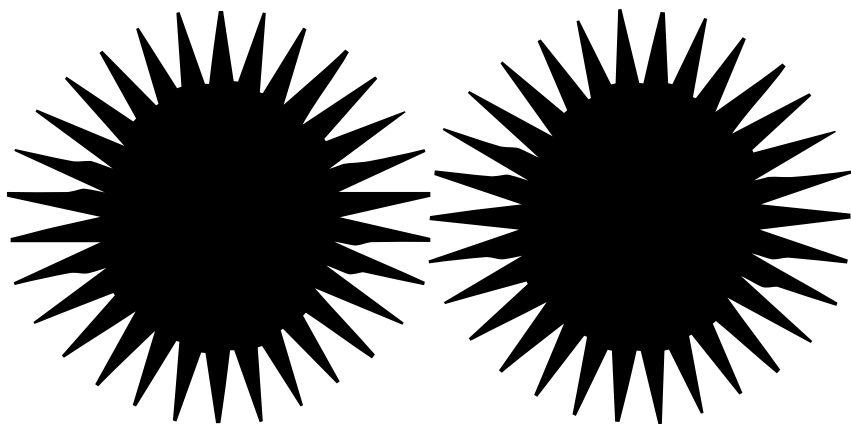


# POST-PARTICIPATIVE PARTICIPATION



RICARDO BASBAUM

**TROPICALISM, AFTERWARDS: FROM  
ADVERSE JELLY TO JELLY ADVERSE<sup>1</sup>**

Ricardo Basbaum (São Paulo, Brazil 1961).  
Lives and works in Rio de Janeiro.

Investigates art as an intermediating device and platform for the articulation between sensorial experience, sociability and language. Since the 1990s, has been nurturing a vocabulary specific to his work, applying it in a particular way to each new project. Recent solo-projects include *subhidroinfraentre* (Galeria Jaqueline Martins, São Paulo, 2021), *Você gostaria de participar de uma experiência artística?* (Dragão do Mar, Fortaleza, 2018) and *re-projecting (london)* (The Showroom, London, 2013). With *Diagramas* (Centro Galego de Arte Contemporânea, Santiago de Compostela, 2013) a survey of the diagrams in his practice was presented. Exhibited at the 30<sup>a</sup> e 25<sup>a</sup> Bienal de São Paulo (2002, 2012) and at *documenta 12* (2007). His work was recently included at the 35<sup>o</sup> Panorama da Arte Brasileira (Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo, 2017), *Free Collection Displays* (New Tate Modern, London, 2016) and the 20<sup>a</sup> Sydney Biennial (2016). Published *Diagrams, 1994 – ongoing* (Errant Bodies Press, 2016). Author of *Manual do artista – etc* (Azougue, 2013) and *Além da pureza visual* (Zouk, 2007). Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago (2013). Artist in Residency at the Audain Gallery (Vancouver, 2014). In 2021, developed projects as Visiting Artist at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Full Professor at the Art Department, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Brazil, where he also works as researcher at the Pós-Graduação em Estudos Contemporâneos das Artes (PPGCA-UFF).

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FERNANDO JOSÉ PEREIRA

## INTRODUCTION

5

RICARDO BASBAUM

## POST-PARTICIPATIVE PARTICIPATION

7

## TROPICALISM, AFTERWARDS: FROM ADVERSE JELLY TO JELLY ADVERSE

23



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We have finally arrived at the third volume of the collection “lado B” [“side B”], a fruitful and necessary collaboration of the Doctoral Programme in Fine Arts with the Research Institute in Art, Design and Society (i2ADS).

In this new volume, the important Brazilian artist Ricardo Basbaum (who, like the previous authors, kindly gave his text to this collection) carries us, through two of its many texts, towards incredibly important questions to all those who care about practice and thought around the so-called contemporary art.

Unlike the previous ones, this volume privileges a condition, that is of the utmost importance for the Doctorate in Fine Arts as well as for i2ADS. These are texts written by an artist, and this condition alone would be decisive for the objectives of the collection. However, the dimension of this choice is stronger and wider. It embodies one of the most discussed questions in the field: what is the role to be played by artists in contemporaneity? What are the limits that they must impose? And, finally, what singularities may these texts, written from the inside out of the territory of artistic practice, bring? These are all open questions, but, also, because of that, enhancers of broader horizons with which we want to work and deal.

The texts that are now presented have also another important dimension in the, also, fundamental, contemporary discussions: they come from the southern hemisphere, they come from a country that still has open wounds that derive from its previous condition as a colony, but, above all, from a gaze that escapes the cultural centrality with which we are used to living. These are, after all, generic questions because the most important ones are posed by the artist in his texts. Straight away, the problem of participation and so-called participatory art and all the mistakes that it has generated over the past few decades. The in-depth and singular analysis that Ricardo presents to us is beyond any misunderstanding. He knows what he means when he talks about participatory art. He situates the problem based on a historical research that allows an understanding of the visible approximation in our days between the territory of art and the cultural industry. He rightly feels that this approach and, in some cases, almost fusion, takes refuge in myths and misunderstandings enhanced by a more than spent rhetoric of criticism of the individualism of the artists. Coming from the most profoundly individualistic sectors of society: neo-liberal theorists who present a kind of anarchism external to any collective cause, but which on

an individual basis allows them to offer myriads of saving possibilities (more now with the introduction of the digital siege and the self-proclaimed telework). From the advertisements with any tanned and well-nourished figure doing their job on a paradise beach to the extreme of what we already know as selfie-reality in which software for sharing allows us to touch up defects to appear perfect in front of others. He puts his finger on the wound when he raises the problems that are inherent to this condition of self-made man and the corresponding “participatory” possibility present in many works that claim this condition, forgetting that the symmetry between author and viewer is just another fallacy.

The author rightly refers at the end of his text “Today’s most interesting artistic practices can take us closer to that paradox: to mobilize the other as an extension of yourself and to mobilize yourself as an extension of the other – where otherness is mutually reinforced and where ‘me’ and ‘you’ are continually replaced by a wide, outer area of contact. What can we do but live outside ourselves?”

Not by chance, the text that complements the book uses the same tools. Historical research and, right away, the refusal of this kind of social schizophrenia in which we are continually involved by the perpetual present that neoliberalism imposed on us, as a way of understanding this same present. Going back to the past, looking for examples of fundamental artists like Hélio Oiticica, will, therefore, be a powerful strategy for artists to be able to situate themselves and, as the author says, eventually find ways to resist so that the changes they crave in their works can appear, even if we can easily recognize that we are living in adverse times. And yet, as Derrida said, it is in the im-possibility that the challenge lies. The texts are there to help to understand the strangeness of the Derridean statement.

We finish exactly as in the previous presentation text. We know how difficult this is, but we also know that for artists, the *make known* of art is a necessity that we can, but we do not want to give up.

Fernando José Pereira, May 2021

## POST-PARTICIPATIVE PARTICIPATION<sup>1</sup>

RICARDO BASBAUM

**ABSTRACT** Based on the author's long-term artistic research project and a myriad of references in Brazilian and international contemporary art and criticism, this article reflects on the introduction of the audience and participatory practices into the realm of contemporary art as a form of resistance to neoliberal strategies.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Participation. Participatory art. Spectator. Neoliberalism.

"Who, me?"

"Yes, we were already expecting you."

"When I invite people to take part in my propositions, what am I offering them and what is expected of them, of me, for them, for me?" This should be a basic question addressed to participative processes, one that would help indicate with greater precision how each project constructs the image of the artist and of its other, the so-called "participant". There was a time in which artists did not conceive their practice as a gesture directed to any other: it would be enough if the work of art was completed and had its internal aspects solved. There was not even room for interpretation: before modernism, the "reading" of a work pointed to narratives without any ambiguity. Meanwhile, during modernism the same structure of artistic language began to ensure that the work of art operated correctly when it pointed to the future, thus bringing up advanced critical topics. But, for some reason, changes have occurred in the mid-1950s – towards a "participative condition" of contemporary society – in the sense of decentralizing the artistic gesture and adding a new role to the art circuit or system. It was the role of the active participant, a figure of alterity that will become not only increasingly relevant in artistic processes but will also influence decisively, at the end of the 20th century, the displacement of critical practices towards curatorial practices.

Yes, Marcel Duchamp took under consideration the way in which the reception of his work would influence its meaning. But he was more concerned with the impact that a generalized and anonymous mass of people ("the public") would have over his reserved place in history. Duchamp did not write specifically about the production or negotiation of the subject's condition – this would be a discussion that would only appear much later in the general debate of art, in the conversations during the 1980s decade around micropolitics and the politics of production of subjectivity. Therefore, although it is true that his famous *Mariée* in fact represents a process of subjectivation (**she** and her tireless bachelors) – there is a flow of desire that energizes *La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (*Le Grand Verre*) [The Bride stripped bare by her bachelors, even, 1915–23] and the pages of *The Green Box*, 1934 –, our position in looking at the glass is analogous to the position of someone who seats in a traditional movie theatre. The plot and the processes happen in

some other place, not establishing any direct relationship with us (as voyeurs), unless (as obsessive thinkers) we ourselves integrate the mechanism of the glass. But that we will only realize later, as contemporary participants. One of the main aspects of participation protocols, still not implemented at the time, refers to the re-enactment of the work process by the spectator, as a paradoxical process of internalization, in which the subjectivity of the spectator is constructed by the work of art – simultaneously activated by her or him. Despite that, yes, “Doctor MD”<sup>2</sup> was one step ahead of his colleagues and, effectively, opened the space in his practice, in which the other became, in fact, albeit weak and partially, visible – a pale shadow or spectrum, that would become gigantic in the future, becoming impossible to ignore.

