# PERFORMANCES OF SPIRAL TIME

LEDA MARIA MARTINS

# PERFORMANCES of SPIRAL TIME



#### DISSIDENT ACTS A series edited by Macarena Gómez-Barris and Diana Taylor





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# PERFORMANCES of SPIRAL TIME

#### LEDA MARIA MARTINS

Translated by Bruna Barros and Jess Oliveira

Foreword by Fred Moten



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In memoriam
MARCO RODRIGO RIBEIRO MARTINS
beloved son
still young,
embraced by Kalunga
and
ALZIRA GERMANA MARTINS
mother and queen,
sweet voice,
still irradiates

now in the spirals enchanted ancestors shelter my affection and my feelings

TO OUR ANCESTORS



Ô, com licença Ô, com licença Entre tambores e gungas Ai, ai, ai Venho pedir sua bênção

[Allow me Allow me With drums and gungas Oh, oh, oh I ask for your blessing] — REINADO CHANT Ajudai-me Rainha do Mar Ajudai-me, Rainha do Mar Que manda na terra Que manda no ar

[Help me Queen of the Sea Help me, Queen of the Sea You who rules the earth You who rules the air] — REINADO CHANT

# DUKE

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### Black Swan Song

If there's a body, or if here and now there must be one, it's just a gathering of spray.

To refuse to learn, to shake his power off, you have to find, then break, the circle of the general twist and shout into some ribbons, concerts of open locks brushing the ground on every side of the ground, a cascade storm of penetrant embrace. The spiral is retropreformative disarmament—

a bouquet of little returns and runaways.

We can't just break the arrow of time. We have to bury it in what we have to give, which is what they steal because they just can't take it, she chants. They can't survive how we survive.

# DUKE

#### Ritornellos

Performances of Spiral Time dives back into and broadens considerations on time as spirals that I have been working on since the mid-1990s. In this iteration, these concepts are interwoven with new returns, like ritornellos. The compositions braid recurring ideas. They can be interpreted either sequentially, maintaining a continuous syntax, or as accumulative, complementary condensations that build upon each other. Just like call and response, they uphold the main theme while also engaging in improvisation, mirroring the nature of the inspiring spiral time itself.

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I also acknowledge everyone who, in Brazil and abroad, has been sharing these ruminations and ideas, and those who contributed toward this publication. I, therefore, bow to those precious readings.

For me, writing is an offering. So is this book.



#### COMPOSITION I

## THEOSOPHIES, TIMES, AND THEORIES

Olê, angoma Essa gunga vai girá Essa gunga vai girá Corrê mundo Ê, corrê mar

[Ole, angoma
This gunga's gonna spin
This gunga's gonna spin
Round the world
Round the sea]
— REINADO CHANT

#### **INSTANCES**

In the body, time dances. And in its movements, it initiates the being into time, inscribing it as temporality. The voice breathes from primal gestures, inspiring divine breath into beings, the original breath which circumscribes the sacred within and around itself. Before being a chronology, time is an ontology, a land-scape inhabited by the body's tender ages, a wandering prior to progression, and a mode of predisposing beings in the cosmos. Time inaugurates beings in time itself, inscribing them in its kinesthetics.



FIGURE 1.1. Rui Moreira, *I said* (play, part of the show *Hongolo* [Serpent's enchanter], Cia. Será Quê?, 2008). Photo: Guto Muniz.

All cultural and artistic expressions convey the worldview that constitutes and shapes societies and subjects. In embodied cultural knowledges, wisdoms of various orders manifest themselves, be they of philosophical, aesthetic, technical, or other natures, or in the most notable sociocultural events, as well as in the minimal and invisible actions of our daily lives. In everything we do, we express what we are, what pushes us, what forms us, and what makes us part of a group, a cohort, a community, a culture, and a society. Our minimal gestures and looks, the choices of our senses of taste and smell, our hearing and response to sounds, our bodily vibrations, our flourishes of language, our silences and goosebumps, our modes and ways of experimenting and questioning the cosmos, our sensibility, in all that we are and in the ways we are, we respond to cosmoperceptions that constitute us. We also respond to conceptions of time and temporalities, both in the cultural productions manifesting them and in our daily rituals.

This book explores the interrelations between body, time, performance, memory, and the production of knowledges, especially those which implement themselves through embodied practices. The idea here is that the experience and the philosophical comprehension of time can also be expressed through

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an inscription that is not necessarily discursive, not even narrative, though no less meaningful and efficient because of this. There is a language constituted by the body in performance, by the living body that in and of itself establishes and presents a cosmic, ontological, theoretical, and also quotidian notion of temporal apprehension and comprehension.

Ultimately, I propose as an epistemological possibility the idea that in certain cultures, time is the location of inscription of a knowledge graphed through gesture, movement, and choreography, on the surface of the skin, as well as in the rhythms and timbres of vocality. These knowledges are thus framed by a specific cosmoperception and philosophy. I explore which conception(s) of time informed and constituted the cultures and societies of the African peoples brought to the Americas, and the ways these notions were transmitted and transformed as signs of cultural formation.

