

PERFORMATIVE JOURNEYS FOR THE REENCHANTMENT OF *MUNDOS*

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DOSSIER WORLDS IN PERFORMANCE: 20 YEARS
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ABSTRACT:

In this article, we discuss the work *Mundos* (“Worlds”) and the process of its creation by the collective Teatro do Instante, linked to the Department of Performing Arts at the University of Brasília (UnB). With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, this creative work was reconfigured to occur without the artists’ physical co-presence, a factor that had initially been considered crucial. The interdict unfolded in an exploration that involved not only research on the poetic possibilities and synchronous presence on digital screens but also immersive taletelling into the screens of our minds. We experienced different ways of being together temporally across different distances with and without the intermediation of screens in practices such as shamanic journeys, tele(em)pathetic dialogues and experiments, automatic writing flows, dream recordings,

KEYWORDS

Performance; Creative
process; Body-memory;
Presence; Nature.

consultations, and oracular creations. We revisit and share some traces of this two-and-a-half-year process that, in one way or another, constituted what eventually became the film work *Mundos*.

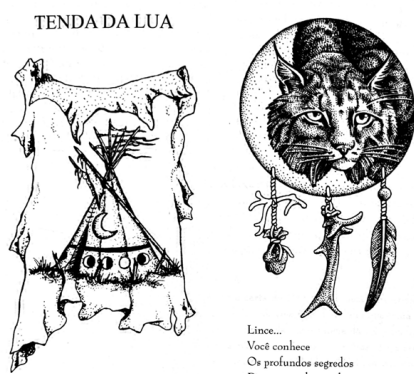
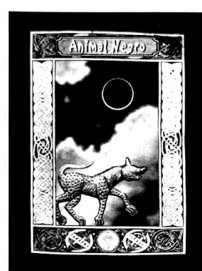
Teatro do Instante is a theatre research collective that has existed since 2009, linked to the research group Poéticas do Corpo from the Department of Performing Arts at the University of Brasília (UnB), which includes the authors of this text. The group is characterized by providing its members with opportunities for continuing education; for its collaborative processes and partnerships with different artists; through the investigation of immersive poetics and in unconventional spaces; for seeking themes and approaches relevant to the historical and sensitive subject; through the investigation of “practices of the self” both as means of self-care and to access states and affections that enhance performative work in its areas of creation and reception; and further developing theoretical and critical research on poetic processes and experiences with repercussions in spaces for discussion; and writing articles and books. Over the last few years, researchers from the collective have created performances, shows, and films, published several articles and organized, produced, and launched the book *Poéticas do Corpo: Instantos em Cena*, by Editora da UnB (2017).

The interest in expanding the field of dramaturgies and further developing the power of the senses and affections has been key to our collective’s study and explorations. The theatrical show *Sonhares*, which we created in 2019, invites people to take a journey between circles and environments and to experience sensory experiences from the approaches of themes such as memory, imagination, death, and ancestry by stimulating the senses with the elements of earth, water, fire, air, and ether as conductive threads, inspired by the material imagination of Gaston Bachelard (2002).

On March 3, 2020, the *Mundos*¹ process began, born out of the collective’s desire to continue creating fields of experience for themselves and others. In that first face-to-face meeting, still unaware of the impact that the pandemic would have on the country, three cards from different oracles were drawn by the three artists: *animal negro* (black animal), suggesting contact with the dark side and the shadows as a possibility of self-transformation (Levy 2002); *tenda da lua* (the tent of the moon), which called for recollection and silence, for a time of contemplation (Sams 2017); and *lince* (lynx), which also suggested keeping silent so as to avoid revealing the secrets of magic and dreams (Sams and Carson 2017). Even before information about the spread of the virus in Brazil and

1. Technical data – Creation and performance: Alice Stefânia, Giselle Rodrigues, and Rita de Almeida Castro – Direction: Tatiana Bittar – Co-direction: Lupe Leal – Art direction: William Ferreira – Sound creation: Ana Borges, Felipe Castro Praude, and Lupa Marques – Direction of photography and montage: Joy Ballard – Lighting: Ana Quintas – Make-up: Alessandra Campos and Deni Moreira – Artistic collaboration: Deborah Dodd – Production: Guilherme Angelim and Guinada Produções.

the long and necessary social isolation that would take place, the cards already heralded a period of retreating, collecting, turning inward, and learning from this.



