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Over two years ago, we published a conversation with Walter Mignolo on decoloniality. The interview became one of our most-read pieces and was the first time that we expanded our focus on topics concerning African perspectives in South America. Around the same time, we traveled to Brazil and started conversations which developed into close exchanges with creatives and collectives such as Lanchonete.org, based in São Paulo, and the cultural magazine OMenelick 2°Ato. What may have seemed obvious from the start became even more clear to us in the process: the connection between Africa and South America. The link the Black Atlantic creates between the experiences, problems, debates, and productivity of cultural producers from African perspectives is crucial to the issues and people C& wants to provide a platform for.

The reality for most Afro-Brazilian artists today is still a state of invisibility within the Brazilian art scene and beyond. One example for this that remained with us was that of Rosana Paulino, who in 2010 was the first Afro-Brazilian artist to achieve a PhD in visual arts in Brazil. The first Black artist to receive a PhD in visual arts in the US was Jeff Donaldson — in 1974.

With this C& print issue focusing on Afro-Brazilian perspectives as well as the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo commencing this month, we continue to strengthen our focus on the connections between Africa and South America. We are especially happy to be co-editing this special edition with the amazing editorial team of OMenelick 2°Ato.

THE CONTEMPORARY AND (C&) TEAM

OMENELICK 2°ATO

For the past six years, the magazine OMenelick 2°Ato has been regularly publishing print and digital content that argues for Afro-oriented artistic production in Brazil and in other areas of the African Diaspora. We strive to recover essential biographies for the development of thought in the arts as well as to follow the ideas of a new generation of artists emerging in the twenty-first century. We persist on this path with resilience, motivated by our love of art and by the awareness that the artistic works we present express the plurality constituting us as Brazilian people. OMenelick 2°Ato continues the earliest project of São Paulo’s Black press, the O Menelick journal, which was in print for six months in 1915. We are the only Brazilian magazine in print to cover the production of work by the Black Diaspora in various artistic modes, bringing these efforts together in order to ensure a critical appraisal that locates and contextualizes the work of Black woman and man in film, theater, music, literature, and visual art. And so we are honored to partner with Contemporary And in this endeavor, for through encounters such as these that we forge new paths, new narratives, new trajectories.

THE OMENELICK 2°ATO TEAM

Let us invent better ways.

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THE TANGLED HISTORIES OF DISCONNECTED PLACES

There are contextual parallels between Brazilian and Zimbabwean politics, says artist LUCIA NHAMO, who recently completed a residency in Salvador de Bahia.
LUCIA NHAMO was awarded the Goethe/Lanchonete residency prize at Bamako Encounters in 2015. The Goethe Institute and Musagetes/ArtsEverywhere support the juried prize of a two-month residency for an artist from Bamako Encounters with Lanchonete.org in São Paulo. The residency prize is awarded to a female artist whose work broadens and/or challenges perspectives on contemporary African migrations.

characteristics of today’s society is the “increasing significance given to the archive,” Merewether’s concept of the “counter-archive” or the “counter-monument,” in which artists work through “a form of re-collection of that which has been silenced and buried,” informs my work as an artist. My urge to remember is tied up in the same principles that Avishai Margalit outlines in his book The Ethics of Memory, and is very much related to Derrida’s notion of archive fever as being a “searching for the archive right where it slips away.” Both personal and institutional archives continue to play a significant role in the work of practitioners who seek to problematize the past. When it comes to the impulse to create a range of alternatives in response to the dominant ideology, the counter-monument in particular sets memory in motion, verifying human experience while disrupting the one-way absolutes of authority.

You just completed a residency in Salvador de Bahia, at the Vila Sul. Could you talk a little bit about your experiences there and the encounters that you had?

Salvador was an incredible experience. Through the Goethe Institute, I had the opportunity to exhibit work and give a lecture during a performance festival run by the Escola de Belas Artes. I gave a lecture on my work at the university, and for many, the contextual parallels of Brazilian and Zimbabwean politics were of particular resonance. I also embarked on a project centered around the gesture of unraveling: I wrapped myself up in 20 meters of white fabric and rolled down different ladeiras (slopes) and sites in the city. The video footage is wonderfully bizarre. It also prompted a delightful collaboration with performance artist Michelle Mattiuzzi, who rolled for me just outside the Lina Bo Bardi “Coaty” building in Pelourinho, the city’s historic center.

What about your interest concerning the history of slavery in Africa and Brazil? How are you looking into this topic?

Zimbabwe doesn’t share in this legacy of transatlantic trade in the way that Benin does, for example. So while this is an incredibly important aspect of global history, it’s not a topic of personal resonance for me. I have, however, drawn tremendous value from the sentiments and historical investigation of artists that I’ve met here in Brazil who deal with this subject as part of their practice. You also cannot deal with the very grave contemporary issues around race in Brazil without confronting the repercussions of that deeply fraught historical legacy.

How do you see the relationship and connections between Lusophone artists and cultural producers from Africa and Latin America?

Language has been such a huge element and mediator of my experience here in Brazil. It has opened up an entire new awareness of the Lusophone world. I’ve been thinking a lot about early Portuguese trade and influence in what we know today as Zimbabwe: the introduction of maize as our staple crop, for example, and the integration of the Portuguese early settlers. I’ve also resolved to visit Mozambique. It’s right next door to us! I’m very much looking forward to an art-filled, in-depth experience that goes beyond the superficial tourist jaunt of beaches and shrimp.
FOCUS: 32ND BIENAL DE SÃO PAULO

I would suggest Kendrick Lamar’s Alright as a soundtrack to this piece. Imagine how conflicting it can be for young Black Brazilians to form their identity while growing up surrounded by mostly negative references to Blackness.

