

Latex, Blood, Ink: Extraction and Exposure in the Amazonian Performances of Jorge Bandeira¹

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Rubber

Tyres, insulation, shoes, gloves, toys . . .

the uses for rubber are almost endless.

*Made from the milky sap (latex) of *Hevea brasiliensis*, rubber is extremely versatile. Although the tree is native to Brazil, most of the world's rubber comes from plantations in Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia.*

The latex is harvested by cutting an angled groove into the bark, at the base of which is placed a cup. The thick, milky liquid runs down the cut, filling the cup over a period of 3–4 hours. This is known as "tapping." The latex is then strained, acid is added and the mixture dried and made into sheets. Today, over 5 million tons of rubber are produced each year.

Visitors to the Palm House at Kew Royal Botanical Gardens in London can read the above statement and further information about rubber on a sign in front of a specimen of *Hevea brasiliensis*.² Remarkably blithe, the statement betrays no trace of the involvement of Kew administration and staff in the cultivation of *H. brasiliensis* seedlings stolen from the Brazilian Amazon in the 1870s for propagation in tropical British colonies such as Malaysia.³ The fact that this action broke the Brazilian export monopoly on rubber explains why the name of the thief, Henry Wickham, though forgotten elsewhere, is still much remembered in northern Brazil, especially in Manaus.

The theft of the seedlings has since been understood literally as an act of biopiracy that led to economic ruin in the Amazon (although if Wickham had not smuggled them out successfully, someone else would have done so

sooner or later).⁴ But it has also been interpreted figuratively as a theft of potential, creative as well as economic. The life-giving seeds dispersed across the waters recall a legend, common among several Amazonian peoples, in which the trickster hero Makunaíma fells a mighty tree to reveal a food source, and in so doing alters the landscape around Mount Roraima (said to be the stump of the tree, currently marking the Brazil/Venezuela/Guyana border), creating floods, waterfalls, mountains, and valleys. Inadvertently, he sets up a region of abundance on the wrong side of the Caroni River, the bank opposite to the one where his people live.⁵ In northern Brazil, Wickham's robbery is arguably as legendary today as the tale of the food tree, and if we consent to compare the narratives thus, we can see that both Wickham and Makunaíma dispersed sources of Amazonian abundance to other areas. Both etiologies serve to explain displacements or extractions of natural resources, stolen from one area to thrive in another, and both lead to an awareness of unwanted consequences. Like the stories of Makunaíma and other indigenous figures, both mythical and historical, such as Jurupari and Ajuricaba, the story of the outsider Wickham has been integrated into Amazonian folklore, including theater and performance events, as we shall see below.

In this essay I will present a brief overview of theater in Manaus before focusing on the works of Jorge Bandeira, a contemporary dramatist, actor, director, teacher, translator, and activist who has also worked in the Conselho Municipal de Cultura under the auspices of the Prefeitura de Manaus.⁶ Bandeira has been involved in theater in Manaus since the 1980s, directed and acted in numerous performances, composed or adapted about a dozen works, and seen six of his own works produced. Five of these works will constitute the focus of my study:⁷ *A fabulosa loja dos bichos* (The fabulous store of the animals; published 2003, produced 2004 in the Teatro Amazonas by the Apareceu a Margarida theater company and directed by Michel Guerrero), *A carroça de Pandora do Largo de Sabá Tião* (Pandora's carriage on the Largo of Saint Sebas; produced 2007 on the Largo by the ArteBrasil theater company, under the direction of Ana Cláudia Motta and guest director Roberta Moratori; unpublished), *Nuances* (Nuances; staged 2010 at the Coletivo Difusão by the Coletivo Artístico Graúna theater company and directed by Jorge Bandeira; unpublished), *As 22 Lâminas* (The Major Arcana; staged 2011, 2012 at the Casarão de Idéias by the company Teatro Eden, under the direction of Jorge Bandeira; unpublished), and *A casa alienígena de Van Gogh* (Van Gogh's alien house; staged 2012 at the Espaço Cultural/Sebo Alienígena by the company Teatro Eden under the direction of Jorge Bandeira; unpublished).⁸

Manaus as Theater Capital

Manaus, the largest city in Brazil's largest state, sits just northwest of the *encontro das águas* (meeting of the Negro and Solimões Rivers) that forms the Amazon River proper. The city is known for its late nineteenth-century theater, the Teatro Amazonas. Even though the building is celebrated as an opera house, it is in reality "too small" for grand opera (with a maximum capacity of 685 people), and thus its highlights have more often included plays and concerts.⁹ The early repertoire was heavily Eurocentric, and indeed the house is decorated with column tops of theater masks over shields emblazoned with the names of European playwrights and composers such as Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Gil Vicente, and Mozart. But beginning with the experimental theater collaborative TESC and Márcio Souza's groundbreaking stagings of indigenous cosmologies from the 1970s on—such as *A paixão de Ajuricaba* (1974; The passion of Ajuricaba); *Dessana, dessana ou O começo antes do começo* (1975; The beginning before the beginning); *A maravilhosa história do Sapo Tarô-Bequê* (1975; The wonderful tale of a frog called Tarô-Bequê); and *Jurupari, A guerra dos sexos* (1979; Jurupari: The battle of the sexes)—theater in Manaus has come to expand the boundaries and possibilities of indigenous cultural manifestations as performance art. Souza's work remains popular; Lucia Sá explains that the TESC engagements with Souza's indigenous worldviews on stage were a "remarkable feat [that] went beyond most ritual theater experiments by making Rio Negro cosmogonies politically significant in an Amazonian context" (238).¹⁰

