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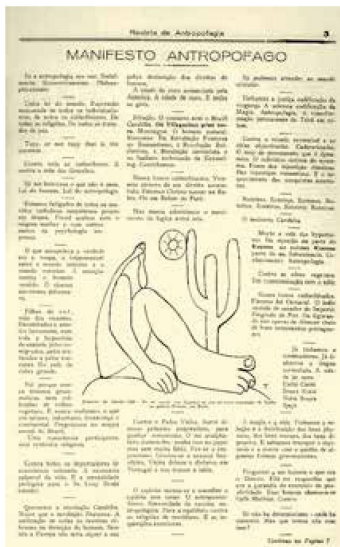
Between Physics and Alchemy
2016
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Author
Artist

Hans-Peter Wipplinger
Ernesto Neto

Between Physics and Alchemy

Ernesto Neto’s art as a sensuous, poetic metaphor for a life in flow



Oswald de Andrade
„Manifesto Antropófago“, veröffentlicht
/ published in *Revista de Antropofagia*,
1928

Hans-Peter Wipplinger

Following the historio-cultural, art-historical and sociopolitical milestones that fundamentally shaped Brazilian modernism, this essay will retrace the path that led Ernesto Neto’s oeuvre to its present position, firmly rooted in the stylistic and philosophical tradition of Brazil. At the same time it will show that this “reservoir of identity” contained and still contains many sources of inspiration for the evolution of the artist’s work. Neto’s early Constructivist/Concretist phase in the 1980s, for example, reveals aesthetic features that operate with experimental repetitions, serial procedures and ideas reminiscent of minimalist formal logic. Beginning in the 1990s, however, Neo-Concrete elements such as sensorial experience, process and participation assumed a prominent role. From the perspective of the specific genealogy of Brazilian art that feeds Neto’s work, the emergence of his oeuvre will be examined, and transformations with regard to form, space, time and structure will be discussed, transformations that make his artistic work understandable in light of its concurrence with and divergence from Concretism, Neo-Concretism and Tropicália.

We are Concretists: ¹ *Antropofagia* – the beginning of Brazilian modernism

Brazilian modernism developed largely under the influence of concepts and formal principles that were prominent at the time in Europe and, to a lesser extent, North America. But what set Brazilian modernism apart from that of “northern” countries, and what gave it its distinct status, accompanied by independent and innovative results, is the rejection of a rigid rationalism beginning in the Neo-Concrete period of the late 1950s and early 1960s. This opposition was accompanied by an increased emphasis on aspects of participation, playful behavior and the recognition of the significance of material and space. The ground for this ideological shift had been prepared by Brazilian intellectuals as early as the 1920s. Among the most important of these was the writer Oswald de Andrade, who with his “Manifesto Antropófago”² from 1928 (ill. p. 13), a response to the omnipresent cultural influences of the dominant colonial powers, devised an avant-garde counterstrategy that can be considered the initial spark for an independent Brazilian modernism. The dialectical concept of *Antropofagia*, or “cultural cannibalism,” which for its part developed in the atmosphere of the 1922 *Semana de Arte Moderna [Week of Modern Art]*, held at São Paulo’s opera house, followed the motto “Instead of pushing away the foreign, eat the

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foreign.”³ This approach triggered a counterrevolutionary way of thinking that, in a metaphorical sense, was based on “devouring and excreting” foreign cultural elements and thus dissolving the differences between the national and the international, and between foreign culture and one’s own culture. The strategy of selective appropriation, the planning for a free, classless society and not least the reflection on one’s own roots constituted the pillars of the program that was intended to break the cultural hegemony of the colonial countries. A significant example is de Andrade’s polemic transformation of Hamlet’s “to be or not to be” into “Tupí or not Tupí.” The reference here is to the Tupí-Guaraní people, who before the arrival of the Conquistadores ruled over broad swaths of the Amazon region and the Atlantic coast, and who are said to have practiced cannibalism. They were not, however, concerned with simply eating humans; rather, as part of their animistic philosophy, they practiced a spiritual ritual in which they devoured the defeated enemy to banish him along with the energy of evil spirits and to acquire his powers. To be a cannibal or not to be a cannibal – this, therefore, was the existential question that was to determine survival in a cultural sense. With his cultural strategy, de Andrade succeeded in transforming a world-famous passage from European literary history into an anthropophagical statement and in semantically de- and recontextualizing it.

While the young Brazilian economy experienced an upswing in the 1920s and 1930s due to the influx of immigrants escaping the political unrest in Europe, the late 1940s and 1950s were a time of political, economic and cultural strife. After the Second World War the political establishment – not least in order to support technological progress and industrialization and to bring order to a muddled society – pushed a nationally oriented art strategy based on Constructivist-geometric principles. Alongside initiatives such as the construction of Brazil’s first modernist high-rise – the Ministry of Education and Health Building in Rio de Janeiro, a project overseen by Le Corbusier, Lúcio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer – and the establishment of numerous museums⁴ and universities, it was first and foremost the founding of the Bienal de São Paulo in 1951 that, with its presentations of Western artists, greatly influenced Brazilian art.⁵ In 1952 the group Ruptura⁶ published the first Brazilian manifesto concerning Concrete art, in which they expressly distanced themselves from the naturalistic, romantic foundations of Brazilian art. In 1956, the year of the first national exhibition of Concrete art in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, the visionary project of establishing the futuristic capital of Brasília was started. The new city, which celebrated its inauguration in 1960, provided a Functional and Productivist impetus in the area of its architecture that was unparalleled.

