


**PARTIAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN RITUAL
AND PERFORMANCE IN *BORI: OFERENDA À CABEÇA***


CONEXÕES PARCIAIS ENTRE RITUAL E PERFORMANCE EM
BORI: OFERENDA À CABEÇA

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Partial connections between ritual and performance in Bori: *Oferenda à cabeça*

Abstract: This article analyzes intersections between the artistic and the religious in visual arts, focusing on Ayrson Heráclito's performance *Bori: Oferenda à cabeça* (2008). It seeks to understand how the work mobilizes and reinterprets elements of Candomblé—especially the ritual of offering food to the *orí* (spiritual head)—in the field of contemporary art, creating friction between art and religion. To develop the analysis, documentation of the work prepared by the Pinacoteca de São Paulo, the catalog of the exhibition in which the performance was presented, and interviews given by the artist were examined, articulated with a theoretical-conceptual approach based on Marilyn Strathern's reference of “partial connections.” In the performance, while *alabês* sing and play songs related to *orixás*, a performer composes crowns of raw and cooked foods on the heads of 12 artists lying on mats, who personify the children of different deities. The study emphasizes the subtleties of the preparation, activation, and demobilization of the performance, which highlight the symbolic complexity of transposing the ritual into the artistic realm. It argues that this process constructs an intricate game of analogies that, while reiterating the aesthetic dimension of the work, allows it to be understood as a space of mediation between rituality and artistic creation. Thus, Heráclito's performance highlights the power of contemporary art to stretch disciplinary boundaries, while valuing knowledge and practices derived from Afro-Brazilian ancestry, contributing to broadening debates on memory, ritual, and representation in the arts.

Keywords: performance; Afro-Brazilian art; candomblé; musealization of art; Ayrson Heráclito.

Conexões parciais entre ritual e performance em Bori: *Oferenda à cabeça*

Resumo: O artigo analisa os atravessamentos entre o artístico e o religioso nas artes visuais, tendo como objeto a performance *Bori: Oferenda à cabeça* (2008), de Ayrson Heráclito. Busca-se compreender de que modo a obra mobiliza e ressignifica elementos do candomblé – em especial o ritual de oferecimento de alimentos ao *ori* (cabeça espiritual) – no campo da arte contemporânea, instaurando fricções entre arte e religião. Para desenvolver a análise, foram examinados documentações da obra elaboradas pela Pinacoteca de São Paulo, o catálogo da exposição em que a performance foi apresentada e entrevistas concedidas pelo artista. Esses elementos foram articulados a uma abordagem teórico-conceitual sustentada pelo referencial das “conexões parciais”, de Marilyn Strathern. Na ação performática, enquanto *alabês* cantam e tocam cânticos relacionados aos *orixás*, um performer compõe coroas de alimentos crus e cozidos sobre as cabeças de 12 artistas deitados em esteiras, que personificam filhos de diferentes divindades. O estudo enfatiza as sutilezas das etapas de preparação, ativação e desmobilização da performance, nas quais se evidencia a complexidade simbólica da transposição do ritual para o âmbito artístico. Argumenta-se que esse processo constrói um intrincado jogo de analogias que, ao mesmo tempo em que reitera a dimensão estética da obra, permite compreendê-la como um espaço de mediação entre ritualidade e criação artística. Assim, a performance de Heráclito evidencia a potência da arte contemporânea em tensionar fronteiras



disciplinares, ao mesmo tempo em que valoriza saberes e práticas oriundos da ancestralidade afro-brasileira, contribuindo para ampliar os debates sobre memória, ritual e representação no sistema das artes.

Palavras-chave: performance; arte afro-brasileira; candomblé; musealização da arte; Ayrson Heráclito.



1 Introduction

The beating of the *atabaques*, the voices greeting the *orixás* in song, the white garments glowing under the light, the scent of palm oil and freshly cooked food—all within an art museum. The unease caused by the clash of contexts, the questioning of institutional norms, and even a subtle suspension of reality are among responses elicited by the performance *Bori: Oferenda à cabeça* (2008), created by artist, curator, and university professor¹ Ayrson Heráclito. An *ogã* in Candomblé, at a Jeje Mahi nation *terreiro* in the suburbs of Salvador, Bahia State, Heráclito sets out to present a poetic interpretation of *bori*, one of the initiation rituals in the African-Brazilian religion that venerates *orixás*, *inquices*, or *voduns*, deities embodying the force and power of nature.