Such significant change, brought about in the second half of last century, can be delineated from at least three different origins, each one affecting the symbolic field and modifying the “pact” that determines the field of art and its roles – in the sense that not only the positions of the artist and the spectator, but also those of the critic, the historian, the curator, etc., were affected, and needed to be reconfigured. On one hand, structuralism and anthropology decentralized the role of the producer and receiver of knowledge, that had always been typically exercised by the white European man. It was evident that a large part of the planet had already reacted against eurocentrism, with the development of other modernisms, diving, therefore, directly in the discussion about alternative centres of power. At the same time, the Macy Conferences about Cybernetics, in New York (1946–53), established a proto-diagrammatic comprehension of the relational and communicational patterns and of human societies, instituting a mediation zone in which body, living beings, machines and cultural artefacts would share lines of contact and common layers.<sup>3</sup>

According to the themes proposed in those conferences, it is understood that the sensory experience is taken as a gesture that would not return directly to the internalized self, but, instead, would come to the surface in the shape of external layers and lines that could be prospectively modelled. We can see Lygia Clark’s “organic line”, a concept that she initially articulated in 1954, as being related (although indirectly) to that development, given that she “discovered” the border or mediation line as a result of the contact between two distinct surfaces: body and object, or work of art.<sup>4</sup> Finally, we may also refer to Umberto Eco and his book “Open Work” (1962), as well as the aesthetic of reception (*Rezeptionsäs-*

*thetik*) by Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser, at the end of the 1960s, in Literature. They defined a concrete and definitive role for the receiver agent in the symbolic production of a text, arguing that the author merely indicates a coming process, given that the realization of the literary experience will only happen through the “creative” gesture of the reader/spectator, who completes the work and without which it remains only a potential promise.

Of course, we could add here other aspects that also contributed to this moment of change, but what is shared here is an attention to the deconstruction of certain dominant, and for a long time immobile, models of subjectivity and, subsequently, to the conduction of the very mechanisms of this process for the field of art. At the same time, there was also the advance of the implementation of a communicative model (as well as a reaction to it) that brought to the map (or diagram) of the field of art new positions (or points) related to the interfaces between art and its context (society, science, the subject, the public, the economy, etc.) – defining the circuit or system of art in terms even more explicit. In fact, it has become commonplace nowadays to refer to the art system or circuit as a natural entity, since the practitioners of art (**we**) have become so used to dealing with the layers of mediation. Any gesture requires being associated to a project; having a budget; seeking publicity, press, licencing fees; to engage with museology, insurance, etc. In other words, making art entails a permanent state of negotiation with the many constitutive knots of the entanglement of the circuit – therefore, to reach and really be in contact with a work of art would only be possible after overcoming mediator after mediator, layer after layer; after all, what can be considered a work of art would be, in reality, an aggregate of multiple and explicit interests, including, fortunately, the artists’ proposals.

Some clear moments in this process of half of the past century may be found among the different gestures that characterize the several conceptualisms (including orthodox Conceptual art), current throughout the world at the time. This was a particular moment, highly influent of collective thinking, referenced completely in the territory already conquered (but still open and full of potential) of the presence of the participant-other. There, the majority of the propositions dealt directly with discursive models and patterns (even if reached by clearly defined material elements), launched to the spectator as a challenge, a task, a problem to be solved – that is, he or she were invited to engage in complex tasks

to make the work produce meaning. Conceptualism made clear that the spectator produced by the artistic operation was not a simple, ordinary or neutral agent: the artists understood that one of their main functions would be to work towards the modelling of the subject that would receive their production. This **imperative** (that is, the demand of the work of art by its other) was in fact understood as something too important and decisive to simply be left in the hands of the market, of consumption, and of other directed social projects.

The art system (and in fact Conceptualism always dedicated itself to sketching systems, maps and diagrams) has, since then, included this **place** of the expected other – which also possesses several levels of **specificity**. Different moments of contemporary art can be revised in terms of their investment in what we can call **process of production of the expected spectator** – although this is not a field of causal and linear results (that, in turn, may be approached rather naively, given the complexity and importance of the problem).

In the 1950s, in Brazil, the Concrete and Neoconcrete Movements established their main conceptual lines under the new epistemological condition that considered the presence of the spectator or reader as part of the poetic deflagrated by the work of art. Not that there was a special perception of the problem among Brazilian artists and intellectuals (at the same time, in France, Yves Klein proposed *Le Vide* [The Void, 1958], that contained a similar concern with the dissolution of everything preceded the reception of the work, forcing the spectator to reconstruct her or himself in direct contact with the work).<sup>5</sup> But some particular aspects of that moment are important for today's landscape and they deserve to be examined in greater depth. Both groups, at different times, recognised their debt towards the "Anthropophagus Manifest" (1928), of Oswald de Andrade. Without a doubt, this strong modern proposition was decisive for the international reconfiguration of local culture, in the sense of recognizing the difference, feeding on it and producing the new – no longer as a subservient other, but as an autonomous voice loaded with invention potential.<sup>6</sup> It is not incorrect to approach this modernist *piece de resistance* (given that several other modern Brazilian artists and writers, of the same period, turned to more conservative positions) to a particular sensitivity, directed at the closer and more direct involvement of the spectator and the reader in terms of an activation of the work of art. If, on one hand, the poet and essayist

Haroldo de Campos was recognized by Umberto Eco as having anticipated similar ideas about the incompleteness of the work of art (that later would result in Campos' theories of translation), on the other hand, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica got involved in highly inventive and experimental research. This indicates that they advanced through the 1960s e 1970s decades already with a vast consideration of the participant as a necessary part of the artistic gesture. However, another point must still be noted: both movements saw themselves as actors of the avant-garde impulse, organizing their actions and propositions in manifesto and fighting for their right places in history – that is, defending a definite truth in the field of modern art (Concrete and Neo-concrete were notorious for their battles). In that sense, it is important to emphasise that the so-called **participation** entered the discussion as an avant-garde topic, and, as such, was modelled – particularly in Brazil at that historical moment – under the influence of the "pedagogy of the avant-garde": without any concession to the public in general, to commonplace or to the market. The spectator, here, is understood as someone to whom one offers an integral engagement around all radical aspects of the new and, therefore, will gain access to the possibility of real emancipation and autonomy, through her or his contact with the work of art.

So far, we have been discussing the presence of the "participative" as a general and epistemological condition of the last fifty years of contemporary art. This condition has been appropriated in different ways, in several layers and roles, in various events and works, as well as by agents and forces that compose the circuit of art. It would not be difficult to see, therefore, how the corporate world of art, for example, has also been profiting with such condition, advertising great and spectacular art events as especially participatory moments. Likewise, society has been injecting in all of us the temporality of consumption as a gesture of will and desire, just as described by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their vehement and precise analysis of the foundations of capitalism, in "Capitalism and Schizophrenia" (vol. 1, published in 1972; vol. 2, 1980). Pointing out the demand for the other, as part of an avant-garde platform, intends to bring some light to that process as a truly constitutive element of the contemporary artifact – obviously, the term "formal" does not belong here, since it is no longer about plastic composition, but, rather, about a problem of concept and awareness. How to conceive something (an



object, an event, a film, an image, etc.), that may function as a work of art, in the sense of triggering the production of new sensory layers? And, furthermore, that takes these specific dynamics as a bodily agency (work of art + participant) in which the subject is reconstructed and the symbolic rewritten, as a simultaneous and bidirectional process? Such questions are presented apparently in an uncomfortable way; because, to produce meaning, the work of art should (not exclusively, of course, this is just one possible side of the problem) be treated by the **formless**, by the idea of game (not necessarily from *game theory*, but rather through an area connected to the history of games in culture and in politics), and by the framework of bio- or micro-politics. Respectively, such erasure of the formal and of previously established categories, as well as the maintenance of a space for open conversion and public problematization of subjects and bodies, would render making art in a participative way productive, since it would establish lines of resistance against instrumentalization and other forms of manipulative appropriation. Artists like Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, but also David Medalla, Antônio Dias, Luis Camnitzer, Lygia Pape and Cildo Meireles, for example, helped (in different ways and by distinct strategies) to construct the thickness of this contact zone, transferring responsibility to the spectator and establishing the double aggregate 'subject body + work of art' as an indispensable aspect of the contemporary.

