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## **Black Feminism and the Feeling of the Sublime in the Performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!***

**Abstract** This paper presents a criticism of the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* by Michelle Mattiuzzi and the self-reflection on it published in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Biennial of São Paulo – “Live Uncertainty” (2016) – entitled *Written Performance Photography Experiment*. To this end, we emphasize the performance’s formal elements alongside aspects of the history of racist practices and theories in Brazil, in addition to the official historiography concerning the black population, which contextualize the feelings of pain and horror impregnating both the artist’s personal experience and her performance.

Accordingly, the elements of this performance that can incite feelings of pleasure in the observer such as the resistance of black women and their political representation are analyzed in the field of art and culture. Lastly, to conclude, this paper argues about the possibilities of the performance’s fruition. This argument is based on the artist’s text and certain constituent arguments of the feeling of the sublime’s concept, as presented by Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant and Jean-François Lyotard.

Considering an analogy with the aesthetics of the sublime, it is argued that *Merci Beaucoup Blanco!* gravitates in the atmosphere of horror, pain and shock, recalling/suggesting feelings of racial violence and discrimination still existing in Brazil. This performance of a black woman against racist oppression also constitutes an act of resistance of the artist, capable of awakening feelings of pleasure in their watchers. The public then moves from shock, pain and horror to contentment of the political consciousness of race, gender, and class.

**Keywords:** art criticism; black art; performance; sublime; racism.

### **Between art and life: body painting and the eugenicist thought in Brazil**

This text refers to the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* of Michelle Mattiuzzi in the midst of risk and unpredictability in the ‘here and now’ of the performance event and the possible “psychosocial influences and motivations”<sup>1</sup> that constitute the

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<sup>1</sup> Florestan Fernandes, *O negro no mundo dos Brancos*, my translation. (São Paulo: Global, 2007), 208 [all translations in the text are made by the author, A. L. L.].

modes of feeling and “representing, poetically, feelings, aspirations and frustrations that could be understood as part of the life experience”<sup>2</sup> of black women in Brazil.

We will begin with a brief description of the “rite” proposed by Mattiuzzi particularly, the actions discussed in this text, they are: the act of the artist to paint herself with her own hands entirely in white ink and the moment she removes the needles that are holding the metallic mask fixed on her face. Accordingly, the analysis refers exclusively to the video documenting the performance that is part of the collection of the Videobrasil Cultural Association (SP), produced in Vienna in 2017.



**Figure 1:** *merci beaucoup, blanco!* by Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi. Videobrasil Historical Collection. Photography: Pedro Napolitano Prata

At the beginning of the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!*, Mattiuzzi is naked and sitting on her back on a round wooden swivel seat. She’s breathing through three perforated round metal structures. These structures are stitched together and it’s tied to the artist’s hair by three red ribbons. This type of mask alludes the torture performed during the enslaved period. One of the ribbons is placed in the height of her nose, it passes between the eyes and is fixed by two needles on her forehead. The other two ribbons leave the height of the mouth, one on each side of the face, and are fixed by two needles on her cheeks.

Sensually caressing her body, the artist paints herself with white ink with her own hands. Then, she walks towards a seat and stands upon it, extending her arms in a horizontal direction. Following that, she begins to untie the ribbons attached to

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

her dreadlocks. Carefully, and with enough composure, she takes the needles from her forehead. She then removes the needles attached to her cheeks. At this moment, we see her whole face for the first time and there are three needles spiked vertically, closing her mouth. She removes the needles slowly and her head hangs back, demonstrating dizziness and pain. The blood runs down her forehead, her eyes watered and the performance ends.

