Ghosts: *boias-frias*, she-wolf, and dolls in performance[1]

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ABSTRACT

"What is a ghost but the re-appeared, or restored enactment that Schechner defines as performance?", asks Diana Taylor. Worlds in performance emerge when the dead and alive brush against each other. According to Avery Gordon, a ghost may give access to the marginalized, suppressed, trivialized, and negated. A ghostly image, which is manifested as an absence, or as the presence of an absence, forgotten yet vital, may interrupt the course of things. A deviation is produced, possibly shedding light on our current condition, and allowing us to see things which we had not previously seen. In this essay, I intend to discuss three field studies involving *boia fria* sugarcane cutters, a she-wolf, and dolls in performance. In each of them, I am haunted by images that appear unexpectedly presenting, as Walter Benjamin would say, "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past".

KEYWORDS

Ghosts; performance; boias frias; she-wolf; riverbank dolls.

Assombrações: boias-frias, mulher-loba e bonecos em performance

RESUMO "O que seria uma assombração senão uma re-aparição, a ação restaurada que Schechner define como performance?", pergunta Diana Taylor. Mundos em performance se formam quando vivos e mortos se friccionam. De acordo com Avery Gordon, assombrações podem dar acesso a elementos marginalizados, suprimidos, trivializados e negados. Uma imagem assombrosa, que se manifesta como uma ausência, ou presença de uma ausência, esquecida e, no entanto, vital, pode interromper o curso das coisas. Produz um desvio, possivelmente iluminando a nossa condição atual, e fazendo com que possamos ver coisas que antes não conseguíamos ver. Neste ensaio, pretendo discutir três pesquisas de campo envolvendo boias-frias, mulher-loba e bonecos em performance. Em cada uma delas, lampejam imagens que me assombram e, como diria Walter Benjamin, "uma oportunidade revolucionária de lutar por um passado oprimido".

PALAVRAS-CHAVE
Assombrações; performance; boias-frias; mulher-loba; bonecos ribeirinhos.

Noises, deviations

1 | Translated by Ian Dawsey.

According to the anthropologist André Lepecki (2012: 56), "there is no ground without accidents, fissures, scars of historicity".[2] Fissures cause stumbles and detours capable of giving rise to surprising, unusual movements. They may spark the imagination with stories of ghosts and tales of things that have been forgotten.

2 | I wish to express my gratitude to the National Council of Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and The São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp) for funding of this research.

In the formulation of an anthropology of performance, at the beginning of the 1980s, Victor Turner (1987b:76) calls attention to noises, residues and disruptive elements of expressive forms of behavior. Performance, for this author, has to do with the experience of the *limen* (meaning "threshold" in Latin). In liminal moments, social beings trick themselves, you might say, interrupting the flow of social life, and suspending social roles. Submerged elements rise to the surface. Volcanic materials that are lodged in lower substrates of collective memory and social formations erupt into the present. From the depths of oblivion, elements of stories that have not yet come into being emerge and become visible. As elements that cause one to think beyond what seems obvious, with estrangement, they produce awakening effects. Playing with danger, they produce knowledge.

According to Sergei Eisenstein (1990: 10), art is the most sensitive of seismographs. At the crossroads between art and anthropology, researchers attempt to acquire this type of sensitivity. Music affects snakes, says Antonin Artaud (1999: 91), because their bodies touch the earth in their entirety, and "the musical vibrations which are communicated to the earth affect them like a very subtle, long massage". As art touches life, the anthropology of performance seeks the sensitivity of snakes. Bodies in performance touch the earth in their entirety. In fissures, margins, and whirlpools, the whispers and cries of muted voices can be heard.

The street is the stage, wrote Richard Schechner (1993). In performance, attention is directed to action and its surprising, destabilizing effects. In action, worlds are formed. Action is the beginning of things. It is the creative act that sets the world in motion. As Hannah Arendt (2000: 258) says, it has the nature of the miraculous and the unexpected. "In the beginning was action", says Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's Faust (2003). Although social and symbolic structures may try to mitigate the effects of action, whose nature is to break all limits, they can never eliminate the consequences of its unpredictability. Action is fragile and ephemeral, and, at the same time, potentially powerful and explosive. In the creative action of beings, in seismic movements, worlds are formed.

According to Roland Barthes (1990, p. 85), theater can be defined as an activity that "calculates the place in and from which things are seen". If one were to expand the definition to include the place in and from which things are seen, felt, and lived, it would become especially meaningful for anthropologists. Anthropology of performance is particularly interested in exploring the surprising elements of the stage:

corners, margins, fissures, undergrounds, underworlds, cracks and openings, areas backstage, streets and places where the stage comes to life, and where audiences, coming on stage, turn into actresses and actors. In such places, spectators, as Augusto Boal says (1985: 135), become espect-actors, spect-actresses. Listening expands and dives under to capture, in living and changing stages, the whispers and noises of the acoustical unconscious, producing bodily innervation. Stages expand and, as living bodies, become porous. Entering in and on stage, anthropology also becomes an anthropology in performance. In and on living stages, in performance, worlds are formed.

William Shakespeare (1975, p. 239) writes,

> All the world's a stage,
> All the men and women merely players;
> They have their exits and their entrances;
> And one man in his time plays many parts.
> ("As You Like It", Act II, Scene VII)

One might add that, while "all the world's a stage", worlds and stages are formed in performance. In and on living stages of the world, or environmental theaters, as Richard Schechner (1994) might say, worlds in performance are formed.