Such pedagogical capital of the avant-garde, in terms of participative practices, has shown to be decisive in the context of the 1980s and 1990s, when Brazilian society went from military dictatorial control to the neoliberal market economy, following the expansion of integrated world capitalism. I began to work under these social-political conditions, and I developed my practice in the direction of a combination of artistic and communicational strategies – in the sense of organizing conceptual and visual aspects so that they would be able to flow perceptively with ease, through certain networks. I did that by using signs, logos, diagrams, choruses and other forms of graphic communication that presupposed direct contact with the observer. Meanwhile, there was a moment in which a decision had to be made. In 1990, I reduced all my work to a simple drawing, conceived as a particle of easy memorisation, and developed (in the form of diagrams, ob-

jects, installations and drawings) as a vehicle or a kind of virus, to circulate in **your** body (therefore, pointing directly to the observer or reader). The adopted **artistic methodology** suggested the use of contagion theory,<sup>7</sup> together with the repetition of visual choruses (BASBAUM, 1990). After some initial experiences as an artist, in the expansive atmosphere of re-democratization,<sup>8</sup> it became possible – just like in the case of other artists of the same period (among others, Alexandre Dacosta, Alex Hamburger, Márcia X. and Mario Ramiro) – to understand that the art circuit and the neoliberal economy were developing new and complex patterns of relationship and were making it increasingly faster and more aggressively. The artists of the 1980s, who emerged globally under the sign of the “return to painting”, moulded themselves very well to these new dynamics and were quickly promoted to representatives of the period.

Such overload of strategic and promotional practices, however, found resistance among the artists whose research combined art and science (Eduardo Kac, Ramiro) and those who researched performative actions (Dacosta, Hamburger, Márcia X.) – as well as inside the field of “participative” art. As already indicated, corporate economy organized its management programs in order to engage the subject in productive and creative practices.<sup>9</sup> It is no coincidence that the works of Oiticica and Clark resurfaced precisely in this context, after decades of lateralized existence and almost underground (or “subterranean”, as Oiticica would prefer). When the art game was at risk of losing itself in a kind of speculative bubble, in which the institutional fabric was unable to attribute value to a work beyond the validation by operations of the art market, the presence of two artists who deliberately positioned their work and themselves apart from those dynamics (the practice of both was initiated at the end of the 1950s, still under the impact of modernism), somehow restored some concrete value to artistic action of critical bias. That emergency (urgent and necessary, of course) – exemplified by the first international retrospective of Hélio Oiticica, organized at the Witte de With, in 1992, by Luciano Figueiredo, Guy Brett, Chris Dercon and Catherine David<sup>10</sup> – stands as symptom of the fervour of the dispute between the corporative and institutional universes of art – necessary to aggregate critical and intellectual value to contemporary practice – as well as indication of the strength of interests and agents (institutions and artists, but also banks and other international finance and communication companies) that

continue to align with the topic of the “participative strategies”. Yes, it was important to emphasize that an artistic, critical and intellectual commitment should prove to be viable and adequate for strategies of resistance (undoubtedly still to be better explored), before the subject’s place dispersed and diluted in a generalized way, based on the interests of the new economy of culture. The speed of the alliance between art and neoliberal practices also indicates how ambiguous the connections that have existed between the heirs of artists from the Concrete and Neoconcrete movements and the current art market have been.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is almost impossible to make works that function, simultaneously, turned to the market and active inside the pedagogical field, without a clear understanding of the complex implications of both fields (basically, recognising how difficult it is for the market and the pedagogical field to relate without strong conflicts). When I initiated the NBP (New Bases for Personality, 1990–present), it was about a gesture to localize the work in line with transformational strategies,<sup>12</sup> in close contact with the other and acting in a way to involve and mould the subject. “NBP is a program for sudden changes. Which? How? When? Let yourself be contaminated: they will be the result of your own effort” (BASBAUM, 1990). Through this particular project, there was recognition of the existence of a proper place of potentiality for the contemporary artwork and, at the same time, of the need to occupy that place conceptually and sensorially.<sup>13</sup> That was achieved by seeking to make productive artwork and adopting procedures that brought the pedagogical capital of the avantgarde foreground as a means to resist the speculative capitalism of the private art market – after all, the only active layer of the commercial sphere of Brazilian art. There has never been, until today, a regular and constant public initiative to support the formation of collections outside the private sector.

The sign that I adopted as starting point and repeated in different ways in the years that followed, has connections with the reductionist strategy of Daniel Buren (1973, p. 17), in the sense of establishing an iconic structure for continuous game: “the repetition that interests us is the repetition of a method and not of a mannerism (or trick): it is a repetition with differences”. But an important and significant methodological particularity in NBP indicates another strategic position: the NBP sign does not start directly from painting (like in Buren). Instead, it assumes a communicational and viral profile, that not only works as a vehicle or mediator, but also situates it as an emblem that points simultane-

ously to the visual and to the discursive.<sup>14</sup> That double bond triggers any and all unfolding of NBP, including, from 1991 to 2000, a series of sculptural objects that deal with the scale of the human body and, since 2001, a series of architectural-sculptural structures. Such development is accompanied by diagrams and texts, in addition to some live video installations in closed loop. The project does not look at discourse merely as an explanation tool or at the visual as a purely seductive and hypnotic *gadget*, but carefully seeks to articulate the two universes as mutually implied layers in permanent contact, with each other. If this condition causes NBP’s reception (contagion by direct contact mind to mind, hand to hand) to flow more slowly than in similar efforts, where relational and participative strategies are organized more pragmatically and more oriented towards the market – given that the reader/spectator of NBP will basically follow visual as well as verbal fields –, it also produces an interesting field of action, in which gestures may be replicated sensorially and conceptually. It is possible to ‘see’ the way in which visual structures attach in a complex way to concepts, and to experiment the production of a “space of problems without solution”, where questions are brought like devices to open spaces and create connexions. The subject is confronted with the production of speech, because of her or his intensive and sensorial involvement with visual/conceptual structures.

Projects like *Você gostaria de participar de uma experiência artística?* [Would you like to participate in an artistic experiment?] (1994–present) and *eu-você: coreografias, jogos e exercícios* [me-you: choreographies, games, exercises] (1997–present) are conceived as methods for the involvement of the other through the work of art, in a way that the subject may take part in the proposed situations and produce something through them – be it speech, images, written propositions, choreographic movements, events, experiences, etc. That is, the subject is given space to organize her or himself, in terms of a visual and verbal involvement. Group dynamics are important for the way in which those situations unfold, particularly in the actions of “eu-você” – a series being developed around choreographies, games and exercises, that I have been making with different groups of participants, and which, in general, happens in public spaces outdoors, without any specific audience. Here, the events occur when the participants, initially unrelated to each other, start to behave as one and the same organic and affective entity, a kind of fragile and local swarm, but simultaneously vigorous and volatile.<sup>15</sup>

That aspect brings to the work a kind of self-sufficiency, which does not require the presence of the usual art audience (like in the “activities” by Allan Kaprow).<sup>16</sup> Games are developed inside the group and the results are visible publicly only when the video is exhibited. The reader/spectator/participant and the artistic proposal are sufficient to flare a situation and make the poetics of the work function: here, the aggregate “work of art + (collective) subject” is the basic unit submitted to the transformational dynamics. We could add, to that conglomerate, ‘the artist’ (since I am included in the experiences), and, also, in certain cases, the ‘institutional partner’. The participative condition is not proposed as mere entertainment (although diversion may, of course, be part of the process) or as empty production itself, or for itself, but as the moment in which the subject and the work of art are taken to a liminal state, one pressing the other, towards a mixing situation where subject and work of art overlap and create common regions, membranes and folds. Not only is the artistic piece conceived to be actively triggered, but also the subject is driven to be produced in a different mode, in close contact with a work, reinventing itself, there. Such condition is not easily achieved under the standard functioning of the art system: after all, where, and at what time, in this process, will institutions, collectors and the art market be able to access the work and make it available to the so-called general public?

Under the participatory “wave” that rocks the economy, artists have been anticipating certain effects – since the 1950s – and addressing the crowd in different ways: the sensorial-conceptual developments proposed by the artists have now become useful and strategic. The condition of this operation can be made pedagogical if the ongoing effort involves the production of the subject and of the artwork at the same time, as part of the very process of aesthetic experience (which must be inseparable from the awareness of its institutional place). From the perspective of the modification of cultural economy, in the last decade of the 21st century, the pedagogical aspect – proposed by the avant-garde in terms of public sharing of sensory and conceptual aspects of the artistic propositions and of the production of a new subject from this confrontation – is recognised as one of the regions that can be occupied by strategies of resistance, **that value contact as a way of bringing difference** to the forefront, in terms of subjectivation and transformational dynamics (that is, resistance). Today, this aspect has also been highly disputed by the agents of the

macroeconomic games, and this is an openly present symptom of how much such aspect is now meaningful. It would be important not only to pay attention to the microsensory<sup>17</sup> (the layers of perception activated by the contact with the artistic proposition), as well as to occupy this space with doubly linked sensory and discursive strategies. The pedagogy of the avant-garde indicates how to produce membranes that generate contact and potentiate the experience. **To become other with the work of art** points in the direction of a model for action, for the modelling of the subject, being transformed by it, beyond the formal limits. As an artist, I have been focusing on this set for the transformation of art and its actors, bringing proposals that may contribute with this general change in terms of the joint production of the sensorial and the discursive. New images for the artists are continuously being forged and collectively modified, emphasizing more than ever the act of listening, of paying attention to any trepidation, touch, scratch and sign, produced in close or distant contact.