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Neo-Concrete art

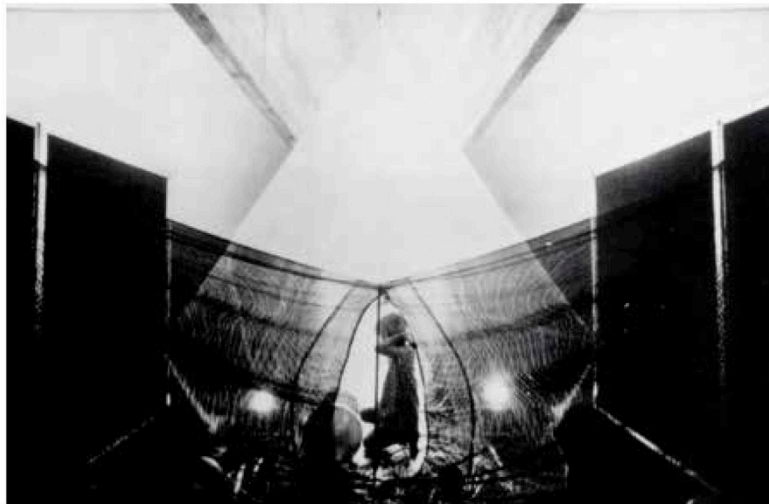
The period of the implicit belief in progress and the modernization of Brazil under president Juscelino Kubitschek – who with his politically optimistic campaign slogan “fifty years of progress in five” not only provided the initial stimulus for an economic boom but also gave new hope to the dream of democratization – also saw the publication, in 1959, of the “Manifesto Neoconcreto”⁸ by Ferreira Gullar and other artists (ill. p. 16). While the Neo-Concretists built their program on the amalgamation of a specifically Brazilian aesthetic with the “International Style,” they expanded their terms of reference from a purely mechanistic-rationalistic position – in the sense of Neo-Plasticism, Constructivism, Suprematism, Bauhaus and the Ulm School⁹ – to include means of expression that give more importance to the conceptual moment of an artwork than the politico-cultural establishment intended. The Neo-Concretist artists with a Constructivist past were concerned with a fundamental renewal of the dogmatically encumbered Constructive avant-garde. From that point on the aim was to develop an independent position with distinct and authentic Brazilian references, one that would establish a comprehensive and dynamic relationship between humans and the environment, between art and life. A significant aspect of this paradigm shift was that physical sensuousness, with the emphasis on a lyrical, sensorial sensibility, took precedence over purely visual and severely geometric, austere elements.

The primacy of the active subject

Following the phase of sterile Concretism and its focus on functionality, the Neo-Concrete concept intended to concede to the human subject a more significant position and make him or her an active participant. This shift in thought and sensibility is expressed in the “Manifesto Neoconcreto” as follows: “Neo-Concretism, born out of the need to express the complex reality of modern humanity inside the structural language of the new plasticity, denies the legitimacy of scientific and positivist attitudes in art and supersedes the problem of expression, while incorporating a new ‘verbal’ dimension created by non-figurative constructive art.” The artistic concepts of form, space, time and structure, according to the manifest, should be given back their “existential, emotional and effective significance,”¹⁰ thus preparing the ground for the shift toward a more active involvement of the viewer. In conjunction with this, the movement propagated crucial categories such as emotion, expression, physicality and sensuousness. The new achievements resulting from this discourse facilitated an artistic practice devoted to transcending conventional concepts such as picture and sculpture. While in the period of Concretism a positivistic rationalism still dominated, the advent of Neo-Concretism brought with it a phenomenological idealism.

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Lygia Clark
A casa é o corpo: penetração, ovulação, germinação, expulsão, 1968



The new dimension of time

Another critical category for the Neo-Concretists was time. While time in the context of Concretism still served as a relational, mechanistic component – in other words, as a functional unit of measure – Neo-Concretism propagated time in the sense of duration, which placed the processual aspect in the foreground. Through the new openness of the artwork, which also implied the production process as it related to the varying ways art is perceived by the viewer, the expanded concept of time encompassed the personal experience as well – a factor that in later artistic trends, particularly those of the 1960s, was to become increasingly relevant. Consider, for example, Hélio Oiticica's experience-oriented works such as the *Parangolés* (ill. pp. 20, 21, 62), Lygia Clark's interaction-dependent *Bichos* constructions (ill. pp. 18, 64) or her immersive 1968 work *A casa é o corpo: penetração, ovulação, germinação, expulsão* (ill. p. 19), all of which require active participants in order for the artwork to be completed or experienced.

The social space

A central topos that for the Brazilian art scene of the 1960s had a fundamental importance equal to that of time was the reevaluation of space, to which a quality was attributed that was expansive as well as expressive. Henceforth, the focus was not merely on a rigid spatial conception but also on discontinuities of the space that – especially in the social context – were to be handled in a playful manner. Here as well, the aesthetic experience of the (play) space provided through interventions, and the sometimes irrational relationship between subject and artwork that were thus evoked, became the focus of attention. The dominant driving force of these reformed concepts of space was the consistently undogmatic questioning and critical exploration of the foundations of art

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production with all its historic, physio-materialistic, individualistic and social implications. Despite the essentially apolitical approach of the Neo-Concretist protagonists, Brazilian art with these holistic intentions was politicized in a broader sense. As the Brazilian poet and critic Ronaldo Brito wrote, "It should be stressed that Neo-Concretism's wish to break away from the conventions of art has, after all, an ideological connotation, indicating a critical position within the cultural field. If Concretism, following the Constructivist tradition, was characterized by its reformist social-democratic positions, apolitical Neo-Concretism was close to utopia and to an anarchic refusal of established reality."¹¹

The dissolution of the Neo-Concretist group in 1961 was, among other things, certainly a result of disillusionment related to the increasing attempts to instrumentalize the movement for national cultural propaganda purposes, and above all to the military coup of 1964 and the subsequent widespread totalitarian repression. From this situation, the Brazilian cultural phenomenon Tropicália was to emerge as an open counter-movement.

