



Body and historical-social experience in the Brazilian cinema (2014-2021)

*Corpo e experiência
histórico-social no cinema
brasileiro (2014-2021)*



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Abstract: This article argues that a certain independent Brazilian cinema (2014-2021) invests in the somatic mediation of social-historical experience. It suggests that films made by or starring individuals targeted by inequalities of race, class, and gender mobilize the body on two fronts. On one hand, as a cumulative sign of subject determination processes. On the other hand, as a matrix of resistances produced by performed experiences, both in the epistemes they transmit and the identities they displace. The dual political attribute is discussed through the analysis of *O verbo se fez carne* (2019), by Ziel Karapotó, and *Vaga carne* (2019), by Grace Passô and Ricardo Alves Jr.

Keywords: contemporary Brazilian cinema; body; raciality; accumulation; agency.

Resumo: O artigo argumenta que certo cinema brasileiro independente (2014-2021) investe na mediação somática da experiência histórico-social. Observa-se que filmes realizados ou protagonizados por sujeitos alvos de desigualdades de raça, classe e gênero mobilizam o corpo em duas frentes. De um lado, como signo cumulativo de processos de determinação dos sujeitos. De outro, como matriz de resistências produzidas por experiências performadas, seja nas epistemes que transmitem, seja nas identidades que deslocam. O duplo atributo político é discutido a partir das análises de *O verbo se fez carne* (2019), de Ziel Karapotó, e *Vaga carne* (2019), de Grace Passô e Ricardo Alves Jr.

Palavras-chave: cinema brasileiro contemporâneo; corpo; racialidade; acumulação; agência.

Introduction

This article analyses the aesthetic and political singularities of certain contemporary independent Brazilian cinema (2014-2021), focusing on the prominence given to corporeality. It proposes that filmographies made by and/or starring subjects who live in conditions of inequality due to race and class positions, sometimes in intersection with gender, depict the social-historical experience through a somatic mediation. It is argued that one of the strengths of such production lies in the valorisation of the body as a means of sensitive enunciation of the mechanisms of power inflicted on subalternised subjects and, conversely, of their aesthetics of resistance.

Recent research has analysed the body in Brazilian cinema over the last two decades from a political perspective. Brandão and Souza (2021, p. 54), for instance, address a queer filmography in which LGBTQIA+ people confront biopolitical regimes and mobilise their corporeality amid a struggle for “the right to exist, reinventing themselves in the midst of capital, the precariousness and vulnerability that surrounds them”. In her defence of updating an expressive regime of attractions by investing in the spectator’s affections and sensory-sentimental engagements, Baltar (2023, p. 16) also recognises the centrality of the body “as a vector, effect and instrument of political, social and cultural disputes”.

Notwithstanding the parallels with the aforementioned works, the approach of this article is circumscribed around an empirical observation, a thematic recurrence, concerning works in which corporeality is given prominence based on the deviation from a state or physical condition of well-being, such as: tiredness, convalescence, pathologies, trauma and subjection to death. Secondly, of interest here are the formal expedients of films that construct staging based on an economy of means whose main focus or foundation is bodily gestures, which stand out from the other filmic elements. Instead of being restricted to a dramatic event or narrative propellant, corporeality responds directly, through subjection and contravention, to a political conjuncture founded on state violence or micro-powers - sometimes in the wake of the colonial process of national formation.

The crises and the concentric presence of the body in the staging, taken separately or overlapping, allow us to identify a transversality in films belonging to different modes of enunciation. Examples abound. In *Branco sai, preto fica* (*White Out, Black In*) (2014), by Adirley Queirós, the protagonists carry the marks of police violence on their bodies, but also the memory of everyday forms of freedom. In fiction about workers, such as *Arábia* (*Araby*, 2017), by Affonso Uchôa and João Dumans,

