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Aparecida and the she-wolf in performance: intersections of gender, race, and class in Brazil*

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Abstract

At the intersections of gender, race, and class, Aparecida emerges as a haunting figure, giving access to that which is marginalized, repressed, trivialized, and denied. The ritual process of popular Catholicism produces a montage effect: Aparecida and the she-wolf. Uncanny similarities between these ghost figures are explored. Following a sequence of performances involving Aparecida in the basilica; the she-wolf in the amusement park; and ladies of Devils'Hole, in their daily dramas; one sees how, as a flashing image, the abject body in performance, even if repressed, becomes meaningful for devotees of Our Lady in critical life-threatening situations.

Keywords: Aparecida, She-wolf, Performance, Gender, Race.

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1. What's going on?

On October 12, 2022, during his failed campaign for reelection, former President Jair Messias Bolsonaro went to the city of Aparecida do Norte, the home of Our Lady Aparecida, the patron saint of Brazil. The presence of the former president and his entourage charged the basilica with tension. In 2016, as a relatively unknown congressman, Bolsonaro gained notoriety on national television during proceedings to impeach Dilma Rousseff, Brazil's first female president, or *presidenta*. Before declaring his vote, Bolsonaro exalted the deeds of Colonel Carlos Alberto Ustra, whom he called a "national hero". Ustra had been the head of DOI-Codi, the repressive intelligence apparatus of the military dictatorship, during the 1970s, when Dilma and other opponents of the regime were tortured. Known for a series of attacks and disparaging remarks against women and descendants of African and Amerindian people, the candidate for reelection went to Aparecida to honor and show devotion to an idealized image of a woman, considered by many to be the black holy mother of Brazil.

What's going on? Are we in the realm of "ghostly matters"? Is this what Avery Gordon (2008) means by haunting? Is Bolsonaro haunted by the figure of a black woman? More significantly, are we in Brazil collectively haunted by the image of Aparecida?

When I visited Aparecida, in 1984, with a group of devotees from a place called Devils' Hole (*Buraco dos Capetas*), I met not only Our Lady Aparecida, but, also, the she-wolf. After visiting the old and new basilicas, we came upon an amusement park in which gorilla woman, snake woman, and werewolf woman were the main attractions. We saw the werewolf woman. After returning to Devils' Hole, I was struck by the interest and delight shown by women and men when recounting our encounter with the she-wolf. The trip produced in me an experience of montage. When I saw Our Lady, I saw a she-wolf. I too am haunted.

As Gordon (2008:xvi) suggests, haunting may give access to that which is marginalized, repressed, trivialized, and denied. A haunting image or ghost, manifesting itself as a figure that is not there, forgotten yet vital, may interrupt a course that one has taken. A distraction, or deviation, possibly illuminating our present situation, and allowing us to see things we had not seen before. In Aparecida do Norte, such an image flashed in the form of a she-wolf.

After coming into contact with the she-wolf, the image of Our Lady seemed particularly uncanny. I was increasingly intrigued by similarities between Our Lady and the she-wolf. Above all, I came to see Aparecida – as an *aparição* [apparition]. I also became aware of the haunting nature of terms such as gender, class and race – "phantom words", Patricia Williams (1991:49) calls them. I am haunted by Our Lady Aparecida.

In 2019, I visited Aparecida do Norte again looking for the she-wolf. She was no longer there. At a small amusement park near the Old Basilica, I saw the spectacle of Monga – The Gorilla Woman. I was intrigued. What do these apparitions have to do with Aparecida? And what do they have to do with Aparecida's devotees from Devils'Hole?

As I will discuss below, the Bolsonaro incident sparked my interest in Judith Butler's (1993) discussion of bodies that matter – a bodily domain that is haunted by the specter of an excluded domain, consisting of abject, abhorrent, or negligible bodies. It also led me to rethink some of my fieldnotes taken during the trips to Aparecida, in 1984 and 2019. The first visit occurred when I was doing ethnography with *boia fria* sugarcane cutters in a place that residents playfully referred to as Devils'Hole –, located in the Slash-Knife (*Risca-Faca*) District of Piracicaba, São Paulo. During the year of 1983, I lived with the family of Mister Z and Anaoj (fictitious names). Anaoj and her daughters were at the center of a wider matrifocal network of kinship and neighborly relations. In 1984, I accompanied Anaoj on a bus excursion to Aparecida, organized by her nephew. In 2019, on leave from my teaching activities in São Paulo, I went alone.

Bodies that matter: performing gender, race, and class.

"Gender is a verb masquerading as a noun", says Marilyn Strathern (2016: xvi). As an identity instituted through "a stylized repetition of acts" – "an identity tenuously constituted in time" –, according to Judith Butler (1990: 179; 1993:2), gender is a performative act. In this paper, I take it as

an instance of what Richard Schechner (1985b:36) refers to as "restored behavior", or "twice-behaved behavior".

