

Spiral Genealogies in Aline Motta / *Genealogias em espiral em Aline Motta*

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes processes of activation, performative enactment, and invention of an Afro-diasporic ancestral memory in the book *A água é uma máquina do tempo* [The Water is a Time Machine] (2022) and in the video *Filha Natural* [Natural Daughter] (2019), by Aline Motta, a contemporary Brazilian multi-artist. In these pieces of work, the poetic exhumation of victims of the Black Atlantic precedes the ancestralization of the dead relegated to oblivion by the colonial power and its founding racial apparatus that tensions the present. Investigating the traumatic crossings of slavery in its genealogy, Motta revisits photographs, diaries, certificates, newspapers, and spoils of slaveholders, allocating her ancestors as protagonists of these materialities. The colonial archive is stirred in the aesthetic transcreation of its textualities and through a body that performs and updates ancestral knowledge. Thus, the insubordinate handling of the formal hybridism of the archive inscribes, in the meshes of History and the spirals of ancestral time, black women who share an important cultural, affective, and political legacy.

KEYWORDS: Aline Motta; Ancestry; Memory; Dead; Black Atlantic

RESUMO

*Este artigo analisa processos de ativação, performatização e invenção de uma memória ancestral afrodiaspórica no livro *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022) e no vídeo *Filha Natural* (2019), produções de Aline Motta, multiartista contemporânea brasileira. Nesses trabalhos, a exumação poética das vítimas do Atlântico Negro precede a ancestralização de mortas relegadas ao esquecimento pelo poder colonial e seu aparato racial fundante que tensiona o presente. Investigando os atravessamentos traumáticos da escravidão em sua genealogia, Motta revisita fotografias, diários, certidões, jornais e espólios de escravocratas, alocando suas antepassadas como protagonistas dessas materialidades. Revolve-se o arquivo colonial na transcrição estética de suas textualidades e por meio de um corpo que performa e atualiza saberes ancestrais. Assim, o manejo insubordinado com o hibridismo formal do arquivo inscreve, nas malhas da História e das espirais do tempo ancestral, mulheres negras que partilham um importante legado cultural, afetivo e político.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Aline Motta; Ancestralidade; Memória; Mortos; Atlântico Negro

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[...]

Under the rings
and the bridges that united the south and the north.
Still hasn't died

what the dead bequeathed to us.¹

Edimilson de Almeida Pereira

Introduction

Aline Motta has been gaining visibility in the circles of Brazilian and International contemporary art due to her immersions in a variety of fronts of artistic endeavors, transiting with her works in Brazilian, African, Latin-American and European territories. In the wide range of insurgent possibilities within multimedia artistic endeavors founded on the expansion and (un)specificity of expressive mediums (Garra Muñoz, 2014), by way of a varied poetic, imagistic and sensory handling, Motta has elaborated interventions with the support of photography, video, performance, image printing on fabric, collages, installation exhibits, artist books, among others. In a recent endeavor, she has released *Água é uma máquina do tempo* [Water is a Time Machine] (published by Círculo de Poemas [Circle of Poems] in 2022), a poetry book that reverberates the hybridity of format/form and artistic languages common to her work, which approximates poetic texts with photography, collages, fac-simile reproduction or retextualization of texts taken from documents – family albums, personal diaries, obituaries, newspaper articles and registry certificates from the late 19th century – that provide partial information concerning the lives of her women ancestors.

Among the themes that are dear to the artist, the following two motivate and bring tension to great part of her production. The first theme encompasses meanings of ancestry underlying the remembrance of her matriarchs, once the past has been actualized as a constant becoming or a “continuous preterite” (Martins, 2021b)² to make way for Motta’s comprehension of self, her black corporeality, as well as her place in the family, in

¹ In Portuguese: Sob os anéis / e as pontes que uniram o norte e o sul./ Ainda não morreu/ o que os mortos nos legaram.

² In Portuguese: “pretérito contínuo” (Martins, 2021b).

History, and in the world. The second theme comprises the vastness of the sea and of its metaphors – not only those that attempt to convey the pains of over twelve million bodies that were enslaved and deported from Africa to Brazil by way of a mortal diaspora through the Atlantic, but most importantly, those that attempt to convey the restoration of traces of an individual memory that is at the same time inserted in one that is more extensive (once it is collective), embodying the difficulties involved in elaborating a transatlantic memory.

In different ways, the presence of ancestry in *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022) in many ways supports the dialogue (the recognition and, at times, the estrangement) between the poet and the memory of her women relatives, and may be understood taking the considerations of Leda Maria Martins (2021b) as a structuring framework or a “thought grid”³ of many afrodiasporic cosmovisions that inhabit the world. In Martins’ words,

This great principle orders social relations, religious, metaphysical and secular dimensions, production dynamics, ethical and aesthetic values, measures and exchanges, interlocations and interdependence between all beings and beings in the cosmos, interlocations with the deities, the coupling of the principles of generic and individual existence, the necessary covenant between life and death, the distribution of vital energy; Everything, finally, is organized and structured within the ancestral conception, founding of civilizational friezes (Martins, 2021b, pp. 58-59).⁴

As it shapes discourses and cultural practices that convey African knowledges, the ancestry principle is in everything and puts everything in relation (to each other) and in motion/movement. It presents itself in the contemporary arts that are concerned with the black Atlantic (Gilroy, 1992)⁵ in works that propose a return to and a weaving of, in the present time, the legacies of African populations that have been historically subjugated by modern racial, rational and colonial apparatuses, as well as threatened by spoliation

³ In Portuguese: “pensamento matriz.”

⁴ In Portuguese: “Esse princípio magno ordena as relações sociais, as dimensões religiosas, metafísicas e seculares, as dinâmicas de produção, os valores éticos e estéticos, as medidas e intercâmbios, interlocuções e interdependência entre todos os entes e seres e dos seres no cosmos, as interlocuções com as divindades, a acoplagem dos princípios de existência genérica e individual, a aliança necessária entre vida e morte, a distribuição da energia vital; tudo, enfim, se ordena e se estrutura no seio da concepção ancestral, fundante dos frisos civilizatórios.”

⁵ GILROY, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992.

and the death of their bodies, and by the erasure and negation of their traditions, cultures and memories regarding the generations descending from the diaspora. In this sense, furthering the repression of the black lives swallowed by the depths of the Atlantic,

Ancestry chords create supplements that line the many gaps, empty and ruptures forged by the diasporas abyssal, something that puts it instead of something that seemed inexorably submerged in the crossings, but is perennially transformed, reincorporated and restored in the cadence of their otherness, inscribed under the sign of reminiscence and presence in the spiral of time (Martins, 2021b, pp. 213-214).⁶

Activating the ancestral memory of African and Afro-descendants by way of ritual, performance, music, dance, in visual arts and in literature (among others) involves an imbrication of ethics and aesthetics, body and memory, the individual and the collective, in a shared web of circulation, creation and recreation of meanings that resist and make succumb historic erasures: “Here, ancestry vibrates and restitutes, performing the repertoires of our africanias, from those most long-lived to those most recently improvised with and in which they have fermented” (Martins, 2021b, p. 68).⁷ It is important to underscore the emergency of this ethical and political position in Aline Motta’s poetics, as it adds to the vigorous body of writings of so many other Afro-Brazilian poets that have elaborated “a memory of women’s ancestry” (Bernd, 2013, p. 97),⁸ opening itself to its imagination. In agreement with the benjaminian thought of a History, told from the perspective of the vanquished and being guided by traces, Zila Bernd (2013) situates some characteristics of Afro-Brazilian literature of women’s authorship, mainly those produced from the 20th century onward. According to the researcher,

the main feature of the current Afro-Brazilian female author’s poetic making is tracking the “memory’s keep,” as poet Ana Cruz states, through the traits of pieces left by inheritance of their ancestors. The second feature of this literature is what we can call “dynamic or

⁶ In Portuguese: “Os acordes da ancestralidade criam suplementos que revestem os muitos hiatos, vazios e rupturas forjados pelas abissais diásporas, algo que se coloca em lugar de alguma coisa que parecia inexoravelmente submersa nas travessias, mas que é perenemente transcriada, reincorporada e restituída nas cadências de sua alteridade, inscritas sob o signo da reminiscência e da presença nas curvilíneas espirais do tempo.”

