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Joana Dark and the werewolf woman: the rite of passage of our lady

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ABSTRACT

This essay deals with unexpected aspects of field experience in Aparecida, particularly from the viewpoint of a carnival fair. An image of Our Lady is there juxtaposed to that of a werewolf woman. So as to discuss the montage-like effects of this experience, an attempt is made to accompany a double rite of passage involving symmetrically inverted movements of Our Lady and pilgrims. First, the pilgrimage of devotees. Then, of Our Lady. Unresolved questions arise, as from the bottom of a river. A tragic story of Our Lady unfolds. In the beginning, a body without a head. And a head without a body.

Key words: *Aparecida, ritual, werewolf woman, body, carnival fair*

1. Introduction

In this essay, using fieldnotes taken in 1983 and 1984, I plan to revisit Aparecida do Norte. The meeting with Our Lady took place in special circumstances. When I encountered her image, a werewolf woman appeared.

The visit took place during a bus trip organized by members of a soccer team from Jardim das Flores (Garden of Flowers) neighborhood. This small abyss on the periphery of Piracicaba, in the interior of São Paulo, had about 100 shacks. In one of them, as an apprentice of Malinowski's trade, I was taken in by a couple from Minas Gerais, Anaoj and Mr Z. And by the soccer team. With a sharp sense of humor, Jardim das Flores was also known by its residents as the *buraco dos capetas* [Devils' Hole or, more literally, a hole of little devils].¹

In Aparecida, I came upon a ritual process as well as a type of theater. According to Roland Barthes (1990:85), theater can be defined as an "activity that calculates the place where things are seen". I believe that this definition is also useful as a way of talking about a ritual process. Particularly if we can expand the metaphor. Through ritual, as in theater, one experiences a dislocation of the place where things are *sensed*. The sense of the world, Constance Classen (1993) reminds us, is formed through the senses of the body.

In other texts, I have dealt with theatrical aspects of a ritual experience in Aparecida (Dawsey 2000; Dawsey 2006). Inverting this approach, I now intend to explore ritual dimensions of an experience that can also be considered theatrical. I will do this in two parts. In the first I accompany devotees in a rite of passage. This experience entails not only a foreseen dislocation to the margins, that is, to the sacred places of Aparecida: the basilicas, the room of miracles and altar where the image of the saint is

¹ The proper names found in the text can be considered literary fiction created by the researcher, generally registered in fieldnotes like ancient Hebrew, without vowels. This observation is also valid for the name "Jardim das Flores". The term "buraco dos capetas" is real fiction, born from the poetry of the residents.

located. It also involves a double dislocation to the margins of margins: the experience in the amusement park. There one comes upon the attractions of the gorilla woman, the snake woman and the werewolf woman.

In the second part, the starting point is altered. Would it be possible for one to speak of Our Lady's rite of passage? Exploring this perspective, I seek to accompany the saint in a movement that goes from basilicas to street vendors, shops and amusement park. Liminal experience occurs for the saint, not in the domain of the church, but on its outskirts, in profane places. Instead of a religious illumination, a profane illumination is witnessed.² Something is discovered. From the whirlpools of Our Lady's originary history a broken body emerges. An issue arises: the experience of montage as a healing rite. At the margins of margins the *buraco dos capetas* is illuminated. Thus, with Arnold Van Gennep's (1978) guidance, we come upon the holy mother at a moment of incorporation: she returns to the cathedral, and to everyday life that is experienced, in this case, in the domain of the sacred.

The text below results from the surprise encountered during field experience in an amusement park. An image of the saint is juxtaposed to that of a werewolf woman. As in the montages that Sergei Eisenstein (1990) produced in cinema, the planes collide.³ What can be said of this collision? Can a two-way rite of passage involving symmetrically inverted movements of saint and devotees illuminate this montage?

Passing on to the rite, I present as a preamble an exclamation of Dln, a widow from the *sertão* (backlands) of Bahia, and who had just seen a movie on television:⁴

“Joan of Arc, woman warrior! That was a real woman, a saint! She was afraid of no man. She put on that armor and went to the heat of battle to defend her people. She confronted arrows, swords, cannon fire! ‘I am not afraid! Victory is ours!’ she cried. She went ahead, the soldiers behind. The enemy came, legions came, she confronted them. She didn't run, no. She fought, she killed. She is a woman warrior” (21.1.84)

Two images are juxtaposed: a saint and a woman who kills. From the collision of these two factors a concept is born: Joan of Arc. The saint bursts forth as a “woman of truth” – who kills and dresses as a man. This is a Brechtian principle: people (normally) do scary things.⁵

With such methodological disposition –with astonishment! – I invite fe/male readers (the juxtaposition of genders, in this case, can be revealing) to the exercise that begins below, revisiting fieldnotes, in the company of Anaoj, in Aparecida do Norte. A saint is also possibly revealed there with shock effects.