In a register that is attentive to dissonant sounds and noises, performance is capable of producing a seismological effect in relation to time. Images from the past burst into the present, in moments of danger, subverting the stage of history when conceived as a sequence of scenes culminating in a naturalized present. With volcanic force, these images come to the surface, cracking the crusts of the present. In tension-filled montages, geological layers of the past emerge in the present, side by side with recent sedimentations, interrupting the continuum between past and present. In speaking of dislodged sequences of time, in which past is present, and present past, Rebecca Schneider (2011: 11) refers to liminal time, with a hint from Schechner, not past and *not* not past - here and now. One of the precepts of the historical materialist envisioned by Walter Benjamin is relevant to a seismology of worlds in performance: one needs to "blast open the continuum of history" (Benjamin, 1985: 229-230). In these moments, suggests Schneider (2011: 30), performance touches time.

According to Richard Schechner (1985b: 35-36), the strips of behavior from which performances are created can be compared to the strips used by a filmmaker when making a film. In surprising, sometimes shocking, explosive montages, performances are produced. In liminal time, tension-filled montages are formed. Referring to Schechner's influence on his own thinking, Victor Turner (1985: xi)

says: "I learned from him that all performance is 'restored behavior', that the fire of meaning breaks out from rubbing together the hard and soft firesticks of the past (...) and present of social and individual experience". This idea is at the heart of Turner's anthropology of experience and performance. In the friction between the sharp sticks of the past and the wood of the present, images arise from the depths of memory and forgetting, forming worlds. Performance is the art of Prometheus. In the constellation of times, in which sounds and noises of the past emerge in the soundscapes of the present, performance, as a form of montage, mobilizes, here and now, the remains and residues of archaic worlds, creating new worlds, or rehearsing worlds that have not yet come to be.

In Joseph Roach's (1996) *Cities of the dead*, worlds in performance are formed when the living and the dead brush against one another. "For what is a ghost but the re-appeared, or restored enactment that Schechner defines as performance?", asks Diana Taylor (1997: 30). According to Avery Gordon (2008: xvi), in *Ghostly matters*, ghosts can give access to that which is marginalized, repressed, trivialized, and denied. A ghost or haunting image, manifesting itself as a figure that is not there, forgotten, yet vital, may interrupt a course that one has taken. A distraction, or deviation, possibly illuminating our present condition, and allowing us to see things we had not seen before.

Below, I'll present three research experiences, having to do with cities, memories, and the performing arts. The performance artists in each of these cases have not had any formal artistic training. In each of them, from faded fieldnotes, emerge images by which I am haunted: *boias frias*, she-wolf, and dolls.

BOIAS FRIAS IN PERFORMANCE

I remember the first time when, taken by surprise, I saw a truck of cane cutters passing through the center of a city. I was startled. They were called *boias frias*, a Portuguese term literally meaning "cold meals".[3] Covered in ashes of burnt sugarcane, with pieces of cloth over their heads framing their sun-beaten faces, they produced a small shock among passers-by. The experience of seeing oneself being seen by the other – as people from the backlands and others from the city actually saw each other for the first time – produced a sense of strangeness. Having come, in many cases, as part of the exodus of people from the hinterland, boias frias lived on the outskirts of cities, in places such as Slash-Knife (*Risca-Faca*), Devils'Hole (*Buraco dos Capetas*), and Coffin Bridge (*Ponte do Caixão*). Leaving at dawn and returning at dusk, they travelled to and from cane fields, occasionally passing through downtown areas.

The manner in which certain liminal figures, particularly those coming from the countryside, have haunted the city throughout history, is striking. *Boias frias* are

3 | As a metonym, the term *boia fria* (meaning "cold meal" in Portuguese) evokes some of the more disconcerting aspects of the experience of working in the cane fields. The term signals the experience of estrangement, or even the breaking of ties with the land. While peasants in the North of Minas Gerais state and other parts of Brazil – the backlands from where many *boias frias* came – have access to *boias quentes*, or "hot meals", consisting of food which they themselves produce on the land on which they work and make their homes, *boias frias* eat their food when it is already cold, prepared at dawn, or at night, in homes on the outskirts of cities, physically and emotionally far from the sugarcane fields on which they work.

part of this history. During the 1970s, in the midst of a climate of generalized intoxication induced by dreams of progress, with stimulus from *Pro-álcool* – the National Alcohol Program –, *boias frias* burst onto the national scene, in a historic act of mythical proportions: the transformation of São Paulo's sugarcane fields into the Brazilian equivalent of the oil fields of Arabia.

In the 1980s, I carried out an ethnography with *boias frias*, living for a year in a room next to the shack of Anaoj and Mister Zé (fictitious names) and their family in Devils'Hole, located in the old Slash-Knife District, on the periphery of Piracicaba, São Paulo. During the 1983 sugarcane harvest, I went daily with Mister Zé riding on *boia fria* trucks and cutting cane in the fields.

As the harvest advances one has the experience of an embodied everyday type of shock. In the face of "mad cane"(*cana brava*), "raging cane" (*cana embramada*), and "furious cane"(*cana enfezada*), as sugarcane was called, *boias frias* found themselves in a fierce battle with the cane fields. "I'm surrounded by *cana brava*! It's out to get me!" *Boias frias* with machetes are themselves cut by the cane which they cut, that is, by the *cana brava* with its razor-sharp foliage. Pieces of cloth framing their faces, and long pants worn by women under skirts and dresses, are like soft, Arab-style armor, tailored for work in cane fields beneath the scorching sun. As *boias frias* attack succeeding rows of sugarcane, the very skin of the body acquires the texture of leather or armor. The human face becomes as parched as the dry clay and hard terrain of the backlands. Wrinkles streaking down from the eyes cut into hollowed out cheeks. In their relations with cane fields, it wasn't clear whether cane cutters were the ones toppling the cane fields, or cane fields the ones toppling the cane cutters. The circuit followed by sugarcane served as a metaphor for *boias frias*, who were crushed in the fields and made into bagasse.

