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Facing the Colonial Scar: Body and Black Agency in Brazilian Audiovisual

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Abstract

This article examines, in Brazilian short films from the 2010s, the formal and political procedures engaged in imaginative appropriation of colonial trauma, specifically slavery and the African diasporas. Based on the analyses of *Experiencing the Flooding Red* (Michelle Mattiuzzi, 2016), *The White Death of the Black Wizard* (Rodrigo Ribeiro, 2020), and *New World* (Natara Ney and Gilvan Barreto, 2020), the emphasis given to the body among the elements of fabulation of the past and of resistance against the structures of the colonial potentate is demonstrated. Special attention is given to the way in which the works emphasize the political agency of black subjects and, equally, represent individual and collective experiences based on the tensions between image, sound, and word.

Keywords
Brazilian Audiovisual; Colonial Trauma; Slavery and the African diasporas; Body; Aesthetics and Politics.

Roots of Brazil

Since the mid-2010s a set of Brazilian films and videos, in styles aligned with documentary and fiction as well as with more experimental works, has focused its narratives around the figuration of the body based on states of convalescence, trauma, or subjection to death. Sensitive form of the subject in the world, the body is depicted in these works under a myriad of formal inventions and, especially, as a privileged means of visualizing power mechanisms employed by the Brazilian State and by micropower devices against specific social groups, as a result of their class, race, and/or ethnicity. Despite focusing on contemporary Brazil, some of the works refer back, directly or indirectly, to the process of national formation, announcing a present inhabited by the ghosts of the colonial potentate.

Within the more general framework being referred to, one group is composed of works that recover the African diasporas and the lives of black people subjected to the colonial slavery mode of production in Brazil – which lasted until the year 1888, in spite of the country's independence in 1822. My interest in this article is to focus on how the brutal violence of the dehumanization process of enslaved subjects, through the reification and commercialization of their lives, is at the core of audiovisual works made by black Brazilian filmmakers and artists, such as the short films *Experiencing the Flooding Red* (Michelle Mattiuzzi, 2016), *The White Death of the Black Wizard* (Rodrigo Ribeiro, 2020), and *New World* (Natara Ney and Gilvan Barreto, 2020).[1] Instead of a macrostructural view around major historical events, the formal and political expedient of these works elects a more circumscribed perspective, situated around the body as a means of fabulation of the past and of resistance against colonial power structures. There is an emphasis on the gesture, on the gazes, and, especially, on the voice, here understood in a broad sense: from the sonic materiality evidenced by the singing to the oral emission of the word in the form of verbal discourse. This last precision is imperative for not only the reason that sound is decisive in theworks discussed, but because when I refer to the body I am not separating it from the subject.[2] It is a position in consonance with the perspective of the works themselves, which underline, in opposition to the reifying yoke of slavery, the struggle of black people as agents of their own histories.

In order to better singularize the above mentioned works, it is worth considering them in concise comparison with a Brazilian filmography of the 1970s and 1980s that commonly represented slavery through historical dramas around the abolition process and the eminent figures of the period.3 If it is true that part of this production recognizes the enslaved as political agents[4], one cannot ignore that, mostly directed by white filmmakers, they impute to black characters the function of bearing "the burden of national allegory; they become 'carriers' of signs meant to point to something other than themselves.

[1] Hereinafter referred to as the acronyms *EVD*, *AMBFN*, and *NM*.

[2] Despite being evident, the statement is necessary given that an objectification of the black subject, such as that endorsed by the colonial regimes of modernity, and today underlying a variety of racist manifestations, rests precisely on the reduction of the subject to the body, or more specifically to the fantasies imposed onto its surface. According to Mbembe, the racist complex triggers the replacement of the being by the simulacrum of appearances, by an imaginary structure, an outer casing that covers the subject: "this massive coating of nonsense, lies, and fantasies has become a kind of exterior envelope whose function has since then been to stand as substitute for the being, the life, the work, and the language of Blacks" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 39). A duplicate is created, a mask that conceals and relegates to the background the true being, "by granting skin and color the status of fiction based on biology" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 2).

[3] In the example of *Sinhá Moça* (Osvaldo Sampaio and Anglo-Argentinian Tom Payne, 1953), *João Negrinho* (Oswaldo Censoni, 1958), *Ganga Zumba* (Cacá Diegues, 1963), *A marcha* (Oswaldo Sampaio, 1972), *Xica da Silva* (Cacá Diegues, 1976), *Quilombo* (Cacá Diegues, 1984), and *Chico Rei* (Walter Lima Jr, 1985). An exception to the predominance of white directors and naturalistic historical dramas is Zózimo Bulbul's *Alma no Olho* (Soul in the Eye) (1973).

[4] Stam (1997) cites, for instance, films that presented alternative paths to freedom, such as the *Quilombo* of Zumbi in *Ganga Zumba*, Teodoro's smuggling in *Xica da Silva*, and economic autonomy or, in the author's terms, black capitalism in *Chico Rei*.

The quilombos, for example, at times become the sign for national liberation" (Stam, 1997, p. 318).[5] More importantly, the previous filmography, in general, approaches the colonial past and even the violence of slavery with a filmic form that does not put under suspicion the regime of representation. A classical narrative style is chosen, at least with regard to an enunciation whose privilege is that of intelligibility rather than opacity, be it that of the means or that of the narrated plot.