Brazil received more slaves than any other country in the Americas – around 40% of the people forced to leave the African continent between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries were brought here. We were the last country in the southern hemisphere to abolish slavery and we are the country with the second-largest Black population in the world, after Nigeria. Human trafficking created a complex and terrible transatlantic network that spanned nearly four centuries and contributed immensely to the formation of Brazilian society, influencing many of its cultural aspects. Official history in Brazil still silences the Black leadership in the struggle for abolition. And schoolbooks largely reproduce images of enslaved men and women only in submissive positions, dehumanizing them and ignoring the numerous slave rebellions that arose throughout the slavery period, especially during the nineteenth century. One result of these rebellions was what’s become one of the most iconic moments of the entire slavery period emerged – the deportation of former slaves back to West Africa. This return happened mainly to African and Brazilian-born freed slaves who lived in Bahia, where the main uprisings took place. During this period the region had a considerable number of Black Muslims, both enslaved and free, who participated in various rebellions. In 1835, the Malê Revolt took place, culminating in harsh punishments for those involved and deportation of freed slaves. This also extended to many of those who hadn’t necessarily engaged in the rebellions, but who were seen as a threat to the empire. It was in those moments of tension that the first groups of freed slaves were sent to Accra, the capital of Ghana, settling in Jamestown, one of the oldest parts of the city. Because of their technical skills they got involved in various activities such as jewelry making, construction and agriculture, and human trafficking itself, which was practiced extensively in the region. This showed once again the complex social web that had formed around the transatlantic slave trade. Having poor command of the regional languages, this group often used the expression tá bom, “it’s all right” (Portuguese for “it’s all right”) when struggling with communication. On this account other residents dubbed them Tabom people.

In April, as part of the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, we began Dias de Estudos em Accra (Accra Study Days) with a group of artists, curators, and researchers. The initial theme was the search for memories, possible continuities and traces left by the Tabom, as well as confronting the colonial ghosts that prowl the Jamestown area. In between walks in Labadi, a visit to the Makola market, and seminars, we had...
things were still very far from being what I expected.

I came to realize that the colonial ghosts were not to be mostly Black. Growing up in São Paulo, I was aware of the presence of Black people on the streets and gradually they moved away from these spaces that once were of fundamental importance to the local economy are now completely abandoned, almost as if in an attempt to erase a period that doesn’t evoke pride in anyone. The ghosts were there but the Tabom people were not. After their arrival, the Tabom received a number of privileges and also got involved in various commercial and political activities, which helped them build up their own network of influence. This would also grant them some prestige in Ghanaian society and gradually they moved away from the area that first welcomed them. The presence of Black people on the streets of Accra startled me from the beginning, even if I expected the population of Ghana to be mostly Black. Growing up in Brazil, where I got used to seeing Black men and women working mostly as domestic help or taking up roles at the bottom of the social pyramid, had a detrimental effect on my imagination. And thus it came as a surprise to find here young Black artists, Black curators, and Black researchers. In the end, I came to realize that the colonial ghosts were much more alive inside me, and that things were still very far from tâ bom.
LOOKING BACK

Pastinha já foi à África / Pra mostrar capoeira (Pastinha went to Africa / to show Brazilian capoeira). These words are taken from Triste Bahia, a song by Caetano Veloso, from the album Transa (1972). They refer to Vicente Pastinha, a master of capoeira, who in 1966 traveled to Dakar, where the First World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN) was held – an unprecedented cultural event, the like of which had never before taken place on African soil. Over the course of three weeks, more than 2,500 artists, musicians, academics, and writers came together in Dakar. The list of participants reads like a who’s who of the major figures in Black culture from the early to mid-twentieth century. The representatives came not only from the continent of Africa but also from Europe and the USA as well as Brazil, which was the only country from South America to feature at the festival. The project was based on the idea of Négritude, a philosophy proclaiming the power of “Black culture” on the global level. “For the defense and illustration of Négritude”: this is how the Senegalese president and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor solemnly characterized the project in his inaugural address. Vicente Pastinha was one of the forty-three members making up the Brazilian delegation, whose ranks included – besides capoeira performers – singers, painters, sculptors, and dancers from a samba school in Rio de Janeiro. Agnaldo dos Santos won the sculpture prize at the festival. At that time, Brazil was under military dictatorship and, at a diplomatic and commercial level, its participation in the festival was in keeping with its rapprochement with the countries of West Africa, principally Senegal. However, in spite of all the excitement, there was one noteworthy absence. Abdias do Nascimento – the founder of the Teatro Experimental do Negro (Experimental Black Theater, or TEN) and the man who had brought Senghor’s Négritude to Brazil – was expected to come. The TEN troupe had even rehearsed a play to be staged for the occasion. The festival was, after all, a wonderful stage for Afro-Brazilian artists to highlight their African heritage and contribute to this project for a global community through a shared Blackness. But in the end they were unable to participate due to censorship imposed by the Brazilian government, as Nascimento made known in an open letter published during the festival in the Senegalese weekly L’Unité Africaine, and then rerun in the pages of the influential journal Présence Africaine. In it he revealed the underlying political facts of the situation: the organizers of the Brazilian contingent had excluded the most militant Afro-Brazilians from the festival preparations. TEN kept going through to 1968, up until the point when Nascimento, driven into a corner by the
regime, was obliged to go into exile in the US. There he built up strong links with the leaders of the activist movements for civil rights and against racial discrimination. Brazil sent an impressive delegation consisting of diplomats, intellectuals, artists, dancers, musicians, and filmmakers to Lagos in 1977, for FESTAC, the Second World Festival of Negro Arts. The official publication celebrated the nation’s peaceful incorporation of African traits and peoples, which the delegation displayed primarily through cultural manifestations like samba music and Afro-Brazilian religions. Nascimento was there too. However, he did not owe his presence to Brazil – he was a visiting professor at the University of Lagos. This undoubtedly offered him freedom of speech, which he made impassioned use of to assert his dissident stance in an intervention entitled *Racial Democracy in Brazil: Myth or Reality?* One can imagine the reply that he gave to this question. It showed how his thinking had evolved – his ideas were clearly influenced by the Pan-African and Afrocentric African American movements, as evidenced, in particular, by his espousal of the issue of “internal colonialism.” There is one more chapter in this story, which comes in the form of a conclusion. Nascimento’s name can be found on the list of members of the advisory board for the Third World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar in 2010. He died a year later at the age of ninety-seven.

