

## THE SENSES POINTING TOWARD A NEW TRANSFORMATION<sup>1</sup>

HÉLIO OITICICA

The process of shifting the main aesthetic focus away from the so called “visual” arts and the introduction, then, of the other senses, should not be concentrated or looked at from a purely aestheticist point of view; it is much more profound; it is a process which, in its ultimate sense, relates and proposes a new unconditioned behavior[al] possibility: the consciousness of behavior as a fundamental key to the evolution of the so-called art processes → the consciousness of a totality, of the relation individual-world as a whole action, where the idea of value is not only related to a specific “focus”: the aestheticist event taken formerly as the “focus goal”: the conflicts tend to be absorbed into behavior itself, away from the super intellectualist visual focus, too submitted to that “focus-value” relation. The appeal to the senses, which can be “multi-focal” concentration, becomes important as a way

<sup>1</sup> Hélio Oiticica's final manuscript (ref: PHO 0486/69) is reproduced here with minimal alterations. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling have been corrected and regularized following *ARTMargins'* house style (employing US English spelling conventions and double-quotation marks as the standard). Occasional ellipses in the text have been completed with the relevant omitted terms in square brackets. Care has been taken, however, to retain Oiticica's distinctive, neologistic, and often rule-bending English prose style (the original draft of which had been corrected by Guy Brett, a native English speaker, in 1969, as Oiticica notes at the end of the Document). Terms underlined for emphasis have been left as is rather than set in italics. A series of individually commented terms (“significant,” “objectal,” “unsufficiency,” etc.) are retained throughout, despite their not necessarily being current usage or strictly grammatically “correct.”

toward this behavioral absorption: smell-sight-taste-hearing and touch mingle and are what Merleau-Ponty once called the “body’s general symbolics,” where all sense relations are established in a human context, as a “body” of significations and not a sum of significations apprehended by specific channels: the apprehension and the action cannot be isolated, and the analytical idea of the senses becomes a metaphor too to express the complexity of human behavior. But, we emerge from purely rational, “objectal<sup>2</sup> relations” of art-problems, of established conditions for an “aesthetic action” so much developed during so many years, into the idea of a whole human world, into the trust in behavioral action as a creative force and not a “passive” or “background” one: the dissolution of “art” into it is not also an “objectal dissolution” but a forming of concentrated specific ideas, fundamental problem-creative ideas, into life manifestation as far as the infinite area of human behavior is concerned, as a building up of significations, symbolic bodies of relations, so rich in themselves and reinforced then, by this now significative<sup>3</sup> body, spread-growing from its former sublimate position, into its former “background,” which is the behavior[al] world.

Of course past art always tried in a metaphorical way to create, and did create, a new level of significative relations: a world in itself could be felt and lived and proposed as a structure, a creative structure, opposite the objectal world, as a “model” of synthetic truth, uncorrupted in itself. Often then, mostly I should say, the artist-creator would be the actor-creator, the sublime generator of creative forces and the recipient of them, he himself the poles of the structural significative world proposed by his creations. The great differences in a new position would be that, whereas the former links were metaphorical-structural totalities imposed onto the behavioral world, the actual ones tend to grow from it after a long process of dissolution of “living human acts” → the destiny of human living acts meet themselves without intermediary sublimatory efforts, transcendental conflicts or ideal goals.

As a stage in the evolution of these “living act processes” we can point to the dissolution of old art forms, painting, sculpture, etc., into the hybrid “object.” But all through the modern evolution of art the

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- 2 In Oiticica’s use of the nonstandard term “objectal,” the suffix “-al” means “relating to; of the kind of” an object, rather than object-like.
  - 3 Oiticica employs the rare adjectival form “significative” here, meaning “being a symbol or sign of something; having a meaning.”

conflict between the idea of an “art-object” and an “anti-art” has been moving toward an impasse. Anti-art, taken recently to dramatic forms, to the “edge of experience,” now demands a definitive radicalization. Many initiatives have stood still or gone back in relation to this impasse: the urgency for a new field of consideration is felt—the concentration on the process itself is a beginning of a new light that gradually invades and creates those considerations: I call it, in my experimental efforts, a crebehavior; it is not simply “creative behavior,” although it can be, but something much more amplified; not an object-creation through behavior, nor the transformation of living acts into creative ones, which would be a simplist<sup>4</sup> idea: in such a case the conditions would only become distant Utopias, but, if from inside conditioned behavior, the elements start to grow as necessities, like germs which burst from the center of the conflicts themselves, and inform behavior in a new open way, completely at large with individual lived-acts: the process which conducts and informs toward the center of behavior[a] conflict itself and opens into surprising transformations → not to be content with the effort to “attain a model” of life, but to live in a continuous consciousness of such conflicts, which could be the only way for such a transformation process to take place.