The cited works of Mattiuzzi, Ribeiro, Ney, and Barreto are situated, if not in the antipodes, in a considerably distinct position from such national filmography. Besides the circumscription of the body, previously mentioned, the coping with colonialism does not occur without first putting under re-evaluation the audiovisual form itself, without questioning the very possibility of representing the past in a closed diegesis. Under these conditions, *EVD*, *AMBFN*, and *NM* share a reflexive and experimental approach. Although the aesthetic choices depend on both the short film format[6] and the production issues, our hypothesis is that they equally respond to the difficult translation of colonial violence, while also being mobilized in view of colonial traces in present time. In order to better delineate this hypothesis and the central problem of the article, it is necessary to comprehend how the Brazilian historical past is depicted in the form of trauma in the works.

From the colonial wound to the imaginative appropriations of History

Etymologically, the word trauma, of Greek origin, refers to a wound inflicted on the body. This sense is not at all foreign to slavery in Brazil. As Abdias Nascimento underlines, a new society was built on the bending and breaking of the backbone of the enslaved African. The plethora of horrors inflicted on the corporeity of those subjects, from overwork to the disabilities resulting from punishments and torture carried out by white colonial society, fertilized "the Brazilian soil with their tears, their blood, their sweat, and their martyrdom" (Nascimento, [1978] 2016, p. 57)[7]. Faced with the always insufficient task of translating the barbarity of the colonial enterprise, depriving thousands of lives of value, the notion of trauma can be understood, following the Freudian definition, as an event whose violence carries something of the order of the unassimilable, resisting comprehension and symbolization by part the victims (Seligmann-Silva, 2003). In correspondences with this perspective, and when specifically discussing the experience of racism and its somatic effects on the black person, Grada Kilomba (2010, p. 97) emphasizes the impossibility of attributing a meaning or cognitive comprehension to it, since what is in effect is "the idea of trauma in the sense of an unspeakable experience, a dehumanizing event, to which one does not have adequate words or symbols to respond."

The experience of an event that resists being comprehended or symbolically translated runs through the historical narrative of the Afro-diasporas. It is in this sense that in her work on slavery in the United States, writer and historian Saidiya Hartman asks herself how to retell and recover the lives of enslaved women beyond "the violence that produced numbers, cyphers, and fragments of discourse, which is as close as we come to a biography of the captive and the enslaved" (Hartman, 2008, p. 3). The author recognizes the difficulty of confronting the historical archives that document the slave trade, in which the unimaginable, due to the cruelty and precariousness imposed on the lives of the enslaved, was

[5] As Beatriz Nascimento (2021, p. 164) underlines, in the 1970s the intellectual production in Brazil sought in the phenomenon of *quilombos* an ideology of utopia, a "reinforcement of the Brazilian nationality through the mother lode of popular resistance to forms of oppression".

[6] Due to the difficulty of access to funding for feature films and the inequality of the Brazilian film industry itself, dominated by a white and male elite, Oliveira (2020) stresses that black films are mainly concentrated in the field of short films.

[7] In the original: "o solo brasileiro com suas lágrimas, seu sangue, seu suor e seu martírio".

a daily practice. Under the conditions described, how to tell History, get to know the past, and represent lives, without the risk of relapsing into the libidinal investment and the mere replication of the violence present in the documentations? As Kênia Freitas has been showing (2019; Barros & Freitas, 2018), although directed to the US sociohistorical process, Hartman's reflection is fruitful for thinking about the black Brazilian audiovisual. More than a transposition of ideas from a US author, what is recognized is the intercultural and transnational character involving the different African diasporas, an aspect discussed, for example, by the categories of "amefricanity"[8] (Gonzalez, [1988] 2020) and Black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1993).

As far as the corpus of this article is concerned, the process of seeking an aesthetic and ethical form capable of narrating enslaved lives shares a characteristic common to certain productions of contemporary Brazilian black cinema, namely, the focus on the plurality of experiences of black subjects, the non-essentialization of their experiences (Freitas, 2018). In this sense, "[t]rauma and the experiences of violence and death that indelibly mark black trajectories in the African diaspora will always be present, but cannot be the sole determinant," since "[w]hen thinking about black cinema, it is crucial to look beyond the trauma" (Oliveira, 2020, p. 34).

Faced with the challenge of depicting the trauma of slavery without incurring in an essentialization of its victims, *EVD*, *AMBFN*, and *NM* operate according to an "imaginative appropriation of history" (Gilroy, 1993, p. 222),[9] through which social memory about slavery and of the enslaved is rewritten in a spirit of formal experimentation. The stance dialogues with what Hartman (2008, p. 11) defines as "critical fabulation".[10] Given the limitations of the archives on slavery, the author opts for a narrative of History based on imagining what cannot be verified. The documents serve as base material for works that privilege "to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done. By throwing into crisis 'what happened when' and by exploiting the 'transparency of sources' as fictions of history", preferring an open and even opaque narrative form (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). Having said that, the central problem of this article is to analyze which formal and political strategies are summoned in those three films in order to do justice to a historical experience whose barbarity resists representation and, without losing sight of this, to preserve the subjectivities and the position of black people as agents of their social realities. I will privilege an aesthetic analysis of the short films based on the figuration of the body, montage, and articulation between image and sound, resorting, more briefly, to historical and cultural aspects concerning the black diasporas. The expedient will take into consideration, lastly, how the body is conceived in the works from different formal traditions: by the artistic performance reworked in the audiovisual context, by the reemployment of archive materials, and by the interaction between the body on stage and the acousmatic voice of documentary inflection.

