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Abstract: This interview aims to explore, based on a Black perspective, the intersections between improvisation, theater pedagogy, and axé knowledge based on a dialogue between Altemar Di Monteiro and Gustavo Melo Cerqueira. The interview, conducted in May 2025, belongs to ongoing research for the book “Jogo Negro no Mundo” (Black Game in the World). An in-depth conversation between two Black professor-researchers (marked by critical reciprocity and the sharing of academic experiences) was adopted as the methodology. As a result, this text explains the importance of body repertoires and memory in educational processes, defending improvisation as Black intelligence constructed in relation to diasporic knowledge. The notion of spiral pedagogy, inspired by Makota Valdina and experiences in terreiros, articulated the idea of an education as axé centered on the vital force, the ethics of choice, and student autonomy. Such pedagogies should not be reduced to content topics, but rather understood as ways of existing and learning, calling for a commitment to other forms of presence and thought at the university.

Keywords: improvisation; spiral pedagogy; axé; Black knowledge; theater teaching.

Improvisação e Saberes de axé:

Altemar Di Monteiro entrevista Gustavo Melo Cerqueira

Resumo: Esta entrevista tem por objetivo explorar, em chave negrorreferenciada, as interseções entre improvisação, pedagogia teatral e saberes de axé, a partir do diálogo entre Altemar Di Monteiro (UFMG) e Gustavo Melo Cerqueira (UNIRIO). A entrevista, realizada em maio de 2025, integra a pesquisa em andamento para o livro “Jogo Negro no Mundo.” A metodologia adotada foi a escuta em conversa aprofundada entre dois professores-pesquisadores negros e marcada por reciprocidade crítica e partilha de experiências acadêmicas. Como resultado, o texto explicita a importância dos repertórios do corpo e da memória nos processos formativos, articulando a improvisação como inteligência negra construída na relação com saberes da diáspora. A partir da noção de pedagogia espiralar, inspirada por Makota Valdina Pinto e pelas vivências em terreiros, articula-se a ideia de uma educação como axé, centrada na força vital, na ética da escolha e na autonomia dos estudantes. Conclui-se que tais pedagogias não devem ser reduzidas a tópicos de conteúdos, mas compreendidas como modos de existir e fazer aprender, convocando um compromisso com formas outras de presença e pensamento na universidade.

Palavras-chave: improvisação; pedagogia espiralar; axé; saberes negros; ensino de teatro.



1 Introduction

At an early afternoon in Tiradentes prior to preparing for a talk about Black Theaters at the Tiradentes em Cena Festival 2025, Altemar Di Monteiro, professor of the undergraduate theater course at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, proposed an interview with Gustavo Melo Cerqueira, babalorixá and theater professor at Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. This interview grew from “Jogo Negro no Mundo,” to be published by Di Monteiro in 2026. Based on the research to write this book in process, Di Monteiro has been conducting some interviews, including the following one with Melo Cerqueira, which seeks to discuss aesthetics, politics, and pedagogy based on the relations between improvisation and Black diaspora knowledge. By proposing the idea of “Black game in the world,” Altemar Di Monteiro has investigated how *quintal*, *axé*, *reinado*, *batalha*, *ginga*, and other practices can become curricular principles, disobeying the white-centric frames of theatrical improvisation. In this conversation, the two Black professors bet on thinking about the challenges of a moving theatrical training that addressees Blackness themes and ways of doing. Altemar Di Monteiro and Gustavo Melo Cerqueira show some of the various crossings and challenges of thinking-doing *with* and *based on* Black knowledge in university. The interview was conducted on May 23, 2025. It lasted one hour and a half in its original format, which produced 35 pages of transcription. This edited version sought synthesis.

2 Interview

Altemar Di Monteiro (ADM): Hello, Gustavo! I have been working on this book since I finished my PhD in 2021. Writing is enjoyable. I take the greatest pleasure and excitement from writing. When we write, we see the image of thought, which is really cool, but it is always a very lonely process. Before publishing it, I have sent my book to some people, who agreed to this interlocution, to see if I am not going too crazy. Chime in and ask some questions because, otherwise we go mad, right? This process includes two people who, for me, are fundamental to exchange ideas about some concepts: you and Babá Everton de Iemonjá. I am interested in knowing how you elaborate your thoughts based on the terreiro experience. The proposal here is this exchange, to talk about what I am thinking, about this notion of Black game in the world. In a way, what I am trying to write has a desire that is, in addition to aesthetic, political. Since the 1970s, the way in which theatrical improvisation has been thought of as a curriculum has almost always followed a European and/or reference. We almost never think of theatrical improvisation based on the knowledge of Brazil, based on the various Black-Brazilian crossroads. Therefore, I have been very curious about this subject. Even when we try to think about improvisation from Brazil, the references almost all revolve around the interculturality debate. So, I am interested in thinking about the *Black game in the world* not from the outside but from the peripheral knowledge itself, from terreiro, from



quintal, from axé communities. In a way, what I am trying to articulate is that the very notion of improvisation can be thought of as a Black knowledge. In this articulation, I have walked together with reinos, congados, funk, rap battles, ballroom. Various scenic, peripheral, and terreiro cultural practices have mobilized me to think about this idea of Black game in the world. I want to talk to you about this.