² This involves – as I reword what Benjamin (1985a:33) said about surrealism – a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as extraordinary, and the extraordinary as everyday.

³ “What, then, characterizes montage and consequently, its cell – the plane? A collision. The conflict of two pieces in opposition to each other. Conflict. Collision.” (cf. Eisenstein 1990:41)

⁴ *Sertão* refers to the backlands of Brazil, particularly the parched regions of Northern Minas Gerais and of the Brazilian Northeast.

⁵ In the final verses of the didactic play *Exception and the Rule* (Brecht 1994:160), the actors direct themselves to the public:

“In the familiar, discover the uncommon.
In the everyday, unveil the inexplicable.
May which is habitual provoke shock.
In the rule, discover the abuse.
And whenever abuse is discovered
Look for a cure.”
(Cf. Peixoto 1981: 60)

We begin with the rite of passage of devotees from the *buraco dos capetas*. A reminder: according to the model of Van Gennep, a rite of passage may be subdivided into rites of 1) separation, 2) transition (or *limen*) and 3) incorporation. As already mentioned, still a fourth is suggested, involving a double dislocation, to the margins of the margins (or *limen of limen*).

2. Rite of passage of devotees

2.1. Rite of separation: leaving Jardim das Flores.

Anaoj was a devotee of Our Lady Aparecida. “Who is the strongest saint, Anaoj?” “For me”, she responded, “Our Lady Aparecida is the strongest. I pray mostly to her.” (25.8.83) Then came *Sant’Ana*. On Anaoj’s cupboard, alongside an image of *Nossa Senhora do Desterro* (Our Lady of Exile) and a photo of the *Menino da Tábua* (Boy on a Board), one finds Our Lady Aparecida.⁶

In 1984, the excursion organized by residents of Jardim das Flores left on a Saturday night, October 13, one day after the date celebrating Our Lady Aparecida. Before leaving, Bible readings and Hail-Marys took place in the shack of Mn Prt, the nephew of Anaoj and captain of the soccer team. We climbed the hill to the place where the bus was stationed. Anaoj and her youngest son, Wlsnh, chose two seats which later they were surprised to discover to be the very seats marked on their tickets. Anaoj said: “You see? It’s because of the saint!” As the bus left, the captain of the team made note of the presence of women and children, reminding everyone that this was a journey of devotion to Our Lady and not a soccer team trip. Fireworks burst in air.

2.2. Rites of transition: altar, basilicas and the miracle room.

Traveling through the night, we reached Aparecida at 5 A.M.. More fireworks exploded upon arrival. In the parking lot, where soon there would be hundreds of buses, we found ourselves in front of a church of giant proportions. Huge and majestic, the New Basilica dominates the landscape of Aparecida. Consecrated during the 1980 visit of Pope John Paul II to Brazil, the image of this church multiplies on tee-shirts, magazine covers, newspapers, post cards and television news. In Aparecida one learns that this is the largest basilica in the world. In 1982, the image of the patron saint of Brazil was transferred from the Old Basilica, or the *Capela do Morro dos Coqueiros* (Chapel of Coconut Hill), to the New Basilica. On knees, a man slowly climbs the steps of the stairway. In his arms is a child.

At 6:30 A.M. we participate in the first mass. During prayer, we hear the murmur of people talking. After mass, as if pulled by gravity, people turning into multitudes gather in the recesses of the church. In silence, they advance step by step. Here and there eyes glimmer. A tear trickles down. One senses the smell of sweat and the humid contact of bodies. A dark, clay-colored face flashes. Under the watch of the saint, people of the *buraco dos capetas* are transfigured. As they become play actors in cosmic drama they are transformed. At the end of the corridor is a pile of crutches. Through the allegory of the lame and crippled who walk again the powers of Our Lady are illuminated.

Entrance to the lower regions of the basilica suggests an act of purification. Two immense white-tiled bathrooms appear – clean and impeccable. Between them, one finds dozens of sinks for washing hands and faces, teeth and dentures.