According to this description of the performance, there is no rational and logical narrative with beginning, middle and end, that focuses on certain content or message to be transmitted. Instead, collage is used as a structuring axis, that is, “juxtaposition and collage of images not originally close”<sup>3</sup>. In other words, using mainly her body, Mattiuzzi overlaps images distant from each other, unlikely to be experienced in daily life, which possibly determines the strangeness to the public. However, such distance from everyday events does not cause a break between art and life, “on the contrary, it will enable the stimulation of the sensory apparatus for other readings of the events of life.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the actions unleashed by this performance, there is a rearrangement, a rereading, a “reconstruction of the world”<sup>5</sup> with the purpose of subverting it. Let’s remember that, “the artist recreating images and objects remains to be who does not conform to reality. He never takes it for granted. He aims through his alchemical process of transformation, arrives at another reality – a reality that does not belong to every day.”<sup>6</sup>

The consciousness of the uninterrupted physical and psychological racist violence directed at the black population motivated the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* The critical sensitivity with which the artist understands her own experience and the solidarity is shown with other black women in situations of vulnerability overflows in the performance field. Hence, when Mattiuzzi paints her entire naked body in white, she brings out the feelings around the oppression experienced in a society whose ideals focus on whitening part of the Brazilian population or the Black population’s extinction. It refers to the experience of being black in a society which aesthetic and moral standards are determined by the dominant white ideology. In this conception, it’s understood that black people should try to be similar to white people. In other words, they should become white.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Renato Cohen, *Performance como linguagem. Criação de um tempo-espaço de experimentação* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2002), 60.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 61–2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fernandes, *O negro no mundo dos Brancos*, 45. Neusa Santos, *Tornar-se negro ou as vicissitudes da Identidade do Negro Brasileiro em Ascensão Social* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda, 1990), 17.



**Figure 2:** *merci beaucoup, blanco!* by Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi. Videobrasil Historical Collection. Photography: Pedro Napolitano Prata

The eugenic theory starts to transit in the imagination of the Brazilian population through scientific expeditions made in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by theorists such as Gustave Le Bon, Arthur de Gobineau, Louis Agassiz and Louis Couty. By observing the *mestizaje* in Brazil, they understood that this society was unable to develop itself in respect to the civility values, due to its hybrid constitution.

In Brazil, the doctor and pharmacist Renato Kehl, notoriously influenced by the theorists referred above, affirms the eugenic ideas through publications such as *Lessons from Eugenics* (1929), *Sex and Civilization* (1933), *Why I am Eugenicist: 20 years old of the eugenic campaign 1917–1937* (1937) and also through several articles in magazines and lectures were given about this subject. In addition, Kehl founded in 1918 the “Eugenic Society of São Paulo”, with 140 associate doctors. Kehl’s eugenics ideology prioritized the development of awareness in the Brazilian population, whose purpose was “become general the public interest for the social protection by the eugenics program, the promotion of dignified paternity, the procreation impediment of the defective and the perverted”<sup>8</sup>. Through this ideology, “discussions about the restriction of immigration, the obligation of a prenuptial medical examination, the control of marriages, [...] and the sterilization of the unfit”<sup>9</sup> became public. In these terms, racial segregation was promoted, supported by pseudoscience.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Renato Kehl, 1929, 39, quoted from: Denis Henrique, Fiuza, “A Propaganda da Eugenia no Brasil: Renato Kehl e a implantação do racismo científico no Brasil a partir da obra ‘Lições de Eugenia;’” *Aedos* 8, 19 (2016): 96.

<sup>9</sup> Vanderlei Sebastião de Souza, “A política biológica como projeto: a ‘eugenia negativa’ e a construção da nacionalidade na trajetória de Renato Kehl (1917–1932), dissertaton (Mestrado em História das Ciências), Fundação Oswaldo Cruz, Rio de Janeiro, 215 f, 2006, 13.

