



**EX-TINTO:  
deconstructing black authorial poetics**

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desmontagem de uma poética autoral negra

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 [doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v9i18.8496](https://doi.org/10.70446/ephemera.v9i18.8496)

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**Abstract:** This article presents a deconstruction (Ileana Diéguez, 2018) of the authorial creative process *ex-tinto* (2018), developed in the Graduate Program in Arts at the Escola de Belas Artes of the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. This deconstruction was grounded in autobiographical research, including an artist-researcher diary to produce *escrevivências* (Conceição Evaristo, 2020) of a trilogy of Black performances titled *Projeto Córpe*. *Ex-tinto*, the trilogy's final work, investigates the materiality of white disposable cups, which are configured as a "white mask" (Frantz Fanon, 2008), through a masking process that denounces and exposes structural racism and whiteness.

**Keywords:** deconstruction; *escrevivências*; black performance, masking and authorial poetics.

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**Resumo:** O artigo trata de uma desmontagem (Diéguez, 2018), do processo criativo autoral *ex-tinto* (2018) realizado no Programa de Pós-Graduação em Artes da Escola de Belas Artes da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Para realizar tal desmontagem desenvolveu-se uma pesquisa autobiográfica, na qual realizou-se um diário de artista pesquisadore para fazer "escrevivências" (Evaristo, 2020) de uma trilogia de performances negras chamada *Projeto Córpe*. O trabalho *ex-tinto* é o último da trilogia, nele há uma investigação por processo de mascaramento com a materialidade de copos descartáveis brancos que se configuram como uma "máscara branca" (Fanon, 2008) de denúncia e anúncio dos fenômenos do racismo e da branquitude estruturais.

**Palavras-chave:** desmontagem; *escrevivências*; performance negra, mascaramento e poética autoral.



## 1 Introduction

This text presents the deconstruction (Diéguez, 2018) of the authorial creative process *ex-tinto* that I carried out during my master's thesis, in the COVID-19 pandemic, at the Graduate Program in Arts of the Escola de Belas Artes da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (PPG-Artes UFMG), supervised by Marina Marcondes Machado, and defended in 2022. Deconstruction, according to Ileana Diéguez, involves exploratory immersions into a creative process, aimed at (un)covering the backstage of a work and revealing the creative and critical paths used in dramaturgical creation. It is a process of analysis, a deep dive into aesthetic choices made at a given time, identifying what lay behind poetic intentions.

The *ex-tinto* work is the final creative process in a trilogy named *Projeto Córpe*, which also includes the works *Projeto Servir* and *Ex-Tintos*, created over eight years. The word *córpe* is a neologism I coined to merge body and disposable cup. In all of the trilogy's works, I used white and clear disposable plastic cups (WDPC) as material, enabling devices that sparked creation. The main theme was disposability, both in environmental terms—pollution of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems affecting fauna and flora—as well as disposable human relationships, the impacts of interactions that cancel and erase presences, extinguishing a being from their existence and agency in the world. In *ex-tinto*, I specifically reflected on my existence in the world as a Black, nonbinary, and homosexual person<sup>1</sup>.

Although I had submitted a different research project to the Graduate Program, the pandemic led me to develop a new proposal to address the difficulties encountered at that time. At the beginning of my master's, in 2020, at my supervisor's suggestion, I began an artist-researcher diary. Through this immersive, reflective, and meditative writing, I identified my new object of study: the *Projeto Córpe* trilogy, works I created as an independent artist after being dismissed by Cristina Machado from Cia de Dança Palácio das Artes (CDPA).

To conduct the deconstruction, I carried out an autobiographical research, using my own life history, experience, and artistic trajectory within this creative process as sources for the data presented in my dissertation. As a recent epistemological field, autobiographical research seeks the research subject's recognition of their own life histories, body-territory, and the historical, social, and cultural relations to which they belong, thereby strengthening ethical and political narratives.

The act of narrating lived experience carries the essential power for individuals to recognize themselves as subjects of their own histories, assigning meaning to the paths they have taken. By composing narratives of lived life, they enter a position of listening, looking in multiple directions—within and beyond themselves—toward what they were, what they are, and what they wish to become; what they did, what they do, and what they project themselves to do (Kolb-Bernardes and Ostetto, 2015, p. 164).

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<sup>1</sup> As a nonbinary person, I wrote this text using inclusive and/or nonbinary language.



