Why We Need Black-feminist Poetry

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RESUMO

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This essay aims at a double goal: reconstructing the problem of how Enlightenment created and sharpened the conceptual weapons that made possible the European colonialist/slavery-machine (reframing thus universal history as a project of universalization of European/colonialist reason); and arguing how black-feminist poetry plays a fundamental anti-colonial role not only in exposing/forcing into review colonialist/racist thought, but also in creating non-totalitarian worlds of possibilities. Mostly, these two poles are put in motion in a non-systematic argumentative movement: our medium of/for reflection are an assembly of Theodor Adorno’s philosophy and black-feminist poetry and thought. The analyses of Brazilian black-feminist inventions – particularly, Conceição Evaristo’s concept of “escrevivência”, Priscila Rezende’s Bombril (2010) performance and Tamara Franklin’s videoclip for Wakanda (2019) – is meant to allow for an innovative take on Adorno’s concept of art as social monad, which will be revisited in view of the key-concepts of technopolitics/technopoiesis.

Palavras-chave
black feminism; Adorno; escrevivência; technopolitics; techopoiesis

ABSTRACT

Por que precisamos de poesia feminista negra

Este ensaio visa a um duplo objetivo: reconstruir o problema de como o Iluminismo criou e afeiçoou as armas conceituais que tornaram possível a maquinaria europeia de colonização/escravidão (reconfigurando assim a história universal como um projeto de universalização da razão colonialista europeia); e argumentar como a poesia feminista negra desempenha um papel anticolonial fundamental não apenas em que expõe/produt a crítica do pensamento colonialista/racista, mas também em que cria mundos não-totalitários de possibilidades. Em geral, ambos os objetivos são colocados em movimento através de uma argumentação não-sistemática: nosso meio de/para reflexão é uma seleção de passagens da filosofia de Theodor Adorno e da poesia e pensamento feminista negros. A análise de invenções feministas negras brasileiras – particularmente, do conceito de “Escrivivência” de Conceição Evaristo, da performance Bombril (2010) de Priscila Rezende e do videoclipe Wakanda (2019) de Tamara Franklin – destina-se a permitir uma abordagem inovadora do conceito de arte de Adorno como mônada social, que será revisitado tendo em vista os conceitos-chave de tecnopolítica/technopoiesis.

Keywords
feminismo negro; Adorno; escrevivência; tecnopolítica; tecnopoiesis

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I claim Escrevência is not a narcissistic writing, for it is not a writing of the individual self, which is limited to a story of one single self, lost in the solitude of Narcissus. Escrevência is a writing that does not contemplate itself in the waters of Narcissus, for the mirror of Narcissus does not reflect our face. Nor do we hear there the echo of our speech, for Narcissus is deaf to our voices. Our mirror is that of Oxum and Yemanja. We appropriate the abebés of African mythical narratives to build our theoretical apparatuses for a deeper understanding of our texts.¹

Conceição Evaristo

It is interesting how some authors have a way of making their presence felt in different historical horizons. In his famous inaugural lecture delivered at the Collège de France in 1970, Michel Foucault – in recognizing his debt to Jean Hyppolite – describes his age as continuously struggling to "make a real escape from Hegel", only to find him again, "waiting for us, immobile and elsewhere".² This held true for the 1970s, and still holds true now, although for a different reason: if Hegel is back in the 21st century, his newfound importance is due to decolonial/anti-colonial studies, and – therefore – thoroughly critical towards Hegelian racist/colonialist motifs. It has motivated, among other things, attempts at reconfiguring/rescuing the “enlightenment project of universal history” (i.e. the Hegelian project for universal history), such as Susan Buck-Morss’s³, and recent new attempts at producing a dialectics of non-totality (non-closure), such as George Ciccariello-Maher’s Decolonizing Dialectics.⁴ Hegel’s criticism is at the core of the so-called decolonial turn, both because Hegel would present the most developed form of modern European thought, and for his system would provide the most enduring format for an Eurocentric philosophy of world history. This essay aims at a double goal: reconstructing the problem of how Enlightenment created and sharpened the conceptual weapons that made possible the European colonialist/slavery-machine (in doing so, it intends to reframe universal history as a project of universalization of European/colonialist reason); and arguing how black-feminist poetry plays a fundamental anti-colonial role not only in exposing/forcing into review colonialist/racist
thought, but also in creating non-totalitarian worlds of possibilities.