The ideology of ‘stimulating a eugenic education’ is present in article 138 of the Constitution of the Republic of the United States of Brazil of 1934. In the book *Brazilian Political Institutions* (1949), Oliveira Viana presents an analysis of how much the black people and their culture would have disseminated in the country’s regions. According to the authors presented, the North, Northeast and South regions would not have absorbed the black culture in alarming terms, so that, especially in the South, the ‘selection process’ would be ‘practically complete’. In São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro there would have been a “reaction movement of the police authorities [...] against *candomblés*<sup>10</sup> and *terreiros*”,<sup>11</sup> which would prove to be a “selective reaction of Aryan culture”.<sup>12</sup>

The black element as a cultural factor is therefore transitory in our civilization – and all its ‘traits’ will have to disappear as Aryan (European) ‘culture’ increases its penetration and diffusion in the mass, in consequence of the increasing densification of the white immigration coefficient – because the African flow has been stagnated since 1850. Brazil is destined to have an exclusively European culture within a hundred or two hundred years. Black people will survive only through the heredity of the blood – because it is ineliminable.<sup>13</sup>

Oliveira Vianna idealized the whitening of the Brazilian population with the intention of its development and its modernization. To this end, “the culture of the dominant group” should impose “its characters, eliminating those of the culture of the dominated group, through the selective mechanism with which its ‘integration’ takes place.”<sup>14</sup> It is evident that this idea did not materialize, but remained in the imagination of the Brazilian population in order to promote racial discrimination, which determines the physical and psychological violence directed at black people. According to Florestan Fernandes, people considered as “white” in Brazil live a “contradictory accommodation” in relation to the racial issue, because, discrimination “is condemned without reservation, as if it were evil in itself, more degrading for the practitioner than for its victim.”<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, some conservative freedom is maintained in relation to racist practices, that is, discriminatory actions are preserved in the “intimate that subsists in the home recess” or they are associated with impositions resulting from the agents’ way of being or style, for which they ‘have a duty to care’<sup>16</sup>. To this end, a false decorum remains in order to conceal racial discrimination, which determines the conception of ‘cordial racism’ practiced in Brazil.

<sup>10</sup> Afro-Brazilian religion.

<sup>11</sup> Place where Afro-Brazilian religion is practiced.

<sup>12</sup> Oliveira Viana, *Instituições políticas brasileiras*, Vol. 2 (Brasília: Conselho Editorial do Senado Federal, Coleção Biblioteca Básica Brasileira, 1999), 563.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 437.

<sup>15</sup> Fernandes, *O negro no mundo dos Brancos*, 41.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 41–42.

### The metallic mask as a symbol of the slave violence



**Figure 3:** *merci beaucoup, blanco!* by Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi. Videobrasil Historical Collection. Photography: Pedro Napolitano Prata

By wearing the metal mask, the artist revisits the pain felt by Anastasia,<sup>17</sup> who would have lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century among many other brave black warriors. It is noteworthy that, in the process of creating this performance, Mattiuzzi claims that black women in miserable conditions on the streets of Salvador, where she currently lives, would also be a motivation for her presentation.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, this performance ‘discusses’ in its own way the ignorance or neglect related to the damage caused by the slavery past to the black population, which is perpetuated until contemporary times in the form of racial discrimination.

Even in the period of the slavery, there would be no reasonable justification for the use of the tinplate gag because of the cruelty of this practice, unless we agree with

<sup>17</sup> Although there is still doubt about the existence of Anastasia, she is worshiped as a saint and heroine in Afro-Brazilian religions in the contemporaneity. She is described as a beautiful blue-eyed woman, a descendant of the Bantu people, originally from Congo. His mother Delminda was raped by a white man, and then Anastácia was born. She participated in the struggle of resistance to the slave system. In colonial times, her beauty attracted even more violence from lords and their jealous wives, which would lead to punishment by the use of the tinplate gag until her death.

<sup>18</sup> Michelle Mattiuzzi, “Encontro com a performer, escritora e pesquisadora do corpo Michelle Mattiuzzi,” SP Escola de Teatro, sede Brás., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3q9ZwEtAdE>, acc. March 3, 2018.

the black writer Machado de Assis, who affirms in *Father against Mother* (1906) that “it was grotesque such mask, but the social and human order is not always reached without the grotesque, and sometimes the cruel.”<sup>19</sup> The writer’s condescension facing such violence is curious. If by ‘social order’ is meant the concept of Comte’s positivist school, which sought the resignation of the working class, torture might even ensure some discipline, but in no way harmonious and balanced but simply atrocious.