The performance usually takes place at night, in a dimly lit space where the lighting draws the audience's attention to a central area where the artistic action unfolds. Over the course of roughly two and a half hours, the performer leading the action (played by Heráclito in all activations up to the writing of this article) creates ornamental compositions with religious foods around the heads of 12 hired performers. One by one, these performers lie down on mats in view of the audience and receive, over and around their heads, arrangements of raw and cooked foods associated with each of the 12 *orixás* honored. As each ornamentation dedicated to an *orixá* is completed, the deity is celebrated by specific chants performed by a group of *alabês*—sacred musicians responsible for playing and caring for the sacred percussion instruments of Candomblé.

The word “*bori*,” in the Yoruba language², derives from the fusion of “*bô*” (offering) and “*ori*” (head), thus referring to the act of “feeding the head” (Rabelo, 2013; Moreira, 2022). In Candomblé, the head is considered the place in the human body in which one's spiritual essence and consciousness reside. The *bori* ritual consists of offering sacred foods to the deity residing in each person, a force that connects the individual's ruling *orixá* to the creative power of Olódùmarè (“I am that which is”).

The performance *Bori* fits into what Ayrson Heráclito calls “performance-*ebó*,” a category that encompasses “[...] works directly associated with the re-signification of Candomblé's ritual practices” (Ferreira; Sant'Anna, 2013, p. 2,350). It incorporates emblematic elements of Heráclito's trajectory, whose four-decade-long career has been devoted, among other pursuits, to exploring forms of healing for violence stemming from the enslavement of Africans and their descendants. His works—spanning installation, performance, photography, and video—often dialogue with Candomblé references to evoke the resilience of Afro-Brazilian culture and its connections between

1 Heráclito holds a PhD in Communication and Semiotics from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo and is a professor at the Center for Arts, Humanities and Letters at the Federal University of Recôncavo da Bahia (UFRB).

2 Regarding the spelling of Yoruba-derived words in this article: the text written by the authors follows Portuguese orthographic conventions. When these words appear within quotations, they are reproduced according to the original source.



Africa and the diaspora in the Americas. Materials such as palm oil, dried meat, sugar, semen, and blood are employed with the intention of questioning the lingering effects of colonialism and racism embedded in Brazilian culture. As Heráclito stated in an interview (Tessitore, 2018), he seems himself as “[...] a kind of translator of this sacred universe. A translator in the sense of someone who brings people closer to another world, making it accessible for those who are not initiated.”

In this article, we propose an analysis of associations between *Bori* and the religious ritual that inspires it³. The relationship between ritual and artistic action brings forth a series of considerations regarding both the experience and preservation of the work. The tension inherent since the conception of *Bori* gained an additional layer of complexity in 2020, when the piece was acquired by the Patrons Program of Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo and became part of the museum's collection.

The relevance of this study lies in the timeliness of its concerns, especially in light of contemporary debates on the musealization of performance and its challenges of preservation, documentation, and transmission. In analyzing *Bori: Oferenda à cabeça*, we analyze an artistic gesture, questioning the conditions of preservation and institutional reintegration of practices that, by their ephemeral, ritualized, and embodied nature, resist conventional logics of museum conservation.

2 Brief description of *Bori*, the performance

Bori: Oferenda à cabeça was first activated by Ayrson Heráclito in 2008, in front of the Castro Alves Theater in Salvador, Bahia State. Since then, it has been presented at least twice before being acquired by the Pinacoteca in 2020: during the activation during the International Performance Manifestation (MIP2) in 2009, and at the IC13 Dance Festival organized by the Federal University of Bahia in 2019. After its acquisition, the performance was presented in 2021 at the Museu de Arte do Rio, in Rio de Janeiro, and in 2022 at the Pinacoteca, both activations taking place during the *Yorùbáiano* exhibition season. The work evolved into a photo-performance in 2011, with a series of 12 images—present in full configuration in the collections of different museums (such as Museu de Arte do Rio and the Art Institute of Chicago) and as individual prints in institutional and private collections. In 2023, following the activation at Pinacoteca the previous year, the piece gained an audiovisual variation with

³ Although this investigation occasionally engages with concepts developed within the field of Performance Studies and recognizes the importance of dialogue between the performing arts and anthropology in this area, its analytical focus is situated within visual arts, privileging the discussion on the musealization of performance. Thus, while aspects related to performance language and Black-referenced epistemology are fundamental dimensions of Ayrson Heráclito's work, this article focuses on examining challenges involved in its registration, documentation, and preservation within the visual arts system.



the short film “*Irawo Bori: oferenda para a cabeça cósmica*” (16’), directed by Lula Buarque de Hollanda.

