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iiéanales@gmail.com

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HINTERWALDNER, INGE

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*Sensorial, Supra-Sensorial,  
Hélio-Sensorial*  
*Analyzing Oiticica in Action*

Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica's (1937-1980) works known as Parangolés are frequently discussed as the culmination point of his longing for the liberation of color into space and the empowerment of the interacting user; and some questions remain open, for example, in what exactly do the invention and creativity of which Oiticica speaks in this context lie. Is it sufficient to actively engage with the Parangolé capes? The artist would probably say that, no matter which action is accomplished, it is better than dropping back into the contemplative attitude of the traditional way of viewing art. Nevertheless the idea of the supra-sensorial as heightened perception far exceeds the mere sensorial. Thus this contribution proposes a way to imagine the issue by adopting an image-theoretical perspective.<sup>1</sup> Through a close reading,

1. This contribution is concentrated in scope and thus differs from other recent literature regarding Oiticica's Parangolés: Tania Rivera for example writes about how activation towards the beholder points out a major shift in the relationship between individual/subject and society/culture and emphasizes the spatial dimensions in this setting. See Tania Rivera, "O reviramento do sujeito e da cultura em Hélio Oiticica," *Arte & Ensaios*, no. 19 (2009): 107-117. Sérgio B. Martins discusses the Parangolé within his historical account of Brazilian art and modernity (Sérgio B. Martins, *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Passages in Brazilian Art, 1949-1979* [Cambridge, MA/London: MIT Press, 2013]). Paula Braga's thesis is complementary to this contribution as she elaborates some of the same concepts (like creativity) by starting

or rather a close viewing, of existing photo and film documentations of Oiticica's works as primary sources, this approach seeks to interrogate related passages in his writings (instead of taking the latter for granted) in the hope that it will complement, clarify or flesh out the written statements.

*Film Footage in H.O. and Heliorama*

Ivan E. S. Cardoso, a filmmaker from Rio de Janeiro, interviewed and filmed his friend, the artist Hélio Oiticica in January 1979. The film portrait *H.O.*<sup>2</sup> originated from this encounter. It is a collage of archive photographs, existing film footage from the 1960s and newly recorded scenes. According to the curator Cristina Cámara Bello, the film summarizes the essence of the œuvre by the Brazilian artist.<sup>3</sup> This is quite a claim for a film of almost thirteen minutes that, moreover, seems to hardly demonstrate any systematic structure at all. In contrast, the filmic documentary *H.O. Supra-Sensorial: A Obra de Hélio Oiticica* (1999) by Katia Maciel, is well suited as an introduction because it provides an overview of Oiticica's work phases in a well-balanced manner, in chronological order and competently with (few) words and (many) pictures.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it stands out due to two attempts to do justice to the artist's visions when presenting his works. On the one hand, *H.O. Supra-Sensorial* is also available as an interactive CD-ROM with a navigable menu, providing a labyrinthine exploration between colors, texts and projects, etc.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, in the linear film version, a pace was chosen that guarantees the viewers time enough to adjust to the impressions. The camera moves fluently and without

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from Oiticica's text production and by discussing thinkers the artist has thoroughly studied himself. See Paula Priscila Braga, "A Trama da Terra que Treme: Multiplicidade em Hélio Oiticica," thesis (Universidade de São Paulo, 2007).

2. Ivan Cardoso, *H.O.*, 35 mm film transferred to video (Betacam SP and DVD), colour and black & white, 1979, 12'52".

3. Cristina Cámara Bello, "H.O., 2009," in Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, <http://www.museoreinasofia.es/en/collection/artwork/ho> (consulted November 28, 2014).

4. Katia Maciel, *H.O. Supra-Sensorial: A Obra de Hélio Oiticica*, hypermedia (São Paulo: Associação Cultural Videobrasil, 1999), <http://site.videobrasil.org.br/en/acervo/obras/obra/81787> (consulted January 8, 2015). The film chapters follow this order: "Metaesquemas," 1957/58, "Monocromáticos-invenções," 1959, "Relevos espaciais," 1959, "Grande núcleo," 1960, "Bóides," 1963, "Parangolé," 1964, "Tropicália," 1967, "Éden," 1969, "Ready constructible," 1978/1979.

5. Maciel, *H.O. Supra Sensorial... A Obra de Hélio Oiticica*.

rushing through the exhibition spaces and around the works; it approaches the reliefs and draperies, provides close-ups and shows how the Bólides can be used. Felipe Sá (camera director) catches sensations such as those a fearless audience (as imagined by Oiticica) would have experienced when viewing his pieces. Even though Maciel's documentation aims to present Oiticica's œuvre—within the scope of the chosen medium—in the best possible way, and even though by doing so it stands in considerable contrast to *H.O.*, I nonetheless agree with Câmara Bello that Cardoso's film (actually two of his films) capture the main core of Oiticica's pursuit.

As for Cardoso's other film *Heliorama*,<sup>6</sup> it is predominantly conformed by the same historical records, but this time they are not accompanied by the artist's declarations; instead, it is furnished with fragments by the poet Haroldo de Campos and others. While Maciel's film takes on a deliberate explorative stance as to the role the audience might play, in Cardoso's films it is primarily about the artist himself, who is involved with those "non-contemplative activities," which he—as "instigator of creation,"<sup>7</sup> initiator of states of invention,<sup>8</sup> "‘entrepreneur,’ or even ‘educator’"<sup>9</sup>—proposes to the recipients of his art as an experimental setting by providing the necessary paraphernalia. Oiticica accompanied his visual-artistic œuvre with extensive thought filled writings which scholars constantly and excessively quote. It is hardly enough just to pair his elaborate written thoughts with a certain group of work. My pursuit is to overcome this shortcoming and to analyze Oiticica's active engagement with his pieces, as preserved by films documenting them.

6. Ivan Cardoso, *Heliorama* (Rio de Janeiro, 2004), <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-e611g3k55>, 14'31".

7. Hélio Oiticica, "Position and Program," July 1966, in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth/The Great Labyrinth*, eds. Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt am Main (September 28, 2013–January 12, 2014), Susanne Gaensheimer and Max Hinderer (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2013), 169–178, here: 169 ["motivador para a criação," in Hélio Oiticica, "Posição e programa," in Archives Hélio Oiticica/Projeto Hélio Oiticica (henceforth AHO/PHO), doc. no. 0253/66, 1966, 1–5; here 2].

8. "declanchador de estados de invenção," in Hélio Oiticica, "Ivan Cardoso Entrevista Hélio Oiticica" [January 1979], in R. F. Lucchetti and Ivan Cardoso, *Ívampirismo o Cinema em Pânico* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Brasil-América, 1990): 67–81; here 73. See also Ivan Cardoso, "A Arte Penetrável de Hélio Oiticica [Interview 1979]," *Folha de São Paulo*, November 16, 1985, 48.

9. Hélio Oiticica, "General Scheme of the New Objectivity," in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 211 ["‘proposicionista,’ ou ‘empresário’ ou mesmo ‘educador,’" in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "ESQUEMA GERAL DA NOVA OBETIVIDADE," doc. no. 0110/66, December 17, 1966, 1–15; here 14].

Is it thus possible to define his ideas more precisely or to accumulate further well-grounded material-based evidence to understand them? For this purpose I will refer to three motifs at large: each time, the artist operates outdoors with a Parangolé. One of these motifs appears only in *Heliorama* and is edited. The other two are present in both films. Each time they were cut in a different manner and the segments are distributed throughout the films. In the interest of simplification, I name these sequences by the title of the work.

### *Sequence Parangolé P4 Cape 1*

The *Parangolé P4 Cape 1* (1964) is a very complex assemblage of different cloths, some up to 150 cm long, colored red, bright blue, white, lemon yellow, and different shades and tones of orange; wrinkled and patterned, smooth, almost transparent. In *Heliorama*, the sections with the *Parangolé P4 Cape 1* appear three times: 0:21-0:38 (figs. 1a-1c). At the beginning, only Oiticica's forehead and a tuft of hair are shown; his face is concealed by a cloth strap. He is about to let his slightly straightened upper body sag again. Then the camera zooms out a bit and reveals that the artist is mostly lying on his back on a mound of soil, intimately entwined by the Parangolé, with one leg angled. With his arms he keeps the fabric loops in motion, he acts in an improvised, playful manner as if with a lover. He burrows himself into this colorful cloth ensemble elaborately sewn together. Then, without using his arms, the artist unpretentiously gets up while he continuously distributes the Parangolé over his naked upper body. He bends slightly forward and keeps his gaze directed towards the entanglement in his arms in front of him. Eventually, he raises one arm together with the cloths, at a slant.

3:52-4:09 (figs. 1d-1f). This time the artist can be seen descending the hill in a full shot as he approaches the camera. At all times his face remains covered—far too long and too consistently for it to be fortuitous—by some of the many parts of the fabric, thus leading one to wonder how he can avoid falling down the embankment, given that he has no clear view. He swings his upper body in all directions, while stretching his arms out somewhere and maneuvering parts of the Parangolé. Quicker movements alternate with slow flowing ones, however these are definitively not dance steps. At no point in time did I have the impression that it is about a graceful performance outwardly oriented intended to be seen by the spectator as elegant.



7:15-7:19: In this short scene the artist is still standing at the same spot, his upper body tangled in a muddle of cloth. Externally, little happens; he is hardly moving. The fabric's movements seem rather to be caused by the wind. Two issues will be noted here and elaborated later. First, for Oiticica, the body and especially the eyes are involved in a creative act: "the real 'making' would be the individual's life-experience".<sup>10</sup> Only with this in mind can the statement

10. Hélio Oiticica, "The Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial" [November-December 1967], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 222 ["o verdadeiro 'fazer' seria a vivência no indi-



“Looking can be like dancing”<sup>11</sup> be understood, and one can rightly ask: where, then, does the productive moment actually lay? I will come back to this point later. Second, what de Campos writes in his text “The Open Work of Art” (1955) and which Oiticica mentions several times, must be considered. Therein,

víduo,” in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, APARECIMENTO DO SUPRASENSORIAL, doc. no. 0108/67, November-December 1967, 1-4; here 2].