If we take into account that the majority of African peoples brought to the "New World" came from societies that did not have written or printed texts as the main means of inscription and dissemination of their multiple wisdoms, we can then affirm that knowledges, from the most concrete to the most abstract, were restored and passed on through means other than those figured by writing,<sup>2</sup> such as oral and bodily inscriptions, that is, *graphyas* performed by the body and voice in the dynamics of movement. What is repeated in the body and voice is also an epistemic system.<sup>3</sup>

Ancestrality, in many cultures, is a foundational concept. It is imbued in every social practice. It expresses the sense of the person and the cosmos in all their aspects, from the most intimate familiar relationships to broader and more diversified social and communal practices and expressions. In which modes, then, do this sophisticated experience of ancestrality and the immanent presence of the ancestor in the subjects' daily life inscribe a single comprehension and experience of temporality, as a *sophya*? In which ways do the times and intervals of calendars also mark and dilate the conception of a time that bends forward and backward, simultaneously, always in a process of prospection and retrospection, of simultaneous remembering and becoming?

In my understanding, spirals illustrate this perception, conception, and experience. The compositions that follow aim to contribute to the idea that time can be ontologically experienced as movements of reversibility; dilatation and contention; nonlinearity; discontinuity; contraction and relaxation; simultaneity of present, past, and future instances; as ontological and cosmological experiences that have, as the basic principle of the body, not repose as in Aristotle, but, rather, motion. In curved temporalities, time and memory are images reflecting each other.

#### ON THE TYRANNY OF CHRONOS

Considerations about time and the experience of temporality have always been a privileged object in philosophy, as well as in physics, anthropology, literature, and multiple areas and fields of knowledge. All cultures express diverse notions and experiences of temporalities, in their most quotidian and concrete daily lives, as well as in the most diverse theoretical, rhetorical, and ritual speculations and abstractions of their wise ones and masters.

In Western mythology—particularly in Greek mythology—there is the outline of a chronosophy interwoven into foundational texts or mythical narratives that establish chronologies. It is chronosophy in both the realm of indistinct time, non-severed from ontic chaos—time outside the conventional temporal boundaries of the creation and infancy of the cosmos, from which deities emerge—and its subsequent rupture and severance, ruled by chronologies and all their windings.

Western notions of the cosmic and theogonic formation appear, for example, in Hesiod's *Theogony*. Chronos emerges from an undetermined time-chaos that is not measurable or capturable in any sequence, order, or linearity. It is Chronos who establishes an ordered, consecutive, mensurable, and progressive generation. This introduced a calendar of deities, now organized in a determined sequential line, protected from chaos's atemporal forms and formations.

Thus, Chronos, in the West, inaugurates a certain idea of calendar-temporality by surpassing his father, instituting a linearity and a progressive lineage of substitutions and power that install and implement themselves simultaneously with the very fixation and separation of the ideas of past, present, and future. This is the opposite of his father Uranus, who is time without temporality, that is, without distinction between before and after. Chronos, in Greek mythology, is the time of severance, the time that divides itself into now and before, into today and tomorrow, instants and becomings. He opens pathways to the ascension of Zeus, his usurper-successor, his tomorrow, which is simultaneously his ontic past. Zeus, just like the future, substitutes today, the temporary and provisional present inaugurated by his father Chronos, the father of time, imposing his tyranny on the West. In his *Theogony*, <sup>5</sup> Hesiod graphs the Greek conception of the experience of the formation of temporality in a mythopoetic narrative that anticipates all the seductive philosophical speculation that succeeds it.

The notion of time that expresses itself through succession, substitution, and through a direction whose horizon is the future, marks Western theories about time and modernity's very idea of progress and reason, even as many philosophers from the same West problematize and argue about the lived and individ-



ual experiences of temporality. According to Reis, "The history of philosophy always had [time] as a theme: from Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel, Marx, to Husserl, Heidegger, Bergson, Bachelard, to mention only the more classic discourses about time."

In fact, legions of thinkers discuss time in various fields of knowledge and in fruitful and instigating elaborations. A basic paradigm and premise of these speculations lies in the assumption that time is fundamentally constituted by a chronological passage that divides and cuts it into past, present, and future. Time is then ordered in the logic of succession, that is, through instants, days, cycles, events, or happenings. The very idea of *durée*, as in Bergson, would not fully escape this linear consecutive logic, even in its pulses of duration, for it does not subvert logic, but rather captures it in moments of abyssal immersion of the subject in itself. Still, according to Reis, when one "lives time, this experience already presumes a previous representation of a 'timeline'—whether circular, linear, ramified, or a combination of them all."

