The Fifth Annual Symposium of Latin American Art Vistas

Vistas 7

The Fifth Annual Symposium of Latin American Art

Touch, Taste, Turn: Unleashing the Senses in the Art of the Americas

Edited by Blanca Serrano Ortiz de Solórzano

INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES ON LATIN AMERICAN ART

Established in 2016, the Annual Symposium of Latin American Art is an international event supported by the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA) and independently organized by graduate students at The Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, The Graduate Center of The City University of New York, and Columbia University. The symposia feature graduate students, scholars, and artists presenting original research and discourse on Latin American and Latinx art and visual culture.

Initially proposed to ISLAA by The Institute of Fine Arts graduate students, the annual symposium provides a vital space for scholars to convene, sharing research that runs the gamut of art historical periods and traditions and engaging in ongoing critical dialogues. ISLAA has the privilege of supporting graduate students in their professional development and in building lasting networks of intellectual exchange.

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Preface

Blanca Serrano Ortiz de Solórzano

Vistas 7 is dedicated to the Fifth Annual Symposium of Latin American Art, titled Touch, Taste, Turn: Unleashing the Senses in the Arts of the Americas. Started in 2016 by a group of graduate students at The Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, the Annual Symposium of Latin American Art has recently expanded to become a collaborative project co-organized by The Institute of Fine Arts, The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (CUNY), and Columbia University. It is an honor and a pleasure for us to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the annual symposium. Supported by ISLAA since its inception, this international platform for emerging scholars of Latin American art has become a point of reference for vital intellectual exchange.

The fifth edition of the symposium was originally scheduled for spring 2020 but had to be postponed until April 2021 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The exemplary student organizers of the symposium met this unprecedented challenge with creativity and resourcefulness, transforming the in-person format of the symposium into an entirely online event with more than 450 attendees located around the world and over many time zones. The speakers shared short prerecorded presentations before the event, while the panel discussions and keynote talks were presented live with reserved time for Q&A.

Touch, Taste, Turn: Unleashing the Senses in the Art of the Americas focused on the development of multisensorial experiences within the arts and visual cultures of Latin America. The eleven participants, whose abstracts were selected from the 116 that were submitted, reflected on this "sensory turn" within interrelated forms of knowledge, materiality, and perception. Their presentations considered a vast chronology (from colonial times until the present), a broad geography (including diasporic practices across the Americas), and myriad media (which ranged from feather art to performance). The international scope of the

symposium is also reflected in its presenters, which included emerging scholars based in France, Egypt, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States. The keynote speakers were María Magdalena Campos-Pons, artist and Cornelius Vanderbilt Endowed Chair of Fine Arts at Vanderbilt University, who discussed the profound influence of her Nigerian, Spanish, and Chinese heritage on her artistic practice, and writer and curator Claire Tancons, who reflected on the possibilities of an African diasporic sensorium. The symposium concluded with a stunning video performance by artist Castiel Vitorino Brasileiro that evoked the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade and of religious practices of African origin in Brazil.

Vistas is a platform for emerging scholars who participate in ISLAA's research and academic programs. In order to disseminate the latest research on Latin American art as widely as possible. we have made Vistas accessible for free through ISLAA's website and available on paper at select university libraries. Due to its format, only three essays are featured in each issue of Vistas. As chief editor of the publication, I found it painfully difficult to select the essays presented here given the outstanding quality of all the presentations included in the 2021 symposium. Dedicated to Dr. Atl, Cildo Meireles, and Ayrson Heráclito, respectively, the three essays presented in Vistas 7 investigate how understandings of how nature can be experienced through the body have evolved throughout the past seventy-five years of Latin American art. Focusing on Mexico and Brazil, the selected texts also speak to the changing conceptions of the relation between body and mind according to transforming epistemologies concerning questions of nationality, race, and gender.

In "Palpitaciones telúricas: Mexican Modernism and Physiological Aesthetics in Landscape Painting," Rebeca Barquera explores the idea of "sensescapes" in Dr. Atl's landscape paintings, in which energy, vibration, and rhythm play a crucial role in the psychological and physical perception of the atmosphere. The idea of participants in Cildo Meireles's works as both transmitters and receivers of perception is proposed in "Through Other Senses: Eureka/Blindhotland and Através by Cildo Meireles" by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite, in which the author also analyzes how obscurity and revelation influence the experience of time. In his

essay "On Ayrson Heráclito's *Bori*," Bernardo Mosqueira examines how performances inspired by Candomblé rituals can be inserted within fine arts institutions in the Global North while preserving the opacity of these sacred practices, and therefore escaping colonialist power structures derived from Western positivism.

I would like to thank the audience, moderators, presenters, and organizers of Touch, Taste, Turn: Unleashing the Senses in the Art of the Americas, Special thanks to Edward J. Sullivan, Helen Gould Shepard Professor in the History of Art at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; Anna Indych-López, professor of twentieth-century Latin American and Latinx art at the Graduate Center, CUNY; Katherine Manthorne, professor of modern art of the Americas at the Graduate Center, CUNY; Lisa Trever, Lisa and Bernard Selz Associate Professor in Pre-Columbian Art History and Archaeology, Columbia University; Alexander Alberro, Virginia Bloedel Wright '51 Professor of Art History, Barnard College; and Kellie E. Jones, Hans Hofmann Professor of Modern Art, Columbia University, for their thoughtful and committed coordination of the symposium. My sincere admiration and thanks go to the student organizers, Francesca Ferrari, Tie Jojima, Juan Gabriel Ramírez Bolívar Horacio Ramos, Julián Sánchez González, and Gwen Unger for their tenacity and enthusiasm in carrying out such a successful symposium. The ISLAA team looks forward to the Sixth Annual Symposium of Latin American Art and to many more editions to come, and I look forward to having the privilege of editing their corresponding issues of Vistas.

Palpitaciones telúricas: Mexican Modernism and Physiological Aesthetics in Landscape Painting

Rebeca Barquera

During the first half of the twentieth century, Mexican artist Gerardo Murillo, better known as Dr. Atl (1875–1964), painted and wrote about Mexican landscapes, mountains, valleys, and waves. Atl was famous for his long walks to explore the Popocatepetl and Iztaccihuatl volcanoes and for living from time to time in a little shack at the top of the former for several weeks. In his poem "La noche," Atl described an experience he had one night at Popocatepetl: "[F]rom all things emanated a new force whose influx I had never felt before—a palpitation whose rhythm was born from every molecule of matter and vibrated on my nerves with renovating energy."

This essay will consider Atl's landscape paintings (focusing on *Nubes sobre el valle* and *La sombra del Popocatepetl*) as "sensescapes." According to David Howe, sensescapes establish "the idea that the experience of the environment, and of the other persons and things which inhabit that environment, is produced by the particular mode of distinguishing, valuing, and combining the senses." Atl experienced nature with his entire body, each sense contributing to his appreciation of it, and focused not only on the spatial organization of nature but also on energy flow, particle rhythm, and the atmosphere of vibrations. The artist's observation and experience of nature would become the leitmotif of his work, present in his literature, painting, pochoirs, and scientific dissertations alike.

Looking at Atl's painting *Nubes sobre el valle* takes us inside the image, where we appear to be looking down from a high point in the Valley of Mexico. Downward, using the wide view allowed by the painting's curvilinear perspective, the view unfolds onto a wide valley with areas of farming and human activity. This view is contained by a mountain range that forms the curved line of the horizon, bordered by a large mass of clouds against a deep blue sky. The painting's spherical structure gives the viewer the sensation of being part of the

image, of being absorbed by it. It also suggests the movement of the clouds.

This painting was included in an exhibition organized by the artist in the last months of 1933. The chosen venue was a colonial building formerly known as Convento de la Merced in downtown Mexico City, where Atl had been living in an attic room for more than a decade. There, he showed drawings and paintings that promoted many experimental artistic techniques and media that included a kind of tempera mixed with beeswax known as "acquaresina," crayons of his own invention that he called "atlcolors," and a new kind of perspective invented by his friend and former disciple at the National School of Fine Art, later renamed the Academia de San Carlos, the artist Luis G. Serrano. These ideas were explained in a self-published booklet titled El paisaje (fig. 1), which was also sold during the exhibition. At created different covers for the publication, alternating between pochoir prints of a mountain, a cactus, and a volcano and using type in blue, black, red, or orange.