The panorama of performance possibilities and venues in Manaus has amplified steadily since the 1980s. While the Teatro Amazonas (renovated in 1990) still reigns, an additional dozen or more venues have opened in the city in a variety of formats, beginning with the Teatro Américo Alvarez (Américo Alvarez Theater) in 1986 (initially named Teatro dos Artistas e dos Estudantes, or Artists' and Students' Theater) and including (as of December 2012) venues such as O Porão (The Basement) located in the Casarão de Idéias (Big House of Ideas), Teatro da Instalação (Installation Theater), Teatro Oficina do SESC (SESC Workshop Theater), O Balneário do SESC (SESC Spa), TESC (Teatro Experimental do SESC, or SESC Experimental Theater), Coletivo Difusão (Diffusion Collective), Teatro Manauara (Manauaran Theater), Teatro Jorge Bonates (Jorge Bonates Theater), and the Espaço Cultural da Editora Valer (Valer Publishing House Cultural Space). Theater companies have also proliferated, including the ones mentioned above related to stagings of Bandeira's works, and the Companhia de Idéias, which has recently founded a monthly magazine, *Idéias Editadas* (Edited ideas, first issue May 2011), dedicated to the performance scene in Manaus and the rest of Brazil.¹¹ This expansion of

venues and theater companies stems from the initiation of municipal, state, and federal governmental funding beginning in the 1980s through organizations such as SESC (Serviço Social do Comércio/Social Service of Commerce) and its sponsored group TESC, which was the force behind Souza's string of indigenous adaptations.¹² The development of venues dovetailed with expansion of repertoire, such that Souza's plays, for example, could be staged in the city simultaneously with classics by Nelson Rodrigues, García Lorca, or Shakespeare; experimental theater such as works by Arrabal or Brecht; or more contemporary Happening-style performances.

Perhaps the number and variety of venues and performances in Manaus would rank as average for a city of two million people, but the local context, in which the Teatro Amazonas dominates the landscape of the Largo de São Sebastião and the city makes efforts to support its history of intercultural contact and conflict, makes theater an integral part of the city's identity. The Universidade do Estado do Amazonas (Amazonas State University) hosts a theater department whose faculty and students are deeply involved in the Manaus theater scene, and the older Universidade Federal do Amazonas (Federal University of Amazonas), long a sponsor of theater workshops, was planning to start a theater program in 2012.¹³ The Manaus-based publishing house Editora Valer, which specializes in materials related to the history, arts, and culture of the Amazonian region, in collaboration with the Amazonas state cultural office, has published many plays by local writers, including an eleven-title drama series called *Coleção Poracé* in which Bandeira's *A fabulosa loja dos bichos* appears. In all this activity, there is a growing consciousness of theater in Manaus, or in Amazonas, as pertaining to Brazilian theater in general but locating itself nonetheless "fora do eixo" (outside the axis), meaning outside the overwhelmingly dominant São Paulo–Rio de Janeiro cultural axis (Júnior 20–21).¹⁴ To be located in this way means to recognize innovation from these urban centers while embracing local forms of theatrical presentation—not just theater but also dance, music, and folklore festivals such as the Bois-Bumbás de Parintins.¹⁵

Eva and Hevea

This tightly woven mix of history and theater in Manaus—indeed, a theater aware of its history, a metatheater—is what Jorge Bandeira explores in his two-part farce *A carroça de Pandora do Largo de Sabá Tião* (2006). A "bufônico" (clownish) satire designed to be staged on the very Largo (plaza) that frames the Teatro Amazonas, the piece was in fact produced on the Largo as an open-air performance in 2006 and 2007 by Roberta Moratori, a São Paulo-based director.¹⁶ The farce follows very much in the vein of

Souza's *As folias do látex* (The Rubber Follies), a 1976 vaudeville-inspired piece that explores the envious attentions given lavishly by foreigners and Brazilians alike to a personified Amazonia. In Souza's *Folias*, the character-type named "Britânico" (British) speaks in a furtive aside in which he channels Sir Henry Wickham, Joe Jackson's "thief at the end of the world": "Consegui setenta mil sementes de seringueira. O maior roubo da história da Inglaterra. Mandeí plantar na Ásia e já começam a dar frutos" (*Tem* 29) (I obtained seventy thousand rubber tree seeds. Largest theft in the history of England. I sent them to be planted in Asia, and they have already grown for harvesting). In another scene, the greedy "Americano" (American) almost succeeds in sawing the personified Amazônia in half in the traditional magician's box (49–50). *Folias* also includes the meta-staging of the Teatro Amazonas's opening night in a decadent ambiance in which everything—rubber, the theater, positivism, "French" prostitutes, the state of Acre, and Amazonia in general—seems a commodity up for grabs.

Sapling-filcher Wickham figures prominently in Bandeira's *Carroça*. As one of the prodigious wonders produced by the Pandora's box of the carriage, Wickham is summoned from the past to present himself among the clowns on the Largo as "aquele que não é Jesus Cristo mas que multiplicou coisas . . . tão bem que deixaram o Amazonas em escassez" (*Carroça* 10–11) (he who isn't Jesus Christ but nonetheless multiplied things . . . so well that they left Amazonia lacking). A linguistic bricolage, Wickham comically mixes Spanish and English with his rudimentary Portuguese:

Todos: Seja bem-vindo Sir Henry!

Sir Henry Wickham: Obrigada. Vocês índias são muitas educadas, só não gostar destas roupas feias que estão usando.

Bufas: São roupas do aviamento, Sir Henry.

Sir Henry: Não interessa, eu gostar mais do traje original índio, feito de pele e pintura.

. . .

Sir Henry: Traga as sementes!

Bufa 3 (confusa): Que sementes?

Sir Henry: Ah! My God, as sementes de *Hevea brasiliensis*.

Bufa 3: A Eva brasiliense? (*Carroça* 11–12)

(**All:** Welcome, Sir Henry!

Sir Henry Wickham: Thank you [feminine form], You Indian women are very polite, I just no like these ugly clothes you be using.

Female Clowns: These are clothes from the latest shipment, Sir Henry.

Sir Henry: Not matter, I like better original Indian outfit made of skin and ink.

. . .

Sir Henry: Bring the seeds!