Working in the cane fields produces a dulling of the senses, a Baroque-style mortification of the body, evocative of the extraordinary moments of rites of passage. But here, the extraordinary is revealed as the ongoing shock of everyday life. In the social imaginary of the city, *boias frias* were associated with the realm of the dead.

With the advent of *boias frias* on the national scene, one enters into the entrails of dreams. They were called "scarecrows" and "ghosts". Playing the part, they provoked passers-by, with shock effects. On their way to and from sugarcane fields, at dusk and dawn, they transformed the boards of truck wagons into the stages for everyday theater. Interrupting the flux of the city, a theater of ghosts emerged.

In this unusual type of theater, mounted on stages of daily life, amidst laughter, *boias frias* transformed themselves into multiple characters: sheikhs, Apaches, saints, bandits, madmen, Antônio Conselheiro,[4] Lampião and Maria Bonita,[5] bulls, boys, cowboys, Michael Jackson, Margaret Thatcher, scarecrows and ghosts, among others. Hanging down ladders on backs of trucks, fun-loving *boias frias* played like

4 | Antônio Conselheiro, in English "Anthony the Counselor", real name Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel (March 13, 1830 – September 22, 1897), was a Brazilian religious leader, preacher and founder of the village of Canudos, the scene of the War of Canudos (1896-1897), a civil rebellion against the central government which was brutally stamped out with the loss of 25.000 lives. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%B4nio_Conselheiro. Accessed June 26, 2024, 13:45.

5 | "Captain" Virgulino Ferreira da Silva (7 June 1897 – 28 July 1938), better known as Lampião (meaning "lantern" or "oil lamp"), was probably the twentieth century's most successful traditional bandit leader. The banditry endemic to the Brazilian Northeast was called *Cangaço*. *Cangaço* had origins in the late 19th century but was particularly prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s. Lampião led a band of up to 100 *cangaceiros*, who occasionally took over small towns and who fought a number of successful actions against paramilitary police when heavily outnumbered. Lampião's exploits and reputation turned him into a folk hero, the Brazilian equivalent of Jesse James or Pancho Villa. His image, as well as that of his partner Maria Bonita (meaning "Pretty Mary"), can be seen across the entirety of the Northeast of Brazil. Available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lampi%C3%A30. Accessed June 26, 2024, 13:55.

ghosts scaring young couples and other people on sidewalks. Boo! Sometimes they played like agonizing and playful bulls, *ê boi!*, "hey bull!" Or, like madmen on drunken boats sailing over green oceans of sugarcane fields. A truck of *boias frias* would frequently turn into a ship of fools.

For *boias frias* this wasn't simply a matter of staging an experience of madness up against the normality of everyday life. Daily life itself was staged as madness. There is no more eloquent example of our condition as homo ludens (cf. Huizinga, 1993) than the theater of *boias frias* and their playful performances in sugarcane fields and on the backs of trucks. Here, the subjunctivity or make-believe dimensions of life – the "as if" of things that Victor Turner (1982: 83) and Richard Schechner (1985a: 6) associate with performance – becomes an everyday experience.

Liminal experiences can produce estrangement in relation to daily life. This involves more than a simple mirroring of reality. The subjunctivity that characterizes a performative, liminal state appears as the effect of a "magic mirror" (Turner, 1987a: 22), capable of altering perceptions of time and space, and creating playful and fantastic associations. Altered or even grotesque figures take center stage. Fissures open up revealing the unfinished nature of things. Suppressed tensions come to light. Hidden strata and sedimentations of social life come to the surface. In liminal time and space, knowledge is produced with a tremor.

In some instances, *boias frias* at play presented themselves as Arabian sheikhs. Leaving the city at dawn, as a truck of *boias frias* passed by a group of people on sidewalks, one of the young men on board, acting like a circus ringmaster, drew attention to his colleague on the back of the truck, a fellow *boia fria* with white cloth framing his face. "Look at the sheikh of Arabia!" "Straight from Saudi Arabia, my friend the Sheikh!" "Hey you, pay attention! Have you ever seen a sheikh before? Look up here!" Such montages of a *boia fria* sheikh are revealing. The figure of the *boia fria* aroused the social imagination of the 1970s, after the first oil crisis and collapse of the Brazilian "economic miracle". Dreams of a giant Brazil that, "lying in a splendid cradle" – as sung in the national anthem –, was on the verge of awakening from secular slumber, were disturbed by the refusal of oil sheikhs to supply fuel to the world of industrial capitalism. Still under the effects of the "economic miracle", in a climate of near intoxication of a nation driven by what Walter Benjamin would call the "narcotic of progress", major national projects were set up to replace oil with sugarcane. Sugarcane was acclaimed not only as a "modern" product (Graziano da Silva, 1981), requiring high capital investment, but also as a source of renewable energy for boosting economic development. From the standpoint of industrialization of agriculture, however, sugarcane production presented a problem: the harvest cycle had not yet been fully mechanized. Hence the need for a huge number of seasonal cane cutters. At this historical juncture, in one of the "primal scenes" (cf. Berman, 1990: 148) of Brazilian modernity, the figure of the *boia fria* cane cutter appeared in cities

and cane fields, sparking social imagination. *Boias frias* replaced Arab sheikhs. On the backs of trucks rode the new sheikh *boias frias*.