Thus, working as an artist in the coming years (that is, looking ahead from the current condition), seems to generate some particular and specific questions: the field of contemporary art is daily becoming more integrated in the pragmatics of the regular economy of culture, forcing the art circuit to change some of its practices to find spaces closer to the cultural industry. If a growth in the number of active practising artists can be expected, perhaps a better and more generous distribution of conceptual and pedagogical capital of art is also in process – breaking with some, still present, class, economic and cultural barriers, and, also, pointing to inevitable changes in their concepts, modes of production and reception. But no one has the right to speculate from within the field of art; this is not a place from which to look to the future – the contemporary artist lives and produces problems as part of a radical present that is not easily accessible. Working for its emergence is one of the main tasks of contemporary times.

Meanwhile, how do you participate in something – an action or process – when your body is already *there*, even before you answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’? The most interesting artistic practices of today can take us closer to that paradox: to mobilize the other as an extension of yourself and to mobilize yourself as an extension of the other – where alterity is mutually reinforced and where ‘I’ and ‘you’ are continuously replaced by an ample and exterior area of contact. What can **we do but live outside of ourselves**?

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1 Originally published as "Post-Participatory Participation". *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, London, v. 28, pp. 90-101, sept. 2011. Transl. Pablo Assumpção Barros Costa.

2 This is how Allan Kaprow (1993) refers to Marcel Duchamp.

3 For N. Katherine Hayles (1999), the Macy Conferences were "radically interdisciplinary", placing side by side "researchers from a wide range of fields — neurophysiology, electrical engineering, philosophy, semantics, literature and psychology, among others". Some of its core themes involved "how to prove that humans and machines twin each other, having much in common" and acting "like criss-crosses for movement between cyber models and artifacts". Hayles organized the arguments of the Conferences along "three fronts": "the construction of information as theoretical entity"; "the construction of the [human] neural structures [...] as flows of information"; and "the construction of artefacts that translated flows of information in observable operations".

4 The organic line is a line that was not drawn or forged by anyone, but that re-

sults from the contact of two different surfaces (plans, things, objects, bodies or even concepts). According to Guy Brett (1987, p. 67), Lygia Clark liked to exemplify the organic line as the one we can see "between the window and the door, or among the floor tiles". She would say that the organic line appeared for the first time in 1954, when she observed the line that was formed where a framed collage touched the paper of the passe-partout. She wrote: "I left that research aside for two years because I did not know how to deal with this freed up space". See also: BASBAUM, Ricardo. Within the Organic Line and After. In: ALBERRO, Alexander; BUCHMAN, Sabeth (orgs.). **Art after Conceptual Art**. Vienna, Cambridge (EUA), London: Generali Foundation and The MIT Press, 2006, pp.87-99.

5 In fact, Klein was more concerned with the "immaterial" layers of mediation than with the direct touch of the work on the body. The complete title of the work is *La Spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Le Vide* [The Specialization of Sensitivity in the Raw Material State in the Stabilized Pictorial Sensitivity, The Void].

6 Suely Rolnik (2008) defends, precisely, that point of view: "The notion of 'anthropophagi' [...], proposed by the [Brazilian] modernists, refers to the practice of the Tupinambá natives [...], a complex ritual, that could last for months, and even years, in which enemies captured in battle would be killed and devoured. Cannibalism is just one of its phases". Another phase involved the executor of the act changing its own name and scarifying his body with the name of the enemy: "The existence of the other [...] was therefore inscribed in the memory of the body, producing an unpredictable becoming of subjectivity". Thus, in "proposing the idea of anthropophagy, the Brazilian modernist avantgarde extrapolates it from the literalness of the indigenous ceremony, to extract from this ritual the ethical formula that permeates it from the inevitable existence of an alterity, making it migrate to the cultural terrain. With this gesture, the active presence of this formula in the mode of cultural production practiced in Brazil since its foundation gains visibility and is affirmed as a value: the critical and irreverent devouring of an alterity always multiple and variable". Rolnik also proposes an important update: "We would define the anthropophagic cultural micropolitics as a continuous process of singularization, resulting from the composition of the particles of any number of others devoured and of the diagram of their respective marks in the body's memory. A poetic reply — with sarcasm — to the need to confront the imposing presence of colonial cultures [...]; a reply [...] to the need of dealing with, and positivize, the hybridization process brought by the successive waves of immigration, that has always configured the living experience of this country".

7 On "contagion theory", see PARIKKA, Jussi and SAMPSON, Tony D. **The Spam Book**. Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2009; and the works of SAMPSON, Tony D. **Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012 and \_\_\_\_\_. **The Assemblage Brain: Sense Making in Neuroculture**. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. In direct conversation with Tony D. Sampson (London, July 2013), he recognised the relationships of the NBP project with the contagion theory, aligning this gesture to the practice of "post-conceptual art, which seeks to create new tools to resist the society of control" (SAMPSON, 2017, p. 22). (AN for this publication).

8 The first presidential election in Brazil, after the end of the dictatorship, occurred in 1989.

9 See HOLMES, Brian. The Flexible Personality: For a New Cultural Critique, available at: <http://transform.eipcp.net/transversal/1106/holmes/en>; and also ROLNIK, Suely. A Geopolítica da Cafetinagem, available at: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/rolnik/pt> (both accessed on the 15th April 2018).

10 The art critic Glória Ferreira organized the first retrospective of Clark and Oiticica's work in 1986, at Paço Imperial, Rio de Janeiro. The exhibition "Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica" had "a very particular cut, [...] the 'participation of the spectator' [...] as unfolding of issues common to both during the Neoconcrete period" (FERREIRA, 1986, s/p). Clark was still alive and visited the exhibition often. The discussions she had with collectors about the originals of her *Bichos*, a series of sculptures from the 1960s that was included in the exhibition, became memorable: although she invited the public to manipulate the sculptures, the collectors who owned the pieces forbade any manipulation.

11 It is no coincidence that the estate of three of the main Neoconcrete artists (Clark, Oiticica and Pape) are managed by their families, under the model of private cultural associations. This gesture is justified by the lack of support from governmental institutions and Brazilian museums to contemporary art in general (with rare exceptions). Private associations need to get funding in the corporate and art markets, sometimes assuming positions that contradict directly the gestures defended by the artists themselves when they were alive. Needless to say, such conflicts and contradictions vehemently express aspects of the current economy of culture. See Projeto Hélio Oiticica, founded in 1981 (<http://www.heliooitica.org.br>); Associação Cultural O Mundo de Lygia Clark, founded in 2001 (<http://www.lygiackark.org.br>); and Associação Cultural Projeto Lygia Pape, founded in 2004 (<http://www.lygiapape.org.br>) (all accessed on 11th July 2011).

12 By "transformational strategies" I refer to the different programs and projects that aim to actively engage the other (spectator or participant) in an intensive process in relation to the work of art, facing a "problematic field" and deflagrating a process of subjectivation. See DELEUZE, Gilles. **Difference and Repetition**. Translation: Paul Patton. Nova York: Columbia University Press, 1994.

13 This aspect of contemporary artworks is developed in my text "Quem é que vê nossos trabalhos?", Seminários Internacionais Museu Vale 2009, Museu Vale, Vila Velha, ES, 2009.

14 If I refer to a **viral strategy** for the NBP project, I want to emphasise the specific relation that the project establishes with aspects of **replication**, **contact** and **contagion**: the work (relational situations, objects and installations) searches for a continuous re-enactment of the initial drawing of the form-specific, always with differences, investing in a kind of tactile/haptic condition, in which the body is always physically involved. The proposed effects can be organised around Jacques Derrida's "virology": the Algerian-French philosopher "initiates a philosophical development that seeks to inoculate the Other in the I: a redefinition of the subject. Eventually, this 'inoculation' becomes 'infection', and the Other is radically reformatted as a virus." (DERRIDA, J. apud BARDINI, T., 2006, n/p, italics in the original).

15 For a description of the actions of "me-you", see my text "Diferenças entre nós e eles", available at <http://rbtxt.files.wordpress.com> (last access on 15th April 2018). Originally published in Becky Shaw and Gareth Woollam (ed.), *Us and Them – Static Pamphlet Anthology 2003–04*, Liverpool: Static Gallery, 2005

16 The development of Allan Kaprow's work (1927–2006) is usually considered from three sequential and complementary series: "environments", "happenings" and "activities". The last, created after the 1970s, consisted of sets of daily actions and gestures to be performed by small groups of volunteers from written instruction or the artist's script. Activities were never documented for posterior contact with the public, because these were actions that should be done – and later discussed – only within the group of participants. In the final phase of his life, Kaprow encouraged the interested in creating new versions of his works "from the three principles formulated by the artist: site specificity, impermanence and doubt in art". See published exhibition guide to accompany the show "Allan Kaprow: Art as Life", Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 23th March – 30th June 2008, available at [http://www.moca.org/kaprow/GalleryGuide\\_Kaprow.pdf](http://www.moca.org/kaprow/GalleryGuide_Kaprow.pdf) (Access on 1st Aug. 2011).

