

KAMCHATKA

REVISTA DE ANÁLISIS CULTURAL



**FUTURISMO AFROLATINOAMERICANO, CIENCIA FICCIÓN
NEOINDIGENISTA Y POSTINDIGENISMO LATINOAMERICANO**

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CUERPOS NEGROS Y CUERPOS CELESTES: AFROFUTURISMO QUEER Y NUEVAS ESPACIALIDADES EN *NEGRUM3* DE DIEGO PAULINO

Of Black Bodies and Celestial Bodies: Queer Afrofuturism and New Spatialities in Diego Paulino's *Negrum3*

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RESUMEN: Al lanzar su cortometraje *Negrum3*, el director brasileño Diego Paulino despliega un acto activista en favor de la comunidad queer de Sao Paulo. La apuesta estética del film eleva una nueva epistemología del cuerpo negro y queer haciendo uso de la analogía y apropiándose del lenguaje de la astrofísica y la ciencia ficción en respuesta al clima tenso y homofóbico generado por la derecha brasileña. Los diferentes cuerpos que reclaman el universo cinematográfico de este corto dominan los códigos de la estética afrofuturista y especulan sobre la utopía queer y el futuro de las personas negras en Brasil. Las potencialidades del futuro negro y queer son contextualizadas en relación al movimiento afrofuturista como fenómeno global en un intento de definirlo localmente en Brasil. Para lograr una aproximación a las características del afrofuturismo brasileño y su praxis se analizará el texto cultural en relación con el concepto teórico de José Muñoz de utopía queer que consiste en considerar al futuro “dentro del dominio de lo queer” y a lo queer como “un modo estructural de desear que nos permite ver y sentir más allá del presente” (2009). Además, considerando que Paulino crea un universo utópico y estético con el cuerpo negro como epicentro extremadamente crítico de la situación presente, su obra será considerada como un caso de “utopianismo transgresor”, concepto elaborado por la teórica Lucy Anderson (2000).

PALABRAS CLAVE: Afrofuturismo brasileño, Cine negro, Utopía queer, Utopianismo transgresor.

ABSTRACT: This essay explores how Brazilian film director Diego Paulino performs activism through his short film *Negrum3*. I will argue that *Negrum3* develops a new epistemology of the black and queer body using analogy and the appropriation of the language of astrophysics and science fiction in response to the current tense political climate and the homophobic policies of the Brazilian right. The different bodies that claim the cinematographic universe of this short film demonstrate a command of Afrofuturistic aesthetics and speculate about queer utopia and black futures. Consequently, the potentialities of the queer and black future that Paulino is presenting in his film are going to be framed within the aesthetic movement of Brazilian Afrofuturism. Moreover, two main theoretical ideas are going to anchor the analysis of the short film. First, I will discuss the film in relation to José Muñoz's idea of queer utopia: “The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.” (2009). Secondly, I will argue that Paulino is working with a new epistemological approach focused on the black queer body and by doing so, his work is aligned with Lucy Sargisson's theoretical concept of “transgressive utopianism” (2000).

KEYWORDS: Brazilian afrofuturism, Black cinema, Queer utopia, Transgressive utopianism.

Hoje vamos olhar para o futuro de onde tudo começou
Aretha Sadick - Negrum3

SPACE IS THE PLACE: FROM SUN RA TO *NEGRUM3*

In 1972 one of the most radical Afro-Futurist blaxploitation films was produced in the U.S., starring the father of the Afrofuturistic movement, Herman Poole Blount, also known as Sun Ra. *Space is the Place*, directed by John Coney, as Eva Diwalska points out, is widely recognized as an early visual and aural manifesto of Afrofuturism and a bold cinematic materialization of Sun Ra's mythology (2019: 910). The film features Sun Ra, portraying a messianic being descended from the pharaohs, and the members of his orchestra arriving on Earth on a psychedelic spaceship, only later to end up abandoning the planet behind them while it explodes. The idea of futurity for black people in this experimental movie is linked to the premise of an extraterrestrial utopia since "the annihilation of planet Earth together with existing racial inequalities represents a new beginning for black people" (Diwalska, 2019: 918). One year later in Brazil, film director Zózimo Bulbul directed and performed in the short movie *Alma no olho* (Soul in the Eye), which according to Janaína Oliveira, is a piece that showcases the status of Bulbul as a pioneer of Black Brazilian cinema due to the aesthetic and narrative advances that he accomplished in relation to the previous films directed by other Brazilian filmmakers of color (2014: 32). Unlike Coney, Bulbul does not use any type of psychedelia resources and his short film does not show any trait of the Afrofuturist aesthetic proposal or Sun Ra's philosophy. However, just by placing his black body at the epicenter Bulbul "performs a pantomime of the history of Black people between Africa and the diaspora" (Oliveira, 2014: 32). The two films were released the same year, in 1974, and even though they display distinctive formal traits, I situate them both as antecedents of the short movie *Negrum3* directed by Brazilian director Diego Paulino, a film that serves to delve into the particularities and intricacies of Brazilian Afrofuturism in the realm of film studies.

