

Actions Eleonora Fabião

It is forbidden to sell this book. *Actions* was made to be given, received, traded, lost, found, purposely lost, donated, lent, passed on. Neither bought nor sold. Even if you find it in a bookstore, you can acquire it at zero cost; just ask the bookseller. I will leave some copies on bus', subways', and ferryboats' seats; on town squares and churches' benches; on tables at coffee shops, bars, and nightclubs; on the ground at universities, museums, galleries. I will also leave copies in government offices, banks, supermarkets, gyms, and on car hoods in parking lots and garages. And, on pieces of colored cloth, they will be left at beaches, waterfalls, and riverbanks. Several copies will be sent to Brazilian and international libraries or handed out in specific events. I can affirm that this book enjoys movement immensely. The proposal is to continue the performative movement launched on the streets. What matters is the art of initiative.



This book measures 18 x 24 centimeters and weights 970 grams. It was printed at the Ipsis Printing Plant in Santo André, São Paulo State, Brazil. Print run: 1,000 copies (650 in Portuguese and 350 in English). Rara Dias, who created with Paula Delecave the design for this publication, slept at the Ipsis plant throughout the printing process. She closely followed the production of these pages. This publication was funded by the Itaú Cultural Rumos Program 2013/14 and is part of Projeto Mundano (Mundane Project) proposed by Eleonora Fabião and selected by the program's 19 jury members. The book would not exist without this support. Thank you very much. Thank you very much Sônia Sobral and Bebel Barros, manager and producer of the Performing Arts Department at Itaú Cultural, respectively, for the impeccable dialogue throughout this process. Thank you very much to all that are part of the actions: known and unknown, family and friends, photographers and photographed, curators and producers, interlocutors, collaborators and cocreators—to all that, in their own ways, participate in this movement. *Actions* is the result of collective work. Now it is in your hands. It has become paper, printed image, ink, word, smell, color, and weight and is in your hands. It becomes with you. And you become with it. Whatever you want.

Actions Eleonora Fabião

Essays

- Adrian Heathfield
- André Lepecki
- Barbara Browning
- Diana Taylor
- Felipe Ribeiro
- Pablo Assumpção B. Costa
- Tania Rivera

Editors

- Eleonora Fabião
- André Lepecki

Support



Este projeto é selecionado
RUMOS
Itaú Cultural

Funding



Rio de Janeiro, 2015

Dear collaborators,

Mundane Project: Book and Performances was selected by the Itaú Cultural Rumos Program 2013/14, and we are organizing a bilingual book in which Eleonora's work on the streets since 2008 will gain a new spatial-temporal and performative dimension. After eight years of radically urban practices, the book will allow the work to continue happening in other modes, in other spaces and times. A first spinoff of the actions was the series *25 postcards for Rio*—a mail art project circulating since 2012, a result of the Funarte Award for Arts on the Street. Now the new medium will be a book, the book *Actions*. The collaborators, in addition to you, are: Adrian Heathfield, André Lepecki, Barbara Browning, Diana Taylor, Eleonora Fabião, Felipe Ribeiro, Pablo Assumpção B. Costa, and Tania Rivera. And also designers Rara Dias and Paula Delecave; translator Christopher Peterson; proofreader Rosalina Gouveia; producer André Bordalo. As for the text's content, we think it is up to each of you to decide. Of course we can exchange ideas, talk, and think together, which would all be a great pleasure. Eleonora always says that the text does not need to be *about* the work; she invites you to write *with* the work, *through* it, *from* it. We trust entirely in your sensibility and we are happy to provide whatever you find necessary to develop the writing—just let us know. Honored by your extraordinary collaboration, A hug from the editors,

Eleonora and André.

Thank you both for inviting me to participate in this! I am thrilled for you that this is happening and honored to be a part of it. Let me think with this and through this and come up with an idea to fly by you. abraços! Diana. • Hi Eleo, love. "Misifia" in Montreal read that beautiful talk, and at one stage I thought that your pieces were composed for the street at an almost reparative intensity that you called "anticrime" (or something like that). I had recorded your talk on my iPhone, but it was stolen several months later. Do you have a copy of that text? Or could we talk about this "anticrime" idea? Is it something specific to Rio de Janeiro or does it go beyond the Carioca context? In my text for your Projeto Mundano I want to try to theorize on the "act," but not as an authorial gesture circumscribed by a heroic intent, but rather as a response (both possible and unavoidable) to the world in all its affective complexity, a collective agency that reveals a shared "responsibility"—or perhaps, quoting Bakhtin, a "responsibility" (a type of act-tie, trans-individual thing). Something breathes to me that your reference to anticrime can help me. And also the *Line*, about which I still know little but would love to learn more. In short, it's the *saudades*, the yearnings, that inspire one in this winter. Happy New Year! And kisses from a cold morning in beautiful Granada, Spain, on the eve of a full moon. Pablo. • Hi Eleonora and André, I was happy to be able to participate in the book. It's fascinating, thanks for the invitation! I just consulted my *Webster's*, and "mundane" really is synonymous with "worldly," but it can also connote "ordinary." Whenever you want to visit us, we can put several bilingual editions on the table to leaf through, and ideas may emerge (if not least, by process of elimination). And meanwhile we can share some wine. *abraços*, Christopher. P.S. Elisa and Marta send kisses. • *Tranquilo!!!* Actually the time is up to you, I'm not rushing, alright?! Just to remind you of the contracts. :) kisses Bebel de Barros Itaú Cultural Núcleo de Artes Cênicas maria.barros-goncalves@itaucultural.org.br fone 55 11 2168-1814 fax 55 11 2168-1864 Avenida Paulista, 149 São Paulo - SP - 01311-000 • hey so relieved you liked it. i feared over-writing you. it's a complicated business this jump of the cat / temporary inhabitation of other skins. i'll make those changes and five or six other small errors i noticed after i sent it. do you want to add anything more detailed? a xx • The question of the city - to inhabit and reframe the city - is very strong for me in this piece and i'm thinking about how to associate this with the thoughts about the image... let's see... kisses and the breeze from Corumbau! Felipe. typed wrong? keyboard's fault! • Attached is the text as word. doc. I've corrected the bed sheets and a couple of other trifles. You can fix anything else I got wrong! I'll send the Lévi-Strauss page numbers soon, I promise - and if there's anything you want me to change, expand, contract, etc., just say so. Kisses kisses kisses. I love love love thinking about this work. Barbara. • Eleonora, can I pick up the new bunch of documents and give you the documents that have already been scanned on Friday evening? I got the donation of scraps. I think they weigh about three kilos. I'll pick them up on Sunday, ok? Kiss, Bordalo. • dear Eleonora (Paula also copied), I liked very much what you wrote about fragments. especially when you say: "Unlike a detail, a fragment does not evoke a purported totality to which it originally belonged, but on the contrary, it sparks open, provisional, unfinished, or even unfinishable configurations. A fragment is not melancholically seeking its lost wholeness, but vividly reinforcing its precariousness, that is, its relativity and relationality." do you think it could be included in the book...? we could try entering both the fragments on the actions (the excerpts from your notebooks) and this text on fragment itself... kiss rara. • Eleonora dear, How about a picnic Sunday afternoon at Flamengo Park, if the sun is out? Big kiss. Tania.

[Rio de Janeiro]
Carioca Actions

- # 1: I will have a conversation about any subject
- # 2: flag
- # 3: line
- # 4: Reiki
- # 5: Brás Cubas
- # 6: archive
- # 7: pitchers
- # 8: rainstorm

[Rio de Janeiro]
Carioca Action #9: talk

[Fortaleza]
Fortalezense Actions

- # 1: I will have a conversation about any subject
- # 2: Saudades do Brasil
- # 3: to trade everything
- # 4: a stroll on the town square
- # 5: pitchers
- # 6: kite-orama
- # 7: talk

[São José do Rio Preto]
Rio-Pretense Actions

- # 1: with white t-shirt in the Black River
- # 2: I will have a conversation about any subject
- # 3: to touch everything
- # 4: to trade everything
- # 5: Saudades do Brasil
- # 6: pitchers
- # 7: a stroll on the town square
- # 8: talk

[Rio de Janeiro]
Line Rio

[Montreal]
Precarious Series

to touch everything
to trade everything
talk

[Rio de Janeiro]
in the middle of
the night there was
a rainbow; in the middle
of the rainbow there
is a night

[Rio de Janeiro]
I do not buy old wreck

2008

2009

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015

[Berlin]
Berliner Actions

- # 1: Unterhalte mich über jedes Thema
- # 2: Reiki

[New York]
Line NY

[Rio de Janeiro]
Precarious Series

money
to touch everything
to trade everything
a stroll on the town square
Saudades do Brasil
Museum of Modern Art's ramp

[Rio de Janeiro]
Stains

Black Stain
White Stain
Red Stain

[Santo André]
Andreense Actions

- # 1: I will have a conversation about any subject
- # 2: talk "a performance called Line: encounters with the encounter"
- # 3: postcards

[Bogotá]
Bogotana Actions

1: converso sobre cualquier asunto
2: pitchers
3: Reiki
4: talk

[to be performed]
Intimate Series

[Rio de Janeiro]
Almost nothing,
always everything

1: 25 bricks
2: charcoal
3: 9 bed sheets

[mail art]
25 postcards for Rio

[Rio de Janeiro]
Gouache tagging

[Rio de Janeiro]
Brazil: the moment when
the glass is full and
it is no longer possible
to swallow—our affair's
door is ajar

A photograph of the Carioca Actions art installation in Rio de Janeiro, 2008. The installation features a large wall of maps and posters. People are interacting with the maps, including one person lying on the ground and another sitting on a stool. The ground is paved with a pattern of large, irregular stones.

Rio de Janeiro, 2008
Largo da Carioca

Carioca Action #1: I will have a conversation about any subject

Carioca Action #2: flag

Carioca Action #3: line

Carioca Action #4: Reiki

Carioca Action #5: Brás Cubas

Carioca Action #6: archive

Carioca Action #7: pitchers

Carioca Action #8: rainstorm

Carioca Action #9: talk

Carioca Action #1: I will have a conversation about any subject

To sit on a chair, barefoot,
facing an empty chair (chairs from my kitchen).
To write on a large sheet of paper:
I WILL HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT ANY SUBJECT.
To display the invitation and wait.



I picked up the kitchen chairs, a large notepad, a felt pen, and went. One chair hung over each shoulder, like shoulder bags. In my pocket, a photocopy of my ID card and a little money. The program echoing: "To sit on a chair, barefoot, facing an empty chair...". I picked the spot, positioned the chairs, took off my shoes, and wrote the invitation. When I held the poster up for the first time, I really didn't know what might happen. A person sat down almost immediately. He wanted to tell his stories, to hear my stories. To give his opinion, to hear my opinion. To speak and listen. He wanted to know why I was there, what I was doing there. Some passersby doubted whether I was really open to a conversation about anything. Several stayed with me for more than an hour. All were interested in experiencing that unusual situation. In some conversations there was a lot of laughter, while in others none. Some days the action was documented, others not. When present, the documentarist would be at a distance, and I would ask the participants if they agreed to sign a use of image consent form; if they didn't, the images would be deleted. One man told me about his childhood in the city and was deeply moved when he recalled his adoptive mother, "as black as that girl's dress over there." A young man sat down to celebrate that he had just been hired for his first job as a veterinarian. A lot of people were curious about my sexuality. One specifically tried to figure out whether I was a prostitute, a lesbian, a lesbian-prostitute, or a prostitute-lesbian, ruling out any other hypothesis. "Do you masturbate?" he asked. "Of course," I replied. One woman wanted to know if I was a psychologist, since she was in deep suffering and needed immediate help: "The upstairs neighbors are walking on my head," she said. I explained that I was not a psychologist, but an artist; she left. One former boxer, now the superintendent of the building where he lives, saw his friend Jorge walking by and shouted: "Come here, Jorge, this girl has conversations about any subject!" Jorge joined us. Three teenagers from a nearby school shared the chair to chat, among other things, about how to ask a girl out on a date. I told them stories about my teenage years in Rio. Two others, shoeshine boys working at Largo da Carioca, warned me to be careful with my camera because somebody might mug me. I reminded them that there was a police station less than fifty feet from where we were sitting. They looked at each other, smiled, and said something like, "These cops are the worst. We used to steal here, so we know. They wait for us to pick a pocket, and then they take the loot from us. Like, they take the camera, the money, the jewelry, or whatever, and then they beat us up." Several people asked if I was really Brazilian. In a month and a half of *Actions* at Largo da Carioca I got to know uncountable Rio de Janeiro.

On the street I came to understand the following: this first action is not exactly about site-specific art, but about opening spaces. Or still, it is about performing the opening of a dimension: "a state of art without art," as Mário Pedrosa says.





An essential work tool is receptiveness. Receptiveness transforms body into field. I have no illusion of mutual understanding or the desire to communicate some predefined message. Far from it. I work for the cocreation of momentary and shared meanings. For the joint creation of a relational field.

[...] consensus, dissensus, countersense, sense, nonsense. And also silence.

Decelerate spectacularity, accelerate receptiveness; create a zone of instability, a precarious terrain where chair, ground, I, other, we, communication, words, city, public, private ceaselessly change sense.

Carioca Action #2: flag

Barefoot, sitting at a table at noon, to cut out from the Brazilian flag the words "order and progress" printed on it.
To sew a white strip across the resulting gap.
To separate the letters and recombine them to form new words.





I borrow a table from the newsstand owner and take my shoes off.
I organize the materials and sit. Everything's ready. Time. More time.
Very difficult to start.

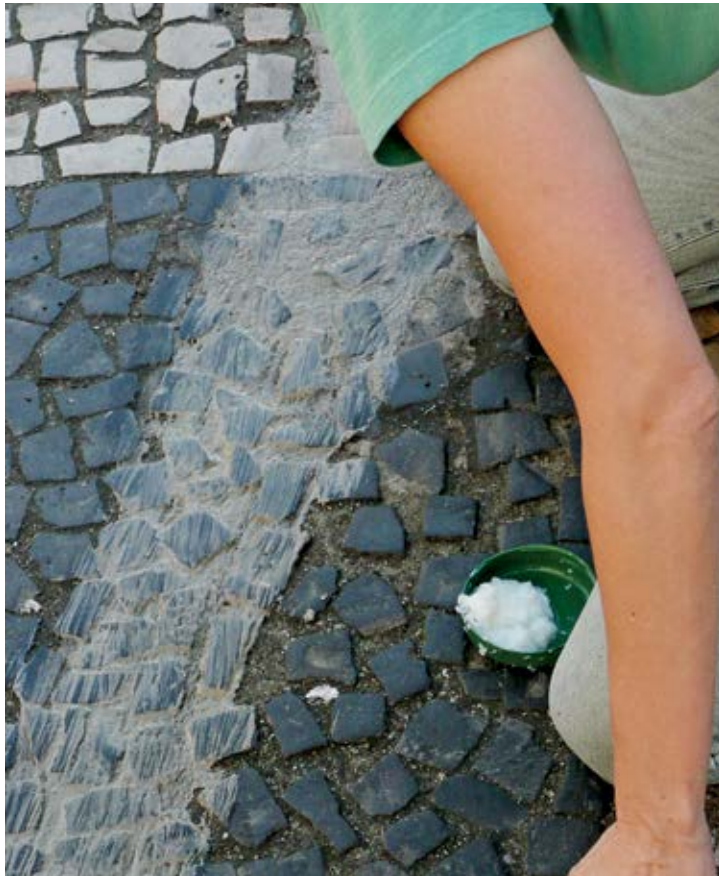
Some discovered words:

medo (fear), osso (bone), podre (rotten), prego (nail), pode (can), pede (asks),
poder (power), mero poder (mere power), osso de prego (nail bone), prego
de osso (bone nail), ego (ego), preso (arrested), ego some (ego disappears),
ego morde (ego bites), rede (net), dor (pain), odor (smell), dom (gift), erro
(mistake), eros (Eros), esmero (care), dose (dose), demo (demo, devil),
regresso (return), gesso (plaster), roer gesso (chew plaster), grosso (thick),
germe (germ), geme (moans), mede (measures), morro (hill, I die), moro (I live),
mordo (I bite), remo (oar, I row), dorme (sleeps), ser (to be), somos (we are),
oremos (let us pray), rodemos (let us spin), sopremos (let us blow), poremos
(we will put), porem (however), poro (pore), poros (pores), esporro (sperm,
I ejaculate, hullabaloo), se (if), esse (that), soro (serum, whey), sogro
(father-in-law), peso (weight), pego (I grab), rego (I water), rogo (I plea), gorro
(cap), gomo (sprout, section of orange), ogro (ogre), po (powder), po de ogro
(ogre's powder), segredos (secrets), sp (São Paulo), ps (post scriptum).

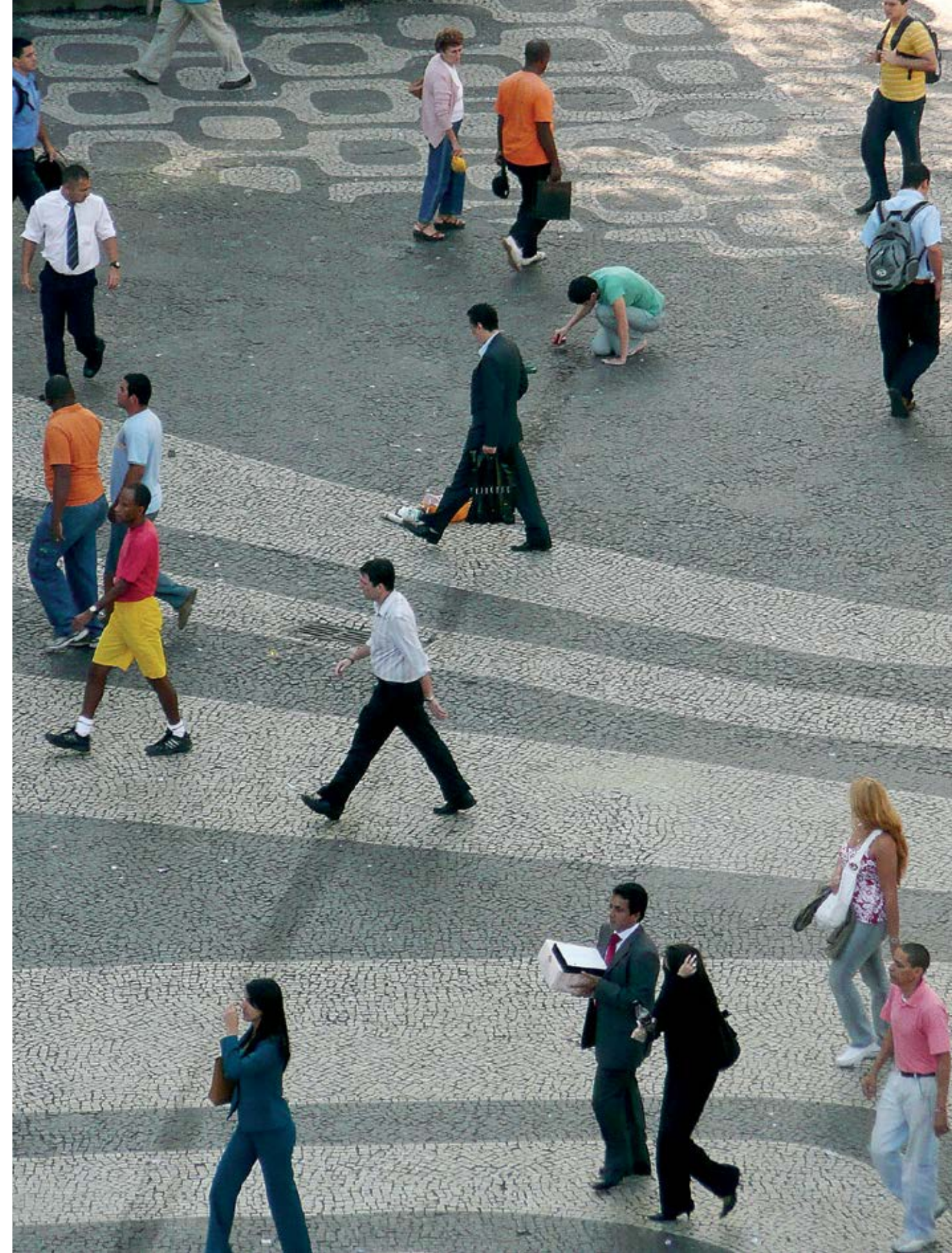
After three hours forming and unforming words, after many conversations
and heated arguments with passersby, I found just one anagram, one way
to replace all the letters in a single combination. ORDEM E PROGRESSO
became O SER GORDO SEMPRE (BEING FAT ALWAYS) or O SER SEMPRE
GORDO (THE BEING ALWAYS FAT) or SEMPRE O GORDO SER (ALWAYS
THE FAT TO BE) or SER SEMPRE O GORDO (TO BE ALWAYS THE FAT).

Carioca Action #3: line

With scouring paste and a brush,
to polish a long straight line on the pavement.



A child approaches and asks: "You're doing that because there's going to be a play here later, aren't you?"



Carioca Action #4: Reiki

To invite people connected to the arts (actors, writers, musicians, critics...)

to participate in a Reiki session at a scheduled time.

Condition: to lie on the pavement on Largo da Carioca.

To offer: the possibility of lying on a sheet of cardboard.

To offer: a glass of water at the end of the session.







Since my eyes were half-closed, I didn't see the people around us. I could sense when they approached or walked away, and could hear what some were saying in the midst of the many sounds on the square—horns, engines, whistles, street hawkers, preachers, passersby, an Andean flute, a saxophone, music for meditation, “only the strong survive” (Billy Paul), “this city's color is me” (Daniela Mercury). “I know what that is. I've done it to treat a problem in my eyes. She has visions. She runs her hands over him and sees everything. It's a psychic operation.” “It's art—each person can think whatever they want.” “She does that and each person that passes by here has to pay attention to their spiritual life; what they've been doing to care for their spirit.”



If we consider that usually only the corpses, passed out, drunks, addicts, and homeless occupy the city's sidewalks horizontally, we understand how this action calls attention. The piece makes me realize that each *Carioca Action* has its specific degree of visibility—its mode of apparition and relationality. Thus the interest to work in series, the taste for linked multiplicity—one action is quick in the way it attracts attention and activates contact, another is slow; one is more abstract, another literal; one stands out, another blends in. Each one makes me want the next. Each, in its way, makes with the Largo, makes the Largo, and is made by it. The action is to make us together.

Carioca Action #5: Brás Cubas

At sundown, to read out loud, like Bible preachers and standing near them,
the seventh chapter of *The Posthumous Memoirs of Brás Cubas*—

“Delirium”—, by Machado de Assis.

Also to read to people who are interested in listening.

And to trucks, light poles, clocks, walls, and stones.

To read repeatedly into the air.

“[...] I saw a hippopotamus come and carry me off. I let myself go, silent, I don’t know whether out of fear or trust, but after a short while the running became so dizzying that I dared question him and in some way told him that the trip didn’t seem to be going anywhere.

— You’re wrong, said the animal, we’re going to the origin of the centuries.

I suggested that it must be very far away, but the hippopotamus either didn’t understand me or didn’t hear me, unless he was pretending one of those things; [...]”¹

“[...] everything was beyond the comprehension of human gaze because the outlines were lost in the surroundings and what looked thick was often diaphanous. Stupefied, I didn’t say a word, I couldn’t even let out a cry, but after a time, which was brief, I asked who she was and what her name was: the curiosity of delirium.

— Call me Nature or Pandora. I am your mother and your enemy.

When I heard that last word I drew back a little, overcome by fear. The figure let out a guffaw, which produced the effect of a typhoon around us; plants twisted and a long moan broke the silence of external things.

— Don’t be frightened, she said, my enmity doesn’t kill, it’s confirmed most of all by life. You’re alive, that’s the only torment I want.”²

¹ ASSIS, Joaquim Maria Machado de. *The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas*.

Trans. Gregory Rabassa. Oxford: Library of Latin America, 1997, p. 17.

² Ibid., p. 18.



Carioca Action #6: archive

To give passersby small prints of Largo da Carioca (7 x 5 cm) at different times in history (from the beginning of the 17th to the end of the 20th century). To talk with interested people about the history of the place, about changes that have occurred, and imagine future transformations. To paste with adhesive tape some of these miniatures on different spots around the square.



What I did was to reduce the paintings by Carlos Gustavo Nunes Pereira published in *Largo da Carioca: 1608 a 1999: um passeio no tempo* [*Largo da Carioca: 1608 a 1999: a stroll through time*] (Rio de Janeiro: Novas Direções, 1999), to print the 7 images inserting the place's name, the respective dates, and the source references on the back of little slips of paper—similar to the flyers distributed on the streets of Rio, including Largo da Carioca, to advertise services such as “I buy gold,” “sex shop,” “I’ll bring your loved one to you in 3 days”—, and hand them. However, there is a slight difference in the way I do it if compared to other flyer distributors: when someone takes my flyer, I hold on to it slightly, I don’t let it change hands so quickly. Sometimes this slight holding-on calls attention to the little object. Then, depending on the person, the image is absorbed, the pace slows down, sometimes to a standstill, and eyes wander in space. I follow the movement from afar. It is beautiful to see the archive performing, the historical vertigo, times intertwining. When someone comes back to talk, we imagine together the Largo da Carioca one, two, three centuries into the future.





Carioca Action #7: pitchers

Two pitchers: one clay, another silver; one full of water, the other empty.
In bare feet, to pour the water from one to the other until it disappears completely.
In case passersby approach, to offer the pitchers so they can perform the action too.
Or to offer one of the pitchers so we can do it together.





She wanted to know where I got the money to perform the pieces. I explained that my expenses were almost nil, that I mainly use things I already have at home, or very cheap and easy to obtain materials; that I didn't apply for institutional support or sponsorship. That I do what I do to live the life I want to live; to build the city where I want to live. And I do when I want to. That this is my mode of production and that it spawns a specific aesthetic. And, as a matter of fact, every mode of production spawns aesthetics; all artists participate in politics of production and reception (objective and subjective) to perform their work, and all artists produce economies (material and affective) with their work. All of us, consciously or not, resist specific forces and form alliances with others, and this defines the work's aesthetics and the working ethic. She said that she understood what I was saying, but she still couldn't grasp what I was actually doing there. She wished me luck.



It took more than four hours to make 300 ml of water evaporate.

Carioca Action #8: rainstorm

Stand in the center of Largo da Carioca holding an empty glass.

Wait for the rainstorm to fill the glass.

Drink the water and let myself dry off in the breeze.

(not performed because it didn't rain)

Carioca Action #9: talk

"a talk on performance followed by an endless conversation"

At a snack bar. To present the *Carioca Actions* series,
show images of the actions on the bar's TV,
and have a conversation about the work.
To eat and drink.

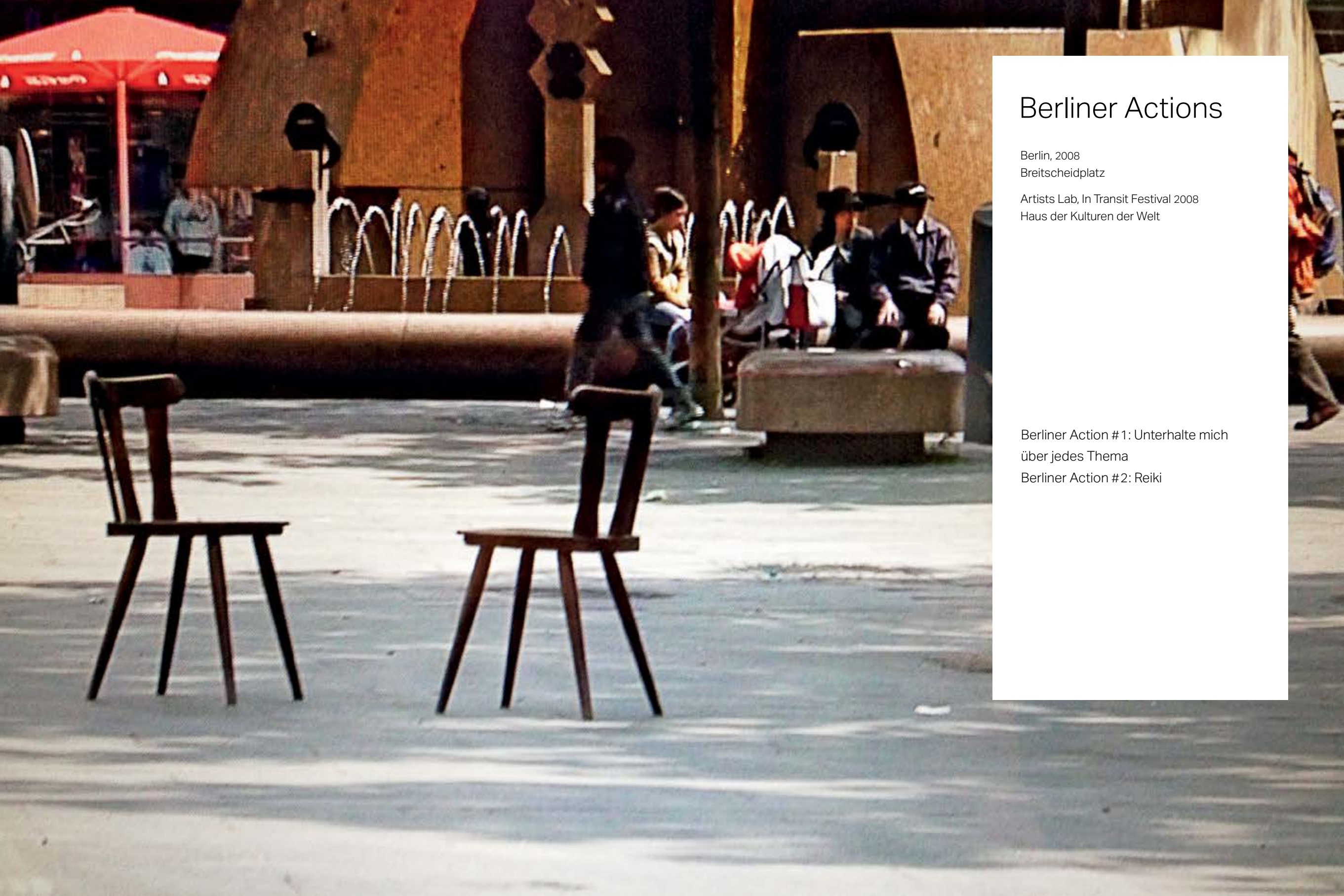
Festival ArtForum
Escobar Snack Bar, Institute of Economics, UFRJ
Av. Pasteur, 250 – Campus Praia Vermelha
June 6, 2011

From the talk:

"*Carioca Actions* is a project of detoxification: the act of purging the toxins of fear through contact, friction, dialogue. In Rio de Janeiro, as in other conflict areas, fear is a sophisticated mass-control biological weapon. What guided me was the simplest wish to feel good, to reclaim what is mine (the city where I was born and grew up), to inhabit my public space, to rub myself on it, to love it; to create modes of active belonging that refuse the culture of fear and the logic of violence. A re-appropriation of the body and of the city, one through the other. Or rather, an appropriation of the body and of the city as body. Both bodies in a process of mutual formation, since the city makes us and we make the city."

"*Carioca Actions* is also a process of exorcism: a reflection on the colonial heritage to unburden the colonized body. The colonized body: a body transfigured, domesticated, and silenced by violence; or, on the other hand, a body possessed by the colonizing spirit, a mimetic machine that reproduces the colonial mindset thereby becoming a colonizer of its own land and people; or still, an amnesic body, with no historical memory and thus in eternal political infancy. In this work I seek to exorcize the colonial legacy by fighting these three pathological modes of subjectivity: fearful catatonia, mimetic paranoia, and historical amnesia."

"As performance makes us see, body and world will never be formed: body and world generate their reciprocal incompleteness. Body and world are not exactly unfinished, but unfinishable: provisional, partial, participants: precarious, precarious, precarious. They are not exactly, or not only, in a process of continuous transformation, but in a state of permanent generation. Body-world that generates the world-body that generates it."



Berliner Actions

Berlin, 2008
Breitscheidplatz

Artists Lab, In Transit Festival 2008
Haus der Kulturen der Welt

Berliner Action #1: Unterhalte mich
über jedes Thema
Berliner Action #2: Reiki

Berliner Action # 1: Unterhalte mich über jedes Thema

To sit on a chair facing an empty chair (household chairs).

To write on a large sheet of paper: UNTERHALTE MICH ÜBER JEDES THEMA.

To display the invitation and wait.



Says he has lived in Berlin for four years but has never had the opportunity to really talk to anyone since he arrived. What a thing. We spent more than an hour together. We agreed and disagreed. He from the Middle East, I from South America. So many things. At the end of the encounter we thanked each other deeply for all of that. When I asked him if he would sign a use of image consent form, he politely and emphatically declined. Thus, the footage from that hour and a half was deleted. Impossible to forget him. And very difficult to remember what we talked about. That's rare; I usually remember quite well.

In this other case, the difficult part was to maintain a balance between our fields. His moved forward once in awhile, and I had to withdraw or condense mine a little. Then it was my turn to ask whether he saw me as aggressive.

Berliner Action #2: Reiki

To invite people connected to the arts (actors, writers, musicians, critics...)

to participate in a Reiki session at a scheduled time.

Condition: to lie on the pavement on Breitscheidplatz.

To offer: the possibility of lying on a sheet of cardboard.

To offer: a glass of water at the end of the session.





Bogotana Actions

Bogotá, 2009
La Plaza de Bolívar

7th Meeting of the Hemispheric Institute
of Performance and Politics

Bogotana Action #1: converso sobre
cualquier asunto

Bogotana Action #2: pitchers

Bogotana Action #3: Reiki

Bogotana Action #4: talk

Bogotana Action #1: converso sobre cualquier asunto

To sit on a chair facing an empty chair (household chairs).

To write on a large sheet of paper: CONVERSO SOBRE CUALQUIER ASUNTO.

To display the invitation and wait.





That was when a boy 11 or 12 years old in a school uniform walked over and asked, "Usted conversa mismo sobre cualquier asunto?" "Sí," I replied. He ran off, disappeared around a corner, and soon came back with his friends from school, all in uniform. We talked about Latin America, about how our parents had met, about our favorite foods (it was nearly lunch time), whether the buildings in Brazil were as high as in Bogotá, math problems, and soccer teams; we sang, we said the words we like the most in Spanish and Portuguese. They asked whether there was war in my country too, and I said yes, unfortunately. A boy asked me if I had any children. I said I had a daughter, and that I would give a present to whoever could guess her name. "What's my daughter's name?" I asked. Going once, going twice, going three times... then a dainty girl's voice chimed out from the left, behind my shoulder: "Valentina." "Say what?" I said, nearly falling off my chair. "Valentina," the girl repeated. "How did you know? That's right!" "That's a lie!" a boy shouted. "It's true," I said. "Is it a common name here?" I asked incredulously. "No," some replied. "But she got it right, that's exactly right!" I repeated. "A lie!" several said in unison. "It's true! I swear on my life, I swear on the life of my daughter Valentina, on the lives of each and every one of you!" Silence. To swear on one's life is a serious thing. "So if she got it right, what are you going to give her for a present?" "A kiss," I said. The gift was a kiss and the impossible happened.

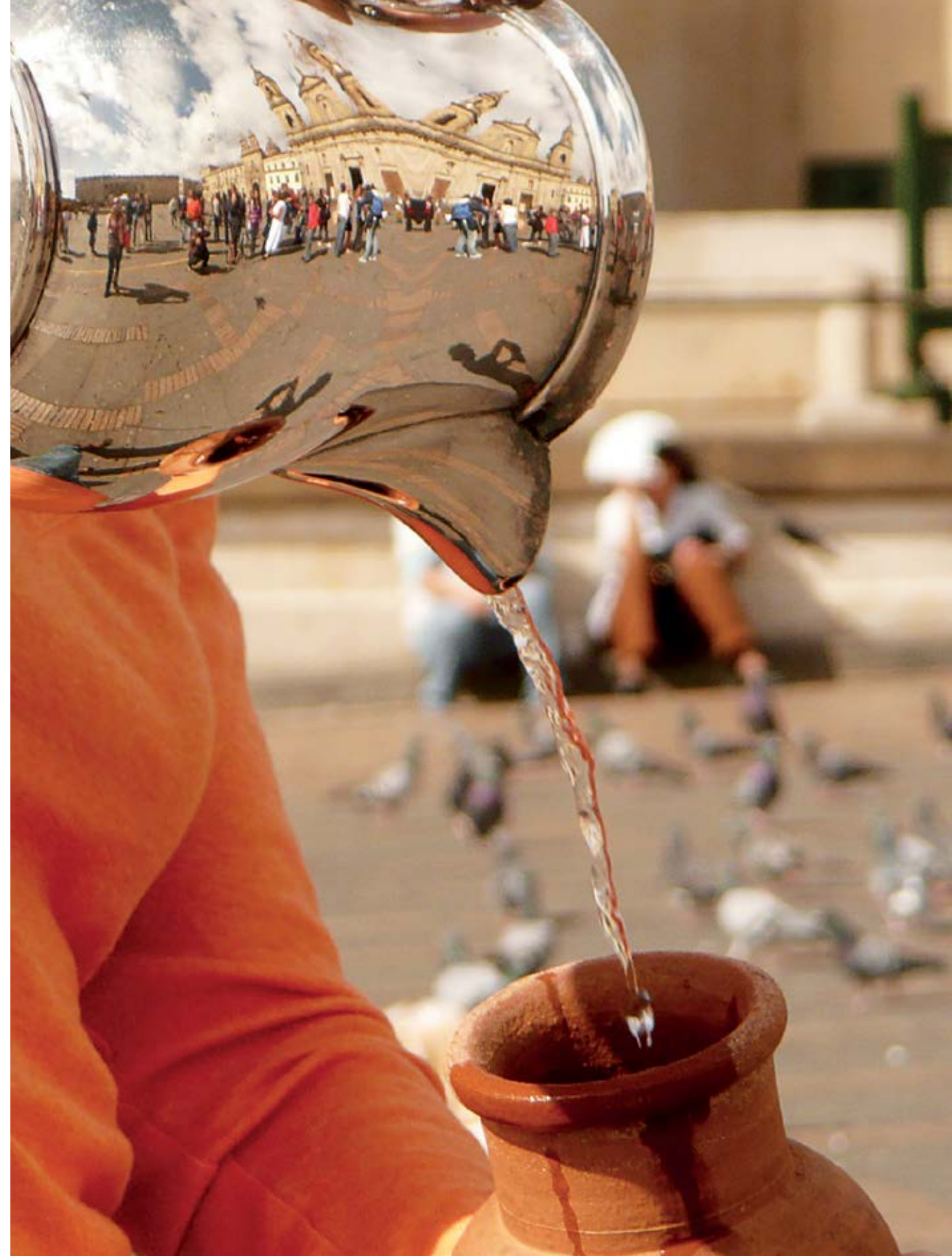
I used to see the street as the place of randomness par excellence.
Now I see the street as the place where the impossible happens.





Bogotana Action #2: pitchers

Two pitchers: one clay, another silver; one full of water, the other empty.
To pour the water from one to the other until it disappears completely.
In case passersby approach, to offer the pitchers so they can perform the action too.
Or to offer one of the pitchers so we can do it together.



"That's how it is with the faucets in the village homes around here—just a little trickle of water."

"Is it plain water, or is there something mixed into it?"

"The thing is to enjoy life drop by drop because one day it ends."

"Does it evaporate or disappear? Because they're not the same thing."

"But in the end it's the same water—whether in the pottery jug or the silver pitcher."



Bogotana Action #3: Reiki

To invite people connected to the arts (actors, writers, musicians, critics...)

to participate in a Reiki session at a scheduled time.

Condition: to lie on the pavement on Plaza de Bolívar.

