Crossroads, walkers, apprentices: on three performance-films

Encruzilhadas, andarilhos, aprendizes: sobre três filmes-performance

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Abstract: starting from the hypothesis of Pignarre and Stengers about capitalist sorcery, this article considers three performance-films – *Ungüento* by Dalton Paula, *Árvore do esquecimento* by Paulo Nazareth, and *Noirblue* by Ana Pi – to understand them as counter-colonial critiques, elaborations of the history of the African Diaspora by using the body. If capitalism – and colonization, which cannot be separated from it – constitutes a "sorcery system without sorcerers," the three works can be seen as counter-spells, interventions within time and with time.

Keywords: capitalism sorcery; counter-spell; performance; *Ungüento*; *Árvore do Esquecimento*; *Noirblue*.

Resumo: tendo como ponto de partida a hipótese de Pignarre e Stengers em torno da *feitiçaria capitalista*, o artigo aproxima três filmes-performance – *Ungüento*, de Dalton Paula, *Árvore do esquecimento*, de Paulo Nazareth e *Noirblue*, de Ana Pi – para pensá-los como críticas contracoloniais, elaborações da história da diáspora negra por meio do corpo. Se o capitalismo e a colonização que lhe é indissociável configuram um "sistema feiticeiro sem feiticeiros", cada qual à sua maneira, os três trabalhos podem ser vistos como operações de contrafeitiçaria, intervenções no tempo, com o tempo.

Palavras-chave: feitiçaria capitalista; contrafeitiço; performance; *Ungüento*; *Árvore do Esquecimento*; *Noirblue*.

Ancestral

é quem
vive no meio

do tempo
sem tempo:

é quem veio
e já foi

e é também
quem

ainda não
veio

(Ricardo Aleixo)

Dalton Paula walks through the streets of Lençóis (BA), shirtless, pestle, two bottles of *cachaça* and a handful of *guiné*. It is morning, the first tourists appear, and the commerce begins to open its doors. The artist sits on the stone street, leaning against the curb and diligently begins to prepare the ointment (*garrafada*, in the popular expression), as shown in Figure 1. On fixed long-term plans, the camera accompanies him in his solitary rite: at first, he blindfolds himself. Then the artist seems to evoke the protection of Exu by making a brief offering to the saint, splashing some *cachaça* around himself. Then he begins to pillar the *guiné*, a plant also called *amansa senhor*, since doses of the herb were administered in the drinks of the great house, a slow and silent poisoning that generated mental disorders, malaise, starvation and even the death of the masters[2]. We heard some questions and comments offscreen, accusing the presence of the camera and the film crew in a performance action that opens there, between the traffic of cars and the commerce of the tourist city, a time and space of its own.

The artist continues with his performance, *Ungüento* (2015)[3]: unexpectedly, but quietly, he breaks one of the *cachaça* bottles, gathers the pieces scattered around

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[2] The researcher and curator Hélio Menezes Neto commented on the performance of Dalton Paula in his participation in the panel "Contemporary art, performance and Afro-Brazilian religions" of the VII Colóquio Cinema, Estética e Política (Colloquium of Cinema, Aesthetics and Politics), promoted, in November 2018, by the research group "Poetics of Experience" and" forumdoc.bh" – Documentary and Ethnographic Film Festival. I owe Menezes Neto several suggestions about *Ungüento*, including the relationship between Gilvan's approach and Exu's arrival. The presence of elements related to the orisha – *cachaça*, the herb and the street – was already mentioned in Menezes (2018).

[3] The performance *Ungüento*, by Dalton Paula, was presented at the III Mola – Mostra Osso Latino-americana de Performances Urbanas, in Lençóis (BA), in March 2015. Available from: https://bit.ly/2CdRHtS. Access on: Nov. 1, 2019.

and mixes them with the macerated plant, continuing, not without difficulty, to pillar the ingredients, as shown in Figure 2. Offscreen, a companion emerges, a plastic cup in his hand, interested in one or another dose of the 51 *cachaça* he saw beside the artist (Figure 3). He arrives quietly and settles on the edges of the frame, to which someone we do not see jokes: "Not to drink, Gilvan, get out of there!". Then this one, who seems to be the incorporated Exu himself, attracted by the *cachaça* and the ritual, approaches and uses the drink, not shying away from helping the artist – blindfolded – in his task.

The mixture of *cachaça*, *guiné* and glass is then poured into a bottle and left there, at the performance site. Dalton Paula leaves on one side and Gilvan on the other, taking what remains of the *51* with him. The camera frames the bottle on the street, in front of the half-open door, as if offering it to viewers.

Figures 1, 2 and 3: Passages of *Ungüento* (2015).

If, in Dalton Paula's performance, the body is "seated," concentrated, in the gesture of pillaring the plant, in *Árvore do Esquecimento* (*L'arbre d'oublier*, 2013)[4], Paulo Nazareth walks, circulates the tree in an apparently calm square of Uidá, in Benin. He does it, however, backwards (Figure 4). The circle will, in a sense, be a common feature of both performances, given the circular gesture with which Dalton Paula spreads the *cachaça* around him: with this, he circumscribes a space of protection and, at the same time, of passage.

Nazareth's performance is performed for the first time in the city that was sadly marked by having housed one of Africa's main slave trading ports. A square, the statue of the infamous Chacha, Francisco Félix de Souza, an influential slave trader in West Africa, and a tree covered in flags: alone, apparently without any audience, Paulo Nazareth circles the tree with 437 reverse turns[5].