Marina Marcondes Machado also encouraged me to engage with the literature of Conceição Evaristo and her concept of *escrevivências*<sup>2</sup>, since, according to the writer, “*escrevivência*, before anything else, is questioning. It is a search to insert ourselves into the world through our stories, through our lives, which the world disregards” (Evaristo cited by Duarte and Nunes, 2020, p. 35). As I began reading this Black author, my own *escrevivências* in the diary awakened the urgency of deconstructing this trilogy, which directly intersected with my process of becoming Black. Indeed, as Neusa Santos Souza writes, “to be Black is to take possession of this consciousness and create a new one that reasserts respect for difference and affirms a dignity beyond any level of exploitation” (Souza, 2021, p. 115).

This Black consciousness unfolded throughout my trajectory in creating the trilogy. Investigative and research practices in creative laboratories epistemologically reeducated me toward understanding what it means to exist as a Black, nonbinary, and homosexual person in Brazil. I regard the solo *ex-tinto* as a Black performance, in which I synthesized this process of becoming Black; in it, I performed a dance of metamorphosis, was born again, and materialized on stage the birth of a Black-memory-being—like a caterpillar emerging from a chrysalis and transforming into a butterfly.

## 2 Residing the Mask

There is a mask I heard about many times in my childhood. The mask Anastácia was forced to wear. The many accounts and detailed descriptions warned me these were not merely past facts, but living memories buried in our psyche, ready to be told. Today I want to retell them. I want to speak of the mask of silencing. This mask was a concrete object, a real instrument embedded in the European colonial project for over three hundred years. It consisted of a metal piece placed inside the Black subject’s mouth, between tongue and jaw, fastened behind the head by two cords, one around the chin and the other around the nose and forehead. Officially, white masters used it to prevent enslaved Africans from eating sugarcane or cocoa while working on plantations, but its primary function was to enforce muteness and fear, since the mouth became a site of silencing and torture. In this sense, the mask represents colonialism as a whole. It symbolizes sadistic regimes of conquest and domination and their brutal silencing of so-called “Others”: Who can speak? What happens when we speak? And what can we speak about? (Kilomba, 2019, p. 33).

For eight years I unfolded these authorial poetics across the three works, seeking to extract narratives from the relations between my body and disposable cups. Developing such deconstruction meant probing hidden places within myself and bringing forth deep, conflicting feelings. Although I self-identified as Black in 2014, I now see I lacked awareness of the complexity of structural racism and whiteness. I was still fully whitened, covered by a “white mask” as discussed by the Martinican psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (2008), which prevented me from grasping the

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<sup>2</sup> *Escrevivência* is a concept created by the Brazilian writer Conceição Evaristo meaning a hybrid of writing and living.



political, social, and cultural implications of my reality and often hindered my artistic-professional development. I see *ex-tinto* as the materialization of this ethnic-racial maturation, since in the performance I dance to shed a mask, a cocoon of white cups. The solo enacts the unmasking of this “white mask”; symbolically, it marks metamorphosis, rebirth, and the overflow of an ancestral Black-memory-being.

Fanon, in the book’s introduction, asks, “What does a man want? What does the Black man want?” (Fanon, 2008, p. 26). In the fifth chapter, he answers that the Black man wants to exist, to be a man, “simply to be a man among other men. [...] I wanted to be a man, nothing more than a man” (Fanon, 2008, p. 106). This creative process is a self-unveiling of racism and the pathologized whitening imposed by an unequal society that rendered my perceptions invisible. A poetics to unmask captive silences, like the mask the enslaved woman Anastácia was forced to wear, latent at the mouth of my traumatic memories, soothed by the hypocrisy of a country still intent on staunching hemorrhages that daily shed Black blood.

The solo premiered in 2018 at *the Festival Curta Dança at Espaço Aberto Pierrot Lunar*. I gave three further live sharings: at *A-Mostra.Lab* (2018), also at *Espaço Aberto Pierrot Lunar*; at the *3º Encontro NegreSer—Poéticas de Aruandê* (2018), at *Teatro Espanca*; and at *Ações de Apartamento* (2019), held in the apartment of Ítalo Augusto Moreira, dancer, performer, producer, improviser, and the event’s curator. After completing the creative process of my undergraduate thesis in UFMG’s Theatre program, titled *Ex-Tintos*, in late 2017—created with dance artist Carol Vilela—I decided to create an independent solo and claim, with courage, my own Black authorship.

Based on feedback from the examining committee and conversations with artists who experienced the work, I saw the need to continue the work in process (Cohen, 2004), premiering a nearly 15-minute version at the short dance scenes festival. In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, I created a video-performance of the live solo, which circulated in several online festivals. I shared it live again in 2021 in the city of Medellín, Colombia, invited to the *VIII Encuentro Endanzante—Arqueologías Corpóreas*. That same year, in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte, it was also selected for the *Manifestação Internacional de Performance* (MIP-4).