Female Clown 3 (*confused*): What seeds?

Sir Henry: Oh mi Deus, the seeds of *Hevea brasiliensis*.

Female Clown 3: The Brazilian Eve?)

The female clown confuses the rubber tree's Latin name with the biblical original woman in a Brazilian setting. This ambiguity—or perhaps mutability—between trees and humans will be explored in this play and in other works by Bandeira. When Sir Henry disappears inside the carriage to mysteriously multiply seventy thousand rubber tree seeds, his “magic words” are “Malásia, Ceilão, Java, Sumatra”: the locations where the British would cultivate their own rubber supply. Like Makunaíma, Wickham has opened a Pandora's box but seems oblivious to or unconcerned about the unintended consequences of his theft. In *Carroça*, the thief exits to the Beatles' “Run for Your Life” from the album *Rubber Soul*, one of the many clever touches that build layers of local meaning into the ad hoc Largo staging. Other such touches involve cameos by characters from the Largo's history, including the former owners and inhabitants of the houses that line it, such as professor and pianist Aristóteles Comte de Alencar and his neighbor, Dr. Agenor Magalhães.

The broadly comic strokes of the action change quickly, but they return to the theme of rubber a few minutes later in a scene depicting a highly damaging rubber extraction process. Called “arrocho,” the practice involves tying rubber trees off at the base and then beating them all over the trunk, causing them to release a maximum of latex. Bandeira explores the theatrical ramifications in the stage directions: “Esta cena deve ser feita com atores e bonecos, a diretriz da pancadaria é própria para bonecos, porém existe a possibilidade de interação entre ator (torturador do arrocho) e bonecos (torturados, como árvores de *Hevea brasiliensis*). A cena deve ser forte, mas essencialmente divertida” (20) (This scene should be done with actors and puppets. This kind of drubbing is appropriate for puppets; however there could also be the possibility of interaction between an actor [torturer who commits the *arrocho*] and puppets [tortured, like the *Hevea brasiliensis* trees]. The scene should be strong, but essentially amusing). The equivalence here between people (even *bonecos* as representations of people) and nature (in this case, trees), especially as victims of violence, abuse, or fraud, characterizes Bandeira's work while successfully linking his ecologically activist stance to the local intermingling of theater and history. Latex on bark is blood on skin is ink on paper. In fact, when the play was produced, the director, Roberta Moratori, chose to have an actor represent the tree; no puppets or dolls were used. The male actor playing the *arrochador* bound the legs of the female actor playing the rubber tree, and she waved her arms like branches as he acted out the cutting and beating of this *Eva brasiliense/Hevea brasiliensis*. The audience found the scene “forte” (strong), certainly, but perhaps not all that “divertida” (amusing).

Beasts, but Not Brutes

It is a natural step to move from actors representing flora to actors representing fauna; in fact, the tradition of actors-as-animals in Manaus is particularly strong, not only because of the focus on indigenous cosmology in both theater and dance presentations but also due to the use of animal characters as rainforest denizens in allegories of ecology on stage. Bandeira's *A fabulosa loja dos bichos*, as well as Custódio Rodrigues's *A floresta e os bichos contra o Homem-Fogo* (The Rainforest and the Animals against the Fire-Man, directed by Bandeira in 1995) and Ediney Azancoth's *A vingança do carapanã atômico* (Revenge of the Atomic Mosquito, first published in 1976) represent this tradition. In *Loja*, a dozen animals—including a manatee, an armadillo, a turtle, a tapir, a tree frog, various monkeys and parrots, and a few others—are duped by the mysterious Sr. Papus into destroying their own habitat to build a store. Everything is hush and hurry: the animals, though assigned jobs particular to their skills, do not know when they will be paid nor what the store will sell. The animals' boss, the giant anteater Ban-Ban, rather than acknowledge their misgivings, seems merely to follow the orders of Sr. Papus, who arrives by helicopter and speaks a ridiculous language understood only by Ban-Ban: "Poc, pluft, nhoco" (Bandeira, *Loja* 40) (nonsense words). The name "Papus" suggests the general term "papo" as a conversational speech act as well as "papo furado" (nonsense) and "papo pra boi dormir" (tall tale). Each animal character expresses doubts about the entire strange situation, but only Fefeu, the margay cat, abstains altogether from participating in the store's construction, and continually challenges Ban-Ban to be more forthcoming.

When the animals hear rumors about the nature of the soon-to-be-completed store's merchandise, they strike, demanding to see the boss in person. Upon the arrival of Sr. Papus, Ban-Ban is forced to read the small print of the blood contract that reveals what is to be sold at the store: turtle soup, frog legs, monkey-hide drums, agouti-teeth necklaces, parrot and macaw feathers, *mixira* (oil made from manatee fat), and other horrible extractions. The animals' revenge is swift: they tear up the contract, then tear down the store.¹⁷ As he flees, Sr. Papus's reaction to the animals' righteous anger shows that he does in fact understand and speak Portuguese. Very soon, the animals are able to show they have learned their lesson. In a brief scene like an epilogue, a new exploiter arrives in a noisy car. Sr. V. C. T. Enrolo ("Just C I Fool U"), speaking an error-riddled Portuguese, is greeted with a false cordiality by the animals before they quickly trap him in a large basket and carry him away. Fefeu throws the store's marquee sign from the stage as the lights go down.