To offer: the possibility of lying on a sheet of cardboard.

To offer: a glass of water at the end of the session.



Bogotana Action #4: talk

To present the *Carioca Actions* and the *Bogotana Actions*
in a roundtable on urban intervention.
To show images and have a conversation.

From the talk:

“On the street, the point is to raise the recurrent questions as always, again, and one more time: what is body? (ontological question); what moves a body? (kinetic, energetic, affective question); what does a body move? (performative question); what body can move? (biopolitical question).”

“Resistance is a key word, but needs to be considered in psychophysical terms, in the sphere of the dramaturgies of the body. The proposal here is to take the body and its adhere-resist pulsation as a model. Resistance and adherence are aspects of a constitutive psychophysical experience: belonging. To belong or not to belong, that is the question. To belong and not to belong, that is the problem. To belong actively or passively, that is the challenge.”

7th Meeting of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics
Round Table: “Urban Interventions,” with Adriana Mejía Flórez, Álvaro Villalobos, Eleonora Fabião, Patricia Ariza, and Pedro Bennaton

Universidad Nacional de Colombia
Virginia Gutiérrez Auditorium, Human Sciences Graduate Studies Building
August 29, 2009



Fortalezense Actions

Fortaleza, 2010
Praça José de Alencar,
Praça da Lagoinha, and Passeio Público

Ceará International Dance Biennial/
De Par Em Par 2010

- Fortalezense Action #1: I will have a conversation about any subject
- Fortalezense Action #2: Saudades do Brasil
- Fortalezense Action #3: to trade everything
- Fortalezense Action #4: a stroll on the town square
- Fortalezense Action #5: pitchers
- Fortalezense Action #6: kite-orama
- Fortalezense Action #7: talk

Fortalezense Action #1: I will have a conversation about any subject

To sit on a chair, barefoot,
facing an empty chair (household chairs).
To write on a large sheet of paper:
I WILL HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT ANY SUBJECT.
To display the invitation and wait.





Priests and psychologists listen a lot; I am neither one, I am an artist. I have conversations. It's for free: it costs nothing and is disinterested—it is not about profit, cure, or salvation. I do it because I know nothing more beautiful and amazing than people and people's lives.

It happened little by little. He approached stiffly, standoffish, skittish, but he eventually loosened up. We exchanged sideways glances until our eyes met. At a certain point he told me something I will never forget. He said something like this: "You always have to be ready to die." "And how do you get ready to die?" I asked. "By being at peace," he said and added, "You have to be ready to die every day, living in peace." The talk proceeded and I understood he was a retired police officer. "I used to be at peace, but I no longer am. I've been arguing with my wife a lot. It's stupid, because I really do love her." "Well sir, so go home right now and settle it!"

Fortalezense Action #2: Saudades do Brasil

On the ground, to open the book *Saudades do Brasil* by Claude Lévi-Strauss —a register of his travels with a series of photos of the Nambikwara people (state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, 1930s).

On the ground, to lie down like the ones in the photographs and let time pass.







Today, 8 a.m. Mr. Castelo was already there—he came to wish a good morning. I squatted and opened *Saudades do Brasil*. The wind was blowing. I pinned the pages down with paving stones, known in Brazil as “pedras portuguesas” (Portuguese stones). In a few minutes a small crowd had gathered. A girl helped me find the same position as in the photograph, straightened my hair, and from time to time rearranged my posture. Somebody spoke of the wisdom of silence. Somebody was asking the others what it is to learn, and how one learns. Somebody asked me to give examples of learning situations, situations in which I had learned new things. I couldn’t think of any situation that wasn’t learning, and I said so. Somebody wanted to give me money, two *reais*, because to make theater here was really precarious. Somebody handed me the priest’s telephone number. The priest that lives in a nearby indigenous village. The word is that he is a brilliant man. Somebody kept repeating, “This is culture.” Somebody insisted: “this is theater, the Town Hall is sponsoring it.” Somebody was telling stories about Indians. Somebody was pondering on life in a village and life in a city. Somebody was pondering without speaking and we smiled. Somebody was commenting on the televised debate the previous evening and the presidential elections. Somebody said I should get up off the ground because of the sun and the filth. I explained that I took de-worming medicine every six months and that I’d put sunscreen on. Somebody asked to see the book, to leaf through the book. We sat in a circle and all leafed through it together. Somebody kept asking what all that meant. Somebody answered that it was culture. Somebody said that I was simple. I was overjoyed to the point of embarrassment that somebody had said that. Somebody said they worked exactly with that, occupying the ground and taking care of the ground. Somebody said he only uses the ground, but doesn’t pay attention to it. Somebody is called Fabiana. Somebody is called Maurício. Somebody knows by heart the names of dozens of Brazil’s neighborhoods and cities and rivers and highways, and rattled off dozens of them at breakneck speed. Somebody doesn’t like the name Brazil, thinks it’s ugly. Somebody loves it a lot, too-too much. Somebody’s gift was to make speeches, and made a speech about intelligence and lack of culture. Somebody said he’d seen a poor man, very poor, and happy, very happy; the man was happiness-in-person, he said. Somebody claimed that all that—the woman on the ground with that book—was an exposé. Somebody wanted to call an ambulance. Somebody received a call on the cell phone and explained that there was a woman lying on the ground imitating Indians. Somebody said yes, while somebody said no. No one said maybe. Somebody had to rush off to work. Somebody couldn’t lie on the ground, or else she’d get her work clothes dirty—but she wanted to, said she wanted to, if only she could... So many people in that village. So many arrows, so many baskets, so much ground, and so much sky. So much to bite and chew. So much of so many things. I’m dizzy. After a bath I’ll write some more. Dizzy, dizzy, dizzy.

Fortalezense Action #3: to trade everything

To approach strangers and ask,

"Do you want to trade something with me? I give you something of mine, something I'm wearing or carrying, and you receive it.

You give me something in exchange, and I receive it."

The action is finished when I've traded everything I had at the beginning.





I want this yellow balloon, said the man in the shadow of the statue of Capistrano de Abreu. I have a question: what you've traded for, do you trade it again? No, I keep it; I take it home and use it or wear it. Capistrano de Abreu was one of the first great historians of Brazil, who also worked with ethnography and linguistics. He was a proponent of sociological determinism and, as he wrote, with his research he aimed to discover "the fatal laws that govern Brazilian society." I have a duster, but it's no good for dusting, is that alright? I don't like anything you have there. Listen, I want the coat you traded with her over there. So, go over there and trade something with her for it. Nothing's fair, young lady. I'm going to take it to my aunt in Bahia. I have to warn you, this watch tends to run fast. But how fast? I think about fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes is no big deal.



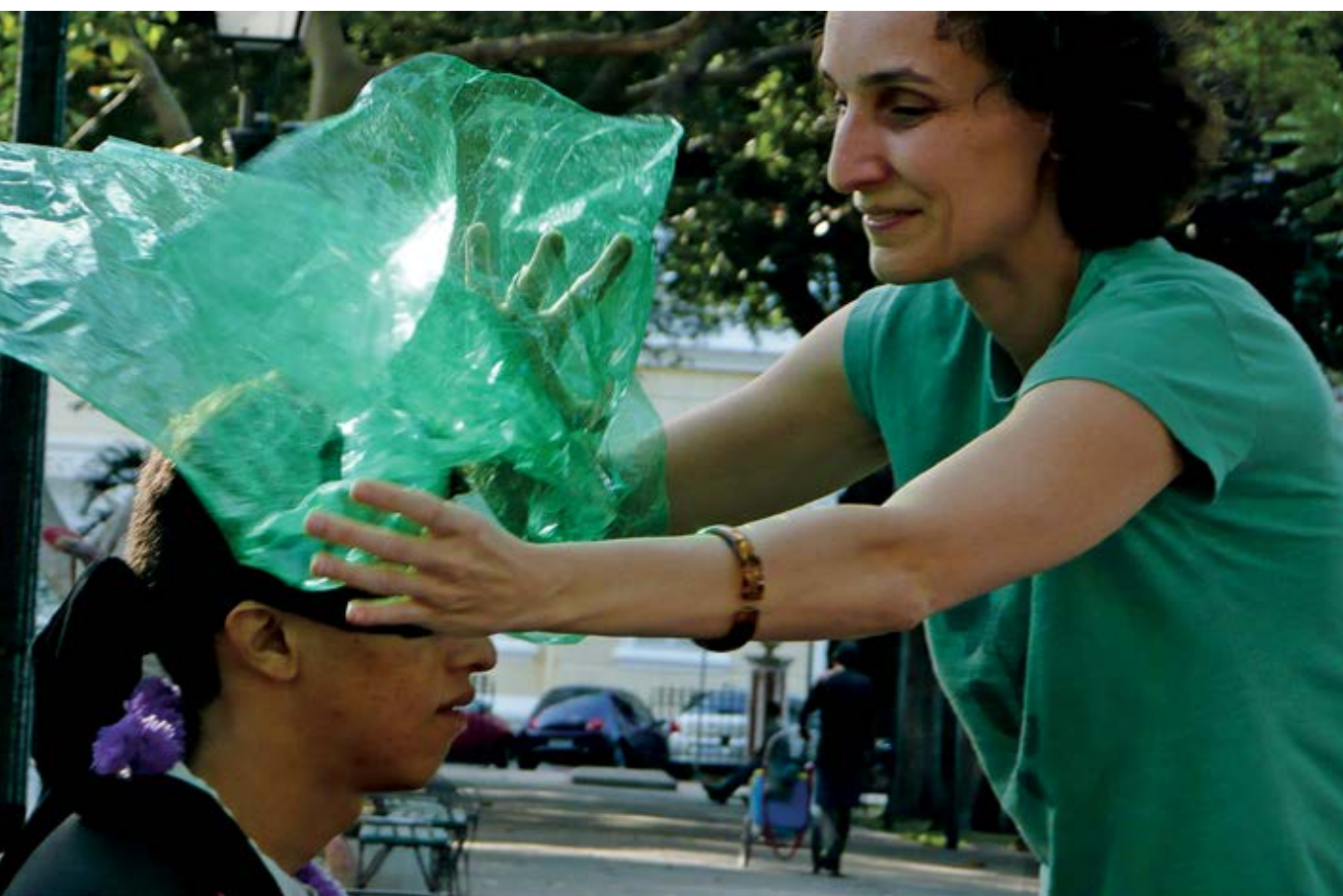
Fortalezense Action #4: a stroll on the town square

To propose to people on the square to take them on a stroll.

Condition: to accept having their eyes blindfolded.

In the handbag: fruit, brush, feather, sponge, aromatic herbs, a bed sheet, water, etc.





Fortalezense Action #5: pitchers

Two pitchers: one clay, another silver; one full of water, the other empty.

To pour the water from one to the other until it disappears completely.

In case passersby approach, to offer the pitchers so they can perform the action too.

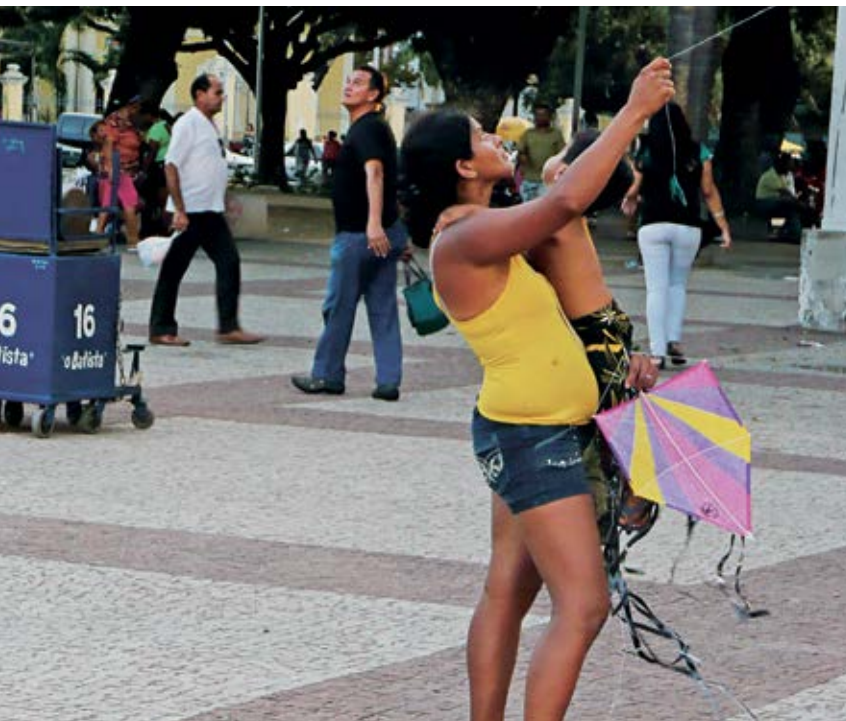
Or to offer one of the pitchers so we can do it together.





Fortalezense Action #6: kite-orama

Invite artists and people on the town square to fly kites together.
Fill the air with music.



A police officer called me over. "Yes, sir, did you wish to speak to me?"
"Are you responsible for this, lady?" "You mean, am I in charge of this?"
"Yes, I mean if you're in charge." "If I am in charge?" "Yes, lady, are you responsible?" "Yes, I am responsible and I am in charge. But at this stage I think everybody's in charge. Would you like a kite, sir?" "This is forbidden here."
"What exactly is it forbidden to do here? Is it forbidden to fly kites and dance on the square?" "Yes." "Yes? But why? We're not disrespecting or disturbing anybody. We're not breaking anything or blocking the pedestrians' flow. There are no overhead wires nearby. We're having fun. It's Friday, late afternoon, and everybody's happy." "This here is no place for happiness. This is the way people take to get to work." "Isn't the town square a place for happiness? It's a way to get to work?" "Exactly." "The entire square?"
"You got a permit?" "Do I have a permit? For what, exactly? To fly a kite, to give out kites, to dance, or to be happy anywhere on the square?"
It was difficult to follow that policeman's reasoning. What he said appeared to make no sense. I asked him to please give me ten minutes, and I went to explain the situation to the people.



Fortalezense Action #7: talk

At Alpendre. To read the text "Performance: ways of belonging and creating world," show pictures of the actions performed in the city, and have a conversation.

From the talk:

"Performances are atypical compositions of velocities and extra-ordinary affective operations that emphasize the corporeal politicality of the world and of relations."

Alpendre Casa de Arte, Pesquisa e Produção
Rua José Avelino, 495 – Praia de Iracema
October 30, 2010

Line New York

New York, 2010/11

Streets and homes in the city

To visit a stranger at their home to talk, exchange ideas, and drink water, tea, or coffee. To bring from my home to this meeting: 2 white cups and 2 white saucers (wrapped in colorful cloths), 1 thermos bottle with coffee (Brazilian), teabags (Brazilian), and sugar (Brazilian). During the meeting, to plan an action to be performed by the two of us, together, in a public space—this is a fundamental goal of the visit: to discover/ create an action that we want to perform together in a specific location. At the end of this first meeting, to schedule the second one. Meanwhile, gather whatever is necessary to perform the action. And, having concluded the practice, to ask the collaborator to contact an acquaintance of theirs (a person of their choice to continue the *Line*). Then, send me the date and address where I will meet this new stranger (at their home). Please do not give names, but just the space-time coordinates—where and when. That's how the *Line* moves.

Line New York: talk

In specific locations and events, to read the text “a performance called *Line*: encounters with the encounter” and show images of the work.
To throw each read page on the ground, so that the space will be semi-covered by the end of the reading. To have a conversation with those present.
To continue rewriting the text according to the conversation.

Exhibition “The Experience of Art”
(Sesc Santo André, Santo André, once per month, from April to October 2015)
Keynote Speech of the “Processes’ Presentation”
(Escola Livre de Teatro, Santo André, July 2015)
Keynote Speech of the 3rd Meeting Questão de Crítica
(Sesc Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro, April 2015)
Polyphonies Series: Universidade Federal Fluminense + MAR
(Rio’s Art Museum, Rio de Janeiro, October 2014)
Zé dos Bois Gallery
(Lisbon, September 2014)
1st Research Seminar of the Post Graduate Program
for the Performing Arts
(Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Ouro Preto, September 2014)
Brazil Project Seminar
(Headquarters of Cia. Brasileira de Teatro, Curitiba, June 2014)
5th Seminar of the Post Graduate Program in Arts
(Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, April 2014)
Promptus Brazil-Mexico Exchange on Performance
(Sesc Santo Amaro, São Paulo, February 2014)
3rd International Seminar on Performing Arts
(Pontifícia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro, October 2013)
19th Meeting of the Post Graduate Program in Visual Arts
(Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro + Hélio Oiticica Municipal Art Center,
Rio de Janeiro, October 2013)

Talk on June 25, 2015:

a performance called *Line*: encounters
with the encounter

[...] everything we do, know, or experience
only has meaning if it can be discussed.
Hannah Arendt

Point of departure. or once upon a time

It is April 1st, 2010. Living then in New York City, I phoned an old friend called Karmen. The conversation went something like this: “Karmen, I’m starting a new project with this phone call. It’s called *Line*. And the line begins in this phone call with a question. Could you please arrange a meeting for me? I would like to meet somebody that I don’t know, a stranger. [...] That’s right, what we heard throughout our entire childhood that we weren’t supposed to do under any circumstances—talk to strangers. [...] Yes, and as you know, I already do that in many pieces I perform on the streets. The difference is that now I want to go to strangers’ homes, visit them, cross several doors that I’ve never crossed and would never cross except through the *performative body*. I want to talk with strangers in the privacy of their homes.” “But does it have to be an artist?” she asked. “No,” I replied, “a person, it must be a person.”

[to describe the piece’s program to those present]

Once upon a time, and many times upon many times:

The visits were many and the conversations long. Fluid, impacting, difficult, unforgettable, mild, arid. Meetings that resulted in varied actions. Actions in a boat, a museum, a church, restaurants, parks, rivers, city squares, street corners, subway trains and stations. In the water, in the wind, in the sun, in the snow, and coincidentally (or not), always in daylight. Jeff Stark, Rachel Berg, Anne Wenniger, Mina, Clarisse, Olivia Beens, Natalie J. Willemsen, Miki Glasser, Lucy Kaminsky, Aimee Lutkin, Brooklyn, China Town, Spanish Harlem, Soho, Times Square, Central Park Zoo, Lower East Side, Staten Island. And some premises:

1) do not scrutinize the homes I visit. Far from it. It is a matter of entering fields and creating fields, cohabiting internal and external spaces;

2) to keep always the program's objective in mind: to conceive an action together, reach an agreement, and act together. The motivation was never to go meet people in order to get to know them or to make myself known. That was not the goal of the visit; perhaps a possible consequence. I insist: our purpose is *to do something together*; something that we could only become capable of doing because we join together, and that we could never do if we had not joined. We promise each other the joint experience of an action, and that is the question's nerve center;

3) do not come to the meetings with "aces up the sleeve," that is, with preconceived programs or readymade ideas. Rather, to absorb *that* situation, *that* conjunction—whether a met meeting or an unmet meeting—as a compositional motto and part of the practice to come;

4) to acknowledge and value the strange, stranger, strangeness as ways of knowing and relating. Strange house, strange bodies, strange visit; strange "good morning," strange cup, strange city, strange exchange; strange silence, strange hours, strange coffee from the strange land of Brazil drunk by the stranger I am and the stranger that receives me, and once upon a time. It would be redundant to say "strange performance"—it would be like saying "strange-strange" or "performance-performance." The performance act is precisely about suspending habits and usual ways of perception, relation, and cognition to create a strange-state-of-things; or rather, to reveal the strangeness-of-all-things. The performative body rips the routine out of situations, places, and things, making us deliriously lucid and lucidly delirious.

So, once upon a time. Once upon a time Eleonora and Jeff in a living room with two windows. April 2010. Cold outside. Drinking black coffee in white cups, we decided to dive into the brown waters of the Hudson River, the river that runs along Manhattan Island. We agreed (as he had proposed) to jump in holding hands. And so it was: we dove into the gelid water, into that murky soup, on a blue day, with fingers intertwined. And our feet touched the slimy sludge which is the crust of that part of Earth. Afterwards, a hug. Tight.

May 2010. Jeff sent me an address, a date, and recommended that in addition to coffee, I should take chocolate milk. So I did. It was Anne's home. Anne has a daughter named Mina; Mina has a friend named Clarisse. The two girls, 9 years old, think make-believe princesses are little kids' stuff—they're interested in real-life princesses and do research on the royal families of Norway and Great Britain. We played for hours. While we were drawing pictures together, we decided on the action Anne and I would perform on the street. She would paint—paint my body, on my skin. And at her suggestion, and this time without the girls, we had our second meeting on the banks of the Hudson River for the painting session. The river again. She painted flowers and leaves on me.

Olivia and Eleonora decided to plant Portuguese flower seeds in the flowerbeds in Battery Park, New York City's main immigration port in the 19th century. It was still May when the seeds arrived from Lisbon in a friend's suitcase. We planted more than a thousand seeds of pink gillyflowers, *saudades dobradas* (folded longings), and mixed verbenas. After digging the furrows with a kitchen fork brought by Olivia and sowing the seeds, we watered the flowerbeds pouring bowl after bowl of clean water over each other's heads. So, the water that irrigated the sown earth trickled first through hair and faces to then reach the ground. Before she migrated to the United States, Olivia, an Eastern European, lived part of her childhood in Portugal. At our first meeting she showed me a photo from that time—she and a little Portuguese girl (holding hands, wearing dresses, knee-high socks, and buckled shoes). The two were holding bunches of flowers. Again, on the banks, holding hands, flowers, leaves. The river: a water *Line*.

July 2010. Rachel and I decided to take a tree for a boat ride. But "tree" is too big of a word. It was a fig sapling. A fig sapling that I planted on her belly, on the deck of the Staten Island Ferry from Manhattan. If we had stayed there, on that ferryboat deck for some weeks, I'm certain the tree

would have found a way to take root in her body. The thing is that the first time we talked, throughout most of the conversation, all I thought about was trees. An image kept coming to mind: to fill a tree with things, with all kinds of things; a big tree with big and small things; hanging, propped up against, and suspended things; sofa, chair, fan, books, pots and pans, tableware, TV, clothing, pillow, mirror, shampoo. Meanwhile, she said all she thought about was water, the sea, rivers, boats. When the time came to decide what to do together, what we would like to do *in* that city, *for* that city, *with* that city, and to *offer each other through that city*, we decided to mix the two virtual clouds that had formed over the course of the conversation. That is, we decided to take a tree for a boat ride. When the boat anchored upon its return to Manhattan, and while we were scooping the dirt scattered on the deck back into the planter, the security guard, who had watched the entire process unfold, approached us and said, "Don't worry, the wind will take care of the rest." "Thank you," we replied. So, I handed the planter to Rachel—she had asked to keep the fig sapling for it to grow at her house—and we got off the ferryboat. We were dazed. The experience of suspending habit and meaning is a kind of spell; a *performative spell*. We roared with laughter, and she said, "This work is a celebration. That's what it's about, about celebrating." Another collaborator said that the *Line* is a ritual. Another said it's a laboratory. As I understand it, *Line* is a performance. A performance—with "p" for program and practice. It is a practice, a set of practices.

In November 2010, Lucy and Eleonora met, dressed as ghosts, and walked holding hands for about 50 blocks of the Avenue of the Americas (6th Avenue). During our first meeting we talked a lot about ghosts—ghostly matter, space and ghostly density—, specifically about South American and North American phantasmagorias. Accordingly, the spot we chose for our second meeting was the corner of White Street and the Avenue of the Americas. The objective was to reach the door of the Majestic Theater on Times Square—the theater where the musical *Phantom of the Opera* has been playing nonstop for more than 25 years. When the ghosts got there, they let loose of their hands, hugged, and vanished.

That same November, Miki and Eleonora agreed to take a Sunday-morning stroll in Central Park taking a bag with 15 new white t-shirts, fabric paint, and letter stencils. It went like this: we approached park visitors and asked whether they would like to think with us about a phrase that we would

paint on a t-shirt, which would then be given to them. Despite numerous refusals, but before sunset, we had given away all t-shirts. On one of them we wrote:

to be or not to be (William Shakespeare)

to be is to do (Immanuel Kant)

dobedobedo (Frank Sinatra)



By exploring the traversing of doors, the home-street transitions, and the inside-outside intercrossings, the *Line* weaves public-private and personal-social circulations. The work dynamizes mixtures—I-other-we, inside space-outside space, strange-familiar, distant-intimate, citizen-city—and emphasizes the importance of this movement for the creation of the performative body.

Equally relevant in *Line* is the shift from the relation between performer and spectator, accomplice, or even participant, to a performer-performer interaction. Rachel and Jeff did not participate in the activation of programs conceived by me but were cocreators of programs performed by us. Another peculiarity: I had never experienced such a unique temporality in a performance. Sometimes I needed to wait for more than a month to hold the second meeting. In nearly a year and a half of work, it was possible to accomplish a total of 18 meetings and 9 actions in public spaces.

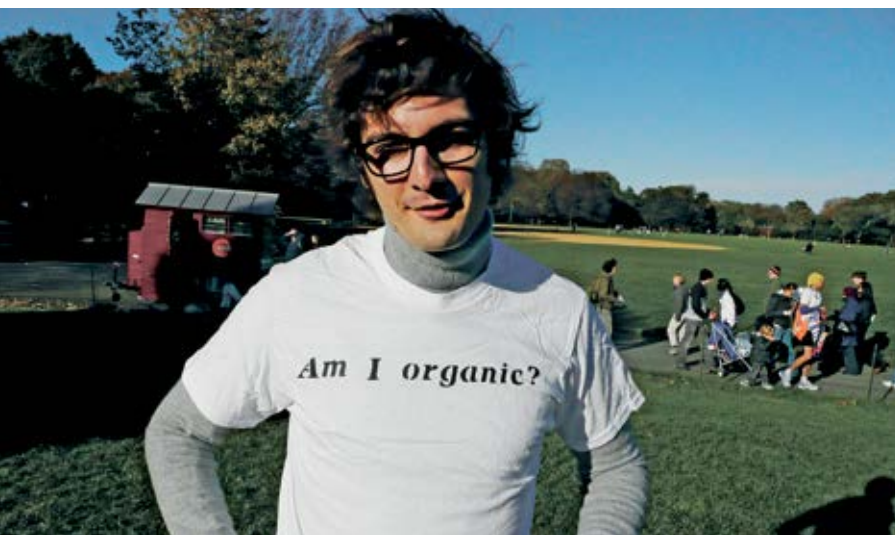
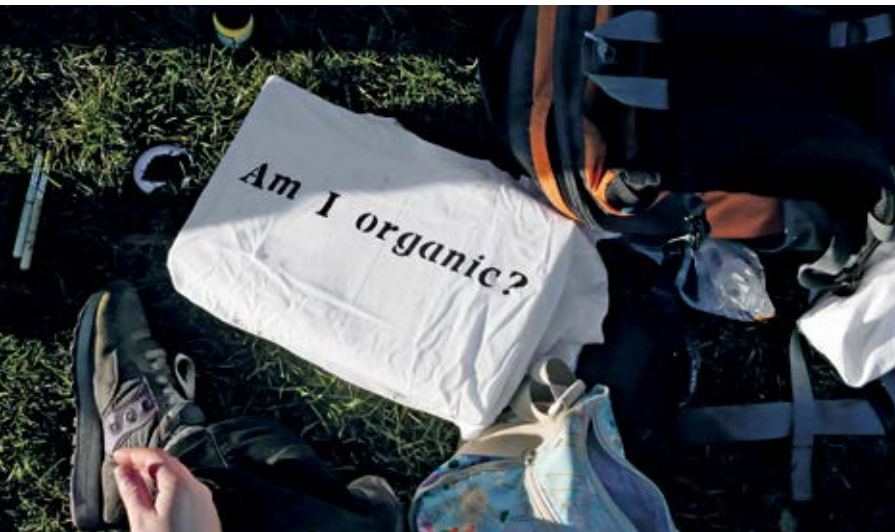
To write and to speak in public about the *Line* are fundamental stages of the project. This is another of the public spaces that becomes part of the work and another kind of encounter that it aims for and spawns. As Hannah Arendt suggests in the epigraph to this text, everything a performer does, knows, or experiences is an invitation to discussion. Thus, this talk not only addresses the *Line*'s past, but continues its weaving. The proposal is to create performance programs, to perform them, to generate stories, and to narrate them. The narrative of experiences and the experience of the narrative are key concerns of this work. As Maurice Blanchot says, "The narrative is not the telling of the event, but that event itself, the approximation of that event, the place where the event is called to make itself."¹

The proposal is also to reflect on concepts that energize the project and discuss them with you. I wrote some thoughts about the following themes for today: encounter, encounter with the encounter, self-surveillance, anticrime, political friendship, and aesthetics of precariousness.

¹ BLANCHOT, Maurice. *O livro por vir (The Book to Come)*. Lisbon: Relógio d'Água, s/d, p. 14. Quoted in GUEDES, Antônio. "A precisão das falas e a concretude cênica em Nelson Rodrigues." *Folhetim, Teatro do Pequeno Gesto* #29. Rio de Janeiro: Pão e Rosas, 2010/11.









point 1. on the encounter

If there is a question at stake in *Line*, it is the encounter.

Michel Serres writes in *The Parasite*:

We are buried within ourselves; we send out signals, gestures and sounds indefinitely and uselessly. No one listens to anyone else. Everyone speaks; no one hears; direct or reciprocal communication is blocked. This one here speaks learnedly; he is as boring as the last course he gave; he doesn't care if people hear him. Another, more jovial, plays a strong role that he dearly holds on to: he spreads his good humor through his discourse. The third, an irritable pipsqueak and always on his high horse, terrorizes those around him. They all play their favorite instrument, whose name is their own. [...] And yet, sometimes, there is agreement. The most amazing thing in the world is that agreement, understanding, harmony, exists.²

For Serres, in a world of deaf egos, the encounter is practically an impossibility. And concord—etymologically the union of hearts—is nothing less than a miracle.

On the other hand, for Baruch Espinosa, life is precisely an experience of encounters—encounters that feed or poison us, or that feed *and* poison us. According to the encounters it experiences with other bodies, a body composes or decomposes itself, is activated or deadened, potentialized or constrained. The encounters of which Espinosa speaks take place with ideas, objects, persons, fruits, stories, groups, places, sounds, houses, horses, that is, with all kinds of bodies. The world is thus a field of encounters between bodies with a wide variety of constitutions, velocities, and ways of affecting and being affected.

² SERRES, Michel. *The parasite* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 121, quoted by André Lepecki in "No metaplan, o encontro." In: ESPÍRITO SANTO, Cristina; FABIÃO, Eleonora; SOBRAL, Sônia (org.). *Encontro*. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2013. In his essay, Lepecki calls attention to the opposition between the views of Serres and Espinosa, an aspect that will be addressed next.

A good encounter is that which potentializes—that by which strength increases and the *capacity for action* augments.

Portuguese philosopher José Gil sees encounters, according to Deleuzian terminology, as operations of "disjunctive synthesis." Says Gil: "the encounter [...] simultaneously involves something like an osmosis between those that meet and the preservation of their total singularity."³ He exemplifies:

I can imagine an encounter (aesthetic, let us say) with a glass. When I perceive it, it sends me a series of virtual particles, while my body sends it other beams of other particles of the same kind. [...] In a word, the *dual capture* that happens in a dialogue or perception involves a *dual becoming: the reciprocal becoming-other in the dialogue*, the becoming-glass of my body and the becoming-body of the glass in the perception. [The dual capture] forms a "zone of indiscernibility"; a medium of osmosis in which one and the other, the body and the glass, mix without losing their distinction.⁴

So, encounters are operations of "disjunctive synthesis." Furthermore, processes of disjunctive synthesis are the condition of possibility for perception and relation.

To this *Line*—which de-automatizes usual modes of relation and perception between fellow citizens and with the city—it is of interest the understanding that encounters are practically impossible, veritable miracles (Serres), and the notion that the world defines itself as a field of encounters that involves all sorts of bodies (Espinosa). Applying a bit more performative pressure, I propose that for this piece, the encounter is a *practice of the impossible*. Through this performance, the idea is not to make the impossible possible, but to live impossibles. It's about activating series of radically improbable disjunctive syntheses and cultivating zones of indiscernibility (Gil) for the creation of the performative body. A body that wants to perceive beyond and ahead of automatic life, to know beyond and ahead of the predictable, to experiment beyond and ahead of the possible. A body that opens zones of indiscernibility in the body of the city.

³ GIL, José. "Um bom encontro?" In: *Encontro*. Op. cit., p. 126.

⁴ Ibid. My emphasis.

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point 2. on self-surveillance and anticrime

Line, as I experience it, is an examination of modes of subjectivation and action in urban centers in the beginning of the century. As Michel Foucault articulated, we are experiencing the passage from a disciplinary society to a society of control. That is, the passage from a sociopolitical and corporeal mode in which institutional regulation and its disciplinary modes were paradigmatic, to contemporaneous modes of mobility, virtuality, and information flow in which discipline has been introjected. Interviewed by Toni Negri in 1990, Gilles Deleuze said:

We are definitely moving toward “control” societies that are no longer exactly disciplinary. Foucault’s often taken as the theorist of disciplinary societies and of their principal technology, confinement (not just in hospitals and prisons, but in schools, factories, and barracks). But he was actually one of the first to say that we’re moving away from disciplinary societies, we’ve already left them behind. We are moving toward control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication.⁵

In this world, not only we live with inspectors, we perform the task of self-inspection. The external watchful eye is also introjected as self-surveillance. That is, I am under the effects of disciplinary apparatuses, regardless of the presence or absence of some power and knowledge authority. Under (self)control, I am my own police; and even more, a potential criminal.

Line is a conscious and methodical proposal to decelerate self-surveillance for the acceleration of *political imagination*. It is also a conscious and methodical work of predisposition to relations with vigilantes—with all levels of control in the city, which are evidently not limited to governmental forces (when performing on the streets we frequently interact not only with the police, but also with private security guards, owners of commercial establishments, owners of the street, owners of the truth, muggers...). An important strategy has been to avoid a head-on clash with forces opposed to the performative movement underway, but rather to absorb them into the making of the program.

In this version performed in New York City (and I say version because a *Line* has been running in Rio de Janeiro since August 2014), the performance happened nine years after September 11, 2001, and one year before the Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011. Anne and I (or Natalie, or Miki...) had conversations and made decisions that I now realize, were based on the following question: which acts construct the city in which we want to live, and which acts prevent the formation of the city in which we want to live? Our actions worked to break the inertia established by acquired (and often fantasized) certainties that “this is not allowed” and “that is forbidden,” in order to know possibilities and impossibilities in practice. At this moment, as I write this text, I conclude that our work—based on exchanges, agreements, very low expenses, and a high investment in the politics of encounter and in the aesthetic of precariousness—is an *anticrime*. After all, the opposite of committing a crime is not to not commit crimes, but to commit anticrimes. I propose that each action performed was an anticrime committed in the name of a reflection on behavior and modes of belonging in a disciplinary society of control.

⁵ DELEUZE, Gilles. *Negotiations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 174.

In cities like New York, especially since 2001, or Rio de Janeiro, in times of “shock of order,” the recent “World Cup law,” the upcoming “Olympic Games law,” the need for collective security has led to unjustifiable forms of control and preemptive violence. The songwriter Criolo, from São Paulo, describes as follows our biopolitical times in a rap song recorded in 2014: “Today / There is no mouth to kiss / There is no soul to cleanse / There is no life to live / But there is money to count [...] It’s the roof of the mouth of hell waiting for you / It’s the roof of the mouth of hell waiting.”⁶ This is precisely the time to commit anticrimes (of all kinds, scales, and intensities, and in all fields). It is time to commit anticrimes indiscriminately.

In the scope and reach of this *Line*, according to the micropolitical perspective in question, it seems to me essential to oppose introjected control, ostensive surveillance, the culture of fear, the unbridled multiplication of all forms of terrorism, and biopower (power over life) with performance acts where different ways of inhabiting the public space and relating to fellow citizens are examined, questioned, and expanded. Under the current circumstances, to *commit performances* has become vital to me.

point 3. on political friendship

In a book entitled *Talking to Strangers*, American political scientist Danielle Allen calls attention to a theme that permeates this performance and this reflection: “political friendship.” Allen explains that for Aristotle, friendship and virtue are separable, highlighting three types of friendship: ethical, pleasurable, and useful. Ethical friendships involve virtues and are based on good faith and love. Pleasurable friendships are based on the immediate pleasure provided by the interaction. And useful friendships are not based on either love or pleasure, but like the other forms, they seek negotiation and agreement for the benefit and fruition of all parties involved. For Aristotle and Allen, a fellow citizen is a “useful friend,” or a “political friend.” Allen: “Aristotle argued that good citizenship amounted to interacting with strangers in ways that look like friendship even if, since they lack the emotional charge, they don’t feel like friendship.”⁷

⁶ Excerpt from the song *Esquiva da Esgrima* by Criolo.

⁷ ALLEN, Danielle. *Talking to Strangers*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 127.

I think that this performance investigates and invests in aesthetic-political friendships. Or performative ones, that is, transitory, intense, practiced friendships. I am interested in discussing, experimenting, inventing relational modes: the political-performative friendships. I am interested in dismantling behaviors that are opposed to the negotiation between friends: to dismantle patterns of condescendence (laxity, permissiveness) or intransigence (rigidity, intolerance). Thus, like Allen, I believe that to develop a culture of political friendship (she says) and performative experimentation (I suggest) are fundamental for vitalizing our political world. This, by the way, is the opposite of nepotism, pulling strings, political workarounds, and favoritisms, so deeply rooted in Brazilian culture.

Further on friendship, Francisco Ortega, a Spanish philosopher living in Rio de Janeiro and a professor at the State University (Uerj), advances the following argument in his article “For an ethic and a politics of friendship”:

In the end, friendship is “an empty program,” another name for a relation still to be created, a metaphor for the open that can replace the family in our affective imaginary. It’s not a matter of denying the family as institution, but of changing the policies that prioritize the latter to the detriment of other forms of life, of fighting the monopoly it exerts on our emotional imaginary, and of no longer thinking of friendship relations in family images. A society like ours, that concentrates the sources of psychic security and material support in the family, hinders the invention of other modes of living. Only a shift away from the family-centered ideology can promote variety, experimentation of ways of life and community, and multiplicity of choices. A shift that should revitalize the public space and reclaim the attraction it held prior to the total familialization [sic] of private life.⁸

⁸ ORTEGA, Francisco. “Por uma ética e uma política da amizade” (For an ethic and a politics of friendship). Available at https://www.google.com.br/search?q=Francisco+Ortega,+Por+uma+%C3%A9tica+and+uma+pol%C3%ADtica+da+amizade+&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&gws_rd=cr&ei=zMmJVdXkFcPigwTl2oC4Dw. Accessed June 23, 2015. My translation.

Ortega is interested in thinking friendships that are not “turned inward,” based on “egology” as he says, or on the “narcissistic appropriation of the other,” but rather focused outward, to the world. In interiority (and he quotes Hannah Arendt), “the most one can do is reflect, but not act or transform something.” Ortega proceeds: “Freedom emerges in the space ‘between’ individuals, as [Arendt] highlights repeatedly, and this ‘in between,’ the ‘intermediate-space,’ is the world.” And he quotes her again: “The birthplace of freedom is never some man’s interiority, nor his will, thoughts, or feelings, but the *in between space*, which only emerges there, where some join together and only subsists while they remain together.”⁹

point 4. sewing without knots. on the encounter with the encounter

There is in *Line*—in this making of political-performative friendship—a profound disinterest in the rigid conventional description of subject: a defined, fixed, stable, self-sufficient identitary unity. The *Line* cannot stand that much weight. It is too vibrational to withstand such a burden, such crystallization, such closing, and still be a line. Or, to put in another way: bodies are too vibratory to stand that much stability, that much identity, that much permanence, and still continue as bodies. What interests in this project is thus not the encounter between subjects, but the *encounter with encounters*.

