

We do not understand an artwork as a machine or 'object'; we see it as a quasi-corpus, i.e. a being whose reality is not limited to the external relations of its elements; a being decomposable for analysis that only fully reveals itself by means of a direct phenomenological approach. We believe that the work of art surpasses the material mechanism on which it is based, not because of some unearthly virtue, but because it transcends these mechanical relations (the focus of Gestalt) and creates for itself a tacit significance (Merleau-Ponty) that it brings up for the first time. Therefore, if we were to seek a simile for the work of art, we would be unable to find it in a machine or in an object, both viewed objectively; rather, according to Susanne Langer and Wladimir Weidle, we would find it among living organisms. At any rate, this comparison alone would not adequately express the specific reality of the aesthetic organism.

The objective notions of time, space, form, structure, colour, etc., are not sufficient to comprehend a work of art and to explain its 'reality', because the work does not limit itself to occupying a place in the objective space. Instead, it transcends this space while creating in it a new significance. The difficulty of finding an accurate terminology to express a world that does not surrender to notions has forced art criticism to use words indiscriminately that betray the complexity of the artwork. Science and technology have had quite an influence here, to the point that, today, certain artists dazzled by this terminology try to make art by taking objective notions and applying them to their creative practice.

Inevitably, artists who proceed in this manner only illustrate *a priori* notions, for they are bound by a method that prescribes, beforehand, the result of the work. By refraining from intuitive creation and limiting himself to reducing his work to an objective body, made in an objective space, a simple reaction of stimulus and reflexive response is all that the rationalist Concrete artist asks of himself as well as of the viewer through his paintings. He speaks to the eye as an instrument rather than a human tool to apprehend the world and surrender to it. He speaks to the machine-eye, not to the body-eye.

It is because the work of art transcends mechanical space that, in the artwork, notions of cause and effect completely lose their effectiveness. Moreover, notions of time, space, form, colour – that did not pre-exist as notions for the work – are so intensely integrated that it would be impossible to speak of them as decomposable constituents. Neo-Concrete art asserts the absolute integration of these elements and believes that its 'geometric' vocabulary is capable of assuming the expression of complex human realities, as for example in a number of works by Mondrian, Malevich, Gabo, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and others. And if these artists themselves sometimes mistook expressive form for the notion of mechanical form, it must be made clear that, in art language, so-called geometric forms totally lose the objective character of geometry to transform themselves into

instruments of fancy. The Gestalt, as a school of psychology that interprets causal relations, is equally insufficient to elucidate this phenomenon that dissolves space and form as causally determined realities and renders them as time – as spatialization of the work. The expression 'spatialization of the artwork' means that this work makes itself always present; that it is constantly reviving the same dynamic impulse that created it and from which, in turn, the work has resulted. And if this description takes us back to the primordial and thorough experience of the real, it is because Neo-Concrete art aims at nothing less than to rekindle this experience. Neo-Concrete art creates a new expressive 'space' [...]

Amílcar de Castro, Lygia Clark, Ferreira Gullar, Reynaldo Jardim, Claudio Mello e Souza, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanudis and Franz Weissmann, 'Manifesto neoconcreto', *Jornal do Brasil* (23 March 1959); translated in *Lygia Pape: Magnetized Space* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía/Rio de Janeiro: Projeto Lygia Pape, 2011) 80–83.

Hélio Oiticica

Colour, Time and Structure // 1960

The sense of colour-time has made the transformation of the structure indispensable. Not even in virtualized form, in its *a priori* sense of a surface to be painted, was use of the plane – that former element of representation – any longer possible. The structure then turns into space, becoming temporal itself: a time-structure. Colour and structure are inseparable here, as are space and time; and the fusion of these four elements (which I consider to be dimensions of a single phenomenon) takes place within the work.

Dimensions: colour, structure, space, time

It is not a combination but rather a fusion of these elements that takes place here, one that exists from the very first creative movement – fusion, not juxtaposition. Fusion is organic, while juxtaposition implies a separation of elements that is profoundly analytic.

Colour

I seek to bestow a sense of light upon pigmentary colour, in itself material and opaque. A sense of light can be given to all primary colours and others that derive from them, as well as to white and grey, although for this experience one must

privilege those colours that are more open to light: *luminous colours*: white, yellow, orange, *luminescent red*.