Tenda da lua, da boa acolhida,
Tempo de contemplação,
Observando os ciclos do corpo,
E a vida que recomeça.

Recollimento e silêncio.
Sagrada Tenda Negra do Ocidente.
Merina e Avó,
Unidas em retiro,
Junto à Mãe Terra.

Lince...
Você conhece
Os profundos segredos
Da magia e dos sonhos
Mas não os revela
A ninguém!

Que eu possa aprender,
Assim como a Esfinge,
A controlar as palavras


Que eu possa aprender,
Assim como o Lince,
A manter o silêncio!

Animal Negro: necessariamente não existe na natureza, como, por exemplo, o leão (não existe, em toda espécie, na cor negra). Este animal significa a "O Negro da Luz", a única força que pode combater a magia negra; ele partilha e recebe esta força da Madona Negra. Representa nossa *Sombra*, nosso lado escuro, que ao ser iluminado pelo conhecimento, nos traz as infinitas possibilidades de autotransformação. A Sombra, quando assumida, é a medida da nossa humanidade, nosso irmão escuro. Quando não a enxergamos, torna-se uma auto-magia negra que impede o nosso crescimento e as soluções de problemas, principalmente nos relacionamentos.

FIGURE 1
The cards: *animal negro*, *tenda da lua*, and *lince*. Source: (Levy 2002; Sams 2017; Sams e Carson 2017)

Black Animal: does not necessarily exist in nature as, for example, a lion (does not show, in all its species, the color black). This animals means "The Black of the Light," the only force that can fight against black magic; it shares and receives this force from the Black Madonna. It represents our Shadow, our dark side, which, as it is illuminated by knowledge, brings us infinite possibilities of self-transformation. The Shadow, once adopted, is the measure of our humanity, our dark brother. When we do not see it, it becomes a dark self-magic that hinders our growth and problem-solving, especially in relationships.

Tent of the Moon, of the good welcoming,
Temple of contemplation,
Observing the cycles of the body,
And the life that starts anew.
Gathering and silence.
Sacred Dark Tent of the West.
Girl and Grandmother,
United in retreat,
With Mother Earth.
Lynx...
You know
The deep secrets



Of magic and dreams
But do not reveal them
To anyone!
That I may learn,
As did the Sphynx,
To control words
That I may learn,
As did the Lynx,
To keep silence!

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the creative work was abruptly reconfigured to take place without the physical co-presence of the artists, a factor which we had initially considered crucial. Although we had some anxieties due to the forced distance and the impossibility of sharing skin-to-skin touch, the smells exchanged by the proximity of bodies, the moods felt at a glance, our curiosities were fed from the attitude of simplifying an act. At first, instead of worrying about how virtual technology could serve our process as a resource and device for dramaturgical construction, we chose to face technological devices and the virtual as triggers of experience in which the technological apparatus is somehow forgotten, giving way to involvement with the experience.

The interdict unfolded in an exploration that involved not only research on the poetic possibilities and synchronous presence on digital screens, but also dived into the depths and fables of our mental screens. We experienced different ways of being together temporally across different distances with and without the intermediation of screens, in practices such as shamanic journeys, tele(em)pathetic dialogues and experiments, automatic writing flows, dream recordings, oracular consultations and creations, foot baths with rosemary, drinking Artemisia tea, contemplating the sunset... We cultivated a collective time for poetic sharing and impressions both at the time of the experience itself and in subsequent dialogues about it.²

Since the beginning of the process, we were interested in exploring the physical possibilities themselves and their relationship with the world or with different worlds. And so, we sought and allowed ourselves to experiment with different devices and modes of creation, and these left traces in our work. Regarding the different layers that a creative process leaves behind along the way, we recall Kastrup (2007, 27), who, investigating invention, takes up the etymology of the Latin word *inveniere*, linked to “finding relics or archaeological remains.” She adds:


2. In the following link, you can watch a six-minute video that brings together a compilation of images from the first stage of the process <https://youtu.be/Z9WPksmTN-k>.

