

## MIP2, BH09: TROPIC OF BODY<sup>1</sup>

Suzana Vaz<sup>2</sup>, August 2009/July 2010.

### **A stranger in a suit, hair wrap, and flip-flops.**

On my arrival at Belo Horizonte, Paulo Nazareth was waiting for me, with a handwritten wooden sign on his chest, hanging from his neck, reading “Translator”, his status in one of the works he presented at the Manifestação, Bureau de Langue, because of which we were meeting now. Our dialogue begins with words in the tupi-guarani language, placing us beyond the hiatus between linguistic systems, into the haunting abyss of the cultural erasure left by the planetary historical vicissitudes. It is not possible to find any separation between the person of this artist and his work, all his vital energy remakes the world, poetizes it, turns it into symbols, magnetizing it as a natural extension of his own body. Nazareth is a “stranger in a suit, hair wrap and flip-flops”.<sup>3</sup> His typical attire is this permanent garment, a sign of his creative

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally written for the catalogue of the MIP2, and later basis for a presentation at the TrAIN, UAL, Latin American Group of Study.

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<sup>3</sup> “ouvi umas palavras que diziam ser eu um extranho ... um extranho que falava bem, embora andasse com uma touca azul na cabeça ...caminhava DE CHINELOS E USAVA TERNO ... perguntaram ser eu um estrangeiro ... como disse me extranham aqui e em outras passagens... entre os descalços pareço ser um deles ...” (I heard a few words that said I was a stranger ... a stranger that talked well, despite wearing a blue hair wrap on the head ... walking ON FLIP-FLOPS AND WEARING A SUIT ... they asked whether I was a foreigner ... as I said they find me

trade, that is, an archaic activity that constantly “reconnects” man with the purposefulness of his experience, that empirically and immediately establishes the coherence between the deeper unconscious knowledge and the awareness of the present. Maybe this is one of the defining features of the experimental artists, their power of influence over the near context, disseminating the reconnection by means of a sense experience different from the others. Thus, a few days later, walking around the city by Nazareth’s side, I feel his impressive scanning of reality, comprehensive and exact, inadvertent and strictly intentional, like that of children who were brought up to be free: in a step he lowers to pick something up and in his hand is a paper that bears something of his typical iconography, or an object in absolute plastic coherence with his collection of handmade icons.

It is still the presence of the artist that polarizes and irradiates the non-rhetorical sense of his exemplary actions, pragmatic and symbolic initiatives of an experimental practice: the moment to live the gestures, procedures and inaugural creations of activities that directly concern subsistence, thus dignified with the “prestige of the beginning”. In *Well, nothing more than a cup of pure water (Poço...Nada mais que uma xícara de água pura)*, Nazareth distilled water of the contaminated river Arruda and drank a cup of it; in *I think it is here, I think of Haiti, I think it is there: what do I know about the places and the people from here or from Haiti?... (Penso que é assim, penso que é aqui, penso no Haiti, penso que é ali: o que sei sobre lugares e pessoas daqui ou do Haiti?..)*, after three days of fasting, he baked cookies made out of butter, earth and sand, that he ate with the audience. The objects and materials he manipulates are rudimentary, improvised, precarious: despite their direct practical utility, they appear to be historical artifacts of an indefinite antiquity, charged with the aura of a remote era. The instructive tranquility of these experiences rests upon the situation of “absolute beginning”, of “restoration of the creative time”, of the mythic *illud tempus* of creation, during which the knowledge of the sacredness of life, of the world and the cosmos, and their mutual binding as creations was transmitted to man. Maybe this is another feature of the experimental manifestation, in which the “new order of creation”, besides showing

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strange here and on other places... among the barefoot I look like one of them...”, Paulo Nazareth, email to the author in 25/6/2010.

the existential condition of “absolute beginning”, also expresses the resistance to the ideology of pedagogics that dissociated the individual from his physical, ecological, cosmogonic component.

As with the majority of the participants of the MIP2, Nazareth takes hold of the processes of “high culture”, discursive and intellectual, mimicking them on the realm of artistic intervention, to show how civilizational evolution within the dominant paradigm goes against the bodily functions – nourishment and excretion, speech and language – physiologies respectively of the raw, organic, material instinct, and of a course beyond the intellect, an equally preponderant factor in human psychism. The artist shows how those functions are essentially human and, therefore, cosmogonic, and are preserved on the concrete and intuitive processes of the “low culture”, in popular, archaic, and aboriginal contexts, and in what is left of them after the impact of the rational scientific model, in the eccentricity of the destitute and forgotten who seem to show the limbo between paradigms of knowledge. Probably with this intention of exposing the contrast between cultural processes, the directors of the MIP2, Marco Paulo Rolla e Marcos Hill, opened the event to the public with the presentation of a popular festivity band (Banda Bororó). This distinguished the autonomous character, vitalist and celebratory, of the Manifestação, a general fusion destined to a mutual validation, to the renewal of energy and to a global regeneration. Immediately after, they invited everyone to make an opening, a split of the legs, the comical use of a codified, technical position, athletic and poetic, to indicate, in a concrete way, the instability of the content in the “manifestation of performance”: neither language, nor meaning, nor representation. At the Manifestação, the body is a “centre of the world”, an axis between heaven and earth, where one experiments with an existential situation of “absolute beginning”; the manifestation runs on a new parallel, the Tropic of Body.