Throughout the creative process, I was not aware I was developing a creative investigation with masks or masking (Costa, 2015). Only when writing the trilogy’s deconstruction-performance for my master’s I came to understand this work as contemporary masking. My artistic training included little study of this theme in the Performing Arts. My knowledge was incipient, and during the creative process of *ex-tinto* I empirically experimented and “played” (Paulino, 2011) with the cups’ materiality to generate mythopoetic narratives and possible dramaturgy.

I wanted to create a performance based on the clothing involved in that work, which we call the body-trash whale, an element for which we lacked sufficient time for a more profound investigation of corporeal research. *Ex-Tintos* became too long, and Carol and I could not develop this image as intended. I extended this performance only in the solo *ex-tinto*, stretching its poetic



meanings into a performative action that symbolically addressed my autobiographical experience as a Black person.

During the creation of *Ex-Tintos*, while still an undergraduate Theatre student, I was in dialogue with the field of Visual Arts, taking elective courses at the *Escola de Belas Artes* focused on sculpture, installation, happening, performance, and body art. From these references, I proposed to Carol ways of relating to WDPC, integrating them into our bodies to produce danced performative narratives. In our investigations, we discovered ways to attach the cups to our bodies: we used tape to fix them onto the skin or filled our clothes with them, generating large, strange figures unable to move or fully navigate space. These limitations produced by the cups became central to what we wished to express, functioning as the creative devices through which we composed the body-trash whales.

In the creation of *ex-tinto*, I realized that this body-trash whale garment—made of grayish elastic fabric and filled with WDPC—would enable a performative experience denouncing and announcing the structural racism that imposes extinction upon marginalized, excluded, and discriminated existences. I began experimenting with the sewn garment as a headless puppet; once inside it, through sensory engagement with its materiality and my synesthetic perceptions within the mask, it revealed itself as a shell, a cocoon, even a womb. Filled with WDPC, the shell cased, coiled, and cradled me; I felt inside a rough carcass. As in masking, I hid entirely within the “white mask” (Fanon, 2008), which, when closed and propped against walls at the performance sites, resembled a large ordinary trash bag. My intention was to render more explicit a reading of “disposable bodies,” less evident in the trilogy’s earlier works.

I regularly walked through a place known as Baixo Centro in Belo Horizonte, beneath the Santa Tereza overpass, extending along Aarão Reis Street to Praça da Estação. I crossed this area to teach dance classes, traveling from the Centro de Formação Artística e Tecnológica (CEFART), located within the Palácio das Artes compound, to the Núcleo de Formação Artística of the Escola Livre de Artes Arena da Cultura (ELA ARENA), in the Edifício Central. Moving from an area considered “noble,” in the Funcionários neighborhood, to one deemed “marginalized”, I observed the shifts between territories so close yet marked by stark differences in those who inhabited them: from an elite central zone, physically well-structured and populated mostly by white, privileged people, to another central yet precarious space inhabited largely by vulnerable Black people.

Centro Baixo area is a place that has been revitalized in recent years, where the Praça da Estação cultural complex is located. Many alternative and independent artistic events in Belo Horizonte take place there. At the same time, many unhoused people live there under extremely poor, miserable, and unsanitary conditions. In contrast, there are numerous bars, bohemian gatherings, and festivals. It is an apparently contradictory environment, where poverty and inequality coexist with art, celebration, and joy. Walking there, the Black male waste pickers and scrap collectors who lived there drew my attention.



In these drifts, I focused especially on the Black male scrap collectors, as their situation echoed something within my own family. My father, also a Black man, for many years collected aluminum cans at home to sell as scrap. When our financial situation worsened, he would also gather cans after events where he worked as a waiter. I noticed those men covered themselves with bluish and grayish felt blankets, so-called “beggars’ blankets”, which evoked the shell (body-trash whale) I was experimenting with in *Ex-Tintos*. I perceived that beyond protecting against the night cold, the blanket was also an object of affection, protection, and self-care for those Black men.

The scenes I witnessed—Black men relegated to social neglect, treated as disposable, useless, and “without function”—echo the grim context described by Abdias Nascimento in *O genocídio do negro brasileiro: processo de um racismo mascarado* (2016). According to Nascimento, “[...] those who survived the horrors of slavery and could no longer sustain satisfactory productive capacity were cast into the streets, left to their own fate, like unwanted human waste” (2016, p. 79). Those Black men, like my father, are the outcome of state omission following the abolition of slavery on May 13, 1888, with the signing of the Lei Áurea—an omission tragically perpetuated to this day.