Then, one comes to the *sala dos milagres* (room of miracles): a resplendent, overflowing baroque display of the extraordinary prowess, magnificent grace, and marvelous feats of the Mother of God. Crutches reappear in large numbers alongside wooden legs. A mannequin dressed as a bride calls attention. Here and there, model houses look like toys. A world in miniature. There are soccer balls, shoes and shirts. Objects accumulate: harnesses, saddles, boots, sandals, slippers, caps, cattle-horns,

⁶ *Menino da Tábua* (Boy on a Board) also attracted the devotion of pilgrims. Born in poverty and confined to a board, possibly due to poliomyelitis, he was seen by devotees as being a medium for healing.

records, fiddles, guitars, harmonicas, accordions, uniforms, knives, rifles, shot-guns, muskets, muzzle-loading pistols, books and poems. Multitudes of letters lining the room, registered in different calligraphies, evoke sounds of myriad voices and give witness to the immense variety of forms and textures of the writings of devotion. The very walls and ceilings signal the return of the dead and gone, with countless photo-images of *pagadores de promessas* (payers of promises) peering out at the visiting onlookers.⁷ Walter Benjamin's precept is appropriate here: "to 'tidy up' would be to demolish" (Benjamin 1993:39).⁸

Afterwards, devotees follow a walkway to the top of the hill. At this place, the highest point of Aparecida, can be found the *Capela do Morro dos Coqueiros* (Chapel of Coconut Hill), the Old Basilica. Inaugurated in 1888, it was built to receive pilgrims whose numbers kept increasing. In 1908, it was consecrated as a basilica. In 1982, the Old Basilica became a national monument. Surviving, in part, because of an architectural sensibility – to the confluence of baroque and neoclassical elements – the basilica has avoided the fortune of an even older chapel. The first chapel dedicated to the worship of Our Lady Aparecida, inaugurated in 1745 on the *Morro dos Coqueiros* during the Sant'Ana festival, turned into ruins. Its construction had put an end to a 28-year period in which the image of Our Lady Aparecida migrated from house to house among families of fishermen. According to the oft repeated story that has spread throughout Brazil, the image was found in 1717 by three fishermen who cast their nets in the Paraíba River.

2.3. Second dislocation: the amusement park.

The Old Basilica only marks the end of the sacred journey. From there one enters into profane places, following streets and alleys in labyrinthic circuits of shops of popular consumption. We descend. At the end of the route, at the foot of the hill, surprisingly near, although at the margins of the cathedral, one comes upon an amusement park. Amid merry-go-rounds, sharp-shooting galleries, and electric bumper cars, are found the spectacles of women becoming animals: gorilla woman, snake woman, and werewolf woman.

We watched the spectacle of werewolf woman. While standing in a semicircle, in a small room, spectators observe a cage on a stage, from which emerges a light-skinned, pale-looking woman in a bikini. Two men hold her by the arms. In circus style, an announcer with resounding voice and loud speaker prepares us for the wonders we are about to see. After supposedly receiving an injection, the woman is led back into the cage. The lights go out. Thunderclaps are heard. Amid flashes of light, the figure in the cage looms larger. She grabs the cage bars. In a burst of light irrupts the beastly image of a hairy creature with the body and face of an animal. Suddenly the cage breaks open. The creature or specter leaps at spectators. In the commotion, the semicircle breaks apart. Wlshn runs out.

As I wrote elsewhere:

"(...) in these attractions one might choose to see a carnival-like manifestation of chaos in the midst of which emerges a serene order of cosmic proportions. The wildness of these mutant and grotesque women dramatizes, by comparison, the beauty and gentleness of the face of Our Lady Aparecida. The real terror that is engendered by these spectacles, whose artists specialize in the production of fear, magnify possible longings to see oneself in the bosom of the holy mother. While some visitors, in the sanctuary of the new cathedral, in its most sacred recesses, contemplate the peaceful face and eyes of the saint wrapped in a veil of golden lace, others, in the amusement park, witness with a mixture of laughter and astonishment the eruption of ghastly "lower bodily stratum" in the bodies of unclothed, scaly, and hairy women. Like a serpent that tries to swallow its own tail, the

⁷ *Pagadores de promessas* (payers of promises) are devotees who are "paying up" on promises made to Our Lady for blessings received.