11. Adrian Searle, “And it Was all Yellow,” *Guardian*, June 7, 2007, 28–29; here: 28, in <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2007/jun/07/art> (consulted February 18, 2015).



de Campos quotes the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and the composer Pierre Boulez who express the concern that in poetry and music the break, the pause, should not be disregarded as it is an element of rhythmic organization.<sup>12</sup> As soon as pauses become important, it is an indication of a time-based arrangement being involved. Those who wear the Parangolés decide how fast they move. There is no need to rush and they can also envision various velocities.

In *H.O.* three further moments of this motif exist. Firstly, in 1:07-1:58 the above mentioned scenes can be seen en bloc. In this case Oiticica, when coming down from the hill, approaches the camera to the point where an orange cloth fills the entire monitor and darkens it because he has practically covered the lens. 4:19-4:25 (figs. 1g-1i): Now the camera stands to the left of the artist whose head is visible at the right edge of the image. This time, Oiticica's percept seems more or less to correspond with what is presented to the viewer in the middle of the image. With his right arm, he holds up crumpled yellow and orange cloth panels and twists a yellow scarf-like appendage with his left wrist, producing ever more new drapes. As Oiticica holds everything towards the sun, additional interplays of light and shadow evolve, the colors light up. The artist does not pay attention to what he does with his hands, but to its effects. 4:33-4:36 (fig. 1j): What can be seen is only cloth panels in motion, however the color combination reveals that this is still the same Parangolé. Due to missing cues it is difficult to judge whether the camera is gliding alongside the orange, bright orange, yellow, pale-bluish fabrics or whether Oiticica—wrapped within them—rolls along.<sup>13</sup>

4:40-4:48: The orange-wrinkled cloth panel is mummy-like, tightly wound around the artist's head. It is mostly due to the way the camera approaches the cloth, rather than to its form, that the viewers notice there is a face behind it. Towards the end of this scene this turns out to be the case (fig. 1k). What curator and art critic Guy Brett finds as regards the Penetrables also serves as a thought-provoking impulse for the phenomena at hand when he writes of: "veiling sight as perhaps the most elementary and primordial pleasure in our

12. See Haroldo de Campos, "The Open Work of Art" [1955], trans. Jon Tolman, *Dispositio. American Journal of Comparative and Cultural Semiotics* 6, no. 17-18 (1981): 5-7, here: 6.

13. In his review of the exhibition "Bodies of Color," Johannes Birringer probably refers to this passage, when he writes about three projected films in parallel, in which one of them shows "a blurred close up of a yellow Parangolé folding and turning" (Johannes Birringer, "Bodies of Color," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29, no. 87 [2007]: 36-45; here: 38.)



visual relationship to world.”<sup>14</sup> When Oiticica wraps and coils cloth around his head, for him it is not a covering, occluding, or shielding. If I am correct, behind it he constantly keeps his eyes open in order to let various levels of sensory input merge together. This is also to be assumed in the second film passage.

### *Sequence Parangolé P17 Cape 13*

This action with the simpler *P17 Cape 13* “*I am Possessed*” (1967) was fixed on black-and-white film by Ivan Cardoso in 1979 and was used only in *Heliorama*: 10:32-10:55 (figs. 2a-2c): The image section shows Oiticica’s upper body obliquely from above; he is rolling on the ground. A dark cloth loops across his back, diagonally crosses his chest and is wound over his left upper arm. A pale, longish, semi-transparent gauze (the red inscription “*estou possuído*” is not legible here) is attached to it. Oiticica holds the gauze from its free end where something cushion-like and beige-colored is sewn into a plastic bag. He makes sure the over dimensioned gauze bandage always blankets his face. The left arm merely serves to support his rolling body over the uneven earthy terrain, a motion which takes place without haste so as not to hurt himself. The cushion-like appendix filled with straw<sup>15</sup> at the end of the gauze is not used in order to soften the fall; instead, it is constantly kept in the air. So, like the veil in front of the artist’s eyes, it is certainly not a protective measure. Rather it structures or alienates his perception of the near outside world: sky, meadow, soil that because of his rolling periodically appears as alternating flashes of azure, green and sepia, as seen through the unifying bright textile.

The art historian Tatiane de Oliveira Elias pointed to the connection between the *Parangolé P17 Cape 13* and the Orixá cult of the Afro-Brazilian Um-

14. Guy Brett, “The Experimental Exercise of Liberty,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Guy Brett, Catherine David, Chris Dercon, Luciano Figueiredo, and Lygia Pape, exhibition catalogue (Witte de With Centrum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Rotterdam 22.2.-26.4.1992/Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris 8.6.-23.8.1992/Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona 1.10.-6.12.1992/Centro de Arte Moderna da Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon 20.1.-20.3.1993/Walker Art Center Minneapolis 31.10.1993-20.3.1994) (Paris: Editions du Jeu de Paume, 1992): 222-239; here 236.

15. Ariane Figueiredo, personal email correspondence, March 4, 2015.



2a-2c). Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé Pt17 Cape 13 "I am Possessed"*, 1967. Filmstills taken from Cardoso, *Heliorama* (vid supra n. 6).

banda religion.<sup>16</sup> The dances during the rites of the Orixá cult resemble the Samba; it is all about trance, in so far as the “possession trance” plays an important role. Then, the persons in trance receive a white bandeau, called *oja*, wound around the upper part of their bodies and they wear *oxu*, a conical pack of ingredients that protect the sacred cuts received during the initiation rite. The priest or priestess is considered to function in a creative capacity causing the novices’ birth. In this sense, art historian Mikelle Smith Omari describes the procedure as follows:

The basic ritual consists of the sacrifice of a white dove or pigeon, whose neck must be wrung in a special ritual manner rather than cut. The blood is placed on the head of the individual along with other sacred items such as kola nut and some of the favorite foods of the *orixá* owner of the individual’s head. [...] Tiny portions of all the food and the sacrifice are placed on the tongue, palms of the hand, soles of the feet, and the forehead of the novice before finally being placed in tiny bits in the center of his or her head and in the food receptacles of the *orixá*. Finally, a long white cloth is wrapped around the head of the individual and tied tightly. This head-tie serves to secure the items placed on top of the head during the night-long seclusion of the individual after the ceremony.<sup>17</sup>

16. See Tatiane de Oliveira Elias, “Hélio Oiticica-von Neokonkretismus zur Cosmococa,” *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 49, no. 1 (2008): 288-293; here 291.

17. Mikelle Smith Omari, “Candomblé: A Socio-Political Examination of African Religion and Art in Brazil,” in *Religion in Africa: Experience and Expression*, eds. Thomas D. Blakely, Walter E. A. van Beek and Dennis Thomson (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1994): 135-159; here 142-143, see also 135, 148-151.

It is reasonable to suggest that Oiticica was familiar with the initiation rites of the Candomblé, as loans also seem to reappear, for example in *Head Parangolé* (1979), in an altered manner. In 1969, Oiticica conceived the *Parangolé Self-mummyfication*, which is embedded within a related line of action: in a dark cabin with purple light a person, on a bed, wraps herself/himself from tip to toe (including the head) in colored cloths (fig. 3). Afterwards, the person rolls around the bed, “on a floor, inside the cabin yet, filled with rubber & plastic balls and lots of artificial fruits: bananas, apples, etc.”<sup>18</sup> While Brett assumes that the *Parangolé Self-mummyfication* stems from a striking contradiction—a dispositif of liberation on the one hand and simultaneously a sensory deprivation,<sup>19</sup> on the other—it is also possible to find at least an analogy to existing Orixá ritual practice. I understand this piece in different terms, primarily in those that parallel Oiticica’s use of the *Parangolé P17 Cape 13*. The artist himself called it an experience of “auto-sensation.”<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the extent to which the person is wrapped from head to toe in the *Parangolé Self-mummyfication*, the rolling automatically affects the hands, which as principal organs of touch used to identify objects quickly, are dethroned from their outstanding position regarding this task and from their habit of measuring. The entire body’s surface serves as a large scale tactile sense organ that collects impressions in many places at the same time and that only to a lesser degree works in terms of object determination.

### *Work Concept of the Parangolé*

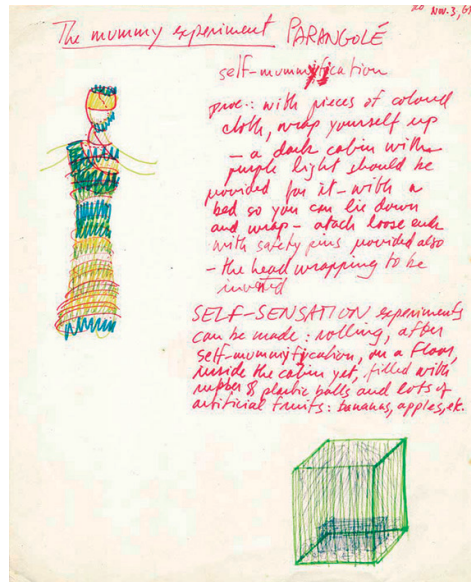
Oiticica developed the Parangolés between 1964 and 1978. They consist of burlap bags, torn cloth, nylon, fabrics, semitransparent plastics, belts, strings, and ropes. Numerous attempts have been made to grasp what it is essentially about. It has been described as: dress-objects seen as wearable or even inhabitable paintings (“d’objets-vêtements [...] comme des peintures à porter,

18. AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, “The Mummy Experiment,” doc. no. 2070/69, November 3, 1969, 1-3; here 1. See also Guy Brett, “Fait sur le corps: le Parangolé de Hélio Oiticica,” *Cahiers du Musée National d’Art Moderne*, no. 51 (1995): 32-45; here 43. In the above mentioned Orixá cult, joining the religious community as an active member includes also a phase of retreat into a chamber.