In the images that designate time, the most graphically common one is the arrow that drives itself to the inexorability of the end and origin and, even when pointing in two directions, draws a linear mode of designation and perception of time. Likewise, the image of the river that cannot be contemplated or accessed more than once, for neither the river nor the person would be the same, rushes toward the future in a continuous accelerated, non-accumulative, and irreversible flux. There, becoming is always elsewhere and the present is an illusion. The lexicon that alludes to these images is vast and includes expressions such as "before," "during," "present," "past," "future," "instant," "now," "yesterday," "today," "becoming," "duration," "repetition," "event," "succession," "simultaneity," "eternity," "conscience," "nature," which, in their web of meanings, express "temporal 'relations' or 'attributions,' that is, relations of anteriority, posteriority, and simultaneity or the succession of past, present and future events." <sup>10</sup> In this setup, Bosi states that each "moment that occurs is the death certificate of what is already gone," leaving only "the adjacency/imminence of the body struggling for survival."11

According to this lexicon, time is also configured as numeration, as a temporal sequential attribution, Chronos's domain par excellence, as Bosi summarizes well:

For the sequential gaze, everything that succeeds brings the seal of a number disposed in a series; hence, the past moment, the previous moment, has already passed and, mathematically, cannot come back.... Thus, we begin to discuss historical time in terms of irreversibility. To this con-

ception of time belong the—only apparently contrasting—ideas of the passing of each instant and of continuation. Each minute in History lasts until it vanishes, that is, it fades away, but only to be substituted by another, and so on and so forth. This time, when schematized, is what was said about it, in the classic era, by Hobbes and Descartes, Newton's physics, and the philosophy that goes from Leibniz to Kant. It is the before and after of movement (Hobbes). It is the number of movement (Descartes). It is the external measure of movement (Newton). It is an order of successions (Leibniz). It is the condition of existence of the causal order (Kant). It is, when taken abstractly, the mensurable time of Newtonian science: t, t', t''. The time that figures in Mechanics equations, hence a number inside a series. . . . This syntactic view on time supports two opposite philosophies: one, that is cumulative and finalist; and the other, that is specific and, to use a neologism, contingential. In both, one may observe the model of time as seriality, succession, a chain of before-and-after. 12

In Western thought, the very word "time" becomes an aporia.

In African philosophy, rarely quoted by Western theoreticians, multiple notions of time are also argued, and are foundational to philosophical thought. In these conceptions and fabulations, distinct from the Western, one can find arguments about time, both as theoretical speculation and as a cultural experience. Some of these notions are long-lived and classic, such as those by Mbidi, Kagame, Aguessy, Ngūgĩ, among many others. <sup>13</sup> Other thinkers in the African continent and in Brazil also offer us meaningful material on this vast and complex matter, for time and its experiences are also reasons for reflections in the territories mentioned above. They are also aporias. We will visit them further on. I will refer principally to the Congolese scholar and philosopher Bunseki Fu-Kiau, a great master who radiates knowledge about the history, culture, and thought of Bantu peoples, whose territorial and linguistic domains, and cosmoperception are extensive and vastly influential both on the African continent and in Brazil.

#### **BODY-EVENT AND WORD-EVENT**

In Western philosophy, it is maintained that, in the realm of language, time is expressed through words, just as it is also through words, mainly through writing, that its aporias are postulated. Time is inscribed as writing, be it in fabulation, be it in the discourse that speculates about it, as highlighted by Ricoeur, who affirms that "the *said* things are the ones inserted in their *scriptures*." In his reflections on narrative and time, the philosopher will turn to Greek thought, via





FIGURE 1.2. Cyda Moreno, I Yellow, Carolina Maria de Jesus (play, 2024). **Exhibition Women** of Words. Photo: Ana Paula Azevedo.

Aristotle, allying the latter to Augustinian metaphysics, and gathering in both more than the teleological notions that inform and differentiate these thinkers. From Augustine, Ricoeur retrieves the very idea of the primacy of the present in Western aporia, as a vain attempt to apprehend the instant; whereas, in Aristotle, he is interested in the form of reverberation of speculation, fabulation, that is, the structure that covers the narration of time. He is interested, then, in the form of expression of the temporal experience as an argumentative, discursive reasoning.15

Time would be figured only by words, in its discursive expressions. In the introduction of the anthology As culturas e o tempo, Ricoeur states that all cultures inscribe their conception of time through words and, in this particular anthology, all the authors "insist on the adherence of the conception of time and history to the settings of language." <sup>16</sup> From this perspective, the empirical perception of time, according to Ricoeur, would be inseparable from its discursive translation, even if it is presented in a hymn, "in its hymnic mode." He reiterates:

The *diversity* of cultures comes from the diversities of languages in a broader, but maybe deeper sense than the simple diversity of words and syntaxes, and even than the—more literary—diversity of the forms of discourse (hymn, chronicle, epic, tragedy, and lyricism). Many of the cultures considered in this anthology have their implicit or explicit conceptions of time linked to the emergence of a Word—or Scripture—which creates, in benefit of an event of foundational discourse, the set of experiences, behaviors, and interpretations that, in turn, constitute the unique characteristic experience of that culture.<sup>18</sup>

According to this line of reasoning, writing, as a place of memory, is one of the most praised means of expression and underwrites the West's favored places of memory, for, according to Merleau-Ponty, "what we call 'ideas' are carried into the world of existence by their instruments of expression—books, museums, musical scores, scriptures." These are the platforms and devices favored by the West for keeping memory. Even though Ricoeur links rites explicitly to what he calls "word event," by stating that "so the diversity of exegetic intelligence is the imperious corollary of the word event," he will recognize the power of rites in the perception of time, for, according to him, "time is not only interpreted, but signified by the rite." <sup>20</sup>