and *Mascarados* (2020), by Marcela and Henrique Borela, resistance to bodily exhaustion is a fundamental part of a class experience (Costa Júnior, 2023). In Black cinema, Michelle Mattiuzzi's *Experimentando vermelho em dilúvio* (*Experiencing the Flooding Red*, 2016) makes the gesture of walking an instance of remembering the pain of tortured enslaved people in Brazil and also the struggles for emancipation, while Ana Pi's *NoirBLUE* (2018) uses dance as a sign of a historical-speculative stitching of Afro-diasporic lives. In films starring indigenous people and filmed by white people, such as Luiz Bolognesi's *Ex-Pajé* (2018) and Maya Da-Rin's *A febre* (*The Fever*, 2020), illness manifests a somatic awareness, the urgency to act against the ongoing ethnocide. On the other hand, in works produced mostly by indigenous people, such as *Nũ hũ Yāg Mũ Yōg Hām: Essa terra é nossa!* (*Nuhu Yāg Mũ Yōg Hām: This Land is Our Land!*, 2020), by Isael Maxakali, Sueli Maxakali, Carolina Canguçu and Roberto Romero, the body both exposes the necropolitics of agribusiness on the Tikmu'un (Maxakali), in Minas Gerais, and is a collection of traditional knowledge and cosmopolitics, a tool in the struggle for territory. On the other hand, in *Ava Yvy Vera: A terra do povo do raio* (*Ava Yvy Vera - The Land of the Lightning's People*, 2016), by Genito Gomes, Valmir Gonçalves Cabreira, Jhonn Nara Gomes, Jhonatan Gomes, Edina Ximenez, Dulcídio Gomes, Sarah Brites and Joilson Brites, the Guarani-Kaiowá recall the conflicts with gunmen hired by farmers in the region. The oral narration is strengthened by re-enactment, by an embodied, gestural memory.

Taking into account their aesthetic particularities and political agendas, the grouping of the films by their corporeal prevalence shares a common predicate: the stage presence of subjects who do not fully enjoy the status of (ethical-legal) citizens before the Brazilian state, often being deprived of the auspices of the law and relegated to a logic of exclusion or obliteration. Marked by the sign of particularity, by a difference in relation to a presumably universal hegemonic Self that establishes the parameter of humanity, the protagonists of the aforementioned works have their ontology reduced to the ontic dimension at first².

Indigenous thinker Ailton Krenak (2019) has often criticised the select club of humanity protected by universal rights, organised around a civilising modernity based on the colonisation of nature. From this group, a sub-humanity made up of

² By recovering Martin Heidegger's distinction between the ontic, referring to particular entities or the determinations of being, and the ontological, being as such, Carneiro (2023, p. 19) draws attention to how the subsumption of subjects to the categories of race, colour, culture, religion and/or ethnicity reduces "being to its ontic dimension, denying its ontological condition and leaving its humanity incomplete". The framing of the subject within a particularisation, imposed by a hegemonic "I", limits them to a specific group, tearing them away from universality.

peoples affiliated to the land (caiçaras, indigenous people, quilombolas, among others), targets of territorial expropriation and barbarities of all kinds, are excluded. In another area of political philosophy, the production of subjects through difference has received rigorous reflection from Denise Ferreira da Silva (2022). The author conceptualises what she calls the “analytics of raciality” to refer to the knowledge apparatus resulting from the founding statements of modern philosophy and science, which, between the 17th and 18th centuries, established the significance of the racial difference of the “others of Europe”. This apparatus produced an ontological context that “fuses particular bodily traits, social configurations, and global regions, in which human difference is reproduced as irreducible and unoblatable” (Silva, 2007, XIX). The racial signifier gestated there – in combination with other social categories (class, gender, sexuality, culture, etc.) – goes back to subjects who can be excluded from (legal) universality without causing any kind of ethical crisis, as they would be devoid of self-determination and transparency, and therefore distinct from the post-Enlightenment subject, whom the law and the state protect³. In Brazil, this situation affects, for example, black, indigenous and poor people – the latter because of the disappearance of the distinction between the protective and punitive mandates of a state that participates in violence in peripheral contexts (Silva, 2014).