Gustavo Melo Cerqueira (GMC): Just so I do not lose your point on improvisation. It can also articulate discussions with axé. There is a guy named George Lewis (2002). He discusses the American context but I think that some of his ideas are interesting and pertinent to other Afrodiasporic contexts. He wrote an article on improvised music or improvisation in music after the 1950s that distinguishes two perspectives: a perspective he calls Eurological and another he calls Afrological. He does not go so far as to propose what you are doing — that is, claiming improvisation as Black knowledge — but he understands that there is an Afrological way of improvising that has characteristics that distinguish it from that way he names Eurological. Perhaps this is an important consideration to make, that is, less the idea that improvisation is Black knowledge but rather that Black epistemologies give rise to their own modes of improvisation. Speaking from my own words based on my understanding of Lewis's article, relating it to my experience in axé and extrapolating the dimension of music to include the body and dance, I think that improvisation in an Afrological perspective is perhaps much more anchored in a previously developed repertoire than the improvised music in a Eurological perspective. The existence of such previous repertoire is not always what is taught and disseminated. This repertoire often lies in how much we learn and apprehend from our lived experience. It is always important for us to talk a little about this relationship between the drum and the body, especially the body in a trance state but not only that. Considering this is important because, when we talk about axé, especially in the context of terreiros, we should remember that many cultural expressions and productions take place in that context, such as, for example, samba de roda, in which we also see this complementary relationship of the drum that improvises based on a certain vocabulary or repertoire and the body that dances and improvises whether in a trance or not. But even when we see the way orixás dance, we usually realize that the older orixás are the ones who improvise as they have had existed for longer in the body of the child; that is when you start to see some improvisation. You do not see it as much before that. Prior to that, it is time to create the repertoire, the vocabulary in that body. When you are older, you improvise, you create, you produce something new based on that repertoire, which can even become part of the repertoire at a later date. You see that body gaining structure, gaining repertoire, gaining harmony. Then comes the time to improvise. One improvises based on the examples that have been constituted in that body. It is not spontaneity. Improvisation is built on the basis of a performative and historical accumulation.



ADM: Given my thoughts on the matter, I cannot agree with you on spontaneity. In fact, I critically undertake this discussion all the time. I dig and dig and look for other positions. I also trust in the construction of the repertoire. In fact, I do not even use *repertoire*, I prefer *reference*. I formally distinguish between repertoire and reference. I articulate repertoire as in the order of accumulation; whereas reference describes everything that is transformed in a relational way from a set of things that affect us, cast us, and are put into play with the world. It has to do with memory, with what jumps out from this knowledge of the body. Although a conceptual philosophical distinction, I believe it makes a difference. In the end, both demand a relationship with a body that only interacts with the world because it knows something even if that something is not fully conscious. Then, when you talk about orixás, when we think about the knowledge of the elders, it is a body that carries a lot of memory. From there, in fact, one has a game to play with a very large collection of references. So, in a way, I articulate it like that too. I find that thinking about the training of students in the university (whose cultural repertoire is nourished by the archive of whiteness) and reviewing references has an immense aesthetic and political force. I like to think that we are inside the university creating in a pedagogical process another archive of memories for these students, another reference so they can improvise based on Black-referenced, Black-diasporic, Indigenous, and other knowledge. However, there is an issue that sometimes disturbs my sleep. Whiteness — especially the one that accesses the spaces of power in the university, in culture, in the arts — has always had access to all kinds of repertoire. It collects it. They travel the world, read all the books, enjoy the possibility of filling suitcases and stocking up on knowledge, whereas many Black communities have not even accessed this possibility of transit (when they do that, it is almost always by force of violence). Understanding that we are now increasingly leaving the theme to assert ourselves as a form, as a methodology, as a construction of thought, as Black intelligence, I have been asking myself to what extent we will be able to move forward. My quest is to try to look at what this knowledge actually does within the university. For example, I get really uneasy in my classes. I have 22-student classes, of whom only four or five are Black at most. A thought sometimes haunts me: to whom is this knowledge actually becoming reference in the university? What do you think about this?