19. Brett, “Fait sur le corps: le Parangolé de Hélio Oiticica,” 43-44.

20. Hélio Oiticica, cited in Brett, “Fait sur le corps: le Parangolé de Hélio Oiticica,” 43.

3. Hélio Oiticica, *Parangolé*  
*Self-mummification*, 1969, taken from  
 AHO/PHO, doc. no. 2070/69,  
 November 3, 1969, 1.



voire à habiter”),<sup>21</sup> textile works to sheathe and operate (“zum Überziehen und Agieren”),<sup>22</sup> sculptural costumes (“skulpturale Kostüme”),<sup>23</sup> “canvases for wearing, for going out into the world and for communicating in the free spontaneous exchange of the samba experience,”<sup>24</sup> “painting[s] in which ‘support’ and ‘act’ are fused,”<sup>25</sup> “hang-glider[s] of extasy,”<sup>26</sup> and as “transcenden-

21. Philippe Piquet, “Hélio Oiticica. La couleur en mouvement,” *O’œil. Magazine International d’Art*, no. 446 (1992), 88.

22. Peter Gorschlüter and César Oiticica Filho, “Streben nach dem großen Labyrinth,” in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 19.

23. Sabine Weier, “Samba, Kokain und Jimi Hendrix,” *Schirnmag*, October 2, 2013, [http://www.schirn-magazin.de/Helio\\_Oiticica\\_Film\\_Frankfurt.html](http://www.schirn-magazin.de/Helio_Oiticica_Film_Frankfurt.html) (consulted January 15, 2015).

24. Fiona Hughes, “Style in Communication: The Hip Swing of Hélio Oiticica’s *Parangolés*,” in *Style in Theory: Between Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Ivan Callus, James Corby and Gloria Lauri-Lucente (New York/London: Bloomsbury, 2013): 187–215; here 208.

25. Guy Brett, “Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica,” in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Waldo Rasmussen, Fatima Bercht and Elizabeth Ferrer, exhibition catalogue (The Museum of Modern Art New York 6.6.-7.9.1993) (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993): 100–106; here 103.

26. “asa-delta para o êxtase,” in Haroldo de Campos, “Hang-Glider of Ecstasy,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Brett, David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 217.

tal robes [...] quasi-impossible to wear," but with the potential for multiple meanings when they are tried on.<sup>27</sup> They "were a cross between a banner and a cape and were designed to be lived and danced in."<sup>28</sup> Evaluations from a material analysis and conservation point of view are also helpful. Restorer Wynne H. Phelan understands the Parangolés as "ultimate color structures. They are flexible and un-predictable forms. The entropic motion of the person wearing the Parangolé prescribes the way light interacts with color, texture, and sheen. The Parangolés are not costumes; rather, they are layered fabric structures."<sup>29</sup> While secondary literature locates the Parangolés, given their material condition and formal quality, mostly as oscillating between paintings and garments, Oiticica emphasizes, in contrast, that he is not interested in relations of similarity to existing things.<sup>30</sup> It is striking that he describes the Parangolé functionally, as an "open-ended object."<sup>31</sup> "The cape is not an object but a searching process, searching for the roots of the objective birth of the work, the direct perceptive moulding of it. [...] It is more a constructive nucleus, laid open to the spectator's participation, which is the vital thing."<sup>32</sup> He also names his works programs, "situations to be lived,"<sup>33</sup> "auto-performance proposition[s],"<sup>34</sup> or "sensuality testers."<sup>35</sup> This indicates that the Parangolé is to be seen as a configuration for another actual, an ephemeral concern. Such a cape is nothing without its use.

27. Caetano Veloso, "Hélio and I in London," *Tate Etc.*, no. 10 (Summer 2007): 80-81; here 81.

28. [Janes Alison, Kathleen Madden and Alona Pardo], "Hélio Oiticica," in *Colour After Klein: Re-thinking Colour in Modern and Contemporary Art*, ed. Jane Alison, exhibition catalogue (Barbican Art Gallery 26.5.-11.9.2005) (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2005): 126-129; here 126.

29. Wynne H. Phelan, "To Bestow a Sense of Light: Hélio Oiticica's Experimental Process," in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez, exhibition catalogue (The Museum of Fine Arts Houston 10.12.2006-1.4.2007/Tate Modern 6.6.-23.9.2007) (London: Tate Publishing, 2007): 75-103; here 101.

30. Hélio Oiticica, "Fundamental Bases for the Definition of the Parangolé" [November 1964], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 152.

31. Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* [2005] (London: Tate Publishing, 2008): 64.

32. Hélio Oiticica, untitled [facsimile from the Whitechapel experiment catalogue], in *Oiticica in London*, eds. Guy Brett and Luciano Figueiredo (exhibition catalogue) (London: Tate Publishing, 2007): 112.

33. AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "Subterranean TROPICÁLIA PROJECT," doc. no. 0266/71, September 15, 1971, 1-2; here 1.

34. AHO/PHO, Oiticica, "Subterranean TROPICÁLIA PROJECT," 2.

35. Cited in Guy Brett, "The Experimental Exercise of Liberty," in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Brett, David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 236.

*Weighted Double Use of Parangolés*

To this day I have found two reports based on self-experiments with Parangolés. The first comes from the art historian Anna Dezeuze. In order to get a fresh look at this group of works, she chose a practical approach. In December 2002 and March 2003, together with the photographer Alessandra Santarelli, she conducted indoor and outdoor experiments in London. The personal experience of wearing a Parangolé as well as the photo series from two sessions were designed to aid her to “explore the nature of the relation between the artist’s formal experimentation and his political objectives.”<sup>36</sup> Wearing the cape with the banner “Sex and violence, this is what I like” in public, led to an increased awareness of her own appearance and look. Simultaneously, being a white middle-class European female, a feeling of inauthenticity rose in her when faced with this message, that is, the impression of taking on another persona, and finally interpreting a long piece of gauze as a caudal body extension.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, for Dezeuze, the studio photographs seemed to more strongly foreground the formal qualities as an effect of a precise determination of illumination and contrast. However, when Dezeuze writes in her conclusion, “Parangolés encourage a ‘supersensory’ state of absorption,”<sup>38</sup> it must be assumed that she could not derive these insights from her practical experiences because according to her own report she was *not* “with it.” The findings would have premised the embodiment of what the artist meant when he said it is about

overcoming the structuralism created by the propositions of abstract art, making it grow on all sides, like a plant, until it embraces an idea focused on the liberty of the individual, furnishing him with propositions which are open to his imaginative, interior exercise—this would be one of the ways, provided in this case by the artist, of de-alienating the individual.<sup>39</sup>

36. Anna Dezeuze, “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Helio Oiticica’s Parangolés,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 58-71; here 60.

37. Dezeuze, “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Helio Oiticica’s Parangolés,” 65 and 67.

38. Dezeuze, “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Helio Oiticica’s Parangolés,” 71.

39. Hélio Oiticica, “The Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial” [November-December 1967], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 222. [“superar o estruturalismo criado pelas proposições da arte abstrata, fazendo-o crescer por todos os lados, como uma planta, até abaroar uma idéia

Dezeuze's analysis focused mostly on the external impression: a factor which Oiticica in turn saw as but a welcome secondary effect. Those looking at the "performer" can slowly feel themselves partake, they warm up, get into the mood or atmosphere to a certain degree, until it is their turn to perform, i.e. to really live it from within.

It is striking how many authors have picked out passages from Oiticica's "Notes on the Parangolé"<sup>40</sup> (1964-1965) without following his postulated hierarchy between the two kinds of participation.<sup>41</sup> People speak of an (egalitarian) mix of experiences while wearing, watching, and looking back at viewers or of the 'dialogical nature' of the Parangolé in introversion and extroversion: "This invention allowed the extroversion—the performance, the mediation of a message for the spectators—and at the same time the introversion—the personal and introspective exploration of the material coils."<sup>42</sup>

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concentrada na liberdade do indivíduo, proporcionando-lhe proposições abertas ao seu exercício imaginativo, interior – esta seria uma das maneiras, proporcionada neste caso pelo artista, de desalienar o indivíduo," in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "APARECIMENTO DO SUPRASENSÓRIO," doc. no. 0108/67, November-December 1967, 1-4; here 2].

40. Hélio Oiticica, "Notes on the Parangolé" [1964], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth* [in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "Anotações sobre o 'Parangolé,'" doc. no. 0070/64, November 25, 1964, 1-3; here 2]

41. At first glance it may seem tempting to associate the two sides of the reception of the Parangolé with the pair of concepts "absorption" and "theatricality" of the art historian Michael Fried. However, on closer inspection each of the terms would have to be redefined. Given that Oiticica strictly rejects contemplation, the absorbing would consequently have to be thought of as an active and extensive incorporating. Theatricality can be associated with flaunting. The communicative display of those who act with the Parangolé was not meant as a primary mode by Oiticica, but as a side effect (this may also represent another difference to the Brazilian carnival). Both of Fried's terms would have to be weighted differently and receive a positive connotation. Finally, Oiticica never opts for a strict either-or, because generally he advances the view that "Pureza é um mito". See Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1980).