A dozen or more times throughout the play, several of the animal characters repeat variations of a line that enforces an ambiguity between

animals and humans: Biruta the capuchin monkey says, “Ora, vão ter que contratar a gente, eh, quer dizer, os bichos, para trabalhar na loja” (22) (Well, they’re going to have to hire people, uh, I mean, animals, to work at the store); Lourinho the howler monkey exclaims, “É verdade, gente, quer dizer, bichos” (37) (It’s true, folks, I mean, fauna); while later on Ban-Ban says, “Bem, pessoal, quer dizer, bicharada, o Sr. Papus acha . . .” (49) (So, people, I mean, you beasts, Sr. Papus thinks . . .). The anaphoric phrase supports a solidarity between people and animals, but it also suggests a kind of animalization of people in the sense of anthropomorphic animals acting like people but being compared to beasts, or to a herd. The variations culminate with the wordplay of the peccary Queixada’s line near the end of the play, as the animals’ power is growing against Sr. Papus: “A gente é bicho mas não é besta!” (98) (We/The people are beasts, but not brutes!). The clever line allows the spectators to identify with the local fauna while resisting the beastly ignorance that the foreign exploiter wants to assume in them. Although the characters in *Loja* are animals, their anthropomorphic transparency allows for analytical engagement based on critiques of neoliberalism and on the environmental justice movement. The main conflict in *Loja* thus fits Laura Barbas-Rhoden’s description of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century Latin American ecocritical literary works “preoccupied with natural spaces . . . as part of a broader critique of economic systems of subjugation” (7–8).

Exposures of Nuance

The performance *Nuances: A Poética do Corpo em Khalil Gibran* (Nuances: Poetics of the body in Kahlil Gibran) contrasts with *Carroça* and *Loja* because it is not designed as theater—whether for open air or for a more traditional closed venue—but rather as a performance happening. There is no scripted conflict; notably absent are foreign antagonists like Wickham, Papus, or Enrolo seeking extraction of resources. Accordingly, *Nuances* does not focus on corporeal extractions but rather on corporeal exposure. The title purposefully evokes the masculine and feminine forms of the Portuguese word for “nude” (*nu*, *nua*) in its first syllables. The focus on exposure in *Nuances* aims to be not destructive but rather spiritual, life-affirming, and literally grassroots in the sense of derivation from the ground—like plant growth—with human vulnerability likened to that of trees. The performance event was conceived by Bandeira and the Coletivo Artístico Graúna and staged in 2010 as a corporeal interaction with the poetry and illustrations of the Lebanese-American author of the 1923 *The Prophet* (*O Profeta* [1962]). The multimedia performance featured a gallery of Gibran’s poems and drawings representing nudity as a state of innocence

evocative of creation and necessary for spiritual purity. These works were complemented by a series of nudes, photographed by Macarena Mairata and Jorge Bandeira, designed to reproduce, echo, or otherwise engage Gibran's works. The attendees at the event first watched a live performance in which five nude actors (three of whom had also posed for Mairata's and Bandeira's photographs) interpreted embodiments or poses of scenes from the photographs and from Gibran's drawings, in addition to other scenes in movement and rotation. Simultaneously the actors were taking turns reading from Gibran's poems, lines (in Portuguese translation) such as "Would that you could meet the sun and the wind with more of your skin and less of your raiment, / For the breath of life is in the sunlight and the hand of life is in the wind" (Gibran 35). Moreover, the actors' bodies became screens, because they were moving and posing in front of a screen upon which were projected, in a slide show, exposures of Gibran's images with Mairata's and Bandeira's photos.¹⁸ The performance lasted about twenty-five minutes, after which time the attendees circulated through the exhibit of the images by Gibran, Mairata, and Bandeira.¹⁹

In the case of this performance, Bandeira participated as actor, director, model, and photographer. His photographs featured nudes in natural landscapes, often posing as tree trunks and covering their faces with broad leaves (see fig. 1). Following Gibran's themes, *Nuances* emphasizes positive or harmonic interaction with nature, in contrast to the violence wrought upon the woman-as-tree Eva/Hevea in Moratori's staging of *Carroça* or the "pave-paradise-and-put-up-a-parking-lot" destruction in *Loja*. And yet the leaves used to cover the models' faces in the *Nuances* photographs are unmistakably the leaves of the rubber tree, as if to extend this imagery of latex exploitation in order to appropriate it. The models—exposed and vulnerable but certainly not cut or scored like rubber tree trunks—reclaim the everyday nature of the image of the nude human body by presenting it in nature, as nature. In this context of nature and nonviolence, the placement of the rubber tree leaves over the models' faces cleverly offsets the Judeo-Christian image of the fig leaves used to cover Adam's and Eve's genitals, or euphemistically their "shame," while wryly commenting, perhaps, on the destructive anonymity, generality, and commonality visited upon the indigenous peoples by the Europeans. Thus the Coletivo Artístico Graúna's multimedia performance functions as a way of reclaiming from destruction the image of nature, both botanical and anatomical, through naturism, a philosophy of life represented by Bandeira as an activist and Graúna as an organization.



Figure 1: A pose from *Nuances*, based on Gibran. Photo: Jorge Bandeira.

It is tellingly ironic that Gibran’s exoticized, orientalized poems—some originally written in English, others in Arabic in the early twentieth century and perennially popular since the 1960s—served as a vehicle for a message entirely in tune with attempts made over the years to represent or revitalize local indigenous cultures in Manaus, the great majority of which commonly eschewed clothing. Yet when Souza’s well-known and oft-produced play *A maravilhosa estória do Sapo Tarô-Bequê*, based on an Amazonian folktale attributed to the Tukanos people, was to be staged in 1995 at an indigenous reservation in Amazonas state by the Manaus-based Grupo de Teatro Vitória-Régia under the direction of Nonato Tavares, it was blocked by the reservation leaders: “Por ter cenas de nudez parcial (a personagem Juriti e o

próprio Sapo usavam tapas-sexo), os coordenadores da reserva não permitiram que a peça fosse mostrada aos índios vestidos e subjugados em sua tradição [protestante]” (Bandeira, *Folha de Adão 2*) (Because it includes scenes of partial nudity [the character Juriti and the titular Frog use loincloths], the reserve coordinators did not permit the play to be presented to the Indians, dressed and subjugated as they were to [Protestant] tradition).²⁰ This act of censorship was a key incident in shaping Bandeira’s determination to promote a performance praxis comparing exposure of the natural, vulnerable human image to exposure of Amazonian exploitation and extraction, for example in the revelation of the specific merchandise that the “fabulosa loja” would be selling.