During *Bori*, the conductor (main performer, a role assumed by Heráclito in all activations up to 2025) leads the public assembly of food mandalas around the heads of 12 performers, who represent the children of Candomblé deities. The offerings are made to one head at a time and, gradually, each performer lies down on mats arranged on the floor in a spiral-like formation.

The conductor, the 12 interpreters, and the *alabês* wear white cotton garments. The women’s attire consists of a skirt tied above the bust, adorned with silk ribbons and finished with white English embroidery at the hem. The men must wear white cotton pants fastened at the waist with a cotton drawstring. All performers are barefoot.

In addition to the 12 mats, the spatial composition includes 12 white cushions, microphones, and speakers. Three benches are placed at one end of the space to accommodate the performers. The four to six *alabês*, along with their respective musical instruments, should occupy an area with good acoustic conditions. Twenty-five straw baskets containing the sacred foods to be arranged by the conductor are also set out. The performance begins with the interpreters seated on wooden benches, arranged in the order in which they will enter the performance space. The *alabês* then play an introductory song called “*Ramunha*,” followed by a chant dedicated to Exu⁴. After music ends, the conductor begins arranging the head offerings, and the subsequent songs correspond to the order in which the heads of each deity are prepared, following the classificatory sequence of the *orixás* in the *xirê*⁵.

For the preparation of each deity’s head, specific foods are required, prepared according to Candomblé precepts and by an initiated practitioner⁶. The first head to be assembled is that of Ogun, followed by those of Oxossi, Omolú/Obaluaê, Xangô, Ossanha, Oxumaré, Kitembo/Tempo/Iroko (the only Bantu deity in the performance), Oxum, Iansã, Iemanjá, Nanã, and Oxalá. The foods must be placed on the interpreters’ heads so as to “create an expressive composition” (Portas Vilaseca Galeria, [2020], p. 4). These visual constructions—described by Heráclito himself as sculptural (Borí, 2022, 2’19)—require large quantities of sacred foods: Ogun’s head, for instance, requires 30 kilograms of raw yams; Oxóssi’s, 10 to 15 kilograms of cooked red corn; and Xangô’s, 20 to 24 kilograms of raw okra. For Yansã’s head, the descriptive report submitted by the artist to the Pinacoteca foresees 500 *acarajés*. None of the foods are

4 No head offering is made for Exu; however, one of the conductor’s commitments is to prepare the *padês*—sacred foods composed of cassava flour, honey, palm oil, among others—at least six hours before the public activation of the performance. These offerings are dedicated to the “street deities” (Pinacoteca de São Paulo – Núcleo de Acervo Museológico, [2022?], p. 4), defined in the description published on Google Arts and Culture as Exu and Pombogira (Pinacoteca de São Paulo, [2022-1?]).

5 *Xirê* is the circular dance in which devotees dance and sing for the *orixás*, who, on this occasion, manifest in the material realm. The ritual is very common during festive periods in the life of the *terreiro*. For further information, see Silva (2012).

6 In the activations held up to 2025, the preparation of the foods was carried out by Joceval Santos.



consumed by the 12 performers, nor are they offered to participants⁷ gathered around the performance space⁸.

With the 12 heads composed of their respective foods and liturgical chants (Figure 1), the *alabês* play the closing song while the interpreters remain lying down for a few moments, enabling the participants to contemplate the scene. Only at this point are audience members allowed to move among the mats, take photographs, and record videos—carefully, so as to preserve the harmony established by the performance. Finally, the conductor assists each performer in rising, dismantling the head compositions, thus bringing the action to a close.

Figure 1 - Ayrson Heráclito. *Bori: Oferenda à cabeça* (2008). Performance Activation held at Pinacoteca de São Paulo, August 2020.



Source: Ayrson Heráclito, 2020

7 According to the Guide for the Preservation of Performance Works of Art in Brazilian Public Museums (Silva, Tinoco *et al.*, 2025, p. 122-123), *participador* (participant) is a “[t]erm mentioned by Hélio Oiticica in the texts of his Environmental Program. It defines a shift from the position of spectator to a more active active stance toward the artwork, in which the person not only observes but also participates in the artistic action, remaining open to the possibility of a new perceptual behavior.”