In composing the solo, I sought to evoke the everyday scenes I had witnessed in the Baixo centro, to render visible the lack of affection, love, dignified healthcare, and public social assistance policies in my city that bitterly pierced me along that route. In the first studio rehearsals, upon again taking up the body-trash whale casing, I initially simply donned it and wished to “merely reside” within the mask—a hostile cocoon that hindered my breathing. I wanted to reside the mask and perceive how it would affect me emotionally and psychologically, since, according to Stratico, “the object thus connects personal history to the history of other citizens, establishing relations between the personal and the social” (2013, p. 76). Residing that inhospitable masked space, my street drifts, drawn from observations in Belo Horizonte’s Baixo Centro soon surfaced in my repertoire of bodily memories, enabling the first experimentations and improvisations with the object.

Objects reveal the manifestation and construction of identities, as well as the power relations that produced them. Questions on gender, sexuality, religiosity, and subjectivity inhabit the systems of everyday objects and persist when they enter artistic spaces (Stratico, 2013, p. 77).

The performance took shape as the action of “dancing that mask” (Paulino, 2011) and being danced by it. Rogério Lopes da Silva Paulino (co-supervisor of my master’s degree) developed this expression in his PhD research on masks in *Folias de Reis* in the municipalities of Matosinhos and Fidalgo, Minas Gerais, and on their possible use in acting and theatrical improvisation. Paulino addressed the agency of the mask—how it operates as a creative device enabling revelers to become *brincantes*, activating performative action within the cultural manifestation and producing the festive event.

[...] revelers become accustomed from an early age to correlating masking with dancing, so that the mask becomes an aid in recovering the memory of bodily knowledge learned in childhood and inscribed in their bodies, as argued in the first chapter. The mask, in turn, when manifested through dance, potentiates this



knowledge. Thus, the mask functions as a device facilitating the recovery of this bodily knowledge (Paulino, 2011, p. 124).

“Am I the one who wears the mask? Or is it the mask that wears me?” This question, posed by Paulino, emerged for me while residing that mask. It expanded my body’s dimensions and extensions in space and, in “dancing that mask,” I lost awareness of the boundaries between my body and it, now integrated. The WDPC filled casing covering me generated multiple discomforts: the cups scraped and wounded my skin, while impairing my breathing and vision; I felt completely suffocated (asphyxiated) by disposable cups—an experience of enclosure. According to Paulino, “[...] a mask’s agency is revealed above all in its capacity to enable the wearer to be (un)dressed in a perspective” (2011, p. 153). I perceive that “dancing that mask” emerged from the discomfort it produced. Wearing and residing it meant being (un)dressed by it, thus initiating the mask’s agency, manifest as bodily performativity in space. It was not I who animated the object, but the object that propelled my body toward the poetic discourse it required.

I sought to submit myself to a radical experience capable of lending the audience a truthful sense of the physicality and corporeality investigated through masking, thereby generating synesthetic sensations in those who saw the performance. The mask-casing altered my body’s physiological condition. Inside it, allowing myself to be packed by those cutting cups, breathing was difficult and seeing from within the cocoon was severely impaired. These difficulties altered my spatial perception of the performance sites. According to Paulino, “due to the various physiological and perceptual alterations provoked by its use, the mask altered these energy flows or our perception of them, making them more readily noticeable” (2011, p. 155). From my limitations, inabilities, and inefficiencies in relation to the object’s materiality, I created the work, using elements inherent to the mask itself as vectors to generate a monstrous figure.

Beyond the difficulties of seeing and breathing, another limitation in investigating the mask was hearing. Inside the casing, the sheer number of cups produced a loud, abrasive sound. For the soundtrack of the live premiere at the Curta Dança Festival, I asked musician and dancer Leonardo Molina to compose a soundscape blending Kalunga (sea) sounds and whale cries from the ocean depths with percussive instrumentation. I wanted the soundtrack to evoke the Black Atlantic—the traumatic Africa–Brazil crossing endured by enslaved Black people—and to resonate with the noise of the cups scraping my Black body. I danced traversed by the cups’ strident sound, by the tactile discomfort that wounded me, and by the suffocation caused by the airless casing, which, as I moved, intensified the heat inside the mask, making me sweat profusely.

