

moved to take part in an activity that is at once meaningful to them in its ideas yet natural in its methods.

There is an exception, however, to restricting the Happenings to participants only. When a work is performed on a busy avenue, passers-by will ordinarily stop and watch, just as they might watch the demolition of a building. These are not theatre-goers and their attention is only temporarily caught in the course of their normal affairs. They might stay, perhaps become involved in some unexpected way, or they will more likely move on after a few minutes. Such persons are authentic parts of the environment.

A variant of this is the person who is engaged unwittingly with a performer in some planned action: a butcher will sell certain meats to a customer-performer without realizing that he is a part of a piece having to do with purchasing, cooking, and eating meat.

Finally, there is this additional exception to the rule. A Happening may be scored for *just watching*. Persons will do nothing else. They will watch things, each other, possibly actions not performed by themselves, such as a bus stopping to pick up commuters. This would not take place in a theatre or arena, but anywhere else. It could be an extremely meditative occupation when done devotedly; just 'cute' when done indifferently. In a more physical mood, the idea of called-for watching could be contrasted with periods of action. Both normal tendencies to observe and act would now be engaged in a responsible way. At those moments of relative quiet the observer would hardly be a passive member of an audience; he would be closer to the role of a Greek chorus, without its specific meaning necessarily, but with its required place in the overall scheme. At other moments the active and observing roles would be exchanged, so that by reciprocation the whole meaning of watching would be altered, away from something like spoon-feeding, towards something purposive, possibly intense [...]

Allan Kaprow, *Assemblages, Environments and Happenings* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1966) 187-8; 195-8.

Hélio Oiticica

Dance in My Experience (Diary Entries)//1965-66

No account of collective production and reception in art is complete without reference to the work and writings of the Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica. By the mid-1960s, Oiticica was collaborating with participants from the samba schools of the Rio favelas to produce disruptive events based around dancing in parangolé capes (see footnote below). The emphasis was on a Dionysian loss of self in social fusion.

Before anything else I need to clarify my interest in dance, in rhythm, which in my particular case came from a vital necessity for disintellectualization. Such intellectual disinhibition, a necessary free expression, was required since I felt threatened by an excessively intellectual expression. This was the definite step towards the search for myth, for a reappraisal of this myth and a new foundation in my art. Personally, it was therefore an experience of the greatest vitality – indispensable, particularly in the demolition of preconceived ideas and stereotypification, etc. As we will see later, there was a convergence of this experience with the form that my art took in the *Parangolé*¹ and all that relates to this (since the *Parangolé* influenced and changed the trajectory of the *Nuclei*, *Penetrables* and *Bóldes*).² Moreover, it was the beginning of a definitive social experience; I am still unaware of the direction which this will take.

Dance is *par excellence* the search for a direct expressive act; it is the immanence of the act. Ballet dance, on the contrary, is excessively intellectualized through the presence of choreography that searches to transcend this act. However, the 'Dionysian' dance, which is born out of the interior rhythm of the collective, exteriorizes itself as a characteristic of popular groupings, nations, etc. In these, improvisation reigns, as opposed to organized choreography; in fact the freer the improvisation the better. It is as if an immersion into rhythm takes place, a flux where the intellect remains obscured by an internal mythical force that operates at an individual and collective level (in fact, in this instance one cannot establish a distinction between the collective and the individual). The images are mobile, rapid, inapprehensible – they are the opposite of the static icon that is characteristic of the so-called fine arts. In reality, dance, rhythm, is the actual aesthetic act in its essential raw state – implied here is the direction towards the discovery of immanence. Such an act, the immersion into rhythm, is a pure creative act, it is an art. It is the creation of the actual act, of continuity, and also, like all acts of creative expression, it is a producer of images. Actually, for me it provided a new discovery of the image, a

recreation of the image, encompassing unavoidably the aesthetic expression in my work.