Viewing love as a priority in Black lives is a rather complex maneuver because it compels us to question our very emotions. We will likely encounter serious emotional barriers in terms of what we mean by strength, sharing or hiding feelings, the need for affection – often at odds with the exigencies of day-to-day survival – and, finally, the choices and desires that ultimately make us who we are. Racism and feelings of supremacy among whites did not evaporate once slavery was abolished, and the lingering legacy of slavery continues to be passed on from generation to generation in terms of how we love. According to bell hooks, the Black feminist writer from the United States, “we think we’ll jeopardize our survival if we let ourselves go and yield to our emotions.” That is what we learned from a slave system: to dismantle our affective ties. We were forced to believe that we only have control over our lives when we repress our emotions or pay little or no attention to our families, not giving them any affection, or when we teach our kids and siblings not to cry when they witness racism or discrimination. When affection is considered to be as important as survival and the fight against racism, we come to realize that oppression and forms of domination have compromised the very existence of Black people. When racism impacts emotional health and feelings, it leaves permanent marks and weakens us to the point that we are unable to fight for who we are. As a symbolic field of imagined sociabilities, art opens a space for possibilities and experimentation with other tangible realities. Accordingly, many artists have explored issues related to emotional life and its interplay with society, especially emotions and identities that depart from the norm. In this context, we as researchers at Cia Os Crespos de Teatro e Intervenção completed an audiovisual survey of stagecraft (2011–2015) that delves into the
The performer Ézio Rosa during the event Rolêzinho das Bichas Nagô, São Paulo, 2015.  
Photo: Vanderlei Yui. Courtesy of the artist.

Aretha Sadick performing on Paulista Avenue, the main street of São Paulo, 2015.  
Photo: Mandela Crew. Courtesy of Nabor Jr.
emotional lives of Black women and men, examining how slavery impacts on our ways of loving. Entitled *Dos Desmanches ao Semhas: Patrícia em Legítima Defesa* (*From Wrecks to Dreams: Poetry as Self-Defense*), the project, conceived under the City of São Paulo’s theater funding program Programa Municipal de Fomento ao Teatro, involved research, production, and a five-show tour.

In an attempt to create poetry that transcends this boundary, we have focused on our experience as an “encounter” in order to understand emotional contexts and diverse identities. Field research spanned bars, porn movie theaters, squares, diversity centers, offices, prisons, households, and a myriad of other physical spaces in São Paulo, where researchers engaged with men, transvestites, cross-dressers, drag queens, and transgender people of varying ages, though contact was predominantly with younger individuals.

Based on the listening experience, Os Crespos created a show that assembled the interviews alongside the mythical and transgressive figure of Madame Satã (Madam Satan, 1900–1975), a Pernambucan transvestite who spent part of her life in Rio de Janeiro. *Cartas à Madame Satã Ou Me Desespero Sem Notícias Suas* (*Letters to Madame Satã, or, Hopeless Growing Desperate without Hearing from You*) sets out to create a discourse in favor of this body/witness their experience as witness to an emotional performance of certain artists has laid bare their relationship with the body. In this sense, the body’s intervention and the audience’s response to this performative act is considered to be a fight for one’s identity.

**HEAD-ON**

From the beginning, Cia Os Crespos have treated performance as a space for the body’s intervention and the audience’s relationship with the body. In this sense, the performance of certain artists has laid bare their experience as witness to an emotional life hemmed in by taboos. The work also crafts a poetic statement in which love as a public act is treated performance as a space for the body. In this sense, the body’s intervention and the audience’s response to this performative act is considered to be a fight for one’s identity.
COLLABORATE & CO-CREATE

AN ESSENTIAL GESTURE 
OF CULTURAL RESISTANCE

A round-table conversation with three collectives talking about the role of their artist-run platforms: in Zimbabwe, MISHEK MASMU of Village Unhu and, in Colombia, ADRIANA QUIÑONES LEÓN of Afroexistencia and several members of LUGAR A DUDAS.

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CONTEMPORARY AND (C&)

Being artists, why did you choose to co-create an art space?

MISHEK MASMU We once created Artist in Conversation, an intervention to speak about the ills imposed by institutions against the artist. It was a good platform but it ended in disaster and unnecessary jabbering. I learned from it that real talk is when you present a product and talk about the product rather than speaking for or against an idea that is still in the imagination. We strongly believe that some form of a structure has to be built by artists around their practice, enabling them to develop organically, not have their work informed or prescribed by institutions or market forces.

ADRIANA QUIÑONES LEÓN The Afroreexistencia collective emerges from the desire and vital need of its members to set forth on a path of collective action that utilizes artistic language and practices and social communication to contribute to the transformation of the unjust realities experienced by Global South communities. To this end, Afroreexistencia inscribes itself as a chapter of this creative duty and impulse where the protagonist and historical subject is of African descent.

LUGAR A DUDAS lugar a dudas opened as an attempt to respond to the needs of Cali’s art scene, in a historical moment when, despite the frenetic activity of several groups of artists, there weren’t spaces to show their work nor initiatives that supported their practices. Institutions at the time, more than now, ignored those artists and acted based on populism without a clue of what cultural policies were about. So the project started as a gesture of cultural resistance. While the idea of creating a space was initiated by Oscar Muñoz and Sally Mizrachi, its implementation is the result of a collective effort. The project has been built over a decade with the participation of many artists and people who have contributed from different perspectives and disciplines to create possibilities of exchange and dialogue. We encourage readers to check out the list of our residents and guest artists on our website: lugaradudas.org.

lugar a dudas has also benefited from the support and collaboration of relevant artists from the city of Cali who have been part of the staff, coordinating all of our activities and making effective decisions defined through dialogue and group negotiation. Our goal is to foster an inclusive community rather than only a platform for the promotion of a few, so that’s our reason to avoid, among other things, dropping certain names rather than others.
Over the years we’ve been exploring different ways of action. We’ve joined networks, experimented around cross-practices, participatory platforms, and formats, to expand the ways in which the artists can show their work and interact with their audiences.

C6 Could you share the vision and the goals of your art platform?