Throughout the performance, I danced an ode to liberation, to metamorphosis. It symbolized the rebirth of a caterpillar freeing itself from its pupa within a cocoon or chrysalis and becoming a butterfly. During the action, I undressed the cocoon—the mask—as release from that cup-filled shell, a second white skin over my “black skin and my voice,” as Elza Soares sings in *Mulher do fim*



*do mundo*<sup>3</sup>. Freed from the chrysalis, a being-black-memory moved toward a ritual of becoming Black, reclaiming an ancestry repeatedly threatened with extinction: “I take up this blackness and, with tears in my eyes, reconstitute its mechanism. What was broken apart is, by my hands, by intuitive lianas, reassembled, rebuilt” (Fanon, 2008, p. 124).

### 3 Breaking the black myth: overflowing existential limits

The dramaturgy of *ex-tinto* delved more deeply into questions of my Blackness, as discussed by Leda Maria Martins, than the other two works in the Projeto Córpe trilogy. Yet it exceeded my biographical experience. While rooted in my lived reality as a Black person and the traumas carried through this social marker, the research also encompassed other experiences of Blackness. I examined newspapers, articles, books, videos, and related materials on the systemic genocide inflicted upon Brazil’s Black population. From my observations of Black men in Belo Horizonte’s Baixo Centro, I sought, through masking with the body-trash whale garment, to provoke reflection on the projects and procedures of invisibilization, annihilation, and disappearance imposed upon Black lives and subjectivities in this violent country. These crimes are perpetuated, above all, by white supremacy, which continues to drive the extinction of these human existences.

In this solo, I wished to continue researching extinction, but now through a lens grounded in my own reality, since *Ex-Tintos* addressed extinction across broader thematic possibilities. In *ex-tinto*, I sought to navigate the depths of my transatlantic self, concealed within “submerged worlds that only the silence of poetry penetrates”, as written by Conceição Evaristo. I needed to revisit my own myths to unleash new artistic and existential overflows. As Beatriz Nascimento states in the documentary *Ôrí* (1989):

There must be a myth, there must be a hero... there must be independence from death... this liberation from death. You must know the myth’s flaws... because only then you do grow, when you destroy your myths... when you discover they are just like you. That is indeed a real revolutionary state! (Gerber, 1989).

I needed to brush against the idiosyncrasies etched into my bodily memory and confront what Neusa Santos Souza calls the “Black Myth,” symbolically dissolving the contradictions surrounding it. According to Souza, myth masks reality, producing an illusory parallel narrative on ourselves and our world. As a product of economic, political, ideological, and psychic forces, it conceals relations of oppression and domination under whiteness. This myth thus constitutes a Black problem produced by a white problem: racism.

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3 MULHER do fim do mundo. Interpreter: Elza Soares. Available at: <https://www.lettras.mus.br/elza-soares/mulher-do-fim-do-mundo/>. Accessed in: Jan 10, 2026.



Souza (2021) argues that the Black Myth is one of the central challenges shaping Black existence. We are constantly confronted with pressures to approximate whiteness, which appears to offer pathways to social mobility. Fostered by our social matrix, this myth operates like a ghost—an imago compelling us, through colonized desire, to pursue whitening at any cost. The Black subject strives to escape stereotyped representations imposed through social relations: “the irrational, the ugly, the bad, the dirty, the sensual, the hyperpotent, the exotic” (Souza, 2021, p. 57). Throughout the creation of this solo, and still today, I remain engaged in deconstructing and destabilizing the values of a white culture sedimented within my lived experience.

I reflect on the notion of mask and masking in this context through a dialogue with Professor Felisberto Sabino da Costa in the article “Arquiteturas do corpo: máscaras e mascaramentos contemporâneos” (Costa, 2015). The author states that these two spheres—the mask and masking—flirt with performativity and theatricality. I worked with what he terms the “body-mask” in an experience of *presentifying* past, present, and future memory. This process involved stripping away the casing covering I wore: a second skin composed of disposable cups. For Costa, mask and masking can be used as synonyms, yet they occasionally represent distinct meanings. When discussing the concept of masking, we expand “its palette, distancing it from the usual notion of the mask” (Costa, 2015, p. 16). It is not merely a binary logic of hiding or revealing a body, but of activating, resizing, and highlighting it; its presence serves as an artistic-political questioning in contemporary times. I view masking as a way to estrange and marvel at reality itself, updating it from its normative and, at times, perverse meanings.

Beyond the hide-reveal opposition attributed to the use of masks, other possibilities arise from the relationship established by wearing them. Masking is a mutating phenomenon, as Zeami declares regarding Noh theater: “a new flower is created in response to the changing times” (1984, p. 161). In this sense, it is a historical process; people must always shape new keys to access it. Rather than sticking to the friction between the real and the fictional, masking is situated in the ambiguity of these borders. It is not so much a matter of seeking relationships between the two, but of living that tension (Costa, 2015, p. 16).