In a contemporary work to Silva’s⁴, Sueli Carneiro (2023) investigated how the existence of a raciality device⁵ operates an ontological division in Brazilian society by sheltering subjects under different conditions in terms of living and dying. By producing ontological (modes of subjectivation), epistemological (knowledge) and power fields, disciplining and normalising race relations on the basis of whiteness as the hegemonic Self, “the priority and majority inclusion of the racially elected [whites]

³ Silva (2007) demonstrates the construction of the racially subalternised as a subject of affectability, an effect of an external determination, governed and not guided by universal reason. Their existence is in contrast to that of post-Enlightenment European man, considered the subject of transparency, a tributary of the Kantian model of transcendence and the Herderian model of history, forged in terms of self-determination “the ability to alone decide on its essence or existence - which requires the bold articulation and disavowal of the ontoepistemological relevance of extended things, that is, bodies” (Silva, 2007, p.XXXVIII). This subject would encompass “the self-determined people that the law and the state protect”, as opposed to the subjects of affectability, the racialised subalterns, who “before these structures [...] are nobody, they are non-beings” (Silva, 2014, p. 100).

⁴ The works by Silva (2022) and Carneiro (2023) are the results of their respective doctoral theses, completed in the 2000s.

⁵ The concept, based on both Foucault’s *dispositif* and Charles Mills’s racial contract, encompasses epistemicide and interdictions in discursive productions and social practices that inscribe black people under a social imaginary capable of naturalising their subalternisation, while forging the superiority of whites (Carneiro, 2023). Although she places race at the centre of her work, the author analyses its different impacts on the male and female genders.

in the spheres of reproduction of life appears at the same time as the subordinate and minority inclusion of the Blacks, who eventually survived the technologies of death of biopower” (Carneiro, 2023, p. 25).

The brief allusion to these authors introduces the existence of a distinct onto-epistemological regime for subjects who do not fit into the hegemonic categories of race and class, which offers me a basis for understanding the protagonists of a certain contemporary Brazilian cinema that places corporeality at the centre of political experiences. In this case, relating it to the material effects of a certain humanity set aside. At other times, by including the body in the arsenal that claims the right to life, forges possible worlds, and imagines futures beyond the mechanisms of subalternity. The double status announces the irreducibility of essentialisation. In Black cinema, for instance, the “trauma and the experiences of violence and death that indelibly mark the black trajectories in the African diaspora will always be present, but cannot be the sole determinant” (Oliveira, 2020, p. 34). It seems reasonable to think of the argument in a broader sense, resonating with films that, dedicated to other subjects living under difference, engage in the struggle against imaginaries and material conditions that crystallise life solely in the sphere of pain and violence.

The interval in which the emergence of a centrality of the body to historical and social experience is identified is marked by intense transformations in Brazilian cinema and in the country. Situated between the June 2013 protests and the parliamentary coup to oust then-president Dilma Rousseff, 2014 saw the release of three films produced in Brazilian peripheries. The works mark a turning point in the cinema of those territories by focusing on everyday life from the point of view of its residents or former residents: *Branco sai, preto fica*, by Queirós; *A vizinhança do tigre*, by Affonso Uchôa; and *Ela volta na quinta*, by André Novaes Oliveira. The trio is emblematic of a broader context that reflects the social transformations⁶ engendered in the 2000s and the rise of a production characterised by the endogenous viewpoint, in which fabulation is derived from the filmed subjects.