## **MIP2**

The program included workshops, during the first two weeks and, throughout the third week, there were debates, lectures, presentation of performances, and a video program. More than eighty events took place in a refurbished building, a former fabric mill, called the 104, and also at the FunarteMG, Teatro Alterosa, Museu Inimá

de Paula and several outside locations in the city. The MIP2 had the participation of invited artists (around forty) and selected artists (more than thirty), facilitating the exchange of ideas and creating spontaneous interactions and impromptu actions.

The workshops were important to generate that intimacy. They were conducted by invited artists – Nezaket Ekici, Mariëlle Videler and Dudude Herrmann – with a major presence of artists that were also presenting at the Manifestação, in a total of fifty participants. Ekici, with a background of pedagogy of art, sculpture and professional proximity, in performance, with Marina Abramovic, stimulated the participants to be affected by the vertigo of their bodily and cultural limits, and to test the strength of their motivation, expressing this as a new position before the anonymous and general collective. The final presentations, with variable durations, took place during the whole of the first day of the Manifestação, throughout the centre of the city and in the vicinity of the 104, effectively changing the flux of urban reality with unusual images, such as the almost naked body of a performer at the glassed bar of a snack shop.<sup>4</sup> Videler, with a background in fine arts and textile design, organized her practice of performance, for this occasion, from a personal archive that she calls Museum Floor Travel, and centered the participants in rituals of the daily life and their vehicles – objects, actions, images, concepts. Framed by imposed conditions, such as a limited duration, the items of the archive and the colour yellow, the participants presented the result of that methodology in a final sequence at the central nave of the 104. Herrmann, whose practice of performance derives from the field of dance, improvisation and contact, installed at the FunarteMG space her laboratory of deconditioning and learning of the body. De-automatizing movements and gestures, she re-sensitized the body in order to assert the impact of the context and retrieve the “tonus of the presence”, in the relation of the several dimensions of the body with space, physical, energetic, emotional, intuitional.<sup>5</sup> Interacting in synergy, the participants preferred to fill the hours with

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<sup>4</sup> Performance by Ana Paula Wada Tominori, from Porto Alegre, Brazil.

<sup>5</sup> Mariana Lage, translator and participant of Dudude Herrmann’s workshop, wrote a report: <http://www.ceia.art.br/por-um-tonus-da-presenca-experiencia-estetica-performance-e-o-zen>.

small occurrences destined for the final presentation, integrating them naturally into their group practice.

The video program ran in six parts, with works from the participants of the *Manifestação* and other artists, a total of fifty-five video pieces by fifty-one authors. The curatorship of parts I, II and III from CEIA had three themes, landscape, inside/outside, and discomfort. The selection of works offered important hints for the reading of each participant's work. In "landscape", the works address actions taking place at natural landscapes, urban sites, transition places (non-sites); in "inside/outside", actions taking place in confined spaces; in "discomfort", one of the factors is the erosive effect of a repetitive action and another is the choice of situations involving physiological interventions. Part IV was curated by Goto, from *epa!*, which promotes the mapping of contemporary video production in the archive *Circuitos Compartilhados* (Shared Circuits).<sup>6</sup> The selection of works explored the features of video technology to unsettle atavistic notions of the image of the body. Parts V and VI were presented by the London sited *Balin House Projects*, run by? Eduardo Padilha, in partnership with Lois Keiden's LADA.<sup>7</sup> The first selection of works gave a global vision of the vitality of contemporary Live Art production based at the UK, and the second focused on long works by historical artists, such as La Ribot.

### **Experimental practice and primordial image**

I arrived with the plan of assessing the theory of "experimental practice and primordial image": talk with the artists, get to know their work and interpret it using the theory, understand what they had to say about what I was revealing. In the first interviews with the artists, tentative and indirect, I would identify remarkable aspects of the work through which I could convey the theory; later, I would summarize it, and the artist would spontaneously frame the work into remarkable aspects of the theory.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the information on the *Catálogo de Sinopses* (NEWTON, Goto, org. 2008), this archive keeps more than 44 hours of works in video, 225 titles, recorded in 35 DVDs, concerning 40 years of contemporary production.

<sup>7</sup> Live Art Development Agency, directed by Lois Keidan.

During these conversations that amazing thing happened: the artists were surprised with the validity of the theory in interpreting a sense they supposed occult or inexpressible; I was bewildered at the acknowledgement by the artists of that stratum of interpretation, not by realizing it was plausible, but because it was almost universal. An easy understanding would take the conversation beyond the interview, resumed later with the same enthusiasm. This report is a result of those encounters, whilst trying to discover factors to understand the diversity of the Manifestação.