This way of thinking about time as a narrative instance, subject to a function of narration, underwrites many formulations of countless other thinkers, who highlight them in varied genres and forms from the most diverse cultures and societies, through which time—and its heuristic and holistic notion; empirical understanding; ontological experience; cosmic, functional, everyday representation; and figuration in clocks and calendars—is narrated through the written word.<sup>21</sup>

However, within Western societies, other ways of conceiving, experiencing, and living time, as well as expressing it as language, survive. Within the very realm of the aesthetic experience of the word, time provides rhythm to one of the most beautiful forms of human expression and transgression of its conception as an absolute linearity: the poetic language, whether that of poetry or that of myths.

Poetry is time. Time as a ritornello, dispersed in a rhythmic spatiality. As Bosi teaches us, the poetic discourse presupposes recurrences, resonances, turns, cycle regimes, return procedures, the simultaneity of several times and their reversibility. "Poetic discourse," Bosi would say, "as a fabric made of sounds, lives a regime of cycles," a coming and going processed as rhythm, phonetic subsystem,

intonation, timbre, duration, tempos. With these modes of ritornellos, poetic time disrupts and breaks the absolute sequential line, interweaving curves and spirals and thus, through the "cycle that closes and through the waves that come and go, the poem summarizes and rounds off discourse's successive temporal line." He adds: "Rhyme and rhythm are procedures of returning, of bending, of internal reversibility. They are structure." <sup>23</sup>

Still, according to Bosi, the "mythical time and the time of worship of the dead are also characterized by being a (com) position of recurrences and analogies. Their main note is reversibility. A structural reversibility, for it embraces internal returns." This also breaks the logic of the productive economy, in which one cannot waste time, because if "economy works according to a game that aligns the mechanisms of production, supply, and demand, arranging them in series, and therefore measuring them (since time 'is worth' production which, in turn, is worth money), this does not mean that this logic is the only interactive rule steadily bringing men together in society." 25

In the same anthology where Ricoeur reaffirms that in all societies, temporal experience is expressed through the written word, he also presents, albeit with some bewilderment, several theorists who discuss some absolutely unique conceptions of temporality in relation to Western perspectives. This list includes the Hindu, the Chinese, and the African conceptions, all of which process very diverse and contradictory notions to the ideas of time expressed through succession, through substitution, through a defined origin of progressive direction and meanings whose horizon is an often apocalyptic inexorable end, as in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In countless contemplations regarding time, the word holds a unique place. Not everything, however, seems to be conveyed and expressed solely by words, in its status as writings. African notions of time, for instance, emphasize the uttered word as a *locus* of expression of temporal experiences. This concept is situated within a wide spectrum of phonic and sound elaboration within languages, processed by the body, aligned and composed by other perceptions that translate them in and through the body.

African philosophy takes into account the entire range of knowledges regarding oral performance as significant for the inscription of temporality experiences, as well as for their epistemic elaboration. The word as *oralitura* inscribes itself on the body and in all its activities. And it produces knowledge, in spite of the declared biases of European thought, which disqualified Africa as a thinking continent. This type of exclusionary reasoning is largely due to the false dichotomy between orality and writing emphasized by the West. This biased view fayors written discursive language as an exclusive and privileged mode of postu-

lating and expanding knowledge. This mode is implemented due to the primacy of a linear progressive conception of time and is established as thought due to the almost absolute dominance of alphabetic writing as a platform of fixed graphyas in its narratology and its writing, ignoring or neglecting other modes of establishing wisdoms, including those made up by voice and its resonances in various embodiments. As Finnegan also states: "So it is that when we are faced with any art in which words play a part at all, we so readily look to its textual writable qualities. . . . It is language furthermore, above all in its written form, which is so often conceptualized as the vehicle for modernity, rationality and the value of the intellect. In this still strikingly prevalent ideology, written language (especially when alphabetically printed) stands for the highest achievement of humanity." According to the logic of Western reason, writing would translate one of the modes of recognition of the historical subject and of historicity, as observed by Pomian:

Throughout the 19th century, both philosophers of history and professional historians conceived time as merely linear.... Linear, cumulative, and irreversible time is equated with the time of history to such an extent that the peoples in which it cannot be found are simply peoples without history, *Naturvölker*. On an ideological level, the equation of historical time with linear time... is a component of Eurocentrism.... Sometimes, even within Europe, it justifies the division between peoples who have a history and those who are deprived of it; it justifies the feeling of superiority we get when we turn to the past and compare it to the present.<sup>28</sup>

This hegemonic thought, a devaluation of the African continent, is present in Hegel's ideas about it: "Africa is no historical part of the world, it has no movement or development to exhibit... the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature... as on the threshold of the world's history." <sup>29</sup>

In the colonial system, the emphasis on writing prolongs this illusory dichotomy between what is oral and what is written, with the latter actually becoming an instrument of domination practices, unequal power relations, and strategies for excluding the peoples who favored bodily performances as forms of creation, memorization, and expansion of knowledge.