Invention implies a duration, a work with leftovers [...]. It is a practice of groping, of experimentation, and it is in this experimentation that the shock, more or less unexpected, with matter takes place. Behind the scenes of the visible forms, connections occur with and between the fragments, without this work aiming to recompose an original unit [...]. The result is necessarily unpredictable. Invention implies time. It is not done against memory but with memory, as indicated by the common root 'invention' and 'inventory.' It is not a cut but an incessant composition and recomposition. (Kastrup 2007, 27, our translation)

Thus, it is important in this text to revisit and share some traces of this two-and-a-half-year process that, in one way or another, constituted what we share as a filmic result, remaining more or less evident and sometimes just as latencies, layers, images: reminiscences of the lived experience.

The issue of presence was an important theme for the *Mundos* process from its beginning in addition to being an issue that moves us as artists, researchers, people. In addition to the notion conceived within the scope of our work, it is worth remembering the crisis of presence that plagues humanity in general, something intensified or at least made explicit in the pandemic. The crisis of presence we are referring to concerns not only the weak meaning of this concept — which, according to Fischer-Lichte (2019), relates to the phenomenal dimension of presence, to the pure fact of being physically present in a space — but also its radical sense, which involves the exercise of letting our physical presence (co)incide with our affections and crossings. This is also revealed in a dilation of the field of sensitivity, in a deep listening to the other (human and non-human human), which is absorbed by sensoriality and by an openness to the world of forces; as Suely Rolnik (2019) says, by the connection with an intuitive knowledge characteristic of the body in this state of radical, integral presence, a kind of being-feeling-knowing about the vibrating body, one capable of accessing the invisible.

For Fischer-Lichte (2019), the radical concept of presence dialogues with the notion of embodiment. It is an idea of presence connected to an experience with the potential to dissolve dichotomies such as body-mind and body-soul since it consists of a process in which the immaterial dimension of the body (sensitive, affective, spiritual) is involved in the flesh and is inextricably linked with its physical dimension, with a materialized existence as a being in the world. A state, perhaps, of not splitting between immanence and transcendence.



Starting from the interdiction of material or spatial co-presence between bodies, we begin to ask and challenge ourselves regarding what kind of presence and co-presence, in its most radical sense, would be possible for us to activate. The imposition of a virtual world as a digital world, of screens and simulacra as the only possibility of being together, opened us up to the virtual in another sense, as a field of possibilities, a field conducive to imagination. And yet it made us wonder if and how we could be together, to create together at a distance with a quality of presence, rather than only through electronic devices.

Among the experiences we proposed in this process, we will begin by addressing what we call tele(em)pathy.³ Provoked by the director Tatiana Bittar, we experimented with this idea as a kind of temporal co-presence, that is, we proposed to ‘meet’ each other from different places, but on common days and times, for several weeks in a row. First, on Mondays, we watched together, each from her own isolated refuge, as the day wore on. We followed a common ritual at the beginning of our meetings: drinking some Artemisia tea, taking a foot bath, sharing some gossip, stretching, listening to the same music...

This first shared activity was fundamental. Both because it was experienced as a first-person exercise of presence, embodiment: interrupting the flow of everyday life and proposing to be in the here and now, but also because we experienced this action as a ritual of connection and re-enchantment of the day, the establishment of a common field of affections. It fostered personal connection and the creation of a collective ethos. At that moment, we knew we were together and, although far apart, we were experiencing something similar: pause one’s day, look at the sky, have a cup of tea or another common action.