17 See GIL, José. **A imagem nua e as pequenas percepções: estética e metafenomenologia**, Lisboa: Relógio D'Água, 1996.

# TROPICALISM, AFTERWARDS: FROM ADVERSE JELLY TO JELLY ADVERSE<sup>1</sup>

RICARDO BASBAUM

23

**ABSTRACT** Certain themes related to the Tropicalist period are discussed here, in close connection with investigations in the field of the visual arts – we refer specially to two of the more emblematic verbal expressions produced during that time: “da adversidade vivemos” [“of adversity we live”] (Hélio Oiticica) and “geléia geral brasileira” [“general Brazilian jelly”] (Décio Pignatari). What could they have meant by such statements which seem to point to an awareness of confrontation (“adversity”), mixture and multiplicity (“jelly”)? The discussion here approaches the formulas “geleia adversa” [“adverse jelly”] and “adversa geleia” [“jelly adverse”] as an eventual mode of resistance to the actual economy of culture in the sense of searching effective possibilities of intervention and change.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE** Tropicalism. Concrete poetry. Brazilian contemporary art. Artist’s writing. Theory of art. Bioconceptual art.

Re-seeing, re-reading, re-listening, re-hearing, re-walking, re-passing: what do the actions that propose to appreciate in retrospect actually do? It is about more than simply revisiting memory or digging the archive; something else is necessary besides retrieving records and documents, when what is wanted and imposed is the production of meaning for the here and now, the moment in which the urgencies of each period, placing us under the pressure of existing in an interesting and active way for at least another day – and another, and another. Not in the immobility of isolation but in the intensity of exchange and contacts of the collective.

What I will propose here unfolds from two axes around which we can access the dynamics of events of the Tropicalist period: “of adversity we live”, proposed by Hélio Oiticica, and “general jelly”, coined by Décio Pignatari and reappropriated by Torquato Neto – both sentences written in 1967, when tropicalism was being built by Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil and colleagues. In trying to transpose these two expressions and organize them as brand proposing gestures, what is intended, initially, is to reinforce certain articulating orality, which throws terms to the core of shared language, seeking to produce their cultural insertion. Choruses, slogans, commands, demarcating certain efficiency that multiplies the poetic gesture that constructed them, simultaneously implicated in a real ambience of fights and clashes as much as in a strict aim to be multiplied in the future, in the search for new bodies. The strength of both expressions was achieved under the indirect precision of its inscriptions: when Oiticica and Pignatari wrote such terms, they could not have measured the reach and the reverberation in the scope of the tropicalist cultural impact. When coining the expressions – each in his own time – from artistic-poetic actions that had already registered important inscriptions in the debates on Brazilian art and poetry, both brought in examples of verbal constructions that claimed precise historical moments and simultaneously lent themselves to the provocation necessary for the local terrain to continue in an attentive dynamic of developments and interventions. Not by chance, as we can see, they contribute to the demarcation of tropicalist happening, pointing out in full the concretist, neo-concretist, post-concrete, pop, conceptual and dada aspects at play in the tropicalist intervention.

When writing “DA ADVERSIDADE VIVEMOS!” (“of adversity we live” in uppercase and with exclamation point), Hélio Oiticica concluded his long essay “Esquema geral da nova objetividade”

[General scheme of new objectivity] (printed in 15 pages), one of the three presentation texts included in the catalogue of the exhibition Nova Objetividade Brasileira, that took place at MAM-RJ in April 1967. The other two, much more concise, authored by the critic Mario Barata and the artist Waldemar Cordeiro, occupied, respectively, only two and one pages. This exhibition would be the apex of the cycle of three great events that animated the art circuit of Rio de Janeiro at that time, followed by Opinião 65 and Opinião 66, signalling a kind of resume, given that “the fine arts, after the dismemberment of the neoconcrete group, would only mobilize again” there, having MAM as “activity centre”.<sup>2</sup> The Brazilian New Objectivity, whose organizing team (the term ‘curator’ was non-existent) was composed of Hélio Oiticica, Rubens Gerchman, Pedro Escosteguy, Mauricio Nogueira Lima and Hans Haudenschild, appears as a collective project that intends to assemble “almost everything rich and contradictory that exists in the formulation of young art in the country”.<sup>3</sup> They assume “an important role in the concentration and in the dialectics of the impulses and creative, structural, constructive, semantic or communicating intuitions of the country’s current avant-garde” – which “represents a new awareness of the aesthetic movement, awareness at a higher level, due to self-reflection and participation in the outside world”. Brazilian New Objectivity indicates, for all those involved,<sup>4</sup> the accomplishment of a “qualitatively, elevated stage of Brazilian artistic life”. It is a “collective demonstration”; if “the whole vanguard is not present there, there is at least one decisive moment, endowed with high technical efficiency, beauty and information”. The publication of texts by Cordeiro and Oiticica clearly signals the presence of representatives of the two main recent currents of Brazilian art, concretism and neo-concretism. It is a significant composition, given that the two groups had confronted each other in strong theoretical battles during the 1950s. In a post-avant-garde condition (in its historical sense), the exhibition is politically aligned in the sense of organizing the sum of these two recent traditions, which HO will undoubtedly equate better than any other agent of the time, connecting with key figures of the two groups (Mario Pedrosa, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Augusto de Campos, Haroldo de Campos – although the contact with the Campos brothers will occur later, in the context of post-tropicalism).

In that sense, Oiticica is clearly in a position that allows him to go forward in the instigating reflection presented by the “Esquema geral da nova objetividade” [General scheme of new ob-

jectivity], a text that does not venture directly only around its own plastic-investigative processes but that unfolds in blunt, attentive and generous utterance, eager to include references derived from the actions of several artists and groups, in the intention of formulating “a Brazilian state of the art of the current avant-garde”.<sup>5</sup> The six items from which the essay is structured are well known, and I leave them registered here:

1- general constructive will; 2- tendency towards the object in denying and overcoming easel painting; 3- spectator participation (bodily, tactile, visual, semantic, etc.); 4- approach and stance in relation to political, social and ethical problems; 5- tendency towards collective propositions and the consequent abolition of “isms” characteristic of the first half of the century in today’s art (a tendency that can be encompassed in the concept of “post-modern art” by Mário Pedrosa); 6- resurgence and new formulations of the concept of anti-art.

There could be some issues here that almost crossed Tropicalism, a gesture still being formulated at the time. One should not intend to recognize in the musical movement some trace of a “new objectivity”, but the inference of the six items of the “general scheme” leave open and indicate flanks where decisive issues are already hinted at, which, being present, crystallize through the actions of Caetano, Gil and colleagues.

In a quick overlook, the perspective indicated by HO makes room for an inter- or multi-media welcoming of the several languages in relation (visual, sound, verbal or *verbivocovisual*, as concrete poets had already proposed),<sup>6</sup> preparing the spectator for a broad gesture of reception. At the same time, it emphasises the acting of the artist beyond the laboratory of formal innovation, the search for direct relationships with social contexts and openly politicizing the language practices (which tropicalism will handle with precision, by articulating macro and micro-political aspects – just as Lygia Clark and Hélio himself do, in an equally decisive way, in their emphasis on the relationship between work of art and production of subjectivity). There is emphasis on collectives, in a way amplifying the authorial perspective towards group practice. Meanwhile, perhaps the most instigating topics here are, precisely, the first and the last, for bringing two decisive axes to magnetize attentions and desires for action, present at

that time of intense historical mobilization. In identifying a “general constructive will” in avant-garde Brazilian art of that time, Hélio Oiticica proposes a state of “superanthropophagy”, as a way of absorbing the resistant traces of cultural colonialism still present in the nationalist and provincial closure of Brazilian culture in full military regime. After all, it was necessary to understand Brazil “also at the international level” and to “objectivize the Brazilian avant-garde in a cultural solidification”. Curiously, when articulating the recent constructive movements of Brazilian art (Concrete and Neoconcrete), and their unfolding, to the anthropophagic drive triggered in 1922, Oiticica finds his “spiritual motive” in the formula that articulates will and construction. But, in any case, what is the scope of this proposition?