Mostly, these two poles are put in motion – throughout the essay – in a non-systematic argumentative movement. Our medium of/for reflection are an assembly of Adorno’s philosophy and black-feminist poetry and thought. This happens for a reason. In assessing Adorno’s changing positions on art and culture and confronting aspects of his philosophy with the feminist/decolonial endeavors of Lélia Gonzalez, Audre Lorde, Gloria Anzaldúa, Patricia Hill Collins and Conceição Evaristo, the essay intends to shed new lights on old aesthetic/political philosophical problems – signaling at the possibility of artworks as materializing (and maybe advancing) an important anti-colonial/non-totalitarian dispute fought from the peripheries of Capital. The emphasis on and analyses of Brazilian black-feminist inventions – particularly, Conceição Evaristo’s concept of “escrevivência”, Priscila Rezende’s Bombril (2010) performance and Tamara Franklin’s videoclip for Wakanda (2019) – is meant to allow for, as we shall see, a perhaps innovative take on Adorno’s concept of art as social monad.

This innovative take depends on the possibility of the following three steps: I. understanding artworks as belonging to the larger class of “dispositifs/apparatuses”, in line with Giorgio Agamben’s expansion of the Foucauldian concept; II. claiming the key-concepts of technopolitics/technopoiesis as fundamental traits of apparatuses; III. arguing how Latin American black-feminism operates a guerrilla-like struggle as it: a. disputes the control of enunciation apparatuses aiming at b. self-definition, which puts in check the dynamics of power – as Patricia Hill Collins puts it – “underlying the very process of definition itself”, and c. appeals to “escrevivência” as an anti-colonial, affirmative practice of reinvention.

**Art as barbarism and the barbarism of reason**

Written in 1949, the essay “Cultural Criticism and Society” – by Theodor Adorno – made famous the dictum “to write poetry after
Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today". It is important to note that, regardless of Adorno’s seminal analysis of the “immanent” and “transcendent” types of cultural criticism, criticism still operates from a culture that has failed. The ultimate failure of culture, says Adorno in his *Negative Dialectics*, is that Auschwitz “could happen in the midst of the traditions of philosophy, of art, and of the enlightening sciences [...]. All post-Auschwitz culture, including its urgent critique, is garbage". Barbarism, in that sense, denotes a culture that, as a whole, was not only unable to prevent the holocaust, but might have even engendered it – an idea already found in an earlier (and also very famous) text from 1944, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written with Max Horkheimer. The same argument could be built around slavery – in fact, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* Adorno and Horkheimer even mention that “the bourgeois in the successive forms of the slave-owner, the free entrepreneur, and the administrator is the logical subject of enlightenment". Nevertheless, the recognition that slavery and European enlightenment were two sides of the same coin never really came to the foreground in Adorno’s writings.

In her essay-turned-book “Hegel and Haiti”, Susan Buck-Morss brings the “freedom/slavery” problem to the foreground – “the exploitation of millions of colonial slave laborers was accepted as part of the given world by the very thinkers who proclaimed freedom to be man’s natural state and inalienable right” – but seemingly insists in a paradox/contradiction (between Enlightenment’s ideas and colonialist practice) – “this glaring discrepancy between thought and practice [...] this paradox did not seem to trouble the logical consciousness of contemporaries”. It gets even more interesting: Susan Buck-Morss argues a young/more open-minded Hegel was directly inspired by the Haitian Revolution as he developed the slave-master dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Mind*, but took a reactionary turn for the worse down the road – the *Lectures on The Philosophy of History* reveal a prejudiced, racist and downright stupid Hegel. This stupidification, she argues, has to do with an effort on the part of Hegel to become more educated.
in African studies – “it is sadly ironic”, she says, “that the more faithfully his lectures reflected Europe’s conventional scholarly wisdom on African society, the less enlightened and more bigoted they became”. But while Susan Buck-Morss does not fail to acknowledge racism as a formal, scholarly production of European education, she still fails to acknowledge slavery and enlightenment as one and the same project.

