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**Article**

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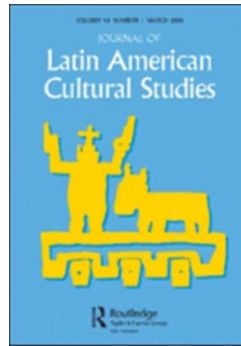
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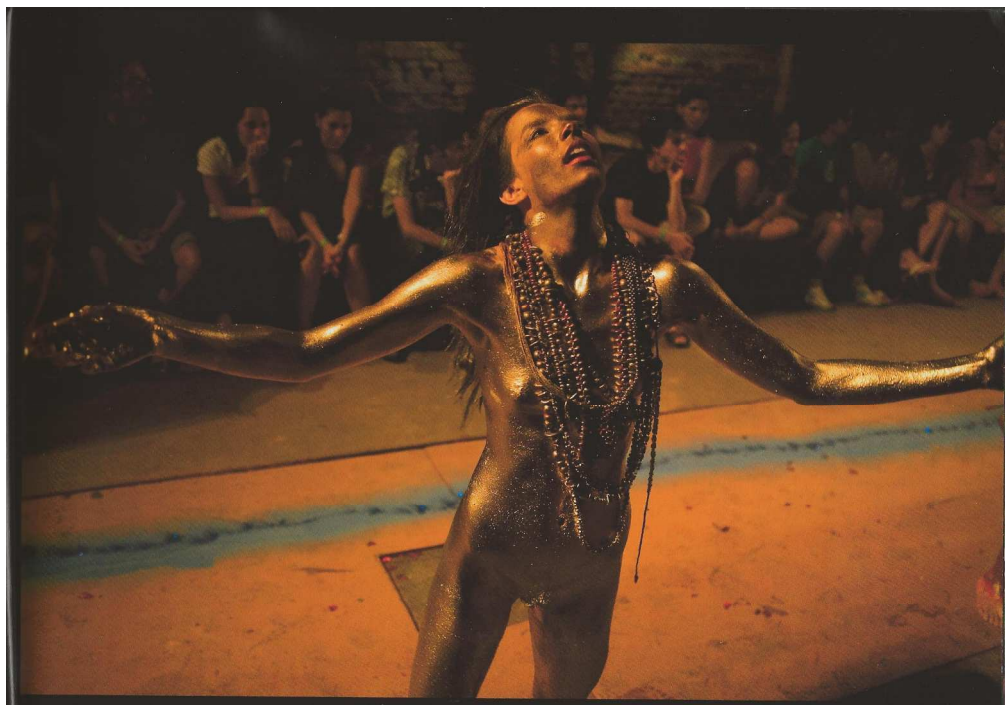


**Traces of the (M)Other:  
Deconstructing Hegemonic Historical Narrative in Teat(r)o  
Oficina Uzyna Uzona's Os Sertões**

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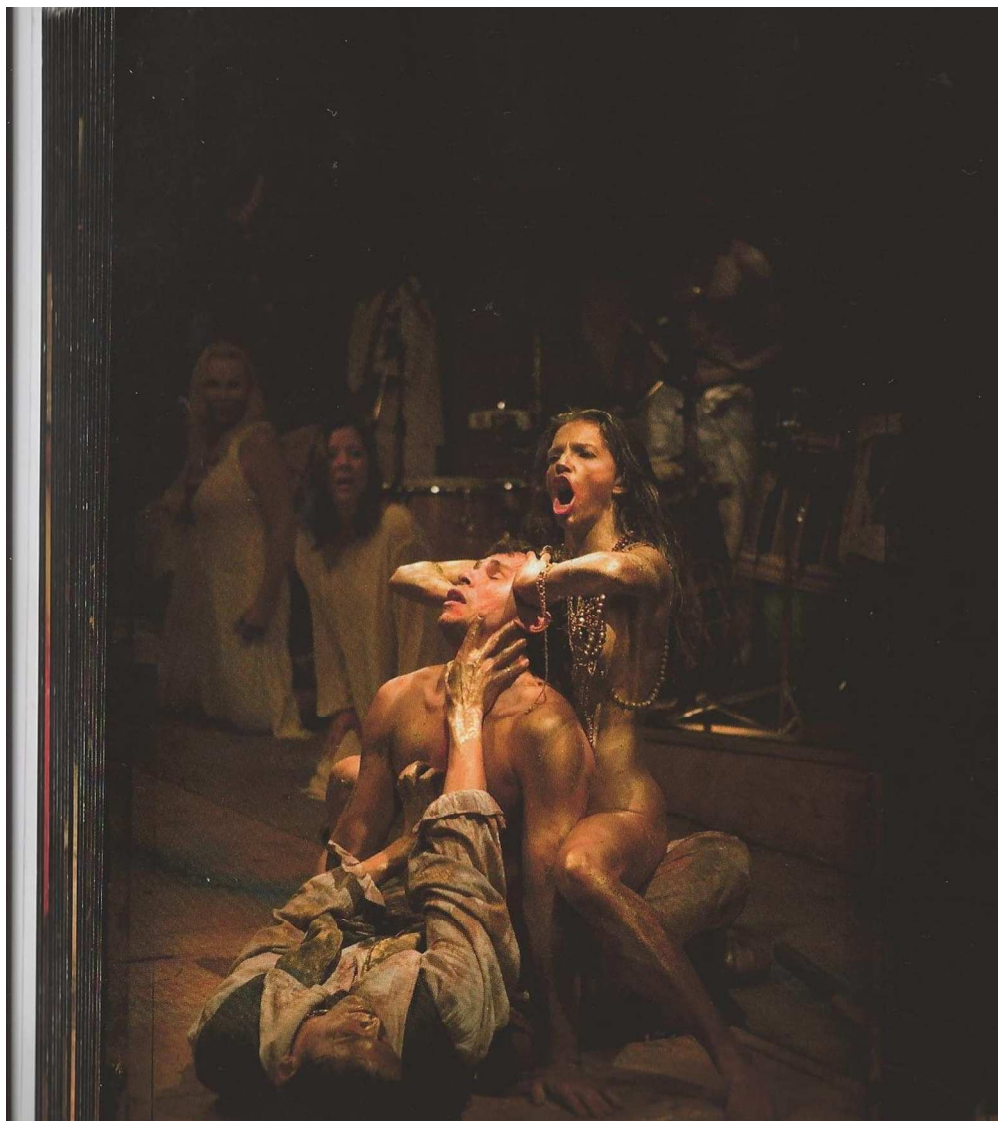
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"Indian Mother" (Photo - Marcos Camargo)  
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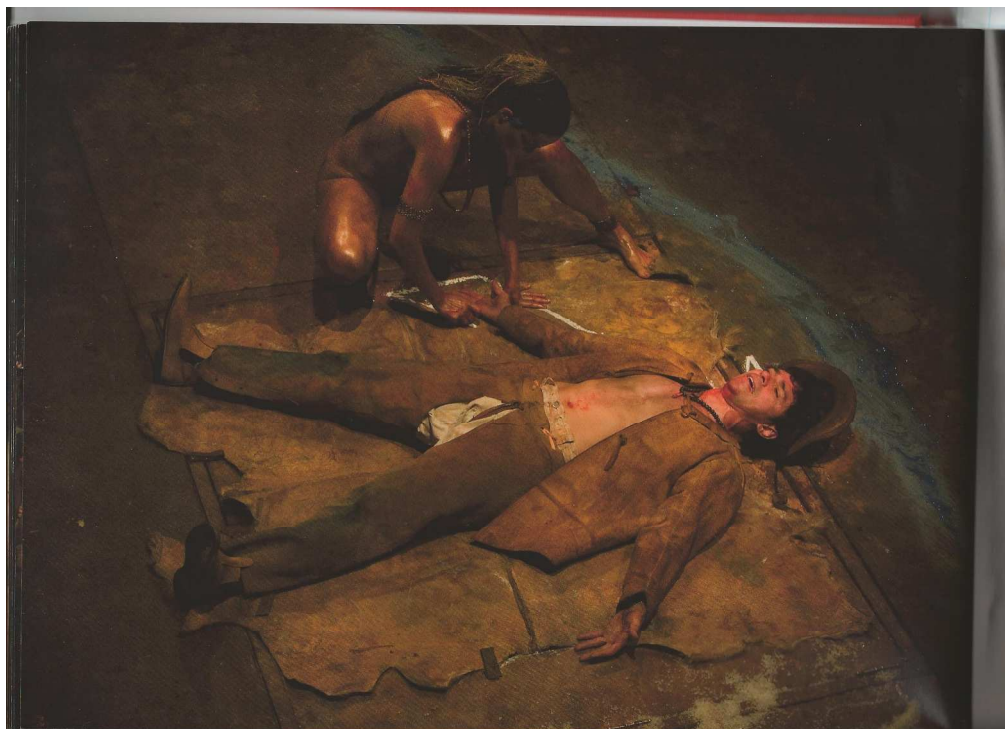
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The birth of the Sertanejo (Photo - Marcos Camargo)  
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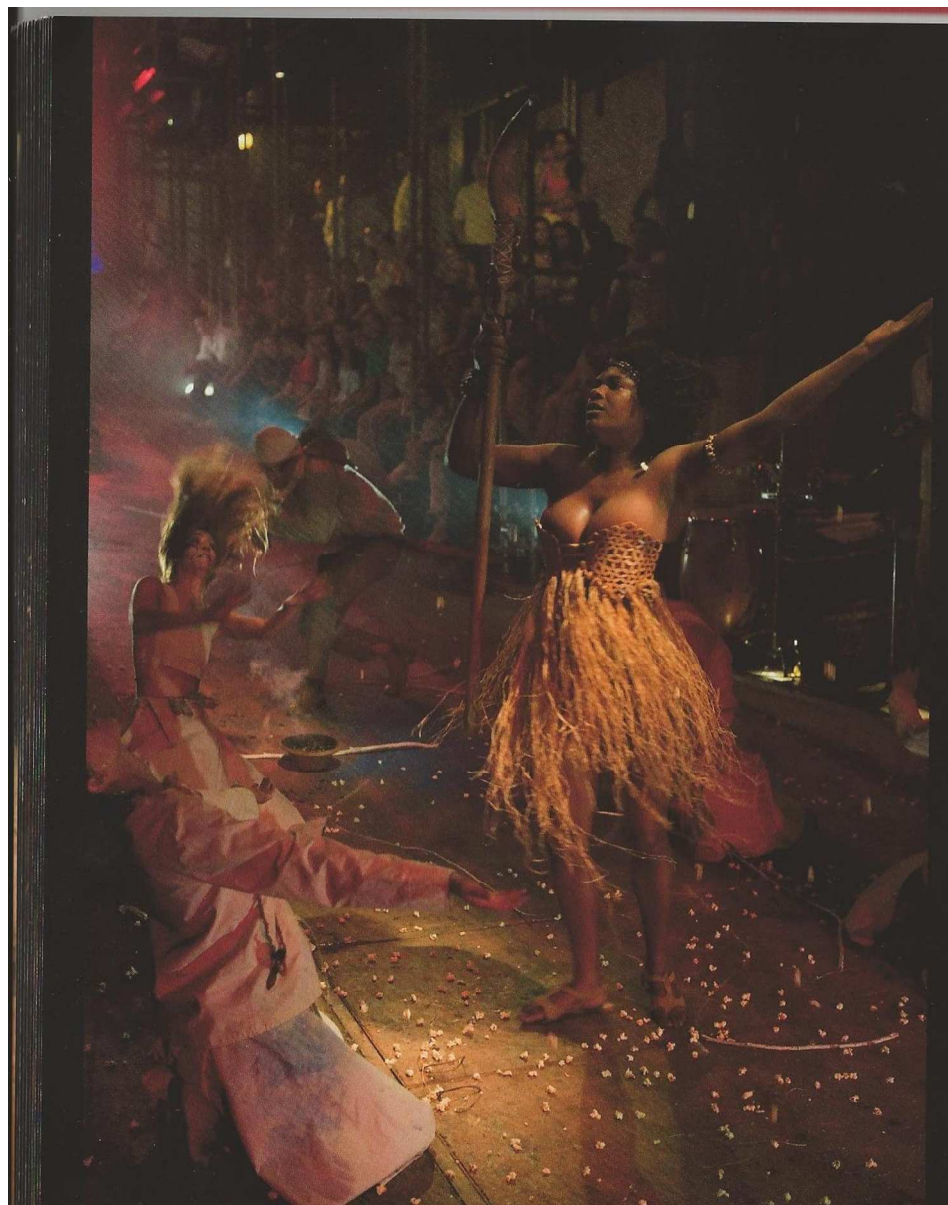