42. "Cette invention permettait à la fois l'extroversion – la performance, la projection d'un message à l'intention des spectateurs – et l'introversion – l'exploration personnelle et introspective des circonvolutions de matière," in Guy Brett, "Fait sur le corps: le Parangolé de Hélio Oiticica," *Cahiers du Musée National d'Art Moderne*, no. 51 (1995): 32-45; here 37 (translated by the author). See also Carlos Basualdo, "Quelques Annotations supplémentaires sur le Parangolé," in *L'Art au corps. Le Corps exposé de Man Ray à nos jours*, exhibition catalogue (Marseille: Musée d'Art Contemporain, 1996), 256-273; here 269; Mari Carmen Ramírez, "The



Nevertheless, upon reading the artist's writings, another emphasis can be detected, in so much as Oiticica speaks of "primary" and "secondary" meaning.

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." [...] "Wearing" in its larger and total sense, counterpoints "watching," a secondary feeling, thus closing the "wearing-watching" cycle. *Wearing*, by itself already constitutes a total experience since, by unfolding it and having his own body as the central nucleus, the spectator experiences, as it were, the spatial transmutation which takes place there: he perceives, in his condition as structural nucleus of the work, the existential unfolding of this inter-corporal space. There is, as it were, a violation of his *being*, as an individual in the world, distinct and yet collective, towards one of participator as a motor center, nucleus, not only motor, but principally symbolic, inside the "structure-work."<sup>43</sup>

Oiticica did not denude the upper part of his body in order to expose himself, but to include the skin as a sensitive organ of perception for experiencing the various textures and material surfaces. Noticeably and significantly, he always covers his face, but not in order to withhold it from the public, but in order to pursue his perception-related experiments. While "doing his own thing," the audience profits because it can observe a moving mass of color. At the same time, those watching from outside are never close enough to the event to really be enclosed and to gain the experience of those who are inside and operate the *Parangolé*. The distance from what is happening is consequential and marks a qualitative differ-

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Embodiment of Color-'From the Inside Out', in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, 27-73; here 66; Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History*, 107.

43. Oiticica, "Notes on the *Parangolé*" [1964], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 158 ["Tôda a minha evolução que chega aqui à formulação do *Parangolé*, visa a essa incorporação mágica dos elementos da obra como tal, numa vivência total do espectador, que chamo agora 'participador'. [...] O 'vestir', sentido maior e total da mesma, contrapõe-se ao 'assistir', sentido secundário, fechando assim o ciclo 'vestir-assistir'. O *vestir* já em si se constitui numa totalidade vivencial da obra, pois ao desdobrá-la tendo como núcleo central o seu próprio corpo, o espectador como que já vivencia a transmutação espacial que aí se dá: percebe êle na sua condição de núcleo estrutural da obra, o desdobramento vivencial desse espaço inter-corporal. Há como que uma violação do seu *estar* como 'indivíduo' no mundo, diferenciado e ao mesmo tempo 'coletivo', para o de 'participador' como centro motor, núcleo, mas não só 'motor' como principalmente 'simbólico', dentro da estrutura-obra." [AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "Anotações sobre o 'Parangolé'," doc. no. 0070/64, November 25, 1964, 1-3; here 2].

ence because—according to my hypothesis—with the spatial distance, the mode of perception directed towards the object of recognition can hardly be eliminated (and this very point is yet another hypothesis). For the audience, the Parangolé in movement is always framed by its surrounding. As for those who operate the Parangolé according to Oiticica's intention, there exists no viewpoint providing an empowering overview and thus a reassuring position.

The persons immersed channel the focus of their activity towards their own sensory perception and frame the events through the control of their own movements and the limited—because mediated—control over the cloths' movements. This moreover is a frame coming from within. So when artist and art theoretician Luis Camnitzer writes that Oiticica's "work is not presented *for* the viewer, but happens *with* the viewer,"<sup>44</sup> I would add "and *within* the viewer-as-a proactive-perceiver."

In his note "Parangolé Synthesis" ("PARANGOLÉ-SÍNTESE") of 1972, Oiticica offers the following entry that, in my opinion, mirrors the above mentioned disparity in meaning. As what is important is not that *vestir* and *assistir* are different, but that they are given different importance: *vestir* and *assistir*: "non-display | auto-climax | NON-VERBAL | Corporal proposition taken to a level of open experimentalism."<sup>45</sup> What must act in concert are—I will try to clarify this in technical terms—the effectors as well as the sensors of the human body. In the discussed film motifs, he is not looking inward introspectively, oriented towards his inner mental/bodily world, oblivious to the outer world; on the contrary, he is oriented towards the outer world, in order to actively mold the incoming impressions. This can happen without any perceptible exterior movement on his part or without the help of others (as with the Parangolés where the artist himself is the "motor"); however, movement itself is indispensable in any case.

The same holds true for the works by Spanish intermedia artist and post-queer activist Jaime del Val (b. 1974). As I see it, the metaformance *Metakinesphere* (2014) which del Val developed within the framework of the interdisciplinary laboratory Metabody (2013-2018) can be viewed as a technologically augmented successor project to Oiticica's artistic approach in several respects.

44. Luis Camnitzer, "Hélio Oiticica. Quasi-Cinemas Environments," *Art Nexus*, no. 48 (2003): 76–79; here 77.

45. Hélio Oiticica, "Parangolé Synthesis" [1972], in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Brett, David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 166 ["não-display | auto-clímax | NÃO-VERBAL | proposição corporal levada a um nível de experimentalidade aberta," in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "PARANGOLÉ-SÍNTESE," doc. no. 0201/72, December 26, 1972, 1–5; here 3].



4. Jaime del Val &  
Cristian García-Reverso,  
*Metakinesphere*, July, 2014.  
Metaformance, Metabody  
Forum, Medialab Prado,  
Madrid.

With his collaborator Cristian García-Reverso, del Val conceives it as “a new bond of art and technology, which will generate new kinds of perceptions and embodied knowledge that put more emphasis on movement, multiplicity, and unpredictable change.”<sup>46</sup> The image (fig. 4) shows the performer outdoors and completely enmeshed by a translucent net lace. This textile configuration is attached to his body at eight points, on the arms and legs, by flexible curved metal rods, so that each of his movements has an effect on the entire structure. Additionally, several red, white, and blue light sources attached to

46. Jaime del Val et al., “Project Summary of METABODY: Media Embodiment Tékhne and Bridges of Diversity,” July 2013-July 2018, 4 at [http://www.infomus.org/assets/Metabody\\_Project-brief.pdf](http://www.infomus.org/assets/Metabody_Project-brief.pdf) (consulted April 15, 2015).

his legs, hands and back guarantee the camera will film close-ups of the performer's skin. With a portable projector placed on the performer's left foot facing upwards and projecting onto the surface of the metakinesphere from inside, their live stream is immediately made visible on the semitransparent tulle and beyond, adding to the whole flux that the person at the same time controls yet does not have completely under her/his control. Del Val emphasizes that in this "posthuman cocoon without recognisable form or function,"<sup>47</sup> besides being a "laboratory of perception," the interacting person perceives something else different than what the spectators receive from the outside, as this kind of "mobile and tactile vision" demands breaking the distance.<sup>48</sup> This evidently coincides with my main assumption regarding the kinds of perceptions present in the use of the Parangolé and thus attests to the continued interest in concerns Oiticica set forth more than fifty years ago.

*Immersive Expression for Their Own Multi-sensory Impression*

Although in his text "Notes on Dance"<sup>49</sup> Oiticica emphasizes how closely the Parangolé principle is to the Dionysian dance, in the analyzed scenes he is not dancing. Moreover, we do not see him in any other particularly "representative" occupation. On one occasion he is lying on the floor, gets up and stamps his feet; in another he rolls down a mound of earth. He does not appear as a show piece for others. While most of the people from Mangueira, to whom Oiticica gave a Parangolé, danced and thereby displayed themselves before others in either a latent or an explicit manner, the artist himself remains unimpressed by the camera's presence. Even when he dances—he wants to have it understood as an "inventive liberation of the capacities of *play* | it's | INVENTION-PLAY"<sup>50</sup>—it only happens for his self impression, for his own visual

47. Jaime del Val, *Metakinesphere*, in <http://metabody.eu/metakinesphere/> (consulted April 15, 2015).

48. Jaime del Val, "Metabody," Media Arts + Sciences Rendezvous, Duke University, April 9, 2015.

49. Hélio Oiticica, "Notes on Dance" [1965-1966], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 161-167 ["A dança na minha experiência," in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "A dança na minha experiência," doc. no. 0192/65 - 4/9, November 12, 1965, 1-9].

50. Hélio Oiticica, "Parangolé Synthesis" [1972], in *Hélio Oiticica*, ed. Brett David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 166 ["liberação inventiva das capacidades de *play* é INVENÇÃO-

and general bodily experience. If it is about the *impression*, what does Oiticica mean with the word “*expressive act*”?<sup>51</sup> It is about the immersive expression within each individual’s multi-sensory impression: when the “performer” is engaged in an expressive activity, but this expressive activity is done primarily for his/her own impression (and not for others that might happen to be around). The term “immersive expression” implies tension because immersion always has to do with imposing. This is also the case here, but in combination with a very active arrangement and reception; its particularly active attitude, and the fact that the arrangement can also be seen as reception, must be emphasized.