Of course, the paradox disappears once we move to the topoi of those most affected by it – and we come to realize, with Achille Mbembe, that “Blackness and race have constituted the (unacknowledged and often denied) foundation, what we might call the nuclear power plant, from which the modern project of knowledge – and of governance – has been deployed”. Enlightenment puts in motion a racial (socio-philosophical) engineering process, allowing for the transmutation of human beings into things among things, into commodity. This process is well described by Magobe Ramose in “On the Legitimacy and Study of African Philosophy”. Ramose argues how the Aristotelian definition of man as a rational animal was utilized by colonization as a restrictive device: reason was understood as an exclusive attribute of European humans, while other human beings were only humans-look-alike, in appearance, lacking – precisely – reason. The concept of race, says Mbembe in the Critique of Black Reason, initially developed to categorize animals, was then useful for Europeans to differentiate humans other than themselves. Race, in general, and Blackness, in particular, were the fictitious inventions that allowed for the maximum exploitation of non-European human groups. This made-up, elaborated lie functioned as the touchstone of a whole conceptual colonial system, for it makes colonization not only a logical necessity, but even an ethical imperative: Enlightenment honed the conceptual tools that justified conquering, taming (“educating”), exploiting and exterminating.

Unsurprisingly, the consolidation of this modern project of (European) rationality is to be found in the Kantian transcendental subject – the formal backdrop for the “synthetic unity of the manifold of intuitions [...] the ground of the identity of
apperception itself\textsuperscript{17} –, always identical to itself. This is a precondition for an endeavor such as Universal History, an endeavor which, although likely triggered by Kant (particularly in his essay “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View”), reaches its final form in Hegelian \textit{Geschichte} – as a project of universalization of European/colonialist reason (aiming at total closure through its dialectical resolution via civil society – \textit{Sittlichkeit}). This is why epistemicide – described by Boaventura de Souza Santos as the murder of the knowledge systems of subordinated cultures\textsuperscript{18} – must also regard the colonial process of weaponizing concepts. Of course, this makes decolonial/critical thinking a big-challenge, a fact that did not go unnoticed by the likes of Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire and Lélia Gonzalez – for decolonial thinking is in itself a process of re-education, re-orientation and, mostly, re-connection.\textsuperscript{19} Lélia Gonzalez’ words are, in this very sense, instructive:

So, I had the opportunity to study, I went to kindergarten in Belo Horizonte, then to elementary school and I went through that process I call brainwashing by the Brazilian pedagogical discourse, because the more I deepened my knowledge, the more I rejected my situation as a black person. [...] At college I was already a person with a perfectly whitened mind, within the system. I majored in Philosophy and History. From this point on the contradictions began. [...] Needless to say, the inner conflict of black women in the university is so great that in the moment you are confronted with the reality of the prejudiced and discriminatory ideology out there, then you completely lose your head. I had to start seeing an analyst [...]. From then on, I started hanging out with my own people, I mean, I went on to mingle with candomblé, macumba, those things that I thought were primitive. Cultural manifestations that I, after all, with a background in Philosophy, committed with such a sophisticated Western cultural form, definitely couldn’t perceive as important things. But anyway: I went back to the origins, I sought my roots and started to realize, for example, the crucial role that my mother played in my education. Although indigenous and illiterate, she had such an incredible
This is very much in tune with Brazilian contemporary writer Conceição Evaristo’s testimony in “Da Grafia-desenho de minha mãe, um dos lugares de nascimento de minha escrita”, in which she acknowledges her mother’s ritual – who struggled to survive as a washerwoman – of drawing a sun in the dirt as having deeply influenced her own writing. These accounts point to a problem Paulo Freire has developed thoroughly in Pedagogia do oprimido, which is the understanding that the oppressors intellectual tools cannot be tools for liberating the oppressed – for they are firstly and foremost dehumanizing tools of oppression. The task of the oppressed, in that very sense, is to develop their own conceptual arsenal – which they can only do in the process of realizing their own position as they keep oppressors in check. This is why for us, people living in those countries regarded by colonialism as the “Third World”, views such as those developed by Adorno in his Prisms essay (“Cultural Criticism and Society”) cannot be read without a double suspicion: first, because in facing statements that seem to force the position of art (and culture in general) as barbarism, we must ask ourselves if wouldn’t it be likely that Adorno could have mistaken the part for the whole and, referring to petty-bourgeois art or the productions of the cultural industry, has lost sight of the forms of life (and culture) for which – to borrow the expression of Audre Lorde – poetry is not a luxury; and second, because black-feminist poetry – as we intend to argue – is fundamental in exposing and forcing into review many of the prejudiced conceptual tools inherited by us in the guise of Enlightenment/universal reason.