In another meeting in the week (this one already on screens), we exchanged impressions about the experience. From then on, we unfolded tele(em)pathic proposals: we dialogued in the field of the imaginary, we provoked each other, we composed from a distance, without hearing or seeing what the other was creating. Collective experiences took place, as did others in pairs. We also produced descriptive, poetic, dialogic texts together and blindly.⁴

The moment of contacting the rubbed materials, still unknown to most of us, was also lived as a poetic, performative, and immersive experience:

3. A term suggested in a chat during a YouTube stream about our work.

4. Links to excerpts from our tele(em)pathic conversations. We emphasize that each question and answer shared below is exactly as it appeared in the experiment. <https://qrify.com/p/HhES9sO>.


one must do is unblock the body-memory. [...] If the body is allowed to dictate different rhythms, continuously change rhythms, change the order (of details), take another detail as if from thin air, then who dictates? It is not thought. But neither is it chance. This reacts with life itself. It is not even know-how: but it was body-memory. Or the life-body? Because it trumps memory. The body-life or body-memory dictated what to do in relation to life experiences or cycles of experiences [...] It is a small step toward the incarnation of our life in impulses. (Grotowski apud Flaszen and Pollastrelli 2007, 173, our translation)

Body-memory is also what conditions the muscles, the ways of perceiving and acting in the world, and for the director, the life-body is only achieved when working on the awareness of what we carry impregnated in the body from our relationship with culture, education, and the environment in which we are inserted but also with forces and traces of pasts unknown to us. The meanings of the body that cross us are multiple and continue in transit: a vibrating, non-dichotomous body subject to crossings, body in process, oneiric body with openness to subtle fields. Bodies that trigger concreteness, body-presence, body-memory, the phenomenal body... Bodies!

Amidst the turmoil of so many cosmic and energetic revolutions accentuated by a virus that dilated our perception of the various layers that surround our existence and how we relate to them, during the creation process each body let itself die, fail, give up, simplify, to be disenchanting, but also to be reborn, reinvigorated, mixed-up, and nourished by worlds of the here and now, seeking enchantment in a mixture of moods and intensities that are often still incomprehensible. The practices we experienced brought us into confrontation with the movement of body-memory forces, triggering perceptions of stiffness, blockages, flows, and desires in counterpoint to what it was possible to be and do but they also threw us into exercising our imaginaries and confronting acceptance, detachment, the feelings of potency of becomings, and of invisible and unspeakable forces.

In this approach to art, we believe that one of the possibilities is to dialogue with the French director Ariane Mnouchkine from the Théâtre du Soleil group, when, during her internships, she calls for actresses and actors to “activate the muscle of imagination.”

Each one of us had her shamanic journeys and shared this experience with the collective, animals of power that emerged for each actress were integrated into the creative process: a bear, a dragonfly, and a deer. How



can we bring into the here and now, through poetic actions, the connection with archetypal images or images that connect with the unconscious and are materialized and re-signified in this field that crosses us in states of shamanic journeys? We can transmute our dreamlike images into drawings, photographs, videos, dances, songs... One of the challenges is to leave the field of representation and allow the image itself to connect us to creations and to become creations.

As Stefano Mancuso puts it, “we animals represent only 0.3% of the biomass, while plants represent 85%” (Mancuso 2021, 10). And even though we are a minority on the planet, with our chaotic way of living we are imploding the conditions of existence and balance on earth. The challenge is to reinvent ourselves as a collective force, to manage better futures for our descendants. The space-time of the pandemic provided us with greater potential for introspection and connection with our inner worlds and nature, but when we weave our stories, most of the time we continue to place ourselves as protagonists. How can we rupture this way of thinking and acting and broaden our perception of the plants and other animals that coinhabit the earth with us?

Even so, from a perspective of the field of imagination, we had this interest throughout the process of creating *Mundos*. We cultivate an openness to perceptions of mini-worlds, building and perceiving the worlds around us. More than thinking of a representation as something to be shown, our purpose was to create a convivial space: bodies in a situation of collective experience which would connect us with dimensions of subtle fields and access areas of remembrance and individual experiences.