In 2005, MIP1 had presented authors from the fine arts. MIP2 gathered authors with diverse disciplinary routes – dance, theatre, fine arts, “live art”, music, “entertainment”, with work within the “manifestation of performance”, or experimental practice.<sup>8</sup> Using Gustav Jung’s theory of analytical psychology, Nise da Silveira’s methodology of iconological interpretation and also the patterns of primordial images analyzed by Mircea Eliade, it is possible to relate experimental practice and primordial image. The experimental practice, by the definition of its terms, searches for the creation of the new, in a concrete, empirical way; when, in experimental practice, the artist resorts to the engagement of the body, the embodied knowledge that emerges corresponds to the “existential situation” of *creating the new using the body*; that embodied knowledge, mostly unconscious and projected, is unravelled through primordial images; in this case, the most recurrent pattern of primordial images is that of the “absolute beginning”, of “restoration of the creative time”, and the most frequent image is that of the “conjunction of the opposites”. As an archaic image of an embodied, and thus radical knowledge, the “conjunction of the opposites”, or “union of the polarities”, refers to a concrete psycho-physiological process, the subtle energetic phenomenon of the ascension of the kundaliní<sup>9</sup>. This

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of experimental practice such as it is presented here, makes part of the theoretical frame of the PhD research I presently conclude. I believe it coincides, to a great extent, with the idea of *manifestation of performance*, such as I could apprehend it throughout the three weeks of the MIP2.

<sup>9</sup> “Kundaliní ia a physical energy, of a neurological nature and sexual manifestation. (...) The Freudian concept of libido and the Reichian concept of orgone came very close to the principle and anatomy of the kundaliní (...) in a lay term, more

happens with the arrest of bio-energy, *prána*, on the two main opposing subtle energy conduits, *idá* e *pingalá*, resulting in the ignition of the kundaliní energy and subsequent ascension through the central channel, *sushumná*, in the vertebral column and throughout the whole nervous system up to the brain. The ascension of the kundaliní to the brain enables profane consciousness to be surpassed, and the attainment of an atemporal, cosmicized, mode of being, beyond consciousness, an “absolute mode of being”. This concrete process, unconscious but universal on the psycho-physiology of the human species, constitutes a powerful matrix within the collective unconscious. The archetype that is activated – even if the process is not effectively achieved but only projected – when the individual condition demands the assertion of the creative teleology, of one’s own or of human kind, generally as the response to an engulfing inner conflict, a radical creative challenge. The image of the “conjunction of the opposites”, or “union of the polarities”, externalizes that unconscious knowledge, encoding its concrete psycho-physiology or its corresponding existential situation. Its figuration crops up in rites, symbols, myths, dreams, reveries, intuitions, insights and in the creative plastic production. It is a reminder of this inalienable individual embodied resource, regenerative and soteriological (salvational), it makes that emancipating potency present.

Let’s briefly recall the definition of primordial image by Jung: “I call the image *primordial* when it possesses an *archaic* character. I speak of its archaic character when the image is in striking accord with familiar mythological motifs. It then expresses material primarily derived from the collective unconscious, and indicates at the same time that the factors influencing the conscious situation of the moment are collective rather than personal” (JUNG, 1990, 263). According to Jung, a mythological motive is “a continually effective and recurrent expression that reawakens certain psychic experiences or else formulates them in an appropriate way” (ibid., 263). In experimental practice that engages the body, the pattern of primordial images of “absolute beginning” expresses simultaneously three levels of accomplishment in the creative purpose: the existential situation of “absolute beginning” that results from the accomplishment of the creative potency; the original

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comprehensible, we can translate kundaliní simply as sexuality” (DeROSE, 2007, 649, 654).

creation, that determines a “new order of creation”; and the present actualization of the original creative command, since the moment is that of “return to the Great Time”, to the “time of creation”, of “absolute beginning”. The accomplishment of the creative purpose, declining any conventional discursive content – neither language, nor representation, nor meaning – relies on an intrinsic power of manifestation that results from the integrity of the relation between body and matter. The use of elementary technologies and plain iconography, as well as the experimental approach to matter by the body, aim to trigger the suggestive power of both, their concrete allure and protean serendipity. The “conjunction of the opposites” bears a direct continuity with other types of primordial images within the pattern of “absolute beginning”, homologous types of images, that mutually annex each other, equalling each other within the existential situation of “restoration of the creative time”. The complex figuration of “organic solidarity” expresses the integrity of the relation between body and matter: all that *is* on earth is united with everything else that exists on Earth, “due to the *life* which is the same” in all those forms of existence. This organic solidarity results from the biological unity and creative fertility through which “a magic, sympathetic bond between the earth and the forms it has engendered” is established.<sup>10</sup> Another type of primordial image, of “return to the origin”, connects all categories of images of “absolute beginning” in embryological and cosmological figurations, of a regression to an pre-formal state, without attributes, unconditioned. The proximity between these two types of images, of “organic solidarity” and of “return to the origin”, shows the same process of vital creative fertility in both the micro and macrocosmic scales, expressing the anthropocosmic attribute of the human body, placing man in a cosmological creative teleology, in “cosmological solidarity”. Also, with the sense of retrieving a spontaneous mode of being, the type of primordial images of “change of the mode of being”, express the impossibility of attaining this without annihilating the previous one, in plastic representations of rupture of plane or initiatory death. Finally, the type of primordial images of the “centre of the world”, axis for the change of the mode of being, connecting Heaven and Earth, unites figurations of ascension (flight, abolition of weight) and of demarcation (field, circle, enclosure, cabin). These express the human wish to place themselves naturally and permanently in a sacred