MM The vision is quite a difficult one to realize. The goals on the other hand are very simple. The goal is to improve our reality and conditions. Currently, Village Unhu offers studio spaces and accommodation to the artists. We run a residency program hosting artists for a maximum of three months. We have created a contemporary exhibition and gallery space. The vision is to have a group of people or, at this stage, artists who ask questions and understand that not every question deserves to be answered in words. Through our work, we have a chance to initiate a new turn of events or experiences. The vision goes beyond encouraging the artists to keep their doors open to others in need. Through the platform we have a chance to look within ourselves and learn about others.

AQL Afrorexistencia endeavors to recover Afro-Colombian historical memory through paleography and ethnography while facilitating the re-appropriation of these memories — through historical memory through paleography and ethnography while understanding that not every question deserves to be answered in words. Through our work, we have a chance to initiate a new turn of events or experiences. The vision goes beyond encouraging the artists to keep their doors open to others in need. Through the platform we have a chance to look within ourselves and learn about others.

LAD Beyond the viability of tangible artistic products, which, of course, are an essential part of our interest, lagar a dudas places particular emphasis on issues that arise in today’s society with the intention of highlighting different points of view, bringing out contradictions and divergences to generate complexity and critical thought. The space, which is an art center that includes a documentation center, exhibition rooms, a residency program, film projections, seminars, workshops, and more, is currently redefining its vision towards the integration of the art scenes in the city with a broader community of academics, thinkers, social practitioners, writers, youth scenes, and other communities that act as cultural agents. Starting from the consensus of what an artist is supposed to do, we are trying to create spaces where these suppositions are challenged, transformed, and redefined. In order to do this, we are enhancing our organization as a space for education, discussion, and criticism. Under the motto Educación sin Escuela (Education without school), we’re trying to explore new avenues, looking for fresh experiences, partners, and chances to learn from our mistakes and actions.

C6 Please tell us a little bit about the respective names of your platforms: Village Unhu, Afrorexistencia, and lagar a dudas.

MM The actual name for Village Unhu was supposed to be “dunhu unhu.” We then settled for Village Unhu. Village at this stage does not refer to a “locus,” it is a syntax, an idea of collecting and unpacking various views and experiences. Just like the saying, a child is born to be raised by everyone, although our stories might speak to individual experience, the story is often about everyone. Unhu is not an idea or concept, Unhu is a footprint of humanity.

AQL The name Afrorexistencia makes reference to the varied and new forms of existence established by descendants of the African Diaspora in the particular regions they settled, as well as the ways they resisted enslavement, erasure, discrimination, and exploitation.

LAD lagar a dudas means “room for doubts,” a name that, undoubtedly, claims the right to think twice, to never be comfortable in any position, to exercise a healthy opposition while hesitating, even about doubt and negativity, through the exercise of action, organization, and cultural production. To have some room for doubts doesn’t imply stopping and refusals. It’s not a state of inaction but a statement in defense of the provisional.

C6 How would you describe the artistic community in your context? How do you engage with it?

MM I know there are lots of creative sensitive “peoples” in Harare, so I am not sure if they would find me suitable to speak on their behalf. The artistic community in Harare is sensitive and above all it is sensible to rise above one’s precarious “realities.”

AQL How can we think about the Afro-Colombian artistic community as a social protagonist that expresses itself through idioms, forms of knowledge, and traditional expressions that some call folkloric, and that are transformed by history and take on new forms. We understand our contribution as a revisionist historical perspective of Afro-Colombian cultural history. For example, we are currently preparing an illustrated publication that is the product of rigorous ethnographic archival research, but that utilizes a visual and written language accessible to any audience. This publication seeks to articulate the memory and identities of people of African descent suppressed by colonial processes because we believe that “the shortest path to the future is a profound knowledge of the past.”

LAD Cali is a city with a population of 2.5 million. The city has an art museum, two commercial galleries, and five professional arts programs, each of them with different approaches. The lack of structured cultural policies has resulted in a wide range of needs in the different artist communities all over the city. Artists respond to this institutional precariousness through self-organization, DIY ethics, temporary initiatives and, in general, a rich set of informal practices. lagar a dudas works locally, fostering artists’ initiatives and facilitating access to information, knowledge, and possibilities to reinforce these different local initiatives, as well as their ways to interact in meaningful ways.

C6 With reference to your many forms of collaboration, can you talk a bit about how you see the role of education in your artistic practice and in relation to your art space?

MM The role of education could be seen as a sham. The role of educating has been reduced to transferring information without it translating from real experiences. To dwell only on words and speak of a quotable history is to neglect one’s present reality and experience. One must work, even if your work is speaking from the heart about what you know, not what you have been told.

AQL The place of cultural education and arbitration is fundamental, thus it is necessary to draw connections between academic intellectual production and other epistemic subjects through the mediation of artistic languages in the codification / decodification of discourse.

LAD It has been crucial for us to strengthen the relation between artistic and pedagogical practices. We incorporated the slogan Educación sin Escuela as a statement that guides our action and unifies our mission, offering space and opportunities for practitioners to implement new forms of work and organization, to build networks, to connect the local to an international community of cultural agents, institutions, and peers, and, finally, to produce complex layers of thought, practice, and affection. We are learning to learn from those who come to learn from the space. We are thinking about entanglements, about the need to effect and be affected by others at a distance.

C6 Misheck, can you tell us a little bit about your contribution to the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo?

MM The work can only be painted at night, usually around midnight. It has become a ritual. It seems like time stands still, a time undecided. My work concerns doubt about reaching a clear state of mind. To commit to a life’s worth, defying the risen night spirits. With reference to your many forms of collaboration, can you talk a bit about how you see the role of education in your artistic practice and in relation to your art space?

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MM The work can only be painted at night, usually around midnight. It has become a ritual. It seems like time stands still, a time undecided. My work concerns doubt about reaching a clear state of mind. To commit to a life’s worth, defying the risen night spirits.

C6 How did you come up with this idea?

MM I guess I am frustrated to learn that knowledge drawn from imagined fecs holds my reality hostage. Why must I live in fear of tomorrow?
BLACK LITERATURE, LITERATURE OF THE PERIPHERY?
A BLANDISHMENT TO READERS ALREADY TIRED OF THE STRUGGLES AND CRIES FROM SWEET, UNCERTAIN LABYRINTHS?

