

THE PARTICIPANT BECOMES THE 'STRUCTURAL NUCLEUS' OF THE WORK, THE EXISTENTIAL UNFOLDING OF HIS INCORPOREAL SPACE.¹⁾

HÉLIO OITICICA ABOUT HIS WORK "PARANGOLÉS", 1965



Jerônimo wearing Parangolé P7 Cape 4 - "Lygia Clark" - Hélio Oiticica, 1964-65

elasticity of space

a prologue by Gabi Schillig

the geometric - the kinetic
from representational
to real space

The emergence of kinetic art can be considered as the most specific product of tendencies of delimitation during Modernism. It was kinetic art that finally dissolved the boundaries between object and spectator. Artists of that time, like Naum Gabo or László Moholy-Nagy generated an art of the real-space, operated in real time with real forces, that entailed an endless transformation of expression in which the spectators could immerse themselves. In his book *Vom Material zur Architektur* Moholy-Nagy describes in 1929 the further development of sculpture by adding time as a fourth dimension and therefore its abstraction through movement: the mass tends to dematerialize through movement. Through movement the sculpture evolves into an appearance of virtual volumetric relations.

He describes the transformation from material - from static to kinetic - as virtual volumes:

"We must therefore put in the place of the static principle of classical art the dynamic principle of universal life. Stated practically: instead of static material construction (material and form relations), dynamic construction (vital constructivism and force relations) must be evolved, in which the material is employed as the carrier of forces. Extending the unit of construction, a dynamic constructive system of force is attained, whereby man, hitherto merely receptive in his observation of works of art, experiences a heightening of his own faculties, and becomes himself an active partner with the forces unfolding in himself."³⁾

Moholy-Nagy already anticipated the interaction of the spectator with his environment. The integration into an artistic process results in an extension of body in time and space that at the same time is open for all materials and media. This performative process breaks the boundary between traditionally divided units and enables the communication between object and spectator and the dissolution of spatial boundaries which originally separated both of them.

Movement and architecture usually appear in direct opposition - as dynamics and stasis - whereas architecture is in general considered to be static in contrast to the moving human body. According to the French philosopher and phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty the body is not a static component of space, but instead he considers the body '*le corps propre*' as the expression of an intermediate state between subject and object, as a mediating entity between mind and body. In this regard he describes a concept of spatiality in which the '*living body*'²⁾ becomes the centre of focus. In his thoughts he addresses the issue of an interacting body-subject that is characterized by a corporal consciousness. The moving and interacting body stands in opposition to the humanist practice whereby the body was considered as fixed and static. Movement generates a non-determined concept of space where spatial and bodily boundaries are constantly blurring.

the interactive

'dance in my experience' 4)

the work of Hélio Oiticica

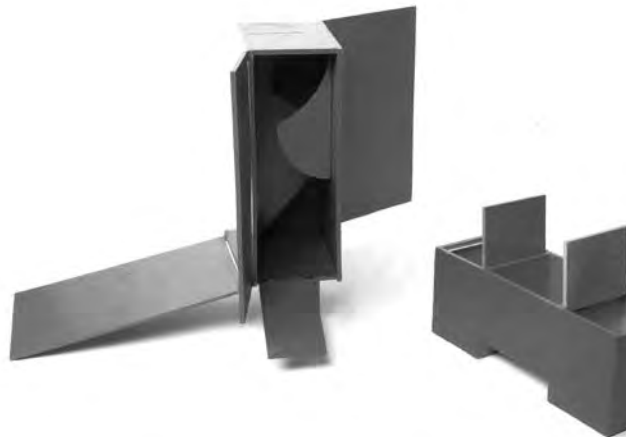
Specifically Brazilian artists of the neo-concrete movement during the 1950s and 1960s re-evaluated aesthetic principles of Modernism in their works. They questioned representational tendencies in art, by establishing new relations between the inner and outer space of body. The notion of visibility was eclipsed, as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica concentrated in their work on the body and explored tactile space through haptic, auditive, olfactory and kinetic propositions.