GMC: I have had, for example, just to mention this racial demographic, a considerable number of Black students. Generally, I have about 25%, if at all, of white students. You are talking about Black-referenced knowledge, not necessarily about axé, right?

ADM: Exactly. Now I am talking more broadly.

GMC: Well, I have had a series of crises. I will try to separate them into three layers. One layer has to do with people's academic training. What is this I am calling academic training? For me,



it includes a super pragmatic thing that is related to the job market. Another thing is thinking about Black-referenced content. Another layer includes reflections on what Black-referenced methodologies would be. These three layers are closely related, especially the last two, but for now I want to treat them as distinct from each other. The issue of training, which is one of the first things that caught my attention, includes a component I have been teaching: Theater, Culture, and Society. I have been working with concepts that I think are super important for people who are entering Theater courses, such as theatricality, performativity, State, society, community, culture, identity, and cultural policies. I work on all these concepts and ideas but the axis of the component, what enables me to deal with all these themes, are Black theaters or Black theatricalities in Brazil. Talking about Black theatricalities gives us the opportunity to address all the themes or contents I have mentioned based on a necessary dialogue with Black-referenced pedagogical materials, even if not exclusively. It is an exercise and a demonstration of the possibility of transversalizing what we could call Black-referenced pedagogies without having to confine such pedagogies to a single curricular component. Therefore, I am working on more traditional content to train people to teach theater but I do this in dialogue with other themes and content that are also very important, which are Black theatricalities. This makes everything much more complex and richer. It is also important to say that it is not only a matter of bringing Black-referenced content to the course, but also of thinking about the development of methodologies that are based on such a repertoire, vocabulary, or even the technology that has been developed, for example, in *candomblé terreiros*. I have experienced what I call a spiral pedagogical approach. I call this the spiral methodology because I point out the contents and return to them in a variety of ways throughout the semester. Each time I return to them, I give them a different degree of depth. This is certainly inspired by what Leda Maria Martins (2021) calls spiraling time, based on Bantu cultures and the studies of Bunseki Fu Kiau (2001), but the first person who really woke this in me was the late Makota Valdina Pinto¹. Based on the memory of a conversation I had with Makota Valdina with Cia dos Comum², I began to perceive the spirality of time in my life, especially in the context of *candomblé*. It is precisely in some aspects of the pedagogy in *terreiros* that I anchor myself to propose what I am provisionally calling the spiral pedagogical approach or spiral methodology. To bring a practical example and respecting the ethical limits of secrecy, there is something very recurrent in my tradition in *candomblé* in which we never tell an elder that we know how to do something. We often avoid showing great self-confidence when an elder assigns us a task. This obviously depends on the moment but if we realize that some temporal elasticity offers us the possibility to take advantage of that task to learn a little more about it, the myths that underlie it, and the past experiences that justify our own way of performing that task, we do not open our mouths to say that we know how to do it. Sometimes we show some insecurity

1 Valdina de Oliveira Pinto (1943-2019) was Makota in the Tanuri Junsara *candomblé terreiro* from the Angola nation. She was an educator, activist, writer, and one of the main voices in the fight for education and against religious racism.

2 A Black theater group founded in 2001 in Rio de Janeiro at the initiative of actor Hilton Cobra. Cia dos Comum develops shows, workshops, and instances to discuss and propose public policies to develop and disseminate Black theatrical poetics.