Under the image and the singing of those who came before

Experiencing the Flooding Red is situated around a performance by Mattiuzzi. Dressed in white, she walks through the streets of Rio de Janeiro towards the Zumbi dos Palmares Memorial (Fig. 1). While making her way, she bears a facial metal object, made in the likeness of the Flanders mask used by European colonizers on slaves from different colonies, including Brazil – as seen in Jacques Etienne Arago's *Punishment of Slaves* (1839). According to Kilomba, one of the authors who inspired Mattiuzzi's project, the mask was an instrument of the colonial project for more than three hundred years. If officially it was "used by white masters to prevent enslaved Africans from eating sugar cane or cocoa beans while working

[8] In the original: "amefricanidade".

[9] Gilroy refers to the historical turn of writer Toni Morrison and other African American novelists, especially in works devoted to slavery.

[10] See Barros and Freitas (2018) and Freitas (2019).

on the plantations," the primary function, in truth, "was to implement a sense of speechlessness and fear, inasmuch as the mouth was a place of both muteness and torture" (Kilomba, 2010, p. 16).

Figures 1 and 2

Source: Experiencing the Flooding Red, 2016

The mask worn by Mattiuzzi is held on by red laces. Two lateral ones, each going around one side of the head, and a vertical one. In addition to tying them, the artist fixes them to the head with needles that pierce the forehead and cheeks (Fig. 2). There are also lancing metal pieces going through the upper and lower lips, immobilizing the mouth, which is seen at the end of the film, with the removal of the mask. Given these elements, one could ask: how does *EVD* avoid the repetition of the colonial trauma, and specifically of the violence against the bodies of black people?

Initially, it is essential to understand the anti-illusionist reflexivity of the work, which demarcates a distancing from the representational regime. Mattiuzzi's walk is thus interspersed with scenes of the making of the mask and the process of piercing her mouth and face. A similar explicitness of the means of enunciation is found through the use of the freeze-frame on a plane with the gaze at the camera (Fig. 2), when the artist directly interpellates the audience, placing them as an accomplice of the action, obstructing distanced contemplation, the comfort of scopophilic voyeurism. In addition to these strategies there is the slow fade-out in red color for the transition of certain scenes. Besides allusively emerging the images in a bloodstain, the choice for red instead of the color black, conventionally used in cinema for the passage between shots or scenes via fade-out, "denaturalizes conventions of (in)visibility in the cinematic language"[11] (Freitas, 2019), by making explicit the materiality of the filmic form.

The particular manner in which the body is signified in an artistic performance must also be considered in *EVD*. Works of this nature usually conceive "the 'body as an object' to subvert cultural norms and explore social issues" (Mcmillian, 2015, p. 3). A performer, thus, deals with his body as a material, physically exploring it, manipulating it, moving it, making it conspicuous by treating its elementary parts outside an illusionistic representational regime. The relationship of an artist to his performance "is no longer one of an actor to his role, even if that role is his actual one, as the Theatre wanted it to be." Instead, he becomes "the point of passage for energy flows – gestural, vocal, libidinal, etc. – that traverse him without ever standing still in a fixed meaning or representation" (Féral, 1982, pp. 173-174). It is in these terms that in *EVD* Mattiuzzi's body assumes the violence of the colonial regime against black subjects. It is not a matter of staging suffering or of introjecting an enslaved character into a diegesis detached from the real world, but of situating, through physical aggression, the ghosts of the past in the present and material reality of the body. The presentification is corroborated by the performance being carried out in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, among passersby and cars, allowing the performance to operate displacements and small variations of the real space, at least during the passage of the artist (Féral, 1982).

[11] In the original: "desnaturaliza convenções de (in)visibilidade na linguagem cinematográfica".

The violence inflicted by Mattiuzzi recollects the colonial brutality through a volitional and conscious act about the colonial trauma, and not from a mere distanced reproduction of the latter. The anti-illusionism resulting from the announcement of the means of preparation, the artistic performance, and the elements of audiovisual enunciation makes it difficult to stage the action in a closed and finished representation of the past – along the lines of certain historical dramas. The reflexive emphasis of the film and of the performance renounces the repetition of trauma, opting for the retrieval of its sequelae under the political agency of the artist.

The critical and open remembrance of the colonial wound equally depends on a dense temporality, perceptible from the montage of three movements. First, the coming and going between the performance and its preparation. In parallel, there is an overlap between layers of the Brazilian historical past (Zumbi's bust; allusion to the Flanders mask), the experience of African-Americans in the South of the United States (evoked by the musical score, as we shall see ahead), and the present time of the performance (its realization in the streets of contemporary Rio de Janeiro). Lastly, there is the repetition of filmic procedures such as the fade out in red and the musical score. As Freitas (2019) noted, in dialogue with Tavia Nyong'o's writings on Afro-fabulation, Mattiuzzi's short film operates on the idea of a black poly-temporality, "not just superimposing the past on the present, but complexifying the fabular duration of the performance."[12] In this way, "Michelle Mattiuzzi's performative afro-fabulation puts in evidence [...] blood as a founding element of black experiences in the past and in the present"[13].