Paulino premiered his short film in 2018, in a political climate hostile¹ to counter-hegemonic sexualities and corporalities, making *Negrum3* not only a response statement and countercultural product but also an Afroqueer manifesto. This article explores the

¹ Since Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro took office, the Ministry of Women, Family and Human Rights has decided to cancel and remove the legal protection of people from the LGBTQ + community. Moreover, in recent years, Brazil has earned a reputation as the capital of the murder of LGBTQ + people and events such as the murder and torture of Dandara dos Santos, a trans woman from Fortaleza, in February 2017 and the murder of the city council member, Marielle Franco, in March 2018, have contributed to the perpetuation of such a reputation creating a queer-dystopic atmosphere.

cinematographic strategies that Diego Paulino employs in his film in order to perform activism and create a wholly new futuristic aesthetic in response to the homophobic policies of the Brazilian right. I will argue that *Negrum3*, as an heir of *Space is the Place* as well as *Alma no Olho*, creates a new epistemology of the black and queer body through the use of analogy and the appropriation of the language of astrophysics and science fiction in response to the current tense and exclusionist political climate.

The different bodies that claim the cinematographic universe of this short film execute a command of 1) Afrofuturistic aesthetics and speculate about 2) queer utopia and 3) black futures. Consequently, the potentialities of the queer and black future that Paulino is presenting in his film are going to be framed within the aesthetic movement of Brazilian Afrofuturism and queer theory. I will contextualize *Negrum3* as part of a bigger corpus of Afrofuturistic works and establish a set of common traits that are relevant in the Brazilian context. In addition, two main theoretical ideas are going to anchor the analysis of the short film. First, I will discuss the film in relation to Jorge Muñoz's notion of queer utopia: "The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present." (2009: 1). Secondly, I will argue that since Paulino is working within a new epistemological approach focused on the black queer body, his work is aligned with Sargisson's theoretical concept of "transgressive utopianism" (2000: 2). This concept is not a blueprint for an ideal polity; instead, it demonstrates an approach to the world that is both idealistic and pragmatic, focusing on bodies of thought in relation to bodies of people, communities or, in the case of *Negrum3*, constellations of black and celestial bodies. Through the examination of the formal strategies employed in Paulino's short movie I aim to conceptualize the nuances and particularities of Brazilian Afrofuturism and elucidate the pragmatic agenda that the local movement is contributing to the global phenomenon.

NEGRUM3 AS PART OF AN ONGOING CONVERSATION: BRAZILIAN AFROFUTURISM AND THE DYSTOPIAS OF THE PRESENT

Before beginning to talk about Paulino's work, it is necessary to point out the nature of the concept of Afrofuturism and the particularities of its aesthetic forms in Brazil. The term was used for the first time by the American academic Mark Dery, who in his essay "Black to the Future", defined it as follows:

"[Afrofuturism is a type of] speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses AfricanAmerican concerns in the context of

twentieth-century technoculture—and, more generally African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (1994: 180).

Dery’s definition was limited to a subgenre of Science Fiction, especially in the Anglo-American framework, created by black authors. Since then, a growing body of scholars has explored the field of Afrofuturism, expanding Dery’s definition by incorporating not only tools borrowed from other fields, such as queer of color critique, but also extending the research possibilities to other media, such as music and the plastic arts. De Witt Douglas Kilgore expands on Dery’s notion, mentioning that “Afrofuturism can be seen as less a marker of black authenticity and more a cultural force, an episteme that betokens a shift in our largely unthought assumptions about what histories matter and how they may serve as a precondition for any future we may imagine” (2014: 8). In this sense, there is a marked relationship of Afrofuturist texts to the history of racism, slavery, colonization, and systemic oppression, as well as a central position occupied by racialized bodies in these futuristic narratives. Therefore, it is imperative to approach the subject aesthetics while analyzing the intersectionality between race, gender and sexuality.

In recent years Afrofuturism has gained momentum as scholars other than Kilgore, such as Lisa Yaszek and Lonny Avi Brooks have been publishing on the topic and express unanimity on the importance of globalization and temporality when it comes to establishing a definition. Yaszek points out how omnipresent Afrofuturism is as a global phenomenon: “Afrofuturism is speculative fiction or science fiction written by both Afro-diasporic and African authors. It’s a global aesthetic movement that encompasses art, film, literature, music, and scholarship” (2013: 1). The author also points out the main objectives of Afrofuturism: “Afrofuturist artists are interested in recovering lost black histories and thinking about how those histories inform a whole range of black cultures today. They also want to think about how these histories and cultures might inspire new visions of tomorrow” (2013: 1-2). Lonny Avi Brooks also suggests a retroactive analysis when he writes that “Afrofuturism as a framework suggests promising directions for reinvigorating our language talking about racial identity in the deep past and the long-term future” (2016: 153). All these authors share the idea of Afrofuturism as a global movement which aims to connect the past and the present in the mission to imagine an alternative future. According to Isiah Lavender and Yaszek Afrofuturism represents a multigenerational, multigenre aesthetic and social movement that engages social media and Web 2.0, and that includes black authors stretching back to the beginning of modernity and spanning the entire globe (2020: 7.) From this perspective, it is important to point out that the particularities of Afrofuturism in each context of insurgence are relevant too and shape the movement in different ways. Each region and

community, even each single author, nourish the movement in different ways and uses the aesthetic to face or confront specific individual issues. Studying the Afrofuturism movement in both frameworks, global and local, will offer a less biased understanding of it and will be faithful to the plurality of views offered by authors who subscribe to it.