on purpose so that the elder who assigned us the task can spend time with us and teach us again. By doing this, we are opening the possibility that, by re-teaching us, that elder will tell us more stories, bring us more details, teach us more songs, correct procedures, teach some foundation since they may now realize that we are ready to learn it. This happens if they ask us to make a portion of acarajé, prepare a bath, organize the materials for an ebó, and several other things. We never miss the opportunity to be able to absorb any kind of knowledge and contact with these elders because every time they revisit the doing, they present us with more depth. We are always in this possibility; every time I do it again, repeat that behavior, repeat that ritual, that way of doing it of an elder, I will always be able to refine what I am doing, deepen what I am doing and the layers of understanding and application of what I am doing. Axé has many secrets. Sometimes we do not teach things in axé not for a matter of secrecy, it is just that we need the circumstance. There are things that will not make sense to you if I were to teach you before you had lived the experience in our traditional axé thinking. This is the European thought, in which you teach in advance, which gives people as much knowledge as possible so that they go into the world knowing how to “deal with the world” based on those principles, a way of perceiving, a way of understanding, based on a prescription of how to react, how to act, how to intervene, and the expected result. I think a lot about ways to develop learning in the classroom regardless of whether the content is Black-referenced. I think there are Black ways of teaching and learning, and my interest is to develop ways to bring those ways into the classroom. I do not need to take a chant to class, I do not need to bring a percussion instrument to class. I am thinking about ways of teaching that are familiar to me today and are part of my body because of the way I have been educated in axé. Now, I am also very concerned that precisely these methodologies do not lose sight of the colonial skills people must master. In my opinion, this does not prevent the development of skills some people sometimes consider colonial or colonized, such as academic writing. I think that the person who enters the university must master it and other skills for their instrumentality for some modes of research and the pragmatic aspect of meeting the demands of the labor market. These people will go through several selection processes that will require the mastery of an academic organization of thought. So, this cannot be left aside. I encourage this in all the components I teach: the production of works that intertwine students’ lived experiences and research interests with classroom contents, expressed in academic modes, that is, in a linear, progressive, and allegedly evolutionary temporality. It seems contradictory to what I am calling the spiral pedagogical approach and maybe it is, but we are embracing the contradiction and walking forward. Because I am very concerned about the training of students, especially Black ones. I have the impression that some professors have been condescending toward Black quota students. It seems that sometimes a posture is taken of not demanding too much from a given profile of students when these students show some deficiencies, so to speak, regarding formal education. I think this is dangerous because students end up not being as prepared as they should. I think it is a form of belittling those students’ capacity, which can decisively affect their possibilities of social ascension. I know this is very complex but we have to think carefully about it. An effect I find somewhat perverse is that many people reach the end of the course to offer a mini-biography as their



undergraduate thesis instead of working from their lived experience and positionality — concepts that I began to work with my students so they could understand their implication on their subject, taking care so themselves do not constitute their only theme. I get the feeling that, when we give up talking about things in the world and remain in the biography, on the path, we offer ourselves as an object, we give ourselves as research material. Obviously, this is not always the case. There are works that bring the path as a way of thinking very critically about the world. But again, I think we need to think about this quite carefully. For me, crossroads is a place of encounter, a place of possibilities, everything is crossed there. I am working with Abdias do Nascimento, Evani Tavares, Leda Maria Martins, Alexandra Dumas, and Renata Lima. I am bringing all these guys but I am also bringing Michel Foucault, Marilena Chauí, Josette Feral, Erika Fischer-Lichte, among others without the slightest problem. I bring Augusto Boal too; I make these crosses. The other day we were discussing body based on Tadashi Endo because of the Butoh story. So, I promote various crossings within my positions because I understand that that is what our Black cultural identity brings us. I am not willing to give up our permeability because I want those of us who are going through the university to leave it with a lot of skill and freedom to think and act.

ADM: I am super happy for you saying that because it also has a lot to do with the issues that I think about, that I am discussing, including in the Negrras research group³. One of the things I have been thinking about is precisely this: we have been talking a lot about how we need to be careful with this thing of Black people being attached only to Black referenced content. Then, when a public tender comes out, there are 25 Black people fighting for a vacancy. There are three or four more open competitions for theater direction, theory of this and that, and many of us end up not being prepared to take these competitions because we focus on a certain discursivity, sometimes losing sight of a series of other forms of knowledge that also must be, and is, connected. This question reminded me of the perversity of this process because I also work with seminars, written texts, and all these things. I remember the day when a decolonial and deconstructed student came to me really upset, saying that I am controversial and that it makes no sense for me to work with oral knowledge, discuss a lot of things, and demand a final written paper. I was like: Dude, what do you mean? People think that Black knowledge is not knowledge of writing.

GMC: Then you challenge them and the person is surprised, like, shocked. It is as if it committed some violent act by demanding that they write something.

3 The Negrras Research Group, linked to the School of Fine Arts at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais and led by Prof. Altemar Di Monteiro, configures a space to study, create, criticize, and exchange knowledge focused on Black performativities and pedagogies. They carry out poetic and pedagogical actions under Black references, following processes of creation, assembly, and disassembly of shows and promoting debates, workshops, conversation circles, and seminars dedicated to studies on Black theaters in Brazil.



ADM: Improvisation itself is a constant game. I think that it is important that leave university knowing who Spolin was, who Boal was, even who Keith Johnstone was. I do not like sports theater very much but I still teach improvisation matches. People also need to know other references in my component. I have not given up on that. I spend several days discussing and playing with *ginga*, one of the concepts I use to think about games, while, in parallel, I am scoring, reflecting, and experimenting with other games. I have the feeling, Gustavo, that we must work much harder... I place this knowledge in the crossroads so people can build their own research processes. The difference is that my non-Black colleagues do not seem to care, it seems that they will forever continue with their whitened references. We, in addition to bringing other content, always keep this knowledge tangential with several others. So, it seems that it is one service above the other. It is more work all the time.