8 An activation of *Bori* also requires post-performance measures regarding leftover foods. A basket containing a small portion of each food used must be set aside to be dispatched by the conductor in a location such as a park, forest, river, sea, or lake. Uncooked foods may be donated to institutions, as well as some of the cooked items. It is recommended that this distribution be organized in advance to prevent food waste. After the 2022 activation, the sacred foods were donated to the cultural and social space Teatro de Contêiner Mungunzá for the distribution of soups to individuals in situations of social vulnerability. The grains used in the performance were donated to Dona Carmem, Birico/Teatro de Contêiner, and to the Candomblé house Ile Axé Kalamu Funfun (Pinacoteca de São Paulo – Núcleo de Acervo Museológico, [2022?], p. 2).

3 Observations on the *bori* ritual in Candomblé

The *bori* ritual (Barretti Filho, 2010; Rabelo, 2013; Monteiro) is a traditional practice within African-Brazilian religions, particularly Candomblé. “To perform a *bori*,” as initiates commonly say, “[...] consists in establishing, consecrating, venerating, and offering to the òrìsà Orí—in other words, to worship and praise Orí, thus creating a link between the head (*orí*) of the neophyte who dwells in the àiyé and the head of their double (*Enikeji*) who resides in the òrun, thereby creating the harmony and balance necessary for life [...]” (Barretti Filho, 2010, p. 1-2).

During the ceremony, one feeds a person’s *orí* by offering sacred foods prepared specifically for this purpose. The goal is to establish a communion among three elements: the material head of the person receiving the ritual, the *orixá* that governs their spiritual head (their *orí*, which is not to be confused with the person’s ruling *orixá*), and the creating power of Olódùmarè.

Orí is a sacred entity in Candomblé, worshipped as the central point of individuality. According to Barretti Filho (2010), each person has their own *orí*, chosen before their earthly birth. Leke Adeofe (2004) argues that the presence of *orí* is what defines a being as human in Yoruba culture, endowing the individual with a stable identity and the ability to determine their own destiny. Adeofe (2004) also states that the continuity of intentions, beliefs, and memories via *orí* is directly connected to the purpose of fulfilling projects aimed at self-realization: “*Orí* provides the metaphysical support necessary for our social existence; it helps shape our beliefs, characters, and social projects that are truly our own. With *orí*, our social existence exemplifies a process of self-realization” (Adeofe, 2004, p. 13).

The *bori* ritual is a moment of retreat, conducted by a priest or priestess (*babalorixá* or *ialorixá*) who invokes protection and asks for physical, mental, and spiritual health for the person being honored, with prayers and chants related to the *orixá* who governs that person’s head. It is usually preceded by herbal baths and other purification procedures. Preparations include the purchase and preparation of foods, beverages, herbs, and other items according to religious precepts. “In *bori*, eating triggers different levels of relationship, continuously shifting the positions of subject and object, self and other, inside and outside” (Rabelo, 2013, p. 92).

The foods used in the ceremony are those prescribed by the *orí* by means of a consultation with the priest or priestess using cowrie shells, as part of the ritual preparations: “[...] food is not merely the vehicle for human requests; it carries *axé*, the vital energy that must be accumulated and renewed to ensure the life of the *terreiro* and of the various beings present within it, including the *orixás*” (Rabelo, 2013, p. 93). Among the elements offered to the *orí* is the *obi*, or kola nut, considered sacred in Candomblé. Some animals are sacrificed (“sacralized”) during the ceremony, which may include guinea fowl, pigeons, chickens, fish, and *igbin* (African snail, associated with *Oxalá*), as well as others required by the *orí*. Foods are offered to *orí* in vessels called *igbá-orí* in Candomblé, which represent the double from the òrun (spiritual realm) in the àiyé (material realm).



The seats prepared in *Borí* are the *igbá-orí* and the *kòlòbó*. Separately, *igbá-orí* is a lidded vessel representing the *orí-òde òrun*, while the *kòlòbó* or *ìborí* is similar but much smaller, representing the *orí-inú òrun*. The pair *igbá-orí* / *kòlòbó* represents the *orí-òrun*, while the pair *orí-òde àiyé* / *orí-inú àiyé* represents *orí-àiyé*. These sets (including, of course, spiritual coexisting elements) compose the *òrìsà Orí*, which is offered in the *Borí* ritual, both in the neophyte and in the representative vessels, thus corroborating and communing with human coexistence (Barretti Filho, 2010, p. 3-4).