Gender is also performative discourse. Discourse on gender is performative. In the very act of discourse, gender is enacted and produced. Gender identities are not only the subjects of discourse, but are created by discursive means.

Inspired by Michel Foucault's idea that discourse produces truth effects, Edward Said (1990) shows how the Orient is produced in the West through a discourse which he calls "orientalism", involving literary, artistic, religious, political, economic, and military institutions. The Orient becomes real in discourse. Discourse is productive. In the mirror of an Orient projected as Other, the West produces itself as a symetrically inverted reflection. The Orient is made into the Other of the West.

Likewise, according to Judith Butler, also inspired by Foucault, the category of woman becomes real within discourse as a product of words and deeds. Butler (1990) argues that woman exists as a term that stabilizes and consolidates a binary and oppositional relation to a man. Being a category that functions as a diacritical sign in relation to man, woman stabilizes norms of compulsory heterosexuality. Within a matrix of hegemonic male discourse, binary male and female terms are produced in such a way that woman becomes almost a male invention to reflect male power (Butler, 1990). In the mirror of woman, seeing himself being seen by the other – an image of his own projection –, man sees a reflection of himself as his own invention.

According to Judith Butler (1993), compulsory binary heterosexual norms, as seen in repetitive performative acts, result in bodies that matter. Some bodies matter more than others. Bodies that signify and create meaning are also an effect of signification. The signifying act delimits and contours the body that it may claim to find prior to signification. Bodies appear and materialize within productive constraints of highly gendered regulatory schemas (Butler, 1993).

Judith Butler goes a step further, raising the question of how normative constraints, created and taking hold through performative and repetitive sets of action, "not only produce the domain of intelligible bodies, but produce as well a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies". Through such bodies, constrained to disappear, or to be kept out of sight, the excluded domain "haunts the former domain as the specter of its own impossibility" (Butler, 1993:xi).

The experience of abjection, however, is not restricted to the category of gender. Analyzing the state of the art of feminist studies, Adriana Piscitelli (2008) calls attention to the emergence of intersectionality, an analytical tool for showing how categories of gender, race, and class, among others, are interrelated. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989; 1991). Intersectionality, for Crenshaw, makes possible the analysis of interaction between forms of subordination, such as sexism, racism, and patriarchy. Other authors, such as Anne McKlintock and Avtar Brah developed the idea that race, gender, and class constitute relational categories. This approach makes possible the analysis of experience within specific contexts – as demonstrated by Piscitelli (2008) in her studies of Brazilian migrant women.

Also viewing intersectionality as an analytical tool, Patricia Collins and Sirma Bilge (2021) provide various examples of contextual analysis showing how categories of race, class, and gender, among others, are interrelated. Overlapping, these categories act in a unified manner. Following the lead of Patricia Collins, Carla Akotirene (2019:21) views intersectionality as "an interconnected system of oppression".

At least since the launching of the Manifesto of Black Women in Brazil, in 1975 – long before the first formulations, in the 1990s, of theories of intersectionality –, leading thinkers and protagonists of the black movement, such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, called attention to how questions of gender interact with race and social class in the oppression of black women. In a patriarchal society in which black mothers are idealized as mothers of sons and daughters of all races – according to ideologies of "whitening" [*branqueamento]* and racial democracy – they become bodies that matter primarily as mothers of the sons of white men. Interracial marriage in colonial Brazil, says Gonzalez (2020), was produced by the violence of white men against Black and Amerindian women. Carla Akotirene (2019) speaks of the colonial rape of Black women. In their attacks on the ideology of "whitening", feminists such as Gonzalez (2020) show how black women have been protagonists in the struggle against genocide of black people.

Exploring intersections of gender, race, and class, Brazilian black feminists haunt both the feminist movement, largely white elite and middle-class, and the Black movement, largely male. Occupying the interior margins of these movements, they reveal how the experience of abjection among black women in poverty runs deep in Brazil.

In the company of devotees from Devils' Hole, I was led to a place where abjection is highlighted in Aparecida: the amusement park where women turn into animalistic and feral creatures. In this paper, following the flow of a ritual process designed by popular Catholicism in which borders between sacred and profane are highly unstable or impossible to establish (Montes, 1998), I will visit three places: the basilicas of Aparecida, the amusement park, and Devils' Hole. Methodologically, this route may evoke Richard Schechner's (1985a:16) notion of the "whole sequence of performance". More appropriately, the route suggests a "whole sequence of performances" (with an "s" at the end): Our Lady in the basilicas; the she-wolf and gorilla woman in amusement parks; and women in Devils' Hole.

I intend to discuss uncanny similarities between Our Lady and the she-wolf, and explore the significance for people of Devils' Hole of the domain of abject bodies in Aparecida do Norte's amusement park. I am struck by the importance of performative acts displayed in spectacles of this abject, excluded domain in the materialization of women in Devils' Hole. Here, one sees how, as a flashing image, the abject body in performance becomes meaningful for devotees of Our Lady in critical life-threatening situations.