In other instances of sugarcane cutters at play, the image of the *boia fria* is associated with bulls and "boys". While passing by a truck designed for carrying cattle, a young sugarcane cutter stands up and playfully shouts: "Hey bull! *Boia fria*! I'm a boy!", *Ê boi! Boia fria! Sou boy!* This fantastic combination of images was also very real. Seemingly arbitrary, this montage evokes the ruptures and interruptions in trajectories and life stories of *boias frias*. Life stories become montage. *Boias frias* were often taken to the fields in trucks originally intended for transporting cattle. Like beef cattle they went. The rural exodus, which created in cities of the interior of São Paulo a reserve labor force that was periodically incorporated during the sugarcane harvest in the form of *boia fria* labor, was stimulated by a process in which small rural producers were replaced by cattle, as "working land" turned into "cattle land" (Garcia Jr., 1983). Replaced by cattle in the fields, they took the places of cattle on trucks. Thus, while producing the raw material that fueled the automotive industries – that had become dependent on ethanol made from sugarcane, with incentives created by national projects of *Pro-álcool* and *Planalçúcar – boias frias* provided energy for machines that populated the dreams of a society and, as the fulfillment of a forbidden desire, the dreams of a sugarcane worker: to own a car. Taking a break from cutting cane, and falling into a state of reverie, a young man nicknamed Pajé (meaning "Witchdoctor") once told me: "My dream, João Branco ("White John"), is to own a Passat. Ummmm. Just imagine me with one hand on the wheel and with the other holding my girl, right next to me. Then you'd see." At such moments, *boias frias* turned into "boys", that is, rich "Daddy's boys", with access to cars and girls. However, the vibrations of the cars in which these *boia fria* boys rode every day were capable of producing awakening effects. On the backs of old trucks recovered from junkyards by recruiters or "cats" (*gatos*) for transporting cane cutters – "boys" *boias frias* were taken to sugarcane fields. "Boys" *boias frias* rode on trucks made for cattle and bulls. "Hey bull! *Boia fria*!, I'm a boy!" *Ê boi! Boia fria! Sou boy!*

One early morning, upon entering a side road, the truck carrying *boias frias* passed by a small piece of land, intended for pasture, surrounded by barbed wire fence, and engulfed by the vastness of sugarcane fields. On the dry parched earth lay a carcass and skull, next to which were some scrawny cows and bulls. A woman suddenly stood up to see from the back of the truck: "Oh my, they're just skin and bones!" "There's no pasture!" "It's hunger, they're starving!" Other *boias frias* also stood up, looking on in silence.

Next, the truck entered a road lined up with imperial palm trees. But, the palm trees looked like they had been neglected over the years. Their branches were broken and dried out. Suddenly, we came across an extraordinary scene: the ruins of a "Big House" (*Casa Grande*). "Look at the mansion!" someone said. Laughter erupted.

"It's Class A!" Some *boias frias* were cracking up laughing. They laughed while passing by the rubble of a *Casa Grande*, where the owner of a sugarcane plantation had probably once lived. "In the shadow of the allegory of the embalmed pharaohs" – as the lyrics of the song *Rancho da Goiabada*, by Aldir Blanc and João Bosco, say – *boias frias* had a carnival celebration.

On a Friday night, after an excruciating week, returning from the sugarcane fields to the city, on the back of the truck, an atmosphere of physical and nervous exhaustion intersects with that of a carnival celebration. Sharing the contents of a bottle of *cachaça* as it was poured into a small bottle cap and passed along from hand to hand, *boias frias* sang songs and had fun.[6] On a long and steep climb uphill, the truck significantly slowed down. At a turtle's pace, a line of new cars and trucks formed behind the old *boia fria* truck. "This truck belongs in the junkyard!", one of the cane cutters yelled out. Attempts to pass the old truck were frustrated by the flow of traffic coming from the opposite direction. Some drivers impatiently honked their horns. Others roared their engines. Suddenly, hanging from the ladder on the back of the truck, Goiaba, a young *boia fria*, brandished his machete and challenged the cars and trucks behind. "Come on! Come on!" Then, lowering his pants, like a Gargantua standing before the Parisians (Rabelais, 1991: 99), he irrigated the road. The *boias frias* were crying from laughing. From the back of an old truck, *boias frias* looked at their world. Walter Benjamin's (1985a: 25) comment about the Surrealists is relevant: they perceived the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded", in the first iron constructions, in the objects that have begun to be extinct.

The "angel of history", suggested Walter Benjamin (1985: 226), would be like the angel in one of Paul Klee's paintings. His face takes on an expression of astonishment. His eyes are fixed on the wreckage of the past that accumulates at his feet. But he can't stop to pick up the pieces. His wings are ready for flight. In fact, behind him blow the winds of a storm by which he is carried towards the future. This storm is called "progress". On junkyard trucks *boias frias* also rode with their backs towards the future, carried away by a storm called "progress". At dawn, they rode towards the sugarcane fields. At nightfall, towards the cities.

6 | *Cachaça* is a distilled spirit made from fermented sugarcane.Accessed June 26, 2024, 13:55.

She-wolf in performance

In 2019, I returned to Aparecida do Norte looking for the she-wolf. I didn't find her. But, in an amusement park, close to the old basilica at the top of Coconut Hill (Morro dos Coqueiros), I saw Monga – The Gorilla-Woman. Like the she-wolf, who I had seen years before, Monga also breaks through the bars of a cage.

In 1984, I was in for a surprise: when visiting Aparecida, the patron saint of Brazil, for the first time, I also saw a she-wolf. That year, I went to Aparecida on a bus

with Anaoj and other people from a place called Devils'Hole (*Buraco dos Capetas*), where I had lived the previous year. In a moment of emotional intensity, in a corridor of the New Basilica, devotees slowly, step-by-step, walk by the image of the holy mother. In moments like these, a subjunctive way ("as if") of relating to the world presents itself, creating fissures and frictions, illuminating fictional dimensions of the real, and subverting reality effects produced in a world as seen in the indicative mode ("as is"), rather than as a living and moving stage.

In this register, performance is no simple mirror of the real. The subjunctivity that characterizes a performative state arises from the effects of a "magic mirror", as Victor Turner (1987a: 22) would say. As people walk by the image, the persona of Our Lady creates friction in relation to the bodies of those who are transformed, for an instant, into daughters and sons of the holy mother. At the same time, bodies in devotion brush against the persona of Our Lady who momentarily is revealed as Our Lady of Devils' Hole.