According to the guide written by Marcelo dos Santos Monteiro⁹ ([n.d.], p. 25), the person whose head receives the offering is the only one seated during the ceremony, on a straw mat, surrounded by the foods to be offered. The other participants, dressed in white, remain standing. As described by Daniela Calvo (2020, p. 2)¹⁰, offerings are made “[...] to the person’s *orí*, to the *òrìsà*, to ancestors, and to other spiritual beings (according to the indications of the oracle). All share in the meat of animals that were sacralized and cooked.” Monteiro (p. 29) further instructs: “After the sacrifice, everything on the ‘table’ is offered to the head, the mouth, the *Ebò*, and the participants. Remember that the head only eats what the mouth eats.”

The act of sharing the same food accompanies several moments, both upon the person’s arrival and departure from the *terreiro* and throughout the ritual itself: those present eat a portion of what is offered to the person’s *orí* and the meats of animals consecrated and offered to the *òrìsà*. Sharing food is a fundamental value within *terreiros*; it is part of health care, and it reinforces and creates bonds among people, ancestors, and spiritual beings (Calvo, 2020, p. 4).

After this moment, the person who received the ritual goes to rest, with a bit of each element offered to their *orí* placed around their head, supported by a white cloth. The following morning, the priest or priestess lifts the person to conduct the oracular consultation and final procedures. The person then takes a ritual bath, prepared by the priest or priestess the previous day, and proceeds to have breakfast before returning home. (Calvo, 2020).

The *bori* ritual “[s]trengthens the *orí* and, in doing so, steadies the individual’s head, bringing the balance necessary for their health and, when applicable, preparing them to receive their *orixá* (thus preceding the initiation process)” (Rabelo, 2013, p. 90). For practitioners of Candomblé, nourishing the *orí* using the *bori* offering strengthens their vital energy and fosters a deeper harmony with their *orixá* of head and spiritual guidance. Among the expected outcomes are health, self-control, and prosperity, along with a decrease in the frequency and intensity of feelings such as anxiety, fear, and sadness.

The *bori* may be performed periodically to ensure spiritual integration between a person and their *orí*, or it may serve as a preparatory rite before deeper initiations within the religion: “[...] only after the *Borí* can other deities be worshipped or established, and, if applicable, produce trance in

9 Marcelo dos Santos Monteiro is *Omọ-Áwo Ifafunké* (Supreme Priest) of *Ilé Àṣe Idasilẹ̀ Qdẹ̀* (Casa de Àṣe: liberdade do caçador), in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

10 Calvo (2020) reports having attended the *bori* ritual, which lasted one day, at the *Àṣe Idasilẹ̀ Qdẹ̀* of Bábá Marcelo dos Santos Monteiro *Oloye Qdẹarofa Omọ-awo Ifa-Funké*, a Keto-nation *terreiro* located in the city of Rio de Janeiro.



the now ‘*boriado*’ individual, since their head has already been consecrated and is being worshipped, therefore ready to proceed to other initiations [...]” (Barretti Filho, 2010, p. 3-4).

4 Partial connections between ritual and performance

Research on the musealization process of the performance *Bori*, which forms the basis of this article, included an analysis of the available documentation, interviews with professionals from the institution, participation during the activation of the work at the Pinacoteca in 2022, conversations with the artist, and a bibliographic survey on Candomblé and on the artwork itself. In attempting to inventory different intersections within the work, we are prompted to conceive a relational model in which the events—ritual and performance, religious and artistic—interconnect and disconnect, without establishing coherent totalities or reducing one event to the other. The performance *Bori* is neither a mimetic enactment of the ritual—given the modifications and transformations of fundamental ritual elements, such as the absence of animal sacrifice and alterations in the preparation and offering of food—nor is it “devoid of *axé*.” We identify compositions among elements without their differences being nullified, whether in the interplay between the performance and the *bori* ritual or between the *bori* and other moments in the life of Candomblé, as will be further discussed.

In interviews and other occasions discussing the performance *Bori*, Ayrson Heráclito frequently asserts that the artistic action does not constitute a Candomblé ritual performed within the museum. The artist (Borí, 2022) argues it was necessary to construct a “regime of visibility” to respect what can or cannot be revealed outside the liturgical environment of Candomblé.

Because Candomblé is a religion like any other, whose secrets are sacred, they cannot be exposed by an anthropologist who kicks down the door and reveals secrets of the *santo’s* room; that is not my goal. And the performance *Bori* is an exercise in precisely that: how to speak of elements of nature, how to speak of divinities by means of their food (Borí, 2022, 3’49”).

Among differences between the religious ritual and the artistic interpretation proposed in the performance *Bori*, Marcello Moreira (2022) highlights the sacrificial nature of the food offerings to the deities. As previously noted, the ritual in the Candomblé *terreiro* includes the immolation of birds.