In my work, masking was a critical device for denouncing and announcing experienced whitening processes, reflections of structural racism as discussed by researcher Rikelle Ribeiro in the article *A máscara branca como dispositivo crítico no teatro negro* (2020). Embedded in my performance narrative was a critique of racism through the use of a white mask. This element is highly present in Black poetics and is increasingly studied by theorists of Black theater, dance, and performativity. As the researcher points out, “when Black subjects (actors or not) dress in white to ironize and question the status quo of whiteness, we see a subject who denies the white mask device to offer a salvation of their Blackness” (Ribeiro, 2020).

Ribeiro (2020) discusses blackface, a masking technique in which white artists painted themselves black to ridicule—in racist dramatic performances—what they, as white people, represented as their imaginaries of Black people. These were crude performances that depreciated



the phenotypic traits, identity, and culture of Black individuals. Regarding these racist maskings, the researcher states that “in this work, this technique takes on the quality of racist because through it, stereotypes about a race were perpetuated. There, the Black subject was represented as stupid, naive, depraved, violent, hypersexualized, and dependent” (Ribeiro, 2020). It is observed that the use of blackface throughout the history of theater and television was a strategy to further diminish the representation of Black artists. The privilege of white artists was also present in this context to retract and remove opportunities from Black people.

According to Ribeiro, the technique emerged in the nineteenth century in the United States, expanding to various other artistic forms. The reproduction of this heinous practice began to decrease from the 1960s onward, due to the resistance of Black civil rights movements that erupted in the United States and worldwide. However, we still identify contemporary blackface today, reinforcing the strong presence of anti-Black racism. The researcher argues that Black theater is a powerful instrument for anti-racist formative actions, raising awareness of the privileges of whiteness that insists on undermining Black presence in the performing arts. Black theater, dance, and performance can teach through narratives that have been historically silenced, erased, and buried, bringing fundamental discussions about ancestral Black knowledge and practices to light.

I agree with Ribeiro (2020) regarding the white mask in both theater and Black performance. The white mask used by a Black artist does not hold the status of “whiteface” and thus lacks similarities with the ideology of blackface. By intentionally using white masks in their poetics, Black artists critique and denounce structural racism as a system of domination and enclosure of their existences. In this sense, white masks are not used to stigmatize the phenotypic traits of white people. These maskings serve to reveal the oppressions operating on Black bodies and intersubjectivities. The researcher cites South African actress Ntando Cele, who, when asked if the white paint on her skin in her work *Black Off* related to blackface, replied: “No. There is no equivalent to blackface. Blackface was always about laughing at someone of lower status in society. ‘Whitefacing’ mocks the privileged; it is a mirror. But it is harmless compared to the humiliation and history of blackface” (Athiê, 2017).

Ribeiro (2020) also draws on the discussions of Fanon (2008) and Souza (2021) to affirm that Black subjects and their subjectivities in a white-racist society are subjected to whitening processes as palliative exits from the racial problem that dehumanizes them. The author states that these seemingly “solution-oriented” doors are conditions manufactured to sell ways of becoming human: “becoming a person.” Furthermore, the researcher says that white masks are produced by whiteness to maintain social hierarchies and systems of dependency. However, these are masks that do not serve us and do not fit our Black bodies. For her, the white mask as a denunciation of racism can be a way to enunciate and teach possible modes of Black emancipation, as Fanon warns:

There is no white world, there is no white ethics, and no white intelligence as well. There are, in every corner of the world, men who search. I am not a prisoner of History. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introducing invention into



existence. In the world toward which I am heading, I continually recreate myself. (Fanon, 2008, p. 189).

Many factors lead to the systemic extermination of racialized people globally, and the complexity of such a situation cannot be fully developed in this article. I bring forward only a few points that caught my attention to reflect on my original Black poetics, which are closely correlated to the Brazilian context as presented by Abdias Nascimento in the book *O genocídio do negro brasileiro—processo de um racismo mascarado*. The researcher points out that following the crimes committed during nearly four centuries of slavery in Brazil, which decimated a large part of the African and Afro-Brazilian population—the post-abolition period of the 20th century saw many state actions of complete neglect, omission, repudiation, and elimination of the Black population. Whiteness was established as a political-ideological project of the Brazilian white elites for the extermination and genocide of Black and Indigenous people through projects of mass extinction (Nascimento, 2016).