Africa has always had written and oral textuality, but without a hierarchy of modes of inscription, even in the oldest writing systems, such as the Egyptian system, which, along with Sumerian and Chinese systems, is one of the oldest, besides other centuries-old writing systems such as "the Bamoun (Cameroon)... Vai (Sierra Leone), Nsibidi (Calabar, western [sic] Nigeria), Basa and

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Mende scripts (Sierra Leone and Liberia),"30 besides those originating, in the Middle Ages, from Islam, informs Aguessy. According to this author, "every human society, as is now widely recognized, has some specific means of recording that permits it to appropriate time, to a certain extent" and, in Africa, "cultural values have by and large been transmitted and perpetuated orally." Aguessy concludes: "Therefore when I speak of 'orality' as being characteristic of the field of African culture, I mean that it is preponderant, not exclusive. I use the term to indicate that the oral transmission of knowledge and cultural values is generally preferred, but this need not exclude a specific mode of recording and stabilizing messages."31 The prevalence of literacy, and the consequent high status of writing, introduced both in Africa and in the Americas by European colonizers, did not just substitute one mode of inscription with another. The mastery of writing was instrumental in the attempt to erase wisdoms deemed heretical and undesirable by Europeans. When literate writing was turned into an exclusive source of knowledge, its domain superimposed itself, neglected, and tried to abolish other systems and contents that were not considered by the colonizer as qualitative knowledge, or even as knowledge. The domain of few, as it excluded, marginalized, and alienated what was once familiar. It disturbed the colonized societies, shifting power relations among subjugated peoples. Alphabetic writing installed itself as an instrumental vehicle of ostracism: It segregated and stigmatized. It was not an addition or a supplement, but rather an imposition, an exclusive means of diffusion, as were the values it disseminated, whether social, religious, behavioral, or related to worldviews. The civilization of writing, of books, imposed itself, as if it were unique, true, and universal in its yearning for domination and hegemony, and it was resistant to any difference. It also aimed at the symbolic or literal disappearance of the other, at its erasure. Taylor points out that "what changed with the Conquest was not that writing displaced embodied practice (we need only remember that the friars brought their own embodied practices) but the degree of legitimization of writing over other epistemic and mnemonic systems."32

Despite this repression, what history shows us is that even though the performative practices of Indigenous and African peoples were prohibited, demonized, coerced, and excluded, these same practices ensured, through various processes of restoration and resistance, the survival of a *corpora* of knowledge that resisted attempts at annihilation, whether through disguising, through transformation, or through the innumerable modes of revitalization that nuanced the whole formation process of the hybrid American cultures.

These embodied practices, alongside the exercise of writing—a privilege of few—shaped the new cultures and societies in the Americas through a process

of mutual influences, just as European knowledge entered the universes of African and Indigenous peoples. It became a two-way path: European knowledge was also affected by Indigenous and African peoples, even though, in the hierarchy of power, the latter did not, and still do not, enjoy the same degree of legitimacy, recognition, or primacy. According to Roach, "echoes in the bone refer not only to a history of forgetting, but to a strategy of empowering the living through the performance of memory," because, despite the centralizing European self-consciousness, Africa "leaves its historic traces amid the incomplete erasures, beneath the superscriptions, and within the layered palimpsests." <sup>34</sup>

The African cultures transferred to the Americas found in orality their favored —albeit not exclusive—way of producing knowledge. Likewise, for the peoples of the forests, the production, inscription, and dissemination of knowledge took place primarily through bodily performances, rites, songs, dances, and synesthetic and kinesthetic ceremonies. Through these performances, a plethora of knowledge was transmitted by the body in movement and its vocality, from simpler behaviors, practices, and daily habits, to the more sophisticated techniques, forms, cognitive processes, and more abstract and sophisticated thinking, including their cosmoperception or philosophy.

Graphing wisdom was not, then, synonymous with mastery of a language alphabetically written. Rather, graphing wisdom was indeed synonymous with an embodied experience, with an embodied knowledge that found its place and environment for inscription in the body in performance. Words were danced, gestures sung, every movement resonated with a choreography of the voice, a pronounced score, a pigmentation graphed on the skin, a sonority of colors.

The body becomes an auratic wisdom, a rhythmic calligraphy, a *corpora* of knowledge. In one of the oldest records of Toltec wisdom, the installation of a new city did not begin when the dwellings, streets, and temples were finished, but rather and only when the chants and music were heard, and when the drums were beat. Singing and dancing. This is how that place and civilization were founded. As León-Portilla states, "It is beautifully stated in the Indigenous text that all these cities [Teotihuacan, Azcapotzalco, Culhuacan, Chalco, Xochimilco, among many others] came into existence only when music was established in them."<sup>35</sup> And so they poetically told us, while singing:

Se estableció el canto se fijaran los tambores, se dijo que así principiaban las ciudades: existía en ellas la música.<sup>36</sup>

And then there was singing, the drums were played, it was said it was like this that cities began; there was music in them.]