Tropicália

The Tropicália movement took its name from an installation by Hélio Oiticica that he showed in 1967 as part of the *Nova Objetividade Brasileira* [*New Brazilian Objectivity*] exhibition at the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro (ill. p. 63). He described his concept as follows: "Tropicália is the very first conscious, objective attempt to impose an obviously Brazilian image upon the current context of the avant-garde and national art manifestations in general."¹² Oiticica was pursuing – with, for example, the formulations of his *Parangolés*, through his interest in the marginalized poor and the so-called antihero, in the organic architecture of Rio de Janeiro's favelas, and in the ecstatic samba as an attitude towards life – the objective of creating an awareness for the idea that, as he wrote, "the myth of 'tropicality' is much more than parrots and banana trees: it is the consciousness of not being conditioned by established structures, hence highly revolutionary in its entirety. Any conformity, be it intellectual, social, or existential, is contrary to its principal idea."¹³ Oiticica's reference to Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" here is of crucial significance: "For the creation of a true Brazilian culture, characteristic and strong, expressive at least, this accursed European and American influence will have to be absorbed, anthropophagically, by the Black and Indian of our land."¹⁴ These combative views – which also contained harsh criticism directed at superficial consumerism as a strategy for appeasing the masses, à la *panem et circenses* (ill. p. 22, left), at middle-class values, at the manipulative influence of the media and at the unquestioning embrace of international styles and fashions – were taken up by musicians, poets, artists, filmmakers and theorists as their point of departure in developing a principle based on eclecticism, which succeeded as the theorem of Tropicalismo successfully disseminated all over the world.¹⁵

Hélio Oiticica
Jerônimo mit / with *Parangolé P8*
Cape 5 – „Mangueira“, 1965



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Ernesto Neto
In the Corner of Life, 2013

Hélio Oiticica in Zusammenarbeit mit /
in collaboration with Neville D'Alemeida
Cosmococa CC5 - Hendrix War, 1973

This retrospective view of Brazil's artistic, political and social legacy illuminates the tension-filled dichotomies between rationality and sensuality, objectivity and subjectivity, and geometry and expression. The awareness of these sedimented phenomena ultimately constituted the humus for the contemporary forms of Brazilian art and made possible the dissolution of the hierarchies concerning mind (Concretism) and body (Neo-Concretism), and form and material. Numerous advancements of Neo-Concretism, such as sensory perception, the emphasis of the subject, vitalism and interaction, paved the way for a contemporary, specifically Brazilian brand of artistic work, not least that of Ernesto Neto.

Play, variation, interrelation

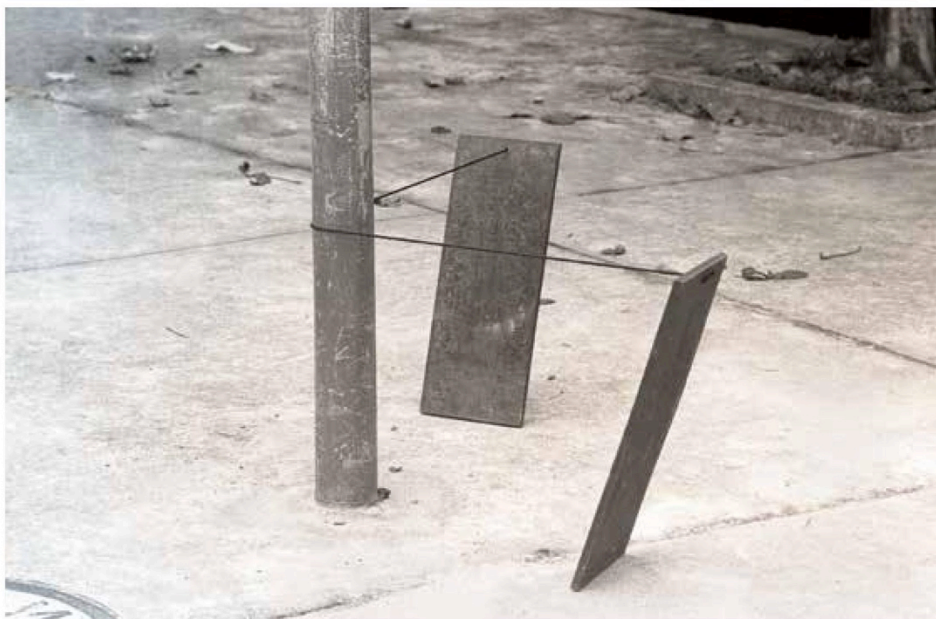
When one visualizes Ernesto Neto's aesthetic concept at the outset of his artistic career, beginning in the mid-1980s, one can detect in his works, which at the time were quite geometrically oriented, a Constructivist resonance influenced by Brazilian tradition. These stringent formations were still dominated by heavy materials like steel plates and iron rods that the artist connected by means of ropes, thus already formulating central parameters for his later sculptural works in which he studied structures and surfaces by experimenting with physical laws like gravity, weight and counterweight, and with material qualities such as the denseness and elasticity of fabrics.

As can be seen from early studio photographs (ill. pp. 6, 7, 24, 46/47) and contact prints, aleatoric and experimental elements also had a prominent role.