⁷ In Portuguese: “Aqui, a ancestralidade vibra e restitui, performando os repertórios de nossas africanias, tanto das mais longevas quanto das mais recentes que com elas improvisaram e nelas se fermentaram.”

⁸ In Portuguese: “a memória da ancestralidade feminina.”

relational embeddedness,” or the identity built based on the search for origins, which doesn’t neglect the traces left by the motherly word and project itself respecting the alterity and recognition of the Brazilian nation’s diversity. As the third feature of this female black poetic, we would list the inclination to recover transatlantic memory (Bernd, 2013, p. 96).⁹

The aesthetic and thematic directions suggested by the author find their fulcral point in ancestry, a force that acts upon the poetic handling of residue that speak of the sensibility of an intimate and familiar intergenerational legacy; the recognition and construction of one’s own identity, as well as on the reflection on the contemporary of the historic echoes of the diaspora through the Atlantic. It is the link with ancestry that connects the world of the living and the world of the dead, as the latter fosters the process of revisitation of the past with the optics of the present, in a trajectory that distances itself from the logic of western positivistic temporality and creates the perception of time as non-linear, and with layers of intersection and communication with each other. According to this episteme that conducts the communication with ancestors, “Ancestry is divided by a bended time, that is recurrent and curved; a spiraling time, which returns, reestablishes and also transforms, and with which everything is concerned” (Martins, 2021b, p. 63).¹⁰ The ancestors, therefore, are present time and presence: “In us reverberate the teachings, the chants and the utterances they have given us, the timbre of their voices, gestures, histories and reminiscences, their presence and never their abandonment or oblivion” (Martins, 2021a, p. 216).¹¹

As the waves that move back and forth, in the works of Aline Motta the ancestors are not stuck in and untouched past. Once revolved by memory, this past opens itself and makes these women return constantly to the artist’s imaginary, foreshadowing what was earlier mentioned as a theme or an image in her poetics. In special regard to her

⁹ In Portuguese: “a principal característica do fazer poético das autoras mulheres da literatura afro-brasileira atual é a de rastrear os “guardados da memória”, como afirma a poeta Ana Cruz, através dos traços, dos fragmentos deixados pela herança de suas antepassadas. A segunda característica dessa literatura é o que poderíamos chamar de “enraizamento dinâmico ou relacional”, ou seja, a construção identitária baseada na procura das origens, que não negligencia os rastros deixados pela palavra materna e projeta-se no respeito à alteridade e no reconhecimento da diversidade da nação brasileira. Como terceira característica dessa poética negra no feminino, elencaríamos a tendência ao resgate da memória transatlântica.”

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “A ancestralidade é clivada por um tempo curvo, recorrente, anelado; um tempo espiralar, que retorna, restabelece e também transforma, e que em tudo incide.”

¹¹ In Portuguese: “Em nós ressoam seus ensinamentos, os cantos e falas que nos deram, os timbres de suas vozes, gestos, suas histórias e reminiscências, sua presença e nunca seu abandono ou esquecimento.”

audiovisual productions, the signs of the sea and of the Atlantic crossing acquire the mystery and the expansion residing in the Bantu cosmology of Kalunga: “the Sea-Ocean, the place of the sacred, mirroring (mirrors) the divinity in which inhabit the power of life, of death and of crossings” (Martins, 2021b, p. 58).¹² Traversing the religious rites and the utterances of the griots, the encounters, the dis-encounters and the vital transcendent energy that imbue the bonds between generations with life, the sea of ancestry does not find in death its absolute finitude, but the catalyzation of potential encounters. Its waters conform a thin and malleable frontier that binds and brings apart (Motta, 2021) the dead, the living, and those who are to come (Martins, 2021b).

The waters of Kalunga bathe the remembrance of Aline Motta’s mother, grandmother, great-grandmothers, great-aunts, and great-grandmothers. The creation of these bonds can be perceived in the installation *Máquina Kalunga* [The Kalunga Machine] (2022) and in the trilogy of videoinstallations and photographs *Se o mar tivesse varandas* [If the Sea had Balconies] (2017), *Pontes sobre abismos* [Bridges over the Abyss] (2017) and *(Outros) Fundamentos* (2017-2019) [(Other) Foundations].¹³ Kalunga, following its uncontainable flux ever since primeval times, projects the making of oscillating bridges between the artist and her matriarchal family history. In this regard, the work of memory brings to view the roots of a family tree that is in great part submersed in the waters of the unknown, such as the aerial roots of a mangrove tree. This search crosses the Atlantic taking Aline to countries such as Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Congo, Angola and Mozambique; it is the same search that forges a confrontation between the works of the artist and the forced erasure of the African ancestry, mainly due to how little is known about one of the women in her family: her great-grandmother, Francisca, a woman who was enslaved in the 19th century in the city of Vassouras, Rio de Janeiro.

Aline Motta’s reasearch into Francisca’s history is what motivates her work with video in *Filha Natural* [Natural Daughter] (2019). Motta’s inquiry through registry records, newspapers from the 1800’s, and the archive of a family of slave owners of the Vale do Café region, finds textualities that are read situating the great-grandmother as a protagonist in the pursuit of traces of her life. In this article, we pursue the artist’s outlines through the winding documental imprecision and through the hollows of absences

¹² In Portuguese: “o Mar-Oceano, lugar do sagrado, espelhando a divindade, na qual habita o poder da vida, da morte e das travessias.”

¹³ The works of Aline Motta can be seen at alinemotta.com and on her Instagram profile [@1alinemotta](https://www.instagram.com/1alinemotta).

brought to fruition by the colonial institutionalization of the death of African and Afro-descendant peoples in Brazil, which reverberate in Motta's contact with her woman ancestors. In order to do so, the work of the Claudia Mamede's performance offers some points of exit, anchorage and return within our writing toward the construction of images alongside verbal text and chanting of work in quimbundo language in the video of *Filha Natural* (2019), as well as some texts from *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), in which enunciation inscribes presence – of voice and body – of dead women of the family.

As the driving hypothesis of our analysis, we consider the appropriation and disassembling of textualities of historical documents, the critical presence of irony in the reading of the colonizer's archives, as well as the formal hybridity that brings tension to creations “appear[ing] to share a common discomfort when faced with any specific definition or category of belonging that might include them” (Garramuño, 2014, p. 12),¹⁴ are important aesthetic artifices that compose the construction of counternarratives to the colonialism in Mottas' poetics, by engaging with meanings of Afro-diasporic ancestry e its ties to the legacy of the dead. As we propose other points of view regarding the representation of black individuals in the documents of History, we believe that the handling of multiple languages and discourses in Aline Motta, which privileges an unsubdued treatment of the archives, is an alternative that disrupts the emptiness relegated to black populations by a Brazilian historiography operated by white land and slave owners.

1 The Ethics of “Redying” in Face of the Politics of Erasure

The Atlantic flux of slave ships for over three centuries and the mercantilization of black bodies during the extent of the plantation system, which brought wealth to former European metropolises and the colonizing elites, resulted in the immediate death of enslaved populations. According to Saidiya Hartman, “life has no normative value, when no humans are involved, when the population is, in effect, seen as already dead” (Hartman, 2021, p. 31).¹⁵ The colonial project of dehumanization that has othered the

¹⁴ In Portuguese: “parecem compartilhar um mesmo desconforto em face de qualquer definição específica ou categoria de pertencimento em que instalar-se.”

¹⁵ HARTMAN, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. London: Serpent's Tail: 2021.

Africans, using the concept of race to justify the domination exerted, has turned the production of death twice as effective. In the first place, by utilizing racism as the main ideological and necropolitical engine, this project adopted “a sacrificial economy, the functioning of which requires, on the one hand, a generalized cheapening of the price of life and, on the other, a habituation to loss” (Mbembe, 2019, p. 38).¹⁶ In addition to physical death, many other forms of mortification/dying are effected, with “the precarization of life, the disarrangement of memories, the cognitive dismantlement, the reification of being or the production and maintenance of the trauma” (Rufino, 2019, p. 130).¹⁷

Bearing in mind that colonial power reads its enslaved victims as non-subjects and that the documentation of death tolls throughout the centuries has been banalized and/or neglected, the negation of the right to a communitary experience of mourning of the diaspora losses was therefore institutionalized. An effect of the echoes of the past in the present, where racial violence structures social relations, is that the deaths carried out against black populations are still racially framed, in a reality “under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others, and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others” (Butler, 2004, p. 30).¹⁸ It is this production/negation of the mourning process that, imbued in value differentials of life according to color, authorizes a potential second death of black bodies, consistent with the “*operations of abandonment* that strike the dead and extend the mechanisms through which certain living beings were abandoned on the domains of meaning, legality, and politics” (Franco, 2021, p. 34; authors’ italics).¹⁹

The logic of the abandonment of bodies victimized through racial violence by the established authorities and of the abandonment of collective memory enacts the prevalence of death that resides in oblivion, reproducing the exploitation and the violence of colonialism in contemporary times. In this way, the work with Afro-Brazilian memory extrapolates the narratives that have built and controlled a History that normalizes violence and acquires an ethical tone (as far as the creation of collective and

¹⁶ MBEMBE, Achille. *Necropolitics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019.