2. Our Lady in performance

New Basilica

Traveling through the night, we reached Aparecida at 5:00am, on October 14, 1984. Fireworks burst in air upon arrival. In the parking lot, where soon there would be hundreds of buses, we found ourselves in front of a church of giant proportions. Huge and majestic, the New Basilica dominates the landscape of the city. Consecrated during the 1980 visit of Pope John Paul II to Brazil, this is the largest basilica dedicated to a Virgin Mother in the world. In 1982, the image of the patron saint of Brazil was transferred from the Old Basilica on Coconut Hill [*Morro dos Coqueiros]*, to the New Basilica. On his knees, a man slowly climbed the steps of the stairway. In his arms was a child.

In 2019, after the modernization project carried out by architect Cláudio Pastro, under direction of Redemptorist priests, the New Basilica looked even more impressive, with a capacity to accommodate 30,000 people for Eucharist celebration around the central altar; and 300,000 outdoors. The parking lot can hold 4,000 buses and 6,000 cars.

Hauntology

Like *Cities of the dead*, the title of one of Joseph Roach's (1996) books, Aparecida do Norte evokes a genealogy of ghosts, or unsettling spirits of the past, reenacted and restored. "What is a ghost but the re-appeared, or restored enactment that Schechner defines as performance?" (Taylor, 1997:30). The visit to Aparecida, on October 12, 2022, by Jair Bolsonaro, the one who praised as a "national hero" the head of the military regime's repressive apparatus, during the 1970s, was not unique. The modern basilica was largely built during the years of the military regime (1964-1985). The German Redemptorist priests, who headed the diocese of Brazil's patron saint, greeted the military coup of 1964 as a "miracle of Our Lady". In 1967, after accompanying the leader of the coup, General Castello Branco, on a tour of Brazil's state capitals, Aparecida was given the title of *Generalíssima do Exército Brasileiro* – "Highest General of the Brazilian Army".

Since her appearance, in 1717, Our Lady has been courted by men in high places: emperors, popes, presidents, dictators, and army generals. In her analysis of courtly love of the Middle Ages – in which the image of the Virgin Mary, as an idealized and ethereal figure, played a central role –, Marilyn Strathern (2016:246) suggests that "it was not relations between men and women that were their principal focus but relations between men". The same holds true, perhaps, in regard to the courtly

love shown to Our Lady Aparecida, involving a repetitive, and ritualized, process referred to by Diana Taylor (1997) as the gendering of a nation. Aparecida, one might say, is a place where white men battle to become fathers of the Brazilian nation, or *Pátria* – a term literally meaning "belonging to the father".

Wary of the courtship of white men, Sojourner Truth – who had been raped by her owner, forcibly mated with an enslaved man, and robbed of her children – took issue with the argument of men who denied women their rights by saying that "Christ wasn't a woman". *Ain't I a woman?* (cf. hooks, 1981; Haraway, 2004b; Akotirene, 2019:25-26). "Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him!" As an evangelical black feminist, perhaps Sojourner Truth drew on biblical sources of inspiration, according to which the Holy Ghost, or Spirit – from the Hebrew noun *ruah* or *ruach* –, is feminine.

Broken body

After mass, in 2019, I looked for the corridor in the recesses of the church, where visitors get a glimpse of the thirty-six centimeter image of Our Lady. On a mural leading to the image, there is a picture, in colorful stones, of the appearance of the holy image. As the story goes, in 1717, fishermen pulled from the waters of the Paraíba River the fragments of the Aparecida image. They first pulled out a headless body, then a head. The pieces were glued together. Our Lady's bodily image is broken.

In 1978, after a frustrated theft or kidnapping attempt by a young man – rumored to have been hearing voices of the devil, or evangelical preachers –, the image of Our Lady shattered into pieces. Almost two hundred fragments were collected and secretly taken to the Art Museum of São Paulo, where the image was carefully and painstakingly restored (Alvarez, 2017).

In 1995, an assault on the image became known as the "kicking of the saint" [*chute na santa]*. A former evangelical bishop, in a crusade against Catholic idolatry, kicked a replica of the holy mother on an early morning television program, causing widespread commotion. This event set into motion the modernization of the Basilica at the turn of the twenty-first century. In reaction to neo-Pentecostal iconoclasm, the Catholic Church developed its own neo-Byzantine form of iconoclasm (Godoy, 2022).

In 2012, a replica of the image was violently hammered, provoking uproar and a near public lynching. There is a tragic history of the clay figure, seen as the image of a suffering mother. In her analysis of India's construction as a nation, Veena Das (2007) speaks of the figure of the violated woman as a mobilizing point for reinstating the nation as a "pure" and masculine space. Aparecida may be such a mobilizing point in Brazil.