White is the ideal colour-light, the synthesis-light of all colours. It is the most static, and as such, favours silent, dense, metaphysical duration. The meeting of two different whites occurs mutely, for one is brighter and the other naturally more opaque, tending toward a greyish hue. Thus grey is infrequently used, because it is already born from the uneven luminosity between one white and another. White, however, does not lose its meaning in this unevenness, and because of this, grey still has a role to play in another sense, about which I will have more to say when I get to that colour. The whites that confront one another are pure, unmixed, hence also their difference from grey neutrality.

Unlike white, yellow is the less synthetic (colour), possessing a strong optic pulsation and tending toward real space, to an unmooring of itself from the material structure and to expanding itself. It tends toward the sign, in a more profound sense, and to the optical signal (or indicator) in a superficial sense. It must be noted that the meaning of the indicator is of no interest to us here, for coloured structures function organically within a fusion of elements, constituting an organism that is separate from the physical world, from the surrounding space-world. So its meaning would indicate a return to the real world and, therefore, a trivial experience, consisting merely in the signage and virtualization of real space. Here, the meaning of the signal is one of direction; it is internal to the structure and in relation to its elements, the sign being its profound, non-optical, temporal expression. Unlike white, yellow also resembles a more physical light, closer to terrestrial light. What is important here is the time-light sense of colour; otherwise it would still be another representation of light.

Orange is the median colour par excellence, not only in relation to yellow and to red, but also within the colour spectrum: its spectrum is grey. It possesses characteristics of its own that differentiate it from dark yolk yellow and from luminous red. Its possibilities still remain to be explored in this experience.

Luminous red differs from darker blood red and possesses special characteristics within this experience. It is neither light red nor vibrant, sanguine red, but a more purified, luminous red that does not quite become orange because of the red qualities it possesses. For this very reason, it lies within the spectrum of dark colours, but as a pigment it is open to light and warmth. It possesses a cavernous, grave sense, such as might be produced by a dense light.

The other derived and primary colours – blue, green, violet, purple and grey – may become more intense as they approach light, but they are colours of an opaque nature, closed to light, except for grey, which is characterized by its neutrality in relation to light. I shall not deal with these colours now, for they possess more complex relationships that have not yet been explored here. All we have seen thus

far is the relationship of colour to colour, of the same quality, in the sense of light. The colour-light of various qualities has not also been explored here, for such an investigation will depend upon a gradual development of colour and structure.

Structure

The development of structure occurs as colour transformed into colour-light and finding its own time, goes on to reveal its own core, to leave it naked. Seeing as how colour is time-colour, it would not be coherent if structure were not, also, or rather, that it did not become a time-structure. Space is an indispensable dimension of the work but, because it already exists in itself, it does not constitute a problem; the problem, here, is the inclusion of time in the work's structural genesis. The centuries-old surface of the plane, in which the space of representation was constructed, is stripped of all representative references because the colour planes meet from outside at a given line. Thus, the plane is virtually broken but does not cease to exist as an *a priori* support. Next, the rectangle is broken up, for the planes that [previously] met began to slide organically. Here, the wall does not function as a *background* but as a space that is unlimited and foreign (albeit necessary) to a view of the work; the work is closed in itself as an organic whole, not sliding on the wall or superimposed upon it. The structure is then led into space by turning upon itself 180 degrees. This is the definitive step for the encounter of its temporality with that of colour; here, the spectator sees not only one side (in contemplation), but tends toward action, turning around it, completing its orbit, in a multidimensional perception of the work. From here on, evolution occurs in the sense of appreciating the work from all perspectives and investigating the work's dimensions: colour, structure, space and time.

Time

Colour and structure having arrived at purity, at the first creative state (static par excellence) of non-representation, it was necessary that they become independent, possessing their own laws. This leads to the concept of time as the work's primordial factor. But time here is an active element – duration.

In representational painting, the meaning of space was contemplative, and that of time mechanical. Space was what was represented upon the canvas, fictitious space, and the canvas functioned as a window, a field for the representation of real space. Time, then, was simply mechanical: the time from one figure to another or from that figure's relationship to perspectival space; finally, it was the time of figures in a three-dimensional space which became two-dimensional on the canvas. However, since the plane of the canvas began to function actively, it became necessary for a sense of time to enter as the principal new factor for non-representation. Thus, the concept of the *não-objeto* (non-

object) was born, a term invented and explained by Ferreira Gullar, and more appropriate than painting, given that the structure was no longer unilateral (as in a painting) but multidimensional. In a work of art, however, time takes on a special meaning, different from the meanings it possesses in other fields of knowledge; it is more closely linked to philosophy and to the laws of perception; but it is its symbolic meaning, in the sense of man's internal, existential relationship with the world, that characterizes time in the artwork.

