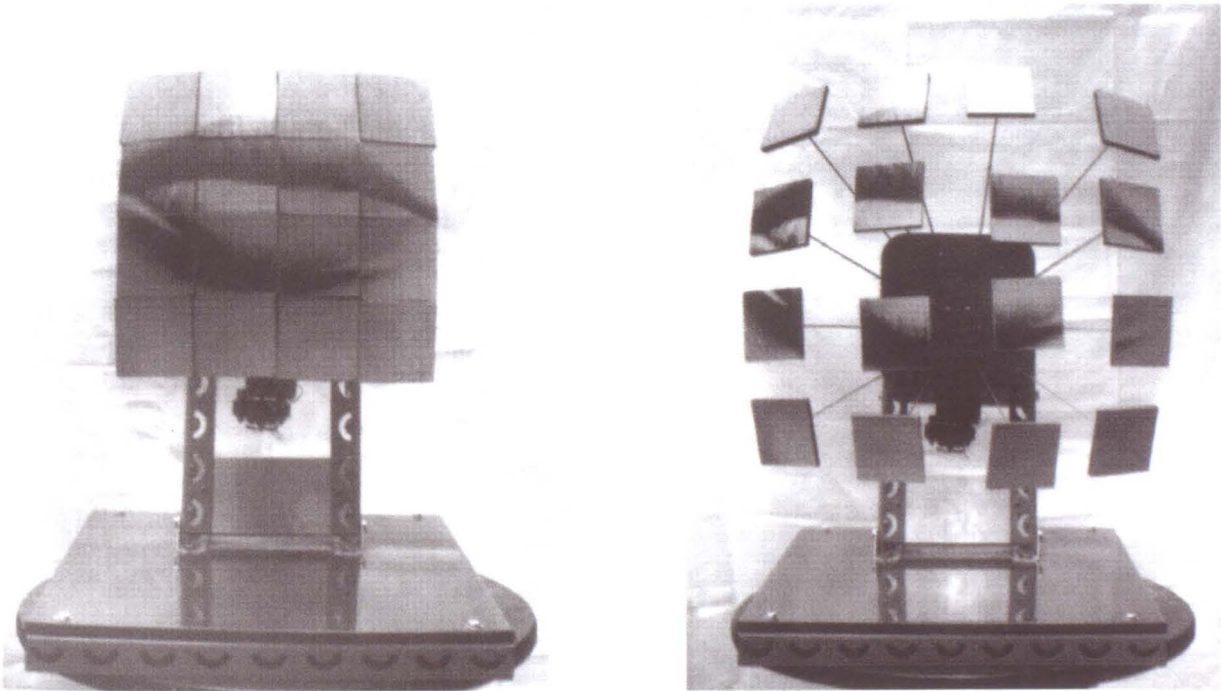
58. Hélio Oiticica, The inauguration of the *Parangolé* during the opening of the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro 1965.



59. The inauguration of the *Parangolé* during the opening of the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro 1965: *Parangolé P2 Bandeira 1* (*Parangolé P2 Flag 1*) 1964; *Parangolé P2 Bandeira 1*, *P6 Capa 3* and *Estandarte 1* (*Parangolé P2 Flag 1*, *P6 Cape 3* and *Banner 1*); *Parangolé Roseni* from Mangureira with *P5 Capa 2* (*Parangolé P 5 Cape 2*); *Parangolé Maria Helena* from Mangureira with *P8 Capa 5* (*Parangolé P8 Cape 5*). [From top clockwise.]



60. Waldemar Cordeiro, *Beijo* (Kiss) 1967. Photograph of electromechanical apparatus, 50 x 45.2 x 50 cm.

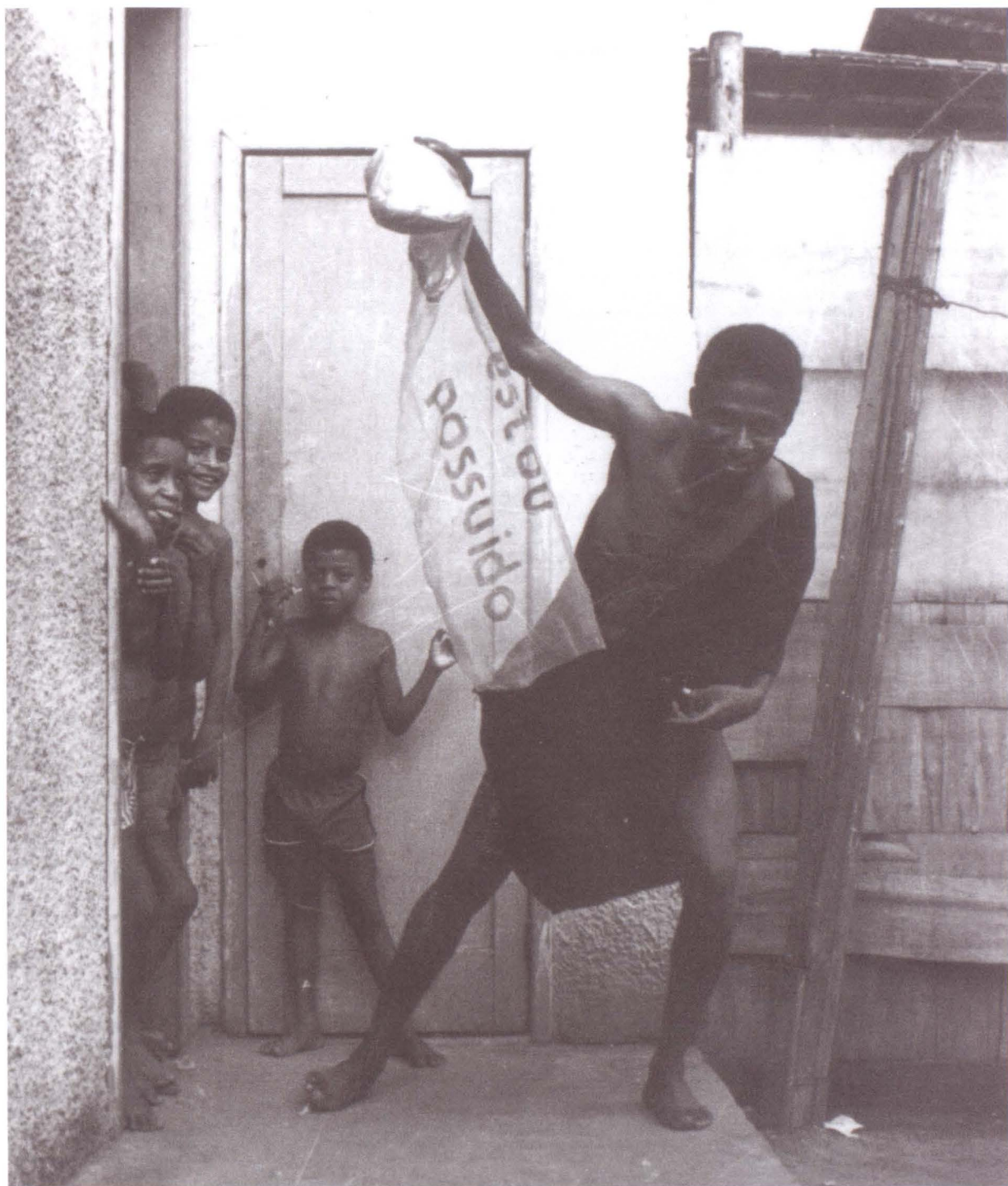


61. Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolés*, installation view XXIV Bienal de São Paulo 1998.



62. Win Beeren (curator of the Malevitch section) orders dancers wearing *Parangolés* to 'get out' at the XXII Bienal de São Paulo. 1994.

63. Hélio Oiticica, Nildo from Mangueira with *Parangolé P17 Capa 13, Estou Possuido* (Parangolé P17 Capa 13, I am Possessed) 1967.

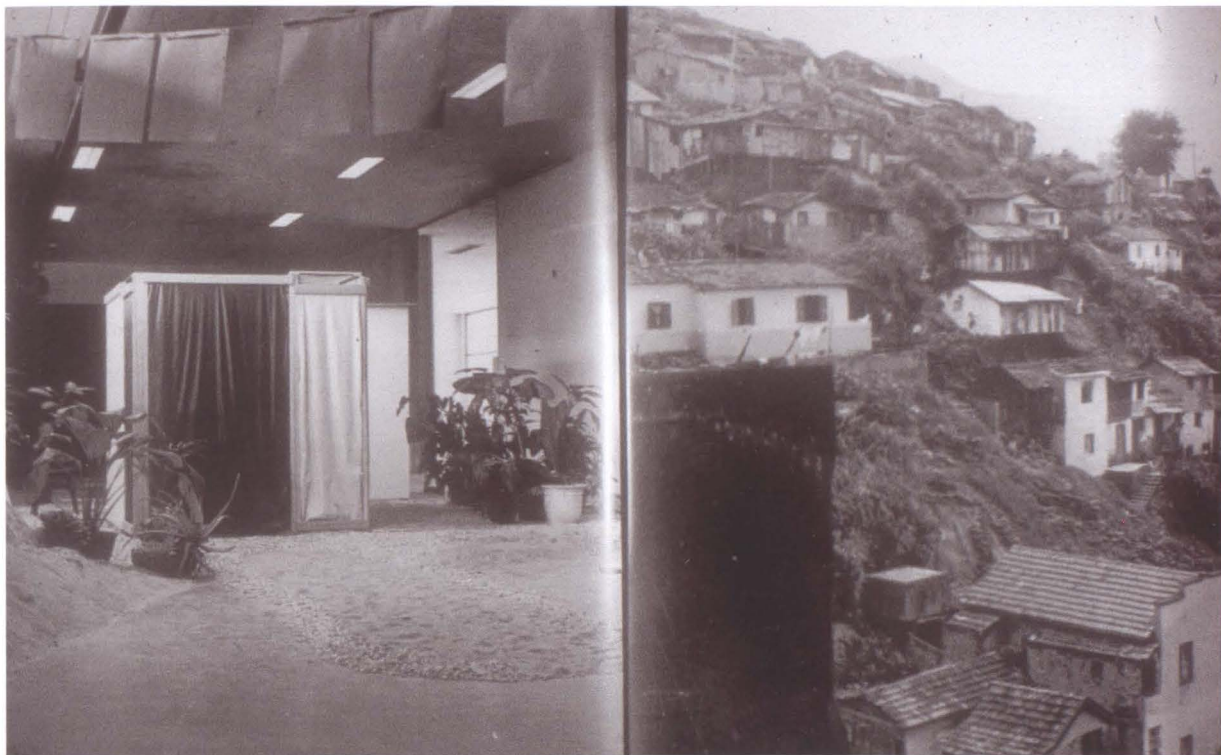


64. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólide 18 Poema Caixa 2, Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo* (Box Bólide 18 Poem Box 2 Homage to *Cara de Cavalo*) 1966.



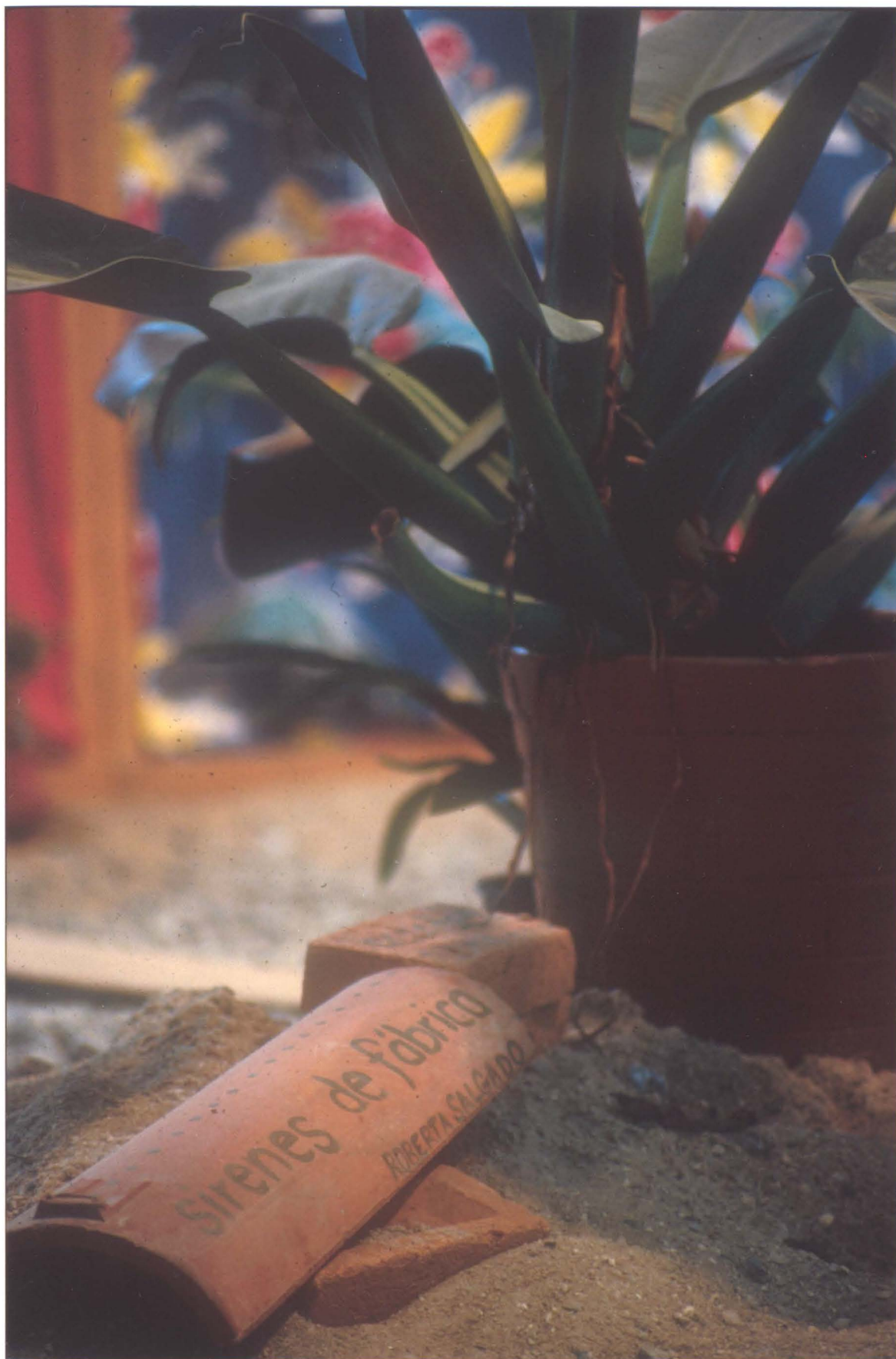


66. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália Penetráveis* (Penetrables) PN2 and PN3. Installation at the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro 1967, juxtaposed with image of *Morro da Mangueira*, in Whitechapel Gallery (1969).



67. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália Penetráveis* (Penetrables) PN2 and PN3. Installation view XXIV Bienal de São Paulo 1998.





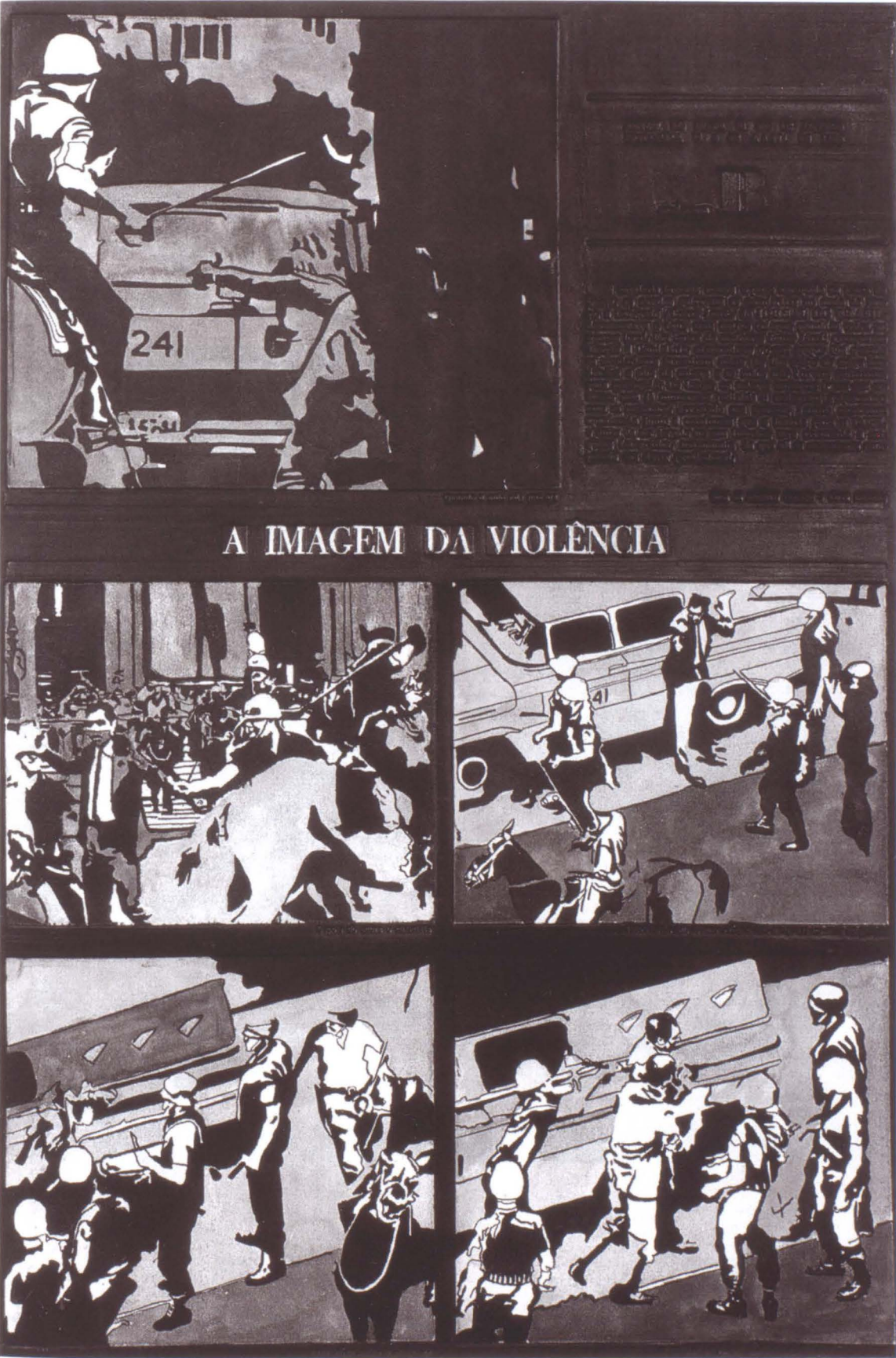
69. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália*, detail of PN2: *A Pureza é um Mito* (Purity is a Myth). Installation at the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro 1967.