The artist's action makes reference to the so-called Tree of Oblivion, the Baobab around which enslaved people were forced to go around (9 times for men and 7 for women), which would make them forget their past, their name, their family and their land before embarking towards forced exile. If the turns around the tree were intended to produce the forgetfulness of the individual and collective past – as if that forgetfulness could, in the form of a blank slate, found the future of slavery in another country –, now, in the performance of Paulo Nazareth, it deals with undoing the rite, demanding that we remember both the black ancestry and the oppressive and violent gesture that its erasure aimed to produce. Reverse turn that asks us *not to forget oblivion*: to un-forget; to remember the oblivion to which were forced the kidnapped blacks; to remember, finally, that the work of forgetting – a deliberate erasure – remains operating in the present.

A moment in the *Árvore do Esquecimento* draws our attention (since it bears similarities with the visit offscreen in *Ungüento*): near the number 133, a woman, whose presence partially out of frame was unnoticed, moves and sits (Figure 5). The artist now has the company of someone who watches the performance. Unlike Gilvan,

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[4] The performance-film *L'arbre d'oublier*, by Paulo Nazareth, is part of the *Cadernos de África* project, which has a blog, travel journal to Zambia, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Botswana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Benin, Kenya, Paraguay, Argentina, in addition to Brazilian cities. Available from: https://bit.ly/32eKfcz. Access on: Nov. 1 2019. The films are available from: https://bit.ly/2PRNnZg. Access on: Nov. 1, 2019.

[5] Asked by *Whatsapp* about this number, Paulo Nazareth says that it is "a cabalistic… prime number… for me something like the infinite and at the same time the incomplete…"
"4 + 3 + 7 = 14
1 + 4 = 5
5 = the number of fingers we have in our hands …
principle of Mayan mathematics"

who shares the scene with Dalton Paula, here, the woman assumes the position of spectator, perhaps the only one[6] (Figure 6).

The same performance was repeated by Paulo Nazareth in other places: in Belo Horizonte, in front of Cine Brasil; in Maputo, in front of Cine África; and again in Belo Horizonte, around a yellow Ipê tree. With each new performance, the refusal to forget is reiterated, addressing this to the present, as if each tree planted in the center of a city updated the possibility of this reverse "forgetting" gesture.

Figures 4, 5 and 6: Turns in reverse in *Árvore do Esquecimento* (2013).

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[6] Renata Marquez (2016, p. 159) draws attention to the coexistence of two times in *Árvore do Esquecimento:* the "mythological-desiring time of the inverted movement" and the "everyday time of the city", which appears in "small banal facts […] at the edges of the image".

Unlike the works of Dalton Paula and Paulo Nazareth, in *Noirblue –
displacements of a dance* (2018)[7], Ana Pi uses words, precisely poetic ones, that she
enunciates in a *voice over* from the first images (distant, colored lights). The narration
is serene and paused, as if groping the meaning and materiality of each word.

> It is important to know that what I'm living in now is the future
> that someone dreamed for me. I'm on the plane and, around
> me, all people are black, for the first time. The pilot, his team,
> the people of the first class, and that makes me understand
> immediately that this is not just any trip. I'm going to sub-
> Saharan Africa for the first time. When I arrive at passport
> control, a gentleman tells me: *Madame, vous êtes d'*òu? And
> I answer: *Je suis Brésilienne*. And he says: *but you know that
> you're from here, don't you?* (NOIRBLUE, 2018)

As in *Árvore do Esquecimento*, it is a return to Africa, in this case, Sub-
Saharan Africa, which Ana Pi visits to – as she says – undo the turns that were made
by force in the Tree of Oblivion. In her performance, Ana Pi dances, entwined in a
blue veil, in spaces in the various cities she passes through (Figures 7, 8 and 9).

The videos of Dalton Paula and Paulo Nazareth are records of the
performances in very long duration plans, and it is up to the editing to apprehend
the course of action in its (almost) fullness. In *Noirblue*, on the other hand, images
of dance-performance coexist, in a segmented way, with records of encounters and
experiences lived by the artist, in a kind of travel journal. The images of Ana Pi's
dance-performance help, as she points out, to be with both feet firm on the ground.
They connect the body – entwined and hidden by the blue veil – to the landscape of
the cities (bridges, sheds, stairs, fairs, open spaces). The dirt floor, in turn, reminds
her of her childhood neighborhoods: Petrolândia, Granja Verde... From there –
from these images of the origin, which is always displacement and travel –, the artist
removes the uniqueness of her gesture, words and writing. As Tatiana Costa and Layla
Braz (2018, p. 161) summarize, Ana Pi "recognizes or builds her belonging" through
a "fictional identity" that transits through a "mosaic-memory-territory": it is, after all,
of a *signature* "*on* and *with* the film".

If there is wandering, the circle is also an organizing figure here: in some
way, it punctuates the performance in the form of the link. It also organizes the
editing and narration in a *voice over*: at the beginning of the film, Ana Pi asks the

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[7] I first watched *Noirblue* at the 20th Belo Horizonte International Short Film Festival, in which it won the
award for best film by the critic and popular jury.

elders for a blessing because she lives the future dreamed by someone. In the end, she asks for blessings also to the youngest, to those who come later and to those who dream of a future of freedom. Thus, the circle connects – paradoxically, as we shall see – the experience of the ancestors to that of the youngest, allowing the eyes getting used, little by little, to the appearance of the invisible.

In these performance films, the circle organizes wandering (either to firm it up and settle it, to temporarily suspend it or to link and elevate it[8]) and the wandering reopens the circle to the crossings of history and the injunctions of the present.