⁶ Especially the policies for a democratising culture that began with the more inclusive and diverse agenda of the federal governments of the Workers’ Party (2003-2016) (Dennison, 2020), which included, for instance, the National Culture Plan in 2010. Amid this scenario, entities were formed to strengthen the production of indigenous, Black, peripheral, LGBTQIA+ and women’s films, as well as specific exhibitions, often fuelled by “critical thinking that was created and sustained outside the confines of both film criticism in its conventional circuit (specialised magazines and newspapers) and the theorising and historiography produced at university” (Guimarães, 2020, p. 11). A contextual overview would include, among other things, the reduction in the cost of the production chain, the increase in the number of undergraduate courses in Cinema and Audiovisual, and the socio-racial quotas for public universities and federal technical institutes.

that, in some contemporary Brazilian cinema, the body evinces the ontological division through which different life conditions are attributed on the basis of class, race and gender. The films mobilise their own means to show what in the field of humanities is identified as the relational predicate of the body, its porosity to the space-time it inhabits, allowing it to act as a condensed sign of the positions the subject occupies. This perspective resonates with David Harvey's (2000) exposition of Marx's theory of the embodied subject, where he discusses the body as an accumulation strategy: both moulded by the external forces of capital accumulation and circulation, and as an element that perpetuates them. The author recognises that to claim the body as a source of experience is to use a privileged means "to counter the entire network of abstractions (scientific, social, political-economic) through which social relations, power relations, institutions, and material practices get defined, represented, and regulated" (Harvey, 2000, p. 100). Recovering the body would initially make it possible to exemplify the networks that subject it, the social processes of determination.

The idea of accumulation can be used to think about the different states of crisis that I announced at the beginning of the text. However, it deserves to be expanded. As Mesquita (2021, p. 5) identifies in Brazilian films from the 2000s, especially from 2010 onwards, this historicity is centered on the dispute over collective memory stemming from a reexamination of the past. It is conducted "in relation to the present (and sometimes the future) of characters, territories, and collectivities. In short, they are narratives that reopen the past in the present in order to reflect and act on the present".

The corporeality situated at the centre of this dynamic or aesthetic of historical accumulation supplants the insignia of oppression/subjection, since it is capable of preserving temporally distant experiences, allowing them to be exhumed, revolved, and put back into play so that they can be confronted, especially in the case of traumatic events. This perspective echoes what Diana Taylor (2003, p. 20, emphasis added) identifies in performance studies as the formation of a "repertoire" by the body, an "embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing-in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge". The author differentiates between the memory inscribed on the body and that provided through archives, which are supposedly long-lasting materials (texts, documents, letters, archaeological remains, etc.).

In Brazil, the proposal of an embodied memory found fertile ground in the research of Leda Maria Martins (2021 p. 36), who emphasises how the "production,

inscription and dissemination of knowledge” in African, Afro-Brazilian and native peoples’ cultures is strongly based on “bodily performances, through rites, songs, dances, synaesthetic and kinetic ceremonies”. Despite colonial repression of these practices, processes of restoration and resistance have ensured the survival of embodied knowledge, transmitting and mobilising it as a constituent of contemporary post-colonial societies, including Brazil.

Body knowledge is analysed by Martins (2021) not only in the context of cultural performances (rituals and ceremonies, for instance), but also artistic ones, which signals a welcome influx for the study of the body in contemporary Brazilian cinema. In particular, the thesis of the body as a mnemonic and epistemic *locus*⁸ allows us to delimit a second pole for the reflection proposed here, that of agency. It recognises corporeality as one of the systems through which subjects claim a sphere of action in relation to the social-historical processes that subject them, thus refusing the position of mere passive surface. This formulation crystallizes in analyses such as the one André Brasil (2020, p. 23) dedicates to *Árvore do esquecimento* (2013), by Paulo Nazareth, *Ungüento* (2015), by Dalton Paula, and *NoirBLUE* (2018), when he defends the field of performance as “a device for remembering and elaborating history” from the body.

Works produced in the fictional or even documentary realms also conjure up their own ways of figuring out the split between the accumulation resulting from historical-social processes and the agency of subjects. Without losing sight of this, I will analyse two experimental films that are emblematic of how the interface with artistic performance enables to confront the processes of determination stemming from devices of raciality.