#### *Sequence B 54 Sac Bólido 4*

Another scene now showing Oiticica, in an abandoned shopping arcade, under a transparent plastic bag (figs. 5a-5c)<sup>52</sup> presents movements that come the closest to something that can be termed dancing. The philosopher Fiona Hughes describes these movements as “a walking that is almost dancing.”<sup>53</sup> As for the Parangolés, she takes the following position:

Think of a conversation in which the exchange freely develops without any discernable constraint. [...] Conversation becomes playful in its structure, open-ended in its development, and self-sustaining in its motivations. [...] I would also suggest that when a conversation takes off in this way, we can become aware of the form or pattern—we might say the stylistic frame—of the conversation quite differently from the normal case.<sup>54</sup>

PLAY,” in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, “PARANGOLÉ-SÍNTESE,” doc. no. 0201/72, December 26, 1972, 1-5; here 3].

51. Oiticica, “Notes on the Parangolé” [1964], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 157-160; here 157 [“*ato expressivo*,” in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, “Anotações sobre o ‘Parangolé’,” doc. no. 0070/64, November 25, 1964, 1-3; here 1].

52. Cardoso, *H.O.*, 9:14-12:01; 1:18-1:42 and Cardoso, *Heliorama*, 1:47-2:26.

53. Hughes, “Style in Communication,” in *Style in Theory*, 187-215; here 211. In her study Fiona Hughes traces the relation between style and communication and argues that with persistent ambiguity, art works become evident as a second, complementary form of reflection besides theory (understood as a project of disambiguation). She exemplifies this with the idea of the hip swing in Oiticica.

54. Hughes, “Style in Communication,” 205.



5a-5c). Hélio Oiticica, *B 54 Sac Bólido 4*, 1966-1967. Filmstills taken from Cardoso, *H.O. (vid supra n. 2)*.

If one argued that—given the freedom from all constraints—the course would automatically lead to the creative and inventive, then one would misjudge how much energy has to be invested in these goals. Oiticica does not distribute the label “invention” carelessly to an audience that takes his suggestions loosely and interacts however it pleases. Becoming active and responsible participants (and therein lies the political dynamite) demands complete self-investment in the immersion and embodiment. In the scenes with the Parangolés used in Cardoso’s films, I was unable to recognize anyone other than the artist himself, and probably Nildo of Mangueira who reached this goal as well.

In reference to the above-mentioned scene from *B 54 Sac Bólido 4* (1966-1967), Hughes regrets the absence of a discernible dance style which would have been slightly modified by an improvising Oiticica. As she acts on the assumption that the use of the Parangolés is supposedly an intrinsically harmonious performance symbolized by the hip swing, she misinterprets this sequence that shows a seemingly arrhythmic Oiticica, in so much as he calls attention to a crisis:

Is there any *jogo de cintura* in this second sequence? We may suspect not, for Oiticica’s movements are often jerky and might even appear unbalanced. Nevertheless, I would suggest that his bodily movements reveal a deeper significance or what is implied by this verbal expression, through showing the evolution of movement and the risk of its breaking down. He deconstructs *jogo de cintura* as an activity of balancing by highlighting its potential crisis. In doing so, he draws out a deeper possibility within the phrase, highlighting the ongoing project of improvisation that entails both the difficulty and the achievement of kinetic balancing.<sup>55</sup>

55. Hughes, “Style in Communication,” 212.

As I understand the scene, in fact there is no deconstruction and no crisis going on, but rather Oiticica's improvisation under or inside a plastic bag in which whether he decides to move jerkily or fluidly, homogeneously or rich in variation, is completely irrelevant. Only the acting person herself/himself can judge the success of her/his improvisation. "In that Oiticica's works are interactive objects [...] this interpretation cannot be separated from the embodied knowledge of the viewer him or herself."<sup>56</sup> He does not care whatsoever whether or not this provides an aesthetically valuable display for outside viewers. What was he searching for in this experiment introduced as "parangol' helium" in the film *H.O.?* Through the transparent plastic bag's materiality he most likely perceives the urban space in a modulated way; the glaring ceiling lights and the display windows optical reflections refract according to the kinks in the plastic. The artist registers its crinkling sounds, his steps on the blank pavement stones and the traffic noise. He notices how the synthetic material, due to his respiration and transpiration, accumulates more and more condensation, altering his vision and making the bag stick to his back. He tests what is altered in his perception when he moves towards the darkness. When he lets the camera enter the plastic hood, he does not attend to it more than necessary. He seems to be weary and ecstatic; it is probably very (and increasingly) stifling inside the Parangolé. This action's creative moment consists in consciously living and absorbing all these components of sensation simultaneously and over a period of time in an intense manner. The following paragraphs hint as to what is needed for this to take place.

### *Parangoplay*

Games are often, and plausibly, described as an aggregation of rules (constraints). Nonetheless, it is possible to elucidate an important aspect from Hughes' parallelization of *playfulness* and *constraintlessness*. Certainly, the unconditioned nature should not be interpreted in such a way as that the specificity of the experiences that can be had with each different Parangolés can no longer be distinguished. As Oiticica himself emphasized the experimental and the play aspects over and over, we may allow ourselves an excursion into

56. Irene Violet Small, "Morphology in the Studio: Hélio Oiticica at the Museu Nacional," *Getty Research Journal* 1 (2009): 107-126; here 118.



this topic. The psychologist Heinz Heckhausen sees the play of infants as a behavior free of purpose, which primarily “strives to increase or maintain a certain level of tension and excitement.”<sup>57</sup> This delightful experience can be created by and for oneself by triggering constellations of stimuli, which react to and spur on the process of creation. No wonder, writes Heckhausen, that this normally comes with ecstatic feelings that outgrow and surpass oneself.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly, for Heckhausen all of the stimuli are discrepancies and could—he speculates—serve as a basis for better grasping psychological aesthetics. His four categories of contradictions are: *novelty/change* as a discrepancy between current and previous perceptions; *degree of surprise* as a discrepancy between current perceptions and expectations fostered by former experiences; *entangledness* as a discrepancy between parts of a current field of perception or experience respectively, for example a mobile; and *uncertainty/conflict* as a discrepancy between different expectations and/or tendencies involved with the suspense and risk of one’s own acts and that can even extend to a “craving for life-threatening experiences.”<sup>59</sup> To my understanding, the category *entangledness* prevails in the Parangolés. In Oiticica’s writings a similar expression is to be found: “New virtualities are now added to the much more complete thread of structural-color development that unravels here, and the sense of spectator involvement reaches its apex and its justification.”<sup>60</sup> According to Heckhaus-

57. “[es geht] um die Steigerung oder Aufrechterhaltung eines gewissen Spannungs- oder Erregungspegels,” in Heinz Heckhausen, “Entwurf einer Psychologie des Spielens,” *Psychologische Forschung* 27, no. 3 (1964): 225–243, here 226. The opinion that games are free of purpose is controversial, however, it is relevant in this context because Oiticica also expressed ideas that go in this direction. His use of colors for example does not follow decorative or architectonic tasks, but is “just aesthetic, experimental,” see Hélió Oiticica [excerpt from his notebook, August 28, 1961] cited in Luciano Figueiredo, “Hélió Oiticica: Obra e Estratégia,” in *Hélió Oiticica: obra e estratégia*, ed. Luciano Figueiredo, exhibition catalogue (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro, 2002), 72–78, here 75.

58. “zurückwirk[en] und den Fortgang der Gestaltung beflügel[n]. Kein Wunder, wenn dies gewöhnlich mit rauschartigen Gefühlen des Aus- bzw. Über-sich-selbst-Hinauswachsens verbunden ist,” in Heckhausen, “Entwurf einer Psychologie des Spielens,” 240.

59. Heckhausen, “Entwurf einer Psychologie des Spielens,” 231. Translated by the author.

60. Hélió Oiticica, “The Transition of Color from the Painting into Space and the Meaning of Construction,” in *Hélió Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 129 [“O rio do desenvolvimento estrutural cõr se desenrola aqui acrescido de novas virtualidades, muito mais completo, onde o sentido de envolvimento atinge o seu auge e a sua justificação,” in АНО/PHO, Hélió Oiticica, “A transição da cõr do quadro para o espaço e o sentido de construtividade,” doc. no. 0013/62, 1962, 1–15; here 4].

sen, *entangledness* is distinguished by the fact that it provides an activating effect of longer duration (longer than the *novelty* or the *surprise*).<sup>61</sup> One can stimulate oneself by means of the above mentioned categories because not everything can be anticipated and pre-programmed. This becomes even more evident in the self-experiment conducted by choreographer Johannes Birringer. It is the second report based on his own experiences with a Parangolé and it speaks of completely different aspects than Deuze writings do.