Figures 7, 8 and 9: The dance tied to the veil, in *Noirblue* (2018).

Performance as elaboration of history

What allows me to bring these three performance films together once the differences between them are recognized? Each in their own way, in the present of

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[8] I owe this idea of an "elevation", to which I will return later, to Fábio Rodrigues, whose reading I thank.

performance action, they resume the history of the black diaspora, placing themselves in the tense dialectics between enslavement and resistance, colonization[9] and counter-colonization, kidnapping and invention – difficult, but persistent – of freedom. The body in performance is the place of this dialectic.

Historically, in the various fields of its theorization, performance has been defined as present action, the presence of a body that updates (resumes, restores, transforms or subverts) a certain cultural repertoire (traditional practices, behavioral and linguistic codes, etc.), according to Carlson (2010). Performances, Richard Schechner (2003) tells us in his well-known formulation, are restored behaviors, since every gesture has in itself, consciously or unconsciously, gestures of yore. In this sense, every gesture is an inheritance. The fact that the updating of this heritage is unique and singular and, to some extent, unforeseen, gives it a sense of freedom: always the same, another gesture; constantly outdated inheritance of itself. In a formula closer to cinema, in another text, I placed the performance between the lived and the imagined (BRASIL, 2014); between pure gesture and mise-en-scène; between the inheritance that the gesture unconsciously carries and the updating of that inheritance in a scene that reinvents it.

Performance can thus be a device for remembrance and for the elaboration of history. In the space-time that the body in performance establishes and within which it is created and transformed, it elaborates, in action, that which is inscribed in history. As Leda Martins first said, performance is itself a writing that draws on the repertoire of oral traditions (the gesture, but also the voice, clothes and props). Not for nothing, the author tells us, in the Bantu etymology of Congo, writing and dancing are derived from the same root. The body in performance is an important memory device, insofar as it reveals what the texts hide (ROACH, 1996 apud MARTINS, 2003). It is a text – body's writing – which, as such, achieves what verbal writing does not access. Every gesture, Martins tells us, is a mnemonic inscription, which not only recovers, but also recreates, not being reduced to the mimetic representation of meaning. The performance would thus be mainly a place for the inscription of knowledge, "which is recorded in the gesture, in the movement, in the choreography; in the solfege of vocality, as well as in the props that performatively cover it" (MARTINS, 2003, p. 66).

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[9] Here, the concept has the meaning that Antônio Bispo dos Santos taught us in the course *Quilombola Confluences against Colonization*, which he taught at the UFMG's Transversal Formation Program in Traditional Knowledge. "By colonization, we understand all the ethnocentric processes of invasion, expropriation, ethnocide, subjugation and even the substitution of one culture for another, regardless of the physical and geographic territory in which that culture is found. And we will understand, by means of colonization, all the processes of resistance and struggle in defense of the peoples' territories against colonizers, the symbols, the meanings and the ways of life practiced in that territory" (SANTOS, 2015, p. 47-48).

But there is something more that these three performance films indicate: explicitly or obliquely, they summon knowledge – gestures, practices, protocols – that are linked to ancestral rites. In this sense, they are, to some extent, *performance-rites*. Updated precariously in the contingent situation of a performance-rite, ancestry – as well as its ritualistic aspects – here becomes a way of elaborating history. It is, that is to say, an elaboration that uses not only the themes and contents related to ancestry, but the material and sensitive components that are related to them, many of them from the oral and corporal matrix. All of this would allow these films to be brought together in a counter-colonial critique of the history that elaborates it and, at the same time, intervenes in its course. In the somewhat risky hypothesis, I would like to demonstrate here, this intervention would have the meaning of a *counter-spell*. How can we take the idea of a counter-spell not only in its metaphorical sense, but in its effective sense (the refusal to be captured by the spell of others and the intervention in space and time to reverse a spell that weakens and de-potentializes)? The answer to these questions is what drives this essay.

As performances, in one way or another, the three works involve, above all, the interruption of daily time to establish their own spatiality, we reiterate, autonomous, but permeable to the outside (the quotidian, history, cosmology). If each body inscribes a drawing in space, I will try to show, later, how this inscription allows the creation of complex temporal figures. After all, just like the spell, is not the counter-spell an intervention *within* time, *with* time?

Capitalist spell and death management

In *Capitalist sorcery*, Isabelle Stengers and Philippe Pignarre (2007, p. 59) refuse to use the term merely metaphorically and, using a pragmatic approach, define capitalism as a "sorcerer system without sorcerers"[10]: a system whose spell draws our strength, makes us powerless, hostages to "hellish alternatives" (those that leave us no choice but resignation or empty denunciation). Such a hypothesis, the authors remind us, was not entirely foreign to Marx's thought, who, however, did not believe in witchcraft. Not for nothing, what Stengers and Pignarre (2007, p. 73) – in the wake of Deleuze and Guattari – call *capture*, Marxism will designate as *an illusion*: if it

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[10] In the original: "système sorcier sans sorciers". Regarding a recent discussion of the topic in Brazil, I recommend the dossier Entreviver – desafios cosmopolíticos [cosmopolitical challenges], published by *Revista do Instituto de Estudos Brasileiros*, n. 69, Apr. 2018. Specifically, Renato Sztutman, in his article Reativar a feitiçaria *e outras receitas de resistência – pensando com Isabelle Stengers [Reactivating witchcraft and other resistance recipes – thinking with Isabelle Stengers]* (2018), will work on an articulation close to the one we make here between the thoughts of Stengers and that of Federici.