One of the concepts described in the publication, the "perspectiva curvilínea" or "curvilinear perspective," represented a viewer with a body. This is because the "theoretical visual optical center" is located in the observer's pupil and not on the vertex of their optical cone, as was the traditional understanding. This creates a field of vision conditioned by the natural curvature of the eye and the bifocality of vision. Thus, the retina is able to retain images of space and objects through curved and other non-straight structures of the real, intermediate, and virtual space—that is, the space that is in front of us, to our sides, and behind us, outside the plane of the observer. Therefore, per Serrano's theory, viewers of Atl's paintings have two eyes and a body.

In La sombra del Popocatepetl (fig. 2), as in many of Atl's landscapes, the human figure is absent, and although its surface, divided into plots of land, timidly reveals its existence, it is in the amplitude and elevation of the gaze that the landscape captured by Atl is magnified and becomes the stage where an omnipotent being makes use of the forces of nature. That gaze is in itself a human presence, one that wishes to penetrate the mysteries of the cosmos from the summit of Popocatepetl. Atl maintained that artists generally possess—thanks to the exceptional link between their eyes and their

brains—superior capacities that allow them to unravel the knowledge held by every object they gaze upon. It is important, then, to explore the link between the artist's physiological approaches to perception and his understanding of the connection between microcosm and macrocosm. Further still, we must analyze the privileged place that the artist as a figure occupied within his idea of the world.

For the art historian and critic Jonathan Crary, one of the origins of the physiological observer was the subjective vision produced by the use of the stereoscope since, while using it, the observer's body, including the muscular movements of the eye and its blinking, becomes a visual apparatus. The avantgarde movements of the twentieth century famously attempted to link art and life. In his Theory of the Avant-Garde, Peter Bürger wrote: "Not only does reality in its concrete variety penetrate the work of art but the work no longer seals itself off from it." From this, we could infer that for avant-garde artists, sensorial experiments were a way of further blurring the distinction between art and life. Although landscape painting had been practiced in Mexico for decades—following its introduction to the Academia de San Carlos by Eugenio Landesio (1810–1879) and the great advancements in the genre made by José María Velasco (1840–1912)—Atl gave it a meaning of his own. For him it was necessary to understand landscape as "the rhythm of waves that nature extends perhaps generously, where we saturate the spirit with sublime sensations of beauty and energy."

Atl proclaimed himself an alchemist, a creator of techniques who manipulated matter by desiring its transformation. He described his atlcolors—the medium he invented—as "a solid wax- and resin-based procedure, in the form of small sticks, in all colors and shades." That is, it is a technique of secco that compacts pigment and a binder in stick form. Atl typically used atlcolors much like a crayon, dragging each stick over a layer of oil paint to make curved lines of light and small spots in different colors and tones, as we can see in *La sombra del Popocatepetl*, where he employs it with touches of yellow, orange, pink, lilac, and green (fig. 3).

Modernity is dominated by the supremacy of the eye and the gaze, a concept that leads us to what is seen—that is, images. The imagination translates into psychic language the physiological process by which the eye gives us images. To imagine, then, is also to see. In this sense, I suggest that Atl studied matter in order to control the observer's experience of color. It is not just a question of studying the effect of light on a surface (as an impressionist would) or the way in which human beings perceive this light wave but of controlling color and its reception by experimenting with painting materiality itself. Atlcolors served not only as a medium but also as a possible way to represent energy; that is, atlcolors produce "color vibrations," which operate as the final traces, marked throughout the painting.

In this way, these color sticks give different textures to his work, fracturing its surface and creating a different space, one that, in the words of the artist, surrounds all the bodies in the universe, like an electric atmosphere. In his novel Un hombre más allá del universo. Atl explained that those atmospheres allowed life, movement, and balance. "No body can live in the universe without an atmosphere. All the bodies that compose it, from the infinitely small to the infinitely large, the known ones, those that we can touch, the invisible ones, and those that we imagine are surrounded by an electric atmosphere." The interrupted strokes can be considered vibrations, just like their electric atmospheres. It follows that landscape can be thought of as a synecdoche of the cosmos. In other words, studying and painting landscapes create the possibility of exploring the physical and electromagnetic relations between humankind and the universe.

Atl described his creative process in terms of vibration as well:

I am not in favor of making many studies to execute a landscape, a portrait, a painting, or a mural, because in those studies the spontaneity and the emotion remain, and the work turns out to be cold, inexpressive, and mannered, while if it is executed directly, with the palpitating sensation of what was seen, throwing it entirely on the surface of the canvas or the wall, the work will vibrate.

Landscape painting must palpitate . . . but how? Following the ideas of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the signature is the symbolic inscribed in matter by the action of a subject. The act of producing atlcolors and then using them to create artworks, holding them and applying them to the canvas, was the signature that made it possible for the traced signs to speak, to perform as an active principle. The material must be brought to life by the artist's creative ability to reactivate it. Understanding the artist's methods and procedures is important, because it allows us to access the conditions of possibility contained in the work's own making: the symbolic character of the technology of the atlcolor (fig. 4).

A link is thus established between macrocosm and microcosm, as atlcolors imagined and reproduced the signature of the universe. So it might be that through the alchemistic trials that led Atl to the creation of atlcolors, the painter fixed landscape and cosmos for the observer, for the human body. Atl wrote, "Bodies are made up of . . . combinations of electromagnetic charges, differing only quantitatively. And, in synthesis, matter is a substantial entity identical and in solidarity with energy." In the painter's theory of art, in line with the scientific theories of Hermann von Helmholtz and other physicists, matter and energy are linked. For example, it would appear that when painting La sombra del Popocatepetl Atl considered the effects of light on the landscape as well as its curvilinear configuration, which achieved the effect of seemingly surrounding the observer, as if they were a mountain walker whose gaze-body looks out from the mountain peaks. Atl explained sensorial perception as follows:

Pressure, resistance, shock allow us by contact with the integuments to feel the material nature of bodies, their form, their consistency, and their relative immobility or displacement in space. This stimulus is revealed by the neuro-tactile-muscular sensation. The vibrations or electromagnetic undulations . . . give our eyes the sensation of light and color, which reveal to us the presence of things. The vibrations of the air, in agreement with those of the bodies, produce in our ears the sensation of sound. Radiations, which are also electromagnetic through the medium or

material bodies, also give our neurocutaneous sensibility the impression of heat. The emanations of molecular particles from substances and bodies produce the sensation of a scent in our sense. In contact with the papillae of the tongue and mouth, they give us the impression of taste.

Thus, materiality can be understood as a phenomenon that the brain interprets after the absorption, reflection, and refraction of pure vibration. Vibration is also a fundamental principle in occult and theosophical physics, and its representation is based on the use of color as a ray of light. But for Atl it also implied a different way of knowing, which can be seen as being in dialogue with his readings of French mathematician Henri Poincaré, who distinguished three types of perceptual space: visual, tactile, and motor. The first produces a two-dimensional image as a result of the accommodation of the eye, whereas tactile and motor spaces transform the image plane through muscular sensations, which can be as variable as the number of muscles a human being can have. The motor space, Poincaré explains, has as many dimensions as we have muscles. In that sense, Atl's ideas relate the qualities of visual and tactile perception and movement in an attempt to transcend representation.

Finally, it is important to note that Atl is better known within art history for encouraging the production of public murals before the Mexican Revolution, securing commissions from the government for himself and other artists since very early on, but almost all his wall-based works, which perhaps included his early color experiments and technical innovations, were destroyed. While the manipulation of color and its effects was a phantom that haunted Atl throughout his career, his sensorial and scientific ideas never managed to dominate modern Mexican painting. According to Atl, a revolution was necessary—a revolution that would make painting dynamic. Perhaps what was at stake was art's materiality itself.

