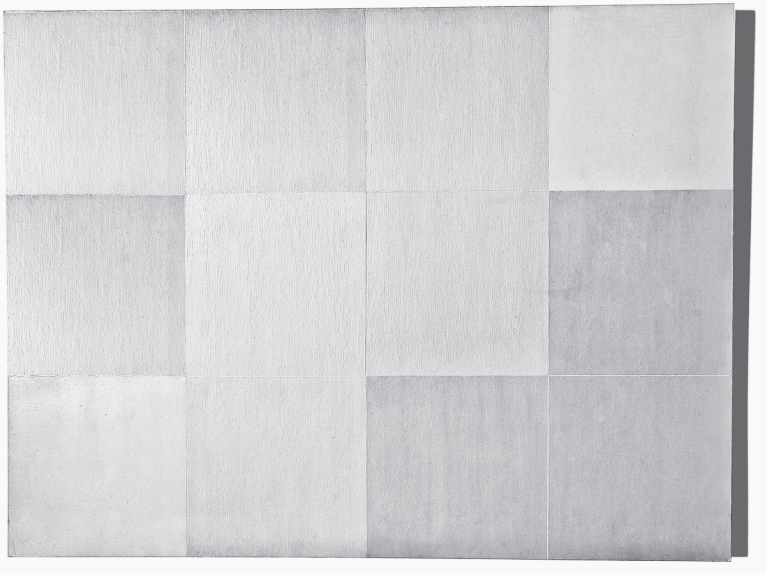

Hélio Oiticica. Untitled, Série Branca. *1958–59*
Photograph by César Oiticica Filho.
Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

Pigment Pur and the *Corpo da Côr*: Post-Painterly Practice and Transmodernity

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In recent years, scholars have invoked "alternative," "synchronous," and "multiple" modernisms in order to complicate the notion of modernity as a Western phenomenon that spreads to the so-called periphery, erasing local expressions of difference in its wake.[1] Such frameworks have catalyzed the recovery of aesthetic practices previously neglected within hegemonic matrices of artistic influence, innovation, and critique. Yet as an art-historical discourse, modernism remains distinct from regional methodologies in its insistence on the comprehensive importance of certain utterances: utterances such as the ready-made, the monochrome, and the score. Likewise, despite the rhetoric of autonomy often ascribed to decentered modernist practices, more than a few original protagonists claimed direct affinities with totalizing narratives of Western modernism such as the avant-garde. Such was the case, for example, with Brazilian Neo-concretism in the 1950s, which was explicitly understood by Ferreira Gullar, its central theorist, as a continuation—indeed culmination—of advanced European art proceeding from the Cubist rupture of the 1910s.[2] Yet in Neo-concretism, as with many other movements, these affiliations were far from simple and constitute a politics of destabilization in and of themselves.[3] To posit a "paral-

1. The literature and debates on multiple and alternative modernities is extensive. See, for example, the special issue "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (Winter 2000); Timothy Mitchell, ed., *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007). With specific relation to art and art history, see also Kobena Mercer, ed., *Cosmopolitan Modernisms* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005); Nicholas Bourriaud, *Altermodern*, exh. cat. (London: Tate, 2009); the special issue on "African Modernism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (Summer 2010); and Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For counterarguments of modernity's expansive, even "singular" reach, see Fredric Jameson, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (London: Verso, 2002); and T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

2. See Ferreira Gullar's "Manifesto Neoconcreto," *Suplemento Dominical Do Jornal Do Brasil*, March 22, 1959, pp. 4–5, and his art-historical series "Etapas de Arte Contemporânea," which was published in the *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil* from March 1959 to October 1960. I have discussed Gullar's series in "Exit and Impasse: Ferreira Gullar and the 'New History' of the Last Avant-Garde," *Third Text* 26, no. 1 (January 2012), pp. 91–101.

3. Sérgio Bruno Martins, for example, has argued that Brazilian modernism self-consciously

OCTOBER 152, Spring 2015, pp. 82–102.

lel" modernism for such artistic manifestations would thus discount the degree to which they intervened within modernity at large.

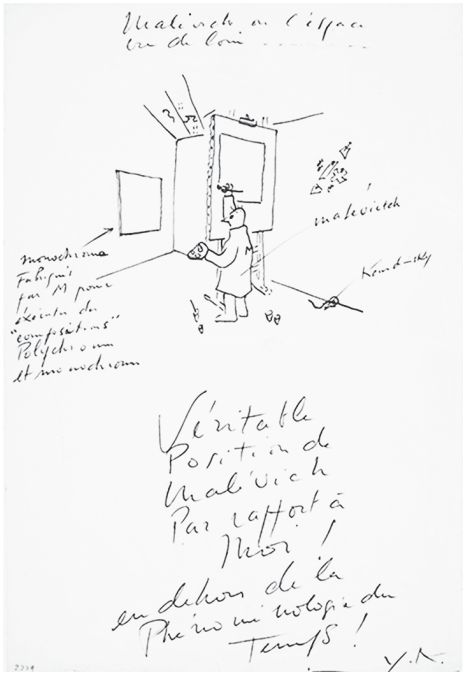
Rather than subscribe to either a Eurocentric discourse of center-periphery flow or to a romanticized narrative of indigenous autochthony, I seek in this article to situate and analyze a specific and near-contemporaneous incidence of post-painterly practice—the use of raw pigment—by French artist Yves Klein (a central protagonist within the European neo-avant-garde) and by Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica (a key member of Neo-concretism). The use of raw pigment by both Oiticica and Klein was conditioned by a self-conscious relationship to a history of modernist art, specifically the trope of the monochrome as a limit and origin of painting. Oiticica's early works demonstrate a clear engagement with Kazimir Malevich's Suprematism, rehearsing the Russian artist's stylistic tropes in gouache paintings from 1954–55 (made within the context of the Rio de Janeiro–based artists' group Grupo Frente) and building on his white-on-white paintings in the *Série Branca* (White Series) of 1958–59.[4] In Oiticica's version of these monochromes, varying levels of pigment saturation create tonal differentiation within the whites, shifting emphasis from purified abstraction to experiential encounter. His *B22 Bólide Vidro 10 Homage to Malevich, Gemini 1* of 1965 suggests an intimate artistic dialogue, this time by way of twinned glass bottles filled with colored liquid, one transparent blue, one opaque yellow. Klein, meanwhile, framed his relationship with his avant-garde predecessor in terms of aggressive reversal. In 1954 he published a pamphlet containing color plates supposedly representing a series of his own monochrome paintings, but which merely referred to the miniature tabs of paper themselves.[5] Four years later, he drew a cartoon, labeled "Position of Malevich in relation to me," that imagined the Russian artist anachronistically painting a still life of one of Klein's own monochromes. Thus, when the two artists arrived at the use of raw pigment—Klein with a tray of ultramarine pigment exhibited in 1957, Oiticica with a nested glass sculpture titled *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* from 1963—they did so with full awareness of their own position in relation to the historical avant-garde.