An essential step in the development of nudity as an integral element of Bandeira’s performance praxis has been formed by his statements differentiating his work from that of Zé Celso, the notorious director of bacchanals and similar spectacles, often under the auspices of the São Paulo-based Teatro Oficina (Workshop Theater).²¹ Celso’s productions openly value the more erotic aspects of corporeality.²² After attending two of Celso’s signature-style productions in Manaus in late 2010, Bandeira wrote a review in opposition to what he calls Celso’s “Teatro do Hedonismo”:

As Bacantes e O Banquete estão neste fio tênue, onde não se sabe mais se o que se assiste é uma representação ou o real, e sendo assim, o Teatro perde-se aos olhos dos espectadores. Não adianta um ator nu, uma atriz nua, uma relação sexual dissimulada, uma tragada de um cigarro de maconha, uma cena escondida de sexo oral ou anal; trata-se de uma proposta de teatro, e aqui a nudez é deveras castigada, banalizada e colocada numa vitrine terrível de encenações de exibicionismo. (“Teatro Oficina”)

(*The Bacchae* and *The Symposium* are on that fine line where it’s no longer clear whether what is being attended is a representation or real, which is why Theater gets lost from the spectators’ perspective. It’s not about a nude actor, a nude actress, a simulated sex act, a marijuana hit, a concealed scene of oral or anal sex; it’s about the purpose of theater, and here nudity is truly punished, made banal and exhibited in a terrible showcase of staged exhibitionism.)

Evoking the well-known title of a play by famous Brazilian playwright Nelson Rodrigues in the last line above (*Toda nudez será castigada* [All nudity will be punished]), Bandeira sustains a perception of exhibitionism extant since the experimental stage nudity that characterized late 1960s productions such as *Hair* and *Oh! Calcutta!* More generously, performance theorist Richard Schechner problematizes theater exhibitionism from the same time period as being different from—but, along with voyeurism,

inseparably linked to—an “affirmation of the body” (114). Referring to productions of *Dionysus in 69*, Schechner affirms:

I don't use the term [exhibitionism] clinically. I mean a delight in showing off, in displaying the body. Coupled with exhibitionism is a certain amount of voyeurism. The one who wants to be looked at is complemented by the one who wants to look. . . . [T]he differences among body liberation, serious art, and sex shows are of degree. They each center on the body: the first as celebration, the second as symbolic or metaphoric “objective correlative,” and the third as merchandise. And in each there is more than a pinch of the other two. (114–15)

For Bandeira, however, exhibitionism implies no affective connection other than the most basic voyeurism, and therefore can apply only to productions like Celso's, which do little to move beyond it: “O público saía do local de apresentação, incomodado não pelas cenas ousadas, mas pelo cansaço e falta de vínculo afetivo e estético com que via em cena” (“Teatro Oficina”) (The audience was leaving the theater, bothered not by the provocative scenes but by fatigue and by the lack of an emotional or aesthetic link with what they had seen on stage). In contrast to Celso's performances, known for opening with raucous street processions in which more people participate than can fit inside the performance venue destination, Bandeira has advocated a smaller-scale, intimate familiarity allowing for a more direct and precisely nuanced audience participation.

Theatrical Interactions

Like *Nuances*, *As 22 Lâminas* originates from an engagement with esoteric traditions. Bandeira conceived this production as a series of loosely scripted scenes based on the twenty-two Major Arcana of the tarot (The Fool, The Chariot, The Lovers, The Tower, and so on). The public, which was limited to twenty-two spectators per performance in selected small venues in 2011 and 2012, would engage with a tarot card reader before the production started. This served to familiarize the attendees with the tarot tradition and the nature of its icons, while suggesting the allegedly prophetic nature of a tarot card reading. The various spectators would then choose, from a deck of the tarot trumps, six cards that would determine the sequence of scenes for that evening's show. The premise is that each performance is unique, because the three actors interpret the scenes that correspond to the cards in the order they were chosen at any given performance. The public thus “sets the stage” for the evening through the selected cards. Building from the intimate setting and from this initial audience involvement, *Lâminas* was

staged such that the public enters into a Brechtian engagement with theater-as-representation through the aleatory nature of the spectacle's composition. The performance they experience has been fated by their own hands; the spectators are left to ponder the nature of the scenes they didn't pick.

Moreover, the ambience of intimacy is accented by the actors' frequent nudity throughout the performance (depending on any given scene, they may be nude or they may don only masks, headdresses, capes, or other accessories, or in a few cases more concealing outfits) (see fig. 2). An opening nude scene, unvarying, depicts the initiation of the two apprentices by their master.²³ The objective of the onstage nudity echoes the conclusions of theater practitioner Eric Kupers, director of the 2004 performance *Night Marsh*, who wrote that the actors' "nakedness [is] a spiritual and energetic practice" (33), probing "how the shedding of clothes can yield potent inner growth and creative expression" (31). The body unadorned, in its universally shared dimensions and characteristics, if not phenotype, becomes a kaleidoscoping micro- and macrocosmos capable of representing all of humanity, including underrepresented groups such as indigenous or LGBTQ populations. Kupers states, "Embracing the parts of the body that I previously pushed away also serves as a metaphor for embracing the parts of my emotional, mental, and spiritual selves that I'd rather were different" (34). A nude performance can be an exercise in spirituality conducive to a certain tendency toward fatalism: in *Night Marsh*, says Kupers, "we were practicing dying with nakedness as our guide" (35). More specifically for Bandeira, nudity signifies the rejection of consumerism that echoes the demise of the "fabulosa loja": "A nudez exterior proporciona, neste tipo de Teatro, um desnudamento da mente, equacionando as diferenças, que inclusive começam pelas roupas e grifes utilizadas neste universo perverso do consumismo implacável" (personal correspondence) (In this kind of Theater, corporeal nudity brings about a disrobing of the mind, neutralizing the differences that spring even from clothing and brand names in this perverse universe of implacable consumerism). In fact, at one performance of *Lâminas* in late 2011, spectators and actors alike doffed their clothing for a naturist night at the theater, unprecedented in Manaus. This kind of shared intimacy contrasts with the spectacle-for-the-masses strategy of Zé Celso's elaborately orgiastic productions, which in Bandeira's view offer alienation more than participation. Nonetheless, both of these kinds of theatrical strategies have a fundamental relationship with famed Brazilian theater pioneer Augusto Boal's blended concept of the "spect-actor," the spectator drawn into the role of actor through encouragement and intrigue.²⁴