¹⁷ In Portuguese: “com a precarização da vida, com o desarranjo das memórias, com o dismantelo cognitivo, com a coisificação do ser ou com a produção e a manutenção do trauma.”

¹⁸ BUTLER, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London; New York: Verso, 2004.

¹⁹ In Portuguese: “*operações de abandono* que atingem o morto e prolongam o conjunto de procedimentos anteriores pelos quais certos vivos foram *abandonados* do campo do sentido, do direito, da política.”

transhistorical bonds surrounding black lives are concerned) and a tone that is political (regarding the aim to inscribe and create spaces of enunciation for the memories of those populations, despite the politics of erasure that are in place).

It is the overcoming of an erasure imposed by powerful *politics of oblivion* that, in Brazil, in an ambiguous way, *glamorize* our history to the same extent that they deny any continuity between the violence of the slave system and the biopolitical and racial violence of today (Seligmann-Silva, 2022, p. 21; authors' italics).²⁰

Oblivion, or forgetting, is comprehended by the Yoruba people as a spiritual death that goes beyond the death that is physical (Rufino, 2019). In this sense, the works of Aline Motta appeals to the necessity of mourning, wailing, and burying – with dignity – the enslaved dead of colonial history, as well as the dead that have descended from the enslaved throughout the centuries, birthed by diaspora to be worshipped and celebrated. This is to be done by way of veneration toward the dead women of her own family, pulled from oblivion and inscribed in the winding intricacies of History: “I turn my body into a shrine/ In it a dead one can dance” (Motta, 2022, p. 95).²¹ Considering that “From death are born *ancestres*, whose rituals of initiation secure its transcendence and presence” (Martins, 2021b, p. 205),²² some moments of Motta’s poetry may be read as a form of symbolic exhumation for the treatment of memory, of the legacy of the dead, that reach from the Atlantic to her own family and intimate history.

In *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), the writing is elaborated as a place that is privileged so as to allow the mourning of her dead women relatives (as the artist’s mother), and to constitute senses and meanings regarding a loss of such magnitude, when becoming an orphan also means having something die inside oneself: “Inside the cemetery, the dead entered without asking for permission./ I was the daughter of the funeral and wrote my own obituary./ Converted tombs into books” (Motta, 2022, p.

²⁰ In Portuguese: “Trata-se da superação de um apagamento imposto por poderosas *políticas de esquecimento* que, no Brasil, procuram, de modo ambíguo, *glamourizar* nossa história na mesma medida em que negam qualquer continuidade entre a violência do sistema escravocrata e as violências biopolíticas e raciais de hoje.”

²¹ In Portuguese: “Eu faço do meu corpo um altar/ Nele um morto pode dançar.”

²² In Portuguese: “Da morte nascem os *ancestres*, cujos rituais de passagem asseguram sua transcendência e presença.”

131).²³ In this memorial ritual pervading the writing and the book, which is fundamental to the process and ancestralization by way of poetry, death is not an ending, but a beginning of an ancestral permanence in the world of the living that guides their relations and experiences with the cosmos. As the *rememoration*²⁴ of the dead secures a place of remembrance, it becomes equated to a second death, which is not that of forgetting or oblivion. Remembering makes the dead “redie,”²⁵ so that they can be born an ancestor.

To be remembered is to participate, to be present in the interludes, transcurion and interlinences of life. It is landing on spirals, as one *in being* recorded and integrated into the dynamic circuit of memory and cinese, as the quality of movement. It is inhabiting multiple temporalities, such as being floating on simultaneities surfaces; It is being time in temporality Kalunga (Martins, 2021b, pp. 205-206, authors’ italics).²⁶

The ethics of redying takes form in the work of suturing “the emptiness and the cavities originated by the losses” (Martins, 2021b, p. 126).²⁷ In Afro-Brazilian literature, it claims “processes of dislocation, substitution and re-semanticization” (Martins, 2021b,

²³ In Portuguese: “Dentro do cemitério, os mortos entravam sem pedir licença./ Eu era a filha do funeral e escrevia meu próprio obituário./ Convertia sepulturas em livros.”

²⁴ The prefixal form *-re* highlighted widens the might of conceived death in the fabric of ancestrality. With the sense of returning to the past to establish the ancestors in the present, remembering is also opening the future for the celebration of the dead. According to Martins, “the prefix *re* sends us to the need of a comeback, of a retrospection, a retroaction, but also points us to a repetition to come, produce yourself ahead, as a memory of the future. In the prefix *re*, in redie, yearn to return, turn into, and return to the past, just like resume, reinstate, reactivate the future.” In Portuguese: “O prefixo *re* nos remete à necessidade de uma volta, de um fazer-se de novo, de uma retrospectão, de uma retroação, mas também nos aponta para uma repetição a vir, produzir-se à frente, como uma memória do futuro. No prefixo *re*, de remorrer, anelam-se o retornar, tornar-se e volver no passado, assim como reatar, reinstaurar, reativar o porvir” (2021b, p. 205; authors’ italics).

²⁵ This notion, pointed out by Martins (2021b), is extracted from Mia Couto’s novel *Under the frangipani* (2001). In the story, the narrator is the ghost of Ermelindo Mucanga, who died on the eve of Moçambique’s independence. Without undergoing the proper funeral rites, Mucanga didn’t turn into an ancestor and suffers because of it. In the words of the narrator: “As they didn’t assign me a proper funeral, I became a ghost, one of those souls who wander from somewhere to nowhere. Seeing as I hadn’t been given a formal send-off, I ended up as a dead man who couldn’t find his death. I shall never be elevated to the position of an ancestor, someone well and truly dead and gone for good, with a right to be invoked and cherished by the living. I’m one of those dead men who are still attached to life by their umbilical cord. I belong to the fellowship of those who are unremembered” (Couto, 2001, p. 2). In: COUTO, Mia. *Under the frangipani*. Translation: David Brookshaw. London: Serpent’s Tail: 2001.

²⁶ In Portuguese: “Ser lembrado é participar, estar como presença presente nos interlúdios, transcurtos e interlínias da vida. É pousar nas espirais, como um *em ser* gravado e integrado no circuito dinâmico da memória e da cinese, como qualidade do movimento. É habitar temporalidades múltiplas, como ser flutuante em superfícies de simultaneidades; é ser tempo na temporalidade Kalunga.”

²⁷ In Portuguese: “os vazios e as cavidades originadas pelas perdas.”

p. 126)²⁸ of narratives that formulated History according to the white victors. Artifices and desires that bring tension to the language and the western temporal order, as they project past, present and future in a single dimension of contacts, interruptions, and sequences, envisioning possibilities of futures that are dissonant from the racial and colonial tethers. The presence of ancestry in these processes is constituted by the notion of a spiraling time, with “founds itself in the place of privilege of the ancestor that presides, as Presence, over the spirals of time, inhabiting the transient temporality” (Martins, 2021b, p. 58).²⁹ In this weaving of times, as in the composition of a “rhetoric of patches/patchwork” (Martins, 2021b, p. 175).³⁰ that tacks and juxtaposes residues of the historic and the quotidian, the public and the private, in *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), Aline Motta summons her ancestors in the same way that she herself is summoned by them, in such a manner that, at certain points in the work, the reader cannot distinguish whom is being summoned by who. What takes place, in fact, is a mutual summoning of these women for a coexistence in poetry: “SHE LOOKS FOR ME,/ I APPEAR ONLY WHEN I CAN” (Motta, 2022, pp. 86-87).³¹

The poems transform themselves in rituals of invoking/evoking of the dead women of her family: “Invoking, enter my consciousness./ Evoking, manifest yourself./ She accesses the not living to see the future./ I reminisce./ In the same day was created your flesh/ and your consciousness./ / Don't make of it/ a mismatch” (Motta, 2022, pp. 84-85).³² The relation with ancestry opens itself to a horizon of endless becoming in which life proceeds indefinitely. Thus, being born, living, and dying are parts of the same vital and sovereign cycle: “The curves of ancestrality are held by the venerated ancestors because their immanency and presence are essential conditions for the pulse and flow uninterrupted and continuous of existing” (Martins, 2021b, p. 204).³³ Therefore,

²⁸ In Portuguese: “processos de deslocamento, substituição e ressemantização.”