Black women “were a pasture of the human bestiality that the slavery generated, [...] to serve on dessert pieces of black mistresses to the lords or whom they admired – or simply because they were so beautiful and overshadowed their ladies’ pallor – was common.”<sup>20</sup> The jealous *sinhás* (ladies) ordered that the slave’s women had their teeth broken or torn out by a hammer. Their eyes were torn out, their breasts were cut off, and served at meals for the ladies’s husbands, “who often ate them not to denounce himself as the victims’ lovers.”<sup>21</sup>

In the period of low slave prices, black newborns were killed, because the mother could not spend her time caring for her baby and should turn exclusively to work. In addition, the lords would have spent money on poor baby feeding, which in turn would only bring some productive return by the time they were sixteen. As evidenced in documents at the time, raising these children would not be profitable, because in just one year of work, in harvesting a crop, the adult slave would pay his price (300 \$ 000) and the following years of work would mean profits.<sup>22</sup> Another determining factor in the interest of the death of black babies would be related to the rent of the wet nurse, who earned twice as a coffee picker (600 \$ 000).<sup>23</sup> And even in 1871, with the “Law of Free Birth”, in “every twenty black babies born only one survived.”<sup>24</sup>

During slavery, the horror directed at the black population continues to be represented in the sexual abuse of virgin black children and teenagers, aged between 10 and 15 years old, by white men who commonly sought to cure syphilis.<sup>25</sup> In addition, chronicles of the nineteenth century<sup>26</sup> narrate that families survived by forcing their slaves to prostitute themselves, an act legitimized by article 179 of the Empire’s Constitution, which ensured full ownership.

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<sup>19</sup> Machado de Assis, “Pai contra mãe,” in *Relíquias da casa velha* (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, 1906), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Julio José Chiavenato, *O negro no Brasil* (São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1986), 10, 132.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 139.



**Figure 4:** Jacques Etienne Arago, *Slaves Punishment*, 1839.<sup>27</sup>

Facing the feelings incited by the metallic mask, it is worth mentioning the intrinsic transgressive character of the performance art, whose purpose is to transpose “the impediments and interdictions that reality”<sup>28</sup> imposes on us. This way, there is a dialectical movement in this ‘rite’, that’s it, the black body of Mattiuzzi, which routinely faces the oppressive racist barbarism, symbolized by the mask, exhibits these atrocities and the resistance to them. Because

Know yourself like a black woman is to live the experience of being massacred in your identity, confused in your perspectives, subjected to demands, compelled to alienated expectations. But it is also, and above all, the experience of committing to redeeming her history and recreating herself in her potentialities.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Museu Afro Brasil, <http://museuafrobrasil.org.br/pesquisa/indice-biografico/lista-de-biografias/2016/04/07/jacques-etienne-arago---obras>. Acc. March 7, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *Performance como linguagem*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> Neusa Santos Souza, *Tornar-se negro ou as vicissitudes da Identidade do Negro Brasileiro em Ascensão Social* (Rio de Janeiro: Edições Graal Ltda, 1990), 17–18.



Mattiuzzi affirms<sup>30</sup> that assume the risk in the performance art, accessing certain physical and psychological pains leaves her in a permanent emotional disorder, but this experience with body art makes possible the knowledge of herself and the realization of her autonomy. According to Cohen,

In direct line with counterculture artists, performance practitioners are part of the last stronghold that Susan Sontag calls ‘heroes of radical will’, people who do not submit their selves to the system’s cynicism and practice at the expense of their personal lives an art of transcendence<sup>31</sup>.