One of the chants by the *congadeiros* (Congado practitioners), in Minas Gerais, reminds us of this same multi-significant preeminent relationship between Black peoples and chants:

Cheguei na casa do rei O meu destino é cantar Sá rainha me falou Pisa neste chão devagar

[I arrived at the king's house To sing is my destiny The queen told me To step on this ground carefully - REINADO CHANT

#### CROSSED NZILAS. PERFORMANCE. AND ORALITURAS

Inscriptions of knowledge via embodiment are sought in various areas through alternate and alternative epistemologies and perspectives.<sup>37</sup> Many scholars ponder over other possible means of approaching embodied wisdoms, proposing different theoretical approaches to their intellectual actualization and apprehension. Performance Studies, for example, as a multidisciplinary field, breaks the sterile dichotomy between oralities and writing, providing us with methodological tools for the investigation of performance practices.

Performances, for Schechner, are "marked, framed, or heightened behavior separated out from just 'living life' — restored restored behavior." As such, the so-called twice-behaved behavior can be "actions marked off by aesthetic convention as in theater, dance, and music,"38 in habits and social conventions, and in the most diverse cultural practices, whether in the realm of the sacred or in the realm of the profane in rites, ceremonies, and other practices, no matter if considered aesthetic or not. Still, according to Schechner, the restored behavior "can be worked on, stored and recalled, played with, made into something else, transmitted, and transformed," always through a symbolic and reflexive frame, whose "meanings need to be decoded by those in the know," 40 that is, twice-behaved behavior, which alludes to the reiteration of the performed ac-

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tion, its repetition in time and as time and duration, as well as its simultaneous ephemerality.

This definition of performance, always *in progress*, that is found in numerous texts by this author, alludes to some basic assumptions for its understanding, namely: "A performance [even when it emerges from a painting or a novel] takes place as action, interaction, and relation." "The habits, rituals, and routines of life are restored behaviors" and, as such, are alive and can be recreated and rearranged. They "can be of long duration as in ritual performances, or of short duration as in fleeting gestures such as waving goodbye." Their symbolic and reflective universe of meaning demands the mastery of the codes, including cultural ones, that inform them.

The concept of performance as "restored behavior" implies the idea of a permanent but ephemeral repetition that never makes itself known nor repeats itself in the same way. According to Roach, ephemeral and durable performances are not "prior to language, but constitutive of it." We can point out, along with these intellectuals, that performances themselves, as well as Performance Studies, allow us to shift the *focus* from written text to the broad and significant repertoire of embodied wisdoms. 44

For Taylor, performance "on one level, constitutes the object/process of analysis in Performance Studies, that is, the many practices and events—dance, theater, ritual, political rallies, funerals—that involve theatrical, rehearsed, or conventional/event appropriate behaviors." As such, the term *performance* is inclusive and covers a wide range of actions and events that require the living presence of the subject for their realization and/or enjoyment, functioning as acts of transfer, since, on a certain level, "performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [behavior]." On another level of apprehension, "performance also constitutes the methodological lens," which enables us to analyze certain events as performance, since, theoretically, "as a term [performance] simultaneously [connotes] a process, a praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, an accomplishment, and a means of intervening in the world." That is, performances are and build epistemologies.

Within the scope of French theories, Paul Zumthor also offers a series of insights that aid us in thinking about the performances of orality. He does so by providing substantial inflections for their understanding, analysis, and reception. His contributions to the poetics of the voice, the body, performative gestures, and the reception of oral transmission performances highlight, among other aspects, the notion of performance as a "knowing how to be," a "knowledge that implies and commands a presence and a conduct, a *Dasein* comprising



concrete space-time and physio-psychic coordinates, an order of values embodied in a living body."<sup>49</sup>

Connerton uses a series of examples through which we can glimpse many sociocultural activities that typify social memory, from the most naive—and apparently bucolic and playful—to those that carry philosophical concepts and wisdoms within them through conventional practices, repeated in collective events of greater or lesser size, in the public and official or in private spaces, in urban and rural communities, in festive, celebratory, or incantation rites, and even in the costumes that compose the body. According to him, "concerning social memory, we may note that images of the past commonly legitimate a present social order." Thus, we may say that our experiences of the present largely depend on our knowledge of the past. He adds that "social habits are essentially legitimating performances. And if habit-memory is inherently performative, then habit-memory must be distinctively social-performative." Commemorative ceremonies, for instance, "prove to be commemorative only insofar as they are performative; this is performed knowledge."

From this perspective, as Pierre Nora also warns us,<sup>54</sup> the memory of knowledge is not only safeguarded in sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*), libraries, museums, archives, official monuments, theme parks, et cetera, but is constantly recreated and transmitted by environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*). These are oral and bodily repertoires, gestures, and habits whose transmission techniques and procedures are means for creating, passing on, reproducing, and preserving knowledge.