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<sup>10</sup> ELIADE, 1971, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 255.



place, at the core of reality and, through a short cut, transcend the human condition.<sup>11</sup>

### **Life in the body of the poet**

Sitting in front of me to speak about his work, Renato Negrão explains the influences of a generation of experimental artists. I travel in time with him: the marginal poetry of the 1970s, the Tropicalia movement, Jorge Mautner, the Winter Festivals of Ouro Preto, the workshops of Alice Ruiz, Décio Pignatari, Marcelo Gabriel, Dudude Herrmann, and all the cultural effervescence of the festivals. The experience with somatherapy, group therapeutic body techniques with the writer and ex-psychoanalyst Roberto Freire, with whom he learned about bioenergetics, gestalt, angola capoeira, the work of Wilhelm Reich, anti-psychiatry and anarchism. He set up the Dragões do Paraíso (Dragons of Paradise),<sup>12</sup> a group of performances and poetic interventions; prompted by Jorge Mautner he replicated those experiences in creative workshops. Renato Negrão presented Concerto para o Erro (Concert for the Mistake), simultaneously using retroprojections, sound samples, handwriting, pictorial actions and recitation of texts. On the projection table rest some elementary materials, familiar and trivial to improvise images: water, oil, paint, string, letter characters and diverse knickknacks. This is a poet/performer that loves to use the word with “love from within”:<sup>13</sup> One of the meanings of the title of his performance is to gather, to harmonize, valuing mistakes as fundamental and an appropriation of the creative process; another points to the regenerative attribute of creation, its power of repairing, remedying, healing. Negrão reveals, half way through the piece, the aspiration of his work: he throws himself against the wall,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 382-383.

<sup>12</sup> Name inspired by the title of the tale of Fernando Abreu *Os Dragões não conhecem o Paraíso* (Dragons don't know Paradise).

<sup>13</sup> Title of the lyrics of a song by Renato Negrão, *o amor de dentro* (love from the inside) in this excerpt: “o amor é longe/é veloz e lento/bússola não conta/que o amor é dentro” (love is far/it is swift and slow/unaccounted by compass/since love is from within).

leaps into the projection of images and letters, in a concrete manner enunciating the “rupture of plane” by which the gap between the linguistic and the pre-linguistic body is bridged; he reaches concretely the “change in the mode of being” that leads to an existential situation in which the images are body, matrixes of imagination. During the concert, the projections evolve into a concrete physical essentiality of the images and sounds, almost without an end, leaving a link between space, matter, body and creation afloat in the atmosphere.

Perhaps because she is an actress, Samira Ávila knows that the text becomes body. By means of text, primordial intuitions on the body are formed, about its anthropocosmic attribute, its intrinsic knowledge, truly unconscious, of a cosmo-physco-physiology. The study of the work of Sonia Lins brought Ávila to the *Manifestação* to talk about the artist's *Performative Writing/A escrita performática*,<sup>14</sup> and to present *O Umbigo é o Gol Dentro da Gente* (*The Navel is the Goal Inside of Us*). Samira Ávila shows drawings by the artist that inspired the essential image of her presentation: cursive letters spread through the page, on a graphic progression suggestive of organic growth, natural, like that of the ivy creepers that take over the walls of houses. Samira Ávila is inside a bath tub, inside a primordial broth, the water full of very green leaves and branches that overflow and spread throughout the floor of the space; her long red hair also overflows, myriad of floating extensions of the body, an icon of libido, the fertile energy that magnetizes the world. On the periphery of the flora, drops of milk fall from a teat into a white pool of milk, where images of ultrasounds of fetuses are projected, pulsating to the amplified sound of heartbeats. Real time images are projected on the wall, while the camera that is capturing them is disassembled, the performance ending when it stops operating. *O Umbigo é o Gol Dentro da Gente* is a primordial image of “cosmological and organic solidarity”, an embryological and cosmological figuration, elucidating the aparent anthropocosmic incoherence of creation, expressed by the actress: “Perhaps I [inside the bath tub] am a figure of death and what pulsates is life...” Mircea Eliade says: “From the forst moment when a form emerged from water, every direct organic bond between them was broken; between form and the pre-formal there is a gulf.

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<sup>14</sup> With the lecture *A escrita performática de Sonia Lins*. Sonia Lins is Lygia Clark's sister.