In the case of Brazilian Afrofuturism, while there is the clear intention to build a future for black bodies, there is a tendency to depict this futurity through a revision of the past linked not only to the history of slavery in Brazil but also to the African diaspora experience and its religions: remembering the stolen past is essential to foreseeing a better future. In this sense, the particularities of Brazilian Afrofuturism are more in line with the stance of Griffith Rollefson who defines it as follows: “Afrofuturism questions and undermines the eurocentric idea of progress and the universalizing values of rationalism, and empiricism –and in the process, it breaks down the perceived opposition between “white science” and “black magic.” (2008: 3) In the context of Brazilian Afrofuturism, this dichotomy between Eurocentric science and black magic is articulated through a strategy that draws on the different forms of ancestral knowledge of Brazil, like for example the African religions of *Candomblé* and *Yoruba*. In Brazilian Afrofuturistic narratives, African religions are not conceived oppositionally to white science but rather as the core of creative potential.

A good example of narratives that feed on ancestral knowledge are the literary works by Fábio Cabral, author of *Ritos de Passagem* (2014), *O Caçador Cibernético da Rua 13* (2017) and *A Cientista Guerreira do Facão Furioso* (2019). As an initiated *candomblecista*, Cabral incorporates the ancestral knowledge and mixes it with his futuristic stories. On the musical front, Naná Vasconcelos is considered one of the greatest exponents of Brazilian Afrofuturist music. In a more contemporary setting, other exponents of music are Xênia França, Larissa Luz and Ellen Oléria, who incorporate electronic, and synthesizer sounds as well as visual elements in their videos to mix ancestral knowledge with elements of science fiction.

Brazilian Afrofuturism also carries a powerful social critique² of the current situations of systemic racism directly attacking the myth of racial democracy proposed by Gilberto Freyre. The social critique is particularly evident in the Brazilian film field, especially in the science fiction genre, where there is a proliferation of what scholar Kênia Freitas defines as racial dystopias. These are films that critically examine Brazilian society por-

² The polarization and tension between the film and its context affected even its distribution. Paulino showcase the film mostly in independent festivals. Initially, *Negrum3* had received support from AN-CINE, the national cinematographic Brazilian entity, in order to be able to attend the Queer Lisboa Festival. Nonetheless, after the project was approved and the funding promised, AN-CINE canceled the support and Paulino could not receive the funds.

traying the near present as a dystopia to enhance their illustration of the current social problems of police brutality and racial segregation. Some examples include *Chico* (2016) by the Carvalho brothers, a film that imagines a Brazil in 2029 in which every black child is expected to become a criminal and, therefore, enters prison at an early age; *Personal Vivator* (2014) by Sabrina Fidalgo, a film that imagines an alien visiting Rio de Janeiro to study the inequality between races and classes and *Rapsódia para um Homem Negro* (2015), in which director Gabriel Martins uses the mythology of Afro-Brazilian religion to show political and racial relations in a dystopian city.

Paulino's short film joins these ongoing conversations and presents a series of queer black bodies as celestial bodies under attack and the queer community of Sao Paulo as a constellation trying to resist and reinvent itself. In this sense, Paulino expands the discursive possibilities of Afrofuturism by incorporating into the racial element the ambition to represent a queer utopia through symbolic representations that combine sexuality, the claim to spatiality, and posthumanism. Paulino's motivation and main strategy is making an optimistic projection about the future and trying to materialize the queer utopia into the present. The short movie is a journey that presents the challenges that the queer community faces every day and offers a manifesto, a plan, to overcome those challenges. This manifesto is fueled by the energy and epistemological knowledge of the Brazilian queer black experience and its ancestral religions.

MATERIALIZING THE QUEER UTOPIA IN THE PRESENT

The main contribution of Paulino is that he is responding to the dystopian racial present with a queer utopia. If, for Sun Ra, the only possible utopia was outside of this planet, for Paulino the utopia is possible in the queer earthly present. The chance to reshape our current and future social world, as Colmon points out, is particularly important for queer(ed) subjects of color—whose bodies are often physical reminders of historical disparities in sociopolitical representation (2017: 329). The notion of utopia in the framework of queer theory studies is rescued and brought up by José Esteban Muñoz's text *Cruising Utopia* where he defines it as intrinsically linked to queerness. However, in questioning the characteristics of utopia through this lens, Muñoz at the same time raises an ontological question about what it is to be queer and defines it as an element that has not yet reached or materialized itself in the present:

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be disti-

lled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. (2009: 1)

Two aspects of this notion by Muñoz are important for understanding the relevance of a queer utopia in the context of current Brazilian society. On one hand, Muñoz mentions that the queer ideal can be thought about and planned in relation to the past. On the other hand, understanding queer as a future possibility allows the creation of a new epistemology of desire in which a new structure enables a gaze capable of seeing beyond the present. In this way, the queer utopia does not exist inhabiting only a space in the future but is intrinsically linked in three temporal dimensions and therefore is omnitemporal. This notion of non-linear temporality and infinite transcendence is intrinsically linked to the articulation between past, present, and future that Brazilian Afrofuturism embodies.