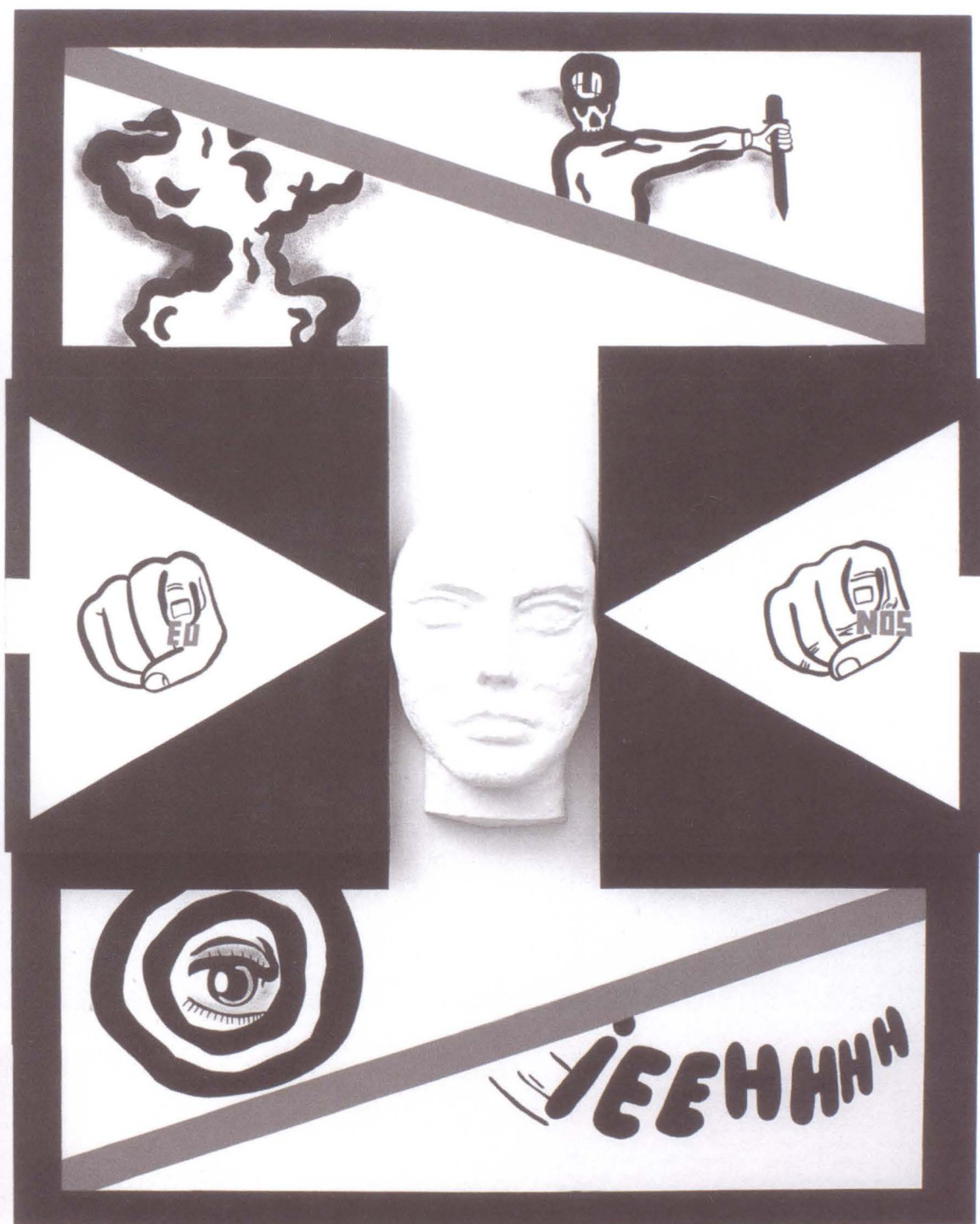
70. Antonio Dias, *Vencedor?* (Winner?) 1964. Freestanding clothes hanger built with painted wood, padded fabric and military helmet, 181 x 70 cm.



71. Antonio Manuel, *A Imagem da Violência* (The image of violence) 1968. Painted flong, 57 x 37.5 cm.



72. Carlos Zilio, *Opção* (Option) 1967. [Original lost, 1996 re-edition] Acrylic on Eucatex and plastic resin, 94 x 74 x 10 cm.



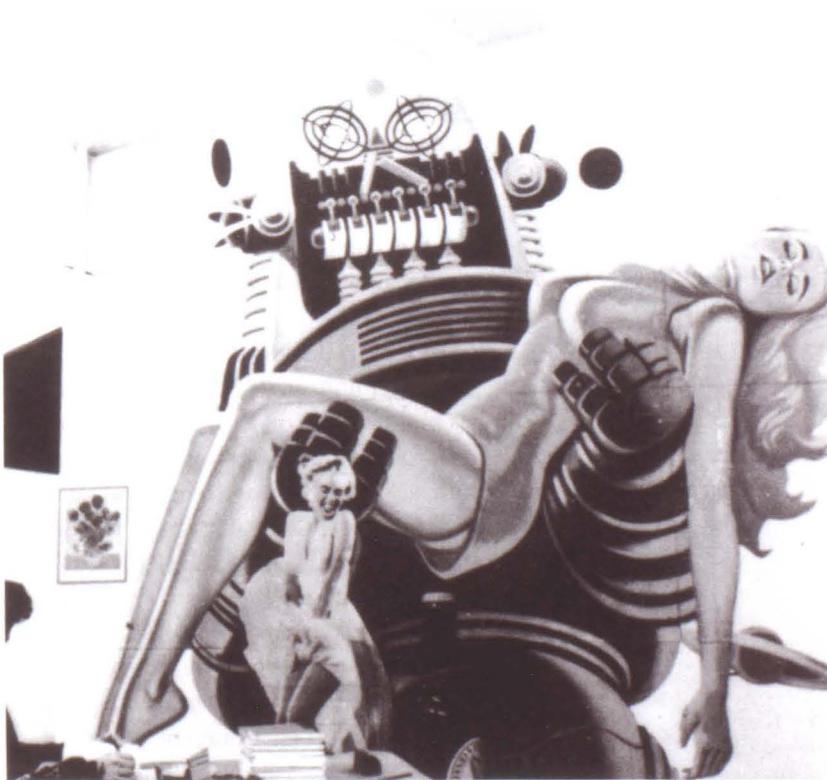
73. Raimundo Colares, *Estou Só e Feliz* (I am alone and happy) 1968. Emael on wood, 160 x 160 cm.



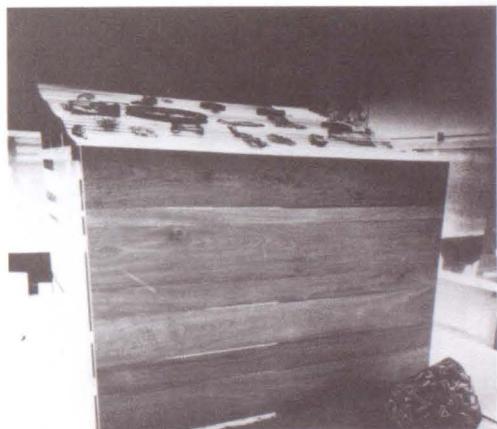
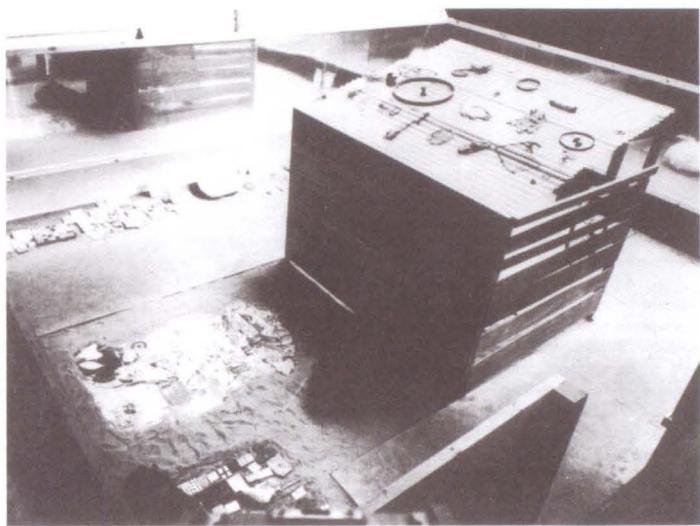
74. Rubens Gershman, O Rei do Mau Gosto (The king of bad taste) 1966. Fabric, glass, butterfly wings and acrylic paint on wood cut-outs, 200 x 200 cm.

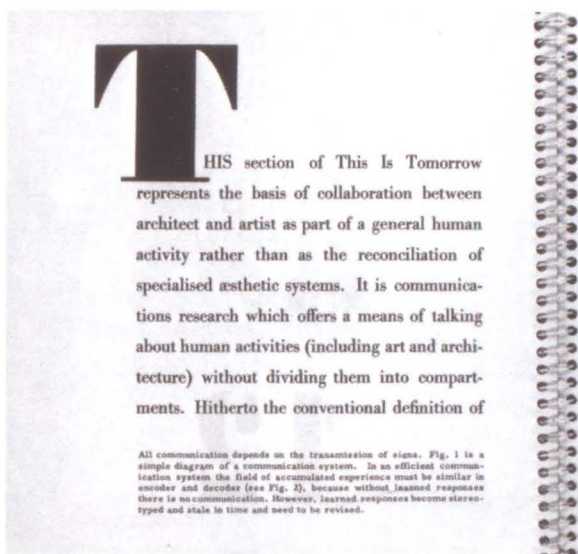


75. Voelcker-Hamilton-McHale, installation views: Front of Structure and Side Panel with Popular Culture Panel, Group 2, *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1956.



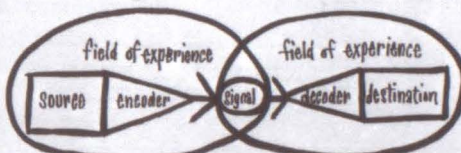
76. Smithson-Henderson-Paolozzi, installation views: Patio and Pavillion, Interior with Nigel Henderson's *Head of Man*, rear view of pavilion, [Top to bottom clockwise] Group 6, *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1956.





the artist and architect has limited their efficiency to narrow mutually exclusive areas. It is this that has made collaboration difficult. Seeing art and architecture in the general framework of communications, however, can reduce these difficulties by a new sense of what is important.

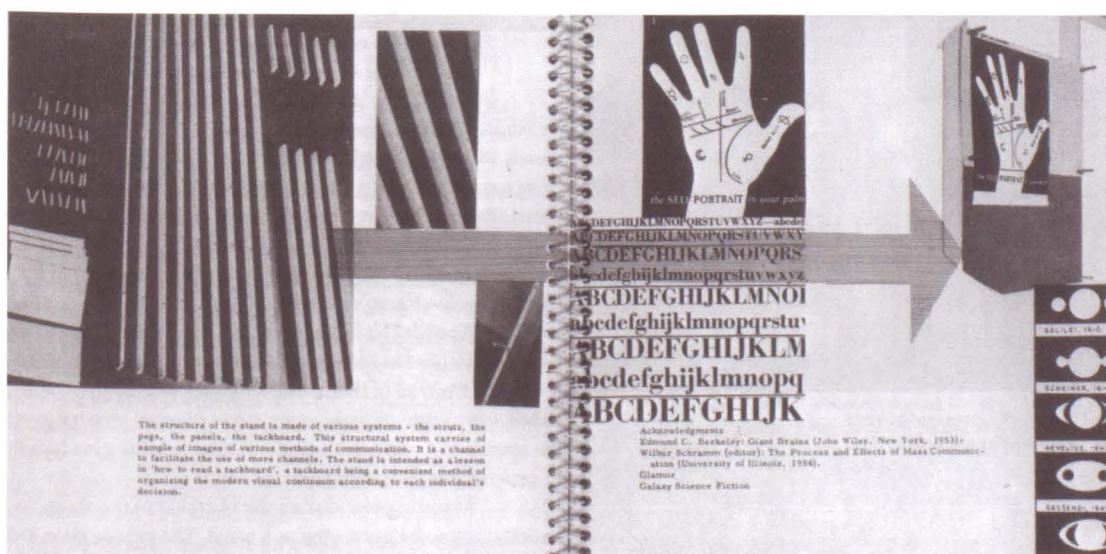
GEOFFREY HOLROYD, TONI DEL RENZO, LAWRENCE ALLOWAY



PHYSICAL OBJECTS	ARRANGED IN OR ON	OPERATED OR PRODUCED BY
maps	hands	stick
maps	slates	chisel
maple inscriptions	wood clay	pyram chisel
maps	paper	pen pencil
letters	paper	typewriter and fingers
letters	paper books	printing press hands
coloured painting	clay canvas	knife and brush
photos	film prints	camera
gestures	space	body
fingers	hands	body
pebbles	slab	hands
callies notches	stick	knife
coins	rock in press	hands
counter wheels etc	slab	hands
counting wheels etc	reed card machines	hands motor
punched tape cards	punch card machine	motor and input instructions
magnetic surfaces	machinery	motor and tape's instructions
size tape discs		

There has always been a variety of channels available for communications but modern technology has increased the scope of communication and the audience has increased in size. This chart suggests a way to organise this multiplicity of messages by reference to the characteristics of the different channels. By its use the visual arts can be set in new relationships, free of the learned responses of composition, experiment, and so on.