How might we describe the significance of this use of raw pigment, which is to say, pigment *unbound* from paint? To begin, we might note that it amounts to an

"hijacks" European modernism in *Constructing an Avant-Garde: Art in Brazil 1949–1979* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2013).

4. In 1960, Oiticica wrote of "representation [arriving] at its limit" in Malevich's paintings. Notebook entry, May 1960 [AHO/PHO 0182.59], p. 8. On Malevich's white paintings, see the artist's "Non-Objective Art and Suprematism" [1919], in *Art in Theory 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (London: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 292–93. Both Martins and Paula Braga have discussed Oiticica's relationship to Malevich, the latter in *Oiticica: Singularidade: Multiplicidade* (São Paulo, Editora Perspectiva, 2013). On Oiticica's color practice more generally, see Mari Carmen Ramírez, "The Embodiment of Color—'From the Inside Out,'" in *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, ed. Mari Carmen Ramírez, exh. cat. (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2007), pp. 27–69. All translations are author's unless otherwise noted.

5. On the importance of this pamphlet for establishing Klein's brokering of the painterly and discursive, see Kaira M. Cabañas, "Let This Be Said and Done," in *The Myth of Nouveau Réalisme: Art and the Performative in Postwar France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 31–61.



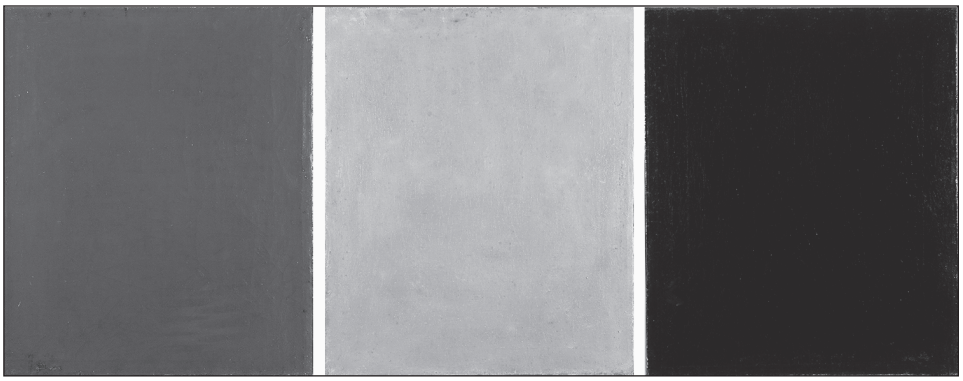
Yves Klein. Malevich or Space Viewed at a Distance. *C. 1958. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.*

elementarization of painting.[6] By employing raw pigment in powder form, Oiticica and Klein moved purposely away from the convention of paint as the primary vehicle for color and, consequently, from the painterly support as a prerequisite for its construction. Pigment unbound from paint mobilizes a material state prior to the physical making of paint in order to conceptualize an art-historical position that self-consciously supersedes painting as such. As abstract works, Klein's tray and Oiticica's *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* are decidedly post-representational. But as spatialized investigations of otherwise painterly color, they are also post-medium, and in the case of Oiticica, post-plane.

In this recourse to painterly elementarization, Oiticica's and Klein's works establish a dialogue with Alexander Rodchenko's 1921 trio of paintings *Pure Red Color; Pure Yellow Color;* and *Pure Blue Color*, each of which consists of a panel painted a primary color. Emerging from the immediate context of the laboratory phase of Russian Constructivism and its injunction against the aestheticism of traditional art, the works record Rodchenko's abandonment of painting through a process of rational deduction. As he later explained, "I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue and yellow. I affirmed: It's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane, and there is to be no more representation."[7] By eliminating composition, taste, skill, and symbolic significance, the works dispensed with all that anchored painting to the realm of aesthetics, revealing it instead as a composite of conventions: a rectangular support and the application of color to a flat plane. What is more, by demonstrating

6. On the principle of elementarization (and the corresponding operation of integration) in the work of De Stijl artists and architects, see Yve-Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 101–22.

7. Alexander Rodchenko, from the 1939 manuscript "Working with Mayakowsky," in *From Painting to Design: Russian Constructivist Art of the Twenties* (Cologne: Galerie Gmurzyska, 1981), p. 191. On the reception of Rodchenko's canvases in postwar art, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (Summer 1986), pp. 41–52.

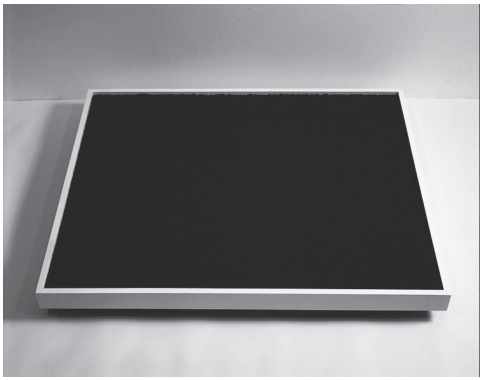


Alexandr Rodchenko. Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color. *1921. Image courtesy of A.Rodchenko V.Stepanova archive. © Estate of Alexander Rodchenko/RAO, Moscow/VAGA, New York.*

painting as a series of protocols, Rodchenko's materialist elementarization could paradoxically "reduce painting to its logical conclusion" by merely naming the works *Pure Red Color, Pure Yellow Color, Pure Blue Color.* In other words, it is less important that the colors be perceived as "pure" than that they be acknowledged to correspond to the primary colors as they are conventionally known.

Elementarization for Oiticica, by contrast, involved a materiality oriented explicitly toward the viewer's perception—and ultimately participation—and was thus overwhelmingly phenomenological in approach. The consistently varied surface of his monochrome paintings recast Rodchenko's 1921 "logical conclusion" by way of the facture the Russian artist had previously explored in his black-on-black paintings of 1918.[8] In a triangular red painting from his *Série Vermelho* (Red Series), completed around the same time as the *Série Branca* in 1959, for example, Oiticica varied the surface of his monochrome by changing the direction of the brushstroke along a central dividing line. Although appealing to an elementarist logic of primary colors, Oiticica dissolved the notion of a "pure" or absolute color into the contingency of the viewer's encounter with the work. As his subsequent trajectory indicates, Oiticica did not harness this phenomenological intensity towards the recuperation of traditional painting. Instead he sought to mobilize it towards a reconfigured notion of "construction" and in this sense aligned his experiments with Rodchenko's own movement into space. For Oiticica, painting as a historical category, and specifically materiality as a product of painting's elementarization, was therefore to be mined not for its conventional limits but for its chromatic, experiential capacities. Paradoxically,

8. One of Rodchenko's black-on-black paintings illustrates Ferreira Gullar's "Etapas de Arte Contemporânea" in the section on Non-Objectivity and Constructivism (*Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, November 11, 1959, p. 3).