Negrum3 shows not only that queer utopia is possible, but it is also materializing operations that are necessary in order to achieve a better queer future. Paulino includes in his short film scenes of daily actions and behaviors, such as walking in the street and traveling in public transport, that offer resistance to the homophobic Brazilian tendencies, and he elevates these practices to the category of artistic performance. For example, the director follows queer activists while they walk in the street or use public transport wearing afrofuturistic costumes. While performing these afrofuturistic walks and inhabiting public spaces, the activists confront disapproving glances. In this sense Paulino is also theorizing about queer utopia adopting a pragmatical approach. The activistic praxis of the short film paves the way for every queer subject leading them to find resistance in the everyday and intimate life.

Building on Muñoz's work, Angela Jones expands the notion of queer utopia by presenting a series of essays that drives current debates about the future of individuals identified as queer outside the realm of the purely theoretical and demonstrates how the queer future is being shaped by individual behavior in praxis; its main focus is everyday practices that demonstrate the potential of the queer future (2013: 1). Jones's work contributes a model to think about those practices where the creation of those possible futures is configured. However, Jones does not offer a predetermined linear program for the establishment of queer utopian spaces but instead focuses on the everyday acts of resistance and the affective forces that create the potentiality for these spaces to arise. As Muñoz suggests, these spaces are necessary because in them lies the potential to "liberate" minority individuals from the "here and now" of heteronormative space and time or the "majority public sphere." This is a premise that is observed in *Negrum3*, where there is no escape from the present or the traumatic past, but rather the two confront

each other so that an artistic performance is born from that encounter or disagreement.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE SIDERAL AND LITERAL SPACE

One of the pragmatic strategies that *Negrum3* propounds in order to materialize the queer utopia in the present is the invention of a new potential spatiality. The space is discussed in different ways throughout the film on both literal and symbolic levels. The spatiality of display on screen is manipulated and shaped in function of the queer bodies that inhabit it. At the beginning of the short a robotic and cybernetic voice provides a message that warns the viewer:

Warning! These scenes contain nudity, biochemically modified bodies, chimeras, machines, self-mutilation, existential crises, questionable empowerment, degenerate feminism, noise, postmodern jargon, plagiarism, cheap academicism, gratuitous violence, saliva, blood, and other fluids. Anytime you feel the need, please leave the space. (0:0:52)

From these first lines, *Negrum3* inscribes itself and dialogues with a whole tradition of previous theories that deal with the intricacies of the queer body. For, in these sentences there are reminiscences of Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* and other texts by Paul Preciado, such as *Testo Junkie*, where the author gives an account of how sexual dissidents have been pathologized. In his description of the pharmacopornographic era, Preciado refers to how, during the 20th century, the discovery of the biochemical substance of the hormone and the pharmaceutical development of synthetic molecules for commercial use radically modified traditional definitions of normality and pathological sexualities (2013: 21). *Negrum3* assumes in advance not only the pathologization of these bodies that will be staged but also presents them as machines and chimeras. It also assumes viewers framed in a certain normality whose subjectivity can be hurt by the images that they will see.

However, the final sentence, which seems to take into account this fragile sensitivity of the spectator, has a double meaning. The robotic voice asks the viewer to "leave the space." It does not use the verb to abandon, there is no reference to the movie theater, but the voice mentions "please leave the space." To leave, *deixar* in Portuguese, is a verb whose connotation keeps the volitional aspect of giving something voluntarily. In this way, the voice is commanding the viewer to give up their own space to be occupied by these bodies that will take over the screen.

Paulino's main goal is to materialize the queer utopia, but it is equally important for the director to demonstrate that a utopian future is not unreachable but rather a particular moment that can be conjured in the present in the form of hope. Structura-

lly, the short is divided into three parts, each of which is a hybrid of performance and documentary format. The performance offers the sense of material presence while the documentary genre opens up the lives of those who participate and provides a window into inner and personal struggles, creating a bond and a space of intimacy between the subjects and the audience. *Negrum3* starts with a performance that features Eric Oliveira, a performer, DJ and party producer. Eric opens the universe of *Negrum3* by presenting an individual performance on stage in which her almost naked body is placed in front of a mirror whose glass has exploded into several pieces. In this performance there are some reminiscences of Bulbul's *Alma no olho*, since the black body as artistic clay is the unequivocal protagonist and takes over the screen space. The *mise en scène* is also built around the black body and highlights its importance. The broken mirror, as a prop, serves this purpose by duplicating and refracting the performative corporeal presence. Regarding individual queer performance, Muñoz claims the following:

“There is a certain appeal to the spectacle of a queer body standing on stage alone, with or without props, with or without scenery, dedicated to the project of opening up a world of queer language, lyricism, perceptions, dreams, visions, aesthetics and politics. The solo performance speaks to the reality of being queer at that particular moment.” (1999: 1)

In fact, the initial performance of *Negrum3* is a reflection on inhabiting the black queer body and the dangers that inhabiting that type of body in Brazil entails. While Eric contemplates herself in the mirror, she displays a fearful gesture. As she puts on makeup, the stage is invaded by a set of colorful clothes that hang, eerily, in the void. In these first moments, the fear of one's own identity and body and the need to use various types of camouflage as political survival strategies is being raised. The reflection of one's own body as a source of fear is counteracted by the different costumes, the different skins in which the performer transmutes herself.

In terms of materiality, in this initial performance *Negrum3* states the importance of plurality and diversity when it comes to the physical appearance embodied in all the different costumes that the performer wears. After changing costumes/skins, again and again, the performer returns to her own naked reflection. While the performer executes these costume changes, she is interrupted by the homophobic and transphobic accusations of a voice-over that begin to torment her “Your aesthetics is prohibited” (00:03:38), “Kill this wretch” (00:04:04). Faced with these hurtful voices that find their echo in the actual homophobic political climate of Brazil, the performer loses control and begins to remove all her clothes. Once she finishes with the clothes, she begins to make violent gestures against her own body: she frantically tugs at her hair, trying to pull it out, and also tugs at her own skin. It is not enough to remove your wardrobe; it is also neces-

sary to leave your own body. Along with the frenzied tantrum of the performer and the condemning voices, a drum begins to be heard mixed with synthesizer noises and the poem by the Peruvian poet Victoria Santa Cruz “They yelled black at me,” (00:05:15) a hymn that works as an invocation to exorcize the segregationist voices that had invaded the performer’s space. As a symbol of acceptance of her black identity, the performer’s final costume is a network of transparent chains that, instead of hiding or disguising, expose his skin. Chains were a prop in Bulbul’s film too; they restrain the protagonist as a symbol of the transatlantic slave trade period. In the opposite way, here Paulino turns chains into a glamorous dress, an object that serves to enhance the beauty of the black body rather than oppress it.



Figure 1. Eric Oliveira ends her performance in chains. (00:06:16)

Chains, as a symbol of oppression, are thus resignified as an ornament of the black body. This first part of the short film begins as an individual performance and turns into an interview. The performance is complemented with these interviews of Eric in which she talks about her daily struggles to be herself and accepted by her family as well as the daily violence that she must face. The section culminates with the performer leaving the domestic space of her house and walking down the street where she joins a celebration party with other racialized queer bodies. The struggle to inhabit one’s own body thus culminates in the collective victory of inhabiting the public space in the middle of a

party and taking over the streets of the city.

THE CONQUEST OF SIDEREAL SPACE

In the second part of the short movie, the praxis of queer utopia is to define the black queer body as distant, unreachable, and celestial, illuminating the urban sky. This celestial praxis is delivered in the form of poetry and visual images. The following performance in the short movie is a whole manifesto in which the artist Felix Pimenta proclaims a poem in front of a pictorial scenography of bloody and fragmented bodies³:

Manifesto for the black space
 On my black skin as dark as night
 I carry stories from generations
 Mine and the past
 I carry the voices of those who came before me,
 And resist in the name of those who are yet to come
 If my black skin is my courage cloak,
 I wear its protection to move forward and endure the everyday
 Going against the statistics, dodging bullets
 That aim at me in the light of day or in the moonlight
 (...)
 I am looking for the strength to reinvent a future where my existence
 And the existence of my brothers
 becomes the fundamental idea of being human
 We aspire to the cosmos simply for the possibility to dream
 We aspire to the outer space, to the beyond, the ethereal and the remote
 But we also aspire to the Space in its most literal form
 Space!
 (...)
 Do not introduce in our veins your pale and squalid ideas

³ Manifesto pelo espaço preto / Na minha pele negra, tão escura quanto a noite / Carrego a história da gerações / Da minha e das passadas / Carrego as vozes daqueles que vieram antes de mim / E resisto hoje em nome daqueles que virão depois / Se a minha pele preta é meu manto de coragem, / Uso da sua proteção para avançar e perdurar no cotidiano / Contrariando estatística, desviando de projéteis de chumbo / Que me miram na luz do sol ou ao brilho da lua (...) / Busco forças pra reinventar um futuro onde a existência minha e dos meus irmãos / Seja a própria ideia fundamental de ser humano / Aspiramos ao cosmos pela simples possibilidade de sonhar / Aspiramos ao espaço sideral para além de o etéreo e longínquo / Mas também ao espaço na sua forma mais literal / Espaço! / (...) Não introjete em nossas veias suas ideias pálidas e esquálidas / Ou as máximas retrógradas que delimitam a sexualidade e o gênero / Nossos corpos negros e celestes são maiores do que isso.