Most notably Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980) worked with ephemeral materials and created multi-sensorial objects, in whose artistic development processes the spectator was involved. His works became more and more interactive as moved away from his object-based works, towards projects where the body became centre of the work and where the participation of the user became his central focus.

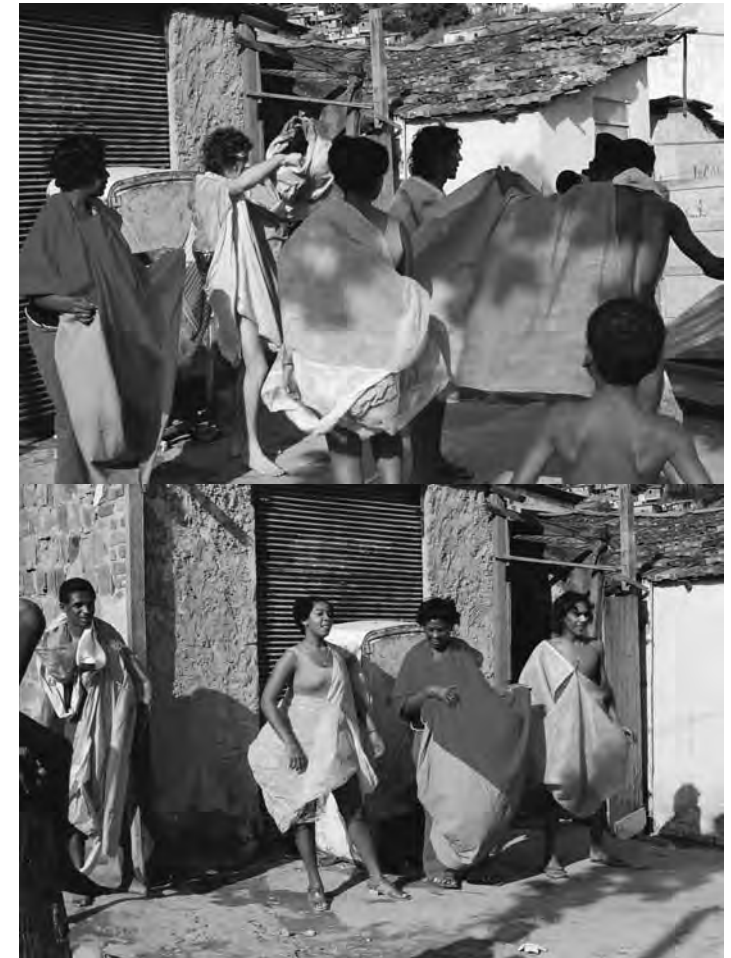
Beside his first object-based works, e.g. *Spatial Relief* - which were wooden colored geometrical structures hanging from the ceiling that could only be fully perceived through the spectators movement around the object - he worked on the so-called *Trans-objects* (*Bólides*) that could be experienced by using multiple senses and which would only be activated by their exploration through the user. Between 1964 and 1968 Oiticica designed a series of textile structures, the *Parangolés*. In 1965 he invited people from the favelas, to interact with those structures during an exhibition opening at the Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro – which was a quite radical intervention during an official institutional event. The *Parangolés* communicated through the user's experience and emphasized the dynamics of life, in opposition to attempts to see the world as something systematic and static. Oiticica, who was at the same time artist, performer and thinker, placed his work between the avant-garde, Brazilian pop-culture and in the context of the Brazilian reality of underdevelopment and political radicalism in the 1960s. Through his work he succeeded in reflecting changes in art and society and articulated questions on issues of freedom in contemporary society and culture.