²⁹ In Portuguese: “funda-se no lugar de privilégio do ancestral que preside, como Presença, as espirais do tempo, habitando a temporalidade transiente.”

³⁰ In Portuguese: “retórica de retalhos.”

³¹ In Portuguese: “ELA PROCURA POR MIM,/ APAREÇO APENAS QUANDO POSSO.”

³² In Portuguese: “Invocando, entre na minha consciência./ Evocando, manifeste-se./ Ela acessa os não viventes para ver o futuro./ Eu me recordo./ Num mesmo dia foram criadas a sua carne/ e a sua consciência./ / Não faça disso/ um descompasso.”

³³ In Portuguese: “As curvas da ancestralidade são presididas pelos antepassados venerados, pois sua imanência e presença são condições imprescindíveis para o pulso e fluxo ininterruptos e contínuos do existir.”

there is no mismatch at the intersection of woven imbrications of different temporalities: the dead women of the past elicit glimpses of futures.

In the texts, names and existences of women living in the 19th century appear in the capital of Rio de Janeiro, that underpin the genesis of the poet and her poetry. At times, as in the short poems cited above, that occupy great white spaces, being fragmented along two pages, the voices of the dead women get mixed with that of the poet, to the point where they become completely indistinguishable. The use of pronouns and verb inflections intensify this ambiguity: they suggest that at times it is a dead woman taking over the space of the poem, taking hold of the freedom to guide it and speak to the one engaging in the work of memory, and at other times, the living subject that searches for the dead women of her affectivity dominates the enunciation. In such confusing exchange of voices, the dead enter the bodies of the living and afford them a function: the intense work of restitution with memory that holds the treatment of the archive as its central point.

The poet inherits the archival delirium of Nicaldes, her great-aunt who has a breakdown after having a scare in a carnival party, never recovering from the trauma: “[...] After coming back to herself, Nicaldes was never the same. A dead person had entered her. She started to chant odd noises, pointing to ghosts arranging imaginary drawers [...]” (Motta, 2022, p. 9).³⁴ The work initiated by the woman ancestor (who inspires the making of the poems) is continued: “[...] Nicaldes, archivist,/ blew this book” (Motta, 2022, p. 140).³⁵ A dead ancestor enters Nicaldes; Nicaldes enters Aline Motta. In organizing her own family memories, the voice of the poet, once again, is traversed by the voice of a dead ancestor. The crazed great-aunt and her heiress share the same space in the family: “I arrange drawers in the air. They are full of things. I take off one at a time. [...] I try to disguise my movements whispering, as if it was music, and pretend that I don't see the mess. [...] I have so much to do” (Motta, 2022, p. 93).³⁶

This plurivocity, however, echoes one single voice: that of ancestry, which resumes the memory of great-grandmother Ambrosina and of her daughters, Nicaldes and Iracema. Ambrosina was also mother of Antônio, Honorina, Cassuinda and Izaulina, dead

³⁴ In Portuguese: “[...] Depois de voltar a si, Nicaldes nunca mais foi a mesma. Um morto havia entrado nela. Começou a entoar ruídos estranhos, apontava para fantasmas arrumando gavetas imaginárias [...].”

³⁵ In Portuguese: “[...] Nicaldes, arquivista,/ soprou este livro.”

³⁶ In Portuguese: “Eu arrumo gavetas no ar. Estão abarrotadas de coisas. Tiro uma de cada vez. [...] Procuro disfarçar meus movimentos sussurrando, como se fosse música, e finjo que não vejo a bagunça. [...] Tenho tanto a fazer.”

who, in the process of memory restitution, give shape to a family tree that provides the roots for the entire book. In this search pervaded by presence/absence and a mixing of spectral voices, spirits, noises and temporal fluxes, the work *Filha Natural* (2019), performed by Claudia Mamede, a renowned comunitary leader, a guardianship counselor and a *jongueira* in the region of Vassouras, resulted in a video (15 min 52 s), a series of photographs and an artist book.

Photography 1 – Claudia Mamede in Filha Natural (2019)



Source: Website of Aline Motta

Available in: <https://alinemotta.com/Filha-Natural-Natural-Daughter>. Accessed on April 25, 2025.

Filha Natural (2019) has been shown in the format of photography and video installations at important spaces within the cultural circuits of the Southeastern region of Brazil: at MAM-Rio [Modern Art Museum – Rio], MASP [Art Museum of São Paulo], SESC Vila Mariana [Social Service of Commerce Vila Mariana], CCSP [Cultural Center of São Paulo] and Inhotim Institute. We have analyzed *Filha Natural* (2019) from the mixture of languages that constitutes it, in the hybrid uses of video, Claudia Mamede's corporal intervention and textual creation, aligned with a perspective of expanded writing (Santos; Rezende, 2011) that blurs the divisions between the fields of poetic and audiovisual arts. The sharing of these frontiers and disciplines are added by the audio aspect of Aline Motta's narration, alongside the reproduction of songs in quimbundo language and working chants or *vissungos* sung originally by the enslaved at the mining

areas.³⁷ The soundtrack is composed of songs by Victória dos Santos, Lenna Bahule e Yannick Delass, artists of Brazilian, Mozambican and Congolese nationalities, respectively. Through the hybridity of different cultures divided by the diaspora, in this kind of duplicity or “a linguistic and cultural bilingualism” (Taylor, 2003, p. 89),³⁸ Portuguese is the means through which Motta pursues the uncertainties regarding Francisca: “I, daughter of Everaldo and Wilma. Wilma, daughter of Valdir and Doralice. Doralice, natural daughter of Mariana. Mariana, natural daughter of Francisca. Francisca, natural daughter of who?” (Motta, 2019).³⁹

Undertaking the research into her great-grandmother, based initially on her name and family accounts of her enslavement in the 19th century, at a coffee plantation in the rural zone of Vassouras, Aline heads to the city in search of more information on Francisca. There, she finds the death certificate of Francisca Maria da Conceição, who died on July 12, 1918, at Fazenda Ubá, at an age that associates her to the likely birth date of Motta’s great-grandmother, in 1855. In addition to this document, Motta encounters inventories of property informing the quantity of enslaved persons who had worked and Ubá: an average of 200, and amongst them, Francisca Maria da Conceição, born to the couple Bruno and Clementina, also parents of Thomé and Eulália, all enslaved at the location where the *Filha Natural* (2019) is filmed. Motta’s research manages to find some photographs taken during the pinnacle of the Fazenda’s economic success, as well as information regarding the former owners in newspapers and accounts taken from European travelers on expeditions through the region.

In this sense, the forma hybridity of *Filha Natural* (2019) gives way to a multiplicity of handling of different genres and textualities (the archive of the colonizer, the songs, the narration in Aline Motta’s voice, Claudia’s performative acting, among others) that intercross temporalities, living women and the memories of dead women ancestors. It’s important to notice how *Filha Natural* (2019) enacts the foundation of an “*experimental field*, a space that places the signs in relation, with no distinction as to the

³⁷ Some of the songs present in *Filha Natural* (2019) are, with other interpretations, in the album *O canto dos escravos* (1982), sang by Tia Doca da Portela, Clementina de Jesus and Geraldo Filme. Available in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gil3Mw32OnU>. Accessed on: April 1, 2025.

³⁸ TAYLOR, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2003.