New Afro-Brazilian literature, writes ALLAN DA ROSA, is a literature of discovery and sprawling charm.

The writer, community educator, and historian Allan da Rosa unpacks Black and peripheral aesthetics in literature with a focus on writing that traverses Brazil’s complex social history. Whether textually, through discussions, at sarau/s (soirées), or in everyday life, da Rosa is in the thick of things, examining the urgent desires in the fissures, styles and themes that Black writers and writers of the periphery proclaim with substance and in a broad scope, while maintaining an awareness of the inevitable dilemmas present in the trajectories of this literature springing forth from contexts lacking in privilege.

It is a literature attentive to the tactical scheme of its time, becoming a window. Words embroidered by Black hands, that sneak around and persist in urban crevices, signaling at the top of winding stairs or with their feet deeply in the muck. The periphery is a fertile pavement, fighting for a history to the tactical scheme of its time, becoming a window. One that won’t slip easily into an intimate: this fertile garden. That is recited at sarau/s, also leading to doubts macerated in anger, led by cries, shouting and screaming. That gets sweaty in the singing, in the harmony between the trumpet and the drums, but that seeks our melody and rhythm in the very words of a text and makes an instrument of the electric beat of the drum, wire, coins, and calabash warning that it is going to set off or stand guard, to play slyly or in cut something off at its knees. Like revealing secrets without killing off the mystery. Literature that gives accounts of reflections on what constitutes community, idealized as though at some point in history it had been homogenous, presented as though it were not incredibly complex. There are so many points of view and the distance between belief and skepticism is vast: can a text be a home? If so, is the roof there for good or are we looking at one night in a hotel? There is much wisdom and spillage emerging in the lyrical malice of Akins Kinte’s texts, in Jeniffer Nascimento’s cutting, scintillating chronicles, in the snares of Dinha’s laconic irony, in Fábio Mandinga’s pen and in his bitter, gloating labyrinths, in the mischief of Salvador’s postcards, in the malice that sways against the passing of time in Walner Danzinger’s pieces, in the majestic shenanigans and heartache of the alleys traversed by Maria Tereza’s weary feet. A literature observed that also grows stiff when understanding is hampered by talk of a group of Black people entering universities; it winds up being misunderstood, given the squareness of the format or the vice of using terminology miles away from the ears of the slopes, alleys, and wagons. Lives that we paint, that carry us, scooping us up and shining in intimacy and in literature.

“Black literature dances in the ancestral challenge of organizing its own system and sharing its values, ethics, and philosophies, combining the mission to cry out with the gift of being able to ask.”

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that ensnares us in style, this magnet, this pleasure. Reflecting the times or acting as a thumb under our hammer when we build our desks. That lives sharply in the skin of the text, without thousands of codes to solve, without truth hidden beneath tons of detritus and ornamentation. That brings fundamental questions to the crossroads and that gives posters hanging in the window or on a Facebook wall the maximum slip. Literature that teads, that has weight, sifts the crystalline out of the wet earth and hard asphalt of our inner fervor. That at the heart of our loneliness shows us how from within we are intimately entangled with both yesterday and tomorrow. Comparing, identifying, and surprising us with what is grounded in the here and now and cunningly facing what doesn’t fit in this scheme. An immense but necessary kind of the traps lie, the arguments of those who don’t. And it is in these problems where the “militancy” that shows up in times of struggle and of leaves, the_windows of state-run children’s homes, which for building critical thought fomented in the 1980s, in meetings with a hunger between the remote control and the undergrowth or with an ax sharpened and place, the notes composed in our hearts with both yesterday and tomorrow. Faced with a system which constantly implies that we are something between the calluses on fingertips and in the thick of our intelligence and which is al-ready much discussed by Black writers and the maps of desire. With subtlety in the Americas, full of gaps that don’t fit easily on the flag. Strengthening our doubts. Reflecting on this together. Without giving anything more gold to the barons, whether from our minds or our pockets. On these Brazilian paths, not fleeing from these ideas of “racial democracy,” of harmonic racial miscegenation, and of “we are not racists,” which don’t deserve two minutes of reality or two centimeters at the cemetery, from the revolving door, chains, textbooks, or TV shows. And not even from the simplistic idea of a biracial society that might take into account realities and arguments from the US but that doesn’t always come to a boil in the thousand crevices and ledges here, in these Brazils of our ruptures and mirrors. Faced with a system which constantly implies that we are something between animals, robots, and merchandise, thorns between the remote control and the uniformed nightstick, Black literature dances in the ancestral challenge of organizing its own system and sharing its values, ethics, and philosophies, combining the mission to cry out with the gift of being able to ask. Clearing the fog and fostering understanding of the whys and ways of our existence, doing what we do, braiding with reason and spirit the coordinates of time and place, the notes composed in our hearts and the maps of desire. With subtlety in the undergrowth or with an ax sharpened to perfection and care for each line. As was already much discussed by Black writers in the 1980s, in meetings with a hunger for building critical thought fomented in the schools and in the kitchens of Rio de Janeiro’s state-run children’s homes, which led to the book Creole Creation: Naked White Elephant. This blow to literature, which was tied up with prepared speeches and which got mucked up with clichés, by unforeseen twists, also yielded the singularity of works by Cuti and by Conceição Evaristo, which today give off the heat of having traveled lonely roads in the company of those who don’t see, but read. Black and peripheral literature is a literature of discovery, loss, mistakes, validations, and a sprawling smattering of charm, from the bathroom’s stink to the dancehall’s perfume, from the grinding, sweaty happiness in the ankles of someone backing away from a kiss still on the lips, from the uniform sticky with grease to learning to eat with chopsticks. It is a literature that becomes literature, vital, a sweet mango in which we smear our intelligence and which is always made new when it becomes entangled in the head and heart, wrists and belly, in the calluses on fingertips and in the thick of hair. Through vibrant webs or through fragments of the Black Diaspora, whether strong or shrinking, here and there with lineages, composition, the possibility of leaving clichés behind by observing, creating, stylizing – and diving deeper, with pleasure and fire, into the many spheres of retaliation and into the history of each piece of straw in our nests.