Figures 3 and 4

Source: Experiencing the Flooding Red, 2016

An effect equally resulting from the densified temporality of the film are the collective and diverse processes of black resistance. In this sense, one aspect, as far as I know not much explored in the analyses of *EVD,* is the intertextuality resulting from the musical score, with the gospel blues *No More, My Lawd*, by Henry Jimpson Wallace and his group. The voice singing the song belongs to a prisoner at Parchman Farm, a penitentiary in the state of Mississippi in the United States. The institution is known for having replicated until the second half of the 20th century, among the inmates, mostly African-Americans, the plantation model of the 19th century, despite the end of slavery. The music was recorded in the penitentiary itself in 1947 by white ethnomusicologist and researcher Alan Lomax. In his writings, he recounts how at Parchman Farm and other Southern penitentiaries communal chants, heir to African traditions and plantation work songs, were a powerful means of consolation, cure, and resistance against the brutality to which prisoners were subjected (Loman, 1993). In *No More, My Lawd*, Henry Jimpson's sweet, melancholy voice, lulled by the rhythm of a hollow percussion beat, sings a religious lyric about a refusal to return – to a life devoid

[12] In the original: "não apenas sobrepondo o passado no presente, mas complexificando a duração fabular da performance".

[13] In the original: "a afro-fabulação performativa de Michelle Mattiuzzi coloca em evidência [...] o sangue como elemento fundante das experiências negras no passado e no presente".

of value? –, and about having found a place to finally rest. Coming from a historical context in which its interpreter was facing the insidious continuity of slavery in a post-abolition context, the song reinforces the transits between past and present that exist in Mattiuzzi's action. From the bridge between the History of Brazil and that of the United States, the work weaves a collective memory of the pains, struggles, and cures of the Black Atlantic, particularly of *Améfrica*.

The process of de-individualization and resistance suggested by the song is corroborated by the images of Zumbi's bust, which open and close the film. The figure of the best-known leader of the Quilombo dos Palmares brings to the work the memory of the ancestors who would rise up in favor of a social organization against colonial oppression. Differently from films such as *Ganga Zumba* (1963) and Quilombo (1984), both by Cacá Diegues, the demand of *quilombola* leaders from the past appears in *EVD* from an ancestry that inhabits the time of now. The work's poly-temporality places Mattiuzzi's performance under the gaze and the company of Zumbi. The final image of the raised fist in the air flanks the bust of the Palmares leader and, figuratively, into him it integrates (Fig.4).

Ghostlinesses of freedom

The heart of *The White Death of the Black Wizard* is a suicide letter written by Timóteo, a young urban enslaved, in-between 18 and 20 years old, who lived in the 19th century, in Bahia. Director Rodrigo Ribeiro found the document in Jackson Ferreira's (2008) master's thesis, *Loucos e pecadores: suicídio na Bahia do século XIX* (Madmen and sinners: suicide in 19th century Bahia). According to the research, Timóteo shot himself with a pistol, hitting the left side of his chest, in 1861, among other possible reasons because he did not wish to be sold in a public square. The text of the letter is shared in its entirety in the film. The word is articulated with video images made by the director and appropriated visual documents – photographs and excerpts from Brazilian films featuring black people working.

Already in 1959, Clóvis Moura (2020, p. 59) placed suicide alongside individual or collective escapes, *quilombos*, guerrillas, insurrections, and other means by which the enslaved subject "undermined the foundations of slave relations, creating a galaxy of maladjustments unknown to the political leaders of the time"[14]. There are, hence, powerful socio-historical implications surrounding Timothy's gesture in face of the slavery mode of production, discussed in part by Ferreira (2004). Without disregarding them, my emphasis here is on how *AMBFN* formally explores the processes of subjectivation and the desire for freedom inherent in Timothy's words and action. "[The] suicide can also emerge as an act of becoming a subject. Deciding not to live under the white master's conditions is a final performance in which the Black subject claims subjectivity," as Kilomba (2010, p. 117) ponders, recognizing that, ultimately, it is, on the part of enslaved people, an act of autonomy over one's own life. It is along this path, I argue, that *AMBFN* takes Timóteo's letter as a testimonial matrix to which the visual archives, videos, and the musical score – the track *Eká*, by Juçara Marçal and Cadu Tenório – will directly respond. Despite the heterogeneous genesis, image, sound, and text forge an organic articulation that hypostatizes inner life, giving it a sensible form, a materiality. The fable amplifies the letter, a historical and testimonial document that is irreducible, in its affection, to the reification of the slavery mode of production.

[14] In the original: "solapava nas suas bases as relações escravistas, criando uma galáxia de desajustes desconhecida pelos dirigentes políticos da época".