But there is no such break between the earth and the forms engendered by it; these forms remain bound to their source, from which they are in any case separated only for a time, and to which they will return to rest, to be strengthened, and one day to reappear”.<sup>15</sup> And Eliade adds: “The waters are there at the beginning and end of every cosmic cycle; the earth is there at the beginning and end of every individual life. (...) Water *precedes* every creation, every form; earth produces living forms. (...) Time – which, so to speak, sleeps as far as water is concerned – is alive and active in the earth’s engendering. Living forms come and go with lightning speed. But the going is never definitive; the death of living forms is a hidden and provisional mode of existence; the living form as such, as a species, will never disappear till the end of the term allowed to earth by the waters”.<sup>16</sup>

The *Tentativa frustrada de transmissão telepática de ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’, de Susan Sontag, 1967 (Frustrated attempt of telepatic trasmission of ‘The Aesthetics of Silence’, de Susan Sontag, 1967)*, by Maurício Ianês, accounts for the dissociation between the systems of the linguistic consciousness and living an embodied transpersonal dimension. Over a period of 120 minutes, the artist read mentally and tried to transmit that verbal content. Presence, permanence, immobility, economy, seem to be the elementary concrete conditions, that make visible the natural attributes which incessantly emanate from existence itself, the numinous quality of the being, universal and cosmogonic. Through the presence of the artist, that which might be interpreted as a conceptual option can thus be taken as a concrete option: the inversion of the natural and mundane processes, a psycho-physiological traditional resource to achieve the return to a pre-formal state, of “absolute beginning”; immobility opposes movement, permanence opposes instability. In previous works, Ianês lies with her abdomen on the ground, as if combining with the latter through evident traces of identity, the face, the chest, the sex; in his presentations, he arranges likely objects also on the floor, orderly, perhaps as elements that had just emerged from the primordial chaos, brand new creations, arranged to produce a new order of creation whose apprehension seems to require a “spontaneous, unconditioned mode of being”.

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<sup>15</sup> ELIADE, 1971, *Patterns in Compative Religion*, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> ELIADE, 1971, *Patterns in Compative Religion*, p. 254.

Other authors, in a ludic manner, ironized the preponderance of verbal language as a system that legitimises categories and discourses. This model coaches behaviours which disregard the integrity of the body, and through which one experiences the arbitrariness of classifications. In *Agora se mostra o que não está aqui* (*Now showing what is not here*), Neto Machado skilfully moved the audience through the space using verbal suggestions, spoken and also written in stickers he handed out. The participants formed smaller groups, and afterwards were directed in specific actions. At the artist's command, the participants joined a group and performed the ascribed task, drawing areas on the floor, swapping between them, reciting the sentences printed on the stickers. *Exercício III: Do Processo Aleatório da Lei* (*Exercise III: On the Random Process of the Law*, by PMDN + Zero do Brasil, was an action with an absurd flavour: an attempt to go against the law of gravity by making creased paper balls, throwing them up and expecting them not to fall. The members of the PMDN + Zero do Brasil showed up in uniform, giving an institutional and vaguely military appearance to their actions. On a table, there was a pile of 4000 A4 white sheets, a stamp with the the sentence DEUS ABENÇOE AS LEIS (GOD BLESS THE LAWS) and its respective ink container. A microphone captures the sound of the stamping of each sheet, a deep thumping sound, before the papers are creased and thrown up in the air. On another micro, members of the group alternate in reading excerpts of texts on the laws of gravity, relativity and probability. The amplification distorts the voices, creating a cacophonous sound. While the floor gets covered of balls of white paper, the audience spontaneously joins in, throwing balls into the air, against each other, in an atmosphere of benign chaos.

The ritual dynamization of iconographic contents figuring factors of identity seems to have been the core of some presentations. In *Autoretrato quando coisa* (*Self-portrait as thing*), Nadam Guerra captures images in real time of his naked body, projecting them in large scale in black and white on to a wall just beside him. The body seems to be the global organ or vital instrument for the unfolding of a microcosmic observation, through which the body itself is assured of its immaterial quality, affective, intellectual and intuitional. In continuity with this image of "organic and cosmological solidarity", Nadam Guerra also presented on the video programme of the event the piece *Duas Terras* (*Two earths*), showing himself in a foetal position, naked, turning around inside an open hole on earth.

Márcio Shimabukuro presented three complementary pieces, ceremonies of precise procedures, where the reference to internal energetic processes is evident: *Mãe, Pai e Irmãos* (*Mother, Father, Brothers*). In *Mother*, using his usual tie and suit, and entirely wet, he sits at a table bearing one dinner plate and one soup plate, two glasses (one with water, the other with alcohol); he builds a pile of matches on the plate with alcohol, drinks water every once in a while and, eventually, lights up the fire to the plate and covers the pile of matches with one glass: the alcohol is sucked into the glass and extinguishes the fire – “mother is the game of elementary forces, fire and water, combustion, inner strength, vital energy”. In *Father*, he uses a photocopier and prints out pages with fathers and sons, while he sings a tune; he places the images on the floor, standing up and in a chain, and hands out packs of sticker cards of super-heroes to the audience, murmuring to each one “be the model” or “follow the model”; he opens a few packs and places the cards in front of the images and puts them on fire with matches: some burn, some fall – “father is the technical knowledge, the rational, the machine, the model, the working force”. *Brothers*: Shimabukuro creates a double seat with two chairs side by side, facing in opposite directions; he sits in one, in his suit, wearing an overall and a stethoscope around his neck, placing another overall and stethoscope on the other; he invites the people that pass by to sit with him and exchange heartbeats, looking in each others eyes (...) I tell them that this is a performance art piece, I explain what is performance, and talk about my work, and that listening to the other’s heart is a way of being in brotherhood (...) brothers is the encounter with the other, someone to whom to entrust your heartbeats”.<sup>17</sup>