“Populist misery is writing merely to please. It is by now a traditional temptation in Black art, understandable from south to north after legalized slavery, and it is shriveling and drying up in militant clichés.”
A NEW KINGDOM OF SISTERS AND BROTHERS

A wave of new Afro-Brazilian dance and theater in São Paulo is promoting ethical positions that transgress existing hierarchies and build new audiences, write JÊ OLIVEIRA and LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA.

In the last decade, the city of São Paulo has seen a flourishing of productions that, using dance or theater as a base, face Black experience and examine how this reality mobilizes artistic acts within the labyrinths of the Diaspora. These are dramaturgic approaches which capture and recreate memories, interpreting history from perspectives that distrust established modes. These are artists who create in an attempt to redefine values that were crumbling along the way, owing to numerous displacements, silences, and inequalities. These are not outcries, but rather artistic strategies with an eye toward change.

BODIES EMBODIED – WRITINGS AND RE-IMAGININGS

Within the particular field of dance production, among the various actions involved in the search for utterances and listenings for the body, approaching the political via aesthetics and poetics has been addressed with care and depth. In a constantly changing scenario for the city’s cultural politics, where we question an absence of works by Black artists in the contemporary arts scene, creators move from Africanized perspectives, rejecting cliches and stigmas created by dominant discourses, and giving tension to the soothing statements that ignore the racial hierarchy present in the country’s dance history.

These ideas — of rooted feet, spiraling torsos, and arms and legs drawing curving paths, traveling distances and coming back to wholeness — pierced legitimate positions of power, even occupying the academic sphere, with theories, procedures, and references that point to what the cultural critic and feminist bell hooks defines as transgression: pushing against boundaries.

In the piece Dikanga Kalunga (2014), by Nave Gris Clínica Company, choreographed and performed by the dancer Kanzelumuka, the varied universe of traditional Bantu expression was the seed for a creation that endowed the body with the elements of ancestral relationships and archetypes of these cultures, so deeply present in the socio-cultural makeup of Brazil. And this piece was not a frivolous collage dressed up as “reinterpretation,” but rather a thoughtful appropriation of conceptions of space, time, and Black experience.

By coming back to and returning dignity to bodies and cultural expressions seen as fora da ordem, that is, not in keeping with the prescribed norms, these artists are situating dance in a just place: as an area of knowledge production. At this crossroads, investigating language is a key element. The young Fragmento Urbano Company, interested in the creative, technical, and symbolical possibilities of urban and Brazilian dance, approximate and interweave the dance genres that accompany their lived landscapes. Originating from the periphery and educated at the intersections of hip-hop culture and the popular traditions of Northeast Brazil, the group feeds on tradition as a manifestation of continuity and invention.

In mobilizing creative energy from the landscape of Black experience, these artists bring to the forefront ideas about the body overlooked by hegemonic spaces and discursive practices, which broaden the possibilities of understanding who we are as Brazilians in the face of the tensions and contradictions surrounding us. Blackness is not simply an accessory or an equivalent to dance, it isn’t contained in the material, but rather, developed: in the body and its ancestry. Understanding what we are made of implies distilling the ways and means of perceiving what unites us and what makes us distinct. Nothing other than moving critically.
Humanity Onstage

Returning our attention to theater created from the Black social experience, we will consider several characteristics present in contemporary theatrical productions of the following groups: Os Crespos, Capulanas Cia de Arte Negra, and Coletivo Negro, with a special emphasis on the “civilizing effects of theater with racial concerns” as a guiding concept for this consideration. Among the poets, these groups wield and proclaim, notable is the confrontation and construction of possibilities regarding racism and its effects (emotional, psychological, and social), which seek to make the invisible visible and existent beyond subaltern experiences.

A term that approaches and is in dialogue with the concept developed by the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Crespos examines intimacy among Black people, such as theater in Brazil. Apart from the ethical and aesthetic foundations underpinning their work, these groups also have the massive and devoted presence of Black audiences. It seems that the term “audience” isn’t sufficient to describe the magnitude of what happens at these encounters. The characteristics and manner in which the events unfold resemble what the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl identifies as being established in the relationship between the São Paulo-based rap group Racionais MC’s and the homeboys who follow them: “brothers and sisters” may be the term best suited for describing those who share and bear witness to these creations. The idea of brotherhood expresses the feelings present in these encounters, which are mediated by art in the establishment of an alternate reality—one of kinship, a kingdom of sisters and brothers—according equal respect to those who perform as to those who witness. The notion of brotherhood becomes even more appropriate when we consider that many Black men and women are paternal orphans. The aim is to create a relationship of care, celebration, and education among all those who experience theatrical events put on by the groups. Capulanas, founded by Black women and women from the country’s periphery, in the performance Sogonu (2001) dedicates itself to questions surrounding Black women’s health, deepens these questions, and demystifies certain notions (such as the one leading to the belief that Black women have a higher tolerance for pain, which results in discriminatory and negligent treatment in public hospitals). By upending these stereotypical perceptions of the body, the artists recover care, love, and healing, In Carter à Madame Sétī (2014), Os Crespos examines intimacy among Black men and the preconceptions and curtailed sociability accompanying this experience, imbuing it with affect. The necessary restitution of dignity also comes up in the work of Coletivo Negro, which, in the piece Movimento Número 1: O Silêncio de Depois... (2011), addresses the dispossession of Black populations since the first African exodus, in addition to the petty game of market logic, which glibly sells everything and everyone under the guise of progress. To artistically promote the broadening and deepening of these questions—including the subjective, affective, and the pedagogical face of racism and its implications—is one of the primary endeavors of this generation of artists. Even so, Brazil’s non-Black population is absent or distant from these concrete efforts and constructions. Far from cordoning off these issues, these artists propose the humanization of society as a whole through the inundation of greatly expanded notions of humanity and through the mobilization of values officially silenced by the complex legacies of slavery and racism in Brazil.