Hence—and I only understood long after the beginning of the process—the need to emphasize in advance, in the *Line*’s program: “Please don’t give names, but just the space-time coordinates—where and when.” Already in the program, the emphasis on the subject’s name recedes and gives space to an address, to a date, to the coordinates of the encounter. And there we will be. Not as identitary units, defined, stable, self-sufficient, but as performers. As acts. Not done, not predetermined, neither full nor ready, but events, assemblages, encounters. A *Line* formed by encounters-that-unfold-into-encounters to give way (and here I quote Suely Rolnik) “to processes of singularization, of existential creation, moved by the wind of the events.”¹⁰

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ ROLNIK, Suely. “Toxicômanos de identidade: subjetividade em tempo de globalização” (Addicted to Identity: subjectivity in the age of globalization). Available at <http://www.pucsp.br/nucleodesubjetividade/Textos/SUELY/Toxicoidentid.pdf>. Accessed June 23, 2015. My translation.

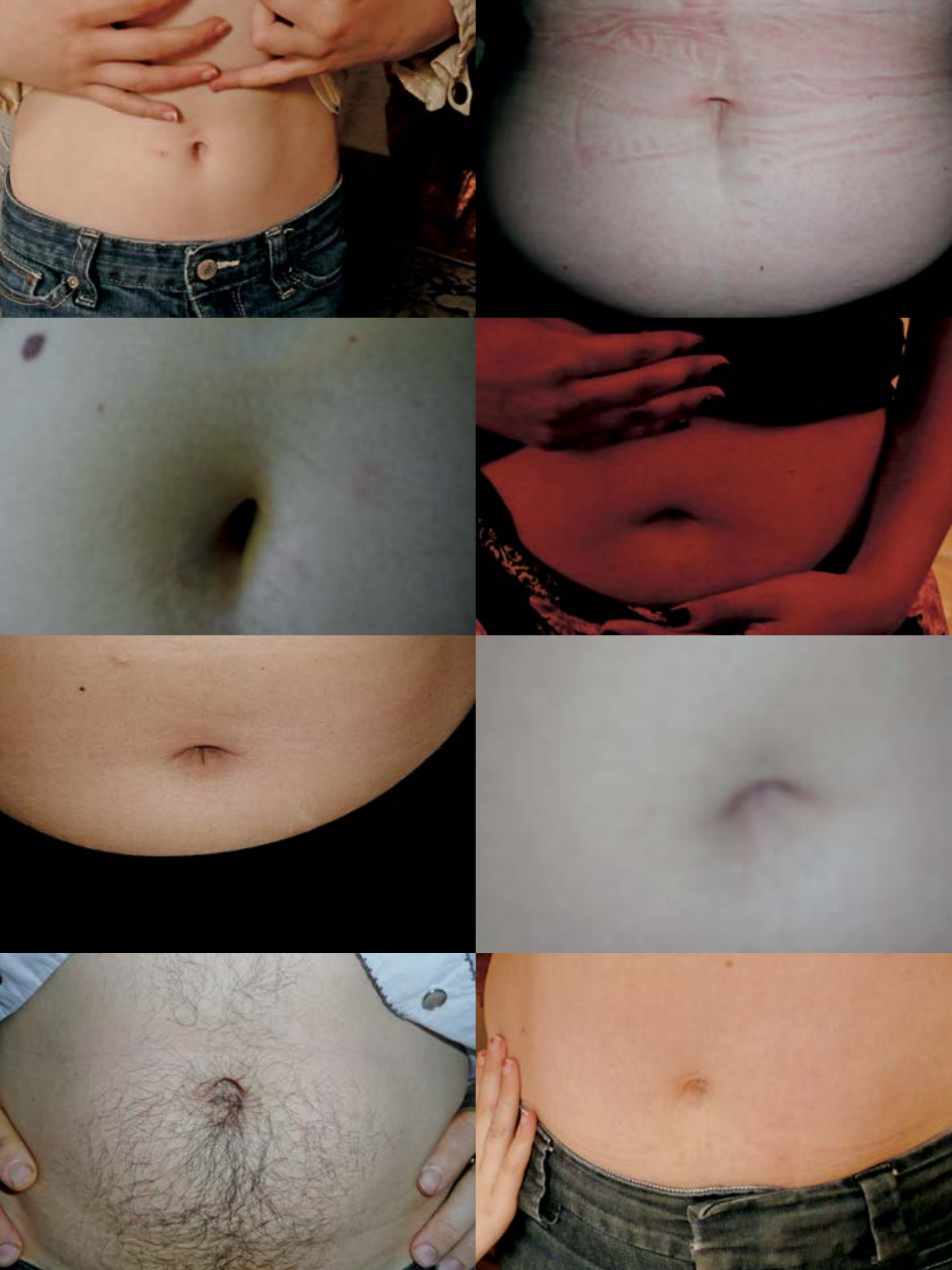
point 5. on feet, hands, navels, windows, and doors

Every time I was in a collaborator’s home, I asked to photograph. Specifically to photograph: their feet, hands, navels, favorite window, and front door.









point 6. on the aesthetics of precariousness

An important strategy adopted by *Line* concerns its modes of production: it is done at low or nil cost. However, rather than viewing the lack of resources as a weakness, as something to be fought, the action proposes a turnaround by valuing precariousness—investigating its political vigor, aesthetic power, and philosophical energy. Precariousness is work material just like fig sapling, old bed sheets, skin painting, gillyflower seeds, and a plunge into the Hudson River. Precariousness is a conceptual tool used to give flexibility to rigid definitions of “spectator,” “artist,” “scene,” “work of art,” “subject,” and to vibrate static separations between art and daily life, ritualistic and mundane, body and city, among fellow citizens. The *Line*, in its own measure, invests in an emphatically corporeal process of recreating the city’s scene through an emancipating precariousness.

I propose “precariousness” as a theoretical referent to think performance and a compositional and psychophysical strategy for creating performance. But let me clarify: means and modes of production will depend on each specific project; this is not a eulogy to the heroic poverty of a rebel quasi-genre, but the defense of performance art’s extraordinary poetic, critical, and political richness, which I think should be more emphatically acknowledged and valued. Many performers are poets that investigate, generate, and disseminate precariousness: the precariousness of *meaning* (which is no longer preestablished and fixed, but becomes conditional, mutant, performative); the precariousness of *capital* (with its reified supremacy debunked and poverty exposed); the precariousness of the *body* (which far from being perceived as deficiency, is lived as potentiality); and the precariousness of *art* (attentive to acts, bodies, relations). Performers valorize precariousness in an economic context that defines it as absence of value; in a market context that labels it as failure; in a moral context that condemns it as weakness and deficiency; in a psychosocial context that associates it exclusively with sadness and deprivation. A cultural context that perversely determines that precariousness—not the dictatorship of capital, the formatting of meaning, the calcification of identity, the normatization of desire or the armoring of the body—is the very opposite of life. Here, the precarious is not a villain to be vanquished, but a condition of aliveness, a potency, that can become a means for creation and a mode of production. The understanding of precariousness proposed here does not



correspond to neoliberal “precarization of modes of living”; quite the opposite. In the realm of performance, precariousness is not destitution and degradation, but the very richness of aliveness. It is not the deplorable condition of irremediable condemnation to time, but the very potentiality of the performative body. The performer’s pact with precariousness does not lead to deterioration, but to permanent recreation. Because, until we die, we never stop being born.

point 7. on suspension points

The ____ *Line New York* _____ has not ended. It remained open when I moved to Rio de Janeiro, where a new ____ *Line* _____ has been running since last year. I agreed with the last collaborator in New York that we could reactivate the piece if a propitious moment appears. If that happens, I will wait to receive the new space-time coordinates. Then, on the scheduled day, I will brew some coffee, put some tea, sugar, and cups in my backpack, and step out of my door to encounter unknown.



Intimate Series

In October 2011, I made my own diagnosis and prescribed the *Intimate Series* for myself.

Duration: 1 week, from Monday to Sunday

(to be performed)

- pulverization:**
to crush a stone

abundance:
to spend 9 hours in the sea

liquefaction:
to ingest only liquids during the period

uncanniness:
to answer only by the name Paulo Otávio during the period

discharge:
to receive a spell

discharge 2:
to spend 9 hours covered with earth

discharge 3 / pulverization 2:
to crush a cell phone

flight:
to set a meeting with someone I haven't seen in 20 years

evaporation:
to donate blood

reclusion:
to spend 9 hours inside a box

flight 2:
to wash a stranger's tomb and leave flowers on it

reclusion 2 / flight 3:
to lie down on the tomb, sleep, and dream

incarnation:
to lick my partner's entire body

incarnation 2:
to take a bath with my daughter

liquefaction 2:
to cry copiously

levitation:
to walk always straight ahead with no destination for 24 hours

dilution:
to go to a samba school rehearsal and mingle with the drums

dilution -1:
to spend the afternoon naked, in the forest, with ants

A photograph showing a woman with curly hair, wearing a white tank top, looking down at a young girl with curly hair wearing a pink floral top. They are in a crowded outdoor setting, possibly a park or street. Other people are visible in the background, including a man with a backpack and a man in a cap.

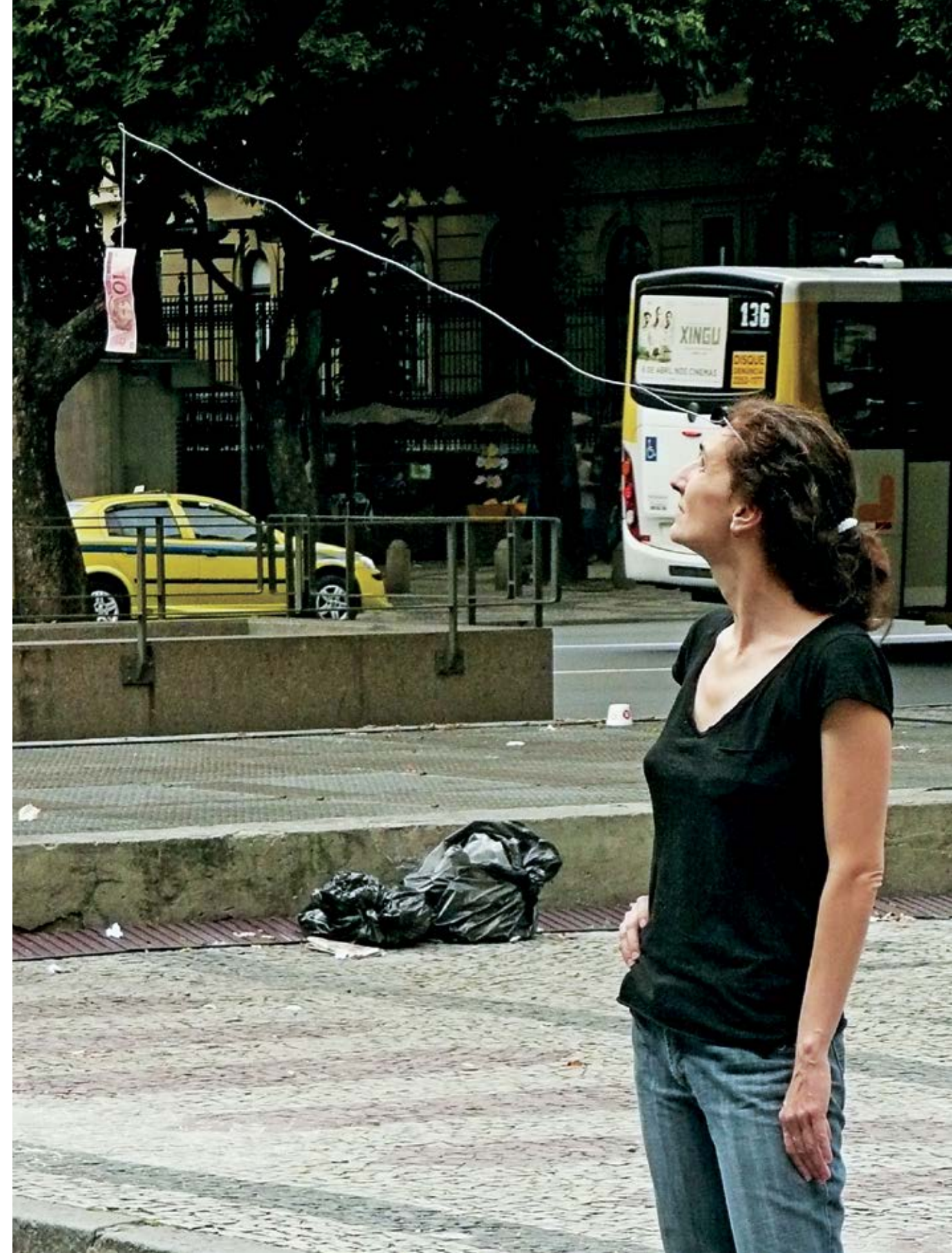
Precarious Series: Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro, 2011/13
Flamengo Landfill Park, Praia Vermelha,
São Cristóvão, and Downtown

Precarious Series: money
Precarious Series: to touch everything
Precarious Series: to trade everything
Precarious Series: a stroll on the
town square
Precarious Series: Saudades do Brasil
Precarious Series: Museum of Modern
Art's ramp

Precarious Series: money

To tie a piece of wire around my head,
whose length from my forehead is longer than my arm.
At the farthest tip of the wire, to tie a piece of string and,
on it, a banknote. To walk in the city.



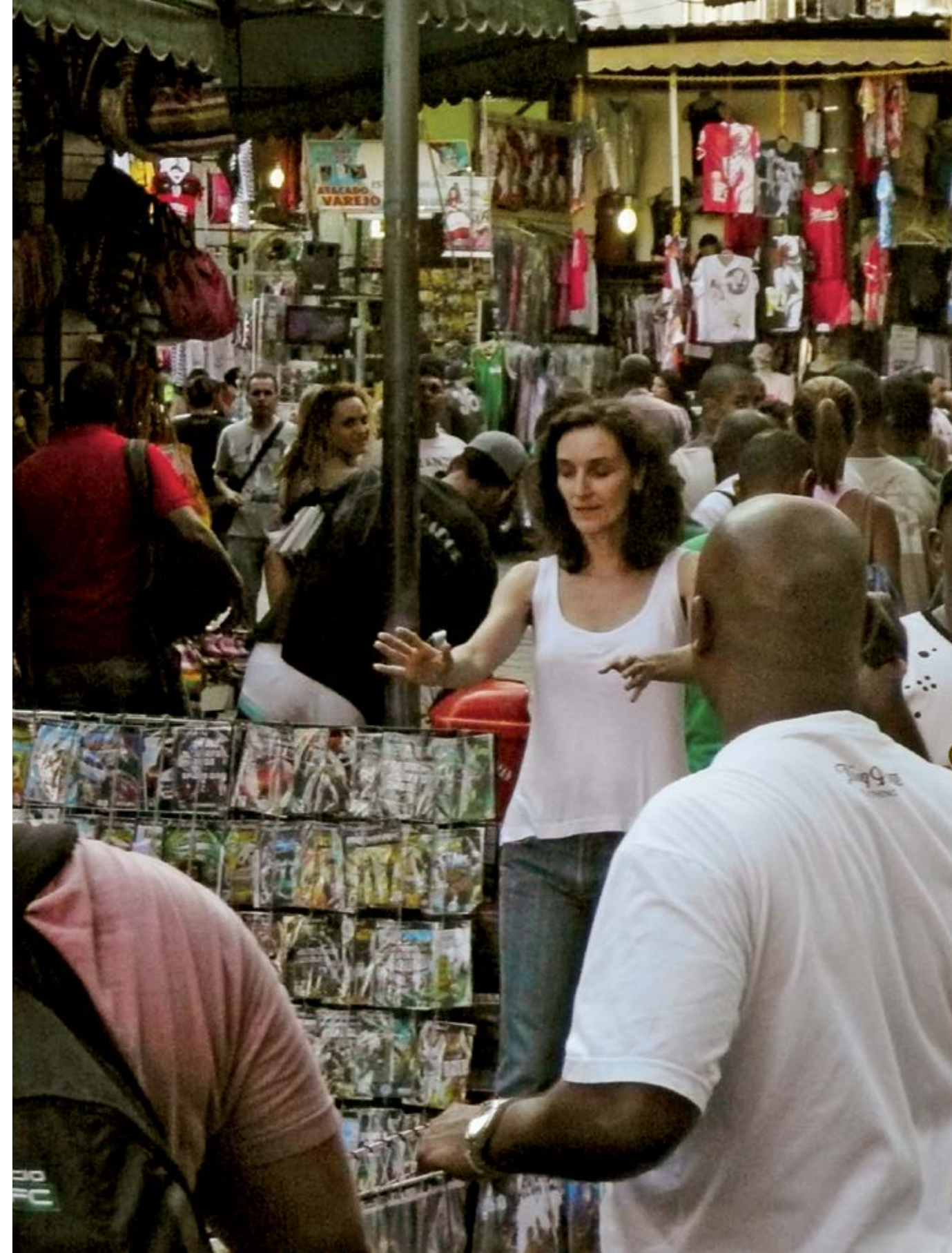


Precarious Series: to touch everything

With pre-established starting and finishing points,
to walk with eyes closed.

To accept the help of strangers.

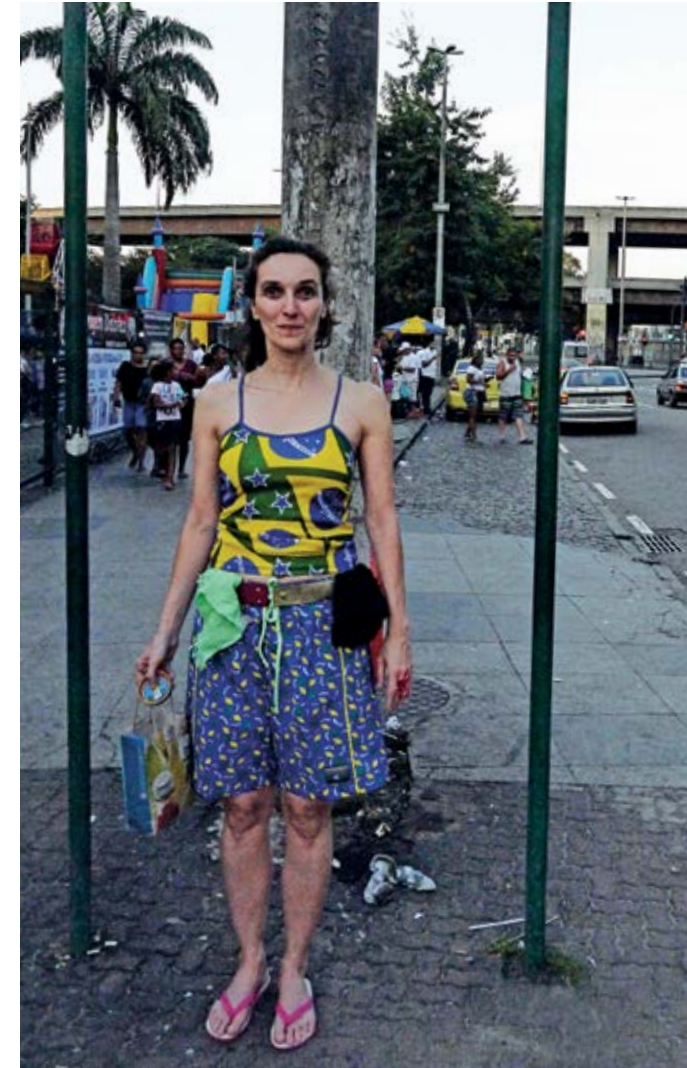
To touch and be touched.





Precarious Series: to trade everything

To approach strangers and ask, "Do you want to trade something with me?
I give you something of mine, something I'm wearing or carrying,
and you receive it. You give me something in exchange, and I receive it."
The action is finished when I've traded everything I had at the beginning.





Precarious Series: a stroll on the town square

To propose to people on the square to take them on a stroll.

Condition: to accept having their eyes blindfolded.

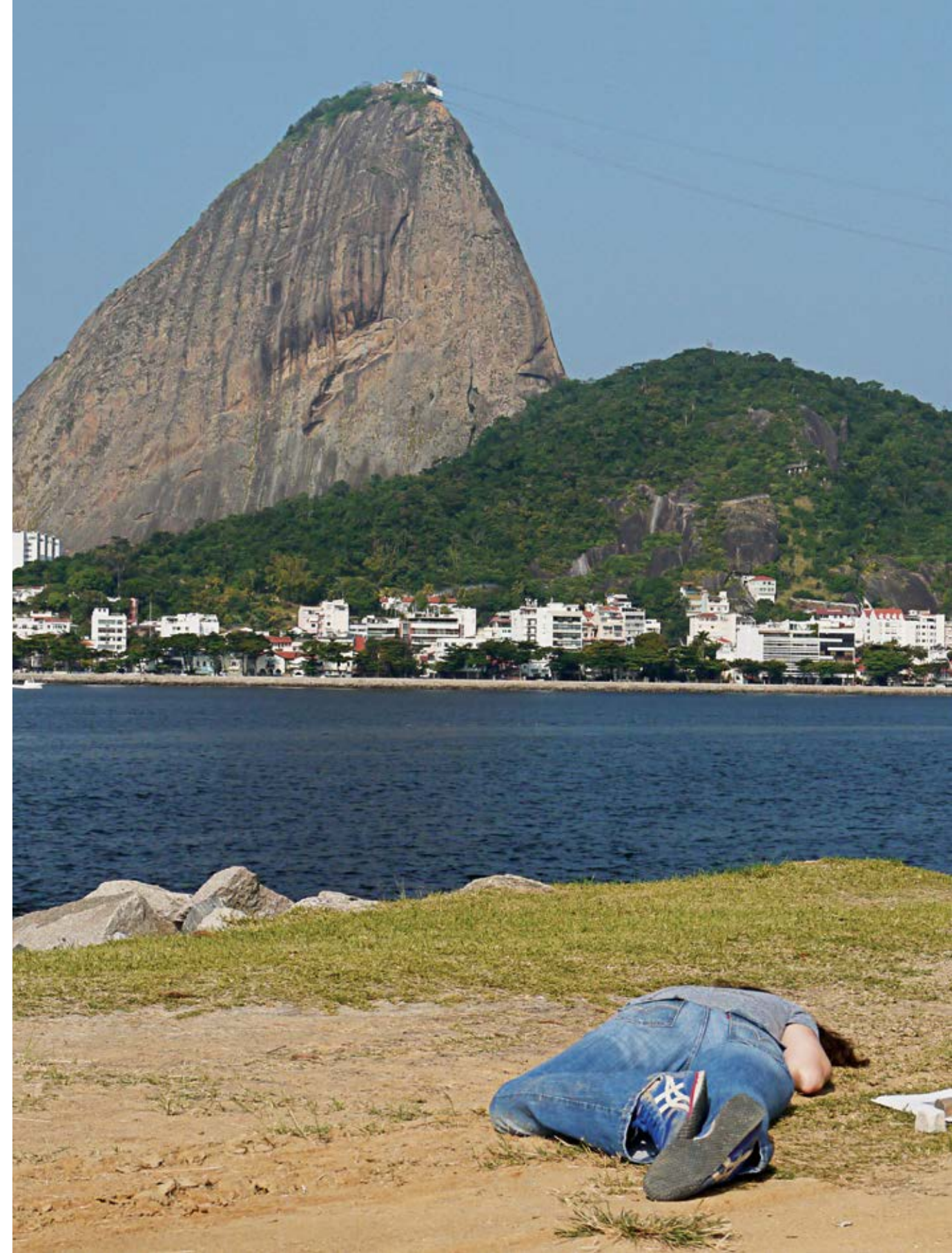
In the handbag: fruit, brush, feather, sponge, aromatic herbs, a bed sheet, water, etc.



Precarious Series: Saudades do Brasil

On the ground, to open the book *Saudades do Brasil* by Claude Lévi-Strauss
—a register of his travels with a series of photos of the Nambikwara people
(state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, 1930s).

On the ground, to lie down like the ones in the photographs and let time pass.





Precarious Series: Museum of Modern Art's ramp

In daylight: to cover with citrus colors' duct tape Portuguese-style mosaic paving tiles on the ramp leading to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.





In the performative sense, the potentiality of precariousness derives from the way it differs from, and also adds to, the notion of “ephemerality” (a term frequently used to conceptualize the temporal aspect of performance).

If the ephemeral is transitory, momentary, brief (the opposite of permanent), the precarious is unstable, moving, risky (the opposite of secure, stable, safe).

If the ephemeral is diaphanous, the precarious is shaky.

If the ephemeral denotes disappearance and absence (thus predicating that at a certain moment, something was fully given to view), precariousness denotes the incompleteness of all apparition as its corporeal and dynamic constitutive condition.

If the ephemeral can open spaces of melancholy, the material urgency of the precarious enervates bodies and space.

If the ephemeral rehearses death, the precarious lives life.

If the ephemeral refers to something that does not last, the precarious discovers that something “in construction is already a ruin,”¹ thus exposing capital’s generalized shakiness.

If the ephemeral leaves traces, the precarious itself is vestige and leaves what it is.

The precarious does not announce or resemble its disappearance; rather, it intertwines present, past, and future as presence.

The corporeal poetics, corporeal politics, and corporeal historicity of the precarious bring together time and matter in such a way that they cannot be conceived as autonomous entities.

Precariousness is the performance of time and matter’s indissociability.

The body, this temporal matter, this material time, is thus emblem of precariousness.

Body, whose form is movement.

Permanent movement moving permanently in the permanent movement.
Permanent movement moving permanently in the permanent movement.
Permanent movement moving permanently in the permanent movement.

¹ Verse from the song *Fora da ordem*, by Caetano Veloso.

Rio-Pretense Actions

São José do Rio Preto, 2012

Banks of the São José River, Praça Dom José
Marcondes, Praça Rui Barbosa, Calçadão,
Rua Tiradentes, São José do Rio Preto
Bus Station and vicinity

FIT – São José do Rio Preto International
Theater Festival 2012

Rio-Pretense Action #1: with white t-shirt
in the Black River

Rio-Pretense Action #2: I will have
a conversation about any subject

Rio-Pretense Action #3: to touch everything

Rio-Pretense Action #4: to trade everything

Rio-Pretense Action #5: Saudades do Brasil

Rio-Pretense Action #6: pitchers

Rio-Pretense Action #7: a stroll on the
town square

Rio-Pretense Action #8: talk

Rio-Pretense Action # 1: with white t-shirt in the Black River

Wearing a white t-shirt, to dive into the Rio Preto (Black River).



There were three. One in a green t-shirt, one that caught four tiny fish, and another that explained: "Today is the first day of the full moon; with this moon fish don't bite. I'm going home to eat a pot of warm rice with my old lady." The first day of full moon: fish mate, wolves howl, and performers perform. "But man, throw that fish back, it's too small!" "I won't throw it back. It goes into the creel." The other group I met was the capybaras, some 25 or 30 of them—big, medium-sized, and pups. "Excuse me, capybaras, I need to enter the Black River to really arrive in São José." My heart pounding, the capybaras grunting loudly, and there we stayed for a long time—very excited on the riverbank, letting the sun heat our fur and hides. Capybaras are river in animal form. "Excuse me, animal river, I come from other waters, I come from the seashore, the city of Rio de Janeiro, and it's time to enter; to dive in a white t-shirt into the Black River." Ploft. The river bottom is a layer of swampy sludge. Ploft. It is impossible to walk, one has to dive right away. Splash—fresh water, lukewarm, brown, almost hot. With your permission São José, with your permission river people, excuse me fishermen and birds. We're launching here the *Rio-Pretense Actions*, actions for and with São José do Rio Preto.



Rio-Pretense Action #2: I will have a conversation about any subject

To sit on a chair, barefoot,
facing an empty chair (household chairs).
To write on a large sheet of paper:
I WILL HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT ANY SUBJECT.
To display the invitation and wait.



I had conversations with Ana Paula, Dona Irene, Flávia, Washington, Seu Manuel, José Evangelista, João Batista, Sandra Mara, Edeli, Alessandro, Gonzaga, Gustavo's mother, Manuela's mother, and many more. Also with people that converse but don't sit down. How much does it cost to sit there? It's free, mister. Okay, so I'll stay. That was how Dom Pedro the 1st proclaimed Brazil's Independence from Portugal, wasn't it? "Tell them I'll stay!" My mother was a circus performer, walked on broken glass, then danced; performed contortionist acts with a glass of water balanced on her forehead. One day she caught me imitating her number—I didn't bleed either, I had her same talent. But she didn't like it and thrashed my hide with a green branch, of that kind that never breaks. Do you know the Pemphigus Hospital in Uberaba? That was where the boy got cured of his sores. Listen, does your husband let you sit out here like this, having conversations with anybody about anything? It was five in the morning, and I was sitting in the lap of an indigenous man. Half-asleep, half-awake, he rocked me, he received me there. I arrived in São José with next to nothing. Just a cardboard box with clothing, tied to a luggage cart. I came alone and worked a lot. Now I've brought my entire family. Life defies explanation. People waste time trying to find an explanation for life. One day you have, the next day you don't. That's how it is. Sometimes a person is an eagle and lives in a chicken coop. Then, when they discover they're an eagle, they try to soar, but can't anymore. The girl only has one lung and was raped by an eleven-year-old boy when she was five. The woman that was supposedly taking care of the group, was not taking care of the group and the boy wanted to experiment. I'll try to explain: I feel like I've already become a butterfly, but can't break out of the cocoon, you know how it is? That was a very important letter—the letter from the will—and the mouse stole it to make its nest. Since I was a bastard son, I ended up with nothing. When we separated I felt like I had lost an arm; I'd wake up in the middle of the night as if I were missing an arm; I'd feel for my arm, hug myself to put the parts back together. The conversation came to a close. Fine, silence is good. We stay together here, in silence, listening to the street, watching the people and the trees. I want to open up to you. Open up, to no longer have a bottom, that's it. God is in all things, she says. But in my opinion God is not in all things, there's no logic to that. God cannot be in somebody who's lost like me. But how so, we have a conversation about what? How do we begin? Has the conversation already started? You know, that's what I missed in life—to sit down and talk—to relate to people. I had a daughter. When they grew up I introduced my son to her, from my other marriage. I was afraid they might meet in the future,

fall in love, and not know they were siblings. I have an open sore on my knee, draining pus, but that's not the problem—I'll just go to the public clinic and have it bandaged. The thing is, I haven't seen her for more than six months and this is destroying me. She's six feet six inches tall. You did the right thing diving in with the capybaras and lying down on the pavement. That's the only way a person can develop the antibodies they need to live. One needs to be vaccinated. Thing is, sex has become pornography, and that's no good for me. But is there anything more beautiful than two naked people making love? Thanks! No, I thank you. Your work is a very good thing. I'm feeling very good here. You know what I think? That you're a millionaire that comes here to listen to other people running off at the mouth. Do you have your credit card with you? She refuses to give me my severance pay. I'm just coming from the lawyer. Give me a hug? The apocalypse is now, with evil dominating the world. The sky is blue, that guy is playing the guitar. Something is wrong. I bought a washing machine and a microwave, and now I have less time than before! Why's that?





Rio-Pretense Action #3: to touch everything

With pre-established starting and finishing points,
to walk with eyes closed.
To accept the help of strangers.
To touch and be touched.





Tiradentes Street is also a river. The walk was another dive.

Rio-Pretense Action #4: to trade everything

To approach strangers and ask, "Do you want to trade something with me?
I'll give you something of mine, something I'm wearing or carrying,
and you receive it. You give me something in exchange, and I receive it."
The action is finished when I've traded everything I had at the beginning.

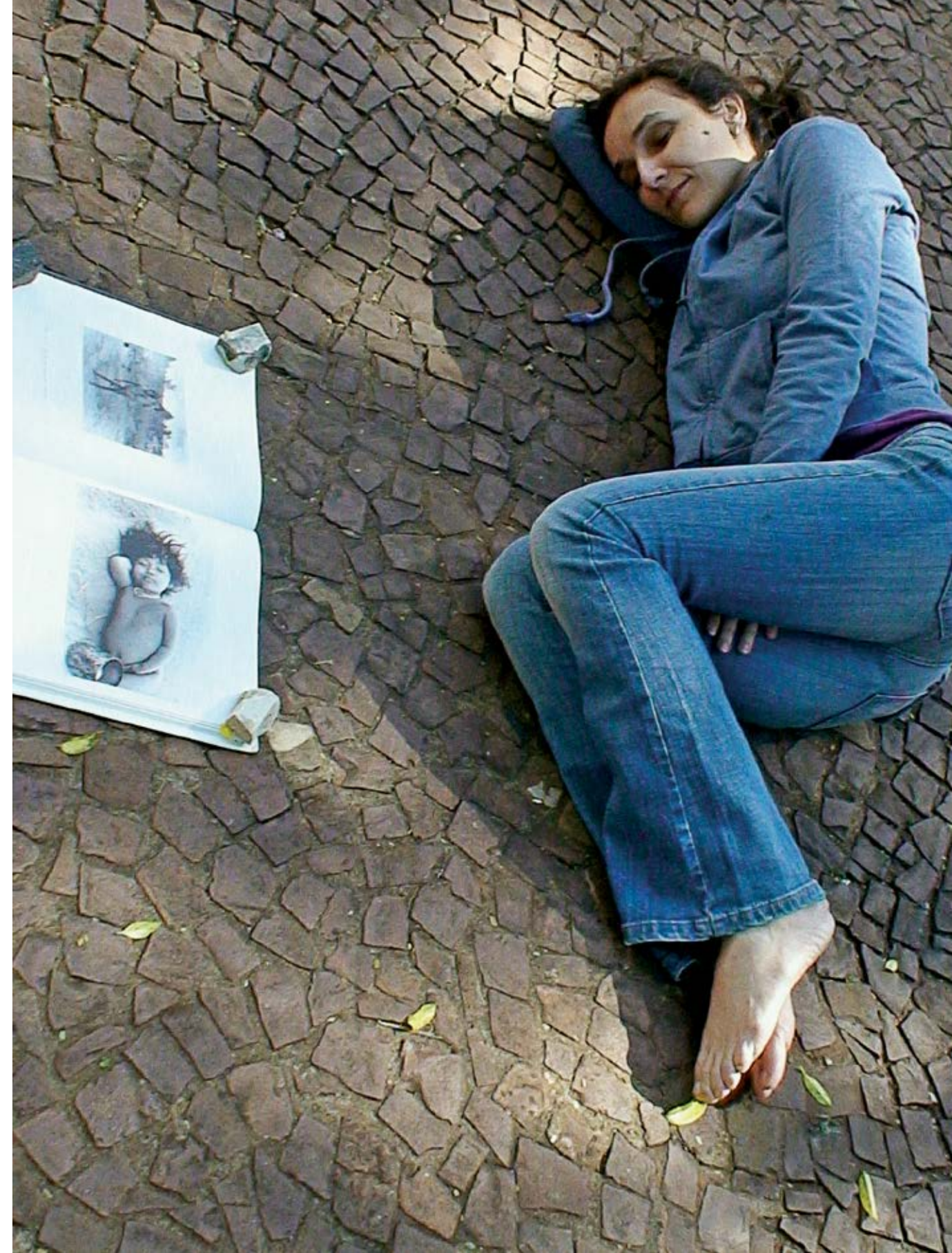




Rio-Pretense Action #5: Saudades do Brasil

On the ground, to open the book *Saudades do Brasil* by Claude Lévi-Strauss —a register of his travels with a series of photos of the Nambikwara people (state of Mato Grosso, Brazil, 1930s).

On the ground, to lie down like the ones in the photographs and let time pass.





Rio-Pretense Action #6: pitchers

Two pitchers: one clay, another silver; one full of water, the other empty.
To pour the water from one to the other until it disappears completely.
In case passersby approach, to offer the pitchers so they can perform the action too.
Or to offer one of the pitchers so we can do it together.



"I don't know why, but what we're doing reminds me of my grandchildren, makes me think of them."

"But you suffer, don't you, young lady, your arms must be tired!"

"It's not about suffering, ma'am, it's about determination."



Rio-Pretense Action #7: a stroll on the town square

To propose to people on the square to take them on a stroll.

Condition: to accept having their eyes blindfolded.

In the handbag: fruit, brush, feather, sponge, aromatic herbs, a bed sheet, water, etc.





Rio-Pretense Action #8: talk

"a talk on performance followed by an endless conversation"

At the end of the week of work on the streets of São José do Rio Preto, perform the last action in a bar, Zitu's Snook Bar.

To present the series, show images of the actions on the bar's TV, and have a conversation.

To eat and drink.



Zitu's Snook Bar
Avenida México, nº 357 – Jardim América
July 8, 2012



Almost nothing, always everything

Rio de Janeiro, 2012/13
Praça Tiradentes

Almost nothing, always everything #1:
25 bricks
Almost nothing, always everything #2:
charcoal
Almost nothing, always everything #3:
9 bed sheets

Almost nothing, always everything #1: 25 bricks

In daylight, on a city square.

For hours on end, to make and unmake compositions with 25 bricks.



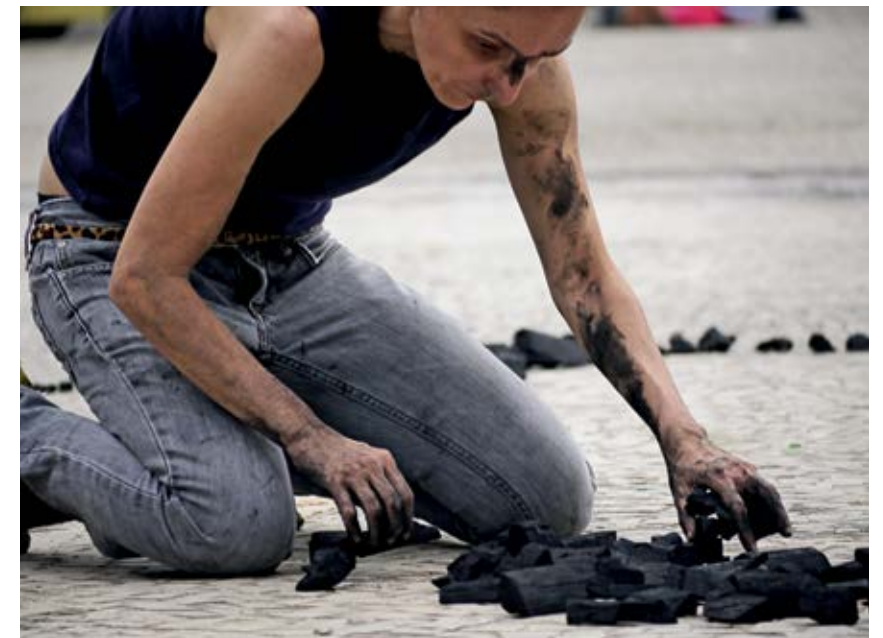
I don't use a studio or rehearsal room. It wouldn't make sense. The street is the work space.



Almost nothing, always everything #2: charcoal

In daylight, on a city square.

For hours on end, to make and unmake compositions with lumps of charcoal.



It is necessary to make the composition and move away. Give it time.



Almost nothing, always everything #3: 9 bed sheets

In daylight, on a city square.

For hours on end, to make and unmake compositions with 9 bed sheets.





And then, lo and behold, the material begins to call out, to ask for movement. The thing.





Stains

Rio de Janeiro, 2013
Copacabana, Ipanema, Arpoador,
and Tijuca Forest

Black Stain
White Stain
Red Stain

Black Stain

To walk, bagged, around the city.





She circled around and around, trying to figure out if I was a man or a woman.
Finally she grabbed me, squeezed my breast, and saw.



White Stain

To walk, bagged, around the city.