Tracing the mandala (Photo - Marcos Camargo)  
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Omolu (Photo- Marcos Camargo)  
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Princess Isabel (Photo - Author)  
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Libertas (Photo - Marcos Camargo)  
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**Traces of the (M)Other:**

**Deconstructing Hegemonic Historical Narrative in Teat(r)o Oficina**

**Uzyna Uzona's *Os Sertões***

Dr Patrick Campbell

## Traces of the (M)Other:

### Deconstructing Hegemonic Historical Narrative in Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna

#### Uzona's *Os Sertões*

#### Abstract

This article focuses on the way in which renowned São Paulo-based theatre company Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona deconstructs hegemonic historical narrative in their 2000 - 2007 25 hour-long production of Euclides da Cunha's seminal Brazilian novel *Os sertões* ("Rebellion in the Backlands"), an account of the War of Canudos (1896-1897), the first major act of State terrorism carried out by the nascent Brazilian Federal Government on the country's subaltern population.

The Teat(r)o Oficina's epic adaptation fuses events from the colonial period, the military dictatorship and contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> Century São Paulo to relate the repetitive cycles of misappropriation, oppression and resistance that have characterized the history of Brazil and its people over the centuries. However, any fatalistic view of victimhood as an essential aspect of Brazilian subjectivity is radically challenged by the vibrant, rhythmic, material impact of the theatrical super-signs underpinning the performance text.

Drawing on Julia Kristeva's notion of the *semiotic* - the pre-linguistic, illogical, rhythmical materialism of language intimately related to a primordial relationship with the *abject mother* - I shall suggest that it is the rhythmic, libidinal force of the performance and its extensive use of the cultural manifestations of Brazil's subaltern population that imbues *Os Sertões* with the silent presence-as-absence of the abject Brazilian *(M)Other* - the Black, Indigenous and Mestiza

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2  
3 matriarchal line whose alternative discourse is often barred from hegemonic accounts of  
4  
5 Brazilian historiography. Her silent heritage is embodied on stage by the members of the Oficina,  
6  
7 who reclaim an alienating national heritage for themselves by transforming the often tragic tale  
8  
9 of Brazil's past into a joyous celebration of tenacious vitality.  
10  
11

### 12 13 **The Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona** 14

15  
16 Founded in 1958, the Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona is one of the longest standing and most  
17  
18 influential theatre companies in São Paulo, having consistently attracted both critical acclaim and  
19  
20 academic attention throughout Brazil. There have been a plethora of books<sup>1</sup>, theses, dissertations  
21  
22 and articles published on the Oficina, written from a variety of perspectives. Over the past  
23  
24 decade, a number of Brazilian academics have specifically researched the Oficina's *Os Sertões*<sup>2</sup>,  
25  
26 exploring the scenic articulation and socio-political ramifications of the performance.  
27  
28

29  
30 The company established its reputation in the 1960s by creating challenging performances that  
31  
32 drew on the latest in European and North American approaches to theatre-making, increasingly  
33  
34 filtered by practical, aesthetic experimentation seeking to reflect the fragmented reality of life in  
35  
36 20<sup>th</sup> Century São Paulo. By the 1970s, the company's ever more anarchic stance, avant-garde  
37  
38 performances and leftist leanings drew the wrath of the military dictatorship, leading to the  
39  
40 imprisonment and torture of group members. After spending four years in exile in Portugal and  
41  
42 Africa, company director José Celso Martinez Corrêa, better known as Zé Celso, returned to  
43  
44 Brazil in 1978, and spent the 1980s creating underground performances and super-eight films,  
45  
46 whilst reconstructing the Teat(r)o Oficina's space.  
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51  
52 In 1993, after a 13-year period of building work, the Teat(r)o Oficina inaugurated a radical new  
53  
54 theatre space in central São Paulo. The opening of the company's so-called *terreiro eletrônico*  
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3 (electronic holy-ground) coincided with an artistic renaissance, and the culmination of this  
4  
5 resurgence was, without a doubt, the company's epic, 25-hour *mise-en-scène* of the classic  
6  
7 Brazilian novel *Os sertões* (Rebellion in the Backlands), which was devised between 2000 and  
8  
9 2007 and went on to win several important national theatre awards, being deemed "best  
10  
11 performance of the century" by influential Brazilian arts magazine "Bravo!"<sup>3</sup>  
12  
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14