Or your regressive principles that limit sexuality and gender
Our black and celestial bodies are better than that

The poetic voice is aspiring to a new world and in the process of manifesting the characteristics of this future world is also antagonizing the present one. Its optimistic projections about the future are not completely idealistic but are raised in relation to a present of struggle and survival. Being optimistic and imagining a different future is mandatory to survive. The poem refers to the pre-slavery past as a point of origin due to its creative potential. The black body is presented as a generational constellation, and the black skin as a kind of armor. Surviving each day in Sao Paulo and walking in its streets becomes an everyday practice that brings these heavenly bodies closer to queer utopia. By speculating about a new utopian future, the agents involved in *Negrum3* create a micronarrative that pushes back bigger discourses of nationhood. Fernando Arenas recognizes that in spite of the exhaustion or weakening of utopias that governed the human imaginary (nationally and transnationally) until the late twentieth century, certain strands of utopian thinking are still necessary for the survival of humanity (2003: 88). The need of a queer utopia presented by *Negrum3* is in some ways denouncing the failure of the Brazilian modern utopia expressed through the myth of modernization and that of “Brazil, country of the future.” (Arenas 2003:99)



Figure 2. Poem “Manifest for the Black Space”
written by Diego Paulino performed by Felix Pimenta.

While the artist recites his poetry, images of bodies with flowers and vibrant colored makeup alternate in the foreground. The close-up is used specially to highlight the plurality of each face. In addition, a community of different black bodies is observed from a terrace where the background landscape is the night city. These bodies appear surrounded by colored neon lights that recreate the futuristic atmosphere. They intermingle with the lights of the city in a single stellar firmament. If in the previous section of the film the performance culminates with a collective act where the daytime urban spatiality was claimed, in this performance there is a claim for the nocturnal urban spatiality, and the community is presented as a constellation of celestial bodies that shine and illuminate the sky of Sao Paulo.

The representation of the queer black community as a constellation of celestial bodies established an emphasis on queer utopia as a communal goal and the utopianism present in *Negrum3* is extremely critical of the racist and homophobic society of Brazil. In this sense, the queer Afrofuturistic utopia presented by Paulino is understood as a case of what Lucy Sargisson defines as transgressive utopianism:

It is wild, unruly, rule-breaking thought that is politically driven and that expresses a profound discontent with the political present. It cannot be confined to one discipline as generic expectations are but another set of ordering structures that it rejects as invalid to its reality. (2000: 1)

Transgressive utopianism is not idealistic but is rooted in an attitude strongly critical of the present condition and advocated by what Sargisson defines as intentional communities. Intentional communities are groups of people who have chosen to live –and usually work in some way– together. They have a common aim or commitment. This commitment might be to such things as a political ideology, a spiritual path or to co-operative living itself (2000: 29).

Towards the end of the poem the poetic voice expresses a rejection of “backward and pale ideas about sexuality and gender” (00:15:40). Being incompatible with these external impositions, queer bodies are redefined as heavenly bodies –planets, satellites, stars in general. Jack Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure* argues that “before queer representation can offer a vision of queer culture, it must first repudiate the burden of inauthenticity and impertinence” (2011: 95). Contact with Afrofuturism as a cultural field enables these subjects to think about the essence of being black and queer in Sao Paulo outside the externally imposed inaccuracies. By rejecting the normativity of hegemonic sexuality and the category of gender, the lyrical voice is proposing the beginning of a process that Muñoz defines as disidentification:

Minoritarian subjects need to interface with different subcultural fields to activate their own senses of self. (...) Within late capitalism, all subject citizens are formed by what Nestor García Canclini has called “hybrid transformations generated by the horizontal coexistence of a number of symbolic systems.” (1999: 5)

Rejecting the hegemonic systems such as heteronormativity and white supremacy, the poem draws on a wide variety of counter-symbolic systems, the black epistemology of the queer body, the technical language of astrophysics, and the visual language of science fiction. All of them contribute to offering an invitation to conquer a new space and in terms of Muñoz this invitation is a desidentificatory practice. For this new space, a new corporeal language is also required. While the poem is playing, the montage incorporates scenes from a ballroom dance where different voguing performances are observed. As it presents an opportunity to play with the body creatively and generate a particular grammar from the conjugation of different poses, voguing is a political statement and a space from which to claim belonging to one's body itself. The director decides to superimpose on voguing archival images that refer to colonial times. The origin of the founding myth of racial democracy, promoted by Freyre in his seminal book *Casa-Grande e Senzala*, appears in these images: the black nurse, also known as *mãe preta*, as a symbol of Brazilian process of miscegenation. While the host of the dance complains that black women are wrongly accused of being aggressive, there are images of black or prettier nurses ranging from colonial times to more contemporary photos. In this way, the future is still thought of in an intricate relationship with the past and the present. Extending Halberstam's argument, I therefore propose that queer Afrofuturism offers us methods to “imagine not some fantasy or some other imaginary place, but possible alternatives to hegemonic systems” (2011: 89).