"poses the problem of truth that hides behind appearances"[11], that one is attentive to the event of being taken and affected by a force that escapes us and calls the pragmatic question of the circumstances, the paths and the agencies at stake. The illusion bets on transparency or on the revelation that would undo it; the capture recognizes the opacity with (and in the middle of) which we must constantly deal with.

Capitalist sorcery operates, perhaps paradoxically, in a world in which sorcery is seen as "simple belief," superstition; a world, consequently, negligent in the need for *protection* (PIGNARRE; STENGERS, 2007, p. 59). Hence an imprudent stance which, for those to whom modern knowledge designates the place of *belief* (denying them the place of knowledge), sounds alarmingly naive: "in their eyes, disaster then becomes predictable"[12] (PIGNARRE; STENGERS, 2007, p. 59).

If capitalism is a sorcerer system in a world that does not believe in sorcery, it is because it has built its economic and scientific rationality by annihilating (or colonizing) traditional and popular knowledge, much of it with a magical and animistic matrix. Or, even if the capitalist spell weakens us, making us hostages to infernal alternatives, it is because it has historically allied itself with the State (and, in a way, with Science) to delegitimize (colonize and, often, criminalize) practices and popular knowledge that would constitute a *multiple* field of alternatives.

This is what Silvia Federici shows us: in her reinterpretation of the theory of *primitive accumulation* from the point of view of women, she demonstrates how, historically, the processes of privatization of communal spaces and land enclosures from which the capitalism comes together with a wide reconfiguration of social relations and modes of knowledge: an unprecedented attack is witnessed on several fronts (legal, scientific and economic), to practices and magical knowledge based on land, tradition, oral transmission and, in many cases, in female protagonism. "The world," says Federici, "should be 'disenchanted' in order to be dominated" (FEDERICI, 2017, p. 313).

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[11] In the original: "L'illusion pose le problème de la verité qui se cache derrière les apparences".

[12] In Brazil, indigenous leaders never tire of asking us: Davi Kopenawa (2015) warns that the smoke produced by the handling of gold and other metals – a kind of epidemic, *xawara waki, -xi* – emanates deleteriously to the planet, which will melt like a burning plastic bag. Sonia Guajajara (2018, p. 55) tells us that "the world is round and everything that happens to the Earth will also happen to the Earth's children, and especially to those who do not respect the Earth." Ailton Krenak (2017, p. 33): "I am not a prophet of the apocalypse. I am just a person who knows where I am. And I know how far the sky is from my head". Isael and Sueli Maxakali (2017, p. 103): "The Earth's body is hot. We plant seeds and seedlings, but they do not grow as they used to. The Earth is warm inside and that is why the seeds burn before sprouting". Cacique Babau (2019, p. 98), Tupinambá leader of Serra do Padeiro (BA), draws attention to land law: "Land law is such a beautiful proposal that has always been violated. The man determined himself to be its owner. He created parliaments and laws to rule over the land, destroy, divide, modify and dig the land, as if it had no rights".

As a diffuse practice, dispersed by everyday plebeian experience in domestic and communal spaces, magic is based on an animistic concept of nature that imagines the cosmos as a living organism, consisting of multiple agencies and hidden forces that are not at all transparent, not fully recognizable or controllable. (FEDERICI, 2017, p. 257). In everything different from nascent mechanism, magical thinking is based on a qualitative and immanent conception of space and time that is resilient to the normalization of work, constituting, in several ways, as an obstacle to capitalist abstraction.

The violence of these historical processes is what allows the author to bring – without neglecting the enormous differences between each experience – the witch hunt in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries to the colonization and enslavement of blacks and indigenous people in the Americas. In the case of enslaved blacks, it seems decisive to emphasize the specificity of the racial issue: as Achille Mbembe recalls, in the plantation system in America, "the slave's life, in many ways, is a death-in-life" (MBEMBE, 2018, p. 29). Emphasizing the complementary relationship between liberalism and colonization, Mbembe demonstrates how, in its accumulation processes, capital does not give up racial subsidies.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing how much this violence is updated in each phase of capitalist expansion, with the expulsion of peasants and indigenous people from the land, with the degradation and stigmatization of women, blacks and Indigenous, as well as the eradication of their knowledge and practices, many of them based on animism and magic. That capitalism is a "sorcerer system *without sorcerers*" can be read in its literality: to sustain itself the capitalist rationality often needed to hijack or eliminate the lives of those who were holders of other modes of sociality and rationality, linked to the land and production of the common good and of multiple and diffuse knowledge little used to the abstraction of work. In this sense, the so-called Great Division between those who know and those who believe – those who believe themselves invincible and those who know themselves to be vulnerable – not only *constituted* epistemes, but provoked violent, undeniably ethnocidal processes.

Inhabiting destruction

This brief theoretical digression is justified by the hypothesis that, each in their own way, these three performance-films take up something of this historical experience – that of colonization, which is at the origin of capitalist accumulation and which continues to be updated – to *reactivate* what capitalism worked to

eradicate or poison. Here, I approach Stengers (2017) again: contingent agency of heterogeneous, *resuming* or *reactivating* does not mean rescuing, as it were, abandoned, eradicated or repressed practices, but, in the author's words, "recovering starting from the separation itself, regenerating what the separation itself poisoned" (STENGERS, 2017, p. 8).