In one sense, Bandeira's dramaturgy has addressed and then transcended some of the tropes of Amazonian flora and fauna to concentrate more fully and integrally on the region's human inhabitants. But to do so he has not looked to adapt Amazonian history and cosmogony to the stage as completely or resolutely as Souza already did. Rather, as someone who

identifies himself as the descendant of indigenous Amazonians, Bandeira has focused squarely on the urban indigenous of the present, who no more wear loincloths than they hunt with blowguns; they constitute a significant portion of “the ordinary people who often have a vision of nature very different from anything presented in idealized Technicolor documentaries” about the Amazon (Slater 3). Indigenous, *mestiço*, ethnically varied: it is the modern *manauara* (inhabitant of Manaus) who chooses to enact an Amazonian interplay with *The Prophet* and challenge an old totem/taboo by embodying the nudity of the performer. Like Celso’s productions—but on a more intimate scale and with a more spiritual and holistic nature—both *Nuances* and *Lâminas* essentially carry out the second, hypothetical half of Oswald de Andrade’s well-known joke-poem “Erro de português” (“A Portuguese Mistake”):

Quando o português chegou
 Debaixo de uma bruta chuva
 Vestiu o índio
 Que pena!
 Fosse uma manhã de sol
 O índio tinha despido
 O português (*Poesias* 177)

(When the Portuguese arrived
 During a brutal downpour
 They clothed the Indians
 Such a pity!
 Had it been a sunny morn
 The Indian would’ve undressed
 The Portuguese [“A Portuguese Mistake”])

Given Bandeira’s assertion that “[n]ós estamos colonizados. O índio não é mais nu” (Gil) (We’re colonized. The Indian is no longer nude), it follows that he wields the theater as a tool with the aim of provocatively overthrowing—or, more accurately, disrobing—the legacy of colonial attitudes and definitions related to concepts such as sin, modesty, corruption, and providence. Although Bandeira often looks far beyond Amazonia for his sources, his theater praxis constitutes an attempt to recreate a repertoire of corporeality that harkens back directly to the matter-of-fact nudity of the region’s indigenous cultures. It is a reengagement with performance theorist Diana Taylor’s concept of the repertoire (corporeal, inherent, interior ways of knowing and transmitting information), in opposition to or complementing the archive (ways for transmitting knowledge outside of the body): “The telling is as important as the writing, the doing as central as the

recording, the memory passed down through bodies and mnemonic practices” (Taylor 35).

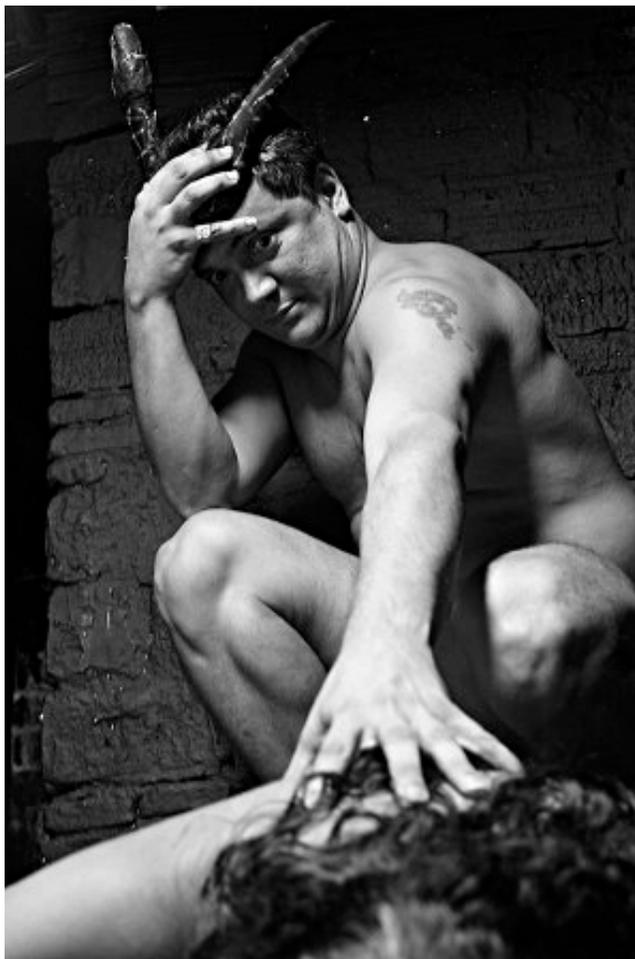


Figure 2: Bandeira as O Diabo in *As 22 Lâminas*. Photo: Ariadne Monteiro.