During the process of *Mundos*, we somehow took on an almost oracular attitude of dealing with experiences. An oracle is known as a method for obtaining answers to obscure questions or as a tool for obtaining guidance. In our process, we assumed it as an attitude in the sense that when we relate to human and non-human things, we consider that they are always asking us, saying something, guiding us down paths, and activating the body that imagines and that makes itself available to what it imagines. As a further part of the construction of the poetics of *Mundos*, we created oracular letters that operated as triggers for performative processes. These resulted in the film *Mundos*, still unreleased. Each letter unfolded into a journey made up of three seasons, and this structure dramaturgically supports our film. We share below the initially created letters and some imagery unfolding from the seasons of each journey experienced by the actresses.

The card of the bear

The card represents transformation, the mutation of things and life. Colors are vibrant, although some shadows are present. There are always two sides to the same coin. There are doubles that mix constantly. In the background, the intense yellow light emanates from an unknown world that arrives on earth. It is not possible to distinguish whether it is the moon or the sun, which rises or sets in the ocean and emits light toward the back of a naked woman's neck. Sun and moon, day and night, death and life, joy, sadness, irony, humor. The sword held in the woman's right hand hangs toward the center of a bonfire at the woman's feet, which suggests that something is relaxed and carefree but has strength and a feeling of enjoyment, although her half-open hand can signify giving up and desire of flight. The black bearskin, hanging from the left shoulder, falls to the ground mixing with a pool of blood, enunciating a sloughing off and entry into new fertile cycles and of different worlds. On the ground, around the fire, twigs of sticks mixed with intense red roses, indicating passion and fire at your disposal. Playing opposites, moving between extremes. Fire, it is not known whether it ascends or descends through the sword, reaching the woman's right arm and solar plexus. We can see a radiant beam that forms from the fusion of fire with the light coming from behind from the sun or moon, indicating that the woman can generate fire but also burn with it. The woman looks up, left arm semi-tensioned and bent in an attitude of opening and receiving, mouth half-open as if letting out a cry of pleasure. The card suggests enjoyment with pleasure, allowing us to be traversed to generate more pleasure. (created by actress Giselle Rodrigues)



FIGURE 2

First Station: Abyss world (urban/nature/human dimensions).

Source: Ana Quintas, 2021.



FIGURE 3

Second Station: Pit bed (meat/earth/dust/gas dimensions).

Source: Guilherme Angelim, 2021.



FIGURE 4

Third Station: Smoke body (spirit/invisible force dimension).

Source: Diego Bresani, 2021.

The card of the witch – free dragonfly

La Maga (“the witch”) has ancestors who live in a house without walls in the middle of a large green field, with many winged drawers full of secrets, drawers within drawers, many dusty closed drawers. In this large open house, the bush enters and brings black and brown jaguars, galloping horses, multicolored birds.

She sleeps on an amethyst bed that connects her to portals and subtle spaces. She is bathed in scented oils and adorned with garlands of garden flowers. She drinks cologne, chamomile, and mint teas and uses rosemary as a foot bath. She swims and canoes in the lake, in the company of fish and capybaras. She embraces yellow *ipês*, *bougainvillea*, *sapucaias* and smells manacas and jasmynes.

She walks with a bamboo stick in her left hand and a Japanese fan in her right hand. The first opens the way and the second clears energy flows, frees up space for the new and unusual. She wears a rose quartz necklace that always arrives before her.

On the waning moon she listens to imaginary sounds. She takes waterfall baths on the new moon. On the crescent moon, she empathizes with the look of owls. She lights bonfires on the ground on full-moon nights and her root force pulses through strong winds and dances to the sound of drums, cymbals, bowls, and ancestral collective chants.

She walks in a troupe, band, flock. She is nomadic, in a state of cocoon. In all moons a wild and free spirit makes it reverberate with the poet Bashô:

“Dragonflies free

Beautiful

Sky of dragonflies.” (Horyu, apud Bashô, 1997, 85)

(Created by the actor Rita de Almeida Castro)



FIGURE 5

First Station:
The dead – I left
my bodies along
the way. Source:
William Ferreira,
2021.

FIGURE 6
Second Station:
Body accumulation
– traces of oneself.
Source: Diego
Bresani, 2021.



FIGURE 7
Third station:
The Flight – Free
Dragonfly. Source:
Diego Bresani,
2021.

