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Charles A. Perrone

For the last fifty years, no Brazilian artist has been more celebrated than Hélio Oiticica (1937-1980). The Rio de Janeiro native began with abstract painting, moved on to sculpture and installation, explored performance and filmmaking, and wrote on art and lived experience. His publications are largely prose from his extended New York City stay in the 1970s. He also had a flirtation with poetry in the mid-sixties, though very few even know about that undertaking. The present book addresses a lacuna in Oiticica studies concerning the relations between his poems and plastic art. The lyrical output is rather small, but is worthy of translation for dissemination and commentary. Composed 1964-1966, the *Secret Poetics* contains only ten sparse poems, or fourteen if one counts three haiku-like pieces in the artist's introductory "Notebook" and the final poem, which can be read as a re-write of the penultimate poem. These were personal reflections and not intended for publication. Access to them is via the artist's archive, or in scholarly pieces (Bachmann) which include transcriptions of half of the poems. One of the best features of the U.S. edition are the facsimile reproductions of the original manuscripts with typeset English on facing pages. This central body of text occupies about one third of the volume; a selection of related images of Oiticica artworks follows. The translator's

introduction, a somewhat limited bibliography, and a substantial critical essay by Pedro Erber fill out the pages.

Kosick's segment provides a convenient overview of the artist's career and considers how poetry might relate to Oiticica's thinking on sensory dimensions, participatory art, memory, and other questions. Self-discovery is key in this lyrical diary of sorts, Oiticica's first adult creative writing, coinciding with his visits to favelas and explorations of sexual identity. He was fully aware of *poesia concreta*, alongside concrete art per se, and joined *neoconcretismo* in 1959 when those artists opted for less rational approaches. An historic photo in the story "O rock n roll da poesia" (*O cruzeiro*, March 2, 1957, in Aguilar) about the "scandalous" new vanguard shows a defiant Haroldo de Campos, co-founder of *poesia concreta*, with both Ferreira Gullar, who would later found the neoconcrete dissidence, and a 19-year old Hélio Oiticica, a precocious talent in the Rio art scene. Campos and Oiticica developed a productive friendship in the 1970s, but "throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Campos's work seems to have exerted no influence on Oiticica's creative process" (Oliveira). Concretist enterprises were decidedly heavy on theory and intellectualized. In his essay, Erber asserts that a "a desire for radical de-intellectualization of art underlies and motivates Hélio Oiticica's *Secret Poetics*." Its brevity seems to have impressed the analyst, whose first page thrice refers to the "incursion into lyric poetry," "experiment," "series" as *brief*. But Erber convincingly shows that their reach proved to be career-long. He takes advantage of his unpacking of Oiticica's modest (if occasionally provocative) poems to discuss dematerialization and intellectualism, as well as phenomenological art (Merleau Ponty) and other aspects of philosophically-informed art criticism, global manifestations of which can help frame Oiticica in the Brazilian conjuncture. The combination of foreword and afterword structures the volume effectively.

As for as the task of translation, Kosick dedicates some space to explaining her process. The originals are not particularly challenging in terms of creating versions but the results certainly achieve their goals. A few lines did require the venerable "search for a solution." The translator has attended to "sonic wordplay," "lexical similarities," and, of course, specific word choices. In one line, the burden is to render "dela," which could refer to any singular feminine nominal antecedent or, more personally, to an actual female player. Kosick chooses the latter option despite several reasons not to, and her justification is just the kind of "explain yourself" prose that one appreciates here. But poetry is often built on ambiguity, and instead of either/or one can often find a way to do both. Discussion of such questions will interest those who come to this book more for the poetics than for the addition to Oiticica scholarship per se, but the value of this welcome publication is that it both uncovers a hidden gem and contributes to a growing critical repertory on a very significant artist.

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