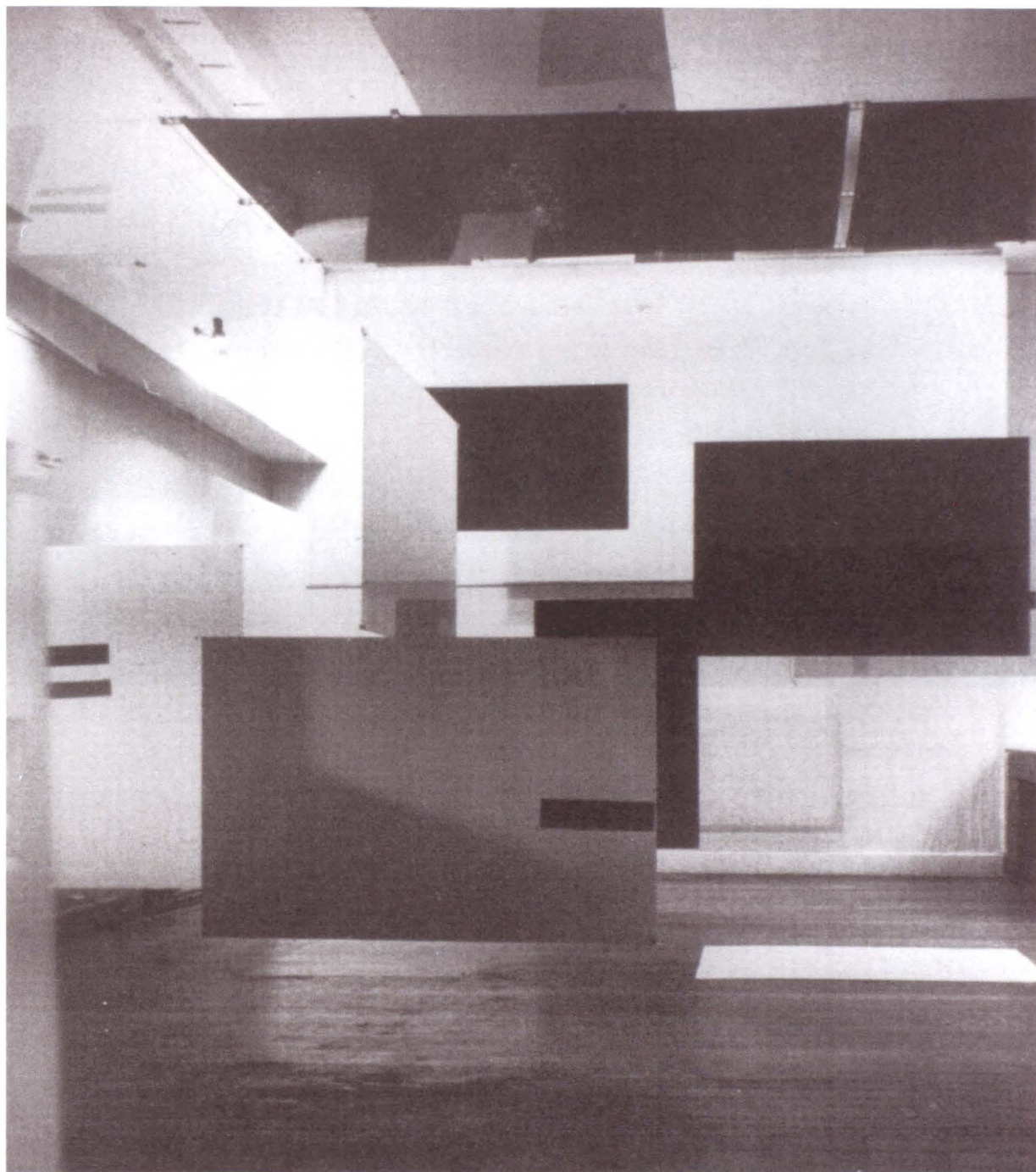
low cost		little space		permanence		erasability		versatility	
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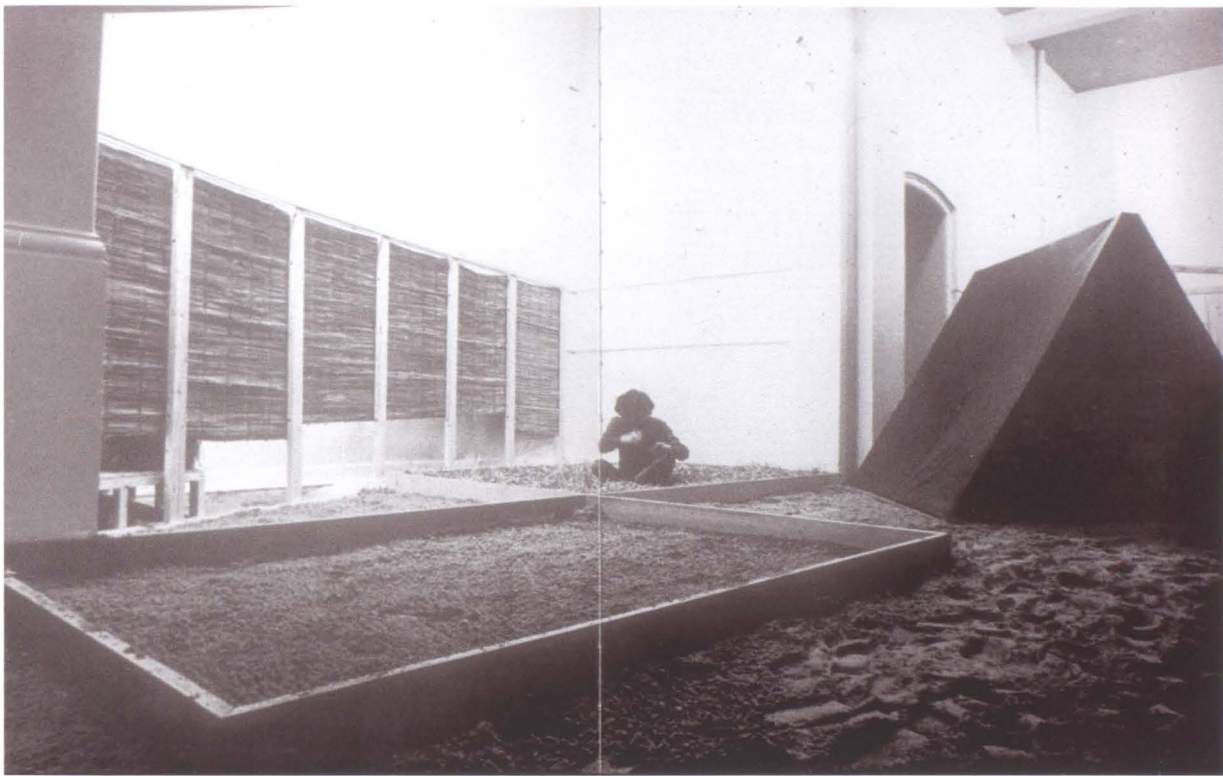
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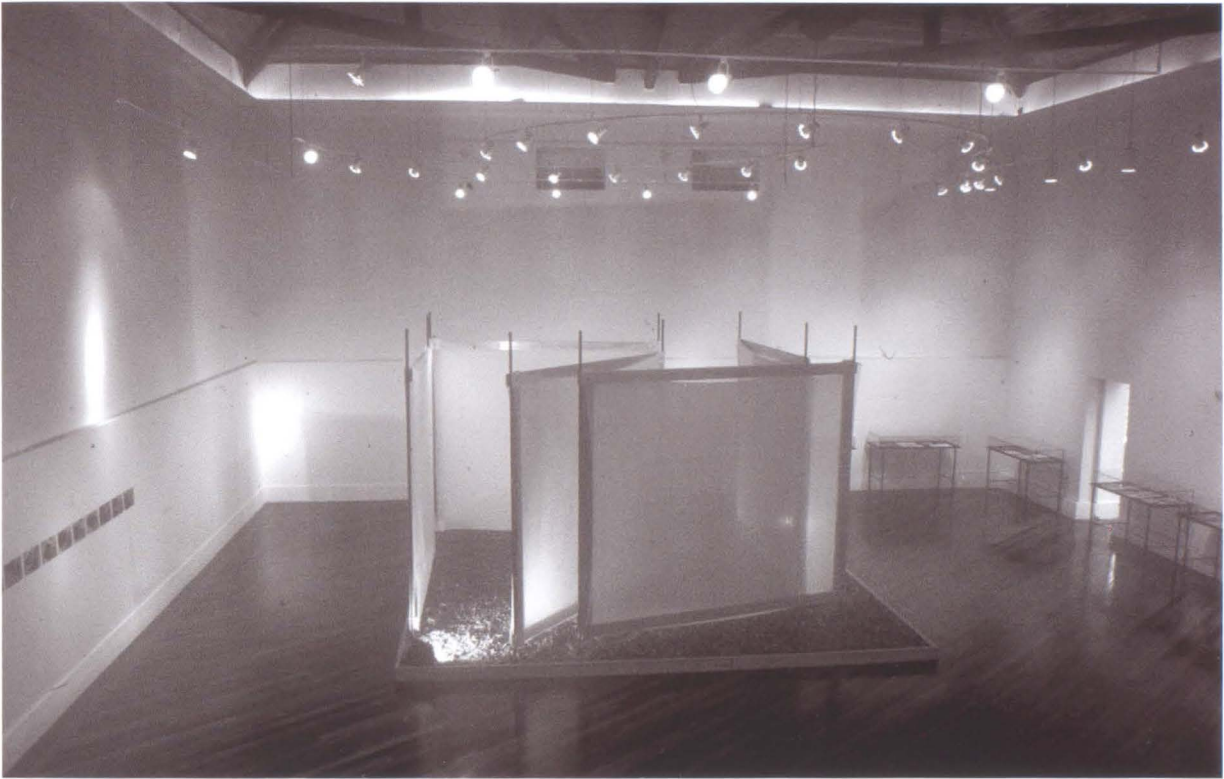
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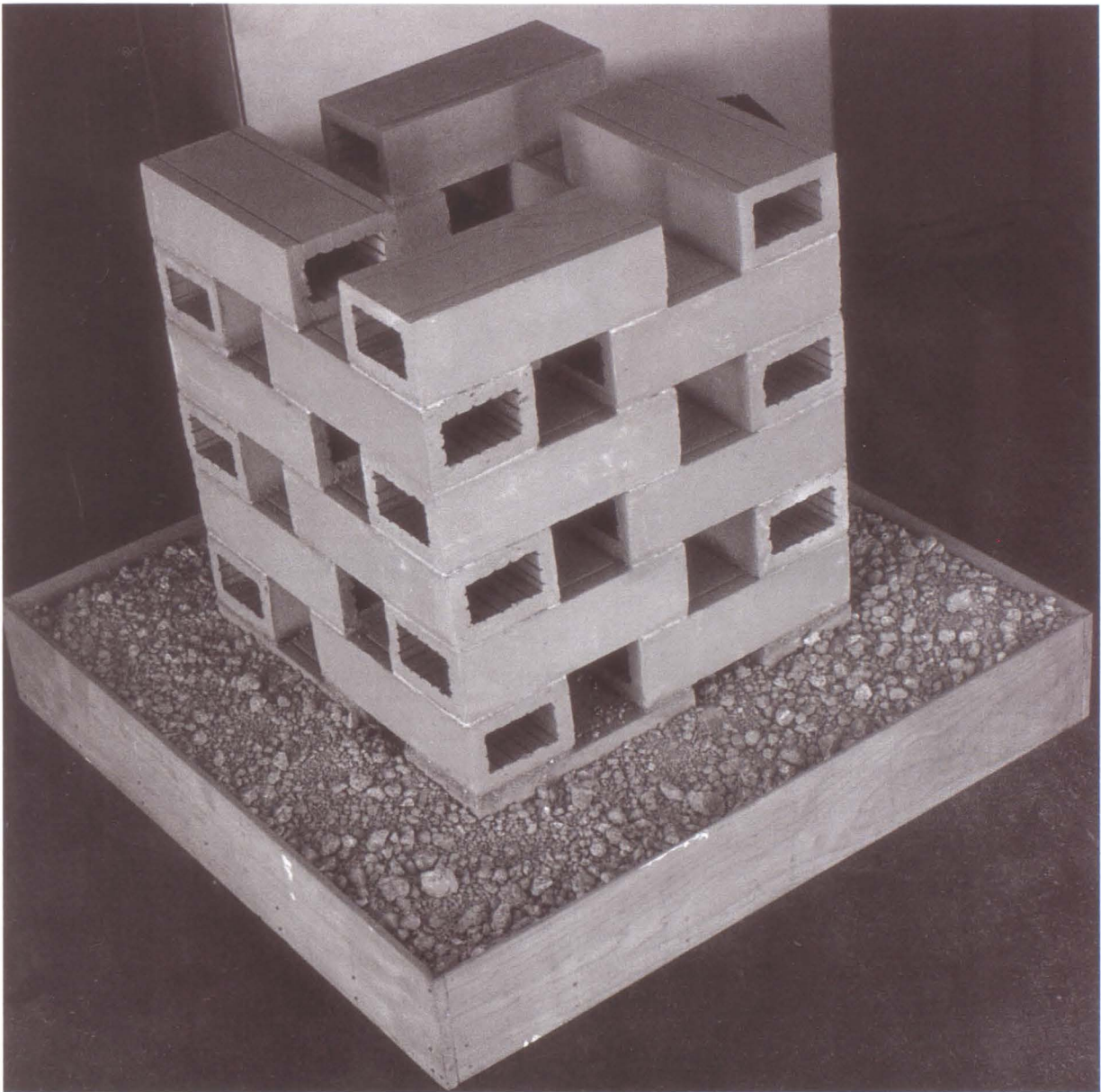


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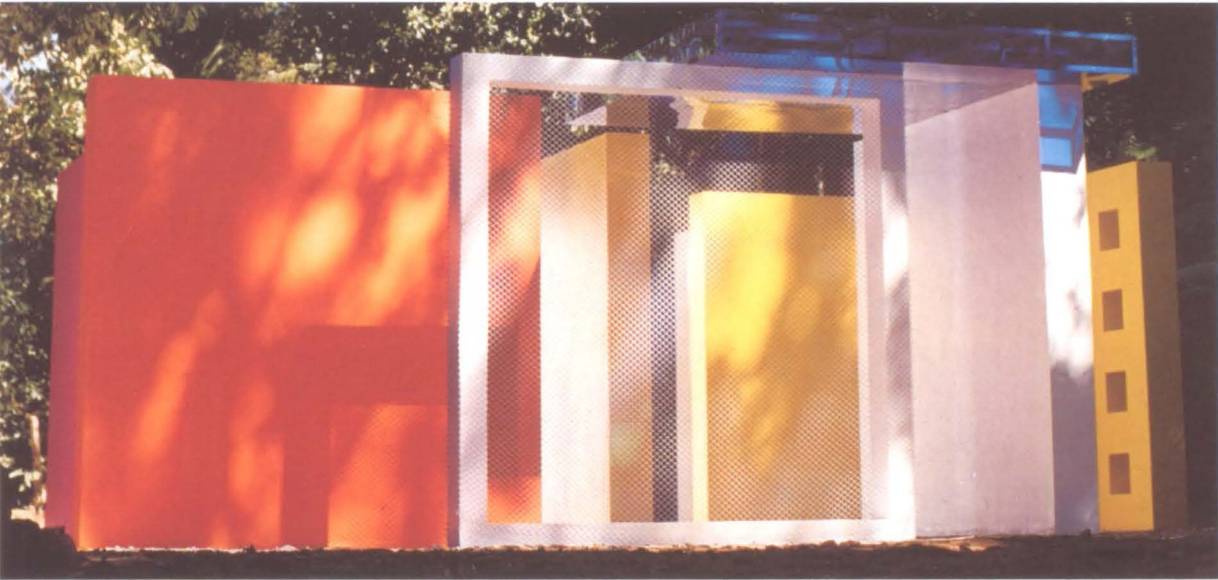


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45. Hélio Oiticica, *Metaesquemas* 1958. Gouache on paper, 55 x 64 cm (each). Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.29.
46. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólido Vidro 4 Terra* (Glass Bólido 4 Earth) 1964. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.68.
47. Hélio Oiticica, *Metaesquema Sêco 27* (Metaesquema Dry 27), 1957. Gouache on paper, 39 x 43 cm. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.30.

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52. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólido Caixa 9* (Box Bólido 9) 1964. *Bólido Vidro 2* (Glass Bólido 2) 1963-4. *Bólido Caixa 11* (Box Bólido 11) 1964. *Bólido Caixa 8* (Box Bólido 8) 1964. [From top clockwise.] Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.78.
53. Lygia Clark, *Bicho* (creature or beast) ca. 1960. Aluminium 60 cm diameter. João Satamini. Source: Brito (1999) p.91.
54. Ferreira Gullar, *Lembra* (Remember) 1959. Painted wood 3 x 40.5 x 50 cm. Artist's collection. Source: Brito (1987) p.55.
55. Lygia Pape, *Livro da Criação* (The book of Creation) 1960. Gouache on card 30 x 30 cm. Artist's collection. Source: Brito (1999) p.82.
56. Nildo from Mangueira with: Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé P16 Capa 12, Da Adversidade Vivemos* (*Parangolé P16 Cape 12 From Adversity we Live*) 1964. Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.101.
57. Hélio Oiticica, rehearsing for carnival at Mangueira, Rio de Janeiro 1965. Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p. 212.
58. Hélio Oiticica, The inauguration of the *Parangolé* during the opening of the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro 1965. Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.89.
59. The inauguration of the *Parangolé* during the opening of the *Opinião 65* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro 1965: *Parangolé P2 Bandeira 1* (*Parangolé P2 Flag 1*) 1964; *Parangolé P2 Bandeira 1, P6 Capa 3 and Estandarte 1* (*Parangolé P2 Flag 1, P6 Cape 3 and Banner 1*); *Parangolé Roseni* from Mangueira with *P5 Capa 2* (*Parangolé P 5 Cape 2*); *Parangolé Maria Helena* from Mangueira with *P8 Capa 5* (*Parangolé P8 Cape 5*). [From top clockwise.] Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.90.
60. Waldemar Cordeiro, *Beijo* (Kiss) 1967. Photograph of electromechanical apparatus, 50 x 45.2 x 50 cm. Museu de Arte Contemporânea da Universidade de São Paulo. Source: Duarte (1998) p.197.
61. Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolés*, installation view XXIV Bienal de São Paulo 1998. Projéto Hélio Oiticica. Photograph Michael Asbury.
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64. Hélio Oiticica, *Bólido 18 Poema Caixa 2, Homenagem a Cara de Cavalo* (Box Bólido 18 Poem Box 2 Homage to Cara de Cavalo) 1966. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.21.
65. Hélio Oiticica, *Estandarte, Seja Marginal Seja Heroi* (Banner, Be a Marginal be Hero) 1967. Serigraphy on fabric, 93 x 110 cm. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Duarte (1998) p.64.
66. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália Penetráveis* (Penetrables) PN2 and PN3. Installation at the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* exhibition, Museum of Modern Art Rio de Janeiro 1967, juxtaposed with image of *Morro da Mangueira*. Source: Whitechapel Gallery (1969). [The Juxtaposition was reprinted in: Witte de With (1992) p.122-3.]
67. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália Penetrável* (Penetrable) PN3. Installation view XXIV Bienal de São Paulo 1998. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Photograph Michael Asbury.
68. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália* details. Installation view XXIV São Paulo Bienal, 1998. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Photographs Michael Asbury.
69. Hélio Oiticica, *Tropicália*, detail of PN2: *A Pureza é um Mito* (Purity is a Myth). Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.121.
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72. Carlos Zilio, *Opção* (Option) 1967. [Original lost, 1996 re-edition] Acrylic on Eucatex and plastic resin, 94 x 74 x 10 cm. Artist's collection. Source: Duarte (1998) p.167.
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75. Voelcker-Hamilton-McHale, installation views: Front of Structure and Side Panel with Popular Culture Panel, Group 2, *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1956. Source: Robbins (1990) p.138.
76. Smithson-Henderson-Paolozzi, installation views: Patio and Pavillion, Interior with Nigel Henderson's *Head of Man*, rear view of pavillion, [Top to bottom clockwise] Group 6, *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1956. Source: Robbins (1990) p.140.
77. Holroy-Alloway-del Renzio, Group 12 section in catalogue. *This is Tomorrow* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1956. Source: Robbins (1990) p.158-9.

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79. Hamilton and Pasmore, *An Exhibit*, installation view ICA London 1957. Source: Robbins (1990) p.161.
80. Hélio Oiticica, *Area Bólido 1 and 2, Penetrable PN5, Caetano Gil Tent*, in: *Eden*. Installation view *Hélio Oiticica* exhibition, Whitechapel Gallery, London 1969. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.10-11.
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83. Hélio Oiticica, *Babylonests*, 81 2nd. Avenue, Loft 4, New York, 1970-74. Source: Witte de With (1992) p.142.
84. Hélio Oiticica with Neville d'Almeida, *Quasi-Cinema, Block-Experiments in Cosmococa, CC3 Maileryn*, 1973. Installation view *Hélio Oiticica e a Cena Americana* exhibition, Centro Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro 1998. Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Photograph Michael Asbury.
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Appendix 1

Ferreira Gullar, **Teoria do Não-Objeto** (Theory of the Non-Object). Originally published in: Suplemento Dominical, *Jornal do Brasil*. 19-20 December 1959.

(Translation, Michael Asbury, 2000).

The expression 'non-object' does not intend to describe a negative object nor any other thing which may be opposite to material objects. The non-object is not an anti-object but a special object through which a synthesis of sensorial and mental experiences is intended to take place. It is a *transparent* body in terms of phenomenological knowledge: while being entirely perceptible it leaves no trace. It is a pure appearance.¹ All true works of art are in fact non-objects, if this denomination is now adopted it is to enable an emphasis on the problems of current art from a new angle.²

The Death of Painting

This issue requires retrospection. When the impressionist painters, leaving the studio for the outdoors, attempted to apprehend the object immersed in natural luminosity, figurative painting began to die. In Monet's paintings the objects dissolve themselves in colour and the usual appearance of things is pulverised amongst luminous reflections. The fidelity towards the natural world transferred itself from objectivity to impression. With the rupture of the outlines which maintained objects isolated in space, all possibility of controlling the pictorial expression was limited to the internal coherence of the picture.