GMC: A discussion I want to have with the guys is this. We may even have one or two components centered on these discussions but they must permeate everyone. Generally, the Black reference that permeates several components is bell hooks (2017).

ADM: And there is the issue of the place of speech of Black teachers. Some colleagues and students are told to talk to me: "Altemar is the one who knows about this subject." Sometimes I wish I had the freedom to research Japanese philosophy as well, for example.

GMC: Right. We are pressured into this place, into this circumstance. Then we get into a situation in which we get called to all sorts of boards with Black students and all sorts of Black students want us to guide their undergraduate theses. The numbers do not add up. It is one of the things I really want to talk about: getting white professors to work on Black-referenced contents.

ADM: It is very comfortable to say, "I have no space for my voice." Come on... that is just lack of study! I have tensioned this in some way as well in my book "Jogo Negro no Mundo." The philosophical framework with which I am working is Glissant's "Poetics of Relation," which, in the way I work it, is a very important conceptual key to thinking about this dimension of the diaspora, of Negrodiasporic thought, which is always poetically relational and woven. That is why we are trying to relate Black knowledge with other forms of knowledge. Also, I have observed that, based on concepts such as interculturality, multiculturalism, even decoloniality, the word crossroads seems to be showing some wear. Although I have an extremely spellbound understanding of the term (also articulating a political position), I see the way in which the term has been used almost as a conciliatory device. It is at the crossroads that I reconcile this knowledge to finally say: "look how multicultural we are," "look how intercultural we are," "look how everything fits here." I would like



to know how you have thought about this because the crossroads, in the terms I am articulating, is a place where good and evil coexist, a process that is not always cute. I am very afraid of the pacifying way some of these concepts have been positioned in the face of the dimension of pluriepistemics we are articulating. I really like how Françoise Vergès' (2023) neoliberal anti-racism and pacifying multiculturalism, a movement of co-optation of our practices and discourses so that everything remains exactly the same under the discourse of inclusion. I wanted to hear a little about what you think about this, about how your practices have or have not mobilized the crossroads.

GMC: Yeah, I have been talking about the crossroads in some of those terms sometimes. To be quite honest, I have not noticed this conciliatory attempt regarding the crossroads issue. I, speaking of crossroads, have done so in the sense of us trying to make things converge. I have seen many people talking about the crossroads as if it were an entrenched place. I have not seen people bringing much of a perspective of greater openness, to be quite honest. It seems that that entrenched place is the place of the discovery of Black knowledge. I, to be very honest, have a huge pet peeve with the way these terms are becoming dominant, you know? Every time I see someone use crossroads, I say "but why are you using crossroads? What is the crossroads? Where? From where? Whose? Who developed this dialogue?" I am pretty nitpicky about this. Material has been written about it. In Brazil, we have Leda Maria Martins (1997), who proposed the crossroads as a conceptual operator and, more recently, Luiz Rufino (2019). There is also M. Jacqui Alexander (2006), who has a book called "Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred," in which the author brings the crossroads to address existential and political issues from the Caribbean. However, many people use it without having read about the subject, without having been willing to dialogue with it in any depth. The same happens with lifewriting, you know? Some might say: "ah, I am lifewriting." I ask: "but what is lifewriting again? What are you doing? You say you are doing it, but what is lifewriting? Is Black autoethnography lifewriting? What is lifewriting?" Let us start playing so we can understand what we are talking about, right? With place of speech and orality too the same happens; the person might say "I am going to apply orality as a method," to which I will say, "show me."

ADM: About this crossroads thing, within what I am working on in improvisation, it mainly refers to the place to which I take people to discuss street theater. Then, thinking about the street knowledge, the knowledge of this urban public space, I always observe how the crossroads begins to be — and this is not a metaphor — disputed. To be disputed by hegemonic thinking in the sense of the privatization of the public space, and how there are already several powers prowling and surrounding the crossroads in its most vivid sense, from the street. I also see this when talking about street theaters since they have almost never racialized the debate. It has always been based on the logic of class debate and of people who have not gone through processes of racialization and went to the streets wanting to save the world, especially in the context of the democratic opening



of Brazil. How has this discourse of public space returned based on the concept of crossroads? This question has intrigued me both to think about street theater and the concept of crossroads. I think that the 1980s-1990s helped us to grow a lot in these debates about cultural democracy, but these were almost always surrounded by the same theoretical framework of whiteness. So, it seems to me that the debate about the street continues to be crossed by the same episteme; it does not reveal itself, in fact, as pluriepistemic. It turns out that the crossroads, in this moment we are living, seems to be in the same field of dispute. But, let us go back, then, to the axé knowledge. Gustavo, how do you think specifically about this insertion of this content in the university? What else have you been thinking about it?