Top: Oiticica. B7 Bólide Vidro 1. *1963. Photograph by Claudio Oiticica. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica. Bottom: Klein.* Pigment pur bleu (Pure Blue Pigment). *1957. Courtesy of The Menil Archives, the Menil Collection, Houston. © 2015 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.*

this meant that he was more interested in pure pigment than in pure color. *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* epitomizes this priority. The work consists of a glass jar of vermilion pigment nested within a larger bottle of crushed brick or earth, its reddish-brown hue formed from the natural pigment iron oxide. Lifting the lid reveals the spatial interstice carved out by the inner jar's glass boundary and resulting concentric circles of color. In the newly haptic, materialist qualities of this work's pigmentary color, Oiticica fully realized what he described as a *corpo da côr,* or "body of color."[9]

Like Oiticica, Klein was attracted to the perceptual qualities of pure pigment, and in 1957 he displayed a tray of ultramarine pigment on the gallery floor as part of *Pigment pur* (Pure Pigment), one half of a two-venue exhibition jointly titled *Yves le monochrome.*[10] While Oiticica preferred to conceptualize his "constructive" sense of color as a "body of color" that interacted with the viewer by way of a "field of development," as he described it in 1962, Klein consistently formulated his chromatic exploration by way of the "immaterial."[11] For Klein, the heightened physicality of raw pigment was a quality to be marshaled toward decidedly dematerialized phenomena such

9. Oiticica developed his concept of a "body of color" over the course of the 1960s. In an early use of the term, in a notebook entry of October 5, 1960, he observes that "when . . . color is no longer submitted to the rectangle, nor any representation of this rectangle, it tends to 'embody' itself; it becomes temporal, creating its own structure, and the work then becomes the 'body of color.'" (AHO/PHO 0121.60, pp. 27–29.) In his 1962 "A Transição da Côr do Quadro para o Espaço e o Sentido de Construtividade," *Habitat* 70 (December 1962), he identifies the "body of color" in proximate form in Aluísio Carvão's *Cubocor* of 1960, where it appears to connote color unbound from a traditional support. It is not until Oiticica's raw-pigment *Bólides*, however, that these joint concerns are articulated in his own work.

10. The tray was shown at Galerie Colette Allendy in conjunction with Klein's exhibition at Iris Clert's, both in Paris.

11. Oiticica, notebook entry, August 22, 1962 [AHO/PHO 207.59], pp. 13–14. See Yves Klein,

as "sensation" and "sensibility," and the aesthetic experience as a whole was conceived as a transcendent event rather than a dialogue or developmental emergence of two actualized bodies, as it was for Oiticica.[12]

Curiously, Klein often spoke of raw pigment in vitalist terms similar to Oiticica's organicist discourse. Describing his early encounter with such pigments while shopping for materials in Paris in the mid-1950s, he noted:

> I had no affection for oil paint. The colors seemed dead to me. What pleased me, above all, were pure pigments in powder form, such as I often saw at the wholesale paint suppliers. They had a brilliance and an extraordinary, autonomous life of their own. This was truly color in itself. The living and tangible matter of color.[13]

The 1957 display of raw pigment in a horizontal container recalls this original encounter with color. The binder-less presentation allowed Klein to preserve the saturated glow of the pigment—its "living" quality.[14] Although he even opened up a brief participatory dimension by positioning a rake in the tray of pigment, the tray's rectangular dimensions effectively tied the work to the conventions of easel painting.[15] As his contemporaneous works and texts indicate, Klein aimed to generate aesthetic experience *by way of* the pictorial and thus remained invested in a specifically contemplative mode of art. In a 1959 lecture, he noted that one could not leave the horizontal tray of pigment on the ground simply bound by the "fixative medium" of gravity, for "man naturally stands upright and his gaze naturally fixes on the horizon. The painting should be presented at his eye level in a position perpendicular to the earth, like a screen."[16] Viewed in this light, the pictorial nature of Klein's works does not derive from residually figurative elements, but from their capacity to *act like a picture*, to image a world distinct from that of the viewer.

To employ sufficiently pictorial supports, Klein had to find a way of immersing raw pigments within a medium that would allow them to be affixed to a vertical sur-

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Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein, trans. Klaus Ottmann (Putnam, Conn.: Spring Publications, 2007), in particular "The Monochrome Adventure," pp. 137–73, and "The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial: Lecture at the Sorbonne, 3 June 1959," pp. 71–98.

12. Klein, "The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial."

13. Klein, "The Monochrome Adventure," p. 154. Klein purchased his pigments at the Parisian hardware store Edouard Adam, a *droguiste* from whom the artist acquired the synthetic ultramarine pigment he later used for his patented IKB. See Carol C. Mancusi-Ungaro, "A Technical Note on IKB," in *Yves Klein, 1928–1962: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Houston: Institute of Fine Arts, Rice University, 1982), pp. 258–59.

14. See, in particular, "The Monochrome Adventure" and "Notes on Certain Works Exhibited at Galerie Colette Allendy," in Klein, *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*. In her essay "Assisted Levitation," Nan Rosenthal has convincingly argued that the objects shown at the Galerie Colette Allendy functioned as "supplements" to the monochromes exhibited at Iris Clert's, both illuminating them and revealing their original, and essential, lack. Nan Rosenthal, "Assisted Levitation: The Art of Yves Klein," in *Yves Klein, 1928–1962: A Retrospective*, pp. 91–135.

15. Pontus Hultén, "Pariskonst och Jiujitsu" [1957], cited in Rosenthal, "Assisted Levitation," p. 112.

16. Klein, "The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial," p. 93.

17. Klein, cited in Klaus Ottmann, "Introduction," in *Overcoming the Problematics of Art*, p. xviii.

face. For Klein, this capacity to bind individual grains of pigment together without losing their autonomous, vital quality was the metaphorical enactment of utopian social cohesion. He wrote repeatedly of creating a work titled *France* in which each citizen would function as a grain of pigment held together by artistic "sensibility."[17] He further imagined this proposition in his "planetary reliefs" of 1961, in which casts of raised relief maps from France's National Institute of Geography were spray-painted his trademark blue. (Not insignificantly, one work joins Europe and North Africa,

Yves Klein making Region of Grenoble. *1961. © Gilles Raysse.*

the latter in the midst of the Algerian struggle for independence, in a single ultramarine swath.) In his 1959 lecture, Klein also suggested that the artistic "sensibility" symbolized by this blue would act as an alternative to the existing social fixative—"the monetary principle"—which "mummifies" citizens and dulls their capacity for "imaginative and free responsibility."[18] The synthesis of raw pigment and medium in paint was nothing short of a national allegory.