- 1. Dr. Atl, "La noche," México Moderno 10 (May 1, 1921). Original quote: "[D]e todas las cosas emanó una fuerza nueva cuyo influjo yo no había sentido jamás —una palpitación cuyo ritmo nacía de cada molécula de la materia y vibraba sobre mis nervios con renovadora energía." All translations are by the author.
- 2. "Part III: Sensescapes," *Empire* of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader, ed. David Howes (New York: Routledge, 2020), 143–45.
- 3. Luis G. Serrano, *Una nueva* perspectiva: la perspectiva curvilínea, prologue by Dr. Atl. (Mexico City: Editorial Cvltvra, 1934).
- 4. Also, in the curvilinear perspective model, the viewer and the horizon are at the poles of a circle that can be located at any angle relative to the sphere. Dr. Atl wrote, "The painter Luis G. Serrano, without exceeding the limits of a rigorously Euclidean world, and based on the principles of rigorous logic, establishes the theory of a curvilinear perspective that determines a new geometric interpretation." See Jonathan Crary, Las técnicas del observador. Visión y modernidad en el siglo XIX (Murcia: CENDEAC, 2008) and Serrano, Una nueva perspectiva, 101.
- 5. Peter Bürger, Theory of the Avant-Garde (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 91.
- 6. Dr. Atl, Gentes profanas en el convento (México: Ediciones Botas, 1950), 73. Original quote: "[E]l ritmo de ondas que la naturaleza extiende tal vez generosamente, donde saturamos el espíritu de excelsas sensaciones de belleza y energía."
- 7. Dr. Atl, "El Atl color. Un nuevo procedimiento en Pintura," manuscript, Mexico City, July 5, 1937, National Library of Mexico, Reserved Collection, Gerardo Murillo Archive (GMA), box 2a. Original quote: "Un procedimiento sólido, a base de cera y resinas, en

- forma de barras pequeñas, de todos colores y en todos los tonos." I explore atlcolors from a technical art history perspective in Rebeca Barquera and Sandra Zetina, "Atlcolors and Encaustic Tradition: Dr. Atl's Renovation of an Ancient Medium," in Futurahma: Materials and Techniques, from Futurism to Classicism (1910–1922). Research, Analysis, New Perspectives, eds. Margherita D'Ayala Valva and Mattia Patti (Pisa: Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa/Università di Pisa, forthcoming).
- 8. Dr. Atl, Un hombre más allá del universo (Mexico City: Editorial Botas, 1935), 27–28. Original quote: "Ningún cuerpo puede vivir en el Universo sin atmósfera. Todos los cuerpos que lo componen, desde el infinitamente pequeño hasta el infinitamente grande, los conocidos, los que podemos tocar, los invisibles y los que imaginamos están rodeados de una atmósfera eléctrica."
- 9. Antonio Luna Arroyo, El Dr. Atl. Paisajista puro (Mexico City: Editorial Cvltvra, 1952), 142. Original quote: "Yo no soy partidario de hacer muchos estudios para ejecutar sea un paisaje, un retrato, un cuadro o un mural, porque en esos estudios se quedan la espontaneidad, y la emoción y la obra resulta fría, inexpresiva y amanerada, mientras que, si se ejecuta directamente, con la sensación palpitante de lo que se vio, arrojándola entera sobre la superficie de la tela o del muro, la obra vibrará."
- 10. The signature is inseparable from the sign, since it makes it capable of acting. See Giorgio Agamben, Signatura rerum: sobre el método (Barcelona: Anagrama, 2010), 74. There is also an English translation: The Signature of All Things: On Method (Princeton, NJ: Zone Books/Princeton University Press, 2009).
- 11. Dr. Atl, "Fragmentos diversos," manuscript, National Library of Mexico, Reserved Collection, GMA,

box 4b. Original quote: "Los cuerpos constituyen... combinaciones de cargas electromagnéticas, que difieren sólo cuantitativamente. Y, en síntesis, la materia resulta una entidad substancial idéntica y solidaria con la energía."

12. Dr. Atl. "Fragmentos diversos." Original quote: "La presión, la resistencia, el choque, nos permiten por el contacto con los tegumentos sentir la naturaleza materia, de los cuerpos, su forma, su consistencia y su inmovilidad o desplazamiento relativos en el espacio. Ese estímulo es revelado por la sensación neurotáctil-muscular. Las vibraciones u ondulaciones electromagnéticas ... dan a nuestros ojos la sensación de la luz y el color, que nos revelan la presencia de las cosas. Las vibraciones del aire, concordes con las de los cuerpos, producen en nuestros oídos la sensación de sonido. Las radiaciones, también electromagnéticas a través del

médium o de los cuerpos materiales, dan, asimismo, a nuestra sensibilidad neurocutánea, la impresión del calor. Las emanaciones de partículas moleculares de las substancias y los cuerpos producen en nuestro olfato la sensación de olor. Las mismas en contacto con las papilas de la lengua y de las fauces, nos hacen sentir la impresión del sabor."

- 13. Dr. Atl belongs to a generation of Mexican intellectuals who shaped their way of seeing and thinking toward the end of the nineteenth century. His engagement with occultist and theosophical positions and their experimentations with the fourth dimension allowed him to think about other possible worlds, which he expressed through his sensescapes.
- 14. Linda Henderson, The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 81–82.

Figures



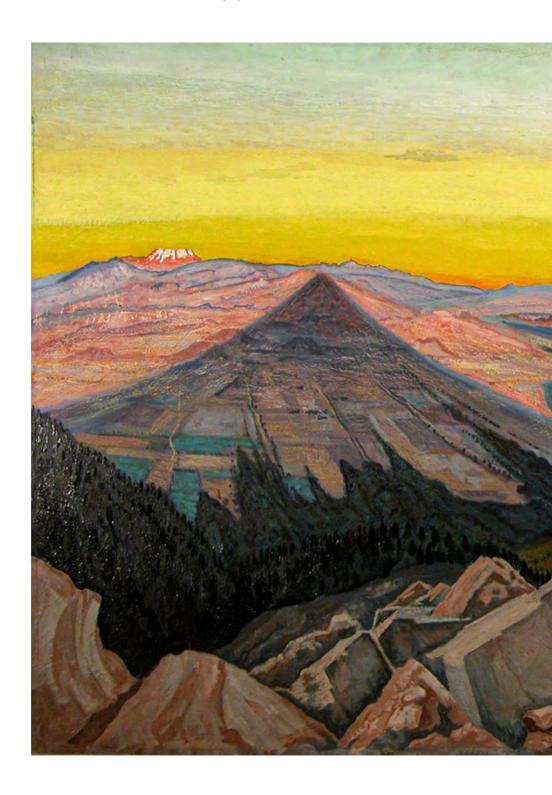
Figure 1

Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), *El paisaje (un ensayo*), 1933 Pochoir print on cardboard and fabric, 9 ¾ × 10 ¾ in. (24.7 × 27.3 cm) Private collection

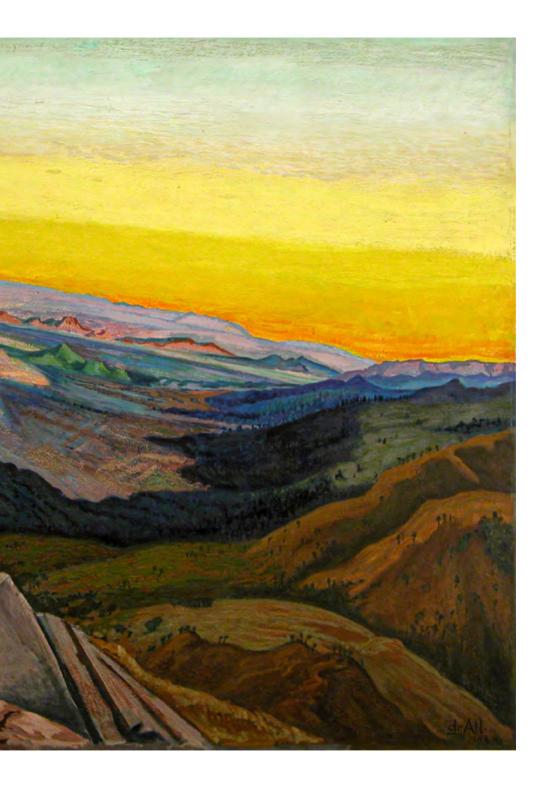
Figure 2 (Following spread)

Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), *La sombra del Popocatepetl*, 1942
Oil paint, beeswax, and atlcolor on fiberboard panel, 48 % × 70 in. (123 × 178 cm)
Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico
Photograph by Eumelia Hernández, 2005 © LDOA-LANCIC, IIE-UNAM

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Figures. Rebeca Barquera. Palpitaciones telúricas



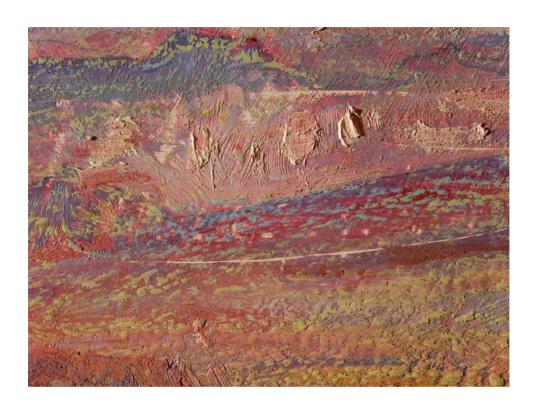


Figure 3

Detail of traces of atlcolors in *La sombra del Popocatepetl*, 1942 Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico Photograph by Eumelia Hernández, 2005 © LDOA-LANCIC, IIE-UNAM



Figure 4

Detail of traces of atlcolors in *La sombra del Popocatepetl*, 1942 Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes/Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico Photograph by Eumelia Hernández, 2005 © LDOA-LANCIC, IIE-UNAM

Through Other Senses: Eureka/Blindhotland and Através by Cildo Meireles

Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite

Multiple Weights and the Same Dimensions

From a distance, *Eureka/Blindhotland* (1970–75) (fig. 1) allows us to see its interior through a golden-yellow nylon net hanging above a floor of a slightly lighter yellow ocher. At its center, a striking light illuminates a scale. According to the artist, Cildo Meireles, Archimedes's formula for density, which has to do with substance and appearance, form and content, and mass and volume, seemed to him to be central to art making; the creation of his work *Eureka/Blindhotland* was guided by the possibility of upending this principle. The work has four parts: the first, *Eureka* (fig. 2), is composed of a scale that balances, improbably, two $4 \times 4 \times 11$ % inch wooden blocks on one plate and a wooden cross on the other.

Upon returning to Brazil from his stay in New York in 1973, Meireles formulated a kind of combinatorial analysis that would result in Blindhotland, the second part of the work. For Blindhotland's final piece, Meireles envisaged 201 rubber spheres with weights ranging from 3 ½ ounces to 3 pounds, which were to be laid out across a floor carpeted in yellow felt, the latter replaced by linoleum for the 2019 exhibition Entrevendo: Cildo Meireles, held at SESC Pompeia in São Paulo. The sound that lingers in the visitors' ears constitutes the third part of the work, Expeso, the sound recording of the spheres falling in "three different situations: at different heights, at varying distances from the microphone, and with spheres of different weights." The fourth part, Insercões (Insertions), would occur through the publication in different newspapers of eight images, presented with no captions, of a man and a sphere whose relative sizes varied throughout each of the publications in a nod to the lilliputian, which for Meireles was reminiscent of childhood.

The image chosen by Meireles carries the drama of a slender man who spent his days resting his head on the same

spot on the wall of the psychiatric hospital of Vila São Cottolengo, in the city of Trindade. When Meireles made his proposal for an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio de Janeiro (MAM Rio), he presented *Inserções* as the first part of the work, according to documents in the institution's archives. It should be noted that the artist explained that *Blindhotland* would be the name of an ongoing series of works started in 1970 in which "visual predominance gives way to a 'blind' reality that is gustatory, thermal, sonorous, oral, related to density, etc." ⁵

The Transparent Labyrinth

Eight years after the completion of *Eureka/Blindhotland*, Meireles embarked on another important work, *Através* (Through, 1983–89). Experiencing *Através* is to be led through the space by a transparency that slows down the pace of our journey while provoking a desire for approximation. The first step of this journey distances us from any certainty; a noise enters our ears, reverberates in our bodies, makes us shiver, mesmerizes our senses. The broken glass is shattered at each new step as the subject follows the labyrinth's path—an unstable and slippery territory. The groaning of the glass colors the work, stimulates walking, sharpens the imagination.

The labyrinth's walls are separated into layers; there is an order to them, a sequence in the distance between one and the next and in the repetition of their materials, familiar to us from our daily lives: a plastic shower curtain, blinds, a rope, a piece of barbed wire. As other subjects walk through the installation, their figures overlap across the walls and their footsteps thicken the noise that accompanies us on the walk. As we move closer to the great sphere, the layers of the labyrinth's walls decrease in height, while their force as a barrier, in turn, increases.

Meireles has stated that one day at his home in Rio de Janeiro, around the age of thirty-four, he opened a cellophane wrapper and crumpled it up. As he threw it in the wastebasket, a sound echoed in the air; the quasi-plastic tangle had twisted, alerting the artist. For the artist, the sound reflected the coexistence of rigidity and malleability. That moment marked the creation of *Através* for the artist, who found the sound

produced by the cellophane wrapper to be fertile ground for artistic creation. Meireles was interested in the duality contained within the cellophane wrapper; while its transparency allows the eye to see what it contains, its solidity constitutes a barrier. Similarly, while it can be easily crumpled, it attempts to return to its original form. The artist then dedicated himself to composing a list of barriers, restrictions, and prohibitions, further exploring this idea of rigidity and malleability.⁶

In Através transparency presents itself as a key element for carrying out a certain perversity, allowing visitors to see, but not touch, what is behind it. The installation (figs. 3 and 4), whose raised walls form a great labyrinth, is founded on this idea of transparency, preventing the circulation of bodies and dictating paths through its cracks while providing our eyes with the freedom to roam through its barriers, arranged side by side. The number of walls in the labyrinth is sixty—a key number for marking time—and their systematic repetition is organized in concentric squares delimited by the materials that stick to the floor or hang from the ceiling. While Meireles began creating Através in 1983, it existed only as a set of sketches until 1989, when the installation was shown in the exhibition Tunga: "Lezarts"/Cildo Meireles: "Through," at the Kanaal Art Foundation, located in a former textile factory in Kortrijk, Belgium.

What the Transparency Hides

Sound pervades the creation of the Brazilian artist, who, in turn, seems attentive to the fact that "everybody hears the same thing if it emerges. Everybody hears what he alone hears if he enters in." When we enter into what we hear, instead of letting sound enter into our listening, the listening becomes subjective. John Cage did not strive for harmony in the work he performed, and Meireles's unabashed use of sound goes in a similar direction. Although Cage came from the field of music and Meireles from the visual arts, both artists turned their attention to the world and to its sounds.

In the works explored in this essay, transparency seems to be configured as an element that captures the subject. In *Eureka/Blindhotland*, the net that encircles the work allows our vision to scan it in its entirety in just a few moments.

In Através, in addition to the possibility of different objects crossing our line of sight, all the elements of the work are based on the idea of transparency. In both works, different elements are intentionally hidden through transparency and are revealed to the subjects as they enter the installation.

Meireles's work seeks a dimension in which the senses do not serve as tools for understanding the world but as components of the subject. Full of meaning, ambiguity, and experiences that stem from the historical and the social. subjects let themselves be led through the installation by the context of the work. Thus, Meireles's work seems to converge with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's formulation that "the visible is what is seized upon with the eyes, the sensible is what is seized on by the senses."11 What is perceived reorganizes the subject's perception. The relationship that subjects establish with Meireles's work allows them to perceive themselves, to become aware of the sense of their own being emerging from their conscience. His work is embedded with a spirit that recognizes and reverberates through unknown and unthinkable paths. By understanding perception as imagination made present, Edmund Husserl¹² allows us to wonder how many futures coexist in the experience of entering through the net of Eureka/Blindhotland or walking on the broken glass of Através.