GMC: We always run a very big risk of compartmentalizing knowledge and the way we are going to work them too much, you know? I honestly am not one to work on knowledge of axé in the classroom unless it is in a punctual and pertinent way regarding something that has come up in the classroom. Even so, I always prefer to address the historical, cultural, and political perspectives regarding axé. My way of learning about some things from terreiro was not the packaged way of academia and I do not think we have to try to package it now to fit the temporality and format of academia. But it is always a dilemma. I am not absolutely convinced of that. It is like the dilemma of whether we should write down and publish our worldperception or whether we should stick to the traditional oral way of sharing knowledge. I am in favor of writing as long as we have a qualified debate within a territory or field of knowledge. The ethical limits for this are always very complicated for me. I was once talking to Leda Maria Martins and she mentioned the ethics of secrecy, but this also varies a lot. What I consider secret is not the same as what other priests will understand as what must be kept in the sphere of secrecy. In a way, I think that I seek to recognize the limits of secrecy to the extent of preserving the identity of my community, which involves our normative, affective, technological, cognitive, and ability dimensions, as Edmund W. Gordon (1997) proposed regarding cultural identity. In this way, the knowledge of axé, as much as it dialogues between different communities, continues to be familiar knowledge. It is not intended to be universal, so I do not understand that they can be imported as contents for any and all situations since the way it develops itself is also part of this knowledge.

ADM: It is just like the phrase: “it is like this in African cultures.” I ask: “Why? What are you talking about? When? Where?”

GMC: Even if you contextualize it the best you can, the way people are going to take that and maybe apply it or reference it ends up almost universalizing or trying to universalize it. There is a mechanism, for me, that is very violent. The other thing is to know exactly what we want. I say this based on a provocation a student of mine. She said, “look, what do we want from this Black



knowledge? Why do we want it nicely arranged to fit the course syllabus so we can talk about it in the classroom? Why do not we go out there and get involved with the Black culture that we are into with the manifestation that we are into and effectively live these cultures?” That is it! We cannot keep pouring this knowledge in the form of four or five course syllabuses so that everything is absorbed in the most bourgeois way possible. Some students and professors are still invested in translating knowledge into content to fit the logic of the university. I have been a little bit against this. For me, what influences the thing of knowing axé is less the content and more these methodological issues we were talking about. I still do not know how to do that. I was saying, even in candomblé I think that sometimes, because of the accelerated temporality that we have to deal with out, it is difficult to adequately work on a deeper understanding of our worldperception. I have ached for us being able to do this in a nice way even inside terreiros, let alone in the classroom. Another point that I consider important is that we can approach terreiro knowledge while respecting its identity rather than investing in the idea that we are an antinomy of modernity or an antinomy of European thought. Nowadays I have a certain difficulty thinking this way. For a while the most comfortable way to think, for me, was precisely this. Today I am much more focused on identifying our characteristics and investing in them, promoting dialogues of different orders with different cultures than trying to position myself as an antonym. This was the mechanism Europeans used toward African and several other peoples of the world to constitute an alleged European subjectivity. We do not need to believe in this invention. It is important to be aware that we were placed as an antonym, but we do not need to experience our knowledge based on this positionality. I do not believe that African cultures are exactly this antonym, although they have some aspects and elements that have been positioned in this way. It ends up becoming a little like that, we have to relate to it, to what they say about us, but what we really are maybe not necessarily that, you know? To be very honest, for me this debate of the Black lived experience and what we do with it has been much more interesting than necessarily bringing the knowledge of axé to the university, you know? I prefer to discuss these political issues and involve discuss axé in this dynamic. What in Black theatre refers to candomblé? Who is talking about it? Who does not discuss it? Why is this important? How do we also show ourselves as historical subjects beyond slavery? Thinking that our cults have roots that predate the issue of slavery also aims to demonstrate historical subjectivity. For me, this is the most interesting thing to bring into the university context, also removing a little this fantasy that we are the opposite of this world in which we live, you know? This fantasy that the knowledge of axé brings the opposite of this world in which we live. I think it brings another bias, it brings a difference, it brings another temporality, it brings other things. For me, the knowledge of axé that is important to take to the classroom lies within this historical and political perspective. We can take some of this antagonism, of this antinomy toward conventional knowledge. That is somewhere along the lines of what I think. What do you think?