**Art as an expression of suffering is not enough**

Adorno has returned to this problem on occasion – in his 1966’s Negative Dialectics he presents it in the following way: “perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems.” Later on, in the
Aesthetic Theory, aesthetic pleasure is rebuked – as the problem unfolds into an aesthetics of pain: “whoever concretely enjoys artworks is a philistine; he is convicted by expressions like ‘a feast for the ears’. Yet if the last traces of pleasure were extirpated, the question of what artworks are for would be an embarrassment. Actually, the more they are understood, the less they are enjoyed”. Of course, the term poetry [Gedicht] must be read as a synecdoche for art and culture at large, even though Adorno’s artistic/cultural references barely reached the periphery of capitalism.

There are two interesting considerations to be made here. The first of them has to do with the fact that, in art, not only consumption, but also its production is classist. “Of all the art forms, poetry is the most economical”, says Audre Lorde in “Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference”, a 1980 text. She goes on to describe poetry as: “[...] the most secret, the one that requires less physical effort, less material, and the one that can be done in the intervals between shifts, in the hospital pantry, in the subway, in scraps of paper. [...] poetry has been the main voice of the poor, the working class and women of color”. In this very sense, she is joined by Gloria Anzaldúa’s plea in “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” –

Forget the room of one’s own – write in the kitchen, lock yourself up in the bathroom. Write on the bus or the welfare line, on the job or during meals, between sleeping or waking. I write while sitting on the john. No long stretches at the typewriter unless you’re wealthy or have a patron – you may not even own a typewriter. While you wash the floor or clothes listen to the words chanting in your body. When you’re depressed, angry, hurt, when compassion and love possess you. When you cannot help but write.

Lorde’s and Anzaldúa’s claims resonate with the production of Carolina Maria de Jesus, who in 1960 – at least two decades prior in Brazil – had published Quarto de despejo? Diário de uma favelada, a selected edition of her journals. Carolina de Jesus dwelled for over a decade in the Canindé Favela, São Paulo, living as a scrap collector, a time during which she has written more
than twenty notebooks describing her daily life (and of those around her). Asked about what motivated her writing, she answered: “when I had nothing to eat, instead of cursing I wrote.” Writing poetry turns out to be an injunction to the dispossessed, and barbarism then stands for something else entirely: barbaric is the systematic socio-economic mechanics that conceal and even silence their poetry/their voices/their very existence. Expressing “perennial suffering” can neither be the only nor the main element of a poetry that answers to this “injunction from the margins”, and this is because writing presupposes a process of self-inscription, reinvention of the self and, especially for those most oppressed, counter-narrative. This becomes evident, for instance, in the following words of Conceição Evaristo:

What leads certain women, born and raised in unlettered or at best semi-literate environments, to break with the passivity of reading and seek the movement of writing? I will try to answer. Perhaps, these women (like me) have realized that if the act of reading allows us to apprehend the world, writing goes beyond the limits of a perception of life. Writing presupposes a dynamism proper to the subject who writes, enabling the writer’s self-inscription within the world. And, as an act undertaken by black women, who have historically transited through cultural spaces other than those inhabited by the culture of the elites, writing carries a sense of insubordination. This insubordination is often made evident by a writing that violates the “cultured norms” of language, as in Carolina Maria de Jesus, but also by the choice of the subject matter of the narrative. Our escrevivência cannot be read as “lullabies for those in the master’s house”, rather, it must disturb them in their unjust slumber.

“Escrevivência” is an untranslatable concept developed by Conceição Evaristo by joining two other Portuguese words, “escrever” (to write) and “vivência” (experience). The concept attempts to define what writing/creating – as an activity – means for those in the margins and, particularly, to Black women. This means “escrevivência” entails a necessary element of
collectiveness, an element named by Patricia Hill Collins “outsider within”, which presupposes that “Black women possess a unique standpoint on, or perspective of, their experiences and that there will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group”. This shared experience, nonetheless, does not imply sameness in production, since it is modulated by diversities that shape each individual expression of it – which means each individual expression has the potential of shedding new lights on those common themes. This is precisely why black-feminist poetry (and by poetry we mean – art at large) performs a fundamental decolonial critical function: from its specific standpoint/topos, it not only exposes and forces into review ingrained colonial/racist thought, but also reconstructs/re-signifies and creates counter-hegemonical worlds of possibility. But that is not all – “escrivivência” still points to a strategy of collective subsistence in the borders; and, finally, it is the materialization of this activity of subversion/insubordination (which is already an attribute of subsistence – there is no such a thing as “passive” existence).