When I tried on one of the Parangolés, I actually noticed at first a certain ambivalence as to how to wear them: they seemed labyrinthine and perplexing, fragmented layers with openings (for head, arms, hands, legs) creating asymmetry and confusion of inside and outside, and they felt stiff. I then realized that, contrary to the evocative filmic close-ups, the stiff humble fabrics did not make me sense erotic pleasure or playful self-absorption in masquerade but turned my awareness to the outside of myself. I began to animate the colored fabrics and the stiffer, plastic sleeves toward the others around me observing the color-action and the refracted light, not knowing whether the body's motion could communicate the uncertainty of the sensorial source. I did not know the source, my body seemed elsewhere. Unlike digital interfaces in which gesture or motion controls specific parameterized reactions and in which one feels monitored, the corporeal processes here are indeterminate: they manifest whatever color comes to mean as a living action without place. Perhaps this is what Oiticica's supra-sensorial propositions point to—an inaccessible elsewhere toward which dance strives through its dispersal of energies. These energies can never be analyzed precisely and computed. At the same time, as with all strong relational art, the environment can respond to these energies, sustaining and enhancing the displacement of bodies from the subjective to the objective realm of experience. The dance of color is transobjective, fleeting.<sup>62</sup>

The states of tension and excitement differ depending on whether one is playing or observing. This raises the question about the possibility of a collective dimension of such an experience. It seems that in the case of the Parangolés each single person has to form his/her experience for himself/herself. However, this does not isolate him/her from the outside world, nor does it lead her to a

61. Heckhausen, "Entwurf einer Psychologie des Spielens," 231.

62. Johannes Birringer, "Bodies of Color," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 29, no. 87 (2007): 36–45; here 44–45.

collective in the sense of a crowd, because the “stimulus constellations” do not deny their roots, that rest in the visual arts and in painting more specifically. To this extent they are still aesthetic-formal in nature, even though—at the time when the Parangolés were developed—this meant subversively transgressing several borders of established understandings of art. In order to better outline the specificity of Oiticica’s proposals, I contrast his configurations, which emanate from a core (the Parangolé-wearing human), with a situation where a collective involvement is predominant and that thus needs the activation of a larger environment. It is self-evident that what comes to mind is the Brazilian carnival and, as Carlos Basualdo wrote: “One has to recognize that there is a bit of carnival in the Parangolé,”<sup>63</sup> even though Oiticica’s program differs from spectacle and folklore. Here, we compare his approach with another feast, the Holi-Festival in India. It will serve to speculate on how a concrete realization of Oiticica’s idea of color being literally released into the surrounding space might look. As his art and the religious traditions in Northern India are rooted in completely different cultural realms, this comparison is only meant to carve out formal or structural similarities and differences. Thus, it is not assumed that the Holi-Festival influenced the artist directly, although it should not to be discarded without further study.

### *Hélio-Holi?*

The association of liberated flying colors brings us to India. The Holi festival, taking place in February-March each year, is the celebration of renewal, rejuvenation, fertility, love, and the victory of good over evil. Playfulness and spontaneity, dance (*rāsa līlā*),<sup>64</sup> the play with the colors (*gulal*, preferred red, saffron, yellow, white, green), the consumption of substances (like *bhāṅg*)<sup>65</sup> in

63. “Il faut reconnaître qu’il y a du carnaval dans le *Parangolé*,” Basualdo, “Quelques annotations supplémentaires sur le Parangolé,” 256-273; here 271.

64. This concept from Hinduism roughly means ‘play (*līlā*) of the dance (*rāsa*)’. See Graham M. Schweig, “Dance of Divine Love: The Rāsa Līlā of Krishna from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, India’s Classic Sacred Love Story” (Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), 351.

65. *Bhāṅg* is an Indian cannabis drink, see Rinoti Amin, “Painted Faces in the Desert: Vibrant Colors of the Holi festival in Rajasthan,” *India Currents* 19, no. 11 (March 2006): 20, <https://www.indiacurrents.com/articles/2006/03/09/painted-faces-in-the-desert> (consulted January 28, 2015).

order to “enter paradise”<sup>66</sup> are formal elements that Holi shares with Oiticica’s propositions. He, who wanted to liberate and spread the color into space, would certainly have been fascinated by this joyful and collective splashing of dye and powder, a revelry carried on for hours and days which eventually leads to trance-like states. “Holi—in spite of appearing as the most chaotic and irreligious affair—is in fact deeply charged with spirituality and religious meaning. It is certainly an intimate and intense spiritual experience.”<sup>67</sup> This quotation stems from the film *Holi. A Festival of Color. A Hindu Celebration* (1990, 57’), directed by Robyn Beeche. It traces the pilgrims’ route in the region of Braj and immerses the viewers in the major Hindu religious festival at the full moon of the month Phālguna, in other words, at the beginning of the year for farmers in northern India. We see flags and pennants in the village of Dauji (fig. 6a), colorfully dressed pilgrims on their way to the temple of the village of Nandgaon (figs. 6b and 6c), where they encounter a barrage of water and colored powder originally made of dried flower petals. One cathartic moment happens when the women of the village of Barsana beat men with long bamboo sticks (figs. 6d and 6e). Their attacks are meant to channel anger accumulated throughout the year. They wear *sāris* (a garment made out of large sheet of cloth wrapped around the body) in bright colors that are drawn across their faces, veiling their sight. The men protect themselves by bandaging their head with cloth and by a colored shield (see fig. 6d). Throughout the film, the camera is often brought in at close range to the events and is also made to reflect the view of those who are engaged in the celebration—as seen in a take which (fig. 6f) shows what a man might see when kneeling in front of a woman and being beaten by her. In this way, the chosen women are allowed to act out the reversal of Indian society’s established rules. The devotional paradigm behind this festival is one of finding god beyond worldly forms, of play and of transcendence, and is thus “especially popular among the low caste and low class.”<sup>68</sup> All these—partly powerfully performed—symbolically laden gestures, ceremonies, and colors reviving the stories about Krishna and

66. “entrar em parafuso,” Anna Dezeuze cites Waly Salomão when explaining that this means “to get into a (trancelike) state,” see Anna Dezeuze, “Tactile Dematerialization, Sensory Politics: Helio Oiticica’s Parangoles,” *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 58–71; here 67.

67. Robyn Beeche, *Holi: A Festival of Color. A Hindu Celebration* (USA: Stein Films LTD, 1990), documentary, color, 57 min.

68. John D. Kelly, “From Holi to Diwali in Fiji: An Essay on Ritual and History,” *Man, New Series* 23, no. 1 (1988): 40–55; here 45.

his companion Radha, together form a semantic dimension that cannot be found in Oiticica's works. In the words of the curator Manuel J. Borja-Villel we could perhaps say, his work is rather "a ritual without myth, a ritual which enables the participant to discover and remake his own physical and psychic reality."<sup>69</sup> Oiticica is not consistent in his position towards myth, however; especially in the 1960s it remained an open topic for him.<sup>70</sup> It is not the spiritual that marks the main difference between Holi and Oiticica, as the artist provides numerous hints through which his works reveal their spiritual dimension. It is the absence of enactments of mythical stories and customs, as well as the impulse to experimentation which makes them differ.

69. Manuel J. Borja-Villel, "Introduction," in *Lygia Clark*, eds. Manuel J. Borja-Villel and Nuria Enguita Mayo, exhibition catalogue (Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 21.10.-21.12.1997/MAC, galleries contemporaines des Musées de Marseille, 16.1.-12.4.1998/Fundação de Serralves, Oporto 30.4.-28.6.1998/Société des Expositions du Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels 24.7.-27.9.1998) (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1998), 13-15; here 15 ["se trata de un ritual sin mito, de un ritual que le permite al participante descubrir y recomponer su propia realidad física y psíquica," en Borja-Villel: "Introducción," in *Lygia Clark*, 15].

70. See Luke Skrebowski, "Revolution in the Aesthetic Revolution Helio Oiticica and the Concept of *Creleisure*," *Third Text* 26, no. 1 (2012): 65-78; especially 76-77. Regarding dance the artist writes for instance: "It would be the definitive step for the search for the myth, a rescue of this myth and a new foundation of it in my art" (Hélio Oiticica, "Notes on Dance" [1965-1966], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 161) ["Seira o passo definitivo para a procura do mito, uma retornada dêsse mito e uma nova fundação dêle na minha arte," in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "A dança na minha experiência," doc. no. 0192/65 - 4/9, November 12, 1965, 1-9; here 1]. And elsewhere he writes: "This entire experience into which art flows, the issue of liberty itself, of the expansion of the individual's consciousness, of the return to myth, the rediscovery of rhythm, dance, the body, the senses, which finally are what we have as weapons of direct, perceptual, participatory knowledge [...] is revolutionary in the total sense of behavior." (Hélio Oiticica, "The Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial" [November-December 1967], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 224) ["Tôda essa experiência em que desemboca a arte, o próprio problema da liberdade, do dilatamento da consciência do indivíduo, da volta ao mito, redescobrimdo o ritmo, a dança, o corpo, os sentidos, o que resta enfim a nós como arma de conhecimento direto, perceptivo, participante, levanta de imediato a reação dos conformistas [...] é revolucionária no sentido total do comportamento," in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, "APARECIMENTO DO SUPRASENSORIAL," doc. no. 0108/67, November-December 1967, 1-4; here 3]. On the contrary, in a later interview with Cardoso, Oiticica states that his Parangolés "eram estruturas que propunham um não teatro, um não ritual, um não objeto de arte, um não mito" (Hélio Oiticica, in "Ivan Cardoso Entrevista Hélio Oiticica" [January, 1979], in Lucchetti and Cardoso, *Ivampirismo o Cinema em Pânico*, 68).



6a). Colored banners in the Holi Festival in India; b, c) camera shows closeups of pilgrims wearing colored clothes during their ascent to the temple of the village of Nandgaon; d-f) veiled women of the village of Barsana (actually but symbolically) beating men with long bamboo sticks. Filmstills taken from Beeche, *Holi: A Festival of Color. A Hindu Celebration* (vid supra n. 67).

*Experimenting by Modeling (Ap)perception*

In what does the experimenting with the Parangolés consist? It is important to acknowledge that for Oiticica various levels of experimentalism exist, and he welcomes a broad variety of kinds. However, all have to do with the body. “Oiticica’s *parangolés* redefined corporeal experience from *what a body is* to *what a body can do*.”<sup>71</sup> What does one do as a body that experiments with experience and perception? Perhaps one provokes a perception-related flowing together of colors, lights and structures by straining the lenses of the eye and by testing all possible focus adjustments, by constantly shifting the gaze so that a conscious fix on specific details is avoided. This leads to a gorgeous setting, the movements of which are not foreseeable and arise from several (inner and outer) sources. Moreover, the experience is one of time stretched, lasting.<sup>72</sup> Such an experiment in perception takes time, due in part to the fact that simultaneously the conditions of the sensory impressions change continuously given the movement of the fabric.