In Brazil, many intellectuals are seminal for the analysis and understanding of our embodied knowledge. Several of them will be mentioned and consulted throughout the following pages. In my case, I have worked with the term *oralitura* since 1997 in order to allude to some modes and means by which—in the realm of performative practices—gesture and voice modulate the *graphya* of embodied knowledges. These include various orders and diverse natures, including philosophical knowledge, in particular, an alternate and alternative conception of time, its reverberations, its impressions and *graphyas* in our ways of being, proceeding, acting, fabulating, thinking, and desiring.

Conceptually and methodologically, *oralitura* designates the complex texture of oral and bodily performances, their functioning, processes, procedures, means, and systems of inscription of the knowledge founded by and foundational to bodily epistemes. The term highlights the transit of memory, history, worldviews, and multiple epistemes that are processed through embodiments in such performances. It also alludes to the *graphya* of these wisdoms, as performative inscriptions and as a crossing out of the dichotomy between orality and



writing. *Oralitura* belongs to the realm of performance and its agency. It allows us to approach, theoretically and methodologically, performance's protocols, codes, and systems, the modus operandi of its realization, reception, and affectations, as well as its techniques and cultural conventions, such as the inscription and *graphya* of wisdoms.

In the realm of *oralitura*, not only rituals gravitate, but also a great variety of formulations and conventions that install, fix, revise, and disseminate themselves through countless means of performative cognition, while also graphing—through a body infused with sounds, vocalities, gestures, choreographies, accessories, drawings and graffiti, traces and colors, knowledges and flavors, values of multiple orders and magnitudes—African-inspired logos and gnoses, as well as multiple possibilities for the crossing out of exclusionary and discretionary protocols and fixation systems.<sup>55</sup>

All these authors, with greater or lesser emphasis, allude to the fact that all societies and all cultures have their ways and means of remembering their knowledges and their practices, by developing processes for maintaining their cognitive collections and even questioning, revising, and reshaping them. Certainly, these practices underwrite the most intimate place in social relations and in the subjectivities of the individuals who form and practice them, in all spaces and contexts of interrelationships around which knowledges and values of multiple natures and magnitudes gravitate, including a conception of time and temporalities: the spiral time.

In the context of the thought that entwines diverse and different African cultures with the cultures of the diaspora, movements of retroaction and simultaneous advances can only be measured and argued within a worldview and a conception of the experience of time and temporalities initiated by a guiding thought; that is: ancestrality, the mater principle interrelating everything that exists in the cosmos, transmitting the vital energy that guarantees the concomitantly similar and different existences of all beings and everything in the cosmos. It is the extension of curvilinear temporalities, governing the implementation of cultural practices, underwitten by a non-severed time that cannot be measured by the Western model of linear and progressive evolution. A time that does not elide chronology, but subverts it. A curved, reversible, transversal, long-lived, and simultaneously inaugural time, a sophya and a chronosophy in spirals.

# DUKE

6 COMPOSITION I ERSITY
PRESS

#### Notes

#### RITORNELLOS

I. Ritornellos mean return, the recurrence of something. Very common in poetic constructions, they are the creation of sound patterns through the returning movements of sounds, forming circular poetic structures.

#### COMPOSITION I: THEOSOPHIES, TIMES, AND THEORIES

All translations of chants and/or citations are ours, unless stated otherwise. [Trans.]

- I. In Portuguese: *No corpo o tempo bailarina*. Verse of a chant the author commonly sings during her lectures. [Trans.]
- 2. In the original, the author also uses the term *scripture* when referring to writing. [Trans.]
- 3. The author uses *grafia* as any kind of inscription, be it written or bodily inscribed. In Portuguese, this literally means "written representation of a word; writing; transcription." Its literal translation into English (writing or spelling) resulted in some losses of meaning. Therefore, we transcreated the term into *graphya*, which resonates with the Greek word *sophya*, recovering partially the broader and deeper sense of *grafia* as deployed by the author, that is, as wisdom. In the cases in which the related verb *grafar* appears, we used the verb *to graph*. [Trans.]
- 4. Ancestralidade, in Portuguese, is a philosophical concept in African diasporic and African traditions and scholarships. [Trans.]
  - 5. See Hesiod, "Theogony" and "Works and Days."
  - 6. Reis, Tempo, história e evasão, 12.
  - 7. See Bergson, Matter and Memory.
- 8. Bergson, Matter and Memory, 13. See also Eliade, O mito do eterno retorno, arquétipos e repetição.
  - 9. See Rovelli, A ordem do tempo.
  - 10. Reis, Tempo, história e evasão, 13.
  - 11. Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história," 25.