Take, for instance, Bombril (2010), a performance by Brazilian artist Priscila Rezende. In Bombril, Priscila Rezende uses her hair to scrub and polish different metallic objects – mostly kitchenware – for approximately 1 hour. Founded in 1948, “Bombril” is a Brazilian manufacturer of domestic cleaning products which has as its most recognizable product a steel-wool marketed as “Bom Bril”. Bombril is also a pejorative name (among many) used by Brazilian society to designate the hair of black people.
Bombril is usually performed in the street or other open spaces, breaking with the invisibility of ingrained racism as it confronts bystanders with a very strong impersonation of society’s own prejudices. But this is just one effect of the performance – as “escrevivência”, it expresses not only the artist’s particular, individual position, but points, as we have argued, to a shared experience. This shared experience also reflects back to Black women, in which it fulfills its twofold function: yes, it exposes prejudices, but most importantly it affirms blackness as an agent of art (rather than a sign for race). This makes Bombril an act of self-definition, and, as such, an act that validates Black women’s power – in stressing, as Patricia Hill Collins puts it, “the power dynamics underlying the very process of definition itself”. Finally, in materializing (making visible) affirmative blackness, it takes back the power to define and calls for collective reinvention.

And here we come to our second (belated) consideration: prior to the Aesthetic Theory, Adorno seemingly posits art either as “garbage” (and thence its total condemnation) or as a means to represent suffering – its only viable function. But, as we have seen, the discussion about the capacity or incapacity of art to “adequately” represent suffering is, from the point of view of those who create art in the margins – and in particular for black-feminist poetry –, neither fundamental nor sufficient. But while
this is true regarding, for instance, Adorno’s 1949 essay (“Cultural Criticism and Society”) or the *Negative Dialectics*, and while it somehow persists in his *Aesthetic Theory*, it is precisely in the *Aesthetic Theory* – in which he also proposes art as a social monad – that we will find a more promising middle-ground for a somehow surprising development.

**Apparatuses and their technopolitics/poiesis**

The *Aesthetic Theory* defines modern works of art as social monads whose internal tensions are bounded by the socio-historical conflicts within which they were produced. The resolution of these internal tensions in the artwork cannot be accomplished by the artwork itself – this is because the tension materialized in the work, although contained in it (it shapes/is its form!), does not come from it (since it reflects the contradictions of the world). There is an intriguing affinity between Adorno’s aesthetic theory and, for instance, Lorde’s and Anzaldúa’s claim that poetry is the cheapest art form available to the oppressed, or Evaristo’s concept of “escrevivência” – defined as a specific type of creative activity which, among other things, materializes Black women’s standpoints/topoi. This proximity becomes apparent in passages like the following:

> Although it appears to be merely subjective, the *totum* of forces invested in the work is the potential presence of the collective according to the level of the available productive forces: Windowless, it contains the monad. This is most strikingly evident in the critical corrections made by artists. In every improvement to which he is compelled, often enough in conflict with what he considers his primary impulse, the artist works as social agent, indifferent to society’s own consciousness. He embodies the social forces of production without necessarily being bound by the censorship dictated by the relations of production, which he continually criticizes by following the rigors of his *métier*. In the many particular situations with which the work confronts its author there are always many available solutions, but the multiplicity of solutions is finite and surveyable as a whole.
Métier sets boundaries against the bad infinity in works. It makes concrete what, in the language of Hegel’s Logic, might be called the abstract possibility of artworks. Therefore every authentic artist is obsessed with technical procedures; the fetishism of means also has a legitimate aspect.  

This activity of condensing socio-historical relations in works of art (in particular), and in human dispositifs/apparatuses (in general), corresponds to the broader concept of technopolitics. The concept of technopolitics (and of technopoiesis – we will get there later) develops from an attempt at defining materiality. Its roots of course are in Marx, for whom – it is worth remembering – social relations (and human consciousness itself) derive from relations of production; technopolitics, and this is not so obvious, regard technologies as the counterpart/materialization of those very relations. It designates, then, the social limits of the production of dispositifs, insofar as these are expressions of the social form within which they are produced. What we mean by “dispositifs/apparatuses” here is in line with Agamben’s expansion of the Foucauldian concept, for whom apparatuses are “literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”