### 15 16 *Os Sertões*

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18  
19 Known in Brazil as the "bible of Brazilian identity", *Os sertões* the novel played a key role in  
20  
21 what historian Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr has termed "the invention of the Northeast".  
22  
23 According to Albuquerque, rather than being an exclusively geographically or economically  
24  
25 defined region, the Brazilian Northeast is, in fact, an imaginary *topos* which was articulated over  
26  
27 the course of the Twentieth Century as a "repository of folkloric traditions and a base for the  
28  
29 establishment of national culture"<sup>4</sup>.  
30  
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33  
34 The Northeast and the arid *Sertão* have been consistently inscribed within dominant  
35  
36 historiographic discourse in Brazil as both the subaltern "Other" of the developed Southeast and  
37  
38 the backwards heartlands of Brazil. The region has been condemned to maintaining and  
39  
40 reflecting an essentialist view of Brazilian culture and identity that is indelibly tainted by the  
41  
42 country's legacy of colonialism, slavery and State oppression.  
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46  
47 The Teat(r)o Oficina challenge this reductive, centric view of the Brazilian Northeast (and  
48  
49 hegemonic framings of Brazilian subjectivity) by successfully transforming author Euclides da  
50  
51 Cunha's original, positivist 1902 text – a geographic treaty-cum-ethnographic overview of  
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53 Brazil's arid, Northeastern hinterlands, and historic account of the Republican army's violent  
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3 decimation of the messianic community of the town of Canudos<sup>5</sup> - into an anthropophagic  
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5 Genesis of Brazil and its people.  
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8  
9 The company fuses this historiographic rearticulation with concurrent self-referential scenic  
10  
11 allusions to their own contemporary struggle against their powerful neighbours, the Grupo Sílvio  
12  
13 Santos, a media empire founded by Brazilian magnate and television personality Senor  
14  
15 Abravanel, better known as Sílvio Santos. The Oficina's scenic rewriting of *Os Sertões* thus  
16  
17 offers a radically different form of postmemory on stage; a ritualistic, autopoietic, bacchic  
18  
19 performance that refracts hegemonic Brazilian historiography through the subversive filter of the  
20  
21 company's own ebullient theatrical aesthetic and ethos.  
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25  
26 Marianne Hirsch has suggested that "(t)he aesthetics of postmemory [...] is a diasporic aesthetics  
27  
28 of temporal and spatial exile that needs simultaneously to (re)build and to mourn"<sup>6</sup>. However,  
29  
30 one of the most striking characteristics of the Teat(r)o Oficina's *Os Sertões* is its vibrant,  
31  
32 carnavalesque re-appropriation of Brazil's troubled and often brutal past. Over the 25 hours of  
33  
34 the performance, mourning is eschewed as the taboo of (post) colonial trauma is re-embodied  
35  
36 and radically rearticulated on stage.  
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40  
41 Any sense of disconnection, loss or exile is temporarily abated by the company's participatory,  
42  
43 sensorially potent and libidinally charged poetics, which fetishizes the corporeality of both actors  
44  
45 and spectators alike. This emphasis on the immediate *jouissance* of bodily presence, on the  
46  
47 mercurial transformative nature of the live event, already characteristic of theatre as a medium,  
48  
49 contrasts directly with the play of indexicality and absence, of "irreplaceable loss and  
50  
51 interminable mourning"<sup>7</sup> underpinning the photographic projections, memorials and installations  
52  
53 privileged in Hirsch's discussion of postmemory and the Holocaust.  
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3 The Teat(r)o Oficina's work is indicative of what Hans-Thies Lehmann has termed  
4 "postdramatic theatre."<sup>8</sup> Heterogeneous in nature, postdramatic theatre can nevertheless be  
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6 understood in general terms as  
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11 (... ) not simply a new kind of text staging – and even less a new type of theatre text, but  
12 rather a type of sign usage in the theatre that turns both of these levels of theatre upside  
13 down (... ) it becomes more presence than representation, more shared than  
14 communicated experience, more process than product, more manifestation than  
15 signification, more energetic impulse than information<sup>9</sup>.  
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22 This description of postdramatic theatre reflects the Teat(r)o Oficina's pulsional, non-linear and  
23 participatory performance style. Throughout *Os Sertões*, the company emphasizes the material  
24 impact of its theatrical signs, accentuating overt physicality and rhythmic musicality whilst  
25 ritualistically re-embodiment a resolutely non-linear and subversive rearticulation of Brazilian  
26 historiography.  
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34 Whilst obviously influenced in part by tendencies in contemporary theatre, the company's  
35 aesthetic approach also draws intrinsically on Brazil's African, Indigenous and Mestizo popular  
36 and religious cultural manifestations. Like many of the company's contemporary productions, *Os*  
37 *Sertões* is imbued with the impulse-laden materiality of the signifying systems underpinning  
38 popular Brazilian culture, which the company uses to great poetic effect as a basis for their  
39 deconstructive scenic remembrance of Brazil's (post) colonial past.  
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### 49 **Tracing the (M)Other**

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53 It is possible to draw parallels between the Oficina's scenic appropriation of the rhythmic  
54 potency of popular Brazilian culture and Julia Kristeva's concept of the *semiotic* (*le sémiotique*,  
55 not to be confused with Saussurean or Piercian Semiotics and related studies of semiosis). The  
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3 Kristevan *semiotic* represents the bodily drives as discharged through rhythm, repetitive sonority,  
4 and the material force of signification, and both precedes and pervades language acquisition and  
5 acculturation<sup>10</sup>.  
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11 Importantly, Kristeva describes the *semiotic* as a “primordial leash”, forever linking the speaking  
12 subject to the pre-linguistic, mother/child relationship<sup>11</sup>. The mother in Kristeva’s theory of the  
13 *semiotic* is the *abject phallic mother*; the imaginary representation of the omnipotent, pre-  
14 Oedipal maternal figure. And, according to Kristeva, it is a return to this archaic Other, in  
15 detriment of the castrating Oedipal Father of hegemonic psychoanalytic theory, that characterizes  
16 the poetic endeavour. She states that it is precisely through *poetic language* that one can unsettle  
17 the “thetic function” of the signifying chain, promoting a new, *processual thesis* that fluctuates  
18 between sense and nonsense, language and rhythm, signifying chain and drive; disrupting the  
19 constraints of language by recurring to the embodied *semiotic* underlying it<sup>12</sup>.  
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33 Whilst aware of Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak’s admonition of the phallogocentric framing  
34 sustaining Kristeva’s psychoanalytically-inflected *semiotic*<sup>13</sup>, and the dangers of equating the  
35 gendered subaltern subject with the abject mother<sup>14</sup>, I would nevertheless like to appropriate  
36 Kristeva’s concept whilst simultaneously deconstructing it in the light of the scenic writing of *Os*  
37 *Sertões*, by suggesting that the Teat(r)o Oficina frame the subaltern subject **and the *semiotic***  
38 **potency of her cultural manifestations** as *(M)Other*<sup>15</sup>, over the course of their 25 hour long  
39 performance.  
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50 As I have suggested elsewhere<sup>16</sup>, the Teatro Oficina’s work forces us to radically reconsider  
51 Spivak’s phonocentric framing of the speechless gendered subaltern subject<sup>17</sup>. Rather than the  
52 logocentrally-determined barred subject of *speech*, the gendered subaltern appears consistently  
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3 throughout *Os Sertões* as the *trace* always already underlying the postcolonial *text*. The pun on  
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5 maternity and alterity at play in the deconstructive take on the English word (*M*)*Other*  
6  
7 emphasises the way in which the subaltern woman was both inscribed and erased as mother  
8  
9 within the colonial text through the violence of cultural (re)inscription and rape. Her social  
10  
11 exclusion has always already been an intrinsic aspect of all discourse within Brazil, effectively  
12  
13 making it possible. Therefore she is as omnipresent within the postcolonial script as the  
14  
15 Eurocentric Name-of-the Father.  
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21 What's more, if we care to look more closely, it also becomes apparent that this subaltern subject  
22  
23 always already bares the *trace* of a very different, *alternative writing* to the hegemonic  
24  
25 neocolonial one. She is always already *written*, even if she does not have access to  
26  
27 phallogocentric *speech*. And it is this counterhegemonic script, encrypted in the cultural  
28  
29 manifestations and sacred, embodied praxis of Brazil's subaltern populace, that provides a  
30  
31 restorative, empowering counterpoint to dominant centric discourse.  
32