Lourival dos Santos (2007) commented that the breaking into pieces and putting back together again of the Aparecida statue has served as a metaphor for the building and rebuilding of the Brazilian nation. As a symbol with different faces – as Rubem Cesar Fernandes (1985; 1988) maintained in his article, "Aparecida: our queen, lady, and mother, saravá!" – the Aparecida image articulates the different faces of Brazil. After the 1995 episode, however, scholars of religion (Pierucci, 1996; Montes, 1998; Giumbelli, 2003; Almeida, 2007; Menezes, 2012) were not so sure that the faces could be put back together again.

Fractures of the Aparecida image run deep – perhaps, even more so than the 1995 episode reveals – and may not be easily healed, or hidden, even when crowned and covered by a rosary and golden laced cloak. The story dating back to the first appearance of the image is haunting. In 1717, the image of Aparecida's body without a head appeared to fishermen who were in the act of providing fish for a banquet to be offered by local authorities in honor of the new governor of São Paulo and Gold Mines, Pedro de Almeida Portugal. Later named Count of Assumar, he also became known as the one who "chopped off heads" and "cut off legs" of runaway slaves (Alvarez, 2017:136-137). For many devotees, Aparecida, who was found without a head, is the black mother of Brazil.

Perhaps, the fractured image of Aparecida may best be thought of as a metaphor of the brokenness of Brazil's collective imaginary body – the rosary covering her neck, a reminder of Our Lady of the Rosary, highlighting the brokenness and, possibly, the scandal of the broken bodily image.

Denise Pimenta's (2013) study on pilgrimage calls attention to the experience of bodily brokenness and transformation as part of a collective performative act of sacrifice – etymologically

sacra facere, "making the sacred" –, in this case, one might suggest, remaking or restoring the broken body of Aparecida.

Black Mother

Our Lady is black, Anaoj told me. She called me *João Branco*, so maybe I needed to be told. In 2019, however, following the crowds in the corridor of the Basilica, I could not make out the color or other features of Aparecida. I saw only the glare of light reflecting off the golden and metallic case. Transformations in perception of the color of the clay image have occurred. Rodrigo Alvarez (2017) and Lourival dos Santos (2007) suggest that, at least, before the early twenty-first century neo-Byzantine modernization, a "darkening" process of the image has taken place. Alvarez (2017) calls attention to Maria Helena Chartuni's refusal to "whiten" the image of Aparecida, even in face of pressures from the rector of Aparecida, in the aftermath of 1978, when the image was smashed to pieces. Chartuni was the Art Museum's restorer in charge of putting the broken pieces back together again.

According to Alvarez (2017), the thirty-six centimeter effigy of Aparecida was originally sculpted as an image of Our Lady Conceição, the patron saint of Portugal, with features of a white European woman. In fact, Aparecida's official full name is Our Lady Aparecida Conceição. Supposedly, the image darkened because of the action of muddy waters of the Paraíba River and smoke produced by candles of devotion.

Significantly, during the nineteenth century, says Santos (2007), the image was clothed with a rosary and identified with Our Lady of the Rosary, the most popular saint among black people. Our Lady Aparecida emerged as the fusion between Our Lady Conceição and Our Lady of the Rosary. Among devotees of African Brazilian cults, such as umbanda and candomblé, she also became an avatar of Oxum and Iemanjá, orixá images of rivers and oceans.

If she were an actress on stage, perhaps someone in the audience might ask: "Does Our Lady use black face? Is she a white Portuguese woman using black face? Or is she a black woman using a white face, such as Frantz Fanon (2008) describes in *Black skin, white masks*?" The idea of Aparecida as an actress may seem strange. For the Holy Mother to come on stage, as a Holy Mother, perhaps theater would have to become much more like ritual, as envisaged by Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, or Edward Gordon Craig – a ritual theater in which a small statue or figurine, as Craig (1996) maintains, is capable of evoking the dead.

An effigy, says Joseph Roach (1996) in *Cities of the dead*, evokes an absence. Does Aparecida (literally, "the one who appeared") evoke those who have disappeared? Does she evoke the dead, or, as Abdias do Nascimento (1989) might say, those who inspire the ongoing struggle against genocide of the black people in Brazil? Lélia Gonzalez (2020) suggests that, despite the stereotypes, Brazilian black mothers have their own forms of resistance. Perhaps the capacity to summon the dead is one of them.

Mirrors

According to Victor Turner (1977), liminal moments and places may help one see things in new ways. Liminal experiences produce estrangement effects in relation to everyday life. As experiences of this kind, ritual and aesthetic performances provoke more than the mere mirroring of reality. At such moments, a subjunctive ("as if") mode of relating to the world is installed, creating fissures and friction, and illuminating fictional dimensions of the real – with f(r)ictional effects, placing the R in parentheses, I might add – revealing the unfinishedness of things, and subverting reality effects of a world seen in the indicative mode, not as a moving and living stage, charged with possibilities, but simply as *is*. Performance, in this sense, does not produce a mere mirroring effect. The subjunctivity which characterizes a performatic state arises from the effects of a "magic mirror" (Turner, 1987:22).