The story of Our Lady's first appearance is a bit chilling. In 1717, fishermen found fragments of Aparecida's image in the waters of the Paraíba River. First, a headless body appeared; and, then, a head without a body. The fish catch was intended for a banquet to be offered by local authorities in honor of the new governor of São Paulo and Minas de Ouro, Pedro de Almeida Portugal. As Count of Assumar, this governor would be known as the one who "cut off the heads and legs" of runaway enslaved black people. (Alvarez, 2017: 136-137). Aparecida, who was found without a head, would be known by devotees as the black mother of Brazil, and identified with Our Lady of the Rosary, the most popular saint among black people (Santos, 2007).

According to Joseph Roach (1996), in *Cities of the dead*, an effigy evokes an absence. Does Aparecida evoke the dead, or disappeared, or, even, as Abdias do Nascimento (1989) might say, the very ones who inspire the continued struggle against the genocide of black people in Brazil? Lélia Gonzalez (2020: 198) suggests that, despite stereotypes, black Brazilian mothers have their own forms of resistance. Perhaps the ability to evoke the dead is one of them. Another is the capacity to produce shock effects, the ability to shock. In Aparecida do Norte, I learned to see Aparecida as an apparition.

The attacks on the image of Aparecida throughout the years draw attention. In 1978, there was a kidnapping attempt during which the image was smashed into almost 200 pieces. During the restoration process, there was pressure from the rector of Aparecida to whiten the image. But the artist, Maria Helena Chartuni, refused. In 1995, an attack on the image of Aparecida, known as the "kicking of the saint", by a former evangelical bishop, took place on national television. In 2012, a replica of the saint was attacked by someone with a sledge hammer. In 2023, an attack on the sculpture of Our Lady of Aparecida occurred at the entrance to the city of Bastos, in the interior of São Paulo.

There is a tragic history of this clay figure, seen as an image of maternal suffering. In her analysis of the construction of India as a nation, Veena Das (2007: 19) discusses the figure of the raped woman as an axis of mobilization for the reestablishment of the nation as a "pure" and masculine space. Perhaps Aparecida is also a figure of this type.

Aparecida do Norte is a haunting place. In 2022, the former president of Brazil, Jair Bolsonaro, who is known for his disparaging remarks against women and black people, visited Our Lady during his failed campaign for reelection. Since her appearance in 1717, Aparecida has been courted by men of high distinction: emperors, popes, presidents, dictators, and army generals. In her analysis of courtly love in the Middle Ages – in which the idealized and ethereal image of the Virgin Mary stands out – Marilyn Strathern (2016: 246) suggests that "the main focus was not the relationships between men and women, but the relationships between men". This analysis is suggestive for thinking about the courtly love shown to Our Lady of Aparecida, involving a ritualized and repetitive process that Diana Taylor (1997) refers to as the "gendering" of a nation. Aparecida do Norte, one could say, is a place where men in high places – usually white men – within a setting of ceremonial devotion, compete with each other to become fathers of the nation, or *pátria* – a term that means "belonging to the father."

Since 1975, when the Manifesto of Black Women in Brazil was launched – therefore, before the first formulations, in the 1990s, of theories of intersectionality (cf. Akotirene, 2019; Collins and Bilgre, 2021; Piscitelli, 2008) – leading thinkers of the black movement, such as Lélia Gonzalez (2020), drew attention to the way in which gender interacts with race and social class in the oppression of black women. In a patriarchal society in which black mothers are idealized as mothers of sons and daughters of all races – according to ideologies of racial democracy and whitening –, they constitute bodies that matter, as Judith Butler (1993) would say, mainly as mothers of children of white men.

After walking by the image of Aparecida, in 1984, we descended to the room of miracles, *sala dos milagres*, a resplendent, overflowing Baroque display of the feats of the Mother of God. In 2019, the room of miracles no longer existed. In its place, was the room of promises, *sala das promessas*. One of its main aisles featured a display of paintings and iconographic representations, with summary descriptions of Our Lady's miracles: the appearance of Our Lady and miraculous fish catch; the breaking of shackles setting free an enslaved black man; the blackout of candles and lanterns, and sudden relighting; the fall of the arrogant unbelieving horseman from his horse, when Our Lady appears, on the steps of the Basilica; the rescue of a drowning boy from the rushing waters of a river; the miracle of bringing sight to a blind girl; the deliverance of a devout hunter from the jaws of a jaguar. In this aisle could also be found a replica of the canoe used by fishermen of the Paraíba River, evoking the

moment when Our Lady first appeared.

In 1984, when leaving the National Sanctuary, or New Basilica, we went up the Walkway of Faith (*Passarela da Fé*) to the Old Basilica. From there, we followed the route of popular Catholicism, stopping by small shops and street vendor stands in a descending movement walking down labyrinth-like streets of Aparecida. The image of the holy mother blends in, appearing amongst a multitude of objects for sale. Sacred and profane mix together, rubbing against each other, becoming one another. At the foot of the hill, strangely close to the New Basilica, an amusement park. The main attractions: gorilla woman, snake woman and she-wolf. We no longer see the image of the holy mother. Did Aparecida disappear? Or did she become an apparition?

We saw the she-wolf. Standing within a small room, forming a semicircle, spectators observe a cage on a stage, from which a woman emerges. Two young men, one at each side, grab her by the arms. In circus style, a presenter with a loudspeaker and a booming voice announces the amazing event that we are about to witness. First, however, as the woman stages an attempt to escape, the young men supposedly give her an injection with a gigantic needle. Lights go out. One hears a thunderous boom. As lights flash on and off, the figure in the cage looms large. She grabs the iron bars. In a flash, the image of the she-wolf appears. Suddenly, she irrupts through the bars of the cage and leaps into the crowd. Some people run. Staging a scuffle, the young men manage to contain the womanly creature, who returns to the cage.