The collapse of social preconceived ideas, of separations of groups, social classes etc., would be inevitable and essential in the realization of this vital experience. I discovered here the connection between the collective and individual expression – the most important step towards this – which is the ability not to acknowledge abstract levels, such as social ‘layers’, in order to establish a comprehension of a totality. The bourgeois conditioning which I had been submitted to since I was born undid itself as if by magic – I should mention, in fact, that the process was already under way even before I was aware of it. The unbalance that was entailed by this social dislocation, from the continuous discrediting of the structures that rule our life in this society, specifically here in Brazil, was both inevitable and charged with problems. These, far from being overcome, renew themselves every day. I believe that the dynamics of the social structures were at this moment revealed to me in all their crudity, in their most immediate expression, precisely due to my process of discrediting the so-called social layers. Not that I consider their existence but that, for me, they have become schematic, artificial, as if all of a sudden I gazed from a vantage point onto their map, their scheme, being ‘external’ to them. Marginalization, naturally an already present characteristic of the artist, has become fundamental for me. This position represents a total ‘lack of social place’, at the same time as being the discovery of my own ‘individual place’ as a total man in the world, as a ‘social being’ in the total sense, as opposed to being included in a particular social layer or ‘elite’ – not even in the artistic marginal elite, but that exists (I speak of the true artists, and not of the *habitués* of art). No, the process here is more profound: it is a process in society as a whole, in practical life, in the objective world of being, in the subjective lived experience – it would be the will for an integral position, social in its most noble meaning, free, total. What interests me is the ‘total act of being’, which is what I experiment with here – not partial total acts, but a ‘total act of life’, irreversible, an unbalance for the equilibrium of being.

The old position with regards to the work of art has stagnated – even in those works that today do not demand spectator participation, what they propose is not a transcendental contemplation but a ‘being’ in the world. Dance too does not propose an ‘escape’ from this immanent world, but reveals it in all its plenitude – what for Nietzsche would be the ‘Dionysian drunkenness’ is in reality the ‘expressive lucidity of the act’s immanence’, an act itself not characterized by any partiality but by its totality as such – a total expression of the self. Would this not be the philosopher’s stone of art? The *Parangolé* for instance, when it demands participation through dance, is a mere adaptation of

this structure and vice-versa with regard to this structure in dance – this is simply a transformation of this ‘total act of the self’. The gesture, the rhythm, take on a new form which is determined by the demands of the *Parangolé*’s structure, being that pure dance is a trace of this structural participation – it is not a question of determining value levels in terms of one or another expression, since they are both (pure dance and dance in the *Parangolé*) total expressions.

What has been conventionally described as ‘interpretation’ also suffers a transformation today – it is not a question of repeating, in some cases, of course, a creation (a song for example), giving it greater or lesser expression according to the interpreter.³ Today an interpreter can reach such an important level that the actual song (or any other form) is surpassed. It is not a case of individual ‘celebrity’, although this also occurs, but of a real expressive valorization. In the old days ‘celebrity status’ served the purpose of immortalizing interpreters according to their creation based upon famous works (in opera and theatre). Today the issue is different: even if the works that are interpreted are not great creations, fantastic musicals (in the field of popular music for example) the interpreter reaches a high expressive level – a singer such as Nat King Cole for example, creates a ‘vocal expressive structure’ that is independent from the songs he interprets. This is a creation that is not simply interpretative but pertains to a highly expressive vocalist. An actor such as Marilyn Monroe for example, due to her all-encompassing interpretative presence, possesses above all else a creative quality, which is structurally expressive. Her presence in certain mediocre films makes these films uncommonly interesting, a fact that is due to her action as interpreter. What is interesting here is the vocalization of Nat and the interpretative act of Marilyn, independent of the quality of the interpreted score or script, even if these possess, of course, a value that is relative and not absolute as before.