Yet Klein took a leading and deeply contradictory role in this national allegory. In 1960, the artist registered a patent with the French National Institute of Industrial Property for his combination of binder and synthetic ultramarine pigment, calling it International Klein Blue (IKB).[19] In so doing, Klein trademarked not color but the chemical combination that allows this color to be gathered as

18. Klein, "The Evolution of Art Towards the Immaterial," p. 93.

19. Patent no. 63471, issued by L'Institut national de la propriété industrielle. See Mancusi-Ungaro, "A Technical Note on IKB"; and Didier Semin, "Yves Klein, La propriéte intellectuelle en question," in *Yves Klein: Corps, Couleur, Immatérial*, exh. cat. (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2006), pp. 277–79.

physical matter and fixed to a particular effect, transforming any support into a picture. While in 1959 Klein proposed artistic "sensibility" as an alternative to the monetary principle of economic exchange, his 1960 patent declared that this "sensibility" was to be legitimated specifically in terms of commercial authorial claims. Thus by 1961, when Klein recreated his tray of pigment for his retrospective exhibition in Krefeld, Germany, he could validly state that his paintings were merely "the ashes of my art."[20] He had bypassed art for the legal mechanisms of the industrialized commodity sphere, and his trademark rendered the phenomenal effect of color as a fully detachable product anchored in the commercial conventions of economic exchange.[21]

Oiticica. B11 Bólide Caixa 9. *1964. Photograph by Claudio Oiticica. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.*

The implications for the viewer are stark. For Oiticica, the elementarization of painting that culminated in raw-pigment *Bólides* such as *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* and *B11 Bólide Caixa 9* (1964) constituted a process in which a chromatic "field of development" was gradually transferred from the artist to the viewer. The viewer now constructed the "body of color" in concert with the work, and the act of making structurally expanded beyond the author. In contrast, Klein's IKB tethered commercial proprietorship to artistic "sensibility," reinstating a traditional hierarchy of artist and viewer while allowing color to float free as a commodity. IKB transferred to the viewer not the act of creation but rather the fetishistic power of color as commercially legitimated by the author—hence Klein's habit of calling his sponge sculptures portraits of the "reader" after he or she had traveled into the immaterial depths of his ultramarine blue. Color was the material residue of this transmutation, and the viewer an absorptive surface impregnated by the artistic act.

Like Oiticica, Klein sought out a key form (the monochrome) and a key strategy (elementarization) of the historical avant-garde in order to isolate color as a vital, experiential entity intimately connected to the viewer's perception of the work of art. For both artists, the materiality of raw pigment provided the means to diverge purposefully from Rodchenko's abandonment of color, exceeding the limits of easel painting while remaining insistently chromatic in orientation. Yet through a series of conceptual gambits culminating in the industrial patenting of IKB, Klein retained

20. Klein, "The Monochrome Adventure," pp. 142–43.

21. On Klein's relation to the fetishistic structure of the commodity, see Thierry de Duve, "Yves Klein, or the Dead Dealer," *October* 49 (Summer 1989), pp. 72–90.

three of the most entrenched qualities of painting as an institutionalized aesthetic operation—the mystification of the author, the pictorialism of the traditional canvas, and the contemplative passivity of the viewer—even as he baldly mapped these qualities onto the economic sphere. If Rodchenko abandoned painting for space and what he and his fellow Constructivists idealized as the applied sphere of technology and industry, Klein's work illustrated in unequivocal form the ease with which revolutionary impulses could be absorbed by market forces. In so doing, Klein's work also demonstrated that a post-painterly practice in the wake of the historical avant-garde had to be routed through the commodity. Failing to acknowledge its structuring influence would simply be to hide one's head in the sand.

Oiticica, too, confronted the conditions of the commodity in a post-painterly practice, albeit in a very different context, that of developmentalist Brazil. The conditions of economic production were already front and center for the Brazilian Concretists, the group against which the Neo-concretists defined their identity in their inaugural manifesto of 1959. In Brazil, Concrete art took part in a broader legacy of geometric abstraction and "constructive" art that included prewar manifestations such as Neoplasticism and Russian Constructivism as well as Max Bill's and Tomás Maldonado's postwar mobilization of Theo van Doesburg's 1930 term "art concret" at the School of Ulm. Following upon Bill's and Maldonado's design-oriented approaches, Brazilian Concretism sought to align art with modern industry through shared procedures such as rationalism, mechanization, and the distancing of the artist's hand.[22] Adopting the role of the designer who provides a prototype or schema rather than a finished work of art, Concretism sought to elementarize not painting so much as the division of artistic labor. Indeed, just as Oiticica began his *Bólide* series in 1963, this paradigm was formalized in Rio at the Escola Superior do Desenho Industrial, or ESDI, an industrial-design school that sought to "attend to the two exigencies of our industrial society: the planning of products (Industrial Design) and the planning of the means of Visual Communication (Graphic Design)."[23] Yet as ESDI graduates soon discovered, Brazil's uneven integration in the global market meant that the country continued to play a structurally subordinate role in the manufacturing system. Brazil provided raw or semi-processed materials to external markets, while being forced to purchase finished goods back at a higher price. Conversely, when products were manufactured in the country, it was usually at the behest of foreign companies, allowing little opportunity for integrated industrial-design processes. As one critic wrote in 1968 of the essential incongruity of the ESDI model, "We [Brazilians] fabricate the product, not the design of the product."[24]

22. See, for example, Waldemar Cordeiro, "O Objeto," *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* 20 (December 1956), n.p.; Waldemar Cordeiro, "Arte Industrial," *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* 27 (February–March 1958), n.p.; and Décio Pignatari, "Forma, Função e Projeto Geral," *AD: Arquitetura e Decoração* 24 (July–August 1957), n.p.

23. Internal document, ESDI: Escola Superior do Desenho Industrial (Rio de Janeiro: Secretaria de Educação e Cultura, Estado da Guanabara, n.d.), p. 4. See also Pedro Luiz Perreira de Souza, *ESDI: Biografia de uma Idéia* (Rio de Janeiro: UDUERJ, 1996).