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The purposeless play with the element of chance and with the exploration of possibilities that can lead to insights beyond conventional solutions is to be seen as an alternative way of perceiving the world and is, as the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga observed,¹⁶ an integral factor in cultural development. In his essays on Brazil, the twentieth-century philosopher Vilém Flusser also writes of the importance of games and play, which in Brazil, he said, are not theoretical but rather lie in the nature of the country.¹⁷

Ernesto Neto's serially conceived works, whose basic structures undergo marginal adaptation within a cycle, show – in, for example, his 1987 works *A-B-A [chapa-corda-chapa]* (ill. pp. 25–27) – the potential for work-immanent mutability and the wealth of variety resulting from the reorganization of form, structure and intermediate space. The *A-B-A [chapa-corda-chapa]* series is thus an early indicator of the principle of interrelations that is so important for Neto: “My work is all about relationships, one thing touching the next. Everything relates to something else at any given moment; it is a temporary thing. And when the components of one of the works fall apart, they become something different.”¹⁸ Twenty-five years later the principle of interaction that shapes his room-size installations – which can be seen, for example, in the crochet work *[Balanço] em U, ventre, Ponto e Linha* (ill. pp. 149–151) – has lost none of its validity. In the case of this hovering, immersive room sculpture, the rhythm of



Ernesto Neto
*A-B-A [chapa-corda-
chapa]*, 1987

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one's steps changes as soon as someone else enters the object. As Neto says: "If someone begins to walk on it, you begin to move too. One thing is connected to another. Everything is connected in some way. This work talks about that."¹⁹ For the artist, who thinks in multidisciplinary and holistic ways, this metaphor for a structural configuration can by all means be applied to other systems such as society, nature and economics.

Imaginary and manifest spaces

When Ernesto Neto connects steel plates of various dimensions with each other using a strand of more or less elastic material and thus interrelates the elements with each other, the stretched line creates an imaginary space, a void, that, depending on the positioning of the module, can strike us as open or closed. Even volume can be suggested in this way, although we are naturally speaking here of an imagined spatial presence consisting solely of air. But in Neto's mind it still represents a sculptural category: "I don't believe in the void. There is something everywhere. The air is everywhere."²⁰ Air played a fundamental role in another of Neto's early works as well: his 1987/1988 *Barrabola* (ill. pp. 28/29), in which an iron bar deforms a rubber ball in various constellations on the wall or floor. Air as a material is explicitly mentioned in the description of the work; it is therefore considered part of the spatial dimension here as well, in this case between the bar and the wall or the floor.

Scents as perception amplifiers

In the 1990s Ernesto Neto began enriching the air with certain scents, often from spices such as turmeric, ginger, saffron, curry, pepper, cloves, cumin and lavender,²¹ thus confronting the object status of art with an additional, omnipresent dimension of perception in the exhibition space. While as a rule scant attention is paid to the element of air in the conventional way of viewing art, Neto's treatment of air results in a sensorially experienceable and work-constitutive component. These aromas stimulate the viewer's perception not only on an olfactory level but also visually, since the largely oil-rich spices stain the surrounding fabric, are diffused in its membrane, and fill the space as pigment dust. Moreover, scents can elicit various recollections and emotions on the part of visitors that are stored in their memory as a result of personal experiences.

Dynamic process between object and viewer

The antithesis of manifest and immaterial form that is found in many of Ernesto Neto's works undoubtedly has its roots in the Neo-Concrete movement. In this

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context it is instructive to recall an artist who employed a Constructivist formal vocabulary, and one held in very high esteem by Neto: Austrian-born Franz Weissmann, who lived in Rio de Janeiro from 1924 until his death in 2005. With his work he not only encouraged the inclusion of the surrounding and intermediate space as an integral component in the sense of an "active void" (Weissmann) in the sculptural form; no less important for him was to achieve a constant change in the sculpture's visual appearance as the work is circled by the viewer and thus to convey a processual perception of the time-space continuum. In addition to this dynamic process between object and viewer, Weissmann's sculptures possess an intrinsic tension as a result of their specific design because they always seem in danger of being thrown out of balance. Many of Neto's sculptural stagings, the cycle *A-B-A [chapa-corda-chapa]* being one example, pursue a similar strategy with regard to their prancing lightness, the impression of floating, or the play with voids and balance. The constellations of *A-B-A [chapa-corda-chapa]* not only trigger a dynamization between the guyed objects themselves; not least through the visitors' approaching, circling and partially entering the sculpture, they also initiate a tension-filled dialogue between sculpture and viewer as well as an alteration of the perception of object and the surrounding space.

Ernesto Neto
We Fishing the Time [densidade e buracos de minhoca], 1999
 Installationsansicht / Installation view
 1st Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, Liverpool, 1999

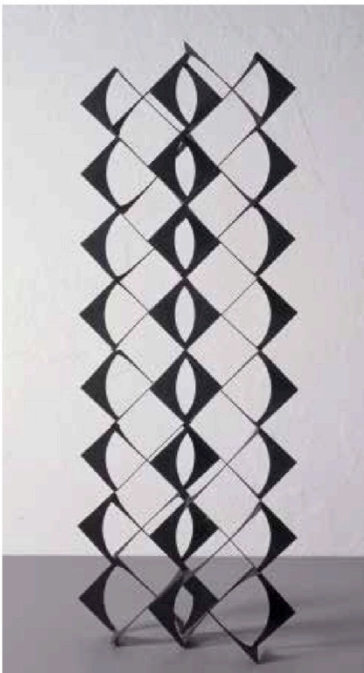


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From a geometric to a biomorphic formal language