Figures 5 and 6

Source: The White Death of the Black Wizard, 2020

Figures 7 and 8

Source: The White Death of the Black Wizard, 2020

AMBFN operates a process common to found footage cinema, that of the resignification of archive materials, displaced from their original context through the rupture of the "direct link between the image and its historical referent, or between the semantic content of the material and the intention with which it was filmed"[15] (Weinrichter, 2005, p. 44). These choices in *AMBFN* can be understood in light of what British-Ghanaian director, John Akomfrah (2017, p. 27), considers to be an "absence of ruins" in diasporic lives, namely, of monuments, tangible fragments, and documents that constitute their memories. Such historical amnesia urges, in cinema, to recover the archives of black presences not as objective evidence, but from the ghosts, fabrications, and fictions they preserve with them. It deals with the vestiges of the past with basis on the ambiguity they reveal when reinserted in new narratives. It is in these terms that Ribeiro (2020) comments on the importance of the use of visual archives in his short film in order to restore the "materiality of slavery". Use and deviation, since the appropriated film excerpts date back to a post-abolition context, therefore, they are inserted there through what is spectral in them, from a past that insists on haunting them.

The severity of Timothy's letter is echoed in the images of underground, dark doors (Fig. 6), black people working (Fig. 7), and cemeteries. At times, a dark hue hangs over the archive images, an unstable cinereous (Fig. 5), a twilight characteristic of what is about to disappear. Whether due to the preservation conditions of the archive material or to Ribeiro's manipulation, the filmic form depicts a transitory world in decomposition. At the same time, *Ekâ* envelops the images with Juçara Marçal's roars in a noise/dark ambient soundscape. The song is part of *Anganga*, Marçal and Tenório's album containing contemporary interpretations of *vissungos*, the work songs of enslaved people. The musicians based themselves on the

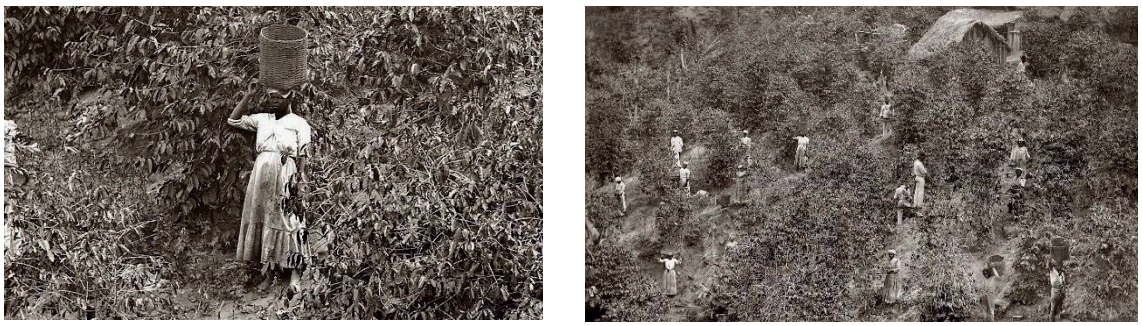
[15] In the original: "vínculo directo entre la imagen y su referente histórico, o entre el contenido semántico del material y la intención con la que fue filmado".

ones that were registered by Aires da Mata Machado Filho in the book *O Negro e o Garimpo em Minas Gerais* (Black Men and Mining in Minas Gerais), in the 1920s, and interpreted by Clementina de Jesus, Geraldo Filme, and Tia Doca da Portela, in the album *O Canto dos Escravos* (The Singing of the Slaves) (1982). *Eká* contains no singing, only the ghostly roars of Marçal, apparently coming from the otherworld, from another time, like "[a] legitimate ancestral outcry"[16] (Ribeiro, 2020). The noise of the sound and the darkness of the images cast over Timóteo's text a "black light", an atmosphere of non-transparency. The term has been used by Jota Mombaça (2020) for works by black artists in which they depict "darkness as a non-representational field where there is no dominant gaze able to cut out bodies as objects"[17], operating "as an efficient device for the politics of black opacity. It dematerializes blackness as an object of the white-colonial gaze."[18]

Figures 9 and 10

Source: The White Death of the Black Wizard, 2020

Figures 11 and 12



Source: The White Death of the Black Wizard, 2020

The montage of the archives causes the bodies there visible to be depicted, in part, as figures, forms resulting from experimentation over the surface of the images. When discussing the notion of the human figure in cinema, Brenez (1998, p. 36) comments on films in which the plastic work leads to a condition in which "the body is not a given and perhaps never will be, the body results from a syntax and a visual and sound parataxis that does not hesitate to leave it under the state of perpetual sketch".[19] It is possible to approximate *AMBFN* to this description, since the film makes the black presence in the

[16] In the original: "[u]m legítimo grito ancestral".

[17] In the original: "a escuridão como um campo não-representacional onde não há um olhar dominante capaz de recortar corpos como objetos".

[18] In the original: "como um dispositivo eficiente para as políticas da opacidade negra. Ela desmaterializa a negritude como um objeto do olhar branco-colonial".

[19] In the original: "le corps n'est pas déjà donné et il ne le sera peut-être jamais, le corps résulte d'une syntaxe ou d'une parataxe visuelle et sonore qui n'hésite pas à le laisser à l'état d'esquisse perpétuelle".

archives susceptible to Ribeiro's interference. The figures are under an open signification, between the colonial ghosts and the possibility of constituting a counter-memory of slavery.