⁸ I am here using the English translation found in Benjamin (1996).

cathedral with its luminous towers pointed to the sun, causes tumult and desperation among subterranean forces that erupt at the end of a descending path that coils downhill through the streets of Aparecida do Norte.” (Dawsey 2000:90)

On the other hand, considering the possibility that, in profane places, popular culture has something to say about the ritual process, reformulating, in its own way, the pathways of devotion in Aparecida, would perhaps a montage aesthetic, with shock effects, become manifest in the amusement park? In the final analysis, does not this amusement park, curiously close to the New Basilica, signal the “moment when popular culture, in the manner of a snake woman, raises its tail and plays tricks on the solemn discourse of the official church?” (Dawsey 2006:143)

2.4. Footnotes of a city.

Who was Mary, Our Lady? What did she have to say? In sonorous liturgies of Aparecida do Norte she sings. Traces of her voice are found in the Song of Mary, Lucas 1:46-55. In Aparecida verses 46-50 are registered:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed;
for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation.
(“*Rezemos o terço*” s/d: 59)

The excluded verses (51-55) are noteworthy for their absence:

He has shown strength with his arm,
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,
he has put down the mighty from their thrones,
and exalted those of low degrees;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.
(The Holy Bible)

Sometimes places of a city also disappear like excluded verses, or submerge like footnotes. Just as verses of the Song of Mary remain at the margins of liturgies, some of the attractions of the city are found at the margins of the cathedral, in the amusement park.

In liturgies the image of an intercessor emerges.

“Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen..”

In the *buraco dos capetas*, where numerous images of the mother of God flourish, her deeds are transmitted principally through oral narratives. Rarely do these stories evoke images of a supplicant mother praying on behalf of “sinful” children. Rather they tend to tell about a powerful saint who

brings rain to the *sertão*; who leaves the jaguar in a state of shock; who makes the horse of the arrogant horseman stand still, and come to its knees on the cathedral steps; and so on.

In a scene recalled by Lrds, which made her laugh until tears came from her eyes, the image of *Nossa Senhora* (Our Lady) is associated with a sense of astonishment, or shock. “A tool fell from the scaffold on a woman’s head. The woman exclaimed: ‘*Nossa!* (Oh my!). Mother of heaven!’ Ha ha” (8.10.83).⁹ For the widow Dln, the image of *Nossa Senhora* is associated with the shock experience of a hunter whose unfortunate head finds itself in the mouth of a jaguar. At the moment in which the poor soul cries *nossa!* the image of *Nossa Senhora* flashes, now leaving the jaguar in a state of shock. In amusement parks one learns to say “*Nossa!*” with an exclamation point.

Walter Benjamin saw in amusement parks places for education:

“The masses can attain knowledge only through the small shock that nails an experience securely to one’s innards. Their education is a series of catastrophes that hurry toward them in dark tents at amusement parks and fairs, where anatomy lessons penetrate to the marrow, or at the circus, where the image of the first lion they ever see is bound inextricably to that of the trainer who sticks his fist into the lion’s mouth. It takes genius to extract a traumatic energy, a small, specific terror from things” (*apud* Jennings 1987:82-3)

Before “falling” into the *buraco dos capetas*, *Professor Pardal* (Professor Sparrow), who played the *atabaque* drums in *saravá* sessions, worked in an amusement park in São Paulo.¹⁰ His first invention dates from this period of his life: a mechanical butterfly whose drunken flight takes place on twisted steel at the hallucinatory speed of a roller coaster. During this time he also acquired an interest in books. The type of knowledge gained by devotees at Aparecida, whether in the cathedral or in the amusement park, is not easily transmitted by means of books and written texts. Certainly, the werewolf woman requires a special book, possibly of the type one might find in the *saravá*. Wary as to the motives of the anthropologist, Professor Pardal asked why I would be living in such a place, the *buraco dos capetas*. A little hesitant, I said something about anthropology. “Don’t talk to me about psychology!” he interrupted. I added that anthropologists at times write books. His eyes lit up. “I also *make* books!” Upon opening one of them, the reader gets a 120-volt shock. The innards of the book are full of wires. There are books one learns to make at amusement parks.

2.5. Rite of incorporation: the return.

After the return from Aparecida, people spoke of their experience. With a sense of awe, they told of the enormous cathedral. They described the suffering of the *pagadores de promessas* (payers of promises) who carried crosses and climbed the stairways of the cathedral on their knees. They recalled the people stretched out on the floor of the basilica; they spoke of the people in rags, the sick and lame, and unemployed. At the end of the corridor, in the recesses of the church, they had seen the piles of crutches – allegories of the extraordinary healing powers of the saint. In the *sala dos milagres* (room of miracles), amid a stunning collection of enchanted objects, they saw up close the signs of the wonderful grace of the Mother of God. With emotion, joining multitudes, they had passed by the image of the saint. With reverence, they spoke of how she looked at them. And looked after them. They saw themselves under her watch.