³⁹ In Portuguese: “Eu, filha de Everaldo e Wilma. Wilma, filha de Valdir e Doralice. Doralice, filha natural de Mariana. Mariana, filha natural de Francisca. Francisca, filha natural de quem?”

domain to which they belong” (Aguilar; Cámara, 2017, p. 8; authors’ italics).⁴⁰ The non-specificity and the structural non-limits demonstrate (as much as they are driven by) tensions deeply connected to the aporias of the ethics of historical representation of enslaved black lives, when the rewriting of History in the present takes a risk toward the colonial archive while attempting not to reproduce the “grammar of violence” (Hartman, 2008, p. 4)⁴¹ of such a record, more specifically the documents that attest to the power achieved by the heirs of Barão de Ubá, a family that prospered from trafficking by slave ships.

We must emphasize a discrepancy when comparing the perpetuation of documents that keep record of the violence perpetrated by land and slave owners in History and the scarcity of information available to us regarding the lives (and the deaths) of enslaved Africans and *mestizos*. The data forged in the colonizer’s archives, expressed by quantities and objectifications, evinces how the “libidinal investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past” (Hartman, 2008, p. 5).⁴² The work of the video demonstrates a necessity of “transgressing the protocols of the archive and the authority of its statements” (Hartman, 2008, p. 9),⁴³ given that it is “tempting to fill in the gaps and to provide closure where there is none. To create a space for mourning where it is prohibited. To fabricate a witness to a death not much noticed” (Hartman, 2008, p. 8).⁴⁴ *Filha Natural* (2019) inserts itself in the aesthetic movements enacted by contemporary Afro-Brazilian art, when the ethical necessities of the process of mourning and ancestralization are faced with the difficulty to represent enslaved lives with the troubling assistance of the colonial archive.

⁴⁰ In Portuguese: “*campo experimental*, um espaço que põe os signos em relação, sem distinção do domínio ao qual pertencem.”

⁴¹ HARTMAN, Saidiya. Venus in Two Acts. *Small Axe*, Durham, NC, v. 12, n. 2, pp. 1-14, jun. 2008. Disponível em: <https://read.dukeupress.edu/small-axe/article/12/2/1/32332/Venus-in-Two-Acts>. Accessed on: July 24, 2025.

⁴² For reference, see footnote 41.

⁴³ For reference, see footnote 41.

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 41.

2 The Excavation of the Colonial Archive: For a Decolonial and Performative Reading

The title of *Filha Natural* (2019) alludes to a typical practice of notary offices in Brazil in which children of unmarried parents were registered only under the mother's name, as many times the name of the father was unknown. Because of this, Motta asks herself, in regard to Francisca's existence, "What is the name of your father?" (Motta, 2019),⁴⁵ to which she responds, "The name of your father, I know. It's the Baron of Ubá, João Rodrigues Pereira de Almeida" (Motta, 2019).⁴⁶ The presence of irony in the artist's speech denounces the violence that founds the spoils of one of the biggest traffickers of enslaved persons in the countryside of Rio de Janeiro during the 19th century: "The proceeds of the most lucrative commercial enterprise in the world is likely to support the Baron's family, even 200 years later" (Motta, 2019).⁴⁷ The surplus of information available concerning this family of slave owners makes a sharp contrast with the many questions and interrogations that Motta is left with regarding her great-grandmother: "Is this Francisca my Francisca?" (Motta, 2019).⁴⁸ As for the display of uncertainty and of limitations of the archive, in spite of their not allowing for an exact determination of a familial relation to the Francisca of the Fazenda de Ubá, they do allow for a space where the artist can imagine meanings to the lives like the ones of her great-grandmother's.

Beyond meanings of revolt, of fighting for emancipation and fruition of freedom, in *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), disobedient readings arise when newspaper articles concerning the sexual abuse of Motta's great-aunt, Iracema Michaela Gomes, who was forced into marriage at thirteen years of age, in 1891, to Eurico Juvenal da Cruz – the abuser who was given a lesser punishment due to the contract of marriage. In the face of this, Motta constructs a visual poem that reconfigures the words that reported the case in the press, throwing the words through the extension of the page until they form the verse "[...] ATENUATE THE HONOR DISHONOR THE HONOR OFFEND THE HONOR" (Motta, 2022, p. 31).⁴⁹ The defense of bourgeois honor reveals its contradictions by favoring the virile violence of Eurico over the dignity and protection of Iracema. The

⁴⁵ In Portuguese: "Qual é o nome do seu pai?"

⁴⁶ In Portuguese: "O nome do seu pai, eu sei. É o Barão de Ubá, João Rodrigues Pereira de Almeida."

⁴⁷ In Portuguese: "Os excedentes do comércio mais lucrativo do mundo ainda devem sustentar sua família, 200 anos depois."

⁴⁸ In Portuguese: "Essa Francisca é a minha Francisca?"

⁴⁹ In Portuguese: "[...] DESAGRAVAR A HONRA DESONRAR OFENDER A HONRA."

patriarchal society of the period, supported by a *machista* justice, lingers into the present through the most varied symbols and homages: “Today, the avenue that runs through the Leblon neighborhood is named after the person who was Justice of the Peace in this suit.”⁵⁰

The subversion of this misogynistic violence of the archives and the law is also featured in the insertion of the content of Iracema and Eurico’s marriage certificate in *Água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), moving toward the hybridization of genders/genres, materialities and temporalities that, as we have mentioned previously, appears throughout the book:

On the four days of the month of
December one thousand eight hundred
and ninety-one in this Federal Ca-
pital, in the office of
the Thirteenth District
where could be found the respecti-
ve judge, the Doutor Ataulfo
Napolos de Paiva with
me Clerk of your
position appointed abo-
ve, there being one
o’clock in the afternoon in the pre-
sence of witnesses Arthur
Augusto Machado and Ar-
thur Luis de Carvalho
Eurico Juvenal
da Cruz, a commercial
employee, legit son
of João Paulino da
Cruz and Mrs. Guilhermina
de Macedo Cruz, was
joined in marriage with
Mrs. Michaela
Iracema Gomes, thirteen years old
fluminense, single,
legit daughter of Manoel
Jose Gomes and Ambrosina
Caffezeiro Gomes, resi-
ding in this district.
That the contractors
are not related
to a prohibited degree
and they did not enter into a
prenuptial contract. And
for the record, I worked
and I signed

Motta, 2022, pp. 32-33⁵¹

⁵⁰ In Portuguese: “Hoje, a avenida que corta o bairro do Leblon ao meio tem o nome do juiz de paz do caso.” (Motta, 2022, p. 37).

⁵¹ In Portuguese: “Aos quatro dias do mes de/ Dezembro de mil oito centos/ e noventa e um nesta Ca-/ pital Federal, na sala da/ Decima Terceira Pretoria/ onde se achava o respecti-/ vo juiz, o Doutor Ataulfo/ Napolos

The versification of the text originally written/worded by a clerk in the late 19th century potentializes the reading of that which lies beyond the words employed in an objective/denotative manner in the legal documents. This formal migration fragments the original structure of the certificate, hindering its decodification while conserving the orthographic markings of an archaic Portuguese. The text appears to be captured by a narrow straight of verses, as the story involving the matrimony – officiated by a judge, a clerk, and some witnesses (all of which were men) – is suffocated in a constricted space, so that some words are unable to fit in the short lines and escape to the beginning of the following verse. The arrangement of the text in two pages guarantees a close attention to the second, in which the clerk concludes his task: “[...] And/ for the record, I worked/ and I signed.” (Motta, 2022, p. 33).⁵² However, the name of the copywriter of the certificate is removed by the poet. On the following page, what appears is the reproduction of the signature of Michaela Iracema Gomes.

Focalizing Iracema’s memory, the trans-creative transcription of the historical document is also its/her invention in the present. In dealing with the archive that had silenced her great-aunt in making decisions over her own body, once faced with the impossibility of restitution of Iracema’s voice, the reproduction of her handwriting embeds an extension of her body in the work.

Photography 2 – Reproduction of the signature of Iracema in A água é uma máquina do tempo
(2022)



Source: Motta (2022, p. 35)

de Paiva com-/ migo Escrivão de seu/ cargo ao diante no-/ meado, ahi sendo uma/ hora da tarde na pre-/ sença das testemunhas Arthur/ Augusto Machado e Ar-/ thur Luis de Carvalho/ receberam se em matri-/ monio Eurico Juvenal/ da Cruz, empregado/ de commercio, filho legi-/ timo de João Paulino da/ Cruz e dona Guilhermina/ de Macedo Cruz, com/ dona Michaela/ Iracema Gomes, fluminense/ de treze annos, solteira,/ filha legitima de Manoel/ Jose Gomes e Ambrosina/ Caffezzeiro Gomes, mora-/ dora nesta pretoria./ Que os contrahentes/ não são parentes em/ grau prohibido/ e não fizeram contracto/ ante nupcial. E/ para constar lavrei e/ assignei.”