24. Frederico Morais, "Desenho Industrial 68," *Diário de Notícias*, August 15, 1968.

Such structural dependencies were legible even within the micro-context of imported and domestic paint. In 1954, for example, artists staged a black-and-white exhibition at the 3° Salão Nacional de Arte Moderna in order to protest the exorbitant taxes on imported paints. These taxes had recently been established as part of the government's developmentalist policies, which prioritized imports destined for Brazil's fledgling industrial sphere. In response to this color "strike," the government moved imported artists' paints from the "specific" category of luxury consumer products to the "general" category of raw materials, thereby lessening the tax.[25] In so doing, the government in essence recalibrated the industrial potential of fine art. No longer conceived as a specific activity confined to an aesthetic realm, painting was now a general practice by which to facilitate the development of the nation at large. In the context of developmentalist Brazil, the commodity was thus an inordinately inconsistent object, riven with the inequities of the modern global economic system. The question of a post-painterly practice in Brazil is therefore not a purely art-historical provocation, but one that engages the very contradictions of modernity at large.

Within this context, it is significant that Oiticica's first use of raw pigment as an independent material in *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* coincided with his first use of a readymade object: the two glass containers in which the pigments sit. In this recourse to readymade objects, Oiticica distanced himself from traditional notions of artistic authorship and moved towards a concept of appropriation that would inform much of his subsequent work. In his first text on the *Bólides*, from September 19, 1963, Oiticica described a dual process by which existing connotations of quotidian objects from the "wasted world . . . of our everyday" were stripped away as the object was rearticulated through the "spatial valorization of color."[26] In this transformation of the object into what Oiticica, drawing freely from the philosopher Ernst Cassirer,

25. The Brazilian government created SUMOC, the Superintendência da Moeda e do Crédito, in 1945 in order to exercise domestic monetary control. With Instrução 70 of October 9, 1953, SUMOC inaugurated a tiered system of multiple tariffs aimed at protecting burgeoning national industries and stimulating Brazilian exports on the international market. See João Sidney de Figueiredo Filho, "Políticas Monetária, Cambial e Bancária no Brasil sob a gestão do Conselho da Sumoc, de 1945 a 1955" (master's thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, 2005); Sérgio Besserman Vianna, *A política econômica no segundo governo Vargas (1951–1954)* (Rio de Janeiro: BNDES, 1987); and Alexandre Kafka, "The Brazilian Exchange Auction System," *Review of Economics and Statistics* 38, no. 3 (August 1956), pp. 308–22. The categories of the tariff system were arranged according to a general spectrum of processing and necessity: I: raw materials for the pharmaceutical industry and agricultural supplies; II: raw materials; III: industrial equipment; IV: less important industrial equipment and consumer goods; and V: all other products. In August 1957, Law 3244 reduced the categories from five to two: general (imports of raw materials, capital goods, and essential consumer goods) and specific (goods not considered essential). Instrução 97 of July 29, 1954, moved "prepared paints for watercolor, drawing, and fine painting, in tablets, tubes, or pots," to the second category, "in order to establish more favorable conditions for importation." Superintendência da Moeda e do Crédito, *Diário Oficial*, Section 1 (August 1954), 13380.

26. Oiticica, "Experiência dos Bólides," September 19, 1963 [AHO/PHO 007.63], pp. 1–2. On the *Bólides*, see also Angela Varela Loeb, "Os Bólides do Programa Ambiental de Hélio Oiticica," *ARS* 9, no. 17 (2010), pp. 49–77. Anna Dezeuze has argued that Oiticica's practice more broadly corresponds to an aesthetics of "bricolage" in her article "Assemblage, Bricolage, and the Practice of Everyday Life," *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 31–37.

called a "symbolic form," the viewer rediscovered the object in terms of its primary qualities: "The solid, the hollow, the round, [the object's] weight, its transparency."[27] Although Oiticica noted that such objects inevitably retained some of their prior associations, he emphasized that their integration within an aesthetic system allowed for "the extraction of new possibilities."[28] "Extraction," for Oiticica, was explicitly symbolic and experiential rather than economic.

Yet the artist was quick to insist that the use of readymades did not amount to a "lyrification" or elevation of everyday objects to the realm of art.[29] He had already dismissed the work of the Nouveaux Réalistes for falling into precisely this trap in 1962.[30] In a second text on the *Bólides*, he set out to distinguish his strategy from these and other contemporaneous works of assemblage. He observed, for example, that Robert Rauschenberg's "combines" operated through "*a posteriori* incorporation," a process by which a readymade object, once appended to a vertical or horizontal support, functioned as one of several signs internal to the work of art. In such works, a readymade object is "transported from the 'world of things' to the plane of 'symbolic forms' . . . in a direct and metaphorical way."[31] Assemblaged objects were thus "combined" with other elements such as brushstrokes and photographs upon a preexisting rectangular support without regard to their structural (as opposed to iconographic) character. In contrast, Oiticica sought to use readymade materials to trigger primal identifications with the *structure* of objects. The work and its readymade elements are thus coterminous and mutually dependent. This distinction is most clear in the glass *Bólides*, in which readymade glass receptacles provide a material structure that gives shape to a formless, pliant, or fluid material such as pigment or liquid. The form and internal relation of the two pigments of *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* would entropically dissolve without the containing function of the readymade jars. Likewise, the pigments materialize the structure of the two receptacles—literalizing their spatial dimensions in a way that would be invisible if left empty. The categories of the work and its readymade elements are reliant upon one another, canceling the hierarchical distinction between them. Whereas Oiticica's objection to Rauschenberg's combines hinged on the perceived arbitrary character of the appropriated object as it

27. Oiticica, "Experiência dos Bólides," p. 1.
28. Ibid.
29. Oiticica, "Bólides," October 29, 1963 [AHO/PHO 1816.63], p. 1.
30. See his "A Transição da Côr do Quadro para o Espaço e o Sentido de Construtividade."
31. Ibid. Oiticica saw Rauschenberg as most closely approximating the structural concerns of his own work in his *Pilgrim* of 1960, which Oiticica describes but does not name. *Pilgrim* consists of a painting mounted behind a chair. Paint from the canvas continues onto the chair, but because the chair rests in its normal orientation on the floor, Oiticica argues, it is not incorporated within the physical space of the painting as a "sign." Oiticica further discussed the implications of a "structural" approach to assemblage in relation to Waldemar Cordeiro's "Popcreto" works of 1964–65 in "Esquema Geral da Nova Objetividade Brasileira," in *Nova Objetividade Brasileira*, exh. cat. (Rio de Janeiro: MAM-RJ, 1967). Jasper Johns's use of an American flag as an appropriated non-compositional device must also be considered a "structural" solution, one, however, that Oiticica does not appear to have considered at the time.

was incorporated within a work, *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* depended upon and revealed the structure of the incorporated object in what Oiticica called the "genesis" of the work. The transparency of the glass jars and their function of containment are thus deliberate, motivated, and generative.