ADM: Look, one of the terms I am using in the book is axé. My big question in general terms is that there is no way to teach axé. I really like Luiz Rufino, who distinguishes an *axé education* from an *education as axé*. Based on him, I think about an education as axé in the sense of thinking about a knowledge that is built in the relationship, in the day to day, in the daily life, in practice; a construction that can strengthen our vital force rather than knowledge that removes, breaks, and cuts such force. This means positioning a knowledge that grows based on this epistemological relationship of the crossroads, of exchange, of the order of a spiraling now. This process is not always one of conciliation, it also emerges from the conflict. Although I have a lot of doubts about the very use of the term axé, I have largely trusted Vanda Machado, Luiz Rufino, Onisajé (who has been extremely important), and Sandra Petit⁴, who has also been very important for me in this process. In the end, just like when I talk about agô, I looked for other words that would well circumvent what I am trying to say about another type of presence in the theater, a presence-memory. None of them managed that. I always returned to the beauty of everything that has been said for centuries in terreiro cultures. In any case, how can I describe a game, for example, in which I am working on a practice that is related to the feet, to the terrain, to the ground, to the belly, and to the hands and say that this is guaranteeing vital force? There is no way. This is very contingent. All the time I am talking about a bet, and that is the big challenge too because everything becomes kind of a product, right? Here lies the challenge of trying to narrate something that is extremely inconspicuous. I think that there is a political disposition to plot another type of pedagogy, another type of relational practice, betting on the relationship with cohabiting bodies. The work I am doing is highly practical, typical of the game itself. The book is an attempt to describe this work, but I find it a challenge. Still, in the book I am also more interested in thinking about thought, playing with the fundamentals, than describing step by step some “very new” way of improvising. Hence the question: What do you do with this type of knowledge (and what does this knowledge do) when you go to university? At the same time, how can we avoid falling into the discourse as that from one of my students: “Oh, you do not need to write. Black knowledge belongs to orality,” etc. This is the paradox, the great controversy. All I announce is always of the order of life. Thinking of an education as axé is to work with people, a practice that goes beyond the limits of theater. It is not about representing knowledge. It is about us being here, doing something together, getting involved with the present time permeated by memory, with what is up to us, with the energies and strengths we have now, but it also involves a very deep commitment because the chance of it turning into anything is very easy. One must be on the lookout.

⁴ In general terms, Vanda Machado (2013) understands education based on the centrality of the body and the principles of care, autonomy, and shared creation, as in terreiro communities, in which only the whole body serves as guidance. Luiz Rufino (2019) proposes a pedagogy of the crossroads in which axé operates as a conceptual and poetic power to invent other paths and ways of life that deactivate what he calls the “colonial marafunda.” Onisajé (2023), by articulating theater and ritual, proposes a theater-ebô, a ritualized theater following the ethical principles of axé. Sandra Petit’s (2015) *pretagogia* understands pedagogical practice as a transformative gesture that can intervene and change attitudes based on Black knowledge and corporeality.



GMC: Talking about time and temporality, something that brings us very unique challenges regarding the classroom is precisely in the short time you will have with those students. This has a great impact on what you plan, including methods and content related to terreiro knowledge. One thing is the time I may take caring for a person who starts in my terreiro. Sometimes, even before it emerges, a relationship begins that presupposes a time of life sometimes beyond the time of existence in the Aiyê. This relationship often awakes learning that takes many years to consolidate itself. Obviously, this is a conflict that also affects many non-Black teachers in theater: how far can we go with some provocations? What time will students have to digest what was proposed? What is the limit of mobilization of student's emotions? I say this because we have to take responsibility for how we return students to the environment outside the classroom.

ADM: Yes, especially in current times, the youth seem quite fractured due to pandemic experience, right?

GMC: This is also a very delicate matter. I think that the time and space we have to work with the students point to the limits of what we can do regarding the knowledge of axé. I tell that to all of them. Some people say: "how do you manage to reconcile you being a priest and a teacher?" I answer: "I am a priest all the time." For me, the fact that I am a professor at the university lies within my priestly mission to take care of people. Something I work with people, including conceptually, is the very idea of teach-in-g Vanda Machado (2013) proposes; bringing the person to their path, to their fate but never in an immutable sense, as a possibility of constructing a history that does not despise the history previously trodden by that person. For me, it is very important to make people embrace their self-confidence in their relationship with academia, their confidence of the knowledge they bring with them, their confidence that their lived experience is valid. The perspective they have of the world (not only of themselves but of the world) is valid and feasible. Sometimes I want to show people that "their experience, their way of seeing the world, what they think about a world, is academically viable. Let us go work on it!" Man, it is a daunting challenge. People seem as if they are in a cave, you know, with a thousand roots around their bodies from which they cannot escape. In short, there are a number of things that demonstrate, at times, a difficult compatibility in the relationship between terreiro knowledge and the classroom in the academic context. There is a mobilization of the sensitive that finds a place of compatibility in the case of theater teaching, but always focusing on the lived experience of each person and how this experience connects with social and political issues. Mobilizing the sensitive by proposing this connection is something that is not new — playwrights such as Augusto Boal (2009) have already proposed this — but I think it is important for us to discover how to do this with stimuli that are perhaps more akin to the Black experience in the African diaspora in a transnational sense. It is nothing too complicated, I think, it is nothing too elaborate. I work a lot with a certain offer of possibilities within the curricular components, you know? It enables each student to choose where they want to go, which