The appeal to the aid of the sensorial ensemble lives further on than the objectal one: the consciousness of “body symbolics” as a totality immediately “at hand” is something much more related to behavior itself than to objectal relations; a richer relation which increases lived possibilities-probabilities in the immediate consciousness of “body totality” in action; when Lygia Clark, for instance, proposes her experience of the “body nostalgia,” she is proposing, through simple sensorial acts, a possibility for a re-informed consciousness of the body as something alive, as if discovered for the first time, thus proposing also a new relation between self-knowledge and knowledge of others. Here we can see the possibility of a process rather than an object-structure imposing metaphorical relations; it could be a living sense discovery, itself a process and not a process for a goal. The senses then, related and acting toward body-symbolics, can be considered as an essential means for the apprehension of this process. Behavior lies just within it, and reformulates continuously those symbolics (as Merleau-Ponty

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4 Oiticica’s use of the term “simplist idea” implies an idea from a person given to simplistic explanations or theories, rather than a simplistic idea.

shows, behavior in this case is itself signification and does not look for a specific one).

Once the “distances” between ideal aesthetic goals are abolished or transformed into the crebehavior, into the continuous consciousness of a living process, the conflicts tend to be solved or assume higher levels; in my evolution I arrived at what I call creleisure. For me the classical leisure-alienation conflict generating the alienated leisure idea as represented in the modern western world, would be attacked as a direct consequence of this absorption of art-processes into life-processes. Creleisure is the non-repressive leisure, opposed to diverted oppressive leisure thinking: a new unconditioned way to battle oppressive systematic ways of life. Its practice, open-practice, is a way of taking hold of a process, a sympathetic creative process, where sense-apprehension is body-apprehension which generates behavior-action, in a total organic process.

Lygia Clark’s and my own work, in our evolutions, have both these points in common, and not only between themselves, but related also to the avant-garde efforts which have characterized [the] Brazilian art-scene in the last decade; starting with Mario Pedrosa’s universalist constant influences, through Ferreira Gullar’s “Non-object Theory” (1959), toward the idea of “probject” (Rogerio Duarte) (1968), Lygia Pape’s recent fascinating experiments (I have [written a] special article on her), from Neoconcrete Group activities (1959–60), through all public-participation ones leading to the Tropicália synthesis recently—and in this they differ from ideas such as “happenings” or “events” and characterize Rio’s and S.Paulo’s movements in a total detached way. I am not going here to make a complete relation of such experiments—they are wide; the ideas diverse; I rather prefer to stick to my own experiments and Lygia Clark’s latest ideas and achievements. We can have, then, direct examples here and possible discussions.

As I was saying, the general efforts in these current ideas turn on an important main idea: the permanent checking of the conflict between the object, as it appears in various forms (work of art, use-object, etc.), and the subject-object relations: this conflict was known since Gullar’s formulation of the “non-object” in 1959, during the Neoconcrete Group activities. The problem spotted then turned out to be a very complex one and it still holds the main line of thought with those artists. The relations with all the international movements are obvious—and the differences also. The main great difference would

be in the way this main subject-object conflict has been led toward a dissolution of the idea of the art object into direct behavioral relations, and the reversion of the former objectal relations: the former structural art-forms which were meant to be total structures conditioning behavior total-structures have dissolved themselves in those evolutions and come to propose the reverse of that, which would be behavior set as a total-structure, generating the elements which are not art total structures (open-open), but the flowing alive experience of human destiny. This process is endless and no bid for a quick solution should be made. It is a process within a process. What would really be formulated and admitted is the unsufficiency<sup>5</sup> of the art-object as such. The experience of such a process can generate whatever communicating form it does, but never the conciliating art-object hooked on to the former “distant” objectal relation. If the communication is not directed into a behavioral relation, it is old, however new [a] form it may have. A relation that would point to a static ideal, a sublime model, is still the old transcendental relation, endured throughout western art for a long time. The same could be applied to the anti-art processes, mainly because they can disguise under such an appearance an old attitude: no use having “participation,” or “propositions,” if they do not relate to a complete change of the objectal relation; the same with what could be called “sensorial participation.”