Faced with articulating a series of subtle but critical distinctions between his new incorporation of appropriated objects and existing practices related to a Duchampian legacy of the readymade, Oiticica coined a new term for his *Bólides*: "trans-objects."[32] This concept was doubtless in dialogue with Gullar's earlier formulation of Neo-concrete "non-objects," works without frames or pedestals that were inserted directly into the space of the viewer and ordinary objects.[33] Because non-objects did not seek relations to these ordinary things, Gullar argued that they were not readymades—what he called Duchamp's "celebrated *blague*."[34] In formulating this difference, the critic was primarily concerned with the redemptive function of aesthetic experience. Within such an encounter, the work of art was apprehended as a "body *transparent* to phenomenological knowledge."[35] Ordinary objects, by contrast, were familiar to viewers and thus characterized by perceptual "obscurity." The readymade was a peculiar case in that it was simply a utilitarian object displaced from its usual function. Because its character as art did not inhere in its formal qualities, "soon that obscurity characteristic of the *thing* returns to envelop the *work*, bringing it back to the common level."[36] In other words, since the readymade had no formal capacity to maintain its critical difference from the everyday, it could return to its prior state once the authorial effects of selection and nomination subsided. What Duchamp celebrated as "non-retinal" was for Gullar the work of art's "defeat."[37]

Oiticica's works between 1959 and 1962 conform ably to Gullar's characterization of the non-object. But with his *Bólides*—particularly those that employ readymade elements—the term no longer applies. Gullar described the non-object as an entity that refuses to capitulate to "the common level" and that "cannot be classified according to its use and meaning since it fits neither in a category of use nor verbal designation."[38] With the *Bólides*, however, Oiticica began to incorporate readymade elements that displayed just such functions. Moreover, he developed a corresponding system of designation in which terms such as *box*, *glass*, *basin*, *can*, *light*, and *bed* describe the use of these appropriated elements. Oiticica's category of the "trans-object" attempted to bridge the work of art and the readymade thing. It transited

32. Oiticica, "Bólides."
33. Gullar, "Teoria do Não-Objeto," *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, December 19–20, 1959, p. 1.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., emphasis in original.
36. Ibid., emphasis in original. Gullar does not appear to consider Duchamp's presentation of his readymades, which simply in their orientation prevented just such a return "to the common level."
37. Ibid.
38. Gullar, "Diálogo sobre o não-objeto," *Suplemento Dominical do Jornal do Brasil*, March 26, 1960, p. 4.

between the categories and collapsed them into a single entity, just as occurred in the glass jars and pigments of *B7 Bólide Vidro 1*. The "trans-object" thus describes a space of aesthetic constitution in which the structure of a preexisting object takes on a generative role in the work of art as a phenomenological, experiential entity. Importantly, it was the "spatial valorization of color," as Oiticica termed it, that allowed this readymade object to act not as a hermetic or fixed entity but as a matrix open for re-signification.[39]

What was it about color that led to this unique articulation of the readymade? In 1961, well before he had begun to use raw pigment as an independent material, Oiticica had attempted to theorize the distinction between "aesthetic" and "utilitarian" color.[40] Whereas functional color could never escape the significance of its application—what Oiticica described as color "of" or color "for"—aesthetic color could signify itself when extracted from an anterior state and integrated into an artistic system. In this initial formulation, raw pigment "belonged to the world" and predated either category.[41] By 1962, however, Oiticica put pressure on his own equation with a series of square paintings, each comprising three or four independent layers of paint. In the last of these *Invenções* (Inventions), Oiticica used crushed brick to add both texture and color. The material functioned both as "aesthetic color," in terms of its determining chromatic role, and the "color of" the brick itself. By essentially returning a readymade product to its "environmental state" as iron oxide (itself a natural pigment), Oiticica used color in this last *Invenção* to demonstrate a fundamental fungibility that spanned natural, aesthetic, and industrial states.

Oiticica. Invenção 40. *1959–96. Photograph by César Oiticica Filho. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.*

39. Oiticica, "Experiência dos Bólides," pp. 1–2.

40. Oiticica, notebook entry, March 3, 1961 [AHO/PHO 0182.59], pp. 43–44. As he wrote, "Color on glass in its pure pigmentary state belongs to the world. It becomes an aesthetic element when the artist integrates it into the system of his work. . . . An automobile painter, for example, removes color from the world-element and integrates it into another system, yet it does not become an aesthetic element . . . since color, here, is always the color 'of' something and 'for' some aim. . . . In the pure work of art color is aesthetic only in itself. It is non-utilitarian *par excellence*."

41. Ibid. See also Oiticica, notebook entry, August 24, 1961, in which he writes, "Color only exists physically for the artist as a chemical thing, but as a significance it surpasses the limitations of the 'physical' despite using matter in order to be made. In painting a surface, the artist does not paint as though he were painting a 'thing.' In the actual act of painting, the artist senses that another order, another synthesis, guides him." (AHO/PHO 0187.61, p. 38.)

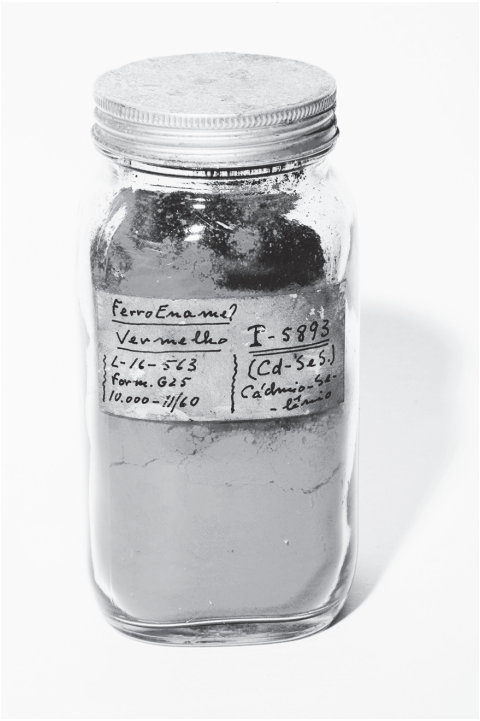
Oiticica's subsequent use of raw pigment as a sculptural material further dismantled such hierarchies. In *B12 Bólide Vidro 3 "Em memória de meu pai"* ("*In memory of my father*") (1964), for example, Oiticica mixed the natural ocher pigment contained in the glass jar of the sculpture's base with binder to make the paint that coats the work's monumentalized lid. The work's two states of color have a demonstrative function: The "found" color of the raw pigment demonstrates the "made" color of the paint, generating an internal circuit by which each functions as a sample of the other. Yet this reflexivity also opens outwards, for the natural ocher pigment is, at its most fundamental level, an element "of the world." Indeed, works such as *B15 Bólide Vidro 4 "Terra"* ("*Earth*") (1964), which features a rich red earth pigment dug from the ground, and *Bólide Vidro 14 "Estar"* ("*To be*") (1965–66), an accumulation of white shells, underscore aesthetic color as a *found* entity situated in raw materials themselves.[42] If in 1961 Oiticica felt that color must be incorporated into the aesthetic system of painting in order to "signify itself," the introduction of the raw-pigment *Bólides* suggests that the autonomy of color was linked to sources that preexisted paint as such.