contents are more suited to the research they want to develop. Because something that was very important in my own experience and education of axé was this almost existentialist aspect (to make a parallel with European philosophies) because I think this is related to Frantz Fanon, who flirted with existentialism, phenomenology, and Marxism to talk about colonialism and racism. It is about our responsibility for the way we build our lives. I learned a lot about this in axé. I was not raised in an axé that mystifies the entirety of life. It is one thing to realize the dimension of the sacred in everything we do and in things as they happen but our responsibility for our path or for our way of walking our path is fundamental. The responsibility to make decisions and choices is fundamental, as is taking responsibility for the consequences. Sometimes I even talk to some of those for whom I care and who sometimes have great doubts, telling them: “no, my daughter, it is not you asking what you should or should not do, it is you listening a little about the trends and making your choice. based on the choice you make, we will see what we have to do within strict ethical limits so the path is the best possible.” You cannot give up the responsibility you have over your own life. When I work with students, I often also offer a panel, topics, content, and, as they choose their assignment for the end of the semester, they choose aspects of their experience, some issues they want to talk about and to what they will relate. If some people want to relate it to the discussion of Law 10.639/03, cool. If some people want to relate it to the discussion about intersectionality, cool. If some people will discuss evaluation in theater and arts, cool. Not everyone will discuss everything we study in class because it is important that each student discusses what is most relevant to what they want to study and has the greatest reference, pertinence, and reverberation with the experience they have in life, you know? For me, all of this is axé education. For me, all of this is also part of my priesthood of making people – to use a very common expression – empower themselves to make things happen in a way that is nice for them. There is some minimal content I think people need to master but the most important thing is to make people develop their own choices within that which can meet the paths they already bring and the paths they want to take.

ADM: Gustavo, it is curious that you talk about this because ebó is also the word I use in the terms I am elaborating. It has to do with the ethics of choice. I am talking about ebó as a space of composition of the world, and for each choice there is a different result. The work with materialities, with discursiveness, with performativities belongs to this order, and how choice mobilizes... I like Vanda Machado because she talks about how to put teaching in fate and about ebó as this poetics of a choice and how it generates compositions. The work we do in art as a work that is not only of the order of the aesthetic event; it always produces and promotes a world. In this choice of what I put together with the materials, the textures, and what I am elaborating I produce a world, a path. I think this is somewhat in line with what I am thinking. However, given the hour, I would really like to hear you speak so we can end this interview. For you, given everything we talked about: what would be the Black game in the world?



GMC: I am thinking about images. Precisely images of breaks. These images of bodies are also paths. I think that the Black game in the world, for me, has something that is perhaps that term of impermanence, of this game that has this aspect of traffic, movement, and a certain instability. I think that is one of the components that, for me, is close to what you are talking about as improvisation. Agatha Oliveira (2020) also works a lot, in fact, on this topic of instability. I always encourage people to perceive a notion of balance that, in fact, comes from the way we will perceive our succession of imbalances. This succession of imbalances and the way in which this succession of imbalances takes place in time and space is what can give us, over time, some notion of how harmonious or how balanced we are. This is largely due to our Black lived experience in which we need to bend so as not to break.

ADM: And to stay alive, right?

GMC: Otherwise, we will die. Otherwise, we will break. Otherwise, we will be captured. Otherwise, we will be traceable. This body cannot be like that. I think that our diasporic experience... In this aspect, I really like Paul Gilroy's (2001) proposal, in the sense that we think of the African diaspora as routes or, I would say, flow. I think that our experience... You are a guy with that experience too, right? You leave one place, go to another, transition from one thing to the other. I am like that too. Our bodies must move all the time. People like that... "for us to be able to move, we need to admit that we sometimes need to cause imbalances." Engaging with imbalance, right? A walk, what is it? A succession of imbalances, right? You lose your balance and put your foot forward so you do not fall, but you need to lose your balance again if you want to take the next step. This instability, this crisis, must be accepted in the most complete way possible. For me, the Black game in the world is related to the way we deal, how we incorporate — in the very sense of *embodiment* to ensure instability, imbalance, and crises in the body. We poetically make this a fundamental part of our life and growth strategy.



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