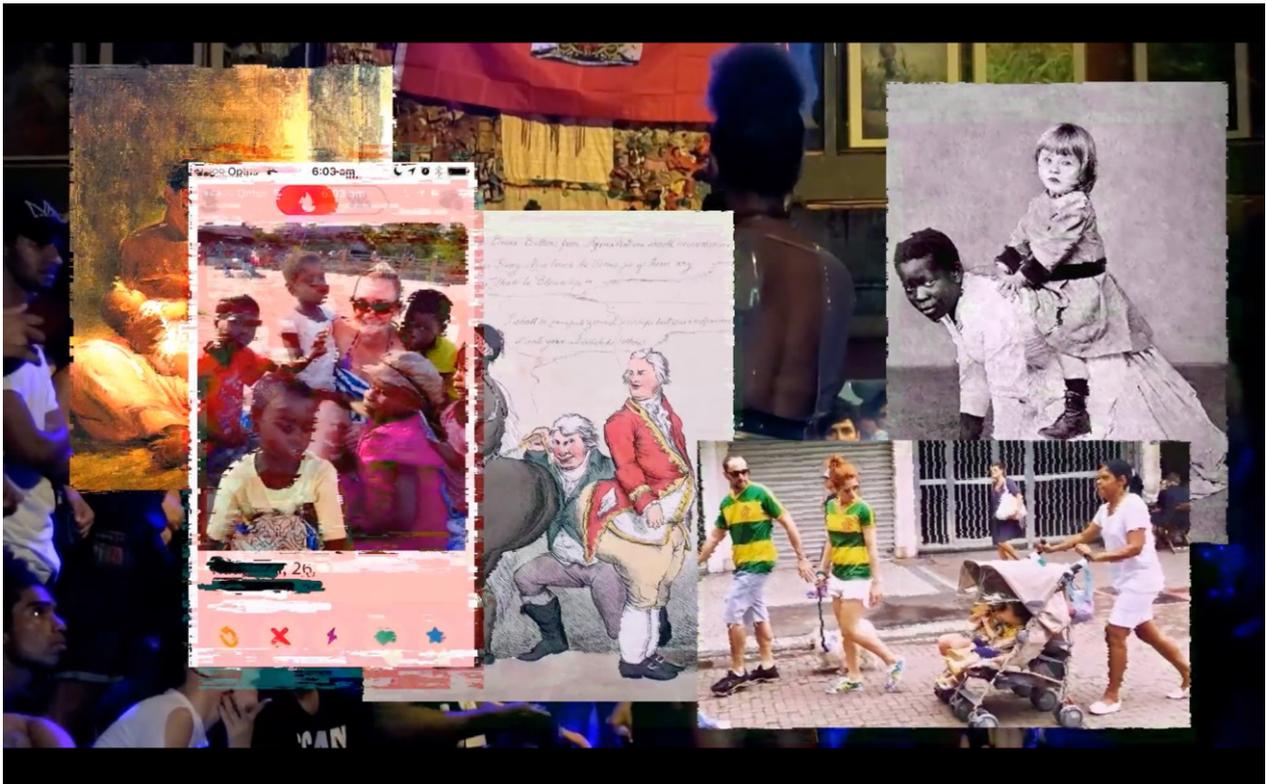


Figure 3. Images of mae preta taking over the screen.

FUTURE PHANTASMAGORIA: CONJURING THE DEAD AND BUILDING FUTURITY

In a direct reference to Sun Ra's *Space is the Place*, *Negrum3* closes with the spectacular appearance of an intergalactic ship that can be associated with claims that relate the imposed diaspora of African people to an alien extraction. Since African people were kidnapped and removed from their places of origin, some Afrofuturistic narratives categorized the whole enslavement process as an apocalyptic alien invasion. It is a dystopian event the material consequences of which are still seen in the present. In this sense, according to Kodwo Eshun, afrodiasporic subjects live the estrangement that science-fiction writers envision and Afrofuturism uses extraterrestriality as a hyperbolic trope to explore the historical terms, the everyday implications of forcibly imposed dislocation, and the constitution of Black Atlantic subjectivities (2003: 299.)

It can be argued that because of the references to Sun Ra's aesthetic, Paulino is presenting a case of a transculturated⁴ product where he is mixing the visual language of

⁴ I am referring to the term transculturation as proposed by Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, who builds on the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz: transculturation expresses the different phases of transition from one culture to another where there is implied the creation of a new cultural phenomena.

American Afrofuturism with the Brazilian context. Nonetheless, this hybridity is only present in terms of the visuals and the rest of the cinematic language and technical decisions are completely aligned with the local context. Paulino used the motif of the spaceship, using a Brazilian carnival carriage as prop and set. He also uses the space travel motif but instead of presenting an escape from earth, like we see in Sun Ra's film, the spectator attends to the arrival of two extraterrestrial beings. The final part of the short film shows Eric Oliveira, who appears again, and Aretha Sadick, activist and trans woman, both portraying aliens. In these last scenes Paulino visually exploits the Afrofuturist aesthetic to the fullest but he also presents a posthuman proposal: Aretha Sadick represents a being from another planet dressed as a half-panther, half-human intergalactic goddess who descends singing from her spaceship.