Unravelling ontoepistemological traps

From an endogenous perspective, the short film *O verbo se fez carne* (The Word Became Flesh, 2019), by Ziel Karapotó, and the medium-length film *Vaga carne* (Dazed Flesh, 2019), by Grace Passô and Ricardo Alves Jr., use corporeality to produce strategies of resistance to the ontological and epistemic policies of extermination of indigenous and Black people. The films radicalise the embodiment

⁸ Furtado and Lima (2016, p. 136) reflect on the temporalities harboured under the corporeality of the protagonists of *Branco sai, preto fica* (2014) based on the idea of the “body as a living archive”. In this article, I’m reluctant to use this formulation for two reasons. Firstly, because it is indebted to a European philosophical framework that disregards the body as shaped by class and identity markers, conceiving of it without naming these power structures. Secondly, because the meaning of archive is almost opposite to that of Taylor (2003), on whom this work is inspired.

of the social-historical experience from the constitution of the space, formulated from a scenic darkness in which one or a few points of light outline the body, with the corollary being its isolation from the representative framework and from a conventional narrative. In the end, the body is enthroned or, at least, constitutes the core of the sound-visual device. Its presence is both centrifugal, from which everything departs, and centripetal, towards which everything coincides.

Embodied knowledge and history

Coming from the Terra Nova community in Alagoas, Ziel Karapotó is part of a heterogeneous group of indigenous artists⁹ who, more strongly in the last decade, have produced works based on performance and the visual arts. Jaider Esbell (2020) called this movement Contemporary Indigenous Art (AIC), “made and contextualised by its own authors”, in a “phenomenal and non-modal transgenerational turn”, carried out as a “trap for traps” – colonial, of terms, of the art system, of academia, of the state, among others¹⁰.



Figure 1: *O verbo se fez carne* (2019)

At the beginning of *O verbo se fez carne*, a small circle of light on the ground marks out a patch of land on which a Bible and a plate with a piece of tongue rest. While Gregorian chants sound from the soundtrack, an indigenous

⁹ Such as Denilson Baniwa, Gê Viana, Sallisa Rosa, Uýra Sodoma, Graciela Guarani and Abiniel Nascimento.

¹⁰ The artist Gustavo Caboco (2020), from the Wapixana ethnic group, resonates with Esbell’s (2020) notion, thinking of the AIC “as a place, a meeting point between us, relatives of various peoples, academic science, museums, the contemporary art system, cultural centres, indigenous art galleries, native museums, literature, cinema, the farm, auntie’s house, grandma’s house, and so many other fields”.

man (Ziel) enters the field. He is wearing body paint and a straw petticoat, holding a *maraca* in one hand and smoking a *xanduca* (pipe) with the other (Figure 1). The presence has a solemn air due to the superior lighting and the hieratic gestures that accentuate each movement. The indigenous man's first action in the ritualistic scene is to leave the *maraca* and the *xanduca* on the ground to take the Bible in hand. As he opens it, the preaching of a pastor argues for the salvation of different ethnic groups through Jesus Christ. It is not hard to see that the film alludes to the process of catechising indigenous people. In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in evangelical churches in the director's community¹¹, resulting in the discrediting and consequent abandonment of traditional practices and knowledge.

Although there are indications of a contemporary situation, it's very telling that the temporality of the work is bifurcated, referring to both the past and the present. The black spatiality cloaks the visibility in opacity, obscuring the possible contextualisation of the action in a historically determined space-time. In addition, the soundtrack overlays the preaching of the Protestant pastor with a song from the Catholic Church, which, as it is well-known, was the spearhead of indigenous ethnocide during the colonisation of Brazil. Contemporary colonisations are superimposed on the wounds of the past. Ziel's body in performance inhabits and makes visible the crossroads of historical accumulation.

The unremarkable action of replacing the *maraca* and the *xanduca* with the Bible embodies history, condenses in the gestural dimension, strengthened by the soundtrack, the secular process of stripping the socio-cultural values of native peoples (and Afro-descendants) by attacking "their individual and collective identities, starting with the attempt to replace polytheistic paganism with monotheistic Euro-Christianity" (Santos, 2021, p. 29). The diversity of elements that the colonial apparatus used to objectify/dehumanise these peoples, stripping them of their cultural identity, included the valorisation of literacy and writing to the detriment of embodied knowledge (Martins, 2021). It is important to realise how *O verbo se fez carne* puts on stage, through corporeality, the (neo)colonial onslaught on ontology (the constitution of being) and epistemes (ways of knowing), using the tools of raciality (Silva, 2007)¹².