33  
34 For *Os Sertões* reveals another scene, a radical, joyous, anthropofagic re-appropriation of  
35  
36 hegemonic historical narrative, that draws on the subversive, counter-hegemonic scripts of  
37  
38 African-Brazilian sacred belief, the cultural manifestations of the Northeast and the popular  
39  
40 culture of Brazil's contemporary subaltern masses that always already space all Brazilian  
41  
42 subjects (whether they accept this or not). What could be pure tragedy is instead depicted as a  
43  
44 joyous, inebriating re-writing of history.  
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47 Thus, far from a naive appropriation of the speechless gendered subaltern, the incestuous  
48  
49 impulse pervading the performance text of *Os Sertões* obliges us to recognize the way in which  
50  
51 this gendered "Other" engenders, shapes and spaces *all* Brazilians as essentially hybrid  
52  
53 postcolonial subjects. This is the radical ethical dimension of *Os Sertões* the performance; the  
54  
55 subaltern subject is scenically articulated as (*M*)*Other* – as the abject (non) origin of Brazil's  
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57 hybrid, Mestizo population, as the all-pervading, radical alterity always already opposing the  
58  
59 absent, castrating colonial paternal function within the country's palimpsestic social script. And  
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3 it is by affirming the *(M)Other's* pulsional (non) presence on stage and attempting to infuse their  
4  
5 discourse with her *semiotic* potency that the Teat(r)o Oficina radically deconstruct hegemonic,  
6  
7 Eurocentric historiography, **forging a subversive theatrical form of postmemory** that emphasises  
8  
9 the eternal return of the country's Indigenous, African and Mestizo cultural heritage.  
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12  
13 Let us now turn to *Os Sertões* the performance to explore the ways in which the *(M)Other* is  
14  
15 delineated on stage through the *différance* of the Oficina's scenic writing.  
16  
17

### 18 19 **Echoes of the (M)Other – *The Man I***

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22 The **first scene we** are going to focus on takes place towards the end of the first half of *The Man I*,  
23  
24 the second installment of *Os Sertões*<sup>18</sup>. The massacre of Canudos is condensed at this point with  
25  
26 the genocide of the Indigenous populations of the Northeastern Brazilian hinterlands by the  
27  
28 *bandeirantes* (17<sup>th</sup> Century colonial mestizo bandits from São Paulo), whose legacy of rape and  
29  
30 pillaging led to the genesis of the multiracial, subaltern population of the *Sertão*.  
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34  
35 On a superficial level, this metaphoric echo of colonial violence and oppression, linking the  
36  
37 destruction of Canudos to the *bandeirantes*, would seem to suggest the continuing, inherent  
38  
39 victimhood of Brazil's subaltern population. However, by focusing on the rhythmic, subversive  
40  
41 *semiotic* underscoring the theatrical graphemes embodied by the Teat(r)o Oficina, we will begin  
42  
43 to see an alternative, defiant re-writing of Brazilian history taking place, filtered through the  
44  
45 restorative and regenerative framing of Brazil's popular subaltern cultural heritage. Let us now  
46  
47 turn to the performance.  
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51  
52 An actor playing the infamous Domingos Jorge Velho, one of the most brutal and successful  
53  
54 *bandeirantes*, responsible for the violent oppression of several Indigenous nations in the  
55  
56 Northeast of Brazil, enters into the space, followed by a number of other chorus members  
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3 dressed as colonial mercenaries. A chorus member dressed as the *boi-bumbá*<sup>19</sup> enters swaying  
4  
5 behind Domingos, who is waving his flag in the air, by the exit. At the same time, another *boi-*  
6  
7 *bumbá* enters at the far end of the concourse. They both begin to move warily towards the centre  
8  
9 of the concourse, stamping their way along the Rio São Francisco, which has been sketched on  
10  
11 the floor with blue powder. A line is drawn in the middle of the course with salt. The two bulls  
12  
13 meet there, kneeling and muzzling the salt before moving backwards.  
14  
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16  
17  
18 Domingos Jorge Velho speaks the following text, whilst carrying out a vaguely ritualistic  
19  
20 sequence of actions, which includes rolling to the ground and holding his flag phallically  
21  
22 between his legs:  
23  
24  
25

26 **DOMINGOS JORGE VELHO**

27 Vast estates,  
28 Never-ending land  
29 I drop Jorge Velho from my Domingos  
30 And I re-baptize myself...  
31 Sertão  
32 On this illuminated soil  
33 I found my principality  
34 Crude feudalism  
35 (*To his subjects*)  
36 Humble subjects I declare you  
37 My vassals  
38 (*To the Tapuyos*)  
39 Placid Tapuyos, I observe  
40 You shall be my honorable serfs.  
41 And I your Crude Feudal Colonial Lord.  
42 The São Francisco Valley,  
43 Is already populated by progressive mestizos  
44 My descendents, stretching out over five-hundred years  
45 It is already our exclusive colony  
46 Paulistas  
47

48 At the end of his text, the chorus members all salute him in military fashion. The actors and  
49  
50 members of the public applaud vigorously.  
51  
52

53  
54 At this point, Domingos' virulent text, his phallic flag and fawning, armed entourage all point  
55  
56 towards the depressing short circuit of colonial violence. The *Sertão* is shown to be swarming  
57  
58  
59  
60



1  
2  
3 with bandits assuming the alienating colonial discourse of rape and pillage. The *Sertanejo*'s  
4  
5 origins are thus founded on the dislocated perpetuation of colonial violence, which has shifted  
6  
7 geographical location (coast to hinterlands) and racial locus (White, European Colonial to  
8  
9 mestizo bandits).  
10

11  
12  
13 However, it is interesting to note that the bull – a traditional symbol of male virility and an  
14  
15 economic sign of wealth in the agricultural regions of Brazil's countryside – is represented on  
16  
17 stage by the *boi-bumbá* – a folkloric figure whose colourful, traditional costume serves as a  
18  
19 metonymic extension of Brazil's traditional subaltern culture. Thus, even the traditionally  
20  
21 masculine symbol of the bull is subverted somewhat by this appeal to the aesthetic framing of  
22  
23 traditional Northeastern culture, with its abject connotations, and Domingos' macho posturing is  
24  
25 disrupted throughout by the traditional Brazilian rhythmic musical accompaniment played by the  
26  
27 live musicians on stage, which underscores his text and endows the scene as a whole with an  
28  
29 ebullient, carnivalesque atmosphere. There is now a decisive shift towards the scene's potent  
30  
31 climax:  
32  
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37

38 *Figure 1*

39  
40 A blood-soaked "Indigenous" actress walks along the concourse towards Domingos in a dream-  
41  
42 like fashion, eyes half-closed as she covers her naked, clay-daubed body with salt, which  
43  
44 showers down from her clenched fists. She comes to a halt, spreading her arms wide, forming a  
45  
46 cross. Domingos kneels on the floor and places his phallic flag straight in front of himself,  
47  
48 pointing towards the Indigenous actress, saying the following text:  
49  
50  
51  
52

53 **DOMINGOS JORGE VELHO**  
54 Come Indian woman, I'm moved  
55 By this ferocious embrace,  
56 Between the winner and the loser  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
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5  
6 He runs after her along the concourse and she rushes off towards the exit. Domingos roughly  
7  
8 grabs the Indigenous woman in both arms and swings her from side to side, her passive body  
9  
10 flailing wildly, until they reach the centre of the concourse. There, Domingos drops her to the  
11  
12 ground and throws himself on top of her, opening her legs and miming an aggressive rape. They  
13  
14 shift positions, and she straddles him, as if riding a bull. They reach a climax and come to a halt.  
15  
16 An actor who played an Indigenous Shaman and the archetypal Mestizo in a previous scene  
17  
18 walks up behind the squatting Indigenous actress, caresses her head and back, and climbs  
19  
20 through her legs. She grasps the actor's head once it is in parallel with Domingos', and pulls him  
21  
22 up until the back of his head rests on her chest, before giving the following text:  
23  
24  
25  
26  
27

28 **INDIAN MOTHER**

29 The son of the winner and  
30 the loser is born  
31 Is it love?  
32 Call it what you wish!  
33  
34  
35

36 She moves away, lifting up the flag and rushes off with it towards the far end of the concourse,  
37  
38 as her "son" and Domingos passionately kiss one another on the floor. They rise to a standing  
39  
40 position. An actor near to the exit with a long cane in his hand beats the stick and the two *boi-*  
41  
42 *bumbás* at both ends of the space collapse to the ground. The son of Domingos then appears to  
43  
44 go into a trance, rising and falling to the floor, maintaining a stooped gait and his arms  
45  
46 outstretched in front of his body, imitating the actions of a reveler playing the *boi-bumbá*.  
47  
48  
49

50 Members of the chorus strip the *boi-bumbá* of his leather hide, revealing the bones of the animal  
51  
52 and the prone body of the reveler lying underneath. The hide is given to the son of Domingos,  
53  
54  
55  
56  
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59  
60

1  
2  
3 who now stands erect in front of the remaining *boi-bumbá*, who faces the exit on the other side  
4  
5 of the concourse.  
6  
7

8  
9 *Figure 2*

10  
11 Domingos' son puts on the hide – it is made up of a pair of leather chaps and a leather waistcoat.  
12  
13 An actress presents him with leather shoes and cap. He is now wearing the traditional garb of the  
14  
15 *Sertanejo*, the mestizo native of the *Sertão*. The chorus and Domingos' son - the *Sertanejo* - sing  
16  
17 the following song whilst Domingos and Indian Mother watch on from the exit: she kneeling,  
18  
19 naked, with the flag in her hands; he standing up, watching with an aggressive, concerned look  
20  
21 on his face.  
22  
23  
24  
25