With its dynamized, geometric character, an early untitled cycle of works by Ernesto Neto (ill. pp. 36, 37) seems to come close to the formal vocabulary Franz Weissmann used in his 1957 work *Torre* (ill. p. 35) and especially in the group of "Colunas Neoconcretas" he created beginning in the late 1950s, although Neto significantly changed the appearance of the form only by mounting stretchy Lycra fabric between two steel plates – certainly aware that the utilized material imposed on the created form its own form. It is evident in both groups of works that the sculptural arrangements aim at an exploration or a material confrontation between hard and soft materiality and at a play with interdependencies. This can be observed in Neto's already organic and fluid-like installations titled *Copulônia*²² (ill. pp. 38/39, 86–89, 106, 107, 109, 112, 113), which he has been creating since 1989. While the stocking-like elements, which are stretched from the ceiling to the floor and connected at various points, convey a lightness and fragility despite their tension, the fabric-covered, lead-filled spheres placed on the floor are an essential, grounding counterpart. While these works in their exploration of interaction between verticality and horizontality, and with their linear arrangements and circular shapes, may still strongly elicit geometric associations, they nonetheless mark the termination of the use of this formal language and the transition to a biomorphic cosmos.

Franz Weissmann
Torre, 1957



Metaphor for the unity of the sexes

This prototypical formal language, which henceforth constantly recurs in Ernesto Neto's works in assorted variations, is greatly influenced by male-female principles of form. Along with cone-shaped protuberances that are filled with various materials and exhibit phallic – ergo male – connotations, many of the "soft sculptures" and installations also feature numerous round and ovoid body shapes as well as vulva-like orifices that, because of their configurations, suggest female attributes. Significant in this regard is Neto's tendency to establish a connection between these two divergent elements – often in the very same organic structure or sculpture – and thus to formulate a metaphor for the unity of the sexes. This unification motif is found not only in the *Copulônia* cycle but in, for example, his 2009 *Variation on Color Seed Space Time Love* (ill. pp. 67, 144–147) as well; it is also integrated into room-size large creations like the 2014 *Paxpa – There Is a Forest Encantada Inside of Us* (ill. pp. 58–61, 170–175) and – in a very abstract form – is present in *Papai e Mamãe* from 2005 (ill. p. 43). This desire for a positively connoted unification and with it the rejection of an isolation of the sexes is counteracted in the exhibition at the Kunsthalle Krems only through the 1989/2014 sculpture *Leda* (ill. p. 161): the Greek myth refers to the sexual union Zeus forces on Leda and thus to the potential for violence and love between the sexes.

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The synesthetic qualities of textile materials

The great variety of applications for textile materials, made possible by their alterability of form, surface and texture, is impressive. No less multifaceted are the synesthetic qualities of these materials, which are conveyed on various sensory levels of sight, touch and smell. There is a local connection here as well, in that Ernesto Neto finds this colorful fabric more or less right outside the door of his studio, at the Saara bazaar in the old section of Rio de Janeiro. Whether the fabric is made of plant-based, animal-based or synthetic fibers, and whether it is then woven, knitted or sewn to create flat or spatial objects: this material is predestined to facilitate Neto's realization of innovative aesthetic concepts. The fabric – not unlike human skin – is distinguished by its softness, adaptability and elasticity, but also by a certain vulnerability. Neto works with these qualities in an idiosyncratic manner to create, for example, flowing, fluid-like surfaces that seem to stretch into infinity, and to form or delineate spaces in order to define an interior and an exterior. Whereas Neto uses expanses of

Ernesto Neto
Peso, 1988



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fabric in his 2005 *Tractatus IDEuses* (ill. pp. 48, 49, 163–165) to exclude the bodies of the viewers, to make it impossible to enter the installation, the objective of his 2001 *Humanóides* (ill. pp. 158, 159) is the complete opposite: they assimilate the bodies, as it were, wrapping themselves around them and touching them, with the result that the object is shaped through this contact with the bodies as well. Ideally, by slipping inside the work, the participants gain a feeling of emotional security in the soft material and become one with the sculpture and thus a part of a synesthetic experience comprised of form and material as well as visual, haptic and olfactory qualities. This experience, which speaks to all the senses and is based on Neto's innovative use of material, establishes a new relationship between the artwork and the viewers.

Psychological worlds of experience

This process of inclusion – making the viewers participants in the artistic process – makes possible not only a physical but also a psychological experience process. Because the participants put not only their body but ipso facto also their identity into play, the psyche is spoken to as an integral component of an inner perceptual process. This level is explicitly addressed in *Tractatus IDEuses*, which was created for an exhibition at Vienna's Sigmund Freud Museum. The work's bipolarity between the conscious and the unconscious, and between nature and culture stems from Ernesto Neto's study of Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories. While the Latin "ID" stands for Freud's concept of the unconscious, "Deuses" refers to the plural form of the Portuguese word for god. The interior of the tulle cocoon contains a rocking chair that appears to be floating, a stand-in for Freud's fabled couch. Reclining in the chair is an anthropomorphic figure that seems in danger of losing its balance. This unstable arrangement rests on a column of books²³ as the foundation of knowledge and culture, perhaps also signifying the terrain of human consciousness. Tube-like supply lines – leading from the head (reason) and genitals (sex drive) – connect the figure with the exterior space, the realm of the unconscious. With regard to the different psychological spheres, Neto refers to the "mutual connection at this fluid transition," to the "flow to something symbolic that is outside of our cocoon 'cube' reactor . . . I don't think this is outside of us, but beyond all science there is something that is untouchable for us."²⁴