¹¹ According to Karapotó's statement (Ocupa [...], 2021).

¹² According to Carneiro (2023, p. 89), "it is not possible to disqualify the forms of knowledge of the dominated peoples without also disqualifying them, individually and collectively, as knowing subjects".



Figure 2: *O verbo se fez carne* (2019)

In fact, Karapotó's film does not just figure an intertemporal colonisation. If the performative body reactivates history, it also takes on the agency of counter-colonisation¹³, setting the trap for the traps. After leafing through the bible, Ziel progressively tears out its pages (Figure 2). The act is followed by the grunt of a pig, overlapping the Christian book and the shepherd's voice, as if by analogy with the noise of a hunted animal. When he closes the Bible and places it on the floor, the evangelical preaching stops, while the sounds of a rattle and indigenous Toré chants erupt, standing out in the soundtrack. As the scene continues, Ziel sews the pages into the ox's tongue and then places it in his own mouth. It is not for me to determine the scene in terms of its strict meaning, but only to suggest that there seems to be a ritual or spell against two (neo)colonial instruments: the Christian religion and language. The performance conjures up a gesture of emancipation for the right to memory and to write one's own history, in resistance to the expropriation of culture and the self. In the words of Esbell (2020), "you don't have much choice but to try to become yourself, and that means denying not exactly who you are but what they wanted you to be".

¹³ For *quilombola* master Antônio Bispo dos Santos (2021, p. 35), "[...] all the processes of resistance and struggle in defence of the territories of peoples against colonisers, the symbols, meanings and ways of life practiced in these territories".

(Audio) *Figurative Accidents*

Starring and co-directed by Grace Passô, *Vaga carne* was made at a time when Black Brazilian cinema was becoming a “consolidated movement” (Oliveira, 2020, p. 34), given the continuity in the flow of production, the existence of an audience and the formation of a field of critical-academic thought. The film, based on a dramaturgical text of the same name written by the artist and staged for the first time in 2016, chooses the identity of Black women as the matrix of a speculative exercise in which the arrangement between corporeality and subjectivity dismantles the ontological fixity reserved for positions of race and gender in Brazilian society. Through the body in the image, literally on a stage, nuanced by audiovisual signifiers, especially sound, the film both hypostasises and subverts the foundations of signs of oppression.

The protagonist of *Vaga carne* is a voice (by Passô) without a body. Her first appearance is on a black canvas, with no figurative referent. There, in voice-over, she claims her existence as an independent, free being, capable of invading and abandoning, at the whim of desire, the most diverse materials: objects, animals, humans. The film’s turning point comes when the sound entity occupies the body of a Black woman (Figure 3), Passô. From there, the whole experience is lived. A foreigner, the voice describes and shares with the viewer the sensations of the discoveries made in its host. Where there could be unity, alterity is cultivated. Although the voice is located in the body, its autonomous subjectivity is not fully integrated as part of the entity it occupies. *Vaga carne* is thus based on a kind of (audio)figurative accident that destabilises meanings, throwing off any attempt to understand the body and the subject, especially those based on race and gender markers.