Text commissioned by OMenelick 2°Ato

Each group, according to its own method of investigating relevant themes to Black experience, and not least among the artists themselves, operates within two major spheres: at the level of symbolic expression when creating and elaborating other forms of representation, and at the level of social experience when performing its issues and problems, thereby influencing reality and proposing presence in fields historically remote to Black people, such as theater in Brazil. Apart from the ethical and aesthetic foundations underpinning their work, these groups also have the massive and devoted presence of Black audiences. It seems that the term “audience” isn’t sufficient to describe the magnitude of what happens at these encounters. The characteristics and manner in which the events unfold resemble what the psychoanalyst Maria Rita Kehl identifies as being established in the relationship between the São Paulo-based rap group Racionais MC’s and the homeboys who follow them: “brothers and sisters” may be the term best suited for describing those who share and bear witness to these creations. The idea of brotherhood expresses the feelings present in these encounters, which are mediated by art in the establishment of an alternate reality—one of kinship, a kingdom of sisters and brothers—according equal respect to those who perform as to those who witness. The notion of brotherhood becomes even more appropriate when we consider that many Black men and women are paternal orphans. The aim is to create a relationship of care, celebration, and education among all those who experience theatrical events put on by the groups. Capulanas, founded by Black women and women from the country’s periphery, in the performance Sogonu (2001) dedicates itself to questions surrounding Black women’s health, deepens these questions, and demystifies certain notions (such as the one leading to the belief that Black women have a higher tolerance for pain, which results in discriminatory and negligent treatment in public hospitals). By upending these stereotypical perceptions of the body, the artists recover care, love, and healing, In Carter à Madame Sétī (2014), Os Crespos examines intimacy among Black...
Brazilian artist Dalton Paula talks to OMenick 2°Ato’s Alexandre Araújo Bispo about his interest in drawing, Black history, performance, botany, and Afro-Brazilian religious practices.
**OPEN ELLICK Z’ATO** How did you become interested in visual art and what is your visual representation, in addition to suggested readings, writings by artists, and other points of reference. Also, the need to develop the practice of drawing, as the artist’s notebook was a focal point for her. This facilitated repeated experimentation, photographing the results and archiving them in order to compare them with earlier creations, so this practice has helped me a lot, particularly in developing my drawing skills in addition to painting.

**ONZATO** As with your biography, does your social experience appear in your work?  
**DP** My personal history and experiences as a Black man pervades my work, sometimes in a direct way, as when I inhabit this character-body that situates itself in urban spaces, or in inhabiting a movement, as in the task from the 2011 video *O batedor de bolsa* (Purse Beater); but this is also addressed indirectly, as a kind of game, playing with the pre-established, making use of the art of the Mandinka people, approaching it, dodging it, being imposed.

**ONZATO** The artist Divino Sobral in the article “Dalton Paula e a arte de amansar senhores” (Dalton Paula and the Art of Taming Men) examines how you confront public spaces when situated in realistic situations. Can you explain how your interest in ritual is related to your work in *Rota de fumo*?  
**DP** In presenting these performances there is a metaphor of the body as a means, as a vehicle, similar to the Afro-Brazilian sects in which diversities inhabit the bodies of their sons and daughters. This ritualistic dynamic informs my artistic work, and, implicitly even, spirituality governs the shaping of the characters, determining the power of that body. Thus, in order to reach other layers of meaning that are silenced or inhabit the realm of the secret, the magical, and the enchanted, I explore the theme of ritual in this work. This approach allows me to show that it’s about a ritualistic plant, one with magic potential that is widely used in indigenous cultures and in an array of African sects. In general these uses and knowledge are developed in villages, in the terreiros and quilombos, Afro-Brazilian public squares and settlements of resistance, and I’m very interested in this spatial aspect. This act of creating multiple forms of spatiality and specific types of knowledge is a political act, a defense strategy, a means of survival, one which is both constant and constantly changing.

**ONZATO** Can you tell us a bit more about the role of your journey to Cuba and Bahia in conceiving *Rota de fumo*?  
**DP** My interest in Cuba is as a place that received the African Diaspora and in the Afro-Cuban social and cultural forms that developed there, as well as the similarities with regard to modes of production—for example, the cultivation of sugarcane or tobacco—in addition to its differences, such as the political regime. I’m interested in this place which produces the most famous cigars in the world, and the various uses of tobacco, including as part of the religious realm of Santeria. Bahia has always caught my attention, especially because it has the largest Black population outside the African continent, and also because of the tobacco farming and production of cigars there, which is historically relevant to the region’s economy. So I’m interested in thinking about how this Black population served as manual labor enslaved in this system of production, but not only that, how it was and is able to be maintained, reworking its cultural and artistic practices, its religiosity under what are still extremely adverse conditions.

**ONZATO** In *Rota de fumo* you demonstrate profound interest in Brazil’s early history, examining the subaltern process of the Black and indigenous populations, but you also manage to demonstrate an understanding of more complex forms of resistance, such as the use of plants. Can you tell us a bit more about these frequently necessary, everyday practices, its religiosity under what are still extremely adverse conditions.

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**OPEN ELLICK Z’ATO** How did you become interested in visual art and what is your training?  
**DALTON PAULA** It started when I was a teenager, from reading manga comics such as *Knights of the Zodiac*. I collected copies of the magazine *Herói* and would copy the drawings using carbon paper and then color them in with colored pencils. Now I’m aware that it was this “coloring in” that brought me to the arts. I also had the opportunity to study at the School of Visual Art in Goiânia, which was right next to the city’s Contemporary Art Museum, and both institutions were really thriving at that time, with the mounting of exhibitions and visiting artists who shared their experiences with the students. At fourteen, I was able to meet and work with artists such as Arthur Bispo do Rosário, Farnese de Andrade, Coletivo Corps Informáticos, and Marco Paulo Rolla. This was an important contribution to my own training, which was further refined in the visual arts course at the Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG).