It would not be easy to combine the romantic traditions of the will with the rationalizing demands of the constructive programs – such antinomy is put to work in the Brazilian neoconcrete experience, as Carlos Zilio recalls: “to place the question of expressiveness at the centre of a constructive project was a heresy with countless repercussions”. In other words, the involvement of the spectator proposed by the neo concrete works leads to “the denial of the subject as pure rationality”, producing an “internal tension in Neoconcretism that breaks up with the constructive tradition”. Oiticica’s proposed formula – reinforced in his likewise hard-hitting text “Brasil Diarréia”<sup>7</sup> – is that of a “contemporary negativity that understands Brazilian art as a permanent tension created by countless variables”.<sup>8</sup> Therefore he writes “if we are an active, really participant, group, we will be a group against things, arguments, facts”,<sup>9</sup> to then indicate, directly: “In Brazil (in this, it would also be similar to Dada) today, in order to have an active cultural position that counts, one must *be against*, viscerally *against everything* that would be, in short, the cultural, political, ethical, social conformism” [*our italics*]. The “motto” or “warning cry” of the Brazilian avant-garde, gathered in the New Objectivity, would be “DA ADVERSIDADE VIVEMOS!” [of adversity we live]. Such motto or refrain was not directly sung by tropicalist voices in any song of the period, but it is undeniable that it shows up evidenced in the scores of the group, in its desire for action and intervention in the state of Brazilian culture. In the same way that Oiticica claims an Anthropophagy to affirm the marks of Concrete and Neoconcrete movements, displacing them to the present of the new necessary actions, Caetano Veloso reminds us that “Tropicália was simply an effort in the sense of defending what

was essential in Bossa Nova”;<sup>10</sup> meaning, to keep moving forward in relation to the modernizing rupture that had already broke up with certain provincial forces, launching Brazil on the world map.<sup>11</sup>

It is necessary to recognize the strength of cultural industry in the impact of the Tropicalist intervention: the tools of so-called mass communication play a key role here, in the sense of the production of an awareness of performance. In retrospective comment (1997) Caetano Veloso admits: “I knew that my place was there in the middle of the central current of Brazilian mass culture, often swimming against the tide or just hindering its flow, other times trying to clear its path”.<sup>12</sup> In an interview at the time (1968), he reveals that he recognizes that “the need to communicate with the great masses may be responsible, itself, for musical innovations. Radio, TV, LP, created, no doubt, a new music: imposing themselves as new technical media for music production, born by and for a new process of communication, they demanded/facilitated new expressions”.<sup>13</sup> One of the main impulses to animate the Tropicalist program no doubt was linked to the need to escape nationalist provincialism in its isolationist search for local purity: Tropicalism

“wanted to be internationalist and anti-nationalist. It tended more towards universal sound, another name we heard and adopted also during a period, closer to the idea of a global village, by Marshall McLuhan, very present at the time. We were very interested in spatial conquests, in rock’n’roll, in electric and electronic music, in short, in the vanguards and in the entertainment industry. All of this was experienced as an international novelty that we wanted to approach fearlessly”.<sup>14</sup>

That search for “universal intercommunicability (...) ever more intense and harder to contain”<sup>15</sup> was also one of the main mottos through which the *Tropicalia* intervention, of Hélio Oiticica, organized itself, precisely the Penetrável [Penetrable] that the artist presented at the Nova Objetividade Brasileira exhibition and that came to name the movement. It is a work with a strong imagetic appeal, which refers to Oiticica’s walks through the Morro da Mangueira: there, a “tactile-sensorial” experience is proposed that reaches its peak at the end of a labyrinth, “where a TV receiver is constantly on: it is thus the image that devours the participant, because it is more active than its sensorial creation”.<sup>16</sup>



The gesture intensified there uses the most emblematic element of the urban–electronic–industrial communicative system (television) to simultaneously activate and implode (devour) the viewer, from the intensity of an involvement that is not completed in the singularity of an organic sensitive body. If there is the invitation to “tread the earth”, there is also its drive through the avenues of the global village, “the world of ‘newsstands’, the world of ‘so much news’, that is, the world of fast communication, the ‘information mosaic’, which Marshall McLuhan talks about”.<sup>17</sup> *Tropicalia* helps to fabricate the viewer capable of expanding her/his reception tools to the expanded field of a mass culture, indicating the demarcation of a field of contemporary art as an effect of the encounter of the characteristics and conditions of contemporary art with the protocols of production, distribution and reception of cultural industry. While “it is pierced by an ironic and counter-aculturative laugh”,<sup>18</sup> *Tropicalia* is inscribed in the horizon of relationships around the world of consumption and of the massification of the gaze. Here, there is an insinuating convergence of the tropicalist desires and the investigative practices of Hélio Oiticica, in the sense of searching for forms of intervention suited to the world that would increasingly be structured from communication networks and systems. Obviously, the impact of digitalization and globalization would take place in a much more intense way from the mid-1980s; but already at that time an acute and vehement attention is produced concerning the mutations that are shaped in the sensitive body as much as in the agency conditions that are imposed in the cultural sphere and its processes. Noting the repercussions of the impact of the mass media on the field of visual arts in Brazil and in the United States – whose scale difference is in fact striking – Carlos Zilio draws attention to the “dialogue that both Pop [Art] and *Tropicalia* would maintain with Dadaism”, mainly indicated in Oiticica’s comment about the “resurgence of the anti-art problem”.<sup>19</sup> *Tropicalia* and Tropicalism take risks in taking a stand against the problem of rethinking Brazil’s position in the world, refusing the nationalist, paternalist and provincial position – represented at that moment by the Military Dictatorship – and seeking the most appropriate language tools for a dynamic and non-subservient relationship concerning cultural industry and mass communication. Yes, to open up to the world as a way to think oneself locally, “to consume consumption”<sup>20</sup> (Oiticica), articulating the relationships that are produced in the displacement that “goes from folklore to popular music, absorbing the educated

extracts, anthropophagically swallowing the influences that come from outside, high and low culture”<sup>21</sup> (Gil), “[to play] without much fuss on the terrifying mass media”<sup>22</sup> (Caetano). Such adherence to communicative protocols is based on the sign of negativity typical of the avant-garde, which recognizes the practice of cultural intervention as a counter-communicative gesture, unassimilable by the institutional instances of power, producing an inflection in the direction of transforming the terrain of its inscription. There is the desire for update, the production of another Brazil within Brazil, in aspiring to “a calculation of intervention that seeks to reach, in addition to the aesthetic level, the political and the ethical”<sup>23</sup> – which could not, of course, fully stand in the normality regime of the hegemonic forces of domination and regulation of the fruition protocols. The concern over communication issues and over consumption and its impact on the formation of new languages was already inscribed in the program of concrete poetry since the mid-1950s, as shown in the reflections of the period:

“a general art of language. propaganda, press, radio, television, cinema. a popular art.

the importance of the eye in faster communication: from the luminous adds to the comics. The need for movement. The dynamic structure. The ideogram as basic idea”.<sup>24</sup>

It is not just about taking a stand, but above all recognizing that an ambitious intervention in the cultural field could not by any means ignore the profound transformations in the contact protocols between poetic object and reader/viewer – now invited to assume the position of activator of the *open work*, built as contact protocol suited to the reception of the gesture that will deflagrate it, put it into operation. It is a gesture of *consumption* that is at the same time a gesture of *production*, where the receiving agent simultaneously produces him or herself and his or her object at the very moment of activation. There, of course, a new authorial model is also configured, in the same way that new procedures of expectation are invented, that will shift reception to increasingly relevant regions. This effort follows the search for positive insertion of the modern constructive currents, in the sense of “creating a formal system capable of intervening, through prototypes, in industrial production and, ultimately, to serve as a model to social construction itself”.<sup>25</sup> However, the approximation of concrete

poetry to the effective movements of cultural renewal – from the resumption from Oswald de Andrade and Anthropophagy and his precocious and precise contact with the transformations of the field of popular music that lead to Tropicalism, symptoms beyond a dogmatic orthodoxy – brings particularly clever conceptual solutions and tools for confrontations typical of the period. This is how Décio Pignatari understands that the field opens up to the ongoing “new models of informational battle” or “artistic guerrilla”, and that one of the battlefronts occurs in the configuration of that producer/consumer agent as practitioner of the “PRODUSSUMPTION: the world of consumption being replaced by the world of information, where great fights will take place”.<sup>26</sup> If the Oiticican calling of being “against, viscerally against everything” resonates here – after all, moving around the avant-garde terrain indicates a predisposition to constant and relentless confrontation, in incessant fighting – it also reveals itself as an important tool, of pressing currentness, for the production of meaning. On one hand, elements are outlined around the new forms of immaterial work, which would be implemented in the 21st century under the impact of neoliberalism – as pointed out, for example, by the post-Fordist model “that seeks a continuous interactivity or rapid communication between production and consumption (...) in which communication and information play a new central role in production”. In those conditions, “instrumental action and communicative action have become intimately interconnected in the informationalized industrial process”, leading to the notion of “immaterial labour, that is, labour that produces an immaterial good, as a service, cultural product, knowledge or communication”.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, the “informational battle” pointed out by Pignatari also presents itself in the debates around conceptual art and conceptualist strands, a conversation that bluntly irradiates in the same period, from the mid-1960s. The dispute for the “nature of the work of art” becomes at stake, at the centre of contemporary art operations, in which the disputed materialities acquire value only insofar as they are carriers of a process for producing meaning, always ongoing and relatively contingent; the emphasis is more on conceptualization processes (or information, if we will) than on real aesthetic terms.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the agent of the produsumption gesture (produsser?) may be understood as a character at the centre of operations for facing the clashes of his or her time, constituting actions of resistance from the poetic-artistic production game.