In *Los niños no toman café* by Juan Der Hairabedian, with the participation of Renato Negrão, the black skin of Negrão was covered with white sugar, and the white skin of Hairabedian was covered with ground coffee. Each of them collected these substances with a spoon, putting them in an Armenian coffee percolator. The coffee was brewed and drunk by both, who afterwards offered it to the audience. This work is exemplary of the primordial image of the “conjunction of the opposites” or “union of the polarities” image, par excellence, of the essential human psychic

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<sup>17</sup> Email to the author in 6 July 2010.

conflict, inherently addressing other inner conflicts and, by homology, their projections on the plane of reality as collective conflicts.

Paulo Rocha and the Conjunto Vazio (Empty Set) apresentaram *É somente agora que reconheço a sua beleza e me recuso a aprisionar qualquer parte da minha vida...* (*Only now do I acknowledge its beauty and I refuse to imprison any part of my life...*). In a circle of light, we see a block of ice with pictures inside, on the edges of the circle we see a man sitting with the back to the centre and another, naked, and in foetal position, on the floor, the skin all over his body showing inscriptions. Paulo Rocha places himself at the centre of the circle, undresses and writes all over his body, with red lipstick, names of women. With an axe he hits the block of ice. He lies over the ice that is spread throughout the circle, also in a foetal position, while a projection of blood flows from the block. In the iconographic economy of experimental practice, the use of sound is an extremely deliberate resource. About the sound in *Sómente...*, Paulo Rocha says: “we always think about overcharging our performances with references, as a system of collage (...) then we add one of those songs[by João], a montage work of narratives, (...) one of his texts about love; my mother, ex-girlfriend and friends reading an erotic poem by a surrealist called Joyce Mansur; a friend reading one of his texts; me reading one of my texts about the fear that men have of women...”

In *Emergía*, Miguel Rodriguez Sepúlveda printed iconic images of popular culture (those typical of each country where he presents the project) on the backs of the participants, that ran in front of a wall, on the same spot, until the sweat washes the image off, leaving it illegible. Sepúlveda synthesises this project with the idea of “energy”, the useful energy that produces something, that attains a goal. In these actions, he shows the body as the autonomous source of an emancipating energy that, from within and by means of an “inner heat”, rejects the “tattoo” of culture. Mastering the “inner heat” is traditionally taken as paranormal power, the prowess of heroes.

## The ordeals of the hero

Sitting on the staircase that overlooks the Viaduto Santa Teresa, watching Cinthia Mendonça in *Sobreabismos*, Paulo Veiga Jordão takes a break following *Sehão* on the streets of the city, one of the group's presentations in the Manifestação. We return to the 104 building talking: the affectionate tranquility of his reflexions, questions and explanations, contrasts with the physical impetuosity and the vivacity of the images and presentations brought by the group Empreza. The group's arrival at the Manifestação seemed to establish a frontier that, even for the other experimental practitioners, was difficult to cross. For the group, the body is essential matter, open to every manipulation that leads to psychic cohesion; it is the ground of concrete experiments that set up new knowledge, on a path with absolutely no return. The undertaking of the group defies the limits of the physical body, generating a porousness through which they access other planes of the body; the emotional, mental, intuitional, regenerating themselves, re-birthing. *Vila Rica* is evocative of Minas Gerais's past: barefoot, Jordão steps into a small aluminum tin filled with stones, into which he pours alcohol, stirring it up with the feet; prepared with catheters, some of the members of the group let their blood flow into the tin; always stirring the stones with his feet, Jordão adds thin sheets of gold to the mixture, grinding them; afterwards, he places his hands on the floor and climbs the wall with his feet, heels over head, to make a painting with his feet; he repeats the procedure of wetting the feet and painting several times; finally, he returns the feet to the floor and sticks what was left of the gold sheets on the fresh painting on the wall. The group presented also *Como chama (How we call)* and *Sehão*. On the first, the members of the group carry lighted candles on the body: over the head, burning pages of a book that they tear one by one; on the torso, crawling to move. On *Sehão*, two members of the group are bandaged together back to back, falling upon the one who walks to carry the other.