Later, Maurice Denis would say, "a picture - before being a battle horse, a female nude or an anecdote - is essentially a flat surface covered by colours arranged in a certain order". Abstraction was not yet born but figurative painters, such as Denis, already announced it. As far as they³ were concerned, increasingly the represented object lost its significance and consequently the picture and similarly the object gained importance. With Cubism the object is brutally removed from its natural condition, it is transformed into cubes, virtually imposing upon it an idealised nature; it was emptied of its essential obscurity, that invincible opaqueness characteristic of the thing. However, the cube being three-dimensional still possesses a nucleus: an *inside*

¹ Translator's note:

In the original: O não-objeto não é um antiobjeto mas um objeto especial em que se pretende realizada a síntese de experiências sensoriais e mentais: um corpo transparente ao conhecimento fenomenológico, integralmente perceptível, que se dá à percepção sem deixar rastro. Uma pura aparência.

Please note also that the phrase that follows is not included in subsequent catalogue editions.

² Lygia Clark has adopted, through a suggestion of mine, the term non-object as a means of describing her latest work which consist of constructions made directly in space. The meaning of such a term does not restrict itself as a definition of specific works: the sculptures of Amílcar de Castro, Franz Weissmann, recent work by Hélio Oiticica, Aloisio Carvão and Décio Vieira together with the Book-Poems by the neoconcrete poets are also non-objects. (Original footnote)

³ Translator's note:

In the original: Cada vez mais o objeto representado perdia significação aos seus olhos [...]. Here, 'a seus olhos' could refer to either the opinion of Maurice Denis' or that of the figurative painters.

which was necessary to consume - and this was done by the so-called synthetic phase of the movement. Already, not much is left of the object. It was Mondrian and Malevich who would continue the elimination of the object.

The object which is pulverised in the cubist picture is the painted object, the represented object. In short, it is painting that lies dying there, dislocated in search of a new structure, a new form of being, a new significance. Yet in these pictures (synthetic phase, hermetic phase) there are not only dislocated cubes, abstract planes: there are also signs, arabesques, collage, numbers, letters, sand, textiles, nails, etc. These elements are indicative of the presence of two opposing forces: one which attempts relentlessly to rid itself of all and any contamination with the object; the other is characteristic of the return of the object as sign, for which it is necessary to maintain the space, the pictorial environment born out of the representation of the object. The latter could be associated with the so called abstract painting, of sign and matter, which exacerbates today in Tachism.

Mondrian belongs to the most revolutionary aspect of cubism, giving it continuity. He understood that the new painting, proposed in those pure planes, requires a radical attitude, a restart. Mondrian wipes clean the canvas, eliminates all vestiges of the object, not only the figure but also the colour, the matter and the space which constituted the representational universe: what is left is the white canvas. On it he will no longer represent the object: it is the space in which the world reaches harmony according to the basic movements of the horizontal and the vertical. With the elimination of the represented object, the canvas - as material presence - becomes the new object of painting. The painter is required to organise the canvas in addition to giving it a transcendence which will distance it from the obscurity of the material object. The fight against the object continues.

The problem Mondrian set himself could not be solved by theory. He attempted to destroy the plane with the use of the great black lines which cut the canvas from one edge to the other - indicating that it relates to the external space - yet these lines still oppose themselves to a background and the contradiction space-object reappears. Thus, the destruction of these lines begins, leading to his last two paintings: *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* and *Victory Boogie-Woogie*. But the contradiction in fact was not resolved, and if Mondrian would have lived a few more years, perhaps he would have returned once more to the white canvas from which he began. Or, he would have left it favouring construction into space as did Malevich, at the end of his parallel development.

The Work of Art and the Object

For the traditional painter, the white canvas was merely the material support onto which he would sketch the suggestion of natural space. Subsequently, this suggested space, this metaphor of the world would be surrounded by a frame which had as a fundamental function the insertion of the painting into the world. This frame was the mediator between fiction and reality, a bridge and barrier, protecting the picture, the fictitious space, while also making possible its communication, without shock with the external, real, space. Thus when painting radically abandons representation - as in the case of Mondrian, Malevich and his followers - the frame loses its meaning. The erection of a metaphorical space within a well protected corner of the world no longer being necessary, it is now the case of establishing the work of art within the space of reality, lending to this space, through the apparition of the work - this special object - significance and transcendence.

It is a fact that things occurred with a certain level of sluggishness, equivocations and deviations. These were undoubtedly inevitable and necessary. The use of collage, sand and other elements taken from the real, already signal the necessity to substitute fiction by reality. When the dadaist Kurt Schwitters later builds Merzbau - made from objects and fragments he found in the streets - it is once again the same intention which has further developed, now freed from the frame, and in real space. At this point it becomes difficult to distinguish the work of art from the real objects. Indicative of this mutual overflow between the work of art and the object is Marcel Duchamp's notorious *blague*, submitted to the Independents' Exhibition in New York 1916⁴, a Fountain-urinal of the kind used in the toilets of bars. The ready-made technique was adopted by the Surrealists. It consists of revealing the object, dislocated from its usual function, thus establishing new relationships between it and the other objects. This process of transfiguration of the object is limited by the fact that it is grounded not so much in the formal qualities of the object but in its connection with the object's quotidian use. Soon that obscurity characteristic of the *thing* returns to envelop the *work*, recovering it to the common level. On this *front*, the artists were defeated by the object.

From this point of view some of today's extravagant paintings pursued by the avant-garde appear in all their clarity or even naiveté. What are the cut canvases of Fontana, exhibited in the V Biennial⁵ if not a retarded attempt to destroy the fictitious pictorial space by means of introducing within it a real cut? What are the pictures by Burri with kapok, wood or iron, if not a return - without the previous violence but transforming them into fine-art - to the processes used by the dadaists? The problem lies in the fact that these works only achieve the effect of a first contact, failing to achieve the permanent transcendent condition of a non-object. They are curious, bizarre and extravagant objects - but they are objects.

The path followed by the Russian avant-garde has proved to be more profound. Tatlin's and Rodchenko's counter-reliefs together with Malevich's Suprematist architecture are indicative of a coherent revolution from the represented space towards real space, from represented forms towards *created* forms.

The same fight against the object can be seen in modern sculpture from Cubism onwards. With Vantongerloo (de Stijl) the figure disappears completely; with the Russian constructivists (Tatlin, Pevsner, Gabo) mass is eliminated and the sculpture is divested of its condition of *thing*. Similarly: if non-representational painting is attracted towards the orbit of objects, this force is exerted with far greater intensity amongst non-figurative sculpture. Transformed into object, sculpture rids itself of its most common characteristic: mass. But this is not all. The base - sculpture's equivalent to the painting's frame - is eliminated. Vantongerloo and Moholy-Nagy attempted to create sculptures that would inhabit space without a support. They intended to eliminate weight from sculpture, another fundamental characteristic of the object. What can be thus verified is that while painting, freed from its representational intentions tends to abandon the surface to take place in space, thus approaching sculpture, the latter liberates itself from the figure, the base and of its mass, therefore maintaining very little affinity with what traditionally has been denominated as sculpture. In fact, there is more affinity between a counter-relief by Tatlin and a sculpture by Pevsner than between a Maillol and a Rodin or Fidias. The same could

⁴ Translator's note:

Although in the original text Ferreira Gullar mentions 1916, the correct date for Duchamp's Fountain - a porcelain urinal signed R. Mutt - is 1917.

⁵ Translator's note:

Reference here is to the 5th São Paulo Biennial.

be said of a *painting* by Lygia Clark and a *sculpture* by Amilcar de Castro. From which we can conclude that current painting and sculpture are converging towards a common point, distancing themselves from their origins. They become special objects - non-objects - for which the denominations *painting* and *sculpture* perhaps no longer apply.

Primary Formulation

The problem of the frame and base, respectively in painting and sculpture has never been examined by critics in terms of their significant implications, as static. The phenomenon is registered but simply as a curious detail which escapes the problematic of the work of art. What had not been realised was that the actual work of art posited new problems and that it attempted to escape, to assure its own survival, the closed circuit of traditional aesthetics. To rupture the frame and to eliminate the base are not in fact merely questions of technical or physical nature: they pertain to an effort by the artist to liberate himself from the conventional cultural frame, to retrieve that desert, mentioned by Malevich, in which the work of art appears for the first time freed from any signification outside the event of its own apparition. It could be said that all works of art *tend towards* the non-object and that this name is only precisely applicable to those that establish themselves outside the conventional limits of art: works that possess this necessity of unlimitness as the fundamental intention behind their appearance.

Putting the question in these terms demonstrates how the Tachist and Informal experiments in painting and sculpture are conservative and reactionary in nature. The artists of these tendencies continue - albeit desperately - to make use of those conventional supports. With them the process is contrary: rather than rupturing the frame so that the work can pour out into the world, they keep the frame, the picture, the conventional space, and put the world (its raw material) within it. They part from the supposition that what is within the frame is the picture, the work of art. It is obvious that with this they also reveal the end of such a convention, but without announcing a future path.

This path could be in the creation of these special objects (non-objects) which are accomplished outside of all artistic conventions and reaffirm art as a primary formulation of the world.

Appendix 2

Excerpts from Hélio-Tapes

(Transcription N-IMAGEM unless otherwise stated, Translation Michael Asbury).

Although having exhibited during the previous years in major international venues such as the Whitechapel Gallery and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Hélio Oiticica's 7 year experience in New York (1970-77) was one of self-exile. Beyond his obvious voluntary absence from Brazil - at the time under a repressive military regime - he also distanced himself from cultural institutions in general. However, in both cases one cannot affirm that such exile entailed an absolute disconnection. On the contrary, Oiticica during the whole period could be described as being engaged in a intense process of cultural translation. He attempted for instance to identify the places in New York described by the late 19th Century Brazilian poet Sousândrade, with the aid of a study of the history of that city by his friend the art critic Dore Ashton. His loft became a focal point for intellectuals, artists, film makers, where discussions would often revolve around the state of Brazilian culture and the peculiarities of the scene in New York.

Oiticica produced tapes of such discussions in addition to recording his own commentaries which he later sent to friends in Brazil as a form of audio letters. Such tapes demonstrate the incredible richness and scope of his cultural references, and in hindsight contribute towards our understanding of concepts such as *Quasi-Cinema*, his self-conscious marginal position and his collaborative activities as an artist during that period. Below are some extracts from the *Hélio-Tapes* in addition to excerpts from letters and other sources:

Hélio Oiticica: letter to Waly Salomão, April 1971 (Projeto HO Archive, reprinted in *Hélio Oiticica e a Cena Americana*, exhibition brochure, Centro de Arte Hélio Oiticica, 1998) [The absence of capital letters refers to the original text.]

jack [Smith] is a genius and i love him; [...] in a few days i have learnt from him what i always desired, like a visceral decifration of the american world, leftovers of consumption, etc: subject-film: to generate a world of extremely rich images: yet the mythologising and isolation to which he is subjected, is alienating and absurd: he was placed as a artaudian mad genius, to whom all is concurrently permitted and negated. [...]

[Smith's] slide projection, accompanied by a sound track [...] was called 'travelogue of atlantis' [...] it started at half past ten, three hours later, well, just the first three slides took half an hour: he changed the position of the screen so that the slides underwent a cut while being projected, and he moved the projector in order to give the appropriate cut to each slide, the rest of the slide would spread throughout the environment: incredible: the waiting and the anxiety that had dominated me were worth while: it was a form of quasi-cinema, in my opinion so cinema as anything else you could imagine: the same complex simplicity that one could sense in godard: [...] the images, the duration of each slide on the screen, etc., were brilliant and extremely important: the sound track was composed of am radio music, [...] latin music, incredible things, noises: telephone, cars in traffic, etc.: it came to a close at one o'clock in the morning: i came out transformed! jack smith blows you away with colour: you see that each slide is a totality and the total sequence is the most profound transformation: a

travelogue, brilliant concept! and the energy that dominated me, made me work consecutive days and raised dormant things: i built a platform on two levels that reconfigure and define once and for all, the spaces here [in the loft]: you climb on another level and then further above, you can also enter below where it is like a subterranean snail's shell, and in the narrowest part you enter by crawling: a live theatre: cinema: i don't know! [...] all this comes from my lion-scorpion contact with jack smith, it can only be beneficial: it is anthologic, above good or evil.

Hélio-Tape: interview with Haroldo de Campos New York 28 May 1971

Hélio: On an international context [Sousândrade] did things that no one had done.

Haroldo: Mallarmé in *A throw of Dice*, where he was inspired by musical scores and the typography of newspapers, was written 20 years later [Hell in Wall St. by Sousândrade].

Hélio: Mallarmé has something as if it was the culmination of a classical process of creation, [while] Sousândrade, as you say, is like an explosion.

Haroldo: Sousândrade is brutal, fantastic, Mallarmé is an intellectual, like Debussy in music, Sousândrade is like the American music of John Cage, a brutal collage of macro-raw reality.

Hélio: I think also of Godard and his relation with the experiences of [Julio] Bressane, Godard represents the culmination of an intellectual refinement which differs a lot from things that happen in Brazil, where things are discovered as if for the first time, whereas in Europe there is a culmination of processes, its different.

Haroldo: Yes, I think that in this sense Décio [Pignatari's] comments on Oswald [de Andrade's] poetry are pertinent, when he states that "it is a poetry of possession against property", a poetry of direct contact, whilst European poetry decants an entire tradition; Brazilian poetry is a total appropriation [...] which is where the importance of the concept of Anthropophagy in cultural terms stems from: a cultural devouring, a means of devouring other values but from the point of view of a Brazilian culture [...]

[...]

Hélio: [...] things produced in Brazil have an *a priori* underground character in the sense that American underground counteracts a professionalising culture; it was something that emerged to demolish what Hollywood stood for: professionalism conditioned by consumption. Suddenly the underground was necessary so that once more people could produce things freely, therefore a Brazilian underground is nonsensical since in relation to the American-European consumerist culture, it is already automatically underground.

Hélio-Tape interview with Julio Bressane, New York (Glauber Rocha's flat, 28 May 1971)

Hélio: [...] I think that with *Cinema Novo*, the thing that annoys me the most about it - it was obviously important, like *Bossa Nova* was for music, maybe even more - is that there is now a repertoire that has become associated to it [...] I think that there is a great distance between that and the type of cinema that you, Rogério [Duarte], Neville [d'Almeida], are working on, [...] *Cinema Novo* suddenly became older than old, it is terrible! So there is this progressive and reactionary thing which stems from the desire to compete with the quality of Hollywood.

[...]

Julio Bressane: [...] and now there is this thing [in Brazil], this marginal cinema business [...]

Hélio Oiticica: That is stupidity, since all Brazilian cinema is in the first instance, marginal [...]

Hélio: [...] what they do a lot over here, in fact, is that to see anyone [for example] Jonas Mekas and Jack Smith talking, you immediately have to pay two dollars admission, that is why these lofts are so practical: today we will have Julio [Bressane] talking to Jonas Mekas about the problem of Latin American cinema, so you charge an entrance fee and people come, in order to have food for the week, they create a sort of mythology of things. So for example Andy Warhol's superstars are homeless [...] he pays 50 dollars to Hollywood, who's a transvestite [...] transformed into a superstar because of Trash. [...] then Trash makes millions of dollars in a single week [but] people don't have money [...] so in reality its a mythologising of shit, because people are in the shit and don't have where to sleep. [...] But at the same time they put Hollywood's face on the cover of Rolling Stone and it sells out in a day. So its a type of conspicuous capitalism, the most absurd thing you can imagine.

Hélio-Tape for Augusto de Campos, March 1974

[...] I would like to dedicate this tape to you [...] since it is mainly Jimmy Hendrix, [...] and I would like to speak about something I think each time I listen to Jimmy Hendrix, [...] it is as if [he stands for] not just a definition [but] the foundation of a vision [...] something completely new, since in my opinion, the visual side of Woodstock was very much generated by him [...] he in fact, finished that audience off, the audience became totally different, [Hendrix] with that ribbon on his head and those clothes [...] you see that the total aspect of dressing, of behaviour, of the body, and specially the relation between himself and the spectators during the performance [...] is really one of the greatest things that exists, it is unbelievable!

[Yet] while he was acclaimed by some, he was repudiated since people in reality [...] acclaimed unanimously Ravishankar, as if they were saying something like this "oh, this is something serious, authentic...! But the issue is that with Jimmy Hendrix, what is the meaning of Ravishankar? That is, after the Beatles digested Indian music, why search for the authentic? It's very nice but, you know, I'm not interested in vocal music, in reality Rock has this Anthropophagite thing about it [...] in fact, in my opinion, it finished with vocal music, [...] and also this nationality thing as well [...] that is, Rock in reality, unconnected music from the place, from its immediate environment.

Appendix 3

Related Publication

Asbury, M. (2002) **Tracing Hybrid Strategies in Brazilian Modern Art** In: Harris, J. ed. (2004) *Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Painting*, Critical Forum Series, Tate Gallery Liverpool and University of Liverpool Press.
[Footnotes relate to publication standard.]

The exhibition *Hybrids: International Contemporary Painting*, held at the Tate Gallery Liverpool (June 2001), by focusing on the specific medium of painting, inevitably conjured an idea of hybridity pertaining to a particular history. Referring to debates which have polarised the activity and reception of painting during the 20th century, the curator, Simon Wallis, introduced the theme as "extending the art historical language of abstraction and figuration."¹ In this context, hybridity is therefore posited as a site for the articulation of discourses on the heritage of painting - as the once hegemonic practice - and its current position as a fine art practice amongst many others. Indeed, the art historical association of painting with a particular tradition could be seen to have placed it at a disadvantage with respect to its claims to contemporary pertinence. This tradition is inscribed within a consensual historical view that saw painting as an autonomous activity, free from external factors, and referring to its own internal logic and process. Within this paradigm the notion of hybridity was entirely antagonistic to - what some critics have identified as - the project of modernist painting itself. Clement Greenberg, the most notorious of these, claimed that:

The extreme eclecticism now [1944] prevailing is unhealthy, and it should be counteracted, even at the risk of dogmatism and intolerance.²

For Greenberg:

the essence of Modernism lies [...] in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself - not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.³

Therefore, hybridity at once reacts against the purported purity of modernist painting, mediating this particular art historical inheritance and its contemporary redefinition. It allows the re-evaluation of that tradition, while maintaining a space for engaging with contemporary issues that unavoidably go beyond the activity of painting itself. While hybridity is anathema to the purity and privilege of painting within a particular (yet not exclusive) interpretation of modernism, painting, as a

¹ Simon WALLIS, Introduction, *Hybrids: International Contemporary Painting*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery Liverpool, June, 2001 p.6

² Clement GREENBERG, A New Installation at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a Review of the Exhibition Art in Progress, (1944) in: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol.1 Chicago University Press, 1993, p.213

³ Clement GREENBERG, Modernist Painting, Arts Yearbook, 1, New York, 1961. Reprinted in: Charles HARRISON and Paul WOOD (eds.), *Art in Theory 1900-1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell Oxford 1992, p. 755

culturally engaged activity, cannot rid itself entirely from this past. In this sense, its past stands as a spectre that returns to haunt its present status.