Oiticica. B12 Bólide Vidro 3 "Em memória de meu pai." *1964. Photograph by Alexandre Baratta. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.*

Yet these works do not simply map the elementarization of painting onto the breakdown of processed materials into more rudimentary, environmental states. Both *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* and *B12 Bólide Vidro 3 "Em memória de meu pai"* incorporate pigments that are readymade, which is to say, commercial and industrial color products selected and purchased from a store. In fact, the glass *Bólide* typology as a whole appears to have roots in the jars and vials of paint pigment Oiticica and his father stored in the family studio, such as one of cadmium-red pigment that Oiticica used for several of his *Invenções*.[43] Within this genealogy, the glass vessels of the *Bólides* gesture to a peculiar condition inherent to the bottle of pigment: color that is "readymade" before it is either "found" or "made" by the artist. In so doing, they pinpoint an intermediary or "trans" state of color as a commodity form, one informed by

42. Oiticica's brother, César, recalls that Hélio found the earth for *B15 Bólide Vidro 4 "Terra"* near their house and collected it in bags.

43. Wynne Phelan, "To Bestow a Sense of Light: Hélio Oiticica's Experimental Process," in Ramírez, *Hélio Oiticica: The Body of Color*, p. 100.

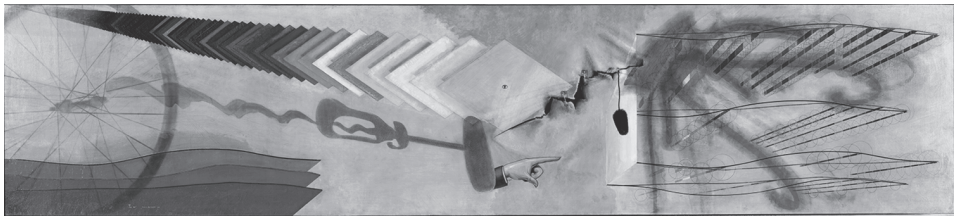


Ferro enamel pigment from José Oiticica Filho's studio. Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

flows of matter and vital continuity between states, for unlike a tube of paint, readymade pigment must be materially *remade* in order to function as paint. This mixing of pigment in medium and binder does not alter its chromatic substance, as each grain is chemically insoluble. But it does radically shift the pigment's material effects. Readymade pigment is therefore neither an origin nor a terminus of production; it is a site of transit that embodies elementarization and transmutation at the same time.

In a series of interviews and statements in the early 1960s, Marcel Duchamp elaborated on the provocation of his so-called last painting, *Tu m'* (1918), by observing that because the tube of paint was itself a manufactured product, every painting was essentially a readymade and a work of assemblage.[44] This observation would appear to locate the historical inception of an industrially driven painterly practice in the 19th century and the regularization of color by way of manufactured tubes of paint. Yet the history of processed color indicates a more complex trajectory of commercialization, ranging from the medieval industry of lapis lazuli to the twentieth-century introduction of cadmium red. In Brazil, the 1954 transfer of imported paints from the highly taxed category of luxury goods to the moderately taxed category of raw materials repositioned paint from a commodity for consumption to a material for production. The new law placed fine art under the sign of industrialization and conceived of artistic labor in terms of processing raw materials into finished commodities. Pigments, however, were assessed differently: Those destined for the local paint industry were imported at a low

44. Marcel Duchamp, "Apropos of 'Readymades,'" address delivered at the Museum of Modern Art, October 1961, subsequently published in *Art and Artists* 4 (July 1966), p. 47. On the relationship between painterly color and the readymade, see Thierry de Duve, "The Readymade and the Tube of Paint," *Artforum* 24, no. 9 (May 1986), pp. 110–21, expanded in *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), chapter 3.



Marcel Duchamp. Tu m'. *1918. © Succession Marcel Duchamp/ADAGP, Paris/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York 2015.*

tariff, except for those plentiful in Brazil, such as iron oxides, which were valued both as independent commodities for export and as raw materials intended for local manufacture.[45] Pigment, unlike paint, could never escape an identity as mere "raw" matter and "mere" commercial good. Its "trans" status within the industrial spectrum of commodity production thus coincided with its intermediary position within a painterly practice.

Oiticica's *Bólides* employ a wide range of found and readymade materials, from plastic sheeting and rubber gloves to charcoal, gravel, and pouches of raw pigment purchased in bulk. Through his materials, Oiticica sourced color far beyond the traditional spheres of artistic production, all the while demonstrating how appropriated color might "signify itself" as a "body of color." Yet through his consistent recourse to iron-oxide pigments, he repeatedly returned to the specifics of post-painterly practice in Brazil. In *B15 Bólide Vidro 4 "Terra,"* pigment exists simply as rich, clay-like dirt piled in a glass jar. In *B34 Bólide Bacia 1* (1965–66), it consists of coarser earth to be manipulated with gloves. In *B12 Bólide Vidro 3,* it takes the more processed form of ocher pigment designated for commercial or household use, and in *B7 Bólide Vidro 1* it appears in the crushed form of manufactured bricks, resulting in a material that is nearly identical to the dirt contained in *B15* and *B34*. If in early works like the *Série Branca* Oiticica collapsed the distinction between industrial and artisanal paint, his *Bólides* up the ante by insisting that pigmentary color is both raw and readymade: raw in the sense that color is extracted in the monist form of pure, indivisible matter; readymade in that this color is not physically created but found or selected from a fluid and reversible spectrum of environmental and industrial use. Simultaneously pre-paint and post-paint, the *Bólides* intervene within the normative production of the work of art as both an industrial commodity and a product of intellectual and aesthetic work. They disrupt the stability of both categories by revealing the material flux at work beneath their regulative laws. When in 1963 Oiticica stated that it was the "spatial

45. See "Instrução 87" (March 20, 1954), in Superintendência da Moeda e do Crédito, *Diário Oficial,* section 1 (March 1954), 4657. President Juscelino Kubitschek's Programa das Metas of 1958 included 30 "targets"; target #26 highlighted mineral exports and called for an increase from 2.5 to 8 million tons, with further preparation for another 20 million tons, in the next five years.