In Brazil, it must be considered, the context of this *reactivation* is different since – despite all the persecutions, historical violence and magical knowledge based on tradition – they remain alive, resilient, active and constitute part of the current Brazilian social and popular tissue, although so often stigmatized and marked by race and class prejudice[13]. As Leda Martins also tells us, in the Americas, black culture expresses the disjunction "between what the social system assumed that subjects should say and do and what, through countless practices, they actually said and did" (MARTINS, 2013, p. 69). African knowledge "takes on new and ingenious formats" and "reactivation" operates less as a recovery of something that has been lost than as a constant update, "displacement," "metamorphosis" and "covering" (MARTINS, 2003), operating tactics of African American cultural formation. When it comes to "inhabiting destruction" – that produced by the unbridled advance of capitalism –, the presence and manifestation of these traditions operate a real therapy in ill social, collective and institutional processes.

If the question is "how to inhabit what has been destroyed?", the answer will not be simple and must start from the assumption that the destruction is never complete. It is, therefore, about betting on a time that is not univocal: each performance is an action – an agency – of the body in space, in order to compose complex, implied, reverse and paradoxical temporalities.

Body-crossroads, temporal implication

In *Security Zone*, a well-known performance from 1971, Vito Acconci walks blindfolded on *pier 18* of *East River*, New York. In the performance photographs[14], the wind seems intense and the waters are rough, which suggests a situation of risk and instability. Acconci is guided by someone whom he invited to the performance not because of the trust, but the distrust they have for each other.

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[13] I owe attention to this specificity of the Brazilian context, from the perspective of Stengers (2017), to José Jorge de Carvalho, in his participation in the doctorate board of Bárbara Altivo (PPGCOM/UFMG, on April 16. 2019).

[14] Vito Acconci comments on photographs of the *Security Zone* (1971) on video. Available from: https://bit.ly/2NhBtq5. Access on: Nov. 4, 2019.

Figure 10: Mutual distrust in the *Security Zone* (Vito Acconci, 1971).

Figure 11: Brief complicity in *Ungüento* (Dalton Paula, 2015).

Thus, the artist risks himself in a situation of vulnerability that is not mitigated, but, on the contrary, deepened by the company of the guide of those of whom he admittedly suspects. Let us say, then, that Vito Acconci's performance acts the paranoia: in a remote space, he creates a suspended time, in which the blindfolded person has only one he does not trust.

Dalton Paula also performs blindfolded. He does not move, but is seated, manipulating, by touch, the objects and ingredients of his mixture (among them, broken glass). The fact that he is blindfolded affects the representation – the subject in the image does not return the look to the viewer, as we see in the tradition of the pictorial or photographic portrait –, but also on the performance itself: after all, in

the absence of vision, the body opens up to the other senses – especially touch and listening – to be affected and crossed by the sensitive experience of the surroundings.

If blindness, in *Security Zone* (1971), produces a paranoid body, removed from relationships that can support it – suspended time and space of isolation in a relationship that is established as non-relationship, since it is based on suspicion –, in *Ungüento* (2015), the blindfolded eyes produce a relational body – body-crossroads[15] –, a protected (since he asked Exu for permission) and available (sitting on the street, sensitive to unforeseen sounds, voices, movements and approaches) one.

The artist's body is circumscribed by the circle of *cachaça* and available through the paths that this circle opens. It is, therefore, a firm body, visibly immobile, concentrated in the activity of maceration, but virtually mobile, open and sensitive to encounters with those who enter its world. Visibly immobile, virtually in transit (isn't that a crossroads?), the body that macerates the poison/medicine is, therefore, a crossroads of affections and produces a time that we could name as *implicated* or *complicated*[16]. Implicated because it is present (focused on the performance and virtually open to the encounters that may come). *Complicated* because crossed by heterogeneous times: the contingent situation, the ancestral knowledge and agencies and the image's virtuality. In a situation of vulnerability and availability (although care is taken), each new agency may further complicate the already heterogeneous temporal composition of performance.

Dedicated to the duration of the performance, the camera not only records the artist's action, but constitutes it and, in doing so, works as a passing device: through the fixed frame, it accompanies the artist's groping gestures that manipulate the mixture inside the scene, also allowing the entry, by the edges of the frame, of those subjects or agencies that complicate the experience. The man who enters the scene to keep Dalton Paula company, for example, seems to consciously deal with the framing: he goes in quietly ("pianinho," as it is said), staying for a while on the periphery of the image, in order to participate more freely in the performance, assisting the artist in his task (Figure 11). If, in the face of the situation's vulnerability, Vito Acconci's company increased suspicion, Dalton Paula's soon produced brief complicity.

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[15] "From the sphere of the rite and, therefore, of the performance, the crossroads is a radial place of centering and decentering, intersections and deviations, text and translations, confluences and alterations, influences and divergences, mergers and ruptures, multiplicity and convergence, unity and plurality, origin and dissemination. " (MARTINS, 2003, p. 70).

[16] Nina Velasco reminds me of echoes of the Deleuzian *fold* (pli) in *implicating* and *complicating* (DELEUZE, 1991).

The same can be said about the voices that marginally participate in the scene. Coming from outside the frame, they acknowledge the presence of the camera (as a passing device) and contribute to increase the ambiguity of the situation: what is it about? An offering? A performance? Are the voices spoken by viewers? By passers-by, by residents? By members of the film crew?