French composer and theorist Pierre Schaeffer proposed a departure from the phenomenology of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, oriented toward listening. Understanding the ear as an instrument of analysis, Schaeffer turned to concrete sounds—sounds that could be registered by a recorder, manipulated through magnetic tape—which led to Schaeffer being recognized as the creator of musique concrète, or concrete music. Schaeffer discovered the possibility of making music through a concrete listening of the world. He proposed an experience without mediation, thus questioning, through phenomenology, "the limits that define object and subject, questioning the way knowledge is built." Thus, we find in Schaeffer the grounding for perceiving phenomenology by listening.

It seems pertinent to rescue Schaeffer's notion of the direct listener, according to which listening would take place in the original acoustic space in which a sound is produced and the listener's hearing would accompany their vision and other perceptions. In contrast, the indirect listener would listen in a

place that is distinct and distant from the circumstances in which the original sound phenomenon took place, by playing back the recording. Através seems to demand a direct listener who will not only be in the exact place where the sound phenomenon occurs but will also be responsible for the production of this very sound. It is exactly in this way that Através takes place and remakes itself, through the presence of a subject that is capable of completely transforming the experience and perception of the work, whose outcome is affected by the number of subjects who enter it, the speed of their steps, and the duration of their presence in the transparent labyrinth.

Através thus intertwines the visual and the tactile through the subject's steps. Schaeffer is attentive to the fact that other perceptions, especially visual ones, contribute to the apprehension of the content of the sound. Thus, in Eureka/Blindhotland subjects seek, through their sense of sight, the source of the recorded sound of Expeso, which resonates between the webs of the work, while their sense of touch allows them to discover a sound analogous to the one playing through the speakers, giving a different meaning to its perception. The subject thus becomes, simultaneously, a direct and indirect listener, or perhaps, at this point, a subject of multiple perceptions intertwined with different senses that, in addition to the act of listening, make the performance of the work and its constant remaking possible.

In Através, the artist employs an everyday sound, shattering glass, allowing it to be hyperbolized depending on the subject's performance. In both Através and Eureka/Blindhotland the perception of sound occurs in parallel with tactile and visual perceptions, within a sound framework that starts with the mundane world and moves into the world constructed by the artist.

A Corporeal Thought

The Brazilian artist and sonology theorist Rodolfo Caesar understands listening as a process that is inseparable from the body and the other senses and believes that even the most distinct sound data is inseparable from the tangible world. Having studied with Schaeffer, Caesar observes that the distance between

notions of image—associated with the domain of the visual—and of sound—associated with obscure perceptual data—does not make sense when taking experience as a basis. Caesar proposes, in line with Henri Bergson, "that all sound generates or is an image, and that the disparity in status between 'image' and 'sound' was mainly due to the lack of physical support to which sound could be affixed—until the invention of the phonograph." 14

With the understanding that "just like seeing, listening is always forming images," we can conclude that the work of Meireles cannot be categorized strictly under the register of the visual, which is to say that the perception of his work does not occur in isolation—rather, it is the interaction between the senses that makes the perception possible. Eureka/Blindhotland and Através show themselves as works that demand the corporeal; stemming from the artist's attention to the world, once completed, the works demand the involvement of multiple senses from the subject.

In an interview given to the author, Meireles cites the "Theory of the Non-Object" by the Brazilian poet Ferreira Gullar, regarding his work *Estudo para espaço* (Study for Space, 1969) and his attempt to make a real non-object. On the same occasion, the artist revealed that his interest in sound was due to its immateriality and its absence of sides. Meireles's quest to radicalize the theory of the non-object would not be exhausted in *Estudo para espaço*, but it would go on to take other forms, such as *Inserções em circuitos ideológicos* (Insertions in Ideological Circuits, 1970) and installations such as *Eureka/Blindhotland* and *Através*, maintaining the subject as a fundamental element in his works. Considering the subject in his relation to the work, Ferreira Gullar's text is definitive:

In front of the spectator, the non-object presents itself as unfinished and offers the means for its conclusion. The spectator acts, but the duration of his action does not flow, does not transcend the work, is not lost beyond it: it is incorporated into it, and it lasts. The action does not consume the work but enriches it: after the action, the work is *more* than before—and this second contemplation already contains, in addition to the shape seen for the first time, a past in which the spectator and the work

merged: he poured his time into it. The non-object claims the spectator (is he still a spectator?), not as a passive witness of its existence but as the very condition of its own making. Without it, the work exists only potentially, waiting for the human gesture to update it.¹⁷

Meireles's search for a certain immateriality reverberates in his works based on the relationship between the subject and his art. Through layers of sound, tactile vibrations, and visualities, *Eureka/Blindhotland* and *Através* are transformed by the presence of a subject who interacts with them. It is in the relationship with a subject that the work gains the possibility of being reworked, either from the presence of only one subject or from the impact caused by multiple subjects interacting with the work simultaneously.

Walking on the bits of glass of *Através*, alone or accompanied by one or two others, will spark a very different perception than if you walk accompanied by twenty or more people. The sonorous dimension of the work gains the possibility of an exacerbation, and such force, increased by the presence of the bodies of those who walk through it, causes *Através* to be transformed. Similarly, experiencing the sounds produced by the spheres thrown in *Eureka/Blindhotland* is quite different when you are alone than when you are with others, which allows the work to provide differing experiences. In this context, we examine Meireles's work as off-center from the visual and engaged in the senses of subjects who ontologically carry with them their social and historical contexts, which enter into a dialogue with their senses when perceiving the work.

- From the displacement of a given fluid caused by the immersion of a body in this same fluid, Archimedes conceived the formula that the density of a body corresponds to the division of its mass by its volume.
- 2. Cildo Meireles, "Memórias," interview by Felipe Scovino, *Cildo Meireles, Coleção Encontros*, ed. Felipe Scovino (Rio de Janeiro: Beco do Azougue, 2009), 236–91.
- 3. The artist's sketches and the proposal presented to MAM Rio show Eureka and Blindhotland as a single part of the piece, dividing the work in three parts: Inserções, Eureka/Blindhotland, and Expeso. However, in an interview published in 2009, the artist describes the work as comprising four parts (Eureka, Blindhotland, Expeso, and Inserções), an option explored in this essay.
- 4. Meireles, "Memórias," 258. All translations are by the author unless otherwise noted.
- 5. Cildo Meireles, "Eureka/ Blindhotland," in Cildo: Estudos, espaços, tempo, eds. Diego Matos and Guilherme Wisnik (São Paulo: Ubu Editora, 2017), 68.
- 6. Cildo Meireles, "Através, 1983–1989. Relatos do artista," in Cildo Meireles, exh. cat., ed. Guy Brett (London: Tate Publishing, 2013), 142.
- 7. The largest square in the labyrinth of Através is 15 meters wide, and its walls are made up of "(1) fishnet, (2) voile fabric, (3) transparent plastic canvas, (4) laminated glass, (5) wired glass, (6) straight wire fence, (7) vellum, (8) aluminum blinds, (9) garden fence, (10) wooden gate, (11) prison bars, (12) wooden trellis, (13) rusty metal mesh, (14) gray fiberglass mosquito netting, (15) city barricade fencing, (16) a fish tank [with transparent fish], (17) green fencing mesh, (18) golden tubular trestle, (19) war trench, (20) electro-