The most insidious form of this process of aggression has been the policy of physically and culturally whitening the country through the encouragement of mass white emigration, the prohibition of Black or African entry after the abolition of slavery, and miscegenation elevated to the category of an anthropological theory of national salvation. Roger Bastide is right when he labels all this as an “ideology that forces [the Black people] to commit suicide as Black in order to exist as Brazilian” (Nascimento, 2016, p. 188)

Shortly after the period conventionally called the Abolition of Slavery in Brazil, there were no state public policies for reparations to the formerly enslaved for years of compulsory labor. Such policies would have allowed them to integrate into the labor market and establish their own lives. Instead, the Brazilian State established itself as a genocidal nation against Black people and Indigenous peoples. The country, independent but still colonized by Western European hegemonic standards and influenced by pseudoscientific theories of 18th and 19th-century scientific racism, reproduced public policies of “cleaning” Blackness throughout the 20th century. These included eugenic and racial hygiene practices of whitening ideology aimed at the extermination of the Black race in Brazil, which was considered a “black stain” on the population (Nascimento, 2016).

The researcher states that miscegenation was widely encouraged by governments as a way to “lighten the Brazilian population” and ensure the eradication of the Black race. The Brazilian State invested massively in European immigration as a labor force, leaving Black people and their descendants to their own devices to fulfill its population whitening goals. They intended for Brazil to lighten through reproduction with white individuals, becoming less Black.

The process of miscegenation, based on the sexual exploitation of Black women, was erected as a phenomenon of pure and simple genocide. The “problem” would be solved by the elimination of the Afro-descendant population. By the growth of the mixed-race population, the Black race would disappear under the pressure of the progressive lightening of the country’s population. Such a proposal was



received with warm praise and great signs of optimistic relief by the concerned ruling class (Nascimento, 2016, p. 84).

The myth of racial democracy was established in Brazil, denying the existence of racism and artificially forging an imaginary in which all people are supposedly equal in rights and opportunities. This myth suggests that the three constituent races of Brazil possess the same social, economic, political, and cultural rights. The book *Casa-Grande & Senzala* (2003) by historian and sociologist Gilberto Freyre, first published in 1933, significantly strengthened this narrative. In this work, the author reaffirmed and systematized theories of racial democracy and social harmony, under which all Brazilians were purportedly equal regardless of skin color.

This expression, supposedly created by white Brazilian elites to guarantee their privileges, remains in our social relations today. It sells the belief that “[...] Blacks and whites coexist harmoniously, enjoying equal opportunities for existence, without any interference from their respective racial or ethnic origins in this game of social parity” (Nascimento, 2016, p. 48). The myth of racial democracy is one of the most insidious factors sustaining the genocide of the Black population in Brazil. It reinforces racism by promoting the illusion of equality in ethnic-racial relations, while simultaneously encouraging the forgetting and erasure of slavery as a crime against humanity. This imposed amnesia hinders critical reflection on the persistently high death rates among Black and Indigenous people.

#### **4 Monstrosity: on the attempt to create a grotesque aesthetic**

Resuming the process of *ex-tinto*, through discoveries with the costume, as I ventured into that body-mask (Costa, 2015), an enormous monstrous figure emerged, bearing “dinosaur-like” features—utterly deformed and moving through space with strangeness, like a large pulsating larva. The core of the aesthetic inquiry revolved around monstrosity, as I sought to create a repulsive moving image capable of provoking an aesthetic that was at once grotesque and precarious. I wished to express imagetically the disturbances embedded in my lived experience within the condition of being Black. I wanted to excrete performatively, through a tenebrous dance, the rage contained in my traumas and pain. My guiding question in the creative process was “How, through this masking, might I explode and/or implode the experience of being Black and echo other Black existences subjected to cancellation, disappearance, and extinction?” According to Muniz Sodré (2019), racism produces a semiotics of monstrosity in the Black being, generating an inner conflict within one classified as non-human by the European West,

from this emerges a semiotics of monstrosity: for the subjectivated, epiphanyed consciousness, the “Afro” is a man whom the Eurocentric consciousness cannot perceive as fully human: he is, like the monster, not an unknown, but a known being who ultimately cannot be perceived as identical to the universal idea of the human (Sodré, 2019, p. 162).