The insistence of exploring physical and physiological limits reveals a pattern of "initiatory death". In this pattern, the experience to which the body is subjected aims at changing the very organization of sensitivity, in order to surpass the known ontological condition, empirically and concretely; from the processing of that experience a new knowledge emerges, a new ontological condition. In the

biographies of experimental artists that use the body, it is not rare to notice that they have gone through episodes of “initiatory death”, such as situations of eminent death, illness, accident, emotional shock. In the rituals of initiatory death, namely that of coming of age, the ordeals suffered by the novice are intended to invoke radical change in the organization of sense experience, generating a new identity: responsible, conscious and knowledgeable. In some archaic cultures, when coming out of the initiatory cabin, returning from the forest, emerging from darkness, the novice shows the symptoms of that change of identity, the most remarkable of them being a complete forgetfulness – of language, his own name, the name of the members of his family, of his whole previous existence. This modification, easy to attain in the context of more archaic cultures, in which the symbolization of death suffices (the separation of the novice from the family, taken into the forest), evolves to more literal procedures with the subsequent cultural complexity. The physical impact of the ordeal is inherent to the pattern of initiatory death, the concrete process of transmutation into a new mode of being; in dreams, hallucinations, insights and reveries, the individual in deep renewal has visions of his own dismemberment, a sign of the archetypal death that precedes the rebirth with a new flesh, into a condition different from the profane.

In different ways, other authors tested the resilience of the body. The *ethos* of experimental practice is centred on a delicate principle of empathy, an amoral solidarity by which the emancipating dimension of ‘absolute beginning’ is attained and a ‘new order of creation’ is apprehended. The audience’s earnestness is a vital expectation, an urge for the sacred, a yearning for numinosity. From the ethos of the experimental practice comes a collective validation of creation and, inherently, of the process of individuation of the artist, whose values are assimilated to those of the collective.

Daniel Saraiva invited the audience to touch his invented instruments, or *Objetos Terapêuticos (Therapeutic Objects)*, provided that they placed themselves under the fresh leather of a bull. The suggestion of change in the mode of being, of retrieval of the instinctual power and its concrete and intuitive processes, is confirmed by the video piece that the artist showed in the video programme, *O Vou (The Go)*. At dawn, in a calm river with dense vegetation, surrounded by mist and condensation,



the artists uses his customary material to cover himself up, trying on the leather, and then on his own skin, a branding with a hot iron. Significantly, the artist emerges from the water of the river, performs this ceremony on land, and returns to the water, as if indicating that we had been before the projections of a deep unconscious psychism. It is an action with a mythical scope, a symbolic whole of death and rebirth to a new identity, of retrieval of an animal, natural condition and, therefore, of nostalgia for the instinctual force.

*Imersão/transbordamento/resistência (Immersion/overflowing/resistance)* of Marco Paulo Rolla, is a setting with seventy buckets full of water, where the artist and six other participants methodically and vigorously plunge their heads, keeping them underwater until they can no longer hold their breath. They emerge gasping for air, while the sounds are amplified throughout the space – the noise of the plunging, the sound of suffocation and of urgent breath, of water projected over the ground, of buckets being knocked over. The action was repeated until every bucket was empty, lain on the floor, a chaos after the deluge. In addition to the reference to the classical process of torture, by which we can read the piece as an ‘initiatory trial’, all the constraint conveyed by the elements of the action – water contained in a bucket, the head contained in the bucket, breathing impeded by the water, plunging only the head – seems to express an assault to the fluid and integral infinitude of psyche. The persistence of the exercise liberates the water over the body and over the space, permeating all matter in chaos, so that a new creative cycle may commence.

*Wax/Latex/Mud*, by Dirk Jan Jager happened over three different days: on the first day, the artist was stripped of his suit, methodically cut by his collaborators, after which he was completely hair waxed; on the second day he was covered in latex, that was then peeled off and, on the third day, he was covered in clay, that was also peeled off, while the material residues of these actions were lain respectively on three canvases. As a repeated action, taking place at the same time, in consecutive days and with specific substances, it gains the dimension of a ritual, in this case, of ‘dismemberment’. The symbolic substitution of the all bodily matter is certified, in concrete terms, by the exhibition of its ‘remnants’, while the new body shows the freshness, softness and splendour of the new man.

In *(entre:) para se ver o que não se vê (come in) to see what you cannot see*, Raquel Versieux and Bárbara Ahouaji tried perhaps to show the invisible violence of attachments or of conditionings. They covered the body with liquid glue, moving between the two walls of the central aisle of the space of 104, coming together, compressed against one another, against the floor, against the walls, and coming apart in order to make the thin, increasingly perceptible threads of glue, finally tugging the skin, as the glue hardened and dried out. *Edificação (Edification)*, from the Coletivo Xepa, took place at the Praça da Estação, where the members of the group built several walls of brick, constructed without mortar, collapsed under their own weight. When one wall collapsed, the group discarded the pile of ruins to start a new one. Felipe Salem tied himself up to a vertical trolley for his presentation *Deriva (Adrift)*, in which he was driven by the audience, without interfering in the moves. Cinthia Mendonça, in *Sobreabismos (Overabysses)*, marched for three hours over the Viaduto de Santa Tereza, shoeless and repeatedly crossing the bridge. At each stage, she refreshed her feet in a basin full of water and golden and ochre pigment, leaving her footprints along the way.