Ernesto Neto
Tractatus IDEuses, 2005 (Detail)
Installationsansicht / Installation view
Museum der Moderne, Salzburg, 2012
SAMMLUNG VERBUND, Wien / Vienna



The psychophysical principle of balance

In the context of this psychophysical constellation of perception, Ernesto Neto speaks of his interest in establishing a balance between body and mind: "I really don't believe in this separation between the mind and the body. I think that our mind is inside our body and it is our body that carries us."²⁵ Moreover,

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he recommends occasionally shutting off the brain; in his installations the visitor should forget the information overload and complexity of everyday life and surrender to a condition of (active) contemplation: "I want thought to be left aside. To find refuge in art. I think it is good not to think, it implies breathing life directly."²⁶

In some works, for instance *Paxpa – There Is a Forest Encantada Inside of Us* (ill. pp. 58–61, 170–175), a shared experience is made possible for the visitors beneath the large organic dome, an experience that places one's own self in a relationship with other visitors and creates what Lygia Clark referred to as a "collective body." In Ernesto Neto's view, "The fact that my body can connect to other bodies, to the body of nature in this mystic situation, is what leads me to believe in this connection between all our bodies."²⁷ This represents not only the abandonment of the conventional concept of distinguishing between passive viewing and active participation on the part of the individual, but also the creation of a space for social experience with sensual perceptions, one that serves as a meeting point and a place of interaction and self-knowledge.

From representation to presentation of space and object

"To me, then, constructive artists are those who establish new structural relations in painting (color) and in sculpture, and open up new perceptions of time and space. They are the constructors, builders of structure, of color, of space and time, those who add new perspectives and modify the ways we see and feel; those, therefore, who open up new directions in contemporary sensibility."²⁸ This statement by Hélio Oiticica, which addressed a synthesis of spatial and mental-sensorial dimensions of perception, can be perfectly applied to the multisensory orientation of Ernesto Neto's strategies. If in their manifesto the Neo-Concretists demanded a new expressive space and sought an organic space, a perfect realization of this is to be found in Neto's sometimes minimalistically simple, other times opulently profuse, biomorphically expressive forms. It is noteworthy that Neto's sculptural choreographies resist a conventional substantiality of mass, instead occupying the space as seemingly ephemeral flat or spatial objects. His sculptures no longer strive to represent anything but rather to present the space as a primary place of experience. Thus room-size works such as *Paxpa – There Is a Forest Encantada Inside of Us* or the 2001 *Esqueleto Glóbulos* (ill. pp. 75, 166–169) no longer "furnish" the location in the sense of a dichotomy of figure and ground or of object and space; rather, with their supple unfolding they create an openness and a flexibility of spatial experience that can be compared to an energy field. Organic structural elements with an organic character and possessing basic principles such as balance, rhythm, growth and harmony shape the works and as a backdrop refer to Neto's statement, "I totally believe that nature is our teacher."²⁹

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The mythological world and the present

The approximately 25,000-year-old Venus of Willendorf – a figurine from the Paleolithic Period (ill. p. 54) that was found in 1908 some 20 kilometers from the town of Krems, in Austria's Wachau Valley, and seems to have represented a symbol of fertility – is presented in the exhibition as a copy, displayed directly adjacent to Ernesto Neto's 1996 photograph *O Escultor e a Deusa* (ill. p. 53). This ancient depiction of Venus, a universal symbol of life, death, and rebirth, one that in Europe was venerated as a divine figure, corresponds with the less hypertrophied Venus figure that the artist presents in his mouth, which here has the appearance of a vulva. Neto's Venus, which he shaped with his own hands, recalls one of the oldest cultural techniques of mankind, ceramics, thus establishing a connection to the beginnings of sculpture, in the Paleolithic Period. But the figure in the photograph is also a reference to the beginning of Neto's artistic career: after studying sculpture, the artist initially started working with clay. At the same time the work represents a harking back to the world of myths and legends and to the ancient wisdom of folk culture, which Neto is presently engaged with in the context of his interaction with the indigenous people of present-day Brazil. In the immediate vicinity of these two works, visitors can view the 2014 video *TxanArp, Fabiano Txana Bane sings "Nuku Mana ibubu" to Kauernd (Hans Arp)* (ill. p. 177), in which Txana Bane, son of the tribal chief of the indigenous Huni Kuin people of the northern Amazon region, sings to the spirits of nature and breathes new life into Arp's sculpture. Together with *Paxpa – There Is a Forest Encantada Inside of Us*, it reflects the sustained inspiration that Neto gained through his exploration of ancient human and cultural history, and which in his oeuvre is represented by a synthesis of tradition and progress, of the past and the present.

"The artist-chemist organizes living and vegetable matter into magic things, working to discover the root of things, in order to re-find them and extol them. His work, however, does include in its scope the use of the simplest material and natural elements . . . for a description or representation of nature. What interests him instead is the discovery, the exposition, the insurrection of the magic and marvelous value of natural elements."³⁰ Ernesto Neto's art could not be better described than with these words by the Italian art historian and critic Germano Celant. His work does, indeed, represent an inexhaustible reservoir of complex and hybrid procedures, modes of using materials, forms and themes that convey a feeling of existence and a vision of the world, and which – at once sensorially, physically and cognitively – provide an impressive report on the phenomena of being.