In this ceremony [...], two feathered animals, a guinea fowl and a pigeon, are sacrificed for the benefit of the *orí* (head), and the meaning of this sacrifice is expressed in one of the songs sung during the ritual: “The head will bring good things.” In the *bori*, the head receives the *ejé* of the sacrificed feathered animals offered on its behalf, while on the *bori* table are placed before the neophyte, and consequently before the head, parts of the sacrificed animals duly prepared in the *terreiro* kitchen according to ritual recipes. If there is a common component between the *bori* and the ceremony of feeding the Gods, it is precisely this duality of offerings destined for the head and the deities: on one side, the *ejé*, and on the other, dry foods. The latter are called so because they obviously contrast with the



shedding of sacrificial blood, with sacrifice belonging to the realm of the raw, while the offering of dry foods belong to that of the cooked, which complements it (Moreira, 2022, p. 92-93).

Thus, in the *bori*, a distinction is made between foods of animal origin, which are offered raw, and those of plant origin (called “dry foods” in the Nagô Candomblé tradition), which are cooked. In this sense, Moreira (2022, p. 93-94) identifies two changes in the performance *Bori* regarding the religious ritual. The first is that there is no animal sacrifice during the activation: “[...] there is, apparently, no *ejé* in Ayrson Heráclito’s *bori*, which would make it, from the perspective of Jeje and Nagô religious practice, completely atypical and, therefore, ineffective” (Moreira, 2022, p. 93). The second change is that food of plant origin is generally offered raw¹¹. This inversion, Moreira argues, brings back into the action the reference to the sacrifice that characterizes the *bori*:

What does Ayrson Heráclito achieve with this apparent reversal from cooked to raw? Why give to the head of the child of a God, without proper preparation, what is normally offered to the God only after being cooked? [...] In Ayrson Heráclito’s *bori*, the raw food, given to the head precisely for being raw, becomes a metaphor for what is par excellence offered to the heads of the Gods during the great ceremonies of Jeje and Nagô Candomblé: the raw yam, in Ayrson Heráclito’s performance, stands for animals whose *ejé* is given to Ogum; the okra is a metaphor for the sacrifice made in honor of Xangô. The raw is a metaphor for the raw (Moreira, 2022, p. 93-94).

The preparation for the performance makes the relationships between artistic action and ritual even more striking. In the dossier prepared between the artist and the Pinacoteca (Portas Vilaseca Galeria, [2022]), the instructions for selecting and hiring performers specify that the conductor must undergo a *resguardo*, a set of behavioral and dietary prescriptions to be followed for a defined period (Rabelo, 2014), serving as both physical and spiritual preparation for the performance. The guidelines can be adapted to the tradition of the *terreiro* to which the conductor belongs. However, the artist makes some recommendations:

It is recommended that preparations take place during the week preceding the ritual, including cleansing and *amaci* baths, avoiding places such as cemeteries and dumps; abstaining from alcohol and any psychoactive and consciousness-altering substances; refraining from sexual activity and avoiding stressful situations (Portas Vilaseca Galeria, [2022], p. 20).

The spiritual safeguard periods in candomblé are recommended during moments of *feitura* (initiation) or other religious obligations. During these periods, the goal is to strengthen the bond with the *orixá* and ensure both the necessary rest after performed tasks and spiritual cleansing and purification before undertaking obligations (Rabelo, 2014). Accordingly, the performance conductor must prepare under the same precepts as when preparing to fulfill an obligation in

11 “There are, however, in Ayrson Heráclito’s *bori*, foods that are given to the head after undergoing a certain degree of cooking, although this does not imply the ritual preparation of the dish made from cooked ingredients, since, in this case, they are not integrated with others that would complete the ritual recipe” (Moreira, 2022, p. 94).



Candomblé.

Turning our attention to another fundamental material aspect of the work, music, we are also prompted to examine other intersections that persist across all activations of the performance. In another section of the dossier (Portas Vilaseca Galeria, [2022], p. 19), we find the following guidelines for selecting musicians: “The *Alabés* (sacred musicians), *ogãs* whose main responsibility is to play the *atabaques* (Rum, Rumpi, and Lé), as well as the *Gan/Agogo*, *Xequerê*, and other sacred instruments, must be neophytes of Candomblé.”

During the performance, the presence of music is constant. As aforementioned, each drum pattern for an *orixá*, with the exception of Exu, is accompanied by the creation of a crown using the food of the *orixá* being honored. However, the drumming and chants of the *alabês* follow a repertoire distinct from the *bori*, which generally does not involve *atabaques*. In the ritual, the chants are specific to *Bori*, followed by songs for Iemanjá and Oxalá, with food offered to all *orixás* except Exu, and are characterized by a period of greater introspection in rhythm with the dynamics of life in Candomblé (Rabelo, 2014, 2020).