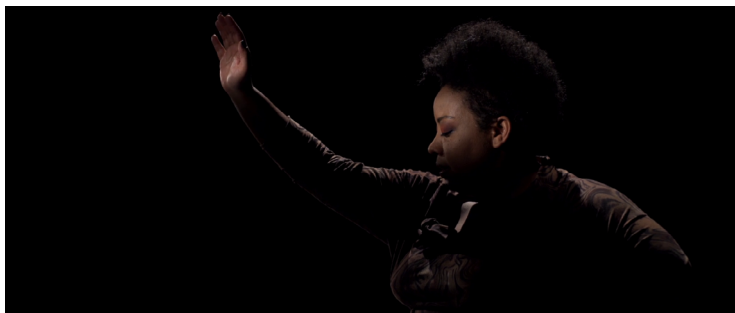


Figure 3: *Vaga carne* (2019)

By being separated from the woman’s subjectivity, the body in *Vaga carne* is presented as a form, as a visual matter to be inhabited by the voice. One suspects that the configuration goes back to some extent to the split that, according to Achille

Mbembe (2017, p. 39), in the wake of Fanon, racism triggers between the subject and their body, by replacing the former with the simulacrum of appearances, covering it with an imaginary structure, relegating “the being, the life, the work and the language of Blacks” to the background. This position, in which the body is apprehended as an exteriority separate from the subject, can be linked to the very title of Passô’s film, if we consider that flesh is a term with a specific meaning in a classic text of Black feminism. Referring to the period of American slavery, Hortense J. Spillers distinguishes the captive’s flesh as a stage prior to a body, susceptible to de-generification, a zero degree of socio-cultural conceptualisation in which “any hint or suggestion of a dimension of ethics, of a relatedness between the human personality and its anatomical features, [...] between the human personality and cultural institutions” is lost (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). But does this perspective do justice to the film?

Although the split between voice and body may allude to the aforementioned critical repertoire, by obscuring the subjectivity of the Black woman, who becomes a mere host, it cannot be denied that the emphasis on “another” subjectivity, that of the full-bodied voice, opens up multiple readings. Separation, then, also inverts the terms of the racist equation. If the latter reduces the subject to the phantasmagoria it casts over the body, what *Vaga carne* builds, as already mentioned, is the anteriority of subjectivity, the primacy of inner life. The voice occupies the body in order to recognise the pleasures of human existence: the physical and semantic resonance of words, the recognition of being alive, feeling, loving. The film’s first form of agency seems to be based on an experience that precedes any socio-historical accumulation of the body. It moves pendulously between the experience of the Black woman-voice in a hypothetical universality (the right to the ontological) and the markers of difference determined by power relations (the reduction to the ontic). The danger of the latter is often announced by the voice: “There’s a ferocious animal out there, something that keeps arrows and guns in its hands! Do you know what that beast is called? Do you know what it’s called? Do you its name? It’s the gaze of others.”

What others? The woman-voice is aware that she does not inhabit a neutral existence. At one point, she had already indicated the nuances that overlap the body: “Corpo-Corpo-Corpo-Corpo-Cor-Cor-Cor-Cor...”. The same awareness seems to drive the warning he makes about gazes. On this subject, it does not hurt to recall Fanon’s oft-quoted words (1986, p. 109), which are nonetheless poignant:

[...] the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst

apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self.

The womanvoice is supposedly alert to the realisation that the white gaze is capable of disfiguring or overdetermining the Black person's perception of themselves and their body from the outside. The fear of being frozen or reduced to the mere specular existence of the body follows in a similar direction: "[...] you want to imprison me, that's what you want. You want me to be a mere representation of you, flesh [...]. You want me to help you be the image the other person wants to see. But no!" These conflicts between voice and body/identity prevent one from determining the other, promoting correspondence and distancing, in an ambivalence that is never appeased or crystallised under fixity. A kind of distance is established, less in the sense of Brecht, a playwright dear to the actress's career (Diegues; Azevedo; Abreu, 2019), and more in the sense of strangeness that disturbs meaning, engendering indeterminacy.



Figure 4: Exchange of glances between the Black-woman-voice and the audience – *Vaga carne* (2019)

Audiovisual disjunction: although the voice brings up the threat of fixation from the outside, the staging never delivers such a situation, refraining

from summoning the external gaze of whites. On the contrary, the film is built on a network of gazes between Black people of different generations and genders (Figure 4). Sometimes they are sitting in the audience, sometimes they are walking across the stage, interacting very discreetly with the woman-voice through physiognomic expressions. None of the reactions, however, suggests an overdetermination. Since the protagonist and the audience share a racial position, the diegesis welcomes the soliloquy in a communal, internal reflexivity, woven by the gazes¹⁴, a gesture whose importance is central to the field of agency of Black people in Brazilian cinema (Oliveira, 2020), especially when their experiences point “to the diverse possibilities of non-essentialised [...] experiences in the world” (Freitas, 2018, p. 163).