**ONZATO** You recently came to São Paulo to do a residency at the studio of Rosana Paulino, an important artist for understanding the Black presence in contemporary art. What was this experience like?  
**DP** Rosana Paulino, apart from being important in the field of contemporary Brazilian art, is committed to education, because she is always guiding and training new artists. I am one of those students, and her involvement was crucial to the refinement of my work. In 2007, I sent an email asking for help and for more information about her work, and Rosana responded immediately; she took me under her wing and has been tremendously supportive. The residency at her studio was an extension of this process, which was already happening indirectly, via conversations about the presentation of work (the portfolio), the materials used, and the coherence between an idea and its structure, growth, and the coherence between an idea and its coherence.
I look back at the historical past in order to better understand how power relations and, especially, the process of enslavement, inscribe themselves on what we experience in the present, which allows me to catch glimpses of potential questions and future trends. This historical investigation, which also utilizes other points of reference, such as botany as well as Afro-Brazilian and indigenous religious practices, traffics in the official record but with a focus on the anonymous, the histories and narratives that are usually disregarded. In them, I find the sacred in its everyday dimension, understanding it as resistance because it’s inseparable from life, from nature, from the temporal space in which it’s located; it’s an element that coexists in the midst of oppression, hence its importance. It is through this sacredness, reworked every day, that Black and indigenous populations are able to survive, to construct other forms of existence, to maintain their dignity.

Text commissioned by OMoneicik 2°Ato

A VISIONARY WHOSE AIM IS TO TRANSFORM CULTURE

Acclaimed South African painter HELEN SEBIDI, who is showing at the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, chats about home, land, history, and ancestral tears with GABI NGCOBO, LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA, and THIAGO DE PAULA SOUZA.
LUCIANE RAMOS-SILVA: Could you introduce yourself, bringing in the idea of home as a place where we can be, a place we can belong, and home as your place of art?

HELEN SEBIDI: Home is my place of art. I believe that charity begins at home. Traditionally this was a moving home, not a home to own like we do now. You have to be natured in your home. You have to communicate with other homes, that is my duty. Other homes means that you are building the human being inside, alone, and the being is held spiritually by those who help you to see the world. Those people will also say to you, “We don’t own this world, we are its messengers.”

We have been given the task of a messenger to transform culture and to communicate. My grandmother used to say to me, “I am built inside you.” It is therefore my duty to move this world as well.

LRS: Thinking about land and country, tradition, community, could you elaborate on those spaces you came from? In Brazil we don’t have much of a connection with the histories and realities of South Africa, so could you tell us about it?

HS: I would start with the land. Our people were working on the land in order to follow the path that the Creator had given them. Then the European community introduced pensions, but our people said: “We don’t want to be given money from those people. These people want to take our land that was given to us by the Creator to do work for Him.” They rejected the pension because they believed that what they had been born for is what they have to work for. So traditionally I would say, the seeds were planted by the Creator and when the reward comes, we have got it here in our hand, we worked for it. We must know our seed and that is the only way that we will save growing cultures, communicating cultures. Before that happens, we will suffer. Africa was the first continent that was built and made by God, by reality. The Creator knew what He was doing. I am proof of who I am and I still say, I will never ever join someone else’s culture without communicating. My grandmother died in 1981, she pointed at me with a big finger and told me, “You are not going to work for white people, your parents have been taken by white people, but you are not gonna be taken.” As I travel around, I take with me all the seeds she planted in me.

GABI NGCOBO: I would like to take a cue from your description of Africa and the complexities of Africa as a continent in order to speak about the work you will show at the 32nd Bienal de São Paulo, ‘Tears of Africa’ from 1989, which you created before the car accident you were involved in in August 1989...

HS: ...even before my understanding of the continent. During the conflicts in the townships of Johannesburg, I happened to see death. I happened to have blood all over my clothes when a child was shot. I had left the Johannesburg Art Foundation and moved to Alexandra (a township) to teach, and the same things happened there. I was shocked. The people who came from Europe brought their culture to our continent. They stopped those who came from rural areas because they knew they would come and demolish the town. And when you went to the rural area as a township person, you used to be stopped and told not to come back.

GN: Stopped by whom?

HS: Stopped by the white people. We had to report at the police station to be allowed to sleep in the township, otherwise we were arrested. You would go for six months; then, when you came back you were caught and went to jail because you had crossed the border against the law. It was a protective measure that was helping them to keep our people working for them. That is a kind of slavery that made our people much more severely dominated because they left their work and when they were supposed to pray they had to pray to white people, even today. So of course we made them richer and richer.
What do you think about showing Tears of Africa in Brazil? What do you hope for the people seeing this work?

The people who see this work could think of how to help our people to return to praying in the same way we learned at home. They could find their way back because their ancestors were shipped to Brazil as slaves, not knowing where they were going. So now they will have to get back to learning how they can pick up the seeds. Their freedom will come when they pick up the seeds.

When you say they can find their way back, do you mean this symbolically, through your work?

I think they will learn who they are and live who they are and be sure of who they are – in Brazil. Those tears of the ancestors will change, it will be love, it will not be tears anymore but it will be something that will help communication, and the chains of the tears will disappear. Because they will have their own seeds and they will know where they are going and what to do...

You will produce a new work for the Biennale, which will be shown together with Tears of Africa. I am interested in how you have been developing your work over the years; your skills, your techniques, your way of producing your art in the context of the new generations you have witnessed being born and growing. Could you also talk about the differences in generational spirit, especially because some younger people may think of themselves as the so-called “born free”?

I don't think there is any such thing as a born free person. Because born free people don't understand – that is why I have spoken about ownership – that we don't own ourselves. We need to move around and see things properly, knowing that we don't own anything. When you don't go to the other side, you don't see what is there. It is like my work: I don't know what I will be doing when I reach the studio in Salvador, Bahia. I will be surprised by what I bring back after visiting all the places I will be going to. My dreams are partly important for my production. But I also just start by playing and following what is coming from in here and from out there. In the end, that is where I am able to guide what I have been doing. It is spiritually awakening and I am quite happy to be able to work that way.

To get back to Tears of Africa, it evokes a sense of people seduced by the life of the city, right? I am thinking about your transition and your experience in Johannesburg and outside of South Africa. Could you talk about those bridges?

There is a big gap between the rural areas and the city in South Africa. City life developed by stealing from the countryside; white people stole the skills of the rural population and claimed them as theirs. If there had not been apartheid in South Africa, the rural areas would have been well-developed and the world would have understood that Africa has the best forests.