Art critic Sabeth Buchmann and cultural critic Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz write: “The means employed to this purpose, however, have nothing to do with an aesthetic of overpowering the viewer, which characterises the Minimal art, Op art, Pop art and multimedia art popular at that time.”<sup>73</sup> On the one hand I agree with them insofar as Op Art differs from Oiticica’s works as—in the words of the artist—it reaches only the sensorial, not the supra-sensorial. However, in order to get there, some degrees of letting oneself be overwhelmed (as a means to an end, not as ultimate result) are useful. It may be true, as in Op Art, that the essential happens exclusively over time and in the perception, as well as in accentuation of these occurrences. However, the variability is rather limited because the original is static. Oiticica’s main objection against Op Art is yet another that has to do with the difference in the activation of the participants. In substitution and abbreviation of a more extensive study on Op Art, here I limit myself to taking up the exhibition cat-

71. Irene Violet Small, “Morphology in the Studio: Hélio Oiticica at the Museu Nacional,” *Getty Research Journal* 1 (2009): 107-126; here 116.

72. For an extensive inclusion of Henri Bergson’s body of thought, see Mari Carmen Ramírez, “The Embodiment of Color -‘From the Inside Out’,” in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, 27-73.

73. Sabeth Buchmann and Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, *Hélio Oiticica and Neville D’Almeida: Block-Experiments in Cosmococa – Program in Progress* (London: Afterall Books, 2013), 37.



ologue “The Responsive Eye” (1965) written by the curator William C. Seitz.<sup>74</sup> He reports on scientific debates and their preoccupation with the question whether the optical “effects” that Op Art yields in the recipients are (more) of a psychological or a physiological nature, that is whether they take place in the brain or in the eye. This limited scope of the questions gives the impression that the “effects” are conceived as passive experiences and not as results of human modulations. The change of perception under the influence of mescaline and LSD is the only variation in the sense of an intensification that is mentioned in this context. Thus, Oiticica’s criticism that it is mainly a stimulus/response-reflex seems justified.

I consider as simple “sensorial” problems those related to “stimulus-reaction” feelings, conditioned “a priori,” as occurs in Op-art [...]. But when a proposition is made for a “feeling-participation” or a “making-participation,” I want to relate it to a supra-sensorial sense, in which the participator will elaborate within himself his own feelings which have been “woken-up” by those propositions. This “wake-up” process is a supra-sensorial one: the participator is shifted off his habitual field to a strange one that wakes up his internal fields of feeling and gives him conscience of some area of his Ego, where true values affirm themselves.<sup>75</sup>

Oiticica declares his pieces as being “open” and “cosmic” works. He wants “the spectator to create his own sensations from it, but without conditioning him to that and the other sensation.”<sup>76</sup> Faced by reflex-like reactions, open works would not exhaust their full potential. For that to happen another attitude of reception is necessary:

In my propositions, I seek to “open” the participator to himself—there is a process of interior expansion, a dive into the self, necessary for such a discovery of the creative process—action would be the completion of it. Everything is valid according to each case in these propositions, especially the appeal to the senses: touch, smell,

74. William C. Seitz, *The Responsive Eye*, exhibition catalogue (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 23.2.-25.4.1965/City Art Museum of St. Louis, 20.5.-20.6.1965/Seattle Art Museum 15.7.-23.8.1965/The Baltimore Museum of Art, 14.12.1965-23.1.1966) (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1965).

75. Hélio Oiticica, “Eden” [1969], in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Brett, David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 12.

76. Oiticica, “Eden” [1969], in *Hélio Oiticica*, 12.

hearing, etc., but not in order to “investigate” them through a stimulus-reaction process, purely limited to the sensory, as with “Op Art.” By proposing and indicating an interior expansion within the spectator, it already aims at the supra-sensorial. Supra-sensorial stability would be represented by hallucinogenic states (with or without hallucinogenic drugs, since supra-sensorial life-experience of various kinds also lead to a similar state; drugs would be the classic exemplary state of the supra-sensorial) and, to complete the polarity, the complementary state, in other words, the non-hallucinogenic.<sup>77</sup>

As a first step, the open arrangement should meet participants ready to open themselves up and as a second step it should make this openness productive. In the following pages I will attempt to portray more vividly what kind of “perception work” the artist links to creativity. I would like to make it clear that it is not my intention to turn Oiticica’s art into something pathological.

### *Suppressing the Protection Against Stimulation*

In the framework of psychoanalytical traumatology, Sigmund Freud described the “stimulus barrier” (*Reizschutz*) as a defense mechanism of the individual against stimulation from the outer world, which secures that the incoming excitation magnitudes “will take effect only on a reduced scale.”<sup>78</sup> Recent psychology uses the expression “latent inhibition” for the instance of

77. Oiticica, “The Appearance of the Supra-Sensorial” [November-December 1967], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 223-224 [“Nas minhas proposições procuro ‘abrir’ o participante para ele mesmo – há um processo de dilatamento interior, um margulhar em si mesmo necessário à tal descoberta do processo criador – a ação seria a completação do mesmo. Tudo é válido segundo cada caso nessas proposições, principalmente o apêlo aos sentidos: o tato, o olfato, a audição, etc., mas não para ‘constatar’ pelo processo estímulo-reação, peramente limitado ao sensorial como no caso da arte Op – ao proper e apontar um dilatamento interior no participante, visa já o suprasensorial. A estabilidade suprasensorial seria a dos estados alucinógenos (por uso de drogas alucinógenas ou não, já que as vivências suprasensoriais, de várias ordens, conduzem também a um estado semelhante; a droga seria o estado clássico (?) exemplificado do suprasensorial) e, completando a polaridade, o estado complementar, ou seja não-alucinógeno,” in AHO/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, “APARECIMENTO DO SUPRASENSORIAL,” doc. no. 0108/67, November-December 1967, 1-4; here 3].

78. Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle” [1920], trans. C. J. M. Hubback (London: The Hogarth Press LTD, 1948), 33.

the preconscious sorting of impulses assessed as being irrelevant (due to former perceptions). For a long time a weak filter mechanism was restricted to psychopathological findings (schizophrenia).<sup>79</sup> Psychologists Shelley H. Carson and Jordan B. Peterson offer yet another interesting perspective for this context. They looked at the possible connection between latent inhibition, the personality trait “Openness to Experience,”<sup>80</sup> creativity, and intelligence quotient. They found out that under some conditions a reduced filtering of stimuli can become productive. “The highly creative individual may be privileged to access a greater inventory of unfiltered stimuli during early processing, thereby increasing the odds of original recombinant ideation. Thus, a deficit that is generally associated with pathology may well impart a creative advantage in the presence of other cognitive strengths such as high IQ.”<sup>81</sup>

Intoxicants can also provoke the overstimulation of the nervous system or the irritation of the stimulus barrier.<sup>82</sup> Such more global measures may exist alongside local ones. A bit too much happening simultaneously helps one to let go, fostering the by-passing of the normal mode of proceeding and, for example, facilitating the deliberate direction of the attention, not as focused (as normal), but directed to all directions in order not to exclude anything.<sup>83</sup>

79. For an overview of the current research, see *Latent Inhibition: Cognition, Neuroscience and Application to Schizophrenia*, eds. Robert Lubow and Ina Weiner (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

80. This is one dimension from “Costa & McCrae’s Five Factor Model of Personality” and is characterized as follows: “Openness is a high-order trait, associated with personality attributes such as imagination, creativity, intellectual curiosity, unconventional attitudes, and divergent thinking” (Jordan B. Peterson and Shelley H. Carson, “Latent Inhibition and Openness to Experience in a High-achieving Student Population,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 28, no. 2 (2000): 323–332; here 324. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(99)00101-4.) See also Jordan B. Peterson, Kathleen W. Smith and Shelley H. Carson, “Openness and Extraversion are Associated with Reduced Latent Inhibition: Replication and Commentary,” *Personality and Individual Differences* 33, no. 7 (2002): 1137–1147. doi:10.1016/S0191-8869(02)00004-1.

81. Shelley H. Carson, Jordan B. Peterson and Daniel M. Higgins, “Decreased Latent Inhibition is Associated with Increased Creative Achievement in High Functioning Individuals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89, no. 3, (2003): 499–506; here 505.

82. See Klaus Wolschner, “Reizschutz, Reizflut, Inhibition: zur medizinischen Psychologie und Kulturgeschichte der Reizüberflutung,” in *Texte zur Geschichte und Theorie von Medien & Gesellschaft* (2013): <http://www.medien-gesellschaft.de/html/reizflut.html> (consulted January 17, 2015). It is possible to interpret the group of works of the Bóldes under these auspices, too. See the sequence 9:46–9:55 in *Heliorama*.

83. The inability to control this consciously is discussed in the clinical picture of the schizo-

*Dimming Out Identifying Automatisms*

A broadly dispersed attention span—provided that this can be controlled consciously—is in itself already an unconventional attitude. Yet another special feature can be added. What is searched for is an instance of the visual or the multi-sensorial which would correspond to the neologism “olfactic”. With *B 50 Bag Bólido 02 “Olefactic”* (1967) Oiticica invited the participants to smell freshly ground coffee. The poet Waly Salomão writes insightfully: “The olfactic precedes the Olfactory, which only exists as a mediating discourse. Olfactic is a direct sensation, *en train de se faire*, immediate.”<sup>84</sup> The immediateness, presence, and processual nature are emphasized. What can a direct visual sensation before any conceptualization be called? How can we release seeing from being oriented towards object identification? Possibly by concentrating exclusively on the sensual characteristics? Pure primordial perception is not easily attainable. Some clues that it is worth trying can be found in Oiticica’s writings, such as in his “Notebook Entry on Bólides”:<sup>85</sup>

Clearly, earlier perceptions cannot be erased, although, through a new aesthetic experience, the new perspective will be heightened, allowing for extraction of new possibilities from an object or a given solid form. I repeat that this is only possible in the aesthetic transformation of the object, which for me takes place in the line of color and its transformation into “symbolic form.” It is the interior aesthetic renewal of our wasted world of everyday objects.<sup>86</sup>

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phrenic disorder, see Andrew McGhie and James Chapman, “Disorders of Attention and Perception in Early Schizophrenia,” *British Journal of Medical Psychology* 34, no. 2 (1961): 103-116.