⁹ *Nossa!*, which literally means “our”, is a common expression of astonishment or shock in Brazil.

¹⁰ *Professor Pardal*, which literally means “Professor Sparrow”, is the nickname of an extraordinarily inventive resident of the *buraco dos capetas*. The nickname is inspired by a Disney character, Gyro Gearloose, who is called *Professor Pardal* in Brazil. *Saravá*, which is a form of greeting in the iorubá language, means *salve*, in Portuguese, or “save”. The word here refers to one of the Afro-Brazilian cults. The *atabaque* is a drum which is played in these cults.

Nevertheless, that which people most liked to speak about in conversation after the return from Aparecida, was about the women who became animals. Why should memories of the amusement park and werewolf woman be important?

As I leaf through field notes, some of the entries stand out. There is something strangely familiar in these amusement park attractions. Similarities between the spectacle of the werewolf woman and descriptions which women from Jardim das Flores make of their own experiences of sudden mutation may be somewhat surprising. While speaking with a friend, one woman, Maria dos Anjos, tells of a confrontation she had with a municipal inspector. “I don’t know what comes over me. Sometimes I just go crazy. Crazy with rage. I am just as sane as I am right now as we are talking. But there are times when I go crazy!” Laconically, the other woman said: “I’m like that too.”

When one of the women from Jardim das Flores heard that the owner of a bar had humiliated her husband, demanding, in front of his co-workers, as he got down from the back of a truck of sugarcane cutters, that he pay up on a debt – a debt that had already been paid! – she immediately went to set things straight. “Then, he [the owner of the bar] said: ‘Crazy woman!’ I said: ‘I am crazy! Did you think I was human?! (*Você está pensando que eu sou gente?!*). You’re not going to get rich off of the sweat of Zé and my children!’” *Did you think I was human?!* Such a phrase also resonates in the images that flash in amusement parks.

When a tractor from the municipal government came to a neighboring *favela* (shantytown) to demolish the shacks, a mother of five children *virou bicho* (“turned into an animal”, that is, went into a rage).¹¹ *Virei onça!* (“I became a jaguar!”), she said.¹² Defiantly, she stood in front of the tractor, until neighbors joined her. They also *viraram bicho* and the tractor went away without destroying the shacks.

Another woman confronted a group of men who had surrounded her boy. Neighbors were threatening to give the boy a lesson because of a “stray” stone which had been unleashed by the boy’s hand. According to the report that I heard from a sister-in-law, the mother “jumped into the middle of the Indian village like a madwoman”.¹³ “Come on!”, she said, “I’ll kill the first one that comes!” Her name was Aparecida. With shock effects, Aparecida from the *buraco dos capetas* protected her boy from raging men.

Other stories can be cited. One night, a woman, whose mother’s name was also Aparecida, heard from a neighbor that police investigators at the entrance of the *favela* had stopped her husband. With a knapsack on his back, he was coming home from work. Aparecida’s daughter ran to the place. Nervous, beside herself, and yelling as loudly as she could, the daughter astounded the police. The story was repeated in neighbors’ conversations. Taking pride in her daughter, Aparecida said: “She became crazy with rage! She charged at (*avançou no*) Luisão [the police investigator]!”

In the configuration of a gesture, of women who become “crazy with rage”, *virando bichos* (“turning into animals”) and charging at those who threaten their family and neighborhood networks, a state of bodily innervation is evoked. Although frequently suppressed, such a state is highly valued among residents of the *buraco dos capetas*. In Aparecida do Norte, the image of this gesture flashes in the spectacle of the werewolf woman.

In the previously cited article (Dawsey 2000:91-2), I wrote:

¹¹ *Virar bicho*, which denotes going into a rage, literally means to become an animal.

¹² *Virar onça*, or “to become a jaguar”, means to become ferocious.

¹³ *Pular no meio da aldeia* (“jump into the middle of an Indian village”), I suspect, may be a common expression among people from Bahia and Minas Gerais, such as these women.

“At the margins of the ‘new cathedral’, in the amusement park, with the help of a sort of pedagogy of astonishment, one learns how to *virar bicho* (“become an animal”). Perhaps, in fact, the werewolf woman is strangely proximate to *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*, not, however, as a dramatic contrast, but as a figure that emerges, according to the expression of Carlo Ginzburg (1991), from her *história noturna*. Could it be that some of the most precious hopes and promises associated with the figure of Our Lady are found in the interruption effects – and astonishment – produced by the werewolf woman?”