Amongst the artists included in the exhibition was the work of the Brazilian Beatriz Milhazes. Her inclusion raised questions which broadened the scope of the notion of hybridity beyond the history of European and North American painting. However, the emergence of the past within her oeuvre, rather than spectral in character, is willingly invoked as an affirmation of a specific cultural identity.

Milhazes' painting thus appears distinct from that of the other artists in the exhibition due to its reference to a specific culture and place. However, the hybrid quality of a work does not suffice in addressing the ambivalent range of its interpretations, which may vary from associations pertaining to identity as a contemporary manifestation of a particular culture, to more rigid categorisations: as one critic recently claimed, her imagery "could *only* come from South America, from Milhazes' Rio de Janeiro".⁴ The statement is not only problematic for associating a continent to a city, but for its explicit essentialism. Hybridity, therefore, does not necessarily erase essentialist connotations, since it might still affirm a sense of origin from the elements of which it is constituted: implying an inescapable belongingness whatever the level of contamination from other sources.

Milhazes' work is layered with references to Brazilian cultural history: the excess of the Baroque, the colours and appropriatory strategies of *Modernismo*⁵, the kitsch and popular culture present in the art of the 1960s.⁶ More generally, it maintains an ambivalent relation to the traditions of figurative and abstract art, and the legacy of European modernism.

A series of questions thus arise when discussing the notion of hybridity with regard to this specific medium. For instance, how do these recent hybrid negotiations within the geo-political boundaries that have traditionally delineated the narratives of canonical art history, relate to the strategies of hybridity developed in non-metropolitan areas?

Hybridity, as a strategy of cultural production in Brazil, played a central role within the inauguration of modernist painting in that country. If we are to celebrate hybridity as enabling the re-emergence of painting as a critically engaged cultural product, in tune with contemporary thought, what differentiates this particular hybrid moment from the hybridity of early Brazilian *Modernismo*?

Brazilian art historians have in the not so distant past interpreted *Modernismo*'s preoccupation with the representation of national identity as a burden in the path towards its development as an autonomous and emancipated - in other words universal - avant-garde. More recently however, the hybridity implicit in *Modernismo* has been evaluated as an example of a possible postmodernism

⁴ David MOOS, La Leçon de Peinture, In: *Beatriz Milhazes* exhibition catalogue, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham UK, Birmingham Museum of Art, Alabama, USA, 2001 p.9 (my emphasis)

⁵ *Modernismo* is used here to define a period in Brazilian art covering the 1920s and leading on into the 1930s. It is a term that describes a loose movement rather than the wider cultural and aesthetic connotations of the term modernism. Although this essay refers primarily to the development of the painter Tarsila do Amaral and the poet Oswald de Andrade, there was a far greater diversity of artists and writers involved in *Modernismo*.

⁶ See Paulo HERKENHOFF, Beatriz Milhazes: a Brazilian Trove, In: *Beatriz Milhazes*, op. cit.

avant la lettre. Neither interpretation seems satisfactory however, since they ignore the specific conditions of painterly production at different historical moments and worrying reinforce the fixity of a notion of national identity.

Hybridity, if a useful term, serves as an interpretative tool which evades the polarisation between the figurative association to a specific cultural place and the purported universality of abstract language. While the latter - the prevalent modernist canon - has been generally discredited, the relation between cultural production and its place of origin has undergone important, if subtle, changes. The ambivalence of hybridity was a central characteristic in the emergence of modern painting in Brazil and continues as a predominant element in today's production. The distinction between these two moments is the subject of this essay. Through a discussion of the emergence of modern painting in Brazil, it attempts to distinguish Brazilian *Modernismo* from the articulation of its legacy within contemporary production.

Hybrid and Syncretic Strategies

To speak of hybridity in the context of Latin American art is to unavoidably refer to the writing of Néstor García Canclini. His *Hybrid Cultures: strategies for entering and leaving modernity*⁷ places hybridisation within the politics of subaltern struggles. Rejecting the claim that modernism in Latin America did not attain the level of cultural purity present in Europe and North America due to the late or incomplete modernisation of the continent, he argued that Latin American modernity, instead of replacing pre-modern culture, coexisted with the traditional. Within such coexistence, the subaltern, through the process of hybridisation, opens a space of negotiation with the dominant culture, while maintaining a sense of identity through the preservation of local traditions. These are in turn articulated with modernity.

In effect, Canclini acknowledged operations which have been present within the history of the continent, particularly at the time of its colonial experience, and placed them within the specific context of the more recent relations and negotiations with modernism and modernisation.

Prior to modernity, the colonial period witnessed the emergence of the syncretic religions such as *Candomblé* and *Santería*, which established forms of cultural translation as strategies for dealing with the imposition of a dominant religion. The Catholic Saints of the coloniser were equated to African Gods. The slaves thus cunningly deceived their masters by worshipping syncretic icons: forms with ambivalent meanings. Marcos Becquer and José Gatti⁸ have suggested syncretism as a more appropriate term in which to designate processes of articulation between contemporary discourses and traditions. The politicised nature of syncretic articulation being more appropriate as a description of subaltern strategies. In this definition, the syncretic does not occupy a third space - implied by the notion of hybridity - but proposes ambivalence as a subversive

⁷ Originally published as *Culturas Híbridas: Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*, Copyright, 1989 Editorial Grijalbo, Mexico, 1990

English Translation (C. L. Chiappari and S. L. López) with a foreword by Renato Rosaldo, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis London 1990

⁸ Marcos Becquer and José Gatti, Elements of Vogue, *Third Text* 16/17, Autumn/Winter 1991, pp. 65-81 (I am grateful to Jean Fisher for drawing my attention to Becquer and Gatti's essay)

strategy. For Becquer and Gatti syncretism defines the unavoidable political nature of such cultural combinations and evades the biological connotations: as a third and sterile outcome of two other, supposedly pure, entities.

In his search for the possible origins of such processes, the French sociologist Roger Bastide⁹ located the emergence of the syncretic Brazilian religions in the interaction between Africans from different and often rival tribes who were placed in extreme proximity through the machinery of slavery. Their situation demanded that they transcend old rivalries and develop operations of cultural translation of the distinctive elements of their respective cultures that would enable communication and understanding of each other. According to Bastide, such strategies were then applied in relation to the dominant culture of the coloniser, enabling the survival of their religion as in the case of *Candomblé*, and indeed, their own physical survival as in Capoeira, a martial art disguised as a dance. Syncretism thus demands an understanding of the other in order to delineate a territory for the self. Bastide's study is coherent with Becquer and Gatti's description of syncretism's etymology and consequently its distinction from hybridity:

The etymology of syncretism points to the tactical articulation of different elements, exemplified in Plutarch by the communities of ancient Crete which, despite their differences, joined to face a common enemy. Thus, syncretism foregrounds the political - rather than the (un)natural - paradigm of articulation and identity, a paradigm under which the factional inhabitants of Crete, rather than forming a homogenous whole, compose a heterogeneous front of distinct communities in altered relations to each other. As such, the discursive alignment implicit in syncretism remains contingent to relations of power and subject to change according to historical specificity; the elements united in it are denied any *a priori* 'necessary belongingness', and are precluded any sense of originary fixity both to their identities and to their relations. In this manner, syncretism designates articulation as a politicised and discontinuous mode of becoming. It entails the 'formal' coexistence of components whose precarious (i.e., partial as opposed to impartial) identities are mutually modified in their encounter, yet whose distinguishing differences, as such, are not dissolved or elided in these modifications, but strategically reconstituted in an ongoing war of position.¹⁰

Today's perception of syncretism as a harmonious cultural translation, ignores its confrontational history as a strategy arising from brutal struggles. The state repression of Afro-Brazilian cultures for instance, remained present until the 20th century. Sérgio Cabral in his account of the rise of the Samba Schools in Rio de Janeiro described the frequent instances of police persecution suffered by many of the pioneering samba musicians due to the association that their music had to the then outlawed practice of Afro-Brazilian religions such as *Candomblé*.¹¹ An awareness of this fact as a contemporaneous occurrence to *Modernismo* further

⁹ Roger BASTIDE, *Estudos Afro-Brasileiros*, Perspectiva, São Paulo, 1973 (I am grateful to the artist Maria Moreira for drawing my attention to the work of Bastide)

¹⁰ Marcos Becquer and José Gatti, *Elements of Vogue*, op. cit. p. 69

¹¹ Sérgio CABRAL, *As Escolas de Samba do Rio de Janeiro*, Editora Luminar, 1996, p.27

emphasises the necessity of distinguishing the hybridity or syncretism of different historical moments. Moreover, hybrid strategies, as Homi Bhabha has argued, were also present within colonial discourse.¹² A politics of encouragement of hybrid subjects - British educated but not quite British - served the purpose of creating a class of mediators or translators between the Empire and its colonial subjects. Bhabha refers to a document written by Charles Grant in which such strategies are elucidated as preventive of "dangerous political alliances" and contributing to maintain the colonial subjects under British 'protection'.¹³ Hybridity in this instance served as a counteraction to syncretism in its original meaning. Bhabha, nevertheless identifies in such mimicry the emergence of the hybrid figure as a 'menace' to the very premises to which the colonial discourse based itself on. These relied on difference as legitimisation of a colonial narcissistic authority: as the distinction between the self and the other diminishes so does the effect of an argument that associates inferiority with difference. Similarly, the ideal of a 'universal' modern art cannot admit the presence of difference.¹⁴ The emergence of modernism in the periphery¹⁵ has been treated by History in a similar manner, being the same yet not quite, it has tended to be interpreted in the light of European movements as a follower, yet discredited as a possible contributor due to its differences, being as it is not quite the same.

Brazilian *Modernismo*: Between Mimicry and Mockery

Some signs of proto-modernism were already present in Brazil at the turn of the 20th century, as much in the development of urbanistic projects as in literature. Modernist painting itself emerged during the 1910s with artists such as Lasar Segall and Anita Malfatti. The former, a Russian immigrant with first hand experience of German expressionism, presented an exhibition of his paintings in 1913 (Fig. 1); but his isolation from Brazilian intellectual circles with modernist inclinations, meant that the exhibition was only recognised retrospectively.¹⁶ The latter, however, caused a scandal amongst Brazilian conservative intellectuals when she exhibited her cubist and expressionist paintings (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) in São Paulo in 1917.¹⁷ Malfatti's paintings were the product of her studies in

¹² Homi BHABHA, *Of Mimicry and Man: the Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse*, in: *October* 28, Spring 1984, p.127

¹³ Charles GRANT, *Observations on the State of Society among Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain*, *Sessional Papers* 1812-13, X (282), East India Company. Quoted in BHABHA, *ibid.*

¹⁴ For a discussion on Universality and Pluralism, see: Andrew BENJAMIN, *Art, Mimesis and the Avant-Garde: aspects of a philosophy of difference*, Routledge, London, 1991 p.138

¹⁵ I prefer to describe these as 'modernism in the periphery' rather than peripheral modernisms or 'other modernisms', etc, because the latter would imply variations on an original modernism.

¹⁶ Lasar Segall, through his acquaintance with Otto Dix and George Grosz, joined the expressionist movement in 1911-12. See: Dawn ADES, *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era 1820-1980*, Yale university Press, New Haven and London, 1989 p.356

¹⁷ Monteiro Lobato was the author of a vicious attack on Malfatti's exhibition in 1917. Lobato later became a main reference for regionalist and indeed modernist literature, through his depiction of the Brazilian rural character. See: Monteiro LOBATO, *A propósito da Exposição Malfatti*, in: *O Estado de São Paulo*, 20/12/1917. Quoted in its

Germany and the USA, and although devoid of any attempt at developing a modern Brazilian aesthetic, the controversial exhibition opened a confrontational space for the modernist group.

While the Portuguese colonisers had brought a strong literary tradition, the fine arts in Brazil had been, with only few exceptions until the 1920s, under the influence of the French 19th century academic artistic mission: an outdated European model, whose imposition of ideals, colours and themes were far removed from the reality of the country. The conservatives defended such academicism as a form of uncontaminated high art, as a proof that Brazil belonged to a genuine and authentic (European) tradition.

The influence of romanticism mediated in Brazil through the indianist movement had placed the idea of the noble savage as representative of a pre-colonial innocent and paradisiatic setting of the original Brazil. In painting the romantic vision of an original Brazil contrasted with its European academic mode of representation. It is in this sense that *Modernismo* proposed an aesthetic rupture while allowing elements of the indianist past to re-emerge.

Setting the tone for debates which would be central to *Modernismo*, in 1915 the poet Oswald de Andrade, in an article entitled 'For a National Painting'¹⁸ criticised the blind adoption of European landscape painting and the consequent exclusion of Brazilian landscape as not responding to the 'proper' standards of aesthetic composition. The article, in a mocking style that would become characteristic of his later manifestos, described the general distaste for Brazilian nature prevalent at the time:

Confronted with our landscape our man is positively shocked: _ Oh! This is not a landscape! What horror, look at that bunch of coconut trees breaking the compositional line!¹⁹

In a footnote to *Antecedentes da Semana de Arte Moderna*, the art historian Mário da Silva Brito²⁰ reminds his readers that it was precisely these coconut trees that Tarsila do Amaral would use as a compositional instrument in her now paradigmatic modernist paintings of the 1920s. At the core of da Silva Brito's argument is the idea that the premises of Oswald de Andrade's *Pau-Brasil* manifesto of 1924 were already present within the rhetoric which he had developed between 1912 and 1915. Although not representative of *Modernismo* as a whole, the relation between Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade will

entirety in: Mário da Silva BRITO, *História do Modernismo Brasileiro: antecedentes da Semana de Arte Moderna*, Civilização Brasileira, pp.52-56

For a (French) translation of Lobato's article and Oswald de Andrade's own response to the exhibition, see: *Modernidade: Art Brésilien du 20e Siècle*. Exhibition Catalogue 1987/88 Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris pp. 62-65.

See also: Carlos ZILIO, *A Querela do Brasil: a questão da identidade da arte brasileira*, Relume Dumará, Rio de Janeiro, 1997 (1st ed. FUNARTE, 1982) p. 40-41

¹⁸ Oswald de ANDRADE, *Em Prol de uma Pintura Nacional*. Originally published in *O Pirralho* no. 168 Year iv, 2-1-1915. Quoted in: Mário da Silva BRITO, *História do Modernismo Brasileiro*, op. cit. p.33

¹⁹ Ibid. My translation

In the original: Diante da paisagem, o nosso homem choca-se então positivamente: _Oh! Isto não é paisagem! Que horror, olhe aquela maço de coqueiros quebrando a linha de conjunto.

²⁰ Ibid.

be discussed below as an important example of the hybrid character of early Brazilian modernism.

The establishment of *Modernismo* as a literary movement with varied responses in the fine arts, occurred at the time of a complex moment of re-evaluation of Brazilian national culture: it is revelatory that its inaugural moment, 'The Modern Art Week' in São Paulo in 1922, coincided with the celebrations of the centenary of Brazilian independence. The nationalism implicit within *Modernismo* related specifically to the socio-cultural conditions of the particular region of the prosperous South, and in particular, the city of São Paulo whose profits from coffee plantation had contributed to its enormous growth, in addition to being the source of income of many of the Modernists artists and poets.

One cannot therefore place the efforts of *Modernismo* as the sole example of hybrid operations in Brazil during the 1920s: in opposition to the modernists from São Paulo, another tendency emerged in the North East, corresponding much more closely to Canclini's definition of hybridity: *Regionalismo*. This diversity of cultural approaches during that period inscribed itself within strong internal geo-political distinctions. São Paulo, as the beneficiary of intense coffee production, was a city that was rapidly and chaotically growing; its rebellion against academicism could be interpreted as a reaction against the capital Rio de Janeiro²¹: its colonial traditions and architecture, its cultural institutions and archaisms. *Modernismo's* distinctive modern European aesthetic served as an affirmation of its cosmopolitan pretensions compared to the rurality of the concurrent regionalism in the North East. Such diversity also occurred in individual responses to the idea of nationalism and its representation. According to da Silva Brito, the nationalist climate predominant during the celebrations of the centenary of independence, brought a surge in 'regionalist' inspired literature whose subject was the simple man of the countryside. Demonstrative of the disparities between the literary field and the emerging modernist painting was the influence that a character such as *Jeca Tatu* had on modernist writers such as Menotti del Picchia. A creation of the novelist Monteiro Lobato,²² *Jeca Tatu*, represented a vision of the harsh reality of the Brazilian rural man.²³ The contradictory presence of images of the cosmopolitan urban environment and the agrarian vision of Brazil had already been recognised as problematic during the 'Modern Art Week': Graça Aranha in his inaugural speech argued that regionalism although appropriate as a literary subject could not form a national literary school with universal aspirations.²⁴ Such discrepancies were symptomatic of a transitional period which the country would undergo during the following decades, from a predominantly agrarian society into an urban and industrial one. Faced with the dilemma of aesthetic renewal in relation to Europe, *Modernismo* attempted to develop an art that addressed a particularly *Paulista* vision of the Brazilian reality. The project of *Modernismo*, developed its premises of cosmopolitanism and nationalism through interesting reversals. These were to a

²¹ It is important to state that modernist circles were not exclusive to São Paulo. For a study of modernist groups in Rio de Janeiro during the early 20th century, see: Angela de Castro GOMES, *Essa Gente do Rio: Modernismo e Nacionalismo*, Editora Fundação Getúlio Vargas, 1999

²² We have already seen Lobato's role as fierce critic of Anita Malfatti's 1917 exhibition. See note 17.