For many devotees, the image of Our Lady, located in the recesses of the New Basilica, is such a "magic mirror". Commenting on the experience of passing by the holy mother, in 1984, a woman said: "I feel like I'm not even me at this moment". In order to characterize such instants in performance, Richard Schechner (1985b; 1985a) speaks of the experience of being "not me" and "*not* not me" at

the same time. Perhaps various devotees from Devils' Hole, as participants of ritual performance, experienced their transformation into daughters and sons of Aparecida. At the same time, they did not cease seeing themselves as flesh-and-blood people from Devils' Hole. In performance, when walking by the image of the saint, devotees may enter into a liminal state, somewhere between the aura of the saint, or sacred *persona* ("not me"), and the innervation of their bodies ("*not* not me"). Perhaps they may even perceive, as if projecting black light on the image, the transformation of the saint into a sort of Our Lady of Devils' Hole. In performance, perhaps, even the clay image is transformed into something between "not clay" and "*not* not clay".

In 2019, I found it hard to visualize the thirty-six centimeter statue of Our Lady Aparecida in the gold and metallic niche located above our heads, as we passed by. Adriano Godoy (2022) also commented on the difficulty of capturing the image on his cell phone, as others, on their own cell phones, were also trying to do. As a result of modernization of the Aparecida shrine initiated at the turn of the twenty-first century, under guidance of architect Claudio Pastro, the image acquired features of a Byzantine icon, shining like a reflecting mirror. The meaning of the *eikon* emerges in performance, as devotees interact with the object. Evandro Bonfim (2021) states that, in keeping with Byzantine principles of inverted perspective, sacred figures themselves become sources of light, radiating outwards in the direction of spectators. The image dissolves in light. At this moment, Our Lady seemed especially ghost-like. She was barely there.

Perhaps, the image performs, in neo-Byzantine mode, as might be expected to occur with a lady situated within a patriarchal matrix of discourse, what Diana Taylor (1997) calls a "disappearing act". Or, would it be more like the "active vanishing" that Peggy Phelan (1993a:19), inspired by feminist performances, has in mind? Behind the shining – perhaps whitening? – neo-Byzantine mask, does one find, in Phelan's (1993b:66) words, "feminine identity", or, in this case, black feminine identity, "expressed by its disguise, by its retreat from the gaze of the other"?

Miracles and promises

In 1984, at the end of the corridor was a pile of crutches, a first display of the healing powers of Our Lady. From there we descended to the room of miracles, *sala dos milagres*, a resplendent, overflowing baroque display of the feats of the Mother of God.

In 2019, the crutches were no longer on display, and the room of miracles no longer existed. In its place, was the room of promises, *sala das promessas*. One of its main aisles featured a display of paintings and iconographic representations, with summary descriptions of Our Lady's miracles: the appearance of Our Lady and miraculous fish catch; the breaking of shackles setting free an enslaved black man; the blackout of candles and lanterns, and sudden relighting; the fall of the arrogant unbelieving horseman from his horse, when Our Lady appears, on the steps of the Basilica; the rescue of a drowning boy from the rushing waters of a river; the miracle of bringing sight to a blind girl; the deliverance of a devout hunter from the jaws of a jaguar. In this aisle could also be found a replica of the canoe used by fishermen of the Paraíba River, evoking the moment when Our Lady first appeared.

Old Basilica

After leaving the room of miracles, in 1984, and the room of promises, in 2019, I followed the movement of crowds up a walkway, the Pedestrian Bridge of Faith, to the top of the hill. Various people climbed and descended the 392 meters of the walkway on their knees. At the top, the highest point of Aparecida do Norte, on Coconut Hill [*Morro dos Coqueiros]*, one finds the Old Basilica, much smaller than the new one. With construction beginning in 1834 to receive increasing numbers of pilgrims, it was inaugurated in 1888. In 1908, it was consecrated as a minor basilica. In 1982, it became a national monument.

As I walked in the old shrine, in 2019, I saw various families sitting or lying on the floor, evidently exhausted from the pilgrimage. A black priest was giving the homily. Up high, on the ceiling, was the picture of Our Lady's miracle breaking the shackles of an enslaved black man.

3. The she-wolf in performance

Amusement park

Leaving the Old Basilica, in 1984, we joined crowds of people descending Coconut Hill in a voluminous and fluid movement through streets and stores where replicas of the Aparecida image, for sale, rub against countless items of popular consumption. The saint herself seems to go along, mixing in with a profusion of other goods and objects. In Aparecida do Norte, following the course of popular Catholicism, the boundaries between sacred and profane are unstable, or impossible to establish (Montes, 1998). What is seen as profane invades sacred spheres, just as the sacred, playing tricks on itself, overflows and converts into profane illumination.

In 1984, at the bottom of the hill, surprisingly near the New Basilica, we came upon an amusement park. Among various attractions, such as the merry-go-round, ferris wheel, sharp-shooting galleries, and electric bumper cars, are found the spectacles of animalistic and feral women: gorilla woman, snake woman, and she-wolf. No more images of the Holy Mother are found. Did she disappear? Has she become other, as may happen in liminal areas? Has Aparecida become *aparição*, an apparition?