3. Our Lady’s rite of passage

As we explore the ways in which ritual processes in Aparecida produce dislocations of the places where things are *sensed*, I now suggest another starting point: instead of the *buraco dos capetas*, the basilica and altar of Our Lady. May one speak of Our Lady’s own rite of passage? If the sense of the world is formed, as Classen says, through the senses of the body, it may be necessary to find out what a mother’s body has to say. This may be a question of montage.

3.1. Rite of separation: streets and alleys.

Things are now inverted. At the moment of separation, as we observe Our Lady’s rite of passage, she leaves sacred places: first the altar in the recesses of the new cathedral and then of the Old Basilica, or *Capela do Morro dos Coqueiros*.

“From there, one enters into profane places, descending the hill in a voluminous and fluid movement of people following streets and alleys, spinning and swirling in countless stores and stands where images of the saint rub next to and against an infinity of items of popular consumption. The saint herself seems to go along, in stores and stands, mixing in with pipes, ashtrays, cigarettes, pictures, embroideries, shirts, blouses, trousers, dresses, handkerchiefs, earrings, slippers, shoes, boots, hats, accordions, harmonicas, fiddles, guitars, country music records, Michael Jackson tapes, assortments of sweets and snacks, bottles of wine and *cachaça* (rum), and a profusion of other goods and objects.” (Dawsey 2006:142)

Rather than ascension, a descent. Images of the saint multiply. Her aura seems to partially dissipate. She exposes herself – on storefronts, stands and shelves. In circuits of buying and selling she becomes a commodity. But, even so, amid a plethora of objects and goods of popular consumption, her image is still recognizable.

3.2. Rite of transition: the amusement park.

At the foot of the hill, the amusement park. No more images of the saint are seen. Did she disappear? Did she go back to church before completing the descent? There may be reasons for suspicion. In the big attractions of the park powerful figures of feminine or androgenous gender flash up: snake woman, gorilla woman and werewolf woman. Did the monster-women scare away the holy mother, causing her to retreat? Or did Our Lady herself become other, (nearly) unrecognizable, making an appearance in shocking form? Did Aparecida become an apparition? Perhaps this possibility should not be discarded. In liminal places, persons and things are transformed, as we have seen. Dislocations of the places where things are seen (and *sensed*) here occur. In this way, knowledge is produced. Something is illuminated. When night falls, the park is buzzing. Lights turn on. In Our Lady’s rite of passage, an amusement park possibly becomes the stage for *história noturna* and profane illumination.

As seen earlier, attractions of the park may evoke images belonging to collections of strangely familiar memories. Some of the elementary gestures – should we say *gesthemes*? – of devotees of Our Lady, which disappear in basilicas and *salas de milagres*, flash up in the amusement park. Here one may speak of tension-packed *habitus*. Transformation. Irruption. Sudden movement. Threatening

charge. Frizzled hair. Eyes popping. A show of teeth, or dentures. Or, of an open toothless mouth. The looming body. And an image of a woman *virando bicho* (becoming an animal). The experience one has in an amusement park may evoke the sort of daily shock of living in places like the *buraco dos capetas*. The park also produces the image of an apparition. A reminder: with shock effects Aparecida performs miracles. Even the jaguar she leaves in a state of shock. In the park one learns to say “*nossa!*”. It is a place of learning. Including, who knows, for a holy mother.

Among the gestures that are produced in the spectacle of the werewolf woman, one may deserve special attention: the breaking of the cage. I would suggest that there is something primordial about this gesture. In some of the stories that are told about Our Lady a scene is strangely familiar: before a slave in chains her image glimmers. Shackles break apart. This is one of Our Lady’s first miracles.

With montage effects, by juxtaposing the New Basilica and amusement park a body is formed. In the basilica, an altar. And a face. Attention is drawn to Our Lady’s eyes. Her face is framed by a two-sided mantle, blue on the outside. Red inside. Her hair is covered. Over her head is a crown. The hands are joined in prayer and pointed upwards. But, in the amusement park, images flash of “lower bodily stratum” (cf. Bakhtin 1993). In the spectacle of the werewolf woman, amid sparks and short circuits, a blackout is produced. And, then, a gush of light. A pale woman is transformed into a dark creature. A hairy animal bursts out.

The descent is noteworthy. May one here speak of a return to origins? Of a reversal, or even, a regression? Our Lady comes from below, from the bottom of the river. In liminal places, stories of origin are also remembered.