Using the metallic mask, Mattiuzzi confronts the cynicism of the society racial prejudice that originally presents a hybrid constitution in order to subvert the oppressive racist logic. Racism stops her voice and body as the tinplate gag did in the slave period. Here, it is noteworthy the disenchantment and the clashes felt in the academic environment, which proved to be unwelcome to the artist. At the time, she should be evolved with self-knowledge through the development of her potential as an artist for to get her autonomy, but she perceives that public and private education institutions reproduce the racial discrimination and the ideology of a white dominant class that there are in the streets. Thus, indignation is felt in this coexistence, as it is evident in her writings:

a great revolt moves my body against some white college students, especially those of opinion-forming profile, ‘white’ artist [...] who try at any cost to morally disqualify me, and consequently all black people who stand up and claim with them rights that these students already have.<sup>32</sup>

*Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* is set in the violence, pain and horror that inhabit the body of the black woman since her kidnapping in her homeland until nowadays in Brazil. The political gesture of this performance art according to awareness of the damage done to black women, who still remain impaired by inconsistencies in perceptions through negative stereotypes. It is known that “a whole device of attributing negative qualities to black people is designed with the objective of keeping the space of social participation of black people in the same narrow limits of the”<sup>33</sup> slave order.

<sup>30</sup> Mattiuzzi, “Encontro com a performer, escritora e pesquisadora do corpo Michelle Mattiuzzi.”

<sup>31</sup> Cohen, *Performance como linguagem*, 45.

<sup>32</sup> Michelle Mattiuzzi, “*Merci beaucoup, Blanco!* Escrito, Experimento, Fotografia, Performance,” Publicação comissionada pela Fundação Bienal de São Paulo em ocasião da 32a Bienal de São Paulo – Incerteza Viva, São Paulo, 2016, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Souza, *Tornar-se negro ou as vicissitudes da Identidade do Negro Brasileiro em Ascensão Social*, 20.



**Figure 5:** *merci beaucoup, blanco!* by Musa Michelle Mattiuzzi. Videobrasil Historical Collection. Photography: Pedro Napolitano Prata

Finally, when Mattiuzzi removes the mask in *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!*, she faces the racist violence and, although her face bleeds and her body shows fatigue, she exhibits some relief in the enjoyment of the resistance. There is also some manifest contentment in the autonomy and courage to represent herself from the understanding of her history and ancestry with the purpose of developing her artistic, intellectual and moral potential as a black woman. In this performance, the artist shows herself in a harmonious acceptance of her black body attributes. Her acceptance also subverts the whitening and Eurocentric stereotypes which insist on subjugating black women in Brazil. The artist affirms that the actions in the performance are “micropolitics of resistance”<sup>34</sup> that free her “from rejection of her own body, which means to go” [...] “at full speed in the will to live to re-exist.”<sup>35</sup> She insists: I am a black woman, out of the standards and symmetries accepted by the normativity of a colonial society that affirms the representations of Eurocentric supremacy. I tell the people that I stay.<sup>36</sup>

In *Merci Beaucoup Blanco!*, Mattiuzzi shows herself in a harmonious acceptance of her black body attributes, subverting the claims of whitening and Eurocentric stereotypes, which insist on subduing black women in Brazil. In this sense, her performance refers to a positive reconstruction of black identity in Brazil’s public

<sup>34</sup> Mattiuzzi, “*Merci beaucoup, Blanco!* Escrito, Experimento, Fotografia, Performance,” 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

imagination, no longer represented by supposed inferiority, passivity and incapacity. Therefore, it is intended to give visibility to the stigma, to break the Eurocentric beauty standards and representations of subaltern behaviors, which still falls on black women in Brazil.

### **The reception of the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* From the sublime aesthetics**

Even though *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* gravitates in the atmosphere of horror, pain and shock, precisely to bring to the surface the feeling about slavery violence and racial discrimination – still existing in Brazil – the performance of a black woman against racist oppression constitutes an act of resistance of the artist. Consequently, it incites feelings of pleasure in its observers and these feelings are in accordance with the aesthetics of the sublime. The public would then move from the shock, pain, and horror to the contentment about political awareness of race, gender, and class in the country.