I couldn't see anything except the white of the bags. Total white darkness. No holes for the eyes or nose. No holes. [...] After the curve I was completely lost, fell over a low wall, and tumbled into a dog park that I hadn't even known existed. The dogs went crazy at the sight. I came to a complete standstill for them to sniff me and realize that I was more afraid of them than they were of me. I don't know how I made it out of there. There is something of a superhero, something hilarious, and something very sad and terrible to all of this.

To become image. Very concretely.

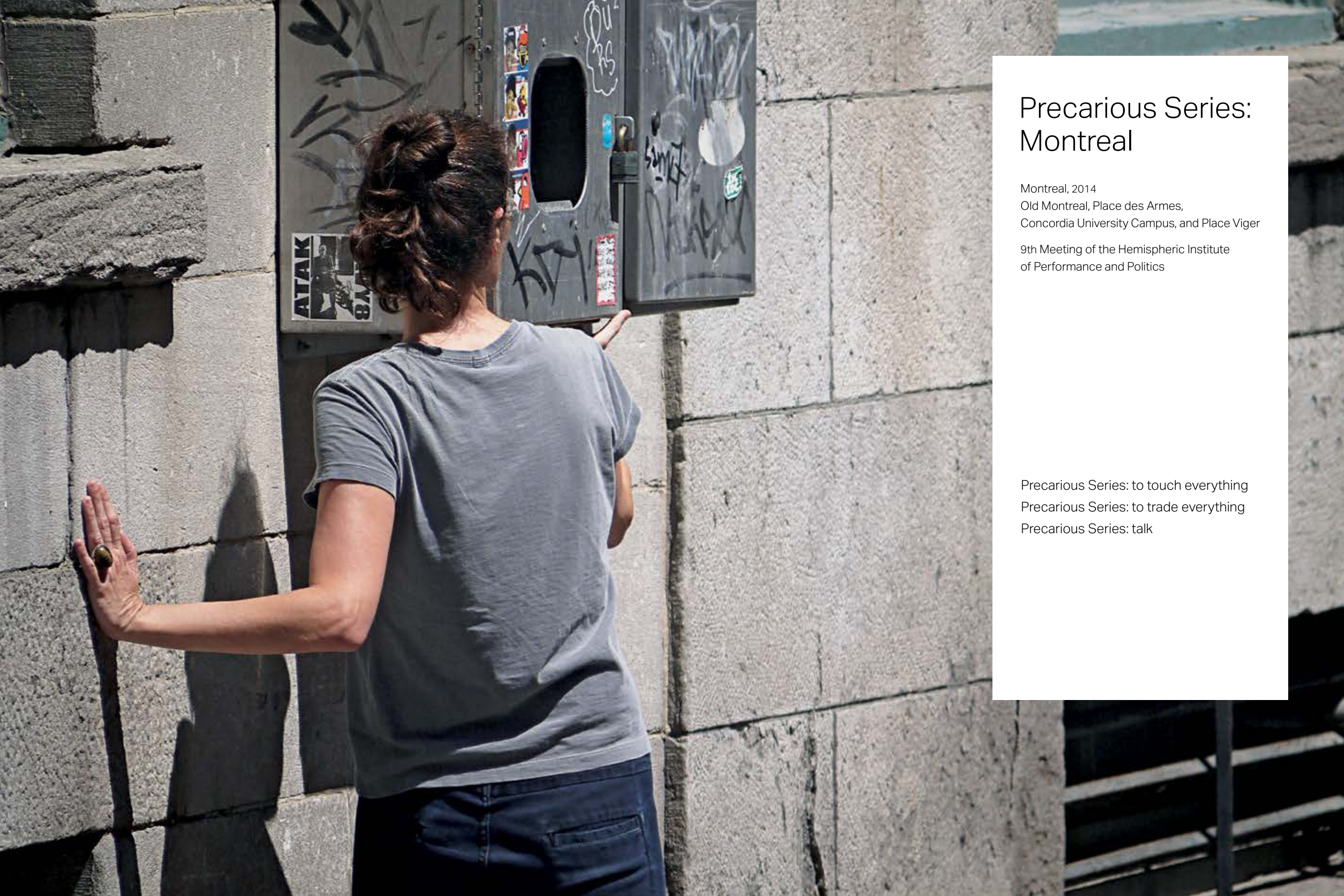


Red Stain

To walk, bagged, around the city. To bathe.







Precarious Series: Montreal

Montreal, 2014

Old Montreal, Place des Armes,
Concordia University Campus, and Place Viger

9th Meeting of the Hemispheric Institute
of Performance and Politics

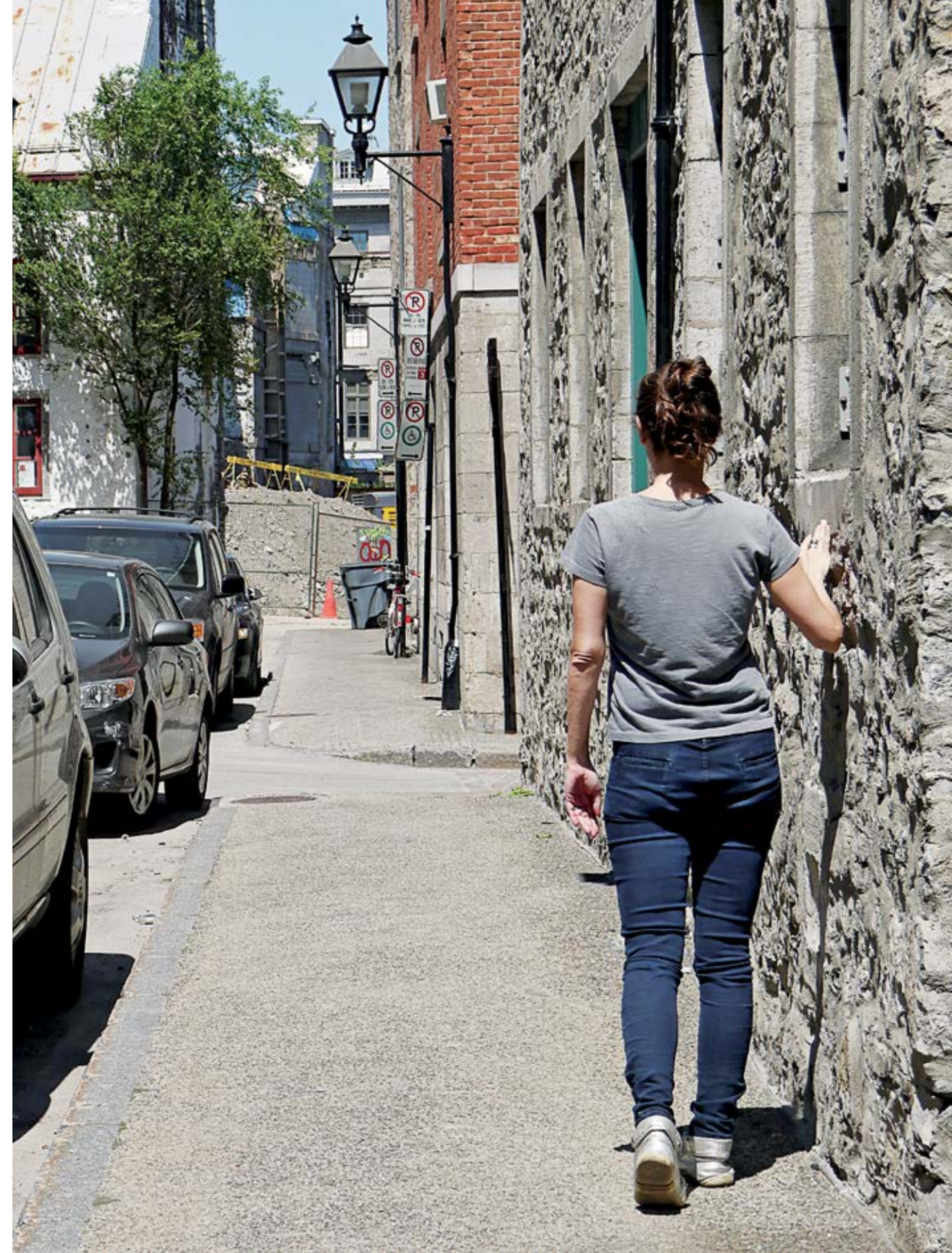
Precarious Series: to touch everything

Precarious Series: to trade everything

Precarious Series: talk

Precarious Series: to touch everything

With pre-established starting and finishing points,
to walk with eyes closed.
To accept the help of strangers.
To touch and be touched.





SIGNALISATION



Sainte-Thérèse

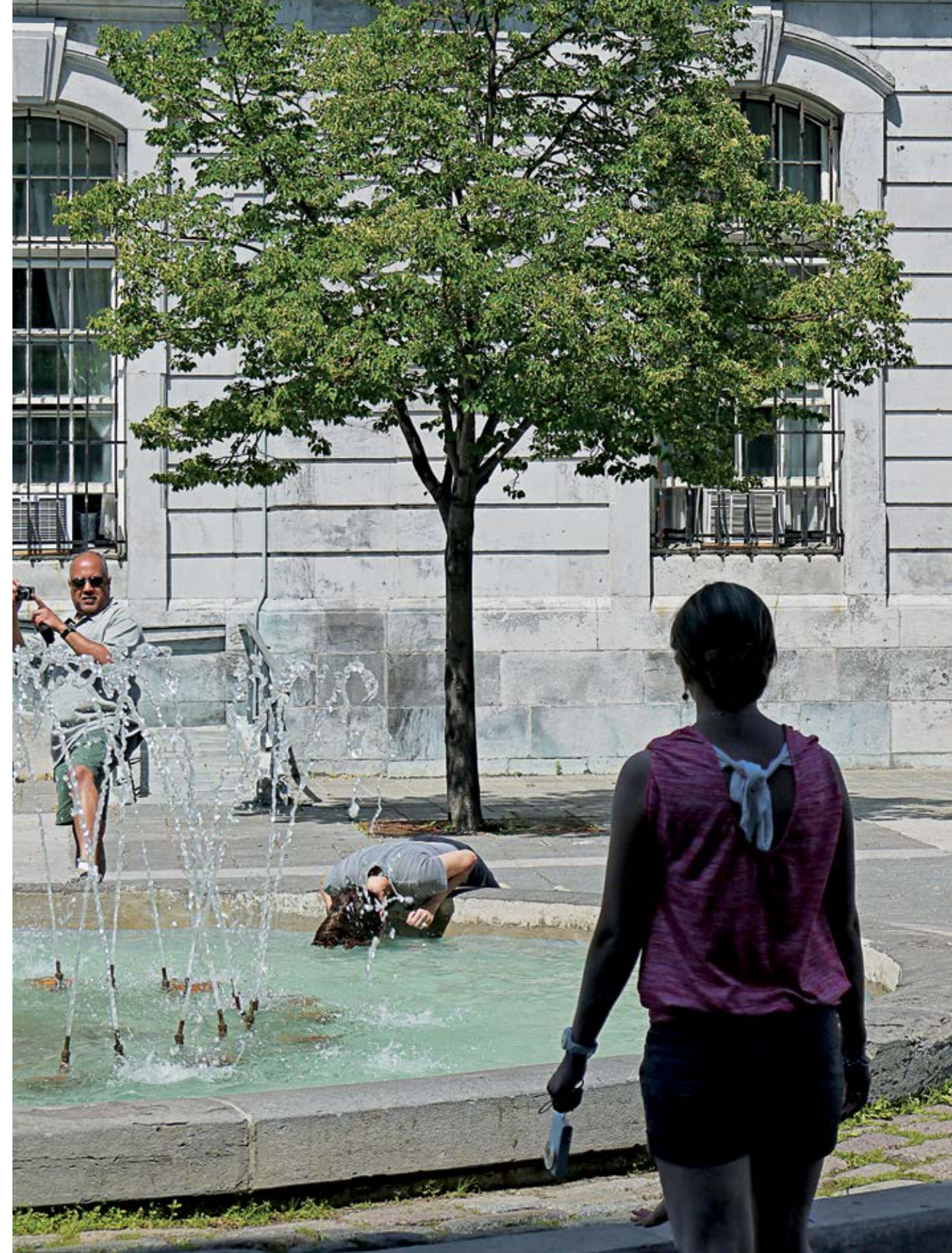
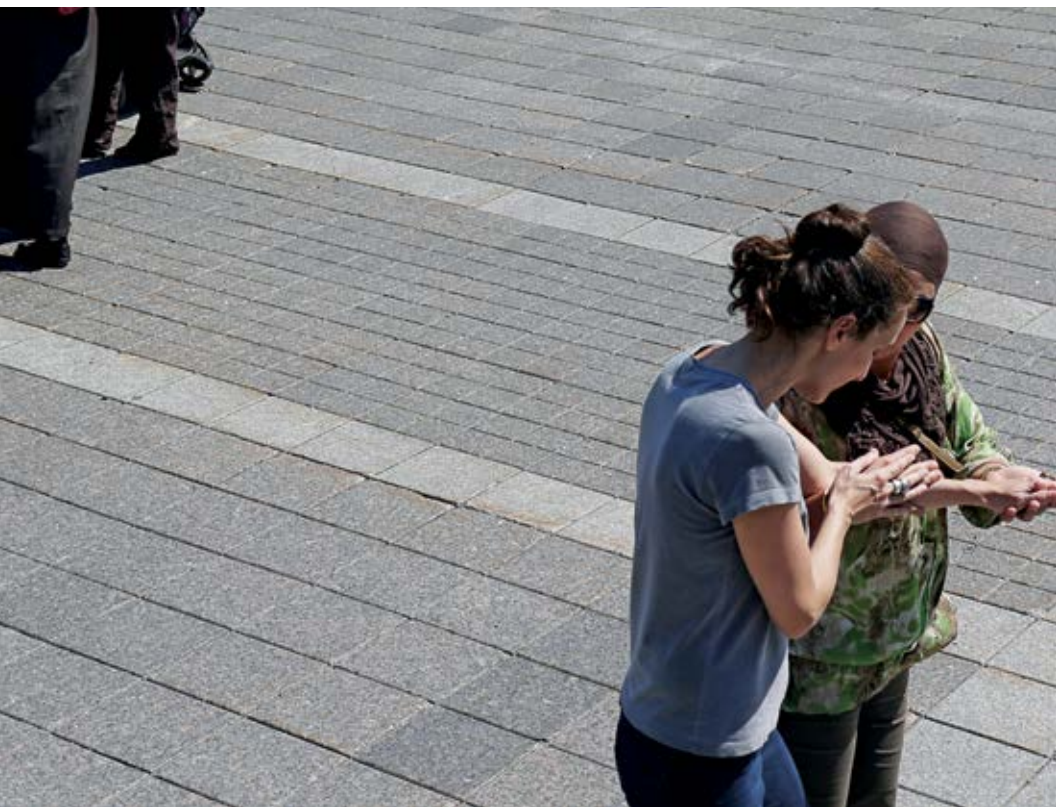




I was moving and thinking: dance without dance.

"Leave, you witch! We don't want you here."

"I'll take you to the fountain."



Precarious Series: to trade everything

To approach strangers and ask, “Do you want to trade something with me?
I give you something of mine, something I’m wearing or carrying, and you receive it.
You give me something in exchange, and I receive it.”
The action is finished when I’ve traded everything I had at the beginning.



Two bracelets for a banana.
A t-shirt with a pineapple for a plain t-shirt.
A hair clasp for a lucky coin.
A denim skirt for a white skirt.
Dark glasses for a green cloth.
A white shawl for a brooch with a red felt square, symbol of the student strike in Quebec against the university tuition raise in 2012.
A gray jacket for a caramel-colored belt.
A watch for the image of a Catholic saint.
A nametag saying Eleonora Fabião for a nametag saying Jess Dobkin.
Orange flip-flops for white sandals.
A kiss for a kiss.
Some hairpins for a roll of green masking tape.
Three dollars for an orange juice.
Short panties for panty hose.
A colorful bead necklace for a little black handkerchief with tiny yellow flowers that belonged to her mother and still has her scent. [...]

We concluded that he no longer needed that lucky coin he’d kept in his wallet for so many years. The passage was done, the union strengthened, the house torn down, and at the end of the day, the important thing was to pass that coin on. End of the cycle. The coin with the golden star—“República de Cuba, un peso, 1987, Patria o Muerte”—was traded for a hair clasp for his wife. And I asked him to kindly take a present from me to her: another hair adornment with details in white and green mother-of-pearl.

Duration of the action on June 27, 2014: 5 hours and 56 minutes.



Precarious Series: talk

To present the *Precarious Series: Montreal*
in a roundtable on urban intervention.

To show images and have a conversation.

From the talk:

“The beauty and potentiality of every action, and also what befuddles agents, is the fact that all action is *immutable*, *unpredictable*, and *ungraspable*. Immutable: what is done is done, and does not remain to be done; ungraspable: actions are born and develop as systems of relations; unpredictable: we do not know how they will be perceived, received, responded, unfolded. That is, to act is to deal permanently with the immutable (what is done is done), the unpredictable (we do not know what the done will do), and the ungraspable (we will not fully know what the done is made of).”

9th Meeting of the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics
Round Table: “Urban Interventions,” with Hector Canonge, Grayson Earle,
Eleonora Fabião, and Helene Vosters; moderator: Shauna Janssen

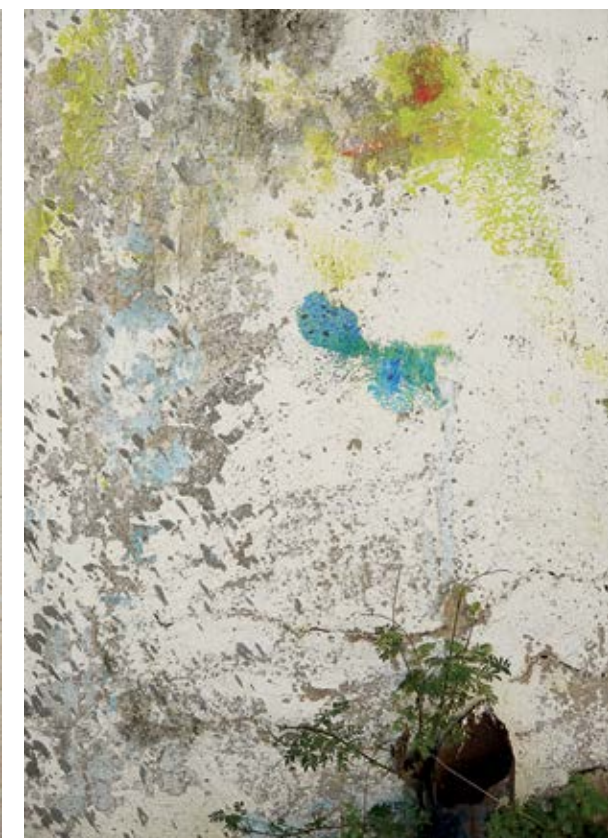
Concordia University
Henry F. Hall Building
June 28, 2014



Gouache tagging

Rio de Janeiro, 2014
Urca and Santa Teresa

To look for a wall with spray-painted tags and graffiti. To smear gouache on the body and body on the wall.
To wait for rain so the marks disappear.





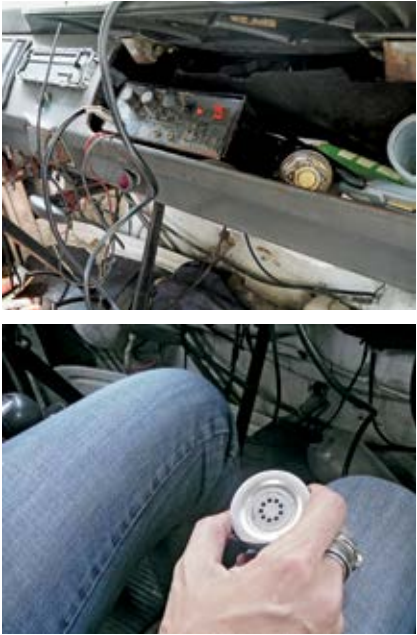
I do not buy old wreck

Rio de Janeiro, 2014/15
Laranjeiras and Grajaú

To borrow mirrors from friends.
To tie them to the sides, back and floor
of a VW Kombi used to buy and sell scrap metal.
To sit on a chair in the back with a microphone
and books, turn on the vehicle's loudspeaker,
and circulate on the streets reading selected
excerpts. To stop in front of apartment
buildings and invite residents to come
to their windows to watch and listen.

In Rio de Janeiro, especially in the morning, it is common to hear scrap metal dealers circulating on the streets and announcing their services over loudspeakers mounted on their VW Kombis. The refrain is repeated in a metallic pitch: "I buy old wreck, I buy scrap metal, I buy old refrigerators..." One day I was sitting at home and heard Valmir's voice. At the time I still didn't know that the voice was Valmir Cândido de Lima's. I rushed down. I went to meet him, introduce the idea, and ask if he would be interested in performing the action with me, if he would rent the VW Kombi for this kind of work. The dialogue extended across several phone calls until he accepted the invitation. On the first time we performed the action, I suggested the neighborhood and time. On the second time, he was already familiar with the work and suggested another neighborhood; the action flowed more and better. On both occasions we followed routes that Valmir usually takes on normal workdays. On both occasions he photographed the action and posted the images on the social media.

Good morning.
I do not buy old wreck, I do not buy scrap metal, I do not buy old refrigerators.
Good morning.
Are you listening?
I ask your permission to enter this way, with voice, into your home.
If you please?
Anybody home?
H as in home;
Here as in home;
Here I am;
Here we are.
I, facing your window. You, facing your window.
I inviting you to look this way, look through the window.
I do not buy old wreck, I do not buy scrap metal, I do not buy old refrigerators.
I bring words to bring you to the window.
You who listen: come see?
I do not buy old wreck, I do not buy scrap metal, I do not buy old refrigerators.
I brought words.



"Silence
Was the first thing that existed
A silence that no one heard
A star moving in the sky
And the sound of melting ice
The noise of hair growing
And the wind's music
The decaying matter
The stomach digesting bread
Seed's explosion underground
Diamond born of coal"¹

Arnaldo Antunes

Valmir's favorite:

"mares multitudinários encarnados the hollow and husky ocean the prow
opening a gash the bow leaving a gash like a lick of lazuli a continuous
scar in the violet pulp of the ocean opening up as a violet vulva the turbid
violet vulva of the ocean óinopoa pónton wine colored or rust colored
according to the sun striking the reflux of foams the multitudinous seas
minute morsels saline water flour at the tip of the ripples crumbling in the
wind iris nuntia junonis changing their plumes but the sea but the skim
but the foam but the foamskim of the recommenced and recommencing
sea the abolished time in the plural green in the pelagic aquarium the
green flourishes as a tree of green [...]"²

Haroldo de Campos

1 ANTUNES, Arnaldo. "O silêncio." In: *Como é que chama o nome disso*. São Paulo: Publifolha, 2006, p. 253.

2 CAMPOS, Haroldo. "multitudinous seas." In: *Galáxias*. 2nd ed. São Paulo: 34, 2004, p. 17. (Trans. André Lepecki).





"We are children of our age,
it's a political age.

All day long, all through the night,
All affairs—yours, ours, theirs—
are political affairs."³

Wisława Szymborska

"Through the voice, there is a journey of the flesh towards the outside
of the human body, an exit, an exile, an exodus, and a consummation.
A body that goes away passes through the voice [...]"⁴

Valère Novarina



Mirrors provided by: Adriana Schneider, Bruno Lara Resende, Cristina Lepecki,
Cynthia Fabião, Felipe Ribeiro, Fernando Madureira, Gabriela Lírio, Heloísa Vinadé,
Ivana Leblon, Lívia Flores, Maria Cristina Lírio Gurgel, Mariana Silva, Otávio Baars,
Raquel Iantas, Rúbia Rodrigues, and Viniciús Arneiro.

³ SZYMBORSKA, Wisława. "Children of Our Age." In: *Poems New and Collected*. Trans. Stanislaw Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh. New York: Harcourt, 1998, p. 200.

⁴ NOVARINA, Valère. *Diante da Palavra*. Trans. Angela Leite Lopes. Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2009, p. 17.



Brazil: the moment
when the glass
is full and it is
no longer possible
to swallow—our
affair's door is ajar

Rio de Janeiro, 2014/15
Saara : Rua da Alfândega,
Rua Buenos Aires, and
Rua Senhor dos Passos

To fill a glass of water to the brim.
To walk on a busy street with glass in hand,
outstretched arm, without spilling a drop.
If it spills, refill the glass to the brim
and continue.

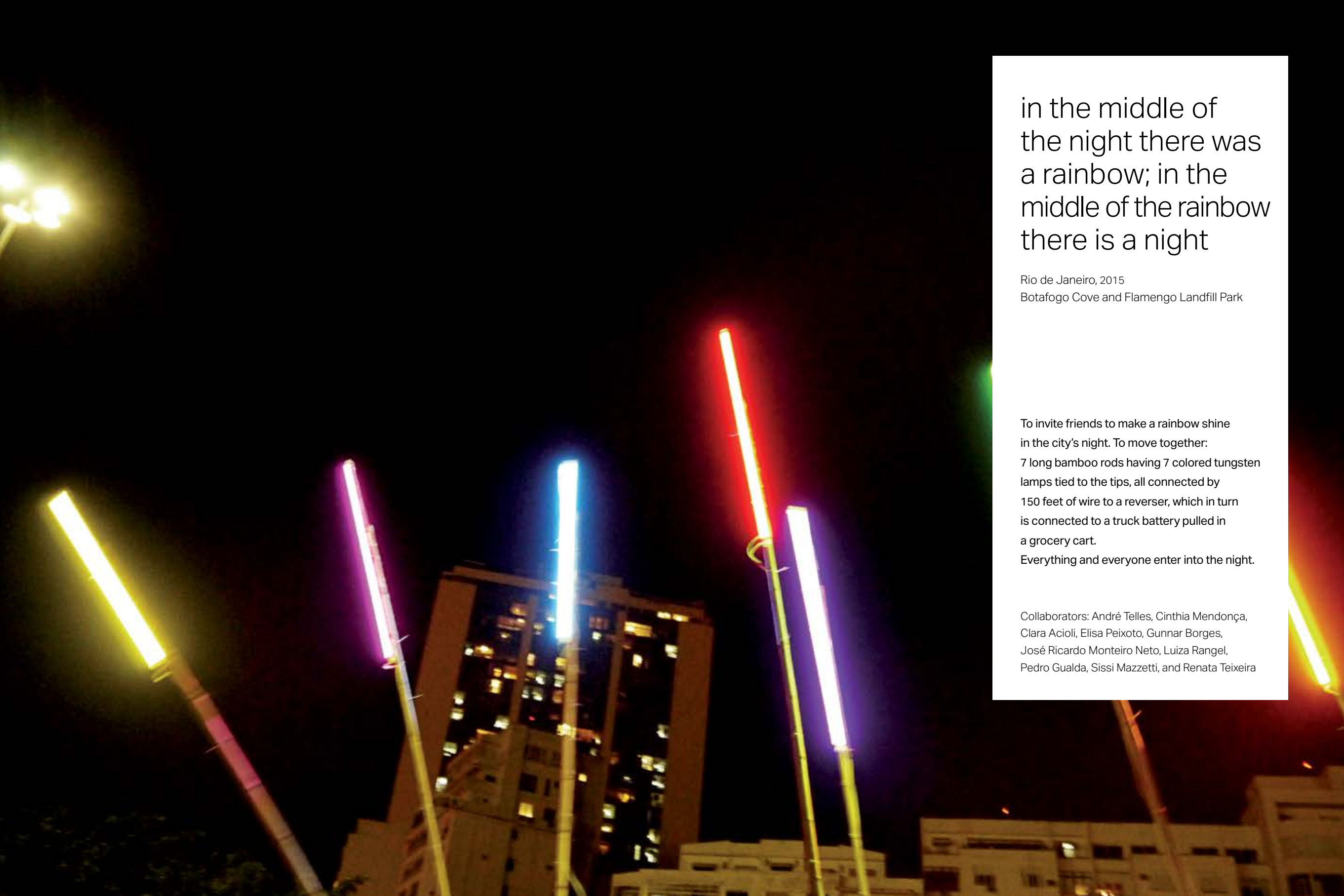


"Is it to drink? Can I drink it?" "Of course, it's yours!"

"There goes the water lady!"

"Witch!"





in the middle of
the night there was
a rainbow; in the
middle of the rainbow
there is a night

Rio de Janeiro, 2015
Botafogo Cove and Flamengo Landfill Park

To invite friends to make a rainbow shine
in the city's night. To move together:
7 long bamboo rods having 7 colored tungsten
lamps tied to the tips, all connected by
150 feet of wire to a reverser, which in turn
is connected to a truck battery pulled in
a grocery cart.
Everything and everyone enter into the night.

Collaborators: André Telles, Cinthia Mendonça,
Clara Acioli, Elisa Peixoto, Gunnar Borges,
José Ricardo Monteiro Neto, Luiza Rangel,
Pedro Gualda, Sissi Mazzetti, and Renata Teixeira





Essays

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Eleonora and the performative body
poetics of the act, materialities of the encounter

Pablo Assumpção B. Costa

The first time I saw a performance by Eleonora Fabião, she spun on her own axis for thirty minutes in a gallery and then exited without waiting for applause, disappearing over the urban horizon on a street in Lima, Peru.¹ Like a profane dervish, next to four TV screens—the only source of light for the event, connected to an enormous and noisy generator positioned right outside, next to the gallery entrance—Eleonora shaped a visceral dizziness in her own body that caught the surrounding audience both subtly and brutally. When the artist's twisted body disappeared around the corner after turning the generator off on her way out and leaving the space in darkness, the audience responded with silence. The typical movement and sonorousness of a public event took some time to recover. People whispered, still wondering whether the artist would return to bow to the audience, or if we should disperse. A friend turned pale and said he felt nauseous. I sat with him on the curb. I myself did not feel totally composed. A young theater actress came up to me and asked, "What did she mean by that performance?" I shrugged, since I found the question out of place, and shot back, "Did you see her eyes when she stopped spinning?" For some reason, I was still focused on the image of the artist's eyes when she stopped her gyratory movement and came face-to-face with us: two completely uncontrolled eyeballs, swaying sideways like hyper-accelerated pendulums. "Could you imitate those eyes?" I asked the young actress. She shrugged and walked away, bewildered, somewhat like me.

¹ The performance *Giro* [*Spin*] was part of the program of the encounter Globalization, Migration, and the Public Sphere, by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics in Lima, Peru, 2002.

Of course the effects produced by Eleonora's action—nausea, silence, bewilderment—cannot be addressed by questions such as "What did she mean by that?" or "Can you imitate her?" Such questions still assume a mimesis operating the poetic discourse, while the spinning we had witnessed did not appear to shape either a figurative-metaphorical poetics or a literal one. We had not witnessed an act that could be translated by a discourse "about" the spin or even "about" the dizziness. In fact it was an encounter with the poetics of performance: the articulation of a discourse that becomes discourse precisely to the extent that it breaks with referentiality and triggers a materiality. A physical speech act, both contagiously caught and catching. There, I understood that the performative body is visceral—e.g., uncontrolled eyeballs, queasy stomach—but also that it does not end there; in reality it triggers effects in the world, reaching out to the other, posing questions, misunderstandings, silences, perplexities.²

In a private conversation with the artist, Eleonora told me that after exiting the gallery in Lima she was actually followed by some people in a long walk around the city. "When I found a bar, I stopped and ordered a beer, and we drank together." I think it's important to highlight this walk around the city and the improvised encounter/dialogue with the audience from her performance in a bar in Lima as a crucial moment in the artist's passage from the gallery to the street as a space for her subsequent performances. Perhaps not coincidentally, Eleonora then decided to perform the *Giro* [*Spin*, 2002] for the first time in the open air, at the city square known as Largo da Carioca in downtown Rio de Janeiro,³ the place that would later host all her *Ações Cariocas* [*Carioca Actions*, 2008].⁴ To spin on the street, she invited a collaborator: a knife sharpener.⁵ While in Lima and in Rio de Janeiro, in the gallery and in the urban space, the spin was performed as the poetic through all the bodily and linguistic

² In an exchange of correspondence with the artist, Eleonora told me she began to spin after witnessing the fall of the World Trade Center in 2001, while she was walking on the street in New York. Reacting to the act of seeing the twin towers crumble, the artist found herself literally dizzy, walking to and fro in the studio, until she simply began to spin. Spinning "was like a long walk around my own axis." As the months went by, Eleonora would spin for up to two hours straight. "I had to cut back on my spinning, because I was starting to burst the capillaries in my eyes and ears."

³ The performance *Giro* at Largo da Carioca was part of the program in RioCenaContemporânea Festival, 2002.

⁴ Translator's Note: "Carioca" is the name given to a person that was born in Rio de Janeiro.

⁵ "Three circles were formed: the knife sharpener's circle, my gyro, and the ring of bystanders that approached to follow the action. Plus the sound propagating—the shrill whistle of the knives scraping on the grindstone. Every once in a while people launched questions, and I answered while spinning. Every once in a while they'd be talking, and sometimes I managed to hear what they were saying. Sparks flew from all the circles. The knife sharpener's sparks were flashes." (Correspondence with the artist).

tangle of materialities ranging from the flesh to the voice—from what the artist did to what was done with us and spoken amongst us—, in the subsequent performances this redistribution of the poetic discourse was radicalized even further, settling entirely on the potential of the encounter with the other.

Perhaps performance in general, but certainly Eleonora Fabião's artistic work, appears to raise questions that are both inadequate and for that very reason revealing. In one of her talks about *Ações Cariocas*, the artist says that a participant, confused with the simple urban proposition *Converso sobre qualquer assunto* [*I will have a conversation about any subject*], responded with a barrage of questions: "Are you a prostitute? [No.] So you're a lesbian?" The questions are both comical and serious, symbolizing the linguistic confusions unleashed by the suspension of referential meaning carried out by the poetics of the performance. A woman on the street (of the street?), sitting on a chair, willing to talk about anything with anybody. No hidden meaning behind the act, but simply its materiality and what can be generated from it.

The radical immanence of performative poetics in its break with referentiality and with the "superobjective" of classical poetics leaves the other bewildered, since in a sense it questions the other in his or her own existential condition, i.e., in their incapacity to verify their own life's referentiality. Hence, perhaps, the search for comfort in a definitive, non ephemeral meaning for the work of art. But after all: why do we breathe? Why does the rain fall? Why do we die? In fact, we are not completely prepared to meet with immanence. By composing a poetic of the encounter with this unpreparedness, the performance artist simultaneously dismantles aesthetic, poetic, moral, and political systems that sustain a certain ideology of the real.

To speak of the performative body is thus to speak of a body-contagion, a body-encounter, a body-dismantlement and its effects. It is a body that does not proclaim an expression beyond itself; it neither metaphorizes nor literalizes, but acts and recreates itself (cognitively and materially) in the act, thus recreating the other who peeks at it and interpellates it. I find this relationship essential in its active openness of the performative body to the other, as much as in its non referential poetic. I say *active* openness because I want to call attention to the negotiation of power that takes place in the encounter of the performative body with the other: I am open, I begin a dialogue, and my openness interpellates you and generates effects in you, which return to me in a continuous feedback that builds reciprocity between us.

If the performative body does not work with referentiality, if its poetic discourse does not separate itself from the act it performs, but rather triggers material processes, we have before us a body that invites us to think of the total "act" with greater

attention—"act" defined here as an event that goes beyond the actor's sovereign will, although it is inseparable from him and triggered by him.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the "act" emerges precisely as a conceptual unit to understand not only the subject, but also the world itself. For Bakhtin, subject and world are always unfinalizable phenomena that articulate and actualize themselves continuously in acts.⁶ My contact over the years with Eleonora Fabião's art work led me to believe that her poetic research based on the performative body materializes a kind of thought analogous to that of Bakhtin. In the aesthetic exploration of the performative body's potentialities, the artist also explores the other's body and the world itself.

As I suggested above, it was thus no surprise to me that years after the *Giro* piece, Eleonora continued her aesthetic-poetic research with *Ações Cariocas*. The many actions grouped in this and in the subsequent series—which Eleonora has performed in various cities of the world, especially Rio de Janeiro—launched many more relationships, dialogues, and encounters that restructure the present for those involved when compared to the "expressions" or "shows" organized under the representational regime. I identify precisely this escape from the representational regime as the performative body's principal poetic operation. Eleonora's street work delves deeply into and intensifies the shared involvement of her body and the spectator's body that I had already witnessed unfolding in the visceral contagion of *Giro* piece.

No alibi

It is necessary to act, says Mikhail Bakhtin. It is necessary to think and it is necessary to act. In books like *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (2003) and *Art and Answerability* (2011), Bakhtin sees aesthetic activity as an ethical act vis-à-vis the world, in strict opposition to the concept of art as a psychological expression of the artist's supposedly inner world. For Bakhtin, there is no alibi for existence, that is, it is not possible to deny the fact that we assume a unique place in the world, whence we are called on ethically to respond to this world. In other words, it is not possible to say "no, I wasn't there," since it is precisely the fact of "being there" that even allows us

⁶ See especially *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) and *Art and Answerability* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1990), but also *Marxismo e Filosofia da Linguagem* (São Paulo: HUCITEC, 2010), and *Estética da Criação Verbal* (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2003), among others.

to say *anything*. Because we exist and are unique, we do not have the luxury of being indifferent. On the contrary, we have a responsibility to *answer* to this existence, and this “answerability” is articulated precisely in acts (thought-acts, movement-acts, creation-acts). In Bakhtin, to be is thus to act. My singularity as a social subject is defined precisely by the conditions of possibility for thought and for creation.⁷

Facing our world, Eleonora acts. She takes chairs from her house out onto the street and sits to talk with strangers. She exchanges everything she is wearing on her body for pieces of clothing and objects that belong to other subjects. She leads pedestrians to walk blindfolded along the streets. She closes her own eyes and walks around the city in blindness, touching everything and everyone that crosses her path. She gives people massages on the ground of public spaces. She walks along the street with her body totally bagged. She polishes the paving of the city square in a straight line. She pours water from a pottery jug to a silver pitcher, back and forth, until it evaporates completely. She walks around the city with a long wire attached to her forehead where she balances a banknote that her hand can’t reach. She spends hours composing and decomposing shapes with nine bed sheets on the public square. She repeats this action with 25 bricks. Or with pieces of charcoal. She walks in the middle of the crowd with a glass of water full to the brim. She circles in a VW Kombi calling out over a loudspeaker for people in their homes to approach their windows and listen to words. She rubs herself on walls to make gouache graffiti. She visits people she doesn’t know and proposes to do something together in the city.

The artist’s performative act with the other and with the city can be defined as an answerability to the world. The act of doing performances on the street demands strong organization of one’s own body, but this necessarily implies a reorganization of the relationship between this body and the other that lives on or walks by on the street. In relation to previous performances, including the *Giro* piece, the formal innovation in these new acts by Eleonora lies perhaps in the fact that now the materialized relationship with her spectator takes the dramaturgical lead once and for all. For Bakhtin, it is in the singular act of responding to the other/world that the subject participates in the *being of the world*. We could thus say that the aesthetic act on the street composes the being of the street, to the precise extent that it

7 Practically the entire unfinished manuscript published under the title *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (op. cit.) elaborates on the non alibi of existence—its implications for thought, creation, and for a renewed worldview, as well as for the ethical coimplication between the subject and the other. See particularly pages 40 to 42 for an introduction to this issue.

also composes the artist’s body and its relationship with the other: three distinct compositional vectors, distinct yet coimplicated.