84. Waly Salomão, “HOMage,” in *Hélio Oiticica*, eds. Brett, David, Dercon, Figueiredo and Pape, 244.

85. “Da experiência dos Bólides.”

86. Hélio Oiticica, “Notebook Entry on Bólides” [September 19, 1963], in *Hélio Oiticica: Das große Labyrinth*, 145 [“É claro que as experiências perceptivas anteriores não poderão ser apagadas, suas por uma nova visão, uma nova experiência, de ordem estética será acrescentada essa nova visão e dar partir para extrair desse objeto, ou forma sólida dada, novas possibilidades. Isso, repito, só é possível na transformação estética do objeto, em (ruim?) pelo fio da côm, na sua transformação em ‘forma simbólica’. É a renovação interior, de caráter estético, do nosso mundo gasto de objetos do cotidiano,” in АНО/PHO, Hélio Oiticica, Untitled [Da experiência dos Bólides], doc. no. 0007/63, 1963, 1-2; here 1-2].

Assuming an unconceptualized perception is at all possible, it would be interesting to know how much overload is necessary for it to happen. Overload is something experienced by all who see for the very first time because they still have a learning process ahead of them before their sight “normalizes.” Reports about the first optical perceptions of formerly blind persons who regained their eyesight after surgery are rare and hotly debated.<sup>87</sup> Although studies address advances in identity learning, object recognition, form discrimination, distance determination, and allude to what could not yet be attained, they seldom provide detailed information about the actual impressions (indeed, how would one capture the experience in words?). Apart from a Russian study from the 1950s that reports the case of a girl who lost her eyesight during early childhood and could thus name colors, and who had her eyesight restored, for example, describes something “big, red, and white”;<sup>88</sup> whereas in other studies the impressions are described with emotionally laden and moreover hardly revealing adjectives such as “confusing”<sup>89</sup> or “nasty.”<sup>90</sup> In

87. A compilation offers the classic: Marius von Senden, *Space and Sight: the Perception of Space and Shape in the Congenitally Blind Before and After Operation* [1932] (London: Methuen, 1960); Donald O. Hebb, “Concerning Imagery,” *Psychological Review* 75, no. 6 (1968): 466-477. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0026771>. And a review of both writings can be found here: Michael Wertheimer, “Hebb and Senden on the Role of Learning in Perception,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 64, no. 1 (1951): 133-137.

88. Ivan D. London, “A Russian Report on the Postoperative Newly Seeing,” *The American Journal of Psychology* 73, no. 3 (1960): 478-482; here 480. Reference is quoted as: A. I. Pokrovskii, “On the Development of Visual Perceptions and Judgments in the Postoperative Newly Seeing in the Light of the Works of I. P. Pavlov,” *Vestnik Oftalmologii* 32, no. 6 (1953): 6-17.

89. Richard L. Gregory, “Seeing after Blindness,” *Nature Neuroscience* 6, no. 9 (September 2003): 909-910; here 910.

90. An approximately 16-year-old foundling appeared in Nuremberg in 1828. He seemed to have been living in a dark cellar until then, completely deprived of light and society. Freed from captivity, Kaspar Hauser attracted the attention of scholars. Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach also studied him and handed down one of the incidents as follows: “I commanded Kaspar to look towards the window, pointed to the vast, broad vista into the beautiful landscape resplendent in full summer decoration and asked him: whether it wasn’t beautiful what he sees out there? He obeyed, however withdrew immediately with apparent revulsion by exclaiming: ‘nasty! nasty!’, then pointing at the white wall of his small room and said: ‘Here not nasty!’ Upon my further question: Why there nasty? Nothing else occurred than ‘nasty! nasty!’ and thus there was nothing else for me but to memorize this instance well, and to await the time for further clarification when Kaspar will be able to make himself understood better.” Later, when Hauser could express himself more eloquently, von Feuerbach asked him

the beginning, blind individuals who see for the first time often go through a difficult period of disorientation, insecurity, and, subsequently depression. Under these circumstances the impressions frequently receive a negative connotation and thus it is all the more surprising how the art historian Michael Baxandall comes to his positive formulation: "Its inquietude and movement [of the visual array as a meaningless field of colours] are simply rewarded with the pleasure of lively and changing stimulation."<sup>91</sup> Such a positive connotation

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about this incidence: "Back then he had turned away from this view with disgust and always exclaimed: nasty, nasty! Why did he do this, what impression did he have? – 'Yes, certainly', he answered me, 'what I saw at that time was very nasty. When I looked in the direction of the window, it always seemed to me *as if a display had been installed right in front of my eyes, and a painter would have squirted on it with his various brushes white, blue, green, yellow, red—everything variegated and muddled.* I could not recognize and discriminate distinct things in it like I see things now. This was really abominable to look at; so I felt scared because I thought someone had closed my window with this varicolored display so that I could not see out into the open." See Anselm Ritter von Feuerbach, "Kaspar Hauser—Verbrechen am Seelenleben des Menschen (1832)," in *Ich möchte ein solcher werden wie .... Materialien zur Sprachlosigkeit des Kaspar Hauser*, ed. Jochen Hörisch (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979): 119-193; here 157-158. Translated by the author.

91. Michael Baxandall, "Attention, Hand and Brush: Concillac and Chardin," in *The Beholder: the Experience of Art in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Thomas Frangenberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006): 183-194; here 186. Baxandall refers to the philosopher Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780), who in turn published a treatise on sensations in 1754. In chapter XI of Part I "A man limited to the sense of sight" the French cleric writes that a statue seeing for the first time ever would not automatically attribute her sensations to the outer world: "1. [...] Analogy might lead us to assume that it must be with sight as with the other senses. The impression of light, the sensation being entirely in the eyes, we must suppose that they can only see it there so long as they have not yet learned to relate their sensations to objects. But if in fact, they see only what they actually experience; could they suspect there is a space, and in that space objects which act on them? [...] 2. I believe, then, that I am justified in saying that our statue sees only light and colours, and is unable to judge that there is anything outside itself. [...] 3. If at the first moment it perceives several colours without attending to one more than another, then, it seems to me, it would be unable to notice any one in particular: its attention being so divided it would embrace them all confusedly. [...] 4. [...] The statue in relation to two or three colours presented to it with many others would be like ourselves before a picture which has a bare sketch [original French expression: 'tableau un peu composé'] and the subject unfamiliar. At first we should only perceive its details confusedly. [...] The confusion which is all that I see at the first glance, is not the result of a number of absolute determined objects, such that if confused for me they are confused for everyone. It is the result of a multitude of objects, more than my untrained eyes can comprehend at a glance." (Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, "Condillac's Treatise on the Sensations" [1754],

of the stimuli to be incorporated is what we have to think of with respect to Oiticica's proposals. According to my hypothesis, in sighted people a kind of overload has to be artificially induced. It is easier to dedicate oneself to non-identifying seeing, to practicing a momentary visual agnosia ("difficulty in recognising common objects from vision"),<sup>92</sup> and to maintain it for a while when confronting abstract forms that undermine the sensing thresholds and that function immersively-invasively. The body is then completely busy with broadly opening itself in order to give preference to the reception of unbiased impressions and to exclude the normal automatic process of categorizing. What is to be filtered out is not the sensory richness of the impressions, but the apperception. It is not about a refusal of (a negatively connoted) apperception in so much as it is an evasion of attentive perception (as the novelist Heimito von Doderer would conceive it),<sup>93</sup> but about a perception-related inventive exploitation of the "openness" of Oiticica's work proposals.

### *Training a Perception Aimed at Openness*

An analysis of the group of works known as Parangolés which Hélio Oiticica developed offers possibilities for a better understanding of creative expression as directed toward the participant himself/herself. In his writings, the Brazilian artist links the supra-sensorial to political maturity and self-determination. This contribution investigates how this idea manifests itself; or better: is instantiated in the work complex of the Parangolés. They can be seen as instances for training a perception aimed towards openness and creativity instead of towards object recognition (repetition of the known). It is about actively seeking, exploring, and enjoying an overwhelmingly rich self-made

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trans. Geraldine Carr (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1930): 60-63.) In fact, Condillac speaks of a feeling of pleasure when seeing a vivid color, but in most cases his main parameter is fatigue (what, and to which degree, makes the eye tired). However, he does not go so far as Baxandall in what he states. Some of his formulations are, nonetheless, interesting for us, for example: seeing light and color only, having multiple simultaneous perceptions, an individual and confused view of something entangled.

92. Glyn W. Humphreys and M. Jane Riddoch, *To See but not to See: A Case Study of Visual Agnosia* (East Sussex: Psychology Press, 1987), 1.

93. Heimito von Doderer and Albert Paris Gütersloh, *Briefwechsel 1928-1962*, ed. Reinhold Treml (Munich: Biederstein, 1986): 18-19.



stimulus. The kind of interactivity that leads to such high claims bears moments of experimentation and playfulness but is demanding as it asks for full self-investment. Thus, there is a major—often overlooked—difference between acting from inside a Parangolé and observing someone engaged with it from the outside. ♣

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Because of the difficulty to obtain high-quality filmstills of the images presented they have been published as obtained.