²³ Mário da Silva BRITO, op. cit. p.141

²⁴ *Modernidade*, op. cit. p.71

large extent the result of the experiences of its protagonists within the diverse artistic circles which they frequented in Paris. Tarsila do Amaral²⁵, who had been in Paris during the São Paulo 'Modern Art Week', had only become acquainted with modernism on her return to Brazil through her friend Anita Malfatti. It was only later, while again in Paris with her new partner Oswald de Andrade, that Tarsila do Amaral became aware of Brazil as a cultural reference. Indeed, in a letter from Paris to her family, she wrote of her discovery of Brazil:

I feel ever more Brazilian: I want to be the painter of my land. How I am grateful to have spent my entire childhood at the farm [fazenda]. The memories of those times become increasingly precious for me. In art I would like to be the little peasant girl from São Bernardo, playing with dolls in the vegetation as in my latest painting. [...] Don't think that this Brazilian tendency is thought badly here. On the contrary, what is wanted here is that everyone brings a contribution from their own country. This is what explains the success of the Russian Ballet dancers, Japanese prints, and black music. Paris is tired with Parisian art."²⁶

Tarsila do Amaral's *A Negra* (Fig. 4) of 1923, is often referred to as a premonitory painting displaying a number of issues and themes which would emerge in her production throughout the 1920s. However, it did not possess the sense of synthesis which her later work of the 1920s presents.²⁷

The most immediate formal aspect of this painting is its distinct approach to the relationship between foreground and background. The critic Frederico Moraes has described this distinction as an abyss which separates the figurative foreground and the abstract background, implying an unresolved dichotomy between a representation of the national and the abstract tendencies of European modern art.²⁸ However, the abstract background could be read as symbolic of the wall of European culture which enclosed the artist's perceptions of Brazil and its popular classes, which were quite distinct from her own experiences.²⁹ *A Negra's* timid abstraction, rather than representing a premonition of the abstract project which would appear in Brazil during the 1940s and 50s³⁰, hints at Tarsila do Amaral's associations with purism. The French movement was itself embedded in the ideal of nationalism which had emerged following World War I: the purist aesthetic promoted, through the Journal *L'Esprit*

²⁵ Emphasis is placed here on Tarsila do Amaral for her relation to Oswald de Andrade's manifestos.

²⁶ Carlos ZILIO, *A Querela do Brasil*, op. cit. p.48 (Zilio quotes this passage from Aracy AMARAL, *Tarsila sua Obra e seu Tempo*, V.1 São Paulo, 1986 p. 84)

²⁷ Such as in Tarsila do Amaral's 1928 painting *Antropofagia* where she combined the figures in *A Negra* and *Abaporu*.

²⁸ Frederico MORAIS, *Entre la Construction et le Rêve: L'Abîme*, in: *Modernidade*, op. cit. p.53

²⁹ Indeed the distance held by the *modernista* circle from the wider Brazilian social context was expressed by Mário de Andrade who during the celebrations of the 20th year since the Modern Art Week, admitted that his circle was generally aristocratic in attitude. Translated into English in: *Brasil: 1920-1950, de la Antropofagia a Brasília*, Exhibition Catalogue, IVAM Centre Julio González, 26 October 2000 to 14 January 2001 p.593-601

³⁰ See: Aracy AMARAL, *The Advent of Geometrical Abstraction in Brazil*, in: *Arte Construtiva no Brasil, Coleção Adolpho Leimer*, (ed. A. Amaral) Companhia Melhoramentos, São Paulo, 1998 p.32-33

Nouveau,³¹ the idea of a *Rappel à l'Ordre* ('Call to Order'), which considered French culture as the rightful inheritor of the classical tradition.³² It therefore proposed a re-evaluation of cubism, through the sobriety of classical art, as a means of eradicating all forms of irrational and romantic connotations seen as intrinsically Germanic in nature. Tarsila do Amaral would have been exposed to such ideas as a student of André Lhote, Albert Gleizes and later Fernand Léger. Moreover, Tarsila do Amaral's Parisian influence is indicative of the diverse and often paradoxical nature of French cultural interests at that time. Guillaume Apollinaire, a central figure in the establishment of the rhetoric of a 'Call to Order' until his death in 1918, had been an enthusiastic promoter of the primitive amongst the avant-garde.³³ In its compositional relationship between nature and the female body, *A Negra* referred overtly to the ideal of primitivism which had been current in Paris since the beginning of the century: the figure of the black woman is rooted in the ground as if an integral part of nature,³⁴ the banana leaf further specifies the location of such nature as clearly tropical; the prominent breast emphasises the associations with motherhood. Moreover, her reference to the figure of a wet nurse is an indication of the level in which the artist interacted with the poor rural classes, being as she was from a wealthy land-owning family where black wet nurses were an intrinsic part of the everyday experience of the landlord's child.

Tarsila do Amaral illustrated an anthology of poems by the Swiss poet Blaise Cendrars who had found his inspiration from a journey which he had made from Le Havre to São Paulo.³⁵ The trajectory of poems and their respective illustrations seem to describe Tarsila do Amaral's own 'discoveries'. On the cover, the sketch of *A Negra* sharply contrasts with Cendrars' final poem in the publication, a description of his entry into the modern city of São Paulo:

At last here are the factories a suburb a nice little tramway
Electricity conductors
[...]
a petrol pump
At last a station

³¹ Research has shown that other central figures of Brazilian modernism had intimate knowledge of this section of the Parisian artistic circles, such as in Graça Aranha's use of the term *Espiritonovismo* and Mário de Andrade's collection of the entire run of the *L'Esprit Nouveau* Journal. See: Gilberto Mendonça TELES, *Vanguarda Européia e Modernismo Brasileiro*, Vozes, Petrópolis, (13th ed.) 1997 pp. 25-35

³² On the importance of the *Call to Order* on Brazilian *Modernismo*, see: Annateresa Fabris, *Forms of (Possible) Modernity, Brasil 1920-1950*, op. cit p.533-539

³³ See: Petrina ARCHER-STRAW, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*, Thames and Hudson, London 2000

³⁴ The artist and art historian Carlos Zilio has associated the lips of the woman in Tarsila's *A Negra* with Brancusi's 1923, *La Nègresse*. See: Carlos ZILIO, *A Querela do Brasil*. op. cit p50

³⁵ Blaise CENDRARS, *Feuilles de Route*, Éditions Au Sans Pareil, Paris 1924 Reprinted in *Modernidade*, op.cit.p77

My translation, in the original: Enfin voici des usines une banlieue un gentil petit / tramway / Des conduites életriques / Une rue populeuse avec des gens qui vont faire leurs / emplettes du soir / Un gazomètre / Enfin on entre en gare / Saint-Paul / Je crois être en gare de Nice / Ou débarquer à Charring-Cross à Londres / Je trouve tous mes amis / Bonjour / C'est moi

St. Paul
 I think it could be Nice's station
 or an arrival at London's Charing Cross
 I find all my friends
 Hello
 Its me.³⁶

When Cendrars visited Brazil, the *modernistas* took him on a voyage across Brazil, a journey which they described as the 're-discovery' of Brazil. Its impact was as important to the modernists as it was to their European guest. Tarsila do Amaral's subsequent paintings would include references to the Baroque architecture of the state of Minas Gerais and to the popular traditions of carnival. In opposition to the closed environment in *A Negra*, the new paintings predominantly display open spaces, landscapes in which typically modern objects relate to each other within the tropical scenery. In the painting *EFCB* (Fig. 5) of 1924, signs of modernity, characteristically Brazilian elements of nature, and a Baroque church on the horizon, form its composition. Such transition could be seen as a consequence of two distinct events. Fernand Léger's influence over Tarsila do Amaral's approach to the stylisation of objects, and the *Pau-Brasil* Manifesto of 1924 by Oswald de Andrade. The latter, argued for a national modern poetry,³⁷ and its rhetoric was clearly transcribed by Tarsila do Amaral onto the canvas. In the spirit of the *Pau-Brasil* manifesto, Tarsila do Amaral transposed contemporaneous French aesthetics within the Brazilian context. The relation between Tarsila do Amaral's paintings and Oswald de Andrade's manifestos is worth emphasising. The influence of one over the other, should be seen as a genuine collaboration expressed in different media. On the one hand, *A Negra* preceded Oswald de Andrade's claim in the *Paul-Brasil* manifesto that:

We have a dual heritage - the jungle and the school. Our credulous mestizo race, then geometry, after the baby's bottle the herbal tea.³⁸

On the other hand, the manifesto, while not a precise prescription, contains descriptions similar to the contents of Tarsila do Amaral's subsequent paintings:

Lift Shafts, skyscraper cubes, and the compensatory laziness of the sun. Devotions, Carnival, intimate energy. The songbird. Hospitality, somewhat sensual loving. The nostalgia of the medicine men and military airfields. Pau-Brasil.³⁹

In some retrospective accounts⁴⁰ formative of the history of modern Brazilian art, Tarsila do Amaral is seen as the catalyst for the development of the notion of 'Anthropophagy' - or cannibalism - which defined a process of Brazilian cultural appropriation, and became the title of Oswald de Andrade's most notorious

³⁶ Quoted in: *Modernidade*, op. cit. p.77

³⁷ *Paul-Brasil* is the name of a wood native to Brazil, giving indeed the country its name.

³⁸ English translation in: *Art in Latin America* op. cit. p. 311

³⁹ Ibid. Admittedly the manifesto's futurist tone is not present in the paintings.

⁴⁰ See, Carlos ZILIO, *A Querela do Brasil*, op. cit. p.52

manifesto.⁴¹ This role is attributed to her painting *Abaporu* (Fig. 6) of 1928 and to her comments following a humorous and nonsensical impromptu speech given by Oswald de Andrade at a dinner party.⁴² It was Oswald de Andrade together with Raul Bopp who suggested the title for Amaral's *Abaporu* - 'the one who eats' -, after consulting a dictionary of native Brazilian Tupi-Guarani language.⁴³

The painting *Abaporu* other than its title has been identified as referring to the European mythological creature⁴⁴, the Sciapode, who is said to possess a "single large foot on which they move with great speed and which they use as a sort of umbrella against the burning sun".⁴⁵

The connection between the work of the poet and that of the painter seems far less literal during the 'Anthropophagite' period: a consequence perhaps of Oswald de Andrade's increasing closeness to a repertory of ideas and imagery expressed by the Surrealists.⁴⁶ Tarsila do Amaral's paintings distance themselves from the previous portraits of a contemporaneous Brazil expressed through a classicised vocabulary of purism, into an increasingly imaginary world based on the mythology and the legends of the Brazilian natives. It nevertheless maintains its associations with aspects of the *Rappel à l'Ordre* through a recontextualisation of the European Arcadian ideal - prevalent within the imagery of that section of Parisian art⁴⁷ - into a particularly national vision of cultural origin: the Brazilian native. The apparent peacefulness of these pictures seemingly betrays the ferocious rhetoric of the 'Anthropophagite' manifesto and its call for a Caribbean Revolution. This rebellious spirit, is given its inaugural moment in the devouring of the Portuguese Bishop Sardinha in 1554.

⁴¹ The *Manifesto Antropofágico* is commonly equated with *Modernismo* as a whole. However, it was written in 1928 shortly before the market crash in 1929 which would bring considerable changes to the work of modern artists.

⁴² Raul BOPP, *Vida e Morte da Antropofagia*, Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro 1977 p.40-41 Bopp's description of the dinner party is quoted in: Carlos ZILIO, *A Querela do Brasil*, op. cit. p.51-52

⁴³ Tarsila do Amaral's account of her *Paul Brasil* and *Antropofagia* period was published in the first edition of the *Revista Annual do Salão de Maio*, São Paulo 1939, an English translation is available in: *Brasil 1920-1950*, op. cit. p.587

⁴⁴ Tarsila do Amaral herself described *Abaporu* as "a monstrous solitary figure" but did not mention that it possessed a single foot. Ibid. p. 588

On the association between Tarsila do Amaral's painting *Abaporu* and the mythological Sciapode see: Oriana BADDELEY and Valerie FRASER. *Drawing the Line: Art and Cultural Identity in contemporary Latin America*, Verso, London, New York, 1989 p.19

⁴⁵ Rudolf WITTKOWER, *Marvels of the East: a study in the history of monsters*, Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, V, 1942 p.160

⁴⁶ Although many accounts have identified the Anthropophagite movement with Surrealism, it was neither a movement nor directly a 'follower' of the French movement. Oswald de Andrade did claim however, that "After Surrealism, only Anthropophagy". In: Oswald de ANDRADE, *Revista de Antropofagia*, 2a Dentição, no. 1, Diário de São Paulo, 17 March 1917. Quoted by: Carlos Augusto Machado CALIL, Translators of Brazil, in: *Brasil 1920-1950*, op. cit. p.568

⁴⁷ The association to cultural origin is expressed below:

"The myth of the purity of the primitive has been the great myth of modern times, and indeed all the classical revivals that have occurred from the time of Winckelmann onwards have been intimately bound up with this ideal, for the return to the classical past is conceived as a return to origins." In: Elisabeth COWLING and Jennifer MUNDAY, in: *On Classical Ground*, Exhibition Catalogue Tate Gallery, 6 June - 2 Sep. 1990. p.25

The manifesto illustrates the manner in which European culture could be irreverently appropriated, distorted, mocked, or rejected. For instance, Oswald de Andrade appropriated Shakespeare in a cannibalistic process, which extended beyond the more literal reference to Caliban in the play 'The Tempest'. In the manifesto, Oswald de Andrade makes a playful parody of Hamlet by stating: "Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question".⁴⁸

As the literary critic Roberto Schwarz has argued, the manifesto is itself an expression of the contradictions which it attempts to overcome as the search for a national identity passes through the English language, whose classical quote is irreverently distorted by a play on words.⁴⁹ Moreover, using the cannibalism of the natives as a metaphor was particularly fitting: in the native's rites associated with the cannibalistic act, the devouring of one's enemy pertained to a process of acquiring the other's strength and attributes. Reverence therefore was an integral part of the rite. The manifesto reveals another form of ingenuity in its appropriation of the European image of the other; deeply ingrained fantasies of absolute otherness were transformed in this way into an affirmative stance. Contained within such notions were the ambivalence of the European fantasy itself: the savage menace and the Arcadian paradise. Such an ambivalence was mirrored in the hybrid project of Tarsila do Amaral and Oswald de Andrade combining the aesthetic of *Le Rappel à l'Ordre*, its Arcadian ideal, and the rhetoric of disorder contained in the dadaist and surrealist avant-gardes. Moreover, this ambivalence is reminiscent of Bhabha's descriptions on the colonial mimicry⁵⁰ in addition to exemplifying - through an elegant reversal - his critique of symmetrical or dialectical relations between self and other.

The closure and coherence attributed to the unconscious pole of colonial discourse and the unproblematised notion of the subject, restrict the effectivity of both power and knowledge. It is not possible to see how power functions productively as incitement and interdiction. Nor would it be possible, without the attribution of ambivalence to relations of power/knowledge, to calculate the traumatic impact of the return of the oppressed - those terrifying stereotypes of savagery, cannibalism, lust and anarchy which are the signal points of identification and alienation, scenes of fear and desire, in colonial texts.⁵¹

Anthropophagy's appropriation of such imagery in the European imaginary deserves a detour into the history of such references. More specifically, it will contribute towards an understanding of the Anthropophagite mockery of the European affirmation of the self through the constructed image of the other. In *Marvels of the East: a study in the history of monsters*, Rudolf Wittkower⁵² traces the legacy of Greek mythological people who were said to inhabit the farthest lands of the East. For the ancient Greeks, India represented such a place. These peoples, variously described as monstrous, marvellous, fabulous, wild, included

⁴⁸ The manifesto first appeared in *Revista de Antropofagia* n.1. São Paulo 1928. An English translation is available in: *Art in Latin America*, op. cit. pp. 312-313

⁴⁹ Roberto SCHWARZ, Brazilian Culture: nationalism by elimination, in: *Misplaced Ideas*, (edited by John Gledson), Verso, 1992 p.9

⁵⁰ Homi BHABHA, Of Mimicry and Man, op. cit.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rudolf WITTKOWER, *Marvels of the East*, op. cit. p.159

hybrid beings (part human part animal), or presented entirely human, yet with unusual characteristics (Fig. 7).⁵³ Wittkower discusses the different routes through which such accounts entered the European imagination: geography, literature, and religion were some of these propagators. While geography used mythology as the basis for a demarcation of the unknown, medieval theology's interest in the subject laid in the origin of such 'monsters'. If their belonging to Adam's stock was established, they were granted the possession of a soul and were therefore recognised as creatures of God; otherwise, they would be labelled as beasts, or worst still, as creatures of the Devil. Wittkower's account located the development of the association between India and the lost garden of Eden in the 12th and 13th centuries:

According to all reports, India lay on the eastern borders of the world and this was also the position of Paradise, for it is said in Genesis (ii, 8): 'And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden.' It is therefore habitual in medieval geography to show Paradise in the extreme east; and there it remained as part of the marvellous country India into the 16th century.⁵⁴

The same bizarre logic informed Columbus's belief, who until his death, was convinced of having discovered a sea route to India and that, indeed, he had passed near paradise. Wittkower stressed the ambivalent position which the monstrous people held for the Greeks and the role which these creatures maintained in the European imagination for 1500 years:

They shaped not only the day-dreams of beauty and harmony of western man but created at the same time symbols which expressed the horrors of his real dreams.⁵⁵

However, the geographical transfer from the East to the 'West Indies' of the assumed location of the mythological peoples went beyond Columbus's misgivings. In his text 'Discovering the European Wild Men'⁵⁶, Roger Bartra studied such myths in the context of the newly discovered Americas and argued for their extended influence beyond the limits defined by Wittkower. While the latter claimed their gradual disappearance with the development of scientific thought during the enlightenment, Bartra argued that a continuation of such myths took place through Renaissance literature. Authors such as Montaigne, Cervantes and Shakespeare, explored characters such as the cannibal, Cardeiro and Caliban.⁵⁷ However, while the presence of cannibals on the Caribbean islands were seen as the confirmation of the existence of the Anthropophagite race, descriptions of the natives provided by early explorers such as Columbus remained ambivalent:

⁵³ Wittkower describes the location of these races on the 13th century Hereford map: "In India live the sciapodes, the pygmies and the giants, the mouthless people, the martikhora and the unicorn. North of India, in Scythia and bordering countries and islands, there are horse-hoofed men, people with long ears, Anthropophagi and Hyperboreans [...]" *ibid.* p.174

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p.181

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p.197

⁵⁶ Roger BARTRA, *Discovering the European Wild Men*, in: *Third Text*, n.21, Winter 1992/93 p.11

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p.11

In these lands I have not discovered monstrous men, as many have believed but instead people of a pleasant deference [...] "thus I have not found a trace of monsters, except on a Caribbean island [...]"⁵⁸

Bartra posited the European perception of the newly discovered people as varying between Rousseau's notion of the noble savage and the Linnaeus's *homo ferus*. In addition, Bartra's description of mediaeval theology differed from Wittkower's approach in that he considered an account of the 'wild men' which assumed their belonging to a lineage unconnected to Adam. In the 16th century, Paracelsus' *Liber de nymphis, syphis, pigmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus*⁵⁹ placed the mythological peoples in a hybrid position between man and beast. In the words of Paracelsus:

Just as we say that man is the image and likeness of God, that is, an imitation of his form, we might also say that these people are the image and likeness of man, constructed in his form. Man is not God but in appearance, though he was created in the image similar to him. Similarly, these are not men, even though they are created in the image and likeness on man..., they cannot boast of possessing a soul like that of men, though they are like him. Just as man does not boast of being God, in spite of being made in his image and likeness as a reflection of him. In other words, man refrains from being God and wild men renounce the soul, and therefore cannot be called men.⁶⁰

Bartra's suggestion that "Paracelsus conceived the inhabitants of the new American colonies when he reflected on the wild man"⁶¹ reminds one of the fact that the wild people remained in European folklore located in a non-specific wilderness. However, as the Americas were discovered at the height of Renaissance, these myths provided or reinforced fantasies of absolute otherness. The new and mysterious world thus reinforced Europe's redefinition of itself as a culture born out of the classical tradition. In this sense, the monstrous peoples stand as the hidden other of Renaissance representations of the classical body.