- weld mesh, (21) wooden blinds, (22) crowd-control chains, (23) chicken-coop mesh, (24) rusty metallic mesh, (25) barbed-wire fencing, (26) crowd control tape, (27) glass-bead curtain, (28) wire fencing, (29) shower curtain, (30) X-shaped wooden protective barrier, (31) cellophane ball."
 Ana Paula Cohen, "Cildo Meireles," in Through: Inhotim, exh. cat., eds. Allan Schwartzman, Jochen Volz, and Rodrigo Moura (Brumadinho, Brazil: Instituto Inhotim, 2009), 88.
- 8. The north and west sides of the work have a different constitution from the south and east sides, while all walls are made of the same materials, arranged in exactly the same order, with fifteen layers on each side, resulting in two identical groups of thirty layers.
- 9. Cildo Meireles, "Esse universo dos sons que a gente não escuta," interview by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite, *Revista Poiésis* 21, no. 36 (July/December 2020): 175–206, https://doi.org/10.22409/poiesis. v21i36.42766.
- 10. John Cage, A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings by John Cage (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 39.
- 11. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Fenomenologia da percepção (São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2015), 28.
- 12. Edmund Husserl, Ideias para uma fenomenologia pura e para uma filosofia fenomenológica (Aparecida, Brazil: Ideias & Letras, 2006), 172.
- 13. Giuliano Lamberti Obici, *Condição* da escuta: mídias e territórios sonoros (Rio de Janeiro: 7 Letras, 2008), 28.
- 14. Rodolfo Caesar, *O enigma de lupe* (Rio de Janeiro: Zazie Edições, 2016), 171–72.
- 15. Caesar, 172.
- 16. Meireles (at his studio) in conversation with the author, June 2019. Special thanks to Cildo Meireles.

17. Ferreira Gullar, "Teoria do nãoobjeto," in *Projeto construtivo brasileiro na arte (1950–1962)*, ed. Aracy Abreu Amaral (Rio de Janeiro: Museu de Arte Moderna; São Paulo: Pinacoteca do Estado, 1977), 94.

Figures



Figure 1

Cildo Meireles, Eureka/Blindhotland, from the series Blindhotland, 1970–75
Netting, wood, lead, iron, rubber balls, scales, four loudspeakers, audio track
157 ½ × 236 ½ × 236 ½ in. (400 × 600 × 600 cm)
Installation at SESC Pompeia, São Paulo, Brazil, 2019
Collection of the artist
Photograph by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite



Figure 2

Cildo Meireles, Eureka, detail
Part of Eureka/Blindhotland, from the series Blindhotland, 1970–75
Two wooden blocks, wooden cross, lead, scales
Installation at SESC Pompeia, São Paulo, Brazil, 2019
Collection of the artist
Photograph by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite



Figure 3

Cildo Meireles, Através (Through), 1983–89

Fishnet, voile fabric, transparent plastic canvas, laminated glass, wired glass, straight wire fence, vellum, aluminum blinds, garden fence, wooden gate, prison bars, wooden trellis, rusty metal mesh, gray fiberglass mosquito netting, city barricade fencing, a fish tank (with transparent fish), green fencing mesh, golden tubular trestle, war trench, electro-weld mesh, wooden blinds, crowd-control chains, chicken-coop mesh, rusty metallic mesh, barbed-wire fencing, crowd control tape, glass-bead curtain, wire fencing, shower curtain, X-shaped wooden protective barrier, cellophane ball 236 ¼ × 590 % × 590 % in. (600 × 1500 × 1500 cm)

Installation at Instituto Inhotim, Brumadinho, Brazil, 2019 Photograph by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite



Figure 4
Cildo Meireles, *Através* (Through), 1983–89
Installation at Instituto Inhotim, 2019
Photograph by Caroline Alciones de Oliveira Leite

On Ayrson Heráclito's Bori

Bernardo Mosqueira

I ask for the blessing of Olodumare, gbogbo egun, and gbogbo orisas, who protect me and my people without sleeping. I ask for the blessing of my elders and of those who are younger than me. I ask for their permission to speak—not as their representative, not as an authority, but as their humble and grateful grandson, son, and brother.

In this essay I will share some ideas about *Bori* (2008), a performance and a series of photos developed by Brazilian artist Ayrson Heráclito, inspired by a ritual of the same name that is essential for practitioners of Candomblé and others who are connected to Yoruba traditions. I will offer an analysis of Bori from the point of view of someone who is a curator and also part of Candomblé, rooting my analysis in my long-standing concern about the ethical dilemmas that come into play when aesthetic experiences dealing with the sacred (particularly non-hegemonic, non-Abrahamic forms of spirituality and, above all, works of art dealing with the cultures of the orishas) meet institutions that are part of the apparatus of coloniality, such as art museums and academia, especially in the Global North. The ways in which these institutions and their agents categorize and try to define the meaning of these practices are invariably unfair and violent, and they reinforce the power structures upon which they were founded in colonial times. In this analysis, I want to highlight and reflect on some meaningful details in Heráclito's Bori but also to address the productive ethical dilemmas that often accompany the insertion of this work in institutional contexts that are part of the colonial legacy.

Ayrson Heráclito's Bori (2008)

Heráclito, very calm and dressed in bright-white clothes, stands in the center of a large room. Around him, twelve straw mats form a large spiral on the floor. The lighting in the space is very

dim, with spotlights pointed directly at the mats. Close to each mat there are large wicker baskets and some pots and bowls. We start to hear live music played on Afro-Brazilian hand drums called atabaques. Heráclito walks to the back of the room, where we see twelve people, also dressed in white, sitting on a long bench. The rhythm changes, and Heráclito invites the first performer to lie down on the mat farthest from the center of the spiral. He then takes African yams from a big basket and, very carefully, starts arranging them around the person's head. The artist cuts some of them in half and inserts seven wooden sticks into the white insides of the raw tubers. He spends about ten minutes attentively placing the yams around the head, like an organic halo. The music's rhythm changes again. Heráclito invites another person to lie down on the second straw mat. The artist takes a basket full of ears of corn. He then peels back each of the ears' green layers until we can see the shiny yellow kernels. Around the second person's head, he creates an arrangement with both open ears and loose kernels. The music changes again and a third person steps forward. Heráclito slowly takes another wicker basket filled with popcorn and long strips of coconut meat and lays them around the performer's head. The artist stands up—we can hear the atabaques beating faster grabs another basket, and takes fresh green okra from it, placing it around the head of a fourth person. Every time a new performer lies down, the musicians play a different kind of music on the atabaques. Heráclito uses milled corn and tobacco leaves to create the topography around the head of a fifth man. Long and curved sweet potatoes make up the sixth person's halo. Around the head of the seventh man, Heráclito arranges shelled and unshelled red peanuts. The eighth participant is the first woman among the performers. She lies down on the straw mat, and the artist surrounds her face with brilliant black-eyed peas, studding this mountain of beans with a few hard-boiled eggs. Another woman lies down on the ninth mat. Heráclito takes a basket full of brilliant red acará (a mashed black-eyed pea cake fried in palm oil) and uses dozens of them to create a tall and vibrant mass between the outline of her face and the surrounding soil. Beige fava beans and white rice are the materials he uses around the head of the tenth performer, also a woman. The artist uses

a mix of black beans and loose white corn kernels to create volume around the eleventh person, using golden-burnt vellow corn to outline her face and creating a vertical line that starts at her forehead and extends to meet the contour of the halo around her head, close to the floor. Finally, the last participant lies down on the twelfth straw mat, at the center of the spiral. Heráclito takes the remaining wicker basket and, one last time, gets on his knees, very close to the man's head, and uses both of his hands to take pure white corn kernels from the basket. placing them around the man's head. With this luminous white mountain perfectly built, Heráclito stands up, walks slowly through the space, and sits on the long bench at the back of the room. He looks directly at the frontmost audience members and invites them to get closer to the performers. Following his instructions, the audience walks through the space, observing the performers before exiting the room. As the public leaves, Heráclito calmly reconnects with each of the performers. He helps them stand up and they leave the room together. The performance—which takes more than two hours—is now over.