When I found Eleonora on the street and interacted with her performances in 2009 (Bogotá) and 2014 (Montreal), I was led to think precisely about these coimplications. The artist places herself in the public space in a state of broad receptiveness, but not like a blank canvas with which the spectator does whatever he pleases. It’s not about a body martyrizing itself, although the challenges thrown at it are sometimes exhausting. In a word, Eleonora’s performative body is propositional. It embodies a dramaturgy that is elaborated beforehand: to pour water from the jug to the silver pitcher until the liquid evaporates completely, or to walk a predetermined path in the city with eyes shut. In both cases, to *accept* help from strangers; which, strictly speaking, means to *need* the help of strangers. In other words, the intervention launched on oneself spills over to the other. Dramaturgically, Eleonora needs the other to supplement her act—to supplement her *as* act. Her poetic is structured as the materialization of the encounter: Eleonora’s answerability activates the other’s answerability, and this cross-angulation composes an aesthetic fold in/of the public space.

During a proposition entitled *Troco tudo* of the *Série Precários: Montreal* [*To trade everything* of the *Precarious Series: Montreal*, 2014], I found Eleonora circulating downtown, in the vicinity of a university campus.⁸ She had arrived there in the morning, dressed normally in her clothing and accessories and with a few objects in her pockets. Over the course of nearly six hours, Eleonora approached various people, proposing that they trade something with her: “I’ll give you something I’m wearing or carrying, and you give me something you’re wearing or carrying.” When everything the artist was originally wearing or carrying with her had been traded, she went home. When I met her, the act still under way, Eleonora was wearing a chaotic combination of pieces of clothing she had traded for with others, and was carrying an unlikely collection of things: from a half-ripe banana to the picture of a Catholic saint. For an instant she reminded me of a mad collector of objects. But talking with her and learning about each trade, I began to see her more as an alchemist-sorceress, manipulating worldly matter and creating spatial-temporal relations that suggested unthinkable geometries in social reality. She and I made a trade, a yellow belt for a charcoal-gray sweatshirt.

Corresponding later with the artist, she told me that the encounter-negotiation trading “things” is always accompanied by an intense exchange of “ideas,” especially

8 The performance was part of the program of the encounter Manifest! Choreographing Social Movements in the Americas, by the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics in Montreal, Canada, 2014.

about values in general and the value of objects. For example, in São José do Rio Preto, in the State of São Paulo, after a long chat with a woman in a bar, the artist agreed to exchange a two-*real* bill she had in her pocket for a one-*real* coin. In Montreal, a man she stopped on the street to trade something with her talked at great length about his family, his marriage, and his nationality. From the exchange of life experiences, they reached the conclusion that he no longer needed a good luck coin he had carried in his wallet for years (a Cuban coin with a star on it). He traded his good luck coin for a hairpin from the artist to give to his wife.

This conversation-negotiation is nothing else than a material effect of the performative body. In the singular act of exchanging things and ideas, new criteria of reciprocity are performatively established. For me, *Troco tudo* is a privileged opportunity for us to observe the coinvolvement of the artist's bodily creation (transformed into an *assemblage* of other people's things, now made her own, and that she goes on using in life), the bodily reorganization of her coparticipant (who loses an object but takes relics of Eleonora and her performance back home), and of the social relationship between the two as effective world creation (a world where "two" and "one"—body, banknote, coin, hairpin—forge other principles of difference and reciprocity).

The aesthetic force of the performative principles of difference and valuation materialized in the work can be verified by the very suspension-recreation of the social real, where it becomes possible to trade a skirt for a duster, a watch for a stocking cap, a story for a story, a sandal for a sandal, bracelet for banana, T-shirt for Tylenol, ring for nail polish, kiss for kiss, sunglasses for beach towel, blue denim skirt for white skirt, handkerchief for ashtray with a picture of Christ the Redeemer, stone for stocking.⁹ The immanent arbitrariness in the meaning of "trading things" as "work of art" not only recreates a strange state of things and ephemeral social relations, but also reveals the "strangeness" in value negotiations that structure so-called "normal" or everyday social relations. By temporarily replacing capital's hegemonic logic with her obviously arbitrary proposal in *Troco tudo*, she highlights the arbitrariness of capital's own logic.

⁹ The artist listed all these trades as having actually happened in different performances of *Troco tudo*. (Correspondence with the artist).

Anticrimes

I don't intend to overvalue a political potency in Eleonora Fabião's works. Whoever comes across her live performance knows that her proposals particularly involve an investment in chance and playful joy that discourages any over-determination of her work as belonging to an antagonistic discourse of political art. Like Lygia Clark (and to a certain extent, Hélio Oiticica), Eleonora Fabião is probably at the margins of the kind of art with explicitly antagonistic content and she is more associated with the "experimental exercise of freedom" that in Brazil has focused historically on the body as connective tissue that reaches and restructures the relationship with the other and with the world. The expression "experimental exercises of freedom," coined by critic Mário Pedrosa to refer to the Brazilian Neoconcrete movement, was recaptured by Guy Brett in a monograph on performance art in Latin America. Brett's text precisely maps how the artistic experiments in Brazil under State terror (in the 1960s and 70s) focus on a certain exploratory joy of the body, particularly the bodily relationship between artist, work, and spectator, as a revolutionary process of breaking with traditional artistic regimes.¹⁰

But due to the very performative and materializing nature I have been emphasizing here, Eleonora's proposals undeniably give way to political readings of the aesthetic act. Drawing on Jacques Rancière, we see that by exploring the Bakhtinian "act" of cocreation of oneself and the world and revealing them as unfinalizable entities, Eleonora's poetic leaves important political marks in the social fabric. For Rancière, the aesthetic regime is a fundamentally political regime that continuously inaugurates the possibility of redistribution of the sensible and, therefore, of other materializations of the real. This takes place because the undecidability proper to the aesthetic experience brings to the surface the arbitrariness of the subject's and the world's organization *in a given form*. In other words, the aesthetic experience (with whatever of alterity it can render sensible) questions ideologies of subject and world and the rigidity of *forms* of the subject and the world as we know them (or as we believe we know).¹¹

¹⁰ See BRETT, Guy. "Life Strategies." In: SCHIMMEL, Paul (org.). *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1998, p. 204.

¹¹ "To pretend is not to put forth illusions but to elaborate intelligible structures," says Jacques Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics*. New York: Continuum/Bloomsbury Academic, 2007, p. 36. See also pages 12-19 for Rancière's definition of the "aesthetic regime" as a "political regime."

Thus, Eleonora in her exploration of herself with the clothing and objects of others. Or Eleonora bagged from head to foot, wandering the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Or still, Eleonora with closed eyes, touching everything and everybody in her path, from Rue Monteuil to the fountain at Place des Armes, in Montreal's historical center. It was on this occasion that a Spanish-speaking street vendor grabbed her by the arm and pointed her in the right direction, hissing in her ear: "Go away and don't come back, you witch!" Eleonora-blind-man's-bluff, Eleonora-witch. Eleonora read by the other, led by the other; reading herself, leading herself; redimensioning her relationship with herself, with the other, and with the city.

In a round table on urban interventions after the experiences in Montreal, Eleonora stated that one of her objectives is to propose and experiment with new ways of relating and new systems of attention through very simple actions in the city. And she further said that she believed in the body and in the act as fields of political resistance against the normatization of life and perception. In an ethical response to her immediate context in Rio de Janeiro and Brazil, to the violent colonial and dictatorial legacies around us, to the growing police state of exception in the big cities, to the transformation of crime into law and revolt into crime, to the spread of institutionalized banditry, fear, corruption, and impunity, the artist came to ask herself: what is the opposite of committing a crime? For Eleonora, given the state of things at the limit of acceptability in Brazil (which she describes as the "Brazilian banditocracy"),¹² it is not enough to refrain from committing crimes: one needs to commit "anticrimes." In a society of irrevocably uncontrolled control, street performance emerges as anticrime: the performative act that examines, questions, and expands the artist's ways of inhabiting the public space and relating to fellow citizens.

I find "committing anticrimes" (committing performance) an extremely important and vital responsive act in the contemporary artistic scene. In my view, the anticrime emerges as a true "signature" of Eleonora Fabião's artistic thought: not the subjective discourse of the artist, but the mark of her performance's thought. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin states that the "signature" of a subject's consciousness, or of a subject's judgment of value, is what constitutes thought and judgment as acts.¹³ In this sense, it is not exactly the "content" of consciousness that makes

¹² Editors' Note: see FABIÃO, Eleonora. "Performing Rio de Janeiro: artistic strategies in times of banditocracy." Available at <http://www.hemisphericinstitute.org/hemi/en/e-misferica-81/fabiao>.

¹³ BAKHTIN, Mikhail. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Op. cit., p. 38.

it singular, but the inescapable fact that each thought emerges inseparably from the specific space-time occupied by the subject who thinks, a space-time that only he or she occupies, and which for that very reason calls on him or her for the act. Since, for Bakhtin, the act is a sociohistorically organized reflex/response, it follows that its "signature" is less an expression of the inner subjectivity of the one who undersigns it, than a mark of the spatial-temporal position of the signatory in the social fabric, from which only that body is capable of acting/thinking. In other words, the signature of a thought is its social and contextual position—e.g., woman, Carioca, Brazilian, artist, anticriminal—and therefore constitutes that thought as singular act, as an integral part of the "event of Being."¹⁴

Therefore, in the anticrime thought-act, a multiplicity of voices engage in dialogue: Eleonora and Brazil, Eleonora and world, Eleonora and art, Eleonora and her fellow citizens, etc. Here is an artist that does not *do* performances (to be seen), but that *commits* them (for us to deal with their effects). By committing them, Eleonora micropolitically recreates a series of relational potentialities in the urban fabric that have been increasingly prevented by banditocracy and unbridled control.

The medium of her work is thus no longer the body in strict sense, but the *socius* that it facilitates and materializes provisionally, i.e., the dialogue that coimplicates subjects and worlds in relation. Transforming the "social relationship" and the "encounter" into the mediation of her poetic discourse, Eleonora in fact proposes a different configuration of the body for performance art. Less spectacular, more receptive, the performative body becomes both responsive act and propositional act. Eleonora thus lends a material and intensive conformation to the de-materialization of the work of art that began in the 20th century, through daily *social* processes triggered by her body/act, such as an informal chat on the park bench, a negotiation of values and exchanges, a stroll through the neighborhood, an accusation of witchcraft. As an antidote to a possible discourse of performance as a representation and boasting of the ego, Eleonora and Bakhtin call on us to think of the performative work as an eminently social, although irrefutably aesthetic, happening.

¹⁴ For Bakhtin, "being" presents itself to consciousness always as an unfolding event and never as a finished act, and it is the singularity of my own place in historical existence that conditions the possibilities of any responsive act, and therefore, of my own participation in that event of being. "I-for-myself constitute the center from which my performed act and my self-activity of affirming and acknowledging any value come forth or issue, for that is the only point where I participate answerably in once-occurrent Being; it is the center of operations, the headquarters of the commander-in-chief directing my possibilities and my ought in the ongoing event of Being." (Bakhtin, op. cit., 60).

Viewed close up, Eleonora Fabião's work continuously materializes the fundamental paradox of the relationship between "I" and the "other." The artist only acts (present indicative tense) to the extent that she was acted upon (past participle). It is Bakhtin again that contends that "I" only exists in dialogue, in the encounter with the "other," where otherness is the very foundation for the existence of I, both always unfinished and re-actualized through the act of the encounter. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (2010), Bakhtin refines his understanding of the language-in-context perspective and the linguistic construction of this context in our utterances. Every utterance, that is, every elaboration of oneself as language, emerges as a product of social interaction, of dialogue, of our coimplication with the other. Any loose word is already dialogic, bearing a historicity that constitutes it.¹⁵

If Bakhtin is correct in contending that we are always emerging from contextual limits and possibilities, then I suggest that performative actions or works of art of the encounter like Eleonora Fabião's, precisely reorganize apparently given limits and rehearse unprecedented contexts for coimplication between the I and the other, thereby allowing the emergence of other I's, and with luck, of other we's.

¹⁵ If the basic unit of language is dialogue, the psychological world "expressed" in the subject's speech as assumed by individualist subjectivism is neither completely subjective nor individual. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Marxismo e Filosofia da Linguagem*. Op. cit., p. 126-127.

Eleonora Fabião: touching the “live”

Diana Taylor

Eleonora Fabião walks through the city with her eyes closed—using her hands and feet to feel her way along walls, buildings, and open spaces. *Toco tudo* [*To touch everything*, 2011] forces her to rely on strangers for help crossing the street and finding her way. She goes to public places and invites people to “trade” or swap everything—their pants, shirts, shoes, whatever—*Troco tudo* [*To trade everything*, 2010]. She walks through the streets completely embalmed in plastic—white (*Mancha Branca*) [*White Stain*, 2013], black (*Mancha Preta*) [*Black Stain*, 2013] and red (*Mancha Vermelha*) [*Red Stain*, 2013]. She sits in trafficked city squares holding up signs inviting passersby to sit and converse with her about “any subject” for as long as they like (*Converso sobre qualquer assunto*) [*I will have a conversation about any subject*, 2008]. She lies on the ground in different Brazilian cities, assuming the poses of the Nambikwara Indians included in Claude Lévi-Strauss’ *Saudades do Brasil*. Some of these performances form part of her *Série Precários* [*Precarious Series*, 2011/13], although they are all, in a way, precarious. She performs by herself in public places in Rio de Janeiro or São Paulo; Lima, Peru; or Bogota, Colombia, seamlessly inserting herself into the fabric of the city. While parts of a performance may be documented, they are not constantly being performed for the camera. On the contrary, Fabião usually engages directly and intimately with her audience, often an audience of one. Those who help her navigate through the city, or who watch her, or sit down to talk, may not know what the performance is about or why she is doing it. It’s enough to know that it’s a “performance.”

What is a PRECARIOUS performance? Fabião distinguishes precariousness from ephemerality:

If the ephemeral is transient, momentary, brief (the opposite of what is permanent), the precarious is unstable, risky, dangerous (the opposite of what is secure, stable, and safe). If the ephemeral is diaphanous, the precarious is shaky. [...] If the ephemeral rehearses death, precariousness lives life. If the ephemeral refers to the non lasting, the precarious discovers that “what is under construction is already a ruin.”¹

Fabião’s notion of the precarious makes these performances powerful and sets them apart both in terms of ethos and intentionality from much discussion of performance art taking place today. She assumes ongoingness of “life” rather than disappearance, although that ongoingness is anything but stable or safe. This distinction between the ephemeral and the precarious locates Fabião in time and space. “What is under construction is already a ruin” as she quotes Caetano Veloso’s lyric. Streets, beaches, structures are revealed as ruins, emptied though not empty—empty of something palpable in its absence. Lévi-Strauss’ Nambikwara Indians, almost decimated by their contact with European Brazilians in the early 20th century, haunt the ground she lies on. The ontological “empty” gives way to the violent practice of “emptying.” Nonetheless, ruins invite us all to fantasize about the stillness of arrested motion, the quiet aura of the far away, even as we inhabit them and walk through them, closing our eyes. Walking the ruins is a durational performance; *presenciamos e damos corpo* (we experience, “being present” and “lend our bodies”) as we perform the acts suggested by the scenario. Fabião inverts the conventions just enough to challenge her audience into awareness. She walks down streets (with her eyes closed or dressed completely in plastic). She sits in a chair (in the middle of a public square, holding a sign inviting people for a conversation on any subject). She carries money (at the end of a wire tied to her head in *Série Precários: dinheiro* [*Precarious Series: money*, 2012]). She trades all her clothes freely in an age in which people cling to their material goods. She comes and goes; she walks through the streets or sits in different plazas. Perhaps the audience’s physical presence and lived interactions with her accounts for what some experience as aura. Aura, usually thought of in Benjaminian

¹ FABIÃO, Eleonora. “History and precariousness: in search of a performative historiography.” In: JONES, Amelia and HEATHFIELD, Adrian (orgs.). *Perform, repeat, record*. Bristol-Chicago: Intellect, 2012, p. 134.

terms as the “unique apparition of a distance,” is also about proximity—not the close-up he associates with mechanical reproduction but the presence of embodied experience.² She asks us, as audience, to presence, or make present, by participating. Presencing—not the same as identifying with another—nonetheless places us in the scenario. Will we sit and talk with her? Help her across the street? Make way for her as she moves through the street encased in plastic? “An artistic performance,” she wrote in 2000,

is necessarily transformative, transitive. In that way, it is impossible to be a passive spectator in a performance situation as much as it is impossible to be a spectator in a party. Your presence is part of the show. If you are there, you are it. The performance is a vital experience through which the participants pass from “before the performance” to “after the performance.”³

It’s all about the moment, the now of performance, the interaction, the connection—however precarious. In other words, her approach to performance might be summarized as to touch everything, to trade everything, save nothing.

Fabião’s approach is oddly, and refreshingly, out of time with much contemporary performance that dwells on saving performance, archiving it, re-performing it, and selling it to museums and galleries. How to explain this? I suggest two possible explanations—one generational, the other geopolitical.

Generationally, Fabião comes some thirty or forty years after what we might call the “founding” group of performance art—artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Yves Klein who started working in the 1960s and Chris Burden and Marina Abramović in the 1970s. At that time, part of the attraction of the form was precisely that it was radical, challenging, disruptive, and dislocating. It interrupted the authorized circuits of the art market by working outside or on the margins of galleries and museums. It thrust the body front and center into the artwork. Schneemann, who was also a painter, stated: “I had to get that nude off the canvas.”⁴ At the same time, performance artists were beginning to explore the limits of their own bodies, often in very

2 BENJAMIN, Walter. “The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility” (second version). In: JENNINGS, Michael W.; DOHERTY, Brigid e LEVIN, Thomas Y. (eds.). *The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility and other writings on media*. Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2008, p. 23.

3 Available at <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/issues/Fabiao.htm>.

4 SCHNEEMANN, Carolee. *Carolee Schneemann: imaging her erotics*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002, p. 28.

dangerous situations. Chris Burden had himself shot in the arm and dragged his body through broken glass. Bob Flanagan pierced his penis, sewed up his lips and his scrotum, nailed his skin to wood, and many other acts that for him expressed invincibility in the face of his cystic fibrosis. Las Yeguas del Apocalypsis (The Mares of the Apocalypse) danced the cuenca, the national dance of Chile, on shards of glass, leaving blood footprints over a map of Latin America to make visible the horror of torture and disappearance during the years of the Pinochet dictatorship. Few if any of the artists in the 1960s and 1970s were thinking back then about how to “preserve” their performances for future generations or commodify them for the art market.

Now that these radical artists have become famous and older (if they are still alive), there is much pressure to “save” and “preserve” their work into perpetuity. Performance art, once almost synonymous with ephemerality, is prompting strategies to avoid its disappearance.

How can performance be kept alive, separated from its moment of knowing and being, and preserved and protected for other audiences at another moment? How does the *now* of one particular performance extend beyond its own initial temporality and context?

Marina Abramović’s blockbuster show, “The Artist Is Present,” at MoMA, 2010, explored many forms of preservation—documentation, video, audio, holograms, on and offline presentation along with performance, and what has become known as *re-performance*. What is re-performance? Isn’t all performance a re-performance? Theatre, dance, musical performances, all repeat themselves again and again. How is “re” different? The repetition of the act does not differentiate re-performance from performance.

The term re-performance, like performance itself, has been taken up primarily in business, banking, and administration. Where it has referred to the arts, it has meant accurate replication of an original. Zenph has a re-performance musical recording series that offers every pause, pedal sound, breath of the original performance. The only thing missing, someone said, was a hologram of the artist to fully recreate the live. But for curators, re-performance offers a means of extending the “original” to wider audiences over time. MoMA website’s stated the intention of the Abramović re-performances: “In an endeavor to transmit the presence of the artist and make her historical performances accessible to a larger audience, the exhibition includes the first live re-performances of Abramović’s works by other people ever to be undertaken in a museum setting.”⁵ Notions of authenticity, originality, historicity, the accurate re-do of great signature works, and broad accessibility underlie re-performance.

I turn to the Abramović retrospective in conversation with Eleonora Fabião's work to explore fundamentally different approaches to performance made visible through one seemingly simple act—sitting in a chair. Abramović sat at a table—and then dispensed with the table—in the Marron Atrium of MoMA for the entire duration of the exhibition, over 700 hours. This was a re-performance of the 1980s *Night Sea Crossing* series that she undertook with her then collaborator and partner, Ulay (Uwe Layesiepen).

As in that durational performance, in which the two sat still and silent facing each other across a table, the one at MoMA elongates time and motion, two central characteristics of performance. As in the earlier version, this one too is all about deep focus and seemingly super-human physical and mental endurance. Like all performance, as Abramović put it, this one too takes place in the “here and now.”⁶ She sat still in a chair, facing individuals from the public who took turns sitting in front of her. People lined up for hours (and even overnight) to occupy the chair across from her. Some cried while staring into her eyes. “Stillness is the moment when the buried, the discarded, and the forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness,” according to Nadia Seremetakis.⁷ The power of the performance lay in the intensity and public intimacy of the look, the interface not only between two people, but two people and their multiple live and digital audiences. Nothing “happened.” But even in its stillness, the excruciating expenditure of doing nothing. This performance flips (or reverses) the tension between movement and stillness characteristic of live performance in which the pause usually marks the seconds or moments “between” movements. Stillness can be full of promise, of immanence. The leopard pauses before it leaps. A photographic subject will pose a second, and then break into activity. There is a kinetic quality to stillness. In Abramović's durational performance, the stillness takes precedence over the movement, which remains outside the frame as potentiality. The pause—not the action or liveness—is the point.

Looking was part of the doing. People standing and sitting around the performance were silent, or spoke in whispers. There was a hushed, reverential feel to the space, as if some high risk, gravity-defying act were underway. And, of course, in a

5 “Marina Abramović: The Artist Is Present.” Available at <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/965>. Accessed December 6, 2010.

6 Marina Abramović. Available at <http://www.moma.org/explore/multimedia/audios/190/1985>. Accessed March 15, 2015.

7 SEREMETAKIS, Nadia (ed.). *The senses still: perception and memory as material culture in modernity*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994, p. 12. Quoted in LEPECKI, André. *Exhausting dance: performance and the politics of movement*. London-New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 15.

sense, it was. The stillness enveloped those of us in the Atrium. Presence, for all its force and intimacy, was also highly mediated. The cameras, video cams, and lighting make the very quiet and still event intensely spectacular—it was all about being and seeing. The interface between the “live” and its many extensions becomes visible. Marina Abramović looks intently at the person in the chair in front of her, and everyone looks at her, either in the room or through the “live” video feed. The artist is present here and now, and in many forms of again-ness. Live, “live video,” the preservation of the “live video,” the photographs of the live video, and so on. All of these recordings were part of the performance and, simultaneously, its documentation or preservation. The stillness moved the audience far beyond the physical confines of MoMA. The scopic reach and the aesthetic frame of the performance were enormous—many in the room, or looking at the Atrium from higher floors in MoMA or watching online, were interpellated into this scene with Abramović as its still, steady center.

All this, clearly, extended beyond the reiterative quality of the “re” in re-performance. This was a new original, in the commercial art world's meaning of the word.

How does this differ from Eleonora Fabião's performance of sitting in city squares, inviting people to converse with her? Fabião's frame is intimate even though she sits in large open spaces. Although she, like Abramović, interacts with anyone willing to sit in front of her, she inverts the power relation between her and her audience by engaging with people at their level. Kids want to play? Teenagers want to talk about troubles at school? Others may want to find out what the performance is about or tell her about their day. Fabião is happy to engage. For her, it's not about the aesthetics, or the art market, or transcending the moment, or making history—it's about aesthetics as esthesis, or sensation and feeling. It's about experiencing the rare, momentary exchange between strangers threatened by the precarious conditions proffered by big, bustling, often dangerous cities. Fabião's performances enact the attributes I call the “repertoire”—people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge. Transmission is “live,” taking place between bodies.⁸ Fabião may perform *Toco tudo* in many parts of the world and yet never call it a re-performance. It will always be unique to the circumstances, animating the act of transfer from body to body with room for differences, even failures. People can reject her gesture, or she may decide precipitously to abandon her chair, without that invalidating the point of the performance.

8 TAYLOR, Diana. *The archive and the repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.

To interact with Abramović, on the other hand, is to participate in a highly structured EVENT open to the art world in one or more of its multiple mediations. The aesthetic frame is so carefully managed—the flowing gowns, the stillness, the sparse space, the circle of admirers who attest to the magic of the moment. Participants engage on Abramović's terms, no speaking, touching and so on. Moreover they are out powered, not only by sitting with one of the world's most masterful performance artists, but one who specializes in the deep focus needed for this type of durational performance. Even as the event engages the repertorial transfer from body to body, it is being archived by all the cameras. The performance simultaneously takes place in the here and now and in the there and then. One might go so far as to suggest that Abramović's fellow sitters are only the excuse for the performance, not interlocutors. They may remember sitting with her but will she remember sitting with them? She seems to exist alone and very solitary in her bubble of concentration and we can only look at her closely, in awe.

There was a clear "historical" dimension to the MoMA project in a triple sense—these iconic works had taken place in the past, they were landmark events in the art world, and their re-performance was the "the first ... ever" staged in a museum. While Abramović sat in the Atrium, other artists gave body to her works upstairs on the 6th floor. These were the works known and discussed as "re-performance." The idea is that a performance can enact and transmit the "presence" of the artist through re-performance of the work by others.

Here I will briefly note one example. In *Imponderabilia*, which Abramović performed with Ulay in 1977 in Bologna, the artists rebuilt the main opening to the museum to create a smaller entryway through which the visitors had to pass. She and Ulay stood naked at the entrance, so narrow now that the visitor had to choose whether to face her or him while squeezing through. The idea animating the performance was that artists, not museums, are the guardians of art, and visitors have to negotiate the challenging and at times awkward relationship with them. While the performance was supposed to last six hours, the police arrived after three hours and asked the two for their papers that, clearly, they did not have on them. The performance stopped. Bologna in the 1970s was a political hot spot where student activism, radical ideas, and acts of terrorism had the city on alert. A student had been shot earlier that year by a highly reactive police force.

The re-performance in MoMA was radically different, even though it cited its iconic predecessor. Two artists (regardless of gender) took turns standing naked at a doorway in the large exhibition space that had videos and paraphernalia from several earlier pieces by Abramović. Her presence, literally and metaphorically, loomed over them. Unlike the Bologna staging, here the doorway was not only wider but, more important

perhaps, it was a secondary door positioned at the far end of the room, rendering it redundant. Visitors did not have to go through it; it led to a room that could more easily be accessed otherwise. The artists, this suggested, were no longer guardians of anything special. The video of the Bologna performance played next to the re-performance, thus elevated to the status of the "original"—a reminder that this new iteration was interesting to the degree it conjured up the last. Unlike an interpretation or variation of a well-known performance, these re-performances tried to be "authentic" to the "original"—two qualities that performance (as opposed to art objects) soundly rejects. Additionally, the context was entirely different. The 2010 Abramović is a celebrity, a superstar, the retrospective is the mega commercial art event of the season, and no police are likely to interrupt the show. On the contrary—security guards stood closely by protecting the show and its actors. Instead of taking place outside the museum, challenging its role in the valorization and preservation of art, the performances of the retrospective took place firmly within MoMA's walls and legitimating apparatus. Clearly the stakes of the performance and the context have changed profoundly since the 1970s. The "time past and time present unified together" that has fascinated Abramović since her first piece in 1973, shows two very different *nows* under the supposed comingling of the performance.

But that *now* of performance meant to highlight continuities marked instead the profound change of time rather than its durational qualities. Several other important elements had changed in relation to the re-performances in general. Abramović, over her career, has exposed herself through dangerous and grueling performances that have tested her human limits—she yelled until she lost her voice, danced until she fainted, cut her body, and remained motionless and exposed before an unknown audience. For legal reasons, though, MoMA needed to eliminate the risk for the re-performers.⁹ While initially all the pieces were to run two and a half hours, they were cut to shorter segments after two re-performers fainted during the first week.¹⁰ So while the re-performance of *Night Sea Crossing* in the Atrium demanded the same kind of expenditure and exertion from Abramović, the re-performances by others demanded relatively little by comparison. Moreover, while the re-performance by Abramović drew crowds, those by the other artists were downgraded to curiosities. There was no

⁹ Abramović too states clearly she will not allow her students to take risks while they work under her mentorship.

¹⁰ Interview with Abigail Levine, one of the re-performers of *Imponderabilia*, Hemispheric Institute, N.Y., September 3, 2010. My thanks also to John Bonafede, Lydia Brawner, Elke Luyten, Juri Onuki, Jill Sigman and, again, Abigail Levine for meeting with me on December 16, 2010 to talk about their experiences as re-performers in the Marina Abramović "The Artist is Present."

place to sit and experience them as performances in their own right, so visitors just walked past them. Only the artist, singular, was present.

So to return to the generational issue: during the 1970s, Abramović's work was all about the ephemeral, the daring, the unauthorized. Now in her 60s, the bid for the sustainability of performance and "saving the live," should not surprise us. Abramović knows that film or video or photos or other recordings may document the work and keep it visible but cannot keep it alive. The logic of the archive controls the repertoire, demanding the "live," even as it insists that the live behave as one more artifact. The living body is treated as script. The point, it seems is to create the record—the photo, video, notation, score—and then re-perform it.

But if we move from the logic of the ephemeral to that of the precarious, as Fabião does, other ways of understanding performance become possible. And here I see the geographical dimension to Fabião's ethos I alluded to earlier. It's not simply that Fabião is too young to experience the anxiety of ephemerality that grips older artists trying to preserve that thing called "art." It's also, I believe, that as a Brazilian artist she recognizes that she lives in the "shaky" and "risky" and "unstable" and "dangerous" reality in which life persists, in spite of all. Instead of focusing on the singular, signature performance piece, she turns to art as experience, as a means of communicating and connecting to others. This is not the MoMA practice. Nor is Brazil a country known for its art market—although it has had more than its fair share of major artists. "Preservation" does not make much sense under these conditions. Rather, she understands performance as a very different sort of thing. Things are not the same as art "objects." They are more ambiguous; they conjure up process and transformation. The chair/thing is tree, wood, planks, chair, splinters, junk, a weapon or instrument, firewood, but it can also be the memory of my home and almost anything else. As Bill Brown notes, the word "thing" indexes "a certain limit or liminality, to hover over the threshold between the nameable and the unnameable, the figurable and unfigurable, the identifiable and the unidentifiable."¹¹ I can use "thing" to speak of another thing. One thing leads to another. With Fabião, spectators participate in a journey that follows the logic of things as being in transit. Fabião's work is funny (*Dinheiro*), trusting (*Toco tudo*), open (*Converso sobre qualquer assunto*), vulnerable (*Toco tudo*) and deep. She feels implicated in her environment, in her history (*Saudades do Brasil*), and in others. Here she shares the sense of precarity that Judith Butler writes of in *Precarious Life*:

11 BROWN Bill. (ed.). *Things*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 5.

maybe when we undergo what we do, something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us. It is not as if an 'I' exists independently over here and then simply loses a "you" over there, especially if the attachment to "you" is part of what composes who "I" am. If I lose you, under these conditions, then I not only mourn the loss, but I become inscrutable to myself. Who "am" I, without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level, I think I have lost "you" only to discover that "I" have gone missing as well.¹²

In an Eleonora Fabião performance, I never feel that I have gone missing. On the contrary—I feel I have found a new, unexpected part of myself.

12 BUTLER, Judith. *Precarious life*. New York-London: Verso, 2004, p. 22.

Postcard

Barbara Browning

I'm sitting at an outdoor table at a restaurant at the bottom of the *Escadaria Selarón* [Selarón Staircase] in the neighborhood of Lapa, Rio de Janeiro. The staircase is a famously, fantastically decorated set of steps leading from the Rua Joaquim Silva in Lapa up to the Rua Pinto Martins in Santa Teresa. A Chilean artist, Selarón, spent years covering the steps with porcelain tiles, a life's work he dedicated to "the Brazilian people" before, apparently, self-immolating on the altar of his own creation in 2013. In the course of covering the steps with thousands of colorful tiles, he both procured and received porcelain specimens from all over the world. But somehow the very eclecticism of the work reads as peculiarly Brazilian.



And, indeed, the steps have become a local picture postcard image, the backdrop for various advertising campaigns, music videos, and even the national bid for hosting the 2016 Olympic Games.

I've come to Rio to celebrate the baptism of the daughter of my friends, Eleonora and André. Valentina is a magical, impish, spirited child—but also wise beyond her years, and, in the fullest sense of the term, amazingly self-composed for her age,

which is 8. Maybe that sounds late for a baptism, but her parents took their time in figuring out how to do it right. I'm staying with their lovely friends, Felipe and Viniciús, at their house on the staircase. I came down here to the restaurant to get a bite to eat, and to write to a friend in France. I'm writing on a postcard, in a minuscule hand. I say: "At the bottom of the steps on the hill where I'm staying, there are two hotels—one on each side. On the right, there's a sign saying HOTEL P SOLTEIROS—Hotel for Single Men—and on the left is a sign saying HOTEL LOVE'S HOU. Presumably the letters S and E fell off."

Look, this was true—I later sent him an email with the photographic evidence:



The postcard I wrote this on didn't show any of the typical touristic scenarios of Rio—no Christ the Redeemer, no Sugarloaf Mountain—not even the *Escadaria Selarón*. It showed the long, thin, bare arms of a woman in a lime green t-shirt and blue jeans lifting a stack of hollow clay bricks. The tiny print on the other side said:

Quase nada, sempre tudo #1: 25 tijolos
Eleonora Fabião, 2012
Praça Tiradentes, Rio de Janeiro

À luz do dia, numa praça. Por horas seguidas fazer
e desfazer composições com 25 tijolos.

(In daylight, in a public square. For hours, making
and unmaking compositions with 25 bricks.)

Why did a Brazilian woman spend hours in a slightly squalid public square in Rio de Janeiro constructing and deconstructing compositions out of hollow clay bricks? Why did a Chilean man spend years gluing colorful bits of his own and other people's porcelain onto a stone staircase in the same city, only to snuff himself out on the meticulously assembled shards of so many lives? Maybe they were thinking about the same thing I was thinking about, sitting there at the bottom of the steps, looking to the left at the house of love, and then to the right, at the hotel of solitude. Our nationalism and our foreignness, our commonplaceness and our alienation, our playfulness and our desolation, our intimacy and our loneliness sometimes exist side by side. Maybe we can't even feel the one without the other.

•

Eleonora had given me a stack of postcards (*25 postais para o Rio* [*25 postcards for Rio*]), with images of some of her performance actions. But when she gave them to me, she told me it was conditional: I needed to circulate them. I needed to put the postcards in the mail. I've been doing it, but very slowly. It's so unusual for us to send things in the mail, the proper mail, now. Why does it feel like such an enormous task to write on her postcards and send them out into the world? It's not the bother of writing, of course, and it's not even the bother of putting the stamp on the card and taking it to the post office. I love electronic correspondence, I do a lot of it, in some ways I sometimes feel it's turned me into a kind of Victorian lady—correspondence takes up so much of my time and energy! I take it very seriously. But it's true that it's made writing on paper or card stock seem strangely, almost embarrassingly personal. Of course that's precisely why it's of interest to Eleonora. She establishes many intimacies that on the surface may not seem particularly inappropriate: to send a postcard. To have tea or drink water with someone at their home. To accept somebody's help navigating a crowded sidewalk. To have a brief or a long conversation in a public square. But it's precisely the conjuncture of contact and solitude, like those two hotels side by side, that makes one so distinctly aware of how potent, and difficult, intimacy can be.

•

What is the proper picture postcard of Rio de Janeiro? When Eleonora and André drove me in from the airport, it was just before the World Cup, and there were plenty of conversations going on about the face that Brazil would be presenting to the world, and to itself. Eleonora gestured toward the new Ponte do Saber, a recently constructed bridge that had been comically dubbed the "perna de bailarina" or "dancer's leg" by local taxi drivers. Not everybody was in agreement about its aesthetic merits.

The architect, Alexandre Chan, said he never intended for the structure to be read as figurative, but that indeed, in looking at it, one might see a fisherman, an aquatic bird, or, he conceded with a smile... a lady's up-ended leg. Like, a kicking can-can leg. Or an upside-down Barbie Doll leg.

The discomfiture of many citizens, of course, wasn't about the question of putting a lady's up-ended leg in Rio's picturesque Guanabara Bay. It was about the allocation of public monies toward another public construction that seemed more oriented to the image concerns of FIFA and the IOC than toward the needs of the urban populace. In fact, the bridge's enormously expensive construction was funded by Petrobras, the semi-public Brazilian multinational oil company, as a kind of penance for an oil spill some years ago in the bay. The governor welcomed the Ponte do Saber as a new "*cartão-postal da cidade*." But it begged the question: what was the image of that bay that the inhabitants of Rio might want to circulate? What constitutes the beauty of the city, and of the nation?

O pintor Paul Gauguin amou a luz na baía de Guanabara
O compositor Cole Porter adorou as luzes na noite dela
A baía de Guanabara
O antropólogo Claude Lévi-Strauss detestou a baía de Guanabara:
Pareceu-lhe uma boca banguela.
E eu menos a conhecera mais a amara?
Sou cego de tanto vê-la, de tanto tê-la estrela
O que é uma coisa bela?...¹

These are the opening lyrics of Caetano Veloso's 1989 song, "O Estrangeiro." *The painter Paul Gauguin loved the light in Guanabara Bay. The composer Cole Porter adored the lights in her night. Guanabara Bay. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss detested Guanabara Bay: it looked to him like a toothless mouth. And me, knowing her less, would I love her more? I'm blind from seeing her so much, from having her so much as a star. What is a beautiful thing?*

Most anyone who's been to Rio de Janeiro would have a hard time denying that there are certain views of the city that are exquisitely beautiful, combining uncanny land formations, lush, tropical vegetation, and the jewel-like lights of dense urbanity. If one speaks, rightly of course, of the "ugliness" of extreme economic disparity laid

¹ VELOSO, Caetano. "O estrangeiro." In: *Letra só: Caetano Veloso*. Selection and organization by Eucanaã Ferraz. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2003, p. 205.

so visible in the light of day, with the stark juxtaposition of costly high-rises and the impoverished, brutally policed favelas, it's a somewhat figurative use of the term ugliness. Particularly at night, the favelas also sparkle like golden constellations.

Still, there's something that rings vaguely true, today, about the passage from *Tristes Tropiques* that Caetano references:

It seems to me that the landscape in which Rio is set is out of proportion to its own dimensions. The Sugar Loaf Mountain, the Corcovado and the much-praised natural features appear to the traveller entering the bay like stumps sticking up here and there in a toothless mouth. Since these eminences are almost always swathed in a thick tropical mist, they seem totally unable to fill the horizon, for which in any case they would be inadequate. If you want a satisfactory view you must look at the bay from the landward side and look down upon it from the heights. On the seaward side, the optical illusion is the opposite of the one which obtains in New York; here, it is nature which has the appearance of an unfinished building-site.²

I write this, now, from New York, the storied "concrete jungle," and from my window glimpse an enormous crane that has, for months now, been my constant reminder of the unfinished and unfinishable business of "rebuilding" lower Manhattan.

But if my city and my country present a possibly menacing picture postcard of unrelenting development, what's to be made of Lévi-Strauss's inversion of the metaphor of the concrete jungle? What is it about the natural landscape of Rio that makes it, too, seem under perpetual, unfinishable construction? *Por horas seguidas fazer e desfazer composições com 25 tijolos...*

She also spent hours making and unmaking compositions of white bedsheets. Making and unmaking compositions of lumps of coal.

It's night. The favela sparkles. Each light is a star—a soul, or a little cluster of souls, maybe gathered around a flickering television screen, maybe two teenagers kissing under an exposed bulb in an alleyway, maybe a lone woman, opening a refrigerator door. How is she composing herself? How is she exposing herself? What does it mean for me to show you this, even if the image is only as I imagine it?

² LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Trans. John and Doreen Weightman. New York: Washington Square Press, 1977, p. 75.