10 April 1966 (continuation)

The experience of dance (of samba) therefore gave me the exact idea of what creation through the corporal act may be, a continuous transformability. On the other hand however, it revealed what I call the ‘being’ of things, that is, the static expression of objects, their expressive immanence, which in this case is the immanence of the corporal expressive act, which transforms itself continuously. The opposite, the non-transformability, is not exactly the fact of ‘not transforming oneself in time and space’ but in the immanence that is revealed in its structure, founding within the world, in the objective space that it occupies, its unique place, and this too is a *Parangolé*-structure. I cannot consider today the *Parangolé* as a structure that is kinetically-transformable by the

spectator but neither can I consider it as its opposite; that is, the things or, better still, the objects that *are* create a different relation with objective space: they 'dislocate' the environmental space away from obvious, already known, relations. Here is the key to what I will call 'environmental art': the eternally mobile, the transformable, which is structured by both the action of the spectator and that which is static. The latter is also transformable in its own way, depending on the environment in which it is participating as a structure. It will be necessary to create 'environments' for these works – the actual concept of 'exhibition' in its traditional sense, is changed, since to 'exhibit' such work does not make sense (this would be a lesser partial interest) – structural spaces that are free both to the participation and to the creative inventions of spectators. A pavilion, one of those used these days for industrial exhibitions (how more interesting they are than anaemic little art shows!), would be ideal for such a purpose – it would be an opportunity for a truly efficient experience with the people, throwing them into the creative participatory notion, away from the 'elite exhibitions' so fashionable today. This experience should range from the 'givens' that have already been produced, the 'livings' that structure as if architecturally the routes to be traced, to the 'transformable givens' that demand whatever inventive participation from the spectator (be it to dress and unfold or dance) and the 'givens to be made', that is, the raw material that would be supplied so that each person can construct or create whatever they like, since motivation, the stimulus, is born from the simple fact of 'being there for that'.

The execution of such a plan is complex, demanding rigorous prior organization, and obviously a team. The varied and multiple categories to be explored (elsewhere I will explain what I consider to be the structural categories in this new concept of mine, 'environmental art') in fact being and indeed requiring the collaboration of various artists with differing ideas, solely concentrated on this general idea of a 'total participatory creation' – to which would be added works created through the anonymous participation of the spectators, who actually would be better described as 'participants'.

- 1 The *Parangolés* (a slang term meaning 'an animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people') were strangely weighted capes made from unusual fabrics that encouraged wearers to move and dance, and forged a circular relationship between watcher and wearer.
- 2 Hélio Oiticica used generic terms that defined groups of works such as the *Parangolés*. His *Núcleo* installations comprised 'floating panels' (acrylic on wood) that hung from latticed structures. Each panel would contain a particular variation in colour, yellow or orange being the predominant tones. With *Núcleo NCI* (1960) the viewer gazes through the structure, directly or indirectly through the mirror placed on the floor. With *Grande Núcleo* (1960) the viewer is

invited to walk through the tonal differentiations stepping on the gravel that surrounds the structure. The first in the series of *Penetrables* that Oiticica would develop was *PNI* (1960). Here the viewer enters an orange/yellow cabin with sliding walls, literally entering into colour. The *Penetrables* vary in material and complexity. They remain in the artist's repertoire throughout his transition from concerns with colour into his late 1960s experiments, which he would define environmental art. *Bólides* could be loosely translated as 'fireballs'; they are generally vessels that vary greatly in dimensions, materials and functions. Oiticica's early *Bólides* were boxes made of wood, and/or glass containing pigment or fabric that would be manipulated by the viewer such as *Box-Bólido 9* (1964) and *Glass Bólido 1* (1963). *Bólides* soon acquired a readymade element such as in *Glass Bólido 10. Homage to Malevich* (1965) in which two bottles (one opaque yellow, the other translucent) would be placed side by side. [Translator]

- 3 Interpreter is here used as the term for a musician who plays or sings a song composed by someone else. [Translator]

Hélio Oiticica, 'Dance in my Experience', Diary entry, 12 November 1965; reprinted in Figueiredo, L., Pape, L., Salomao, W., eds, *Hélio Oiticica: Aspiro ao Grande Labirinto* (Rio de Janeiro: Rocco, 1986) 72–5; and 'continuation 10 April 1966' (*ibid.*) 75–6. Translated by Michael Asbury, 2006.