26  
27 **SERTANEJO**

28 I am born from this vigorous embrace  
29 Wild and fearless  
30 Like my father  
31 A Bandeirante from São Paulo  
32 Fierce and beaten like my mother,  
33 A Northeastern Indian  
34 But I have an advantage  
35 I don't live out of a knapsack  
36 I'm fixed to my soil  
37 The "bull" of the parched plains  
38 The "scrubland" of the plateaus  
39 Rivers,  
40 Tributaries  
41 Flow towards the West  
42 And towards the East  
43 Symmetric inside  
44 Linked to the coast  
45 And to the centre  
46 Disparate people in fusion  
47 In the kernel of the Great Land  
48 In the heart  
49  
50

51 Thus the archetypal *Sertanejo* is born out of the rape of Indian Mother by the Paulista  
52  
53 *bandeirante*. The Indigenous woman is forced to bow down to the aggressive oppression of  
54  
55 colonial violence, losing her own voice in the process, (literally) flying the flag of the patriarchal  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 order. In this part of the scene, we witness the birth of the true voiceless subaltern; the  
4  
5 Indigenous woman who, in the wake of colonial disfranchisement and genocide, is effectively  
6  
7 alienated from her own desire (“*Is this love? Call it what you wish!*”) through rape and conquest.  
8  
9

10  
11 The symmetrical, passionate kiss between the *Sertanejo* son and his *bandeirante* father serves as  
12  
13 a distorted mirror image, reflecting back to the newly born son an alienating Ego-Ideal which  
14  
15 will effectively enchain him to the Master’s discourse. Just as the *bandeirantes* bowed down to  
16  
17 the hegemonic discourse of imperialistic patriarchal domination, the mestizo *Sertanejos* also  
18  
19 seem fated to become links in the self-perpetuating chain of colonial oppression. Their only  
20  
21 possible sense of identity is a fragmented one, forged by the fracturing violence of colonial rape  
22  
23 and pillaging.  
24  
25  
26

27  
28 However, this fatalistic reading is also undermined somewhat by the subversively homoerotic  
29  
30 charge to the father/son kiss – a queer undercurrent subverts this scene of phallogocentric  
31  
32 castration, imbuing the repetitive legacy of the colonial symbolic with a taboo *jouissance* whilst  
33  
34 emphasizing the incestuous impulse underscoring the performance as a whole. The mestizo  
35  
36 *Sertanejo* is dressed in the garb of the *boi-bumbá*, literally fusing on stage with the traditional  
37  
38 culture of the Northeast. He triumphantly asserts his problematic hybrid heritage through his  
39  
40 spoken text, affirming his roots to the Brazilian Earth. Far from a victim, he is portrayed as a  
41  
42 subversive cultural hero, a model of cultural resistance and struggle.  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47

48  
49 Back on stage, the *Sertanejo* runs to the centre of the concourse, where a bull hide has been  
50  
51 stretched out. He lies down on top of the hide, and the “Indigenous” actress from the beginning  
52  
53 enters and traces his outline on it with *pemba*, a ritual tool of great significance in Umbanda, an  
54  
55 African-Brazilian religion which mixes elements of Candomblé, Catholicism, Kardecism and  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

Native beliefs. *Pemba* is essentially a large stick of chalk, normally used to draw out sacred ideograms on the floor related to the different entities embodied within the sacred context of ritual practice. The chorus members and the *Sertanejo* then begin to sing the following lyrics:

**CHORUS**

This primitive society  
Hidden in the middle of the River  
Of our unity,  
Misunderstood,  
Forgotten,  
Is the vigorous core of our nascent nationality!

Domingos comes to the centre of the space and stands over the *Sertanejo*, laying his sword and rifle over his body, “knighting” him, bequeathing him his strength and virility. Indian Mother is by his side, waving the *bandeirantes*’ flag over her son’s body. The *Sertanejo* rises and runs off. The other members of the chorus take his place one by one, lying on the bull hide, receiving Domingos and Indian Mother’s “blessing”.

*Figure 3*

The archetypal *Sertanejo* serves as a blueprint for the Brazilian nation – the *trace* of his brutal conception remains immanent, shaping generations to come. When the other chorus members lie down in the outline of his body to receive Domingos’ and Indian Mother’s blessings, their scenic action belies the tragic inheritance of colonial violence that will spawn a nation that will go onto repeat the violent discourse of the absent imperialistic paternal metaphor, represented on stage by the handing over of the phallic rifle.

However, it is also at this point that the peaceful *Sertanejo* transforms into the violent *jagunço*, the Northeastern bandit who will later become synonymous with the dissident followers of Antonio Conselheiro, the people of Canudos, who the Oficina channel as a positive role model. The use of ritual *pemba* transforms the *jagunço* into a sacred archetype, and the actors’ joyous



1  
2  
3 adoption of his destiny reaffirms the company's identification with the multiracial, subaltern  
4  
5 insurgent of the Brazilian Northeast.  
6  
7

8  
9 Thus, *Os Sertões* reveals another scene, a radical, joyous, anthropofagic re-appropriation of  
10  
11 hegemonic historical narrative, through the sheer libidinal force of the embodied performance  
12  
13 text. In this way, the Indigenous (African and Mestizo) *(M)Other* is no longer the silent, passive  
14  
15 victim of colonial aggression; her alternative script reverberates through the vibrant physicality  
16  
17 and vocalization of her descendants; the multiracial Brazilian actors on stage, who reclaim an  
18  
19 alienating national heritage for themselves by transforming a hegemonic historical narrative of  
20  
21 loss and misappropriation into a rhythmic, libidinal, subversively embodied ritual of redemption.  
22  
23

24  
25 We shall now move onto a second example of this scenic articulation of postmemory from  
26  
27 within *Os Sertões*.  
28  
29

### 30 31 Omolu Cures the Herd – *The Man I* 32 33

34  
35 The following scene takes place towards the end of the first act of *The Man I*. After a scene  
36  
37 based on the “modern servitude” of the *Sertanejo*, depicted in Cunha's original novel<sup>20</sup> in which  
38  
39 the submissive cowboy brands the absent master's calves, separating one in every four for  
40  
41 himself, in compliant obedience of the Laws of the land, the focus shifts to the absent landlady –  
42  
43 the decadent *Patroa* (boss) who lives on the coast, and communicates with the *Sertanejo* via her  
44  
45 two assistants; a young man and a woman.  
46  
47

48  
49 The *Patroa*, dressed in a white evening dress and fur shawl, stands on the platform above the far  
50  
51 end of the performance space, next to her male assistant, who is dressed in a camp sailor suit. As  
52  
53 she speaks the following text to the actors on the concourse below, her assistant notes down  
54  
55  
56  
57  
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60

everything she is saying into a mobile phone, as if he were texting her message directly online to the *Sertanejo*:

**PATROA**

The end of winter is nigh,  
and it's time to settle accounts.  
I won't be able to drop by,  
Although I am the most interested party,  
But I trust in your loyalty my country bumpkin,  
I'm waiting for the fruits of my production line,  
I know you're not lazy,  
Hurry up and send me my percentage of the takings.

The *Sertanejo* and the female assistant kneel on the concourse with a lap-top in front of them, as if they were speaking online with the *Patroa*. The rest of the cast are lying on the concourse, groaning. In the previous scene, they represented the *Sertanejo's* cattle, and now appear to be ill. Three actresses arise from the chorus of cattle, and say the following text:

**SERTANEJA 1**

Look at the cattle  
They're ill.

**SERTANEJA 2**

Dying...  
The healthy ones are running off,  
thundering away,  
in order not to lay down and die.  
The rest just sit down and stop.

**SERTANEJA 3**

Oh it's a sad illness  
These tick bites  
The animals are infested, that's for sure.

**THE THREE SERTANEJAS**

An epidemic  
It's devastated the herd.  
It's contagious.

**FEMALE ASSISTANT**

What's your boss' address?

During this scene, the *Patroa* is dressed in a green hospital gown on the platform above, strapped to a drip and handed an oxygen mask by a member of the chorus, who takes her blood pressure.

1  
2  
3 On the concourse below, the *Sertanejo* rises to his feet and hands the female assistant a modern  
4 calling card belonging to his boss. She reads it out, and then begins to type the *Sertanejo's*  
5  
6 message:  
7  
8

9  
10  
11 **FEMALE ASSISTANT**

12 ladytecnospeculation  
13 @bahiacorporation  
14 .com  
15

16 **SERTANEJO**

17 "My boss and friend,  
18 I would like to inform you that your herd is on its last legs  
19 Four bulls have keeled over.  
20 The rest have scarpered off!"  
21

22 The *Patroa* goes wild on the platform above, pushing away her assistant and the other member  
23 of the chorus, shaking with rage whilst saying the following text in a mixture of English and  
24 Portuguese  
25  
26  
27  
28

29  
30 **SPECULATOR** (on receiving the e-mail.)