Recently, a new demand and important decisions came to me: in the experiences I propose, such as the practice of creleisure. The impossibility of “exhibiting” objects as part of this idea, in galleries or museums, has become evident: I have had a definite glimpse of that with the Whitechapel experiment in February–April 1969, in London. For me it was more an experiment than an exhibition (I proposed things rather than displaying them). But all the evolution I presented there leads into this condition: the impossibility of experiments in galleries or museums—the outdoor ones could still hold depending on the relations and reasons for them: I can mention some of the Exploding Galaxy experiments in London, Amsterdam, or Paris as aiming at something analogous; in Rio, the Apocalypopotesis one in August 1968. The exhibition room refers always to an old idea of “displaying

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5 Oiticica’s use of the term “unsufficiency” is not strictly grammatically correct, since nouns of Latin origin conventionally take the prefix “in-” in English. However, in addition to its sense of “the absence of,” the prefix “un-” carries the sense of “the reverse of” as well as “the absence of”—which “in-” lacks—and thus serves as an intensifier here.

objects,” to an “object representation”; so, why insist on the old form when a new experimental world demands, and with urgency, complete new ways of communication. We are in the beginning of a new language, a new world of experiences in communication and proposing a complete revolution toward an individual-social uprising. The idea of community-cells or of experimental communities came to me side by side with that of wide-spread collectivities, such as the building of collective sites or abiding places: in the first ones the creleisure private group-cells would be evolved in a plan I have had in mind for a long time: the Barracão: after that the idea of environment would be in the creation of real architectures and gardens, invented sites which could have a new sense, away from “integrative” experiences, which for me still have objectal connotations. The great collective groupal<sup>6</sup> experiments should be able to count on groupal abiding places, where experiments would not be united to the idea of “experiment-show.” It should rather concentrate as an internal-growing proposing experience: proposing to propose, which could lead into fascinating ways; or, important also, to build new possibilities of walking through sites (in my work ideas about this came to me since 1960, mainly with the “nuclei” and “penetrables” and projects for built environments—they suffered great changes throughout these years; I propose much more a “living open environment” than anything which could be an objectal one, which could still hold on to the old formal ideas).

The internal communal experiences are more complex and fascinating: the idea of developing expansive-groupal relation-experiments, can create expansive cells for future experiments; they can be centers, small centers for sure, of closed condensed lived-experiences, where the demand for a new social relationship would be essential; the conflict then would be and should be transformed in a permanent dynamic: the creleisure nucleus absorbing and transforming the bombardments of destructive behavior: this can only be properly experimented when put entirely into practice.

Lygia Clark’s recent experiments have led her into fascinating propositions, and she discovered that for sure her communication has to be rather an introduction into a practice she calls cellular:

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6 As with “objectal,” the suffix “-al” in “groupal” means “relating to; of the kind of” a group, rather than group-like. It is also possibly a portmanteau construction fusing the sense of “group” and “communal.”

from person to person, a corpora; improvised dialogue which can spread out into a whole chain creating a kind of biological ensemble or what I would call a crepractice. The idea of creating such relations is more than a simple participation as a manipulation of objects; there is a search for what we could call a biological ritual, where the interpersonal relations would enrich each other and establish a really growing communication on an open level. I say here open level because it does not relate to an objectal, subject-object communication, but to an interpersonal practice: the you and me contact, swift, brief as the act itself. No corrupted, interested “profit” should be expected—the remarks of “it’s nothing” or “what’s the point,” etc., will pour out; the introduction as an initiation is necessary (I can say that since I introduced the Parangolé capes, in early ’64, the ways and means of introduction were much more primary and difficult: I decided that dance and rhythm would be ideal for that, but it didn’t help much; now it appears to me that the collective mind is much more ready to be introduced into practices than then—open practices, let’s say—so those ideas become living aspirations on a collective scale, rather than lost details in a whole).

The elements used in all those experiments, based on a process, are themselves part of it and not detached objects: they are orders in a whole. In the Barracão I am planning, the elements will join, improvised, and will grow in an oyster-process; Lygia Clark’s elements communicate in a chain-process, etc. So, suddenly, the joy of “making things” can be important, not as spurious gratuities to be consumed by affluent society or oppressive “culture,” and they are not submitted to the artist’s privilege in their make-up, but groupally or collectively approached. They can be a direct building up of everyday life, a cell or a seed for unrepressive living. All silly wittiness of “art innovations,” of intellectual commerce, of the oppressive cultural game, are surpassed and eliminated by this stronger reality: a hope and a new light can shine through it; improvisation and creative processes turn out to accomplish their destinies with a new powerful reason to exist.

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