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- 1 Proklamation aus dem „Manifesto Antropófago“ von Oswald de Andrade (siehe Anm. 2).
- 2 Das „Manifesto Antropófago“ von Oswald de Andrade erschien 1928 in der ersten Ausgabe der *Revista de Antropofagia*. Erstmals in deutscher Sprache wurde es 1990 in *Lettre International* als „Anthropophagisches Manifest“ veröffentlicht.
- 3 Oswald de Andrade, „Anthropophagisches Manifest“, in: *Lettre International*, Jg. 11, Heft 2, 1990, S. 40.
- 4 Das Museu de Arte de São Paulo wurde 1947 gegründet, das Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo 1948 und das Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro 1949.
- 5 Signifikant erscheint, dass Max Bill auf der 1. Biennale von São Paulo 1951 den Preis für Bildhauerei erhielt, Piet Mondrian und Alexander Calder auf der 2. Biennale 1953 in Sonderpräsentationen vorgestellt wurden, und, um ein weiteres Beispiel zu nennen, Josef Albers bei der 3. Biennale 1955 ausstellte und wie Max Bill in dieser Zeit Vorträge in Brasilien hielt.
- 6 Das Manifest, verfasst von Waldemar Cordeiro, erschien anlässlich der Ausstellung der Künstler(innen)gruppe im Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo und wurde von Lothar Charoux, Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros, Kazmer Féjer, Leopold Haar, Luiz Sacilotto und Anatol Wladyslaw unterzeichnet.
- 7 Vgl. Thomas Skidmore, *Brasil: de Getúlio a Castelo*, Rio de Janeiro 1982, S. 204.
- 8 Das „Manifesto Neoconcreto“ wurde als Supplement des *Jornal do Brasil* am 22. März 1959 in Rio de Janeiro veröffentlicht. Zu den Unterzeichnenden zählten Lygia Clark, Amílcar de Castro, Ferreira Gullar, Reynaldo Jardim, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanúdis und Franz Weissmann.
- 9 Unter anderem mit Vorbildern wie Max Bill, Naum Gabo, Kasimir Malewitsch, Piet Mondrian, Antoine Pevsner oder Theo van Doesburg.
- 10 Ferreira Gullar, „Neokonkretes Manifest“, in: Robert Kudielka/Angela Lammert/Luiz Camillo Osorio (Hg.), *Das Verlangen nach Form / O Desejo da Forma. Neoconcretismo und zeitgenössische Kunst*, Ausst.-Kat. Akademie der Künste, Berlin 2010, S. 13.
- 11 Ronaldo Brito, „Zur Unterscheidung zwischen Konkretismus und Neokonkretismus“, in: Kudielka/Lammert/Osorio 2010, wie Anm. 10, S. 39.
- 12 Hélio Oiticica, „Tropicália“ (4. März 1968), in: Susanne Gaensheimer/Peter Gorschlüter/Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz/César Oiticica Filho (Hg.), *Hélio Oiticica. Das große Labyrinth*, Ausst.-Kat. MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt a. M., Ostfildern 2013, S. 227.
- 13 Ebd., S. 231.
- 14 Ebd., S. 230.
- 15 Thomas Mießgang geht in seinem Katalogessay auf dieses Kulturphänomen der späten 1960er-Jahre in Brasilien vertiefender ein und analysiert dessen Auswirkungen auf das Werk Ernesto Netos.
- 16 Vgl. Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens. Vom Ursprung der Kultur im Spiel* (1939), Reinbek 2009.
- 17 Vilém Flusser, *Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen*, Mannheim 1994, S. 140 ff.
- 18 Ernesto Neto in einem Gespräch mit Petra Joos, in: Petra Joos (Hg.), *Ernesto Neto: El cuerpo que me lleva / Ernesto Neto: The Body that Carries Me*, Ausst.-Kat. Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Barcelona 2014, S. 24.
- 19 Ernesto Neto in einem Gespräch mit Priscilla Frank, in: „Ernesto Neto's Crocheted 'Cuddle On The Tightrope' Comes To Nasher Sculpture Center“, in: *Huffington Post*, 16. Mai 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/16/ernesto-neto_n_1515477.html (Abruf: 1. Juni 2015).
- 20 Neto 2014, wie Anm. 18, S. 28.
- 21 Bei Gewürzpflanzen besteht häufig eine Verbindung zu Heilpflanzen. Solche Materialien verwendet Ernesto Neto schon seit den 1990er-Jahren, also lange vor seinem Austausch mit der Ethnie der Huni Kuin seit 2012, für die Heilpflanzen eine wesentliche Rolle spielen.
- 22 Der Titel der Arbeit ist ein Portemanteau-Wort aus *cópula* (Kopulation) und *colônia* (Kolonie). Die Anzahl der die Arbeit konstituierenden einzelnen Teile variiert ebenso wie das Gewicht der verwendeten Schrottkügelchen in den aus Lycra bestehenden Gebilden.
- 23 Unter anderem Sigmund Freuds *Die Traumdeutung*, Franz Kafkas *Der Prozess*, Friedrich Nietzsches *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Dante Alighieris *Die göttliche Komödie*, Umberto Ecos *Das Foucaultsche Pendel* oder Miguel de Cervantes *Don Quijote*.
- 24 Aus einem Brief Ernesto Netos an Peter Aufreiter, April 2005, zitiert nach: „Brasilien-Kunst im Freud-Museum“, http://www.art-port.cc/artikel/brasilien-kunst_im_freud-museum (Abruf: 1. Juni 2015).
- 25 Neto 2014, wie Anm. 18, S. 22.
- 26 Ebd., S. 17.
- 27 Ebd., S. 24.
- 28 Hélio Oiticica, „Der Übergang der Farbe zum Raum und die Bedeutung der Konstruktivität“, in: Gaensheimer/Gorschlüter et al. 2013, wie Anm. 12, S. 133.
- 29 Neto 2014, wie Anm. 18, S. 20. Verena Gamper stellt in ihrem Beitrag den biomorphologischen Aspekt und seine Implikationen für Struktur und Form der Werke Ernesto Netos ausführlicher dar.
- 30 Germano Celant, *Ars povera*, Tübingen 1969; zitiert nach: Kudielka/Lammert/Osorio 2010, wie Anm. 10, S. 46, Fn. 5.