We watched the spectacle of the she-wolf. While standing in a semicircle, in a small room, spectators observe a cage on stage, from which emerges a light-skinned, pale young woman with dyed blond hair in a bikini, the stereotypical male fantasy and image of desire: the glimmer of commodity fetishism, perhaps, in the image of a woman in a cage. Two men hold her by the arms. In circus style, an announcer with resounding voice and loud speaker prepares us for the wonders we are about to see. After supposedly receiving an injection, during the enactment of a scuffle in which men forcefully insert a gigantic needle into the body of their victim, the woman is led back into the cage. Lights go out. Thunderclaps are heard. Amid a succession of sparks and flashes of light, the figure in the cage looms larger: arms and legs thicken, the face expands, nostrils dilate, and hair sprouts all over the body. The creature grabs the cage bars. In a burst of light irrupts the beastly image: dark, hairy and horrific. Suddenly the she-wolf bursts through the bars of the cage. As the specter leaps forward, spectators are dazed. In the commotion, the semicircle breaks apart. Anaoj's ten-year-old boy runs out the door. A group of men tries to hold down the creature and thwart her advance. Amid confusion, people rush out of the room, and the she-wolf is taken back to the cage.

In 2019, I found an amusement park a few blocks from the Old Basilica, smaller than the one I visited in 1984. Its main attraction was Monga – The Gorilla Woman. When entering a dark tent area, the image of a young woman dressed in a bikini flashes in a cage. Suddenly, there is a blackout followed by a burst of light, and an explosion. The girl turns into Monga – The Gorilla Woman. Breaking out of the cage, she leaps in my direction. The curtain falls.

As discussed in the beginning of this essay, Judith Butler (1993) speaks of the way in which normative constraints, maintained and recreated through performative and repetitive sets of action, not only produce a domain of bodies that matter, but, also, a subterranean or submersed domain of abject bodies (Butler, 1993). As a ghost, this excluded domain haunts the domain of normative and laudable bodies. On the edges of basilicas devoted to Aparecida (the "one who appeared"), an amusement park features performative presentations of bodies constrained to disappear, or to be kept out of sight.

In these attractions one might choose to see a carnival-like manifestation of chaos in the midst of which emerges a serene order of cosmic proportions. The wildness of these mutant and grotesque women dramatizes, by comparison, the beauty and gentleness of the face of Our Lady Aparecida. The sense of terror that is engendered by these spectacles, whose artists specialize in the production of fear, magnify possible longings of finding oneself in the bosom of the holy mother. While some visitors, in the sanctuary contemplate the peaceful eyes and face of the saint wrapped in a shawl of golden lace, others, in the amusement park, witness with a mixture of laughter and astonishment the eruption of ghastly lower bodily stratum in the spectacles of unclothed, scaly, and hairy women. Like a serpent that tries to swallow its own tail, the basilica, with its luminous towers pointed to the sun, causes tumult and desperation among subterranean forces that irrupt at the end of a descending path that coils downhill through the streets of Aparecida do Norte.

On the other hand, considering the possibility that, in amusement parks, ludic working class popular culture has something to say about the ritual process, reformulating, in its own way, the pathways of devotion, is there perhaps a montage aesthetic with shock effects which here comes into play? Do these amusement parks produce something like the estrangement effects that Bertholt Brecht sought on stage? Does the spectacle of the she-wolf, along with others of shape-shifting women, irrupt as holy terror?[1] Donna Haraway's (1989:280) comment, in "Woman's place is in the jungle", is suggestive: "Laughter is an indispensable tool in deconstructions of the bio-politics of being female". In common, both images of Our Lady and she-wolf are produced by mirror effects. In the case of Our Lady, following principles of neo-Byzantine aesthetics; in the case of the she-wolf, of circus and side show aesthetics.

According to Barbara Creed (2015), the presentation of female sexuality and corporeality as animalistic and feral finds its *locus classicus* in the Inquisition handbooks of the early modern witch-hunts, particularly in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Despite the stigma, images of she-wolves are sometimes seen as forms of empowerment. Exploring the she-wolf imaginary, Hannah Priest (2015:11) found that, "while male werewolves (like wolves) are often figured as an external threat to male property, female werewolves (like women) are more likely to be imagined as trapped *within* this economic and societal structuring". In both cases, werewolves attack "the heart of masculine-defined and patriarchal society". But, "while the male werewolf attempts to disrupt from without, the female werewolf is often trying to break out".

Donna Haraway (2004a), who has devoted much of her writing to stories of women and primates, would appreciate the idea of thoroughly breaching the boundary between human and animal. Perhaps the same breaking out impulse, detected by Priest in regard to the she-wolf, has to do with the popularity of Monga – The Gorilla Woman, the main attraction of São Paulo's Play Center, in the 1970s. Its creator, Romeu Del Duque, dreams of transforming Monga into a comic book heroine (Roque, 2019).