In creating this new bodily repertoire, the past is not forgotten, just reinvented. One of the possible scenes in *Lâminas* reinterprets The Chariot as the modern automobile, indebted to that classic Amazonian extraction—rubber—for its tires. The two female actors represent cars, racing around faster and faster until “as vítimas nuas caem no chão frio do Teatro Porão após o acidente, a colisão, representada pelo apogeu dos seringais asiáticos. Triste fim de uma ilusão” (“O dia” 9) (the nude victims fall onto the cold floor of the Basement Theater after the accident, the collision, represented

by the boom of the Asian rubber tree plantations. Sad end of an illusion). The vulnerability of an entire region lies sprawling naked across the small, bare theater floor: these actresses-as-automobiles recall the conflation of Hevea and Eva in Bandeira's earlier works, corporeally linking extraction and exposure with Amazonian ecosystems and economies. But in other tarot scenes, such as those corresponding to The Empress and The Emperor, nudity does not impede empowerment and can in fact enhance it onstage. Certainly the overall gestalt of Bandeira's works encourages identification—whether through actors' embodiments of local fauna and flora or through the nudity inherent in naturism—with local circumstance and activism, with the recognition that life is fragile but that there exists the possibility of making a difference not only in how you draw the cards but also in how you read them.

Of Indígenas and Alienígenas

Bandeira's recent projects after *Lâminas* have included productions of Souza's one-act play *Contatos amazônicos de terceiro grau* (Amazonian encounters of the third kind) and of *A casa alienígena de Van Gogh* (*Van Gogh, The Man Suicided by Society* [1959]), a one-act play that Bandeira based on Antonin Artaud's tract *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société*. Both of these productions continue to explore Bandeira's favored themes of exposure and extraction through the perspectives of ethereal, outsider characters who embody some degree of alienation. For the production of *Contatos*, Bandeira sought Souza's approval to build on the title's allusion to the classic Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* by adding a third character to the cast. The new character, Alien Kitsch, functions as a sort of interplanetary metatheatrical presence, commenting on the ostensibly bizarre actions and customs of the indigenous couple who, in turn, are discussing the exotic technology of the bulldozers and stereos that have assaulted their home. Each of the three cultures represented in Bandeira's triangular adaptation (indigenous, modern/Western, extraterrestrial) has something that one or both cultures want to take—or steal (recalling Wickham and Sr. Papi)—forming in this way a more complexly layered overlapping of desires for extractions and exposures of everything from rubber and lumber, to Western orchestral music, to the ineffable beyond.

This conceptualization of alien vis-à-vis indigenous is notably and playfully explored in the song “Caboco Ôco” by the contemporary Manaus-based rock group Os Tucumanus. After exposing the origin of the common Brazilian term for a mixed-race identity, “caboco” (also “caboclo”) as a Tupi-Guarani word meaning “one who comes from the forest,” the lyrics question the spatial dynamics of arrival:

Mas aquele que veio só pode ser perante um que já está.
 Mas que lugar é esse alienígena?
 (Aliás senhores,
 alienígena é o antônimo de nativo.)
 Esse lugar, esse lugar é a cidade!
 Mas a pergunta que eu me faço e estendo a vocês é:
 Como ser um caboco hoje?
 Não aquele que veio, mas sim aquele que está!
 Como lidar com o mundo de asfalto e do concreto
 e esse grande e imenso tapete verde de deus? (“Caboco Ôco”)

(But he who came can only be understood in relation to one who is
 already there.
 But what alien place is that?
 [By the way, ladies and gentlemen,
 alien is the opposite of native.]
 That place, that place is the city!
 But the question I ask myself and extend to you is:
 How to be a *caboco* today?
 Not he who came, but he who is already here!
 How to deal with the world of asphalt and concrete
 and that great and immense green carpet of God?)

The term *caboco*, which has also been thought to derive from the meaning “copper-colored,” is an identity signifier that, like many other such epithets once wielded pejoratively, has been reclaimed by groups who now assume it proudly. This back-and-forth ownership of the name and its signifier, dependent on who is doing the naming, is brought out in the title (*ôco* means hollow, implying the *coboco* as a cipher to be filled) as well as in the ludic questioning of the modern rap-style lyrics spoken over a repetitive choral chant, evocative of ancient Amazonian music, that literally dissects the term: “cabo, caboco, cabo, cabo, cabô.” Bandeira, very familiar with Os Tucumanus and a former rock musician himself, takes up this same game of perspectives regarding origins and arrivals, ancient and modern, and local and international in his extraterrestrial adaptation of Souza’s *Contatos*.

The term *alienígena* also makes its way into Bandeira’s approximation to Artaud’s prose text on Van Gogh, in which the renowned French performance theorist offers an apologia for the alleged suppression of the Dutch painter’s talent. As in *Lâminas* and *Contatos*, the cast of Bandeira’s *Van Gogh* includes just three characters; although there are no interplanetary visitors, the label “alienígena” works to contextualize Van Gogh as an artist alienated from the world in his final days of delirium, accompanied only by two female life models, who may or may not be real: Estela and Ex-tela

(puns on the word *tela*, meaning “canvas” or “painting”). The play is divided into eight scenes in Van Gogh’s squalid studio, overtaken by junk and knick-knacks and broken implements. The painter, fresh from his bath, is assisted by his muses/models in the infamous removal of his ear as if the process were just one more mundane task similar to their other duties enacted on stage, such as dressing him, preparing his food, and helping him write his letters. Estela and Ex-tela speak more directly with the audience, referring to Van Gogh in the third person, than they do with Van Gogh himself. Consequently the dialogue is sparse, but hallucinatory, with exchanges such as the following:

Van Gogh (num susurro furioso): Não foi para este mundo, não foi nunca para esta terra que nós todos sempre trabalhamos, lutamos, gritamos de horror, de fome, de miséria, de ódio, de escândalo e de nojo.

Estela: Fomos todos envenenados.

Ex-tela: O corpo sob a pele é uma usina superaquecida, e fora, o doente brilha, reluz por todos os poros, explodidos. (*Van Gogh* 9)

(**Van Gogh** (in a furious whisper): It was never for this world, never for this land that all of us have worked, fought, shouted in horror, hunger, misery, hatred, scandal, and revulsion.

Estela: We were all poisoned.

Ex-tela: The body inside the skin is a superheated power plant, and on the outside, the sick man shines, giving off radiation through all of his exploded pores.)

The dialogue reveals Van Gogh’s sense of alienation from “this world” and “this land,” while comparing corporeal illness to a litany of environmental contaminations (poison, power plants, radiation).