In conversation with Augusto de Campos and Gilberto Gil, Torquato Neto says:

TN – All that is in that text by Décio, the preface of *Invenção* nº5. That text has everything. ‘What are revolutions if not the radicalization of the media’?<sup>29</sup>

*Invenção* magazine had five numbers published, between 1962 and 1967, being “an organ open to experimentation and to the new sign”,<sup>30</sup> whose editorial body included the concrete poets of São Paulo, among other collaborators, Décio Pignatari being the “director in charge”. According to Pignatari, the magazine proceeded “the fight of new art”, continuing the clashes “in which the word avant-garde had a weight and did not present signs of wear”. It is true that Torquato Neto gets excited about the combative verve present at Pignatari’s preface, to, from there, appropriate the expression “geleia geral” [general jelly], using it “in his lyrics of the same title for a song by Gilberto Gil, as well as in his column in the newspaper *Última Hora*, of Rio de Janeiro”. The expression came integrated in a longer sentence, concluding an argumentative sequence constructed as a block, with the minimum use of punctuation and rhythm articulated by using “&” (ampersand letter) as connective:

“& we: in the Brazilian general jelly someone has to perform the functions of marrow and bone &”<sup>31</sup>

While it is clearly reactive – triggering the responsibility of the permanent engagement in the confrontations of the artistic-poetic production game and of its cultural intervention program –, the sentence allocates the expression general jelly as a properly Brazilian condition, against which it is necessary to mobilize – mainly those who take it upon themselves to take care of vital functions (bone marrow, bone), keeping the organism alive. Following his interest in the new dynamics of mass societies, Pignatari redesigns the expectations on transformation actions from the notion of “revolutions as radicalizations of the media”, whose dynamics of social change would start from the consuming strata, their tastes and habits according to the constitutional patterns of groups. The “Brazilian general jelly that the Brazilian newspaper announces”<sup>32</sup> configures, above all, a local, multiple territoriality, sometimes saturated, sometimes loaded with potential, with a

capacity for immense dilution, but also with potent mixtures that are sensitive to activation – variable broth of possibilities, fortifying tonic in its beauties, abyss, setbacks and lines of flight. More than what could, at first glance, be reduced to a scenario of any regressive immobilizations, from there we extract the possible, the singularities and the present, in its radicality.

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We live in complex times, where the new culture economy, in neo-liberal regime, operates in real-time condition based on synchronized reticular strategies: leading bodies to encounters, intensifying immaterial and affective production, constituting groups. None of these operations stands out, by itself, as a guarantee of deterritorializing value production, carrying out an intervention, the promise of rupture of art and culture towards escapes and openings. Such paths lead likewise, when accelerated by processes of domination, to mechanical consumption and to control. It would be necessary to politicize affections, the becoming, in non-hegemonic directions, given that the network society no longer sustains, in a simple manner, antagonistic and confrontational spaces so precisely articulated by the actions of the avant-garde. If, for the network, everything in simultaneously flow and control, how to recover the disruptive potency of the negative when the efficient pragmatic imposes itself through all the intricacies of the platforms of action?<sup>33</sup> The practice of art/poetry of the 20th century forged tools for producing intensities, activating the sensorial game, producing thus other bodies, unregulated in relation to the patterns, hence establishers of other possibilities: intervene, deviate, reterritorialize. Subsequently, based on the mutations that follow since the 1950s, the cultural industry – now post-Fordist – exponentially multiplied its resources towards the spectator-reader-consumer, now transformed into a regular producer of content for the most varied platforms of collective distribution and fruition (it is Joseph Beuys who proposes: “everyone an artist”).<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, agents who invest in the desire for radical intensification of such actions organize themselves either in autonomous communities, or in strong relationships with a dominant market that they seek to stress – even though, in their own way, the so-called creative industries make the intellectual gesture precarious in its submission to the dominant pragmatic agencies and protocols.

In producing the convergence of the enunciated by Hélio Oiticica and Décio Pignatari, folding them over one another and provoking the shock of both matters, we will arrive at the problem about the general jelly of the adversity of which we live – a possible displacement due to the effort to articulate, today, together, the two dominant axes of the Tropicalist discussion: after all, working under the impact of such cross-references, in mutual crossing, leads us (as I elaborate in my poetic-theoretical-investigative practice) to the formulas

adverse jelly  
jelly adverse

moving along in constant concern with the sensorial and discursive layers of the contemporary work. When I initiated the NBP project – Novas Bases para a Personalidade<sup>35</sup> [New Bases for Personality], around 1989/1990, I was in search of a *conceptual functioning* of the work of art in which the discursive proposition only imposes itself when it claims proximity to the sensitive set from which it derives. Thus constituting presence only as concept-work cluster – always escaping the abstract condition, seeking the double sensorial-conceptual functioning; with the caution and the care in keeping the possibilities of coupling open. It is a project that invests in the productive territoriality of contemporary art, recognizing there a set of tools that also establish contact with the field of communication, opening lines of encounter with aspects of the cultural industry. It does so not in terms of its economy of large-scale production and distribution, neither succumbing to the ambition of mobilizing the publics of large-scale consumption and collective entertainment, but by recognizing regions of contact between work and body (membranes) that involve collective experiences and understanding the role of the work of art in the instauration of social, communitarian, memories, from the tools of a supra (or infra)-orality. Hence, a significant layer of NBP unfolds from textural seams assembled in three blocks of triads, starting from “three main ideas-vectors”,<sup>36</sup> in which the first block is composed by “immateriality of the body”, “materiality of thought”, “instantaneous logos”, complemented by the second block, with “negative space”, “transparent concepts”, “adverse jelly”<sup>37</sup> and by the third block, formed by “transcrossing”, “adverse jelly”, “artist-etc”.<sup>38</sup> The use of successive blocks of three terms allows the textual invention layers to be articulated among themselves, producing also

new terms – constituting thus discursive-vibratory elements that combine with the series of plastic work, elaborated throughout the years.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to consider that an artist is produced here as “attentive listening agent, capable of recognizing the ongoing conceptual mutations, alert to internal articulations – but also external (...) in direct relation with an ambience, social fabric, and attentive to the role of constituting itself against different scales of temporality”:<sup>40</sup> the poetics at play bets on “the occurrence of effects of reception, (...) [in] an interested audience, that could always re-fabricate the poem, activating encounters from escape lines to be established – an occurrence never known for sure”.

When we mobilize the cross references “adverse jelly / jelly adverse”, constructed from Décio Pignatari and Hélio Oiticica, what is intended is to make visible a singular conceptual grid, taken as operational for the production of a developing plastic-poetic experiment, turned towards the fabrication of problems and the construction of contact. In that sense, “adverse jelly / jelly adverse” points directly and significatively to the involvement with the tools of reception and with the rhetoric of the production of subjectivity. It is a bet on the encounter of bodies and the drift of meaning that unfolds there, based on the materiality of the work and its plastic-discursive layers. Here, then, is a short sequence of notes, from which it is intended to expand the accumulated tension in the connections between the words that compose the double structured sentence under the contraction of Pignatari-Oiticica’s terms. Be it adverse jelly, or jelly adverse, there is an intense crossing here of different political-cultural times, updated from the urgencies that configure the present of actions, of the will of intervention.<sup>41</sup>

1– may impact, mark or trauma be produced there, that shows in its effective dislocation from the individual body to the social body – that is, from an individual subject to the collective, public, scope – betting that such a dynamic would be the same that indicates the path through which someone becomes an artist; that is, recognizing inhabiting the space of contact between social body and collective body where, besides experiencing the ambience that is constituted there, the turbulences and flows specific to the potential of this membrane are worked on;

2– the topic of group dynamics is imposed when the actions are basically concentrated on the threads and bonds (attrac-

tions and repulsions) that are constituted between the subject and the other in the moments when the play and transit of affections reach a special intensity. These affections establish a dynamic field that facilitates transformations and actions of emergency and openness as political gain. Of course, the institutionalized context of contemporary art today is ultra-complex, being developed in several circuits – local, regional, international, etc. – that establish among them relations on different scales, exhibiting various types of webs and moorings. To be rigorous, one cannot reduce the art system to a mechanical simplification in terms of inclusion or exclusion; we always belong to some collective or community, each of us being in fact enmeshed in affective, professional, political, family groups, etc.; hegemonic circuits occur in each field, in relation to which we are always entering and leaving;

3– we are interested in the access to language as flexible matter, formless matter to be shaped from the multiple resources: we may in fact use discourse as a much more plastic and permeable field than what has already been made available and perceived in other times;

4– to bring to aesthetic perception (that is, to the sensitive field connected to the object but also to the field around it, which is some concrete, but immaterial part, of its effectuation) something extra – considering as a constitutive part of the work, the elements normally located in another part, excluded as theory, text, concept and similar formations. Whichever it is, either these layers are in the work, are the work itself, constitute it, or they would be completely foreign to the construction of the poem, threats to a supposed purity or an integrity of sorts. Attention occurs around the modes, in what they possess as singular, proper procedure. What is made and produced is generated in close contact with a particular ambience, being, simultaneously, a reaction to it and possible intervention, gestures that always seek the other.