Candomblé, Knowledge, and Ethics

Candomblé is a catchall term used to refer to some Afro-Brazilian cultural complexes that worship deities such as orishas, nkisis, and voduns. There are many other Afro-Brazilian spiritual practices (such as Xangô, Batuque, Tambor de Mina, Umbanda, Quimbanda, Encantaria, and countless other macumbas), and there are also many kinds of candomblé. What is known generically as Candomblé encompasses different lineages, called nations. Schematically, one could say that Ketu, Jeje, and Angola are the three nations of Candomblé developed in Brazil by three different Afrodiasporic groups that speak Yoruba, Fom, and Bantu languages and worship, respectively, orishas, voduns, and nkisis. The categorical divisions among these three traditions are not necessarily so simple, however, as their spiritual technologies have been constantly exchanged over the past four centuries. Their combinations formed countless forms of practice many more than the three mentioned above. The spiritual

technologies of different Native peoples in Brazil have also been mixed into macumbas and candomblés, creating even more singular variations.

The nuclear organization of each spiritual community is commonly called a terreiro (but also ilê, roça, and casa, among other terms) which is the center of collective life for each group, the primary space for rituals and conviviality. Terreiros are interconnected in complex ways, yet each one is autonomous. There is no central power for Candomblé as a whole, in contrast, for example, to Catholic churches around the planet, for whom the Pope is the single authority. Each terreiro is led by its own mãe-de-santo (or iyalorisha in Yoruba) or pai-de-santo (babalorisha in Yoruba), respectively the "mother" and "father" of the community and the highest authority in the life of Candomblé practitioners. Each leader is responsible for stating what is right and wrong within the life of the community, and their ideas, decisions, and orders are not to be questioned. For a person who is part of candomblé, the words of the leader of their terreiro and from the elders of the group are more important, reliable, foundational, and precious than those of any other (including, certainly, the words of doctoral researchers from Ivy League schools who choose to research Candomblé, for example). One should always be wary of those who seek to build their own authority by trying to define the truths about groups that do not recognize their authority.

The ethics around the idea of knowledge in Candomblé—which has its own conceptions of truth, authority, wisdom, value, validity, duration, and legitimacy, among other things—are very different from those practiced and replicated by coloniality and its apparatus. Candomblé does not bow down to the authority of academia and does not recognize as valid its colonial instruments for measuring truth and colonial institutional procedures for designating authority. The words of an iyalorisha or babalorisha are always the most important for Candomblé practitioners (being, of course, much more powerful to them than even the most "up-to-date" critical theory). In this way, each terreiro has its own rules, forms of worship, and ways of living, and no one way is considered more "real" or "authentic" than the others. It is essential to this analysis to note that, for this reason,

it is impossible to define Candomblé as a whole or to speak on behalf of its entire community as if it were a monolithic, homogenous, immutable being whose systems and codes can be methodologically described and explained by academic research.

An example of academics missing the mark in this way can be found in an article published in Hyperallergic in 2021, in which US art historian and curator Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw discredited US photographer Deana Lawson's work An Ode to Yemaya (2019), arguing that "[t]he costume and beads should have been blue and white if the child was being presented as Yemaya." Why does Shaw believe she can understand Candomblé, speak for the entirety of candomblé, and reclaim how its *authentic* way-of-doing should be? This is certainly not a personal flaw but a structural problem of the Western (and colonial) onto-epistemological system that Shaw is part of. In fact, even though the belief that everything can be understood through reason is the backbone of Western Rationalism, its characteristic tools (measurement, definition, classification) and its proponents are not capable of representing candomblé. When they try (and they do constantly), they often do it by perpetrating forms of violence, as we will see in a few examples given later in this text. I'm defending here the "right to opacity"2 and the right of the Candomblé community to have our rites and secrets respected.

Counter to this, Heráclito's work offers an outstanding opportunity to discuss the complex relationships between Candomblé, the art world, and academic institutions. Over the past three decades, he has developed his own methodology to produce images from a non-Western perspective, mainly through Yoruba and Yoruba-diasporic aesthetic notions. Heráclito engages directly and unapologetically with his own culture while refusing the technologies and methodologies of anthropology, refusing to perform a self-ethnography. It might be interesting to remark that, besides being a Candomblé practitioner (and also a leader of this religion, as he is an Ogã Sojatin in a Jeje Mahin terreiro on the outskirts of Salvador), Heráclito is also an influential scholar, with a master's degree in visual arts from the Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA) and a doctorate in communication and semiotics from the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC-SP). In this way, the

experiences both of being initiated in Candomblé for a long time and of working daily in academia as an outstanding researcher inform Heráclito's artistic practice.

Candomblé, Nature, and Offerings

Heráclito was born in Macaúbas, Bahia, in the Brazilian northeast, in 1968. He has lived between Cachoeira and Salvador, both also in Bahia, for more than thirty years. Since the 1980s Heráclito has been investigating different African, Afro-Brazilian, and Afro-diasporic forms of art, culture, and spirituality in relation to issues such as embodiment, memory, narrative, love, and sexuality. While he started his artistic trajectory by making paintings, most of his subsequent work has been based in performance, photography, and video art.

I've been learning from and thinking about Heráclito's practice since 2014. We collaborated a few times, the first being for the exhibition *O que vem com a aurora* (What Comes with the Dawn), which took place at Casa Triângulo in São Paulo in 2015. More recently, Heráclito was part of a group exhibition I cocurated with Catarina Duncan entitled À Construção (To the Construction) at Solar dos Abacaxis, in Rio de Janeiro, in January 2020. *Bori* was the first work by Heráclito I ever saw in person, and it has always been very intriguing and inspiring to me—I think about this work constantly.

Candomblé can be described as a religion that worships nature. Its gods and goddesses are directly associated with nature's energies and the life it promotes is all about being in harmony with nature (understanding nature as a totality of which we're a part). In Candomblé, people often conceive of the cosmos as two distinct yet inseparable realms: Orun (the immaterial world of the orishas, the ancestors, and the unborn) and Aye (the material, palpable world where we live). When I say these worlds are distinct but inseparable, I mean that they are different but part of a totality, and so they are constantly in relation, affecting each other in countless ways. Through material operations using elements of nature, people who practice Candomblé can engage with the powers of Orun, the immaterial world, to extraordinarily change the forces of destiny in the Aye, in which they live. These offerings and sacrifices

are central to life in Candomblé. The food that sustains our bodies, lives, existence is understood as the greatest gift that nature can give us. When worshiping orishas, offering food to them is a form of gratitude, of connection, of communication, of exchange, of participation, of manipulating axé (the vital force, the essential energy of realization). An incredibly complex system of values and principles guides how offerings to each orisha are prepared and carried out in different situations. Offerings must be prepared in accordance with specific rituals that are taught and learnt by Candomblé practitioners throughout their life in the religion. Offerings are present in every moment of our spiritual life—they are an intelligence, a technology. Knowing the importance of food in candomblé allows us to better reflect on its use in the performance Bori.

Each photograph of the performance is titled after a different orisha, and around the head of each performer Heráclito has placed the main ingredient used for preparing the favorite food of each deity represented. In *Bori*, as in many of Heráclito's works, different audience members will, depending on their level of knowledge about candomblé, relate to the work in different ways—this also serves to highlight how the idea of a "universal aesthetic experience" within art is a colonial fallacy.³

There are two important details that I'd like to discuss here. The first is that the favorite foods of the orishas are usually offered to them before their shrines or in specific places in nature (like rivers, beaches, quarries, forests, or waterfalls)—not on people's heads. Bori, the process of feeding the head, is a different ritual. With that in mind, in the next few paragraphs I will reflect on what Heráclito is promoting with his creation of this new kind of bori. The second detail I want to mention and reflect on is that, among the twelve deities referred to in the work, there are eleven orishas (from Ketu candomblé) and one nkisi (from Angola candomblé). In the section that follows, I will consider what the presence of Tempo in this work might mean.

Bori and Bori: Accessing Precolonial Africa

In Yoruba, the word "ori" means head, and in Candomblé it is often understood as having many parts or dimensions. The

main ones are ori inú, the inner head, and ori ode, the external, physical head. Ori inú is the principle of the singularity of human life; it makes up one's personality, instinct, decision-making system, potential, destiny, essence. People in candomblé often understand their Ori as their personal orisha. One must always worship and take care of their own Ori before taking care of the other deities. In Candomblé, some people say that the orishas manifest themselves only if Ori allows.