Picture this postcard: Sugarloaf Mountain looms in the background, Guanabara Bay a placid, deep blue between, and in the foreground, on the patchy mix of dirt and weeds, a woman lies, prone, beside an open book.

Série Precários: Saudades do Brasil

Eleonora Fabião, 2013

Aterro do Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro

No chão: abrir o livro *Saudades do Brasil*, de Claude Lévi-Strauss – registro de viagem com séries de fotos dos índios nambikwaras (estado de Mato Grosso, década de 1930).

No chão: deitar-me como os fotografados e dar tempo ao tempo.

(On the ground: to open the book *Saudades do Brasil* by Claude Lévi-Strauss

—a register of his travels with a series of photos of the Nambikwara Indians

(state of Mato Grosso do Sul, 1930s).

On the ground: to lie down like the people in the photographs and let time pass.)

•

The following is another passage from *Tristes Tropiques*—perhaps the most famous one in the book—an old journal entry which he transcribes, nostalgically:

On the dark savannah, the camp fires sparkle. Near their warmth, which offers the only protection against the growing chill of the night; behind the frail screens of palm-fronts and branches, hurriedly set up on the side from which rain and wind are expected; next to the baskets filled with the pathetic possessions which constitute the community's earthly wealth; lying on the bare ground which stretches away in all directions and is haunted by other equally hostile and apprehensive bands, husbands and wives, closely intertwined, are aware of being each other's support and comfort, and the only help against day-to-day difficulties and that brooding melancholy which settles from time to time on the souls of the Nambikwara. The visitor camping with the Indians in the bush for the first time, is filled with anguish and pity at the sight of human beings so totally bereft; some relentless cataclysm seems to have crushed them against the ground in a hostile land, leaving them naked and shivering by their flickering fires. He gropes his way through the scrub, taking care not to knock against the hands, arms or chests that he glimpses as warm reflections in the glow of the flames. But the wretchedness is shot through with whisperings and chuckles. The couples embrace as if seeking to recapture a lost unity, and their

caresses continue uninterrupted as he goes by. He can sense in all of them an immense kindness, a profoundly carefree attitude, a naive and charming animal satisfaction and—binding these various feelings together—something which might be called the most truthful and moving expression of human love.³

On the ground. On the ground. Lying on the bare ground.

This passage and others like it have come under intense scrutiny, perhaps the most intense by Lévi-Strauss himself, who knew his projections placed him in a long line of French depictions of Brazil as an impossible, doomed land of pure nature. The sadness he finds in the tropics isn't just the sadness of a decimated indigenous population: it's also the sadness of the impossibility of his own desire for an unspoiled paradise. Still, even as he condemned Europeans' appropriations of indigeneity for their own fantasies, and even as he pointed toward the inherent violence of ethnographic inscription, he couldn't resist reproducing certain images of noble savagery. Perhaps the most violent ones are the most tender—the very images of the couples he takes care, groping his way through the scrub, not to knock up against, hoping discreetly to let them remain for that moment, at least, free of care. But to say it, of course, is to step all over that scene, and to photograph it, and to call that image the face of Brazil...

Surely for the image of indigeneity to become the picture postcard of the nation is problematic. But is its erasure any less troubling?

Eleonora is lying on the ground, like and not like the Nambikwara girl, naked and covered in dust, that Claude Lévi-Strauss photographed in Mato Grosso nearly eighty years ago. Eleonora is wearing blue jeans, a short-sleeved top, and sneakers. Her face is pressed to the ground, and she's trying to let time pass. Sugarloaf Mountain floats in the distance like a stump of a tooth in a mouth that's still under construction.

Caetano's song goes on: it's 1989 and he listens to the swirl of voices trying to figure out what, in the first direct elections since the military dictatorship, would be the political face of Brazil. And in that swirl of voices:

É chegada a hora da reeducação de alguém
Do Pai do Filho do Espírito Santo amém
O certo é louco tomar eletrochoque
O certo é saber que o certo é certo

3 LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude. *Tristes Tropiques*. Op. cit., p. 329-30.

O macho adulto branco sempre no comando
E o resto ao resto, o sexo é o corte, o sexo
Reconhecer o valor necessário do ato hipócrita
Riscar os índios, nada esperar dos pretos⁴

It's time for somebody's reeducation, of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, amen. The right thing is for the lunatic to undergo electroshock, the right thing is to know that what's right is right, the adult white male always in command, and the rest to the rest, sex is the cut, sex. Recognize the necessary value of the hypocritical act, erase the Indians, don't expect anything of the blacks.

And in this moment of alienation, as the emerging face of the nation takes a distressingly familiar shape, the singer is the foreigner, the stranger in his own land, even as he knows it's once again a moment to take to the national streets. One doesn't *only* take to the streets in explicit political manifestations, but also in those solitary moments when we're trying to find our bearings. Sometimes we understand our relationship to the nation at the very moment when we find ourselves most isolated and alone, walking against the wind, or lying on the ground—in this case, in the beautiful, ugly, wild, urban, toothless mouth that is the impossible, unfinished picture postcard of Brazil.

It's 2013. Brazil is still trying to figure itself out. Eleonora is pressing her face to the ground, trying to *dar tempo ao tempo* (literally, give time to time), to understand this moment and this place.

•

Eleonora often has a very specific contact with the ground. Sometimes it's the dirt. Sometimes it's the pavement. Rio de Janeiro is a city famous, also, for its pavement—the familiar wave patterns of the sidewalks along Copacabana—another picture postcard image. The mosaic stone surfaces are labor-intensive to maintain, and the technique of creating them seems anachronistic—archaic—and yet the municipal insistence on maintaining it extends to its efforts to accommodate the newest of technologies. In preparation for the World Cup, the city began hammering stone QR codes into the sidewalks so that visitors could point their cell phones at the patterns and access touristic information.

4 VELOSO, Caetano. "O estrangeiro." Op. cit., p. 206.



Meanwhile, Eleonora was exploring a very different relationship to the pavement beneath her feet. Instead of viewing the patterns from a distance, or pointing a cell phone at them, she was establishing a very intimate contact with those stones, which go by the name *pedras portuguesas* (Portuguese stones).

Série Precários: rampa do MAM
Eleonora Fabião, 2013
Aterro do Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro

À luz do dia, adesivar cores cítricas nas pedras portuguesas da rampa que conduz ao Museu de Arte Moderna do Rio de Janeiro.

(By daylight, to cover with citrus colors' duct tape the Portuguese stones that line the ramp leading up to the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro.)

She only colors the occasional stone. The acid orange pops out of each isolated stone like a small cry. Momentarily isolated like that, each colored stone seems to speak for the others, to make you want to hear them all.

What are the unspeaking voices in the urban multitude? What happens if we stop for a moment to listen to them as well?

Ação Carioca #1: converso sobre qualquer assunto
Eleonora Fabião, 2008
Largo da Carioca, Rio de Janeiro

Sentar numa cadeira, pés descalços,
diante de outra cadeira vazia (cadeiras da minha cozinha).
Escrever numa grande folha de papel:
CONVERSO SOBRE QUALQUER ASSUNTO.
Exibir o chamado e esperar.

*(To sit on a chair, barefoot, facing an empty chair (chairs from my kitchen).
To write on a large sheet of paper:
I'LL HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT ANY SUBJECT.
To display the invitation and wait.)*

The occasional person will take her up on it. Sometimes someone will choose to tell her a very intimate thing. She will also do so. Maybe something about their family

histories. Or they will discuss the best way to pick up a girl. Their economic precarity. Or remember somebody who hurt them. Or someone they love.

E entendo o centro do que estão dizendo

Aquele cara e aquela:

É um desmascaro

Singelo grito:

“O rei está nu”

Mas eu desperto porque tudo cala frente ao fato de que o rei é mais bonito nu⁵

And I understand the center of what they're saying, that guy, and that woman: it's an unmasking. Simple cry: "The Emperor has no clothes"—the King is naked—but I wake up, because everything is silent before the fact that the King is more beautiful naked.

I write on a postcard: “I think if we come here together one day, Felipe and Viniciús may invite us to stay with them, but maybe we could stay at Love’s House. Some of the ladies there appear to be professionals, but I imagine there are other couples who stay there...”

Another postcard, another action, more intimate contact with the *pedras portuguesas*:

Ação Carioca #3: linha
Eleonora Fabião, 2008
Largo da Carioca, Rio de Janeiro

Polir, com pasta de limpeza e escovão,
uma longa linha reta no calçamento.

*(To polish, with scouring paste and a brush,
a long straight line on the pavement.)*

What does it mean, to brush, as though one were brushing one’s own teeth, the stones beneath one’s feet? To treat each one as worthy of particular care?

I remember when I first walked through Pelourinho, the old town center in Bahia named after the pillory where slaves were once punished and displayed, now a central

⁵ VELOSO, Caetano. “O estrangeiro.” Op. cit., p. 206-7.

touristic point. It's paved in cobblestones, dark and round, difficult to walk on. Someone told me the name of those stones: cabeça-de-nêgo. Head of a black man.

That's what we were standing on.

•

Sou cego de tanto vê-la, de tanto tê-la estrela
O que é uma coisa bela?...

I'm blind from seeing her so much, from having her so much as a star. What is a beautiful thing?

We move through the city without seeing what we're stepping on, in part because if we really saw it, if we really saw its beauty and really heard every stone cry out, it would be unbearable. But maybe there's a way to see the city, and hear the city, with help, or giving help. Maybe we could navigate it less blindly if we'd allow ourselves to close our eyes, or close each other's eyes.

Two more postcards, two more actions:

Série Precários: toco tudo
Eleonora Fabião, 2011
Rua Uruguaiana, Rio de Janeiro

Com local de partida e de chegada preestabelecidos,
caminhar com os olhos fechados. Aceitar a ajuda de estranhos.
Tocar e ser tocada.

*(With pre-established starting and end points,
to walk with eyes closed. To accept the help of strangers.
To touch and be touched.)*

There's an image in which she's reaching out, precariously close to a tangle of men in motion, all but perhaps one seemingly oblivious to her situation. This one is glancing in her direction, apparently puzzled. But there's another image in which someone seems to have proffered his arm. A brown man in a suit and tie, who awkwardly extends his elbow for Eleonora to cling to. Her eyes closed, the man appears to look down, almost timidly, as if wanting not to over-extend the intimacy of his aid. It's very tender.

Another:

Série Precários: passeio na praça
Eleonora Fabião, 2013
Praia Vermelha, Rio de Janeiro

Propor a um frequentador da praça levá-lo para um passeio.
Condição: aceitar ter os olhos vendados.
Na bolsa: frutas, pincel, pluma, esponja, ervas aromáticas, lençol, água, etc.

*(To propose to people on the square, to take them on a stroll.
Condition: to accept having their eyes blindfolded.
In the handbag: fruit, paintbrush, feather, sponge, aromatic herbs, a bed sheet, water, etc.)*

I'm not sure—is that Valentina behind the blindfold? It's a child, anyway, with a face of utter delight. You could say a magical child, impish, spirited—and seemingly on the verge of discovering something very important, something beyond her years.

Eleonora, did I ask you this?

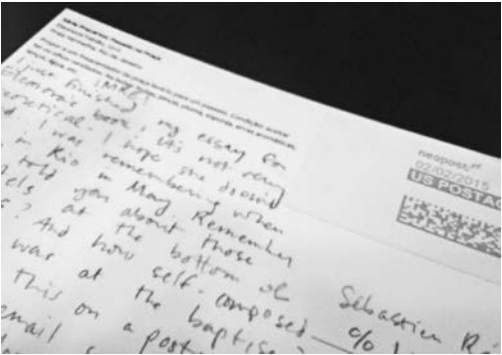
O que é uma coisa bela?
What is a beautiful thing?

•

I write on the postcard:

"I just finished writing my essay for Eleonora's book! It's not very theoretical—I hope she doesn't mind. I was remembering when I was in Rio in May. Remember how I told you about those two hotels at the bottom of the steps? And how self-composed Valentina was at the baptism? I'm sending this on a postcard and not an email so the postman can also see this beautiful face. I love you."

— Barbara Browning



For an ethics of the strange

Tania Rivera

I imagine Eleonora Fabião silent, standing in the middle of the world. At a slight movement of her hands, the invisible strings connecting us to each other would suddenly start vibrating. The artist's small gesture would ripple, undulating, until it spreads along the streets, through the houses and buildings, in the cars and in the passersby, touching each and every one of us, unpredictably and almost imperceptibly. Then, unlike the maestro that remains firm, master of his orchestra, Eleonora would immediately begin to dissolve, blending with the people, the ground and the buildings, the honking horns and the voices, the babbles and sighs of the big city.

To make vibrate the strings that resound among us is a grand feat, but there is nothing spectacular about it. It can only be done in small, punctual, discreet, and scarcely visible actions, thanks to almost gratuitous acts inscribed between dream, word, and body. Such subtle interventions emerge on the world scene and destabilize it in order to redraw the lines, the ties, the web we call life.

•

Eleonora Fabião's most emblematic work is perhaps the one called precisely *Line*, ongoing since 2010. The artist asked an acquaintance to arrange a meeting with somebody she didn't know, and to provide her with just the date, time, and place. Without even knowing the name of the person that would welcome her at home, Fabião would bring Brazilian coffee, tea, and sugar (she was living in New York at the time). During the encounter the artist and this person were supposed to discover/ create an action they both wanted to do together. Then they would schedule the second encounter, before which the necessary measures would be taken for the planned work. Have executed the action, the collaborator would be asked to choose

an acquaintance and arrange a new meeting between him or her and the artist—so that the line is drawn from one person to another, from one point to another in space and time, in a virtually infinite zigzag.

The artist's motivation is not to make friends with each collaborator in *Line*, but to form a pact that allows two persons to achieve such actions as to hold hands and dive into the ice-cold waters of the Hudson River, or to "plant" a fig tree in one of their bellies, on the deck of the Staten Island Ferry. However, I suspect that the action in itself is not the most important thing for Fabião. The strange invitation to conceive a joint action is the password to a universe habitually kept secret and rarely shared: each one's daydreams and crazy fantasies. The action's project is thus a kind of decoy to arrive at something else even more important: what Fabião calls "affective circulations." Among words and bodies, gestures and dreams, such circulations lead to a passage, to a transformation: to a "pass,"¹ as the artist says. Something passes and is transmitted between the persons involved, and that is precisely what should materialize in a joint action, lived like a kind of celebration of such event. For Fabião, the performance thus redefines itself as a "performative pass."

The idea of performative pass thus reclaims something vast and ancient, which I will call here—somewhat prosaically—*poetic encounter*: that to which art invites us and which always involves *others*, even when it does not corporeally present a specific other. What *happens* in art (when it happens, since there are no guarantees, only invitations, wagers, and addressings), always implies some degree of sharing: it's about something that takes place *between us*, and which may occasionally happen outside of art, when life itself is art. Throughout the encounters in *Line*, the artist perceives that this work "spawns peculiar modes of contact, unexpected affective circulations, highly agile personal disconfigurations and reconfigurations" and—doubtless most importantly—it generates "a unique form of pleasure—something I had never experienced before."² The action consists of a complex and ritualized montage—a score—that attempts to trigger something unique: an affective and bodily experience, a desiring and strangely pleasurable encounter.

It may sound surprising that such a poetic encounter happens during such short contact as proposed in *Line*, with no prior situation of familiarity. But it may be that the encounter's sharpness and force depend precisely on a certain anonymity and a *heterotopia*—perhaps I can only truly encounter somebody outside of my habitual

¹ Editors' Note: In Brazilian Portuguese, "passe" means both "pass," as in going through, but also a spell to open someone's paths and ways. Rivera explicitly plays with both senses of the word regarding Fabião's work.

² As Eleonora Fabião says in a talk entitled "a performance called *Line*: encounters with the encounter."

circles, apart from the place in which I and my others already have defined positions. Art thus delineates and reconfigures singular space-times, opening windows in the everyday scene—and flipping my place in it.

Line thus demonstrates a fundamental but habitually denied fact: we need strangers. The stranger is not the one that comes to disturb the idyll of the similar, but rather the one that is both valued and feared, having the power to break the bonds of my own identity and open me up to something else—which for lack of a fixed name we vaguely call *poetry*.

•

Modern Western thought is hostage to the notion of identity, which allows autonomously designing a single *I* to which the *other* is opposed. The latter can be the similar—the one whose identity is different from but analogous to mine—or the stranger, whose identity is dissimilar to mine and who can be either feared and distrusted or idealized and envied in his exoticism. Discourses in favor of approaching and valuing the stranger frequently tend to construct a well-designed figure of the other with a proper identity, and thus reinforce the stranger's difference in relation to the *I*. Although well-intentioned and so important today, praise for alterity can thus reinforce my identity and my belonging to my peer group, with the paradoxical consequence that the stranger is kept at a distance. Only the encounter in which my own identity is cracked and thrown into a crisis, as is the stranger's, is capable of providing a real experience of the other (that in which "I am another," as Rimbaud wrote, highlighting the experience of uncanniness at the core of his poetic work).

The uncanny is sometimes another name for poetry, and its greatest theoretician is Sigmund Freud in his famous work *Das Unheimliche* (*The Uncanny*) from 1919. The strange and unsettling is at the same time familiar, as shown by this curious German term, the meaning of which oscillates between two extremes: the most uncanny is what turns around and suddenly reveals itself very close and intimate. The estrangement of the world, which literature and art can operate masterfully, but which may also be experienced in specific situations in daily life, is for the psychoanalyst linked to the experience of the double, in which the *I* itself becomes stranger. This event's minimalist model is the situation in which, for a split second, one does not recognize one's own image in the mirror. I am, in part, stranger to myself—and this is one possible way of defining what psychoanalysis calls the *unconscious*.

Avoiding the identity trap contained in the term *other* in its opposition to *I*, the strange, the stranger, can name that which cannot be clearly demarcated in relation to me, since although different, the strange/stranger proves to be fundamentally

familiar to me. While the other is the one that traditionally plays the role of alterity as an identitary complement (the *alter ego*), the strange/stranger's position is that of *otredad* (*otherness*), to use a term from Octavio Paz. "Poetry is the search for others, the discovery of otherness,"³ posits the Mexican poet and critic. Art seeks others—since it is always addressed to somebody—but what is encountered in it is something else: the dimension of difference as inherent to the very *I*. Eleonora Fabião follows this same path when she recognizes and valorizes the "strange and strangeness as modes of knowledge and relationship,"⁴ attributing to the performative act nothing less than the power to "reveal the strangeness-of-all-things."⁵ For the artist, performance is, therefore, about assuming the strange as *method*.

Thus, the action *Converso sobre qualquer assunto* [*I will have a conversation about any subject*], performed in various cities around the world beginning in 2008, consists of a mundane situation, that of talking with people on the street, activated by a setting that consists of two kitchen chairs and a large sheet of paper announcing the title. Its performance as *Ação Carioca #1* [*Carioca Action #1*], on the square called Largo da Carioca in downtown Rio de Janeiro, explored a practice which is not uncommon on Rio's streets, namely striking up a conversation with a stranger in situations of physical proximity, like standing on a queue, etc. However, by providing a chair for the stranger and making herself available for any subject—and not only quick comments on a shared situation, as usually happens—the artist expands the limits of this practice, erasing the borders between public and intimate, friend and stranger, place of passage and place of conviviality. In a subtle poetic shift, she questions what is really traded—what is at stake—in each conversation, no matter how banal and everyday.

Something is traded: mine becomes yours, and yours mine. Or could it be that "mine" already belonged to the other? The most intimate can prove to be *extimate*, to employ Lacan's beautiful neologism. The world is something that is shared in fluid demarcations, in transitions—and transactions—between us. In *Série Precários: troco tudo* [*Precarious Series: to trade everything*, 2013], Fabião makes this negotiation the core of her practice. In a busy and popular place like Feira de São Cristóvão, a market and meeting place in Rio de Janeiro, she approaches strangers, successively, asking whether they want to trade something with her, until she has replaced all the pieces of clothing, footwear, and accessories she started with.

3 PAZ, Octavio. *O arco e a lira*. Rio de Janeiro: Nova Fronteira, 1982, p. 319.

4 In the talk "a performance called *Line*: encounters with the encounter," as mentioned in note 2.

5 Idem.

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It's about exploring a zone of exchange between me and the other, so as to put into practice a *strange* way of being, and thus renounce the unification and fixation of identities. This proposal, which is simultaneously aesthetic, subjective, and political in a broad sense, echoes a fundamental question for Brazilian modernism. The Manifesto Antropófago [Anthropophagic Manifesto] by writer Oswald de Andrade, customarily considered a milestone for Brazilian modernism, already proclaimed in 1928: "I am only interested in what is not mine." The Anthropophagic Movement was thus inaugurated, in which Brazil's colonial position was culturally assumed (and subverted) in an anarchic swallowing of the European artistic movements. If Anthropophagy brought out a certain Brazilianness, in which tropical colors and themes abound, its basis did not consist of the affirmation of national identity. Quite to the contrary; central to Anthropophagy was a critical treatment of the very notion of identity—"I am only interested in what is not mine," precisely, because what is my own is problematic and complex, derived from miscellaneous appropriations, as demonstrated so well by Brazil's history.

(Identity is a line that departs in many directions.)

In the Anthropophagic Manifesto, Andrade's point of departure is a noteworthy reading of Freud's famous *Totem and Taboo*, from 1913. The book reconstructs the origin of civilization through the myth of the primitive horde, dominated by a perverse father until the brothers joined together and killed him. In a totemic banquet, each brother swallowed part of the dead father's body, and through this incorporation identified with him, thenceforth sharing their belonging to that group, the social "identity" that the taboos and other totemic practices would maintain and reinforce, in contrast with other groups. Thus did society emerge with its laws and prescriptions.

Oswald de Andrade proposes a subversion of this narrative, based on the substitution of the totemic banquet by a 16th century anthropophagic ritual of the Tupi Indians on the Brazilian coast. The cannibalism of this indigenous people consisted of eating the brave enemy, the valiant prisoner of war, after a long period of contact in which he was familiarized, receiving a name and wife and enjoying freedom, but curiously not taking advantage of such freedom to flee his captivity. The anthropophagic feast in which this familiar-stranger was incorporated at the end of this process was by no means the mere elimination of an undesirable foreigner or a punishment for war crimes, but rather a curious, long, and ritualized experience of alterity. As indicated by anthropologist Renato Sztutman, cannibalism should thus be seen as "an ethics,"⁶ to

the extent that it consists of putting oneself in the other's place (as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has been highlighting in his anthropological writings).

(Still, this experience of the other has an extremely violent facet: that of the rawness of cannibalism, which the allegorical use of the practice by Andrade is unable to totally silence. Perhaps the encounter with the other is not only pleasurable, since the presence of the body implies a "friction of presences," to quote a formula by Fabião,⁷ even before any transaction takes place between the different /s. Intertwined with pleasure is perhaps, latent, some dose of anguish.)

Far from claiming a given indigenous identity, anthropophagy is about a model of incorporating the other that doubts identity and plays with the borders between the I and the other, in a constant and constitutive exchange, in a game in which the body and subject stand out and couple with each other in a certain mobility. It's about a mode of identifying with the other that presupposes and assumes a de-centering in the conception of "oneself." "Tupi or not tupi," proclaims the Anthropophagic Manifesto—and by parodying Shakespeare, the main Brazilian indigenous group (the Tupi people) is thus ironically affirmed in English. In Brazilian art and literature, this marks a critical conceptualization of the position of the colonized, translated as playful and allegorical appropriations of European modernist canons, as seen especially in the twists performed by Oswald de Andrade's writing upon the surrealist model—and later in the reinvention of Joyce by Guimarães Rosa in *Grande sertão: veredas* [*The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*]. More or less latent over the course of the subsequent decades, the anthropophagic élan is explicitly resumed in the music and in the arts by the Tropicalist Movement in 1967.

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Throughout the 1960s, artists like Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica make art's core a certain identity shift, assuming the work of art as a proposition, an invitation to the other. This proposal goes far beyond the notion of "audience interaction," to the extent that it radically questions the autonomous position of both the artist and the work itself. Only the other can complete the work of art, which does not exist otherwise: such is the fundamental proposal, which echoes the core of the anthropophagic proposal and unfolds in numerous and varied works, with nuances that of course I will

6 SZTUTMAN, Renato. "O retorno dos antropófagos." In: XXIV Bienal de São Paulo. *Antropofagia e histórias de canibalismos*. Available at <http://www.escolasaopaulo.org/ESCOLA%20SP%20PDF%202013%20.pdf>, p. 12.

7 FABIÃO, Eleonora. "Corpo cênico, estado cênico." *Revista Contrapontos-Eletrônica*, 10(3):323, Sept.-Dec. 2010. Available at <http://www6.univali.br/seer/index.php/rc/article/view/2256/1721>.

not have time to analyze in this short essay. I only wish to highlight that the body has central importance in these proposals, but in general it is not about the artist's own body, but that of others. The body appears in a fundamentally critical way and is never considered as evidence in itself. To the extent that unitary identity is questioned, the body can no longer be a guarantee of its delimitation. It thus becomes a kind of critical instrument, and may be taken as the seat of perceptions that allow one to extend beyond perception (towards the *Suprassensorial* [*Suprasensory*], of Oiticica), as the crossroads of aesthetic, cultural, and political questions (in the *Parangolés*, also by Oiticica), as the place of fantasies to be lived and put into words collectively (in *Fantasmática do corpo* [*Phantasmastic of the Body*], by Lygia Clark), as the terrain for a transformation of the subject (in *Estruturação do self* [*Structuring of the Self*], that Clark presents as psychotherapy), etc. Whatever the case, in the final analysis, the body as such is irremediably *lost* (I think of *Nostalgia do corpo* [*Longing for the Body*])—Clark, still and always).

Eleonora Fabião's work reverberates this critical and propositional tradition, making the interrelationship with the other her central thrust, in a questioning and transforming way. In a *strange* way. Her position is fundamentally ethical—we can call it the "ethics of the strange" (but perhaps this is superfluous; to the extent that the ethics should always be that of the stranger, it is the ethics that should lead us to experience the other's place).

Lygia Clark's presence is especially striking in Fabião's trajectory, which sometimes resumes collective propositions like *Baba antropofágica* [*Anthropophagic Slobber*, 1973]—precisely Clark's proposition that explicitly reveals the importance of the anthropophagic legacy in her work. "We seek the other to encounter him and ourselves," writes Fabião. And she proceeds, "The search is narcissistic in its resemblances. The search is overwhelming in its fear of perdition."⁸ (As I copied this quote, I typed: "in the *midst* of perdition"—perhaps because I believe that such perdition is the object not only of fear, but also of a certain attraction). At any rate, as the artist proclaims in concluding, "The search is transformative in difference." The other's difference is pursued as a possibility of uncanniness and transformation of oneself—and of the other. And of the world.

As *Line* makes explicit, it's about isolating and highlighting—as in a laboratory experiment—the very fabric of our daily life: the web between me and the others, the interweaving in which familiarity and difference alternate and sometimes mix, so as

⁸ FABIÃO, Eleonora. *9 dias, 89 instantâneos*. Insert in *Encontro: Rumos Itaú Cultural Teatro 2010-2012*. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2013.

to indicate to us—and make us explore and enjoy—our own hidden uncanniness. From this fabric, Fabião removes some threads to make us feel, nakedly and truly, what happens between me and the other, but which is usually found buried in the conventional spheres of friendship, of amorous relations, of work contacts, etc. The word "transactions" is dear to the artist. In *Line*, the encounter is intimate, even though delimited by the rules of the work of art (or perhaps *thanks to them*), since a singular invitation is formulated: to share desires and daydreams. For Fabião, it's about "generating performative programs that generate stories"⁹—the performance aims to incite phantasmatic narratives, it wants words-subject to emerge (which are not exclusively of one or the other, but are immediately *between* them). The invitation to joint action is thus as crazy as the proposal to dream together ("I dream of a long dream where everyone would dream [...] / I dream on the shore of the world and of the night," as Louis Aragon writes¹⁰).

(And the line walks from person to person, unpredictable like life, infinite like the dream.)

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Such intimate contact with the other inevitably involves the body. Its presence, its friction with the world and with other bodies. But the body is not everything. Its presence in itself does not guarantee the encounter capable of unraveling threads. Perhaps the body is not a piece of evidence, but a trigger: something that incites a reconfiguration of the elements in a given system. The body serves to cross doors and spaces, to touch objects and other bodies, it is the territory of transaction with the world, of passage, of *pass*. The body crosses borders, it is between one and the other, the body itself is "something intermediate" as the Portuguese poet Mário de Sá-Carneiro wrote of himself. "Your body, this stage"—this "fluid" stage, says Eleonora¹¹—in it we crisscross the world and others. And in order to be between one and another subject, the body cannot be whole, it has to be the contrary of the image in which identity finds its imagetic anchor. The body thus shows itself the way—I believe—it really is: *in parts*.

I'm moved by the photographs of feet, hands, and navels that Fabião takes of each participant in *Line*. Rather than affirming and showing the body of the other in its entirety—and thus reaffirm its monadic alterity—the artist poetically tweezes out parts

⁹ In the talk "a performance called *Line*: encounters with the encounter," as mentioned in note 2.

¹⁰ ARAGON, Louis. *Une vague de rêves*. Paris: Seghers, 1990, p. 28.

¹¹ FABIÃO, Eleonora. "Corpo cênico, estado cênico." Op. cit., 322.

of the body, in an intimate and even amorous act. In fact, the body is always in pieces. This is an important lesson from psychoanalysis: the bodily unit is a construction that coincides with the formation of the fiction we call *I*. The infant sees its image in the mirror, and recognizes itself for the first time. Its body, previously unperceived as unified and not clearly demarcated from the exterior, suddenly shapes itself to the identification with this image, in which it finds its limits and its surface for sharing with the other. Only at this moment, inside and outside are clearly highlighted, and an “internal” *I* takes shape and opposition to the other and to the world’s other elements. Unified thanks to an identification with a mirror image that leaves out part of its bodily experience, the *I* thus crystalizes itself in a fundamental alienation, as stated by Jacques Lacan.

But another fundamental point needs to be stated. In front of the mirror, it is another’s gaze that confirms to the infant: that is its body, and thus that image is what it *must be*. Here, it is not merely any other, but somebody that loves it and on which it depends to survive—mother, father, or some other figure invested with this role. The body only becomes proper if the other recognizes and confirms it, if the other looks at it, and upon looking at it, loves it in some way. The body makes itself in the amorous crisscrossing of gazes. It is only “proper” when it is taken by the other as “alien.” That is why “the performative body,” as Fabião says, can only be “a field of relations,” an “interplace.”¹²

(Body does not exist without the other’s gaze. One is never alone on the world’s stage.)

By inscribing itself between me and the other, the bodily image that sustains the illusory unit of the *I* takes and transforms the place (the *interplace*) which was occupied before it by a certain fundamental object: the mother’s breast. In the Freudian narrative construction that attempts to explain the origin of desire, it is the object that allows the passage from necessity (the food which is breast milk) to desire (of the body, of the mother’s presence). At first, it is not perceived as “outside,” as part of another body, but occupies a zone of indiscernibility between the infant and the nursing mother. To experience the lack of the mother’s breast at the moment in which one yearns for it thus corresponds to an experience of bodily loss that founds the desiring movement as search of the lost object. The object of desire, which we always attempt to reencounter, is that which was once part of me (and of the other).

Thus, the body does not clearly demarcate an *I* in presence, but always carries with it, uncannily, the other and the object. The body is dubious: on the one hand, my

12 FABIÃO, Eleonora. “Corpo cênico, estado cênico.” Op. cit., 323.

body coincides with my *I* which relates to objects, and on the other hand, my body itself is an object—not only for the other that relates to me, but also for myself, that I *have* a body more than I *am*, as our everyday speech reveals. That is why the body is an intertwining, a chiasm in the flesh of the world (as Maurice Merleau-Ponty says)—it is a zone of intersection in which some objects of the world can take place, those that mark an intersection between me and the other. Such interplace of the object is the same one that, beginning in 1976, Lygia Clark aimed to activate in her “therapeutic” proposal *Structuring of the Self*, using beautiful and precarious objects made of plastic bags, air, stone, net, fabric, sand, water, etc., that she calls *relational objects*, borrowing Donald Winnicott’s psychoanalytical concept.

(Body is what is split between me and the other, making us lose a certain object between us.)

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Any object of the world, whether preexistent or created by me, can thus be sown with body, or rather, with presence, with *inter-presence*, so long as I inject a little of me into it, in a poetic operation that I like to call *dissemination*. In this operation, one puts into practice and actualizes the fact that the subject does not properly inhabit its interior, clearly demarcated from the objects—on the contrary, the subject only becomes itself *outside of itself*, in the objects. Such a strange condition appears to me to furnish the implicit basis of art’s adventure. Any object, anything of the world can become art, so long as a presence of the subject germinates in it (with surprise and uncanniness, I find in one of Fabião’s writings precisely the beautiful expression “seed object”). In addition, the same gesture of dissemination implies that such presence be promptly addressed to others, making the object a kind of *object-pass*. The small but powerful gesture that I spoke of at the beginning of this essay is perhaps that of sowing—oneself, becoming an-other—in the scattered elements of the world. (In some we germinate. In others we die).

In several, we reencounter the form pregnant of life of things. Thus it was on Praça Tiradentes, in 2012, in the action *Quase nada, sempre tudo #1: 25 tijolos* [*Almost nothing, always everything #1: 25 bricks*]. For hours, Eleonora Fabião made and unmade, with her body, compositions with these elements. A photograph showing an arm and part of the side of the body aligned with a line of bricks shows in an unequivocal way such dissemination of the body—or rather, of something more than the body, but which the body indicates: of a certain presence in the world’s objects. The body is outside of itself: in the objects, rather, between itself and the objects. Or rather: the presence

is not in the body itself, but in what it sows *outside*: in the world, in the object, in the other. “The inter-place of presence is in our body what is not in us,” in Fabião’s words.¹³ (With bricks, as with the body, a fragile architecture of the subject is constructed).

In *Quase nada, sempre tudo #3: 9 lençóis* [*Almost nothing, always everything #3: 9 bed sheets*], performed on the same city square in 2013, with a score analogous to the first work in the series, a kind of dance is done between the performer’s body and the bed sheets, in which both body and fabric become *bodies* (that disseminate in the air each gesture performed there, for the gaze of others). Fabric or bricks thus subtract themselves from the logic of merchandise, of consumption, to become pieces of subject that offer themselves to the gaze and body of the other. They are things that are traded, as we saw in the action *Troco tudo*, which the artist only concludes when she has replaced (passed on) everything that originally covered her body. The banknotes themselves are nothing more than that, in the end: an appendix of my body, addressed to the other, to trade (in *Série Precários: dinheiro* [*Precarious Series: money*, 2012], Fabião attaches to her forehead a wire longer than her arm can reach, on the end of which she hangs a banknote).

In the object-pass or object-seed, even before Lygia Clark’s *relational object*, we hear the echoes of the theory of the *non object* formulated by poet and critic Ferreira Gullar in 1960. Before a work by Clark composed of moveable wooden parts, Gullar believed that he had found neither an object in the usual sense of the term, with its use and meaning, nor the object which philosophically would be the complement of the subject, but a *non object*: something that refuses itself as object, but meanwhile is capable of inviting the other to experience it as subject. As refusal and resistance to the objectification of the world, Eleonora Fabião can explore this negative power of the object so as to nearly make it disappear—like the water that she repeatedly pours from a silver pitcher to a pottery jug and back, on the street and occasionally with help from passersby, until nothing is left (*Ação Carioca #7: jarros* [*Carioca Action #7: pitchers*, 2008]; *Ação Bogotana #2: jarros* [*Bogotana Action #7: pitchers*, 2009]; *Ação Fortalezaense #5: jarros* [*Fortalezense Action #7: pitchers*, 2010]; *Ação Rio-Pretense #5: jarros* [*Rio-Pretense Action #7: pitchers*, 2012]). Any and whatever object can thus dematerialize, perhaps to become the seed of a gesture to share.

Art thus appears to be about bringing some body to make present the absent object, or to highlight some object to make present the body that is not there. Or even to assemble a complex interaction between body and object so as to make them alternate and exchange with each other in favor of a strange presence. At any rate, we

13 FABIÃO, Eleonora. “Corpo cênico, estado cênico.” Op. cit., 322.

can say that art is always *a bit of body*, even though what is really at stake, the poetic encounter, is immaterial (the parts and images of the body, like those of the object, can only give news of it).

In fact, we can only keep remains or vestiges of this. Photographs, words. More than recording a passing action, which indeed would have the statute of art, the function of reports and images is to retransmit the encounter and disseminate it in us, in the world. In this dissemination, the act of writing plays a key role in Eleonora Fabião’s work. Her actions involve continuous work with words, both in prior notes and in formulations stemming from bodily practices. The artist “sweats” ideas and gives body to words. She claims she needs to “sculpt verbal mass”¹⁴ in order to move on, and her verbal sculptures should in fact be read as poetry, in a literary practice that may occasionally be presented independently, although organically interwoven with her actions. Taking a closer look, the artist’s propositions reveal themselves as complex montages of gestures and words, bodies and places, spaces and objects. The texts and public talks by Fabião (who is also a university professor) are part of these montages, in essayistic writing that also invites the listener or reader to a *pass*, to the performative pass. It’s about launching, at each moment, a circuit open to life, an affective circulation, a spark cast into the world like a shipwreck’s message-in-the-bottle in the vast sea.

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In *Line*, in addition to the pictures of navels, feet, and hands, Eleonora Fabião photographs windows and front doors on people’s homes. From the body to the dwelling place she thus draws a line. From each to their cave, an inscription is engraved like that of the prehistoric men that produced negative images of their hands placed on the rock wall by blowing saliva with pigment on them. Vestige of presence—past. Our relationship with space is that of marking the place of someone that was there. In *Ação Carioca #3: linha* [*Carioca Action #3: line*], from 2008, Fabião used scouring paste and a scrub brush to polish a long straight line on the cobblestone paving on Largo da Carioca, a dense region of passage in downtown Rio de Janeiro. It’s about “opening zones of indiscernibility in the city’s body,” as the artist says. Zones between city and people, between me and the other, between me and myself thus emerge in the urban landscape, thanks to a bodily gesture that inscribes the subject on the living fabric of the world. Because “if the performer evidences the body, it is to make the body-world evident.”¹⁵ And to make

14 FABIÃO, Eleonora. “Corpo cênico, estado cênico.” Op. cit., 321.

15 FABIÃO, Eleonora. “Performance e teatro: poéticas e políticas da cena contemporânea.” In: *Próximo ato: teatro de grupo*. São Paulo: Itaú Cultural, 2011, p. 240

the body-world evident is to transform and recreate the city (which acts build the city in which we wish to live?—asks Fabião).

But the inscription of the subject on the body-world is, as seen in this *Ação Carioca #3*, subtle and transitory—urban grime will soon reoccupy the paving homogeneously, through the action of pedestrians’ shoes, dust from the cars, and perhaps some rain. It’s about a mobile and infinite writing of the body on the city’s text, and it can even consist of nothing more than the artist’s moving around the streets (with eyes closed as if to make the presence of the body more concrete, in *Série Precários: toco tudo* [*Precarious Series: to touch everything*], Rio de Janeiro 2012 and Montreal 2014, touching things and persons and being touched by them—and, of course, accepting help from strangers). The world is made from the inscriptions—not always imagetic, sometimes nearly invisible, and always remaking themselves—of the subject in the surrounding elements. Amorous dissemination of what is most intimate to me in space, on the street, in the enormous world that I will never succeed in encompassing.