By describing artworks as “windowless monads”, Adorno means the artist is not necessarily conscious of the social horizon of its production and/or the conflicting forces to be materialized in the artwork (the artist might not be aware she/he is, in that sense, “a social agent”), and neither, necessarily, this truth-content is to be “unfolded” immediately by the consciousness of those who interact with the artwork (even though consciousness itself is a product of the same horizon). This also holds true for the production (even at the industrial level) and applications of apparatuses at large – technopolitics is hardly noticeable, for it equals the normalized environment that we inhabit and, therefore, has been desensitized to notice. But there is something else in these objects, a fundamental feature which may have escaped Adorno – probably due to the way he calibrates his concept of social monad. For Adorno, the truth-content of artworks can only
be accessed through reflexive (philosophical) mediation; this truth-content is constituted by a struggle between the conflicting social forces materialized in the artwork and the energy with which the artwork itself turns against these same conflicting forces. This means inasmuch as the artwork draws the observer’s gaze/attention, it baits the observer into unpuzzling it; but the more the observer concentrates in unpuzzling it, the more the artwork reflects the observer’s understanding – from itself – to the outside.

Reflexive mediation in the Aesthetic Theory acts thus as a kind of hermeneutic cage – in chasing the artwork’s truth content, the observer is, in reality, hiding the artwork’s material disposition – in plain sight. This makes it harder to perceive two features embedded in any human-made apparatuses: a. those forces that affect us – and which are also affected/shaped by us – and are materialized in what Deleuze called blocks of sensations (of percepts/affects); b. that these blocks of sensations are also materializations of a dispute (of forms of perception), the aesthetic dimension inherent in all politics. These features comprise what we would like to call technopoiesis. If by technopolitics we refer to apparatuses as expressing/condensing social relations (conditioned, as we know they are, by relations of production), technopoiesis indicates how those technologies modulate our sensibilities/forms of perception – or, to put it differently, how those technologies affect/program/capture us. Technopoiesis produces thus, for our bodies, all forms of possible experience.

This means – as Friedrich Kittler argues in Gramophone, Film, Typewriter – apparatuses are constantly/and historically programming human perception. In fact, they are, in themselves – for us, their inscription surfaces –, the materialization of all available forms of possible experience for any given historic window. This of course is what makes politics an immanent part of aesthetics: for if perception is fabricated, apparatuses then materialize the political dispute for perception. In the perspective of technopoiesis, art’s capability to hint at the possibility of a future reconciliation for those conflicting forces
outside the artwork (ultimately the class-struggle) is not as important as the dispute for the fabrication/modulation of perception (a given feature of any apparatuses). Technopoiesis entails that this dispute is ongoing rather than locked/crystalized within any given apparatus – the apparatus inscribes itself in the observer in his/her very act of observation/interaction!

A closer look at the videoclip Wakanda, by Tamara Franklin, should help us make visible some layers of the dispute. Wakanda (2019) is a Brazilian rap song heavily influenced by congadó and samba. It also refers to Wakanda, the fictitious re-imagining of an advanced ultra-tech Africa by the Hollywoodian film Black Panther (2018), directed by Ryan Coogler – and counting with a predominantly black cast. In Tamara Franklin’s song/videoclip, Black Panther’s Wakanda seemingly develops into a form of content, and as such performs a twofold function: at once it points to the extractivist project of society developed by colonialism and the Brazilian debts with slavery; and evokes the imagery of a Brazilian Wakanda, cherishing black women such as famous singer/composer Elza Soares and Carolina Maria de Jesus, the griots and the Afro-Brazilian ancestral legacy.

Ancestry is of paramount importance to black communities – and especially for black women – in creating, recreating and strengthening collective ties, and subverting a dynamic of hatred, contempt and/or cruelty towards black people and their cultures. This ancestry manifests itself materially in a wide-range of
apparatuses, such as dance-performances, literature, oral tradition/lore, religious practices, clothing, various musical/percussion instruments (drums/atabaques/tambourines/agogôs/berimbau etc.). In Tamara Franklin’s videoclip, this materiality erupts into a clash of forces/dispute happening in different layers: a. Tamara Franklin is a female rapper in a male-dominant setting, who b. by rapping/composing/performing as a black woman, redefines Wakanda from an Afro-Brazilian, feminist perspective, while c. subscribing to a centenary tradition of resistance through rhythm (folk lyrics and congado percussion leading to a rap/hip-hop beat) and d. bringing into her song (and the videoclip) the rhythmic/acoustic/lyric/visual materialities of Afro-Latin American ancestry. Those ancestral materialities that Tamara Franklin brings into her song/videoclip – as much as they are/become part of the new media – are also attempts at resisting from within it.

Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, in their book *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, define Remediation as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms”. Media technologies, in that sense, are to be understood as “networks of hybrids that can be expressed in physical, social, aesthetic, and economic terms”. Now, we have argued how apparatuses emerge from a technopolitical background– and while this is also true for new media, new media can only come to existence as refashioning attempts at other media (thus as hybrids). These other/prior media forms do not just disappear as they are “engulfed” by new media – they “survive” from within it, operating as its “residual form-content” (this redirects media-archeology from the past to the present). But while Grusin and Bolter suggest the term “hybridity” to address this “refashioning attempts at other media”, and while the term designates appropriately the ongoing process of technopolitical/poetical normalization of apparatuses and their subjects (which means – us), it seems insufficient to account for the possibility of counter-movements/resistance. This is why we would like to propose – in consonance with Édouard Glissant – the term *creolization* to address this process when it entails a dynamic of
recognition/valorization through resistance rather than normalized degradation (or, as he would have it, Globalization). This is one reason – the other reason being, and here we quote Glissant, “creolization is unforeseeable, whereas one can calculate in advance the effects of hybridity. […] But creolization is hybridity with an added value, namely unforeseeability”.  

Hybridity is, in this sense, closer to a project of colonization – while creolization would entail the possibility of counter-normalization, the very possibility of difference.

Both Bombril and Wakanda, as attempts at creolizing (re-capturing/interrupting, hacking and/or sabotaging) prevailing technopolitical/poetical forms – are in themselves black-feminist apparatuses fighting a guerrilla war: both constitute a losing side strategy aiming at survival. Black-feminist poetry does not conform to a philosophy of totality (such as Hegel’s), and is, therefore, closer to Adorno’s open-ended negative dialectics – and even then, pushing for openness also in the interior of the dialectical dynamics (both regarding access to exteriority and movement – which might not be forward, could point backwards and, in some cases, direction could even be pointless). As a reality transformation device, Black-feminist poetry plays a fundamental contemporary role: for in a world that has become Capital, difference can only subsist (and revolutions can only be dreamt of) from practices that insist in this seemingly impossible task – decolonizing human perception/senses/bodies and making possible the existence of radical otherness.

Bibliographical References


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1 “Afirmo que a Escrevivência não é uma escrita narcísica, pois não é uma escrita de si, que se limita a uma história de um eu sozinho, que se perde na solidão de Narciso. A Escrevivência é uma escrita que não se contempla nas águas de Narciso, pois o espelho de Narciso não reflete o nosso rosto. E nem ouvimos o eco de nossa fala, pois Narciso é surdo às nossas vozes. O nosso espelho é o de Oxum e de Iemanjá. Nos apropriamos dos abebés das narrativas míticas africanas para construirmos os nossos aparatos teóricos para uma compreensão mais profunda de nossos textos” (EVARISTO, 2020, p. 39).