⁵² In Portuguese: “[...] E/ para constar lavrei e/ assignei.”

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 20 (3): e66510e, July/Sept. 2025

The slender materiality of the girl is shown to be coated with a non-compliance that affronts the patriarchal violence involved in the abuse she had suffered. In other words, possibility is created; precisely that of the right of this body to say “no”:

She had no body and still played with dolls. She washed the dirty basins of interrupted birth with blood. Her womb contracted and the fetus slipped still shapeless, with each unsuccessful pregnancy. Remnants that brought the memory of the complaint. It was her way of saying no. Her belly did not hold babies, it was still an impenetrable place, inviolable, unbreakable. That tightness began at age 13. Time now was going to pass through a funnel, a narrow dropper. Michaela would not give any son to Eurico (Motta, 2022, p. 39).⁵³

The works of Aline Motta reconstitute the possibility of disobedience to the dead women of her family by protecting and turning the memory of their bodies into something “impenetrable, inviolable, unbreakable” These bodies are imagined as capable of resisting and eschewing the violence suffered in the past, which is (not) apparent in the documents. Saidiya Hartman (2008)⁵⁴ considers it a “critical fabulation” to afford the possibility of an historiographic re-writing that aims to deliver History to a state of crisis and to expose its voids, as far as the representation of afrodiasporic lives are concerned. To create senses/meanings of freedom and revolt for the black bodies from the archives that violated these lives is to bring tension to the voids and limits of its documents, as Hartman does in *Wayward lives, beautiful experiments* (2019):⁵⁵ “I have speculated on what might have been, I have imagined things whispered in dark rooms and widened moments of enclosure, escape, and possibility; moments in which the vision and the dreams of defiance appeared to be possible” (Hartman, 2019, p. 4).⁵⁶

In the productions of Aline Motta, the aesthetic imagination of forms of insurgency of black women throughout history breaches the colonial representation of the passivity ascribed to them, disrespecting the authoritarianism of History and its

⁵³ In Portuguese: “Não tinha corpo e ainda brincava de bonecas. Lavava com sangue as bacias sujas do parto interrompido. O ventre se contraía e o feto escorregava ainda sem forma a cada gravidez malsucedida. Resíduos que traziam a memória da denúncia. Era o seu jeito de dizer não. A barriga não segurava bebês, ainda era um lugar impenetrável, inviolável, inquebrável. Começou com 13 anos aquele aperto. O tempo agora passaria por um funil, estreito conta-gotas. Michaela não daria nenhum filho a Eurico.”

⁵⁴ For reference, see footnote 41.

⁵⁵ HARTMAN, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*. New York; London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019.

⁵⁶ For reference, see footnote 55.

cooptation by the hands of white men. In *Filha Natural* (2019), by occupying the Fazenda de Ubá and moving in the direction of the domination assented by the colonial archives and of the history of violence that impregnates the material and symbolic structures of spaces, the corporeality of the black woman of Claudia Mamede is the junction where oral accounts, ancestral memories, photographs, cartographies and *not-knowings* surrounding Francisca come together. It serves, also, “as the site of convergence binding the individual with the collective, the private with the social, the diachronic and the synchronic, memory with knowledge” (Taylor, 2003, p. 80).⁵⁷ Elements to be accessed/ recovered/ performed by means of the aesthetic handling of contamination of languages and temporalities that run through Claudia’s body in transit in the performance act.

As she discusses the insertion of performance in Latin-America and inter-relates gender and race markings with the aspect of cultural memory, Diana Taylor (2003) pays close attention to the forms of incorporation of the founding knowledges of this memory in postcolonial contexts, in the-body-in-performance of the racialized woman: the “body as the receptor, storehouse, and transmitter of knowledge that comes from the archive [...] and from the repertoire of embodied knowledge” (Taylor, 2003, pp. 81-82).⁵⁸ With this in mind, Claudia Mamede’s acting in *Filha Natural* (2019) sprouts from a body that experiences the incorporation and the actualization of ancestral wisdoms shared by her, Aline Motta, and their woman ancestors, as wisdoms “are transmitted from one generation to another through performative practices that include (among other things) ritual, body, and linguistic practices” (Taylor, 2003, p. 108).⁵⁹ From the elaboration of such knowledges, the tactics and strategies of the black women to survive the colonial apparatus bring into being the bonds and connections between subjects and periods that fortify the Afro-Brazilian matriarchy, in the present time, as a potency of senses and meanings.

In the video, the ancestral memory incorporated in Claudia Mamede is the propelling force of imagination of bonds that connect the familial groups of Motta and Mamede to the structural formation of the black Brazilian families who bear the signs of the diaspora. Motta meets Mamede in 2016, when she goes to Vassouras in search of further information about her great-grandmother. When observing old photographs – an

⁵⁷ For reference, see footnote 38.

⁵⁸ For reference, see footnote 38.

⁵⁹ For reference, see footnote 38.

element very much present in the artist's works –, Motta soon notices physical similarities between her grandmother, Mariana (Francisca's daughter), and Claudia. This is again noticed when photographs of Mariana and Nair (Claudia's grandmother) are compared. These women, from different historical moments and different genealogical positions, carry similar facial features and geographic origins, begin to consider the existence of ties that could connect their families.

Photography 3 – Claudia Mamede with photos of Nair (to the left) and Mariana (to the right)



Source: Website of Aline Motta

Available at: <https://alinemotta.com/Filha-Natural-Natural-Daughter>. Accessed on: April 25, 2025.

In the incorporation of the memories of these women, Claudia Mamede occupies, alongside the dead women, some spaces in the old Fazenda: the forest surrounding the building, the balcony of the master's house and the tennis court where once there was a plantation yard for drying coffee. The video upsets, distresses, and modifies the historically stereotypical forms of social roles that are assigned to black women in places such as the Fazenda de Ubá. These are “tactics of occupation, subversion, and resignification” (Aguilar; Cámara, 2017, p. 11),⁶⁰ as the cartography of a location charged with a violence that pervades the racial stratification of power relations and defines the possibilities of occupation and performance of the bodies of slave owners and enslaved people at one and the same site. In this way,

⁶⁰ In Portuguese: “táticas de ocupação, subversão e resignificação.”

While spaces symbolic and material, object and subject, knowable and unimaginable, the spaces are always a place of contest that has regimes and *devices of visibility, sayability and occupation*. Unless the designed places are reproduced, filling a place is not only being in it, but endow it with a new symbolic and material power

Aguilar; Cámara, 2017, p. 20, authors' italics⁶¹

In the video, Claudia Mamede's occupation can be seen as a political and performative action with an aim to "subvert, modify or suppress" (Aguilar; Cámara, 2017, p. 19)⁶² hegemonic conceptions and social views surrounding the historical uses of spaces such as Fazenda de Ubá. The body of Claudia Mamede consolidates the demolition of old standards of subservience that were imposed on black women in the context of slavery. Such posture is also employed by Aline Motta in the treatment of the colonizer's archives, more specifically in her reading of two stereoscopic photographs,⁶³ taken on the balcony of the master's house in the mid-19th century, close to Francisca's birth. In one of these photographs, we possibly see the former owners of the Fazenda, the couple José Pereira de Almeida – son of Barão de Ubá – and Maria Julia; her mother, Mrs. Jeronyma; and Joana and Rachel, two housemaids who, according to the owner's will, were subsequently given their freedom papers.

⁶¹ In Portuguese: "Enquanto espaços materiais e simbólicos, objetivos e subjetivos, cognoscíveis e unimagináveis, os espaços sempre são um lugar de disputa que possui regimes e *dispositivos de visibilidade, dizibilidade e ocupação*. A menos que os lugares designados sejam reproduzidos, ocupar um espaço não é só estar nele, mas sim dotá-lo de uma nova potência simbólica e material."

⁶² In Portuguese: "subverter, modificar ou suprimir."