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The images by Eleonora that I like most are the ones in which her body follows the score of the Nambikwara Indians lying on the ground, that Lévi-Strauss portrays in his *Saudades do Brasil* (*Série Precários: Saudades do Brasil* [*Precarious Series: Saudades do Brasil*, 2013]). The artist’s body delivers itself to the thin grass with the Sugarloaf Mountain as the picture-postcard background—the ground I frequently tread during my walks in search of air and immenseness, I now realize. The body’s abandonment to the earth brings to my mind an intimate, beautiful, and painful episode—my seven-year-old daughter who, for the first time in front of the tombstone of her recently deceased father, embraces the earth with all her body, face-down, corporeally materializing the transcendental in the word *saudade*.

Saudade for the other is *saudade* for myself, in the world.

In 2008, Eleonora Fabião launches her *Ações* [*Actions*] on Largo da Carioca city square.¹ There are moments when Eleonora meets people. There are moments when they talk. There are moments when she reads out into space. There are moments when she arrives at the clock on the square by tracing in her mind a straight line seven blocks long and following it with her eyes closed. There are moments when the line is done by her polishing the square's pavement clean as she goes along. There are moments of waiting on that square—Eleonora brings chairs from home, takes off her shoes, and sits. There are moments when she invites artists she knows to lie on the ground, on cardboard if they prefer, and she applies Reiki on them. There are moments when the air and its heat and humidity become the protagonists—Eleonora pours water back and forth between a silver pitcher and a clay jug until it evaporates. I've been following *Ações* since the beginning, recording them with photos and videos, and I perceive that each of them, through its distinct durations and reverberations, foments a circuit of intimacy with the space where it happens. An intimacy built in the ways of contact with the ground, in the relationship with dirt, in the shifting of furniture from home to the street, as well as in the inflections in the temporal relations with waiting, with the place's historicity, with the posthumous memoirs of Brás Cubas.²

1 *Ações Cariocas* [*Carioca Actions*, 2008] is the first series developed in Rio de Janeiro. Eleonora has written about the work and published slightly different versions: "Acciones Cariocas: Siete Acciones para Rio de Janeiro." *Conjunto: Revista de Teatro Latinoamericano*, 153, Oct-Dec. 2009 (Cuba: Casa de Las Americas.); "On Precariousness and Performance: 7 Actions for Rio de Janeiro." *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory*, 20(1), March 2010 (New York); and "Ações Cariocas: 7 Ações para o Rio de Janeiro." *Cavalo Louco – Revista de Teatro da Tribo de Atuadores Ói Nós Aqui Traveiz*, 5(8):14-18, July 2010 (Porto Alegre).

Ações are works done in public space. I understand space in Nigel Thrift's terms: a hybrid of "concretions, settings, and flows."³ *Ações* create and evoke relations in space and time that fill the city square with the strange and the familiar. This ambiguous relationship generates the intimacy I refer to—intimacy which is a way of positioning oneself, of approaching strangely and familiarly, or even an act of lust. Establishing intimacy with that place is also in some way establishing intimacy with the broader spheres that compose it; not only with that specific public site, but with public space in general. *Ações Cariocas* [*Carioca Actions*] was followed by other actions at Praça Tiradentes, Praia Vermelha, São Cristóvão, Arpoador, Ipanema, and Paineiras, and in cities like Berlin, Bogotá, Fortaleza, Montreal, and others.

Intimacy

The body is a fundamental element in *Ações*. I understand body in Thrift's terms: a hybrid of "concretions, settings, and flows."⁴ To emphasize the body's importance, using the same exact terms with which Thrift defines space, seems vital to me at this moment. As never before, Brazilians are discussing the need to materialize democracy, to understand the public thing as a mixture of bodies and spaces. As I write this article and think of the body as a constitutive element of the public space, I echo the dominant restlessness in the country's streets and squares; restlessness with powers of the state, of the market, and of capital, that forge their sovereignty through discursive flows. Indeed, these powers pose as if they were disembodied, precisely in order to dissipate in multiple embodiments, none of which sufficiently represents their domains. As Michel de Certeau says, the violence of the powers-that-be takes place through "a linguistic dissemination which no longer has an author, but becomes a discourse or indefinite citation of the other."⁵ In Brazil, this violence grounded in the field of the symbolic found an embodied, massive, and spatialized response in the June 2013 protests. Suddenly the system and its violence—the authorship of which is abstract, unnamable, and uncapturable because it is disembodied and not localizable—was caught by its lower zones through the crowd's tactile insurgence against

2 Editors' Note: "The posthumous memoirs of Brás Cubas" is a reference to the title of Machado de Assis' homonymous novel, also translated into English as *Epitaph of a Small Winner*. Fabião reads a section of this novel at dusk, as one of the *Ações Cariocas*.

3 THRIFT, Nigel. *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. London-New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 20.

4 Idem.

5 CERTEAU, Michel de. *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, p. 1.

the physicality of its generic, amorphous architectures. Counter-politics surged in the streets, a counterforce to that rhetorical oppression: the tactile struggle repelling the establishment and its symbols, blocking its flows and sometimes acting violently through regressions and physical struggles. Thus, given the impossibility of breaking the financial system as a whole, bank agencies became targets. If public transportation in fact fails to serve the masses, buses are prevented from circulating. If the election campaign mechanisms raise doubts as to the democratic legitimacy of the vote, Rio's City Council is occupied. The protests' tactile tactics recognize that to act on something is to interpellate its phenomenon. The violence that is materialized as physicality takes a stance against the underlying violence of the "civilized discourse."

Beginning five years earlier, *Ações* also participated in a response to the sovereign regimes of violence. There was no way they could not have. The city does not present itself as a system in which *Ações Cariocas* insert themselves, but on the contrary, violence already defines the mode of spatialization and embodiment of *Ações*. Violence is not a system from which one may or may not rid oneself. The way *Ações* reverberate is inscribed in these vibrations. Eleonora writes: "*Ações Cariocas* is a project of detoxification, [...] *Ações Cariocas* is also a process of exorcism."⁶ *Ações Cariocas* is also a tactile investment in the public space, a micropolitical operation of intervention in the city and whose mode of occupation takes place through intimacy, through a call to the body, through a call to forms that escape the dominant symbolic field.

When I think of Rio de Janeiro, intimidation and intimacy appear as two forces interweaving spaces and bodies. Intimacy is the path of bodily relationship experimented by *Ações* with the city, with the public space and its contexts of violence. Intimacy is the praxis of bodily micropolitics, of tactile contact, happening through the body and in transmissions through different bodies, both human and nonhuman. The body is radically present, although it can lead to abstractions. Abstraction that, therefore, is not lack, but quite the opposite, it is a construction of dispositions, flows, and relations that emerge concretely from this very intimacy with the public space.

Opacity

The *Ações* are immanent acts. They emerge from propositions that must be activated, that must be put to work, propositions that wish to act. Their activation is a

6 FABIÃO, Eleonora. "Ações Cariocas: 7 ações para o Rio de Janeiro." *Cavalo Louco*. Op. cit., p. 17-18.

fundamental thought-expression circuit in the work. I also say that *Ações* are immanent acts because I see them as an affective legacy of Lygia Clark's work, particularly the idea that what is happening are activations of propositions. The body is not a given; it is another material in *Ações*, it is a problem that unfolds in different ways, qualities, distances, and apparitions.

One of these ways is the wrapped body, the bagged body. This procedure marks *Manchas* [Stains, 2013]. Eleonora arrives at the city square Praça General Osório, Ipanema (*Mancha Preta*) [Black Stain], at Rainha Elizabeth Street, Arpoador (*Mancha Branca*) [White Stain], or at Paineiras Road, Tijuca Forest (*Mancha Vermelha*) [Red Stain]. In Ipanema she sits on a bench on the square and a boy—in shorts and flip-flops with a t-shirt slung over his shoulder—approaches, curious, and helps her finish bagging herself. In Copacabana it's a well-dressed, bespectacled gentleman in front of the Galeria River, a small shopping mall of "extreme sports stores," who helps her fasten the adhesive tape, as the final touch to her body-bagging. Having someone from the street to help is essential, says Eleonora. And this essentialness comes from the fact that even a stain is not an object that one simply adds to the landscape, but something that is activated there. Participation is the activation of the thing itself. It is necessary to build together, to build with and in the space in order for each action to be activated as a system of thought and affection. The resulting relations of alterity do not come from elsewhere, but are built from those very specific activations between those bodies in that public space.

From there, from the square in Ipanema, completely enveloped in black garbage bags, Eleonora walks along the neighborhood's main business street, then turns onto a cross street and reaches the beach. She slugs along slowly, between stops and bumps. In *Mancha Branca*, Eleonora walks totally enveloped in white flour sacks, from the street to Arpoador Rock, passing through Cazuza Park. Suddenly a few dogs, in fact many dogs, a whole pack of them, leapt out of nowhere, surrounded her, and started to bark. They barked to defend themselves from that odd shape—although they recognized its humanness from the excess adrenaline it exuded. During her walks as stain, Eleonora could only see the color of the plastic, or at most some vague shapes. The material's opacity led to both a loss of direction and heightened attention—which at that moment, surrounded by the dogs, caused great apprehension. That tense moment clashed also with the inherent humor of stains blotching sunny postcard days.

Eleonora inside the membranes, and:

the sound of breathing, the sound of plastic in movement, in contact with the body, and sounds of the street; extreme heat; sweat streaming in rivulets; soaking, making pools between plastic and fingers; the

fingers' skin wrinkling with the moisture; very little air to breath; dizziness. I remember laughing a lot, sometimes chuckling. and tripping over things. other times absolutely clueless—loss of direction, a blot, on the verge of fainting. a woman came to squeeze my breast, wanting to know if I was a man or a woman—this happened in the black stain.

And:

not seeing practically anything and feeling extremely visible and seen is vertiginous. [...] but I knew where I wanted to arrive at. I was very afraid of some dogs barking, like they were going to charge me, remember?—at Praça do Arpoador, doing the white stain. confidence is gained from one step after another. in my relationship to that ground and to that space. in the determination to make that image awaken sensations and thoughts in whoever sees it. *confidence because of the need to perform not only that specific action but all of them.*⁷

What is at stake in this series is not the artist's dissolution in the public space, but the activation of the work which is nothing less than her own thought-map. When bagged, Eleonora does not disappear or depart, but materializes the inside-outside tension by stuffing herself "even deeper into its ebbs and flows."⁸

The material's opacity builds this tension. The plastic is an impermeable membrane that defines an inside and an outside, not to fix them but simply for the material to establish the logics of "ebbs and flows" to which Eleonora refers. This logic belongs to a phenomenological order:

each color bears a different relationship to the masses of color on the other side—the blue of the sea, the white of the sand, the gray of the rock, the dark gray of the asphalt, the green of the forest, the blue of the sky. [...] the feeling is also one of staining the landscape. because I am bagged, I spread myself, blotting. [...] other times I felt like a Japanese super-hero, like National Kid—a thing from when I was very small, a child, a real cartoon.⁹

⁷ Reproduction of quotes from an e-mail conversation with the artist while writing this article in February 2015. My emphasis.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Idem.

And it also derives from the very materiality of the membrane: "standing under the waterfall in Paineiras was striking—it caused quite an impression. I felt the cold and battering of the waterfall, but not the wetness. perhaps it was the time when the outside was more outside and the inside more inside";¹⁰ and from contact with things: "each color bears a different vibration. walking bagged in red in the forest, white on stone, or black on the asphalt."¹¹

Bagging the body is both to make oneself evident and to cover oneself. More than disappearing in the mass, her body becomes a mass which concretely disidentifies the artist. The wrapped mass bears no prescription grounded in gender, race, class, or anatomy. This is a disidentitary circulation in the public space—rare for the one inside, rare for those outside. By the relationship to the quasi-dysmorphic mass, I see that this dynamic of the body's opacity tensions it towards sculpture. The body as three-dimensional, a plastic mass, an "aesthetic organism" as the Neoconcretists would say—but not geometrical; a plastic mass of plastic, industrial material; once shaped by garbage bags, another time by flour sacks, another by red wrapping from the store Rei dos Plásticos (King of Plastics). A dramaturgy of the material in the body-to-body contact with the space.

A bagged body could be the most violent image of a corpse. Such is a memory that takes shape at the sight of the garbage-bag-body. Just as I am suddenly gripped by the image of a hung man: a silver sliver of water strikes the hooded neck of a slumped red head, as in the case of *Mancha Vermelha* at the waterfall in Paineiras. Living or dead bodies, the plastic membrane of *Manchas* activates a disposition towards anthropomorphic perception. Outside that membrane, we situate ourselves between the representation (it looks like a body) and the tautology (there's a body there). This operates a strange junction of representation, perception, tautology, and presence—what I believe I see is what I see. Form and thing are so one-and-the-same that it's almost absurd to think that this question is even posed. And in fact it is only posed because there is a plastic membrane performing and referring to the problem of this junction—form and thing. Paradoxically, in the face of *Manchas*, to speak of a human's anthropomorphism is to open oneself to a perceptive-tautological instability.

In this paradox of the *Manchas*, the instability derives from the recognition of form and thing together. That which a thing appears to be, it is. Georges Didi-Huberman in *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde* (1992) conceives Walter Benjamin's dialectical image from the perspective of the phenomenology of perception. For Benjamin,

¹⁰ Idem.

¹¹ Idem.

the dialectical image is always historical because it is actualized by the gaze and by activation of cognitive faculties that act by comparison between the time of the image and the present time of its observation. For Didi-Huberman, this question is also phenomenological to the extent that it not only generates a relationship of similarities, but the production of a *space-between*, an obscure space, in which not only we look at the thing, but it looks back at us. It is thus the gaze itself which is elaborated by time, “a gaze that would leave to the apparition the time of its unfolding as thought, in other words, which would leave to space the time of reweaving itself in another way, of reconverting itself into time.”¹² This return of the gaze, Didi-Huberman tells us, creates what he calls a “double distance” constructed between the excess (belief) and the absence (tautology) of meaning. Thus, we have simultaneously a recognition which is pure memory and an obscure operation that makes us be grasped by what we see. I perceive this double distance quite well in the series *Manchas*. There is a space that is produced between belief and tautology. I propose that in this liminal space, rather than simply recognizing a human in the stain, we can also recognize a stain in the human. This inversion appears to situate the *Manchas* in the “ebb and flow” between correlational phenomenology and object-oriented ontology.

What we have here is a stain, a perturbation in the picture-postcard of the beach, in the picture-postcard of the forest, a perturbation on the asphalt, on the sidewalks of commercial districts, in the neighborhood’s day-to-day life, in the flash-mobs’ circuit, in the dog’s-world candid-camera pranks on TV. The stains stain. There is no climax, there is no sneak preview, there is no explanation—three common dramaturgies in such circuits. The stains propose a relationship not of transparency, but of opacity. Eleonora sees little or nothing, but the stains look back at us. Taken by her, we experience the double distance between uncanniness and familiarity, between people and non people, ghostly matter and action incarnate, living-dead, being and being-like, between taking a position before the apparition and being taken by it.

This difference is not simply the construction of a visual distance. It also implies the construction of intimacy. The alterity that’s produced is uncanniness, and at the same time a coming close with a collective of things: with the ground, the organic and the inorganic, the air, the environment, with observation by the police, with observant passersby, their cellphones, the headlines on the newsstands that Eleonora bumps into. The life drive of bodies and between various bodies—intimacy, coming close is an opening of an energy field.

Eleonora bagged, Eleonora-stain, and:

¹² DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges. *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*. Paris: Minuit, 1992, p. 105.

the sensation of being image, a stain of color. a body. an abstract body (if that is possible). no physiognomy, no gender, no skin color. being in some limit between a body and a corpse. the bagged and wrapped dead ones. we know this image too well. the bagged body.¹³

The *Ações* are concrete, but there’s an abstraction under way with the very use of the body that unfolds in thought,¹⁴ that weaves with the public space other plots of temporality. The *Ações* are concrete, the relationships abstract.

How does this dual constitution make itself evident in another *Ação* called *Brasil: o momento em que o copo está cheio e já não dá mais pra engolir – nosso caso é uma porta entreaberta* [*Brazil: the moment when the glass is full and it is no longer possible to swallow—our affair’s door is ajar*, 2014]? There is no membrane here, enveloping the body, and the action stems from the materialization of a metaphor expressed in the lyrics of a song by Gonzaguinha: “Só sinto no ar o momento em que o copo está cheio / E que já não dá mais pra engolir” (I only feel in the air the moment when the glass is full / And it is no longer possible to swallow). Eleonora materializes the verse and takes a glass of water, full to the brim, to stroll in the popular Saara¹⁵ market in downtown Rio de Janeiro, two weeks before Christmas. Every time the water spills over—either because somebody bumps into the glass or into Eleonora, or because she unwittingly spills a little herself—she duly refills the glass to its maximum limit.

The glass is full to the brim, creating an uncanny empathy between the solid state of the glass and the water that is no longer contained by the glass, but which completes it. The temporal question at stake is patience, evidenced in the political sphere—by the work’s title—and in different relationships, dispositions, and flows along the way, in the liquidness and in the interdictions of the direct body-to-body contact in the Saara market. The metaphor is an initial concretion, a trigger, which definitely does not apply as the key to unlock the action’s intelligibility. The concreteness of the verse in action is thus the paradox of its materials’ transparency that, more than allowing one to see, create distortions of images. It is the opening to the frailty of maintaining the existence of the liminal, of the edge’s plane. But this frailty is also the very space that Eleonora activates in the Saara, a space that opens through the full glass, whose constitutive precariousness opens all the space around it to vulnerability

¹³ Reproduction of quotes from an e-mail conversation with the artist while writing this article in February 2015.

¹⁴ DIDI-HUBERMAN, Georges. *Ce que nous voyons, ce qui nous regarde*. Op. cit., p.105.

¹⁵ Translator’s Note: Saara is the acronym of Sociedade de Amigos das Adjacências da Rua da Alfândega (Society of Friends of Alfândega Street and Surroundings). (www.saarario.com.br).

and distortion. And together with this, it activates the capacity to laugh at oneself and at that situation; and further, to act without needing to justify oneself. The edge is a plane, but also a curve. The sculptural question appears again through an action that proposes the corporeal-spatial clash, without exclusively valuing the object's field of visibility. The object, very concretely, opens spaces and displaces bodies in the Saara market.

There is a kind of abstraction that is an effort on matter. The popular metaphor from the song's lyrics is materialized in the objects to which it alludes and opens zones in the plane in which it acts. Gilles Deleuze speaks of this when he writes on Francis Bacon's work, when he observes that Bacon's painting gives in to scraping, deforming, and to the appearance of zones of indiscernibility. His interest in Bacon stems from the fact that the painter does not shirk the problem of the figurative, but acts with a dual approach: rejecting it after a reckless abandon to it.¹⁶ With her glass of water, Eleonora digs voids and distortions in the landscape, interdictions of flow that make other zones appear, other relationships of meaning, other drives and intensities, other fields of thought which escape predefined codes of representation and figuration. I perceive that same duality: acknowledging the figurative, just to make it unstable.

We may well think that this duality takes place not only in the series *Manchas* or in *Brasil: o momento em que o copo está cheio e já não dá mais pra engolir – nosso caso é uma porta entreaberta*, but that it is also experienced in different ways in *Ações* as a whole—to the point that Eleonora says she feels confident “due to the need to perform not only one specific action, but all of them.” The tension of the concrete-abstract dyad, the instabilities and intensities that it causes, are already a quality of the procedures in these performances, from the onset. Intimacy prisms thought. Perhaps this capacity became more explicit for me in the stains, as if, through them, I could retrace an entire genealogy of the *Ações* launched five years earlier.

Haptic

“The sensation of being image,” says Eleonora. I hear her and I think of the stance she takes towards the image, in her dynamics of contact and optical distance: a problematic of inside-outside, of credible inventions and projections of inside-outside. A sensation that places the space created by the *Ação* as a space of tactile and

¹⁶ DELEUZE, Gilles. *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. London-New York: Continuum, 2003, p. 92.

optical sensations, following the logic of Gilles Deleuze. Furthermore, it is about a tactile-optical space that functions by insubordination. The insubordination takes place between experiences of physicality and optical experiences, in which one generates and assumes the other, although one does not define the other. The dimensions pulsate. The sensation of being image is an opening to the accident of non signifying strokes and lines, and not an imprisonment by representation. Being image is a construction based on this logic of sensation, and not a figuration. Every trace in every *Ação* carries all the *Ações* with it, and there is already simultaneity of scales—between proximity and distance, between physical immersion and visibility, between the singularity of an accident and historical perception, between the intensity of the moment in which they take place and the action's different reverberations. This pulsation builds the action's circuit of intimacies. The intimacy is not a denial of the optical element in favor of a purely tactile circumscription, but a de-hierarchization of these senses. “The sensation of being image”: the haptic quality of *Ações*.

When I accompany Eleonora, I experience the moment in which the *Ações* take place, but I have my experience oriented—between action and thought—by the need to compose them in images. However, the perception of *Ações* mediated by the record in the very moment in which they happen is not my privilege alone: several passersby whip out their cellphones and record what they see. The insubordination between the physical experience and the use of technologies for optical perception is perhaps the most affirmative way of conceiving this form of spectatorship that I saw during the *Ações*. This insubordination generates a haptic quality in the passersby that negotiate their own inside-outside ebbs and flows in the *Ação*. I thus witnessed a recurrent need to use the cellphone screen as a mediator-framing of the *Ação* that was taking place right there, right before them. Meanwhile others stopped to accompany the action or changed their trajectory to combine it with the *Ação*'s. Still others incorporated this sensation of being image by participating directly in the *Ações*, under my lens and numerous other gazes.

I spent hours on end discreetly at each *Ação*. This long permanence, intensely mediated by the camera, used to launch me into a meditative state. Being present, participating and relating to the *Ações* through the camera's framing opened a space-time confusion. When the body simultaneously experiences relationships of approximation and distancing, it appears that the notions of simultaneity and asynchrony can no longer be easily distinguishable. This may explain why my memory of the experience is that of entering a meditative state. A state of meditative-mediation.

Given the fundamental haptic quality of these *Ações*, I see each moment's unfolding in photos and videos as a challenge and an opportunity to propose other interfaces

(and even objects) whose specificities strengthen the circuit of intimacies built by the *Ações*. One of the most striking actions generated by these records is the project *25 postais para o Rio* [25 postcards for Rio] that Eleonora started when she received the Funarte Award for Arts on the Street: the production of thousands of postcards based on 25 selected images that have been distributed and sent around the world since 2013.¹⁷ The postcards' physicality, the mechanisms for sending them, and the senders' brief handwritten messages reverberate the circuit of tactile, visual, and affective relationships that are constitutive of the intimacy proposed in *Ações*. The performance tends to disappear, as Peggy Phelan tells us in proposing her ontology of performance,¹⁸ but it can continue reverberating and creating itself in ways that leave it increasingly uncapturable, so that we never know its limits. For that to happen, it is up to the objects that derive from it to reverberate what of the *Ações* takes place through an intimate relationship that not even its local and physical experience can fully give account. The question is the insubordination, a circuit of intimacies that is never fully given, that is not controlled, but constantly nourished. The question is the images that, while always taking shape, find their opacity so that through it they can make us see.

Dear Fabião,

I saw you reproduced many times today on the same city square. I was going home, and the "shopping-ground" was open. The shopping-ground is how we affectionately call that sidewalk flea market on the little square between Glória and Lapa. I was walking from the subway to home when I saw your whole series of postcards displayed there on a burgundy cloth. Judging from the disarray, I imagine that the municipal police had just been there, and that the street vendors had hastily gathered up their wares by pulling their ground cloths closed by the four corners and racing off, to avoid having their goods seized. The postcards were not alone: there was an AM radio, a calculator, three necklaces, two CDs, a tiny head from a toy—perhaps a monkey, many wires—headphone, computer adapter, a DVD player, a sturdy hairbrush, a caramel-colored hat, a leather belt, an acrylic box. A display that was half atlas, half abandonment, half readymade, all excessive. There, they really were things—displayed as

17 Editors' Note: A recent extension of this project happened after the writing of this text at SESC Santo André, in the exhibition "A experiência da arte" (The Experience of Art), from April to October 2015. The series was reprinted including the production of three new postcards specifically for the exhibition.

18 PHELAN, Peggy. *Unmarked: the politics of performance*. London-New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 148.



leftovers and something to be reused—pure potentiality. I took a photo, and looking at it now, my eye is swallowed by your lying next to the book by Lévi-Strauss, *Saudades do Brasil*. You lying on the grass with a book; you and the book printed on cardboard; the image lying on a cloth that protects you from the ground, and especially from getting caught by the municipal tax inspectors. But the truth be told: despite the ground, that was indeed a "shopping mall" and you were for sale. But even for sale, you are on the fringes of the economy, participating on its most vulnerable edge; certainly closer to survival than to profit. I think you don't need to, nor are you going to, worry about it—and judging by the degree of precariousness, I even think you're going to love it!

with love,

Felipe

Adrian Heathfield

*As much as we start dying from the moment we are born,
we never stop being born until the moment we die.*

Eleonora Fabião

I look through the sea of bodies to find her. There, a little nothing: a gesture is born. In that instant Eleonora Fabião begins a performance. The difference from her previous state is everything, but the act remains imperceptible. She is a quiet, mobile anomaly in a crowd. Did I just see what I think I saw: some kind of re-enchantment of people and things? I try to follow her, to memorize moments from the hundreds of microencounters she makes, but it is like running your fingers along a Möbius strip. As you trace the continuous surface of the paper, outside and inside fold into each other, infinitely. You and your hand go round and around while strangely going nowhere. In such reveries you lose your sense of boundary and location. Let's begin again, this time with more consistency.

I am in Rio de Janeiro—that much is certain—and I am experiencing the performances of Eleonora Fabião. Since the street is her “studio,” I am spending some days outdoors watching works of long duration. I am following her, literally, as many of her performances are mobile and plunge into the social body: into that populated space of relations I still hope to call a public. Following her is tricky: it turns me into a critical stalker. But aside from chance encounter, it's one of the few ways to experience her performances “in the flesh.” The works mainly go unannounced, finding non elective audiences who mostly experience them in fractions of their duration. My pursuit, then, is an atypical condition, a privileged access and a shadowy affair. In these streets, as a legible stranger, I stay back and play invisible so that I do not become too much

“a part” of the work. And yet of course I am, how would I ever distinguish myself from it? Its mode is entanglement and its primary imperative encounter: between people, materials, actions and places. These words too are entwined. Coming after the work, they turn outside-in and inside-out. I attempt to render what I sensed in those moments on the street into language; and I try to enter the propositional logics of actions in order to express them. Each is differently voiced: events witnessed are narrated in the third person, the imagined thought of the work in the first person. I describe her actions, and I attempt to inhabit their logic. These articulations are equally acts of projection, for which I ask your indulgence. In all these enfoldings I am reaching out to the work, seeking to touch its intangibilities.

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It is late Friday afternoon in the Saara market.¹ The work is entitled, *Brasil: o momento em que o copo está cheio e já não dá mais pra engolir – nosso caso é uma porta entreaberta* [Brazil: the moment when the glass is full and it is no longer possible to swallow—our affair's door is ajar, 2014]. She stands at the head of a long bustling street, Rua Senhor dos Passos (Lord of Steps Street), filled with shops and makeshift stalls selling every imaginable product. The collective energy is frenetic even though people move at a relaxed pace: it is getting busier, the bodies closer, as the work week draws to a close and folks head to their Friday night, or weave tightly around each other to shop. The ambient hum of traffic is punctuated by the hectoring pitches of salesmen with radio microphones, whose swagger and patter is a weary routine, a local broadcast of wares through speakers slung precariously above the street. From the instant she begins the gesture—arm outstretched, her hand carrying a brimming glass of water—she is intensely focused on her movement and balance, avoiding spillage at all costs. She keeps a cautious pace, like a high wire walker establishing her rhythm across the void. She is a sensory zone of meditative and sharpened attention and slow-time existence, creating affective ripples in the bodies behind and ahead of her. In the thick of the market, she is another kind of transmission and transaction altogether. News of her coming travels up the street, and shopkeepers and workers gather at the thresholds of their stores to watch her progress. In back and upfront of her the flow of bodies is riven as people encounter her reality, faces open, ask puzzled questions, cast speculations, jests and wry commentaries, or draw their friends and

¹ Translator's Note: Saara is the acronym of Sociedade de Amigos das Adjacências da Rua da Alfândega [Society of Friends of Alfândega Street and Surroundings], a popular market located downtown Rio de Janeiro. (www.saarario.com.br).

fellow shoppers attention to the quiet stately spectacle suddenly encountered. If a small spill takes place, she pauses, refills the glass carefully to the brim, and continues her steady labour. She is an altered being, an inexplicable gesture and a mobile sensual disturbance, unsettling the sedimented social functions and realities in this place. She is a social discourse generator. Interactions flare up around her. The street is long and the journey will take many hours, inaugurating new realities around itself as it goes.

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I ask as I act. I am a stripped down form of existence, whose being is radically open to encounter and projection. Can I perform a question in a public place articulated through a gesture cut out of the other actions and movements in this space? I always work through the inhabitation of paradoxical conditions: they make dynamic propositions and ethical demands. Can I be a force field of altered attention: that counter-sense whose pointlessness is the point? What then can happen? Can I propagate a commons of attention? Can I make an immaterial image that will haunt the imaginary of this place? I am an article of an unidentifiable faith. I will be this concrete abstraction. The unknown I presage is immanent rather than transcendent. I carry a recessive causation: I cannot be explained by a subject's will alone. I happily speak to those I encounter whilst remaining a force without answer. I set myself seemingly impossible or infinite tasks approached with modesty and matter-of-factness. I am a messenger from elsewhere rather than an agent of this place. Gesture itself is the catalyst.

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Now, she must be half an hour into this slow water walk, though it's difficult to say precisely. Time is warped in the duration of the work and the mobile field of attention it generates. Some people turn and stop, enter her temporality for a while, others pass by in accelerated avoidance. Her balance and posture is such that even those approaching her at speed from behind sense that she is something to swerve around; the looks of others create a zone of altered sense around her moving body, an invisible buffer. A group of men on one side are heckling, hoping to illicit some reaction. Witchcraft, they say. She smiles, but purposefully continues, entering a new depth of focus. The slowdown generates a micro attention to kinetics and materials. The burble of sounds, the gestures and glances of people, the colours of clothing, all wash and froth around. As she passes you see that the surface of the water is trembling with her steps: it is an impression or trace of her movements. The cobbled street

echoes through the bones, joints and muscles, through the arm and glass and into the water. A miniature ocean. Everything here presses into everything else, channels, vibrates. One shop worker calls out to others to come look, a group of two couples pass and exchange conversation on what is happening, a man in her wake mimics her gesture then shrugs his shoulders. Signs, bodies, things re-resonate. The street is a scene of vibrant passage of material energies. All this arrives from an everyday object, the simplest of things: a profound transformation.

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I am a vessel carrying a vessel at arms length. I made something precious out of the mundane but I cannot own it. It is a gift to whoever will take it without owning it. Here it is in front of me. It could be destroyed at any moment. A mundane thing only needs to be held differently for it to be otherworldly. A transformation of a world can spring from the smallest gesture: there where things stand beside themselves. The vessel is a refracting and kaleidoscopic object, it carries within itself fractured and mobile images of the world around it, constantly distorting and re-imaging worlds. A vessel and I: this is a balancing act. Containment is impossible and spillage inevitable. What is my relation to the thing, if not equivalence? I am overfull: it is a brimming. What does it tell me about how I am? At the lips of the vessel, where the solid matter meets the fluid, there is a ring of tension that holds together all the worlds. Material states touching in differentiation. Look into this world of worlds: see through it. A world is only a mobile refraction of other worlds it is in. We long to drink it, but it remains at arm's length.

While time turns, this world, stilled in motion, held out for others, demands its impossible preservation. Are we the clumsy staggering creatures, the ones who cannot walk a line, who cannot keep things level? Or are we the ones who can hold it all together? What qualities of being would it take for us to sustain this thing—these worlds within a world—in balance? The world I move through is crowded, an indifferent jumble. The social human is the antagonist of this task. The purposefulness of other bodies threatens to overcome my exquisitely purposeless action. Could I be in this erotic yet catastrophic entanglement, could I move through it, while keeping the equilibrium of the spheres intact? We humans are the animals that make irreversible impacts in matter, the shock waves we transmit cause ecologies to collapse and squander resources. Can we desist from acting upon, from making the world? We waste without thinking, we use up everything: we are poor conservationists. How might we move through the damaged world otherwise? Were I to put it in language, poetry would be my only recourse: how else could one translate a poetics of action?

I would not say, as others have, that a glass of water is an oak tree. Instead it is a door ajar, a thing undone by action; it is the occasion for drafts and slithers of light.

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Many months ago now, she begins the performance somewhere in Saara. I cannot say where precisely because I am not there. I am retelling this piece, called *Toco tudo* [*To touch everything*, 2011], from other people's accounts and from photographic documents taken from some distance. She has set an objective, a place to arrive; then she firmly closes her eyes and tries to get there. She has no idea how long this walk in pulsating darkness will last. Almost immediately she is in danger and I fear for her. I know whatever happens she will not open her eyes until she arrives at her destination. After a few steps she has turned towards the road and the steady traffic heading by. It's surely too soon for her senses of hearing, smell, taste and touch to have re-educated themselves from their dependence on sight, to warn her of the present danger. She is tentatively edging through this public place, feeling out an invisible line between calamity and care. Eventually a hand arrives, steering her back to the pavement. The first confusion and explanation: the exact words they exchange I cannot recount, but she clarifies that she is not blind, that she is happy to receive help. Her guide soon leaves and she is on her own again. Sometime later now, and an older man in a dark olive suit takes up the cause. He is grey skinned, somewhat suspicious looking, like an undercover policeman from the time of the dictatorship. He guides her by the waist for a long time, but with an ambivalent paternal attitude. Eventually some necessity takes him elsewhere. A reminder, if one were needed in this place, that you do not choose the other. Many faces pass by, puzzled, not offering help, but nonetheless walking away with an unanswered question.

Much later she is inching forward, moving inexorably towards a large pile of trash bags. She is quickly surrounded and finding it hard to extract herself. I wonder what she is feeling in those moments, how she is making sense of this commotion of barely definable sensual impressions. She finally emerges into a cluster of big-eared telephone booths, her hands tracing the shape of their lobes, repurposing them. She is like a payphone ringing in public, a letter without an addressee. Who can she call on to find a way? At the edge of the street again, a woman with a stroller places her hands on its handles and helps her to cross safely. Every act of kindness, however brief, is an affirmation of this seemingly ridiculous experiment of vulnerability in public space. After a while she is tracing along the rough textures of a wall when she reaches a corner and turns into a garage. She has transgressed into private space and though she immediately feels the absence of sunlight, the interior soundscape, it will take her

twenty minutes of wall caresses to find her way out into the open. Every step is in fact a digression, a losing of the way along the way. Out in the street again, she is aided by a string of people in quick succession, some puzzled, some entertained, remaining as in touch with her body, and the opaque question it carries, as they can. Somehow she has arrived, she has found her way through the erased streets, the night of the people, by being passed from hand to hand. She opens her eyes.

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I ask as I act, once again, can I be a distinct gesture found in the teeming of life, cut out of it in stillness? Stillness arrives not from a static body, or from docility, or from being frozen as an image, but from an intense attention to an action. Altered life goes by in the gesture's wake. I am the bird hovering in the wind: the appearance of effortless suspension arriving only through an invisible strenuous relation to the surrounding forces. I hold my own duration. To be a gesture differentiated from the rest I will lose my self-belonging, becoming indistinct, while this action in space becomes more visible, let's say tangible. It is cut out of time. Am I not a ghost, somewhat shapeless here, an anonymity? Just to be: flesh of their flesh. Have we not forgotten that we are molecules too? I am nothing more than an eddy in a current. I am becoming imperceptible, a dark matter that permeates other substances. I draw back or away through the other bodies that I touch; I instantiate the counter flow. The gesture is transversal, its carriage over in to other bodies comes without language. It is the incommunicable in communication. This action can be done by anyone; while it carries a singularity that emanates from this body, it is already part of the commonwealth, the plenum.

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One day she is possessed by a new idea. She calls around her friends in the city. "Would you mind," she asks, "if I borrow a mirror of yours for a few hours? My intention is to take your mirror on a day excursion; let it see new sights, relieve it from the same old light, walls and faces it endures at your place. Don't worry," she says, "I will bring it back intact." For a day her friends are dispossessed of their reflections. They wander their apartments bereft of those self-same images. A few months back she met this guy Valmir on the street. He is warm hearted, practical and open. With his cousin Anderson in his aging VW Kombi, he buys scrap metal from whoever wants to sell it. Mostly it's spent fridges, bits of piping, chain, trashed bike frames, old microwaves. Since his practice is not an established business, the speaker through which he announces his presence is strapped to the chassis. That way, no immediately identifiable markers of informal trade, no straightforward stops for the municipal police.

What else can he do? This is his living. He is making his own kind of unregulated practice in the streets. Overtime she negotiates his support for her project. The idea is that he will drive around his usual routes, while she sits in the back with the microphone, reading fragments of texts. The VW will be decked with mirrors, so the city is reflected back. It will be called *Não compro lata velha* [*I do not buy old wreck*, 2014]. They will collect nothing but experiences and encounters. They will give out gifts of poetry and broken images of the streets and their people. He agrees.

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What if I make performances with only one class of thing? Coal, brick, or linen sheets. Any one thing would need to be exhausted in order for us to re-experience it. Composition and re-composition of a material in public space is the means through which the possibilities of the thing are exhausted. Multiplying the thing helps us to experience the tension between its consistency and its inherent self-differentiation. Since the number of variations of relation between the multiplied thing is large, a long duration for action is required. I will linger in one place so that the movement of things is more apparent. How might the duration of my flesh meet the duration of the thing without overwriting it? The passage of the day and the gradual exhaustion of my body enacting the re-compositions animate and multiply the differences between compositions. A material is shown as part of a mobile assemblage of flesh-action-thing-context. I am not I and things are never what they are. How to touch a thing whilst setting in motion its transgenesis? It may be enough just to be the quiet agent beside things, or the visible witness, for the other spectators to encounter the incessant transgenesis of things. Open serial re-composition of a material in public space may invite participant re-compositions, but the participant will be aware that they have not witnessed all previous permutations. They understand therefore that their actions are a conversation with unseen actions: that they make a contribution to a process that exceeds their capacity to witness it. In all the trading and transacting, the swamp of productions and reproductions that is a culture, pausing for a moment to see: look what the not-I has done.

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She arranges a time that suits Valmir for the ride. She has collected around twelve mirrors of all shapes and sizes at her apartment in Botafogo. They load up and drive out for the final pick up of a large unframed mirror from her friend's place by the Maracanã stadium. This one will lie across the floor of the truck at her feet, catching the sky. They head to Grajaú where they will ply their trade. Once the mirrors are placed and strapped on, it starts immediately. "Good day. I do not buy old wreck,

I do not buy old metal junk, I do not buy old fridges." Valmir has chosen a good spot: plenty of pedestrians. "I ask your permission to enter this way, with voice, into your home. Do I have your permission?" Across the street the buildings are five or six stories high, and immediately inhabitants arrive at their open windows. She welcomes them, makes a direct address, as people come to their balcony seats or stand in the auditorium of the street. "I facing your window. You facing your window. I inviting you to look this way, look through the window. Here we are." She has nothing to sell, and the potential didacticism of the broadcast is immediately dissolved by poetic force. "Before computer existed there was TV. Before TV existed there was electricity."² She reads from song lyrics and poetry books she has assembled, microphone in hand, casting eyes, reflections and words up and out into the world. "Before electricity existed there was bike. Before bike existed there was encyclopedia. Before encyclopedia existed there was alphabet. Before alphabet existed there was voice." A gaggle of teenagers arrive at the side of the pickup truck, two or three delighted with the interruption of their lives by this event, stand focused and inquisitive even though school is out. They ask questions, enjoy the ridiculousness of it all, trade understandings of where this weirdness meets their own world. "Before voice existed there was silence. Silence was the first thing that existed. A silence that no one heard. A star moving in the sky." One or two linger at the periphery, uncertain of how this fits into the scheme of things, struggling to attend and drawn back to their usual passages. The little gathering dissolves.