"Bori" literally means "offering to the head" in Yoruba. This ritual, usually part of a person's spiritual initiation, can be briefly described as the process through which a person's head is energetically nurtured using specific elements, according to certain spiritual principles. It is also the process through which the person becomes part of a spiritual family. I will now share some important concepts and explain some of the meaningful relations that occur within bori without describing the ritual in detail, as secrecy and memory are essential to Candomblé. As I mentioned earlier in this essay, dynamics regarding knowledge in candomblé are different from those in Western societies. Certain knowledge is reserved for people who are initiated or have been practicing for a long time—they are not to be shared widely. There is an internal hierarchy around knowledge sharing in the religion that must be respected.

This is manifested structurally in the traditional architecture of the terreiros. In them, there is a central house (commonly called a barração) where all public rituals and parties happen. That is the place, for example, where the orishas come to dance during trance experiences, which the uninitiated are allowed and welcome to attend to be present with them. In the back part of the barracão, there are rooms that only some initiated people are allowed to enter. What happens in those spaces is not to be disclosed publicly—that includes, of course, describing these events in academic papers. Unfortunately, this principle is not always respected, and throughout the academic field, researchers (especially, those from the Global North) engage in extractive colonial violence in their approach to Candomblé and its communities. One example of such an approach is Danish scholar Inger Sjørslev's article "Boredom, Rhythm, and the Temporality of Ritual: Recurring Fieldwork in the Brazilian Candomblé."4 In it, Sjørslev describes her process in this way:

I had decided to make sacrifices to the [o]rishas as a way to access information through practice and also to gain a role in the [c]andomblé house that made sense to the people I hoped would be my interlocutors. . . . It is not easy to study Candomblé without personal involvement, and there has indeed been a high degree of "going native" in the studies of this religion.

It is shocking and sickening that while people in Candomblé (Heráclito and I included) refuse to be the "native informant,"5 academics from the Global North such as Sjørslev are "going native" to extract knowledge from those very communities in order to share it, disrespectfully, in research papers and academic journals, violating our right to secrecy. The colonial violence in this situation occurs when the Western researcher purports to have good intentions (as if they were respecting a certain social structure) to gain access to important community secrets, only to later share them publicly, betraying the community in the name of their personal work in academia. Another recent instance of violence disguised as curiosity, innocence, and good faith occurred during the 34th São Paulo Biennial, in 2021, when chief curator Jacopo Crivelli Visconti and adjunct curator Paulo Miyada chose to include in the exhibition pictures of Candomblé initiation rituals that should never be shared with people who are not initiated.

I will not describe literally what happens in a real bori ritual—I won't share images or instructions. What I can explain here is that even if "bori" means an offering to the head, in this ritual, it is not only one's head that eats. In bori, food is usually shared by the head and the body, outside and inside, in specific moments and ways. It's also shared between the person, their iyalorisha or babalorisha (their spiritual father or mother), their mãe-pequena or pai-pequeno (godmother or godfather). At the end, the food can also be shared between the person and other members of the community. Food is always at the center of bonding group experiences in the terreiro. Collectively, people prepare, they cut, they mix, they chew, they spit out, they touch, they sing, they dance, they swallow. The tastes, smells, visions, and tactile sensations that they share create a bond, a consubjectivity of those who share the same

axé, the same vital force. In candomblé, eating together is, therefore, an experience of collective spiritual attunement. Sharing a sensory experience means becoming collectively sensitive to something. In candomblé, this bond goes beyond forming "imagined communities." The bonds are profound spiritual correlations that allow, for example, telepathic experiences, insights, intuitions, dreams, or abrupt urges to go take care of others. Everything in candomblé is about care and transformation, and preparing food and eating are fundamentally transformations of energy.

While academic researchers compete to determine who can best describe the authentic great rituals of Candomblé, most of Candomblé is about small everyday rites, sensations, connections, intuitions—things that science and Western Rationalism do not have the capacity or instruments to perceive, much less define. Much of candomblé happens in the dimension of intimacy, as a constant consubjective rebirth that is spiritual and ineffable. It is meaningful that one of the most famous proverbs in Candomblé is "Those who know often don't speak. Those who speak often don't know." Candomblé is time and embodiment. Its practice develops our intimacy with the different temporalities and durations that materials (such as food) and people (like us) need to transform. We communicate with the orishas with gestures or language that we choose but also with things that, though they are part of us, we do not control (the smell of our bodies, the smell of our breath, the functioning of our bodies). The ritual of feeding or making an offering to the head has the intention of promoting harmony with someone's physical and spiritual bodies: it decreases anxiety, fear, pain, and sadness, bringing health, peace, hope, and joy. And, while it's different from an actual bori, Heráclito's Bori also has an impact on the performers' spiritual harmony.

Looking at the twelve performers lying with those mountains of food around their heads, I can't help but think about land, about topography. I think about how in West Africa the orishas were often associated with specific places, temples, shrines, cities, or elements of nature; for example, Oshun and the Oshun River, Yemonja and the Ogun River, Oya and the Niger River, Oba and the Oba River, Shango and the city of Oyo. As I reflect on the topography that has resulted

from Heráclito's Bori, I think about the fact that African people were kidnapped and brought to the Americas without objects, without their land and belongings. But despite all the efforts to make them forget (and the efforts were many, diverse, perverse, and cruel, lasting for centuries), they were able to create Brazil as an African country outside Africa and to create candomblé as a beautiful, complex, and resilient living structure that has been capable of maintaining certain ways of living even while the violence of coloniality constantly tries to impose its ontology, epistemology, value system, and standardizing universalism. In a terreiro, around the barração, there are areas or houses designated for the cult of each orisha. In the same way that this architectural display of the terreiro can be thought of as a technology of reterritorialization of the African continent by the sons and daughters of the African diaspora, the spiral topography created by Heráclito's Bori can be thought of as a spatialization of precolonial Africa. Looking at this topography, I think about all the intelligence, creativity, and spiritual power that candomblé people had to use to constantly give birth to Africa in Brazil, again and again, recreating Africa from the Ori. Indeed, a great part of Heráclito's work is precisely about accessing precolonial forms of art and life as a way of building a world that doesn't have coloniality at its center.

The spiral arrangement of the straw mats in Bori is a direct reference to Tempo, the sole nkisi among the orishas. Tempo is also worshiped as a tree; the roots represent the world of the dead, and the part above the ground represents its mirror, the world of the living. Tempo is the force that makes this connection, representing the inseparability of those realms. In Candomblé, in large part due to the influence of Bantu, people often conceive time as a spiral movement in which present, past, and future can cross one another. The presence of Tempo in this work can point to the understanding that the past is here, now, and alive. In this way, the performance Bori highlights the possibility of accessing the African precolonial past through our own bodies. In his Bori, Heráclito is not feeding the ori (head) with the elements used in the real bori ritual. He doesn't have any kind of "ethnographic" interest to scientifically illustrate or represent before a "universal audience" what a real bori is.

But, although it's not a representation of an "authentic" bori, it's still a spiritually powerful experience. As this new ritual contains the presence of Heráclito's axé and intentions, it directly influences those who participate in it. In this work, Heráclito is creating a new ritual to feed heads with time—with a spiral experience of time that can access precolonial Africa but that cannot be accessed by colonial rationality.

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Figures



Figure 1

Ayrson Heráclito, *Bori*, 2008/2021 Performance at IC13 Encontro de Artes, Escola de Belas Artes- UFBA, Salvador, Brazil, 2019 Photograph by Patrícia Almeida



Figure 2

Ayrson Heráclito, *Bori*, 2008/2021 Performance at IC13 Encontro de Artes, Escola de Belas Artes - UFBA, Salvador, Brazil, 2019 Photograph by Patrícia Almeida



Figure 3

Ayrson Heráclito, *Bori*, 2008/2021 Performance at IC13 Encontro de Artes, Escola de Belas Artes - UFBA, Salvador, Brazil, 2019 Photograph by Patrícia Almeida



Figure 4 Ayrson Heráclito, *Bori*, 2008/2021

Manifestação Internacional da Performance 2, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2009 Photograph by Marcelo Terça-Nada

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