Thus, we emphasise, besides the production of tools, the very transformation of matter, that presents another consistency when operationalized on the registry of invention and experimentation: (a) performance, (b) negotiation, (c) detour, contact & distribution are understood as modalities of action.

- 1 Text presented at the event *Tropicália 1967-2017 – 50 anos em revisão*, Rio de Janeiro, Caixa Cultural, 29/08 to 01/09/2017. Revised for publication.
- 2 Carlos Zilio, “Da Antropofagia à Tropicália”, in Carlos Zilio, João Luiz Lafetá e Lígia Chiappini M. Leite, *O Nacional e o Popular na cultura brasileira*, São Paulo, Brasilense, 1982.
- 3 Mario Barata, presentation, *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, catalogue, Rio de Janeiro, MAM, 1967. As well as subsequent quotes.
- 4 Among others that participate in the exhibition, are Aluísio Carvão, Anna Maria Maiolino, Antonio Dias, Carlos Vergara, Carlos Zilio, Gastão Manoel Henrique, Geraldo de Barros, Ivan Serpa, Lygia Clark, Lygia Pape, Raimundo Collares, Sergio Ferro, Teresa Simões, Waldemar Cordeiro and Walter Smetak.
- 5 Hélio Oiticica, “Esquema geral da nova objetividade”, in *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, catalogue, Rio de Janeiro, MAM, 1967. As well as subsequent quotes.
- 6 “the concrete poem (...) creates a specific linguistic area – ‘verbivocovisual’ – that participates in the advantages of non-verbal communication, without giving up the virtualities of the word”. Augusto de Campos, Décio Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos, “plano-piloto para a poesia concreta”, in A. Campos, D. Pignatari, H. Campos, *Teoria da Poesia Concreta – textos críticos e manifestos 1950-1960*, São Paulo, Livraria Duas Cidades, 1975, p.157.
- 7 Cf. Hélio Oiticica, “Brasil Diarréia”, in *Arte Brasileira Contemporânea – Caderno de Textos 1*, Funarte, Rio de Janeiro, 1980.
- 8 Carlos Zilio, *op. cit.*, p.45.
- 9 Hélio Oiticica, “Esquema geral da nova objetividade”, in *op. cit.* As well as subsequent quotes.
- 10 Caetano Veloso, interview, in *Tropicália*, Ana de Oliveira, <http://tropicalia.com.br/ilumencarnadosseres/entrevistas/caetano-veloso-2>; accessed 23-08-2017.
- 11 To “tear ruptures” is one of the conditions of contemporary art. Cf. Ronaldo Brito, “O Moderno e o Contemporâneo (o novo e o outro novo)”, in *Arte Brasileira Contemporânea – Caderno de Textos 1*, Funarte, Rio de Janeiro, 1980.
- 12 Caetano Veloso, *Verdade Tropical*, São Paulo, Companhia das Letras, 1997, p.496.

- 13 Augusto de Campos, “Conversa com Caetano Veloso”, in A. Campos, *Balanço da bossa e outras bossas*, São Paulo, Perspectiva, 2008, pp.199-200.
- 14 Caetano Veloso, interview, in *Tropicália*, Ana de Oliveira, <http://tropicalia.com.br/ilumencarnadosseres/entrevistas/caetano-veloso-2>; accessed on 23-08-2017.
- 15 Augusto de Campos, “O passo à frente de Caetano Veloso e Gilberto Gil”, in A. Campos, *op. cit.*, p.142.
- 16 Hélio Oiticica, “Tropicália”, in *HÉLIO OITICICA*. Catalogue. Paris, Jeu de Paume, 1992, pp.124-125.
- 17 Augusto de Campos, “A explosão de Alegria Alegria”, in A. Campos, *op. cit.*, p.153.
- 18 Carlos Zilio, *op. cit.*, p.31.
- 19 Hélio Oiticica, “Esquema geral da nova objetividade”, in *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, catalogue, Rio de Janeiro, MAM, 1967.
- 20 Hélio Oiticica, “Brasil Diarréia”, *op. cit.*
- 21 Gilberto Gil, interview in *Tropicália*, Ana de Oliveira, <http://tropicalia.com.br/ilumencarnadosseres/entrevistas/gilberto-gil-2>, accessed on 23-08-2017.
- 22 Caetano Veloso, “Caetano Veloso solta o verbo”, in *Tropicália*, Ana de Oliveira, <http://tropicalia.com.br/eubioticamente-atraidos/verbo-tropicalista/caetano-veloso-solta-o-verbo>, accessed on 23-08-2017.
- 23 Carlos Zilio, *op. cit.*, p.25.
- 24 Décio Pignatari, “nova poesia: concreta”, in A. Campos, D. Pignatari, H. Campos, *op. cit.*, p.41. Originally published in 1956.
- 25 Carlos Zilio, *op. cit.*, p.22.
- 26 Décio Pignatari, “Depoimento 2”, in *Contracomunicação*, São Paulo, Cotia, Ateliê Editorial, 2004, pp.31-32.
- 27 Michael Hardt e Antonio Negri, *Império*, Rio de Janeiro, Record, 2001, p.311.
- 28 Cf. Joseph Kosuth, “Arte depois da filosofia”, in Glória Ferreira and Cecília Cotrim (Orgs.), *Escritos de artistas: anos 60/70*, Rio de Janeiro, Jorge Zahar Editor, 2006.
- 29 Augusto de Campos, “Conversa com Gilberto Gil”, in A. Campos, *op. cit.*, p.195.
- 30 Carlos Ávila, “Invenção – uma reedição necessária”, in *O eixo e a roda*, UFMG, v.13, 2006. As well as subsequent quotes.

- 31 Décio Pignatari, Prefácio – Invenção nº5 (1967), in A. Campos, D. Pignatari, H. Campos, *op. cit.*, p.170-171.
- 32 Verse of the song *Geleia Geral*, by Gilberto Gil and Torquato Neto (1968).
- 33 “Perhaps there is no lesson on the networks more important than the lesson about control: the networks, by their mere existence, are not liberating: they exert new ways of control that operate on the level of what is anonymous and non-human, that is, material”. Eugen Thacker and Alexander Galloway, *The Exploit – a theory of networks*, University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 5. Thacker and Galloway write: “Resistance is asymmetry”.
- 34 Joseph Beuys, “Introduction”, in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, Nova York, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979, p. 7.
- 35 The paragraphs that follow reference directly my text *Você gostaria de participar de uma experiência artística?* (+ NBP), Volume 1, Doctoral Thesis, São Paulo, ECA-USP, supervision by Martin Grossmann, 2008 – especially “Bloco 1: tríades, ensaio-ficção, manifesto NBP”, pp. 82-103. The NBP project is developed from a specific form, built for multiple uses: “The NBP acronym is combined to its specific form, allowing the development of proposals with the use of various means, such as drawings, installations, videos, objects, texts, diagrams, etc.
- There is in this proposition the interest in bringing contemporary art and the communicative field closer together. Initially, the combination acronym + specific form aimed to obtain fast memorization, so that any spectator, after experiencing the works, would leave with NBP and its specific shape circulating through the body, from strategies of contamination and contact. Little by little, the project gains complexity and new plastic and conceptual elements start being unfolded. The NBP project develops from several interconnected series of works, always constituting the poetics of each intervention through the constructions that present themselves visually and conceptually.” (p. 12)
- 36 Cf. Ricardo Basbaum, “O que é NBP?”, in *Você gostaria de participar de uma experiência artística?* (+ NBP), Volume 2, Doctoral Thesis, São Paulo, ECA-USP, supervised by Martin Grossmann, 2008.
- 37 Cf. Ricardo Basbaum, “(a), (b), (c):”, in *op. cit.*, Volume 2.
- 38 Cf. Ricardo Basbaum, “Sistema-Cinema”, in *op. cit.*, Volume 2.

- 39 Cf. The work diagrama (NBP tríades), 2014, presented at the individual exhibition nbp-etc: *escolher linhas de repetição*, Rio de Janeiro, Galeria Laura Alvim, 2014, curated by Glória Ferreira. There, from the crisscross of the three blocks, one obtains the terms “trauma”, “group dynamics” and “essay-fiction”.
- 40 Ricardo Basbaum, “Bioconceitual: desembarrar franquias solares dos povos ao contrário”. Presented at Performa(t)Cidades Symposium, Instituto de Artes, UERJ, 2014. Unpublished.
- 41 The blocks that follow resume the text *Você gostaria de participar de uma experiência artística?* (+ NBP), Volume 1, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-103.