Sometime later, Valmir turns over the VW and moves on. The van labours up the hill as she casts out fragments into the street, caught by the ears of the passing and unsuspecting. Some ears are tuned to the poetic and heads turn against their decided direction. "The decaying matter. The stomach digesting bread. Seed's explosion under the ground. Diamond born of coal. Man stone plant animal flower. Electric light TV computer." A litany of displaced things and transfigurations reverberating. Time slides like the words against the sky. Further on, Valmir parks up just past the square where there is more street life. A woman dressed in office attire with a plastic carrier bag stops dead in her tracks and stands to listen attentively for what seems like an age. She has convened her own reading in a minor eternity. The VW sets off again, turns up the lazy incline at the foot of the mountain, passes through the guarded barrier. A biker kid hitches a ride, one hand on the rail at the back of the truck.

² This and the following quotes are from: Arnaldo Antunes "O silêncio." In: *Como é que chama o nome disso*. São Paulo: Publifolha, 2006, p. 253.

He gets his own special reading: a mobile intimacy. She is riding off Valmir's trade and the biker boy is riding off hers. A makeshift human-machine-poetry apparatus. "Look, everyone has been a baby. Einstein, Freud and Plato too. Hitler, Bush and Saddam Hussein. Who has money and who does not."³ He laughs and gives her a wave as he releases his grip, recedes into the distance.

This is the second time she has been out with Valmir in the VW and his share of the project is growing. He's not just taking care of the safety aspects, but is choosing the routes they will drive down, using his expert knowledge of the area to craft a dramaturgy of locations, and calling out textual suggestions to Eleonora as they ride. She understands that this is now as much his performance as it is hers. Valmir is an honourable fellow, he understands the seriousness of this practice and he is intrigued by Eleonora's strange projects. He posts images of the rides on Facebook and gets many likes. He doesn't mind that she parasites on his practice from time to time: it makes life more interesting. For Anderson, his current assistant, it seems, it's just another job: he is world-worn and very little surprises him.

The VW rattles and swings through the potholed streets. Some hours later, Valmir parks up at the top of a turnaround street facing a wall of trees. The weight of a mountain presses behind. Here, there is a stillness in the damp atmosphere, as the frigatebirds glide on powerful air currents above. "What do words tell us in the interior where they resonate? That they are not instruments for exchange or utensils to pick up and throw away [...] They know that they are not exchanged between men as formulas and slogans but as gifts and mysterious dances."⁴ She is reciting softly and the words climb. Do the birds hear her? At the overlooking window ledges a few listeners perch at their seats, arms draped across sills, facing these declarations at a tangent. "The world is pierced, turned, changed by us when we speak. Everything that wishes to be here as an apparent real can be subtracted by us when we speak. Words do not come to show us things, to give them a place, to politely thank them for being here—they come to break things, tear them down."⁵ Her amplified voice glances against window pains and resonates through verdant light. The VW is a weird hybrid creature coated in the greenery of reflected foliage. A quietness descends. They decide it is over. Valmir is pleased with the day's labour and a collective photo is taken to commemorate the excursion.

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3 ANTUNES, Arnaldo. "Saiba". In: *Como é que chama o nome disso*. Op. cit., p. 270.

4 NOVARINA, Valère. *Diante da palavra*. Trans. Angela Leite Lopes. Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2009, p. 14.

5 Idem, pp. 14-15.

Why must the material used be mundane, a little nothing? It must have elemental capacities that exceed its symbolic resonance. Hence the title: *Quase nada, sempre tudo* [*Almost nothing, always everything*, 2012/13]. It must speak to instability and insufficiency: it must wear its relation to contingency on its surface. A thing's consistency is a temporal constitution. It should affirm its being of this world. If a material already bears the traces of human touch or fabrication, its pre-madeness or its functionality should not dominate its use. Nor should appropriation of, and resistance to, function register too strongly in the re-use of an object. What is most vital about an object-function is its redundancy. The object is forgetting its objecthood, returning to matter. The poverty of a material is the precondition for a question that it will ask in proximity of the human subject. A material's caring for the human derives from its planetary coexistence, its shared fate. It will ask if it may escape from its subservience, to under swerve being acted upon.

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Back to the slow water walk: she is at least two hours in, maybe more. A sight-impaired man walks by with a cane, tapping out his own singular passage through this place: a sudden correspondence between two bodies of altered attention. A guy with a freezer cart full of drinks gives her a wide berth. She takes a pause and deftly switches the glass over to her other hand without any spillage and proceeds on her way. This technical virtuosic moment discloses a certain seriousness, a practiced ritual dimension, that deepens the attention of those around her. A woman walks with her for a while, enamored with the act, interrogating her on her reasons: "is this a religious practice?" she asks. Evidently it carries a mysterious elemental power. Its force comes from elsewhere. Eleonora invites her to take over the act, but she declines while promising that she will try it alone at home. Now, she takes a turn into a wider street and there is a momentary sense of freedom in space, room to move, and consequently more spectacle. A couple watches her intently from a bench. A man walks with her and asks if this gift is for him. "Yes, of course," she says. "May I drink the water?" he replies. He takes the glass and drinks it whole. They smile. She refills it to the brim and carries on her way. Hours like this spent, moving graciously and serenely through the tumble of bodies, words and things. The task is the living consistency. Countless microworlds of relation are born and vanish in this passage.

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I work through the logics of subtraction in order to arrive at a fuller sense of being. We are subject to orders of sensory control that pre-structure and override the

individual senses and their relations. By disabling a sense capacity or by activating a sensory impediment I can intensify other senses and recondition sense relations. I withdraw sight and overburden touch, then throw my self into the surfaces of the urban and the tumult of social space. My vulnerability is my strength. What kind of city is this, encountered through skin, taste, smell, sounds, what kind of a people? Voluntary “blindness” is a mobile experimental encounter, a proposition for (and of) existence in this space. What would it mean to live and journey without recourse to the visible? The apparition of the mobile unguided unseeing subject in social space announces our overdependence on sight, its perceptual illusions and inadequacies in relation to an imperative to live. We do not fully see what we think we are seeing and vision is constituted by the perpetual emergence of the invisible. Sight is dependent on other senses to make sense, but must they be its diminished servants? The city is a plethora of inchoate interacting textures, aromas, flavours, noises yet to be encountered. Will they sustain me and carry me through my labour? To move here is to traverse a void that is overfull. I cross a city of semblances: a social body composed of a tumble of transient affects. My body is given over to the touch of the unknown, the skins, gestures, limbs and enunciations of the crowd. I will be guided by voices and caresses that will remain without personhood or identity. Here a firm hand on my waist, a brush of cotton, a perfume, a stranger’s breath. If the crowd in its density is that absolute renunciation of separation and inequality, I am becoming its subcondition, before such recognitions. I stumble through “public space,” in the chiasm of fleshly transactions, an existence before any notion of a public. I am learning to walk once again, birthing with every step, a being borne by sensuous assistance, the charity and love of others.

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Still walking with the water. Gathering darkness in the blue. A sunset elsewhere colours the tight streets of the marketplace. Deepened skin hues, eyes flare. Night lights start to emit their phosphorescence. There is expectation in the air, the far off chatter of excited socialization. She slowly reaches the road where people clump beside heavy speeding traffic. Petrol fumes and hot tarmac mix in the scents of bodies. Some little estranged faces and indifferent glances. The focus is on the traffic. All standing and waiting against the grind. Lights change and suddenly she strides out into the road, her sweeping gesture casting the water in a long arc across its surface. A cathartic flourish, barely noticed in the cascade of crossing. And like that she is gone. Spray evaporates on the hot road. She slips away, undetectable, one of many: she disappears in the crowd.

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*Everything I'm writing here is forged in my silence and in shadows.
I see little, I hear almost nothing. I finally dive into myself down to
the birthplace of the spirit that inhabits me. My source is obscure.
I'm writing because I don't know what to do with myself. I mean:
I don't know what to do with my spirit. The body tells a lot.
But I don't know the laws of the spirit: it wanders.*

Clarice Lispector

alongside,
a bit behind
ao lado,
um pouco atrás

André Lepecki

0. from where

I arrived at the actions late, even though I had been alongside them, and alongside Eleonora, years before both she and I knew they were coming. During the first ones I was not even in the same hemisphere, and I would hear of them only through a few brief reports, conveyed by Eleonora, and I would worry in the distance, I would worry about the distance. And when, finally, I accompanied them side by side—me saying “See you later Eleonora” as she was stepping out of the house, our kitchen chairs on her shoulders, to go talk about any subject, or taking with her all the stuff needed for her *Line* (New York 2010/11 and Rio 2014/15) encounters; or me receiving her back from her actions hours later with a “Hey, how did it go?” curious to know how it had been, what it had been, what was still being, what it would be (all these temporalities contained in the act of doing an action, the ever-present times of an action); or me eventually accompanying her out of the house, video and photographic cameras in my hands, so I could follow it all from a distance—even at that moment, even when I started to accompany the actions side by side, I discovered right there and then that I was still, and will always be, a bit behind. Of what? Of Eleonora’s velocities and of the actions’ temporalities. Because it is on the plied vortexes of time initiated by any extemporaneous action that Eleonora acts and makes acts: with things, people,

temporalities. There, on the edges of singularities, and through her work, thanks to her performance—actions that invoke and activate times unglued from chronometric circuits, times so vibrating they are almost matter, times that drag her into another state, a bit beyond synchrony—there, in a limit-time and an out-of-hinge state of existence, there she acts as well as precipitates something to act. What? The work, but only if life as well.

A bit behind, always alongside: this is also the temporality of any (art)work that opens itself up, truly, completely—even to the action that can dismantle it, to actions that can unwork it completely. Since the integrity of the (art)work is not the main goal. The main goal is the work of the actions that, through the (art)work, come into the world. This is why a work in performance is never self-contained. This is why a performance work never gives itself as complete, but instead always demands some degree of reiteration: a one more time, a one more activation of it, a one more reworking, a one more *singular repetition* of that which differs in it. The actions that make the work of art be what really matters—extemporaneous working with and of life—imply that the (art)work will always take place a bit beyond and a bit before itself. Given that its full potentiality never exhausts itself in each actualization. On the contrary, the series of actualizations means that each new action potentializes the (art)work even further, makes the work unfold in ever more virtuality, in ever more futurity, in ever more discovery. This determined reiteration of the series (of the work’s actions) is the (art)work’s consistency. And the labor of working actions this way consists in stubbornly insisting on the (art)work’s program—so that, regardless of what happens, one may remain receptive to the always unforeseeable becomings of any action that indeed is an action. Receptivity must be understood here as any action that makes all that truly matters in the work *consist*: to act, to act the work, to make the work active. Unwavering receptivity within the work’s consistent program is the very opposite of passivity: “receptivity is first and foremost the power to receive blows and to give them: a strange kind of endurance.”¹ There, on the fold of a limitless and skewed time, at the edge of the curve of the vortex of the present, performers diagrammatically rework what, at each of the work’s new moments in the world, still makes sense to set into action, to retain as action, in order to relaunch actioning: anything that, in each reiteration, re-singularizes the work’s program and dispatches it again to all of its times. In this reworking of simultaneous and forever incomplete openings and closings, the

¹ DELEUZE, Gilles. “Péricles and Verdi.” *The Opera Quarterly*, 21(4):716-724, Autumn 2005, p. 717.

(art)work happens, occurs: in a non place called action. Its plane of consistency, within all the possible variations when actualized, Eleonora called *program*. Which, one day, she defined like this:

I suggest that a representation's deconstruction, so fundamental to performance art, is operated through a specific compositional procedure: *the performative program*. I call this procedure "program," inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's use of the word in their famous essay "28 November 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body Without Organs?" In that text, the authors suggest that the program is the "motor of experimentation." A program is a motor of experimentation because its practice creates body and relations between bodies. It triggers negotiations of belonging. It activates affective circulations that were unthinkable before the program's formulation and activation. A program is a motor of psychophysical and political experimentation. Or, to quote a word so dear to Hanna Arendt's political and theoretical project, programs are *initiatives*.

Objectively speaking, the program is the performance's enunciation: a set of previously stipulated actions, clearly articulated and conceptually polished, that will be carried out by the artist, by the public, or by both without any previous rehearsal. In other words: the program's temporality is very different from that of the show, of the rehearsal, of improvisation, of choreography [...]. It is this program/enunciation that *makes possible, orientates, and moves* experimentation.²

1. postulados especulativos

E se?

E se...

E se:

2 FABIÃO, Eleonora. "Programa Performativo: o corpo-em-experiência." In: *ILINX Revista do LUME #4*, 2013. Available at <http://www.cocen.unicamp.br/revistadigital/index.php/lume/article/view/276>. Accessed May 28, 2015.

E se especulássemos por um momento que o que interessa como questão fundamental para a performance não é saber o que é um autor, ou quem é um autor, ou se o artista está presente, ou se o artista está ausente, ou se a obra é performada de modo visível perante espectadores, ou se a obra é feita de modo invisível, sem testemunhas, ou ainda se ela perece ou permanece por via de marcas arquiváveis? E se o que importa não é decidir se a ação performada é efêmera ou durável, ficcional, prescrita ou corpórea? E se a questão fundamental fosse indagar simplesmente o seguinte: *desde quando* e *até quando* uma obra performada estaria tomando lugar? Em que regimes de tempo e em que fronteiras de atualizações incipientes poderia estar já se formando, preformando, performando, agindo, mesmo se vagamente, mas por via de uma vaguidão já plena da força imanente à sua singular consistência? Quando é que uma obra começa a ser *aquela* obra, *aquele* acontecimento, *aquele* ponto crítico antes mesmo de emergir como um objeto reconhecível, performado, materializado, intencionalmente titulado? Quando a obra começa a agir? E durante quanto tempo age no mundo e por via do mundo? E quando poderemos dizer que a obra terá se dissipado definitivamente—em finíssima poeira ou amnésia absoluta, sumindo de tal maneira que nem mesmo sua moldura sobrevive, obra e moldura e o espaço entre elas, essa linha orgânica de conjunção disjuntiva, todos total e finalmente dissolvidos, desobrados? Se fizéssemos tais perguntas, não estaríamos mais perante questões ontológicas. Ao invés, estaríamos considerando dinâmicas topocronológicas determinadas por fronteiras infindavelmente fluidas e, no entanto, totalmente singulares. Estaríamos considerando dinâmicas que não apenas caracterizam todo fenômeno emergente, mas também aqueles nunca totalmente claros momentos de dissipação: quando uma individuação (vida, obra, ação) atinge o seu nível energético mais baixo possível, sua descensão como ruído ou vibração anantrópica.

Posto de modo mais simples: perante uma obra de performance, como poderemos dizer, definir, delimitar, circunscrever, identificar, indicar, avaliar clara e inequivocamente onde estão os seus limites *como* obra—limites espaciais mas também temporais, históricos mas também geográficos, corpóreos mas também espectrais, atuais mas também virtuais, referenciais mas também linguísticos? Como podemos perturbar ou repensar não apenas onde uma obra de performance teve lugar, mas desde quando e até quando teria começado a estar tomando lugar—assumindo, claro, que trata-se de fato uma questão de tomar (um lugar) e uma questão de localizar (no tempo). Dado que, talvez, seja antes não uma questão de tomar mas de *dar*, e não uma questão de *localizar* mas de *temporalizar*. Uma questão de dar lugar (de volta) ao tempo e tempo (de volta) ao lugar. Uma questão de temporalizar o tempo

fora das suas cronoeconometrias de dar e tirar, e ao invés trabalhar apenas em dar e dar, dar e dar, dar e dar.

Sob essas condições especulativas, a questão concreta, a questão urgente, a questão insistente que as noções de dar e de temporalizar oferecem ao problema de definir não o autor de uma obra mas os limites de ação de uma obra, passa a ser a de descobrir não como estar perante uma obra (de arte) tal como se estivéssemos perante uma parede, casa, poste, ou pessoa, nem o que extrair de uma obra, nem o que dela ganhar. A questão, a questão perdida, teria sido sempre (sempre teria de ter sido) a de descobrir *como dar* de modo a podermos estar ao lado de uma obra em performance—sabendo que mesmo a expressão “ao lado” ainda é inexata pois requer (por via do seu sistema implícito de coordenadas espaciais) que sejamos capazes de dizer, ou saber exatamente, onde a obra estava, tinha estado, estaria, já está, estará. E onde eu estava, tinha estado, estaria, já estou, estarei quando estando ao seu lado. Esse é o cerne da questão: dado que toda performance é uma ativação de ações, a obra nunca acontece inteiramente onde achamos que ela está acontecendo, nem mesmo onde o seu autor acha que ela está acontecendo. Desde sempre atrás, desde sempre na frente, desde sempre ao lado, desde sempre passado, desde sempre na iminência de estar vindo, desde sempre quase vindo, mas também para sempre quase indo, sempre indo já, indo e vindo simultaneamente, dando, cedendo, concedendo, descendendo, desaparecendo, chegando. Todas essas ações para serem tomadas o mais literal e temporalmente possível, como efeitos daquilo que na palavra “ação” sabemos com certeza ser o seu cerne: as consequências de uma ação são sempre imprevisíveis, pois elas nunca apenas atingem seu alvo, uma vez que toda ação opera simultânea e continuamente no presente (onde ela se dá ao tempo), no futuro (onde o refaz), e no passado (onde o recomeça). A obra em performance trabalha a seguinte questão, colocada décadas atrás por Roger Caillois, pergunta fundamental que toda experiência-limite de vida, agindo longe da topoeconocronometria de experiências normativas do eu e do outro, levanta: “Sei onde estou, mas não sinto que estou no lugar onde me encontro.”³ Na beira dessa particular dissolução a performance obra, trabalha. E dá.

Em outras palavras, ao invés do impulso ontológico-fenomenológico expresso pelo famoso dizer de Husserl “em direção às coisas,” a vaguidão decisiva de um trabalho de ação propõe outra palavra de ordem, pragmática-especulativa, mas também empírica-transcendental e, portanto, concretamente cronopolítica: “em direção

à realidade de ser *antes* de toda individuação.”⁴ Mas dado que a historicidade importa, podemos reformular esta última frase e dizer: em direção à realidade do existir *após* toda individuação. Mas dado que passado e futuro se misturam em toda ação que age, deveríamos dizer ambas as frases simultaneamente, em trilhas paralelas, cada uma a ser dita um pouco à frente e um pouco atrás da outra, numa duplicação ainda suturada pela urgência de as fazer co-responder, e dizer assim:

em direção à realidade de ser existir antes após toda individuação.
em direção à realidade de ser existir antes após toda individuação.

2. onde quando então

Onde ou quando começar então? Onde foi que você começou então, Eleonora? Um então que não correspondia a um tempo determinado e um onde que não era um lugar determinado por coordenadas específicas. Um então e um onde que não se encontra como se encontra uma esquina num mapa. E não quero com isso dizer que o então, o agora, e os muitos futuros por vir estão todos suavemente interligados ou se desdobram um no outro com perfeita lisura, como se todos constituíssem um contínuo e indiscernível um. Porque há singularidades sim e há rachaduras, cortes, quebras. Porque há fragmentações totais da unidade, bem como há endurecimentos incipientes que, do ponto de vista da ação, podem ser chamados de *crystalização de uma iniciativa*. A obra é obra porque se quebra; num momento específico e num lugar específico. Essa quebra é a sua ação e, no entanto, essa ação se desdobra imediatamente em direção a todos os seus futuros e se redobra em direção a todos os seus passados, de tal modo que a obra sempre excede o instante de ocorrência da ação. Penso aqui em Henri Bergson: no que quer que ainda aja, aí encontraremos o presente. Da mesma maneira, no que quer que ainda faça agir a obra em direção à ação, ali encontraremos o seu presente. Mas como podemos identificar quando aquilo que ainda age começou a agitar sua consistência primeira para se tornar uma obra em ação, a ação de uma obra, de tua obra? Do you know, dear Eleonora?

3 CAILLOIS, Roger. “Mimicry and legendary psychastenia.” *October*, 31 (Winter, 1984): 30.

4 COMBES, Muriel. *Gilbert Simondon and the philosophy of the transindividual*. Cambridge-London: The MIT Press, 2013, p. 1.

3. quem sabe?

On the phone today you told me: "Already in 2005 I had the actions in mind." I keep thinking about that three-year-long waiting period, until those actions in potential would become corporified actions, actualized actions. Indeed, when was it that this body-of-action precipitated itself, made itself, made itself concrete? I understand and tell the story of this process like this: perhaps the seed to it all, the first catalysis of what would later unfold in a body for action, a body for the *Actions* took place when that son-of-a-bitch left you agonizing for days, his stupidity mixed with cynicism and arrogance while you were rotting before my eyes and our daughter's eyes, and thus she and I could not see what was happening either—since it was not possible to see death arriving at the same time that life had just sprung. Who knows? Perhaps it was there and then that what was in your mind distilled from being an action-potential into potency in action—in a body that would remain stubbornly vital amidst the clinical stupidity of men, of know-it-all white machos that found it oh so charming, even as they faced your agony as if it was some kind of joke, to be so close to our pathetic artistic vein and mode of living as if admiring the mysterious but so entertaining comings and goings of two rare monkeys in a zoo (since, for these guys, no human being could possibly desire a life so deprived of what the cynical-clinical-sons-of-bitches—the *porno-pharmaco-capitalists* as Paul B. Preciado calls them—want: to never miss an occasion to kill the other, whether with a word, or a glance, or neglect, given that the actual weapons and the actual blood and the actual corpses and the filthy butchery are always delegated to the *porno-pharmaco-capitalists'* mercenaries, their henchmen, lieutenants and others of the same sort). I tell the story, the pre-history of your actions like this: your will to indomitably incorporate your vital life amidst morbid lives and thus bring to its worldly actualization what was only in your mind; to make of this movement an act of sharing, a giving, a center for the propagation of more life in action.

To me, this way of telling this story is as close as it can get to what happened. It has to do with that story of life and death. And also, at that time there were too many stray bullets in the air. There was the "*mensalão*" (monthly slush-fund) corruption scandal in the Brazilian Congress and at the highest levels of the Executive Branch since 2005, the same year when the first ideas of the actions started to stir, you tell me, for the first time, in your mind. And that same year, 2005, was also when political operatives were found with hundreds of thousands of dollars in their underwear; when macho thieves in the Federal government regularly shed tears on prime-time national TV, claiming their "dignity" in a shameless spectacle; and when the stapled stomach singing-snitch-Senator became, through his own histrionics,

both victim and avenger at the same time. And then, in May of 2008, in the same year and one month after you performed your first action at Largo da Carioca, downtown Rio de Janeiro, there was also the warrant issued for arrest of the former Governor of Rio de Janeiro State, Anthony Garotinho (Anthony Littleboy), who by the way, in 2006, had also sealed his stomach, but in a different way, when he started a hunger strike in *solidarity with himself* (!!!). All this was there, a gang of vile men enmeshed in national and local rotten powers and command centers ever since the actions first started to act virtually in you; and there was also the huge scar on your belly, like a centipede (it even had the color of a centipede, your scar), which even though it had been stitched to cure the rot that almost killed you, also kept rotting, your centipede-scar. And there was our daughter who never slept and there was me far away and close by and far away and close by, always alongside and a bit behind, trying to figure out how to act, which action to take amidst all this, amidst all that, amidst that all. All of this and so much more shuffling through you and working you—already making your work. But the action would be yours. They would be yours, the actions.

So for me, yes that's where it more or less begins, the initiative. Your initiative. Your reply to what had happened, to what was happening, to what keeps happening. An initiative that, even without definite contour, is already action, already the singularity, the breaking point in the turbulence of life, and always courageous because by initiating one is precisely already beyond fear and courage. One is simply in the *urgency of having to transform the conditions that make possible the impossibility of belonging to the world*, to our world, to your city, your life.

For that is action. Particularly in the way you always understand it, as something inseparable from wording, from telling, from narrating, from sharing by talking or by giving an account of what happened, of what you lived and still live thanks to the encounter, all the encounters, even if unhappy ones, even if aggressive ones, or lax ones that actions occasion. This is action: a rebirth by one's own will.

4. surpreender

Eleonora, hoje, lendo ao me preparar para escrever estas palavras, aprendi isto com a Hanna Arendt: "*o surpreendentemente inesperado é inerente a todos os começos e a todas as origens.*"⁵ Pensei que gostarias dessa frase, eu sei que gostas do ensaio onde ela aparece, o capítulo "Ação" em *A condição humana*.

⁵ ARENDT, Hanna. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 178.

Mas, há um tempo, aprendi também o seguinte com Walter Benjamin, num livro dele que nunca consegui ler até o fim, mas do qual li e reli o prefácio tantas vezes que perdi a conta: que toda origem é desde sempre um turbulento desdobrar daquilo que ela não é: a fonte primeira. Ou seja: a turbulência constitutiva de toda origem, assim que atinge sua crista, quebra-se, qual onda incontrolável. Mesmo enquanto ainda se forma graças a tudo o que pré-formou, o seu singular emergir expressa sempre um *surpreendente inesperado*, precipitando ainda mais *surpreendentes inesperados* graças à afirmação, inclusão e aceitação particulares de uma dádiva esquecida, mas que anima todo e qualquer desejo de agir. Esse desejo-dádiva é tão simples e tão decisivo que temos de chamá-lo pelo seu nome próprio: coragem, um sinônimo da *modéstia* necessária a toda iniciativa desafiadora. E a dádiva modestamente corajosa é simplesmente a seguinte: por via do surpreendente inesperado de uma ação levada a cabo com a integridade do que chamamos de programa, por via do ato de dar e dar, você lembra a todos dentro do campo da ação que o momento presente pode ser mudado a qualquer instante. Para tal, apenas precisamos inserir as nossas ações, como ações, nas muitas bordas do presente e movermo-nos por ali por um pouco, de modo a dobrá-las em outro tempo para viver.

5. segundo nascimento

O nascimento das ações foi precedido por dois nascimentos: o da nossa filha e o teu—após teu raspão com a morte nos doze dias que se sucederam a teres lhe dado à luz. Não vou descrever aqui tudo, dado que o que se passou é para nós dois nos lembrarmos e esquecermos. Sei que as ações não surgiram exclusivamente desses duplos nascimentos, é óbvio. Mas elas também surgiram deles. O primeiro nascimento e o segundo nascimento dando à luz as iniciativas necessárias a serem levadas a cabo numa cidade com demasiadas mortes violentas, demasiados homens arrogantes, demasiada ignorância gerando o seu último avatar: violência cega que viola toda a vida, incluindo a da própria cidade, incluindo a das muitas promessas de uma sociabilidade alegre que nunca de fato chega exceto pagando um preço bem alto: o de aceitar o estado violento das coisas como inevitável, como uma espécie de normalidade ontoantropológica.

“Com palavras e atos nos inserimos no mundo humano, essa inserção é como um segundo nascimento,” writes Hanna Arendt. She continues: “Essa inserção não é forçada nem pela necessidade, como o labor, nem solicitada pelo utilitarismo, como o trabalho. Pode ser estimulada pela presença de outros a cuja companhia

gostaríamos de nos juntar mas nunca é condicionada por eles; o impulso por detrás dessa inserção nasce daquele começo que chega ao mundo quando nascemos e ao qual respondemos *começando algo novo por nossa própria iniciativa*.”⁶

This is what you did, right? Change the present, since there were two new lives there: the one you had just given to the world, our daughter, and the one the world had given to you, again. Thus, you decided to give yourself one more life, the third one, given by you to you. It was when you refused to continue living in a city that at each day affirmed to all its inhabitants the impossibility of living in it—and not just surviving in it, or escaping by chance from its many forms of violence—and you decided to give more life to it, through the actions. Four lives in total then. A fourfold with which you departed to the square, the square that has the name of the city’s (female) native, “carioca,” in order to offer to all: you will talk about anything with anyone. Since it is in speech and in body-to-body relations that political action is done: “Se ação como começo corresponde ao fato do nascimento, se ela é a atualização da condição humana de natalidade, então a fala corresponde ao fato da distinção e é a atualização da condição humana da pluralidade.”⁷

6. indocumento

Mas tantas das tuas ações permanecem invisíveis, indocumentadas, indocumentáveis, porque a sua dimensão não é da imagem mas daquilo que Lygia Clark chamou de vivência. Quando, após termos chegado a São José do Rio Preto, no estado de São Paulo, para uma visita preparatória à cidade onde realizarias uma série de ações um mês mais tarde, descobrimos que o Rio Preto era habitat de bandos e mais bandos de capivaras, os maiores roedores do planeta, alguns dos quais, nos disseram, eram abatidos de vez em quando por algum indigente ou morador de rua e transformados em churrasco. Bichos grandes, estranhos, não muito amigáveis, e naquela época do ano os bandos tinham filhotes, de modo que as capivaras adultas estavam particularmente agressivas. E então, durante aquela primeira visita, decidiste acrescentar uma nova ação. Decidiste que quando regressasses um mês mais tarde, para iniciar as *Ações Rio-Preenses* (2012), e antes de qualquer outra ação

6 ARENDT, Hanna. *The Human Condition*. Op. cit., p. 176. Translation and emphasis mine.

7 ARENDT, Hanna. *The Human Condition*. Op. cit., p. 178. My translation.

acontecesse—tinhas decidido fazer *Converso sobre qualquer assunto, Toco tudo, Troco tudo, Jarros, Saudades do Brasil, Uma fala sobre performance seguida de conversa sem fim*—terias de ser “recebida pela cidade,” e terias de “receber a cidade.” Por esse motivo mergulharias de camiseta branca no rio Preto. Esse mergulho se tornou *Ação Rio-Pretense #1: de camiseta branca no Rio Preto*.

E assim, um mês depois, lá fomos nós, ao fim da tarde do nosso primeiro dia no festival, em direção ao rio, eu te acompanhando, porém atrás e longe, de modo a não marcar nossa chegada como “arte,” dado que arrastava comigo uma quantidade de equipamento fotográfico. Na distância, te vi aproximando muito cuidadosamente de um bando grande de capivaras que com seus filhotes pastavam nas margens do rio, 8 ou 10 delas, mais uns 3 ou 4 filhotes. Vagarosamente, de modo que os animais nem se afugentassem nem te atacassem, finalmente conseguiste ficar por entre eles. E lá ficaram todos vocês por um bom bocado, faceando o rio, e recebendo os últimos raios do sol que se punha à vossa frente. E então deste um passo adentrando o rio, era mais fundo do que supunhas, desequilibraste-te um pouco naquele passo, e então deste mais outro passo, desta vez largo e adentrando ainda mais no rio, e chuá, você tragada pelas águas pretas do rio preto, o chuá ressoando altíssimo na tarde assustando as capivaras—algumas das quais, instintivamente, também mergulharam no rio. E de repente lá estavam todas vocês, nadando e flutuando nas águas geladas e poluídas. Havia também algumas pessoas em volta. Pescadores de vara na mão, um ou dois passantes fazendo o seu *jogging* vespertino, uns meninos mais ao longe, atrás de mim, jogando bola. Porém, estranhamente, ninguém demonstrou grande reação perante a cena, você chegando nas margens do rio, você no meio das capivaras, você mergulhando, nadando, saindo do rio, encharcada, despindo as roupas molhadas em público, se secando, enquanto as capivaras emitiam seus estranhos latidos. Não era uma tarde quente, como já disse. O sol estava bem vermelho no horizonte mas quase não emitia calor, e por isso tremias de frio, e eu pensando enquanto te ajudava a secar e vestir porque você tem de passar por esses rituais, esses atos que são tão públicos, tão necessários e intensos para ti, e para os quais não há público convidado, nem audiência cativa, sequer os organizadores do festival, somente eu ao teu lado mas definitivamente atrás, um ou outro passante mais ou menos indiferente, e os animais cuja postura e localização no mundo é estar sempre e de qualquer maneira em outro lugar, em outro quando?

7. o menor dos atos

“O menor dos atos nas circunstâncias mais limitadas traz consigo a semente do ilimitado; porque um feito, e por vezes uma palavra, basta para mudar qualquer constelação.”⁸ Aplica-se perfeitamente, creio, ao que fazes.

8. the necessity to emerge / the necessity to submerge

Querida – pensando no modo como participas em festivais e apresentações mais enquadradas do teu trabalho compus um texto hoje na minha cabeça que já vai fazer parte do meu ensaio sobre ti / teu trabalho pro seu livro.

Entretanto, vou escrevê-lo aqui, bem pior é claro, e apressado, porque acho que pode ser útil um dia e não quero esquecê-lo. Considere estas palavras como notas dramatúrgicas, por assim dizer. Espero que façam sentido para ti.

Seria algo assim:

When a festival or venue invites you to come and do your actions, and you ask them that the places and times of your actions are not to be announced in an exact or precise way in the program – this request does not derive from any wish on your part of wanting to create a kind of meta-performance, or conceptual art piece, or a reactive statement of the sort: “the artist is absent”.

It is not at all (and correct me if I am wrong) that you want the public in a festival to be “looking for the artist” – and thus turning this hypothetical search for your presence into the artwork itself. And no: neither do you want to establish, by keeping your location imprecise in space and time, any explicit references to a Guy Debord/psychogeographic *dérive*. Nor do you want to comment on the notion that performance plunges into its own disappearance. And you definitely do not want to propose any kind of art-as-language statement on the illocutionary power of the “festival program” by turning the festival brochure into a speech act – in this case, the festival schedule as the making of a promise.

So: it is not about conceptualizing the relationship between the document (the festival program) and the event (your actions in the city, always taking place but never with a scheduled time so as not to attract the framing of art produced by spectatorship). It is not because “You want to be alone”. It is not because you are rejecting

⁸ ARENDT, Hanna. *The Human Condition*. Op. cit., p. 190. My translation.

the festival (since, after all, you did accept the invitation to be there, to do work, to work your actions, to look for the encounter, and “to make things happen” – as William Pope.L defines what artists do, a sentence you like to quote so much!).

No. You are moved by none of the above.

You are moved by something else altogether. By your belief that conditions for performance can exist in regimes of extremely low *framed* visibility, and that your actions can only remain actions to the extent that they interact with haphazard interlocutors or momentary co-participants that had not at all made an appointment with art that day... What drives you is actually the desire to *not to make a date* with an audience that would come see a piece and (perhaps more problematically) to come see an *artist*. Yours is a desire to see how chance encounters (and not scheduled dates) with people in the streets, catalyzed by your unannounced (to them) and quite simple actions, can precipitate the event of an encounter, or an encounter as event. Your main quest is: how to encounter the encounter – including the encounter between you and your own work. Usually such encounters with the encounter happen without scheduling. And it certainly helps that the distancing effect of a framing device (like an audience that arrives somewhere expecting the *piece* and *its artist*) is not there.

Because the audience is a frame, and any frame is a set of conditions of inclusions and exclusions. And those framed conditions decondition what you are looking for, which is an uncharted zone of exchange in a situation where your interlocutors, co-participants, co-artists, co-citizens, do not feel exposed, do not feel they are performing for art, or performing for some kind of “candid camera” show... It is very important to say all this, in order not to fetishize your supposed “absence”. You are just working in the conditions you feel the work can actually work best: in its decisive withdrawal from spectacle.

There is, however, one scheduled event that you always announce when you participate in festivals and the like. The last action of the series, always with a time and a place defined and previously publicized for all to come. This last action within the series that you perform in festivals, derives from a desire and sense of obligation to make public a narrative of all that you did, of everything that you experienced through the actions, of all that you have just occasioned in the streets of that city, for the days or weeks you are involved in the festival. There is an ethical-political-poetic imperative to narrate to others what you and the people you meet and interact with do when you have your encounters, or your missed encounters, through the actions. This is the final action always inserted into your series: to story-tell, to narrate.

Thus, you gather the festival’s public and organizers in a restaurant, bar, or café. Usually in a place that is also not part of the festival, not part of the urban and

architectural environment of “Art”, preferably located in a not-so-posh area of town, and with at least half of the costumers not from the regular festival audience. Usually you buy some crates of beer and soda, for which you have negotiated a lower price than usual with the restaurant or bar owner, and you distribute the first round to everyone. Usually people sit around you and you find a position close to the bar. There you start talking, telling what happened, always accompanied by images coming from your laptop computer that you plug into whatever already installed TV set is available in the restaurant. It is in these contexts that you tell the festival audience, but also and at the same time you tell the usual patrons of that bar, restaurant, or café who happen to be around then, what you and their fellow co-citizens did in their city throughout the past few days. I remember once you talking to us from behind the bar of a real cheap (but great!) bar/café/restaurant hybrid in Rio, and the staff was busy around you as you spoke, and they were minding their own business cooking, serving drinks, preparing sandwiches, but also listening to you and commenting here and there the images of your actions on their TV set, cracking a joke, asking a question...

Again, what is important in this resurfacing to framed visibility is to open up the possibility for other series of encounters: with the festival participants (artists, organizers, staff) as well as with the festival’s audience. Thus another encounter is precipitated, through narration. This moment reminds me of what Walter Benjamin had to say about the storyteller as the one who transmits not information *but experience*. It reminds me also of what Hanna Arendt had to say about the inextricable link between speech and action. Pois é isso a ação, principalmente como a sempre entendes: algo inseparável da palavra, do dizer, do contar, do partilhar conversando ou narrando mais tarde sobre o que se passou, sobre o que viveste e vives por via do encontro, dos encontros, mesmo se infelizes, agressivos, ou frouxos: um renascimento por vontade própria.

9. the necessity to submerge / the necessity to emerge



I was there. I am there. I will be there. Alongside, a bit behind.

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This book is dedicated to Valentina, our daughter.

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and Politics
In Transit Festival 2008 – Berlin
Isabel Setti
Izabel Bicudo
Izabela Pucu
Jaime Acioli
Jandira Fátima Jordão

João Baptista Ardizoni Reis
João Bina
José Fernando Azevedo
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Liz Heard
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Marcial Godoy-Anatívia
Marcio Abreu
Maria Lúcia Lepecki
Maria Tendlau
Marlène Ramírez-Cancio
Patrícia Lima
Paulo Geyerhahn
Performa 2015
Professors, students, and staff of
the Theater Directing Program,
School of Communication, UFRJ
Professors, students, and staff of the Arts
of the Scene Graduate Program, School
of Communication, UFRJ
Professors, students, and staff of the
Department of Performance Studies, NYU
Raquel Iantas
Ronaldo Brito
Staff of the exhibition “The Experience
of Art,” Sesc Santo André 2015
Tobias Lepecki
Viniciús Arneiro
Waltercio Caldas

and thank you those who granted
consent to use their image in the project.
We also thank the citizens in the streets
where the actions took place; without
their participation and witnessing,
the adventure is not possible. Praise the
people of the streets! Praise the people
in the streets!

The protagonism is not of the performer, spectator or participant. The protagonism is of the action itself, of the activated relations, of the encounters among the widest variety of bodies that each action is capable of interrelating. The performance of an action generates the need for the next one—whether to address some question that was formulated during its execution, to satisfy any need that imposed itself, or to reinforce some direction more emphatically. That is, ideas for new performances usually emerge when I am performing. Series unfold in series, and I have the impression that I have been performing one single work through diverse movements and with different names. The other day I realized that I understand this work as a practice. Agreeing with William Pope.L: “if I were to call what I do [performance] anything else, I’d call it a *practice*.” And today, this morning at breakfast, I understood the following: it is necessary to rethink the theory of performance as a theory of adventure.





Praise the people of the streets! Praise the people in the streets!



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