I wrote an action script in which the monstrous figure I had created undertook a crossing that traced the metamorphosis from a larval being into a butterfly. During this crossing of the monstrous being, there was a moment of rupture of the cocoon-casing, enabling the escape, liberation, and rebirth of the dissident Black being. The idea was to create a transformation from the larval being into a Black (beautiful) being, an ode to freedom: transgression, transmutation, and rebirth. The dramaturgical script for developing the action was particularly simple: to carry out a crossing in which the monstrous larval being, midway through its trajectory of mortification, breaks with what has been preestablished for it. There is a metamorphosis (rite of passage) altering the course of its trajectory, freeing it into the rebirth of its full existence. . For Marcos Alexandre, “[...] the Black body is the space of memory inscription, the link of recreation and contact with the universe of the sacred and the profane” (2017, p. 50).

I strove for this crossing (memory), in factual terms, to produce a reversal of the narrative that had already been given, a rupture of the cocoon-casing “straitjacket” by the being that inhabited that inhospitable environment. It managed to free itself from the bonds and afflictions of that “white mask,” filled with sharp white cups. From this rupture of the cocoon-casing, a Black being was “reborn,” naked and beautiful, like a butterfly after metamorphosis, “ceasing to be a caterpillar” and becoming a Black being emancipated from the chrysalis. Referring to my experiences wandering the streets where I observed Black men, in my action script the performance began with the masked figure camouflaged as a garbage bag, almost invisible to “naked eyes,” not moving, tightly withdrawn, allowing the audience to see only the breathing movement of the body externalized in the mask. In this initial moment of the performance, the action was very simple and minimal, like the situation I had observed in the street, where Black men were often invisible, thrown on the ground, asleep or awake, depressed, without life perspective, and in profound nostalgia. The action consisted of a body installed in the environment, wrapped in the “blanket” casing. Gradually, that situation which seemed “comfortable” transformed into other conflictual and adversarial relations, and the harmless garbage bag became a large tenebrous monster.

Throughout the solo, the masked figure enacted the process of unmasking, revealing that what had appeared to be a mere “object”—a lifeless garbage bag—possessed vital energy and propulsion. Subsequently, the conflict of the Black being emerged from within a chrysalis filled with disposable cups; through a dance of abrupt movements within this imprisoning and asphyxiating structure, the Black-memory-being discovered an opening for escape. Disentangling itself from the “white mask” (Fanon, 2008), it crawled naked toward a point of liberation. Within this fiction, I sought an alternative trajectory for the Black-memory-being, divergent from death or potential extinction. I proposed a reading of (re)existence, an ancestral reunion with Blackness and a path toward liberation from white alienation, culminating in existential emancipation.



## 5 Final considerations

Through this performative action, titled *ex-tinto*, I sought to foreground the escape toward the liberation and emancipation of a Black-memory-being, including the very term “Black” imposed by whiteness and what it socially signifies. As Beatriz do Nascimento states in the documentary *Ôrí*, “to the extent that recently for Africans in Brazil, their ancestors lived in constant migration within Bantu territories in Africa. Perhaps escape is a cultural consequence, an ancestral consequence” (Gerber, 1989). Escape from whiteness and whitening is liberation and transgression against the anguish and suffocation of being a Black person oppressed by an unequal and racist society. In search of an ancestral movement of *aquilombamento* and rooting, through this work I recognize that I practiced self-love, created possibilities to love myself, to care for myself, and to give and receive love.

The dialectic that introduces the need for a support point for my freedom expels me from myself. It breaks my unreflective position. Always in terms of consciousness, Black consciousness is immanent to itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to resort to the universal. In my chest, no probability has a place. My Black consciousness does not assume itself as the lack of something. It is. It is adherent to itself (Fanon, 2008, p. 122).

As in *Projeto Servir*, the first work of the trilogy, this piece is a performance-manifesto, in which I had the courage to expose my naked body in search of healing processes for the conflictual relations with my self-image. Being naked, in this sense, was extremely important in this work. As in *Projeto Servir*, at the end of the action I remained exposed on the floor like a body, a humanity and presence presumptively disposable. In *ex-tinto*, I exposed myself naked and vulnerable to the actions of the audience. I wanted to expose my Black body, undesirable before many mirrors, as a “beautiful work of art,” for a dilated duration, as a way of resignifying the processes with my self-image and revealing it to known and unknown people.



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**Funding**

Not applicable

**Ethics Committee Approval**

Not applicable

**Competing interests**

No declared conflict of interest

**Research Context**

No declared research context

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**Contribution of authorship (CRediT)**

Not applicable

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**Evaluation Method**

Single-Blind Peer Review

**Editors**

Altemar Di Monteiro

Anderson Feliciano

Soraya Martins

**Peer Review History**

Submission date: 15 July 2025

Approval date: 14 January 2026