The hybridity of human body and panther relates to the proliferation of queer expressions that blur the boundaries between the human and the non-human. As Pierce and Giorgi determine, as the state integrates corporeality and lifestyles previously categorized as "undesirable" into its governmental framework, there is a concomitant proliferation of literary, artistic, and performative gestures that refocus the cultural scope of vision on the unstable boundary between the human and the animal, the human and the machine, the human and the monstrous (2020: 307.) By assuming and performing the identity of "free and ferocious panthers that will devour you," (0:18:16) Oliveira and Sadick are dialoguing first with the tradition of the American political organization the Black Panthers, and second, by referring to the act of cannibalism, they are also invoking the prefigurations of Brazilian modernism presented in the *Manifesto Antropófago* by Oswald De Andrade. Paulino is cannibalizing the Afrofuturistic aesthetic by giving priority to the Brazilian context and the idiosyncrasy of the black LGBTQ+ community.

The main material strategy of this cannibalization in this final performance highlights the African roots as a source of creative power and inspiration and showcases the intricacies of the black experience linked to ancestral religions in Brazil. Crowned with Egyptian-style jewels, Aretha begins a performance under the mandate of "blackening through amplified voices" (00:17:13.) As a verb, blackening implies inhabiting the black body, reclaiming spatiality and temporality. *Ennegritar* is a neologism used in the short film as a command. Aretha Sadick orders the audience to *ennegritar*, to become black, to accept one's blackness. Sadick embeds her performance with the concepts of Ilê (*candomblé* house), Ayê (physical world) and Axê (life force or divine power). Paulino is not the only one turning to *candomblé* as source of epistemological knowledge to solve the problems of the present and project a better future. *Candomblé* has also been conceived as a type of ontology from where to solve other types of problems like for example ecological crises. Valdovina Oliveira defines *candomblé* as follow:

Candomblé is the traditions, the rites, the practices that we Afro-Brazilians recreated in Brazil, from what the Africans who were enslaved brought with them. We recreated and gave new meanings to those African rites, rituals, traditions and worldviews and made Candomblé. For us, Black people in Brazil, Candomblé is much more than just a form of spirituality or a religion. Candomblé is an expression of resistance. It is a way of affirming an identity that was taken through the process of enslavement. Candomblé is a way of reconstructing a family that was dispersed through the slave trade Candomblé is a way of life that differs from Western visions of the world. (2017: 71)



Figure 4. Performer Aretha Sadick

The idea of rebuilding and reconnecting the members of a lost family is also used by Sadick when she concludes with the phrase “I am present here today for those who cannot be,”(0:21:25). The activist begins to name a group of people belonging to the queer community, activists as well as black pop culture icons. She starts with the name Zózimo Bulbul, invoking the pioneer director and continue with names of people who in one way or another are referents to the black community. Referring to the tense homophobic and transphobic climate in Brazil, Sadick calls out the name of Marielle Franco, one of the first queer of color congresswomen, who was assassinated in March 2018. The

short movie concludes with this powerful *nekya*⁵ in which the names of the dead mixed with the ones of the living and offers another proof of the nonlinear temporality that rules this Afrofuturistic narrative.

CONCLUSIONS

By incorporating this aesthetic, Diego Paulino shows that Afrofuturism is presented as an ideal space from which to conjure and imagine the black queer utopia. As Muñoz mentions: “The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” (2009: 1). However, it is not just about projecting idealistic plans for the future or inserting black people into an already existing white future prediction. Paulino is demonstrating that it is necessary to take actions in the present to affect the near and distant futures. Brazilian Afrofuturism as an aesthetic field provides the space for these productions of meaning to be possible and also, as a new arena, reclaims the problematic present. The present is problematic because vestiges of the colonial past still exist, and queer black bodies continue to be murdered day after day. In the act of thinking and creating these performativities or daily struggles within Afrofuturism, the three temporal dimensions are interrelated: the traumatic past as a source of inspiration and as a representation of a return to the black uterus, the present that is enabled as a space from which to create, and potentially the future as a line that allows black queer people to advance towards a more optimistic horizon. Afrofuturist space is a new place from which to think about the self and other possible futures, futures that are more optimistic in relation to those old pessimistic and Eurocentric propositions. The importance of Afrofuturism, considered as a creative and social movement, lies in how it allows reconfiguration of the black self physically and spatially in the present, of new spaces conquered, and of thinking about and conceiving of time in different ways. Just as *Negrum3* demonstrates, the future is built by looking at the past and by changing the present. There is no temporal linearity, but rather a confluence of times and spaces from which a queer utopia emerges.

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⁵ In ancient Greek, *nekya* is a rite in which ghosts were called up and questioned about the future.

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