Like theater envisioned by Bertolt Brecht, the spectacle of the she-wolf produces shock and estrangement effects. The affinities between Aparecida and the she-wolf draw attention. Both are apparitions. Both produce shock effects. In one of her miracles, the shock produced by the appearance of Our Lady knocks an arrogant rider off his horse on the steps of the basilica. In another miracle, a devout hunter who is about to be devoured by a jaguar, calls out to Our Lady for help. With her appearance, the jaguar is startled and releases the hunter. *Nossa Senhora* ("Our Lady"), or simply *Nossa* ("Our"), is also a Brazilian expression of shock. *Nossa!*

In another story of Our Lady, devotional lanterns and candles go out, then, miraculously, light up. Amusement parks produce similar effects, not with candles and lanterns but, in the age of mechanical reproduction, with electric shocks and bursts of light.

Walter Benjamin saw amusement parks as places of education for the masses:

> The masses obtain knowledge only through small shocks that hammer experience safely into the gut. Their education consists of a series of catastrophes that befall them under the dark tents of fairs and amusement parks, where anatomy lessons penetrate to the bone marrow, or in the circus, where the image of the first lion they saw in life is inextricably associated with

> that of the trainer who puts his fist in the lion's mouth. It takes genius to extract traumatic energy, a small and specific terror from things (my translation, apud Jennings, 1987: 82-83; Benjamin, 1999: 136).

At the Aparecida amusement park one learns to say *Nossa!* with an exclamation point.

On the basis of Judith Butler's notes on abject bodies and bodies that matter (1993: xi), the amusement park where the she-wolf is located can be considered to constitute a domain of abject bodies. Even though Our Lady is found in another domain – the domain of bodies that matter –, the experience of abjection is not strange to Aparecida. She initially appeared as a headless body; she suffered attacks; she was smashed into almost two hundred pieces; her nose and right eye were destroyed, then reconstituted. Even after reassembling her body, her image seems strange. According to one of her biographers, she is "very ugly" (Alvarez, 2017: 71, 87, 95). If she were not covered with a rosary, a crown and a golden cloak, hiding her broken body, perhaps Aparecida could also be placed, like the she-wolf, in a domain of abject bodies.

One of the first miracles in Aparecida presents the image of a chained, enslaved man. At the appearance of Our Lady, the chains are broken and fall apart. The gesture of liberation, in the city of Aparecida, comes to life in the amusement park where the she-wolf and gorilla-woman irrupt through the bars of the cage. For crowds of devout people, Aparecida, dressed in a rosary – just like Our Lady of the Rosary – is a black mother.

As she talked about the she-wolf, Anaoj told me, "You know what? She is also a daughter of God." Anaoj did not talk about the contrast between Aparecida and the she-wolf. She saw a similarity – as if observing a mother and daughter, or two sisters. In courtly language, which is not strange to the setting of Aparecida, Walter Benjamin (1985b: 223), writes:

> "For are we not touched by a breath of air that was breathed before? In the voices we hear, are there not echoes of voices that have fallen silent? Don't the women we court have sisters they never met?"

Back at Devils'Hole, I experienced a new shock of recognition. There's something uncanny about these amusement park sideshows. I was surprised by similarities between the spectacles of the she-wolf and Monga – the Gorilla-Woman, on the one hand, and, on the other, the descriptions that devotees of Aparecida made of their own sudden mutations in everyday dramas.

In the face of a tractor about to demolish the shacks of a neighborhood, a woman known as Mary of the Angels (Maria dos Anjos), a mother of five children, "turns into an animal" (*vira bicho*). "You're going to have to run over my dead body if you want to tear down my shack, and home of my children!" "I became a jaguar", she said. Her neighbors also became jaguars. The tractor went away.

As he arrived from the sugarcane fields and got off the back of the truck, in the middle of the street, Mister Zé is confronted by the owner of a bar who was called "Snickers" (Risadinha): "So, when are you going to pay up that debt?" Mister Zé, who was proud of his reputation as a hard worker, was devastated. When he got home, his wife, Anaoj, in a state of fury, ran up the hill to the bar and, from the middle of the street, in front of the people standing by, shouted: "Who do you think you are? How dare you humiliate Zé like that? Don't you remember? My son paid that debt! What were you thinking? You're not going to get rich off of the sweat of Mister Zé and my children!" Snickers, the bar owner said: "Crazy woman!" Anaoj replied: "That's right! I'm a crazy woman! Did you think I was human?" The she-wolf could have said the same thing.

Another woman, whose name was Aparecida, faced a group of men who had surrounded her boy. Neighbors threatened to beat the child because of a "stray" stone. According to the report I heard from a sister-in-law, the mother "jumped into the middle of the village like a mad woman." "Come on!", she shouted, "I'll kill the first one to step forward!" Her name was Aparecida. With shock effects, Aparecida of Devils'Hole protected her son from the anger of men. "That's a real woman!", her sister-in-law told me. "She could face any devil!"

When Lúcia, one of Anaoj's daughters, heard from a neighbor that police investigators had stopped her husband returning from work with a backpack, she rushed to the scene. "I turned into a rattlesnake!" Shouting like thunder she charged one of the investigators. The police officers backed down and went away. Neighbors stayed up late into the night talking with admiration about what had happened. Anaoj was proud of her daughter.

In the configuration of a gesture, of the woman who "becomes an animal" (*vira bicho*) and advances on those who threaten herself and her kinship and neighborhood networks, a state of bodily innervation is evoked that is often stigmatized and suppressed, although highly valued in Devils' Hole. This gesture calls attention to bodies that matter to many black and brown women in Brazil. In Aparecida do Norte, the image of this gesture can be seen in spectacles of the she-wolf and Monga, the Gorilla-Woman.