- 12. Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história," 20. See also Pomian, "Tempo/temporalidade."
- 13. See Bidima, La Philosophie négro-africaine; Biyogo, Histoire de la Philosophie africaine; Imbo, Introduction to African Philosophy; Mundimbe, Invention of Africa.
  - 14. Ricoeur, "Introdução," 22.
  - 15. See also Ricoeur, Tempo e narrativa; Ricoeur, A memória, a história, o esquecimento.
  - 16. Ricoeur, "Introdução," 15-16.
  - 17. Ricoeur, "Introdução," 18-19.
  - 18. Ricoeur, "Introdução," 21-22.
  - 19. Merleau-Ponty, "Phenomenology and the Sciences of Man," 95.
  - 20. Ricoeur, "Introdução," 23, 25.
- 21. See also Pomian, "Tempo/temporalidade"; Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história"; Eliade, O mito do eterno retorno, arquétipos e repetição; Doctors, Tempo dos tempos; Novaes, Tempo e história; Ricoeur, A memória, a história, o esquecimento; Rovelli, A ordem do tempo.
  - 22. Bosi, O ser e o tempo da poesia, 116-17.
  - 23. Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história," 28.
  - 24. Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história," 27.
  - 25. Bosi, "Sobre tempo e história," 27.
- 26. Oralitura is a term coined by Leda Maria Martins to designate the stories and ancestral knowledge passed down not only through literature, but also in cultural performance manifestations—such as Congados. It is not equal to "oral literature," so we kept the term in Portuguese. [Trans.]

In the Anglophone world, orature or folk literature—a genre of literature that is spoken or sung as opposed to that which is written, could apply. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, orature transcends both written and oral literature as it is based not on words, but on the fusion of many art forms in order to create a cohesive narrative experience. See also Ngũgĩ, "Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Orature." [Trans.]

- 27. Finnegan, Where Is Language?, 88-89.
- 28. Pomian, "Tempo/temporalidade," 137.
- 29. Hegel, Philosophy of History, 99.
- 30. Aguessy, "Traditional African Views and Apperceptions," 96.
- 31. Aguessy, "Traditional African Views and Apperceptions," 97.
- 32. Taylor, Archive and Repertoire, 18.
- 33. Roach, Cities of the Dead, 34.
- 34. Roach, Cities of the Dead, 45.
- 35. León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos através de sus crónicas y cantares, 39.
- 36. Toltec poem in León-Portilla, Los antiguos mexicanos através de sus crónicas y can-
- 37. A note on the subheading for this section: Nzila means "path" in Kimbundu, hence "nzilas cruzadas" could also be translated as "crossroads." We kept the term in Kimbundu to preserve the author's style. [Trans.]
  - 38. Schechner, Performance Theory, 35.
  - 39. Schechner, Performance Theory, 35.
- 40. Schechner, Performance Theory, 35.
- 41. Schechner, Performance Theory, 30.



- 42. Schechner, Performance Theory, 34.
- 43. Roach, Cities of the Dead, 26.
- 44. See Taylor, Archive and Repertoire; Roach, Cities of the Dead.
- 45. Taylor, Archive and Repertoire, 3.
- 46. Taylor, Archive and Repertoire, 2.
- 47. Taylor, Archive and Repertoire, 3.
- 48. Taylor, Archive and Repertoire, 15.
- 49. Zumthor, *Performance*, *recepção*, *leitura*, 35–36.
- 50. Connerton, How Societies Remember, 3.
- 51. Connerton, How Societies Remember.
- 52. Connerton, How Societies Remember, 35.
- 53. Connerton, How Societies Remember, 4-5.
- 54. Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire," 284-300.
- 55. See Martins, Afrografias da memória; Martins, "Performances do tempo espiralar."

#### COMPOSITION II: THE CURVED TIMES OF MEMORY

- I. Couto, Under the Frangipani, 43.
- 2. Jones, Blues People, 27-28.
- 3. An Opele is a divination chain used in traditional African and African American (in a broader sense) religions. [Trans.]
  - 4. See Roach, "Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World," 61.
  - 5. Tavares, Gramáticas das corporeidades afrodiaspóricas, 22.
  - 6. Turner, From Ritual to Theatre, 82.
  - 7. Aguessy, "Traditional African Views and Apperceptions," 84-85.
  - 8. Aguessy, "Traditional African Views and Apperceptions," 93-94.
  - 9. Aguessy, "Traditional African Views and Apperceptions," 101.
  - 10. Santos, "Tradição e contemporaneidade," cited in Santos, Corpo e ancestralidade, 112.
- 11. See Martins, "A cena em sombras"; Martins, A cena em sombras; Martins, Afrografias da memória.
- 12. See Martins, "A cena em sombras"; Martins, A cena em sombras; Martins, Afrografias da memória; Fu-Kiau, "Ntanga-Tandu-Kola: The Bantu-Kongo Concept of Time"; Fu-Kiau, "A visão Bântu-Kôngo da sacralidade do mundo natural"; Thompson, Flash of the Spirit.
  - 13. Santos, Os Nagô e a morte, 130-31.
  - 14. Santos, Os Nagô e a morte, 165.
  - 15. Gates, Signifying Monkey, 8–10.
- 16. Gates, Signifying Monkey, 6. See also Martins, A cena em sombras; Martins, Afrografias da memória.
  - 17. Sodré, *Pensar nagô*, 187–88.
- 18. "The Congados, or Reinados, are an alternative religious system that has instituted itself in the very realm of the Catholic religion, in which the devotion to certain saints (Our Lady of the Rosary, Saint Benedict, Santa Iphigenia, and Our Lady of the Mercies) is accomplished by means of African-style performance rituals, with their metaphysi-