Timóteo, in turn, also assumes the characteristic of a figure, not indexed to a filmed body, but dispersed throughout the visual-sound mesh of the film. His presence comes through the letter, the words inscribed over the images. The choice of the film not to vocalize the text, not to embody it in a real narrator, allows the missive to reverberate freely over the images and to be welcomed by a set of gazes, faces, and bodies of black people in the visual archives (Figs. 7, 9, 10). If some of them are shown working, echoing the conditions of inequality and dehumanization of slavery, I believe that their presence in the film is particularly important as witnesses. There they assume a listening ear to Timothy's suffering, in a sharing of the sensitive. The articulation between words and human figures composes an intertemporal collective experience, also tributary of the allusion to the *vissungos*, stemming from *Eká*.

The montage itself contributes to the movement between the individual and a social body. At the end of the film, the photograph *Colheita de Café* (Harvest of Coffee) (1882), by Marc Ferrez, is edited into different shots of the subjects. The procedure individualizes them (Fig. 11), contrary to the close-up framing of the original image (Fig. 12), in its imposition of a generic presence in the image. The gazes become visible, revealing personal expressions that escape the schematic organization of the bodies in the space. Through the editing of the photograph, Ribeiro confronts us with the lives that face us, despite the violence that tries to dehumanize them. Only after accentuating the subjects, the image zooms out from the photograph, revealing us the group, a set of different individuals who share a common trait at that moment.

In the movement between Timóteo's feelings and his communal reception, or between individuals and collectivity, the gaze at the camera is obstinate in the film (Fig. 9, 11). If in Mattiuzzi (Fig. 2) the audience was forced to be confronted with violence, prevented from a distanced or objectifying contemplation, in Ribeiro's film the gesture promotes a triangulation. The words of the enslaved are initially received by the diegetic witnesses to, only then, be returned to us, the audience, through the gazes opposing the camera. We are implicated in the life of Timóteo and in other stories of suffering that erected Brazil.

Escape and frontality

Just as *AMBFN*, *New World* critically fabulates the trauma of slavery without resorting to the visual manifestation of pain and violence. If these still remain nuclear in the works, it is as a construct of disjunctive or not always complementary relations between image and sound. Another contiguity with Ribeiro's film is the option to commence in one of the forms of insurgency of the enslaved against the structures of power. In the former the suicide, in the latter the escape. However, it is not an escape from the *Senzalas*, such as the one Moura (2020), Nascimento (2021), and other historians relate in their writings, but rather an escape from the enslaved ship. The arrival in the land that would come to be called Brazil occurs, if not in the condition of a free person, through the desire for freedom. Thus, the fate of the film's main character operates since the opening as a counter-history, or an imagined history.

Figures 13 and 14

Source: New World, 2020

In one of the first scenes of the film, before jumping off the ship (Fig. 13), the voice-over of actress Mohana Uchôa, the protagonist, mentions that she crossed the ocean in the dark hold of the ship, not knowing the destination. The idea of the unknown initially marks the visual narrative, focused on the heroine's journey, on her recognition of the land she arrived at after the escape. Without aiming at a mirroring or symmetry between the author and the film, it seems possible to associate, succinctly, the starting point of *NM* with what the Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant ([1990] 1997) defined as abyss (in the original, in French, *gouffre*), when reflecting on the petrifying experience lived by Africans deported to the Americas, while facing, without preparation or dare, the unknown. The definition covers the horror of deportation from the standpoint of the belly of the slave ships, the sea, and the erasure caused by everything that is left behind. If Glissant does not identify in the abyss an end, but an experience that, a posteriori, is transformed into knowledge and shared by those who arrived in the new land and by their descendants, *NM* also signals to the possible ways of life stemming from and in spite of the colonial machine.

Although it enacts a fictional universe, in terms of sound the film seems to share characteristics of an expository documentary (Nichols, 2001), especially the organization of fragments of the historical world in a rhetorical or argumentative structure based on the commentary in voice-over, with the verbal enunciation guiding the viewer's attention and assuming a structural importance, while the images are relegated to a secondary function. The allusion is justified by the great importance given to the spoken word as a means of producing meaning in *NM*, whether through Uchôa's voice, or through a narrator who does not appear in the scene. The latter speaks of centuries of exploitation of the land and natural resources in Brazil, based on the massacre of the indigenous, black, and poor populations: "The blood of your people is the cement of almost everything that is erected. It has been 500 years and the mill continues to massacre the same bodies."[20] Thus, there is a temporal disjunction between the images that

[20] In the original: "O sangue dos teus é o cimento de quase tudo que se põe de pé. São 500 anos e a moenda continua massacrando os mesmos corpos."

represent the past and the narration that speaks to us from the point of view of contemporary Brazil. The tension exposes the line of continuity between the colonial trauma and the genocide in the present. It is also worth noting that the narrated text was composed from testimonials of artists, politicians, religionists, and activists, mostly black women, regarding state violence in Brazil.