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- 1 Proclamation from the "Manifesto Antropófago," by Oswald de Andrade (see note 2).
- 2 Oswald de Andrade's "Manifesto Antropófago" was published in 1928 in the first issue of *Revista de Antropofagia*. The essay was translated into English in 1991 and published as "Cannibal Manifesto" in the *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 19, No. 38, 1991.
- 3 Oswald de Andrade, "Cannibal Manifesto", in *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. 19, No. 38, 1991, p. XX
- 4 The Museu de Arte de São Paulo was founded in 1947, the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo in 1948 and the Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro in 1949.
- 5 It seems significant that at the 1st Bienal de São Paulo in 1951, Max Bill received the prize for sculpture, that Piet Mondrian and Alexander Calder were introduced at the 2nd Bienal in 1953 with special presentations, and, to give one more example, that Josef Albers exhibited at the 3rd Bienal in 1955 and, like Max Bill, delivered lectures in Brazil during this period.
- 6 The manifesto, written by Waldemar Cordeiro, was published on the occasion of the exhibition of the Ruptura group at the Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo and was signed by Lothar Charoux, Waldemar Cordeiro, Geraldo de Barros, Kazmer Féjer, Leopold Haar, Luiz Sacilotto and Anatol Wladyslaw.
- 7 See Thomas Skidmore, *Brasil: de Getúlio a Castelo*, Rio de Janeiro 1982, p. 204.
- 8 "Manifesto Neoconcreto" was published in Rio de Janeiro on March 22, 1959, as a supplement to the *Jornal do Brasil*. The signers included Lygia Clark, Amílcar de Castro, Ferreira Gullar, Reynaldo Jardim, Lygia Pape, Theon Spanúdis and Franz Weissmann.
- 9 This includes role models such as Max Bill, Naum Gabo, Kasimir Malewitsch, Piet Mondrian, Antoine Pevsner or Theo van Doesburg.
- 10 Ferreira Gullar, "Neoconcrete Manifesto", in Robert Kudielka/Angela Lammert/Luiz Camillo Osorio (eds.), *Das Verlangen nach Form / O Desejo da Forma. Neoconcretismo und zeitgenössische Kunst*, exh. cat. Akademie der Künste, Berlin 2010, p. 224.
- 11 Ronaldo Brito, "Towards a Distinction Between Concretismo and Neoconcretismo" in Kudielka/Lammert/Osorio 2010; as note 10, p. 246.
- 12 Hélio Oiticica, "Tropicália" (March 4, 1968), in Susanne Gaensheimer/Peter Gorschlüter/Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz/César Oiticica Filho (eds.), *Hélio Oiticica. The Great Labyrinth*, exh. cat. MMK – Museum für Moderne Kunst Frankfurt a. M., Ostfildern 2013, p. 227.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 231.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 229–230.
- 15 In his essay for this catalogue, Thomas Mießgang delves deeper into this cultural phenomenon of late-1960s Brazil and analyzes its implications for the work of Ernesto Neto.
- 16 See Johan Huizinga, *Homo ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1939), Boston 1971.
- 17 Vilém Flusser, *Brasilien oder die Suche nach dem neuen Menschen*, Mannheim 1994, pp. 140 ff.
- 18 Ernesto Neto in conversation with Petra Joos, in Petra Joos (ed.), *Ernesto Neto: El cuerpo que me lleva / Ernesto Neto: The Body that Carries Me*, exh. cat. Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, Barcelona 2014, p. 24.
- 19 Ernesto Neto in conversation with Priscilla Frank, in "Ernesto Neto's Crocheted 'Cuddle On The Tightrope' Comes To Nasher Sculpture Center," in *Huffington Post*, May 16, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/16/ernesto-neto_n_1515477.html (accessed June 1, 2015).
- 20 Neto 2014; as note 18, p. 28.
- 21 Spice plants are often associated with medicinal plants. Ernesto Neto, however, has been using these types of materials since the 1990s, long before his interaction began with the Huni Kuin people, for whom medicinal plants play a significant role.
- 22 The title of this work is a portmanteau combining *cópula* (copulation) and *colônia* (colony). The number of individual pieces constituting the work varies, as does the weight of the lead shot in the Lycra objects.
- 23 The books include Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* and Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote*.
- 24 From a letter from Ernesto Neto to Peter Aufreiter, April 2005, quoted in "Brasilien-Kunst im Freud-Museum," http://www.art-port.cc/artikel/brasilien-kunst_im_freud-museum (accessed June 1, 2015).
- 25 Neto 2014; as note 18, p. 22.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 28 Hélio Oiticica, "The Transition of Color from the Painting into Space and the Meaning of Construction," in Gaensheimer/Gorschlüter et al. 2013; as note 12, p. 133.
- 29 Neto 2014; as note 18, p. 20. In her essay, Verena Gamper explores in greater detail the bi-morphological aspect and its implications for structure and form in the works of Ernesto Neto.
- 30 Germano Celant, *Ars povera*, Tübingen 1969; quoted in Kudielka/Lammert/Osorio 2010; as note 10, p. 251, footnote 5.