At the Aparecida amusement park, by means of a pedagogy of astonishment, one learns to "become an animal" (*virar bicho*). The she-wolf is, in fact, strangely similar to Our Lady – like a figure that emerges, as Carlo Ginzburg (1991) might say, from her "nocturnal history".[7]

7 | In his archeology of the witches' Sabbath, Ginzburg finds elementary narrative structures in stories which, appearing in different times and places, have been ignored or forgotten. In this essay on Aparecida, I have been interested in stories found at the margins and forgotten layers of history and social life, bringing to light similarities between elementary gestures (of shock or astonishment) of the she-wolf and women of Devils'Hole, and miracles of Our Lady. Affinities may be noted between narratives found by Ginzburg in substrata of the witches' Sabbath (followers of the goddess Diana changing into animals; werewolves protecting homes and harvests; etc.), and ethnographical materials found in substrata of Aparecida, particularly in performances of shape-shifting women of Devils' Hole and amusement parks.

Both Our Lady and she-wolf are trapped – the she-wolf in a cage and Aparecida in a golden, silver and iron enclosure covered with bulletproof glass. At least for an instant, the she-wolf breaks through the bars of the cage. In the magic mirror of performance, Aparecida sees the image of a she-wolf.

Dolls in performance

When I saw the dolls, in the early 1990s, I was startled. Many years had passed since I had seen people fishing on Riverport Street. But, even considering the nature of what they were doing, these people were exceedingly still. They looked hallucinatory, like apparitions. They were fishermen dolls. They appeared next to the Settler's House, or *Casa do Povoador*, on the banks of the Piracicaba River.

According to local storytellers, this house, which was said to be the oldest in the city, would have belonged to the city's founding hero, the *bandeirante* Captain Antônio Corrêa Barbosa. As explorers of the interior of Brazil, *bandeirantes*, who have been portrayed as heroic figures, were also known for their expeditions to capture Indians and runaway enslaved people. Throughout the 1970s and following decades, city government led efforts to recover the memory of the *bandeirantes*, associated with the Settler's House, then in ruins. The project known as the "Reconquest of Riverport Street" (*Reconquista da Rua do Porto*), which was launched in 1972, involved not only restoration of the Settler's House, but, also, promotion of tourism, urbanization of Riverport Street, construction of the new City Hall headquarters, and removal of riverbank residents.

In moments of danger, images articulating past and present may erupt. Suddenly, they appear. According to Walter Benjamin (1995: 105-110), who was inspired by Marcel Proust and Sigmund Freud, the voluntary and conscious act of producing and narrating a memory may itself cause one to forget. This may also be true, Benjamin would say, in regard to narrating and producing the memory of a city. On the other hand, involuntary memory, which stirs the depths of oblivion, may bring forgotten images to life. In Piracicaba, from the whirlpools of the city's unconscious, images of dolls on riverbanks emerge.

I soon learned that the dolls were made by a person called Elijah, who lived near the river. A neighbor's daughter, he said, wanted a doll. Having already made dolls for the Burning of Judas festivities on Riverport Street, Elijah made a life-size doll for the child. The girl liked it. But, her younger brother was terrified. He couldn't sleep. At the request of the child's mother, Elijah took the doll away. Placing it on the riverbank, Elijah himself was astounded. For, in the image of the doll, he saw the old riverbank dwellers, *barranqueiros*, people who, like himself, were born by the river, many of whom had already died, such as his own father and mother, and grandpar-

ents. In the doll figure Elijah saw some of his ancestors. Soon he made other dolls which, joining the first, populated the riverbanks. Initially they were placed by the Settler's House, the *Casa do Povoador*. As the old house was restored, a real settlement began to appear at its margins, through the multiplication of dolls made by Elijah Rocha.

However, some people set fire to the dolls and tried to drown them, throwing them in the river. "When they threw one into the water, I would make three or four more. If they set fire to five, I would make ten in their place." The more people mistreated the dolls, the more dolls Elijah would make. Due to the "wickedness" of such people, Elijah said, he took the dolls to the other side of the river, the wooded area near the ruins of the old sugar mill. Even so, some people continued to mistreat the dolls, setting them on fire and throwing them into the water. Elijah persisted. With the help of long irons, he fixed the dolls deep into the clay so that not even the flash floods could wash them away. "The dolls won't leave these riverbanks," he said. The stories that he told about the dolls were similar to the ones he told about himself and other *barranqueiros*. "I'm not leaving the riverbank", "not even the Queen of England could make me leave!". Citing some of his family members and neighbors – such as Lalo, Tote, Piranha, Lambari, and Catfish –, he said that, despite pressures, *barranqueiros* such as himself refused to go.

Especially during seasonal floods, city social workers, firefighters, and police tried to get riverbank dwellers to leave. With the development of tourism and rising costs of property alongside the river, *barranqueiros* found themselves at risk of losing their homes. But, just like the dolls made by Elijah, they refused to leave.

Elijah's action to populate the riverbanks circles back with the force of an energized field formed by riverbank dwellers and dolls, revitalizing *barranqueiros* in their determination not to leave Riverport Street. In this circuit, relationships take place between the dead and the living, past and present. The dolls evoke ancestors, "old riverbank dwellers", or *barranqueiros*, "some of whom have already died". Evoking the presence of an absence, they are charged with the energies of history. As Elijah places dolls on the banks of the river, he seeks to hear, in the whisper of the waters, the muted voices of the past. Like submerged images rising from the whirlpools of time, the dolls emerge.

Art touches life. Dolls reveal themselves as persons. The artist and craftsman Elijah considered them as living beings. "They're not the dolls of Elijah", he oftentimes said, contradicting a widespread perception. "It's the other way around, I'm Elijah of the dolls".