Located at this temporal crossroads (at the same time seated and in transit, protected and available), Dalton Paula's body is, at the same time, in the past and in the present: he resumes – reactivates – the "recipe" of *amansa senhor* to see it "act" in the present. The resuming is not without changes. Firstly, the entry of Gilvan, a figure that, as we have seen, makes sociohistorical and ancestral times coincide, updating the figure of the marginalized, which may also be that of Exu. Secondly, the bottle that shatters and the broken glass that are added to the macerated *guiné* recipe. Finally, the camera, that passing device, which allows transit and transformation from one time to another. It also allows the addressing of the ointment, made explicit at the end of the film: it is up to the viewers to receive and digest this poison, which can also be seen as a medicine, since it has become counter-spell. After all, it is not just the "recipe" that is reactivated by the performance, but the silent resistance and multiple temporality – implicated and complicated – in which it was socially immersed.

Let us say, finally, that the film is not something that adds to the performance: from the beginning, it constitutes it. As we have seen, the camera is a passing device and the image is a space that houses heterogeneous objects, agencies and relationships. Thus, the image is what encrypts, condenses and catalyzes the time involved and complicated in the performance. It houses this maceration of time by the performance-rite. In doing so, it distributes it, as if it were the bottle that holds – and makes it reach the people – the poison/medicine.

Body-walker, reverse time

In 1967's *Walking in an exaggerated manner around the perimeter of a square*, Bruce Nauman walks exaggerating his movements on the lines of a square, inside his studio. Recorded on a 16 mm camera, the walk moves forward, backwards and, occasionally, duplicates itself in the mirror located discreetly at the back of the room (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Exercise inside the studio on *Walking...* (NAUMAN, 1967).

Figure 13: Outdoor performance in *Árvore do Esquecimento* (NAZARETH, 2013).

Both performances, Nauman's and Nazareth's, repeat the gesture of exhaustively going around a shape, in the first case, a square in a closed space; in the second, a circle around the tree, in an open space. Despite the initial similarity, both performances have very different results and addresses. Nauman seems to be interested in the movement itself, the exaggerated gesture, the sway that disconcerts the square. Although the artist is at the center of the scene, it does not seem fair, in the case of this performance by Nauman, Rosalind Krauss's (2008) critique of the video performances produced in the 1960s: that they would compose a sort of *aesthetic of the narcissism* that would make the environment and the self-centered exposure of the self coincide. *Walking in an exaggerated manner* shows itself, mainly, as a criticism to the disciplining of the body, the submission of gestures to normative parameters. In Foucaultian terms, exaggerating bodily manners would therefore be a criticism of

bodily exercise as a disciplinary strategy, leading the body to experiment with gestures that normative standards reject[17].

It could retain, however, a specific aspect of Krauss's critique, which would be valid here: in these performances, she writes, the "self" is exposed as if it had no past, without any connection with objects that are external to it. Perhaps there is an important difference between the performance of Nauman and that of Paulo Nazareth who, instead of the closed space of a studio, walks around the tree in the square of Uidá. Nauman's performance is built in the present – the theatrical body transgressing the normative – and it is the present that it aims; that of Paulo Nazareth rather turns to the past (which here is less biopolitical than necropolitical). Counter-spell rite (disenchantment), its time is reversed: it reverses the erasure of memory that the rite around the Tree of Oblivion was intended to produce; it reverses the oblivion of this gesture of erasure, as if it needed to be constantly reminded to be fought. In this sense, when turning to a past practice, performance intervenes in the present (without losing its connection with history): it aims at the erasures that continue to operate and that sustain contemporary racism. It is not by chance that the artist performs in urban centers, as in summoning, in the present of cities – in Africa and Brazil – the gesture of un-forgetting (Figure 13). Resuming the past thus seeks to undo (as if rewinding) one of its events – the rite in the Tree of Oblivion, an emblem of the slave trade violence. However, for the task to be successful, it is necessary to remember, actively and constantly, the persistence of this violence in the present.

It would also be necessary to place *L'arbre d'oublier* in the broader set of Paulo Nazareth's work: there is an aspect there that is suggested by the appearance of the woman, a solitary spectator, to carelessly follow the performance. Wanderings and performances are a way to intervene in current issues related to racism and, in the same gesture, to form precarious alliances with others, whose life is constantly threatened by stigma and social exclusion. A kind of *community of the margin and exile* finds, in residual images (a video, a photo, a handwritten poster, a pamphlet) its mode of exposure. Walks, performances and fortuitous encounters produce records, scattered vestiges that exhibit "a fragile materiality, weak as a residue, disposable and forgettable as the stories of the people the artist found along the paths of America" (MELENDI, 2016) and, now, through Africa's paths. Paulo Nazareth meets subjects

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[17] Not for nothing, the performance was remade in a prison cell in Nottingham as part of the *Impossible Prison* exhibition in 2008.

from this peripheral community – which does not respect borders – and, at the same time, shelters it in his own body.

Árvore do Esquecimento participates in the *Cadernos de África project*[18], which aims, in the artist's words, "to know what there is of my house in Africa" and "to know what there is of Africa in my house". To this end, he visits African cities, again assuming his role as a collector (of objects and images) open to the encounters he has with marginalized subjects, holders of experiences, stories and knowledge as diverse as they are invisible. The turn, the return and the resuming are not gestures of identity fixation, producing rather alliance and exchange, explaining affinities between blacks, indigenous people, caboclos, migrants, exiles and nomads in a community that is constituted by the separation and updating, in the present, the affinities of an "insurgent mythical time" (OLIVEIRA, 2014). The counter-spell rite – walking backwards around the tree – is less an identity return to the past than a "decolonial turn"[19] (or counter-colonial), which produces a *reverse time* to that of violence and erasure (of memory and knowledge). The result of this reversal is the reactivation – through materials and precarious encounters backed by the daily struggle and the "insurgency" – of ancestral alliances.