3.3. A broken body.

By means of a binary classificatory procedure operated by the ritual process in Aparecida, an opposition is instituted between sacred and profane, cathedral and amusement park, Aparecida and werewolf woman, and upper and lower body. As if from the bottom of a river, unresolved questions emerge. And, who knows, the tragic story of Our Lady. At the origins, a body without a head, a head without a body. In 1717, fishermen cast their nets and found the body of the saint without a head. Down river, casting once again, the head of the same image was found in the net. The two parts were joined with “earth wax”. With golden necklaces evidence of a broken image is covered up. The image of Aparecida is broken at the neck. She has undergone many restorations. In 1978, she was the focus of a national drama. Upon being abducted, Brazil’s patron saint smashed to the ground. During this history, the body of Our Lady has generated debate. At the center of discussion, an issue emerges: the specificity of her body. The body has color. It is the color of dark clay. Our Lady comes from the bottom of a river.

3.4. At the margins of the margins: the *buraco dos capetas*.

After a *saravá* session, in the Jardim das Flores, where Professor Pardal played the *atabaque* drum, the *mãe de santo* (“mother of saint”) explained that the illnesses that afflicted the people who came to be healed would oftentimes become manifest in her own body.¹⁴ Healing of others, as of a social body, has to do with the healing of her own body. Did the pathways of Aparecida indicate ways of healing similar to those which could be found in the *saravá*? Was Our Lady’s rite of passage – involving departure from a sacred and separate place, and descent to the amusement park – a healing rite for someone seeking to regain or create anew the integrity of her body? The terms which Clifford Geertz (1978:20) uses to speak of cultural texts – which are seen as “foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries” – are particularly appropriate as a way of talking about the Aparecida image. From the recesses of an image possibly emerge – as Mikhail Bakhtin (1993) might have suggested – her fecund “lower bodily stratum”.

¹⁴ *Mãe de santo*, “mother of saint”, plays a leading role in Afro-Brazilian cults. She receives the *orixás*, the deified ancestral spirits and forces of nature.

In another article I wrote:

“Is the amusement park a mechanism through which, with montage effects, popular culture makes possible a return of the suppressed? Somatic states and forms of bodily innervation, associated with shock experience, and which are part of the incorporated history of women and men from the *buraco dos capetas*, irrupt in the spectacle of the werewolf woman, among others of the amusement park.”
(Dawsey 2006:147)

Something is revealed in the liminal space of a park. But perhaps a double dislocation, to the margins of the margins, is necessary to discover the more fecund places of a lady from the amusement park. Accompanying the return of devotees to their homes and places of work, the saint moves again. Our Lady also descends to the *buraco dos capetas*.

What liturgy and ritual process separate in Aparecida, in order to compose the impassive image of the saint in sacred places, is brought together in tension-packed images in the Jardim das Flores. In Aparecida – upon passing by the image of the saint – women, men and children are enveloped by the aura of sacred persona (or mask). In a state of f(r)iction with the mask, bodies are transfigured as people become play actors of an extraordinary drama.¹⁵ In the *buraco dos capetas*, the mask (persona) is altered. It takes on life. And becomes bodily. It becomes “*Nossa!*”.

As seen in the preamble of this essay, after watching a movie on television about Joan of Arc, Dln exclaimed: “That was a woman of truth, a saint! She wasn’t scared of any man.” (21.1.84) The oppositions are joined in a single image loaded with tension. The “woman of truth”, who is not afraid of men, dresses and kills like them. There are moments in which reevaluation of categories is accompanied by shock experience. Contrary elements collide. Like the flash of the flame of a match in contact with powder of potassium, an image is revealed. Amid lived experience, when categories are realized (normally) with astonishment, it is at times possible to detect (with the sniff of a detective) how pinned-up energies come to the surface and shake the very order of things and words. At times like this, when even dichotomizing categories implode, something unspeakable takes place. These are language events. In the end, that is, in a scatological register, perhaps the truth of things (and words) has less to do with the way that they are separated and more to do with the way that they are joined – with astonishment! That’s how people and things come to light (*vem à luz*) in the *buraco dos capetas*.¹⁶

3.5. Rite of incorporation: return to the cathedral.

In a choreography that is symmetrically inverted in relation to that of the devotees, Our Lady returns to the cathedral. During commemorations, excursions, pilgrimages and visits of the faithful, she returns. Something is transformed. After a stay in liminal places, everyday life becomes strangely familiar. With astonishment, possibly, she returns to daily life in the basilicas of Aparecida. And to the altar where, in 1982, she was enthroned – with metal bars and bullet-proof glass. Instead of a religious illumination, a profane illumination.