From the waste and debris of a flash flood called progress, following the banks of the river, Elijah made the dolls. In a cart pulled by a horse called Otter, he gathered the leftovers and discarded items of the city. "I'm the biggest garbage collector in Piracicaba." According to Elijah, soon after being dismissed from the Mausa factory,

in 1975, he began working as a collector. Roaming the streets of Piracicaba to gather waste materials, he provided for his family. At the end of 1970, as seen above, with discarded materials he began to make the dolls that inhabit the riverbanks. Waste was transformed into persons, in the form of dolls. With donated or discarded clothes, and, even, the clothes found on corpses that occasionally washed up at Coffin Bridge, the dolls were dressed. The artist and craftsman Antônio Carlos Morelato, Elijahs's neighbor, once saw a young man crying while hugging a doll. "My father, my father", the young man kept saying. On one of the dolls he recognized the clothes of his father, who had died the previous week. Speaking of Elijah's work, Morelato said: "When he dresses the dolls, he resurrects people."

Elijah Rocha was born by the river. In his memories, the river has always been his home. Fish from the river sustained his family and kept hunger away. Gardens of corn, cassava, herbs, fruits, and beans cultivated on riverbanks also gave sustenance. In 1975, after a workers' strike, when Elijah was fired from the Mausa factory, the river came to his rescue. "I owe an obligation to the river", "this river is sacred" – like a refrain, these phrases resonate throughout Elijah's narratives.

Elijah belongs to the river. The horse who accompanies him when collecting the city's waste and leftovers is called Otter – a river creature. His brother, Piranha, has the nickname of a fish. His neighbors are called Catfish and Lambari, just like the fish that they eat. Likewise, the dolls which he makes belong to the river. When making them, and placing them on the riverbanks, Elijah feels that he is giving something back to the river. With fishing poles and cans of worms, the dolls evoke images of a time when the river gave fish in abundance.

Elijah remembers the days when he used to catch fish by hand. His neighbor, Tote, speaks of a particular nighttime fishing practice, called "butt-hitting", *bate-bunda*:

> In those days, you wouldn't fish for *lambari*. The fish itself would jump in the boat. You'd bring the boat near shore, about two meters away, so as not to scrape bottom, at half speed, shining a flashlight. Someone would stay at the head, hitting the bottom of the boat. The *lambari* would jump in. Man, how they jumped in!

According to this fantastic, surreal image, fishermen call for the fish by hitting the bottom of the boat. Rather than being caught, the fish themselves jump into the boat. The fishing dolls made by Elijah don't catch fish either. With fishing poles, they call the fish. In this enchanted world created by the artist, fishing poles become magic wands, attracting the fish and repopulating the river.

The "other side" of the river, the woods next to the ruins of the old sugar mill, where Elijah took the dolls, is also the place where, according to stories told about

the origins of the city, the Paiaguá Indians lived. Elijah said that his father was Indian and his mother *cabocla*, a term referring to mixed white and Indian or Black ancestry. Before working at the Mausa factory, he was employed by the "Boyes" textile mill, in front of which was located an old Paiaguá cemetery, no longer visible. His house was located next to the fishermen's wharf, or *Largo dos Pescadores*, on Morais Barros Street, where the old Caiapó Indian trail passed by. This trail was later used by *bandeirantes*, as the *Picadão do Mato Grosso* ("Big Mato Grosso Trail") to explore the interior of Brazil. The Amerindians who inhabited the Piracicaba riverbanks before the arrival of *bandeirante* colonizers, and who became known as Paiaguás – a Tupi-Guarani term meaning "wanderers of the Paraguai River" –, called themselves *Evuevi*, "people of the river".

As I have already mentioned, after people started mistreating the dolls, setting them on fire, and throwing them into the river, Elijah took them to the "other side", the *lado de lá*, the woods next to the ruins of the sugar mill, located on the right hand side of the river, opposite from the banks on the left, where the Settler's House, the *Casa do Povoador*, was built. In 1776, according to one of the stories told about the founding of the city, the *bandeirante* Antônio Corrêa Barbosa decided to establish the settlement of colonizers precisely on the banks on the right side, downriver from the waterfalls, where the Amerindian people lived. The Paiaguá (*Evuevi*) people were removed from the riverbanks, and decimated. According to some records, the heads of Paiaguá Indians were mounted by *bandeirantes* on sticks by the river, possibly in places where Elijah mounted the dolls.

Every day, in a cart pulled by a horse called Otter, Elijah takes a route that goes from Morais Barros Street, the old Caiapó trail, or *Picadão do Mato Grosso*, to the garden in front of the "Boyes" factory, where the Paiaguá cemetery used to be, subsequently following the riverbanks to Coffin Bridge, where bodies of those who died in the river, carried by the waters, oftentimes appeared. In the cart, Elijah carries the leftovers and waste materials that are transformed into dolls. "When he dresses the dolls, he resurrects people." And, with them, the riverbanks, fish, and life of the river. In this theater of dolls, on the banks of the river running through the city, ghosts are agitated.

Ghosts

Recalling the moments when I was taken by surprise by the uncanny images of dolls, she-wolves, and *boias frias*, Walter Benjamin's materialist historiography comes to mind:

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure, he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past.
>
> (Benjamin, 1985: 231)

The Benjaminian monad is what Avery Gordon (2008: 65) calls a ghost. The *boias frias*, she-wolf, and dolls were monads of this kind. In performance, as images originating from submerged and subterranean places, they appear. Suddenly, like an otter, they emerge from the depths of oblivion, taking one by surprise, and playing with danger. By these images I have been haunted. In their whirlpools, I believe, lie stories that have not yet come to be, and, as Benjamin would say, "a revolutionary chance to fight for the oppressed past".

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