Part of his travels – work in progress –, the films produced by Nazareth are also what allows the rite to circulate beyond the present of performance. If it acts in the present to "undo" an ancestral rite through the film, it continues to act in the future (in other presents, in other contexts): the 437 turns become infinite and, in front of each spectator, the reverse gesture is virtually redone endlessly.

Apprentice-body, paradoxical time

The performance is well known: while an orchestra – *Monotone Symphony* – plays the music for 20 minutes on a single note, followed by 20 minutes of silence, Yves Klein directs the production of his *Anthropometries*, a series of monochromes painted through the body of naked models (Figure 14). The result is large scale abstract paintings, in which the movement of models on paper is inscribed. Much has been said about this work of unquestionable importance in the history of art, integrating itself on several fronts of the late modern avant-garde (monochrome painting, abstractionism, *action painting*, the art of performance). Not without reason, many criticisms have also

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[18] Blog of the project "Cadernos de África". Available from: https://bit.ly/34r4Tb5. Access on: Nov. 4, 2019.

[19] I freely call upon the concept (CASTRO-GOMEZ; GROSFOGUEL, 2007).

been made to the work, since high, in this case, is the price it charges for widening the limits of art: the undeniable objectification of women's bodies.

If this critical repertoire cannot be resumed, it is because the relationship between Klein's *Anthropometries* (1960) and Ana Pi's film *Noirblue* (2018) is fortuitous, almost unfeasible. In addition to the similarity between the blue of the veil that connects the body of the dancer and that of the paint that covers the body of the models, I am interested in emphasizing, however, the contrast between the temporal shape that supports both works. If, in Klein, freed from the weight of past experience, the future seems to open up to the artist's fearless exploration, in Ana Pi's film, upon its arrival, the future carefully asks permission (protection, blessing) from the elders. In turn, on its arrival (because it also does not fail to arrive, to come), the past carefully asks permission (protection, blessing) from the youngest.

Figure 14: Performance in *Anthropometries* (KLEIN, 1960).

Figure 15: Learning in *Noirblue* (PI, 2018).

Figure 16: The avant-garde flight in *Saut dans le vide* (KLEIN, 1960).

Figure 17: The mortal jump in *Noirblue* (PI, 2018).

As a good avant-garde, Klein is, in fact, a fearless artist, which is explained almost literally in another work, a photograph in which he throws himself from the window of a building, as if he could fly. This "leap into the void"[20] seems to rely less on space than on time: it bets on a future open to invention, which requires, therefore, to free itself from the weight of the body, experience and tradition. To remember the well-known categories with which Reinhart Koselleck (2006) characterizes modern progress, the *horizon of expectation* widens as it separates itself from the *space of experience*: "The expectations for the future detach from everything the old experiences were able to offer". In *Le saut dans le vide*, the photograph is edited, forged to demonstrate or prove the possibility of this leap towards a future free from the burden of the past (although it is necessary, in fact, to recognize the irony present in Klein's work).

There is another leap in *Noirblue*: at a certain point in the film, Ana Pi meets the Genies of Babi (*Les Génies de Babi*), learns from them some steps (Figure 15)

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[20] *Le saut dans le vide* (KLEIN, 1960).

and films a long and beautiful sequence of the dance they call *Roukaskass*. In the *freestyle* battle, some "pass the ball" to others, jump and spin in a choreography marked by improvisation, skill and inventiveness of street dance. Sometimes, the jump is launched forward to be cushioned with the arms and the chest; in others, it is a "mortal jump" backwards. (Figure 17). The urban dance of the Babi geniuses, as well as the performances of Ana Pi, seem to draw their strength from their invention of the black and popular tradition that informs, explicitly or "undergroundly," the manifestations of hip hop.

In its fragmentary form, inspired on travel books, *Noirblue* avoids falling back into a narcissistic gesture, precisely by assuming a temporal form that puts the film in direct dialogue with the history of ancestry and the black diaspora: the circular relationship between the beginning – blessing from the elders – and the ending of the film – blessing from the younger ones – respects a temporality that is not built on forgetting, but on memory. Something that Ricardo de Moura, Pai Ricardo, accurately summarizes, in reiterating, in the classes he teaches at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG): "I am a contemporary of my ancestry"[21].

As Wanderson Flor Nascimento (2018) reminds us, in the wake of John Mbiti's thought, in many traditional African societies, the future is not based on the denial of the past, but on its deep and constant knowledge. If, in the West, forgetting is a condition for creation, for traditional African perspectives, the revival of memory is what makes creation an instrument against serfdom.