The feeling of the sublime is understood by Burke as “anything that is in any way capable of inciting ideas of pain and danger, that is, anything that is in any way terrible or related to terrible objects or acts in a manner analogous to terror” with the potential to produce “the strongest emotion that the spirit is capable.”<sup>37</sup> Among the greatness capable of arousing the sublime sentiment, Burke enumerates the deprivation of something, the obscurity – the lack of an integral understanding of some imminent danger – the vastness of the phenomena observable in nature, the power that imposes itself to unveil human fragility, difficulty, and magnificence, among others. These are the causes of the astonishment that suspends the reasoning and the action of the individuals affected by such greatness. However, if pain and danger do not constitute a ‘decidedly imminent threat’ to the subject, enjoyment of delight may occur.

Kant continues the argumentation about this feeling by claiming that it is incited by the force and rapturous greatness of nature, so that, the subject feels subjugated to such power. Faced with these phenomena, it would have a conflict between the faculties of imagination and reason because of the impotence of the imagination in the face of the immensity and the force with nature shows itself. Thus, the limit of this faculty is experienced in the attempt to apprehend the form of the phenomenon in its multiplicity and power. In experiencing human fragility, the subject then resorts to reason, which in its turn will be independent and superior to the senses and nature. There is, therefore, the possibility of pleasure,

it is a pleasure that arises only indirectly, that is, it is produced by the feeling of a momentary inhibition of the vital forces and by the immediately

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<sup>37</sup> Edmund Burke, *Uma investigação filosófica sobre a origem de nossas ideias do sublime e do belo* (Campinas: Papirus: Editora da Universidade de Campinas, 1993), 48.

consecutive effusion and stronger of them [...] Hence, it is also incompatible with attractive, and while the mood is not simply attracted by objects, but alternately also always again repelled by it, the pleasure of the sublime contains not so much positive pleasure as much more admiration or respect, this is deserves to be called negative pleasure.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, the feeling of the sublime refers to the certain disposition of spirit determined by the greatness and strength of natural phenomena and is based on human rational capacity. However, in order to achieve enjoyment, the subject must be safe and there must also be a development of his faculties of knowledge in the culture and moral ideas, because, “in truth, what we, prepared by culture, call sublime, without development of moral ideas, will present itself to the uncultured man simply in a terrifying way.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition, still according to Kant, for this feeling, we could require an agreement in society. Hence, if when one sees the performance *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* one feels the agitation of the contradictory feelings of pleasure and displeasure, analogous to the aesthetics of the sublime, one can require the consent of others to this judgment. It is because, from the notion of the transcendental subject, everyone is conceived to be endowed with the faculties of knowledge: imagination and reason are required for the reflection judgment of the sublime.

In this critique, the phenomenon capable of unleashing feelings analogous to the sublime would be the “rite” constituted by the actions proposed by Mattiuzzi in *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* To use Burke’s terms, this performance is inscribed in the aesthetics of the sublime symbolizing the deprivation of justice, peace, and solidarity brought to view by the metallic mask pinned with needles to her face alluding to the tinplate gag used in the period of slavery. Furthermore, the artist’s attempt to cover her body with white paint, which, as already mentioned, refers to the hegemonic Eurocentric domination and by the pain experienced by the artist removing the needles from her face contribute to the same inscription in the aesthetics of the sublime. “Therefore, all that is terrible to the vision is equally sublime”<sup>40</sup> by unveiling the ideas of pain and danger, according to Burke’s arguments.