31 What injury my Lord do Bonfim,  
32 It's to look after my flock  
33 that I pay you.  
34 Oh My God,  
35 I'm going to smack someone in the face!  
36 I want my profits  
37 with interest!  
38  
39

40 The musicians suddenly begin to play the ritual percussive rhythm of the Orixá Omolu, the  
41 Yoruban deity of disease and remedy<sup>21</sup>. The *Sertanejo* and the female assistant lower their heads  
42 to the ground in reverence. An actress enters dressed as Omolu, wearing a long costume made of  
43 raffia with two bull-horns on her head, dancing a repetitive step, her spine fluctuating outwards  
44 and inwards in time with the music. She holds a spear with a bull's horn on the end in her right  
45 hand.  
46  
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48  
49  
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52

53  
54 The *Sertanejo* rises to his feet. He places his knife and cap on the floor in front of him. He brings  
55 his hands together, palms touching, as if in prayer. The members of the chorus are filling a large  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 clay bowl with strands of raffia and popcorn. Another chorus member, dressed with a white cloth  
4  
5 on his head, holds a flaming bowl up before the Orixá, head hung low. Omolu sings:  
6  
7

8  
9 **COWBOY SORCERER OMULÚ**

10 I know specifically, I cure  
11 more effectively than mercury:  
12 I pray and enter the spirit of the oxen.  
13 (The chorus sing the response)  
14 I don't even need to see the sick animal.  
15 I look in his direction, feel,  
16 pick up on what's heavy, pray...  
17

18 The actress moves, rocking as she sings. The chorus sings the response – lying on the floor as ill  
19 cows. There is a percussive break – there are now five *Sertanejas* lined up, bent over doubled at  
20 the waist with the typical ritual corporeality of the Orixá Nanã, primordial goddess of creation  
21 and death, the mother of Omolu. They form a circle around Omolu and dance. Other chorus  
22 members kneeling on the floor shake as if possessed.  
23  
24  
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30  
31 Omolu forms a line along the concourse, standing in front of the *Sertanejo* and the female  
32 assistant. The actor with the flaming bowl walks bent over, right arm bent at the elbow, with his  
33 hand resting on the small of his back, as he stretches his other arm out, holding the now  
34 smouldering bowl, blowing smoke into the audience.  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39

40  
41 Omolu twirls in circles as the *Sertanejas* dance wildly across the concourse. The *Sertanejo*  
42 kneels on the floor, arms raised, as the actor with the bowl blows smoke onto him. The  
43 *Sertanejas* form a circle around Omolu once again; arms outstretched, they sing the following  
44 lyrics:  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 **THE SERTANEJAS**

52 Star of illness,  
53 Shine Shine  
54 Burn me,  
55 Mount me,  
56 I want you to be mine, alone.  
57 Illness, you are my passion !  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3  
4 Devour my heart...  
5 Away with you, health,  
6 I don't I don't want anyone to help me!  
7 I don't I don't want anyone to help me!  
8

9 Omolu dances wildly in the centre as the *Sertanejas* sing. The *Sertanejo*, kneeling, falls  
10 backwards, slowly lowering himself down to the floor over his legs, eyes closed as if in trance.  
11 Pushing his cupped hands down to his navel, he moves into a kneeling position, and convulses.  
12  
13 The *Sertanejas* and Omolu all fall to the floor and begin to roll over rapidly, as if possessed.  
14  
15

16  
17  
18 An actor comes along throwing popcorn into the air as the percussion becomes more frenetic,  
19 turning into a rapid samba. The *Sertanejo* rises to a standing position, smiling. The *Sertanejas*  
20 begin to pull Omolu's costume off the actress who has played him. She lies with her eyes closed,  
21 and convulses. The cattle are now on their feet, dancing wildly.  
22  
23  
24  
25  
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27  
28

29 **Figure 4**

30  
31 Popcorn pours onto the actress who played Omolu from the ceiling above. The cattle now kneel  
32 in two lines along the concourse, swaying their torsos from side to side as the actress who played  
33 Omolu dances around in circles, holding her staff like a *Porta-Bandeira* (a standard bearer) from  
34 a Samba School as the popcorn continues to fall on her head.  
35  
36  
37  
38

39  
40  
41 She dances along the two lines of cattle, with the same rhythmic steps of Omolu from the start of  
42 the scene, making her way down to the far end of the concourse. When she arrives there, she  
43 turns around and the music comes to a halt. The two chorus members with bowls in their hands  
44 kneel behind her. The cattle begin to crawl, mooing loudly. They have been "healed".  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 This entire scene is based on a short passage in Cunha's original novel, which is rearticulated  
52 thanks to the Oficina's scenic fusion with the subaltern (M)Other as manifest in African-  
53 Brazilian sacred belief. According to Cunha's text,  
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If the herd comes down with an epidemic of worms, they resort to a remedy that is better than mercury: prayer. They do not need to see the afflicted animal. The cowboy just turns towards the beast and intones a prayer while tracing indecipherable kabbalistic lines in the dirt. What is even more amazing is that sometimes the animal is cured.<sup>22</sup>

Reading between the lines of Cunha's prose, the "indecipherable lines in the dirt" could seem suggestive of the *pontos* – the sacred hexagrams drawn on the floor during the religious rituals of Umbanda; and from an African-Brazilian epistemic perspective, the author's brief reference to epidemics and remedies could connote Omolu, the African-Brazilian deity of sickness and healing. Hence, a short, incidental paragraph in Cunha's original historic account is transformed by the astute members of the Oficina into a ritualistic-cum-carnavalesque extravaganza, fundamentally articulated by the sacred signifying chains of Candomblé.

The chthonic nature of Omolu, who is intrinsically linked to Nanã Buruku or Mawu-Lisa, the hermaphroditic goddess of the primeval waters (who also appears in the scene through the *Sertaneja's* ritual dance steps), takes us back to the universe of the phallic (M)Other once more and to the plane of the *semiotic*. The sensorial potency of the scene, which uses signifiers charged with sacred significance such as popcorn, raffia, flaming bowls, ritualistic dance moves and percussive rhythms, breaks with the prior scenic action – which emphasized the castrated nature of the servile *Sertanejo* – displacing the audience to another universe – that of African-Brazilian religiosity as an inherently subversive, powerful counter-hegemonic text that was recognized by the subaltern of the *Sertão* and thus available as a covert source of knowledge and power.

Consequently, the Uzyna Uzona floods the audience's senses with an *Other* discourse from an *Other* scene beyond the tragic repetition of the hegemonic imperialistic script. The destructive death drive underpinning the colonial symbolic pales in comparison at this point with Omolu – a

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sacred embodiment of the endless cycles of death and rebirth in the real, that transcends all signification. He is the (albeit symbolically delineated) manifestation of the universal principals that transcend the *Patroa* and her relatively mundane acquisitive power, which is dependent on nature's whims, and thus ultimately finite and restricted.

Thus the power of the subaltern, her access to a metaphorically and metonymically codified tacit knowledge that transcends the word, which can only be accessed through the ritually codified spacing of the signifier, is acknowledged by the Oficina. The sacred logic of Candomblé as counter-hegemonic writing gives incredible force to the Oficina's subversive scenic articulation of postmemory. The incestuous impulse underlying their whole-hearted adoption of the (M)Other – embodied on stage through the potent *semiotic* layer of Brazil's abject, embodied, sacred (and profane) cultural manifestations - is at one and the same time an aesthetic choice, a political stance and a philosophical challenge, destabilizing the tenets of phallogocentrism, revealing the way in which the (M)Other has fundamentally shaped the (post) colonial text throughout Brazilian history, subverting the very Eurocentric discourse that sought to subjugate her and erase her heritage.

We shall now move onto a third and final scenic example of this subversive play of rearticulated historiography and remembrance in *Os Sertões*.

#### Libertas' Song – *The Man II*

The following scene takes place towards the end of the first act of *The Man II*. After a scene in which the local authorities of Bahia complain about messianic leader Antonio Conselheiro's increasing influence over the subaltern population of the Northeast, the audience members are obliged to rise to their feet by chorus members dressed in elegant evening attire. The doors to the



1  
2  
3 main entrance open, and an actress playing Princess Isabel, the *heiress presumptive* of the  
4 Brazilian Empire in the nineteenth century, enters in an ornate white gown, pulling in two rows  
5 of black actors shackled to one another by chains. She drags them down to the center of the  
6 performance space, rocking backwards and forwards, her eyes bleary. One of the suited  
7 “European” actors speaks the following text in Portuguese with an exaggerated English accent:  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13

14  
15  
16 **SIR JONES**

17 13th May 1888.