If, on the one hand, the strangeness between body and voice in *Vaga carne* warns of the risk of fixating on an identity that is frozen beneath the surface, in contrast to a fluid, infinite subjectivity; on the other hand, as we have seen, the film is based on recognising a location. Apart from the relationship between the protagonist and the audience, there are moments when the voice identifies with its host. The culmination of the entanglement between the two occurs when it’s discovered that the woman is pregnant. Motherhood inspires in the voice a temporal awareness, compassion and dreams of the future for the “little flesh”. In the scene of identification between voice and body, the lights switch off and on successively, in a short circuit. It is a second figurative accident in the film, this time to make the bridging between the entities effective. In the midst of the blackout, the voice resolutely announces its decision to remain in the body to protect the foetus: “After all, I am a woman!”.

The life to come brings joy, but also the fear of embodied existence, reaffirming the risks pointed out at other times. What should be taught to the offspring, asks the dismayed woman-voice, addressing an interlocutor outside the field: “What is a man? What is a woman? What is an existence?” The montage overlays the scene with close-ups of the audience (Figure 5). Projected onto people, the questioning goes back less to a purely existential dilemma than to the sustenance of humanity that threatens subalternised groups in Brazilian society due to the devices of raciality, the ontological division that confers different conditions to lives – a possibility reinforced by the voices we hear at the end of the film, from Marielle Franco, Rosa Parks and other Black women who fought against the mechanisms of segregation.

¹⁴ A practice also present in Rodrigo Ribeiro’s *A morte branca do feiticeiro negro* (2020), in which Black experiences shared through a missive are embraced by a collective, expressed through a set of gazes and faces.



Figure 5: *Vaga carne* (2019)

Much could be said about the film's resources, such as the musicalisation of words, the silences, and the play between the visible and the darkness of the stage, but for the purposes of this text, it is important to emphasise that *Vaga carne* recruits the elusive. Indeterminacy hangs over both the Black woman-voice and the film,

in which Black experiences disarm, or at least dislocate the prisons surrounding notions such as subject, body and identity, in a short circuit that marks critical agency against the subalternisation derived from race and gender markers. The regimes of visibility of Black women in contemporary Brazilian cinema are supplanted, which Borges (2022, p. 125) distinguishes under the “relay between fixation (rigid, inflexible signifiers, fixed to stereotypes) and displacement (emergence of new signs that distance themselves from stereotypes and inhabit other sites of signification)”. Passô’s film certainly launches itself into unknown places of (non)signification, but its strength is to make blackness irreducible to an identity sign or a repertoire of unique ontological and epistemological codes, therefore, in a displacement that does not have a destination, and is configured under a deceptive dynamism.

A mapping of the ways in which contemporary Brazilian cinema gives the body a political status for groups living in conditions of inequality has yet to be written - certainly in dialogue with hermeneutic proposals such as Afrofabulations (Barros; Freitas, 2018), counter-colonising aesthetics (Guimarães, 2020), among others. For now, what is claimed in this article is accumulation and agency as two attributes that constantly gravitate around films centred on corporeality or somatic mediation. The approach taken consisted of an initial presentation of how films modulate identity markers through the tension between the simultaneous effects of power mechanisms and “practices of self-production” (Hall, 2014, p. 125) relating to narratives, performances and other processes of dispute in the symbolic-material field. Dealing with social macro-structures is also needed. However, it is no longer done through an external gaze, in a reflexive, abstract flight, detached from the material world, but from an embodied, immanent experience, formed in the enclave of the body-subject with the social and historical world.

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