Laura Harris, *Experiments in Exile: C.L.R. James, Hélio Oiticica, and the Aesthetic Sociality of Blackness*. New York: American Literatures Initiative, 2018. 221 pp. (Paper US\$ 25.00)

In this well-crafted and thought-provoking work Laura Harris explores what she calls “the aesthetic sociality of blackness” through a discussion of the “surprising resonances” in the work of two “very disparate figures”—the black Trinidadian Marxist historian C.L.R. James (1901–89) and the white Brazilian anarchist artist Hélio Oiticica (1937–80). Harris notes that both figures found a new sense of freedom while resident in the United States of America, and in New York in particular; for James this was during 1938–53, after experiencing British colonialism in Trinidad, and for Oiticica during 1971–78, after the rise of a military dictatorship in Brazil.

Harris argues that both figures went beyond the boundaries of “Euro-centered aesthetics and philosophy” to develop a form of black intellectuality through their encounter with the creative capacities of black performance (p. 7). James first encountered this watching subaltern cricketers in colonial Trinidad and engaging with wider countercultures of modernity among the poor in the barrack yards of Port of Spain in the 1920s and early 1930s. For Oiticica, his contact with the samba dancers of the favelas of Rio de Janeiro during the 1960s was to be formative. Harris eloquently notes that “as James and Oiticica studied the aesthetic sociality of blackness, as they attempted to enter into and attune themselves to its improvised and innovative structures and rhythms, they tried to find ways to integrate it into their projects.” However, it in turn made claims on them, “reconfiguring and rerouting both of their projects in ways they had not anticipated”—and their openness to the new “radical possibilities” suggested by aesthetic sociality meant their oeuvres were characterized by a series of lifelong “experiments in exile” (p. 5).

Harris therefore explores how James with his early novel *Minty Alley* and Oiticica with his *Parangolé* series first attempted to appropriate elements of this aesthetic sociality, and then after sojourns in the United States and examining popular arts such as the movies of Charlie Chaplin in the case of James or rock music concerts in the case of Oiticica, worked to imagine new forms of citizenship and build new apparatuses. For James this led to a collective attempt to build a new form of revolutionary socialist organization (Correspondence), and for Oiticica new *Ninhos*—“nests”—as architectural installations, living and working spaces for making and displaying art, both “set up to create the conditions for new forms of contact to take shape and, from that contact, new forms for social life” (p. 109). Harris concludes by exploring unfinished documentary attempts by James and Oiticica to theorize this new shift in their thinking—

James's "Notes on American Civilization" (partly published posthumously in 1993 as *American Civilization*) and Oiticica's *Newyorkaises*. Harris makes effective use of the internal discussion documents of the Correspondence group in the 1950s to underline the importance of "Notes on American Civilization" and its "subjunctive poetics" for James's oeuvre as a whole (p. 135). As James declared in 1953, "The book that matters ... is A.C.—that is the one that will settle everything" (p. 132).

Yet underpinning Harris's argument is a deeper argument about the destiny and fate of the multiracial, multicultural "insurgent social formation" of the "motley crew" identified by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker in their classic work, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, as emerging with the Atlantic proletariat of the seventeenth century but being broken by the rise of capitalist nation states and nationalism in the nineteenth century, which in Europe and North America tied citizenship to whiteness. Harris argues that the failure by Linebaugh and Rediker to fully attend to "the crew's own self-generated and generative aesthetics" meant they missed how, despite the racial transgressing in the modern Atlantic world, the motley crew persisted "in and as the aesthetic sociality of blackness," in refuge from modern racialization "rerouted into spaces such as the barrack yards and favelas, where the excluded, the motley who became black, congregate" (pp. 31–32, 34).

Whatever one makes of this answer to the question "what happened to the motley crew?" in general, Harris's specific argument that James and Oiticica were then distinctive in that they came to understand the aesthetic sociality of blackness as "a mode of intellectuality, the barrack yards and the favelas as places of study, the members of the cricket clubs and samba schools among their most important instructors" (pp. 47–48) is certainly well made. Indeed, her argument could perhaps have been strengthened further through discussion of James's work on Herman Melville, given the championing by Melville (and James) of the "motley crew" of the Pequod in *Moby Dick*; it might also have been productively situated in relation to Paul Gilroy's "black Atlantic."

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