18 She,

19 The Imperial Princess,

20 will sanction the Golden Law.  
21

22 There is a pause. Isabel motions to one of the black actors chained to her, who hands her a large  
23 spliff. One of the suited “European” actors lights it for her and she takes a large toke before  
24 passing it to one of the “slaves”. An actor playing Emperor Dom Pedro II, dressed in a long  
25 black frock-coat with a fake grey beard, speaks reproachfully,  
26  
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31

32  
33 **DOM PEDRO II**

34 Isabela Cristina...!  
35  
36  
37  
38

39 **Figure 5**

40 The princess is handed a quill. The suited actor bends over in front of her as another smartly-  
41 dressed actor hands her the decree. She places the decree on the bent over actor’s back and  
42 speaks, holding aloft the quill pen:  
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48 **PRINCESA ISABEL**

49 I decree the abolition,

50 from this day forth,

51 of slavery in Brazil.  
52

53 An actor dressed as an overseer cracks his whip on the concourse. Isabel looks upwards. She  
54 goes on to sign the decree, spelling out her name - which is incredibly long and elaborate – and  
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3 the public laughs. The slaves pull on the chains, pulling Isabel backwards. She holds onto the  
4 chains, and then suddenly lets them go. The slaves fall to the floor. The Black actors rise to their  
5 feet. The chorus sings the following anthem with booming voices, as Isabel looks around  
6 triumphantly, her right hand raised above her head in the air:  
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11

12  
13  
14 **ALL**

15 The shackles that they forged for us  
16 of such shrewd and vile wickedness  
17 There was a more powerful hand  
18 That made a mockery of them, oh Brazil...  
19 There was a more powerful hand  
20 There was a more powerful hand  
21 That made a mockery of them, oh Brazil...  
22

23 A sensual samba begins. The Black actors all walk past Isabel, kissing her on the hand and  
24 singing. She smiles coquettishly:  
25  
26  
27

28  
29 **THE *PRETO VÉIO*<sup>23</sup> (OLD BLACK) CHORUS**

30 (Kissing madam's hands)  
31 Madam is good.  
32 Madam is beautiful.  
33 Madam is an angel.  
34 Madam is perfumed.  
35 Madam is a doll...  
36  
37  
38

39 Thus the scene begins with yet another example of the destabilizing difference articulating the  
40 Oficina's performance text, as one of the great myths of hegemonic Brazilian historiography –  
41 the benevolent Princess Isabel signing the decree liberating the slaves of Brazil – is radically  
42 subverted by the potent image of the doped up European princess dragging in a chorus of  
43 enchained Black actors. The myth of the 'kind madam' is irreverently dismantled, and the  
44 departing *Preto Velhos*' words of thanks ring hollow with cynicism, accentuating the  
45 dissimulated nature of Isabela's empty, politically motivated gesture. Back to the performance,  
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57 Dom Pedro speaks to the Overseer, who stands with his whip in the middle of the concourse:  
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**D PEDRO II**

My dear Overseer!  
 In honour of your service to the Empire,  
 I declare you Baron of Jaceguay von Marl,  
 And concede to you the titles of the BIXIGA estate.

The newly-appointed Baron is handed an enormous scroll by one of the suited “European” actors. The suited actors escort Isabel and Pedro off the concourse. The Baron holds the decree aloft in his hands. Rhythmic African-Brazilian drumming commences. The Black members of the cast surround him, forming a circle. An actress enters playing Libertas, the mythical founder of the *Quilombo do Bixiga*, an African-Brazilian maroon settlement in the heart of São Paulo which was located in the present-day neighbourhood of Bela Vista (commonly known still as *o Bixiga*), where the Teat(r)o Oficina’s performance space is now situated. She stands in the middle of the concourse, facing the Baron as he rolls out the scroll on the floor. It is a map of the old colonial Bixiga. The Baron stands on the map and begins to crack his whip. Libertas squeals each time the whip cracks and walks towards him, passing her hands over her body sensually.

She approaches the Baron, grabs the end of his whip and wraps it around her waist. She twirls in to his open arms and they embrace sensually, rocking backwards and forwards. They kiss passionately. He moves away from her and begins to speak, as images of the modern-day Bixiga are projected throughout the space. They are still connected by the whip:

**OVERSEER**

This land,  
 From Here to Avenida Paulista,  
 I bequeath to you,  
 For your vertical royal palaces.

**LIBERTAS**

This land will be  
 Our eternal *quilombo*

**OVERSEER**

Libertas,  
 They are yours,  
 Liberate yourself my love

I'm not your overseer any more!

The Overseer pulls away his whip and Libertas falls to the floor. He moves backwards, cracking his whip. He comes to a halt, wraps the whip around his neck, and pulls the handle upwards suddenly, mimicking a suicide. Libertas screams.

African-Brazilian percussion music plays. The members of the chorus stand in two lines along the edge of the concourse dancing the traditional steps of Ogum, the warrior Orixá of iron, as Libertas is dressed in intricate golden garments and a headdress. A mirror is held in front of her and she applies lipstick. She is handed a microphone – the chorus members begin to tremble, as if possessed, arms stretched out. Libertas begins to sing as the actors repeat Ogum's ritual step:

**LIBERTAS' SONG**

I am now the owner of this *terreiro*  
And of the entire Bixiga  
This is my home and my passion  
Free land, my Nation

The music breaks at this point, and cuts to a *techno-macumba* rhythm. The actors dance.

**LIBERTAS' SONG**

eternal  
Libertas  
chains  
Windows  
Walls  
Open  
I inaugurate present and future life

The African-Brazilian ritual percussion music returns.

**LIBERTAS' SONG**

Electronic *Terreiro*  
Bird flying high

The rhythm now switches to a frenetic samba.

**LIBERTAS' SONG**

Vai Vai

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2  
3 Navio parado  
4 Itororó  
5 Shacks  
6  
7

8 The rhythm switches once more to a fast soul music rhythm. Libertas runs down stage towards  
9  
10 Antonio Conselheiro (played by director Zé Celso) who stands at the far end of the concourse  
11  
12 and back again to the centre singing:  
13

14  
15  
16 **LIBERTAS' SONG**  
17 Outside the Ghettos  
18 The rich, poor Whites, Blacks  
19 Come to Bixiga  
20 Attica  
21

22 The African-Brazilian ritualistic percussion begins once more. Libertas makes her way down  
23  
24 towards the exit. Sepia images of the old-time Bixiga are projected throughout the theatre space,  
25  
26

27  
28 **LIBERTAS' SONG**  
29 450 years of the Bixiga  
30 Even if it's late  
31 Take a hold of your destiny  
32 There's still time  
33 You liberate libertine Bixiga  
34

35 Libertas has by this point danced back towards the centre. A large, metallic Star of David has  
36  
37 been placed on the map of the old Bixiga in the centre of the concourse. The word "libertine" is  
38  
39 sung as a guttural wail and the chorus and audience all applaud.  
40  
41

42  
43 The lights dim. The percussive music returns louder than ever. The white actors leave the  
44  
45 concourse. The Black actors dance frenetically, as if taken by a sudden *barravento* (a violent  
46  
47 spiritual possession that sweeps non-initiates off their feet). Libertas whoops and shrieks, her  
48  
49 voice echoing throughout the space with reverb. The map of old-time Bixiga has been taken  
50  
51 away from the centre of the concourse and is now being hoisted up in the air above the platform  
52  
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55 by the exit, like a flag.  
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3 An actor enters holding a burning torch, which he passes along his body. Libertas rocks her body  
4 in the middle of the concourse, standing on the metallic Star of David. One of the actors draws a  
5 circle around her on the floor with gun-powder, flowing from a bull's horn. The actor with the  
6 torch steps into the mandala, and kneels before Libertas, his lit torch held erect between her legs,  
7 like a burning phallus. Libertas takes the torch in her hand and the male actor dances out of the  
8 circular mandala. Libertas lights the gunpowder with the torch. She is surrounded by a smoking,  
9 burning circle of exploding flames.  
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21 **Figure 6**  
22