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⁵⁸ Christóbal COLÓN, *Textos y Documentos Completos*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1982, p.144 Quoted in: Bartra, *ibid.* p.21

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p.11

⁶⁰ Philipus Aureolos Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, known as PARACELSUS, *Liber de nymphis, syphis, pigmaeis et salamandris et de caeteris spiritibus*. Original German work in: *Samtliche Werke*, 1 volume 14, pp 115-151, Medizinische Naturwissenschaftliche und Philosophische, the Karl Sudhoff edition, Munich/Berlin, 1922-1933. Quoted in Bartra, who also provides references for the following translations:

In Spanish: *Libro de las Ninfas, los Silfos, los Pigmeos, las Salamandras y los demás espíritus de Philipus Aureleous Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim*, edited by Pedro Gálvez (bilingual edition) Olisico, Barcelona, 1983

In English: *Four Treatises of Theophrastus von Hohenheim called Paracelsus*, edited by Henry E. Sigerist, The John Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1941

⁶¹ Roger Bartra op. cit. p.12

The representation of the body in *Modernismo* acted not only as a rupture with academicism, but also as an emancipatory strategy affirming the national through European aesthetics. However, following the 1929 Market Crash, artists associated with *Modernismo* underwent major aesthetic changes, due primarily to a newly found identification with the communist party. Tarsila do Amaral's painting abandoned the mythical landscapes of 'Anthropophagy' in order to concentrate on the portrayal of workers and the dispossessed. However, under the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas (1930-45), the emancipatory character of *Modernismo's* nationalism lost its original impetus as it became appropriated by a manipulative government with a populist agenda and fascist inclinations. Ironically therefore, the national modern aesthetic suited both sides of the political spectrum.

The new regime brought considerable changes to the social formation of the nation. From the land-owning oligarchy in the 1920s, the country's power base gradually shifted towards the industrial sector, and by the end of W.W.II., the urban character of the nation if not consolidated, seemed reassuringly close. The 1940s and 1950s saw Brazilian modern architecture become a focus of international attention enabling critics, such as Mário Pedrosa, to confidently affirm that Brazil was 'a country condemned to modernity'⁶². A crucial transformation occurred during that period: from a tool for the assertion of national identity, modernism became a national tool for affirming the nation's modernity.⁶³

Indeed, with modern architecture, the São Paulo Biennial, concrete art and poetry, ideas such as 'Anthropophagy', if not entirely irrelevant, seemed to belong to a distant past. An ideology of development pervaded the nation, its extraordinary positivism being demonstrated by its most audacious project, the construction of the new capital, Brasília, in only four years (from 1956 to 1960). In a God-like gesture, placed in the country's geographical centre, Brasília represented the peak as well as the rupture⁶⁴ of the developmentalist era.

Hybridity re-emerged - albeit not explicitly - in that moment of transition within the neoconcrete movement in Rio de Janeiro. Reacting against the formulaic nature of the art promoted by the São Paulo concretists, the neoconcrete *Theory of the Non-Object*⁶⁵ purported that art had reached a stage in which it was no longer possible to discern between the traditional media of painting and sculpture. Through a re-evaluation of the object in space and its apprehension by the viewer - based on Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* -, neoconcretism offered a number of artists a means of radicalising the experience

⁶² Mário PEDROSA, *Dos Murais de Portinari aos Espaços de Brasília*, (Aracy Amaral ed.) Editora Perspectiva, 1981, p.304

⁶³ For an interesting and detailed account of the transitions which occurred between the 1920s and the 1960s particularly with relation to ideas and attitudes concerning popular culture see: Carlos ZILIO, *Da Antropofagia a Tropicália*, in: *O Nacional e o Popular na Cultural Brasileira*, Editora Brasiliense, São Paulo, 1982

⁶⁴ I have appropriated Ronaldo Brito's notorious description of the neoconcrete movement (which was contemporaneous to the inauguration of Brasília) as the peak and rupture of the constructive project in Brazil. See: Ronaldo BRITO, *Neoconcretismo: Vértice e Ruptura do Projeto Construtivo Brasileiro*, Edições Cosac & Naify, São Paulo, 1999

⁶⁵ Ferreira GULLAR, *Teoria do Não Objeto*, *Jornal do Brasil: Suplemento Dominical* 20-21/12/1959

of art. As a consequence of its experimentation and the historical moment itself, neoconcretism, as the critic and art historian Ronaldo Brito argued, allowed the insertion of art within the ideological field and by doing so placed the production of art within the scope of social production.⁶⁶

In 1961, the confidence of the nation disintegrated. Jânio Quadros replaced Juscelino Kubitschek as President of the Republic. Following his resignation seven months later, his vice-president João Goulart took charge of power. These political transitions entailed major political unrest through a deep polarisation of the political spectrum: ultimately leading to the military coup in 1964. Following the disillusionment with the ideology of development, the concrete and neoconcrete avant-gardes appeared for some, alarmingly removed from the socio-cultural climate of the nation. The question of national culture re-emerged as a concern for intellectuals who had formerly demonstrated a lack of engagement with the popular classes and their associated culture. In December 1961, the 'Jornal do Brasil's *Suplemento Dominical*', the central arena of neoconcrete ideas, came to an end; the same year, the poet and critic Ferreira Gullar, who had been the main theoretician of neoconcretism, abandoned the movement to join the 'Centres for Popular Culture' (CPC), organised by the national students union.

Critics such as Ferreira Gullar saw their association with the movement as an untenable elitist position. The purity and autonomy of abstraction, or the constructivist ideal of art's potential effect on society became displaced once the reality of underdevelopment could no longer be denied.

Hélio Oiticica's radicalism pertained to the development of his concrete and neoconcrete trajectory into the sphere of the popular culture of carnival and samba. While for some it was no longer possible to maintain pretensions towards an avant-garde position, Oiticica argued that it was not the case of marginalising oneself but recognising and indeed embracing the precariousness of cultural production in Brazil.⁶⁷

Oiticica's installation *Tropicália* (Fig. 8) in 1967, significantly marked the rediscovery of 'Anthropophagy' in the fine arts.⁶⁸ It had arisen from his recontextualisation of the national character within art, articulated by the legacy of constructivism and the apprehension of the popular cultures. For Oiticica, the 1922 modernist movement in Brazil was related to Brazilian modern architecture, concretism and neoconcretism, through the "immediate reduction of all external influences within the national model."⁶⁹ Keeping the Brazilian constructive

⁶⁶ Ronaldo BRITO, *Neoconcretismo*, op. cit. p.95

⁶⁷ As one of his Parangolé capes of the early 1960s declared: 'Da Adversidade Vivemos' (From Adversity we Live). Later in the 1970s he argued that it was pointless to attempt to emulate North American *underground* culture, since the Brazilian cultural precariousness was already inescapably *underground*. See: Hélio OITICICA, O Ivan(H)élio Glaubericônico, in: *Glauberélio: HélioGlauber*, RIOFILME, 1997

⁶⁸ *Tropicália* also lent its name to a musical movement which had concurrently developed on similar lines: extending the legacy of Bossa Nova and adopting clear Oswaldian strategies of eclectic appropriation.

For accounts on the music and development of *Tropicália* see: Celso FAVARETTO, *Tropicália Alegoria, Alegria*, Ateliê Editorial, São Paulo, 1996; Augusto de CAMPOS (ed.), *O Balanço da Bossa* Editora Perspectiva, (5th edition 1993) São Paulo; Caetano VELOSO, *Verdade Tropical*, Editora Schwarcz, São Paulo, 1997 (first ed.)

⁶⁹ Hélio OITICICA, Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade. In: *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, exhibition catalogue, Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro 1967

tradition at a paradigmatic level, Oiticica thus attempted to resolve the problem of the apparent lack of a Brazilian art historical continuity. The intimate space of Oiticica's installations demonstrates a great contrast with the notion of public space in the urban openness of Brasília: while the former emphasised the subjective experience of the spectator, the latter imposed its form upon the world. Until then, art had inhabited the architectural space as part of a project of total modernity; Oiticica proposed a vision of art as symbolic architecture; instead of an architectural monument, he offered - through the labyrinthine structure of *Tropicália* - a matrix of representations and lived experiences.

More specifically, Oiticica's friendship with the people of Rio's shanty-towns and prioritisation of experience over formalism enabled an interchange of ideas and locations between popular culture and the domain of the fine arts. Both Brasília and Oiticica's *Tropicália* are related through the nation's 'constructive will', yet they stand respectively on each side of the abyss that irrevocably annihilated the possibility of imagining an utopia: the military coup of 1964. As such, they represent hugely significant interpretations of the national character. Brasília's formal purity excluded those who had participated in its construction: their temporary accommodation was transformed into permanent shanty-towns circumscribing the modern city. Addressing the history of the national representation in Brazilian modernism, Oiticica proposed a view of a reality that encompassed the extremes of the constructivist inheritance and the anarchic aesthetic of underdevelopment.

Claiming that purity is a myth, Oiticica brought the shanty-town aesthetic within the confines of modern art. Rather than the utopian project of a modern nation, it stated the precarious nature of the popular architecture of the *favelas* through the language of modernity. As such, *Tropicália* functioned as an anti-monument: firstly, it acknowledged the underdevelopment of the nation rather than the Arcadian ideal implicit in Tarsila do Amaral's Anthropophagite paintings; secondly, it was critical of the notion of the absolute modernity of the nation in the positivism prevalent in developmentalist ideology. In its affirmation of one's own identity, *Tropicália* was therefore a non-idealist and less exclusive re-evaluation of the legacy of *Modernismo*.

Anthropophagy as a Paradigm for Brazilian Art?

Brazilian contemporary art's emergence on the international art circuit during the 1990s was accompanied by certain expectations. These related to the perceived vitality of an art that concurrently demonstrated a contemporary pertinence, both conceptually and aesthetically, yet that belonged to an autonomous development, with a historical narrative of its own. This was a strategy of containment that placed artists within a pre-established lineage which could be understood and interpreted with minimal interference from canonical art history. This implied linearity suggested three key moments of 20th century art in Brazil: (1) Oswald de Andrade's 'Anthropophagite' Manifesto of 1928, (2) the participatory and environmental work of artists such as Hélio Oiticica and Lygia

For an English translation, see:

Hélio Oiticica, retrospective exhibition catalogue. Witte With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam / Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris / Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona / Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisboa / Walker Art Center, Minneapolis. Feb. 1992 - Feb. 1994

Clark during the 1960s and (3) the influence of these on today's young generation.

For these three moments, 'Anthropophagy' seemed undeniably paradigmatic. This interpretation was further emphasised by the 1998 São Paulo Biennial, which, under the general theme of *Antropofagia*, situated international contemporary art within the scope of a Brazilian cultural strategy: an interesting reversal which could be seen as an Anthropophagite act in itself. At face value, the assumption is that of a strong cultural tradition continuously developed by various generations of artists.

Many of the young artists who are today experiencing unprecedented international attention emerged in Brazil during the polemics caused by the visit to Brazil of an Italian art critic. Very much in the manner introduced by Marinetti, Corbusier, and Max Bill, who visited Brazil in order to promote their respective visions of avant-garde practice, Achille Bonito Oliva received a strong and polarised reaction from Brazilian artists and critics with his idea of a trans-avantgarde.⁷⁰

Such a reaction was a response to the long history of external influences in Brazilian culture which, according to Roberto Schwarz, often act detrimentally on the development of ideas at a local level, by being the main impetus for change or rupture:

[T]he impression is one of change without internal necessity and for this reason without local benefit. [...] It is not a question of continuity for continuity's sake [but an identification with] real and particular problems, which are inserted in our history and will endure historically according to local prerogatives.⁷¹

On the one hand, the re-emergence of Anthropophagy as a cultural reference may indicate that such a notion of continuity is finally a reality, as artists refer as much to a local 'tradition' as they do to international tendencies. On the other hand, at a time when notions of historical linearity are rejected, it seems ironical that the international dissemination of Brazilian contemporary art can only occur if it is placed within this local and seemingly fixed context. Perhaps contemporary Brazilian art's experience over the last decade, is related to the process of globalisation, which Néstor García Canclini, in a recent article, has claimed that:

destroys or weakens inefficient producers, and presents peripheral cultures with the choice of remaining fixed within their local traditions, or exporting themselves in a stylised, folkloristic form amenable to the demands of transnational [...] companies.⁷²

⁷⁰ For various accounts describing Oliva's visit see: Ricardo BASBAUM (ed.), *Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: textos, dicções, ficções, estratégias*, Coleção N-Imagem, Contra Capa, Rio de Janeiro, 2001

⁷¹ Roberto SCHWARZ, *Tradição/Contradição*. Jorge Zaher (ed.) FUNARTE 1987, pp. 91-110

⁷² Néstor García CANCLINI, Contradictory Modernities and Globalisation in Latin America, In: Vivian SCHELLING (ed.), *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, Verso London 2000 p.45

Caclini is not referring specifically to the field of art, yet there are certain affinities that allow a parallel to be drawn.

The '80s generation' is ambivalent in this respect since although internationally recognised as representing continuity, in Brazil their arrival was considered as a rupture. Many of those who were engaged with the legacy of the conceptual art in the 1960s and 70s, were overshadowed by a generation that arrived *en masse* in a mood of renewal which was seen to correspond instead to the contemporaneous international tendencies. Milton Machado's arguments in relation to the polemics associated with the emergence of the 1980s generation could be extended, in this manner, into the context of their wider international reception during the 1990s:

It seems more appropriate to believe, with Nietzsche, that the production of lies in art acquires a nobility due to the fact that this is how it produces truths. Today the good artists of the 80s generation have already affirmed themselves as such – some even as the ones – many have managed finally to acquire their own genuine individualities, which they rescued from the attempted label: that normative and paradoxical description, the 'individuality of the group'.⁷³

The international dissemination of Brazilian contemporary art is frequently accompanied by a discourse that emphasises the Brazilianess inherent to the work. Milhazes' painting (Fig. 9) is a prime example of this process as it is simplistically seen to "offer a paradigm through which we might perceive the culture from which her painting originates – a polyglot, post-colonial context where metaphorical forms compete and exist upon the same surface."⁷⁴ This interpretation has the effect of fixing the development of hybridity within the context of the single issue of its cultural identity. Although obviously a central concern of this particular artist, it is not the sole issue referred to by her. For instance, the work of Matisse stands as a major source in her use and manipulation of colour.

Paulo Herkenhoff's alternative view, places identity as representing an unconscious level of Milhazes' work. He distinguishes an important characteristic which emerges from the hybridised elements in her painting. As a response to the "idea of living in Rio"⁷⁵ the carnivalesque character of Milhazes' work is seen as demonstrative of how carnival's emphasis has been transformed from a participatory festival based on music and dance into what today is a highly organised spectacle of breathtaking visuality. This seems an appropriate metaphor for the distinction between the experimentalism of the 1960s and the professionalism of today's generation of artists. Herkenhoff's interpretation therefore, significantly places the work as characteristically contemporary.

⁷³ Milton MACHADO, *Dance a Noite Inteira mas Dance Direito*, In: *Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: textos, dicções, ficções, estratégias*, op. cit. p. 339

My translation, in the original: Melhor que ficemos com Nietzsche, na crença de que a produção de mentiras da arte adquire sua nobreza pelo fato de que é assim que ela produz verdades. A essas alturas, os bons artistas da 'Geração 80' já se afirmam como tais – alguns, até como 'os tais'; muitos conseguiram finalmente adquirir suas genuínas individualidades, resgatá-las àquela 'individualidade grupal' – norma e paradoxo – que se lhes tentou colar à testa como um rótulo.

⁷⁴ David MOOS, *Beatriz Milhazes*, Ikon Gallery, op. cit. p.10

⁷⁵ Paulo HERKENHOFF, *Beatriz Milhazes, The Brazilian Trove*, Ikon, ibid. p.11

As a means of proposing a subversive dimension to the supposed 'identity' of Milhazes' work, it could be suggested that her paintings are '*for the English to see*'.⁷⁶ This is a Brazilian expression which originated during the period of the British Empire when international economic affairs were frequently subject to British intervention. Other versions also exist relating to the specific instance from which the expression originates, its meaning nevertheless remains relatively constant: assuring an expectation which is somewhat removed from the reality.⁷⁷ Milhazes paintings could perhaps be more appropriately described as collages of paint. The artist paints on plastic, once dry she then transfers these fine layers of paint onto the canvas. This process means that often there is some loss as fragments of the transferred forms remain attached to the plastic. These are recuperated and applied onto canvas in a seemingly random manner to create an impression of age, of surfaces that have been worn or mistreated. The origin of these fragments does not necessarily come from the composing elements of the same picture and so the impression is one of a painting with several previous layers of paint.