Affinities between Our Lady and the she-wolf

As I think back on the moment when I saw the she-wolf, in 1984, and the gorilla woman, in 2019, I am reminded of Walter Benjamin's materialistic historiography:

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes… a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past (Benjamin, 1969:254).

Benjamin's monad is what Avery Gordon (2008) refers to as a ghost. I believe that the she-wolf and gorilla woman are such monads. At the amusement park in Aparecida, in the form of shock-producing montage (she-wolf/Aparecida), as a result of a ritual process designed by popular Catholicism, in which the "sacred" and "profane" rub against each other, and, perhaps, become one another, may be recognized "a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past". In Aparecida, a haunting and oppressed past, condensed in the ghostly images of Our Lady and the she-wolf (or Monga), seemingly absent, becomes a seething presence.

Stories told about Our Lady speak of a powerful saint – the most powerful, according to Anaoj – capable of performing miracles and extraordinary feats. "Hail Mary full of Grace" – like a hail storm.

Some affinities between Our Lady and the she-wolf call attention. Both are apparitions. Both produce shock effects. The appearance of Our Lady shocks the arrogant horseman who is overthrown from his horse on the stairway of the basilica. When a hunter in the jaws of a jaguar calls for Our Lady, saying *Nossa!*, her appearance leaves the jaguar in shock. Our Lady, *Nossa Senhora*, or simply *nossa*, in Portuguese, is an expression of shock.

[1] The term by which Diana Taylor and Roselyn Costantino (2003) describe various subversive performances produced by women throughout Latin America.

In one of Our Lady's stories, devotional candles and lanterns black out, then miraculously relight. Amusement parks produce similar effects not with candles or lanterns, but, in the age of mechanical reproduction, with electrical shocks and explosive bursts of light.

Walter Benjamin saw in amusement parks places for education of the masses:

> The masses can attain knowledge only through the small shock that nails an experience securely to one's innards. Their education is a series of catastrophes that hurry toward them in dark tents at amusement parks and fairs, where anatomy lessons penetrate to the marrow, or at the circus, where the image of the first lion they ever see is bound inextricably to that of the trainer who sticks his fist into the lion's mouth. It takes genius to extract a traumatic energy, a small, specific terror from things (Benjamin, 1999:136 *apud* Jennings, 1987:82-83).

In the park one learns to say "*nossa*!" in shock, with an exclamation point.

The amusement park featuring the she-wolf constitutes, as Judith Butler might suggest, a domain of abject bodies. Even though Aparecida may be located in another domain, I believe that she is no stranger to the experience of abjection. First appearing in the form of a headless body; assaulted, violated, smashed into nearly two hundred pieces, with nose and right eye turning into dust; then reconstituted; her head never staying in place – the image is disconcerting. One of her biographers stated that she is "very ugly" (Alvarez, 2017). Were it not for the rosary, crown, and golden laced cloak covering her brokenness, she also could have been placed, like the she-wolf and Monga – The Gorilla Woman, in a domain of abject bodies.

One of the first miracles of Aparecida, as pictured on the ceiling of the Old Basilica, portrays an enslaved black man in chains. Upon the appearance, or apparition, of Our Lady, shackles are broken or disappear. The explosive nature of the gesture of setting free, in the city of Aparecida, comes to life not so much in the basilica, but in the amusement park where the she-wolf and gorilla woman break out of the cage.

4. Ladies of devils' hole in performance

On the bus, in 1984, leaving Aparecida do Norte and returning to Piracicaba and to Devils' Hole, I asked Anaoj about the she-wolf. She said: "you know, she's also a daughter of God". Anaoj said nothing of the contrast between Our Lady and the she-wolf. She saw something similar – as one might find when looking at mother and daughter, or two sisters. In courtly language, which is not alien to the Aparecida setting, Walter Benjamin (2003:390) writes:

> Are we not touched by the same breath of air of those who came before? Are there not echoes of those who have been silenced in voices heard today? Have not the women who we court sisters who are not recognized anymore?

After returning from Aparecida, as I leafed through field notes, some of the entries stood out. There is something strangely familiar in the amusement park attractions. Similarities between the spectacle of the she-wolf and descriptions which women from Devils' Hole make of their own experiences of sudden mutation draw attention.

Speaking with a friend, Mary of Angels, a single mother of five children, commented: "I don't know what happens to me. Sometimes I just go crazy… crazy with rage. I am just as sane as I am right now talking to you. But there are times when I go crazy". Laconically, her friend said: "I'm like that too". That very day Mary of Angels had gone crazy when speaking to a city inspector. Not long ago, as she stood in front of a city tractor that was going to tear down her home and the homes of her neighbors, she shouted: "You're going to have to run over my dead body!" Her neighbors joined in, standing next to her. The tractor went away. Later, she said: "I turned into a rattlesnake!"