23 A line of gunpowder leads off towards the far end of the exit. Libertas dances along it, with the  
24 ritual steps of Ogum. The trapdoor centre stage opens, and Marcelo Drummond, the longest-  
25 serving actor in the Oficina's cast alongside Zé Celso, climbs out dressed as Ham-Let, the  
26 character he played in a renowned company performance based on the Shakespearean classic,  
27 which was produced in the 1990s. He wears a leather jacket and trousers, and holds the skull of a  
28 mule in his hands. He dances off in circles and leaves the space through the doors of the main  
29 entrance as Libertas disappears at the far end of the concourse. The music comes to an abrupt  
30 halt.  
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42  
43 Thus, the abject subaltern (M)Other appears on stage in all her potent, *semiotic* glory in this  
44 scene. Personified by Libertas - the quasi-mythical Black female founder of the Bixiga *quilombo*,  
45 in the heart of São Paulo, performed with aplomb by accomplished African-Brazilian  
46 actress/singer Célia Nascimento – her presence-as-absence nevertheless transcends the  
47 individualized dramatic character, infiltrating the scenic action on every level.  
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3 The abject, subaltern, phallic (M)Other is ubiquitous throughout the scene; from the vast array of  
4 different musical rhythms played (which range from African-Brazilian sacred percussion to  
5 samba and contemporary Black Brazilian music); to the choreographed movement (the dance of  
6 the Orixás and the staged *barravento*); the sonorous timbre and range of Célia Nascimento's  
7 voice; her adorned, half-naked body, swathed in the golden colours of Oxum, the Orixá of love,  
8 fertility, richness and spring water; the exclusive presence of Black actors on the concourse; and,  
9 finally, the image of the burning phallic torch held aloft by the African-Brazilian matriarch as  
10 she sets alight a circular, womb-like gun powder-mandala around herself, transforming from  
11 woman into sacred sign. These graphemes all impregnate the scenic action with the (M)Other's  
12 libidinal, cadenced, sensual force.  
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28 This complex, metonymic web of overlapping theatrical grammès weaves a positive, divinized  
29 scenic portrayal of subaltern femininity that contrasts tremendously with the satirical, mocking  
30 depiction of Princess Isabel as puppet of the phallogocentric order, articulated earlier on. The  
31 fact that Marcelo Drummond as the character Ham-Let is “born” out of the trap-door at the end,  
32 emphasizes the fact that the Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona of the 1990s onwards is the “child” of  
33 this abject subaltern *semiotic*, which has held an increasing sway over the company's aesthetic  
34 since 1992, when the company debuted their anthropophagic version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*..  
35 Thus the *terreiro eletrônico* is dedicated to the Chthonic (M)Other as mythical founder of the  
36 Bixiga, and contemporaneous emblem of cultural potency and resistance.  
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50 The Star of David which Libertas stands upon towards the end of the scene was rescued by the  
51 Uzyna Uzona from the ruins of a local synagogogue that was demolished by the Grupo Sílvio  
52 Santos during the creation of *Os Sertões*. Thus, the Oficina draw a metaphoric link between their  
53 own counter-cultural, politically-motivated activities and Libertas' achievement as founder of a  
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Quilombo (a fact further accentuated by the juxtaposition between the colonial map of the Bixiga on the floor of the concourse and the recent recorded footage of the neighbourhood projected across the space). In this way, the Oficina scenically represent themselves as Libertas' legitimate heirs, carrying on her quilombolic model of struggle in the heart of the Bixiga against the forces of neoliberalism, personified by the machinations of the Grupo Silvio Santos. Thus the Oficina fuse with the (M)Other on stage, and are reborn as fertile extensions of her rhythmic, subversive potency.

### Conclusion

Over the course of *Os Sertões*, the Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona's radical aesthetic idiolect subversively articulates a decidedly *differant* form of postmemory on stage by accentuating the lasting trace of the country's subaltern heritage in their scenic rewriting of hegemonic historiographic discourse. The performance text consistently privileges an alternative form of knowledge; the tacit, pulsional, sacred *savoir-faire* of the country's African, Indigenous and Mestizo lines which is shown to have always already permeated the hegemonic Eurocentric script with an emphatically Brazilian spacing, cadence and rhythm. In this way, the company's anthropophagic form of theatrical remembrance eschews victimhood whilst celebrating the tenacious ways in which the subaltern has been able to stealthily make her mark on Brazilian society and culture throughout the ages.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include: Meiches, Mauro Pergaminik. *Uma pulsão espetacular: psicanálise e teatro* (São Paulo: Editora Escuta, 1997); Corrêa, José Celso Martinez. *Primeiro Ato: cadernos, depoimentos, entrevistas (1958 – 1974)*. (São Paulo: Editora 34, 1998); Pires, Ericson. *Zé Celso e a Oficina-Uzyna de corpos*. (São Paulo: Annablume, 2005) and Silva, Armando Sérgio da. *Oficina: Do Teatro Ao Te-Ato*. (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Examples include Simoni, Mariana Maia. “O Gosto da luta: Os Sertões como estratégia de construção teatral” (M.A. thesis, Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, 2006); Limongi, Joana Alice Pinheiro. “Fazer um múltiplo brasileiro: José Celso Martinez Corrêa, Uzyna Uzona e a montagem de Os Sertões” (M.A. thesis, University of Brasilia, 2008) and Antonacci, Dagmar Patricia Mc Quade. “Os Sertões de Euclides da Cunha e a engenharia espetacular do Teatro Oficina de José Celso Martinez Corrêa” (M.A. thesis, Federal University of Minas Gerais, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Available at <<http://teatroficina.uol.com.br/plays/8>> accessed on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Durval Muniz de Albuquerque Jr. *Inventando o Nordeste e outras artes* (Sao Paulo, Editora Cortez, 1999), 54.

<sup>5</sup> The War in Canudos took place between 1896-1897 in a climate of endemic poverty, chronic unemployment and

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extreme social inequality in the rural backlands of the Brazilian Northeast. These acute socio-economic conditions contributed to the rising popularity of charismatic populist leader Antonio Conselheiro, whose mystical visions and sharp criticism of the new Republic attracted thousands of followers amongst the rural poor, who looked up to the travelling pilgrim as a messianic figure. The local oligarchy claimed that Antônio Conselheiro was a monarchist, and the Republican army was called in to quash the burgeoning community. After three failed military interventions, a fourth and final expedition comprising six brigades finally decimated the local population. In all, it is estimated that 25, 000 impoverished peasants lost their lives in Canudos.

<sup>6</sup> Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England, 1997), 245.

<sup>7</sup> Hirsch, 5

<sup>8</sup> See Hans Thies Lehmann. *Postdramatic Theatre* (Oxon: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Lehmann, 85.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 28.

<sup>11</sup> Kristeva, 30

<sup>12</sup> Kristeva, 136.

<sup>13</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 202.

<sup>14</sup> Spivak, 364.

<sup>15</sup> The term (*M*)Other was coined by psychoanalyst Bruce Fink in his book *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (1995), to describe the role of the mother in castration. Within a Lacanian paradigm, it's a child's growing awareness of the desire that the mother (as primordial Other) feels for the phallic metaphor that initiates the onslaught of the symbolic order (through language acquisition and socialization). I use this term in a different way over the course of this article. The (*M*)Other to whom I am referring has much more in common with the abject phallic mother of Julia Kristeva's *semiotic*, rather than the symbolically determined maternal agent of Lacan's writing.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, Patrick. "Narciso Ctônico: Os Sertões e a (r)evolução estética do Teat(r)o Oficina Uzyna Uzona – uma escritura desconstrucionista." (Ph.D. diss., Federal University of Bahia, 2011) pp.192-204 and Campbell, Patrick "A subjetividade pós-colonial processual em Os Sertões do Teat(r)o Oficina" (Revista Repetrório: Teatro & Dança Ano 14 - Número 16 - 2011.1).

<sup>17</sup> See Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, pp.271-313. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> *Os Sertões* the complete work was made up of five separate performances, each lasting from four to six hours: *A Terra* (The Earth: 2002); *O Homem I* (The Man I: 2003); *O Homem II* (The Man II: 2003); *A Luta I* (The Struggle I: 2005) and *A Luta II* (the Struggle II: 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Bóí-bumbá is a Brazilian cultural manifestation that developed in the Northeast and, later, took on grander dimensions in the Amazon region. It re-enacts the folkloric tale of the death and resurrection of a bull. The animal is represented by a participant dressed in a colourful bull costume, made from a wooden frame covered by embroidered velvet, attached to a long, colourful skirt.

<sup>20</sup> Cunha, Euclides da. *Rebellion in the Backlands*. (London: Picador Travel Classics, 1995), 103

<sup>21</sup> Omolu is the Orixá of variola, linked to disease, medicine and the interior of the earth. He is a younger avatar of Obaluaiê, "The King of the Earth", and is the son of Nanã Buruku. The Candomblé initiates who incorporate Omolu during ritual events wear his unique traditional costume: an elaborate cape and headdress made out of raffia, that covers their face and a large part of their body.

<sup>22</sup> Cunha, 105

<sup>23</sup> The *Preto Velhos* (Old Blacks) are entities cultivated by followers of Umbanda, and appear in the form of old African slaves who are wise, patient and tender towards the faithful. They are linked to the African ancestors of the Brazilian people, and are honoured especially on May 13, the day that the Golden Law abolishing slavery was signed by Princess Isabel in 1888.