The bodily function of nutrition, showed by the presence of edible items, is comprised in a universe of references that regards the body as a physiological dwelling, in which the bodily functions assume a mythical character, inherent to the synergy of the individual with the collective. Exemplary presentations with this sense were *Five senses in Brazil*, by Nezaket Ekici who prepared, with the collaboration of an audience of one hundred people, a meal that afterwards everybody shared. In *Oferenda à Cabeça (Offering to the Head)*, Ayrson Heraclito displayed around the head of each of the nine participants the typical food of each of the nine main Orishas of Candomblé. *Oferenda à Cabeça* was splendid and moving: the entire space of the room was prepared for receiving, on the mats disposed in a circle, the representative of each Orisha. The participants sat waiting wearing plain white clothes and, when their turn came, they would lie on their respective mat. The sound of the music of each of the Orishas would fill the air. The materials' organic colours, natural and vibrant, as well as the highly contrast lighting, brought an extreme cohesion to the entire space, unified by the ceremony.

With a less convivial character, showing the instrumentalisation of physiology by the dominant pedagogic ideology, through the perverse contradiction between discourse and the impact of the actions that it extols, Cláudia Paim presented *Tenho medo de quem só quer o meu bem (I am afraid of who only wishes me well)*. On a towel on the floor, a great quantity of food is displayed; the artist places herself in front of it and takes off her fine clothes, until she is naked yet she keeps on her high-heel shoes. She sits down and starts ingesting the food, methodically and, soon enough, in a forced way. The sound track by Ulisses Ferrete combines sounds of chewing, of toys and of a flute, while Cláudia Paim utters sentences increasingly more disturbing: 'Eat to become prettier', 'Eat to get a good husband', 'Eat or I won't like you anymore...' The artist also participated on the improvised presentation of the performance *Maleducção (Badeducation)* by the Grupo Empresa, a group meal eaten in a public place, using odontological devices keep the lips apart,

### **On stage**

Dudude Herrmann and Marco Paulo Rolla presented *Disyquilibrium (Imbalance)*, within a practice of contact, improvisation and de-automatisation of movements and gestures. The logic of their movements appears to be the abolition of the distinctive human attribute of verticality, the deprivation of the evolutionary prowess of keeping the balance over two feet and two legs to move in space. Surrounded by products of civilisation, symbolically represented by a myriad of objects from daily life, these become the pretext or cause for as many falls, a figuration of an evolutionary regression.

Other authors brought stage shows that also inverted the disciplinary models for the use of the body, with an ironic character, that could be described as live art. Thelma Bonavita and Christian Duarte presented *eletróquímicos, baby (electrochemicals, baby)*, a duet with elementar, clear, subtle and precise visual choreography and sound composition. The arrangement of the body of the performers, their mutual interaction and also with the sound, in a deliberate, slow, detailed way, undid some of the surprisingly universal histrionic twiches and clichés of popular social behaviour, establishing a direct and sophisticated complicity with the audience. *Lovers from La Bas*, with Thelma Bonavita, Ana Dupas and Natalia Mallo, aimed at

ludicly defying the frontiers of the relation between the audience and the performer through the codes of pop culture and the pop spectacle. Propped up as pop diva characters, Thelma Bonavita and Ana Dupas sang over an electronic base created by Natalia Mallo, that 'plays with the aesthetics of Lounge, the lyrics (collective authorship) a collage of personal statements, lyrics from songs, etc.' Mallo prepared cocktails to give to the audience, and played 'real time remixes, with Madonna, Schneider TM and Miami Bass rhythm'<sup>18</sup>, while Bonavita and Dupas vertiginously approached the audience.

### **On the street**

Interactive, ludic, conceived for the kinesthetic acknowledgement of the body, *Sensorial*, by Mavi Veloso and Estela Tiemy, offered for the audience the use of several balloons made of plastic bags taped together, with variable dimensions (between 2.5m and 3.5m) to collectively manouvre outside, on the ground. Presented just after the opening of the MIP2, *Sensorial* brought the atmosphere of celebration outside.

Several participants presented performances in which the material component was apparel (mostly dresses), guiding their actions according to the iconographic incidences of the former. In different ways, these works question the body as a linguistic dwelling, referring to the possibility of interpersonal action, be it affective, by sharing one's own private space or memory, or metaphorically, by sharing a fiction. For example, in *On Travel*, Elke Veltman visited the Underground and the Parque Municipal wearing a dress with a long tail, expanding her vital space to bring strangers closer to her, while Juliana Capibaribe slowly strolled with her *Vestido* (*Dress*) at the Praça da Estação, an enormous gown made out of offered clothes. Each piece of clothing had a life story that the artist had heard from the one who offered it, memories that the artist told to those who asked about her act.

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<sup>18</sup> Email à autora em 3 de Julho 2010.

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