⁶³ Stereoscopic photography consists "in pairs of photography portraying the same scene that, seen simultaneously in an appropriate binocular display, produce the illusion of three-dimensionality" (Enciclopédia Itaú Cultural, 2015). Available at: <https://enciclopedia.itaucultural.org.br/termo3865/fotografia-estereoscopica>. Accessed on: April 1, 2025.

Photography 4 – Stereoscopic photograph from the 1860s, taken by Revert Henrique Klumb



Source: Website of Aline Motta

Available at: <https://alinemotta.com/Filha-Natural-Natural-Daughter>. Accessed on: April 25, 2025.

The analysis of the photographs above allows us to notice how the positions of the white and black bodies at the moment the image was taken are symbolic reproductions of social spaces: white landowners sitting in the front; black women standing behind them. The photograph, therefore, shows the observer how the social and racial castes were performed in this specific context, indicating the markers of race and gender, as well as the clothing and body posturing as significant markers of such differences. If, in the photograph in question, there is a colonial reinforcement of Joana's and Rachel's abasement due to the condition of being a housemaid, the enslaved woman – who had the “task of keeping, on every level, the master's house in a well-functioning state: cleaning, ironing, cooking, spinning, sowing, and breastfeeding the children born of the ‘free’ wombs of the master's wife” (Gonzalez, 2020, p. 53)⁶⁴ –, in *Filha Natural* (2019), serves as a catapult to the transgression of the compliance of the black woman, dating back from colonialism.

The reading of these photographs is carried out in a way that founds another reception of documents historically controlled by the colonizer: this shift conducts the observer's gaze in contemporary times and conducts the deconstruction of the colonial

⁶⁴ In Portuguese: “tarefa de manter, em todos os níveis, o bom andamento da casa-grande: lavar, passar, cozinhar, fiar, tecer, costurar e amamentar as crianças nascidas do ventre ‘livre’ das sinhazinhas.”

representations of the black subjects pictured there, as the representations no longer remain static in the past. In the video, a reinterpretation of the objects and historical documents that comprise the archive of the Baron of Ubá takes place. Something similar to what Anne Lafont (when studying the pictorial representations of black people in visual arts) calls “mobility” or migration that dislocates the focus of the critical analysis of authorship and its intentions (related to the owners of aesthetic productions) to the models there pictured, inserted in a wider context and attentive to new forms of exploring the archive and its intersections with the Black Atlantic. This unruly treatment toward colonial iconography presumes that the images “betray, somehow, in the details, oversights and dissonances with the dominant or official message” (Lafont, 2022, p. 73).⁶⁵

As it commits to apparently irrelevant minutiae of the archive, *Filha Natural* (2019) confronts and destroys the logic of racial subordination reproduced in the stereoscopic photographs when, for instance, Claudia Mamede occupies/performs the/on the place once destined for *sinhazinhas* – the white women in the landowner’s family. With this posture, a *jongueira* and a comunitary leader appears in the balcony of the master’s house sitting on a chair, positioned at the center of the frame. The objects present in the photographs in question and in the common practices of the times being depicted are also re-signified in the video performance: the book that in one of the photographs is beside the *sinhazinha*, is now owned and being read by Claudia; the binoculars used to see the three-dimensional stereoscopic photographs, in *Filha Natural* (2019), is handled by Mamede, decorated with white flowers, cowrie shells, and hay (cf. Photograph 1), recurring elements figured in Afro-Brazilian cults of candomblé; the umbrella, which once was a symbol of luxury of the *sinhazinhas* and the masters, being carried by enslaved persons in the pictures of Jean-Baptiste Debret, protects Claudia from the rain while she walks through the Fazenda. Finally, the birdcage hanging on the balcony wall of the master’s house (cf. Photograph 3) is now shown to be hollow and without bars, but holding a lighted candle, thus producing a stunning effect in the beginning and at the end of the performance in the video.

We have noticed that the interpretations of the colonial archive take place in the sense of a shift in discourse and a corporeal change that depose the authority of those who

⁶⁵ In Portuguese: “deixam transparecer, de certa forma em seus detalhes, lapsos e dissonâncias com a mensagem dominante ou oficial.”

have historically detained the power the elaborate and assign meaning to representations involving enslaved and afrodiasporic individuals. The acting of Claudia Mamede, in terms of the languages that constitute the archive and the structures of internalized power within colonial architecture, produces the disorganization and the dismounting of those structures, which are then reorganized and transformed by the imagination/invention of memory, in an ethical endeavor that replenishes, although not entirely, the erasures brought into effect by the colonial control of the archive. The questions pertaining to Francisca and the silences of Iracema have driven the performatization of possibilities of decolonization of History by means of the trans-creation of textualities of the archive, in reading between the lines and what is not said, as well as the body in transit of the performer, which actualizes the legacy of familial dead women. Claudia Mamede lends her eyes so that Aline Motta might see her dead women through the lenses of a living body.

3 Accumulation of Times and Generations

The physical similarities between Claudia Mamede and Aline Motta's great-grandmother, along with her connection to the city of Vassouras, are the first steps that lead to a deepening of the imagination of shared experiences and bonds between these women and her women ancestors. In this respect, the blood ties are no longer more important than the potency of the other bonds that connect these women, who are traversed by an ancestral heritage and a shared cultural memory – elements that undergo processes of re-creation. Temporalities, deaths, and existences are tied together by the thread of ancestry that crossed the Black Atlantic, delimiting the history of resistance to slavery traced by those who came before. These meanings echo through to the present, in the encounter between Motta and Mamede: “Are we related? I think we gave an *umbigada* in time. Boat companions” (Motta, 2019).⁶⁶ As we consider this convergence in form of a crossroad and the notion that “performances are and construct

⁶⁶ In Portuguese: “Será que somos parentes? Acho que demos uma *umbigada* no tempo. Companheiras de barco.”

epistemologies” (Martins, 2021b, p. 39),⁶⁷ *Filha Natural* (2019) is a work supported by what Aline Motta calls “*umbigada*’s epistemology”:

In this dance, I project my bellybutton ahead and invite someone to join me in the middle of the circle. When I throw my body to the center, I step on the intersection of a horizontal line, which is Kalunga, and a vertical line, which represents my backbone, my foundations. The intersection of these two lines is the crossroads. At this point, I can scratch my ancestors’ spiritual signatures, compasses for good living, intergenerational cures. It’s the space where you can hear questions and answer simultaneously (Motta, 2021, p. 336).⁶⁸

In the crossed temporalities of Kalunga, Aline Motta searches for/finds the questions/answers that drive *Filha Natural* (2019) and *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022). Kalunga is also the space-time where one might give the *umbigada* (a projection of the bellybutton that calls for someone to participate in the dance) between Aline Motta, Claudia Mamede and Francisca, who resists History and its archive through the crossing of forces symbolized by the fire that does not succumb to the drowning of ancestry in colonial arrangements: “In 1858, the French traveler Charles Ribeyrolles passed through Vassouras and wrote that he did not find flowers in the *senzala*. His white man’s gaze did not realize the ancestral fire that had crossed the ocean over the waters. He did not see that flower of ember that had never gone out” (Motta, 2019).⁶⁹ The fire is an important element in *Filha Natural* (2019), being present, as we mentioned earlier, in two scenes – at the beginning and at the end of the video performance –, materialized as a burning candle carried by the performer in a birdcage. The fire of ancestry is also that of the remembrance that lights up the dead women in Motta’s artistic works. In this sense, the return to the past and the need for an activation of memory, being vital matters to the poet, pass through the waters of Kalunga and through the fire.

⁶⁷ In Portuguese: “as performances são e constroem epistemologias.”

⁶⁸ In Portuguese: “Nesta dança, eu projeto meu umbigo para a frente e convido alguém para se juntar a mim no centro da roda. Quando lanço meu corpo ao centro, eu piso na intersecção de uma linha horizontal, que é a Kalunga, e uma linha vertical, que representa minha espinha dorsal, meus alicerces. A intersecção dessas duas linhas é a encruzilhada. Nesse ponto de encontro, posso riscar as assinaturas espirituais dos meus antepassados, bússolas do bem-viver, curas intergeracionais. É o espaço onde se pode ouvir a pergunta e a resposta simultaneamente.”

⁶⁹ In Portuguese: “Em 1858, o viajante francês Charles Ribeyrolles foi à Vassouras e escreveu que não encontrou flores na senzala. O seu olhar branco não percebeu o fogo ancestral que cruzou o oceano sobre as águas. Não viu a flor de brasa que nunca se apagou.”