When Anaoj got news that the store owner called Snickers [*Risadinha]* had humiliated her husband, she was furious. As Mister Z was getting down from the back of a truck after a day in the sugarcane fields, the store owner had called out loudly, for everyone to hear, "Hey, Mister Z, when are you going to pay up on that debt?" Immediately, upon hearing the story, Anaoj ran up the hill. In the middle of the street, in front of the store, she yelled out: "Hey Snickers, how dare you humiliate Mister Z who works hard to feed his family?! My son paid that debt last week! Did you forget?! You're

wrong if you think you're going to get rich off the sweat and hard work of Mister Z and my sons!" The store owner said: "Crazy woman!" Anaoj responded: "I am crazy! Did you think I was human?!" – [*Você está pensando que eu sou gente?!]*. That is something that a she-wolf might say.

Another woman known as Aparecida – the namesake of the holy mother – confronted a group of men from the neighborhood who had surrounded her boy. Because of a stray stone, they were getting ready to teach the boy a lesson. According to Aparecida's sister-in-law, the mother "leaped into the Indian village like a madwoman" [*saltou na aldeia que nem uma mulher doida]*. "Come on!" she said, "I'll kill the first one that lays a finger on my boy!" The men backed off. "That's a real woman!" the sister-in-law said, "scared of no man!" I had heard Diolíndia, the sister-in-law, say something similar about her own mother: "I am the daughter of an Indian woman who they lassoed in the woods. My mother was an Indian madwoman who was scared of no man!" Many devotees of Our Lady saw themselves as daughters and granddaughters of African and Amerindian women "scared of no man!" With shock effects, Aparecida of Devils' Hole protected her boy from threatening men. Although her name was Aparecida, the gesture of leaping out at her audience like a madwoman is similar to that of the she-wolf.

One late night, Anaoj's youngest daughter, Lúcia (fictitious name), was told by a neighbor that, at the entrance of the *favela* (shantytown), police investigators were harassing her husband looking into his backpack as he was coming home from work. Several weeks earlier Lúcia herself had pressured her husband, who had a gift for playing the accordion and a love for parties, to find a job. The young black couple had a baby and small child. In a flash, Lucia ran to the scene. Shaking with rage, she confronted the police. One of them hissed "crazy woman!" When an older woman also raised her voice, he shouted: "Get out of here, witch!" Other women joined in and raged until the police went away. The story was told and retold various times that night as neighbors came by. Anaoj was proud of her daughter. With a chuckle, she said: "Lucia turned into a jaguar [*virou onça]* and leaped at the police!"

In the configuration of a gesture, of women who go "crazy with rage", "turning into animals" [*virando bichos]* and leaping at those who threaten themselves, their family and neighborhood networks, a state of bodily innervation is produced. Although frequently suppressed – given the stigma attached to "nervous women" –, such a state is highly valued among residents of Devils' Hole.[2]

In amusement parks, at the margins of the basilicas, according to a sort of pedagogy of astonishment, one learns to "turn into an animal" [*virar bicho]*. In Aparecida, perhaps, one may come to see the she-wolf as one who is very near to Our Lady, not so much, however, as a figure of contrast, but as one that emerges, according to the expression of Carlo Ginzburg (1991), from her "nocturnal history".

In the aftermath of my visits to Aparecida do Norte, in 1984 and 2019, what I found most striking was not the dramatic contrast between Our Lady and the she-wolf, but the uncanny ways in which they are similar. At the end of a trajectory created by popular Catholicism, spectacles of shape-shifting women in amusement parks – in the domains of abject bodies – interact with performances of Our Lady's devotees in everyday dramas of Devils' Hole. In critical life-threatening situations, gestures of the she-wolf and Monga – The Gorilla Woman, as flashing images, create friction and subvert social discourse, revealing bodies that matter for black and non-white women in Brazil. In Devils' Hole, the she-wolf matters.

As Diana Taylor (1997) has said in regard to the Madres de la Plaza de Mayo, mothers are trapped in bad scripts. In patriarchal societies, women only matter as mothers. They are metaphorically caught in a cage. With black women, Lélia Gonzalez might suggest, the cage has a double or triple lock. Perhaps, in Brazil, many of us are haunted by what these cages may hold. While the she-wolf is locked in a cage, Aparecida, the Black Mother of Brazil, is held in a golden and metallic case covered with bullet proof glass. At least, for an instant, as the flashing image that irrupts from the excluded domain of abject bodies, the she-wolf bursts out of the cage. How about Aparecida?

[2] It may be interesting to compare these notes to findings of Camila Fernandes (2017) regarding "nervous women" and other "figures of causation" found in "paradoxical, provocative, and deviant performances of women" in *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro.

In *Ghostly matters*, Avery Gordon speaks of how she was distracted, or deviated from a pre-set course, by a woman ghost named Sabina Spielrein who, looking into a mirror before going to bed, saw a wolf (Gordon, 2008). I too have been haunted by a woman ghost – her name, Aparecida. I imagine that when she looks into a mirror, she also sees a wolf.

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