It would be no exaggeration to attribute to *NM* a type of vococentrism, that is, the prominent place of the voice before all other sounds in a film, since "the presence of a human voice instantly sets up a hierarchy of perception [...] *structures the sonic space that contains it*" (Chion, 1999, p. 5). Such primacy is reinforced by the non-visibility of the narrator. Her identity in the filmic diegesis remains veiled, giving her initially a dubious position between a voice-off and an acousmatic voice[21]. Without a determined location, the narrator seems to possess a transcendent, sovereign knowledge, on the threshold of the so-called "voice of God" of the expository documentary. But this first impression deserves to be pondered. Our defense is that the film plays with the apparent vocal authority, but ends up conferring a meaning to the body in scene from the relationship between the filmic and extra-filmic dimensions. This is due to the audience – at least the Brazilian one – recognizing in the film narrator the voice of actress Zezé Motta. The possibility of identifying the emitting subject partially deconstructs the omniscient nature and omnipotent knowledge typical of the voice of God. The interpretation of the text itself, in its varied moods and tones, in reaction to each piece of information, strips Motta's speech of an authority, reinforcing the subjective inflection.

The choice of the actress for the reading of the text invites the audience familiar with her career to watch the film based on the intertextual relations established with the characters she played previously[22]. When she was young, Motta participated in works that could be discussed in collate with *New World*, since they are equally situated around the social and political agency of black characters against slavery, such as the musical *Arena Conta Zumbi* (Augusto Boal and Guarnieri, 1965) and the films *Xica da Silva* and *Quilombo*, both by Diegues. From a para-textual perspective, the public-political life itself seems to provide other layers of meaning to *NM.* As Lélia Gonzalez points out, Motta's biography involves the "[a] rduous life of a poor young black woman, in a society where the spaces reserved for women, blacks, and the poor are those of exclusion"[23] (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 227); as well as her activism in the Movimento Negro Unificado (Unified Black Movement) (MNU) and the creation of Cidan (Center for the Information and Documentation of the Black Artist) in 1984, a database for the visibility of black actors.

In light of the above, the argument is that the narration suggests points of dialogue between the protagonist of *NM*, Motta's characters, and the actress's militant history. Perhaps the most indisputable of these correspondences, to be examined in another opportunity, would be the common possibility of building nonconforming ways of living and resisting the triple discrimination (of race, gender, and class) generally reserved for black women in Brazilian society (Gonzalez, 2020)[24]. Thus, Uchôa's character carries with her, in the form of a composite figure or body-allegory[25], many voices, and a knowledge shared from

[21] Unlike the voice-off, fully external to the image, the idea of an acousmatic voice refers to a character that speaks from "the off-screen space or that is in the space, but not directly visible in the image" (Chion, 2007). The indeterminate position may confer to this voice the power of the one who sees everything, knows everything, and can do anything (Chion, 1999).

[22] According to Philip Drake (2006), when discussing actors within a star-system, meaning is produced both by performance and by the audience's knowledge of the star's intertextual references.

[23] In the original: "[v]ida dura de jovem negra pobre, numa sociedade onde os espaços reservados para mulheres, negros e pobres são aqueles da exclusão".

[24] Particularly in the text: "A mulher negra na sociedade brasileira: Uma abordagem político-econômica" (The black woman in Brazilian society: An economical-political approach).

[25] At least in the sense that in allegorical narratives usually "the lives of particular individuals are presented as figurations of the founding moment or of the fate of a group, or in which the recapitulation of the past is taken as a disguised discussion of present dilemmas" (Xavier, 2005, p. 341).

the experiences among women, actresses, and black characters.

Figures 15

Source: Quilombo, 1984

Figures 16

Source: New World, 2020

If initially it is the narration that insufflates the images of the colonial past with the blow of a hereafter, in the final scenes of *NM* it is the protagonist herself who is detached from the temporality to which she belongs in the diegesis: as if listening to the voice of Motta (and of the other women), she begins to speak from a point of view of the future, aware of the genocide of indigenous and black people, in force since the process of national formation. In one of the scenes involving this time torsion, the character looks at the camera (Fig. 17), directly interpellating the audience – echoing the procedure in the works of Mattiuzzi (Fig. 2) and Ribeiro (Fig. 9). The protagonist verbalizes and embodies, satirically, the discourse of advocates for the torture and genocide of enslaved and indigenous people. The frontality of the acting corroborates the immediacy of the text, whose form is that of the urgency. If *The White Death of the Black Wizard* invests in the subterranean correspondences that link image, word, and sound, the scene in *NM* presents the text under a regime of scansion, devotee of the rectilinear addressing, in the literal limit, to the audience. The warning from the future, corporally embodied when of the time torsion, impels the character to a rewriting of the past. At the close of the film, she embarks alone in the Atlantic Ocean, leaving behind the land that in the future will be called Brazil, or, nonetheless, preferring other imagined courses of History.

Figures 17 and 18

Source: New World, 2020

Between allegory and life: body, document of many ages

By reclaiming the wounds opened by the trauma of enslavement of black people in Brazil through an experimental form, the critical fabulations of *Experiencing the Flooding Red*, *The White Death of the Black Wizard*, and *New World* situate the modes of insurgency around the body and a collective experience. If the colonial-enslaving enterprise objectified the black subject, reducing them to a property of the white, to a "body of extraction" (Mbembe, 2017, p. 18), pure labor, the works mentioned attribute to corporeity an antinomic intent: to restore the subject, revealing the perspective and political agency over their social realities. In Mattiuzzi, the torture imposed on the body itself in the performance gives a material reality to colonial violence, framing it by the critical eye from the present. The action against one's own body is also at the heart of Timothy's extreme gesture, which is recovered by Ribeiro's film, along with the farewell letter, as manifestations of a subject who has command over their own existence. Finally, Ney and Barreto erect the character of Mohana Uchôa in the form of a body-allegory that embodies violence against black people in Brazil and, at the same time, a counter-history guided by gestures of insurgency.