Facing the exposition to violence committed against the black woman in the slave period and nowadays, which is perceptible in the actions of this performance, the audience is haunted. According to the Kantian perspective on the faculties of knowledge that determine the sublime feeling, facing the ‘rite’ proposed in *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* we experience a certain failure of the understanding and the imagination by not conceiving the actual necessity of this unreasonable cruelty dispensed to the other. As a result, we experience terror and impotence. The passage from these feelings of terror and shock to the pleasures regarded as negative, admiration and respect, occurs

<sup>38</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Crítica da Faculdade do Juízo* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Forense Universitária, 2005), 90.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>40</sup> Burke, *Uma investigação filosófica sobre...*, 65–66.

when the subject uses reason and consciously perceives the possibilities of transposing racist oppression through their political position in society. Let us remember that for the enjoyment of negative pleasures, the development of the faculties of knowledge in the field of culture and morality is indispensable, otherwise, the observer does not transpose the feelings of deprivation and danger.

According to Lyotard's perspective<sup>41</sup> on his critique of Barnett Newman's paintings from the aesthetics of the sublime, *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* propitiates an event, an 'occurrence' which happens specifically in the aesthetic experience, that is, in the time experienced in particular by the observer viewing the performance. It is an "instant that 'falls' or 'arrives' unpredictably"<sup>42</sup> which in its turn would indicate a sense for the feeling; thus, "the agitation between life and death",<sup>43</sup> being that "this agitation is your health and your life"<sup>44</sup> or "a new way of feeling life".<sup>45</sup> Regarding the fruition of his work, Mattiuzzi argues:

I found myself in "Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!" Experiment in art performance – my black presence naked – make my body pass-through for all and, thus, I finally reconstitute myself: I want to become a body, no matter what it may result. *Rejection, exclusion, purging, trauma, inferiority, oppression, horror, shock* [...] My body as a black woman, my marginalized body surrounded by these ideas and they, each in its form, contribute to the definition of my social existential precariousness, although the *indefiniteness* is sometimes one of my main characteristics; exactly the one that allows me the subversive use of the senses of existing in capitalism as a compulsory migration.<sup>46</sup>

The feelings of "rejection, exclusion, purgation, trauma, inferiority, oppression, horror, shock", mentioned by Mattiuzzi as possible feelings incited by performance, constitute feelings of displeasure, analogous to the aesthetics of the sublime, as we have shown. In these comments by Mattiuzzi, it is also worth mentioning the aspect of the indefiniteness as an existential characteristic of her and of her presentation. The indefinite or "indeterminate" to use Lyotard's terminology, is associated with silence, recovered from the aesthetics of the sublime of Longinus, that is, "the sublime is the

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<sup>41</sup> In the work *Inhuman, considerations on the time*, Lyotard elaborates a critique about Barnett Newman's paintings from the aesthetics of the sublime. In this text, we use the concept of the "occurrence" of this Lyotard's critique work in order to discuss the possibilities of fruition in the *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* performance.

<sup>42</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *L'inhumain, causeries sur le temps* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1988), 93.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>45</sup> Barnett Newman, "The Sublime is Now (1948)," in *Barnett Newman: Selected Writings and Interviews*, ed. John P. O'Neill (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 172.

<sup>46</sup> Mattiuzzi, "Encontro com a performer, escritora e pesquisadora do corpo Michelle Mattiuzzi."

echo of the greatness of the soul”.<sup>47</sup> In this perspective, the sublime is not enunciated by words, but still, we feel something:

This gross admiration is the meeting with the naked thought, the thought in itself, the great thought. We can hear it somehow resound in the silence. He is strong enough to make himself heard without a voice, for his own greatness.<sup>48</sup>

In the case of performance, the muted black body would be able to expose its greatness and strength through the contradictory feelings of displeasure and pleasure aroused in its public. In the face of the performative ‘rite’, the observers would feel so full that they could not even reason about what they see. The feelings that affect them, in an ‘irresistible’ way, precede any reasoning about possible messages to be deciphered.<sup>49</sup> In *Merci Beaucoup, Blanco!* the message and the messenger are summed up in Mattiuzzi’s body, which simply indicates the meaning to the feelings experienced, in particular, by the observers. Therefore, what we consume is the ‘occurrence’ of the performance which is the artist’s naked black body. Her body overflows with her history, ancestry, gender and traverses the public with a terrifying force, capable to provoke a new way of feeling and thinking about life.

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