Photography 5 – Claudia Mamede carries a birdcage with a burning candle inside in Filha Natural (2019)



Source: Website of Aline Motta

Available in: <https://alinemotta.com/Filha-Natural-Natural-Daughter>. Accessed on: April 25, 2025

The fire keeps the flame of black ancestral forces alive and it can also be understood, in *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), as that which materializes the passage of the dead in relation to the world of the living: “Why didn’t they cremate her? Why don’t they burn the people in this family? Each life in its box. How can I distinguish this mother’s remains from the remains of the others?” (Motta, 2022, p. 98).⁷⁰ In the inversion of the shattering of the past that confuses the connections of the artist with her women ancestors, the fire and its symbolic wealth ritualize the death and ancestralize the dead women, individuating them. In this pulsating of affects, looking to purge traumas and care for women ancestors, it is possible to resume the past through writing and build it in a different manner, in an inversion of generational time.

If I knew I would have blew a pair of lungs
in the place of your uterus
And this extra pair you would donated in life
to Ambrosina
that would this way breathe the wind of eternity
that doesn't end the next day

⁷⁰ In Portuguese: “Por que não a cremaram? Por que não queimam as pessoas dessa família? Cada vida em sua caixa. Como posso distinguir os despojos dessa mãe dos restos das outras?”

Inverting the logic of embryos
The daughter that turns into an ancestor of the mother's
memory and a vessel
The water is a time machine

Motta, 2022, p. 137⁷¹

The corporeality of the women get mixed up: there is much of the ancestors in the presentified body in the instances of this ritualistic poetry. In the flux of the time that has Kalunga as an axis, the daughter is the mother, the grandmother, the great-grandmother, and the great-great-grandmother. These women also are and live in the daughter, constantly exchanging their places. Or, as Leila Danziger (2022) writes in her review of *A água é uma máquina do tempo* (2022), “the daughter, ancestor of the mother” (Danziger, 2022).⁷² Remembering Ambrosina, her great-great-grandmother, who died due to tuberculosis, Aline Motta lends her the breath and the garbled rhythm of the poem. She allows for the unknown ancestor, deceased in 1894, to revive/redie in herself, so that she might exist as a matter of memory, inserting her name in History, the first sign of a dead among the living, in the time that is open to the possibility of encounters. Similar meanings appear in another poem, connecting the daughter and the deceased mother, Wilma: “A last breath passed through from you passed through the umbilical cord and left my eyes in the shape of tears. Even as an adult I was still able to habit your body. Move your organs around” (Motta, 2022, p. 121).⁷³

The bricolage of excerpts taken from Wilma’s personal diaries, photographs, and memorial fragments, scattered throughout different medias, covering the childhood of the poet until moments before the death of her mother, bring shape to the elaboration of the pain of such a loss. Wilma does not figure as a distant specter, but as an insisting presence. The memory of her, at times, corrodes old pains of the poet, guilts, shared silences and conflicts: “Now that you are not alive,/ I don’t need your approval anymore” (Motta, 2022, p. 105).⁷⁴ Wilma’s passing brings to light the troubles between mother and daughter, but, beyond this, it activates in the poet (now an adult) the indelible presence

⁷¹ In Portuguese: “Se eu soubesse teria soprado um par de pulmões/ no lugar do seu útero/ E esse par extra você o teria doado em vida/ para Ambrosina/ que poderia assim respirar o vento da eternidade/ que não termina no dia seguinte/ Inverter a lógica dos embriões/ A filha que vira uma ancestral da mãe/ memória e veículo/ A água é uma máquina do tempo.”

⁷² In Portuguese: “a filha, ancestral da mãe.”

⁷³ In Portuguese: “Uma última respiração sua atravessou o cordão umbilical e saiu dos meus olhos em forma de lágrimas. Mesmo adulta eu ainda era capaz de habitar o seu corpo. Mover os seus órgãos de lugar.”

⁷⁴ In Portuguese: “Agora que você não está mais viva,/ não preciso mais de sua aprovação.”

of the one who brought her to life, knowing her final years to be the time to be closer once again: “Place of mother. Place of daughter. Same when I had to give you a bath. First communion” (Motta, 2022, p. 119).⁷⁵ The integration between mother and daughter, and the exchange of places and roles project the ancestor toward the present of the poem and toward the future of an encounter: “[...] IN HEAVEN/ with my mother I will be” (Motta, 2022, p. 103).⁷⁶ The also allow for the daughter to be seen by her mother, no longer through eyes of reprimand, but of remembrance. “The look and the voice of ancestors assure existence, because their memories guarantee the production of memory itself. So, as long as the ancestors remember us, we will still be” (Martins, 2021b, p. 213).⁷⁷

To remember is to be, in the wide sense of ancestry, as in an ontology of exchanges of places and times, in a game of epochs and corporealities that make way for the daughter to apprehend her matriarchs within herself. This is also the movement which, in complementary and transhistorical terms, in the spirals of ancestral time, allows for glimpses and fabulations of futures where the accumulation of wisdom and resistance of the black women who lived before us might be transmuted into a tactic of survival in face of the racial violence that insists in the present. Time is unsettled and *dis-ordered*; and is danced and chanted by voices of women who see themselves in one another. In the chronography that privileges the ancestral women Aline is with Wilma, Francisca, Claudia, Ambrosina, Nicaldes, Mariana, Nair, Iracema, Honorina, Izaulina, and so many others who are called during the poetic ritual of the *umbigada*, which puts the linearity of time in suspension and forms a great circle of affection and belonging.

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⁷⁵ In Portuguese: “Lugar de mãe. Lugar de filha. Mesmo quando eu tive de lhe dar um banho. Primeira comunhão.”

⁷⁶ In Portuguese: “[...] NO CÉU/ com minha mãe estarei.”

⁷⁷ In Portuguese: “O olhar e a voz dos antepassados asseguram a existência, pois sua lembrança garante a produção da própria memória. Assim, enquanto os ancestrais de nós se lembrarem, nós ainda seremos.”

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Received May 02, 2024

Accepted April 20, 2025

Statement of Author's Contribution

We hereby declare to all due purposes that Felipe Nildo Oliveira de Lima participated in the following stages: 1. Project conception, selection of the research corpus, and interpretative analysis; 2. Writing of the article and critical revision of its intellectual content; and 3. General text revision. The author Gustavo Silveira Ribeiro, in turn, contributed to the following stages: 1. Project conception and identification of important theoretical references for analysis; 2. Critical revision of the intellectual content of the article; and 3. General text revision and final approval of the version to be submitted for publication.

Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

Reviews

Due to the commitment assumed by *Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* [*Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies*] to Open Science, this journal only publishes reviews that have been authorized by all involved.

Review I

The article provides a careful and in-depth analysis of two works by Aline Motta, the video *Filha Natural* [Natural Daughter] and the book *A água é uma máquina do tempo* [The water is a Time Machine]. It articulates, in its analysis, pertinent and updated bibliography (Saidiya Hartman, Leda Maria Martins, and Paul Gilroy, etc.) on the violence of the past of slavery and the erasure of the archives of Afro-diasporic lives. Hence, it contributes both to the understanding of the work of one of the most relevant

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 20 (3): e66510e, July/Sept. 2025

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contemporary Brazilian artists and to the critical reflection on colonial archives and their urgent problematization. My only reservation regarding the article is the consideration of the video *Filha Natural* as a videoperformance. Usually, both in performance and videoperformance, it is the artist's own body that is on stage, which is not the case in this work. While in performance there is the sharing of a present moment between the artist and the audience, in videoperformance there is usually the sharing of duration, meaning the use of a continuous shot without cuts (although this is not an unquestionable rule). In any case, if the author wishes to maintain the hypothesis that it is a videoperformance, I believe a theoretical articulation with performance and videoperformance scholars is necessary, along with an attempt to better define the concept. In this regard, about the videoperformance, I recommend reading the books *Cinema, vídeo, Godard* [Cinema, video, Godard] by Philippe Dubois, and *Extremidades do vídeo* [Video extremity] by Christine Mello. There are also a few minor details adjustments to be made, which can be solved with a brief text review. I am sending a file with a few notes. APPROVED.

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Reviewed on May 27, 2024.

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