In the last scene, Van Gogh delivers a climactic monologue while ripping the thin gowns from Ex-tela and Estela, exposing them; but they are unsurprised—after all, they seem to be merely bodies as canvases. They nonchalantly continue their dialogue with the painter, and proclaim in the final line that what killed him was a blood clot, even as one of them shoots him in the head with a revolver. In this way they deliberately mix up the blame for the artist’s death, echoing Artaud’s coinage of the adjective “suicided (by society)” on which Bandeira based the tone and gist of his play.

Ultimately Bandeira’s works address the dynamics of natural processes subverted by artificial, accelerated means such as the destructive capitalism underlying Wickham’s theft, Sr. Papus’s greed, and Van Gogh’s poverty. Natural wealth and expression—whether biodiversity, corporeality, or innate talent—merit celebration and conservation, as seen in the *Happening Nuances*. The conflict that results when such wealth is subverted constitutes

the matter of major or minor dramatic articulations in the scripted performances of *Carroça*, *Loja*, and *Van Gogh*, and even in the more loosely scripted *Lâminas*. Moreover, Bandeira's works show a conjunction of ideas about the environment, combining allusions to an offstage, political understanding of environmental activism with the incorporation of more theatrically empirical ideas gleaned from Boal, Brecht, and Schechner's definition of "environmental theater" as a space in which spectators are highly aware of their participation in the performative undertaking. Over the course of his works, Bandeira reorients or re-localizes the environmental space of Manaus-based theater by moving spectators from geographically concrete tropes of Manaus—the public Largo immediately outside the Teatro Amazonas in *Carroça*, the rainforest in *Loja*—to the interplay of Amazonian references with more conceptually abstract coordinates as seen in the mix of imagery in *Nuances*, *Lâminas*, *Contatos*, and *Van Gogh*.²⁵ The body itself—our most intimate and immediate environmental reference—becomes a tree, an animal, a screen, a canvas onto which are projected the joys and sorrows of our relationships to nature and its gifts. Like many writers who engage with the differing praxes of what can be called ecocriticism, Bandeira interprets the "human and nonhuman world with one foot planted in global culture and another in the regions that have captivated" him (Barbas-Rhoden 10). Bandeira, with one foot *indígena* and the other *alienígena*, continues to create pioneering performances and productions that highlight new interpretations of realities both Amazonian and universal.

Notes

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2. Reference July 2009.
3. "Kew Gardens had placed their formidable scientific expertise at the service of the Empire's commercial interests . . . and without its expertise it is difficult to imagine the rise of the plantation industries" (Tully 186).
4. See Jackson 153–72.
5. See Sá 8–17.

6. His translation of Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark*, *A caçada do Snark*, has recently been released in a second edition.
7. The sixth work is *As donas do Apocalipse* (Owners of the apocalypse; produced 2004 in the Teatro Amazonas and Teatro da Instalação by the Arte&Fato company, director Luis Douglas Rodrigues; unpublished). For a brief summary, see "Atrações de hoje."
8. Bandeira has compiled a comprehensive list of nonmusical performances in Manaus from the 1970s to the present. This "Anuário" does not include opera, such as the 2007 staging of Wagner's *O navio fantasma* at the Teatro Amazonas (Bernauer 291); an annual opera series is held in April and May at the Teatro Amazonas.
9. Hemming 180.
10. Several of Souza's works have been revived in productions in the early 2000s (see his *Um teatro na Amazônia* [Theater in the rainforest]). Souza is also known for his novel *Mad Maria*, adapted for a Rede Globo *novela*.
11. A further example of recent theatrical activity is the Teatro-Educação, a pedagogically focused teacher-training program sponsored by the City of Manaus. The program trains teachers and theater students in performance techniques for classroom use. See "Teatro Educação."
12. Sá emphasizes that Souza's *Dessana*, *Dessana* and *Jurupari* more directly engage indigenous ideas, whereas *Ajuricaba* is an attempt to approximate an indigenous storyline to classical Greek theater (223). See Azancoth and Vale for a decisive history of TESC's first phase, and Souza's *Um teatro* for a more comprehensive pictorial coverage up to 2010.
13. The content of this paragraph derives from a personal interview with Bandeira.
14. See Wilker for a brief history of theater instruction in Brazil.
15. These festivals are organized around the legend of a resuscitated bull. See, for example, Valentin.
16. The proposed production of the second part of *Carroça* was thwarted by administrative concern over the script's criticism of certain governmental policies, such as those related to the cleanliness of the Largo and the contiguous theater space itself.
17. Bandeira noted that when *Loja* was staged at the Teatro Amazonas, a special method for tearing down the store had to be created in order to meet the objective of protecting the historic theater's stage floor.
18. The bodies of the actors are thus "objects of projection for audiences, so that they could acknowledge their own body issues" (Kupers 33) and simultaneously canvases for receiving such projections literally.
19. Exhibitions of the gallery component of *Nuances* were also produced in locations in Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo states.
20. Bandeira's "Anuário" provides details regarding this censorship that supplement the brief note in *Folha de Adão*.
21. Zé Celso's productions of *Macumba Antropófaga* have been touring of late (August–October 2012). It is a spectacle based on an Oswaldian, "anthropophagic" amalgam of indigenous, Afro-Brazilian, and European rites.
22. See interviews with Zé Celso such as those published by *Guia da Semana* and *Epoca São Paulo*.
23. The other unvarying scene is that of the card Death, which closes each performance.
24. See his *Teatro do oprimido e outras poéticas políticas*.
25. At this writing (late October 2012), Bandeira is directing a production of Nelson Rodrigues's *A Senhora dos Afogados* (Lady of the drowned ones) in Manaus, produced by Chico Cardoso at the Teatro Direcional. Bandeira has incorporated

Amazonian elements into the design such that the sea of the original play is transposed to the river-ocean of the Amazon.

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