If the child does not start, but follows, however, the child "does not follow monotonously," but in "inversions, displacements, fissures" (NASCIMENTO, 2018, p. 592). The valorization of memory, over the bet in an inaugural image of the future, does not prevent change, freedom and invention. An apprentice, Ana Pi follows the ancestors' tracks: they are scattered, subtle, often invisible. The way in which they appear in the film speaks of this *paradoxical time*: on the one hand, a time of discovery, in which one experiences the dazzle of a first encounter. On the other hand, a time of returns, recurrences, survivals in which the reason for the dazzle is deeply felt, the fact that all that – the encounters and discoveries in Sub-Saharan Africa – is not so new. After all, it is linked to the experience of a people (or peoples) with whom the artist has a relationship as familiar as it is mysterious, not evident. It is

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[21] Twice, Pai Ricardo participated in the subject "Catar Folhas: saberes e fazeres do povo de axé" [knowledge and practice of the people of axé], offered to undergraduate and graduate students through the UFMG's Traditional Knowledge Transversal Formation Program. Also taught by the teachers Mãe Efigênia Maria da Conceição (Mametu Muiandê), Pedrina de Lourdes Santos and Nilsia Lourdes dos Santos (Yalodè Ósún Ifé World Wide).

as if, along with the discovery of an unknown world (since never before visited), came the suspicion of a deep knowledge that she already brought with her. This suspicion would even have been anticipated by the gentleman she meets at the beginning of the trip (the one who plays, who knows, the role of Exu, opening the way to the paradox): "You already know that you are from here, right?". In other words, given the paradoxical temporality that structures the film, wandering (movement of discovery) will suddenly reveal itself circular (movement of reunion) and the circle (which makes young people and ancestors contemporary) will reveal wandering (matter of invention and freedom).

In *Noirblue*, we could mention not only these two movements – the circle and the wandering –, but a third one that derives or escapes from its dialectic: the *elevation*. After all, the performance with the veil is that of a body that rises, whose haughtiness does not distance it from the experiences it lives but allows to elaborate them with care and lightness. Something that is expressed not only in the performances linked by the blue veil, but also in the words, said thoughtfully and firmly. All these movements that are apprehended in the gesture and in the words of Ana Pi – the circle, the wandering and the elevation – constitute a bet on fabulation, in the reinvention of new images based on what, even in the face of a historical erasure, remains resilient. Fabulation, perhaps, in the sense that Barros and Freitas (2018) revised the concept, in dialogue with the claims of *critical fabulation* (in Saidiya Hartman) and *afro-fabulation* (in Tavia Nyong'o)[22].

Dance: war, healing, fertility

Unlike the other two works – *Ungüento* and *Árvore do Esquecimento* –, at first glance, *Noirblue* could not define itself *stricto sensu* as a counter-spell rite. If I insist on the hypothesis, it is to take seriously and draw consequences from the author's own claim by expressing the desire that dance be an experience of war, healing, fertility.

Marked by improvisation and performed in open spaces, dance, in the film, is a relational device, allowing Ana Pi to be, but being available to relate to landscapes, sounds and people. Not for nothing, they dance on bridges, stairs, open spaces, underground passages. The blue veil hides – throughout the film, we rarely

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[22] Attentive to the experiences of contemporary black cinema in Brazil, Kênia Freitas and Laan Barros bring the processes of fabulation closer to the context of performance: "The films mentioned above, we believe, move Afro-fabulous aspects due to the presence of black bodies that refuse the representative determinations of the fictional or documentary. With direct contributions from the plastic, visual, dance and performance arts, the films fabled black existences from multiple connections and relationships" (BARROS; FREITAS, 2018, p. 114).

see the artist's face – and proposes a relationship. It "reveals what is most hidden in the history that I was told". The dance with the blue veil allows to pass, as the artist wants, from the invisible ("under the bridge, several works being done") to the visible (on the bridge, several connections being made, exchanges, a lot of movement, a lot of communication, memory alive, the story being worked in several languages). It also allows you to remain with your feet on the ground and, at the same time, rise up to dance and elaborate, in body and in words, the experience of the journey.

Through dance – linked to the blue veil – Ana Pi recognizes the unknown and overlooks what is known. This can be, quite freely, a definition for magical knowledge. "I dive again, I dive in these gestures and the dancers ask me: if you never came here, how did you already know?"[23]

The narration of the film encodes this temporal form that makes the future a retake of past practices – a reactivation of memory – and that makes the past a matter of future invention (fabulation). In the film, it is as if words have the power – a magic one? – to find a future based on precarious signs that the past bequeathed.

At first glance, capable of joining a poetic-reflexive tradition of the documentary – I think of Chris Marker and Agnès Varda, but there are others –, Ana Pi's voice-over narrative has, however, a particular inflection, if thought in the context of this magical knowledge that we claim here. I refer not only to the meaning of the words, but to the way of enunciating them. One by one, the words are spoken with the care that is marked as such: words of war, healing, fertility. These are situated, positioned words that are enunciated from a precise place, a place of belonging, but relational and in transit.

As the important ethnographic work of Jeanne Favret-Saada (1977) teaches us, in witchcraft contexts, the word is act and power. That is why, in this context, one does not "speak for speaking," and that is why there is no statement that is neutral, un-implicated: in witchcraft, she tells us, "the word is war". I could not say that, in *Noirblue*, words participate strictly in a wizarding context: running through the entire film, the voice comments on the images, reflects and elaborates poetically on the experience they show. But there is another function that accompanies it and that gives the narration a very unique, singular modulation. The voice seems to respond materially to the temporal paradox that the film engenders: how to deal with the contemporaneity of my ancestry? How to deal with the recognizable in the realm of the unknown and with unrecognizable (opacity) at the center of what was thought to

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[23] Narration in *Noirblue* (PI, 2018).

be known? Perhaps, giving words the power to establish, to institute: at the same time clairvoyance and invention, words create worlds (worlds in which "we speak with our own mouths," where "the wheel is even bigger" and "there is room for things we did not even imagine "). These are worlds that paradoxically others have inhabited and continue to inhabit. The designation here, at the same time, redounds and founds, repeats and releases, submerges and raises: "Black. Black. Black". Connecting these two worlds – what is imagined and what is already there, even if hidden under the rubble – is not it a healing operation?

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