Before it, man no longer meditates in static contemplation, but finds his own vital time as he becomes involved, in a univocal relationship, with the time of the work. Here, he becomes even closer to the pure vitality to which Mondrian aspired. Man experiences the polarities of his own cosmic destiny. He is not merely metaphysical but cosmic, the beginning and the end.

Space

As we have already seen, the concept of space also changes with the development of painting, and to trace that evolution here would be exhausting. Let us begin at Mondrian, for whom space was static, not a symmetrical stasis but a stasis related to the space of representation, opposed, for example, to the dynamism of futurism, which was dynamism within the *canvas*, while Mondrian's dynamic stasis entails making movement static within the painting while virtually dynamizing its horizontal-vertical structure. Mondrian does not conceptualize time; his space remains one of representation. The Concrete still conceptualize time mechanically and, in a way, as Ferreira Gullar so nicely puts it, take a step backward in this regard. Their concept of space is an analytic conceptualization of that space's intelligence which does not attain a temporal vitality, because it still contains residues of representation. This is no historical summary of Concrete art. Whereas the former is dynamic/temporal, the latter is static/analytic. I would add one more element to the four which I call dimensions (colour, time, structure and space), for although it is not a fundamental dimension it is a global expression born from the work's unity and meaning: the infinite dimension. An infinite dimension not in the sense that the work might dissolve *ad infinitum*, but in the sense of its being unlimited, in the non-particularity that exists in the relationships between empty and full, colour imbalance, spatial direction, temporal direction, etc. Right now, I consider two parallel directions that complete themselves in the work: one in an architectural sense and the other in the musical sense of its relationships. The architectural meaning is more noticeable in the *maquettes*¹ and in the *large paintings*, the musical sense in the *equali* or the *nuclei*. The first *equali* is made up of five pieces in space (identical squares), but their relationship is not sculptural just because they are in space. They possess more of an architectural relationship, achieved in the *large paintings* and in the *maquettes*. Here, the predominant relationship is a musical

one, yet it is not because, as in music, the pieces create counterpoint or eurhythm, or because they possess this same type of relationship to it, for musicality is not *lent* to the work but born from its essence. It [the *equali*] is, in fact, much nearer to the essence of music. In the large *nuclei*, the parts are not equal and the relationship is more complex (in fact, unpredictable). Because the idea is realized in three-dimensional space, it is tempting to approximate it with sculpture, but upon closer analysis this approximation is superficial and could only trivialize the experience; it might be more appropriate, albeit still superficial, to speak of *painting in space*.

The architectural relationships predominate and are more evident in the *large paintings* and *maquettes* because human scale enters into them. The *large paintings* are propped up on the floor and are approximately 5 foot 7 inches tall, tall enough to envelop [the viewer] in their lived experience, and the *maquettes* are truly architectural, some in a labyrinthine sense, others with sliding panels. What matters in these *maquettes* is the simultaneity (a musical element) of the colours among themselves, as the spectator turns them and becomes involved with their structure. Thus, it is noticeable that, from the very first non-object launched into space, the tendency for a – not totally contemplative, nor totally organic, but cosmic – *vivência*² of colour was already manifest. What matters is not the mathematical or eurythmic relationship of colour, or its measurement through physical procedures, but its meaning. Pure orange is orange, but if it is compared with other colours, it will be light red or dark yellow or another shade of orange; its meaning changes according to the structure that contains it, and its signifying capacity, born from the artist's intuitive dialogue with the work at the time of its genesis, varies intimately from work to work. Colour is, therefore, meaning, as are the other elements of the work: a vehicle for *vivências* of all sorts (*vivência* is understood here in an all-encompassing sense and not in the term's vitalist sense). The genesis of the work of art is so connected to and communicated by the artist that it is no longer possible to separate substance from spirit, for as Merleau-Ponty has underscored, substance and spirit are dialectics of a single phenomenon. The artist's driving creative element is intuition and, as Klee once said: 'In the final analysis, a work of art is intuition, and intuition cannot be overcome.'

1 [footnote 3 in source] [...] Whereas 'model' designates a prototype, Hélio Oiticica considered his *maquettes* to be completed works, whether they were eventually built or not. [...]

2 [4] [...] this virtually untranslatable term denotes more than its English equivalent – 'life-experience', or 'lived experience', both of which lack its sensuous charge. [...]

Hélio Oiticica, 'Côr, tempo e estrutura', *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil* (26 November 1960)

5: trans. and with notes by Stephen A. Berg, in Hélio Oiticica, *Body of Colour* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007) 205–7.