The dissolution of the objects boundaries, is simultaneously accompanied by a redefinition of the role of the subject. The mobilization of the spectator reaches a new quality: empathy is not only achieved by the visual sense, but by touch – thus the interaction of the body with the material. Space realizes itself in action and imagination of the spectator who has become a participant and user, without whose physical participation the work would not be entirely realized. Space itself possesses an inventive strength and emerges as something that is never definite or completed. Attributed functions can only be achieved, if the spectator becomes active – which leads to a critical self-reflection of the artist; his/her sole role as creator is relativized. These kinetic models and the resulting dissolution of object and spatial boundaries can be identified as early concepts for virtual space as it emerged later on in the 20th century.

B 03 Bólido caixa 03 „Africana“ e „Adendum“ - Hélio Oiticica, 1963



Hélio Oiticica - Group of people with Parangolés during the shooting of the film HO, by Ivan Cardoso, 1979
Photos: Andreas Valentin



Later in the 1960s, Oiticica expanded the spatial properties of the *Parangolés*, and created two larger spatial installations that he described as experiences: *Tropicália* and *Eden* referred to a spatial context through situating them within natural elements such as water, plants and sand. Oiticica invited people to step barefoot into these environments and to inhabit them – establishing new relationships between surroundings and bodies; these 'environments' transformed increasingly into immaterial spaces. Oiticica created rather temporary situations that enabled a more open and physically related experience of space.

Artists such as Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica generated a unique interactive vocabulary which they explored through their work – a vocabulary that is highly relevant for architectural production.

the performative

performative constructs beyond geometry

Within the scope of a four-day workshop at Aristotle University Thessaloniki individual spatial design strategies were developed by analyzing a certain textile technique or garment and its underlying geometrical, spatial appearance. Through abstraction of these systems, by filtering their “ingredients”, geometric rules and principles, performative spatial organizations, were enfolded by the participants. Essential to the process was the exploration of materialities, their underlying geometric principles and finally a further systematic development of their spatial and material characteristics. Due to the resulting elasticity of those material constructs, these newly developed systems are open for change and alteration by the human body. The work is dynamic in time and space, rejecting static conditions – exploring spatial aspects beyond pure geometry.

What the spatial models in this book have in common with the kinetic apparatuses of early Modernism and the multi-sensorial objects that Oiticica created in the 60s, is their ability to change, to alter - although they remain clearly defined systems based on certain constructed relationships. Through the ability to change through movement they turn into small imaginative machines for debordering their own space, the space that surrounds them and the space that originally separated them from the spectator. The fact that they are physical objects, constructed out of specific materiality and their interaction with the body, transforms them into sensorial instruments for creating new types of spaces and environments. The soft geometries that emerged during the workshop suggest a space that enables situations beyond geometry, where the object resolves into movement and a state of blurring boundaries. The models anticipate a precursor of virtual space - a virtual space where the body is not suppressed, but for which it becomes the initiator of space.

Public Receptors: Beneath the Skin by Gabi Schillig, New York City, 2009; Van Alen Institute New York

Those changeable, but tectonic structures are open for a process of appropriation through a user, come into interaction with their environment and enable a constant alteration of bodies and spaces. They provide a future prospect towards a new, widened concept of architecture, in which the human body is the operating force and where through the interaction between space and the body spatial boundaries are blurring.

Architecture shifts towards a system of temporary control – an elastic space evolves for the presence of the body.

NOTES

- 1) Between 1964 and 1968, Oiticica created a series of costumes, the Parangolés, a word that is Brazilian slang for “agitated situation” or “sudden confusion”; Oiticica, “Notes on the Parangolé”, 1965 in Hélio Oiticica
- 2) A term used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in “Phenomenology of Perception”, where he describes his embodied understanding of bodies and their surrounding environment and where he considers the living body to be essential for how we perceive our own existence.
- 3) László Moholy-Nagy in “The New Vision”, 1928
- 4) Hélio Oiticica, “Dance in my Experience”, Diary Entry, 12 November 1965; reprinted in Figueiredo L., Pape L., Salomao: Hélio Oiticica: *Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto*, Rio de Janeiro, 1986
- 5) © All images of Hélio Oiticica’s work are courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica, Rio de Janeiro