3 BUCK-MORSS, 2009, p. 79.

4 “Ours is a newly dialectical age, the much-touted teleological resolution of the ‘end of history’ having collapsed like the myth that it always was into fragmentation, division, and dynamic oppositions, new struggles erupting over old questions. For too long, however, dialectics has not served to denote such moments of combative division that give its name, but instead the opposite: a harmonious closure often announced but rarely experienced. For this, Hegel bears as much responsibility as anyone: driven by a profound anxiety toward rupture and ‘intense longing’ for unity, Hegel’s dialectical vision would enable conservative resolutions even as it opened radical possibilities” (CICCARIELLO-MAHER, 2017, p. 1).
5 See AGAMBEN, 2009.
7 ADORNO, 1983, “Cultural Criticism and Society”, p. 34.
9 ADORNO; HORKHEIMER, 2002, p. 65.
10 BUCK-MORSS, 2009, p. 22.
12 BUCK-MORSS, 2009, p. 73-74.
13 MBEMBE, 2017, p. 2. This correlation of race and colonialism has also been thoroughly developed by Latin American scholar Aníbal Quijano, for whom the invention of race propels the dynamic of power/domination advanced by the European project of modernity. See QUIJANO, 2014, “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina”.
14 RAMOSE, 2011.
15 “But Blackness does not exist as such. It is constantly produced. To produce Blackness is to produce a social link of subjection and a body of extraction, that is, a body entirely exposed to the will of the master, a body from which great effort is made to extract maximum profit” (MBEMBE, 2017, p. 18).
16 On how race played a crucial role for imperialism, see Mbenbe’s analysis of France’s national colonialist endeavor following its defeat on the Franco-Prussian War – regarding the publications of the period, he goes on to say: “in all of these publications, the African is presented not only as a child but as a stupid child, prey to a handful of petty kings who are cruel and fierce potentates. This idiocy is the result of the congenital vice of the Black race, and colonization is a form of assistance, the education and moral treatment for such idiocy. It is an antidote to the spirit of cruelty and the anarchic functioning of ‘indigenous peoples.’ From this point of view, it is a gift of civilization. Colonization was viewed as a form of general treatment for the idiocy of races predisposed to degeneration” (MBEMBE, 2017, p. 64-65).
18 SANTOS, 2016, p. 92.
20 “Então, eu tive oportunidade de estudar, fiz jardim de infância ainda em Belo Horizonte, fiz escola primária e passei por aquele processo que eu chamo de lavagem cerebral dado pelo discurso pedagógico brasileiro, porque na medida em que eu aprofundava meus conhecimentos, eu rejeitava cada vez mais a minha condição de negra. [...] Na Faculdade eu já era uma pessoa de cuca já perfeitamente embranquecida, dentro do sistema. Eu fiz Filosofia e História. E, a partir daí, começaram as contradições. [...] Desnecessário dizer que a divisão interna da mulher negra na universidade é tão grande que no momento em que você se choca com a realidade de uma ideologia preconceituosa e discriminadora que aí está, a sua cabeça dá uma dançada
incrível. Tive que parar num analista, fazer análise etc. e tal [...]. A partir daí fui transar o meu povo mesmo, ou seja, fui transar candomblé, macumba, essas coisas que eu achava que eram primitivas. Manifestações culturais que eu, afinal de contas, com uma formação em Filosofia, transando uma forma cultural ocidental tão sofisticada, claro que não podia olhar como coisas importantes. Mas enfim: voltei às origens, busquei as minhas raízes e passei a perceber, por exemplo, o papel importantíssimo que a minha mãe teve na minha formação. Embora índia e analfabeta, ela tinha uma sacação assim incrível a respeito da realidade em que nós vivíamos e, sobretudo, em termos de realidade política" (GONZALEZ, 1994, p. 383-384).

26 ANZALDÚA, 2009, p. 31-32.
27 "Quando eu não tinha nada o que comer, em vez de xingar eu escrevia" (JESUS, 2019, p. 195).
28 "O que levaria determinadas mulheres, nascidas e criadas em ambientes não letrados, e quando muito, semi-alfabetizados, a romperem com a passividade da leitura e buscarem o movimento da escrita? Tento responder. Talvez, estas mulheres (como eu) tenham percebido que se o ato de ler oferece a apreensão do mundo, o de escrever ultrapassa os limites de uma percepção da vida. Escrever pressupõe um dinamismo próprio do sujeito da escrita, proporcionando-lhe a sua auto-inscrição no interior do mundo. E, em se tratando de um ato empreendido por mulheres negras, que historicamente transitam por espaços culturais diferenciados dos lugares ocupados pela cultura das elites, escrever adquire um sentido de insubordinação. Insubordinação que pode se evidenciar, muitas vezes, desde uma escrita que fere ‘as normas cultas’ da língua, caso exemplar o de Carolina Maria de Jesus, como também pela escolha da matéria narrada. A nossa escrevivência não pode ser lida como histórias para ‘ninar os da casa grande’ e sim para incomodá-los em seus sonos injustos” (EVARISTO, 2007).
29 29 COLLINS, 1986, p. s16
31 ADORNO, 2002, p. 43-44.
32 For more on the concepts of technopolitics/technopoiesis, see: FOSCOLO; SPADONI, 2018; FOSCOLO 2019a, 2019b, 2019c.
34 See DELEUZE, 2013.
36 Congado is an Afro-Brazilian cultural/religious manifestation typical in the state of Minas Gerais.
See, for instance, the idea of a “pedagogia da ancestralidade”, as developed by Kiusam de Oliveira (2019) – which points to the ancestral knowledge to be found in/and transmitted through diverse platforms/objects/practices.

BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999, p. 273.

BOLTER; GRUSIN, 1999, p. 21.

See GLISSANT, 2020, “Creolizations in the Caribbean and the Americas”.

GLISSANT, 2020, p. 8.