The card of the woman with antlers

A woman with an elegant bearing balances an antler like that of a deer that is born from her head, from whose branches hang leaves, flowers, and fruits. A swarm of bees dances around this antler.

Her hair is tied up high, woven into the branches.

In her raised right hand, she holds a glass of red wine and in her left hand, next to the neckline that reveals her sternum, she holds a book with a red velvet cover and a gold-plated spine.

Her dress flows, slightly transparent, in shades of green and gold.

Her feet are bare but covered with drawings in patterns that oscillate between geometric and organic, also revealing unknown signs which go up her legs. All visible skin, including her hands and neck, reveal inscriptions, symbols, and patterns sparser than on her feet.

Only her face doesn't take the signs. Her face, mature and serene, is very white, her mouth is pale. Only a large third eye stands out, very well made-up with eyeliner and long eyelashes, blinking and aiming in unison with the other two eyes.

She crosses a busy street in a large metropolis. Around her are many cars and passersby but no one notices her. The city has tall, mirrored buildings.

The woman again. She is standing in front of a cliff. With her left hand she holds a steel chain. At the other end of the chain, about five meters deep, a red car hangs over the abyss. Her face does not reveal her intent. Her eyes gaze at the horizon. With her left hand she holds a cigarette. Her pale mouth lets out smoke.

(Created by the actor Alice Stefânia)

FIGURE 8
First Station:
Treewoman
(between the
animal, vegetable,
and mineral
kingdoms). Source:
Diego Bresani,
2021.

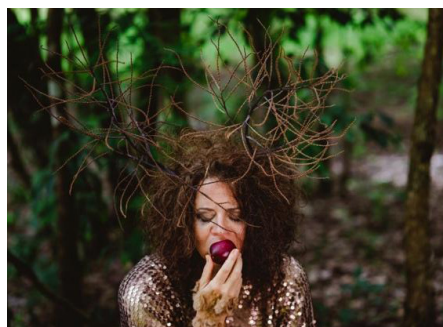


FIGURE 9
Second Station: The
journey (you can
only turn your back
to the past). Source:
Diego Bresani,
2021.

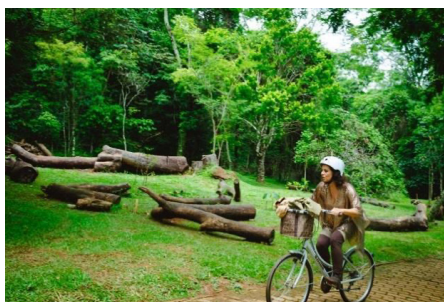




FIGURE 10
 Third Station: Feast
 of vulnerability
 (waiting for nothing
 and nobody).
 Source: Ana
 Quintas, 2021.

We face huge challenges due to the imposed distances between us but we continue with our experiments in an attempt to delineate a dramaturgical web of the sensitive, of re-enchantment, of (im)possible encounters. In the different moments of this path, we embrace the intuitive and corporeal dimension of being as living, relational, connected, and connective.

Even though hypotheses about the format of this poetic exercise have been transformed along the way, such principles have remained. Initially it was to be an experience-piece in co-presence, then we considered doing an online experiment in real time, and finally we chose to make a film. Our dedication to the path that we were able to tread, as well as our listening to the affections moved by the lived experiences, gradually built or revealed *Mundos*, the film that we ultimately created.

The seasons of each journey — imagined, dreamed, tried, and tested in so many versions and formats — were finally filmed in the second half of December 2021, and the final editing took place throughout 2022.

If art at the same time reflects, inspires, and intermingles with life, we feel that our process in *Mundos* — one so mixed, multiple, and transformed by the restrictions of the pandemic — also reveals its high degree of adaptability, resilience, resistance, and re-existence, qualities that we know to be of great value even for our continued existence on our planetary World.

The film *Mundos* was selected for the 3rd International Festival of Eco-performance in 2023, and won an honorable mention. Follow the link to watch the film: <https://youtu.be/PuYmqwqqF6U> (1:23:18 to 1:50:14).

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