During the performance, the musical repertoire is presented according to the order of the *xirê*: Exu, Ogum, Oxossi, Omolú/Obaluaê, Xangô, Ossanha, Oxumaré, Kitembo/Tempo/Iroko, Oxum, Iansã, Iemanjá, Nanã, and Oxalá, with *atabaque* rhythms for each *orixá*. The *xirê* is “the circle of practitioners who sing and dance to call the *orixás* at the beginning of the festivals” (Rabelo, 2014, p. 172). In the *xirê*, the ritual dances of each *orixá* are performed: “[...] to the rhythms of the *atabaques* (Rum, Rumpi, and Lé), a connection is established between the Orum (the dwelling of the *Orixás*) and the Ayê (the Earth)” (Silva, 2012). The *xirê* can take place in more private festivities, in which only members of the *terreiro* are invited to participate in the circle/dance, or in more public events, in which non-members (and non-initiates) are invited to join the celebration, and initiated non-members of the house may even dance in the circle (Amaral; Silva, 2004; Silva, 2012; Rabelo, 2013; 2014; 2020).

Thus, the *xirê* is characterized by greater extroversion of life in the *terreiro*:

One of the best-known and most studied rituals of Candomblé is the public festival, called *xirê*. The beauty of this ritual truly stands out (both visually and aurally), as it is through the music played and sung by the *ogãs* (men with specific functions within the cult, including singing and playing the *atabaques*) that the *orixás* manifest in their “children of the saint” and come to earth to dance and distribute their vital force (*axé*) (Brito, 2018, p. 2).

The *bori*, in turn, is characterized by a more introspective rhythm within the dynamics of Candomblé: “the *bori* is not a public ritual: only those who have already given a *bori*, in addition to the novices, may be present, and generally only members of the *terreiro* attend” (Rabelo, 2011, p. 17). Heraclitus thus establishes connections not only between the performance and a ritual moment, but also between the rhythms of Candomblé life (private/public, introspection/extroversion). Although the *atabaques* and chants in the performance evoke the festival—the moment of the



xirê—there *orixás* do not dance during the artistic action. Conversely, the performance highlights bodies engaged in an artistic action presented to participants who are mostly unfamiliar with Candomblé practices and knowledge. Moreover, when staged in a museum under the paradigm of contemporary art (Heinich, 2017), the performance faces a serious risk of having its power diminished if interpreted by the audience through the lens of entertainment (Silva; Oliveira, 2022).

Faced with the complex relationships between the artistic and the religious in the performance *Bori*—relationships that do not enable simple conclusions regarding mimicry or direct reference—we encounter a dilemma similar to that examined by anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (2004) on the practice of anthropological writing and the comparative method. Strathern notes that anthropologists’ effort to describe foreign cultures using Western concepts—relying on the belief that such descriptions could provide an objective “portrait” of the observed social reality—often proved reductive, both due to the multiplicity of perspectives and approaches among researchers (obscured by the modern paradigm) and the impossibility of translation when considering the immeasurability of entire cosmogonies. As an alternative, the anthropologist suggests establishing what she calls “partial connections.”

In this regard, Strathern draws on the notion of the cyborg expressed in Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) to propose meaning-making based on elements that, although composed in different ways and from different origins, can be understood as analogous in certain aspects. Strathern introduces the concept of the cyborg as a figure that is neither fully machine nor fully human, and therefore escapes traditional forms of totalization. It is a hybrid whose identity cannot be reduced to either side, yet maintains a relationship between both without establishing a common measure. This constructs a relationship not of comparison, but of compatibility between disparate elements—an unstable connection that does not enable the substitution or overlapping of one element by the other. Thinking in these terms involves a continuous awareness of disproportion among variables and scales under consideration.

Another situation presented by Strathern (2004) to further elaborate the concept of partial connections is that of Highland societies. According to the author, these societies are partially connected, not completely, and such connections do not imply totality, insofar as one society does not “eclipse” another (undergoing processes of replacement and transformation). Thus, the anthropologist argues, full comparability is lost, yet a partial compatibility remains:

If so, we could envisage Highlands peoples as in a constant process of social life of self-substitution, eclipsing or turning one kind of world into another, through (a series of) historical events—comparability is lost in that eclipse, but a kind of compatibility remains. Analogy remains possible (Strathern, 2004, p. 54)¹².