¹⁵ “The friction between body and mask can create a tension-packed image. Playing with words, I would say that at these times, a state of f(r)iction is produced. In its original meaning, fiction, or *fictio*, suggests the idea of ‘something made’ or ‘something fashioned’. In turn, the act of friction evokes the dialectically inverted process of attrition and deconstruction. The mask that models also deconstructs. It produces the joyful transformation and relativity of things, as Bakhtin said (1993:35). This, however, to the degree in which the body that flashes from behind, impedes one from forgetting that the mask is itself impermanent. In oscillating states of f(r)iction are produced the most electrifying moments of a performance.” (Dawsey 2006:138)

¹⁶ *Vir à luz*, “come to light”, also means to be born.

In the encounter of the holy mother with devotees, an air of complicity may perhaps be detected. In uncanny ways, at this time, with montage effects, a broken body comes together. Our Lady also goes through rites of passage. During her passage, Jardim das Flores is illuminated not as a place of arrival, or departure, but as *limen* or even *limen* of *limen*. Anaój said: “We are in the asshole of hells!” (*Nós estamos no cu dos infernos!*). After all, we are speaking of Devils’ Hole (*buraco dos capetas*). “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the ‘state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule.” (Benjamin 1985b:226).¹⁷

When Dln from the *sertão* (backlands) of Bahia saw the movie about Joan of Arc, an image of her own mother glimmered.

“I am the daughter of an Indian woman who they lassoed in the woods. My mother was an Indian, a mad Indian woman who was scared of no man. (...) Only a cannon could take down that Indian from the woods! And my father was even a *jagunço* (bandit).¹⁸ I was born *capeta*, a little devil. For this reason I am not afraid of the *capetas*. Come as many as they want and we will explode in the middle of hell. I’ll confront the devils and kick all of them out of here. I have faith. God is with me! I’ll set them all free!” (25.5.83).

The image of “a woman of truth” also flashes up here. Or, in Dln’s view, the image of a saint. With astonishment, amid the implosion of dichotomizing categories, could the werewolf woman truly be Our Lady? Or Our Lady a werewolf?

During the passage of the saint there are moments when things come together. In extraordinary ways, they emerge in the *buraco dos capetas*, as in the *sertões* of Bahia. Or even in the *sertões* of Minas Gerais, where Anaój and Mr Z were born. In the final scenes of *Grande Sertão: Veredas* (Rosa 1988), Diadorim, a brave *cangaceiro* [bandit] is revealed as having the body of a beautiful woman.¹⁹ Our Lady – who, likewise, could have the body of a beautiful woman – also plays a part in the history of astonishment provoked by the apparition of people from the *sertões*, sending shivers throughout the Brazilian social landscape. Images of the *sertão* flourish in cities of São Paulo. And in the sacred recesses of the basilica at Aparecida do Norte, during passage of people from the *buraco dos capetas*, with shock effects, the body of Our Lady is also illuminated.

In the originary history of an image one might come upon the whirlpools of a nation. In such places one hears of stories that have submerged, or that have not yet come to be. And of unresolved questions. How does a broken body heal? Without suspicious emendations?

At the end of a rite of passage one may return to the beginning – with estrangement. I thus invite fe/male readers (the juxtaposition of genders may be revealing) to recall the first miracle of Aparecida:

“And starting to cast their nets from the port of José Correa Leite, they continued to the port of Itaguaçu, quite far, without catching any fish. And casting his dragnet in this port João Alves pulled out the body of the Lady, without a head; casting his net once again farther down, he pulled out the head of the same Lady, never knowing who had thrown her there. The finder stored the Image in an old cloth, and continuing to cast nets, not having previously caught any fish, from then on fishing was so plentiful after a few casts that he and his companions, being concerned that they might sink because of the number of fish in their canoes, returned to their homes, admiring this success.” (quote from the

¹⁷ I am here using the English translation found in Benjamin (2003).

¹⁸ *Jagunço* refers to a bandit or hired gunman from the Brazilian Northeast.

¹⁹ *Cangaceiro* refers to a bandit from the *sertão* (backlands) of Northeastern Brazil.

Livro do Tombo da Paróquia de Santo Antônio de Guaratinguetá, agosto de 1757, vigário dr. João de Moraes e Aguiar. Resende s/d:4-5)

The procedures of montage deserve attention. From the bottom of a river comes a body without a head. Then the head. The pieces are joined.

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