Milhazes in this way, fools the viewer into believing that her paintings have a timeless quality. Their surface seems worn (Fig.10) to the extent that these previous layers become exposed through cracks and the peeling of paint. However, these seemingly exposed fragments are not under-layers but are superimposed. As such, they suggest - perhaps unconsciously - the artist's approach towards the historical references contained in her work. These overt references to past hybrid moments, inadvertently stand as reversals of that to which they refer to. Interpretations of current Brazilian art are often guilty of seeing the invoked spectre of the past as a sign of its authenticity, which in turn acts as a mask which paradoxically becomes the significant element of the work's contemporaneity. Indeed, this phenomenon has been identified as emerging on a general scale from the articulation between the universal and the national within the postmodern era. Andrew Benjamin speaking from a European position describes the contemporary artistic production in terms of:

the ability of a particular artist either to repeat and develop the themes that made up the national heritage or to give expression to a particular aspect - be it geographical or transcendental - of national character. The linking of tradition and nation would provide the grounds for a critical exclusion or inclusion; one sanctioning the promulgation of a canon of national artists. Admission to the canon would reside in the work's capacity to further artistic national identity.⁷⁸

The re-emergence of the national character in culture clearly stems from a notion of pluralism as diametrically opposed to universalism. References to the national

⁷⁶ It is perhaps worth mentioning that the usual derision implied by the expression is not directed here to the work itself but to the way in which it has been received outside Brazil.

⁷⁷ Amongst these versions: an expression that dates from the time when many of the major construction companies in Brazil were controlled by the British. It is an expression that comes from occasions in which the *English* manager would inspect the work carried out by his employees. The special effort in preparing for such inspections would be addressed by the workers as required in order to be seen by the Englishman. The implication being that, although expected, the object of the Englishman's gaze did not necessarily represent the reality of the situation.

⁷⁸ Andrew BENJAMIN, *Art Mimesis and the Avant-Garde*, op. cit. p.135

within this binary scheme tend to gravitate towards a sense of unity and essence as the main factors in a process where judgement is equated to belonging. As we have seen, however, in peripheral or post-colonial cultures, reference to the national has often coincided with a struggle for autonomy from the dominant culture. Although this places their production in a different light compared to Euroamerican artists, it becomes problematical if seen as an exclusive and determining characteristic. It is possible to propose that - like the art itself - the current national aspect of contemporary Brazilian art is as much a consequence of their Brazilianness as it is a sign of the artists' international awareness.

Appendix 4

Hélio Oiticica: Chronology

(From: Witte De With Center for Contemporary Art et al (1992) pp.209-16. The conventions used here relate to the original publication).

1937 – Hélio Oiticica (HO) was born July 26 at 26, Rua Alfredo Chaves in the Botafogo neighbourhood of Rio de Janeiro (Rio). The oldest son of José Oiticica Filho (b.1906) and Angela Macedo Santos Oiticica (b.1903), and grandson of José Oiticica (b.1882), philologist and well-known leader of the anarchist group 'Ação Direta' ('Direct Action'), Hélio and his brothers César (b.1939), an architect, and Claudio (b.1941), a physician, were raised in an anarchist intellectual environment. Their grandfather assembled his family for discussion-filled Sunday lunches at his house in the residential Rio neighbourhood of Urca and strongly influenced his grandsons with his love of liberty and hatred of totalitarianism, patriotism, religion and bourgeois conventions. The father, José Oiticica Filho, a scientist and author of works on entomology, exerted a strong influence on the intellectual development of his children. He was also a photographer and painter as well as professor at the Medical School of the University of Rio and at the Museu Nacional da Universidade do Brasil. As a photographer and scientist, he developed research which earned him international recognition. As a painter he became involved in the Brazilian constructivist project and participated in various exhibitions. The mother, daughter of a Brazilian Navy officer, had excellent schooling. She was bourgeois, Catholic, polyglot and a musician, and moved through the anarchistic world without being influenced by it.

1947 – José Oiticica Filho was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and worked for two years at the United States National Museum in Washington D.C.. Hélio, Cesar and Claudio attended school for the first time in Washington D.C.. Owing to her husband's disapproval of the school system, Angela tutored the boys during their first school years.

1950 – Return of the family to Brazil to the house at 59, Rua Alfredo Chaves in Rio.

1954 – Hélio and César began to study painting with Ivan Serpa at the Museu de Arte Moderna (MAM) in Rio. Hélio began to read extensively on anarchism and also the works of Kant, Heidegger, Sartre and Nietzsche, philosophers quoted frequently in his later texts. On March 31 Hélio wrote his first text on the visual arts, since 1952 he had been writing plays for his family to perform. Hélio continued to put down in a diary format his thoughts on art and his own developing work.

1955 – HO participated in the second exhibition of Grupo Frente at the MAM in Rio, having been introduced to the group by the critic Mário Pedrosa. With César, HO attended Grupo Frente meetings which occurred almost daily at the homes of the artist Lygia Clark and the critic Mário Pedrosa. Meetings were attended by artists and critics such as Ferreira Gullar, Lygia Pape, Aloisio Carvão, Carlos Val and Ivan Serpa.

1956 – HO continued to develop his work along abstract and concrete lines in gouache on paper. Participation in the third and fourth exhibitions of Grupo Frente held in the cities of Resende and Volta Redonda, Rio State. In December participation of HO in the first National Exhibition of Concrete Art held at the MAM, São Paulo and at the Ministério de Educação e Cultura, Rio. Break up of the Grupo Frente. Participation in the exhibition 'Pintura Brasileira Contemporânea' in Montevideo.

1957 – Death of José Oiticica on June 30. Participation of HO in the IV São Paulo Bienal. Began production of *Metaesquemas* (meta-schemas), only designated as such by the artist in a text of 1972, which he continued until 1958. Participation in the exhibition 'Modern Art in Brazil' at the Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires.

1959 – Experimenting on the transition from canvas to three-dimensional space, HO began to develop his 'inventions', which he also called *Monochromatics*. These were followed by the *white paintings*, *Reliefs*, *Bilaterals* and *Spatial Reliefs*. Participation in the Neo-concrete movement of Rio. Following Ferreira Gullar's 'Theory of the Non-Object', HO classified his works as *non-objects*. In December HO began writing essays in which he analysed the influence of Mondrian, Malevitch and the Constructivists on his own production and explained the importance of Lygia Clark's works. Participation in the 'Exposição de Arte Neoconcreta' in Salvador Bahia.

1960 – Participation in the exhibition 'Konkrete Kunst', organised by Max Bill in Zurich and in the second Neo-concrete Exhibition at the Ministério de Educação e Cultura in Rio, where he showed *Bilaterals*, and *Spatial Reliefs*. Publication of HO's essay of 1959, *Colour, Time and Structure* published in the Sunday supplement of the *Jornal do Brasil*. Beginning of experiments involving participation of the spectators: *Orders for Environmental Manifestations* which became the *Nuclei*. HO created his first Penetrable PN1.

1961 – HO made the maquette for his first environmental project *Hunting Dogs Project*, a labyrinthine garden composed of five *Penetrables* and incorporating 'Buried Poem' by Ferreira Gullar and 'Integral Theatre' by Reynaldo Jardim, exhibited later at the MAM, Rio with a catalogue written by Mário Pedrosa. Participation of the third Exhibition of Neoconcrete Art at the MAM, São Paulo.

1962 – Move of the Oiticica family to Rua Engenheiro Duarte, in Jardim Botânico neighbourhood of Rio. On April 16, HO wrote in his diary: "I am already planning a work which at this point I think will be called 'painting after painting', in which I will try to expose and develop the theory and practice of this correspondence, which I initiated in 1959".

1963 – Production of HO's first manipulative structures: *Bólides B1*. HO classified the *Bólides* following strict material categories, for instance *Box Bólido*, *Glass Bólido*, *Bed Bólido*, etc., and numerical orders. He designated these structures as *Transobjects* in his text of October 29. the Brazilian sculptor Sergio de Camargo showed works by HO in Paris to Guy Brett, then critic for the Times, and Paul Keller and the artist David Medalla, who later opened Signals Gallery in London.

1964 – Upon his father's death on July 26, HO, who until then had assisted his father at the Museu Nacional in Rio, obtained work as a telegraphist with the Companhia de Radio Internacional do Brasil, where he remained until 1967. Accompanied by sculptor Jackson Ribeiro, HO began attending the Mangueira Samba School, which later assumed a role of revelation, clearly seen in his works and writings. HO became a 'passista', a leading dancer, and during the years he was in Brazil participated in Mangueira's carnival parades. He became part of the favela's community and made friends with Mangueira members Nildo, Miro, Mosquito, Jerônimo, Rose and Maria Helena, all of whom later participated in performances of his work. Invention of the concept of *Parangolé*, "... which would not be a new order of the manifestation of colour in space, but a new form in which other orders would appear..." (HO). Elaboration in November of the text *Fundamental Bases for the*

Definition of Parangolé. The first three *Parangolés* would consist of tents, banners and flags; *Parangolé P4* became the first cape to be worn on the body.

1965 – Presentation, during the exhibition 'Opinião 65' at the MAM, Rio, of the *Inauguration of the Parangolé*, the first public manifestation of a group of Oiticica's Mangueira samba friends, documented by the photographer Desdêmona Bardin. Participation in the VIII São Paulo Bienal. Meeting with Paul Keeler and Guy Brett in Rio. Keeler invited HO to participate in the exhibition 'Soundings Two' at the Signals Gallery and to hold a personal exhibition there in 1967. Reproduction of works in signals Newsbulletin edited by David Medalla. HO began writing about Brazilian contemporary artists.

1966 – Showing of *environmental manifestation Number 1* at Galeria G4 in Rio, "which represented an environment fusion of *Nuclei* and *Bólides*, to which were added elements such as the *Reliefs* that preceded the *Nuclei* and which due to their colour sense could be *Bólides*." (HO). Group exhibition at Galeria Atrium, in São Paulo with introductory text by critic Mário Schemberg. Participation in the exhibition 'Opinião 66', at MAM, Rio, with the *Snooker Room*. Completion of *box Bólides 18*, 'Homage to Cara de Cavalo', a famous Mangueira outlaw and friend of HO, killed by the police.

1967 – Presentation in the exhibition 'Nova Objetividade Brasileira' at MAM, Rio, of the *Penetrables PN2* and *PN3* as *Tropicália*. The concept of *Tropicália* had important repercussions on the movement which became known as tropicalismo in Brazilian popular music. Publication in the catalogue of HO's text *General Scheme of the New Objectivity*. Collective manifestation with *Parangolés* in Flamengo park in front of MAM, Rio, with poems by Lygia Pape, with participation of the artists Pedro Escosteguy and Rubens Gerschman, spectators and Mangueira dancers. Presentation of *Bólides* as *Suprasensorial proposals* in the IV Salão de Arte Moderna de Brasília. Participation in the Tokyo Biennial and the V Paris Bienal. Participation in the Bienal Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Bahia with *environmental Manifestation Number 2*. HO created *Eden*, a group of *Penetrables* and *Suprasensorial propositions* which he later showed in 1969 at the Whitechapel Gallery in London.

1968 – HO wrote on March 4 the essay *Tropicália*. Collective manifestation in Flamengo park in Rio, of 'Apocalipopótese' with *Parangolés* by HO, 'Ovos' by Lygia Pape, 'Urnas Quentes' by Antonio Manuel and 'Dog Act' by Rogério Duarte. Coordination, together with Rogério Duarte, at MAM, Rio, of the debate 'Madness and Culture'. Manifestation, with other artists, in Ipanema, Rio, with the banner 'Be an Outlaw, be a Hero'. The banner, exhibited later at a concert by Caetano Veloso in the Sucata nightclub in Rio, provoked police intervention. Participated as an actor in the film 'O Cancer' by Glauber Rocha. HO's work was documented in the films: 'Arte Pública' by Sirito and 'Apocalipopótese' by Raimundo Amado and Leonardo Bartucci.

1969 – HO travelled to London to install his one-person exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, which HO later called 'Whitechapel Experience'. Publication in the catalogue of an essay by Guy Brett, and excerpts from the artist's letters, including the text *Eden*. Appointment of HO as artist in residence at Sussex University, Brighton. HO built there with students a second version of the participatory *Nest*, included in *Eden*. Invention of the concept *Creleisure*. HO travelled to Paris and published work in Robho magazine, edited by Jean Clay, with a text written by Yve-Alan Bois. Participation with Lygia Clark in the First International Tactile Sculpture Symposium in California.

1970 – HO returned to Rio, making his home at Rua Engenheiro Duarte a meeting-place for film-makers, poets and musicians. On February 5 he wrote *Brasil Diarréia* HO travelled in July to New York for the exhibition 'Information' at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, curated by Kynaston McShine, where he showed the third version of the *Nests*. Referring to the 'Whitechapel Experience' HO wrote in the catalogue of 'Information': "...the idea of the *Nests* began there (London) and with them I arrived as if it were the limit of everything: the need to develop more and more something that would be extra-exhibition, extra-work, more than a participating object, a context for behaviour, for life; the *Nests* propose an idea of multiplication, reproduction, communal growth...". HO returned to Rio and participated in the 'Ogramurbana' collective event at the MAM, Rio, organised by Luiz Otávio Pimentel. Production of *Environmental Propositions* from musical shows. After receiving a Guggenheim fellowship, HO moved to New York City in November and set up residence at 81, 2nd Avenue.

1971 – Realisation of the environmental project *Rhodislândia: contact* at Rhode Island University. HO maintained a close link with Brazil through the *Hélio Tapes*, recordings and transcriptions sent for publication to newspapers Flor do Mal, Pasquim and Torquato Neto's *Geléia Geral* column in *Última Hora*. Many of the *Hélio Tapes* were recorded at the Chelsea Hotel with the help of the French photographer Martine Barrat. HO also maintained correspondence with artists and intellectuals in Brazil. HO began a series of plans for environmental projects called *Subterranean Tropicália Projects* within the overall program of *Newyorkaises*. HO began to codify projects and texts by his addresses: 'Babylonests' from 2nd Avenue, where he lived from 1970 to 1974, and 'Hendrixts' from Christopher Street, where he lived from 1974 to 1978. meeting with poet Haroldo de Campos. Construction by HO of 'nests-cells' on 2nd Avenue as well as on Christopher Street for visiting friends.

1972 – Death of Angela Oiticica on October 27. Participation in the exhibition 'Exposição' curated by Carlos Vergara, with the project 'Filtro', at MAM in Rio. Exhibition at the Ralph Camargo Gallery in São Paulo, where HO showed *Metaesquemas*. Publication of the text *Metaesquemas 57/58*. This year is marked by intense writing. Creation of visual poem *Bangú-Mangue* as an edition, in homage to his father. Participation in the Latin American Fair of Opinion at St. Clement's Church in New York City and in the manifestation 'Encontros' in Pamplona (Spain), where HO was represented by the artist Leandro Katz. *Parangolés* produced in collaboration with Romero and Luis Fernando Guimarães.

1973 – HO created the concept of *quasi-cinema* and began the *Block-Experiments in Cosmococa – program in progress* series with film maker Neville D'Almeida, CC1 to CC5; with Thomas Valentin, CC6; and continued the series with CC7 to CC9. The concept of *quasi-cinema* also included the slide-series *Neyrótica*, *Não Narração* with which HO participated in the exhibition 'Expoprojeção' in São Paulo, and the super-8 film *Agripina é Roma-Manhattan*. HO conceived *Conglomerado*, a project embodying his New York experiences: the *Newyorkaises*.

1974 – HO created *Parangolés Somethin' fa' the head' 1 and 2*. Filming by Julio Bressane of 'Lagrima Pantera Missil' in the *Babylonests* on 2nd Avenue in New York City. Project for the *Penetrables Stonia* and *Shelter Shield*.

1975 – The slide-series *Helena inventa Angela Maria*, which HO created within the concept of *quasi-cinema* evoked the famous Brazilian popular singer of the fifties. During this period HO created projects for *Penetrables* and texts where he expressed his admiration for Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Yoko Ono and John Cage.

1976 – Created the *Parangolé Gimme Head* and designed plans for the *Penetrables Sram!bolia* and *Cesarslide*.

1977 – Began a new series of *Penetrables* entitled *Magic Squares* and objects called *Topological Ready Made Landscapes* HO wrote in December 5: "...I consider them to be a fundamental part of what I see today as PRELUDE TO THE NEW: all of what came before this demythologising process is but a PRELUDE to that which will emerge and has already done so of this year in my 'work'..."

1978 – HO returned in February to Rio settling at Rua Carlos Goes in the Leblon neighbourhood in Rio. Participation in Ivaldo Granato's event in São Paulo 'Mitos Vadios', with the text and the performance *Delirium Ambulatorium* and a soundtrack by the Rolling Stones. Production of maquettes for *Penetrables Magic Square* numbers 2 to 5. Began maquette for *Ready Constructible Number 1*. Creation of *Tenda-Luz* a *Penetrable* for Julio Bressane's film 'Gigante América'. Installation of asphalt pieces, experience of the demythologised myth – *Avenida Presidente Vargas-Kyoto/Gaudi* and *Manhattan Brutalista* – *object-semi-mágico trouvé*, in the bathroom of his studio.

1979 – Proposal of *Program in Progress Cajú* a collective participation to be carried out in Rio's neighbourhood of the same name. In the *Manifesto Cajú* of April 11 and 13, HO wrote: "it is the same passion that made me dislocate the pictorial field of the painting to space and to destroy the pictorial, impoverished by centuries of walls to the proposition of a new space site, totally open to creative exploration: that which made Malevitch state: let the rejection of the old art world be traced on the palms of your hands". Move of HO to Rua Ataulfo de Paiva in Leblon. Installation of *Penetrable Rijnvieira* at Hotel Méridien. Conception of last *Penetrable Azul in Azul*. Filming by Ivan Cardoso of 'HO' with the direct participation of HO. The Cajú proposal was included in the *Kleemania*-program, an homage to Paul Klee, this was HO's first 'poetic urban happening'. At this event HO carried out with friends the *Counter Bólido To return earth unto earth*.

1980 – HO carried out on the Morro of Mangueira the 'Carnival Warming-up', the second of the 'poetic urban happenings' where he created his *Counter Bólido number 2*. Conclusion of the Maquette of the *Penetrable Invention of Light* begun in 1978. On March 15, HO suffered a stroke at his apartment and died seven days later at the São Vicente Hospital in Rio.