In these cases, and in others also discussed by the anthropologist (such as the relationship

12 “If so, we could envisage Highlands peoples as in a constant process of social life of self-substitution, eclipsing or turning one kind of world into another, through (a series of) historical events – comparability is lost in that eclipse, but a kind of compatibility remains. Analogy remains possible” (Strathern, 2004, p. 54).



between anthropology and feminism), we encounter a thought in which the goal is not to construct syntheses, but to cultivate relationships that preserve difference. Analogy, therefore, is not an instrument of equivalence, but of displacement and openness to new conceptual connections—connections that relate heterogeneous entities without demanding their complete compatibility. Thus, partial connections are connections that simultaneously “cut” a relationship that differentiates, while at the same time linking.

Strathern (2004), therefore, invites us to consider models of relation in which we can compare cultural, social, or conceptual elements without reducing them to a totality that erases their differences. Similarly, in observing the musealization process of *Bori*, we constantly encounter a compositional practice that generates relationships via “partial connections” between the religious and the artistic.

In the performance, paradoxically, it is by means of the cultivation of an immeasurability between events (artistic action and ritual, *bori* and *xirê*) that a field of relations emerges—relations that are partial, because they do not aim to unify, synthesize, or mimic, but rather to preserve the interplay between differences. In this “politics of difference” shaped by the interweaving elements of *Bori*, we perceive, in a way, a condensation of several interventions, practices, moments, and rhythms (private/public, introspection/extroversion, silence/*atabaque*, etc.) inherent to the life of Candomblé, without, however, producing a mimetic enactment of the religious practices.

5 Final considerations

Bori: Oferenda à cabeça, by Ayrson Heráclito, frictionally engages the relationship between artistic enjoyment and devotional contemplation by transporting into the artistic sphere procedures inspired by the *bori* ritual, one of the most emblematic of Candomblé, preserved over centuries by victims and descendants of the colonial diaspora. Fagner Fernandes (2023) highlights the relevance of the work as a visual *oriki*, capable of transmitting ancestral knowledge to new generations and positioning itself as a celebration of resistance:

Heráclito’s performance is not merely a ritualistic transfer based on Candomblé practices; what he enacts is a political act. A claim to spaces and imaginaries, both inside and outside Western art galleries. [...] His intention also brought healing, a mirror before us, reflecting all our potential, for we were enslaved, demonized, bled, silenced, plagiarized, and killed. Even with all colonial power crushing us to this day, they have failed. (Fernandes, 2023, p. 103).

Heráclito’s commitment to procedures for performing *Bori* that remain linked to the precepts of Candomblé, from the preparatory phase onward, demonstrates in a dual sense what



Diana Taylor (2023, p. 54) emphasizes about the existence of performance¹³ as an epistemology, a way of understanding that “[...] provides a means to transmit knowledge through the body.” This premise is confirmed, Taylor (2023, p. 56) notes, even in performances “[...] decipherable by a small group of subinitiates and invisible or opaque to everyone else.”

Inhabiting the space between artistic action and the prohibitions of Candomblé, with the composition of ritual elements from the intimate sphere (*bori*) and the public realm (*xirê*) and their rhythms (reclusion and extroversion), seems to have been Heráclito’s strategy to circulate a performance that touches on the sacred at various moments, yet with (supposed) controlled access. By articulating partial connections between contemporary art and religious liturgy, and within Candomblé itself, between moments open or closed to non-initiates, *Bori* operates a kind of “artistic syncretism,” in which symbols, practices, and African-derived knowledge find a means of survival in images of a different order—not Catholic saints, but exhibition spaces and, subsequently, collections of public museums.

It is precisely in the gaps that cannot be fully perceived, in which any explanation attempting to exhaust them falls short, that the artistic provocation in *Bori* remains pertinent, intensified by the legacy of survival and Afro-descendant pride that the work carries. By subverting details of the religious ritual, Heráclito simultaneously manages to remain faithful to the devotional secrecy and to the heterodox character of contemporary art, establishing both an openness and a boundary that allow non-initiates in Candomblé to aesthetically experience an ancestral, solemn, and magical encounter.

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13 It is worth noting that the term, in Taylor’s approach (Performance Studies), is broader than the framework adopted in this article, in which we focus on performance art. Under Taylor’s specifications, both the *bori* ritual and Ayrson Heráclito’s artistic work *Bori* can be read as performances in different contexts: “performances operate as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity with repeated actions” (Taylor, 2023, p. 42).



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