Oiticica. B34 Bólide Bacia 1. *1965–66.*
Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.

valorization of color" that allowed for the rearticulation of the readymade object, it was because his raw and readymade color isolated a latent *economic inconsistency* inherent to the commodity and redirected it in the form of explicit *material change* within the work of art.

It was this approach—treating seemingly fixed or inanimate objects as mutable entities that are receptive to, and indeed embody, transformation—that allowed Oiticica to mobilize the commodity as matter *in potentia* and, further, to articulate it in terms of flow rather than juxtaposition. In his October 1963 text on the *Bólides*, Oiticica described "the glass jar that contains the color" as a "premolded object, since it is ready-made beforehand."[46] The readymade, for Oiticica, was an entity capable of being activated, or remade, via the vitalism of its colored matter. In his earlier painterly work, this vitalism was intimately linked to a collaborative dialogue between maker and material, one that sought to resist Concretism's accommodation to the industrial logic of finished commodities. This position used postindustrial materials such as commercial paint to recover a

46. Oiticica, "Bólides," p. 1.

largely preindustrial relationship to artistic labor. In the wake of the veritable elimination of the artist's hand as a result of the use of the readymade and the heightened participatory dimension of the *Bólides*, however, it was now the viewer who took on the role of the researcher and experimenter. But instead of approximating the physical creation of the artist, this viewer "develops" and "unfolds" the "body of color" *with* the readymade. By adopting the readymade as both a container (vessel) and content (pigment) of the work in the *Bólides*, Oiticica recalibrated a crucial metaphoric mapping between the commodity and the work of art. Rather than appealing to its mystification, as in Klein's retention of the essential passivity of the viewing subject, he penetrated the very materiality of the commodity in order to reconfigure the viewer's role. Flux and fungibility—qualities that typify the commodity as it is submitted to the logic of economic exchange—are recast as material, indeed basely *subterranean*, operations that can be harnessed and redirected by the participant in concert with the work.[47]

To make color with the readymade is therefore not to make color in an artisanal sense. It is to construct a "body of color" out of the mutability of the commodity and, in so doing, channel its "trans" status towards the conceptual and perceptual emergence of the work of art. Through this process, the temporal character of making shifts. No longer confined to a specific act initiated by the artist, it is iterative and mobile, taking as its locus the body of the viewer rather than the other way around. In *B34 Bólide Bacia 1*, which invites the viewer to sift its pigmentary matter by hand, or *B11 Bólide Caixa 9*, in which a tray of brilliant saffron pigment can be exposed to varying degrees of light, the viewer releases a "body of color" by metabolizing the commodity, converting its physicality into chromatic energy dependent upon the viewer's manipulation and touch.

For precisely this reason it is significant that Oiticica sought to maximize the variability of color even at the granular level of pigment. As Wynne Phelan has noted in her conservation tests of his work, Oiticica often used pigments with high levels of ground-up silica that are particularly sensitive to light.[48] Such materials were frequently used as fillers for inexpensive pigments and indicate just the sort of inferior mixtures to which Brazilian artists objected in terms of domestic paints. The chromatic fluctuation inherent to such impurities was unattractive to painters who sought material stability and permanence, as well as those like Klein who wanted to produce a recognizable and consistent color sensation across a range of applications. But for Oiticica, who was interested in the contingency of color perception, this protean quality was highly desirable, as it underscored how

47. Oiticica would elaborate a principle of the "subterranean" in a text of September 21, 1969, in which he reflects on a wider set of conditions that inflect artistic production in "sub" (meaning "under" or "less than" in Portuguese) zones like Latin America. As he wrote, the "subterranean" is not "a new kind of vanguard . . . [it] is a condition, just as *being here* cannot be the same as *being over there*; the positions are radically different." "Subterrânea" [AHO/PHO 0382.69], n.p.

48. Phelan, "To Bestow a Sense of Light," p. 99.

Oiticica. Experimento "Terras de cores com líquidos vários." *1965. Photograph by Desdémone Bardin. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica and the family of Desdémone Bardin.*

the "body of color" was literally constructed in the temporal process of viewing. Indeed, the ability of such impurities to magnify the interaction of matter and light is perhaps the most concrete evidence for how color in the *Bólides* is "made" in the viewer's eye. Color, after all, is nothing more than the viewer's perception of the interaction of matter and light. By intensifying rather than minimizing the variability of these elements, the *Bólides* render the process of viewing reflexive and explicit. Pigment is not a form of evidence, as in Klein's conceit, but a primal constructive material awaiting the viewer's intervention.

With the *Bólides*, the work of art is not a residue of a past artistic event; it is an environment in which such an event might happen. As "structures for inspection," as Oiticica later put it, the *Bólides* demand to be touched: their drawers of pigment opened, their shutters swiveled forwards and back, their inner compartments discovered, matter manipulated, and apertures revealed.[49] Indeed, it is only by way of the viewer's touch—modulating light on a sculpture's contents, shifting its orientation—that the *Bólides* are able to fully release their "body of color." The works thus create not only an arena for chromatic exploration but also a physical model of how color itself is formed. Oiticica's oft-repeated statement that the *Bólides* sought to give color a body refers not simply to the way the works materialize color. It also refers to the way they model its behavior as an organic phenomenon constituted through and by the viewer over time. With the *Bólides*, the viewer's perceptual act is externalized in physical form and redoubled as the participatory process by which this form is known. If Oiticica's incorporation of readymade elements reduced or eliminated the artist's hand, touch returns as a critical part of the beholder's share. This, perhaps, is the most radical aspect of the *Bólides*. In Oiticica's early practice, the artist made color so that it was found by the viewer; with the *Bólides*, Oiticica finds color readymade and then invites the viewer to construct and release its body through the work.

The *Bólides* reconfigured the contemporaneous coordinates of painting in Brazil, specifically, the desire to align painting with modernization, the accelera-

49. Jorge Guinle Filho, "A Última Entrevista de Hélio Oiticica," *Interview* (April 1982), p. 82.

Oiticica. B32 Bólide Vidro 15. *1965–56. Photograph by César Oiticica Filho. Courtesy of Projeto Hélio Oiticica.*

tion of national development, and the stimulation of the industrial sphere. Oiticica drew from these discourses, but rather than treat the commodity as the apex of an industrial process, he burrowed into its materiality in order to access a state of fluid and reversible flux. This "trans" status is indicative of the inconsistencies of the commodity within an uneven world market. To the degree that this market system is itself a product of modernity, this incidence of post-painterly practice demonstrates that aesthetic interventions are necessarily transmodern in articulation. It follows that modernity is neither plural nor unequivocally singular, but a field of interactive, destabilizing tensions. The subterranean impulse of Oiticica's *Bólides*, in short, haunts the modernist project at large.