In the films, the body of black subjects manifests with itself a memory woven with many plotlines and times, "contents of a continent, of their life, of their history, of their past; as if the body were the document"[26], to remember the words of and narrated by Beatriz Nascimento in *Ôrí* (Raquel Gerber, 1989) when mentioning the importance of gestuality in the liberation from the captivities of the present. Similarly, I verified in the works of Mattiuzzi, Ribeiro, Ney, and Barreto what Mombasa (2020, p. 3) discusses about the protagonist Danda, from *Kindred* (1979), by African-American writer Octavia Butler, namely, that "the time machine is not a metal paraphernalia, but the black body itself entangled in distinct timelines by force of the socially conditioned repetition of the regime of unrestricted violence" (Mombasa, 2020, p. 3). With the difference that in the films here discussed the cohabitation of time is equally unleashed by the resistance against power structures.

Notwithstanding the imaginative recovery of colonial History and of the temporalities that intersect on the body, it must be acknowledged that the works discussed are rooted in the present. If the gaze to the camera is singular in each case, it signals, in common, the addressing of the now, surpassing the temporality of the fable to be received by the audience of the present. The gesture, I believe, cannot be detached from the living conditions of black people in contemporary Brazil, who remain the main victims of the Public Security policy[27] and of social inequalities, in terms of salary, education, income distribution,

[26] In the original: "conteúdos de um continente, da sua vida, da sua história, do seu passado; como se o corpo fosse o documento".

[27] According to the Atlas-Violence-2021, in 2019 black people represented 77% of homicide victims, with a chance of being murdered 2.6 times higher than that of non-blacks (Cerqueira et al, 2021).

and political representativeness (IBGE, 2019). The frontality of the gazes opposing the camera, in Mattiuzzi, Ribeiro, Ney, and Barreto, builds a link between the figurative/imagined colonial past and the present. At the same time, it continues a lineage of the gaze as a form of resistance of black people[28] – discussed by hooks (1992), and recovered by Oliveira (2020) to speak of Brazilian black cinemas.

Through the overlapping temporalities, the works discussed, at first centered on individuals (Mattiuzzi, Timóteto, Uchôa's character), bring with them encounters with other historical agents and with common lived experiences, signaling shared black experiences, in their pains, uprisings, and cures. The sound, whether through the musical score or the oral narration, is capital in this rhizomatic and fractal process, which, as far as I can tell, does not crystallize in the form of a historical allegory; with the exception of *New World*. In *EVD* and *AMBFN* there are, it is true, possible convergences with two commonly allegorical features: the reflection on the dilemmas of the present from the recapitulation of the past, and the journey of individuals alluding to the history of a group (Xavier, 2005). But the similarities are limited. In accentuating Mattiuzzi's corporeality and Timothy's subjectivity, the works resist codifying them as signs of what they are not or as strict personifications of a broader reality. Even in Mattiuzzi's film, which evokes slavery through a subject belonging to an ulterior historicity, the performance is too direct – both in the violence over the body and in the explicitness of the work's means of enunciation – to lend itself to an allegorical reading by which it would reveal an idea or a concept. In both films, if the body carries with it other temporalities and is a document of a collective history, it does so without eclipsing the subject, without conforming them to an allegorical synthesis. After all, there is no way to abstract the person/artist Mattiuzzi, nor the subject Timoteo. Recovering a distinction made by the sociologist Guerreiro Ramos, what is at stake is not the "theme of the black person"[29], but the "life of the black person"[30], "something that does not allow itself to be immobilized, it is evasive, protean, multiform, of which, in fact, no definitive version can be given, for it is today what it was not yesterday and it will be tomorrow what it is not today"[31] (Ramos, 1995, p. 215). The emphasis on the experience/the life reclaims the subject aligned to a social history, but not through the full path of allegory. This is an argument that deserves a separate development, but, for the time being, I present it in the form of a first draft, to be properly developed in future writings.

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[28] This politics of the gaze directly opposes what Fanon ([1952]2008) discusses about the white colonial--racist gaze, capable of disfiguring the black person's perception of himself, operating a predetermination of the subject from the outside. As Mbembe (2017) specifies, this economy of the gaze, as an instrument of the colonial-racist complex, fixes itself primarily on the body. See footnote 2.

[29] In the original: "tema do negro".

[30] Ramos (1995, p. 215) attributes the first classification to sociological and anthropological studies in Brazil that focus on the black person as a "thing examined, looked at, seen, sometimes as a mummified being, sometimes as a curious being".

[31] In the original: "algo que não se deixa imobilizar, é despistador, protéico, multiforme, do qual na verdade, não se pode dar versão definitiva, pois é hoje o que não era ontem e será amanhã o que não é hoje".

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